

Figures of the Many and the One: Genre and Narrative Method in Tim Winton's *Cloudstreet*

FIONA MORRISON

For Christmas 1998, Penguin Australia produced *Cloudstreet* in a hardcover edition under the Viking imprint. As well as author's name and title, the cover includes the phrase: 'the modern Australian classic.' The authoritative use of the definite article is matched by the design of classic navy blue and gold spine supporting a sepia photograph of a boat, with its reflection visible on the water. The profitable production of *Cloudstreet* as a hardcover 'modern classic' seven years after its first publication suggests a canny market response to the Australian readership's discernible desire for 'quality' historical fiction about modern Australian identity, using recognisably Australian idiom. Nick Enright, a successful Australian playwright and one of the co-authors of a stageplay of *Cloudstreet*, has said: 'People get that look in their eye, that *Cloudstreet* look,' and that he regards the book as having 'leapt the fence in Australia, it's in the bloodstream of the nation.'¹ Enright's description of zealous, or perhaps sentimental, reader responses and his breadth and depth metaphors of 'fence-leaping' and 'national bloodstream' subtends the success of *Cloudstreet's* market status as the national classic, and foregrounds the wide appeal of Winton's thematics of belonging and displacement, as well as the text's nostalgic regard for the (now lost) importance of affective social bonds. In this sense *Cloudstreet's* various productions and reception must be addressed in the context of *fin de siècle* politics of Australian identity as well as Winton's particular sense of character, use of humour, incisive use of the vernacular, and investment in a lyrical mysticism.

The desire for a narrative such as *Cloudstreet's* was comprehensively demonstrated by the decision to adapt Winton's 1991 novel for the stage, and the commercial success of that adaptation. By late 1997, Nick Enright and Justin Monjo, a New Yorker, had completed a workable stage version of

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Cloudstreet for premiere at the Sydney Festival in 1998. The two-year process of adaptation had presented both writers with considerable technical difficulties, mainly relating to plot, and they eventually produced a script which played for over four hours. Neil Armfield, the director of the play, commented that the script was 'a shambles to start with' but that 'every scene just has to be a winner because the book is full of so many amazing incidents'.² Armfield's comment, which emphasises the theatrical importance of plot and character, also indicates the unwieldy aspects of dramatising a long and complex novel for the stage. What the predominantly linear requirements of stage-time do not readily accommodate are those non-linear and figurative aspects of narrative organisation: for example, the rhetorically and textually elaborate structuring of genre, metaphor and narration. *Cloudstreet* is in fact a highly structured historical fiction, which uses a number of different textual strategies (for example, the specificity of language, the passing of seasons) to orchestrate the time and space of two decades. It is with the function of genre, mode and narrative method, rather than plot or character, that this essay is concerned.

Cloudstreet is a postcolonial historical fiction which thematises and theorises division at a number of different levels in the context of exploring the possible coordinates of home and belonging in the two decades after World War II (1944-64). How and where we find 'home' and what is at stake in the desire for home, for full identity and for belonging, is articulated by Fish, the text's narrator, at the point of his 'return home':

I'm a man for that long, I feel my manhood. I recognize myself as whole and human, know my story for just that long ... I burst into the moon, sun and stars of who I really am. Being Fish Lamb. Perfectly. Always. Everyplace. Me.³

Cloudstreet's postcolonial thematics of utopian wholeness, subsequent division and sublime re-integration works through a cohesive network of genre (domestic epic), mode (magic

realism), divided and doubled narrative point of view (Fish Lamb), and a series of structural metaphors familiar in historical fiction, such as the river and the dance. *Cloudstreet* combines the authoritative form of the epic with Australian idiom specific to the period 1944-64 in order to narrate the confusion of national and personal identity. The doubled narrative position installs and subverts the traditional realism of historical fiction, and heralds a further productive troubling of categories of gender and class in the postwar period.

In 'Country' (Section VII), Lester and Oriel Lamb have one of their rare private conversations. During a moment of quiet after their daughter's wedding they discuss their son, Quick, and his return to the Cloudstreet house after a two year absence: 'The colour of his skin is strange; like mother of pearl it changes at every angle, but somehow riddled with rainbows that catch at the edge of vision. He's cool to touch and sweet smelling the way a man rarely is' (p. 229). Quick's return prompts the Lambs to take stock, and they produce a number of identifying positions, if only to identify instability. Of Quick's strange glowing, a fluorescence caused by a vision while fishing on the Margaret River, Lester ventures the speculation that Quick is displaced (like his visionary brother), that he 'looks like he's gone someplace else.' His ultimate response to the fact that his son is fabulously 'lit up like a beacon' (p. 231) is to reflect on his own disorientation: 'I just wish I knew what to believe in' (p. 229).

Oriel and Lester's ensuing conversation about confusion and belief is an apposite moment in which the text's commitment to modes of fabulation as a narrative form is made explicit, since fabulation, or magic realism, seeks to provide a language for different registers of reality, including the strange, the sublime and the spiritual. As neither Lester nor Oriel can discuss God or their lost faith directly, they reflect prosaically on the interpenetration of the explicable and the inexplicable. Despite her pragmatism it is Oriel who argues that the uncanny interrelation of the extraordinary and ordinary in family life is commonplace. This is a staple position of postcolonial

fabulation, a textual mode that destabilises traditional realism by producing unmarked combinations of the strange and the familiar. Of Fish's arrested state, Quick's phosphorescence, the moaning Cloudstreet house and her own exile from it in a tent in the backyard, Oriel comments: 'Strangeness is ordinary if you let yourself think about it. There's been queerness all your life' (p. 231). These constructions of the strange and the familiar suggest that Winton's text deals extensively with the uncanny, or unhomely (*unheimlich*) effect in texts where the strange and familiar reside together, continuously destabilising each other and any stable conception of home.⁴

Quick's return home after his inexplicable fishing experience echoes the original moment of confusion for the godfearing Lamb family (in the 'incomplete miracle' of Fish Lamb's return from the dead at the beginning of the Lambs' story in 1944: 'not all of Fish Lamb had come back', p. 32). However, halfway through *Cloudstreet*, Lester and Oriel's disorientation has a clear postwar context, where coordinates of belief have widened to include a newly problematic nationalism. Oriel's confession about her 'loss of bearings' since Fish's accident, and his subsequent non-acknowledgment of her, prompts Lester to claim 'You believe in the Nation, though' (p. 231). Oriel responds with 'I read the newspaper, Lester. They're tellin us lies. They'll send boys off to fight any war now' (p. 232). In the 1950s, Oriel counts neither the nation, hard work, family nor love as providing stable objects of belief: 'Oriel put a blunt finger to her temple: This is the country, and it's confused. It doesn't know what to believe in either. You can't replace your mind country with a nation' (p. 232).

In *Cloudstreet's* twenty year time-frame, the prewar colonial stabilities of personal and national identity give way to the secular confusion, as well as the prosperity, of the Australian postwar period. Confusion about the role and meaning of nation as home, or unproblematic point of identification, is mirrored in Oriel's confusion of mind and faith. Uncertainties of identity created by the processes of beginning to identify away from a colonial centre 'elsewhere' are reflected at the level of region.

Winton paints Perth ('the big country town that wants so much to be a city', p. 364) coming into its own as a major city in the early 1960s. The irony is that city-status is conferred through the alienating murders of Nedlands Monster, and the loss of security, optimism and innocence these represent (Section IX). Although the murders inaugurate the contemporary period through the unhomely loss of those immediately postwar (and utopian) aspects of the homely social text and social landscape for which the text is so nostalgic, the unhomely divisions and instabilities around faith, nation, region and family also generate new possibilities for language and community.

Oriel wants to regain the country of her mind, her only place for belonging, a place where she can sort out 'the confusion' of belief, of nation, of identity. In this she is like the son who will not recognise her. Where Oriel struggles for a return to her faith as a point of belonging, Fish Lamb longs for the 'the water' or the 'Big Country' as the location of singularity and complete knowledge, a place denied to him by his mother (his other displaced site of origin). This simultaneous knowledge of home, and displacement from it, involves the 'queerness' and 'strangeness' described by Oriel as a common element in their lives. This combination of the strange and/in the familiar is a powerful model of the consequences of colonial invasion and occupation of Australia. When Lester remembers the Margaret River country of his youth, 'the farms and dead crops' (p. 231), he claims that the land 'moaned', creating an explicit link between an alienated land and indigenous people, and the haunting of the Cloudstreet house. The haunting in *Cloudstreet* represents the continuous eruption of the strange in the familiar (where the 'return of a repressed' is the return of the murderous text of colonial history that prevents full belonging for whitefellas⁵). Reiterating the theme of division and unhomeliness, Lester suggests to Oriel: 'You think maybe we don't belong here, like we're out of our depth, out of our country?' (p. 231). Fish Lamb's incomplete self, Quick Lamb's 'survivor guilt', and the haunted Cloudstreet house, all echo what Oriel and Lester sense about the unhomely consequences of white colonisation of the land. Their uneasy relations to land

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and house, and the strangeness that stems from their sense of displacement, are grounded in the facts of colonial and postcolonial misrecognition and usurpation.

Oriel and Lester's conversation at the mid-point of *Cloudstreet* highlights the novel's engagement with and production of narrative and figurative representations of belonging and home. Any such thematics of place and identity is necessarily stitched into colonial and postcolonial politics of indigeneity, history, authority, language, genre, gender and class. *Cloudstreet* self-consciously negotiates a postcolonial ethic required by the desire to tell stories about Australian place and displacement, and the search for an appropriate language with which to tell those stories. Part of this ethic is represented in Winton's interesting and problematic deployment of the recurring figure of a 'blackfella', who operates as another kind of narrative witness to the Lamb-Pickles history. The almost entirely silent 'blackfella' is often troped as a bird, granting him an unobtrusive but aerial, omniscient view. His role is often to indicate the location of home, and accelerate the safe return home of 'whitefella' characters (usually Quick).

The house at Cloudstreet operates as the specific locale for the history of two white families in two decades, how they diverge and merge, escape and return. Although the Pickles family were used to the large pub at Geraldton, the huge house at number one Cloud Street was alienating. The text uses the language of colonial exploration to describe their arrival:

The Pickleses move around in the night, stunned and shuffling, the big emptiness of the house around them, almost paralysing them with spaces and surfaces that yield nothing to them They have no money and this great continent of a house doesn't belong to them. They're lost. (p. 41)

The prehistory of the house involves the horrific suicide, using ant poison, of a young indigenous woman imprisoned by an older white woman who owned the house and had turned it into a 'refuge' ('Back in Time,' pp. 35-6). Therefore, an unhomely haunting at the 'dead centre' of the house subtends

the narrative and thematises division, a division fielded only by Fish who, like the ghosts, is caught in a state of suspension. The division between black and white overlaps with a division between women, forming a double division that plays itself out over twenty years. The antagonistic ghosts of the white landowning woman and young indigenous woman, and the embittered mother-daughter relationship between Rose and Dolly Pickles comes to some kind of reconciliation over the birth of a male child (Wax Harry) to Quick and Rose in the room in the middle of the no-man's land of *Cloudstreet*, the room in which the suicide originally occurred. At the very end of the novel, when Quick and Rose decide to return home to Cloudstreet, and Fish returns to the water, Oriel re-enters the house from its margins. The healing of divisions between indigene and settler, and between women, heralds new imaginative possibilities for community and sociality at the beginning of the 1960s, when both gender and racial issues begin seriously to be addressed. In this sense, the divisions of *Cloudstreet* are also its modes of ('whitefella') generativity.

One of the strongest generative forces in *Cloudstreet* is the desire to return, in one form or another, to an ordinary wholeness, or point of synthesis and integration. The longing for home structures various journeys towards full identity and self-knowledge. *Cloudstreet* narrates both Quick Lamb's and Rose Pickles' flight from home and responsibility, and their return to it. With particular attention to Quick, *Cloudstreet* narrates the separation, rites of transition and reincorporation back into the social of one member of each family. This structure of leaving, heroic wandering and return is epic structure: and nostalgia, or a longing to return to origin, is a key element of epic. *Cloudstreet*, like Homer's epic, charts the story of a twenty year journey back home. Like Joyce's *Ulysses*, Winton's epic is mainly located in the domestic-economic space, and includes some journeys through the environs of the city. *Cloudstreet* and *Ulysses* are both domestic epics entangled in postcolonial politics of genre, gender, national character and vernacular language. And if Winton's text is indebted to Homer and Joyce, then another intertextual resonance is Christina

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Stead's *The Man Who Loved Children* (1940), which is also a domestic epic focussed on house, family and home, thematising alienation and interleaved with figures of escape and return. Stead elaborates a ferocious concentration on the idiosyncratic life and language of a particular family, their 'ramshackle' house and their energetic idiom.⁶

The usual centrepiece of epic is the heroic man of action. Yet Leopold Bloom, Joyce's anti-heroic 'womanly man' is an isolated outsider, thoroughly grounded in the material and bodily, with sharp powers of perception but not speech. Lester and Quick Lamb are Bloomian, maternal men in this sense (helpless, inarticulate, nurturing and practical). The otherwise problematic fit between domesticity and masculinity is accommodated through the heroic-romantic role of visionary. Access to the numinous world of dreams and visions, in addition to perception of the rich life of the body, stands in for male 'action' in the domestic epic. Quick's visionary masculinity, and his maternal nurturing of his brother, is sharply contrasted with the steely determination, economic ability and command of language of both his competitive mother and his wife.⁷ For both Oriel and Rose, the language of books, religion and economic survival mediates their experience of the world. Quick's ('because he was as unquick as his father') experience in the world is much less defended and deflected by language. In this sense women's labour and the marginalisation of the maternal body underwrites the privileged masculine access to the numinous. In addition, Quick's access to 'feminine' psychic and intuitive power finds enablement rather than marginalisation in Winton's overall investment in utopian and complementary figures of heterosexual coupling, represented as either determined mother and/or wife.⁸

Quick, the inarticulate working-class boy and man, is *Cloudstreet*'s central visionary character. Quick's visionary, or Romantic, masculinity bears in an interesting way on standard constructions of Australian masculinity and class.⁹ The men in *Cloudstreet* do not participate in standard presentations of Australian masculinity and mateship, valuing

interconnectedness rather than separation. The Lamb brothers share different visionary capacities in *Cloudstreet*; both are inarticulate fishermen and deeply connected and associated with the water. Quick's guilt about his brother's accident generates richly imaginative visions of suffering that make him an outsider with inexplicable visions and remarkable aim:

There was nothing exceptional in him [Quick] but for the fact that he could never seem to be ordinary. He had some mark on him, like a migrant or a priest. You could tell he was trying with you, trying to fit (p. 213).

Quick's visions provide fascinating material for a thematic of home and displacement in *Cloudstreet*. They are episodes in which genre (domestic epic) interacts with gender (visionary masculinity) in interesting ways, as well as providing condensed moments of abstraction and fabulation in the otherwise realist historical (linear) narrative. Quick's fabulist 'waking dreams' are a vital part of the epic theme of being lost, and integral to the rites of passage and acquisition of knowledge that follow his escape from Cloudstreet and his eventual return to his family and his brother-child.

The first of Quick's waking dreams occurs on the Swan River in Perth. Lester asks Quick to row the family's new boat home, and he undertakes this mammoth task with Fish. At the point of complete exhaustion he stops rowing, and Fish states 'I can hear the water' (p. 113). By this Fish does not mean the sounds of the river. An important distinction between 'the water' and literal river or sea is made in this episode. As Fish also refers to the Western Australian wheatfields as 'the water', it is clear that he means the transcendent element of which he had such brief acquaintance near death, and to which he longs to return. As the brothers sing to keep awake, the boat somehow leaves the river and enters 'the water' realm that Fish recognises, and navigates: 'Quick opens his eyes to see Fish standing up in the middle of the boat with his arms out like he's gliding, like he's a bird sitting in an updraught' (p. 114). Fish has become birdlike ('The water. The water. I fly': p. 114). The 'blackfella' who reappears throughout the text as an alternative

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narrative witness, is often likened to, or sometimes actually is, a bird. The Swan River has become sky, and the fish has become a bird, making an ongoing link between the sea and sky as a kind of a transcendent elemental wholeness. 'The river is full of sky as well ... There's only sky out there, above and below, everywhere to be seen' (p. 114).

The language of this episode is quasi-religious, struggling to express aspects of numinous experience. For example: in Quick's visions, and his paradoxical apprehensions of the incomprehensible, Winton often repeats figures of vibration, of singing, and of cathedral space. In the context of sublimity, however, Quick's body is the litmus test of wakefulness, or presence: 'He feels a turd shunting against his sphincter. He's awake, alright' (p. 114). But it is Quick's visionary desire 'to see, to see' (p. 115) that keeps him awake. The brothers' experience of infinitude and wholeness, 'the water', ends with their return to the river, and Quick comforting Fish like a baby, who is anguished at the repeated loss of 'the water'.

When the boys return to Cloudstreet after their epic ordeal, Oriel's reaction is that 'They were foreigners, they were her blood but they were lost to her' (p. 116). The impossible journey handed to Quick by his father is a precursor to Quick's later flight from Cloudstreet as a masculine rite of passage to maturity. For the hero this involves separation from the maternal and from home, the completion of heroic tasks, and a return with wisdom for the community. Yet Rose Pickles' rites of transition are more traditionally masculine (concerning jobs in the city, social interaction and the middle class: 'Rose Pickles discovered that she really could talk', p. 179). Quick's experiences are harsher, more self-destructive (roo-shooting, hard manual labour), yet punctuated with a series of visions he barely understands and cannot articulate.

While Quick is roo-shooting in the West Australian wheatfields he experiences a waking vision in which Fish, rowing an orange crate with a tomato stake across the sky above him, calls Quick to the river, to fishing and to home (pp. 200-3). This 'vision' repeats the doubling of sea and sky from the Swan

River, and proleptically figures Quick's next vision when fishing at the Margaret River. Quick once again bolts from Fish and ends up, through the fabulist agency of the 'blackfella'-narrative witness, working for his cousin Earl in the Margaret River, the scene of his childhood. 'For a year or so Quick thought he had hold of himself' (p. 212) and 'He thought he was coping' but in fact 'he was miserable, lost, drifting, tired and homesick as a dog' (p. 212-3). After Quick nearly dies recklessly driving Earl's truck he begins to wish that Fish would come rowing across the paddock and rescue him (pp. 213-4). Quick promptly resurrects Earl's old dory, and goes fishing on Sunday. On the river 'he met the memory of them all down here at dusk with the fire on the beach, the lantern, the net sluicing along. He set his jaw and kept rowing' (p. 215). The core trauma of Quick's past connected with water and the division of fish, again shapes his experience of the sublime.

Sublime language often depends on a rhetoric of mobility and dimension. For instance, Quick's experience is described in terms of transport and height:

He had the feeling of movement going right through him. Water passed beneath, the trees up by the bank rode by, but inside himself he felt something travel, the kind of transport he felt at the beginning of sleep when he sensed himself going out to meet its sky colour and the promises it held. (p. 215)

Quick's visions recur in the context of a confusion about being awake, or asleep and dreaming. This mental state of inbetween-ness is matched by the physical landscape of the margin between river and sea: 'the river squeezed out in a cool tea-coloured trickle to the sea' (p. 216). In this state of confusion between the inside and the outside, the extraordinary uncannily erupts into the ordinary: 'Above him, the sky like a fine net letting nothing through but light and strangeness' (p. 216). The visual landscape is cryptic, unable to be read. Quick begins to fish and

when he hauled the fish into the boat, it was two fish, one fixed to the tail of the other . . . He dragged in four fish, two hooked and two biting their tails. He caught them cast after cast,

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sometimes three to a hook, with one fish fixed to the passenger fish.
(p. 216)

The figure of the passenger fish immediately suggests the relation between Quick and his brother, Fish. Although it is a trope for doubleness and generativity, Quick's experience with the passenger fish is not so much a vision of plenty as an aggressive multitude. Although the sublime figure of 'vibrating cathedral' is repeated, the description of Quick's experience is characterised less by the language of mystical sublimity and more by an aggressive virility, a destructive insistence:

with all these fish arching, beating, sliding, bucking, hammering. In the water they bludgeoned themselves against the timbers, shine running off them in lurches, stirring the deep sandy bottom into a rising cloudbank until Quick was throwing out baitless hooks to drag in great silver chains of them. (p. 216)

Winton's chain of verbs creates a frighteningly active sense of the violent number and noise of the fish in the boat and in the water. The virility of these fish resides in their extraordinary number and activity, but also 'the shine running off them' and their creation of the cloudbank. Rather than a bounty like Quick and Oriel's prawn bounty, which is also described with a number of active present participles and described as an 'unearthly frenzy' (p. 270), the 'great silver chains of fish' are threatening. They 'shine like money', as it were seducing the Protestant Quick by a commodity desire based on lack and multiplication.

The proximity of the fish is troped as threateningly sexual, using the explicit comparison of Lucy Wentworth's genitals:

They embraced him in their scaly way and he heard their mouths open and close. He felt them slide across his chest as his head sank into them, against his cheeks, along his lips with the briny taste of Lucy Wentworth's business bits. He began to breathe them, stifle beneath them. (p. 217)

The dying fish seem to be suffocating lovers. The overwhelming proximity of their bodies is grotesque, with their

scaly embrace and the audible opening and closing of mouths. The analogue with Lucy Wentworth's genitals feminises the fish that threaten to swallow up the singular male hero in their multiplicity. As the 'blackfella' appears, walking on water, it seems that Quick's experience concerns his return home. During the three hours it takes to complete the drive home that usually takes thirty minutes, Quick begins to see figures on the roadside: 'half the time it was that black bastard and the other half it was him' (p. 218). Although Quick has extracted himself from the fish, he has subsequent trouble demarcating his identity, seeing both himself *and* 'the black angel' in front of him. The overwhelming multiplication and inescapable proximity of fish-Fish poses an identity crisis for Quick, when he 'can't decide how he feels, enlightened or endangered, happy or sad, old or young, Quick or Lamb' (p. 218). In his caravan at Earl's place, Quick dreams—sees the core vision of the 'whole and true' picnic, yet with subtle differences. The familiar refrain 'there they all are, down by the river laughing and chiacking about, all of them whole and true' is followed by a new ambiguous image: 'their own faces in a silver rain of light fused with birds and animals' (p. 218). The 'silver rain' and the figure of fusing into wholeness draws on the language of Quick's experience with the mullet in the dory. The sequence closes with a reversion to Old Testament language, which indicates the difficulty that the meaning (and hence closure) of sublime experience presents for language, as well as foregrounding the religious investments of the fishing sequence: 'Down at the river where the fish are leaping and the sea has turned back on itself and the trees shake with music.' (p. 218)

The repetition of the originary picnic, that evokes the utopian vision of wholeness and community as well as narrating the final departure of Fish, parallels Quick's return to and acceptance of his brother's state through his 'literal' immersion in the doubled fish. Quick cannot escape his brother because he cannot escape himself. Quick's terse account of what he saw in response to his mother's insistent inquiry is 'I saw myself runnin. That's all.' (p. 241)

The third important vision in *Cloudstreet* occurs in 'Inland' (Section X) when Quick returns to the West Australian wheatbelt with Rose, Fish and Wax Harry. After a late conversation with Rose about participation in community, Quick wakes to see that 'the moony light was coming off Fish himself' (p. 419). Fish is back in his water element, and the family, even Rose, witness naked children 'rising from the ground like a mineral spring . . . *familiar* somehow in the multitude that grew to a vast winding expanse, passing them with a lapping sound of feet' (p. 420, my emphasis). As the Fish-narrator later explains, the wheatfield children are lost children, like himself, returning to the sea 'which will not fill with us for we came from it and return to it.' This vision is a gift to 'the man, the woman, the baby' (p. 420) from Fish, to ameliorate his coming departure.

Belonging and displacement from belonging is thematised through genre, mode, figure and the construction of a complex narrative point of view that both demonstrates and describes the position of being split and multiple. The omniscient narrator of *Cloudstreet* is the integrated halves of the initially divided Fish Lamb, who recalls the events of twenty years. This narrative position creates a double position of Fish as controlling narrator (who speaks from a strange omni-temporal and omni-spatial zone) and as an inarticulate yet pivotal character who communes with talking pigs, unhappy ghosts, and speaks in tongues. Winton's adult fiction often explores and relies upon the special insight of children, and the arresting of Fish's development produces the continual presence of a childlike character over a twenty-year span. The Fish narrator-character double thematises division and re-integration as well as working as a narrative technique to facilitate the historical fiction covering two decades.

Fish describes the inaugural 'earthly vision' (p. 2) of *Cloudstreet*: the plentiful picnic by the river ('one day, one clear, clean, sweet day in a good world', p. 1) that marks the decision by the Pickles and Lambs at the end of twenty years to tear down the dividing walls and stay together at Cloudstreet.

The picnic is placed at the beginning and at the end of the text, and repeated, with the figure of the river, as a structural principle of the narrative. The picnic at beginning and end includes the moment of Fish's departure to re-integrate with the part of himself he lost in the accident with prawn nets in 1944. The beginning and the end are the same, and include the 'moment' of the entire story, the moment when Fish meets his other half: 'A flicker, then a burst of consciousness on his shooting way, and he'll savour that healing all the rest of his journey, having felt it, having known the story for just a moment' (p. 2).

Halving Fish into a visionary, if impaired, character and otherworldly retrospective narrator creates a complex double position of inside-outside. The cross-over between inside and outside requires a balancing act, because the divided elements are dynamically suspended together. When asked by a specialist who Oriel is: 'The bright look stayed on Fish's face, but it became a look of suspension' (p. 66). Fish

can't seem to place Oriel. Either that or he sees her and ignores her. He just looks through her like she's not there, like she's never been there.

It's like Fish is stuck somewhere. Not the way all the living are stuck in time and space; he's in another stuckness altogether. Like he's half in and half out (p.69).

Fish's other kind of stuckness, his 'half in and half out' position leads to a number of sequences where the reintegrated Fish talks to his past, earthly self, and there is a confusing double use of pronouns. For example:

What are you thinking, Fish? Do you feel that you're going, that you're close? Strange that you should be so hard to read these last stretching days . . . I can't read your face. I stare back at you in the puddles on the chilly ground, I'm waiting in your long monastic breath, I travel back to these moments to wonder at what you're feeling and come away with nothing but the knowledge of how it will be in the end. You're coming to me, Fish (p. 403).

The narrative position also produces complexities of time and space which can be detected in the liberal use of prepositions such as 'behind' and 'in': 'I stare out from behind the sideboard mirror and see you there, Fish' (p. 164) . . . 'I'm behind the water, Fish, I'm in the tree. I feel your pulse and see you dreaming . . . and I see you coming' (p. 178). . . 'I'm behind the mirror and in different spaces, I'm long gone and long here' (p. 364). The time and space of the mortal characters is troped as 'close foetid galleries' which suggests a 'beyond' that is 'out of time and space' (p. 64) and unlike closed planar space, but which paradoxically must be described in spatial and temporal terms. These descriptions repeat the pressure that language comes under in terms of sublime or transcendent experience.

The transcendent narrator claims that 'Those who've gone before do not lose their feelings, only their bodies' (p. 178), which repeats the assertion of the opening sequence that those who have been lost are not gone. There is no real division between life and death, or the past and present. There is no nett loss. Fish-narrator makes this comment to Rose about time: 'It's gone for you now, but for me the water backs into itself, comes around, joins up in the great, wide, vibrating space where everything that was and will be still is. For me, for all of us sooner or later, all of it will always be' (p. 290).

Fish has spent most of his life longing for 'the water', the transcendent element of his re-integration. The healing of his selves promises wholeness and narrative knowledge, as well as proper masculinity. Near the end of the novel the Fish narrator makes this unifying transition between pronouns:

Soon, you'll be a man, Fish, though only for a moment, long enough to see, smell, touch, hear, taste the muted glory of wholeness and finish what was begun only a moment ago. . . I'm a man for that long, I feel my manhood, I recognize myself whole and human, know my story for just that long (pp. 420-24).

In this instance, full identity is equated with manhood and masculinity and with male authorship. *Cloudstreet's* serious investment in a transcendent signifier, or a transcendent realm

'beyond', engages masculine and phallic models of singularity. These models are deeply troubled by a cross current of problematic, marginalised maternity and desirable, yet troubling, female generativity. Although the text promulgates the importance of generativity and community, the female body as origin and point of generation is displaced by a transcendent 'beyond' as the 'place' from which narrative and subjectivity is produced, and the home to which the subject yearns to return. The uncanny female body is both the element of generativity that is celebrated as part of the utopian complementarity of heterosexuality, and the repressed multiplicity that returns to disturb masculine singularity.

Cloudstreet is a carefully structured historical fiction that thematises division and reconciliation as part of a poetics of postcolonial identity. Winton's text is a nostalgic allegory of the fraught, and perhaps impossible, desire for belonging, wholeness and unified identity. Genre, in the form of domestic epic, formally structures the desire to return instantiated by unhomely division. Winton's use of an intermittent magic realist mode expresses the instabilities and new possibilities generated by this division and desire. The rites of passage for the visionary man, combined with the complex narratorial position, articulate the various states of division, and the transcendent rewards of reconciliation for the working class man and his community. Winton's closing image is of Oriel and Dolly re-entering the domestic domain (freed from haunting) from its margins. In the space freed from haunting, they move co-operatively. Though it does not grant them the authority of vision and narrative generation, the image gestures to the text's project of imagining new models of the social and the spiritual.

¹ Matt Price, 'Triple Booked', *The Australian Magazine* (13-14 December 1997), 38.

² 'Triple Booked', p. 39. The language of this article picks up Armfield's rhetoric of 'shambles', and uses descriptions such as 'ramshackle', 'shambolic' and 'rambunctious.' The critical reception of *Cloudstreet* is also characterised by terms such as 'sprawling saga': for example, the Penguin paperback (1991) includes that standard

component of contemporary book production—excerpts from relevant reviews inserted before the imprint page, and on the back of the book. The key words of these reviews include: ‘generous,’ ‘classic,’ ‘hymn to this country,’ ‘rollicking,’ ‘heart,’ ‘river-of-life Australian family saga,’ ‘exuberant’ and ‘bustling.’ See also Katie Pollock ‘Lambs to the Laughter’, *Sydney Morning Herald* (2 January 1998), 4-5; and for discussion of the novel in the context of Winton’s work, Andrew Taylor, ‘What Can Be Read and What Can Only Be Seen in Tim Winton’s Fiction,’ *Australian Literary Studies*, 17 (1996), 323-31.

³ Tim Winton, *Cloudstreet* (1991; Ringwood, Vic.: Penguin, 1991), p. 424. All subsequent references are to this edition, included parenthetically in the text of the article.

⁴ ‘The uncanny’ is a translation from the German *unheimlich*, literally ‘unhomely’. Freud’s reading of E. T. A. Hoffman’s *The Sandman*, a German Romantic text, identified the uncanny as a literary genre: aesthetic sensation featured in romantic and Gothic representations of it. The key argumentative section of Freud’s essay involves an etymological demonstration that *unheimlich* implies its opposite, *heimlich*—that the unhomely and homely exist within each other. Freud’s definition of the uncanny moment is the recognition of the familiar in the unfamiliar: Sigmund Freud, ‘The Uncanny,’ in *An Infantile Neuroses and Other Works*, ed. and trans. James Strachey, *The Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud* (Standard Edition, 1917-19; London: The Hogarth Press, 1955), vol. 17, p. 218.

⁵ Freud’s eventual position on the uncanny is that the unhomely effect is produced as a result of an infantile complex which has been repressed and is revived by an impression. In this sense, something that has been hidden returns to view. The uncanny may be something which seems strange but is secretly familiar, which has undergone repression and returned from it.

⁶ Winton’s text refunctions Stead’s dystopian vision of the frighteningly articulate and monstrously egotistical father, Sam Pollit. Winton’s helpless working-class men, such as Lester, Sam, Quick, and Fish rewrite the monstrous paternal integral to Stead’s text. Stead’s text also demonstrates the uneasy relation between the use of domestic epic and the central character of an artistic *girl*, suggesting the more usual gender-genre fit between the visionary masculine outsider and the operations of epic, even domestic epic.

⁷ Linzi Murrie, 'Changing Masculinities: Disruption and Anxiety in Contemporary Australian Writing', *Journal of Australian Studies* 56 (1998), 175.

⁸ As Murrie notes: 'valorising the 'feminine' in male characters does not necessarily imply a rejection of the ideologies of sexual difference or hierarchical gender order.' She suggests that such valorisation is an appropriation of what is valued in the feminine, and as such a familiar patriarchal strategy of incorporating threat (p. 176).

⁹ Murrie claims that Winton challenges the regime of dominant Australian masculinity by posting the 'feminine' as constituent of male subjectivities: 'The locating of the domestic as a place of male belonging and discovery disrupts dominant constructions of the public sphere as the site of male proving and "home" as emasculating' (p. 174).

FIONA MORRISON has a particular interest in Australian literature. Her doctoral thesis 'Out of Bounds: Three Expatriate Women Writers (1890-1990)', was completed in the Department of English, University of Sydney, in 1998. During 1999, she has held an appointment as an Associate Lecturer in the Department.