

Between Belonging and Dwelling

The Hospitality of David Malouf's *Remembering Babylon*

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We love the house that we have built and that we hand down to our successors.
Ernest Renan¹

There is no hospitable house.
Jacques Derrida²

Colonialism mangles hospitality. The redrawn boundaries, the urgent and anxious distinction between self and other, and the tenuous claims to belonging and legitimacy complicate a relationship that entails a stable home. Indeed, the simplest terms by which hospitality can be defined—home, host, guest, stranger—founder upon a history of dispossession that directly opposes their signification. Viewed by way of these components, which themselves draw on notions not only of sovereignty, possession and mastery, but also of reciprocity and relation, colonialism is a distortion of hospitality, an arrival that redetermines the attachments, possibilities and legibility of home. This tension between colonialism

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and hospitality is at the heart of David Malouf's *Remembering Babylon*, as the first spoken words of the novel make clear. "Do not shoot" ... "I am a B-b-british object", stutters the protagonist Gemmy Fairley on his arrival at the Queensland settlement, transforming the appeal for hospitality into a plea against aggression, signalling the breakdown of the welcome.³

Settler colonialism, the context of *Remembering Babylon*, offers an especially acute manifestation of the tense theoretical overlap between hospitality and colonialism. As Lorenzo Veracini shows, settler colonialism exists in a troubled relationship to 'home'. The formation of a settler collective depends upon an 'ability to will a collective identity and its institutions into existence'.⁴ 'Home' is a phantasmatic construction of the colony. In addition, the notion of 'home' is split or doubled as the settler colonial collective 'is coming from elsewhere *and* sees itself as permanently situated' and is therefore 'indigenous *and* exogenous at the same time'.⁵ Finally, settler colonialism depends upon a system of segregation and Othering that precludes future hospitality. This is the un-circumnavigability of colonialism's legacy: the usurpation of home, dispossession of peoples, and contesting attachments and claims on land and to belonging.

Remembering Babylon foregrounds the discomfiting correspondence between colonialism and hospitality. The colonial narrative is one of hospitality; it relates the provisional accommodation of an unexpected guest by hosts uncertain of their home. The struggle of the settlers is posed as one of hospitality: establishing a home, confronting an apparently inhospitable land, they attempt not only a physical, but an affective and a cognitive transition from stranger to host. One character echoes claims of the land as *terra nullius*, proclaiming the settlers as the 'first dead': 'It was the fearful loneliness of the place that most affected her—the absence of ghosts. Till they arrived no other lives had been lived here ... They would be the first dead here'.⁶ The central act and driving force of the novel—the event that fully animates the anxieties and fears of the settlers, bringing home to them their vulnerability and the porosity and fragility of the borders that separate them from the unknown—is the accommodation of Gemmy within the home of the respected patriarch and community member Jock McIvor. Not only is Gemmy's appeal the first spoken words of the novel, but Jock's subsequent meditation on recent upheavals to his community

hint at hospitality's importance to the narrative: 'When had it begun? When they agreed to take Gemmy in'.⁷

The novel's engagement with hospitality interferes with what appears to be its national agenda. As a substantial body of scholarship investigates, the novel resembles a revised national allegory.⁸ On the one hand, the novel scrutinises the colonial strategies, tropes and ideologies that enabled and legitimated the dispossession of Aboriginal populations. The friction generated by Gemmy Fairley, an Englishman who lived sixteen years with Aborigines, calls attention to the workings of colonialism. His arrival is a telling disruption of the settlers' dreams of ordered habitations and economies, of homes, homesteads and plantations. On the other hand, the nation survives this critique. The novel seems to establish and legitimate national belonging even as it unravels the logic of colonialism: the stranger invigorates the settler community and Lachlan Beattie, the boy who first encounters Gemmy, grows up to become a minister of the Australian federation government.

The novel's publication in the wake of the landmark *Mabo vs The State of Queensland (no. 2)* further complicates the argument of the novel's nationalism. *Mabo* revisited the colonial government's foundational claim of ownership of the Murray Islands. Against the Queensland Government's argument that the islands had been a *terra nullius*—an empty land without meaning and belonging to no one—the Australian High Court declared not only that native title of that land had existed prior to 1789 but that this title had not been extinguished by the state in the years since.⁹ In other words, *Mabo* overturned the doctrine that had legitimated colonisation and settlement and wrote into the nation's history the displacement of Indigenous peoples. The cultural impact of this resurrection of colonial history is frequently described in terms of home and settlement. Felicity Collins and Therese Davis link *Mabo* to a 'paradigm shift in Australian historical consciousness' that forced Australians to think about moral illegitimacy of their national identity and claim that after *Mabo*, 'non-Indigenous Australians find themselves on unsettled ground.'¹⁰ Russell West-Pavlov's is a Freudian reading, arguing that '*Mabo* made Australia an "uncanny" place. The home of the European settlers became abruptly unsettling, "unheimlich", the familiar suddenly became unfamiliar...'¹¹

Remembering Babylon appears to echo one dimension of the national response to *Mabo*: the desire or aim to settle its disruption. Collins and Davis describe the concern as being one of 'being at home' again in Australia, with 'home' evoking the problematic underlying assumptions of nationhood of unity, exclusion and normativity.¹² Problematically, the discourses of multiculturalism, reconciliation and recognition that promise social justice often end up settling the problems of history in the service of future national unity. Elizabeth Povinelli argues that following *Mabo*, 'shame and reconciliation, a public collective purging of the past, became an index and requirement of a new abstracted national membership'.¹³ The response to *Mabo* revealed contemporary settler states to be what Jo Smith terms 'conjunctural formations that attempt to address the demand of the historical legacies of colonisation at the same time as dealing with the present-time and future-oriented imperatives of the transnational and international global forces'.¹⁴ Multiculturalism in this light is an 'expression of the persistence of settler sovereignty: to make a decision on how differences between settler and native collectivities will be negotiated, maintained, and (ultimately) overcome'.¹⁵

Remembering Babylon's criticism of the nation's colonial foundation can thus be seen to coexist with a reconstruction of the nation. The survival of the community, the disappearance of the stranger, the nostalgia and remorse of the grown children, the conclusion of the novel in a description of Australia's global presence all suggest a transcendence of Gemmy's disruption of the community or the integration of his interruption into a national narrative. In addition, the novel's attention to place, land and home appears to renegotiate the criteria of belonging and legitimacy that relate to and ground nationalism. In other words, the novel seems to strategically incorporate fracture and violence into a national narrative. It seems to inscribe a shameful history into a new national story.

Hospitality interrupts this reading. Although hospitality has a philosophical, theological and political resonance that implicates its defining relationship in questions of ontology, ethics and dwelling and, therefore, in questions of postcolonial national alliance, hospitality decentres and disrupts the home.¹⁶ This is Jacques Derrida's focus in his seminars on hospitality. Derrida's *Of Hospitality* examines hospitality as that which has the potential to signal at once the identity of the home (and nation) as well as its openness and dissolution. Reading

Remembering Babylon as a theorisation of hospitality rather than an allegory of the home, a fine but crucial distinction, affects its construction of the nation. Furthermore, a frame of hospitality privileges a reading of Gemmy that alters the significance of the novel's structure and ending. *Remembering Babylon* puts forward the inevitable and precarious un-belonging of the guest as an ethical mode of dwelling that recognises the home as tragic legacy and remainder of colonialism.

—THE HOSPITALITY OF REMEMBERING BABYLON

The instability of hospitality makes for a malleable and fluid interpretive frame. Hospitality designates relations varying in scope from individual to national and participates in the formulation of theories of globalisation, immigration and cosmopolitanism.¹⁷ It also uncovers and complicates the interplay between two opposing ontological positions of Western thinking: identity and relation. To offer hospitality, the host must be sovereign; he must be master of himself and his home. Yet, hospitality challenges the integrity of the host as it opens (or exposes) the home to the unfamiliar. Hospitality both reaffirms the border of the home—in offering hospitality the host identifies and categorises what and who is outside his home—and puts that home at risk. At the same time, hospitality emphasises reciprocity and relationship. Hospitality, in Tracy McNulty's words, 'involves not only welcoming the familiar *into* the home, but calling the home into question'.¹⁸ The paradox is clear—hospitality entails the integrity it threatens and reconstitutes the home it opens. Hospitality both strengthens and erodes the boundaries between self and other, and between the domestic and the foreign.

To further complicate matters, hospitality can be understood as either a law or an ethics. As a law, hospitality is subject to conditions that set limits on its function and its promise. Derrida shows the violence and injustice of hospitality by emphasising the power of the host and his etymological belonging to notions of mastery, sovereignty and possession: 'hospitality is certainly, necessarily a right, a duty, an obligation, the greeting of the foreign other [*l'autre étranger*] as a friend but on the condition that the host, the *Wirt*, the one who receives, lodges or gives asylum remains the patron, the master of the household'.¹⁹ Moreover, hospitality understood as a right depends on some recognisable similarity between the host and the guest. Derrida specifies that hospitality is available only to those who are

subject to a law, or to those who have a family name, to those, is the implication, who are recognisable. Hospitality as a law therefore sets limits on whom or what qualifies as a guest. And, as McNulty points out, even in the offer the host faces a difficulty: to offer hospitality he must grasp and comprehend the foreignness of the other, thereby reducing and incorporating that foreignness.

Ethical hospitality, on the other hand, is unconditional. Unconditional hospitality requires an open home. It requires the welcoming of the 'absolute arrival', the arrival without name, who might be man, animal, god, dead or alive.²⁰ Unconditional hospitality therefore challenges conceptions of the self as bound, integral, and masterful. Derrida locates hospitality's ethical force precisely in this risk it poses to both home and host. That risk, Derrida suggests, is the price and the value of hospitality. Indeed, Derrida measures the ethics and value of hospitality by its transformation of the host. Read in this way, unconditional hospital is a poetic reach for a being of relation rather than identity that nevertheless remains responsible.

Remembering Babylon lays bare the failures of conventional hospitality that Derrida describes in his seminars, foregrounding the conditionality and limitations of hospitality and the damage these can cause to the guest. Colonialism functions within this narrative both as a specific formation and context that challenges the possibility of hospitality, and as a philosophical excavation of hospitality that exaggerates its violence and limitations and calls into question its underlying suppositions. Penelope Deutscher teases out this distinction. Noting that hospitality depends upon and presupposes property and authority over a territory, she asks, 'what if colonization grounds the assertion of such authorization?'²¹ She calls into question the possibility of hospitality given specific histories of colonisation. She also, however, proposes a closer link between colonialism and hospitality: 'What if those values specifically associated with hospitality (generosity towards the other, fraternity with the other, duty towards the other) must have already brutally failed to generate the possibility of benevolent national hospitality? What if colonialism is the condition of hospitality?'²² In this formulation, all hospitality is colonial. The novel engages with this possibility; it not only critiques hospitality, but raises the question of whether the existence of host-guest relationship, the home, is a sign of an earlier failure of relationship.

Gemmy's arrival sets the tone for the novel's self-conscious analysis of hospitality. Rather than the conventional host of the hospitality narrative, Gemmy first encounters children, playing at the outskirts of the settlement. They mediate his arrival, presenting it as a telling sequence of transformations. At first, he appears as part of the land:

In the intense heat that made everything you looked at warp and glare, a fragment of ti-tree swamp, some bit of the land over there that was forbidden to them, had detached itself from the band of grey that made up the far side of the swamp, and in a shape more like a watery, heat-struck mirage than a thing of substance, elongated and airily distinct, was bowling, leaping, flying towards them.²³

Gemmy changes from land to something elemental—fire, water and air—and insubstantial. He becomes, when closer, a hybrid of man and animal: his humanity uncertain, sex and gender not yet relevant, his movement suggests 'a wounded waterbird, a brolga, or a human that in the manner of the tales they told one another, all spells and curses, had been *changed* into a bird, but only halfway, and now, neither one thing nor the other, was hopping and flapping towards them out of a world over there...'²⁴ Gemmy arrives, in other words, as the indeterminable.

The potential and fluidity of his form and movement gives way to an increasing awkwardness. His final form and arrival, marked by his speech and his claim of a right to hospitality—citizenship—asserts the reductiveness of the law of hospitality:

The creature, almost upon them now and with Flash [a settler's dog] at its heels, came to a halt, gave a kind of squawk, and leaping up onto the top rail of the fence, hung there, its arms outflung as if preparing for flight. Then the ragged mouth gapped.

'Do not shoot,' it shouted. 'I am a B-b-british object.'²⁵

This moment on the fence of imminent flight, which ends with a fall onto all fours at the feet of the children, presents both the limitations and the possibilities of hospitality. Presented through the gaze of children, the narrative retains the potential of Gemmy's arrival. On his arrival, as an arrival, Gemmy resides at the limit. He is neither man nor animal, neither subject nor object; he belongs to both and to neither. On the fence, he is frozen at the threshold and at home on the threshold. Perched there, he calls attention to the precariousness of the threshold, which is

imposed on a landscape arbitrarily and which extends out, exposes and isolates the threshold of the home. Gemmy is what Derrida calls the 'absolute arrival', an arrival who comes from nowhere, who has no name, who resists classification, and who is, therefore, as Derrida describes the absolute arrival: 'Between the profane and the secret, the human or the divine.'²⁶ Arms outreached and hanging, Gemmy is Christ-like; in his movement and then, later, on all fours, he is animal. He is a creature who when silent refuses definition.

His words, however, those first spoken in the novel, register at once colonialism's unravelling of hospitality and the implications of the conditionality of hospitality: "Do not shoot," it shouted. "I am a B-b-british object." Gemmy's address acknowledges the perceived presence of a weapon (in this case a stick wielded by the boy Lachlan), tracking the effect of colonialism on hospitality: the initial greeting, the hail, becomes a plea for life by the one who comes in peace. In addition, the address reveals the potential reductiveness of any identification. In identifying himself as British—and as recognisably human—Gemmy's indeterminability recedes to leave in its place a politically impotent awkwardness. Prior to his arrival, Gemmy is unknowable, uncertain and resists definition. The declaration of nationality and his subjectivity to its law, mistranslates this undefinability into objecthood. Stuttering his nationality, he both calls attention to its importance to the offer of hospitality and registers the restriction of this importance to legal personhood. His stutter calls attention to the importance of nationality in deciding rights of hospitality, while at the same time registering its arbitrariness, its relocation of belonging, worthiness and kinship to issues of the state.

What follows conforms to the dictates of conventional hospitality. The children take Gemmy to the adults of the community where he is subjected to a disfigured, parodic rendition of the interrogation that so often begins and precedes hospitality. Gemmy mimes his history to the adults who gather, communicating his identity in the form of a game that yet keeps within it traces and hints of violence, the wonder of the children given way to the patronising and damaging childishness of the adults. At the centre of a crowd Gemmy explains himself and 'guessing what he intended became a game, and at last, as they eased themselves into the unaccustomed jollity of it, a noisy carnival'.²⁷ Gemmy 'hummed and hooted and shot spittle out his mouth';²⁸ is a 'spectacle', 'a marionette or imbecile, jig[ging] about and play[ing] up

to them'.²⁹ Embedded in the descriptions of the amusement of the adults are phrases derived from colonial narrative—'assault', 'native treachery' and 'savage gesture'.³⁰ Aggression surfaces when one of the younger men, offended at an innocent action, 'jerked his elbow up under the nigger's chin'.³¹ The aggression signals the farce of the interrogation; Gemmy was racially Othered in advance of the parody of identification.

The ostensible issue for the townsfolk faced with this arrival they cannot place, the criterion for their hospitality, is identification or recognition. Derrida describes the interrogation as an attempt to identify the foreigner, to name him, to locate his origin and to comprehend him.³² The settlers are able to construct a fragile identity for Gemmy:

His name [is] Jimmy or Gemmy according to how you heard it ... and his other name [is] Fairley or Farrelly. Sixteen years before, when he was not much older than Lachlan Beattie, he had been cast overboard from a passing ship and had been living since in the scrub country to the north with blacks.³³

In this history, the settlers assume their grasp of the identity of the arrival and they have determined his right to hospitality, which primarily depends upon his 'whiteness'. Hospitality limits and mistranslates him. The creature becomes, when he falls off the fence and enters the village, Gemmy Fairley, native Englishman, and 'a pathetic, muddy-eyed, misshapen fellow'.³⁴

—BESIDE THE GUEST

On one level, *Remembering Babylon* follows Derrida's critique of hospitality, portraying the physical and ontological violence of hospitality and a glimpsed, but lost, possibility of the welcome of the indeterminable. Derrida, however, embraces the ethical potential of hospitality's effect upon the home; *Remembering Babylon's* approach is slightly different. Although Gemmy's arrival disrupts the community, calling into question old ties and assumptions and, crucially, discrediting the closeness and goodness of 'neighbourliness', the novel shifts attention away from the condition of the home and to that of the guest. Rather than fixing its sights on the transformation of the host as a site for the examination of ethical dwelling, *Remembering Babylon* offers the guest as a paradigm for a relation to place that

situates novelty and unfamiliarity within a field of histories and habitations and that disarticulates dwelling from belonging, and, more urgently, from possession. That is, the novel shifts attention from the transformation of the host, Jock McIvor, to the situation and mode of the guest, Gemmy. In doing so, it calls into question the political significance of any formation of home, suggesting the dependence of its construction on dispossession.

Jock's transformative relationship to land after Gemmy's arrival has provoked significant criticism. Although Jock loses standing in the community after agreeing to house Gemmy—his neighbours begin to 'regard [him], who was one of the little inner band, with a closer eye; as if he had developed a mark of difference, or some deformity had emerged in him that they had failed till now to observe'³⁵—he develops a richer relationship to the land:

Wading through the waist-high grass, he was surprised to see all the tips beaded with green, as if some new growth had come into the world that till now he had never seen nor heard of.

When he looked closer it was hundreds of wee bright insects, each the size of his little fingernail, metallic, iridescent, and the discovery of them, the new light they brought to the scene, was a lightness in him—like a form of knowledge he had broken through to. It was unnamable, which disturbed him, but was also exhilarating; for a moment he was entirely happy.³⁶

Jock's experience is controversial as it recalls a settler history of claims to belonging and indigenisation. Patricia Ingram reads Jock's experience as a racialisation of whiteness that re-establishes the criteria for belonging to the land. Ingram argues that Jock imagines a created indigeneity that forges legitimate links to the land (thereby settling the crisis of *Mabo*). This in turn recalls Veracini's argument of the way settlers fashion a relationship to land such that it effects new criteria of belonging.³⁷ Gemmy, understood as a representative of indigeneity who introduces and enables this belonging, disappears from the narrative, allowing the settlers uninterrupted and immediate access to land, history, and home.

Hospitality offers another interpretation. Jock's new experience of the land is not an appropriation or enactment of indigeneity but a relationship to a dwelling place that brings into question the privilege of belonging. This is made clearer in

Jock's reaction to Gemmy's abduction and torture. After interrupting his neighbours' attempt to drown Gemmy—itself a profession of terror within hospitality—Jock goes with Gemmy to his lean-to: 'he crawled with him into that musty, dark-smelling place ... and sat huddled close to him in the dark ... drew him closer, pulled the old moth-eaten blanket around the two of them ... while outside moonlight fell on the cleared space around the hut...'³⁸ Jock turns from his home and neighbours and enters the provisional space of his guest. Jock's transformation is not from settler to Indigenous (from stranger to native), but rather its inverse, an awareness of self not as host but as guest. Jock inhabits the place of the guest, decentering that of the host.

The placement of Gemmy's shed, a 'lean-to' added on to the construction of the house, and thus both attached to and separated from the host's home, mimics the relation of Gemmy's story to that of the community. *Remembering Babylon* provides fragments of Gemmy's story. It is neither whole nor verifiable and is presented through traumatic, disruptive flashbacks. Striking about his story is the violence, the absence of home, and the complication of identity: 'far back, before Willet, when he was still at the maggot stage, he had been one of an army of little creatures ... under the machines in a timber mill'.³⁹ This faded, hazy origin presents Gemmy as human, insect and machine. He is a product both of industrialisation and of insect, of a colony of larvae that live within the factory. From the beginning, Gemmy belongs to the interstices and the outside, which, as the novel makes clear, constitute and bound identity categories and the possibility of inclusion. The world into which Gemmy will enter as human is itself governed by a petty and cruel master, the rat-catcher Willet, whose name echoes the performative utterances of a god: 'Willet. Source of unquestionable commands; of curses, blows, growls, slobbery kisses. The first being he has memory of. Before Willet there is only darkness, his life as a maggot...'⁴⁰ As Willet's Boy, Gemmy clings to a precarious life where 'he has nothing of his own. Everything that comes to him comes through Willet, including his name, Gemmy.'⁴¹ This is another subterranean life; Gemmy's job is to reach into drains and passages for the rats to be killed or to be fought. It is Willet's abuse that pushes Gemmy to arson and to stow away on board the ship on which he would suffer further abuse before being cast overboard to wash up on the Australian beach.

Gemmy's departure from the narrative is as uncertain as his entrance. Although Gemmy's exit has been read as conveniently enabling settler dwelling or erasing

violence from national history, Gemmy's uncertain exit ensures his continued disruption of the narrative.⁴² Reliving Willet's abuse, tortured by the settlers and relocated from the town, Gemmy weakens: 'He too felt burnt out, his skull a husk, paper-thin and rattling as he walked ... it was as if ... he no longer shared the hold these things had on the earth ... He was going to claim back his life; to find the sheets of paper where all that had happened to him had been set down in the black blood that had so much power over his own'.⁴³ As Gemmy enters the story, with an uncertain narrative compiled of gestures, noises and fragments, so he exits, with the physical dissolution of the paper on which he mistakenly believes his life story to have been written: 'he left them, bits all disconnected ... *and my friends Billy an ...*'.⁴⁴ Gemmy disappears both from the story and from the world to which it belongs.

Gemmy's death is similarly uncertain. When Lachlan Beattie, the boy who encountered Gemmy, years later searches for him he uncovers only the rumour of his death in a massacre. Although he attempts to track down Gemmy's bones, Lachlan cannot be certain that those he found were Gemmy's. Without this certainty, Lachlan 'sorrowed quietly for all, in the hope that it might also cover his bones, if they were here, and decided, without proof, out of a need to free himself at last of a duty he had undertaken, a promise made, and a weight on his heart, that this was the place ...'.⁴⁵ As Derrida says of the famous 'absolute arrival' and 'outlaw' Oedipus, Gemmy is 'without a tomb, without a determinable place, without monument, without a localizable and circumscribed place of mourning, without a stopping point'.⁴⁶ Lachlan, like Oedipus's daughter Antigone, is allowed only a provisional mourning. Gemmy cannot be mourned, for '[w]ithout a fixed [*arête*] place, without a determinable *topos*, mourning is not allowed'.⁴⁷ *Remembering Babylon* withholds the closure Lachlan's mourning attempts to achieve.

The novel calls attention to the degree to which the representation of Gemmy is subject to accommodation within a national narrative. Gemmy is presented as foolish, unsettling and other. Yet, details of the narrative suggest the subversiveness of Gemmy's presence. The exchange between Gemmy and the settlement minister Mr Frazer demonstrates one way this takes place. Frazer's 'belief that the sympathy he felt for the man ... gave him an infallible insight into what he was trying to get out' is shown to be ridiculous when 'what emerged from Frazer's mouth was an old man's testicle ... a turd'.⁴⁸ The absurdity of Mr Frazer's attempts to understand

Gemmy undermine readings of any parallel between his views and those of Malouf.⁴⁹ Likewise, Gemmy's exit from the story is not the erasure of a past violence. The narrative notes the violence Gemmy is subject to; it inscribes the marginalisation and elision of this violence into the national narrative. *Remembering Babylon* relates Gemmy through his disturbances within and to the narrative. Like any guest, his story estranges the narrative within which it is housed.

—THE HOME AS TRAGIC

Postcolonial scholars have used the dynamism of hospitality's host-guest relationship to address the legacies of colonialism. To give two recent examples, Katherine Hallemeier describes the ethics of cosmopolitan visitation she reads in J.M. Coetzee as an 'attempt to attend to others' homes responsibly, though they may be as tenuous as, or more tenuous than, one's own' and 'the act of ceding authority and adopting the position of the departing visitor'.⁵⁰ And Smith turns to hospitality for a range of identities that would challenge those constructed by multiculturalism. She analyses lawyer Ani Mikaere's description of colonialism as a transgression of Maori hospitality and comes up with 'vagrant, usurper, and thief' as replacements for a settler identity.⁵¹ In that *Remembering Babylon* privileges guest narrative it resembles these turns to guest identity. However, rather than calling for the ethical abdication of authority that Hallemeier describes, which presumes and depends upon the existence of authority and the definition and hierarchisation of home, *Remembering Babylon* discredits the very institution of home. The novel inscribes home itself into the legacy of colonialism, presenting guesthood as an ethical acknowledgement and suspension of the fiction of home. To be a guest in the settler nation is to address the simultaneity of the nation and its fictions.

If *Remembering Babylon* is a national narrative, it is not triumphant, but tragic. There is no promise of reconciliation or atonement. Lachlan can never be free of his duty to Gemmy. His mourning is simulated, a fabricated closure. Lachlan's childhood friend Janet, who joined a convent when older, recognises this in their later meetings, after Lachlan's only son has been killed in war and they are both under suspicion of spying: 'When he told his uncle of the thing . . . she knew he did not believe it. He was tying up one of the loose ends of his life which might otherwise have gone one bleeding forever'.⁵² The nation in *Remembering Babylon* is the

sediment of the various narratives created to manage homelessness. In this narrative, beginning with a colonialism that is the instigation and abuse of hospitality, the nation is tragic proof of a failure of relation, a brutal Eden of old men and women with no descendants.

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¹ Ernest Renan, 'What is a Nation', in Clive Christie (ed.), *Race and Nation: A Reader*, St. Martin's Press, New York, 1998, p. 47.

² Jacques Derrida, 'Hostipitality', *Angelaki: Journal of Theoretical Humanities*, vol. 5, no. 3, 2000, p. 14, <<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/09697250020034706>>.

³ David Malouf, *Remembering Babylon*, Vintage, New York, 1994, p. 3.

⁴ Lorenzo Veracini, *Settler Colonialism: A Theoretical Overview*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2010, p. 61.

⁵ Veracini, p. 21.

⁶ Malouf, p. 111.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 106.

⁸ Scholarship for the most part reflects ambivalence toward the novel's recognition of the nation's colonial past. Don Randall, for example, reads *Remembering Babylon* as an acknowledgement of injustice and a call for reconciliation: 'If Australia is to be experienced coherently as a modern *and postcolonial* homeland, the excluded elements must be rediscovered and restored ... One must make peace ... with the nation's history of dismemberment', Don Randall, 'Remembering Babylon', *David Malouf*, Manchester University Press, New York, 2007, p. 125. For a discussion of other scholarship participating in this debate see Paul Salzman, who references Germaine Greer, Peter Otto, Suvendrini Perera and Andrew Taylor, as well as Bill Ashcroft and Don Randall; Paul Salzman, 'Recolonising: Historical Fiction and the History Wars', *After the Celebration: Australian Fiction 1989–2007*, ed. Ken Gelder and Paul Salzman, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 2009, pp. 64–94. Salzman reads *Remembering Babylon* as positioning Gemmy as 'a transitional object, mediating an engagement with

the natural world provided by the aborigines' and as 'mythologizing the colonial moment as a path that leads to revelation for those who are in tune with a 'native' experience', p. 66. Russell West-Pavlov writes that Malouf's novel was 'hailed almost unanimously by critics (with the exception of Germaine Greer) as a brilliantly inspired tribute to the ideals of reconciliation', p. 78. In his view, however, *Remembering Babylon* is 'an attempt to destabilize unsettled cultural boundaries, to quell the uncanny unleashed since *Mabo*'. (82) More recent readings raise concerns about the novel's engagement with reconciliation and recognition. Jo Jones condemns Malouf's attempt to establish grounds for empathy and understanding—and so for national unity—through a conflation of non-Indigenous and Indigenous trauma; Jo Jones, 'Ambivalence, Absence and Loss in David Malouf's *Remembering Babylon*', *Australian Literary Studies*, vol. 24, no. 2, 2009, pp. 69–82. Penelope Ingram argues that the novel responds to Australia's identity crisis by presenting a racialised whiteness that allows the settlers to take their place as inheritors and creators of an Australian identity'; Penelope Ingram, 'Racializing Babylon: Settler Whiteness and the "New Racism"', *New Literary History*, vol. 32, no. 1, 2001, p. 159, DOI: 10.1353/nlh.2001.005. She maintains that although Gemmy discomfords the settlers and disrupts their community, these settlers foreshadow or portray a white Australian identity that has forged a link to the land no longer theirs by law.

⁹ Henry Reynolds outlines the significance of the case: 'Up until [*Mabo*] *terra nullius* had played a central role in determining the legal, political and constitutional relations between the European settlers and their descendants and the Indigenous people of Australia'; Henry Reynolds, *Aboriginal Sovereignty: Reflections on Race, State, and Nation*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1996, p. 1. For discussion of *Mabo* and its effect on the national image see also Jeremy Webber, 'Beyond Regret: *Mabo*'s Implications for Australian Constitutionalism', in *Political Theory and the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*, ed. Duncan Ivison, Paul Patton and Will Sanders, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2000.

¹⁰ Felicity Collins and Therese Davis, *Australian Cinema after Mabo*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2004, pp. 3–4.

¹¹ Russell West-Pavlov, *Imaginary Antipodes: Essays on Contemporary Australian Literature and Culture*, Winter, Heidelberg, 2011, p. 72.

¹² Collins and Davis, p. 7.

¹³ Elizabeth Povinelli, *The Cunning of Recognition: Indigenous Alterities and the Making of Australian Multiculturalism*, Duke University Press, Durham, 2002, pp. 18, 29.

¹⁴ Jo Smith, 'Post-cultural Hospitality: Settler-Native-Migrant Encounters', *Arena Journal*, vol. 28, 2007, p. 65, Informit Literature & Culture Collection, <<http://search.informit.com.au/documentSummary;dn=681103352695274;res=IELLCC>>.

¹⁵ Smith, p. 66.

¹⁶ Hospitality organises and responds to questions of belonging, land ownership and homelessness in a way that appears to resolve the national crisis following *Mabo*. Hospitality provides a model for the nation, a frame within which to tease out and to house the problems of the Australian nation—it re-

constitutes identity and yet allows for openness and inclusiveness. As Tracy McNulty points out, the act of hospitality consolidates the home. She writes that 'it is an act that constitutes identity: the identity of the host, but also that of group, culture, or nation in whose name he acts. It is the act through which the home—and the homeland—constitutes itself in the gesture of turning to address its outside', *The Hostess: Hospitality, Femininity, and the Expropriation of Identity*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 2007, p. viii. The offer of hospitality entails a home, in both senses of the word. Holding out the promise of a mode of alliance that can encompass and sustain the trauma and violence of Australia's past and the turbulence of its present—while, crucially, contesting reactionary calls against immigration and for a unified Australia—hospitality addresses the illegitimacy of the nation—for *Mabo* pulled the ground out from under the nation—but also overcomes it. Sarah Ahmed calls attention to the role of multiculturalism's language of hospitality and welcome of multiculturalism in establishing national identity, *Strange Encounters: Embodied Others in Post-Coloniality*, Routledge, New York, 2000.

¹⁷ Tracy McNulty writes: 'The problem of hospitality is coextensive with the development of Western civilization, occupying an essential place in virtually every religion and defining the most elementary of social relations: reciprocity, exogamy, potlatch, 'brotherly love,' nationhood', p. vii.

¹⁸ McNulty, p. xx.

¹⁹ Derrida, 'Hostipitality'.

²⁰ Jacques Derrida, *Of Hospitality*, trans. Rachel Bowlby, Stanford University Press, 2000, p. 35.

²¹ Penelope Deutscher, 'Already Lamenting: Deconstruction, Immigration, Colonialism', *Studies in Practical Philosophy*, vol. 3, no. 1, 2003, p. 11.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 11.

²³ Malouf, p. 2.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ Derrida, p. 35.

²⁷ Malouf, p. 10.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 15.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 16.

³² In 'Foreigner Question', Derrida points out the weight placed upon shared language as a condition of hospitality or as a determinant of foreignness. Australia's history of immigration policy makes the same point.

³³ Malouf, p. 10.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 72.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 107.

- ³⁷ Veracini argues that settler indigenisation is 'driven by the crucial need to transform an historical tie ("we came here") into a natural one ("the land made us")', p. 22.
- ³⁸ Malouf, p. 12.
- ³⁹ Ibid., p. 146.
- ⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 147.
- ⁴¹ Ibid., p. 148.
- ⁴² Ingram (whose is a compelling and careful reading) and West-Pavlov offer two examples.
- ⁴³ Malouf, p. 176.
- ⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 181.
- ⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 197.
- ⁴⁶ Derrida, p. 111.
- ⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 111.
- ⁴⁸ Malouf, pp. 17, 67.
- ⁴⁹ See West-Pavlov, p. 79.
- ⁵⁰ Katherine Hallemeier, *J.M. Coetzee and the Limits of Cosmopolitanism*, Palgrave Macmillan, New York, 2013, pp. 156, 158.
- ⁵¹ Smith, p. 76.
- ⁵² Malouf, p. 197.

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