Australian Reflections in a Mirror Clouded by Dust:

The Search for Self, Soul and the 'Other'

in the Asian Novels of

Blanche d'Alpuget and Christopher J. Koch

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Die Dissertation wurde selbständig und nur mit den angegebenen Hilfsmitteln angefertigt und wurde bislang in dieser oder anderer Form noch zu keinem anderen Prüfungszweck vorgelegt.

This book is dedicated to Colonel George Joseph La Breche (U.S.A.F., ret.), a soldier whose life has been dedicated to a selfless sense of duty, honor and country which would have pleased Arjuna's charioteer, though he has almost certainly never read the *Bagavad Gita*. The belief in education, which he instilled in all of his children, and the good advice to not even begin this study without a firm commitment to bringing it to a successful end are due a large portion of the credit for its completion.

Zusammenfassung

Vom ersten Tag der Existenz Australiens als Sträflingskolonie an bis zum Ende des Vietnamkriegs bezogen sich weiße Australier auf den Westen, was Sichtweise, Einstellung und Stereotypen ihrer Welt betraf, einschließlich der Wahrnehmung ihrer eigenen Rolle darin. Das britische Weltreich unterteilte sich in angelsächsische Eroberer und die eroberten ‚Anderen', und obwohl weiße Australier ihre europäischen Wurzeln nie in Frage stellten, verstanden sie ihre Rolle als die eines ‚Vorpostens der Zivilisation' und betrachteten sich letztendlich gerne als die ‚Anderen' unter den Eroberern. Der Buscharbeiter wurde zum Nationalhelden erhoben, als ‚The Coming Man' bezeichnet und zur Rettung der altersschwachen Mutter England in deren Kriege in ferne Länder geschickt. Die Australier erkannten bzw. waren sogar stolz darauf, dass sie am äußersten Ende des Globus lebten, und nannten ihr Land ‚Oz' und sich selbst ‚Ozzies', als ob Australien das magische Land der Hexen, Zauberer und seltsamen kleinen Menschen wäre. Als sich das Empire aus Ozeanien zurückzog, verlor man damit auch die europäische Perspektive, und eine Neudefinition der australischen Identität nach außen hin wurde notwendig. Es konnte keinen Vorposten eines Weltreiches geben, das nicht mehr existierte, und die weißen Australier mussten sich nunmehr fragen, ob sie in politischer, wirtschaftlicher, kultureller oder sogar spiritueller Hinsicht der alten Ordnung der Eroberer angehörten oder der neuen Ordnung der einst kolonisierten Nachbarländer.

Die Wiedererlangung einer Identität ist zu einem australischen Kreuzzug geworden. Viele Schriftsteller richteten dabei ihre Aufmerksamkeit auf alte europäische Wurzeln. Andere hingegen glaubten, diese Wurzeln entbehrten jeglicher Vitalität, und richteten deshalb ihren Blick nach innen, auf die in mythologischer und metaphorischer Hinsicht reiche, wenn auch extrem ‚andere' Landschaft der Ureinwohner Australiens. Andere wiederum stießen bei ihrer Suche in den ozeanischen Bereich vor, in jene Region also, die in geographischer Hinsicht ihre eigene war und ebenso Jahrtausende an Kulturgeschichte mit dem Westen teilte, die aber immer noch eher eine alte Bedrohung als eine neue Möglichkeit darstellte. Zwei Schriftsteller, die sich nach Asien vorwagten, um dort die Mittel zur kulturellen und spirituellen

Regeneration zu finden, von denen sie glaubten, dass sie notwendig seien, um Australien in der postkolonialen Welt wieder zu entdecken, sind Blanche d'Alpuget und Christopher J. Koch. Sie nahmen ostasiatische Konzepte des ‚Selbst' und der ‚Seele' und verschmolzen sie mit der australischen Besessenheit mit der Angst vor und dem Wunsch nach Kontakt mit dem ‚Anderen'. Durch den so entstehenden Spiegel (‚looking glass') eines hybriden australo-asiatischen Mythos, hofften sie die wahre Seele der australischen Identität aufzudecken.

Es ist eben dies der Grund, weshalb sich die Hauptfiguren in den Asienromanen von Blanche d'Alpuget und C. J. Koch westlichen Standardinterpretationen widersetzen. Die Protagonisten sind gefangen in psychologischen Dilemmata, die sie erbarmungslos an einen Punkt zu treiben scheinen, den das westliche späte 20. Jahrhundert als ‚Wahnsinn' bezeichnen würde, der aber in Wirklichkeit mit seinen Konflikten die Grenzen ihrer eigenen Psyche übersteigt. Ihre Leben sind gekennzeichnet von extremer Mehrdeutigkeit, die ihre Morde und Selbstmorde, ihre Aufgabe persönlicher Werte zugunsten stammesgebundener oder materialistischer Sicherheit, ihre Denkweisen und Handlungsentscheidungen hinter einem Schleier der Paradoxie verbirgt, wobei dennoch für viele die Suche nach einer Identität von Erfolg gekrönt zu sein scheint. Eine angemessene Interpretation der Romane ist deshalb nur möglich, wenn man eine östliche Perspektive einzunehmen bereit ist und östliche Archetypen zu Rate zieht. Der Leser, dem es nicht gelingt, sich in östliches Denken hinein zu versetzen, wird die Protagonisten von Koch und d'Alpuget als frustrierte und desillusionierte Geschöpfe postmodern-absurdistischen Fabulierens verstehen. Er wird Asien noch stärker verurteilen: als Gebiet unwissenden und bösartigen Heidentums, als Gebiet der Korruption und Habgier als Ergebnis ungezügelten Kapitalismus, als Gebiet der Tyrannei, die sich selbst mit Hilfe solcher Greuel wie Armut, Hass und Rachsucht am Leben erhält. Letztendlich wird die Wahrnehmung seiner selbst darunter leiden, denn Australien und Asien sind nicht nur geographisch und wirtschaftlich, sondern auch symbolisch miteinander verbunden. Die Spiegelmetapher trifft deshalb zu, das Bild, das Australien von Asien hat, spiegelt – im Sinne von bedingt und ist bedingt durch – das Bild, das es von sich selbst hat.

Die vorliegende Arbeit gliedert sich anhand einer thematischen Einteilung der Symbole, Metaphern und Mythen, die Koch und d'Alpuget aus den östlichen und westlichen Traditionen beziehen. Es entsteht ein Überblick über die intertextuellen Bezüge der beiden, die als Punkte gegenseitiger Reflektion fungieren, vergleichbar mit parallelen Spiegeln oder dem Bau des Weißen Hasen, der vom England der kleinen Alice ins Wunderland führt, das zugleich am anderen Ende der Weltkugel liegt. Ziel der Arbeit, neben einer kurzen historischen und literarischen Einführung in die Beziehungen zwischen Australien, Asien und dem Westen sowie deren gegenseitige Wahrnehmung, soll es sein, einige der hinduistischen und südostasiatischen Symbole, Mythen und literarischen Strukturen zu ermitteln, die Blanche d'Alpuget und C. J. Koch verwenden. Weiter soll gezeigt werden, wie sie diese wiederum in die westliche Tradition integrieren, in die man sie zu Recht einordnen muss, die aber ihrem Dafürhalten nach ihre mythologische Grundlage verloren hat.

Die Dualität der Identität eines ‚Selbst' und eines ‚Anderen', die sich auf der einen Ebene in der Gestalt Australiens und Asiens manifestiert, auf der anderen Ebene in Dualitäten der Persönlichkeit, der Gerechtigkeit und der Tugend, führt zur Metapher des Spiegels, die Zutritt erlaubt zu dem, was Koch die ‚andere Welt' nennt, in der man zu Selbstoffenbarung gelangen kann, jedoch mit dem Risiko, dabei der Selbsttäuschung zu verfallen. In d'Alpuget führt sie zu einem Konflikt zwischen den Bewusstseinsebenen, der sich häufig in Form eines emotionalen Dilemmas äußert, das darin besteht, sich zwischen einem unvoreingenommenen Wahrnehmen der Realität und immer wiederkehrenden Vorurteilen entscheiden zu müssen. Die Wahl, die man trifft, kann in gleicher Weise entweder zu einem tieferen Verständnis des Selbst oder zu katastrophaler Entmenschlichung führen.

Zentrale Elemente dieser Themen der Suche nach Identität sind: Archetypen des göttlichen Prinzips des Weiblichen aus dem Hinduismus, das als lebende mythologische Gestalt ein subtiles metaphorisches System an die Hand gibt, das dazu beiträgt, die harten Paradoxien der menschlichen Realität in poetischer Vorstellungskraft aufzulösen; die östlichen Wurzeln von Kochs Themen um den ‚doppelten Mann'; die lebenspendende und todbringende

Landschaft und die offensichtlich lebenserhaltende ‚andere Welt', wo das ‚Selbst' und das ‚Andere' die Rollen tauschen, eins werden und manchmal gegeneinander kämpfen; Konzepte der Mächte des ‚Lichtes' und des ‚Dunkels'; die Semiotik von Zeit und Bedeutung; und die Verurteilung durch die Deorientalisten, die glauben, dass die Art und Weise wie d'Alpuget und Koch all das Genannte verwenden, ein orientalistisches Zwängen in Klischees ist.

Untersucht werden intertextuelle Beziehungen zwischen den Romanen sowie ihre östlichen und westlichen Modelle, zu denen Lewis Carrolls *Alice in Wonderland* und *Through the Looking-Glass* gehören, außerdem Orwells *1984*, Washington Irvings *Rip Van Winkle* und bedeudende heilige Schriften wie die *Evangelien*, das *Mahabharata* und das *Bhagavad Gita*. Besondere Aufmerksamkeit erhält das javanesische Schattentheater, das *wayang kulit*, aufgrund seiner strukturellen Modellhaftigkeit für Kochs Charakterisierungen, seine Motive der Macht, des Gesichts, der Loyalität und der Rache, sowie seine doppelte Sicht der Realität, in welcher die illusorische materielle Welt und das auf magische Weise transzendente Reich sich gegenseitig bedingen. D'Alpuget verdankt viel der Hindu-Tradition von Biographien über deren Heiligen, dem Heldenepos *Ramayana* und seinem Thema der Verrohung der Götter und Menschen, was im Zusammenhang betrachtet wird mit der geschickten Verwertung der Autorin der alten orientalistischen Klischees.

Die literarische Besonderheit an Kochs und d'Alpugets Romanen ist, dass sie die intertextuellen Beziehungen so manipulieren, dass sie ihr Ziel der Betrachtung des australo-asiatischen Spiegels zur Seele weiter verfolgen können. Sie zeigen wie östliches und westliches sowohl kulturelles als auch mythologisches Erbe in einer neuen mythopoetischen

Formel zusammengefasst werden kann, die Hindernisse auf dem Weg, Harmonie zu erlangen, überwindet, verschaffen uns Zugang zu der auf erschreckende Weise erleuchtenden ‚anderen Welt' der Seele und geben der modernen westlichen Welt ein Gefühl geistiger Klarheit zurück.

Contents

List of Abbreviations

ABS	Australian Broadcasting Service
ARVN	Army of the Republic of South Vietnam
ASW	*Across the Sea Wall*
BG	*The Bhagavad Gita*
FRM	*The Fortunes of Richard Mahony*
HW	*Highways to a War*
MD	*Monkeys in the Dark*
NVA	North Vietnamese Army
PKI	*Partai Kommunis Indonesia*
TB	*Turtle Beach*
YLD	*The Year of Living Dangerously*

Glossary of Eastern Terms and Names Cited

adharma The absense or antitheses of *dharma* (1), *adharma* represents the chaos which would overthrow the righteous order of the universe, and yet is itself an essential part of that cosmic order.

akasa 'The Void'. A dualistic concept in Sanskrit. It is 'an all-comprehending container, enclosing not only the universe (*loka*), but also the non-universe (*aloka*)' (Zimmer, 1969, 270). It is also the 'brilliant spiritual space' which 'abides within' the individual self, and contributes to the shared identity between the individual and the 'pure Self' (Zimmer, 1969, 430).

alus In the complex continuum of personality types of the shadow puppets of the Javanese *Wayang Kulit*, the positive characteristic of being 'refined'. See *kasar*.

angka The form of *adharma* imposed by the Khmer Rouge, who strove to eliminate all manifestations of *dharma* in Cambodia.

bhakti A sort of 'personal saviour' in the *Mahayana* Buddhist tradition, who, augmented by prayer-wheels, incense, gongs, rosaries, mantras, and a whole pantheon of Buddhas, helps believers gain the 'release' of *nirvana*.

Bodhisattva 'The One Striving for Englightenment'. Originally referring to Gautama Siddhartha before he attained Enlightenment, this term was extended under the *Mahayana* tradition to anyone striving for buddhahood and also to those who, through sublime indifference and compassion, choose to help others reach *nirvana*. See: *Tirthankara*s.

Brahman The changeless divine being of the *Vedas*, who evolved the perishable universe and its creatures out of his own boundless transcendent essence.

dalang The 'puppet master' of the *wayang kulit* shadow theatre.

dharma (1) The righteous order of the universe, which must be supported by all created beings—gods, men, demons, animals, plants, and minerals—, who perform the duties and obligations required of them. Zaehner cites two aspects: 'the *sanatana dharma* or absolute moral order which can never be precisely defined yet is felt to have absolute validity, and the *dharma* of caste and canon law as laid down in the various law-books' (Zaehner, 8).

dharma (2) In the Jainist ontology, the cosmic component which is 'the medium through which movement is possible. *Dharma* is compared to water, through and by which fish are able to move' (Zimmer, 1969, 271). Without this there could be no change—neither beginning nor end nor rebeginning—in the universe.

guna The three *gunas* are natural qualities which distinguish created beings, and which are responsible for the 'impairments', which restrict or impair the manifestation of the true essence of an individual. Man's nature and role in *dharma* is partly determined by his having a certain balance of these. See: *sattva*, *rajas*, *tamas*.

Hinayana 'Lesser Vehicle'. The conservative stream of Buddhism requiring the rigorous spiritual efforts suitable only to a monk. See: *Mahayana*.

kali-yuga In the cycle of the Four World Ages, this is the fourth, final and present one, characterised by the ascendancy of *adharma* over *dharma*. It necessarily preceeds the renewal of the world in another *krita-yuga*, the initial age of creation which is characterised by perfect *dharma*.

karma A universal phenomenon in which an individual's past, including past lives, in conjunction with 'the cosmic *dharma*' or 'fate'—other terms for God's will—, determines whether he goes to a heaven or hell in the period between death and reincarnation, and in what form he will return, or whether he is ready to escape the death-rebirth cycle entirely. See: *dharma* (1).

kasar In the complex continuum of personality types of the shadow puppets of the Javanese *Wayang Kulit*, the negative characteristic of being 'course'. See *alus*.

konfrontasi 'Confrontation.' Indonesia's society created by President Sukarno in which order is based on chaos.

Krishna The Supreme God in the sacred Hindu poem, the *Bhagavad Gita*, who reveals himself to the epic hero, Arjuna. See: Supreme Utterance.

Mahayana 'Great Vehicle'. Of the two great streams of Buddhism, the one by which all beings might attain the state of Enlightment. See: *Hinayana*.

rajas The *guna* which incites passion, rage, and desire. It governs plants and animals in particular, and drives them greedily to devour each other.

sakti The energy, force or power of life, which is the manifestation of the eternal, universal spirit. See: *tapas*.

sattva Brightness, crystal purity, immaculate clarity, utter quiet. That one of the three *gunas* which is associated especially with the gods.

satyagraha 'Insistence on Truth'. Often associated with a very high sense of self-sacrifice.

Shiva One of the triumvirate of supreme gods, with Brahman and Vishnu. Shiva is called variously 'the cosmic dancer', 'the divine lord of destruction', 'model of ascetic fervor', and is the archetype of the 'frantic lover and faithful spouse'. The *sakti* he builds up through ascetic meditation is necessary for the continued change in the universe.

suttee The act or practice of self-imolation of a wife on her husband's funeral pyre. An English term based on the name of the ancient Indian goddess, Sati, who is associated with Parvati as the archetypal good wife. The first wife of Shiva, Sati proved her loyalty to her husband, who was disrespected by the other gods (including her father) despite his essential role in preserving *dharma*, by killing herself.

tamas The *guna* which, dominating the minerals, is darkness, blindness, and the basis of all lack of feeling and ignorance, though at the same time it gives solidity to and frames the universe.

tapas The discipline involving the building up of *sakti*, by which the ascetic cultivates in himself 'a state of psychophysical heat', which bestows on him 'a certain sovereignty over the forces of the macrocosm by virtue of the conquest of the parallel forces in the microcosm' (Zimmer, 1969, 536).

*Tirthankara*s 'Crossing-Maker' or 'Ford-Maker' from Jainist tradition, a saviour or supreme teacher, who acts to help others escape the cycle of time and cross to the 'other shore'. See: *Bodhisattva*.

Triple World The physical realms which are inhabited by the gods, by the demons, and by the plants, animals and men, corresponding roughly to heaven, hell and earth.

Vishnu The Supreme God of Creation, who was reincarnated as the avatar Krishna in the *Bhagavad Gita*.

Introduction

1.1. The Initial Dilemma

Upon beginning this study of the Asian novels of Blanche d'Alpuget and Christopher J. Koch I was struck with the feeling that, while the exotic settings did not seem to lead to significantly innovative plots, the principle characters stubbornly resisted the sort of interpretation which my literary background had prepared me for. The protagonists seemed all to be caught in a psychological maelstrom which was driving them relentlessly into insanity or, at best, towards a socio-cultural siege mentality, a reading which the critical corpus I was encountering strongly supported. At the same time, the primary texts were providing numerous indications that this was not the situation at all, that the protagonists were in fact involved in uncanny struggles which surpassed by far the boundaries of their own psyches, and that, in spite of the extreme ambiguities surrounding the events of their lives and, in some cases, deaths, they seemed, on some level I could not pin down, to be succeeding in the search for identity. Koch's plots and characters were so possessed with images of an 'Otherworld' of fantasy or unreality that the distinction between 'real' and 'unreal' was blurred. In the same way d'Alpuget's characters had taken more than just a jet ride to another continent when they entered into Southeast Asia. They too were transformed in the most fundamental ways; their motives and values strained against explanation in Western psychological or ethical terms. The confrontations faced by d'Alpuget's protagonists recalled the 19th century psychological genre about the beast in man, except that in her Southeast Asia the Mr Hydes far outnumber the Dr. Jekylls. And both writers described characters who suffered from extreme physical handicaps, yet possessed cores of daunting nobility which terrified or bewildered the outwardly stronger men around them.

For these reasons, I realised that I needed to make a study of the Eastern philosophical systems which were at play and of which I had only a superficial knowledge, mostly based on other Western works of literature. Heinrich Zimmer's *Philosophies of India*, a historical survey of the spiritual thought from the subcontinent which I picked up almost by accident,

repeatedly struck me as almost perfectly explaining many of the difficult allusions in Koch's novels. I later learned that Zimmer is held , in the words of Prof. Dr. Michael Hahn, Professor of Indology at the Philipps-Universität in Marburg, Germany, to play the role of 'an inspired outsider' in the field of Indian Studies, but this did not mitigate the relevance I had in the meantime found in the essay 'Crossing the Gap', in which Koch acknowledges his debt to Zimmer's work when he made his own investigations into Hinduism beginning in the 1950s. Indeed, an 'outsider' seems just the authority required for a study concentrating on the Australian 'Other'. It has not always been so easy to find the sources to Koch's and d'Alpuget's knowledge of Asian philosophies, and in the cases when it has been possible it has not always proved useful, but the path towards their Eastern archetypes was opened.

1.2. The Title

Any student of post-colonial literature will recognise the terms 'self' and 'Other' as key concepts in the theoretical discussion about the (re)formation of national identities in the wake of the collapse of the European—and especially the British—imperial regimes. There is a certain ambiguity in the terms which is faced by any society when it goes quietly one day from being colonial to post-colonial. It is a problem which a nice little revolution resolves quite well, but when the colonial master grants post-colonial status mustn't there remain some indebtedness which precludes the growth of a separate identity? The intention of this study, however, is not to explain and discuss current post-colonial theory but to focus on the specific and rather unique relevance of these terms within the context of the Australian-Asian relationship. The white settler society, once a dominated role-player of the empire, has in the post-colonial period become the dominant social group in contemporary Australia. Yet, the post-colonialist label it shares with its Asia-Pacific neighbours has not led to a dismantling of the reciprocal racial predjudices or allowed development of a sense of Australian identity tied to the region in which it has its most important economic and political interests. Indeed, when white Australians venture into the Asia-Pacific, they resemble the old European colonials just as much as—or more than—they ever did—to themselves as well as to the Asians.

Put into an Asian context, the ambiguities of 'self' and 'Other' would inevitably seem to multiply, but the Asian vocabulary also provides the resolving image from classical Indian literature of the 'mirror clouded by dust'. These are all central to the perceptions of identity presented in the novels of Blanche d'Alpuget and Christopher J. Koch, and so deserve some preliminary clarification.

The 'self' refers to the identity of the individual: first, on the level of the entirety of his psychological makeup, and second, on that of his innermost being, that is without the accumulation of masks—the images made by and of him about who and what he is—which conceal the true reality of his being. This reality without the psychological baggage of the 'self' might be identified as his 'Self' or, alternatively, the 'soul'. The 'soul' can, in order to simplify complex matters for immediate purposes, be separated into two concepts which, however, are really one. There is the individual 'soul', which somehow belongs to and distinguishes the individual from all other individualities, and there is the 'Soul', which is the monistic entity to which all reality belongs and in which there is no distinction between individuals. The 'Other' is the antithesis of 'self'. It usually refers to an alien, stranger, or fiend; in the Australian context the 'Other' is typically Aborigine or Asian. Yet, just as one who enters the domain of another culture temporarily becomes the 'Other', to one who finds himself lacking a clear identity, whose 'self' is so full of contradictions and paradoxes that he cannot recognise himself, the 'Other' becomes something within himself. And as one searches deeply into his being for signs of his true reality, it is his unknown 'soul' which is the 'Other'.

The 'mirror' is one of the favourite metaphors used by Australians engaged in this search for identity. Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland* books are the immediate pretext for C. J. Koch's symbolic reflections of the self, though the looking-glass metaphor must be as ancient as still water. Australians long relied on the English for points of view, attitudes and stereotypes, including the perception of the 'Other' which was the perfect term for the yellow and black hordes of savages which seemed to threaten white Australia from both inside and out. At the same time, Australians understood their own role as 'others' in the empire, and

living in a land which lay somewhere 'through the looking-glass' (Alice thought she might eventually arrive in Australia as she was falling endlessly through the rabbit hole) must also have had its psychological attractions. They identified with being the 'outpost of civilisation', made the hard-nosed bush worker their heroic national type, entitled him 'The Coming Man', and sent him to rescue the frail and ageing mother empire in her faraway wars. They revelled in living at the extreme end of the planet, and called their country 'Oz' and themselves 'Ozzies' as if Australia were the magical land of witches, wizards and yellow-brick roads. Yet, with the end of empire, the point of view was deconstructed, and the Australian identity suffered its loss. There could not be an outpost of an empire which did not exist, and white Australians were left wondering if they belonged to the old order of white-skinned European colonial rulers or to the new order of dark-skinned non-European indigenous peoples.

Rediscovering an identity became an Australian quest. Many writers tried to climb back out of the rabbit hole and return to Europe; others opted for deeper journeys through the looking-glass into Asia. The Australian 'Others' were going to meet the Asian 'Others', with the hope that daring to examine each other more carefully might lead to a clearer perception of the 'Others' suppressed within themselves.

This is a veritable house of mirrors; it is difficult to tell what is real from what is only a reflection, but this is the first fact one must accept before he can begin to understand the truths behind realities and reflections. Only then can he begin to see past the illusory reflections which obscure his own true reality—past the dust obscuring the pristine mirror. This metaphor, cited by Billy Kwan in Koch's *Year of Living Dangerously* (*YLD*, 81), comes from the sacred Hindu poem, the *Bhagavad Gita*. The epic hero, Arjuna, asks the Supreme God Krishna what drives a man to sin and therefore be blinded to the wisdom of God's justice and salvation. Krishna answers:

> It is greedy desire and wrath, born of passion, the great evil, the sum of destruction: this is the enemy of the soul.
> All is clouded by desire: as fire by smoke, as a mirror by dust, as an unborn babe by its covering (*BG* 3:36-38; translated by Mascaró).

The mirror is the symbol of the true reality of man's soul; the dust is the illusion which obscures its image. Man's soul is identical to the imperishable spirit which is the only true reality. As Krishna says, 'The unreal never is: the Real never is not' (*BG* 2:16). This, finally, is the riddle of identity faced by the protagonists in the Asian novels of Blanche d'Alpuget and C. J. Koch.

The crux of stepping through a looking-glass is that the world on the other side is one's own in reverse. It may be inhabited by Mad Hatters and fail to abide to the laws of reason and gravity, and it may be a world deemed 'unreal' by those who abide in the world they deem 'real', but it is still both a reflection of the world on this side of the glass and a projection of the world on the other side. Each world represents the complement of its inverted image, making the looking-glass an apt symbol for the Western/Asian dilemma of identity facing Australians.

1.3. Why an Asian Connection?

The question remains: why should white Australians resort to Asia as its looking-glass when they have their own landscape as a source of all the spiritually and mythically regenerative materials they would need to rediscover themselves in the post-colonial world? John Milne suggests that, while they desire to look inwards for landmarks of identity, it may be too hard for white Australians to come to terms with the Aborigines who are inseparably bound to that landscape. By looking outwards to Asia, however, they manage to follow a way round this impediment, and still see a reflection of themselves which, once brought into focus, can later be related to the ultimate goal of addressing their relationship with the Aborigines and the Australian landscape.

> We, white Australians, consider individual traits like assertiveness, pride, aggressiveness, frankness and familiarity as assets. In South-East Asia, as in Aboriginal Australia, virtues of politeness, humility, modesty and passiveness are more greatly admired in a person. (Milne, 286)

The similarities of Asians and Aborigines, in body language, sense of family, concepts of social harmony, sharing and caring for the well-being of the group, contrasts with the Western verbal language, sense of loyalty to mates, competitiveness, work efficiency, and emphasis on the individual of white Australians, and highlights, in Milne's view, that white Australians

themselves are the 'dreaded' others in the Asia-Pacific. If white Australians are to overcome their stereotypes and see Asians for what they really are, and also see the Aborigines for what they are, they must first of all see themselves properly (Milne, 286).

Milne's view is itself a looking-glass image of the one made by Alison Broinowski, that 'the way Australians see Asia determines the way we see ourselves'. As Milne puts it: 'The way Australians see themselves (in their own country) determines the way we see Asia' (Milne, 287). Koch and d'Alpuget are working at the problem from both sides of the mirror by removing the physical separation between the two and then hammering away at the monumental stereotypes Australians have inherited about themselves and Asians. Given that the Australian/Asian relationship so much resembles a house of mirrors, it does not seem unreasonable that the two points of view share planes of intersection and that it is upon these surfaces that Australians (and Asians) will come to know themselves more fully.

1.4. The Problem of Describing the Western/Eastern Liaison

D. M. Roskies writes of some of the main impediments to such a literary study as this about Australia's relationship with Southeast Asia. The first is that 'in popular consciousness "Indonesia," like "Japan" or "India," can seldom be seen except through the tinted or distorting filter of ultramondane assumptions about "The East," assumptions which are so ingrained in one's awareness of the human world as to be impossible fully to refine'. The second has to do with 'the grammar of "orientalism," consisting of unintentionally supercilious associations yoked to suppositions endorsed by the culture as a whole and supervening to reinforce attitudes of judgement from on high' (Roskies, 35).

Most writings about the Asia-Pacific, Roskies argues, have remained within the realm of the 'empirical-romance' which is built upon such preconceptions, but Koch's *Year of Living Dangerously*, which 'adventurously puts to rout some of the obstacles which are apt to supervene between a creative intelligence and materials which customarily remain opaque to western understanding', shows that there can be exceptions (Roskies, 36). Rather than exploiting Southeast Asia 'for its exotic contents or treated as a location wherein various

humdrum seedinesses can be tricked out with a sensational frisson' or doting 'voyeuristically and with *schadenfreude* upon the ramshackle brutalities of a Third World polity coming slowly apart at the seams', Koch has a 'perspicacious determination to arrogate as a vocabulary of significance the complex of values associated with the world of *wayang kulit*' (Roskies, 39). Roskies gives Koch due credit for 'an outstanding attempt on the part of a modern European imagination to receive into itself an Indonesian cosmology, more specifically a Javanese nexus of form and value' (Roskies, 48).

Roskies, however, does not extend his analysis beyond the *wayang kulit*, and this is for the obvious reason that even to begin would be impossible in a journal article. Unfortunately, the *wayang* alone cannot solve the problems of analysis of Koch and d'Alpuget's characters noted above. For that, one must proceed to the pretexts of the *wayang kulit* itself, specifically in Hindu epic poetry. Even in this much longer study a complete intertextual analysis would be impossible as the Eastern pretexts alone are numerous and often massive works—the *Mahabharata* is, with over 100,000 couplets, the longest poem in the world, some 30 times the length of *Paradise Lost* (Mascaró, xxi). It would also be an especially precarious undertaking since both Eastern and Western pretexts to the novels are often sacred scriptures, making interpretation a doubly personal experience. Yet, the novels of d'Alpuget and Koch are striving precisely to become such personal, provocative experiences for their readers.

1.5. The Problem of Intertextuality

This brings up the sticky question of intertextual interpretation. First, it is self-evident that for a 'true-believer' the heuristic interpretation of sacred texts outweighs their original meanings. Second, the same can be said about non-sacred texts and/or non-true-believers, but few works of contemporary fiction evoke much discovery on the part of the readers. Third, the intertextualist argument that the writer is dead—that is, that his hermeneutic role has been vacated, and that he is no more than a semiotic middleman—might seem valid after a first reading of the five novels in this study, but such writers as Blanche d'Alpuget and C. J. Koch are actively manipulating the intertextual process itself. They are reaching back to spurned

Western cultural myths and revitalising them with parallel but living myths from the East, in order to re-enchant the West with a vital mythological culture in texts which, as symbolic if not sacred, the contemporary reader can receive with a degree of heuristic interpretation.

Koch is clearly trying to reach back to the initial, literal 'meaning' of his pretexts in spite of the huge cultural and historical gap which has opened, and not just since the classical Indian era but even since the glory days of the British Empire, because in the West they no longer have 'significance'. Koch becomes the poet of a new mythology, and then encourages the reader to discover the significance by constructing multiple hierarchies of hermeneutic and heuristic interpretations of 'meaning' and 'significance'. Cookie, for example, recites the prayer of the *dalang* puppet master of the *wayang kulit* shadow theatre, asking heaven and earth for the inspiration to recount not only a mundane story of Australian expatriates but the sacred tale of the spiritual battle for the soul; Billy Kwan, from his towering perch up on the tall bar stool or the desktop, lectures on the philosophies of East and West, and invokes the Javanese spirits, first to teach Guy Hamilton but later to discover for himself the truths of self and soul; and in the manner of the *dalang*, the *wayang* puppet master who interprets the canon of heroic and magical plays of the sacred Javanese shadow theatre, President Sukarno subtly refashions the scripts of sacred *wayang* plays performed at his mythical palace in the cool mountains to reveal the shifts in turbulent Indonesian political power to his nervous ministers.

Kwan's journey of self-discovery, likewise, demands the heuristic accompaniment of the reader, who Koch leads like Alice down the rabbit hole, armed with an array of powerful mythological symbols and metaphors. Sent through the labyrinth of Kwan's thoughts, actions, and death, the reader is finally forced into the position of interpreting, in terms of his own socio-cultural environment, Kwan's motives, psychological state, and, ultimately, success and/or failure.

D'Alpuget's task is of another kind, but no less daunting. She first entices her readership into psychological identity with her protagonists in what begin like the stereotypical romance/adventures about the East which Roskies discusses. She shows the reader Asia's

bustling markets and streets, the inadequacies of its most basic forms of modern technology, the quaint personalities of the people, the fascinating and shocking religious festivals, and the extreme nature in the drive for survival. Then, with a change in the light, she shows the weak or even downright ugly sides of the Western protagonists. Her main tool, the stereotype, is a double-edged sword for the contemporary writer, but one which d'Alpuget wields with cold precision. She succeeds as a master of intertextual manipulation, as the reader who one moment is quietly enjoying her humour and 'horror stories' of expatriate life in Southeast Asia, the next moment finds himself the real victim, as an accomplice to the stereotyping which he knows he ought to have repressed.

The reader who fails to incorporate the Eastern forms into his repertoire will inevitably find Koch and d'Alpuget's protagonists to be frustrated and disillusioned figures in post-modern, absurdist fabrications. They will judge Asia as lands of ignorant, malefic paganism, of corruption and greed born of unbridled capitalism, and of tyranny which supports itself with the horrors of poverty, hatred and revenge. Finally, their self-perception will suffer, for try as they may, they will not be able to ignore the fact that Australia and Asia are bound not only geographically and economically but also symbolically.

1.6. The Approach, and its Goal

Nesselroth writes that any text has, on one hand, its *meaning*, 'the *literal* meaning which a statement or textual fragment has in its initial generic and cultural context', and, on the other hand, *significance*, 'what a text would mean in other historical periods, as a consequence of the reader's cultural evolution' or even simply in 'a different verbal or situational context' (Nesselroth, 50). This semantic distinction would involve the problems of divining the unique, probably unknowable 'meaning' and then applying it to any of an infinite selection of 'significances', and seems to oblige any intertextual analysis to divide the material into small, consumable bites. In order to avoid the earlier mentioned limitations which Roskies has taken upon himself, this study does not structure itself according to formal genre but rather along thematic divisions of symbols, metaphors and myths which have come out of the Eastern and

Western traditions. These are of course keywords in mythic criticism, but the reader is warned not to expect an approach centered around the theories, for example, of Carl Jung and Northrop Frye. The dearth of previous work on the novels of C. J. Koch and Blanche d'Alpuget means that the research must start from a position barely past 'Go', and therefore seems to require a much broader view at the relationships than one critical theory would offer. And nevertheless, it must be acknowledged that this study is only able to begin revealing the depths of areas which need to be analysed.

Therefore, while this study is necessarily long and might seem to wander along a path which crosses back over itself at points, its goal is simple; it will attempt to ascertain the origin, nature, and definitive characteristics of some of the Hindu and Southeast Asian symbols, myths and literary structures which C. J. Koch and Blanche d'Alpuget have put to use, and to illustrate how they have integrated them into the Western tradition where their novels rightly belong, but which, they believe, suffers from the loss of its mythological basis.

1.7. A Chapter Preview

Chapters 2 and 3, 'The Historical Environment' and 'The Literary Tradition', provide a brief overview of the triangular relationship between Australia, Asia, and the Western powers, and explore the background for Australian perceptions of Asians and Asia which have developed in the last two centuries from stereotypes inherited from the West. The 'Orientalist' views brought with the rest of European culture to the Antipodes formed the earliest images of the Asians as inferior and untrustworthy races who would best be kept under the tutelage of European powers. The 'Asiatics' Australians knew were pictured as simpletons who walked and talked strangely, and though they seemed to be good and reliable workers their motives were ever suspect, and their paganism, though innocuous, proved them unfit for Christian society. Those the Australians did not know posed a demonic threat to overwhelm Australia by sheer force of numbers, enslave its innocent population, and infect the white race with its degenerate genes.

With the end of the period of colonial domination Australia found its identity crippled by the deconstruction of the old imperial order. Alongside the persistent remains of the older points of view, Australia's vision of itself—in economics, culture, politics, etc.—has changed from being peripheral to world events to being ever more self-aware and assertive as a regional power. Images of itself and the Asia-Pacific are now creations of its own making. Asia is often presented as a sort of panacea for Australian problems and inadequacies, yet the uncertainties of Asian intentions still leave Australia struggling to determine its rightful role vis-à-vis Asia in the post-colonial world. Australians understand that they belong logically to the Asia-Pacific, but still fear the region to be full of the racial and cultural hazards which have always tormented the Australian-Asian relationship.

The direct study of Blanche d'Alpuget and C. J. Koch begins in Chapter 4, 'The Cliché as Writer's Tool', with a look at how the writers manipulate the deeply ingrained colonial stereotypes which ought already to have been 'deconstructed'. In *Turtle Beach* Blanche d'Alpuget shows her mastery of the stereotype by introducing the sort of 'horror story' images of Asia which every tourist loves to bring back from a 14-day package holiday. The extreme cleanliness of Singapore, the filth of Malaysia, the duplicity of the Asians, and impossible technological and social backwardness are clichés which lure her readers into identification with the central characters. She then turns the clichés back on the readers by showing how those Australian expatriates are living in neo-colonialist luxury, exposing the readers' own inherent if repressed feelings of racism and intolerance.

Koch's Asia is a playground for his characters, who express aspects of their personalities which they would have to hide in a West which deems them degenerate. Both d'Alpuget and Koch are raising neo-orientalist ghosts, but are not apologists for the old Western-dominated patriarchy. They are rather juxtaposing opposing views of 'self' and the 'Other' in order to force their Australian readership to reconcile their purported liberal post-colonial values with the realities of their deeper feelings about Asia, and thereby to further each Australian's search for 'self' through a better understanding of the 'Other' both within and without.

Asia as Australia's mirror image is further explored in Chapter 5, 'Asia as the Looking-Glass World'. The nearly obsessive yearnings for danger and desire in the contact between 'self' and the 'Other' realise themselves in images of Asia as a land of totalitarianism and folly, but which are only thinly veiled expressions of Australia's perceptions of itself. C. J. Koch's extensive use of the 'Alice' books of Lewis Carroll as pretexts for *The Year of Living Dangerously* and *Highways to a War* provides the vehicle to further his themes of the dualities of personality and of the interface between parallel worlds which are, at best, playfully reversed images and, at worst, fully antagonistic projections of each other. Following in the footsteps of the innocent Alice makes it easier for Koch's characters and readers to tumble into the unknown and untrusted realms of Southeast Asia, a land where the revealed soul is the true wonder.

Chapter 6, 'The Circular Path of Non-knowing, Doubt, and Faith', investigates the metaphors originating in the essential, circular identity between man and his universe of the *Vedas* which d'Alpuget and Koch utilise to further the Australian search for self and soul. For Koch's protagonists, it is the thwarted search for the wisdom of Europe which leads toward Asia as a perilous but empowering alternative source of inner wholeness. Focusing on Koch's first Asian novel, *Across the Sea Wall*, this section introduces early appearances of the writer's favourite themes of personality and the individual's innocence and experience, of Eastern and Western cultural and mythological inheritances, of converging perceptions of self and of the 'Other', and of the dangerously enlightening 'Otherworld' to which Asia can give access.

The difficulties of achieving the goal of 'at-one-ment' which preoccupies d'Alpuget's protagonists is explored from Eastern and Western points of view. The readers' early sympathy for Judith Wilkes of *Turtle Beach*, who seems to be on the high road of modern Western culture with respect to what appears at first to be an abominably pagan Eastern world, turns into alienation when she is exposed for her unwillingness to acknowledge her own 'non-knowing' or accept her self-doubts. Wilkes rejects the Eastern approach which is increasingly shown able to reconcile the elements of self which lie beyond one's understanding and to lead

to the faith she so sorely lacks. Unable to come to terms with her stereotypically constructed self, she is condemned to be a lonely expatriate of the soul whose only comfort is the materialism her modern world offers.

The focus of this study shifts further toward the Eastern mythopoeic structures and themes in Chapter 7, 'The Two Realms of the *Wayang*'. The *wayang kulit*, the Javanese Shadow Theatre which is the central metaphor in Koch's *The Year of Living Dangerously*, provides a complex formal basis which personifies the spirit of the intertwined Eastern concepts of power, face, loyalty, and revenge. It represents reality on two levels: the illusory material world, and the magically transcendent realm; and through this dual perspective the main characters' development through innocence, experience and maturity is observed.

The main characters of the *wayang* are the heroic Pandava brothers from the great Indian epic poem, the *Mahabharata*, and the Javanese dwarf god, Semar. Koch has held that the *wayang kulit* play *The Reincarnation of Rama* provided his novel's structure, including the prototypes for Hamilton and Kwan in Arjuna and Semar, but the most interesting and illuminating aspects of his use of the *wayang* are found in his adaptation of the multiple levels of narration, the musical accompaniment, and the complex continuum of personality types which is fundamental to any character analysis of *The Year of Living Dangerously*.

Chapter 8, 'The Divination of History and the Duality of Justice', carries forth the argument that a wholly Western critical approach to Koch's *Year of Living Dangerously* is doomed to error. Previous critical papers about Koch's intertextual use of the *Bhagavad Gita*, the sacred 'Song of the Lord' which is the archetype for the *wayang kulit*'s stories of Arjuna and Krishna, the avatar of Vishnu, the Supreme God of Creation, are reviewed and themselves criticised. Many are extremely useful, others betray weaknesses in their grasp of the pretexts, and some are simply looking to ignore the Eastern archetypes altogether and to force a classification of the novel as one form or other of late 20th century Western literature.

This study argues that Koch has written a subtle, fantastic, and harrowing novel of the apocalypse. History is torn away from the control of those who would make it into an

accidental sequence of events, revitalised with a fusion of the mythopoeic semiotics of Hindu sacred tradition—represented principally by the *Mahabharata*—and Western, Christian tradition—mainly from *The Gospels*—, and then applied to the microcosmic tale of a clever Australia dwarf, his clumsy giant friend, and their search for spiritual salvation. The tale is too eclectic in its assembly of pretexts, archetypes, metaphor and symbols to fit easily into Western literary criticism, but its universality can be seen not only in its demonstration of the parallel messages in Eastern and Western sources, but also in its relevance to efforts for a re-enchantment of the modern West's demythologised culture.

Koch's protagonists are all males, but he populates his novels with female characters who embody the sacred feminine principle. Chapter 9, 'The Divine Feminine', investigates the archetypes he has taken from Hindu tradition to continue his revitalisation of the desiccated Western mythological culture. Rather than being a neo-orientalist move to appropriate Asia's symbols, Koch's attraction to the Eastern Goddesses is that as living mythological figures they are much more accessible to provide the subtle metaphoric system which might resolve in the poetic imagination the harsh paradoxes of human reality. This divine feminine is manifested in the Great Mother Goddess, who is known by many names but mainly as Parvati (in her aspect as the Good Mother and Wife), Durga (the Warrior), and Kali (the Destroyer). She becomes Devi Sri (the Goddess of the Earth and Fertility), Sri Lakshmi (the Goddess of Fortune), and a wider pantheon of minor goddesses and accompanying spirits who share ancient roots with the Venus figures of pre-historic Europe. Koch emphasises this pantheistic, Indo-European unity while he develops his female characters in the vocabulary of the Asian imagery.

For Koch, the divine feminine is the metaphor for an unattainable principle which yet underlies all spiritual and material activity. She appears in the guise of many characters in his novels, to prod, provoke, and awaken his male protagonists to activities which are beneficial to *dharma*, the righteous order of the universe.

Chapters 10, 'The Masks of Personality', and 11, 'The Masks of Doubles', form the heart of this study insofar as they delve into the problem of 'identity', 'soul' and the 'Other'

from the Asian point of view. This basically is that the ultimate 'Other' is the individual 'identity'. The totality of masks are pulled over to hide, protect, and/or inhibit revelation of the 'soul', which is the true, unique and perfect reality of the universe. D'Alpuget makes special use of the concepts of the 'five hindrances' and the three *gunas*, which condemn the created universe to illusion and ignorance and prohibit the self-revelation necessary for man's entry into *nirvana*. Her characters are distinguished by the dehumanisation born of their egocentric desires. There are some, however, who would free themselves of their spiritual hindrances, though the struggle for self-awareness proves hard and lonely. Koch parallels this with his images which draw on the ancient Vedic concept of the necessary co-operation between men and the gods to support the dharmic order against the onslaught of demons whose cosmic role is to overthrow *dharma* and bring the cycles of time to a catastrophic end.

Chapter 11 focuses these principles on the double characters. Blanche d'Alpuget's story of Alexandra Wheatfield resembles the Hindu hagiographical tradition depicting saints and the 'dark brothers' who would hinder their enlightenment. In a continuation of the archetypal sources examined in the chapter on the *wayang kulit*, Koch's theme of the 'double man' is explored for its Eastern roots, especially from the various Hindu traditions and from the Javanese Shadow Theatre which see the individual as an incomplete entity in need of unification with his complementary other to become a fully functional whole. The figures of Billy Kwan and Guy Hamilton are given special attention here in order to show how they must be critically analysed from these Asian points of view.

Chapter 12, 'Encountering the "Otherworld"', further explores Koch's fascination with the life and death-giving landscape, perhaps the most important of Australian metaphors involving the desires and fears of contact between 'self' and 'Other', which he applies to the Asian context. Koch's Asia is part Wonderland, part Sleepy Hollow, and part hell, and it is entirely impossible to distinguish which parts are real and which purely imaginary since all are steeped in illusion. It is inhabited by kings, peasants, and spirits, and has become the battleground of foreign invaders, medieval armies, and demons in the apocalyptic storm for

macrocosmic supremacy of which the war in Southeast Asia is but the eye. The journalists are drawn out of their natural but desertificated habitats into the storm by the presence of a seemingly life-nourishing 'Otherworld', whose access lies barely hidden in the bustling markets and streets of Jakarta, Saigon and Phnom Penh. The unknown world they enter is the plane of the looking-glass, the point of conjunction where the 'self' and 'Other' exchange roles and merge. It is a land of imagination and shadow where the forces of light and dark, good and evil have massed to bring to a final decision the war begun with the great battle of the *Mahabharata*. This land is Koch's perception of the 'Otherworld' where nature might no longer be an antagonistic element to human presence, and the virtues of *dharma* reign. Yet, it is also a world where one can become intoxicated with the illusion which threatens to overwhelm reality. Finally, it is precisely by taking the risks of passing through the looking-glass between the worlds that one might finally solve the riddle of identity.

Chapter 13, 'Crossing to the Other Bank', applies the problems of time and meaning raised in Koch's earlier novels to the case of *Highways to a War*. First, however, the de-orientalist stance is considered for its condemnation of d'Alpuget and Koch's use of old Orientalist stereotypes in their novels. The de-orientalist goal would be to wipe the slate clean and let Australia and Asia simply concentrate on future business relations; yet this is demonstrated to be little more than a new paint job on the old Orientalist machine, and would in Koch's view make progress in clearing up the questions of Australian and Asian identity ever more difficult, for the identity of each is necessarily a hybrid of the two. If *Highways to a War* were just a mystery about what happened to Mike Langford, then the de-orientalists would have a good argument. It is, however, more about who (or rather *what*) he is, and, as with d'Alpuget's character analyses, this justifies Koch's incorporating all forms of old metaphors and stereotypes.

Time is a concept which is both concrete and abstract at once, for it must satisfy the needs of living our daily lives which are both linear and circular, finite and infinite, real and illusory. It is, therefore, a notion whose Western perception approaches the Eastern very

closely in spite of the West's reluctance to accept anything it cannot substantiate and the East's devotion to metaphoric expression. Additionally, the West most often couples the concept of time with 'space' while in the East time's sister is 'meaning'. The concrete/abstract duality of time is especially viable for Australia which has always lingered, in its conception of itself, precariously on the edge of time, space, and meaning. *Highways to a War* is Koch's expression of his preoccupation with these dualities as well as the continuation of his development of the notion of the duality of personality.

Koch offers up an extremely unsatisfying image, after so much development of Asian symbolism, of Langford dying on a cross in the killing fields of Cambodia. Langford, however, is no rebaked Christ figure. Koch has partly written him in a ghost story where the spirits are caught in the collapsing wheel of time. He is also fashioned after the *Tirthankara* or *Bodhisattva* saints of Hindu tradition. These are the 'Ford makers' or 'Crossing Makers' who aid other individuals 'cross to the other bank', a metaphor for achieving the self-realisation which is *nirvana*. Finally, Langford is demonstrated to be a sacrificial figure, but one who is more modelled after the Hindu than Christian tradition.

1.8. A Textual Note

Working with texts composed in Australian, British, American and Indian standards of English has led to a few (but persistent) grammatical inconsistencies. Several names of Hindu gods have various spellings. I have opted for the most 'English' representations of the pronunciations, using, for example, Krishna and Shiva in the place of Krshna and Siva or other graphic forms which are not available in my repertoire of character styles. I capitalise 'West', 'Western', 'East' and 'Eastern' according to the rules of the M.L.A., use 'Southeast' instead of 'South East' or South-east', generally follow critical standards by capitalising 'Other' even though this disregards the essential opposition which distinguishes it from 'self' and 'Self', which are described in 1.2 above. I have also selected British spelling norms which, for an American writing about Australian novels which take place in Asia, seems to be the fitting 'middle path'. When citing directly from the novels or other scholars, of course, I stay as close

to the original as my word processor allows. This makes for a colourful tossed orthographic salad, and I trust scholars and readers will not find this too unseemly.

The Historical Environment

2.1. Introduction

That Australia has had a long and ambivalent relationship with Asia should be no surprise when one considers the long and ambivalent relationship it has had with itself. There are, after all, at least three Australias—Aboriginal Australia, White Australia, and Asian Australia—and until White Australia, by far both the last in longevity and the first in social, economic and political power, manages to come to terms with itself it is not going to be able to reconcile its role with respect either to its Aboriginal countrymen, its Asian neighbours, or its European cousins. Geology teaches that the continent has been moving steadily northward at about ten centimetres per year for the last 40 million years since it broke away from the ancient supercontinent called Gondwanaland. From a social and cultural point of view, on the contrary, Australia has slid around considerably in just the last few centuries: emerging from somewhere beyond the hazy edges of the 'known world' in the 16th century, creeping onto the outer fringes of civilisation in the 18th century, snuggling up to the British Isles during the 19th century, then distancing itself from Europe again, gliding through a bittersweet rendezvous with North America, and finally nearing the position the geographer would have given it all along, bordering, perhaps even belonging to, Southeast Asia and the Pacific islands. The quest for place and identity has been so important for white Australians that it—even more so than any resolution to that quest—seems to have become part of the Australian identity itself.

2.2. From the Edge of the Known World, to Hell on Earth, to Paradise

Richard White, in *Inventing Australia: Images and Identity 1688-1980*, explores the evolution of the Australian identity in its first three centuries. 16th and 17th century Spanish, Portuguese, Dutch and English probes of what was called *Terra Australis Incognita* found little to satisfy hopes of finding riches there, though the reports of the Antipodes' strange animals, plants and men peaked Europe's fascination. White writes:

> Much play was made of the idea that in Australia there was an inversion of natural laws, an old idea but one that was popularised by Australia's zoological oddities. So Australia was the land which was upside-down, topsy-turvy,

> where it was day when it should have been night, summer when it should have been winter, where , it was said, grass grew on trees and rivers flowed uphill. It was an idea that continued to have a certain popular appeal for long afterwards. (White, 9)

The English returned in 1770 with the voyage of Captain Cook and a new, scientific interest in the strange continent. At that time the natural sciences were dominated by the Linnean system of classification in which each species of life occupied a specific place in a long, unbroken, though incompletely described, natural chain. European naturalists were mounting expeditions to the unexplored lands searching for new forms of life. Australia, the strange continent which had already provided several oddities of nature, offered fascinating prospects of filling in some of the empty slots in the known chain. Indeed, the zoophytes were found to occupy the position linking animals and plants, and the Aborigines were seen to be the link between the apes and the highest order in the chain, men, of which the Western European was the very highest member (White, 1-8). Asians, along with Africans, American Indians and Eastern Europeans, apparently were somewhere in between.

After the period of greatest scientific interest waned, Australia's isolation made it ideal as Great Britain's penal colony. If the long voyage did not confirm its position at the remote end of the earth, the screwed up seasons there certainly did. This evidence seemed for many to have proved that Australia belonged to Asia, and some unfortunate convicts even believed that they could escape by walking overland all the way to China. Australia's relative proximity to Asia and Europe has been a major and contentious theme in the consciousness of its white inhabitants ever since.

From the very beginnings of the colonial period some of the visionaries of British imperialism saw Asia as a potential market for the nascent Australian economy, as a supplier of material resources and even as a source of immigrants. Asia's men, Werner Levi notes in *Australia's Outlook on Asia*, could provide the cheap labour needed to face the challenges of the huge, undeveloped continent, while its women would serve as consorts for the mostly male British settlers (Levy, 1). Australia's early close links to Asia, certainly, were limited to activities of the British commercial companies there, and yet the foundation of New South

Wales and the rise of the English East India Company's power in Bengal have been seen as two aspects of the British 'swing to the East' which followed the loss of the American colonies. Britain's two new colonies were brought together by complementary economic needs, with Australia exchanging wool, wheat, sugar and horses for Indian tea and jute. Even more importantly, retired Indian army officers and civil servants often migrated to Australia, followed by thousands of immigrants who came as labourers, camel drivers and prospectors (Copland, 127).

Others, however, did not see Australia in Asian terms at all. For many Australia offered Britain another chance to learn from the failures of the former North American colonies, and create a society based on British principles and institutions of freedom, democracy and capitalism. In an argument which ironically demanded strict British domination over Australian society, the new colony would avoid the corruptions to those principles and institutions which, once embedded, had proved impossible to eliminate in British society.

It is even more ironic how the Europeans shut Asia progressively out of their minds as their investment in the Eastern hemisphere increased. Yasmine Gooneratne notes that for the first three centuries of European experience in Asia 'East-West relations were ordinarily conducted with a framework and on terms established by the Asian nations'. The Europeans were in no 'position to force their will upon the imperial rulers of India or China' (Gooneratne, 1992, Asia, 338). Only in the 19th century, when the technical achievements of the Industrial Age impressed Europeans with their own stature, did they begin 'to look on the countries of the East as centres of retardation, as a potential menace to the world which Westerners seemed divinely destined to make over in their own image' (Gooneratne, 1992, Asia, 339). Just when Australia might have taken advantage of its geographic position to maximise exchange with the East—which many Europeans, disenchanted with the West's materialism and impressed with the East's spiritualism and artistic achievement, hoped for—a reactionary attitude 'emerged in the West which emphasized the backwardness of Asia and its stubborn resistance to the spread of the Christian and Western way of life' (Gooneratne, 1992, Asia, 339).

Bailey-Goldsmith and Kalfatovic explain this as a result of Europe's evolving perception of the Orient, drawing on travel literature, the most important literary source which exists throughout the period of the West's relations with the Far East. Travel literature is also interesting in that it provides an area in which the Australian world view significantly diverges from its dominant European roots (Blaber, 46). From the beginning, notably the 1299 AD accounts of Marco Polo's journeys into China, the literature 'reflected a variety of active constructs and presuppositions about the "Other"' (Bailey-Goldsmith, 147) which lacked any basis in fact or in discrimination between different regions and cultures in Asia. Yet, Polo's complaints about the heat in India 'began a long tradition of Western tourists whingeing about Asia', and prepared what would become a cherished literary metaphor 'for the simmering human passions generated in the Oriental context' (Gerster, Bali, 353).

Even the earliest accounts were therefore more commentary on the European context than on any Asian reality. When the sea route to the Far East was opened European governments became centrally involved in relations, leading in the 17th and 18th centuries to better information about Asia, but also to manipulation of the information to serve the purposes of those Western nations. Documentation of social habits and culture took a back seat to furthering business interests. Various fables and myths were added to the older constructs, creating a formulaic image of the East which tended to control and distort all subsequent reports out of Asia. Only changes in the economic relationship resulted in a shift in socio-cultural perceptions. Therefore, as Europe gained more sway in the economic relationship, its 'images of the "Other" show an increasing amount of frustration' with political relationships, leading to growing convictions about the 'importance of governance'. When this became reality with the establishment of colonies the Europeans began to take notice of the Asian milieu, but even then the images were caught up in the old stereotypes (Bailey-Goldsmith, 148). These accounts consequently shed more light on European—and Australian—mores and attitudes than on those of Asians, and continued foremost to serve the purposes of European hegemony (Bailey-Goldsmith, 149).

Colonial Australia, therefore, was hardly disposed to look to Asia as its neighbour, not to mention as a social or cultural model. Becoming a better image of Britain itself, fashioned anew according to British social and political models, meant that trade with anywhere but Britain, when measured in these idealistic terms, was unnecessary, and any outside competition whatsoever, especially from Asia, was, according to Britain's mercantilist policies, irrelevant and undesirable. With England as its principle supplier of labour, capital, consumer goods and even information, the Australian sense of the world was to be severely dislocated.

> Their point of view was centered more in England than in Australia. Australia was an island in an 'alien sea'. Distances were measured from England. Their country was always very far away from somewhere else; rarely was something far away from Australia. Home news was English news. The roots in Aussi soil were weak. Contacts with neighboring peoples were reluctant, their interest was practically nil. (Levy, 4)

Though the group of colonists who extolled this view was in the minority, their influence was strong, especially in the period leading up to Confederation, 'when the outlook of Australian society was being molded between 1850 and 1890' (Levy, 4).

The majority of Australians, however, the poorer immigrants as well as the native-born, labourers, diggers and men in the bush, were oblivious to this attraction to Great Britain. They exerted no influence on the policies of the colony, but their energies went a long way in forming the basis of what would in the long run develop as typically Australian.

> They were less vocal, less influential and less noticeable. Their impact upon Australian life occurred in the sphere of practical politics and economics before it found intellectual expression. Australian consciousness and, later, nationalism had their origin in these groups and their descendants. They introduced what was new and specifically Australian to the colony's life. They varied, altered and adapted English traditions, and 'nibbled at the edges' of civilization. (Levy, 4)

For these people, the problems and opportunities foreseen by the visionaries were irrelevant to what was very often the struggle for survival in a harsh and untamed environment. Still, these were the mostly English and Irish settlers who travelled half-way round the globe determined to make better lives for themselves, and they and their descendants preserved their Anglo-Celtic ways. Levy remarks that all 'Australian democracy, egalitarianism, optimism,

parochialism, isolationism, even anti-Englishism showed the unmistakable signs of British, especially Irish, influence' (Levy, 5).

Of course, many of the early inhabitants can hardly be characterised as having come 'determined to make better lives.' It was no accident that Botany Bay was identified as the land of depravity, of monstrous convicts and worse wardens, where 'virtue became vice and vice virtue'. This hell-on-earth image was disseminated throughout British public on the theory that the severity of punishment was a better deterrent to crime than the prospect of getting caught (White, 17).

> The lowest element of British society was to be cast out among the lowest form of human life; unnatural vice was to be exiled as far from home as possible, where nature itself was inverted and nakedness knew no shame; thieves were to be condemned to a land where there was nothing at all of value. (White, 16)

It is yet worth remembering that among the 'transported' convicts in the days of the Botany Bay penal colony were the most vigorous and capable leaders of the provocative decades of the developing English trades unions, joined by many of the most dedicated Irish rebels. Along with some of the worst criminals and miscreants, therefore, some of the very best leaders of British society were transported to the Antipodes. The energies of these outcasts could perhaps have been shaken, but, fortunately for Australia, not forever quelled. At the outset, nevertheless, the Europeans who arrived in Australia were hostile and dissatisfied, and 'bore class and sectarian grudges like birthmarks'.

> Imbued with the mediaeval myth of the Antipodes, they ingested a self-image of weirdness, loneliness, and absurdity, of being underfoot and beneath contempt, an immature satire of a Western society. (Broinowski, 1992, 7)

The problem once the penal colony was disbanded and Australia became a colony was, nevertheless, not so much that the hell-on-earth image persisted as that, no matter how fast immigrants could arrive from Britain, they would not even begin to satisfy the demand for the kind of labour needed to develop the continent. The original concept of bringing in Asians to meet the demand faced stubborn popular opposition. Workers objected to the competition for labour, and accused employers of wanting to create a permanent class of slaves (Levy, 12).

The typically 19th century feeling of European superiority complicated matters further. Workers objected as unjust having to toil alongside non-whites. Radical political and religious leaders argued that Asians would undermine the morals of Australians, and would inevitably lead to a disastrous mixing of races. Miners petitioned for the limitation on the immigration of Asians, who they labelled 'swarms of human locusts, Mongolians with filthy habits and repulsive to the feelings of Christians' (Levy, 13).

Opposition voices to these claims said that if the Asians had any effect at all on the morals and virtues of white Australians it could be only to improve them. Yet, the high principles which were to establish an egalitarian and wealthy society seemed threatened by the influx of large numbers of non-Europeans, and led ironically to emotional and racist arguments. By 1841 authorities were bowing to the anti-immigrationists, clothing their decisions in social justifications concerning the dangers of bringing in a race of workers who would be expected to assume permanent workers' roles in society (Levy, 12). In Victoria, South Australia and New South Wales immigration was restricted by law (Levy, 14). By the 1880s, as voices of humanitarianism sank away, openly racist views were expressed in the populist newspapers *Bulletin* and the *Boomerang* (Levy, 15). The *Bulletin* especially combined the concepts of radical republicanism, nationalism and cheap labour with anti-Chinese sentiment. In 1891 the '*Bulletin* Manifesto' cited the Chinese, along with 'Religious interference in politics', 'Foreign titles', and 'Imperial federation', as one of the four major hindrances to the republican movement (Ouyang Yu, 1995, *Bulletin*, 132). Talk of an imminent Chinese invasion of cheap labour soon became confused with a military threat. Levy calls this 'a misinterpretation deliberately furthered by some vested interests and by publicists who theorized about an imaginary Chinese attack', but adds that, while this fear mongering was obviously absurd, it did not seem wise to pick a quarrel with 400 million people (Levy, 23).

The fundamental, if somewhat ambiguous, Australian social aspirations were eventually heard, with the essence of the matter being that the 'determination to keep out an Asian

minority for social and cultural reasons was because they did not fit the ideal plan Aussis had for their society' (Levy, 15). At the same time, between 1830 and 1850, the image of Australia changed from a land of punishment for England's worst elements to a land of promise for the sturdy, ambitious and surplus population who felt their prospects in England were limited. Even the once spurned descendants of convicts got a reconstructed image as prosperous and hard-working citizens in a new land of opportunity (White, 29).

> The visions of rural innocence in Australia appealed to a deep-seated resentment against the industrial revolution.
> The result was that the supporters of immigration saw Australia becoming the sort of society they imagined England to have been in the past, before it disappeared under the grime of the industrial revolution. (White, 34)

The idea of Australia as some sort of paradise meant many things to many people. In Australia itself it was often used to hide the problems of society, to attract labour, ignore poverty, prop up the system, and

> it also reinforced discrimination against women, children, non-whites, the unemployed and other sections of the working class, since only the successful, adult, white male fitted the image of the 'workingman' (White, 46).

The image worked to the degree that it gave Australia a sense of going somewhere, of having a future which might be more tangible and positive than its incorrigible past. The appropriate model for this sometimes seemed more American than British. An important example of this is in the many Australians who returned from the California Gold Rush with the management skills and the technology they would use in the Australian gold fields. John McLaren writes of his grandfather, a blacksmith whose 'bookshelves held the American handbooks of agriculture and domestic economy that taught Australians how to survive in a frontier society'. The 19th century saw the birth of a perception of kinship with the American experience and of a need for American models. It was 'a common fantasy' in the 19th century that 'Australia was the coming United States of the South' (McLaren, 45). Linked to its pro-Americanism was Australia's urge for more independence from Britain and a more democratic society. Asians represented the antithesis of these aspirations, and so Britain was blamed for introducing the Chinese as cheap labourers while America's own anti-Chinese sentiments were viewed with favour (Ouyang Yu, 1995, *Bulletin*, 133).

Asians were subject to discrimination but their labour was still needed, and they did come as workers in fairly large numbers, though the government limited them mostly to males on the principle that without their women they would not stay permanently. Chinese immigrants joined the labour-hungry gold rush of the 1850s, and some stayed on afterwards, founding trading houses, restaurants, laundries, market gardens, working on railway construction, and establishing families. Japanese immigrants followed them in, working first as entertainers and prostitutes, pearl divers, and finally as traders once their government recognised their right to be outside of Japan (Broinowski, 1992, 2). The reality of Asia's proximity was simply not to be ignored, but neither was it so very important in the larger scheme of things where the British Empire and its expansion and successes were considered proof of Anglo-Saxon superiority according to the principles of Social Darwinism (White, 69).

The 19th century saw Australia in two ways. On the one hand, it was an ideal proving ground for those Social Darwinist principles—a virgin continent with new opportunities for a strong Anglo-Saxon race to come in, develop the land, and improve themselves, all, of course, at the expense of the 'weaker races'. On the other hand, there was the nagging doubt that it was the cold northern climate which kept the Anglo-Saxon race strong, and that it was only the continued immigration into Australia from Britain which kept the Australians vigorous and successful. The native-born Aussis tended to lose this racial hardiness (White, 70). For some, this was all the more argument that Australia's best future lay within the arms of its British mother. The axioms of Social Darwinism certainly indicated, on the evidence of the empire's impressive military successes, that Britain was best prepared to provide government and administration to the conquered lands (White, 72), and provided what seemed to be self-evident proof of the concepts of the superiority of the white race over the coloured, and of the New World's human progress over the Old World's depravity and tyranny (Ouyang Yu, 1995, *Bulletin*, 131). They also seemed to dispel the haunting suspicion that 'Asian skills and capacities might do a better job of settling Australia and creating a productive continent' (Walker, 37).

2.3. The Difficult Birth of an 'Australian Spirit'

It was a 'proud, European patriarchal, heroic spirit' which came to extend the empire's greatness around the globe. David Tacey writes that, while it was materially and socially successful, the European spirit did not prove to 'travel as well as rum or mahogany'. The so-called 'progressive colonialists' emphasised the universal mission of the Church and the advancement of the colony, but 'paid little attention to the sense of place or to the displacement of the old spirit' (Tacey, 197). It was rather the sense of dislocation and exile which was voiced throughout the colonial period, and this, writes Bruce Bennett, persists even into the modern period. It has proved very difficult for the inheritors of two hundred years of white history to pick up on 'Aboriginal notions of the sacredness of rocks or hills or rivers and the accompanying sense of belonging to this land spiritually'. Australia has largely developed as an 'empty' country, 'deriving in part from the self-interested British doctrine of *terra nullius*—a land without owners' (Bennett, 1991, 12). While this may have been useful for the colonisers' purposes, it proved a huge handicap to the population, quickly dominated by immigrants who were in need of a sense of community but found only cultural disorientation.

This led in the 19th century to the new breed of pragmatic, white, masculinist, and isolationist 'real Australians' (Tacey, 197). Tacey says that, 'naturally egalitarian, instinctual, secular, and godless', they were 'modernists and existentialists on horseback' (Tacey, 198). Sharrad more bluntly calls them anticlerical, sardonic freethinkers (Sharrad, 1990, 173). What held together an image of such a diverse population was the stereotype of the Chinese which served as an ethnocentric contrast to the Australian. That the Chinese were dirty, diseased, conservative and backward, and their country corrupted and old, only made clearer just how clean, healthy, democratic and progressive Australians were, and their land sunny and young (Ouyang Yu, 1995, *Bulletin*, 138).

The Australian landscape often proved tougher than they, however, and the image of loss, sacrifice, and ruin, exemplified by 'the death of the hero, the father, and the patriarchal spirit', became an Australian motif (Tacey, 199). The continent itself draws much of the

blame. The American heroic, paternalistic experience proves that Australia's was not simply a colonial experience. The inhospitable Antipodean landscape, Tacey writes, 'is explicitly linked with the death of the hero and the degeneration of culture', and becomes a 'mythic image for metaphysical wilderness' (Tacey, 205). White Australians were becoming a people in exile in their own land, and even in their own homes.

2.4. The Beginnings of Trade Relations with Asia

The progressive withdrawal of the Australian from outside affairs was paralleled within the British empire by growing outside domination of the colony. In terms of Asian contacts, this meant that direct Australian trade with Asia was legally limited to India. These two were conducting trade from the 1880s, but most other efforts at developing trade were crippled by the European domination of Asia. Australian ships carrying tea and silk in from China were technically smuggling since the East Asia Company held a monopoly on imperial trade with China. The result was that, into the beginnings of the 20th century, Australian commerce, even for products of Asian origin, was routed through the West (Levy, 16).

Trade with China, limited as it was, still represented the promising beginnings of commerce with Asia, but came to an abrupt halt with the Sino-Japanese War of 1894-95. China's defeat closed it off to further Western contact and elevated newly industrialised Japan to major-power status. The Anglo-Japanese trade treaty of 1894 complicated for Australians the new questions about just what Japan was. Trade with Japan was desirable, but not the immigrants which the treaty permitted. Some saw Japan as a counterbalance against the perceived threat of Russia in the region while others feared the evils of 'ungovernable multitudes of Japanese subjects' flooding in. Japan replaced China in the Australian demonology, and whether the Japanese were wily and dishonest or spirited, enterprising, and hard-working, they would still not fit into the Australian social scheme (Levy, 18). Indeed, Australians hardly made any distinction between Japanese and Chinese, tending to lump all Asians together as a collective yellow threat to white civilisation (Ouyang Yu, 1995, Invasion, 77). Hostility to the Chinese developed especially through the union movement, but took on

intellectual and cultural character by the mid-1880s. The question was whether it would be possible to achieve a new social order amidst resident aliens 'who did not share the same common assumptions about life, labour and leisure, about morality, mores and manners' (Meaney, 235).

2.5. New Commonwealth Seeks Identity: Asians Need Not Apply

To most Australians, nevertheless, Asians were still non-entities. The lands of the Asian continent remained 'colonies or quasi-colonies of the West. International relations were with the West. Asians were objects, not subjects of world politics. Asian problems were therefore Western problems, and to be settled in the West' (Levy, 21). This seemed right and proper to most Australians, who gained a degree of nationhood on January 1st, 1901 under the Commonwealth of Australia Constitution Bill, but remained Eurocentric. Australia was the 'Young Country' whose identity was yet to be defined, and the 'true Australian' proclaimed by image-fabricators was young and masculine, reflecting demographic reality and touting a vigorous, forward-looking nation, but still lacked any unifying ethnic, religious, cultural or political characteristics (Ken Stewart, 4). In seeking a new level of independence, Australia unleashed the 'social, economic and political mechanisms which undercut the prior senses of national, ethnic, local, class or trade-specific identities' on which national identity depend (Hamilton, 16). All that was left to hold the new Federation together was the general feeling of anti-Asianism (Broinowski, 1992, 4). While there certainly were many 'who saw the potentialities of trade with Asia in the first decade of the new Commonwealth' (Walker, 38), the new nation's degree of independence from Britain heightened the perception of the threats posed by Asia. Ever more culturally and physically isolated, Australians seemed to be more susceptible than Europeans to the images circulated in books, papers and magazines 'of the evil, degenerate and racially inferior Asian' (Gehrmann, 56). Those Asians were non-specific and faceless, but the Australian gold, jobs, working conditions and women they were suspected of coveting were very real. Underneath it all simmered the sense of an 'instinct of race' and the threat an influx of Asian blood would wreak on the white population. The empire, as

evidenced by the invasion scare novels which appeared in the last decades of the 19th century, was not entirely trusted to protect Australia, and yet remained 'an emotional necessity and a source of national security and political stability' for the new Commonwealth (Ken Stewart, 5).

2.6. The White Australia Policy

Old fears began to bear themselves out by the beginning of the 20th century as Australians witnessed a shift of the balance of power in the Pacific and increasing requirements for the British to concentrate their naval forces in the North Sea. Developing their own sense of 'Manifest Destiny', Australians were becoming more concerned with questions of federation and the expansion of the 'Anglo-Celtic' nation. Beginning also to recognise their own responsibilities for self-defence, some Australians looked longingly at the expansionist Pacific policy of the Americans, newly installed in Hawaii and the Philippines, which they considered more favourable to Australia than Britain's policy which was marked by the onset of decline (Levy, 26).

It was yet a dream for expansion without integration or co-operation, meaning that only trade held any promise for development with Asia. Asians as workers or immigrants were written off by the 'White Australia' policy which in 1901, the very year Australia became a nation by Act of the British parliament, choked off non-white immigration. Chinese immigrants were generally seen as law-abiding and peaceful, but their presence threatened hopes of white democracy and culture (Ken Stewart, 12). Notions of 'culture' and 'race' became interchangeable, and a pseudo-scientific authority was lent by the language of Social-Darwinism to the struggle for survival and supremacy against the 'Yellow Peril' (Meaney, 229). The vast, open lands of the continent were supposed to be tempting to the numberless hordes of Asians and their rabid desires for *Lebensraum* (Levy, 28). Theories of imminent invasion surfaced again, this time involving secret Japanese plans, and images of Japanese battleships lying in Sydney harbour swept across the horrified continent. Australians couched their fears with the slogan 'Populate or Perish'. The political and economic issue of filling the land with 'desirable' immigrants was raised to a moral issue as well. If Britain could not

increase its military presence, then Australia would just have to raise more taxes to build up its own defence forces. Any remaining arguments against the White Australia policy were muted in the face of this perceived threat—the first of any real substance, coming from an industrialised and militarised country (Levy, 29).

The White Australia Policy, which sought to protect Australia from unfettered Asian immigration, caused outrage among Asian nations. Its racist character was not the problem, for many Asian nations shared its notions of racial purity (Brawley, 256), but it seemed evidence that Australians, in denial of geographic reality, 'did not consider themselves to be a part of Asia' (Brawley, 257). Observing how it received support across the divergent lines of Australian politics, Asians came to the perception that 'the policy *was* Australia' (Brawley, 258), with the result that the very threat and distrust which the policy was meant to dampen was heightened by it.

As Japan came to represent for Australia the 'Yellow Peril', the British were seen as willing to sacrifice Australia if Japan seemed to be the more useful ally. With Japan's sobering victory against Russia in 1905, America's Japanese policy, previously proud of its role in opening Japan up to the world, turned sour. Australians looked on with some envy as the U.S. erected severely restrictive policies on Asian immigration, but at the same time feared an American-Japanese war in the Pacific in which they might be obliged by British diplomatic agreements to aid Japan (Levy, 33).

It became clear that Britain intended not only to withdraw its forces from Asia but also to rely on its Japanese allies to defend its Asian empire. Australia, dominated by its European-based stereotypes, still could not understand these actions. Asia hardly represented for Australians a model on which their society could or should depend. Despite thousands of years of political, religious and cultural achievements, Asians were 'coolies, eunuchs, gnomes, dwarfs, or opium-crazed sex maniacs' who, whether sinister or whimsical, were better patronised than treated with equality (Broinowski, 1992, 29-30).

2.7. The Coming Man

Faced with this apparent abandonment by Great Britain, Australia formed in 1909 its own navy. This new attitude of self-reliance fostered a new ideal Australian--the once downtrodden digger. Richard White credits C. E. W. Bean, the Australian war historian, for helping to define the particular qualities of this modern Aussi heroic figure, who was utilitarian but clean, a very 'square' man who valued frankness, disdained class distinctions, and took 'everything on its merits and nothing on authority'. The bush—where every resource of man was pitted against the rawest forces of nature and fate in a fierce competition of survival—was suddenly seen as the consummate training ground for the man who would soon be needed to defend not only Australia itself but the entire empire. Australia was preparing itself to face the realities of a hostile world, with the first step being this vision of the hard, fist-fighting digger being honed into imperial soldier. It was even a source of pride in the Australian bush character that

> the only doubt was that he lacked which made a fighting man into an efficient soldier: discipline. He would always find it difficult to obey orders, and 'even when properly handled he is restless and suspicious of authority' (White, 126).

White lays the significance of the bush-worker on two points. It was he, rather than the urban or agricultural worker, who provided an Australian identity in the empire, for the bush-worker supplied the wool, Australia's main contribution to English industry. The bush-worker also fit perfectly the role of 'The Coming Man', who from the fringe of empire would offer those qualities of comradeship, self-confidence, generosity, restlessness, and resourcefulness on which the empire increasingly depended (White, 103-04). In creating a new national type energised by uniquely Australian conditions of 'space, sunshine, diet and progressive legislation', many Australians perceived themselves engaged in a great experiment of 'race building'. This seemed a necessary accompaniment to the experiment of nation building, and precluded any potentially contaminating influences on the new nation creeping in from Asia, considered 'so lethargic and dissipated that it posed a threat to the moral and physical energies of young Australia' (Walker, 35).

Alison Broinowski sees the promotion of the 'tall, tanned, tough, laconic bushman' in the light of 'a male subagenda' born of the insecurities of the masculinist, patriarchal society. Fearing to lose more than just of their jobs, gold, and life-styles to Asians, but, specifically, their women as well, the new national ideal operated 'to ensure that settler Australians were preferable to Asians as lovers, husbands, and sons'. At the same time, Australian women were chastised for the fears of Asian invasion, since, if it should ever come, it would be because they had failed in their duty to fill Australia with sons. It would be they and their daughters, furthermore, 'who would be the first to suffer unspeakable fates' at the hands of the modern Mongols (Broinowski, 1992, 34).

For empire, for king and country, for racial purity and a 'White Australia', Australian men and women were exhorted early in the 20th century to prepare for inevitable battle against the 'alien host' (White, 126). When the first World War did come, the Australasian White Cross League addressed departing troops to 'Come back clean, to be the fathers of a pure-blooded and virile Australian race'. (White, 127; Quote from: Richard Arthur, *Keep Yourself Fit: The Dangers of Venereal Disease: An Address given at the Camps in Queensland and New South Wales*, Australasian White Cross League, Sydney, 1916, p. 11.)

While the world was preoccupied with events in Europe, Australians looked to the Americans to stem Japanese expansion in the Pacific and maintain the *status quo*. Indeed, Japan did aid the British in China and the Pacific during the war, but seeing them occupy German islands north of the equator convinced the Australians, who had done the same in the south of the equator, that they must become more politically independent (Levy, 41).

2.8. New Attitudes on the 'Near North'

After the armistice many Australians felt, as a former colony, it was logical to take a positive view of post-war nationalist movements in Asia, as exemplified in India (Levy, 42). The first expression of the 'Far East' being Australia's 'Far North' or 'Near North' came in the 1920s and 30s, but indicated more an appreciation of the increased threat than anything else. Australia was still the healthy but lazy nation, betrayed by geography and Newtonian physics,

> exposed to Asian plagues and predators; underpopulated, well-paid Australia was seen as a vacuum, ready to suck in the cheap labouring masses of Asia; democratic Australia was an undefended target for atheistical Asian communists; gravity would cause a yellow tide to rush towards Australia, red paint to rundown, floodgates to burst and dominoes to fall in succession (Broinowski, 1992, 6).

Loyalty to Great Britain remained high, but the United States was rising in popularity among Australians. The U.S. role in the Asia-Pacific as stabilising force was unquestioned even while Australians were recognising their own growing role as a major power in the region. Australia, however, still had no policy of its own for dealing with Asia and could not depend on Great Britain to provide one and back it up with effective force. As Japanese actions in Manchuria and China became more disturbing through the 1930s, looking to the U.S. for assistance became universally acceptable in Australia (Levy, 45-53).

When the Japanese attacked the U.S. and the British Empire in December, 1941, and with Great Britain heavily occupied in Europe, Australia took on greater political and military independence. At the same time, necessity helped overcome the reluctance of even the most loyal supporters of the empire to ask the U.S. for help. In the ANZAC pact (the Australia New Zealand Agreement concluded in 1940) Australia would assume control and/or influence in neighbouring islands to provide for the welfare of native peoples, and determined to play a major role in the Pacific (Levy, 63). Yet, Levy notes the slow-moving limitations of Australian thinking:

> It was doubtful whether most Australians recognized the political and economic implications of the regional system. The importance of Indonesia and Malaya were understood; the rest of Asia seemed to remain beyond discussion. India served as an example of British colonial genius, and some sympathy was apparent for her freedom movement. The Chinese were appreciated for their valiant stand against the Japanese, otherwise there was indifference. The same seemed true with the Japanese in the early years of the war. As the cruelty of their acts in Asia became known, hostility began, and agitation by racists found some response. At the same time, there was some response to agitation of some Aussis for a reconsideration of the White Australia policy in favour of liberalization. (Levy, 66)

Australia still suffered from myopia, though its range of vision was growing slowly. It continued to feel like an outpost of civilization in an alien Asia, but war effected rudimentary change on the reluctant Australians. Levy mentions specifically that: 1) the circle of Aussis

interested in foreign affairs was growing; 2) receptiveness of the public to ideas concerning world affairs became greater; and 3) the information media devoted more space to foreign matters and, significantly, for the first time sent their own correspondents to gather the news (Levy, 67).

The Australia perception of Asians began to change as well. While prior to the First World War Asia was undifferentiated and Asians 'easy-going, colourful, lazy, in need of control and care', the effect of the Second World War was at least to separate Japan from the rest of the continent. The bombing of Darwin in 1942 seemed to confirm the vague reality of the long-imagined threat of the Asian hordes descending on a helpless Australia, and singled Japan out from the traditional images of Asia. In a reversal of roles, Japan became vilified for its 'rhetoric of civilisation and nationhood, which was identical to that of the Western powers, and furthermore seemed to assume that they had the same kind of imperialist rights, including to Australia', which became in turn the easy-going, lazy and defenceless land. That Australians later maintained their old stereotypical view of Asia could have been due to the images of post-war Asia, where the bombed-out landscape and starving masses reconfirmed the need of aid from superior, Western nations (Hamilton, 24).

With all of Asia experiencing throes of change after W.W.II, Australia developed a pragmatic Asian policy, but still one dominated by old attitudes and directed without focus at Asia in general (Levy, 68). The unsettled and violent circumstances, especially in Southeast Asia, and the disappearance of Western safeguards made its position appear insecure. Just when Australia was coming to maturity, the fears of Asians rushing down and appropriating the empty lands seemed more real than ever (Levy, 69).

Once again, Western decisions set the tone of Australia's own regional debate. The Atlantic Charter (1941) promised post-war self-determination for Asia, but after the war the former colonial nations sought to re-establish their rule. Some argued that Australia should pursue a new and positive approach, and learn to live with Asians. Asian independence movements should be taken as a tribute to British imperial heritage, and should be given

Australian aid (Levy, 71). On the other hand, Australians showed no inclination of changing the central element of their relationship with Asia—the White Australia policy. To many Australians the colonial order ought best be re-established, but that did not necessarily mean under the old colonial powers. This was especially true in the Dutch East Indies, later to become Indonesia. Continued white control seemed most appropriate there, and 'the Australians fitted quite naturally into the set of white powers with influence over the dark-skinned native peoples of the region' (Vickers, 65). Australia knew such aggressive, neo-colonialist attitudes would gain no friends in the region, but three old facts seemed inescapable: First, Asia was to be guarded against, not freely associated with; second, all Asians were the same; and third, friendly relations among nations were based on kinship or similar foundations, and hence virtually impossible with Asians (Levy, 70).

2.9. The Australian Way of Life

These realisations resulted in a new approach to immigration in the large-scale post-war policies by which floods of non-British but still European immigrants arrived in the 1950s. While the White Australia policy kept out non-white immigrants as undesirable, the non-British immigrants were seen as a problem which could be dealt with internally. A policy of assimilation, under the banner 'The Australian Way of Life', was pursued with the goal of incorporating the new immigrants, and Aborigines as well, into a common, homogenous way of life. European immigration was perceived as a solution to the 'populate or perish' problem associated with the Asian masses, but the influx of so many alien cultures offered its own threat. 'The Australian Way of Life' campaign of assimilation was, in White's view at least, really a thinly veiled attempt at suppression of any forms of non-conformity.

> It not only denied the possibility that the cultural traditions of migrants might enrich Australian life, but also denied the existence of different 'ways of life' among Australians themselves. Cultural differences were an affront to a society which demanded social uniformity, if not equality. (White, 160)

As the economy, freed from the sole task of being a raw materials supplier for Britain, shifted from primary to secondary industry, the national myth grounded in rural life and the outback was becoming increasingly unrepresentative of the population (Pearce, 30). The

vague notion of a specific way of life in Australia, as unreal as it was in fact, rehabilitated suburban, industrial-based life as the new ideal built around 'the car, the family, the garden and a uniformly middle-class life-style', and furnished what White calls 'a useful tool of intolerance' in internal affairs (White, 160-68).

Reality forced Australia, meanwhile, to look for new external security arrangements. Britain's weakness, the new American presence in the Asia-Pacific, and Australia's growing cosmopolitan consciousness made it clear that the old views were inadequate in the new Asia (Levy, 74). Yet, it was less clear just what that new arrangement should be, and, paradoxically, Australian interest in Asia after the war was waning. The region was in turmoil. China was going communist. Japan was defeated, but still seen as a potential aggressor. American policy there and throughout the region was suspect (Levy, 86). Australians supported the creation of a NATO-like organisation in Asia, but while Asian participants were necessary to dispel the appearances of neo-colonial racism, it was hard to figure out which ones to invite. In 1951, the ANZUS treaty bound Australia, New Zealand and the United States in a sort of Monroe Doctrine for the Asia-Pacific. There was general public approval, but some complained that it made Australia into a base for the 'atom-mad' Americans, and constituted another step in the American invasion of Australia (Levy, 96).

In 1954 the SEATO (South East Asia Treaty Organization) agreement was signed to scepticism that the vaguely written treaty, which lacked definite military commitments and failed to get the signatures of several important Asian nations, would be able to do much to stem aggression and contribute to stability in the region. It did mark, however, an important step in the evolution of Australia's realisation that the 'Far East' was really their 'Near North.' Levy explains the hesitation in the advances:

> Aussis tended to be pragmatists, welcoming self-government on principle, but only to be sustained where and when the people are fit for self-government. Oz was in no way going to encourage the end of colonialism. Between the lines of sympathy declarations for Asian nationalism, there could also be read some lurking nervousness about Australia's security position if all these islands and some other areas should become truly independent. For over a hundred years it had been almost a dogma in Oz that the islands to the north must be in friendly hands. Once they were independent, it was not easily

> predictable under the prevailing circumstances in what hands they would be. No wonder then that Australian governments of all complexions seemed more eager at times to secure the military co-operation of Western rulers of these islands than to engineer their abdication. (Levy, 174)

One thing is nevertheless clear: Australians were learning to like the idea of being the bridge between Asia and the West. Australia was not burdened with the onus of colonialism and imperialism as were the other Western powers, and should therefore present herself to her Asian neighbours as the land of great social experiments and a fellow escapee from colonialism. Beginning in 1951, the Colombo Plan engaged Australia in economic and cultural projects in 17 Asian countries and 30 fields, including engineering, public administration, education and nursing. Some argued it was too expensive for Australia's limited resources, but its success was taken as a necessary response to aggressive regional aid programs of the USSR (Levy, 175-76). The specific influence on individual Australians is more difficult to measure, but in 'Crossing the Gap' Christopher J. Koch describes how as a young man travelling by ship to Europe he met some of the Asian students returning home after taking degrees from Australian universities. This chance encounter introduced Koch to a new world, opened his mind to Asia's cultural heritage and myths, and eventually led to the writing of his Asian novels.

2.10. The Cold War, Vietnam, and Deconstruction of the Old Order

The communist threat persisted as a concern throughout the Cold War, of which Southeast Asia was a focal point. For Australians, at least, the idea of a communist Indonesia, after years of Japanese anti-Western propaganda as well as Dutch warnings of racial and communist aggression in an independent Indonesia, sending waves of soldiers across the narrow straits in Australia was not at all preposterous. Caught between the horns of wanting to support the nationalists in Indonesia and not wanting to undermine the old colonial order, Australian participation in the region, supporting the nationalists yet hoping for a long and stable transition, was deemed to be an inevitable response (Levy, 180). This sense of a destiny of participation led to the demise of the perception of Australia as a lonely outpost of Western civilization. There seemed no alternative to becoming a participating member of the Southeast

Asian community, though Australians were still determined not to pay the price of their own security or interests (Levy, 175).

When the French were unexpectedly defeated at Dien Bien Phu and withdrew from Indochina, Ho Chih Minh assumed the role of the evil Mongol Emperor for many in Australia. Fearing the fall of Southeast Asia to the communists, Australia argued for the partition of Indochina and increased involvement of the United Nations. In Malaysia rebel activity increased so rapidly that Australia chose in 1955 to engage its troops in the fighting there. The sense of isolation crept back in as Australia felt itself forced into fighting against communist aggression, for its own self-defence, and to prevent a wider conflagration (Levy, 189). Falling back on its ANZUS allies, Australia found itself supporting the American build-up in Vietnam in the 1960s. The Americans shared the policy of separation through engagement, but the Australians discovered that this policy was incompatible with desires to develop closer relations with its Asian neighbours.

The sense of isolation persisted as strongly as ever as the seemingly simple security of the past was being overwhelmed by the confounding uncertainties of the future. Aubrey Hardwick voices this sentiment in C. J. Koch's *Highways to a War* when he tells Mike Langford,

> When Britain does pull out of here—when Phoenix Park closes down—that will be the final end of the empire. Funny: I believe an Australian of my generation finds this more bloody poignant than the Brits themselves do; they've lost interest, or numbed themselves. But the facts are the facts. The most successful empire since Rome's: finally gone. And Australia naked: our shield in Asia taken away. (*HW*, 92)

Australia was looking for a sense of self in international relations but was finding itself being swept along by events. The perception of the foreign wars in which Australia participated, always carriers of meaning more mythical than geographic, changed radically. Whereas exotic place names like 'Gallipoli', 'Villers Bretonneux' and 'Kokoda' had stood for 'national sacrifice, courage and virtuosity', 'Vietnam' became 'a signifier of internecine social conflict, of clumsy diplomacy and military malpractice' (Gerster, Asian Destinies, 62). Australia's participation in the Vietnam War drew it into the international dissident movement

which, among many other divisive effects, fostered dissatisfaction with 'the Australian Way of Life', now identified with an older generation and irrational consumerism (White, 167). The 1966 election was centered on the Vietnam question, and produced a record majority for the Liberals, who had exploited traditional fears of Asia, of communism and of internal subversion (White, 168). 'Asia' to Australians in the mid-60s was once again China. 'To acknowledge regional complexity and difference contradicted the meaning of "Asia" as the pejorative antonym of "Australia"', and the war in Vietnam was fought to halt the downward thrust of the Chinese Communists (Gerster, Asian Destinies, 63). And yet, Robin Gerster notes, the Vietnam experience, 'riddled with contradictions',

> was the historical moment when Australia realised that Asia was the Near North, not the Far East. But Vietnam revealed nothing if not Australia's political subservience to America and its fear of acting independently in its own region (Gerster, Asian Destinies, 67).

The political divisions subsequent to the war led to the end of 'The Australian Way of Life' approach to immigration. 'Assimilation' gave way to 'integration' in official attitudes towards migrants in Australia. 'Pluralism' was the new way of coping with the failures with the old program. At the same time, the 'White Australia' policy was quietly replaced, and small numbers of non-Europeans were admitted in the late 1960s. In the 1970s Australians identified so much with their 'multi-cultural' society that 'multi-culturalism' itself became something of a fad, beckoning the formal abandonment of the 'White Australia' policy (White 169). The old prejudices were being thrown out, and a new look at the map prompted some to attest that Australia was in fact a part of Asia. Others even carried the deconstructionist argument to its logical, absurd end, saying that 'Asia, being a construct of the European imagination, did not exist, and hence there was no threat' (Broinowski, 1992, 6). 'Self-determination' became the new policy on migrants and Aborigines, and by the early 1970s Australia was promoting itself as a pluralistic, tolerant, multi-cultural society, although, White points out, 'it did not reflect any real improvement in the position of Aborigines and migrants, most of whom remained on the lower rungs of the socio-economic ladder' (White 169).

In fact, the notion of some socio-political union between Australia and Asia along with constantly rising levels of Asian immigration resulted in a resurgence in invasion theories and literature. No matter the directions taken by politicians and intellectuals, as long as Australia, though 'much changed from its original position of supporting the 'White Australia' policy, remained predominantly white and European, it was basically opposed to the idea of the Asianisation of Australia or the future of a Eurasian nation' (Ouyang Yu, 1995, Invasion, 80).

Young, affluent middle-class Westerners, meanwhile, were discovering Asia as a paradise of 'peaceful, palm-lined beaches, sun-drenched landscapes, tropical nights, the mysteries of the Orient'—all available at very low prices. Hippies flooded in, looking for the Asia of transcendental experiences obtained through drugs, sex, and religious ecstasies. They were followed by the tourists, who wanted all this plus modern plumbing and easier travelling. The 'underlying desire', Hamilton writes, was—beyond the surface requirements for a paradise full of erotic natives, good surfing beaches and Australian beer—for hippies and tourists alike 'to escape the constructions of urban Western life and re-discover the hidden native in themselves' (Hamilton, 25). The Australians and other Westerners had indeed 'rediscovered' Asia, but their perception remained the old stereotypical land of exotic dreams. The psychic wounds caused by the war in Vietnam led to the expansion of the sex trade in Asia. 'The Asia woman (and boy) has increasingly become the means through which another form of power can be discovered', writes Hamilton. In stark contrast to Western women, 'Asia women are constructed as "really feminine", docile, undemanding and childlike'. Sexuality is associated with nakedness and thus 'nativeness', and so 'is seen to be liberated by being in "Asia"' (Hamilton, 26). Having sex with a 'native' would serve to restore the Westerner's sense of superiority, not only over the Asian but over one's Western partners as well.

In Australia Prime Minister Whitlam ushered in what he called the 'New Nationalism', a vague concept which was associated with renewed pride in Australian achievement, especially in the cultural field, but also with doubts about the increasing foreign involvement with the Australian economy. The most obvious targets were American mining giants, but, White

remarks, so was the threatening industriousness of such as the ethnic-Chinese capitalists. And yet the Australian commitment to mining and its repercussions has led down a social, cultural and economic path of no return:

> The old commitments to egalitarianism have disappeared; pluralism has produced not a more tolerant society, but a more unequal one. A new economic orthodoxy is beginning to operate in favour of export industries; no end is offered to high unemployment; welfare is cut and education and the taxation system are restructured to favour the haves over the have-nots. The future is tied, not to pastoral, or agricultural, or manufacturing industry, but to mining, a sector of the economy which, because it is capital-intensive and largely foreign-controlled, promises only to exacerbate the inequalities. It is tied, not to the cities, but to the outback, not to the south-east, but to the north and west. (White, 171)

2.11. The Backlash

And so once again, just when it seems like there is hope of pinning it down once and for all, the developing sense of an Australian identity, like the Cheshire Cat, evaporates. The inevitable backlash, exemplified in the reactionary political movements of the 1990s, represents an attempt by white Australians to wrest control of what they still see as their just and proper domain. Alison Broinowski sees no difference between the 'One Australia' slogan which came out of the bicentenary celebrations in 1988 and the 'room for only one' slogan of 1888. Yet, she faults those who find in all Asians 'undifferentiated incarnation of their worst fears' equally with those who have 'idealized Japanese industriousness and artistry, Chinese civilisation and Indian philosophy' for their similarly selective use of information. Those who 'offered wiser counsel', she laments, have generally been 'shouted down' (Broinowski, 1992, 17).

Frank Dunn has written an impressive satirical argument against the perverse directions of multi-culturalism, which he calls 'a sort of new religion' in Australia. Dunn points out, as his title makes clear, that, according to the tenants of multi-culturalism, it seems as though all cultures are good, but Australia's own culture is somehow an exception to the rule. Among those principles of multi-culturalism, Dunn notes, 'there is no Australian identity, and no Australian culture', and in fact no 'Australians' unless one is willing to talk about 'the whole mass of the residents' (Dunn, 40-41). Dunn is calling for a new sense of reason in the domains

of immigration, education, and identity, and certainly makes the points that there are limits to the usefulness of the Australian exercise in self-effacement, and that seeing everyone as equal and equally wonderful is, in fact, the equivalent of not seeing anyone at all. Yet, for all its good points, this article signals a return of the spirit of the old nationalist, 'White Australia' treatises. Dunn avoids putting his argument in terms of the Asian question, saying, 'I regard that as largely a false issue', and invoking the license accorded to 'the prejudices of the elderly'. In the next breath, however, he compares Asians with taxes, as they are both imposed on Australia by 'fools in government and administration, who on ideological grounds, without adequate thought or planning, or expressed popular approval, have engaged in a vast social experiment of unpredictable outcome'. These culprits, Dunn complains, are not the ones who 'have to make the sacrifice' when Asian children take jobs and university places from the children of those who have not the means to prevent it (Dunn, 43).

The problem may be, as Robin Gerster points out, that

> Marriage with 'Asia' has for twenty and more years been held up to Australians as a promise and an aspiration, as the national future. But the honeymoon is over, Critics of 'Asianisation' of the country are cropping up in numbers, disdaining intimate ties with the region with the vehemence of disenchanted lovers (Gerster, Bali, 353).

Gerard Lee explores Gerster's theme in *Troppo Man* (1990), describing what he labels the 'Nobel Savage Syndrome':

> 'He says a lot of people get it the first time they come to Bali. They think the Balinese are living in perfect harmony and can't do anything wrong. They treat the whole island like it's a cathedral. The Church of the Noble Savage … .' (*Troppo Man*, 96)

Frank Dunn and Gerard Lee obviously do not share politics, but they do agree that the recent tendency to dress Asia as the princess at the ball is no more honest or realistic than it was to make her into the stepdaughter charged with the dirty work. What seems to be central to this issue is that Australians have yet to come to grips with their perceptions of Asia, and that their perception of themselves is inexorably tied in with this problem.

2.12. Conclusion

In any case, interest in the Asia-Australia relationship remains high, as evidenced in the high rates of tourist visits and of the numerous literary works redefining Asia from an Australian perspective (and vice versa). By the late 1980s Asians outnumbered Europeans in making up a third of all immigrants into Australia; the International Development program led to increased academic co-operation in the region; and the Asian Studies Council began implementing a program to 'produce a reasonable number of "Asia-literate" graduates with a working knowledge of an Asian language' (Myers, 27). The high expectations and admiration of things Asian of recent years, however, is being seen as being as specious as the demonisation of the 'yellow hordes' a century before. Enthusiasm is being replaced by a neo-colonial anxiety and distaste. The warm embrace is turning into a new form of the old cold shoulder (Gerster, Bali, 353). Some cynically translate the calls about Australia's need to embrace Asian cultures and penetrate its markets by proclaiming old fears in a new formula: 'Australia must get into Asia before Asia gets into Australia' (Gerster, Asian Destinies, 68).

This 'reorientation of attitudes to the multi-headed monster "Asia"' reflects, nevertheless, the revision of the way Australians see themselves and the world in which they live. No longer just 'an assemblage of ancient civilizations encrusted with superstition and wearied with age', Asia often seems more like a 'tiger country, bounding with energy and full of entrepreneurial zeal'. Getting closer to Asia then might let some of that energy rub off and enhance Australia's own (Walker, 35), though getting too close to tigers is not a generally recognized prescription for long, healthy life. Australia does not know quite what to make of Asia, but 'the fashionable if simplistic ideas' which led to the sense of a shared colonial experience and a nascent Asian identity are seemingly meeting more resistance 'as Australia comes to grips with what belonging to Asia implies and entails' (Gerster, Bali, 354).

In addition to its inherited European vision of the 'Orient', Jasmine Gooneratne writes of two principle forces wrenching the Australian response to modern Asia. The first is its colonial past which juxtaposes the ethnic relationship it shares with Britain and the painful

history of subjection to a colonial/imperial foreign power which it shares with its Asian neighbours. The second is the legacy of World War II, during which a militarily aggressive Japan was countered by Australians fighting with Britain and the Empire. This is the single instance of Australian participation in a war in which it was itself at risk and left deep and enduring attitudes of resentment and fear until this day (Gooneratne, 1992, Asia, 341).

The emerging nations of Asia have shown strong signs of being able to overcome the disadvantages of the post-colonial world. Singapore has gained independence and economic success. India has proved itself to be able to defeat the British empire through pure force of will. Even war-ravaged countries like Vietnam and Cambodia are rejoining the world economic community. There are also disturbing signs out of Asia. Antagonism between old rivals—India against Pakistan; Malaysia against Indonesia—plus the continuing internal political troubles coming out of weaknesses in democratic systems and ethno-religious conflicts are causes for doubt over Asia's proposed role as model and/or partner for Australia.

The self-contradictory goals of Australia—to reaffirm its co-operation with the West; to maintain its security; to promote good relations with Asian nations; to limit non-white immigration is the knot which Australians have never been able to untie. That they definitely recognise Southeast Asia as their 'Near North' seems certain in light of recent events in East Timor in which Australia has taken the lead in bringing in an international presence to help that troubled emerging state. Yet, the continuing political, social and economic turbulence seems to justify a return to a perception dominated by 'Orientalist' terms. Perhaps it is fair to call the Asia-Pacific a very exotic, enticing, and threatening region, and it is not so surprising that many are not sure how near they want to get to their North.

The Literary Tradition

3.1. Introduction

Driven by pressing needs for new socio-cultural points of view, Australia has in the post-Vietnam period been experiencing a growing movement for renewal. David Tacey writes that the 'old stoical, laconic "masculinist" national persona is now widely viewed as anachronistic and burdensome' (Tacey, 118), but just what awaits Australia in their new, deconstructed world is yet unknown. The old Australian ego is being eroded, and there is always the possibility 'that a new stability or point of integration will not be achieved'. There will be casualties in the process of psychological reorientation, but, while the Australian national spirit 'may be young or frail, the time has come to allow it to mature and to expose it to the deep unconscious' (Tacey, 122-23).

The process of psychological reorientation which is fascinating writers and critics today is bringing all that which is known into question, stripping away the psychological and spiritual armour of Western culture, and seeing reality invaded by a mythopoetic 'Otherworld'. Tacey says that the challenge for Australians is to integrate the two competing worlds of today—one represented by the old Euro-centric, patriarchal order; the other by the re-emergent ancient sciences and mysteries of Asia and the Middle East.

This implies, Tacey argues, neither clinging to the new or throwing out the old, but balancing the two at 'a new point of cultural and personal equilibrium'. Blanche d'Alpuget and C. J. Koch put this approach into practice, exploring that which Tacey describes as 'the excesses and tyranny of the patriarchal institutions on the one side, and the excesses and indulgences of the matriarchal counter-culture on the other side'. Their characters experience the alienation, loneliness, and psychological conflict between warring parts of the psychic totality which he warns about (Tacey, 193), and in the end they can not be properly seen except in the context of the dual world in which they live.

3.2. The Outward Search For That Which Lies Within

White Australians have always been looking outward to find themselves. This is not unusual for a colonial culture, especially one which has never burned its socio-cultural bridges with the cataclysm of revolution, but Australians seem somehow more sensitive than other nations about questions of identity. It could be that they are intimidated by the Aboriginal ability to identify with the here and now, perhaps augmented by the fact that so many other former colonies did undertake revolutionary movements while they meekly awaited their master's gift of emancipation, but, for whatever reason, white Australians have continually looked over their shoulders, across the seas or back in time as if they might find themselves somewhere else. It is a habit with serious psychic consequences. The literature is peppered with the sense of self-belittlement which white Australians feel, as in Christopher J. Koch's *Across the Sea Wall* when the protagonist, Robert O'Brien, is introduced to the Indian businessman:

> Ram turned to him. 'Mrs O'Brien is Latvian, I understand. You are English?'
>
> 'Australian,' O'Brien answered.
>
> 'Oh—yes,' Ram said. His dark eyes rested on O'Brien with vague regret, as though the young man had confessed to some embarrassing defect which he was prepared to overlook, together with the tramp's clothes with which O'Brien was disgracing his club. (*ASW*, 111)

The problem is not that there is anything wrong with being Australian, but it is one of knowing what being Australian means. Or, as Koch has another Indian character put it, that 'you bloody Australians don't know what you are. You don't think much of colonialism, but then suddenly you're waving the Union Jack' (*ASW*, 96). The criticism causes O'Brien to reflect defensively, and he finds himself feeling 'profound mistrust of India: India was chaos, and sudden horrors' (*ASW*, 95), and sorry for the British Empress whose statue 'grilled in the terrible heat, a figure of fun, her majesty a joke'. Hot, tired, and 'sickened by the beggars', O'Brien, who has 'a sudden thirst for anything familiar' (*ASW*, 96) when suddenly nothing is, is suffering an attack of identity crisis. Like many of the figures studied here, O'Brien has a better sense of what he is not than of what he is.

On the other hand, the incomplete sense of identity may be what gives Australian literature its suppleness, as if the feeling that the Australian identity not being fixed or complete gives writers a license to explore the world in search of themselves. It is not surprising that Australian literary encounters with Asia would first produce 'the exotic Asia delighting the tourist, the infernal Asia torturing the jungle soldier, or the non-union Asia threatening to destroy the democratic rights of the working man' (Tiffin, 1984, 468), for they are coming out of the European tradition, imbued with the prejudices, images and expectations that come with those genres. What is interesting, however, is how Australian writers are separating themselves from the strict ranks of European tradition, and creating a new branch which reflects better the unique Australian experiences of and perspectives on Asia.

3.3. The Sense of Loss and 'Otherness'

The first white Australians were mostly 'transported' there as convicted criminals, representing elements of the worse and also the best—in the case of the militant union organisers or Irish nationalist leaders, for example—of British society. Thomas Keneally's *Bring Larks and Heroes* gives a contemporary perspective of the origins of white Australia with the story of Corporal Halloran and his convict-love, Anne. Halloran plans to stay in the penal colony until Anne's time is served, and then get them both back to England where they expect to find a good life together, but they share the fate of most convicts in that they will never leave the Antipodes again, and worse, that all that their admirable love and commitment will get them is a bad death.

After the early settlement of the convict population came waves of others who chose to come, but normally with every intention to return 'home' once they had made their fortune. Henry Handle Richardson's *The Fortunes of Richard Mahoney* presents two such characters. As a young and conservative, rather impractical and romantic but honourable man, Richard Mahoney let himself be swayed by the tales of fortune and wonder across the sea, and embarked for what he expected to be a two- or three-year adventure. When he finally realises that abandoning his less-than-promising but still not desperate life in England was a mistake,

he has to face the probability that he will never be able to return. His younger, more affable character is spoiled by this dilemma, and he turns more intolerant, puritanical and humourless, even as he becomes more successful with the support of his wife Polly. Sent over to Australia to escape a hopeless situation back in Ireland, Polly shows the resourcefulness and strength of character to come to grips with the exigencies of the hard colonial life, making the tough decisions which her silly husband cannot. Richardson is in effect only reversing masculine/feminine roles, not transforming them, and so keeping this female writer with a male pen-name in Australia's paternalistic tradition.

Later came others whose homes had been destroyed by war, or whose very families had been sacrificed to the evil of European ideologues, and whose lives have become an important theme in Australian literature. Many of these immigrants came penniless, but none came naked—clothed at least with rich histories and cultures and armed with a hardened will to survive. Louis Nowra brought the theme of suspect identity to the stage in his *Summer of the Aliens*, the story of a pubescent boy growing up in an environment where everything and everyone can be construed as alien, from his parents, to his friends, to his uncle's silent Japanese wife, to the pretty, crippled refugee girl, and even to the featureless, volcanic Australian landscape.

This feeling of foreignness shared by many Australians is the root of the *leitmotif* of the search for identity by a population where nearly everyone feels like an exile, alien, or an 'Other'. Generations of Australians made pilgrimages back to Europe to find themselves. Then, with the end of the Second World War, came the dismantling of the European colonial empires. Britain, in particular, turned its own attention inward, and, step by step, left its former colonies to rely on themselves. In Australia this manifested itself in a perceived weakening of the old Mother Country, a fact which the Australians had surely noticed when the Japanese routed the British in the Pacific and the Aussis found they could fare better fighting the Asian enemy themselves. Nevertheless, the vacuum of power left by the retreat of the British colonial forces and the increased instability in the region led Australia to turn to the United

States for a new role model, and American influences in lifestyle and language were soon to be seen and reflected in the literature.

This shift from British to American political leadership is explored in such novels as Christopher Koch's *Highways to a War*, which spans a long enough time to include the eventual decline in American influence as a result of the defeat of the U.S. and its Australian allies in Vietnam. This decline then led to Australia's turn toward Asia in its search for identity, cementing the re-designation of the 'Far East' as the 'Near North', representing more a shift in Australia's sense of geography than anything else. At the same time, Asian nations, led by Japan and Singapore, emerged as huge economic powers, and Australians had even more reason to develop ties with these neglected neighbours. Identification with Asia did not come without its price, however, as traditional, shared cultural and political values were not easy to find in the Asian nations. Most were nominal democracies at best, and others were blatant dictatorships. The middle class, so cherished in Western society, did not seem to be developing as might have been expected in the new capitalist economies. This trend continues even today, as Australians try to strengthen what would seem to be natural ties with Asia, while political and economic turmoil acts to undermine the trust necessary to furthering structural and psychological ties.

3.4. The Orientalist Stereotype

These difficulties sit upon old and well established prejudices. The image of the Chinaman in Australian literature developed along the lines of the stereotypical images described in the discourse on 'Orientalism' by Edward Said. Cathy Van Der Driesen identifies Orientalist literary strategies adopted by the Australians, including 'authorial position' with regard to the 'Other', 'narrative voice', and the 'kinds of images, themes, motifs' which deliver 'lamentably alien', 'dehumanizing', even 'demonizing' representations of the Orient (Driesen, 17-18).

Ouyang Yu classifies four basic types of the Chinese stereotype in Australian literature: including the sensual Chinaman—representing the fear of contamination of the white race

through miscegenation; the money-grubbing Chinaman—greedy and cunning, though also a cowardly furtive thief; the vindictive Chinaman—who is viciously revengeful because, as a natural heathen, he cannot learn Christian tolerance and forgiveness; and the comic Chinaman—the most visible of stereotypes, with the wagging pigtail, funny walk and pidgin English found in the nursery rhymes of the 19th century as well as adult literature. (Ouyang Yu, 1995, *Bulletin*, 139-41) All of these types come together to portray 'the heathen Chinese who commit all sorts of crime from gambling, opium-smoking and prostitution to stealing and spreading disease like leprosy and small pox' (Ouyang Yu, 1993, 21). They are restricted usually to a few occupations: as the ubiquitous market gardeners they excel in presenting the comic Chinaman, illustrated in the following example from Henry Handel Richardson; as cooks they are sometimes credited for their cuisine, but more often stereotyped as dirty, and predisposed to eating, and serving to unwitting white diners, dogs and rats (Ouyang Yu, 1993, 22), and, when angered, to urinating in the soup (Ouyang Yu, 1993, 23). Otherwise the Chinese were pictured as working in the other 'lower orders', as laundrymen, diggers, fishermen, street hawkers, and rubbish collectors, where they maintain the stereotypes of their race.

Henry Handel Richardson recreated in *The Fortunes of Richard Mahoney* the kind of portrait which was so typical in earlier literature, employing many of the old strategies even though her presentation of the Asian is relatively sympathetic. Mahoney is obliged to bring his dead drunken neighbour back home one night, and the worst criticism he can lay on the man is that 'even a Chinaman rose to impudence about Johnny's nerves, his foul breath, his cracked lips' (*FRM*, 100). Mahoney's wife Polly frets later about the unreliable white vegetable man, who Mahoney insists she buy from, while the Chinese garden farmer is more punctual with his cheaper and beautiful goods.

Richardson draws on the old tradition, inherited from the English, of Australian writers who 'perpetuated condescending antipathy to Chinese in the way they transliterated names and represented Chinese spoken language' (Broinowski, 1992, 30). The Chinese gardener's name

is the stereotypical Ah Sing, but Polly calls him the equally stereotypical nickname for the Chinese, John. It may have been that Ah Sing was beyond her capacity to remember or pronounce, but Broinowski notes in *The Yellow Lady* how it was believed as late as the 1920s that the Chinese language caused madness in foreigners (Broinowski, 1992, 36). Something similar seems to happen to Ah Sing whose ridiculous pidgin English comes out of a mouth which is 'stretched' in a too large grin, and, though his vegetables are indeed better than those of the white man, his sales technique is rather too insistent:

> The Chinaman jog-trotted towards them, his baskets a-sway, his mouth stretched to a friendly grin. 'You no want cabbagee to-day? Me got velly good cabbagee,' he said persuasively and lowered his pole.
>
> 'No thank you, John, not to-day.'
>
> 'Me bling peasant for lilly missee,' said the Chow, and unknotting a dirty nosecloth, he drew from it an ancient lump of candied ginger. 'Lilly missee eatee him … oh, yum yum! Velly good. My word!'

Polly accepts the gift—though to her niece Trotty, for whom the ginger candy is intended, the Chinaman is a bogeyman—with an imitated version of his English: 'Me takee chowchow for lilly missee'. She relishes 'such savoury moursels', but still refuses to buy anything, even after his offer is repeated 'with the catlike persistence of his race'(*FRM*, 171), as though there would be some guilt in eating delicacies made by less than entirely human creatures.

An excellent example of the earlier writing about the Chinese in Australia is the Henry Lawson short story 'Ah Soon', first published in *Lone Hand* in 1911 and reprinted in the *Picador Henry Lawson*. Lawson opens his narrative by admitting to anti-Chinese and White Australia sentiments, but proceeds to relate a tale of a Chinese gardener and his son, who are very much the image as presented by Henry Handel Richardson, and of the hard work, generosity and honesty which Lawson said was typical of the Chinese in Australia. The story combines criticism of the white market gardeners of the day with praise and admiration of the Chinese, even though clothed in the trappings of casual racism—which Bennett calls the 'usual habit of thoughtless generalisation' (Bennett, 1991, 188). Lawson makes fun of the way the Chinese dress, speak, and run around selling their vegetables, but points out elements of their

old and remarkable culture, like the water wheel which was used to irrigate the Chinaman's garden, 'of a fashion some ten-thousand years old' (*Picador Henry Lawson*, 440). Lawson praises Ah Soon, who never whipped his horse and who offered his dried up pumpkins free of charge to help sustain the hungry cattle of the narrator's family, as well as his son, Ah See, who extended in complete trust credit to his customers, and never forgot the help given to his father by the narrator's parents.

In a side comment which is completely germane to this study, Lawson points out how the harsh Australian climate helps overcome racist tendencies. In times of drought, certainly rather common in the bush, everyone, 'saints and sinners, Christian and heathen, European and Asiatic', would work together to survive (*Picador Henry Lawson*, 440). This is an interesting observation of a public man who 'feared the possibility of Asian domination in Australia' (Bennett, 1991, 188), who has been called 'a nationalist who believed that Jews wanted to take over Australia, using Japanese as a front' (Broinowski, 1992, 10), and who was one of the *Bulletin*'s most influential proponents of anti-Asian sentiment (Ouyang Yu, 1995, *Bulletin*, 136). Lawson's story did, however, soundly condemn racism, even if only because it was the sort of luxury which could not be tolerated in a hard country like Australia.

Children's literature took advantage of the marketing and propaganda value of cultural stereotypes of the period. Sharyn Pearce describes one example, *Smiley* by Raymond Moore (1945). Smiley, the young Anglo-Saxon protagonist, conforms to the lineage of Australian heroic types, expressing the 'virtues of independence, self-confidence, courage, dislike of mental activity and distrust and disrespect for authority that were created and embellished by the radical-nationalist *Bulletin*'s team of city bushmen in the 1880s and 1890s'. He is 'an obvious construction of a mini-Digger, a little larrikin with a heart of gold' who has a 'genius for getting into trouble' and 'the Australian male's supposedly legendary passion for gambling'. The representative of the race Smiley calls 'yeller devils' is the market gardener Charlie Coy. Charlie hates Smiley for a past wrong, but Smiley's 'innate distrust for Orientals is confirmed when it is later discovered that Charlie has been working as an opium dealer'.

Killing two racial birds with one stereotypical stone, the decadent opium customers are Aborigines living in a camp outside of town. The moral, Pearce notes, is that there is a close link between national identity and racial identity, and that non-conformity inevitably threatens the Australian way of life (Pearce, 35-36).

Thomas Keneally cannot be grouped with such racist literature, but employs many forms of latent racism in his novels, invoking Orientalist stereotypes in expressions like 'beyond China', which he says means, 'beyond anything', evidently somewhere further out than that region described by the archetypal 'beyond the Pale' (*Bring Larks and Heroes*, 36). When the soldiers attack the rebellious but unarmed convicts with bayonets, there is a great roar of shouting and killing. Corporal Halloran is appalled by 'the death roar of some man, bull, singer, saint' amongst the cacophony of rout which Keneally calls 'Chinese music' (*Bring Larks and Heroes*, 142).

In *The Chant of Jimmy Blacksmith* Keneally offers a digressive and wonderfully illustrative tale about Australian identity in which two clerks of the Department of Agriculture argue about the proposed federation of Australia. One speaks 'upper-class English', and criticises the idea as unworkable, saying 'there is no such thing as an Australian' except for an Aborigine, and makes an appeal to British heritage. The other, of more common stock, is angered by this talk, and argues that Australians must come together to unite against their common enemy, who he identifies as 'the Asiatics' (*The Chant of Jimmy Blacksmith*, 15).

3.5. The 'Asian Invasion' Genre

This is a humorous version of a whole genre of Australian pulp fiction which exists since the beginnings of Australian literature and is based on unabashed anti-Asian racism. 'From the 1880s to the first World War, the fear of an Asian invasion, whether migratory or military, was a major theme in Australian literature, as it was in Australian politics' (Meaney, 228). The 'Yellow Peril' or 'Invasion Scare' genre of novel 'amounted almost to an obsession', and was exploited in the nation's cartoons, short stories, plays, films and, most substantially, novels (Meaney, 229). These participated in the national preoccupation of

defining social and political aspects of the 'good society'. Whether that translated into increased self-reliance in national defence, closer alignment with the United States, or even an outright split with Great Britain, it seemed to many Australians that 'race, viewed as culture as well as colour, was the common denominator' in society (Meaney, 263).

Ouyang Yu notes that 'Nationalism combined with racism finds in the Chinese a convenient scapegoat and a necessary antithesis' (Ouyang Yu, 1995, Invasion, 74). He points to the 'projection of paranoia' which led to the invasion hysteria—also describing origins of the 'looking-glass' metaphor of the Australia/Asia relationship—where a society's 'unacceptable impulses' such as a recognition of self-reproach or self-distrust are attributed to others. The projection can also result 'from splitting the world into good/bad and superior/inferior dichotomies', whereby the existence of the bad and inferior within oneself is denied and projected on a scapegoat. The cultural, religious and racial differences made the Chinese ideal scapegoats, and the resulting fear and hatred of them as an undesirable 'Other' was deep and enduring (Ouyang Yu, 1995, Invasion, 75).

A recent example of this genre is John Warwick Hay's *The Invasion*, a novel of the surprise atomic attack and invasion of a naïve and defenceless Australia by the sinister South East Asian Republic. The Asians are all depicted with contempt, especially the stupid, untrustworthy and unhelpful Chinese cook who gets the station owner's outraged scorn from the very first page. Even proving able to survive in the bush when the whites would starve only lowers him to the level of the Aborigines, whose usual moniker, 'jackaroos', equates them with kangaroos. The white Australians are rough and tough men, acting according to passion when they are wrong and to cool cunning when right. The Asian soldiers are lazy and careless malingerers, and the Asian subordinate officers are cowards. The commanding officer is an uncouth, crude, professional soldier who belches after eating too fast, hates Australia from his first day there, and is so full of intolerance that he wonders how any country could allow such a potential traitor as the 'half-caste' Lucas to live. The Asian considers being half-caste a fundamental flaw and reason enough to turn against one's country. The Australians are

pictured as more egalitarian, and yet share this innate distrust, seeing Lucas as 'a good shearer. A true professional, but a trouble-maker' whose real flaw is being a member of the Australian Communist Party.

If nothing else, *The Invasion* is an extreme example of the influence on Australia of depictions of Asians in popular culture, with such films as those of Buck Rogers, who fought the evil Mongol emperor, or the *Terry and the Pirates* comics, which are formative for C. J. Koch's hero in *Highways to a War*. The immediately notable distinction would be that in *The Invasion* the popular culture's image is taken at face value, with Australians still struggling against the overwhelming forces of the Mongol emperor, while in *Highways to a War* it is only a starting point for a young man's initiation into the complex and enigmatic culture of Southeast Asia.

3.6. The Literary Impact on Perceptions of the East

Adrian Vickers writes that, as the Southeast Asian region was 'never a primary focus of public discourse in Australia', whatever extant historical sources do remain of Australian attitudes are best represented in literature. 'The novels and travel articles, in particular, form the most coherent and extensive depiction of this part of the world available to Australian readers', though they indicate that the broad idea Australians had of the region 'rarely broke through to the level of consciousness'. There was generally little desire to know the Asian region beyond the horizon of expectations which was 'formed and reflected in the literature'. This provides no 'total image of South-East Asia held by all Australians', but indicates how the 'suppositions that crept into conceptualisations' tended to be 'a local manifestation of an international set of suppositions and power relations':

> In literature the Malay Islands were fitted into a colonial picture. The ethos of colonialism was reinforced by a romance genre which depicted the Islands as the backdrop for white adventures, and in these adventures the normality of bourgeois life in the West, particularly English bourgeois life, was praised. This was a bourgeois identity best realised in the novels on that last frontier of the West, the East. The East was a field of fantasy, a realm of extremes, which made adventure possible in order to prove the worth of people of English stock. (Vickers, 66)

Australian writers had a considerable impact on the national perception of Asia, but many were published in England and owed enormously to the influence of 'the archetypal colonial writer', Rudyard Kipling. They therefore published 'as international writers contributing to an international genre' which trumpeted 'the triumph of British values and the search for manly adventure'.

> It was Kipling who, both in his writings and as a public figure, managed to ground such narratives in a colonial view of the world, so that the Australian writers who followed him incorporated colonialism within their assumptions about the nature of the area they used as a setting, and about the workings of the genre in which they wrote. (Vickers, 67)

The 'great degree of subtlety' in his work means that Kipling cannot, in Vickers estimation, be 'dismissed as pure imperialism'. His 'depth of personal knowledge of India' enabled him to present India and Indians more accurately than other writers. He also argued 'for the preservation of "pure" native cultures, and sympathised with many aspects of Indian life, philosophy and religion'. But while he 'demonstrated the possibilities of moving between cultures through the eponymous hero's mastery of disguise', Kipling's work is founded on a belief in 'the irrevocable difference of races, just as the colonialists' praise of native cultures is combined with disdain for those colonial subjects who attempt to cross the racial barrier, either by being "half-caste" or by acquiring Western education and Western styles' (Vickers, 69). Nevertheless, Kipling provided the antecedent for later Australian novels, including those of d'Alpuget and Koch (who cites his debt to Kipling in 'Crossing the Gap', 8, 16), which explore 'the emotional frontier of humanity, the place where exoticism tested human limits and made the unbelievable possible', and which seek out a means of reconciling 'some lack or absence in individual characters' and the needs of society (Vickers, 73).

In comments concerning the Australian short story which are certainly pertinent to the novel, Bruce Bennett notes how the principle difference from the 1890s to the present is 'that the depiction of Asians has extended beyond last century's goldfields fears of Chinese takeovers'. Fears, misunderstandings and distrust still predominate, though the images are sometimes more romanticised and usually more complex due to the greater direct experience

of Australian writers in Asia. Some images represent a 'fusion of Australian country-bred values and an instinctive recoil from the directions of Americanised automatism in industry and life'. Others express counter-culture reactions against Australian socio-cultural repressions in light of 'the extremes of experience' possible in Asian countries (Bennett, 1986, 60). The simple alternative Australians once faced in response to the world of colonies was 'to identify with either the colonised or the colonisers', and, though it 'was laced with ambivalence', white, Western-minded Australians found 'the choice already made' (Vickers, 78). Today the alternative is still there, but the choice not nearly so simple. Australia's involvement in Southeast Asian wars has led to a more sceptical, ironic response to the Asian experience, while closer religious involvement has often resulted in quizzical, ironic questioning of the meaning and value of Eastern mysticism. The importance of all this, Bennett remarks, is that 'an increasing self-consciousness is evident as alternative beliefs and ways of living are contemplated' by Australian writers (Bennett, 1986, 60). This opening to the culture and way of life of the Asian 'Other' is in Bennett's view a very positive development.

It is precisely the view Australians take of Asia which distinguishes them from their European forefathers. Ron Blaber discusses the developments in travel writing which indicate how Australians are struggling with, and overcoming, the dilemma of promoting their relationship with Asia while holding true to their European roots. The Australian world view has largely been subservient to the European view, and yet, Blaber argues, as Australia has turned its eyes toward Asia, it has been able to make an assessment of a region which, unlike any other, is its own. Most Australians once followed the mould in restraining themselves to writing mostly about European travels, and even when they wrote about travels elsewhere they tended to be conditioned to seeing the world from a European perspective, but 'for those writers who chose to travel through and write about the Asian region certain significant differences to their British counterparts emerge' (Blaber, 50). They seem to have been able to look to Asia 'with an almost innocent gaze' due to having been excluded from direct contact

with European-dominated Asia. Their untrained view then is 'less assured, less knowing, and can be read as partially deconstructing orientalist constructions of Asia' (Blaber, 51). It is when looking at Asia that Australia produces significant differences with the 'traditional imperialist literary mode', not only producing a new view of Asia but also of Australia itself. While Blaber notes 'an inescapable orientalist discursive mode operating within most of the texts,' belying Australia's colonial history, 'both as colonised and coloniser', he sees the 'fractures within the narratives' about Asia as the first indications of a divergence of the Australian world view from its European antecedents (Blaber, 56-57).

3.7. A Love/Hate Affair

This innocent capacity to assume new outlooks on Asia is comparable to that attraction felt in the other Western societies which in the latter half of the twentieth century have been drawn toward the exotic and mysterious nature of Asian culture, knowledge and art. It is just that for Australians the appeal of Asia is augmented by a geography which was once held in check by the priorities of its European and American models. Asia may have at first only been permitted to serve to supply the cheap and reliable labourers Australia needed, but today presents apparently viable models of how Australian society and culture might develop.

This, of course, is an extremely problematic view. The dominant classes of Australians, though hardly representing a racial purity in any sense, are driven to maintain the nation's white and Christian nature. And while democracy and capitalism are developing in Asia, these diverge enough from the traditional Western models to cause many Australians to question Asia's commitments to linking political and economic structures. And finally, the continuing political turmoil, which seems inextricably tied to the political and economic inequities in the Asian nations, continues to undermine the efforts of those Australians who believe that their nation's future would be best served in a working regional association.

Still, Asia has established itself as part of the culture of Australia, and the literature represents the inescapable attraction Australians feel toward Asia. Robert O'Brien of *Across the Sea Wall* experiences this attraction when he travels for the first time by train through

India—an Ozzy encountering for the first time the Emerald City in the wonderful land 'somewhere over the rainbow' of the Hollywood film classic, the *Wizard of Oz*:

> O'Brien stared out the window at the new Indian Republic sliding by, flat and brown as a table-top, enormous, with empty stretches of burnt grass reaching to the horizon. But the few scattered trees were a surprising emerald green (*ASW*, 105).

Juxtaposed with the gleam of a marvellous new land, however, are the inescapable images of 'thin dogs and naked children', of poverty and struggle. O'Brien senses that he is 'on the edge of emptiness' and that there 'was a struggle out there from which he had somehow been spared' (*ASW*, 105), but the fractured world confronting him would not fail to jolt his Australian psyche into looking for meaning in its own hard, dry life.

3.8. The Australian Vision into the Future

The Asia of today remains a puzzling partner for Australia. Australians are told that they must 'participate more fully in the global and Asia-Pacific region', and judge themselves not by their own but by multinational standards (Tacey, 117). And so they look out at Asia's apparently steady and impressive advances in democracy, socio-economic opportunity and human rights, but the vision often turns back to its old, ugly and familiar face. Still, there is promise even in the disturbing view of the Near North. After the Communist crackdown on the democracy movement in Tiananmen Square in 1989, for example, Australia allowed thousands of Chinese dissidents to immigrate. The influx of artists, writers and others of cultural talent brought new vigour into the country, but, more importantly, some believe that Australia also gained 'an opportunity to begin to recover what has been lost from historical memory, hidden in suspect nationalism'. The Asians not only brought tools with which Australians could 'negotiate the dangerous future' of East-West relations, but also gave Australians 'a chance to see ourselves in a new light. The mirror of East and West works many ways' (Kingsmill, 220-21).

It is paradoxical, writes Fay Zwicky, that Australians persistently see Australia itself as 'someone else's country, a homeland so fundamentally altered as a concept as to be no longer comfortably recognisable as "Home"', and yet Australian writers are still so drawn to 'the

physical environment, the strange and harsh beauty of an ancient land'. The themes of 'nostalgia, loss and lovelessness' are typically Australian and reflect this paradox which is most strongly felt by white Australian writers who can no longer feel very comfortable with their European cultural origins. The 'scientifically sanctioned rationalistic interpretation of nature' has led over the last centuries to a 'sense of deep spiritual deprivation', and a 'severance of the sacred correspondence between the human spirit and the created universe' (Zwicky, 34). Old sources of strength can no longer be relied on to nourish the spirit of mankind, though the roots it manages to send down will tap into whatever resources can be found. Tacey believes the Aboriginal world will be a major cradle of a new Australian spirit. Many, like d'Alpuget and Koch, 'have turned to the East in their search for antidotes to the modernisation and material acquisitiveness of their own cultures' (Zwicky, 34). They have turned East to recall and reconstruct the misplaced meaning and symbols of what they call 'home'.

John McLaren makes a similar call for cultural renewal by tapping ancient understandings of man's place in the cosmos, and finds what he sees as the 'productive myth for Australia and the Pacific' in Shakespeare's *The Tempest*. The magician, Prospero, represents Australia's cultural links both with Europe, through his despotic rule of the island, and with America, through his scientific control of nature which associates him with the culmination of the Renaissance and Enlightenment, and yet he wisely rejects both.

> sIn breaking his staff, freeing his subjects, and entrusting the future to the feminine spirit of Miranda, the one who marvels, rather than to the masculine lords of misrule whose nominal authority is restored, Prospero foretells the abdication of power that alone can make real the promises of knowledge. (McLaren, 46)

Sadly, McLaren writes, Australia 'has rarely listened to the many voices his magic can reveal in nature', preferring 'to follow the example given at the opening of the play, when Prospero uses his powers to subdue nature. The consequence is that nature 'has taken its revenge, turning settlements into dust and salt, and alienating people from the land' (McLaren, 46-47).

3.9 Conclusion

The marvelling, feminine voices of enlightenment discussed by McLaren and Tacey are those heard and relayed by Blanche d'Alpuget and Christopher J. Koch , though, to all of them, it seems much of the earth is already laid bare. By confronting fractures in Australian and non-Australian perspectives of Asia, d'Alpuget and Koch's protagonists are joining a long tradition in facing up to the fractures within the Australian perspective of itself. The message of re-enchantment is at least as ancient as the voices which express themselves in the Bible, the Vedas, or the Aboriginal cliff paintings, and has been heard throughout history whenever conditions demanded more radical measures than merely propping up the old way of things. It remains a question whose ramifications may come down, as Henry Lawson pointed out, to simple human survival. It is, at least, certainly one which weighs heavily on the developing identity of modern-day Australia.

The Cliché as Writer's Tool

4.1. Introduction

Neither economics nor geography allows Australia the luxury other nations enjoy of maintaining a comfortable disinterest in its exotic, often eccentric, confusing and irritating Southeast Asian neighbours. This gives Australian writers a greater motivation to write about their society's experiences in Asia, though they do not have a greater or more accurate pool of images to draw on than other Westerners. Their public is still largely limited in its knowledge of Asia, much of which stems from the foreign cinema and other media, or from one-sided memories of World War II and Vietnam. At the same time, the Australian readership is today confronted more than most non-Australians with Asia, especially its abundant hoard of socio-economic threats and its promises, and many believe that the nation's future can only lie in close association with Southeast Asia. This chapter will deal with Australia's paradoxical perception of Southeast Asia, and how Blanche d'Alpuget and C. J. Koch avoid having to write around their public's ignorance by attacking it head on and making the stereotypical constructions which make up that ignorance into one of the prime materials in shaping their public's awareness.

The first level of imagery with which any Australian writer can interest readers in a novel about Asia comes out of the array of popular clichés born of ingrained stereotypes which make up the public's superficial general knowledge. Two centuries of stereotypes born of distance and mystery, combined with today's accessibility through jet travel, has made travel to Asia 'depressingly formulaic' (Gerster, Bali, 354). Yet Kirpal Singh notes that Australians now almost cherish their stereotypes of Asia, remaining

> quite happily content to believe that Singapore is simplistically authoritarian and good only as a stop-over place because it has one of the best airports and airlines in the world; that Indonesia, Thailand, the Philippines, and to some extent Malaysia, are all besotted by corruption; that these are all dirty places with unclean streets and unclean people with strange customs and practices and where one easily gets lost if one is not careful (Kirpal Singh, 281-82).

One really can get lost, Singh adds, and there is indeed some truth underlying stereotypes. It is the tower of ignorance built upon a shallow foundation of truth which bothers Singh, but standing so tall in the minds of Australians makes it the stuff of national literature.

Abrams and Massar define stereotypes as the most suitable model of data 'given certain goals and perceiver characteristics'. Stereotypes, they write, 'are shaped by their association with self' (Abrams, 58-60). As one's self-perception—determined by perceptions of his position within the group, his group's position relative to other groups, etc.—is open to change, so are the stereotypes he has concerning others. An excellent example of this is Gerard Lee's *Troppo Man* (1990), an ironic parody of the novels, travel books and films which have constructed images of Bali, Australia and their inhabitants according to the various designs of the characters. The protagonist is an Australian whose whole existence is a bulwark of stereotypes so overwrought that it is crumbling under its own weight. Mathew Walker travels to Bali to find the true meaning of life, which he is convinced will confirm his preconceptions, and put his wobbly identity to rest. His knowledge, however, is based on public television programs and travel guides which proclaim Bali as 'one of the world's most refined and spiritual cultures', and he discovers on his arrival that it has been 'corrupted totally' by the rampant tourism of which he is a self-denying participant (*TM*, 3). This black comedy exploits Australian stereotypes of Asia because they define Australians so well. While Mathew's rigorously built self-perception is so closed to change, that of the carefree Pete, who has come only for the surfing and without any preconceptions at all, truly awakens to the truths of life which are indeed to be found in Bali. Yet even Matt's ascetic resistance to reality is broken by his experiences, which follow the Asian archetype by literally burning up his pent-up energy, and when the cool monsoon rains arrive he is ready to begin forming a better view of himself and his world.

Alison Broinowski notes how such one-dimensional prejudice born of ignorance becomes a fuller, better expressed duality when involved with reality, partly opening minds and partly reinforcing old prejudices. The artists, not only writers but painters, filmmakers and

others, who returned from Australian wars, expressed how 'for some, the experience served to engrave more deeply the preconceived image they held of Asians', while others were led to question their prejudices (Broinowski, 1992, 59). Individual reactions are somehow driven by the attitudes one has. The 'less angry writing' may express 'a sense of the stupidity of war and of the universality of humankind', as Broinowski says, but the experience itself is the same as for those who retain the anger, fear and suspicion they started with. Even the nationalist poets lost their 'xenophobic racism', but the clichés survive in some form for everyone involved, for they continue to provide a frame for our picture of the world. Australia's knowledge of Asia, writes Broinowski, 'has not effectively been passed on, or only in stereotypical terms', leaving many of the images of different writers nearly identical, and each generation seems 'as if they were discoverers of a new world, yet they inherited the predispositions of the past to its hygiene, morals, poverty, danger' (Broinowski, 1992, 181).

Yasmine Gooneratne has complained of 'the limited range of stock themes that tediously recur in Australian novels set in Asia'. Her list, including 'the required transitory love affair with a foreign woman', a New Age sort of plot where Eastern wisdom cmes to the rescue of Western spiritual emptyness, followed by a return to the 'home and safety' of Australia, makes one question the degree of creativity gone into any of the novels considered in this study:

> The characters unfailingly experience the shock of arrival, they respond to smells, crowds and colours, they encounter a local guide or mentor, and they undertake the inevitable quest which provides a plot, usually involving a journey into the interior or a climb to a mountain top, from which would arise enlightenment of some sort. (Gooneratne, 1992, 4)

The list naturally goes on, including the fabricated myths of authenticity and exoticism with which the modern tourist industry markets Asia; and touristic gullibility—'the willingness of tourists to ease their disaffection with the Western world by subscribing unthinkingly to alternative causes or systems of belief', called by Gita Mehta 'Global Escapism masquerading as spiritual hunger' (Huggan, 1993, Age of Tourism, 176). And yet, as d'Alpuget and Koch demonstrate, stereotypical images, whose use number among the most heinous sins of the writer's art, can still be carefully worked into a complex and provocative story.

4.2. The Queen of Cliché

Blanche d'Alpuget's *Turtle Beach* is so chock-full with national stereotypes that the novel comes dangerously close to being overwhelmed by triteness. Yet she turns it into a *tour de force*, using the abundance of clichés she can expect her readership to share as her principle vehicle to explore the theme of Australia's contradictory and ambivalent images of the 'Other'. Bruce Bennett attests that d'Alpuget's 'satiric portraits of members of the diplomatic community, particularly the wives, brilliantly ridicule their ignorance, arrogance, gracelessness and insensitivity' (Bennett, 1982, 13). She can make the cliché into a useful literary tool here since it is so prevalent in the Australian image of Asia, though this perhaps also explains the difficulty in marketing her novels outside of Australia, where the stereotypes of Asia, while similar, are yet far less ingrained in the public's mind. Still, d'Alpuget, like C. J. Koch, who both 'invoke deliberately the stereotypes of Asian menace and mystery', use the stereotypes as a basis from which they 'interrogate the patterns of Orientalist devised binary oppositions—oppressed/free, civilised/savage' (Driesen, 19). Driesen notes how Billy Kwan forces Guy Hamilton 'out of his stereotypical Western attitude to the Orient as simply a site for individual self-aggrandisement', but her conclusion that d'Alpuget's Judith Wilkes 'is able to view Minou's suicide as possibly a redemptive act, through the eyes of her Indian lover, Kanan' (Driesen, 19-20) is highly questionable. What is more possible—and more important to d'Alpuget's efforts—is that d'Alpuget's readership might manage to recognise the psychological barriers thrown up by Orientalist stereotypes. They at least might then participate in the 'new Australian consciousness' which Driesen, Tacey and others write about.

Much of d'Alpuget's subject matter revolves around the very privileged and isolated expatriate community which is bound together by strict social convention and therefore doomed to stereotypical patterns of behaviour—which can safely be described as caricatures of the people buying her books. The journalists spend most of their time getting drunk in dark, cold bars, ruminating over the corruption of local authorities and the availability of sex, only exiting the bars enough to get an adequate number of the pictures and quotes required by their

employers. The embassy officials and their wives survive between rungs of their social ladders, their racial and economic prerogatives counterbalancing the frustrations of their hopelessly structured existence. Finally, Asia itself is reduced to an array of photos and sound-bites, mixing the beauty and the squalor, the ridiculous and profound spirituality, the nostalgia for an earlier, seemingly better world, the promise of a New Age, and the sheer, unrelenting heat.

Bruce Bennett calls the 'intelligent dramatisation of a deep cultural ambivalence about Asia', which is most directly addressed by d'Alpuget's near caricatures of the expatriate/tourist Australian in Asia, the 'singular strength' of the novels of d'Alpuget and Koch. 'The journalist-protagonists are forward scouts, adventurers, but they too are bound by conventions, even when they break away from their fellow Westerners.' Their perceptions 'fall somewhere between the tourist and the expatriate', as they are drawn against their will 'into an involvement in political action'. The novelists 'are inhibited by an Australian past and become involved in testing the limits of Australian engagement in "other" modes of thought and feeling' (Bennett, 1991, 202-03).

Judith O'Donahue Wilkes, the protagonist, is an attractive Australian journalist with big breasts and marital problems who encounters various, yet expected, forms of racism, classism, xenophobia and infidelity in her dual search for a story about the Chinese boat people fleeing Vietnam, and for an explanation for her own excessive carnal instincts. D'Alpuget moulds her images to reveal the reality behind the cliché—how one can struggle to liberate oneself from the stereotypes and still fit into a safe and well-formed niche. D'Alpuget gets away with her heavy use of cliché by building a few good characters on them, and by putting the clichés in the mouths of characters who are themselves stereotypes. Most of all, d'Alpuget manipulates the stereotypes for the sarcastic, critical purposes of her narrative.

She blames an unidentified Englishman for having noted how 'a Malay would kill a Chinaman with as little conscience as he would kill a tiger that trespassed on his village. For were not all Chinese cunning trespassers in this country, and predators on the Malays?'

D'Alpuget writes that this prejudice comes out of 'the days of the Raj', a time 'so different that it seemed unreal now' (*TB*, 3), though several of her characters would certainly share it. The cliché serves to introduce the novel's central motifs of the predators, trespassers, and indiscriminate violence which are so commonplace that they are almost invisible.

4.3. The Real Asia

Asia itself is the principle object of the stereotyping. Modern Singapore—the very image of the well-ordered industrial society—is treated, as a general rule, unmercifully. The airport is 'huge, bright and very clean', and is inhabited by 'small, bright and very clean Singaporeans' who 'hand out passes and snap out directions.' D'Alpuget repeats the words *bright* and *clean* as if to insist that, yes, these really are the right adjectives to use with 'the new Asians, the economic miracle-workers'. 'Huge' meanwhile goes only with the facilities. The workers are just 'small', and are less the producers of the economic miracle than its product, churned out by engineers and archetects as 'perfectly painted dolls' for the airport. If becoming 'new Asians' is what Australians are interested in, d'Alpuget is implying, this is what they'll get. Judith retreats in panic from such a salesgirl who, like a robot, gets short-circuited over doubts of the authenticity of luxury items. The cliché exposes its true self—the cleanliness turns into the 'aggression' of the 'bright lights of the terminal, the sharp, assertive colours of the tarmac buses, the monosyllabic jabbering of the shopgirls' (*TB*, 53).

Christopher J. Koch in *The Year of Living Dangerously* focuses on the image of Singapore as the last protective buffer between the Australian bastion of Western civilisation and the Asian threat. Yet, if there is truth in stereotypes, then Singapore seems too flawed to be up to the task. Wally O'Sullivan refers to it as 'Singers' and longs to return, but only because that clean efficiency meant he could indulge his immoral passions (*YLD*, 61). Still, Guy Hamilton recognises its place in the civilising efforts of the British presence:

> 'Wait till they quit Singapore, Cookie. It'll all fall down. The Yanks won't save it. The British Empire was better—we're not supposed to say it, but it was. There'll be more tyranny without it, not less.' (*YLD*, 64)

Hamilton sees Singapore from the early 60s, before the British retreat, but also before the changes wrought by the economic miracle and, as d'Alpuget pointedly reminds us, 'the ten good years the Vietnam War had given the ASEAN nations' (*TB*, 68). Still, the lessons of the Second World War and the confrontation with Communism conjure up age-old insecurities which seem reconfirmed by the economic and political turmoil throughout Asia in the 1990s, and Hamilton's fears cannot be called out-of-date.

Koch's protagonist in *Highways to a War*, Mike Langford, recorded much more favourable impressions of Singapore than are to be seen in the other novels studied here, but the town in which he made his first entry into Asia was also not yet the successful modern, industrialised and authoritarian state. The whole gamut of images Koch invokes in his Asian novels are introduced in Langford's first taxi ride from the airport into town, when 'Asia was disclosed to him for the first time, like a video show arranged for his pleasure.' The old highway was 'a glowing and teeming tunnel of life, walled and roofed over the dim fronds of palms, and by giant, snake-limbed banyans and rain trees' (*HW*, 68). Along this rural road Langford experiences the macrocosm of Asian society, with the peoples, the activities, the smells and sights that give Koch the tools to explore the psyches of his characters. Koch is careful to stress, however, that the modern highway, like the modern Singapore, hides all of this from the arriving visitor, and therefore does not lead to the same places as before. When he has his hero say 'This is the place I've always been waiting for' (*HW*, 69), Koch is not forgetting that, while Asia is replete with ghosts and memories, the old colonial Asia cannot be a realistic goal in the modern Australian's search for self in the Near North. Singapore especially, an overworked land of artificialities, is no place to look.

D'Alpuget, like Koch, gets quickly out of Singapore, and moves the scene to Kuala Lumpur, another nation which has benefited from the economic frenzy of the Vietnam War, but which has not been anaesthetised like Singapore. It, like Jakarta and Phnom Penh of Koch's novels, is still a land of feverous activity, with one foot in the modern world but the other firmly planted in cultures which are thousands of years old. Judith Wilkes sees a land

where the neo-colonialist industries still bear British names, but where the streets are bustling with the Chinese, Malays and Indians whose racial and economic competition is well suited to 'Orientalist' stereotyping. The Chinese girls are still 'slick and pretty as dolls', but, unlike the immutable Singapore girls, they are on the move in busy streets smelling 'sweetly of incense and spices'. Chinese families are in their shops, furtively 'engaged in trivial, mysterious activities'. The Indians are selling 'poisonous-looking delicacies' (*TB*, 82). A Malay cloth seller promises whatever he thinks Judith wants, not even hesitating in his contradictions (*TB*, 83). One Chinese man 'cooking at a mobile stall, frying garlic' is in a screaming match with a Chinese woman leaning out from an upper-level window (*TB*, 95). An airline worker caricatures the old Australian image of Chinese tact and trustworthiness when Judith's bags are lost:

> The most important male—one wearing a suit not a uniform—led her to the desk where he unfolded a telephone message slip. 'We rang Quantas for you. You baggage is located. It is going to London!' He was overjoyed by his cleverness but skilfully adjusted his face when Judith replied, 'Shit.'
>
> 'Aaagh?' he said.
>
> 'How long before I can have it back here?'
>
> He held his hand in the air and rotated it swiftly. 'Four-five days, la.' He saw this caused displeasure. 'One-two days, la!' (TB, 82-83)

It is not an easy destination to travel to, but Judith's impressions during her walk through Kuala Lumpur are generally positive. This, d'Alpuget tells us, is the Asia which should interest Australians—exotic, colourful, rather mad, and not all that far from home, for it 'could have been a hot summer morning in Sydney's Dixon Street' (*TB*, 82).

Very similar dualities are to be found in each of the novels studied here, and their appeal to the reading public is based on the universality of clichés. Considering the xenophobia exhibited by Australians, one might wonder if the images of military authoritarianism, violence, religious intolerance and racism which are so fundamental to the novels might also be transferred, in the minds and fears of Australian readers, into the Asian neighbourhoods as Sydney's Dixon Street. Yet, an unexpected cliché might gain in currency by marrying it to an expected one. The power of the cliché is, after all, partly in making the illogical seem reasonable and rendering the intolerable quite acceptable. Part of d'Alpuget's strategy is

precisely to bait her readers with what they know and want to believe, and to switch it with what they either do not know or do not want to believe.

The similarities noted, it is the differences between Australia and Asia which are emphasised, and even the most trivial highlight the inability of Australians and other Westerners to adapt properly. This begins on the lowest level with basic, non-functioning technology. Judith is warned not to touch the constantly ringing telephones during a night-time thunderstorm for fear of being electrocuted. So she lies sleepless, thinking that she like most humans had lost the stamina to be so close to nature and her emotions. 'These storms pull us back to the era of caves, but we haven't got the wherewithal now to enjoy or defy them' (*TB*, 130). There is something very appealing about pre-industrial, pre-stress Asia. And yet Judith is shocked when her Malay lover indulges himself in a big, public kiss in a cheap bar while their companion Ralph is trying to pick up a whore. This is what d'Alpuget identifies as

> the real Asia: infant girls abandoned on rubbish dumps; women murdered for losing their virginity; wives divorced by the repetition of three words; villagers stoning to death hopeless people because they were Chinese. No mercy here for the weak. You'd be kissed in public whether you were embarrassed or not. Kissed, killed—it was a matter of degree only, the source was identical, disregard for the unimportant. Playing cricket was important, and being tolerant, being an unpollutable Hindu, a life-tenured academic. (*TB*, 207-08)

There is no need to question the vulgarity of the kiss, but the reaction seems a bit too much coming from a woman whose life, marriage and children have become unimportant to her. The cliché, once again, proves itself a useful double-edged sword.

4.4. Ex-patriots Sacrificing Themselves in a Gentleman's Hell

D'Alpuget turns the blade on the most vulnerable of all—the Australians in Asia for work and play. The tourists are 'dressed as if for bushwalking—with knapsacks, zinc-creamed noses and shorts. People were staring at their hairy legs; only coolies wore shorts in the street' (*TB*, 199). Embassy officials and their families are her favourite targets, engaged in the necessary and temporary hardship of living in Asia while on their way up the technocratic ladder. They are usually self-serving civil servants, epitomising the sort of government

officials that Australians love to distrust. Judith's husband, a lawyer and political aspirant, tries to programme the way she writes her story on the boat people in Malaysia:

> 'Write up the boat people in a way that won't cause bleeding hearts for them here. That'll make it a lot easier for the Party to come out against our taking too many of them. And *that* policy is necessary—I shouldn't have thought I'd need to explain this—because the unspoken grudge issue at the next elections will be jobs for all, and Aussies *first*!' (*TB*, 31)

The embassy people love to complain and condescend about the host country and its indigenous population, as exemplified by one foreign affairs man's comments: '"Malaysia is a country without a heart" he'd said. "It seems like Paradise. The Chinese are allowed to make as much money as they like; the Malays are allowed as many privileges as they like, and the Indians..." he had flicked them away' (*TB*, 19).

The Australian vice-consul in *Monkeys in the Dark* takes special pleasure in explaining to Alex Wheatfield how the embassy procured the house she was to live in:

> 'We've got it for free,' he said. 'Y'remember that little Javanese bastard who owned it?' He winked. 'Enemy of the People.'
> 'What? Has he been arrested?'
> 'Yep. The boys in jungle green came round last week. We'll put in a new dunny for you with what we save on the rent.'
> Alex was frowning. 'Isn't that illegal? I mean, we're just stealing the house.'
> 'Stealing from the Indons? Dearie, they invented stealing.'
> She was still frowning. David added, 'When you've been here six months you'll understand this town. You'll sort the place out.'
> 'I'm beginning to already,' she said. (*MD*, 22)

Staying on the high road as Alex is trying to do is not typical of Australian characters in Asia. D'Alpuget's Judith Wilkes in *Turtle Beach* mimics Alex's dislike of the rampant stereotyping of other Westerners, yet is herself hardly innocent. Koh Tai Ann finds it 'all the more astonishing and symptomatic of some deeper cultural conditioning that she is basically no different. Her alienation from the local scene is complete' (Koh Tai Ann, 29), and, consequently, so is her alienation from herself.

The Westerners do not limit their condescension to Asians. Alex's cousin Sinclaire offers the simplest possible explanation for Australia's rejection of the U.S. as a role model: 'You know the Americans have Uncle Sam's rice in their PX? Only costs eight times as much

as the local variety, and you can't taste it, but hell, it's a little bit of home.' Then, perhaps to show fairness, he adds criticism of Australian shopping habits:

> Alex, do you realise we are surrounded by second-rate people? Just look at what they eat and drink—they fight to get hold of this stuff. When the ice-cream consignment was left at the airport for three hours and turned back into a swill of powered milk and whale oil, they cried. Betty James actually cried tears of rage and deprivation. No wonder they all get dysentery. (*MD*, 43-44)

The snobbism and racism the embassy people exhibit is caricatural, but is not so unusual in a group of people who are as isolated and ingrown as they are. This is, typically, at its worst with those who do not come out of such high class families as Sinclaire does, but his stereotyping is working on several levels at once. His goal is to win Alex back, and his means are to isolate her from every other group in town. He instils his biases in her which the reader will first find fairly rational, factual, and humorous; yet they are still so obviously negative that any reasonable reader will finally decide they ought to be suppressed.

The embassy families still have their stereotypical priorities, usually some form of rationalising their lives in what they like to think of as a hardship post. Sasha, the foreign service wife in Kuala Lumpur, writes off the schools because they have 'no sport.' She professes hate for life in Kuala Lumpur, and yet admits 'It's heavenly having servants' (*TB*, 18-19). She leaves her children in the care of her domestics in order to spend her time at the Golf Club pool. When that proves impossible, as when the 'wretched cook expects a holiday for the Prophet's birthday', she is forced to bring the whole family to the club, 'a lifesaver when the servants are away' (*TB*, 114). There she is joined by English ladies, relics of the empire, experts in stereotyping and grumbling about the nouveaux riches:

> 'Every South Chinese coolie is driving a Mercedes these days,' and 'The boarding schools at home are full of Malay children.' Their husbands warned club newcomers, 'You can get a game for a thousand dollars a hole, any day of the week.' (*TB*, 68-69)

But Sasha, who would not quite fit in with 'English ladies', envies the rich locals, considers their playing golf instead of going to the mosque to be commendable behaviour, and insists on introducing Judith to Jaime, son of the Sultan, who has enriched himself by clear-cutting the jungle and shipping the wood to Japan (*TB*, 132). Everyone seems to agree in

resenting the servants, who are treated more like slaves than employees. Sasha especially indulges herself in complaining about having to live in Malaysia, but still manages mornings to linger 'in bed, where she would stay for breakfast, since the amahs were expert in dressing and feeding the children, despite their resistance' (*TB*, 86). Nostalgia for colonial days is omnipresent in the embassy world, and this gives d'Alpuget the opportunity to illustrate the hardships of an embassy post in Asia:

> 'Of course, since the war no one has had time to teach servants how to mix drinks,' somebody, who had been given a brandy and soda, was saying. 'My God, it took me a year to find a *koki* who could make an omelet. Back in the Dutch period . . ..

Even the best educated Asians are presented with trite ridicule and condescension. Judith notes the scene around the club pool, where one man is demonstrating the best English an Indian can be expected to speak, while some Chinese seem hardly descended from the ancestral trees:

> Not far away an Indian, teaching his son to swim, was saying in a Cambridge voice, 'I shall now turn you on your back, isn't it?' and over on the golf course a group of Chinese in jaunty peaked caps were slapping each other and laughing. (*TB*, 121)

The whites are not the only ones guilty of condescension. An Australian official reports what one Malaysian Chinese from Vietnam said about the Chinese refugees from Vietnam:

> 'Johnny said to me the other day, "We Chinamen don't like any limitations on us. We like to make money all ways. Bloody Chinese Vietnamese made so much money, under Diem, under Kee, under Thieu. Now they can't make money, so they come here." Making dough is a soft option in Malaysia. The local Chinese don't want competition from real pros.' (*TB*, 67-68)

Sexual stereotypes know no racial boundaries, as shown when Judith is hustled at the Kuala Lumpur airport by an Australian businessman who

> pressed his card on her and invited her to dinner at his hotel for the following night. 'You need friends in a place like this,' he said and patted her shoulder. She heard him calling the Malay girl 'Little Blossom' and she and the girl later exchanged looks of shared resentment (*TB*, 73-74).

Still, as both the man's aggressiveness and the women's resentment are stereotypical behaviour, d'Alpuget is leading her reader into the dilemma of choosing which one might be justified by the other.

The family of Kanan, Judith's Indian lover, is founded on stereotypical behaviour. The auntie, the de facto head of the household, hounds Kanan, the titular head, with disparagements like 'alcoholic' and 'cow-eater' when he spends an evening out with friends. Meanwhile, Kanan's wife is entirely controlled by the other females.

C. J. Koch works with clichés and stereotypes, though not as blatantly as d'Alpuget. His Colonel Henderson, the finicky yet stern attaché of *The Year of Living Dangerously*, resembles d'Alpuget's Colonel James, both vestiges of colonial days. D'Alpuget uses the character as comic relief and to develop her theme of the animalistic nature of men. Koch's colonel demonstrates the better, although still anachronistic, side of the old guard's discipline, order, and self-esteem, as well as its limits. He is an ideal character to develop Koch's theme of the difficulty and necessity of letting go of the past. At the pool frequented by embassy officials and rich locals in Jakarta, Henderson is served his drink by the 'plump-jowled, always smiling' Indonesian steward:

> 'What's this?' His voice, always resonant, had now an extra incisiveness.
> 'Gin-tonic, sir,' the steward said. 'You order gin-tonic.'
> 'Yes — I ordered gin-tonic. Did I order ice?' It was the tone of a headmaster about to administer a dressing-down.
> The glass was indeed crammed with ice. 'Gin-tonic always have ice, sir' the steward said, and attempted to smile.
> The Colonel's voice now rose to an intimidating level. 'Gin tonic does not always have ice,' he said. 'Americans always have ice — and I am not an American.' (*YLD*, 63)

To deflect the reaction to his behaviour, Henderson delivers a cliché about Americans: 'Ice in everything', he said. 'Barbaric habit. Well, we don't *all* have to drink like barbarians' (*YLD*, 64). The man who wears his uniform shoes even to the pool and is described derogatorily as *pukka sahib* by his admirer, Guy Hamilton, still represents the good old days of the British Empire in Asia, but he looks, sounds and acts pretty much like one would expect of an imperial relic—which an Aussi would call 'a whinging Pommy'.

4.5. Poor Super Women

D'Alpuget's female protagonists, Judith Wilkes in *Turtle Beach* and Alex Wheatfield in *Monkeys in the Dark*, have to deal with these male chauvinist clichés, but at home, where they

are spoken under the breath, and in lands where machismo is at a premium. That 'd'Alpuget's women have Australian men as authority-figures' but 'turn to non-Australians, including their Asian lovers, for other views', stands metaphorically for 'Australia's dependence on the judgement of former Western masters to lead it in these strange lands' (Broinowski, 1992, 180). D'Alpuget's protagonists are not so much fickle in their dependence as far too complex to be able to accept blanket domination of either Australian or Asian men, though each dominates in his own domain, and solidifies his domination through the imposition of stereotypes.

Her most interesting character becomes a veritable kaleidoscope of clichés as she is judged by various characters in the novel. First seen as the scandalously dressed intruder at the funeral of her husband's first wife, Minou Hobday is described by a foreign service man: 'Her name is Minou—that's what the French call to their pussies. Hits the spot, don't you think?' He tops the sexism off with a dose of racism, saying, 'She's got good legs—for a Chink' (*TB*, 17-18). Even Minou reduces her own turbulent life to trite banalities, telling Judith:

> 'I saw what happened to my mama, after Dien Bien Phu. People spat at you, in the street. Nowadays, things are better organized—they have re-education camps and new economic zones. But the truth is,' she sounded offhand now, as if bored with the subject, 'because I was born in Vietnam, and so was mama and grandmama and great-grandmama, and everybody, I wish sometimes I was still there. It's not good to be ripped away from your family and your customs, la, all the things you like. All the people who've looked after you since childhood. What's the West got for me?' She retracted one nostril in an exaggerated sniff of distaste.
>
> 'Comfort?' Judith asked dryly.

D'Alpuget then puts an interesting twist onto the whole issue of identity, making a biting remark about Minou's complaints which could easily be turned against any Australians whining over their own sense of dislocation.

> 'Comfort. A comfortable existence.' She fell silent, then said in a low voice, 'I'm Asian. I feel déracinée here.'
>
> It was pretty rich, Judith thought, coming from someone who was half-French, spoke English like a Long Island debutante and enjoyed to the full the privileges of being married to a member of the Australian Establishment. (*TB*, 37-38)

Minou is described as having a face with 'the gravity, the appearance of having lived through many lifetimes, that Asian features can suggest' (*TB*, 21), but d'Alpuget offers little to support or clarify this. That her old life had been cruelly hard is not to be doubted, but Minou has invested herself in the clichés of her new life, and most of the images make her seem silly and frivolous.

Her husband, the Ambassador, has procured a job for her as a special attaché for the refugees, which gains her access to the boat people camps. She is beloved in the camps, not for her valuable accomplishments, including securing a refrigerator for the vaccines, but for the absurd films she shows the children who cannot even speak English, including titles which equate *Perth, Gateway to the West* with *Donald Duck's Birthday* and *Goofy Goes Fox Hunting*. In her private life Minou comes off as a manipulative playmate for the Ambassador, who has traded half his wits for a jaunt with a sexy young wife.

D'Alpuget's extensive use of stereotypical images may be annoying at first, but she weaves her clichés together well into characters and a story which, in the end, are very original and, more importantly, evoke the reader's sympathy. She manages to avoid the problems of stereotypical perceptions, including the tendency of clichés to veil latent racism, or the phenomenon whereby all individuality melts away into generic description, which Fitzpatrick calls 'undifferentiatedness' (Fitzpatrick, 36).

4.6. The Oriental Female Stereotype

This 'undifferentiatedness' has been rule in the long tradition of Asian stereotyping. While there are few Asian women represented in early Australian literature, due to the fact that there were few in Australia at all, by the 20th century they were receiving special, but prejudiced, attention. The mythical image of the beautiful and mysterious Oriental woman appeared as a special lure for Australian men. She was 'deified' as beautiful, artistic, idealistic, courageous, full of initiative, highly-educated and, most importantly, westernised. Ouyang Yu remarks that her deification 'reveals a basic racist assumption about the great potential in her for Christian or Western conversion', and represents 'a sort of fetishization' in

its ‘fixity’ and ‘phantasmatic’ mode of the old Orientalist stereotype (Ouyang Yu, 1995, Women, 76-77). Minou conforms, notably with C. J. Koch’s Claudine Phan, to the representation of the part-Chinese, part-European woman who, in Ouyang Yu’s view, generally betrays ‘a streak of ethnocentrism that regards the white blood in them as somehow stronger than the yellow, making them more likeable and possessible to whites’ (Ouyang Yu, 1995, Women, 84). Madame Phan fits this description perfectly, exposing Koch’s motives to questions of racism. Minou meanwhile has no white blood in her, though she is half-blooded, a mix of Vietnamese and Chinese which made her an ‘Other’ even in her homeland, and has become thoroughly westernised, giving her special claim as an Australian metaphor. As she provokes the wild, sexual excitement of Ambassador Hobday and fulfils dutifully all of the other characteristics of the female Asian, Minou wears her ‘Otherness’ like a scarlet letter.

Yuan Fang Shen details the stereotypical presentation of Chinese women in Australian literature in an analysis which can certainly be applied to non-Chinese Asian women as well. Yuan notes how there are ‘very few fully drawn, individualized and memorable portraits’ of Oriental women ‘until the late 1980s’, and that those which do exist, which he puts into three categories, are ‘highly stereotyped’ and derivative from Western literature and media.

First, is the ‘nameless, mindless and emotionless “Oriental siren”’ (Yuan, 39). She is self-sufficient and emotionally careless, and therefore able to attach herself to any man who can buy her off (Yuan, 40). In return, she not only allows him the space to think, which a white woman stereotypically would not, but provokes in him unparalleled sexual excitement. That she is usually dainty and childlike reflects her metaphoric value, in the terms of Said’s Orientalist thesis, of the East, which is irrational, depraved and childlike, and thus in need of the West’s rational, virtuous, and mature direction.

Second, is the ‘tasteless political harridan’, quite the opposite to the seductive first type (Yuan, 41). Unattractive and passionless, this woman is necessarily wicked ‘because of the paternalistic belief that only wicked women seek power’ as she does. She is typically ‘a nuisance, a tasteless but cunning woman who is expert at changing face and cheating people’

(Yuan, 42). In the extreme, she is 'an "evil hag," a murderess and a bitch with endless lovers', built on the image of the 'dragon lady' Tzu Hsi, notorious in the Western media around 1900 as 'the "formidable" empress Dowager'. Tzu Hsi was said to have had 'the soul of a tiger in the body of a woman' (Yuan, 43), was called 'the wicked witch of the East', and was reported to have 'arranged the poisoning, strangling, beheading, or forced suicide' of her political opponents (Yuan, 44). Other members of this class include Yang Kuei-fei, 'the legendary Chinese beauty' and 'destructive concubine', who used her wiles and position to gain political power, and Empress Wu, 'a cruel woman of fierce ambition coupled with unscrupulous amorality and immorality'. Yuan remarks that women who have fierce political ambition, Madame Mao for example, have been called 'Wu Tzertien' after this infamous empress. As a general rule, such women are said to be 'on the make' when young, and become 'old hags' in old age, which Yuan argues is a sign of 'an ingrained misogyny' in a patriarchal society which 'finds it difficult to tolerate women in power (Yuan, 44).

The third type is a modern update on the old 'submissive, desirable Oriental' stereotype. 'Delicacy, beauty, fragility coupled with mind and determination' are the new characteristics of the Oriental woman in Western literature. This 'new breed of cultivated, intelligent Chinese woman' is surrounded by corruption and deeply sensitive to the political realities. 'To a certain extent', Yuan comments, 'this portrait accurately reflects the characteristics of contemporary Chinese women'. Yet, he adds, 'Western male writers have so far seemed to find it virtually impossible to move away from the stereotypical Oriental siren whose great aim in life is to please Western man' as 'sex object, seducer, in the end a sort of whore' (Yuan, 45).

This new female stereotype is especially significant when seen alongside the new Oriental male figure. In either variant, as the oversexed or the emasculated villain, he is inferior to the Chinese female and also to his Western male counterpart, so that

> the Australian image-maker on the one hand leaves the Chinese woman free for the Western male to manipulate, and on the other hand makes her emotionally dependent on the Westerner (Yuan, 48).

The lingering images of the Oriental, male and female, are 'either extremely lustful or extremely feeble', and reveal the persistence of both 'white European political and cultural hegemony' and the old 'deep-seated cultural anxieties about the East as sexual threat and, by extension, as a potential invader (indeed rapist) of Australia' (Yuan, 48).

That these stereotypes can be detected in the work of such writers as d'Alpuget and Koch, whether used consciously or not, illustrates how they have not faded with the historical and cultural developments of the past fifty years. Koch and d'Alpuget make no claims to political correctness, however, nor could any serious writer of fiction so inhibit himself, and join many other contemporary Australian writers—Louis Nowra and Gerard Lee are two notable examples—who are using contemporary clichés as tools of their trade. For Koch, the stereotypes often signal the unattainability of the 'Otherworld' represented by Asia. Tiger Lily in *The Year of Living Dangerously*, for example, reflects Yuan's third category of Oriental female stereotype in that she is beautiful, elegant, seemingly even fragile, yet cultivated, intelligent and determined, but she in no way is available or dangerous to Western men—at least not to Hamilton. (In his film version, Peter Weir reinstated the Orientalist cliché when he wrote the Russian Vera Chostiakov out of the script and transferred her threatening aspects to Tiger Lily.) This may illustrate Koch's purpose of blending clichés, just as he blends myths and structures. By drawing on the silent Tiger Lily of *Alice in Wonderland*, he is distancing himself from the Orientalist cliché without entirely divorcing himself from it, and fashioning a new, though still stereotypical, metaphor for the Asian woman.

D'Alpuget exploits these clichés for more than they seem worth. Notably, she transforms Minou's kaleidoscopic character into a complex and enigmatic, but still convincing personality, caught up in a sometimes poignant story of a resourceful, frightened woman who has lost everything and is struggling to find a new identity in a society which will never see her as anything else than an 'Other'. The depth of the cunning and experience Minou needs in her struggle make her a very appropriate metaphor to Australia's own search for identity.

That Minou's struggle ends in a form of suttee which Judith cannot fathom is perhaps d'Alpuget's pessimistic prognosis for Australia's search for self in Asia—that it is doomed to be unsuccessful and possibly even disastrous. She is writing of the 'anguish of the foreigner' in a modern world 'in which the greatest need is to survive'—physically and psychologically. In her essay 'Jakarta, Jerusalem and the Caves' d'Alpuget explains that she sees how the positivism of the technological society which grew up in the 19th century has fallen into the pit of 'a *necessary* contradiction: the nihilism and hopelessness of this century'. She describes a painful process of growth which is necessary to heal 'the broken relationship between the earth and heaven' in an article which resembles the plea of David Tacey for 're-enchantment', and mirrors Christopher J. Koch's deliberations on the divine feminine in the modern world. 'The end is not yet revealed', she writes in a very appropriate, Australian idiom. 'In this unfamiliar, broken landscape there are no maps, no guides, no reliable phrase books. We are pioneers and we have to survive as best we can' (d'Alpuget, 74).

4.7. Asian Philosophy and Australian Indigenization

Australian literature is deeply involved in the process of indigenization, a rather common conflict in post-colonial societies where present-day majority populations who were transplanted from an ancestral homeland must come to grips with their identity by sorting out who they separately were and who they together might be. White Australians have had two strong societies to choose from, but have increasingly come to the conclusion that they belong to neither the European nor the Aboriginal, though many find advantages with each, and that is where the Asian alternative comes into the picture. Helen Tiffin evaluates *Turtle Beach* as a provocation to a deep re-examination of the Australian cultural identity.

Tiffin argues that d'Alpuget is presenting her readership with a stereotypical Australian protagonist, inviting them to identify with her as she confronts Asia and the difficult 'boat people' situation, but then putting into question her behaviour and perspectives of events. 'The novel presents competing world views, which are each tested by its attitude to the Chinese refugees', who stand as a metaphor for all of the characters who are figuratively displaced in

that they lack ‘at-one-ment’. Judith’s Western view dominates the early part of the novel, but is quickly thrown out of balance through another Western character, Ralph Hamilton, an Australian embassy officer ‘who is loud, suffering, clearly not happy with himself, and whose remarks about Judith are crudely insensitive’ (Tiffin, 1984, 472). Accompanying Ralph is Kanan, ‘the still centre’ next to the rowdy Westerners, who presents the Hindu view. Tiffin writes that Judith’s radical, reformist attitudes are unsubstantiated by actions, leaving the reader to distance himself from her Western view towards that of Kanan. This would at first have been unpalatable to the Australian public, but becomes increasingly attractive as the Western one proves to be faulted and ineffective (Tiffin, 1984, 473).

Having brought her public so far, d’Alpuget then coaxes it with a Third World view offered by Minou, who ‘lacks Kanan’s peace’ but shares with him ‘the notion of *Satyagraha*, true self-sacrifice that is incomprehensible to the self-seeking West’ (Tiffin, 1984, 473). The critical distinction between concepts of ‘duty’, ‘purpose’ and ‘function’ are brought into focus when Minou throws herself into the ocean to stop the villagers from killing the boat people arriving on the beach. While Judith upbraids Kanan for not helping her useless attempts to save Minou, it is Kanan’s view that they should not interfere with Minou’s sacrifice which has been most carefully founded on reason and compassion (Tiffin, 1984, 473). Judith’s sense of duty, purpose and function come into focus when she is last seen using her association with Minou and the refugees to get bumped up to a first-class seat on the flight home, capping the reader’s alienation with Judith’s perspective. By subtly shifting her point of view, d’Alpuget puts Australian attitudes to the test. Tiffin would even argue that d’Alpuget successfully ‘enables us to stand back and judge Judith’s perspectives impartially’ (Tiffin, 1984, 474). The extent of the new-found impartiality remains difficult to measure, but in undermining their stereotypes, d’Alpuget certainly gives her readers the possibility of expanding the horizon of their expectations, and thereby of judging Judith’s and their own perspectives and prejudices.

4.8. d'Alpuget's Neo-Orientalist Looking-glass

Gaik Cheng Khoo, in response to Tiffin's thesis, puts quite a different spin on the reading of *Turtle Beach*, which is seen not so much for its various post-colonialist voices, but for its substratum of reinvigorated Orientalist clichés which only serve to undermine the validity of that post-colonialist expression. The novel, Khoo argues, maintains an ambivalent, binary approach to the issues—maternal duties/career; East/West; natural/unnatural; fatalism/free will; spirituality/materialism—and offers various liberalist views on feminism and race to 'challenge the traditional imperialist perspective of the Australian journalist protagonist' (Khoo, 31). Yet, when put into direct confrontation with the 'Other', those voices, not just Judith's, which Tiffin argues is deliberately undercut, but particularly Kanan's and Ambassador Hobday's, which Tiffin sees gaining in esteem, are compromised by 'Western projections of desire and racial prejudice' which brand them as Neo-Orientalist (Khoo, 33).

Judith Wilkes' stereotypical liberal feminist view of herself is foiled by her perception of Asia as a patriarchal society where 'women are mere commodities, objects to be discarded, sold, rented out cheaply'. This image of Asia serves only to support Judith's assumed role as the white feminist come to rescue Asia's oppressed women (Khoo, 33).

Judith's feminism, which has required her to abandon the traditional female role, is, however, undermined by the same masculine mask it forces her to wear. She is pursuing a traditionally male career in journalism, engages in extra-marital affairs while on assignment, and stays away from her family while her husband remains at home with the children. Judith is ultimately shown to have the same handicaps as the traditional male, namely that her social value is tied to her functioning as a superior and dominant provider and protector. Her suppressed feminine side can bring nothing to this masculine role, and offers her none of the special help a Western woman could usually employ to her advantage in altering the rules of the profoundly masculine, Orientalist realm (Khoo, 40). Minou Hobday stands in contrast as the 'Saigon Bar Girl', the 'seductive yet superstitious Asian woman', and 'the sacrificial mother' whose 'blatant sexuality disguises her strong familial ties to her mother and children'.

Judith's condescension of Minou, in true Orientalist form, stems from seeing Minou as 'all the past representations of women that Judith, as an emancipated, progressive, secular, pro-feminist, Western woman, has renounced'. These representations sometimes tend to justify Judith's sense of her role, but usually only illustrate the professional and private satisfactions which Judith has sacrificed to her feminism. Judith necessarily avoids self-recrimination for these losses, and it is the Third World woman who must 'bear the burden of Western feminist guilt' (Khoo, 41). Minou sacrifices her self for her family; Judith her family for her self. This leaves the implication of 'the hypocrisy of Western liberalism and, consequently, the limitations on its feminism' (Khoo, 41).

D'Alpuget is also presenting images of the New Age philosophy, 'the beacon of moral hope for the West', and exposing it for its dubious effects and neo-Orientalist foundation. 'New Age' appropriates Eastern and American Indian concepts of nature, spirituality, holism and metaphysics into its philosophy of personal growth and transformation (Khoo, 41-42). In *Turtle Beach* it is represented in the characters of Ambassador Hobday and Kanan.

Hobday is the proponent of holism, exemplified in his hermaphrodite theory where a whole personality is realised through the union of male and female halves, and sees his own completion in the person of Minou. At the same time, Hobday is the image of Australia's involvement in the Vietnam war, making a strong association between colonialism and hermaphroditism. Both concepts, argues Khoo,

> are based on desire and power. After all, it was the colonies that gave England her economic might and defined her 'whole' as an Empire at the height of British aggrandisement. Hermaphroditism works in a similar self-serving manner, undermining the concept of selfless love to reveal, instead, that it is the desire to be whole and the power derived from that wholeness which is often mistaken for love (Khoo, 44).

The search for Self in another is ultimately selfish, and when it 'ends in envy for the Other and self-loathing, one must reject the Other in the interest of self-preservation' (Khoo, 44). This principle reiterates Orientalist notions of the one-sided power relationship between East and West, and also explains many of the wavering relationships between the novel's main characters.

Kanan is the wise and transcendent Hindu, the spiritual guru for Western seekers of New Age wisdom. Yet, as a source of guiding light his wisdom is full of dark zones. Most importantly, one is certainly left puzzled with the indifference he shows to Minou's suicide, even if Judith's reactions are already recognised as shallow and hypocritical. 'Kanan's philosophical detachment, specifically his ability to define the world in cosmic terms, together with his fatalism, avoids confronting the present troubled realities which stir up Judith's so-called liberalism' (Khoo, 42). This cowardly detachment extends to his dismissive attitude toward his extra-marital affair with Judith, and puts the usefulness of his New Age ideals into question.

Both Hobday and Kanan, Khoo demonstrates, show how New Age philosophy, which promises an Eastern path to wisdom and spiritual fulfilment, is but a new face on old-age Orientalism. It 'demands that the East remain exotic and mysterious: a force or energy inexplicable to Western rationality yet accessible to those who seek spiritual comfort in it'. East and West must remain 'separate and un-deconstructed', for only then can New Age offer its notions of spirituality as a counterbalance to, and thereby an apologia for, Western materialism (Khoo, 42).

The Indian male Kanan, portrayed for his exceptional beauty and virility, especially next to his weak Western friend Ralph, fits the exotic, gentle, and feminised cliché of the Eastern male. His spiritual authority is consequently undermined on the principle of the East being weak, immature, feminine, and unable to get along without the help of the strong, masculine Western colonial powers (Khoo, 40). This and the other instances of a rewritten presentation of Orientalist tropes goes far to indict the post-colonialism to which Australia subscribes as profoundly hypocritical. Khoo makes a strong argument that *Turtle Beach* 'rewrites the postcolonial Australian as the neocoloniser' of its post-colonial neighbours (Khoo, 45).

If Khoo is right, then perhaps d'Alpuget has failed to convey her premise for *Turtle Beach* that 'in the service of something higher than oneself, a person becomes so much higher that for a moment she (or he) is divine' (d'Alpuget, 76). On the other hand, just because Judith

Wilkes has failed to navigate the dangerous course to this divinity d'Alpuget calls 'at-one-ment', does not mean that d'Alpuget condemns her as a neo-colonialist. She is, rather, exposing the latent stereotyping which Australians are susceptible to and which can erupt into full-blown rejection of Asia and Asians. D'Alpuget is even offering an alternative in Minou, the wandering Chinese-Vietnamese-Australian—the ultimate 'Other'—who has managed to achieve that divine at-one-ment.

4.9. Conclusion

D'Alpuget and Koch have indicated in their novels how stereotypes are so important in helping one determine how to behave in a strange environment. The only way one can 'understand the "foreign" is through conscious and unconscious references to one's own cultural constructs', which as often as not is manifested by 'the disparaging comments, the condescending air, and the inevitable homesickness' (Bailey-Goldsmith, 142). D'Alpuget and Koch are not excusing the negative stereotypical perceptions they put into the mouths of their characters, nor should they be blamed for voicing the stereotypes. Abrams and Masser write that 'people feel guilty when they are aware that they have made unreasonable negative judgments of others' (Abrams, 60), and that is because society sensitises us against exhibiting our prejudices. D'Alpuget and Koch are only forcing their readers to recognise those stereotypes when they are their own, and so freeing them to deal with their prejudices accordingly, for this means reassessing not only their perspectives on Asian philosophy and religions, on Third World technology, administration, and work ethics, or on women, but also on themselves.

Asia as the Looking-glass World

5.1. Introduction

The previous chapter has tried to demonstrate how Blanche d'Alpuget employs for their value as fictional tools various forms of overt and suppressed stereotyping which come out of ordinary, actual experience. This chapter will endeavour to show how Christopher J. Koch similarly accesses images which are supposed to be integral parts of the Australian identity, but which have been generated by the mass media and literature.

The difference between the two writers is more of technique than purpose, for both firmly believe that, in the search for national identity, the ability of Australians to look inward has been crippled by the stigma of invasion, forced settlement, suppression of the indigenous peoples, colonisation, imperialism, and finally abandonment by the ailing 'mother' nation. The two are further writing in defence of the possibility that, by carefully observing the Asian 'Other' and alertly seeing through their inherited prejudices which exist to aggrandise a weak perception of self by producing an even worse perception of the 'Other', Australians might ultimately discern an enlightening image of themselves, as if Asia were indeed a sort of dualistic viewfinder.

5.2. The 'National Imaginary'

The sociologist Annette Hamilton has proposed a concept which she calls 'the National Imaginary' to explain a society's simultaneous production of interdependent images of the 'Other' and the 'self'. This mechanism comes from the stresses formed by a nation's developing sense of internationalism in conflict with internal cleavage or differentiation. The process distinguishes a 'national self' from 'national others' by establishing a point of view from which the world can be interpreted. It is illustrated by 'the Lacanian scheme' which describes 'the mirror-phase' in a child's development, when 'the child sees itself in the mirror, while thinking it sees another'. Until a third element intervenes to mediate, the identities are confused. On the social, collective level, that which concerns the Australian novels, we are 'looking at ourselves while we think we are seeing others'. Most important is the projection of

the seemingly foreign elements of the self onto the 'Other', for, as Hamilton writes, 'it may be precisely the split-off part of the self, the unrecognised part, which is seen in the Other' (Hamilton, 16).

In many cultures the mass media images flooding the scene will not have a great effect on the national sense of 'self' or 'Other', as the national identity is firmly based on older forms of 'collective representation', notably myths, which 'interpenetrate and affect the construction of the repertoire of new images' (Hamilton, 17). It is in settler colonies, where 'this mythic layer is tenuous or (arguably) altogether absent', that the new images will have the most impact. While Australians have tried to produce national symbols or myths,

> the brief span of white Australian habitation, the heterogeneity of Australian settlers' origins, and the extremely rapid social changes during those two hundred years have hardly permitted anything like a coherent set of collective representations around which an Australian mythos and identity can coalesce. In the absence of a stable set of images of the self, the construction of images of others becomes equally problematic (Hamilton, 18).

In societies where a strong mythos does exist, images of the 'Other' will tend to be constructed 'in a manageable way, which means a way of neutralising it to reconfirm the separate identity' of the nation. 'In the case of Australia', Hamilton writes,

> the reverse seems to be occurring: although there is a fear of something in the heart and outside the boundaries, there is also a lure and a fascination, which can be neutralised not by retreat but by appropriation. This is not an appropriation of 'the real'; it is an appropriation of commodified images (Hamilton, 18).

This process allows the selection of 'certain critical and valuable aspects of "the Other"' for inclusion into the Australian national imaginary of 'itself', giving it a claim on 'both a mythological and spiritual continuity of identity which is otherwise lacking' (Hamilton, 18).

What is most interesting in terms of the novels of Christopher Koch is how Hamilton contends that this process of creating the 'national imaginary' remains in contact with 'the relic imaginary of the past'. The older images, dating from a time when the relationship of the 'self' and the 'Other' was less difficult and originating in children's stories, fairy tales, plays and novels, 'construct a hidden dialogue with the emerging images', countering their appropriation. Instead, the 'profound, historically-rooted Australian (British) racism'

reinforces the sense of 'fear and danger inherent in contact' between self and other. The ultimate danger would then lie in the merger of the self and the 'Other', specifically (1) through influence of the 'primitive' inherent in the 'Other'—as exposure to the rituals, festivals and artistic performances which d'Alpuget and Koch's protagonists experience—, or (2) through sexual contact—as occurs with d'Alpuget's female, though interestingly not Koch's male, protagonists—, or (3) through the production of the 'half-caste'—as represented in Koch's parade of hybrids (Hamilton, 18).

Yet, in what Hamilton calls 'a danger' she also sees a tremendous desire, and this is what d'Alpuget and Koch interpret as opportunity. For sure, Judith Wilkes is driven by her fear of the 'Other' to the cold comfort of her materialist oblivion; Alex Wheatfield's profound sense of virtue suffers a defeat to the forces of stereotypical segregation; Billy Kwan is driven from what friends and family he manages to gather to himself; Mike Langford disappears in the hell of Khmer Rouge Cambodia; et cetera. At the same time, Guy Hamilton, the introvert with hardly an iota of self-knowledge finds his world drastically converted by its interaction with the 'Otherworld' of Java; even Billy Kwan, the consummate passive thinker, becomes a man of action; and Alex Wheatfield's setback bears all of the signs of being temporary; and Minou, the ultimate personification of Hamilton's thesis, throws herself against all of the maddening and deadly forces of isolation from self and collision with the 'Other', and finally realises exactly what her identity and purpose are. D'Alpuget and Koch set up these situations, let old and new perspectives of the 'self' and the 'Other' come crashing together, and demonstrate how they might occasionally fuse, so that the image seen through the veil of dust on the mirror becomes clearer and the likenesses of 'Other' and 'self' recognized.

5.3. The Threatening 'Other'--the *1984* Paradigm.

The formulaic cultural imagery depicting the 'Other' as a threat must first be acknowledged before the clash between fear and desire can be brought into action. Koch and d'Alpuget's novels, especially *The Year of Living Dangerously* and *Turtle Beach*, therefore present Southeast Asian countries as a latter-day 'Yellow Menace', where a degree of order

which would never be accepted in a Western democracy is imposed apparently to hide the chaos which underlies society. Where d'Alpuget deals principally in clichés of power or in- and out-group relationships, Koch applies a well stocked bag of pretexts, not the least of which is George Orwell's *1984*. Billy Kwan invokes Orwell when he stigmatises Guy Hamilton for pining nostalgically over decadent Europe, 'a continent where ignorance is virtue, where bogies exist only in old, wicked countries overseas' (*YLD*, 183). In *1984* a whole bureaucracy is responsible for correcting history, making truth into lies and back into truth again; in Indonesia the sacred texts of *wayang kulit* plays are rewritten to confirm changes in revolutionary thought and policy. President Sukarno has created in Indonesia a society in which order is based on chaos, here called *konfrontasi*, 'hypnotising his crowds at the great rallies' with his calls for confrontation against Malaysia, Britain, the United States, the whole Western world, and India (*YLD*, 8-9). Kwan explains the situation to Hamilton, newly arrived in this focus point of international confrontation:

> 'For intrigues, this town's like West Berlin, old man. No one knows what anyone else is doing. The Yanks and the Brits watch the Russians; the West Germans watch the East Germans; and all of them watch the Chinese.' (*YLD*, 34)

Sukarno certainly has the creation of a monolithic 'Eastasia' in mind as the threatens to invade Malaysia, enters into alliance with Peking, procures 'huge loans' to spend on arms and new buildings to make Jakarta into 'an instant world capital.' Koch leaves no doubt about comparing Sukarno's megalomanic efforts with those of the major dictators of the twentieth century when he writes,

> Monuments rose, topped by ecstatically gesturing figures like ghosts from the Third Reich, or Stalin's Russia. Borrowed millions were spent to construct a mask, while old Batavia's arteries hardened and its vital organs ceased to function. Jalan Thamrin, speeding south from Merdeka Field and the Old City to the Hotel Indonesia in New Jakarta, carried a freight of new banks and offices and a vast, Western-style department store whose prices kept it empty. Engineer Sukarno flew over it all in his special white helicopter. (*YLD*, 28)

Sukarno even dreams of setting Indonesia on course to becoming a world naval power with plans for a major shipbuilding programme. Warships are, however, expensive, and much of Sukarno's revolution remains confined to paper. Rhetoric replaces reality here as it did in

Oceania. As part of the *konfrontasi* lessons held at weekly 'Crush Malaysia' rallies at the sports stadium or events like the Young Student Demonstration against Big Corruptors, Sukarno also launches the local form of Newspeak, a project of popular motivation which fits better into the dire economic situation of the new nation. The narrator explains that President Sukarno

> had created a strange propaganda world of paper and capital letters: a world divided between the NEFOS—New Emerging Forces—and the OLDEFOS—Old Established Forces--where we whites were called NEKOLIM: 'neocolonial imperialists'. Bung Karno showed a genius for such coinings, as a substitute for economic management (*YLD*, 8).

In addition, Sukarno names each year, announcing each one at his important Merdeka Day celebration of Indonesian independence, including the Year of Living Dangerously, whose focus is on *konfrontasi*, which would be followed by the Year of Self Reliance with its curious sub-title, 'Reach to the Star', implying perhaps a turn towards Communist China, and introduction of Sukarno's concept of a time of *banting-stir*, or absolute change (*YLD*, 221-22), during which *konfrontasi* is to be turned inward on Indonesian society itself, with the prosperous Chinese Indonesians being the principle targets.

The agents of the BPI, the Indonesian intelligence service, have been modernised to fit the affluent world of 1965 as well as its sense of racism, as one who is 'thirty-ish, fit-looking, saturnine, with a thin moustache and finely cut features which hinted at Hindu ancestry'. On the fateful day of Billy Kwan's attempt to display his 'Feed Your People' banner to Sukarno, he passes Cookie in the Hotel Indonesia 'at a jog-trot run, closely followed by a companion in an expensive blue suit, a man of heavier build, with blank, stolid Malay features and a brutal crew-cut' (*YLD*, 244). Hamilton calls them the 'Goon Squad' (*YLD*, 245), and when he is talking to Jill Bryant after Billy Kwan's death he refers to the former one as 'quite a polite fellow: very good manners. He's the one who shot Billy' (*YLD*, 257).

Confrontation is not just rhetoric. It's reality becomes a part of the essence of this Southeast Asian country, where natural and artificial lights and smells are pervasive and practically indistinguishable:

> Jakarta's street lights were growing dimmer and fewer by the month, as the electric power shortage became acute; in the street they were now passing through, the lights had failed altogether, and Hamilton found himself navigating in an almost total darkness, in which only the meditating windows of bungalows glowed irregularly. There seemed to be no moon (*YLD*, 180).

Sukarno himself is described as the *dalang*, or 'puppet master' of the Wayang shadow theatre, who controls the light projected onto the screen, and is therefore the 'creator'. He is also variously called *Bapak*, or 'father'; the reincarnation of the god Vishnu; and is noted by Wally O'Sullivan for his long list of titles: Great Leader of the Revolution; Mouthpiece of the Indonesian People; Main Bearer of the People's Suffering; Supreme Shepherd of the Women's Revolutionary Movement; Father of the Farmers; Great Leader of the Workers; Supreme Commander of the Mental Revolution; Supreme Leader of the National Association of Football Clubs; and, so adds O'Sullivan, the Supreme Boy Scout (*YLD*, 12-3). Sukarno, however, is most commonly called simply *the Bung*, which Koch has the narrator translate, with little care for hiding its archetype, as 'elder brother' (*YLD*, 9).

These echoes of *1984*, the bugged hotel rooms, the Newspeak, the ominous pronouncements of the absolute ruler and their frenzied acceptance by the huge, fanatical crowds, are far too obvious to be ignored. Yet, they were perhaps too blatantly stereotypical about a neighbour and region which Australians more than suspect for absurd totalitarian, expansionist tendencies, and so could threaten to distort the novel's focus on Australia. Peter Fitzpatrick—referring specifically to playwrights but of a phenomenon apparent in fiction writers and poets as well—notes the recent departure from a tradition in which Australian writers 'seemed to accept that it was their responsibility to hold the mirror up to a recognisably local nature, and to present images of Australian-ness, satirized or mythologized or more usually both'. Instead, they have turned to 'looking out from the island' for more 'international' subjects and structures, but, though the gaze was turned outward, the purpose was still to examine Australia and Australians (Fitzpatrick, 35).

Koch's gaze is directed toward this Asian mirror, but, rather than satisfied with the thin, echoing surface, it is probing deeper into the other side, noticing how in its reflective essence,

it offers some fundamental, sometimes shocking, clues to a truer, hidden reality. It is only natural that Christopher J. Koch found structure and inspiration, and to an extent which makes it surprising that nothing has been made of it in the critical literature, in another source (among several minor ones) out of the English classics which permits a more relaxed, ironic reading, and which is particularly appropriate for the Australian experience in Asia: Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking-Glass*.

5.4. An Australian Alice in Wonderland

The processes discussed by Annette Hamilton are apparent in all of the novels studied here, and both d'Alpuget and Koch are provoking their Australian readers into recognising and questioning their assumptions about themselves and Asia. Both are also deliberately setting into play conflicting images of 'self' and of the 'Other', and are trying to force the reader into a situation where he must wonder, as Alice sometimes finds herself doing, how to tell them apart.

Koch's *The Year of Living Dangerously* teases the reader with repeated direct references to the two *Alice* books. When Guy Hamilton attends his first press conference, he is confronted with the same obscure and accusatorial question that Alice faces as she ventures through her Wonderland: 'President Sukarno pointed his swagger-stick at Hamilton. "You," he said. "Who are you?"' Koch makes sure we get the connection by having the narrator comment, 'Sukarno always spotted a new correspondent, and nearly always used the words the Caterpillar had used to Alice' (*YLD*, 25). Later, Koch writes of Hamilton's love affair with Jill Bryant: 'They were linked by the usual shared enthusiasms to which lovers give exaggerated importance: a fondness for Vivaldi and the Beatles; for similar jokes; and they had enjoyed the same childhood books, at their opposite ends of the globe, in particular the "Alice" books' (*YLD*, 137-38). Finally, Hamilton finds himself in a maze of undersized halls, trying to find his assistant Kumar, who has disappeared like the White Rabbit, and the narrator explains, 'All the low wooden doors were closed: like Alice's rabbit hole, he said' (*YLD*, 171). Alice's problem of growing and shrinking repeatedly may very well have first suggested the

link with Koch's story in which he had planned to showcase the Wayang Shadow Theatre as analogy of real-life Indonesia, for in the Wayang the characters also grow and shrink, dissolve and materialise, fly, enter a ring, or incarnate a spirit in another body at the will of the *dalang* (Brandon, 36). At the same time, the sort of hyperbole exhibited by Alice and Hamilton's bouts of growing and shrinking tests the relativity of perspectives. Susan Stewart notes how

> size is determined by measurement to context, to those things in the surrounding environment. Size is a matter of differential identity, of 'measuring up' or 'measuring down' in relation to some other. But in nonsense, size becomes determined by those things inside the boundary of the text—thereby demonstrating the paradox of any internal measurement.

Alice is in this respect an especially apt prototype for the dwarf Kwan and his 'giant brother' Hamilton, who must both undergo radical change, for, when her body becomes amorphous, she 'both loses and explores her sense of identity' (Susan Stewart, 101-02).

These direct references let us in on this structure, supported mostly by better hidden allusions, whose purpose is to underscore how the world of Jakarta of 1965 is just as absurdly nonsensical as Alice's Wonderland and also as potentially enlightening. The playfulness gained helps to soften the novel's handling of the poverty and squalor of the indigenous quarters of Jakarta juxtaposed to the lavish lifestyles of the rulers, a handling which has two major problems inherent to it: first, its sometimes stark realism threatens to interfere with Koch's message of rediscovering the ancestral unities of East and West; and second, by the time Koch was writing *The Year of Living Dangerously* these images had already become stereotypes to the Australian reading public and needed to be approached gingerly. Koch has found in *Alice* a metaphor which he will use repeatedly, both to remind the reader that what he is seeing is as much an image of himself as of the 'Other', that these images are distorted by their environments, and also to signal the existence of another world alongside our world, and into which one might enter if one is prepared. He pictures it as a land in the looking-glass, which one knows about from vague memories and whose promise pricks one's imagination:

> In each of his novels Koch's heroes respond to a calling, to a kind of appeal to the spirit from a place they have not previously known but which they feel they must have known, and which is very often in Asia. They respond to its 'essence'—not just its allure, but to something they can intuitively identity

> with, as though they have made contact with an adjacent world, in time as well as in place. (Mitchell, 1996, Ancestral Voices, 6)

Koch uses the same dreamy, fanciful and ridiculous 'Otherworld' adjectives that are found in *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* to describe things. The foreigners left in Jakarta at the beginning of the novel are faced with what is said to be 'life under a regime whose hatred for all Westerners had reached the dimension of insanity' (*YLD*, 9). Jill Bryant calls Jakarta 'this bloody madhouse' (*YLD*, 104). Sukarno is said to live in a 'fairy-tale palace' where 'legendary deer roam' (*YLD*, 156). Inflation in the wrecked Indonesian economy is 'dreamlike' (*YLD*, 179). By the end of Sukarno's Year of Living Dangerously, when the currency had become worthless and the critical supply of rice was dwindling, the whole city is described as having become 'insane'. Cookie explains that '*Amok* is an old Malay word; and Jakarta had now run *amok* with classic completeness' (*YLD*, 221). The narrator, having rushed to Billy Kwan's bungalow to get the files after Billy's death, describes himself somewhat from the point of view of Kwan's files as 'living half asleep' and decides, 'Perhaps Billy's refusal to do the same had been his undoing. It just isn't bearable to be fully awake' (*YLD*, 252). Once in possession of the files, Cookie begins seeing the demons which Billy had earlier talked about, in particular the little one who lurked outside Kwan's bungalow, as if the files themselves were the key to another world or held some magical power:

> As I went back through the garden with my burden, I thought I saw a figure out of the corner of my eye, in the pool of dark by the great trunk of the banyan—an Indonesian or Chinese child, watching me with a stricken expression. Electric terror shot through me; but when I peered closely there was nothing there. I wasn't made for intrigue: soon I'd be hallucinating. (*YLD*, 254)

Cookie, a journalist colleague who acts as the story's teller, invites the reader into the plot not only according to the formula of the Shadow Theatre's *dalang* (discussed in the chapter on the *Wayang Kulit*) but also to the method of the Lewis Carroll narrator in the poems and prefaces which begin the two *Alice* works, namely with a direct appeal to the reader to let himself to accept Billy Kwan with a degree of innocent tolerance and curiosity, the protagonist who would otherwise be mistaken as just a cripple or a freak (*YLD*, 3). Later,

when he introduces the grim slums of Jakarta, he again diverts our attention with details alluding to games and toys, and coaxes us to keep a child's point of view, as does the second central character, Guy Hamilton, who lets himself be coaxed into Asia like Rip Van Winkle did into his faery land:

> Most of us, I suppose, become children again when we enter the slums of Asia. We re-discover there childhood's opposite intensities: the gimcrack and the queer mixed with the grim; laughter and misery; carnal nakedness and threadbare nakedness; fear and toys. This was now happening to Hamilton, who found that the puzzling clove-and-nutmeg scent, like the smell of the heat itself, had intensified; it suddenly became very important to know what it was. Questioning Kwan, he discovered that what he was scenting was Jakarta's most essential odour; that of clove-spiced kreteks—the cigarettes the poor smoked. It mingled with the spiced smell of saté, the city's favourite delicacy: little pieces of meat skewered on bamboo slivers, being grilled here over a charcoal brazier by a man in a baseball cap. (*YLD*, 20-21)

Lewis Carroll prefaces *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* with a poem about his creation of the stories in a rowboat with three little, rather tyrannical, girls, who finally allow him to begin on his terms:

> Anon, to sudden silence won,
> In fancy they pursue
> The dream-child moving through a land
> Of wonders wild and new,
> In friendly chat with bird or beast—
> And half believe it true. (Lewis Carroll, 3)
> …
> Alice! A childish story take,
> And, with a gentle hand,
> Lay it where Childhood's dreams are twined
> In Memory's mystic band,
> Like pilgrim's wither'd wreath of flowers
> Pluck'd in a far-off land. (Lewis Carroll, 4)

In *Through the Looking-Glass*, Carroll again harks back to 'the dreaming eyes of wonder' of childhood as he picks up the threads of 'a tale begun in other days', 'whose echoes live in memory yet,/ though envious years would say "forget".' Then the summer sun was high, but now is winter, and the world Carroll describes resembles Koch's Jakarta, the Wayang Bar journalist hideout, the land of faery:

> Without, the frost, the blinding snow,
> The storm-wind's moody madness—
> Within, the firelight's ruddy glow,
> And childhood's nest of gladness.

> The magic words shall hold thee fast:
> Thou shalt not heed the raving blast. (Lewis Carroll, 115)

These passages recall Koch's own description in 'Crossing the Gap' of his first experiences of Asian literature, of the *wayang kulit*, the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*, where he discovered 'familiar figures: figures from my childhood reading, strangely transformed into darting shadows' (Koch, 1987, 24). This play on memory, much of which is ancestral, and on the prototypal images themselves, are ever suggestive of the flickering shadow figures of the old *wayang kulit*, of Alice's Wonderland, and are central to the puzzling and teasing construction of Koch's novels.

5.5. Into the Rabbit Hole—Through the Earth to the 'Antipathies'

Having warned us to keep rather innocent, open minds as we read, Koch takes us on one of those remembered journeys leading into Wonderland. The appropriateness of the allusion is immediately established in Carroll's work when Alice follows the White Rabbit into the hole and finds herself 'falling down what seemed to be a very deep well', which apparently is taking her straight through the centre of the earth into a world which is immediately distinguished by its strangeness (*Lewis Carroll*, 10). Alice figures such a fall to the earth's centre to be four thousand miles down, and then ponders the quintessential Australian question: 'I wonder what Latitude or Longitude I've got to?' (Alice had not the slightest idea what Latitude was, or Longitude either, but she thought they were nice grand words to say.)' Lewis Carroll, who first published *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* in 1863, a time of great activity in the whole question of Australian identity, has no doubts about where Alice would end up after such a fall, however, when he has Alice realise that she may well fall all the way through the earth.

> 'I wonder if I shall fall right *through* the earth! How funny it'll seem to come out among the people that walk with their heads downwards! The antipathies, I think—' (she was rather glad there *was* no one listening, this time, as it didn't sound at all the right word) 'but I shall have to ask them what the name of the country is, you know. Please, Ma'am, is this New Zealand? Or Australia?' (*Lewis Carroll*, 11)

Alice realises 'what an ignorant little girl she'll think me for asking!', which leaves her nothing to do but to go 'Down, down, down!' to the other end (*Lewis Carroll*, 11).

For the British in Lewis Carroll's day the extreme opposite end of the world seemed to be Australia or China; for many Australians it still, illogically, was China. Gerard Lee illustrates the continuing Australian dependence on the British point of view in *Troppo Man* (1990), when a group of mixed nationals in Bali express regional mentalities as they talk about the relativity of location. The young Australian, Pete, accuses the Balinese of believing the others to be 'hairy and act like apes' and to be less than human since they 'do not come from here, the centre of the world.' The Balinese dispute this, and the reasonable German girl, Gabriella, mollifies them, saying, 'We are all thinking our country is the centre of de world. For me, Chermany, for you, Bali, for these, Australia.' Burditt, the American, says the centre of the world is Manhattan. His wife Barbara says it is Hawaii. Pete pursues the attack, saying the Balinese believe the world to be flat. He argues that it is round, but figures that 'If you dug a hole down here and you went far enough—I wouldn't like to be digging it mind you—you'd come out in China.' The Balinese imagine somewhat more accurately, and perhaps more optimistically, that they'd come out in California. Burditt, the intellectual, says Calcutta is probably the opposite of Manhattan, but adds, 'I think what we're talking about here is a decentring process. There are no places on Earth now we could call *the* place. There's no centre any more.' Finally, Matt, the Australian protagonist who desires nothing more than to reject everything he is, ends the discussion: 'The Earth is flat,' he said. 'Bali is the centre of the Earth and Mt Agung is the centre of Bali. That is the truth' (*TM*, 124-25).

With Koch, it amounts to something akin to both Carroll and Lee. Guy Hamilton, like Koch's other (as also d'Alpuget's) protagonists, feels very much dislocated as he arrives in Indonesia from Australia. Like Gerard Lee's Matt, he very much wants to avoid the life falling into place for him back in Sydney. And like Alice, he is bored. Carroll begins his book:

> Alice was beginning to get very tired of sitting by her sister on the bank, and having nothing to do: once or twice she had peeped into the book her sister was reading, but it had no pictures or conversations in it… . (*Lewis Carroll*, 9)

Alice is feeling 'very sleepy and stupid', not to mention lazy, 'when suddenly a White Rabbit with pink eyes ran close by her' (*Lewis Carroll*, 9). Koch opens *The Year of Living Dangerously* by having Billy Kwan similarly come by. As seeing a rabbit with a waistcoat-pocket and a watch perks Alice's attention, and, 'burning with curiosity, she ran across the field after it' (*Lewis Carroll*, 10), so does Koch open his novel, writing:

> There is no way, unless you have unusual self control, of disguising the expression on your face when you first meet a dwarf. It brings out the curious child in us to meet one of these little people. (*YLD*, 3)

Alice plunges after the White Rabbit down the hole, 'never once considering how in the world she was to get out again' (*Lewis Carroll*, 10), much as Hamilton descends carelessly into the journalists' world of the Wayang Bar, a world he will never again quite escape and which is very much like a rabbit hole indeed:

> The Hotel Indonesia in Jakarta was managed by an American airline, and the Wayang Bar followed the American practice and sealed itself against all natural light. Coming into this circular chamber, you stepped from the flat blaze of the equator into a permanent half-dark, to which air-conditioning added a Scandinavian cold; you would halt inside the doorway, the sweat drying on your back, and wait for your eyes to adjust so that you could see who was there. (*YLD*, 3)

The rabbit and its hole are obvious symbols for the Australians and their bar for other reasons as well. Both rabbit and white Australian are non-indigenous newcomers who overwhelm the balance of nature in Australia. Billy Kwan, who is to upset the natural balance among the Wayang Bar's clique of journalists, is introduced as he comes into the bar, 'squinting about him at the few sources of light' (*YLD*, 3) like a rabbit sniffing and squinting as it heads down into a strange hole.

In addition to the Wayang Bar, there are two other sites identified with Alice's rabbit hole as the gateway between two worlds. One is a 'cave-like, dimly lit' and bare café (*YLD*, 88) in the centre of Jakarta where the journalists stop to eat. Among them is Wally O'Sullivan, a pederast 'who would eat anything' (*YLD*, 89) and who is the Walrus of Tweedledee and Tweedledum, who ate all the young and naive oysters. Wally, here contrasted to the others who find the café's offerings to be indigestible while he 'gulped down

the last vestiges of his curry, sat back, and belched' (*YLD*, 89), especially appreciates the café because it allows him access to both worlds—in both of which he excels, but in neither of which he quite fits—at once. While enjoying the company of his professional and social companions, he is surrounded by his own young oysters: 'Spectators on the footpath outside—Chinese children, Indonesian youths with nowhere to go—stood and watched the drunken white men eating and drinking on their iron chairs.' The oysters of Tweedledee's poem have clean shoes, which was logical since they had no feet. Koch gives us 'a man with no legs, who propelled himself across the floor to us with wooden blocks tied to his hands, blocks which hissed and shuffled slyly on the tiles at our feet, as we fumbled for our money' (*YLD*, 89-90). This image, repeated from Koch's India of *Across the Sea Wall*, is followed by that of a 'woman dressed in a hood-like head-scarf and a crazy assortment of coloured rags and tatters, who carried what appeared to be a baby wrapped in a filthy shawl'. This is Koch's rendition of the Duchess, who carried a baby which was no baby but only a pig. Sculpting his image after the Lewis Carroll original, Koch presents the pathos of the situation in a way which builds for the reader the same walls of emotional protection which must exist for any real visitor to such a Third World café, writing, 'It was an old trick; there was nothing inside the shawl but rags, and we all knew it'. The beggar's show is as two-dimensional as the wayang and as dreamlike as Alice's Wonderland, as 'she whined and gestured at the bundle and then at one limp, exposed brown breast with its fantastically elongated nipple.' The phantasmagoria ends with journalists gaining some excuse for being able to sit in those iron chairs by giving the woman money 'in a hiatus of painful quiet', all except for Billy 'who waved her away with a frozen stare' (*YLD*, 90), and sets up the final bizarre episode in the café.

Two other journalists, Curtis and Sloan, mischievous characters in the Lewis Carroll tradition of madness, bring in a dwarf off the street and present him as a gift to Hamilton, provoking what Cookie describes as 'a childish fear' in Hamilton, as if 'the joke would come true, that he would be saddled with the Indonesian dwarf for ever' (*YLD*, 92). In the café

where 'weird cartoons' of Disney characters are painted on the walls, this dwarf is a caricature of Billy Kwan, 'a genuine midget, with close-cropped hair like a black cat's fur, and wide-set, clever dark eyes' (*YLD*, 90). Koch's Wonderland descriptions continue with 'fantastically abbreviated brown legs and stubby bare feet' which 'peeped' from under the dwarf's sarong, the arms which were 'like flippers', and the 'tiny infant hands whose fingers were strangely splayed'. Cookie says, 'Compared to him, Billy Kwan (at whom I dared not look), was a normal man' (*YLD*, 90), but apparently only compared to this dwarf, with whom Billy has far more in common than he has with anyone else. Around the dwarf's neck hangs a tin cup for money, and this reflects the beggar in Billy Kwan, who is desperate, as Cookie recognises later, for love and acceptance. Kwan is even capable, in spite of his serious intellectualism, to resemble the freakish dwarf who, at the instigation of Sloan and Curtis, 'began instantly to dance on his little legs, breaking at the same time into a droning song', causing Wally to belch forth 'deep chuckles which had in them a protesting, appalled sound, as though he were being forcibly tickled' (*YLD*, 91). Later, at the house-warming party for Wally and his new bungalow, Kwan will don the *pitji* cap made famous by Sukarno, and will dance and sing for the other drunken guests as he reaches the heights of his popularity and acceptance. He imagines it to resemble Sukarno, but mostly only recalls the café dwarf (*YLD*, 100).

The other site which is fashioned directly after Alice's rabbit hole is the hotel where Hamilton takes a holiday with his assistant Kumar. The weekend outing brings Hamilton for the first time out of the bustling mad world of Jakarta up into the highlands of Java, which is itself an almost unreal world of fantastic beauty and wonder. In a prologue to the episode, Koch makes a point to write of Indonesia as a sort of mirror through which worlds change, citing its sacred name, 'the Gate of the World', the passage between the 'real' world and the 'Otherworld'.

> No kingdom on earth can equal this one, which is the Gate of the World. Its countless islands, from the Moluccas to northern Sumatra, balanced in an arc between Asia and Australia, shield it from the storms of the Indian Ocean and the South China Sea. Active volcanoes form its spine, and Vishnu, its guardian god (who sometimes takes the guise of a dwarf), protects it from all

> harm. Its children are more numerous, its women more beautiful, its soil more fertile: foreigners covet it. And most favoured of all is Java. (*YLD*, 156)

This beautiful and fertile land which lies protecting Australia from the 'storms', both literal and figurative, of India and China is itself one of volcanic temperament. Koch reminds the reader that 'these are the paddy fields and terraces the people cultivate to the very rims of the craters', and that 'Java's spirit is the terrible volcano Merapi, which seems to sleep, but is always ready to explode in violence' (*YLD*, 156). This is the land where Sukarno's 'white, fairy-tale palace stands among pines and legendary deer roam', and where the Wayang Shadow Theatre comes alive, and where the new rulers of Indonesia, 'the new nation's élite: generals wealthy from rake-offs; Chinese merchants; favoured officials; and foreign envoys who enjoy the pleasures of colonialism without colonialism', ascend their thrones (*YLD*, 157).

When Alice follows the White Rabbit down the hole, before entering into Wonderland, she gets left behind and lost in the subterranean passage:

> She was close behind it when she turned the corner, but the Rabbit was no longer to be seen: she found herself in a long, low hall, which was lit up by a row of lamps hanging from the roof.
>
> There were doors all round the hall, but they were all locked; and when Alice had been all the way down one side and up the other, trying every door, she walked sadly down the middle, wondering how she was ever to get out again. (*Lewis Carroll*, 12)

In his Indonesian Wonderland, Hamilton must first wander through a similar labyrinth of halls and doors of the hotel. A self-described claustrophobe, Hamilton finds himself in a closed-in room at the hotel. Alone and feeling dependant on his assistant, he wanders the halls looking for Kumar.

> Hamilton wandered through the long, musty-smelling corridors of the Ministry bungalow, which were utterly silent. All the low wooden doors were closed: like Alice's rabbit hole, he said.
>
> The old servant, in his white, starched jacket and *pitji* cap, suddenly appeared round a bend ahead of him, and Hamilton tried to ask him where Kumar's room was. The old man spoke no English, and could not understand Hamilton's feeble attempts at Bahasa; he bowed and smiled eagerly, saying something about '*makan*'. Hamilton said that he wanted no food, and gave it up. He began to feel that his position was ridiculous. (*YLD*, 171)

Hamilton gives up trying to find Kumar and opts for a nap, but is disturbed by a creaking sound and thinks someone has opened the door to his stuffy room. He sees that 'the

noise came from a purple and green lizard some six inches long, clinging to the wall above his bed' (*YLD*, 173). He feels 'unreasonable loathing' for the creature, who as Bill the lizard is sent down the chimney into the house where the hugely grown, claustrophobic Alice is trapped:

> She drew her foot as far down the chimney as she could, and waited till she heard a little animal (she couldn't guess of what sort it was) scratching and scrambling about in the chimney close above her: then, saying to herself 'This is Bill', she gave one sharp kick, and waited to see what would happen next. (*Lewis Carroll*, 36)

Hamilton is as yet no more ready to act in less nonsensical ways than Alice, but having met his Bill is important. Lewis Carroll's Bill returns as an important juror in the capital trial of the Mad Hatter, who stands accused of stealing the Queen of Heart's tarts. Koch's green lizard melts into an image of the lush and fertile Javanese countryside—metaphor of ferment, mystery and power—and, as will be discussed in the section on Koch's Two Enigmatic Alices, into the personality of Billy Kwan. The two are interrelated, as is made clear in Hamilton's dream which foreshadows his second journey into the highlands of Java, when he will come face to face with Asian forces of destruction and creation:

> The road they had driven on to get here this morning unwound in his mind like a film, and the film kept winding back to one persistent image: the Javanese mothers nursing their babies at the doorways of the roadside kampongs, and then blending together to become one mother with one baby. Green-framed by the palm-grove's liquid green, she smiled in great friendliness—her gleaming, oiled hair in its traditional bun secured by right combs, her bared, yellow-brown breast resembling one of the fruits piled in baskets by the road: as though human and vegetable flesh were nurtured alike by the hill-country's deep red soil and myriad streams. In shallow dreams such as these, we are still half-consciously thinking; and Hamilton said: But that's the picture in Billy Kwan's room.
>
> He did not know why he said this. The pleasant Javanese matron did not really resemble that wildly dancing figure with snake-like hair in Billy's picture of the Hindu goddess; and yet seemed to him in his dream that her hair had now come lose from its combs, and fell in snake-like coils and switches on her shoulders: that she had become someone else. (*YLD*, 173)

This leitmotif of the duality of creation/destruction in the image of Asia is often found in Australian literature. The rabbit hole, through its entry into the 'Otherworld', offers the promise of enlightenment, yet poses certain threats to those who dare venture in. For Lewis Carroll's Alice the danger is treated childishly nonsensical; for Koch's protagonists the

nonsense is revealed to be far more foreboding. This theme of the dual aspects of the 'Otherworld'—in the traditions of the Hindu and ancient European goddesses who bring both fertility and destruction, and of the Australian landscape which represents both paradise and hell—is further dealt with in the chapters 'The Divine Feminine' and 'Encountering the "Otherworld"'.

5.6. Wally O'Sullivan, et al., Inhabitants of Wonderland

Several of the characters of *The Year of Living Dangerously* can be immediately identified with characters of the *Alice* books. In *Through the Looking-Glass*, Alice goes into the Garden of Live Flowers and meets Tiger Lily, a flower who shares a name with the elegant but silent secretary in Hamilton's ABS bureau. Hamilton's Tiger Lily—whose real name is Rosini, or 'little rose'—fits the Orientalist stereotype of the Asian female which has survived throughout Western literature, as the protagonist's uncle's beautiful but totally silent Japanese wife in Louis Nowra's *Summer of the Aliens*. Alice's Tiger Lily, however, explains that flowers are not really silent, and even criticises other flowers for talking too much:

> 'Oh, Tiger-lily! said Alice, addressing herself to one that was waving gracefully about in the wind, 'I *wish* you could talk!'
> 'We *can* talk,' said Tiger-lily, 'when there's anybody worth talking to.' (Lewis Carroll, 138)

Hamilton's Tiger Lily receives very careful descriptive preparation, but if one expects her to do something overtly central to the plot, he is to be disappointed. She clearly does not think Hamilton worth talking to, but this might simply be to protect her reputation. One is left wondering about the possibility that she is responsible for the enigmatic message which Hamilton receives, that 'Your assistant Kumar is PKI' (*YLD*, 36). If Tiger Lily is so conservative as to avoid conversation with the Westerner who employs her, she would necessarily also be anti-Communist. The only other candidate for suspicion is Kwan, and while this would be somewhat illogical as he still has contacts with and admiration for the communists, as a self-styled *dalang* he could certainly be playing the '*wayang* of the left' against the '*wayang* of the right'. Koch has, however, made Tiger Lily beautiful and refined, put her in a uniquely powerful position to know and communicate that Kumar is a Communist

official, given her the option of Alice's Tiger Lily to remain silent or not, and then maintains her status as an Orientalist cliché by leaving her mystery unresolved. Tiger Lily is indeed one of Koch's finer, if usually overlooked, creations, and she finally seems best described as an *apsarasas*, a heavenly attendant to cosmic events, which Koch has liberally adopted from Eastern mythology, and which are discussed in chapter 9 on the Divine Feminine.

In a more serious vein, Wally O'Sullivan, as already mentioned, is the Walrus of Tweedledee's poem who entices the young oysters to take a nice walk along the beach with him, and then eats them all. O'Sullivan, whose size and eating habits as well as his first name fit the walrus motif, is a pederast who has fallen in love with Southeast Asia thanks to the access it gives him to beautiful young boys along with the relative anonymity, allowing him solve his identity problem by coming, at least partly, out of the closet. He tells Hamilton and Cookie:

> 'I'm happy in this bloody mad country, you know. They might be on the wrong track at the moment, but the Javanese have everything, really: intelligence, subtlety, sense of humour, and sen-sensitivity.' He hiccuped. 'I love them. I think I may never leave,' he said. 'This is my home, now. I may apply for citizenship.'
>
> At this, we laughed in disbelief; but he raised a stilling hand; even in drunkenness his dignity was paramount. I'm quite serious—really, I have something to *give* them; they have something to give me. There are young men here who are hungry for education, for guidance that they can't find in the present breakdown. You met my young friends tonight—Hadji and Abdul? Fine young men. I teach them English—supervise their reading--guide them in their political thinking. They'll be leaders, some day, and they'll set this country on a civilised course. And I can be *myself* with them. I can't be myself in Australia.' (*YLD*, 102)

This explains why Koch would take prototypes out of Lewis Carroll. He must make his characters likeable even while they represent very real, decadent Westerners who fall into the worst tradition of Western imperialism as they live out their Orientalist fantasies. And so Koch ennobles him as 'Great Wally' and makes him into the central figure in a clique where shared experiences make the group important above all else, and the group's rigid stereotypes regulate its members. Like the Walrus, Wally relishes his role especially well, both as consumer of Indonesian boys and as ringleader in the Wayang Bar, and his performance is exceptional. Called upon to recite the many monikers of President Sukarno, Wally maintains

a lofty calmness and lets the others wait a moment, focusing their attention during this dramatic pause. He clears his throat, then, like the Walrus, who let himself become enthralled by the little oysters before devouring them, and deliberately so that his 'well-oiled voice would taste each item', he commences his delivery, 'his rose-bud mouth working solemnly, like an old lady's at prayer' (*YLD*, 12). Big, soft, witty, intelligent, romantic, sensitive, majestic, loving, and as loveable as a teddy bear—except that here it is a walrus—'Great Wally' is a character right out of Wonderland.

All this almost makes Wally into a tragic character, for the complications of his large personality make for a big and sudden fall, except that Koch does not choose to write the tragedy of Wally O'Sullivan. In spite of his professed love for Indonesia, Wally has already confessed to Cookie the problems of his pederasty in Indonesia:

> 'I'm living on the edge of a volcano. The Indos would love to get something on me—I irritate them so often with my articles. It's all so bloody cloak-and-dagger here. I wish I were based in Singapore again. Singers was marvellous. I could send out from my room for the most beautiful boys—they deliver them there like *hamburgers*.' (*YLD*, 60)

Or like *oysters*. In any case, Wally, like the Walrus, does not recognise his own decadence because the boys he has sex with do not seem quite human to him. Koch clothes his blatant racism in the heavy robes of higher, perhaps for some readers even redeeming, romantic French literature—citing one of the most important figures in 19th century Orientalist expression.

> I've got used to having boys in South-East Asia, Cookie. The funny thing is, I never allowed myself at home. I only half admitted it to myself. You come here, and they're available, and they're almost like a new sex—so smooth and brown; like plastic.' He pursed his lips and gave a single snort of laughter at his own vulgarity. 'Somehow, with another race it doesn't seem so wrong. I felt like André Gide discovering the beautiful Arab boys—you've read the journals? South-East Asia—the Australian queer's Middle East.' (*YLD*, 60)

If Wally believes that he can be himself in Southeast Asia, then he must be willing to accept his pederasty as something other than degenerate, exploitative and very dangerous. Cookie tries to warn him about the possible consequences of his all-too-open activities, but Wally does not listen, and his sudden expulsion from Indonesia comes as a complete surprise

to him. Alison Broinowski would agree that Christopher Koch stands firmly behind the judgement of Cookie, his likely mouthpiece. She affirms that Koch concurs with such of his intellectual forebears as Rudyard Kipling who have seen such decadence as proof of the decline of Western society (Broinowski, 1992, 178). The irony is that Asia, where Australia is hoping to clarify questions about its identity, has always born the Orientalist stereotype as where even—perhaps especially—the most degenerate of Westerners can finally be themselves.

5.7. Koch's Two Enigmatic Alices

Koch substantiates this theme of moral degeneracy in physical form by fashioning his Alice type as two characters who have separate backgrounds, personalities and destinies, but jointly make up a composite protagonist. Billy Kwan and Guy Hamilton are each terribly incomplete and incapable of taking lead roles in the events of the plot, but together they become a unified heroic figure. This identity puzzle is itself a dual image out of Lewis Carroll's *Alice* books and the *wayang kulit*'s representation of the three Pandava brothers, Arjuna, Judistira and Bima, who epitomise an Eastern version of the separate elements of a whole personality. This section limits itself to Kwan and Hamilton's labyrinthine *Alice* connection; the complex Eastern associations of this double character are investigated in chapter 11.

5.7.1. Billy Kwan

The search for lost identity is a special problem for Billy Kwan, who has as much trouble keeping track of who he is as does Alice. Kwan, indeed, is a shape changer. The narrator seems to be describing one of the chessmen in *Through the Looking-Glass*, when he says: 'His black, crew-cut head appeared large in relation to his body, and his legs were comically brief; but his chest and shoulders were powerful, and his hands square and capable-looking.' He sounds like Humpty Dumpty on the wall when he 'perched himself with some precariousness on a high bamboo stool and crossed one stumpy leg over the other'. Then he becomes the Cheshire Cat, with his head separating from his body and dissolving into a

disarming smile, as Cookie remembers, 'The disturbingly intelligent face above the comical body split into a grin, and I decided that I liked him' (*YLD*, 5). Jill cites another catlike characteristic in Billy. 'Billy *never* swims' she says, patting his 'spiky black head' as if he were her house cat (*YLD*, 49). Billy Kwan and the Cheshire Cat are the sages of their stories. Kwan would likely apply the Cheshire Cat's logic about madness to the Indonesia experience:

> 'But I don't want to go among mad people,' Alice remarked.
> 'Oh, you can't help that,' said the Cat: 'we're all mad here. I'm mad. You're mad.'
> 'How do you know I'm mad?' said Alice.
> 'You must be,' said the Cat, 'or you wouldn't have come here.' (Lewis Carroll, 58)

Kwan is the only character in the novel who is actually trying to do anything about the lamentable conditions of life among the Indonesians, and being a dwarf with a quick motor scooter gets him into places inaccessible to the others, associating him with Bill the lizard who was sent down the chimney to save Alice who had grown trapped in the house, even if for Kwan it is exploiting the compassion of others more than the physical size that counts. He also acts, like Bill the lizard, as the jury in his trials of the others, especially of Guy Hamilton and of Sukarno. On top of it all, Billy Kwan is the lizard's namesake.

Finally, Billy is the allusive White Rabbit. When he has become disillusioned with Sukarno and Hamilton, Kwan disappears into the indigenous quarter of the *Pasar Baru*. Hamilton, who wants to make things right between them and re-establish their working relationship, follows him into the Pasar, chances to track him down like Alice did the White Rabbit. Kwan, however, is inconsolable, and after accusing Hamilton and all journalists as being just Peeping Toms, he runs and disappears back down what resembles another hole in the earth (*YLD*, 237).

This difficulty to pin down Billy Kwan's personality is a central part of *The Year of Living Dangerously*. Wally remembers Billy from university days as an anarchist, but fully expects him to have since become conservative. Cookie tells him that Kwan looks Chinese, and Wally answers, 'That's his trouble. He's not sure whether he is or not' (*YLD*, 4). Billy Kwan remains throughout the novel an enigma; no one is sure just what he is. He finds his

most profound sense of identity in being a dwarf, but does not have the physical characteristics of the typical dwarf, and no one really wants to see him as one. Hamilton says he is being hard on himself when he talks about being a dwarf, and Cookie remarks that 'he was not really a dwarf in the extreme sense: that is, he was not a midget' (*YLD*, 4-5). His accent is Australian, but with British overtones (*YLD*, 4) thanks to his British education. He looks Chinese, except for his almond-shaped green eyes. His father was Chinese, though when Pete Curtis tries to provoke him with a standard derogatory joke about a Chinese gardener in Australia, Billy simply responds, 'My father owns a gift store in Dixon Street, not a market garden' (*YLD*, 6). Billy Kwan does his best to distance himself from his Chinese origins, and complains to Hamilton about the racism he has encountered, saying 'It's difficult to break out of the restaurant and fruit-shop business, if you're an Australian Chinese. Or it was when I was young' (*YLD*, 19). He insists that he does not speak a word of Chinese, but also that he does not speak more than a few words of Bahasa, the local language of Java, and this is so clearly false that one must also doubt these assertions. The Javanese themselves are confused about him, and their mistaking him for a Chinese Indonesian is a huge professional advantage for Kwan. Similarly, Kwan tries on a series of philosophies, testing each for its attractions, but seeming intent just in discovering why it does not fit him before moving on to the next. Kwan's identity is, then, defined by all that which he is not.

Such negative-based identification is the norm in the *Alice* books. Alice is drawn into the rabbit hole by her curiosity at seeing the White Rabbit, but Lewis Carroll writes:

> There was nothing so *very* remarkable in that; nor did Alice think it so *very* much out of the way to hear the Rabbit say to itself 'Oh dear! Oh dear! I shall be too late!' (When she thought it over afterwards, it occurred to her that she ought to have wondered at this, but at the time it all seemed quite natural.) (*Lewis Carroll*, 9-10)

Alice finds the door into the garden, but she is not small enough to go through. She chooses to drink the bottle marked 'Drink me' only because it was '*not* marked "poison"' (*Lewis Carroll*, 14). Once she shrinks she discovers she is not tall enough to take the key to the door. Alice

wonders how all of the strange things can be happening to her, and begins to doubt her own identity:

> 'Dear, dear! How queer everything is to-day! And yesterday things went on as usual. I wonder if I've been changed in the night? Let me think: *was* I the same when I got up this morning? I almost think I can remember feeling a little different. But if I'm not the same, the next question is "Who in the world am I?" Ah, *that's* the great puzzle!' And she began thinking over all the children she knew that were of the same age as herself, to see if she could have been changed for any of them.
>
> 'I'm sure I'm not Ada,' she said, 'for her hair goes in such long ringlets, and mine doesn't go in ringlets at all; and I'm sure I can't be Mabel, for I know all sorts of things, and she, oh, she knows such a very little! Besides, *she's* she, and *I'm* I, and –oh dear, how puzzling it all is! (*Lewis Carroll*, 17-19)

Alice's solution to having fallen down the rabbit hole and forgotten who she is, one which seems to be adhered to by Billy Kwan, whose identity problems stem from his inability to belong and be loved, is to stay put in the hole until someone comes along to help her out:

> I shall only look up and say "Who am I, then? Tell me that first, and then, if I like being that person, I'll come up: if not, I'll stay down here till I'm somebody else"—but, oh dear!' cried Alice, with a sudden burst of tears, 'I do wish they *would* put their heads down! I am so *very* tired of being all alone here!' (*Lewis Carroll*, 19)

The Cheshire Cat uses the same sort of logic to prove its madness:

> 'To begin with,' said the Cat, 'a dog's not mad. You grant that?'
>
> 'I suppose so,' said Alice.
>
> 'Well, then,' the Cat went on, 'you see a dog growls when it's angry, and wags its tail when it's pleased. Now *I* growl when I'm pleased, and wag my tail when I'm angry. Therefore I'm mad.' (*Lewis Carroll*, 58)

This sort of specious logic illustrates how Koch's reliance on Carroll's novels go beyond the most obvious forms of intertextuality, winding meaning and mis-meaning together like the reversed images in the looking-glass. Susan Stewart notes how meaning in Carroll 'is often made material, factual, and consistent at the expense of the understanding that makes up common sense'. Carroll, she argues, undercuts the power of meaning while giving it central stage (Susan Stewart, 78), and this can also be seen in Koch's playful manipulation of meaning, one of his leitmotifs. Koch links 'meaning' in a confusing network of literal, abstract and often incongruent terms—time; history; Dis, commander of the dead; Kali and her 'lila' of creation and destruction; memory; death; and the 'Otherworld'—thereby bringing

konfrontasi home to the reader,who is confronted with the fact that the meaning of 'meaning' is about as solid as the Cheshire Cat.

Just as the Cat reckons that he is mad since the dog is not, Billy Kwan weighs evidence of all he is not, and arrives at the conclusion, 'So I must be Australian, mustn't I?' (*YLD*, 10). Kwan's ideological and spiritual tendencies are just as fluid as physical identity. He professes to usually subscribe to a Christian moral point of view, meaning 'the view that you don't think about the so-called big issues, or changing the system, but you deal with whatever misery is in front of you—and the little bit of good that you do adds its light to the sum of light' (*YLD*, 22). Kwan is Roman Catholic, but says that he is considering converting to Islam. He tells Cookie, 'Lately I have a feeling the Church has spent its passion'; and, 'the Methos in Sydney used to invite me to little suburban gatherings to show how broadminded they were with their tame Chinese—but they'd get uncomfortable. They only like multi-racialism in theory, poor darlings.' He cites several reasons for his possible move to Islam, 'No priest cast. Equality for all believers under God.' He gets to the point then, however, when he mentions, 'And they have *force*. That's what the communists in this country underestimate—the fury of the Muslims at being told there's no God.' (*YLD*, 95-96)

Kwan would be as difficult a Muslim as Catholic, however, as he is really an animist. Cookie asks him if he believes in the supernatural, and Kwan answers that there is a spirit near his bungalow who moves about in the garden and even 'came in one night, and knocked some bottles of developer off the shelf.' He explains their existence, with the circular thinking typically found in *Alice*, by the presence of a belief in them. 'Where animistic religion is still strong, you're obviously going to have a lot of them hanging about. Demons can't come without invitation, can they?' (*YLD*, 96)

Billy Kwan's flexible spiritual bent parallels his fluid identity. His extensive files, which Cookie terms his 'indexomania', is an attempt by Kwan to understand everything and everyone around him, and the point is to arrive at a knowledge of himself. In his files on dwarfs, he tries to justify his physical condition by putting on the trappings of mythology and

mediaeval history, in which the dwarfs are seen as an ancient race of little people who were assimilated into the Celtic gene pool but who reappear as throwbacks. The narrator wonders,

> But who did Billy truly wish to be? Perhaps, with his archaic slang and Public School accent, his 'old man' drawled in mockery (of himself or of us?) he played an upper-middle-class Australian or Englishman of the pre-war era. Yet sometimes he played a special role as an Asian: he was to go through Confucian Chinese and Japanese Zen phases. It was as though, since his race was double and his status ambiguous, he had decided to multiply the ambiguity indefinitely. In the Middle Ages he might have found his true function as a *vagans*, a wandering scholar. (*YLD*, 67)

This would certainly make Billy Kwan someone special, and not just a half-breed, achondroplastic dwarf with a wide, frog-like smile.

Perplexed by similar problems of identity and size, Alice begins crying and then scolds herself:

> 'Come, there's no use in crying like that!' said Alice to herself rather sharply. 'I advise you to leave off this minute!' She generally gave herself very good advice (though she very seldom followed it), and sometimes she scolded herself so severely as to bring tears into her own eyes; and once she remembered trying to box her own ears for having cheated herself in a game of croquet she was playing against herself, for this curious child was very fond of pretending to be two people. 'But it's no use now,' thought poor Alice, 'to pretend to be two people! Why, there's hardly enough of me left to make *one* respectable person.' (*Lewis Carroll*, 14-15)

It is a conclusion Kwan might have been well advised to reach himself. He is, after all, a very likeable figure, and one almost wishes he could have kept Alice's sense of humour. Billy Kwan, however, is tormented by his disparate origins. Hamilton wonders why he would reject his Chinese side, and Billy responds:

> 'My heritage isn't China—my heritage is Europe, just as yours is. Tell me, what books did you read, Ham, when you were twelve years old? Sherlock Holmes? The Saint? The William books?'
>
> 'All of those. Used to love them. Why?'
>
> 'So did I. Do you see? I used to want to be William. I suppose you did too. But I couldn't be—my face wouldn't let me. Sooner or later, you see, at a party or in a bar, there's a character who's always waiting for me. He says, "Kwan: now what sort of a name's that?"' He was imitating a crass Australian. '"Half Chinese aren't you?" he says. I can never get rid of that bastard.' (*YLD*, 83-84)

Billy Kwan's identity problem is indeed far more problematic than is Alice's, though perhaps only due to the more serious tone. So, like Alice, Billy feels as though he is less than a whole person, and finds that creating multiple identities for himself does not help much:

> 'It's rather a bore to be *half* something, you see, old man. There's no great problem belonging to any *one* race—but a man needs to be able to choose. Well, I chose. William was part of *my* family past, like Christianity, and the Renaissance, and parliamentary democracy.' (*YLD*, 84)

5.7.2. Guy Hamilton

Sharing Billy's green cat-eyes and a perplexing identity problem, Guy Hamilton is the other half which Billy Kwan has been searching for. Hamilton, who has not yet learned who he really is through the tutelage of Billy Kwan, the experience of entry into the Javanese otherworld, and the enchantment of the *wayang kulit*, is immediately marked for his lack of an identity at his first presidential press conference by Sukarno in the tradition of the Caterpillar, whose superior status and degenerate Eastern origin are evidenced by his languidly smoking a hookah from a mushroom throne, and who confronts Alice about her identity:

> 'Who are you?' said the Caterpillar.
>
> This was not an encouraging opening for a conversation. Alice replied, rather shyly, 'I—I hardly know, Sir, just at present—at least I know who I *was* when I got up this morning but I think I must have been changed several times since then. (*Lewis Carroll*, 40-41)

Hamilton, too taken aback by the milieu of chandeliers and gilt chairs that 'made you half-expect Strauss waltzes', and by Sukarno's confrontation to use the rare opportunity to pose a question, is likewise barely able to identify himself: 'President Sukarno pointed his swagger-stick at Hamilton. "You," he said. "Who are you?"' Cookie reports that Hamilton 'actually flushed; it was plain that he simply didn't know what to say.' All he gets out is a lame 'I'm just here to report the news' (*YLD*, 25-26).

Lost like Alice, Hamilton errs through the tunnels and mazes of Java, encountering bizarre characters and inverted logic similar to those of Wonderland. He experiences his own bouts of growing and shrinking when he is brought by Vera Chostiakov, the Russian agent, to the Kellerman, an appropriately named, claustrophobic and underworldly hotel. Vera

apparently drugs Hamilton, and questions him about relative strengths of Muslim and PKI forces in central Java, as his perception gets 'more and more queer'.

> He found now that there were gaps; periods when he was not aware of what was happening; but then her voice and her face, with the analytical grey eyes he still found attractive, would return into his field of vision. She had come over now to sit next to him on the bed, and looked at him sideways: but her face grew smaller and smaller, until it was the size of a tennis ball. Then it grew immensely large. And all the time, at the back of his mind, he was concerned that Peter the 'driver' would appear: he grew annoyed at the thought that the man was still in the building, perhaps in a room nearby, and would try to use strong-arm tactics. (*YLD*, 209)

Astounded by the strange things happening to her, Alice says, 'When I used to read fairy tales, I fancied that kind of thing never happened, and now here I am in the middle of one! There ought to be a book written about me, that there ought!' (*Lewis Carroll*, 33) Hamilton has the same reaction. Feeling more and more powerless and enclosed, and, in an expression of the Australian paradox of place, time and identity, Hamilton wonders how he ever got involved in a 007 sort of story.

5.8. Alice on the Highway to War

The allusions to *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* continue in *Highways to a War*, though with some important twists to reflect the different masks of the principle characters. Claudine Phan has the same green cat or leprechaun eyes as Billy Kwan and Guy Hamilton. Mike Langford, like Hamilton, grows into a white giant among the Southeast Asians. The armies of South Vietnam and Cambodia are full of figures right out of Alice's looking-glass. Perhaps the most interesting of these is the information officer of the Cambodian Army, who is too appropriately named Am Rong, 'was always inappropriately smiling' and 'spoke in French of battles of the imagination rather than those that had really taken place'.

> His were medieval encounters, like those that had been fought in his films about the kings of ancient Angkor, and in these accounts, the Republic's army was ever-victorious. With one of the most formidable guerrilla forces in history closing its circle around the capital tighter every month, this would have been funny if it hadn't been desperate—and if journalists hadn't been dying because of Am Rong's confident assertions that the Government held territory it had already lost.

Rong's briefings were translated into English by a 'sensitive-looking young Cambodian' poet who 'had an air of quiet desperation' which indicated to the journalists 'to believe nothing of what he was being made to say' (*HW*, 263-64).

The Cambodian capital is described as a veritable 'Wonderland by night' as the Khmer Rouge forces tighten their strangle hold all round. There are 'coloured electric bulbs' and 'petrol lamps' flickering 'like the fairground lights of childhood'. The fragrant air of the garden 'suggested peace, but a peace in the process of mummifying' into a 'peace of the past, masquerading as the present for a little while longer'. On the café's terrace 'embassy officials, Cambodian military officers and bureaucrats, Western correspondents, and a sprinkling of up-market Cambodian prostitutes in black sarongs' enjoy the orchestra's rendition of 'Wonderland by Night'. The mad hatter's birthday party is made up of the journalists, 'huddled over their table lamps, faces reflecting the flames of the lamps like those of nineteenth-century plotters'. They were 'the noisiest of the groups', inspiring a 'note of hysteria in their laughter', alternating 'wild clowning' with 'emotional diatribes against the corrupt Lon Nol leaders' (*HW*, 384).

The North Vietnamese Army is not spared its share of absurd and mad characters. In the NVA's theoretically egalitarian, non-materialist system, a high-ranking officer can only be identified 'from the number of ballpoint pens in his pocket' (*HW*, 299). For a variation on the theme, when the Soldiers Three are captured and brought deep into the forest, their NVA captors turn out to be the Seven Dwarfs. There is Doc, 'the medic, with his open boy's face and a big cap of hair cut straight across the forehead'; Lenin, a 'tough-looking man with slit eyes, who carried the field radio' and 'squinted and watched people', is a sinister remaking of Grumpy; Weary, who has 'heavy eyelids, prone to malaria', is an undisguised representation of Sleepy; Prince, 'a quiet, handsome one with a broad face', recalls Bashful; and Turtle, a 'stocky, cheerful man who always carried the rice pot on his back', fits in as Happy. Escaping such direct correlation are Professor, the 'one with glasses and a sensitive face', whose nail-biting and rereading of old letters from home still characterise him as one of the original

dwarfs; and the leader, Captain Danh, named most likely after Dan, the Old Testament prophet who was forced into an otherworld exile, interpreted the dreams of the Babylonian king, was protected by angels when thrown into the lions' den, and whose name means 'God is my judge' (Morris, 334), all of which fit him well, as also the role he plays as the true believer in the cause of North Vietnam, who is yet judicious and dares to think for himself (*HW*, 314).

Mike Langford is confronted, like Alice and Guy Hamilton, with many doors, symbolic of psychological or spiritual hindrances, but he finds that they are opening for him. The first door opens when Aubrey Hardwick offers him a job at Telenews, but he does not quite explain that what lies behind the door is the duplicitous world of espionage (*HW*, 90). A hidden door lies behind a curtain of heavy red velvet in Madame Phan's home (*HW*, 126). Through this door Langford enters into the world of wisdom and riddle of the dragonlady, who acts as Langford's counsellor, lover, and Parvati/Durga figure. Then there is the doorway of La Bohème, the bar/brothel on Saigon's Tu Do street. Koch leaves it unclear just what awaits Langford behind this door, although the street-wise children who accompany Langford everywhere vehemently protest his entry (*HW*, 197), indicating the sort of grave danger Koch associates with the 'Otherworld'. Finally, there is the trapdoor into the underground bunker of the North Vietnamese Army through which the Soldiers Three pass into a region of renewal, finding that underneath the carnage of the war there are surprising forces of life waiting to re-emerge. This proves critical to Langford, who is destined to act a saviour's role as the forces of evil overwhelm Southeast Asia (*HW*, 233).

Saigon's Tu Do street, where 'every second doorway seemed to be a bar', is 'a carnival alley', a degenerate 1960s amalgam of Wonderland, Rip Van Winkle's Sleepy Hollow, and the dual sides of the *wayang kulit* screen. Tu Do's primary odours are 'beer, urine and perfume', which suits the foreign soldiers filling the street in bland khakis or bright Hawaiian shirts, who wander in the humid heat like 'coarse and alien giants, white and black, badgered and pursued by a race of refined, ivory-skinned gnomes who waved mutilated limbs at them, or tried to sell them copies of Time, and Stars and Stripes' (*HW*, 100). Also present in this

bizarre world is the White Rabbit, manifested as 'a Vietnamese girl got up as an American Playboy bunny. She wore the required tights and rabbit's ears and tail, but her face seemed full of woe: an ambiguous lure for the American troops. Woeful parodies of American pleasures' (*HW*, 195-96).

5.9. Conclusion

The most striking thing about the looking-glass images in these novels may very well be not that they are so exotic and 'Other', but that they are somehow, deep-down familiar. Almost every major centre of human activity in the world has its To Du Street, its confusing and enticing passages to otherworlds, its mix of beauty, ugliness, and the macabre. This strange and unpredictable familiarity of that which at first glance seems purely exotic is the foundation for the looking-glass metaphor. Though she is discussing Asian writing in Australia, and thereby looking at this question from the other side, Elizabeth Kingsmill sums up succinctly the paradoxical nature of the boundary between interacting cultures in terms of the looking-glass. 'Like a reflective surface, it may seem at once both alluring and impassable; may seem to reveal unfamiliar worlds, that, in a sudden shift of light, are shown to be reflections of our own' (Kingsmill, 220). It is truly an inward search for self when Australians look outwards for the 'Other' in Asia. Opening the doors and passing into the 'Otherworld'—partly a realm of enlightenment, partly a nonsensically backwards Wonderland, partly a sinister and totalitarian technocracy—in order to know the self, however, is, as will be discussed in the following chapters, a strange and dangerous act.

The Circular Path of Non-knowing, Doubt, and Faith

6.1. Introduction

The Aryan herdsmen/invaders who brought the *Vedas* to the Indian subcontinent sometime around the 2nd millennium BC, setting into play a mix of cultures which would have profound influence throughout the world until today, had a view of the natural world which was monistic and filled with wonder. Juan Mascaró describes this Indo-European migrant in his introduction to the *Bhagavad Gita*:

> He watches the beauty of the dawn and the glory of the sun and he feels that fire and air, and the waters and the winds are living powers: he offers to them the fire of sacrifice. His life depends upon nature, and he knows that between nature and himself there is not an impassable gulf. (Mascaró, xi)

Mascaró cites the *Rig Veda* to show how this was a man who deeply identified his own existence with the universe he viewed as magnificent and beneficent:

> Darkness was hidden in darkness. The all was fluid and formless. Therein, in the void, by the fire of fervour arose the ONE.
> And in the ONE arose love. Love is the first seed of soul. The truth of this the sages found in their hearts: seeking in their hearts with wisdom, the sages found that bond of union between being and non-being. (*Rig Veda* x.129; Mascaró, xiii)

Yet while he sensed his identity with the love that arose in the 'One', he could also accept his 'non-knowing' of that pre-eminent truth. This 'non-knowing' was central to the role he saw for himself, and, he suspected, it was perhaps central for the entire created universe:

> Who knows in truth? Who can tell us whence and how arose this universe? The gods are later than its beginning: who knows therefore whence comes this creation?
> Only that god who sees in highest heaven: he only knows whence comes this universe, and whether it was made or uncreated. He only knows, or perhaps, he knows not. (*Rig Veda* x.129; Mascaró, xiii)

Just as 'the poet of the *Vedas* saw that for the progress of the mind man requires doubt and faith' (Mascaró, xiv), the 're-enchantment' which David Tacey calls for today requires a sense that the truth of the being of man is to be found throughout the universe. This truth is only with tremendous difficulty and effort to be perceived, and even then will remain beyond the grasp of man's understanding. It is in this spirit that the novels of Blanche d'Alpuget and

C. J. Koch turn attention to the ancient thought of Asia to further the Australian search for self and soul, and to demonstrate the psychological hardships one must overcome just to rediscover the essential, circular equilibrium of the spirit of the *Vedas*.

This chapter will focus on this fundamental concept as applied by Blanche d'Alpuget in *Turtle Beach* and Christopher J. Koch in *Across the Sea Wall*. Though it is an essential principle to the other novels, these two adequately introduce the problems of escaping the linear and positivist Western attitudes which are laden with the clichés, stereotypes and prejudices discussed in the two preceding chapters, and of moving toward an Eastern attitude which acknowledges that in order to know himself and his universe man must come to terms with the limits to his discernment. Accepting his 'non-knowing' will lead him to doubt, but it is precisely that doubt which is necessary to engender faith. Only through faith can man seize the reality that his present and natural—but by no means ultimate—state is one of non-knowing.

6.2. First Steps to Self-discovery in C. J. Koch's *Across the Sea Wall*

In his early novel *Across the Sea Wall*, Christopher J. Koch takes on the search for an Australian self in Asia. His protagonist, Robert O'Brien, is a young Australian who runs away from his pre-packaged future as a married civil servant towards what he expects to be a young man's adventure in Europe. He embarks on a rusty ship bound for Italy, where he encounters a group of European emigrants, including the Latvian war refugee Ilsa Kalnins. O'Brien is fascinated by the exotic allure of India which is part of his Orientalist cultural heritage, by the 'impression of sophisticated knowledge of the world which he gets from his post-war European travelling companions', and especially by Ilsa, who seems to be the 'keeper of the key/secret' of 'hidden power, superior knowledge, access to the source of all riches' (Sharrad, 1985, 64), and in whom he falls uncontrollably, passionately, helplessly in love.

Helen Tiffin notes how Ilsa, who is mostly recognised for her representation of the Hindu goddess Kali, at first personifies Europe for O'Brien, making a further journey there unnecessary. He fantasises over and is obsessed by 'the vast experience of Europe embodied

in her both through her ancestry and through her living there during the war', and also by 'her maternity', which 'seems both mysterious and paradoxical' to him and which offers some hope to him for gaining the experience which will assuage the guilt of his, and by analogy Australia's, ignorance (Tiffin, 1982, 329). Thus on this single character Koch is bringing into focus all of the themes which preoccupy him throughout his novels: of the dualities of personality; of evil; of history; of Eastern and Western cultural and mythological inheritances; of perceptions of self and of the 'Other'; of the dangerous and/or enlightening 'Otherworld' to which Asia can give access; of innocence and experience; of thought and action. Foremost, however, is the difference in perspective which makes these issues so critical to O'Brien and, as Tiffen points out, utter non-issues to Ilsa:

> By retracing the ancestral steps to Europe, and by learning its old, dark secrets, the vacancy of colonial innocence might be overcome. Characteristically such experience, particularly the enormity of evil represented by the war itself, is important only to O'Brien, and is quite incidental to Ilsa's sense of herself and of her background. (Tiffin, 1982, 329)

O'Brien and Ilsa decide to separate themselves from their friends for an adventure in India, where 'they begin to recognize themselves and each other as petty escapists, not heroic adventurers; instead of satisfying their urge for freedom, travel reminds them of their unfulfilled commitments and responsibilities' (Huggan 1993, Tourist Gaze, 84). O'Brien has imagined that Ilsa's experience can be his door into the 'Otherworld', but hope turns to 'frustration as he finds he is unable to grasp it or to nurture himself on it' and that the woman he worships remains ever beyond his grasp (Tiffin, 1982, 329). The conflicting dualities inherent in India and Ilsa nearly kill O'Brien, who is just looking to find a complement to his own, rather simple sense of self, but finds a whirlwind of love, contempt, exploitation, colonialism, spirituality and poverty.

O'Brien survives by retreating into the mountains, where he is able to recompose himself, unintentionally following the example of the god Shiva, the archetypal ascetic who was so unnerved by the world that he withdrew to a mountaintop to meditate. The idealised dream O'Brien held of the world failed him along with his health, but is replaced with Koch's

concept of a synthesis of Old World and New World mythologies and attitudes in a vision based on ‘a greater acceptance of people for what they are (rather than what he wants them to be) and an understanding of migration as a part of modern life (rather than some hot-house plant)’ (Sharrad, 1985, 67). The India O’Brien expected to discover, based on his Orientalist concepts, did exist, but only alongside many other Indias. He ‘comes to realize that doubleness is the essence of the human condition’ (Thieme, 1987, 457), though the acquired wisdom is not pleasing. O’Brien returns to Australia, picking his conventional life back up, but knows he is somehow fundamentally changed. Like Guy Hamilton and Mike Langford, he is symbolic of Australia’s shift from looking to the West for its identity, to a gaze both inward and toward Asia. O’Brien’s new job as a journalist represents Australia’s move toward interpreting the world for itself rather than through European eyes, and is also far better than clerking in the civil service for keeping him on track to return to Asia. A return seems a necessity for him, haunted as he is by his Asian Sirens, as it does for Koch, who needs to continue working out his expression of these themes of initiation and experience, of the shift of the Australian search for identity from West to North, of an interior struggle for wholeness, and of the potential of Asian elements to compensate for the psycho-cultural deficiencies of the contemporary Australian. It is the spiritual legacy which Asia holds for Australia which is most important to Koch, and his novels are well described as ‘an attempt at theological revisionism which emerges as a distinctively Australian response to the question of spiritual identity’ (Thieme, 1987, 452).

6.3. D’Alpuget’s Hindu ‘Mirror, Mirror on the Wall’

Blanche d’Alpuget tends to look at Asian society through the eyes of her most common reader, but does not hesitate to exploit some of the more esoteric and subtle images to further her story. Her persona's penchant to be critical and condescending, much like a tourist, dominates the presentation of Asian thought, but covers up a profound yet painfully reluctant yearning to find a way to end the sense of incompleteness. In this way, d’Alpuget coerces her

reader first to identify with the protagonists, and then to recognise how that identification reflects anything but the most beautiful face in the land.

In *Turtle Beach*, d'Alpuget deals with the festival celebrating the heroic victory of Lord Subramaniam. D'Alpuget's protagonist, Judith Wilkes, accompanies her Indian lover, Kanan, to the strange festival, and while she is striving to find in Kanan some sense to her life, she tends to reduce his efforts to help her to absurdities.

First of all, d'Alpuget makes fun of Lord Subramaniam as one among many ridiculous Asian gods:

> The Lord Subramaniam had six heads and twelve arms ('Some gods have ten thousand arms - he's modest with only twelve', Kanan said); he was forever youthful; his elder brother was the elephant god (*TB*, 143)

D'Alpuget goes on to note that he significantly had thirty-seven names—corresponding to his stature, which is due to being the offspring of Shiva, the destroyer of the universe, and of Parvati, the creative force of the universe. Yet, already mostly unknown qualities to Western readers, these markers of importance are dampened through association with such trivia as that 'in the lunar/solar calendar it was now the tenth month, Thai; and the lunar station was Pusam, governed by the planet Brishaspati' (*TB*, 144). The basis of Asian religion is reduced to a pseudo-science of funny sounding names and ridiculous images, overladen with the minutia of ritual, as the exact number of steps from the ground up to the cave, and accentuated with elements of slapstick, Keystone Cops humour, as when a relative of Kanan nonchalantly tries to explain the significance of the tenth month while racing through the crowded Indian streets: '"In southern India now the moon is at its most beautiful," the relation told Judith, just missing a truck. Traffic was getting heavier.' Having made as much fun of the festival as possible, and reduced the Indian cosmic view to mere pleasantries, d'Alpuget has Kanan then pronounce in an ominous undertone that the festival 'is banned in India' (*TB*, 144).

This establishes the mixed mood of ludicrous gravity in which Judith and Kanan join the thousands of other participants in an increasing frenzy of emotion and excess. Judith is drawn to the site of the festival with all the others, quickening her pace up the steps to the cave, her

heart speeding to the beat of the drums, caught up in the narcotic effects of the sweet incense until she is no longer in control of herself, and is driven hysterically up the mountain:

> Judith knew the way without any help from him now, she was ahead of him already, almost running towards the lights off to the right of the roadway where hundreds of people moved in the dark, and where the music was loud, and there were shouts and fires burning on the ground, with clouds of incense billowing up from the flames.

Kanan, who is Judith's informant and Asian expert as well as her lover, then suffers a change which reduces in her eyes his strength and influence: Like the Indian who loses his head in the riots at the novel's beginning, symbolising the central theme of spiritual disjunction, Kanan loses an arm. One must embrace a brass pot containing sacrificial milk, but having only one free arm signifies his limited, mortal attributes, especially in comparison with the many-armed—an Asian symbolism of strength—gods; C. J. Koch also employs this metaphor at a critical moment in *Highways to a War*. Judith is driven away from weakened Kanan towards another force:

> Judith knew something was pushing her, something different from the soft, hot bodies. It was an urgent noise, musical instruments - cymbals and drums - and a shout 'Vel! Vel!' (*TB*, 146)

They rush up the stairs on the mountainside, totally carried away by the atmosphere, the crush of twirling dancers, the thumping of drums and chanting priests, the overwhelming smoke of fire and incense, and finally reach the cave, where an absurd little plaster figure of the god draped with garlands of marigolds round his neck receives the offerings of milk in a cave most notable for its reek of bat dung. The sacrificial rite, the basis of the ancient Vedic philosophy, is here described with the language of chaos. Kanan has hauled his pot of milk up the mountain to the god figure, which he readily admits is kitsch by saying it is 'Just a small plaster god with garlands of marigolds round his neck' (*TB*, 148). D'Alpuget describes the ceremony as 'confusion and noise', with the focus on the 'chanting and mumbo-jumbo from priests in white dhotis, things were being flung into open fires, and grey clouds of camphor incense floated into the air'(*TB*, 147). Judith sees the festival as malevolent superstition, and even Kanan views it, at least according to Judith's interpretation, with contempt (*TB*, 148).

Everything about the festival is seen in the worst light. When she and Kanan receive free food, Judith suggests the benefactor is being generous 'As a penance for being so greedy the rest of the year'(*TB*, 148).

Judith is intent on seeing the *kavadis*, the central part of the festival which involves acts of endurement of great pain. She insists when Kanan questions her strength, but is shocked at the first, relatively harmless sight of 'a man with a naked chest as hard as a gymnast's and grey snakes of hair to his waist. He glared at them and jumped up and down on the grass, rattling his ankle bells' (*TB*, 149). Judith senses a 'mindless, concentrated malevolence' emanating from him. Kanan tries to explain how the man is taking on the role of Shiva, the god who 'destroys the universe by dancing it down to atoms', but to Judith it is just part of 'this orgy. This abomination'(*TB*, 149). Judith later describes the far more gruesome part of the festival, the *kavadis*, acts of voluntary submission to torture where 'dozens of silver fish-hooks were run through the flesh of backs and chests to act as anchors for the towers of tinsel, peacock feathers, plastic dolls and other glittery rubbish that made up the big *kavadis*' (*TB*, 151). Indian ascetics who regularly submit to tests of pain endurance are so well known that their images have become banal, but d'Alpuget describes a scene which not only Judith would find unbearable:

> There was a little girl of about five. She looked starving, her arms were like sticks, and her eyes were too big for her face. They screamed 'Vel! Vel!' in her ears, held the incense under her nose, and she closed her eyes and began rolling her head. They just grabbed her, her mother held her still, and they speared her tongue. Everyone looked as calm as if they were threading meat on to a skewer for shish-kebab. (*TB*, 149)

The description seems meant to shock her readers with the unbounded barbarity of the festival, and Judith's desire is understandably to either vomit or rush in and stop them, yet d'Alpuget juxtaposes Judith's horror with the inane reaction of a stereotypical Australian tourist. This hippie girl is more impressed with other aspects of the festival, notably the Chinese man who goes into 'a monkey trance': 'He turned into a monkey before my eyes. He ate bananas with the skins on, and ripped a coconut husk off with his teeth, and they beat him

with whips' (*TB*, 151). She goes on with her own intensely passionate and irrelevant impressions, showing how the ludicrous gravity is really a question of perspective:

> The girl said, 'I couldn't stand the young guys. They're so bloody beautiful. Their bodies are so smooth and lean after all the fasting. Did you see? When their eyes roll up, showing only whites, and they start dancing they don't have any expression at all. No joy, no excitement, no fear. Just nothing. When the priests put those big spears through their cheeks they don't register anything. They aren't there, they're out with the cosmos somewhere.' The girl picked distractedly at a patch of bleached skin on her arm - she said she'd caught a skin fungus in Bali. 'I wonder if they fuck like that?'
>
> Judith snorted.
>
> 'No, I'm serious,' the girl said. 'Those guys really let go. They let go of the whole world, they look like they're coming. I kept thinking, Jesus I'd like to fuck with a guy who looked like that. And then I'd think, but Jesus, it's scary. You'd be alone.' (TB, 150)

This egocentric, Orientalist reaction might well be shared by many Western tourists enthralled with the exoticism of Asian ritual, and though Judith's snort pretends to reject it out of hand, we know that she shares a fascination for the festival's macabre ritual, and that she has been having sex very much 'alone' during her unhappy married life, and also find her immediately after the festival back in the passionate throes of sex with her own Indian lover.

This is, after all, just how Judith reacts to such intense experiences, and is the whole point of the scene as well as of the early one of the horror of the 1969 street riots in Kuala Lumpur, when she and a male colleague witness the decapitation of an Indian and, thanks to a feat of extraordinary strength on Judith's part, save another Indian from a similar fate. Judith and her just-met colleague then rush back to his hotel room and have repeated cathartic sex, and this just days after marrying to her long-time sweetheart, engendering the child which is to destroy her storybook marriage. Westerners, like Judith, might show shock and disgust at the extremes of asceticism of such Asian practices, but tend to confuse the passions themselves and how interrelated they all are. Bruce Bennett notes how d'Alpuget was impressed by the 'smell of sex in the air' during her visit to Jakarta when she was 22. She found the 'fear and loathing' of sex in the Judeo-Christian cultures was replaced by an openness, amongst her female acquaintances at least, in the Hindu-Buddhist milieu. This seemed to have fit in with the other apparent socio-political contradictions she encountered in Indonesia, and made

Australia in comparison seem reactionary (Bennett, 1982, 12). The confused reaction of her protagonist to Asia's passion, then, does not seem contradictory at all. Intense suffering and ecstasy indeed are for this reason described in Western languages with the same terms—as the German *Leiden*/*Leidenschaft* or Latin *pathos*.

Kanan tries to explain the events in a short discourse on the philosophic basis for the festival, which also goes a long way to help explain the puzzling characters of Minou and Billy Kwan and also the problematic relationships of Judith with her husband and Kanan:

> 'All of us want only two things: power and protection. That is the human condition - the desire for dominance, the craving for succour. These devotees, who are mostly from the socially oppressed classes, satisfy both in their trance. The god takes away their pain; they have his protection. But they also unite with him, they have his strength. So they are as strong as a god, isn't it?' (*TB*, 152-53)

In the midst of d'Alpuget's presentation of the maddening festival, these words of Kanan are easily overlooked, yet they express the gist of the central theme of this and the other novels studied here. The desire for power and protection correspond to the sense of hopelessness and suffering which d'Alpuget identifies in her article 'Jakarta, Jerusalem and the Caves' as the common heritage of the modern world. Though she scoffs at the festival, Judith shares the need for relief, and this unifies her with the participants whether she likes it or not. As a young woman, Blanche d'Alpuget experienced the Thai Pusam festival. Like Judith Wilkes, she was outraged by the terror and fear of life she saw in Asia (d'Alpuget, 71), but she reports how she was amazed at the 'human courage and endurance' of the people who went to celebrate the unimpressive, plaster deity (d'Alpuget, 76). This prompted her to write of 'the anguish of the foreigner', especially the female foreigner, where the need for survival forces one to grow beyond the old assumptions and routines which leave us all displaced (d'Alpuget, 74). The lack of wholeness of her protagonist in *Turtle Beach* is symbolised by the beheading she witnesses of the Indian during the riots, just as Judith's spontaneous, massive drive for sexual unity is her response to her own spiritual dismemberment (Maack, 127). This drive for sexuality represents the need for a renewal of a sense for a sacred feminine principle which has

been suppressed in the masculine, positivist existentialism of 20th century society, but seems doomed to failure when limited by its ephemerality.

D'Alpuget sticks by her basic assumption that Judith, as an Australian who like most Westerners is closed to Eastern ideas, just cannot understand how Asian philosophy might offer her a more lasting way to wholeness. Kanan tries to reduce it to a level she might understand, and reflects his own westernised, intellectual side, saying, 'There is no god in the cave. There is only yourself. Power over yourself is the only power'. She interrupts, expressing in her liberal feminist terms, 'It isn't religion either. It's mutilation of children!' Kanan tries to argue that the 'parents don't mean to harm him. They believe they are doing something wonderful for him. The philosophy of Hinduism is harmlessness to all living things'. Kanan realises, however, that it is 'like reasoning with an imbecile' (*TB*, 153). He admits that 'we Hindus take a pessimistic view of life. It must be lived, that is all. These things, these hours of release, make it seem more bearable' (*TB*, 155). Having justified his disinterested moral attitude of life, he then removes himself from Judith by joining the dancing:

> Kanan liked dancing, liked the feeling of his limbs flowing loose and his hair giving soft blows to his cheeks as he shook his head. It was lovely dancing on the wet grass with all the other dancing people, the sky pink and blue with dawn, incense rising from the altar fires. (*TB*, 153)

The dance is the Hindus way of forgetting the crush and regaining the marvel of life. Shiva the Destroyer is said to dance the universe to atoms—destruction being the necessary prologue to creation. Kanan's act of harmless, yet profound, participation is too much for Judith, and she runs away, 'her hands covering her ears against the drums' (*TB*, 153), as if running away from Kanan's interpretation of the festival's message of suffering and succour. Yet there are in the festival elements of the message Mascaró described about the nature of man, and Judith's running away is a rejection of the fact of her 'non-knowing'; an unfortunate act, for Kanan's intent is to help Judith apply the message to her own search for answers to her crumbling life.

Judith's final assessment of the festival is overwhelmingly negative. As she is escaping it all in a crowded vehicle, she notices how 'one of her fellow passengers—perhaps the hippie

girl—stank', another jibe at Australians who 'go troppo', but she finds even that preferable 'to the nauseatingly sweet incense down by the river—and the fruit abandoned to be trampled under foot, and the music and screams which had shuddered through her.' And so Judith Wilkes, a woman who has come to exploit Asia for her career and sex life, dismisses Asia as a land of degenerate barbarity. She invokes her own Greek-based culture for the coup de grace, thinking: 'Everything in excess for these people' (*TB*, 152). It is an ironic finale when one considers that the ancient Greeks were somehow cousins to the Aryans who introduced the Vedic culture to India, and also that Judith has managed to avoid learning anything from her intense experiences in Malaysia. The goal of attaining 'at-one-ment', of forgiving herself for her own sins and accepting a sense of the 'doubt' about herself in developing the 'faith' she so desperately needs, is first described to her by a Catholic priest, and she treats this message with the same stereotypical derision within her in-group that she gives its Asian parallel (*TB*, 54). In the end, she confirms Minou's analysis of her lack of a sense of purpose by retreating back into her consumerist shell, more concerned with her duty-free bargains than with her spiritual renaissance (Maack, 129).

Turtle Beach is an essentially Western novel about Westerners whose social predilections are shaken by contact with the 'Asian Other'. Even the principle Asian characters, Kanan and Minou, though maintaining a underlying respect for their roots, are destabilised by their deep Westernisation. Kanan comes off as an intellectual who knows all about Indian philosophy, but participates more as an 'art lover' than a 'true believer'. Minou is a quintessential lost child, a 'hybrid' who has never fit in. She is almost more Western than the Westerners, though her inability to find a home for herself leads to her very Eastern self-sacrifice which Westerners can only see as self-destruction. Judith Wilkes is something of each of these two. As a journalist and Western woman she is interested in the Indian culture and in the problems of the Asians, but she steadfastly maintains her distance. This, Koh Tai Ann complains, is borne of the Australian attitude of being very secure in its views about Asian countries and people, never failing an interpretation of events and conditions there,

feigning concern, and at the same time exhibiting a patronising, disdainful, exploitative, and very 'Orientalist' behaviour.

> Thus the Australian characters are allowed to have it both ways, despising what they perceive as the sociological reality of the place even while using the orient as erotic adventure playground to act out their fantasies; but it is ultimately a place not really to be taken seriously and to be abandoned once the imagination cannot bear the reality. (Koh Tai Ann, 29)

Yet, it might be only fair to say that the Australian feint of knowing Asia comes from its insecurity about its own identity. Unfortunately for Judith, the failure of the feminist self-image and stereotypes she so carefully cultivates finally engulfs her private life, and she has to face losing custody of her children to the husband she has been untrue to, leaving her as homeless as Minou. Her professional disinterest has become a personal, icy coldness. It is hard to take as accidental—though it could be subconsciously constructed—that the married name d'Alpuget has given Judith, Wilkes, is that of the huge Australian sector of Antarctica.

6.4. Conclusion

Perhaps this is d'Alpuget's expression of the Australian paranoia of Asia—that one can go in, but getting out is rather more complicated and is just not to be effected without consequences. It is interesting to note that the dominance of d'Alpuget's narrative voice, drawing its images from the confused mix of common experience and expectations of her reading public, almost forces one to make a pragmatic criticism of her novels. Her characters are racist and sexist, and they suffer from racism and sexism; they sink to the level of animals, and they are brutalised by their world; they are cold and fearful, and yet, at times, they are fully expressive of their passion, and capable of rising to heroism.

The novels of both d'Alpuget and Koch establish poles of opposition of theme and character, and then bring them crashing together without coming to any definitive resolution, so that 'it is ultimately the reader, rather than the author, who must take responsibility for what he/she sees or fails to see' (McKeogh, 35). D'Alpuget is bringing her public into a region of fear and suffering, which they should relate to on the subconscious level, and from where they might learn more than her protagonists do. Koch is meanwhile inviting his readers into a

theatre where their expectations are shown to be crippled by inherited points of view which often preclude any sensitivity for the limits of human acumen. They are all, along with the protagonists, however, occasionally allowed to gain new points of view or shed their inhibiting dramatic masks.

Neither Judith Wilkes nor Robert O'Brien achieve states of faith in non-knowing. O'Brien at least is shaken enough in his preconceptions to begin doubting that which he believed he knew. And while Wilkes rejects any such reversal, d'Alpuget's other protagonists are sometimes more successful. 'The journeys that my characters make to the outer world are at the same time journeys to an inner realm of the psyche' d'Alpuget says, explaining that the outer and inner confusion and chaos is simply 'the state in which we, I believe, of the late twentieth century, are trapped', and are, therefore, shared by us all. 'We must GROW to get out of the pit we are in', she writes in a statement that is certainly applicable to Koch's world as well, adding with insistence that 'growth is painful' (d'Alpuget, 74). Any considerate reader of these novels must similarly be encouraged to take that first step into the circular path of non-knowing, doubt and faith. Just how d'Alpuget and Koch consider this might be accomplished will be fully discussed in following chapters, particularly those on the *wayang kulit* and the Masks of the Personality.

The Two Realms of the *Wayang Kulit*

7.1. Introduction

For Christopher J. Koch, the task of getting his readers to recognise their state of non-knowing, the concept discussed in the previous chapter, is akin to achieving a suspension of their expectations of verisimilitude. Once this is accomplished, Koch endeavours to show how reality itself is, like a theatrical performance, less a state of being than a sense of perspective. Though this concept is not new to Western thought, Koch finds in Indonesia a theatrical genre whose espousal of a non-material reality, which can therefore only be grasped through faith, is still current and applicable to everyday society. Koch confirms his sense of the importance of the Javanese Shadow Theatre, the *wayang kulit*, describing it as an integral part of the Javanese landscape, involving whole villages and entire nights in the presentation of epic heroic adventures of the great Indian sacred texts. It's artist, the *dalang*, is 'more than a puppet master, and these are more than puppets: their shadows are souls', Koch writes, 'the *dalang* is God, and the screen is Heaven' (*YLD*, 121). The *wayang* represents 'the Kingdom of Dwarawati, the land of all good things, through the long dream of the *wayang* night; a night divided into three stages: foolish youth, middle life (when a man seeks the right path), and old age's serenity' (*YLD*, 122).

This chapter will concentrate on Koch's use of the *wayang kulit*. First attention will be given to the structural applications, which provide Koch with unusually interesting alternatives to simply telling his story according to a Western literary model. Next, the focus will shift to the protagonists, Billy Kwan and Guy Hamilton, and their association to the *wayang*'s Kreshna and Arjuna. This presents problems, partly due to an apparent misleading statement on the part of C. J. Koch himself. It is also due to the complexity of the protagonists' identities, and will therefore be further discussed later in this work, notably in chapters 8, 10 and 11. Remaining with the *wayang kulit*, the next topic is the physical manifestations and moral consequences of the personality types, *alus* and *kasar*, which, other than the structural form, serve to distinguish the Shadow Theatre more from other literary and dramatic forms than perhaps anything else.

The final matter dealt with is the manifestation of the Javanese *wayang kulit* as the Wayang Bar, where the Western journalists try to retreat from the outside reality, which they observe professionally, and create their own reality, with various degrees of success, as from the other side of the *wayang* screen.

7.2 The *Wayang Kulit* Structural Model

Helen Tiffin recognises the *wayang kulit* as the 'central metaphor' of *The Year of Living Dangerously*, citing its implementation as the novel's structural paradigm, in place of a Western model, as 'a significant step towards decolonialization'. Beyond the parallels of plot and character with the *wayang* play *The Reincarnation of Rama*, this application includes using the puppet analogy—in which the relationship between shadows and puppets are metaphors for levels of reality in which the shadows magically transcend illusory material presence—to associate both Australians and Indonesians under the colonialist regime as prisoners in Plato's cave. Use of the *dalang* figure also gives Koch an elaborate means with which to create and manipulate his characters, where 'the supreme *dalang*, Koch, controls the narrator, Cookie, who relates his story and draws his characters from the files of the innermost, would-be *dalang*, Kwan' (Tiffin, 1982, 334).

Maes-Jelinek also suggests that Koch's appropriation of the *wayang*'s *Patet Nem*, *Patet Sanga*, *Patet Manjura* structural divisions for the three parts of his novel goes beyond the obvious prelude, intrigue and denouement or finale of the *wayang kulit*, corresponding to Hamilton's development through innocence, experience and maturity. Based on the two tuning systems of the *galang* musical accompaniment to the *wayang kulit*, the musical scale or mode of the three *Patet* conveys psychological overtones to the performance, and it is this musical structure which Koch is trying to adapt to a literary form. The musical mode 'enhances the meaning of the shadow's movements and structures' of the *wayang kulit* and, by analogy, should of the novel as well.

> It is not mere accompaniment to the deeds of heroes and villains but the 'silent voice' of the shadowed Indonesian people which underlies the narrative and eventually acts as a catalyst in awakening Hamilton's sensibility. (Maes-Jelinek, 31)

It may appear difficult to apply modes of musical accompaniment for a theatrical work to a work of fiction, and yet, close examination of the three divisions supports Maes-Jelinek's thesis. An initial instructional voice—as Billy Kwan brings Guy Hamilton up to speed on Indonesian politics and society, the *wayang kulit*, and the *Bhagavad Gita*—dominates part I, entitled "Patet Nem: Hamilton's Dwarf". A new, more sensually expressive voice in part II, "Patet Senga: Water from the Moon", keys in on the developing complexities in the relationship between Kwan and Hamilton, as on the sacred aspect of Indonesia, called 'The Gate of the World' (*YLD*, 156)—identifying it as the passage way between Earth and Heaven, or illusion and reality. Earthly illusion is represented by the suffering of Jakarta's inhabitants, while heavenly reality, depicted in the Javanese highlands, is, as Hamilton interprets it, 'like hallucination' (*YLD*, 159), or, as the more culturally sophisticated Kumar says, 'Water from the Moon', meaning 'anything impossible' (*YLD*, 163). Part III, "Patet Manjura: Amok", seems to present anything but old age's serenity. Instead, it depicts the fall of Indonesia into violence and chaos, and even Guy Hamilton's flight to Europe with Jill is riddled with a sense of an incompleteness of the sensibility Maes-Jelinek argues should be present, and which can only be resolved by a return to Southeast Asia. This must, nevertheless, be put into the terms which Koch is working, which is, first, that Hamilton is only half of the personality in question; and, second, that Koch associates the three *patet* to the concept of the circular path of non-knowing, doubt and faith discussed in chapter 6. Billy Kwan, the character most determined to formulate his sense of 'knowing', does finally recognise his state of non-knowing, and suffers the doubts which cause him to run amok with the rest of the population. The important voice of spiritual maturity of *patet manjura*, lacking in the incomplete story of Guy Hamilton, is fully expressed in the faith and serenity which characterise Billy Kwan's death. (The assertion that Kwan dies anything but a violent and senseless death butts up against conventional critical analysis, and so is extensively dealt with in Chapter 8.)

Functioning in relation to this musical structure is the *wayang kulit*'s two-tiered narrative, provided by Cookie in the function of the novel's *dalang*. The first aspect, called

djanturan, sets the scene and mood in eloquent language to an accompaniment of the sacred *gamelan* music; the other, *tjarijos*, is usually a shorter form given without background music, and describes minor scenes or off-stage action rather than setting. In addition, Cookie employs the *dalang*'s formal emotive songs, called *suluk*, to express the state of mind of a character. Cookie takes on these multiple voices borrowed from the *dalang*, who uses them in the *wayang kulit*

> to amplify and elaborate on the action of a play. Narration provides exposition of past events, interprets characters' feelings and thoughts, and comments on events. Suluk establish moods and emotional states and vary the tempo of a performance. (Brandon, 29-31)

Brandon points out that in 'Western drama, plot action and characterisation are achieved almost entirely through the single medium of dialogue' while in the *wayang kulit* this accounts for only about one third of the performance (Brandon, 31). It is especially through his development of Cookie that Koch has woven the two thirds represented by *djanturan*, *tjarijos* and *suluk*, the elaborate movements of the puppets, and the *gamelan* music into his novel, thereby gaining a unique tool for plumbing the depths of his characters.

Cookie is thus a first-person narrator whose important personal voice is capable of revealing the veiled souls of his colleagues. His own voice, however, often disappears into self-effacing narration which can be compared to *tjarijos*. This can be seen when he borrows the eloquent opening *djanturan* of *The Reincarnation of Rama*, which begins with a *gamelan* melody while the *dalang* whispers:

> 'The hills and mountains are my abode, may the strength of the wind and storm be mine.' He reaches above his head to the coconut-oil lamp which casts the shadows on the screen. Adjusting its flaming wick, he prays silently ... (Brandon, 84)

Cookie offers his literary rendition of the *wayang*'s *gamelan* music, endowing the hills, mountains, wind and storm with musical powers, while he sings a *suluk* to invoke nature's help, emphasised with the first lines of *The Reincarnation of Rama*, 'May silence prevail' (Brandon, 86).

> There are gale warnings on the radio tonight; a strong wind is racing through the pines and eucalypts above the top paddock. The lamp hisses like thought; I

> adjust its position. Billy, Billy: what person and industry went into these presumptuous dossiers! Sorting through them, I whisper the invocation of the Javanese *dalang*, the master of the shadow-show: *'May silence prevail: may the strength of wind and storm be mine.'* (*YLD*, 87)

'May silence prevail' certainly work as a call on the audience to be quiet, but are also ironically the first intoned lines, following a preparatory ritual which begins even before the *dalang* leaves his home, of the *wayang kulit* performance (Brandon, 83). The inconspicuous Cookie, who is readying himself to recount the story he has saved from obliteration, chooses, with the irony of a story teller who has also acknowledged his awe for the story, to whisper the words as if they were meant for him as well.

In another analysis of the *wayang* structure, Xavier Pons cleverly imposes a psychoanalytical interpretation which must gratify Koch's designs of synthesising Eastern and Western traditions. The Wayang of the left, Pons argues, is an Oedipal force in its rebellious challenge to the existing order and desire to abolish the hierarchic predominance of father over son. It lacks, however, clearly both defined goals and an obvious leader, and so must rely on agitation and anarchy. The Wayang of the right is the force of authority, especially paternal authority, and the futility of filial ambitions and rebellion is proven by the ultimate triumph of the father (Pons, 116-17).

Though Pons' interpretation (whose ramifications are treated in Chapter 8) is open to dispute, it is important to emphasise the recognition it shares with the other critical writings that the purpose of the *wayang kulit* is to expose reality. In the most mundane sense, Koch's Sukarno employs *wayang kulit* performances at his palace to signal the directions of the government and the rise and fall of the ministers (*YLD*, 52). It also represents a deeper, sometimes unsettling reality beyond more comfortable surface appearances. Sharp goes so far as to argue that the *wayang* embodies the very essence of the Asian concepts of the relationship between power, face, revenge, and kinship/friendship (Sharp, 275), and functions as 'a metaphor for the formal, public sphere' in Southeast Asia, where dealing 'with reality in public would be too brutal, too impolite' (Sharp, 273). This also makes the *wayang kulit*'s two-sided

screen, subtle structures and metaphors the appropriate, ambiguously public/private sphere for perceiving and dealing with reality in the novels of C. J. Koch.

7.3. Billy Kwan and the Heroic Protagonists of the *Wayang Kulit*

Billy Kwan begins Koch's second Asian novel with a reintroduction into Indian philosophy and its development in Java. When Guy Hamilton shows interest in the *wayang* puppets adorning the walls of Kwan's bungalow, Kwan tells him bluntly, 'If you want to understand Java, Ham, you'll have to understand the *wayang*' (*YLD*, 80-81), then launches into a quick introductory lesson in the philosophy of the *wayang kulit*. To properly understand the novel, one must pay close attention to Kwan's explanations, not that they are always accurate interpretations of Javanese thought, but they are necessary in evaluating the various characters—Kwan most particularly. Kwan begins with two important incarnations of the great god Vishnu:

> 'Here's King Kresna—Kresna the Black: he's obviously Krishna, who's one of the incarnations of the Hindu god Vishnu. Vishnu comes to earth as many things: as Krishna, who acts as charioteer to the hero Arjuna—and also as a dwarf, in Hindu myth.' He looked arch, as though he had passed on some titillating gossip … .' (*YLD*, 81)

Billy, who identifies with many mythological and real figures in the novel, is giving Hamilton his first hint that dwarfs—like Billy—are not just physically stunted humans but are very special beings indeed. As an imagined reincarnation of Vishnu, Billy has more important information to pass on to Hamilton, who he sees as his Arjuna who needs counsel.

> 'Arjuna's a warrior; but he causes a turmoil in nature just by meditation: by building up his spirit-power—his sakti. But to build up that power, he first has to battle his own weaknesses. Have you read the Bhagavad Gita? No? In the Gita, Krishna tells Arjuna how to master himself before he can master others. Nothing's in black and white, you see. Arjuna's a hero, but he can also be fickle and selfish—that's his weakness.' (YLD, 81)

Billy imagines his relationship with Hamilton to be like that of Kresna to Arjuna. Koch confirms that he found in the *wayang kulit* play *The Reincarnation of Rama* the necessary structure for his novel, including the 'distinct correspondences' between Hamilton and Kwan, and Arjuna and Semar (Koch, 1987, 25). It is hard to argue with the authority of the author, but there are problems in not doing so, not the least of which is accepting Hamilton as an

Arjuna. B. N. Balajee wonders how 'Hamilton's failure at the end in doing anything substantial to the Indonesian populace could be called *Arjuna Vishada Yoga* at all' (Balajee, 35). Hamilton does experience 'hero's pilgrimage to the hills in search of enlightenment', following the role of Arjuna in *The Reincarnation of Rama* (Koch, 1987, 25), but this is among the most vague developments in the novel, as well as a stock scene in novels about Australians in Asia. Desperately seeking a justification for the sea change in his emotional development, Helen Tiffin can only suppose that Hamilton is transformed 'largely by the magic of the show and the communal and friendly atmosphere of the audience' (Tiffin, 1984, 477). Hamilton does resemble Arjuna, but in both action and appearance Koch is clearly fashioning him to his own purposes. Still, it seems to be going too far to say that with his efforts in fighting 'through the polarizations of the Indonesian situation without being overly affected by it', and wanting 'to avoid *konfrontasi* as much as possible' he is perhaps more a parody of a *wayang* hero than a real one (Maes-Jelinek, 31).

7.4. Personality Types of the *Wayang Kulit*

To begin resolving this question, and also to understand *The Year of Living Dangerously* at all, it is necessary to reveal the features which distinguish—among others—Billy Kwan and Guy Hamilton from other Western protagonists. The focus, therefore, now moves to the characteristics of the major puppet types of the *wayang kulit*, referring principally to *On Thrones of Gold*, James Brandon's study of the *wayang kulit* which includes his English version of *The Reincarnation of Rama*, which Koch acknowledges as one of his own sources of inspiration (Thieme, 1986, 24), and which can give some hints on how Koch has adapted the *wayang* to his own creations. Further discussion on the complexities of the intertwined personalities of Kwan and Hamilton will be pursued in chapters 8 and 11.

7.4.1. Physical Manifestations of the Qualities *Alus* and *Kasar*

Ardjuna, the *wayang kulit*'s adaptation of the *Mahabharata*'s Arjuna, is the model in Javanese culture of *alus* (refined) behaviour. He is 'refined and modest, yet a supernaturally endowed warrior' of exquisite beauty (Brandon, 12). It is, however, Judistira who is the most

perfectly *alus* of the brothers. 'His body is delicate, his foot stance is narrow, his nose is thin and sharply pointed; his eyes are almondlike slits, and he looks modestly almost straight at the ground' (Brandon, 41). Their far less *alus* brother Bima, who is half-ogre, is 'as crudely powerful and blunt as Ardjuna is delicate and controlled' (Brandon, 12). At the other end of the scale is Barandjana, the ogre king, who personifies *kasar* (course) qualities. His 'body is fat and bulging and covered with mats of repulsive hair', his 'foot stance is broad and aggressive', his 'nose is bulbous', his 'eyes are round, and staring', and he 'haughtily looks straight out'. *Alus* represents the admired qualities of the inhabitants indigenous to Java who are descended from the gods; *kasar* represents the shunned faults of the foreign born (Brandon, 41).

The range of personalities in the *wayang* (or *wajang*) *kulit* can be described as a continuum from *alus* to *kasar*, manifested in the degree of such opposing characteristics as: small versus large bodied; refined and controlled versus gross and rough movements; restrained and modest versus active and aggressive. Other markers, as the way the hair is done, the clothes or the amount of jewellery worn, are also important in identifying where a character fits into the six broad categories of this continuum (Brandon, 49). There are 'thirteen different eye shapes, thirteen nose shapes, and two or three types each of body build, foot stance, and slant of head' which can be combined into 'dozens of identifiable puppet types' to make up the 'several hundred human, god and ogre figures in the wajang cast' (Brandon, 40-41).

Classifying Koch's characters according to a *wayang* description, then, is not as cut-and-dry as some critics might like. Koch describes Hamilton as having 'a "refined" handsomeness' (*YLD*, 11) with 'sleepy-lidded eyes' (*YLD*, 10), and outfits him in a modest and impeccable 'well-cut tan suit' (*YLD*, 7); His voice is 'resonant, pleasant, perhaps a little too bland,' and 'almost a BBC news-reader's' (*YLD*, 10); he has a 'calm, unconscious certainty' (*YLD*, 11), making him seem 'like a sober man joining a drunken party' (*YLD*, 7) when he meets the other journalists of the Wayang Bar; all of which would indicate a very *alus*

character. Yet, Hamilton is a very tall man, even 'fantastically' tall in comparison with his alter ego Billy Kwan (*YLD*, 7); Cookie questions the authenticity of 'some of his "a" sounds' (*YLD*, 10); and, in case anyone missed the other clues which separate him from the *alus* Arjuna, he is distinguished 'by a rather coarse nose, bulbous at the tip, which stuck a discordant note' (*YLD*, 11). All of these *kasar* traits push Hamilton towards a moderate position on the scale.

Other characters share the mix of *alus* and *kasar* qualities, notably Wally O'Sullivan, at 'twenty-two stone' (*YLD*, 3), with 'thick, pale hands' and 'bulging, venous cheeks' (*YLD*, 11) is the largest figure in the novel, yet is endowed with many *alus* refinements, as a delicate, sideways hand motion to express his dismissal of a topic (*YLD*, 11); a 'quiet', 'well produced' and 'throaty bass' voice; professional integrity; great emotional control; and personal dignity. Then there are those clearly *kasar* Westerners, exemplified by Pete Curtis, whose red hair indicatesd a fiery temper, and being Canadian makes him foreign, therefore a degenerate 'Other' not only to the Indonesians but even somewhat to the Australians. He carries 'both his work and his drinking to excess' (*YLD*, 4); aggressively encircles the shoulders of his listeners with his 'freckled, muscular' arms (*YLD*, 4), and 'clapped a hand' on Kwan's shoulder as he tries to provoke him with racist humour (*YLD*, 5-6).

7.4.2. The Moral Consequences of *Alus* and *Kasar* Tendencies

While these physical features are indicators of the personality of the puppets—and of Koch's characters—they cannot alone determine moral standing. In the *wayang*, only the ogres, since they are foreigners to Java, are fully *kasar* and indisputably 'bad' characters. All of the other characters are *alus* to varying degrees, and are more or less 'good' according to events of a given play. The most blatant example of this is Semar, a god who has been 'cursed and transformed into a misshapen dwarf' (Brandon, 12) but who acts as the moderating force between opposing elements in the plays. He is a comic figure, but is still heroic and wise in his action. Thus, Brandon notes, 'only by watching a character's actions in the plays can we know his moral qualities' (Brandon, 41).

Koch maintains the distinction between alus/kasar and good/bad. While depicting his various characters in wayang terms, it is only their actions that finally count. Wally, for all his alus determinants, is disgraced for his kasar pederasty. Kumar, though stained with the 'bad' mark of a communist, turns out to be one of the most reasonable and caring alus figures of the novel. Cookie is a rather uninteresting, passive character, but is rewarded for his courageous action of saving Billy's files by being promoted to the godlike *dalang* status of storyteller. Hamilton starts the novel in the middle of the alus/kasar continuum, but grows through Billy's tutelage, and finally makes a series of 'right' choices—covering the people's march in the highlands while all the other journalists are sitting on their heels in Jakarta; committing himself to Jill and their baby; showing the courage to cover the events of the coup—which lead him to a degree of enlightenment beyond his early promise. And Billy Kwan, in spite of his grotesque shape, his manic-depressive tendencies, his anger, fear, selfishness, finally masters himself and acts righteously and without concern for himself, and so attains the spirituality which he could earlier only nag and intellectualise about.

Since Judistira, the Just King, is so compassionate that he is unable to act; Bima, the bold warrior, so committed to action that he is inflexible; and Ardjuna, so committed to defending divine order and justice that he is cold, fickle and selfish; the *wayang kulit* calls on Semar, the divine fool, to combine and resolve the virtues and imperfections of the others, bringing them 'an emotional detachment and an inner peace' to the 'struggle for order and justice' in a 'world in flux' (Geertz, 273). And Koch's Semar is, of course, Billy Kwan, the dwarf Buddha in a multi-coloured Hawaiian shirt.

Semar is, like Krishna, a god incarnated to serve human heroes. Cursed and punished, he is transformed into a 'ludicrous dwarf', but 'his status as a god of supernatural powers is acknowledged by the Pandawas' (Brandon, 16). For Koch's purposes, Billy Kwan as Semar is very appropriate indeed. In one play Semar 'saves the kingdom of the gods from the fury of the goddess Durga', and in others 'he and his sons become for a time kings' (Brandon, 12). Kwan's heroic accomplishments and spiritual reward are mostly ignored by critics, though the

section on the *Bhagavad Gita* in Chapter 8 tries to indicate Koch's intents and purposes in fashioning Kwan after Semar/Krishna.

In fact, Billy Kwan, the self-styled, multi-faceted Semar, fits the characteristics of Arjuna far better than Guy Hamilton. In *wayang kulit* terms, Hamilton best corresponds to Bima. Both are genetic hybrids, and share not just size and nose shape, but also personality. Hamilton is, like Bima, inflexible, blunt and predisposed to taking bold action without considering the consequences. Billy Kwan is, however, the warrior, even if mostly of words. He specialises in provoking and testing the convictions of friends and foes alike, just as Arjuna provokes Krishna to reveal himself in the *Bhagavad Gita*. Billy's form of meditation is the keeping of his dossiers, and he has by the beginning of the novel such a store of *sakti* built up in them that he is, like Arjuna, the prime motor of his intimates in a world already caught in a maelstrom of confrontation.

Koch plays with the apparent contradiction of deliberately creating turmoil through meditative stillness, explained by the Hindu concept of turmoil as not only a necessary precursor to the establishment of order, but also its twin. Hamilton is compared with Billy as 'having that same dark-light contrast' (*YLD*, 10), referring to their black hair and eyebrows, but also to their complex personalities. Nervous, provocative Billy, like Semar, believes in turmoil, in *konfrontasi*, just as he believes in mastering others. Restrained, introverted Hamilton in turn believes in turmoil, for it is the stuff of this journalistic trade. When Billy is explaining the dual concepts of turmoil/stillness and light/dark to Hamilton, however, he has not yet managed to learn to master himself. Like Arjuna, Billy too is fickle and selfish:

> And when Arjuna asks Krishna what makes a man sin, Krishna says, "Greedy lust and anger: this is the enemy of the soul. All is clouded by desire, Arjuna: as fire by smoke, as a mirror by dust." Rather good, don't you think?' His 'light' tone had crept in. (*YLD*, 81)

Billy is citing one of the oldest and most fundamental ideas of Indian philosophy, that, while the pure Self is obscured by human desire, it remains, like the dusty mirror, essentially unchanged and pristine. One must discover one's true Self beyond the impure elements which stain his soul, and he will be liberated. Billy understands this on an intellectual level, and is a

word warrior against the manifestations of desire—the lust represented by Wally O'Sullivan's pederasty; Curtis' visits to the cemetery; Condon's drives around the open sewage canals to glimpse bathing women. Billy, however, is still far too fascinated by the *wayang kulit*. He wants to be all of its characters and to see it from both sides of the screen at once. Before he truly can understand the human soul, he must come to terms with his own unquenchable desire for love and with the anger which blurs his ability to reason and feel. Master these, he knows from the start, and the way to love opens:

> He turned to a female puppet. 'And this is Srikandi—the princess Arjuna's in love with.' (YLD, 81)

Srikandi is a metaphor for Jill Bryant. The union of Arjuna and Srikandi represents the joining of opposites to make up the whole. Arjuna, who is the model of the man of righteous action, furthers Koch's theme of doubleness by standing for both Guy Hamilton—the man of thoughtless action—and Billy Kwan—the man of actionless thought. Kwan and Hamilton then are another pair of opposites who must unite into a whole; only then can their whole unite with that represented by Bryant.

7.5. The *Wayang Kulit*'s Dual Points of View

Unlike d'Alpuget, Koch is not writing down to the level of his readers, though he does seem 'to assume nil knowledge of *wayang* and of Indonesia' in the period before the Vietnam War (Roskies, 48). This assumption, one must admit, is entirely justified. Billy Kwan's role as protagonist includes making sure everyone, especially Hamilton and including Koch's readers, have an opportunity to get a grasp on such esoterica. Guy Hamilton represents the Australian who has neither background knowledge nor motivation to help him absorb Kwan's instruction. He has come to escape a dead-end job in a Sydney newsroom, but avoids real interaction with Indonesia at all costs, living in an air-conditioned room at the Hotel Indonesia and eating only in westernised restaurants. At his first blank encounter with the *wayang* puppets, Hamilton seems indeed to be a creation of d'Alpuget. They evoke in him no response at all,

> neither pleasure nor dislike; they were too alien, and scarcely human. With their black and gold faces, elongated limbs and grotesquely long noses, they

> resembled insects rather than men. India's gods and heroes, so far south, had metamorphosed into weird cartoons. (YLD, 81)

As a newcomer to Asia, even a well-prepared one, Hamilton has the limitations of knowledge and experience of d'Alpuget's characters. Most of Koch's characters are swept along by events in the way of d'Alpuget's, but Hamilton and Kwan, like *Highways to a War* protagonist Mike Langford, are destined to make progress towards self-discovery that is too rare to be shared with many others. This represents an important departure from the tradition of the Australian looking toward an Englishman or American for guidance, turning instead to 'an Oriental mentor figure' whose role is 'to guide and educate culturally overwhelmed, or simply antagonistic, Australian characters. D'Alpuget and Koch's protagonists move, with varying success, toward greater regional awareness under the direction of their Asian guides (Gerster, Asian Destinies, 67).

It is still far too early for most to accompany Hamilton and Kwan in their progress. D'Alpuget likens her disjointed characters to animals, and Koch, in *The Year of Living Dangerously*, describes his typically in terms of the leather puppets of the *wayang kulit*, with thin, elongated faces and insect-like bodies. The Westerners of both d'Alpuget and Koch are manipulated like Java's *wayang* puppets, and have in Jakarta metamorphosed into weird cartoons of themselves. The difference is that Kwan and Hamilton move to the other side of the screen—they get to see the magical, spiritual manifestations of reality which is represented in the shadows, while the puppets themselves, the *galang* musicians and the machinations of the *dalang*, which most onlookers are watching, are but the workings of the material world.

Koch's deft adaptation of the *wayang* structure and function is illustrated by D. M. Roskies, who cites the scene of Hamilton confronting Kwan in Pasar Baru. Hamilton wants to know what Kwan told Jill (who has apparently broken off their relationship), and Kwan answers with his lecture on men of light and dark, of journalists as Peeping Toms, and how he 'chose', 'completed', and even 'created' Hamilton, who failed to return the understanding and constancy required of him (*YLD*, 235-38), all of which on the surface sounds like the hysterical outburst of 'a little man's megalomania'. The melodrama 'is a decoy' on the order of the two-

sided screen for viewing the *wayang kulit*, 'diverting attention away from the quotidian substratum of the narrative towards its myth-creating and myth-determined dimension in which the fate of the gods and men intertwine'. Roskies points out that

> what looks from one standpoint to be fairly ordinary contretemps, an affair of the heart which is nobody's business but Hamilton's, asks from another point of view to be seen as extraordinary, a violation of a primordial symbiosis. In such a conjunction Hamilton/Kwan—Arjuna/Semar execute stylised pirouettes round each other, announcing an interdependency and, completing identities, in so doing laying bare problematically complementary qualities and characteristics (Roskies, 45).

That which appears from one side of the screen to be 'a familiar crisis' is seen on the other side to carry 'other, stranger resonances. Behind the carapace of story glimmer the outlines of Story, which illuminates, supports and diversifies experience of felt life' (Roskies, 45). Koch companions 'energy and imagination' with 'egoism and illusion' in a game of power and manipulation which he draws from the *wayang* and which inevitably overloads the 'inherited cultural equipment' Hamilton brings with him into Asia (Roskies, 46). In 'a partly menacing and partly romanticised Indonesia' Hamilton confronts

> an environment where people still have the idea of being successors and inheritors; where landscape, a reservoir where time is coiled, is as much a matter of history as geography; where all is bespoken, encrusted with a patina of cultural antiquity; where as it might be, signification is perpetually deferred (Roskies, 47).

Roskies interprets Hamilton's *wayang* experience as 'a sort of epiphany, in which by a decisive reformation of feeling a quixotic self-seeking is bartered for an acceptance of things as they are' (Roskies, 47). If this seems too simplistic to be the 'conceptual pivot of the novel', one must remember that it corresponds to the concept of the circular path of non-knowing, doubt and faith. It is also this message which Koch repeats in *Highways to a War* through the voice of Madame Phan, who points out that the fish swimming freely in the little pond 'don't worry about the depth of the water' (*HW*, 184).

Acquiescing to the *wayang*'s sensitivity to the concepts of truth and reality, Koch offers a sense of 'the real as being more mutable and less totally legible than is normally assumed'. Hamilton's *wayang* experience preludes his 'return from a limbo of vapid careerism to an

ethical imperative (or the makings thereof) which is premised on the idea of limits and the penalties for the transgression of limits'. It prepares him to accept his 'role as accessory to Kwan's murder', and to 'see through the affair with Jill to a satisfactory end'. Hamilton is accompanied in his journey by the novel's authorial voice, which is 'ventriloquially merged' with the narrative voice and remains 'detached, subdued, and carried in a formal matrix that is notably undeluded about human enterprise'. This authorial voice shares with the *wayang kulit* an evocation of 'an acceptance of things as they are' and an endorsement of 'the autonomy of will and impulse', which leads Hamilton to the concept of 'submission to duty and acceptance of its burdens' (Roskies, 47). This acceptance/impulse dichotomy, which will be discussed in detail in chapter 8, stems from the *wayang kulit*'s archetype, the *Bhagavad Gita*, and constitutes the lesson for the hero, whether Arjuna, Kwan or Hamilton, before he can know what is right and to act accordingly.

7.6. The Bar on the Edge of Reality

The central point from which the action radiates is the Wayang Bar in the Hotel Indonesia—a hangout for foreign correspondents and businessmen, though for very few Indonesians other than the barkeepers and bouncers. The dark, shadowy bar is appropriately named, and introduces the reader into the novel's strangely artificial universe:

> … the Wayang Bar followed the American practice and sealed itself against all natural light. Coming into this circular chamber, you stepped from the flat blaze of the equator into a permanent half-dark, to which air-conditioning added a Scandinavian cold; you would halt inside the doorway, the sweat drying on your back, and wait for your eyes to adjust so that you could see who was there (YLD, 3).

The American influence noted here—a backhanded tribute to the long reach of U.S. involvement in Southeast Asia in the sixties—seems at first misplaced, the numbing air-conditioning and artificial light antithetical to the aggressive, natural outside conditions, and yet the juxtaposition is a manifestation of the macrocosmic conflict of parallel worlds in Indonesia—the conflicts of ideology between Capitalism and Communism, of religion between Christian, Moslem and Hindu, of race between Indonesian, Malaysian and Chinese, all of which are in turn worldly reflections of the cosmic conflict between the gods and titans. Like

Alice's looking-glass world, these competing universes exist along the two-dimensional lines of the *Wayang* Shadow Theatre, but will not adhere to the boundaries of their projection screens. As Billy Kwan explains to Hamilton in their final meeting in *Pasar Baru*, it all comes down to the forces of light and of darkness in an eternal, cyclical battle which is the theme of the *wayang kulit's* drama of shadows.

The journalists willingly bide their time in the artificial, flattened ambience of the Wayang Bar, which Broinowski puts in the tradition of Kipling, Forster, and Orwell's British clubs as 'spiritual citadel' (Broinowski, 1992, 181), symbolising the 'deep-rooted yearning among 20th century Australians to identify and become one with, the habits of the imperial English gentlemen and clubmen they never were' (Gooneratne, 1992, 341). When they must step back out into the streets of Jakarta, the journalists find another strange world which can scarcely be dubbed real, but is ruled by the organised chaos of *konfrontasi*. Freakish characters police the city. The President flies around in a helicopter pretending to be the reincarnation of the Supreme God, Vishnu. The city's Western inhabitants, Koch's rendition of the *wayang kulit* ogres, a motley collection of imperial residue, career sycophants, pederasts, transvestites, and alcoholic oilfield workers, to name a few, acclimatise themselves very well indeed to this zany ecosystem which perversely thrives on their presence.

Cookie notices the disjointedness of the world in Southeast Asia, and recognises how the *wayang* shadow puppets are bizarre Javanese reincarnations of ancient Indian gods and heroes. In the same way, the colonial-era renditions of Mickey Mouse characters adorning the walls of a cheap, all-night restaurant in Jakarta seem like strange westernised reincarnations of the *wayang* shadow puppets. Even the authentic Javanese *Wayang Kulit* shadow theatre, which Hamilton sees is out of joint with time and place, and said 'to have a weird modernity: a video-machine from an unknown civilisation' (*YLD*, 201). Yet, the *wayang* provokes in Hamilton the same kind of memory of things beyond this lifetime that Mike Langford experiences in *Highways to a War*:

> The figures of this dream of Java's childhood tantalised him with the notion that he *ought* to know them, *ought* to recall them, from some other life. And they woke in him now a long-buried memory of his own (*YLD*, 202).

Hamilton senses the people's fear of the approaching 'presences of hunger and pain and threat at the edges of their green world' and that the *wayang* frame was a barrier against them. He learns, through his memories of World War II, compassion for them, leading him later to ask Cookie the central question Billy Kwan first asked him, 'What can we do for them?' (*YLD*, 203). Only through his journey from the material, mechanistic side of reality to the spiritual, magical side—the two sides of the *wayang* screen—has Hamilton been to some degree awakened to the unity of his own soul and the souls of the 'Others'.

7.7. Conclusion

Koch's Wayang Bar is abuzz with talk of intrigue and power struggles which follow the tradition of the *wayang kulit*'s representation of the struggle between forces of light and darkness, which are the source of the Javanese people's fears. The Wayang Bar represents the Western view of a world of order and right, just as the *wayang kulit* does the Javanese view. Cookie calls the bar 'a refuge' against the increasingly insane world of *konfrontasi* on the outside (*YLD*, 8), but it is a 'fools' paradise' whose inevitable end, another expulsion from Eden, is a familiar theme out of Australian invasion fiction (Broinowski, 1992, 182). For inside the Wayang Bar, a distinctive *Alice in Wonderland* sort of insanity reigns. The namesake of the *Wayang* Shadow Theatre is itself a clashing multicultural shadow theatre of incongruent juxtapositions, including the luxurious and passionate but inconstant light of the 'fat red candles' sitting atop the bar which is round like the table of the Arthurian knights but covered with black Formica, an artificial, evil-coloured material. Western electric lamps are 'set high on the gold walls, across which were fixed Javanese shadow-puppets—the heroes and villains of the *wayang kulit*' (*YLD*, 3). These puppets are reminders 'of the wider world of Javanese ritual art and belief from which these Westerners are insulated: where they act out their own shadow plays at the edges of the real Indonesian drama' (Bennett, 1982, 11). The ironic use of Western light reflecting off the Javanese leather puppets must provide an eerie

illumination in the bar, projecting the shadows of the puppets across the room, onto everyone and everything there. In the same way, the expatriate Westerners cannot escape the flickering, threatening shadows of the Javanese world of magic to which the *wayang kulit* is the door. In the Wayang Bar, as in the *wayang kulit*, theatrical performance is the only reality; the bar's patrons are themselves shadow players, hybridised heroes of competing, yet somehow complementary traditions, enacting their roles in the greater epic drama.

The 'Divinisation of History' and the Duality of Justice

8.1. Introduction

Alongside the important Western sources like *A Passage to India*, *Alice in Wonderland* and *1984*, C. J. Koch draws deeply on Asian archetypes for his novels, some of which Blanche d'Alpuget introduces, though for other purposes, in her novels. The philosophic canon of India, as represented especially by the *Bhagavad Gita*, or 'Song of the Lord', 'the most important, the most influential, and the most luminous of all the Hindu scriptures' (Zaehner, 10), by other sources from the Vedic, Buddhist, Tantric and Vedantic traditions, and by their development in the Javanese culture as well, have provided Koch and d'Alpuget a vast mythopoeic wellspring to call upon in their fiction. Beginning with its rather pedantic presentation in *Across the Sea Wall*, the philosophy becomes the principle mechanism in Koch's development of structure as well as theme in *The Year of Living Dangerously*, and most recently, in the 1996 novel *Highways to a War*, provides the archetype for Mike Langford, Koch's new version of 'The Coming Man', who is modelled on the 'Ford Makers' of Hindu tradition. D'Alpuget uses her Eastern pretexts more subtly than does Koch, and limits their influence to thematic and character development, yet is just as successful in expressing the relevance of the *Bhagavad Gita* and the *Ramayana* to contemporary Western society.

This chapter will take a threefold approach to exploring Koch's and d'Alpuget's applications of these Eastern literary structures and themes which demand that their novels be judged as syntheses of Eastern and Western traditions. First, it will look at the previous criticism in this area, specifically at Sharrad's excellent article on Koch's intertextual use of the *Gita*, and the following critical analyses which have typically depended too much on, and misinterpreted, Sharrad. The resulting tendency has been to discount Koch's influence and impose strictly Western critical models on his novels—a tendency so extreme in d'Alpuget's case that her attention to Eastern pretexts is almost universally ignored. Second, it will outline two landmark calls for a *rapprochement* between antagonistic cultural systems, one found in

the *Bhagavad Gita* and the other in the work by the Australian sociologist David Tacey, *Edge of the Sacred: Transformations in Australia*. Though written some two millennia apart, they both set out to reconcile the relationship between man and his universe, and explain why seeking to justify opposing world views should be an especially germane concern to Australian writers. In addition, they both address other important perplexing Asian concepts which need to be investigated in order to accurately criticise Koch and d'Alpuget—namely: time and destiny; destiny and free will; the cyclical concept of history and the 'Black Age' of destruction. Third, this chapter will give special attention to Billy Kwan, who of all the protagonists of the studied novels best exemplifies the dilemma posed when contradictory but equally valid systems demand non-reconcilable responses. It will show how Kwan finds models for his decision in the *Bhagavad Gita*, the *Mahabharata*, and the *Gospels*, supporting Koch's own conviction that the antagonistic systems of East and West are not only reconcilable but closely related.

8.2. Critical Perspectives on Koch's use of the *Bhagavad Gita*

Until now critics have generally dismissed or, at best, glossed over the importance of the Hindu tradition in the works of C. J. Koch and Blanche d'Alpuget. In d'Alpuget's case, such recognition is non-existent; in Koch's case, critics have bowed most often to the authority of Paul Sharrad's study of the intertextual relationship of *The Year of Living Dangerously* and the *Bhagavad Gita*, 'Echoes and their Distortions: The Gita in C. J. Koch's Fiction'. The problem here seems twofold. On one hand, most critics clearly have not studied the Eastern sources, and therefore misinterpret Sharrad's criticism of Koch's intertextual use of Indian and Javanese myths and symbols. On the other hand, many critics are too quick to rely on the intertextualist trick of sticking a handy literary label on Koch—failing to consider his voice as author of one in the line of texts, and reducing him, for instance, to a 'post-colonialist' or 'neo-orientalist' writer. This much is unfortunate enough, but has the graver consequence of interpreting his protagonists as anti-heroes, degenerates or misfits, who suffer from bouts of extreme nostalgia

for the empire and anti-Asian racism, and exemplify everything that is wrong with contemporary Australians.

8.2.1. Intertextual Distortions, Third World Anti-heroes, and Sacrificial Scapegoats

One of the most sweeping examples of this critical stance is given by Annegret Maack, who writes, 'Daß das Echo der *Gita* und des Hinduismus in Kochs Werk verzerrt ist, wie dies bei allen Echos der Fall ist, hat Sharrad im einzelnen ausgeführt' (Maack, 125). It is a bold statement when one is either unable or unwilling to defend it with one's own evidence, and seems even more so when compared to Sharrad's own, less accusatory words: 'if there is an echo, it is, like all echoes, distorted by the surfaces reflecting the original sounds' (Sharrad, 1990, 175). Sharrad is defending Koch against criticism that he is not faithful to the spirit and letter of the *Bhagavad Gita*. This is a strong argument against an intertextual reading of Koch's work, but Sharrad's own argument is 'echoed' (i.e., distorted) by those who would use it to criticize Koch rather than critique his novels.

Koch is neither rewriting the *Bhagavad Gita* nor offering an adaptation to it. The distorting surfaces which Sharrad discusses are, without a doubt, partly due to the fact that Koch is an Australian with a growing appreciation for, even with an imperfect knowledge of, the *Gita* and Hindu philosophy, and that he is applying this Asian experience to his own cultural milieu and developing literary purposes—and that makes for a rather unavoidable intertextual critical approach. At the same time, as the *Bhagavad Gita* is a sacred text, it remains open to interpretation. That disagreements about its meaning are to be expected even—or especially—among experts and true believers is one of the most common comments made in the other articles included in *The Gita in World Literature*, in which Sharrad's work is included. The recognition of the distortions in Koch's appropriation of Indian philosophy is then much less accusatory in Sharrad than Maack makes it seem.

Furthermore, Sharrad says there are three contextual factors which make distortion inevitable. First, that the novel remains 'firmly Christian' in outlook; second, that the *Gita* is transmitted in Koch's 'continuing theme of colonial culture', necessarily foreign to the

Bhagavad Gita's poet(s); and third, that *The Year of Living Dangerously* is 'founded upon structural motifs of warped representation' due to Koch's reliance on a marginal but not disinterested narrator who relates the story according to unreliable conversations and hearsay and 'Billy Kwan's crazy attempt to catalogue his life'. Sharrad allows that 'Koch would claim that artistic, textual truth' makes the distortions necessary, and concludes that the distortions finally reflect back on the truth of the *Bhagavad Gita*.

> Everything in mortal life is infected with illusion and to "see it clearly and see it whole" we must seek the detachment of Arjuna meditating, of Cook on his country mountaintop assembling his narrative, or of the mystic *dalang* puppeteer showing us truths through the shadowy stories of the epics. (Sharrad, 1990, 177-81)

It might help to see *The Year of Living Dangerously* as a progression from *Across the Sea Wall*. Here, the protagonist's anxieties generated by his illusions of himself and India lead to a spiritual paralysis. O'Brien pursues an 'illusion of detachment', ignoring that 'he is projecting his own fear of inadequacy onto a landscape that is only as sterile as his own judgment of it' (Huggan, 1993, Tourist Gaze, 84). Huggan says that O'Brien is submitting India to a 'neo-colonial tourist gaze'. He is seeking reassurance 'in a romantic idealist vocabulary of impressionistic essences' mixing Biblical and European pastoral/elegiac conventions. By anthropomorphizing India, with the north being the dynamic faculty and the south mysticism and blind emotion, he is taking 'refuge in the schematic distinctions of Jungian psychology' (Huggan, 1993, Tourist Gaze, 84-85). Only by breaking off his journey and retreating to the pure air of the mountains can O'Brien, like Shiva, who goes to meditate in the mountains to get away from not only the mad world but also his own active, dancing aspect, begin to free himself of his illusions. He returns to Australia, and becomes the journalist who could very easily turn out to be Guy Hamilton. Hamilton is still hemmed in by self-imposed illusions, but not as badly as the young Robert O'Brien; he is moving toward enlightenment, or at least toward a better understanding of himself and his world. This, however, is predicated on the 'theme of colonial culture', and must be transformed through the *wayang* and the *Bhagavad Gita*, a conjunction which the *Gita*'s poet could not have imagined.

Huggan concludes about *Across the Sea Wall*, in an analysis which should be extended to *The Year of Living Dangerously* and *Highways to a War* as well, that to see Koch's work as 'an Orientalist conception of India is to miss the considerable irony with which Koch treats his confused protagonist: an Australian whose sensibility is formed by Europeans, yet whose country neighbours on and shares an indefinable affinity with the Asian sub-continent' (Huggan, 1993, Tourist Gaze, 85).

Part of what seems an Orientalist distortion is that, when Billy Kwan begins to explain the *wayang kulit* and *Bhagavad Gita* to Guy Hamilton, his intellectual appreciation is inadequate in two ways. First, he misunderstands certain key parts of the *Gita*, which, as Cookie suspects, he does not want to accept correctly; and, second, the message of the *Gita*, as of every sacred text, cannot be fully comprehended intellectually anyway. Billy Kwan, like Arjuna, must learn a lot, including how to forget to depend on his impressive intellectual capacity. This, however, is what makes Kwan a representative Australian in Asia. He is a hybrid, lives on the fringe of what is considered civilisation, and is 'motivated less by the sympathetic heart than by the head, by Australian interests and concerns than by that instinctive Forsterian 'kindness' that bridges gaps' (Koh Tai Ann, 21). In Kwan's defence, it must be said that he starts out much farther along the road to comprehending the *Gita* spiritually than any other, and he is the only one who seems in the end to succeed.

Arguments concerning the unfaithfulness between Koch's and Hindu and Javanese works are somewhat harder to disqualify when they come from sectors one might expect to be better versed in the original texts. Such is the case with B. N. Balajee who states flatly that 'Koch's mythological details need not be examined in their Oriental perspective. After all, Billy Kwan himself is Koch's new myth' (Balajee, 36). Koch's principle metaphors of dwarfism and hybridism provide Kwan 'a greater inwardness with the squalor and misery of the local people' than any of the other journalists of the Wayang Bar (Balajee, 34), and also a better perspective to analyse the figures in his files (Balajee, 35). Yet, by ignoring the source mythology and their adaptation to the novel itself, Balajee also inevitably arrives at the

analysis that Billy is finally totally disillusioned and suicidal. While allowing, albeit without clarification, that 'it is only Billy Kwan who is capable of self-sacrifice that makes him a martyr', Balajee goes on to claim that his 'size, his generosity, his enigmatic life and ultimate death make him the anti-hero of the third world similar to the heroes of the absurd theatre' (Balajee, 36-37).

Literary critics are generally willing to recognise how a writer like C. J. Koch is attempting to create a 'new myth' with Eastern correspondences, but then seem bent on shoving him back into the very Western tradition he is striving to escape. This much should be writ large: Billy Kwan is neither a modernist anti-hero nor does he belong to the theatre of the absurd. Yet Maack and Balajee are hardly alone. Felicia Campbell not only misrepresents the *wayang kulit* sources Koch exploits in developing his characters, writing that Guy Hamilton is fashioned after an ogre (Campbell, 166), but also declares that 'as Billy moves to revenge, he abandons the *wayang* imagery' in favour of 'the rigid dualism of Christian imagery' (Campbell, 167). Rachel Ingalls, in critiquing the cinema version, justifiably deplores the film's cutting of Billy's 'deep need to believe in heroes, of his thwarted sexuality, his voyeurism, his clinical approach to emotions he does not share, his compulsion to control others and incapacity to deal with his own powerful emotions'. She concludes, however, that without these elements there is little reason 'why he should be the character who cracks'. Her reading of the book version of his final act then is that Billy has 'cracked': 'He makes a grand, romantic gesture that is politically useless, and he knows it' (Ingalls, 22). David Myers concludes more dramatically that Billy Kwan is one of a type in the genre who must be a sacrificial scapegoat 'to appease the angry gods of revolutionary chaos and political or racial violence' in order to fulfil the 'ambition to bridge the gap between East and West', and that 'Billy's sacrifice inspires a moral enlightenment in the representative Australian journalist Guy Hamilton'. This 'central myth' of a sacrificial scapegoat suggests 'a new heroism and a new dimension for the understanding of Australian national identity', which 'may now be formed out of the tragic culture-clash between Australia and the Asia/Pacific' (Myers, 28).

Christopher Koch cannot be held responsible for Myers' gross misunderstanding of the religion and mythopoeic symbols of Hinduism. It is precisely such misled and undocumented evaluations as these which cause Koch to complain about 'totalitarian', post-colonial prescriptive criticism (Mitchell, 1996, Interview, 70).

8.2.2. The 'Oedipus' Interpretation

Xavier Pons reads *The Year of Living Dangerously* as being largely a manifestation of a string of Oedipus complexes which determine the behaviour and failure/success of the characters. The 'main Oedipal hero', Guy Hamilton, is beset by a number of problems which are complicated by the fact of his father's wartime disappearance. He is relentlessly driven in his profession by his ambition and fear; he is rather helpless in an unfamiliar, exotic environment; and he feels it necessary to repress his sexual desires (Pons, 109). Hamilton associates sex with fear and guilt, which clears up in Pons view the puzzling encounter with the Russian Vera, when he has 'fantasies about women being dangerous and castrating' (Pons, 110).

Hamilton's relationship with Jill is affected by the same Oedipal legacy. She is at first under the protection of Colonel Henderson, the archetypal, virile, and coldly authoritative father-figure. Despite a desire to court Jill, Hamilton also sees Henderson as a father-figure. His feelings of guilt cause him to repress the Oedipal desire to challenge Henderson—both for Jill's love and in the race at the pool—making him a 'quasi-Oedipal hero'. When he does challenge Henderson for Jill, however, and wins, he must pay the Oedipal penalty—mitigated as he is 'naïve but sane enough' and 'commits no unforgivable offence'—, the loss of one eye, which Pons interprets symbolically as 'partial castration', 'the price to pay to reach maturity, that is the capacity to love' (Pons, 111).

This reward is not received by the other characters—namely, Great Wally the closet homosexual; Condon the voyeur; Cookie, who 'appears to have renounced sex and who seems content to get his thrills vicariously' (Pons, 111); and Sukarno, whose embodiment of virility makes him Kwan's perfect foil, but in denying reality and replacing it with a more satisfying

fiction he becomes a 'pseudo-Oedipal hero'—, for they all fail to successfully go through the Oedipal phase (Pons, 112).

This, in Pons view, is especially the case of the pre-Oedipal Billy Kwan. Kwan has a pervert's approach to sex, partly voyeurism and partly exaggerated idealism, which leaves him fascinated by the sex he condemns (Pons, 111). He is only capable of pretending an engagement with Jill, or trying to sublimate his desires, as toward Jill and Ibu. His efforts—also including his attempts to control Hamilton and self-identification with Hamilton and Sukarno—all end in failure, and Kwan 'is left with the unhappy realization that phallic power is beyond his reach'. Kwan's failure, Pons concludes, 'results in death rather than castration, since he hadn't achieved virility in the first place' (Pons, 112).

Where Hamilton succeeds by assuming a true father-figure in Henderson, Kwan fails by looking to Sukarno, the *Bapak*, 'father', who is really just the *Bung*, 'elder brother', 'a cheeky, immature adolescent'. Kwan's ambiguous political positioning, siding at once with both imperialists and anti-colonialists, his claims to 'superiority of his twofold racial heritage', and his identification with Sukarno are attempts 'to achieve the status of a father and the virile potency which goes with it'. When Jill rejects him, Udin dies, and Ibo disappears, Kwan 'loses his illusions and consequently dies a sterile death, just as he had led a sterile life, which is often the fate of hybrids' (Pons, 115).

This is certainly a well thought out analysis, but while the thesis is valid, there seem to be two important weaknesses. First, while Koch deliberately leaves the Vera Chostiakov episode unclear, it hardly seems adequate to write it off as 'fantasies about women being dangerous and castrating'. Koch is working with the *wayang kulit* metaphor of the multiple viewpoints of reality. On one side of the screen Hamilton is hallucinating due to the fatigue and over-stimulation of covering the march of the PKI, to his natural inclination to imagine himself as a James Bond type, and, perhaps, to the Oedipal complex Pons describes. On another side, however, Vera really is a Soviet agent trying to get his information about the Chinese arms shipment. On yet another, Vera is a manifestation of the goddess Uma, bringing

the message of the destruction of this world and creation of the next. The *wayang kulit* sense of being is that the two sides of the screen express differing levels of reality, and Koch's purposes here, as throughout his novels, are to demonstrate the unsharpness in the lines of tangentiality between the worlds of substance and imagination, making it extremely difficult sometimes to know into which world one has tread.

The second problem is the logical end of Pons' argument that Billy Kwan's life and death were sterile. The validity of Pons' argument is assured only as long as it is limited to the vocabulary of Western critical tradition. Pons makes no accounting at all for Asian influences, and for the good reason that they would contradict the Oedipal thesis. Wally O'Sullivan, Kevin Condon and others, perhaps even Cookie, and many of Blanche d'Alpuget's characters, can surely be analysed according to this formula, but only because they exemplify expatriate Westerners in Asia. As soon as the characters move into new directions, absorbing the myths and symbols of the East as do Hamilton, Kwan, Alex Wheatfield, and Mike Langford, then they surpass purely Western analysis; their uncovered Eastern sides must be taken into account. From an Eastern point of view, Pons' statements about Kwan's 'phallic power', 'castration' and 'virility' are quite simply illustrations of how man is blinded by the illusory quality of nature.

Pons tries to pre-empt complaints of these critical limitations by claiming for his thesis place as one interpretation among many contributing to understanding a complex work of art (Pons, 117). One cannot argue against this, though it is imperative to signal the misleading implications of Pons paper, especially in view of the corpus of criticism outlined in sections 8.2.1 and 8.2.2, which have looked at the problems of judging C. J. Koch according to exclusively Western or Eastern traditions. The next section highlights criticism which recognises the need to take both into consideration.

8.2.3. A Mischievous Synthesis of Eastern and Western Myth

In his analysis of Koch's hybridised semiotics, D. M. Roskies describes how the narrator, Cookie, with his vast array of information, from Hamilton's accounts, the other

journalists' 'confessions', and hearsay, to Billy Kwan's 'scurrilously annotated, alarmingly encyclopaedic' files, engages in 'bold speculative-analytical flights, with a view to determining devious motives and relationships'. Cookie admits to limitations in his knowledge and possibly inaccurate suppositions, but this does not deter him from relying on invocation of 'the strength of wind and storm' to help him tell the tale right, doing so according to an odd structure based 'with care and cunning on the model of *wayang kulit*' (*YLD*, 263). Koch has conjured up a phantasmagoric work of fantasy, suggestion, and harrowing reality whose 'analogues as between the operations of the text and the conventions of a cultural context are precise in intention and effect, the one imaged in the other, with the text itself a mirror angled for infinite regression' (Roskies, 42). This witches brew would seem to preclude any hope of analytical success in absence of the perspective on the Austral-Asian context.

Encouragement can be taken from another Indian scholar, Alur Janaki Ram, who judges Koch largely 'appreciative of Indian mythical lore', and has no objection to its use as a tool for psychological development, even if Koch is not entirely faithful to the original (Ram, 29-30). Most significantly, Koch's work is 'free of all the claptrap about India's mysticism and other stereotypes—usual temptation for the Western writer'. Ram finds that Koch's 'keen, sensitive and poetic imagination' lends him extraordinary insights into the people and the landscape, and declares Koch successful 'in linking the Indian mythological motifs to the inner mental history' of his protagonists (Ram, 32).

Added to this is Maes-Jelinek's observation that in his emphasis of the parallels between Eastern and Western mythologies Koch is giving them universal meaning. His characters, who otherwise are among the forgotten participants, spectators or victims of historical events, are illuminated by the creative, therapeutic dynamics of his myth-building. (Maes-Jelinek, 30). Kwan, she cleverly argues, the 'wise fool', is something between Harlequin and trickster, *dalang* and manipulator, mischief maker and saviour, and as such represents not only the focus of the 'legacies of hate' which afflict the age but also the 'possibility of its rebirth' (Maes-Jelinek, 32).

The ambiguous, hybrid identities which Guy Hamilton and Billy Kwan share give meaning to their relationship. It is the meaning which they also share with all of the hybrid, white Australian society whose history and geography have made paradoxically both subject and object of colonialism and imperialist aggression. The ambiguity causes some distress, but, as Kelly notes, quite a lot of freedom as well in the perception Australians have of themselves and their world.

> Evidently, and this would appear to be a dominant reading, colonial Australians could identify with what they construct—or totalise—as the approved metropolitan version, gratifyingly affording to the colonial what Said calls a 'flexible *positional* superiority' over an Other constructed as the Oriental. Yet, since colonials were themselves constructed as, and resentfully mis-recognised themselves as being, an Other within imperial hierarchies, there exists an available reading position of identification with Orientalist spectacles as in some sense legitimating, even providing, imagery of their own alterised reality. (Kelly, 33)

In this sense, the image of the 'hybrid' could lead, as Kelly explains with a quote from Nietzsche's *Beyond Good and Evil* (1886), to a 'less monolithic and more ludic and de-essentialised sense of identity' (Kelly, 34; Nietzsche, 150), where Orientalism becomes 'an empowering repertoire of identities and self-transformations' (Kelly, 34). This is indeed the interpretation which Kwan gives to being a hybrid, though, while he believes that it is Hamilton whose restricted sense of identity needs this empowerment, Kwan himself proves to be at least an equal beneficiary of alternating images and perceptions, and of the subsequent transformation they exert on the sense of self.

Blanche D'Alpuget has not come under comparable scrutiny concerning her place in Eastern and Western traditions, and this is another critical failure as she is similarly describing efforts and hindrances in harmonising the two. Her most significant hybrid is Minou, who shares Kwan's resistance for seeing things in 'black and white' and proves herself the mistress of self-empowerment through the determined, yet playful, fluidity of her identities. Yet, the character who has the chance to learn the most from Minou, Judith Wilkes, is also the least successful in these terms. She is so afraid of allowing herself to relate with Asian culture that

her sense of identity becomes, if anything, more monolithic and less ludic, and as a last resort she envelopes it within the safe but cold confines of progressive materialism.

8.3. Eastern Philosophical Keys to the Australian Puzzle

Considering these strengths and weaknesses in the available corpus of criticism of the Asian novels of d'Alpuget and Koch, there does seem good argument for a more careful analysis of some of the important Eastern concepts which d'Alpuget and Koch evidently are sourcing for their novels.

8.3.1. The *Bhagavad Gita* and the Spirit of Re-enchantment

The *Bhagavad Gita* is one episode of the great Indian national epic, the *Mahabharata*. Heinrich Zimmer finds the *Gita*'s importance in its synthesis of the two ancient traditions in Indian thought—that of the Vedas of the Aryan invaders, and that of Jainism, Sankhya and Yoga—, which had been competing over the thousand years since the Aryan shepherd/warriors migrated southward into the subcontinent. The Brahmanical Vedic system was monistic, vigorous, and joyously life-affirmative. Ritual and sacrifice sanctified all activities of everyday life in the practice of Brahmanism, making the actions of all men glorifications of the Supreme Being. The goal was to attain the realisation of the Self (*Atman*), the true and unique reality (Zimmer, 1969, 379-80). The more philosophically profound but terribly pessimistic non-Aryan systems were characterised by a dualistic life process in which the polluting, darkening principle of the material world was continuously at odds with the pure essence of the individual. The goal was to separate these antagonistic principles through a strict regime of purification, thereby halting the infernal, corrupting life process, and allowing one to reach an ultimate state of perfect motionlessness (Zimmer, 1969, 379).

Zimmer calls the *Bhagavad Gita* the 'classic doctrine' of this *rapprochement* of systems. Although an 'esoteric document', he says that it 'has become the most popular, widely memorized authoritative statement of the basic guiding principles of Indian religious life' (Zimmer, 1969, 380). The *Gita* is well known, if neither well read nor understood, in the West. Writers like Emerson and T. S. Eliot have drawn extensively from its poetics and

images, and its use as a source for the Australian image of Asia is not surprising. Alison Broinowski in *The Yellow Lady* attests to The *Gita*'s adaptation to Australian music and dance compositions (Broinowski, 94, 139), and says that Christopher Koch found in the affinity between India's cattle-centred culture and Australian culture an escape route from what he considered the decadence of Western society (Broinowski, 178).

David Tacey's *Edge of the Sacred: Transformations in Australia* finds many of the roots of the contemporary sense of bondage and decadence in the humanism and science of the Renaissance and Enlightenment, where the ego struggled to free itself of the past and its superstitions, but created a secular, culturally impoverished and spiritually bankrupt world.

> God is dead, moral and spiritual values have been declared entirely relative and arbitrarily constructed, the soul and spirit find no solace or nourishment, communal ties and traditional bonds are weakening and falling apart, narcissistic individualism is rampant, and Western civilisation finds itself sliding inexorably into degradation.

Instead of fashioning a world of freedom and liberty, 'we have simply become enslaved to the ego, to the lower instincts, and to all the unconscious archetypal forces that course through us and take easy possession of us' (Tacey, 185).

Such extremes of Western decadence would give further impetus to an awareness of the wisdom of the *Gita*, which teaches a middle path toward human fulfilment. It makes a plea for moderation and the avoidance of excess, including calls for both self-restraint and tolerance, two qualities which Tacey, Koch and d'Alpuget find sorely lacking. It supplants a notion of individuality and self-interest with a concept based on social and moral collectivity, and a 'spirit of participant action-sharing' (Varma, 70-71). Though some two thousand years old and conceived to reconcile the divergent paths to spiritual realisation in ancient India, the *Bhagavad Gita*'s message of righteous, altruistic action in a non-utopian world has perhaps never been more relevant than today.

The *Gita*'s spirit of *rapprochement* makes it an ideal model for Koch, whose novels are actively searching for a dynamic synthesis of Asian and Australian cultures. Billy Kwan seems to take a knowledge of the *Bhagavad Gita* almost as a prerequisite for intercultural

discussion when he asks Guy Hamilton nonchalantly, 'Have you read the Gita? No?' (*YLD*, 81). In *Turtle Beach*, Blanche d'Alpuget acknowledges the significance of the *Bhagavad Gita*, albeit through the back door. Ralph, the Australian embassy official charged with dealing with the deplorable situation in the boatpeople camps, and who is suffering from severe stomach ailments, laughs that Kanan says 'collecting bad karma in the camps' is the cause of his sickness. Ralph says, 'The bugger is so modern in some ways. But he lives by the *Bhagavad Gita*, you know.' Judith answers mockingly, 'Whatever that means' (*TB*, 224), perhaps quietly alluding to the fact that, as a sacred scripture, the meaning of the *Gita* is open to debate, though also commenting on the fact that Westerners have little idea of the *Gita* beyond its title. D'Alpuget is critically exploiting the perverse humour that one's own ignorance is funny so long as that which is misunderstood can be sloughed off as mere pagan superstition and mumbo-jumbo. Yet, Ralph is indeed dying, and d'Alpuget makes it clear that it is no more due to his physical than to his spiritual cancer. The agony and frustration of his hopeless job results from his inability to conform to the precepts of the *Bhagavad Gita*, specifically to the counsel of Krishna to Arjuna, who is despairing over the coming fratricidal battle, to maintain disinterest in his action. The heat, cold, pleasure and pain of the world of the senses are transient, Krishna says, and 'The man whom these cannot move, whose soul is one, beyond pleasure and pain, is worthy of life in Eternity' (*Bhagavad Gita*, 2:14-15).

Koch is less forgiving of his readership in its failure to read and heed the wisdom of the *Bhagavad Gita*. He stops short of offering it as a panacea for Australia's problems, but he is clearly reading the *Gita* as a 'sacred' text. Both Koch and d'Alpuget focus attention on their characters' 'preoccupation with normal self-interest, excessive concern for personal safety, and uninhibited appetite for personal gain if chance should happen to bring it their way' (Roskies, 37), themes which they share with the *Gita*. Koch, nevertheless, is not content to recite and superficially compare, as a journalist/historian would, the various interpretations of the text, which is what d'Alpuget does, and all he manages to do in his early novel, *Across the Sea Wall*. In *The Year of Living Dangerously*—acting as what Robert Minor calls the 'committed

scholar, that is one who asks the questions of the believer, not merely the questions of the historian'—, Koch delves into insights which have 'the certainty of religious Truth and the arguments for that certainty are appeals to revelation, intuition, or some data that go beyond space and time limitations' (Minor, 38). Koch is also trying to show that these insights which he has found in the *Bhagavad Gita* are not really so foreign to Western traditions, that, while a sacred text will have elements which are 'temporary and perishable, belonging to the ideas of the people of the period and the country in which it is produced' (Minor, 38), there are also the eternal and imperishable elements which are applicable to contemporary Western society.

David Tacey argues for a such a spiritual infusion of ancient wisdom in Western culture to bring about a 're-enchantment' of society, with a new understanding of man's relationship with nature which goes far beyond symbiosis to a recognition of shared identity. Krishna Chaitanya develops this idea, writing that Western society has been motivated on the principle of self-interest formulated in 1776 by Adam Smith in *Wealth of Nations*. The eventuality of universal prosperity predicted by Smith has, however, led man to a 'war on nature', exploiting and polluting the planet's resources, and to a 'war on his brethren in the form of exploitation through monopoly, colonialism, multinational economic imperialism and annihilation through nuclear armament'. This selfishness was already a major theme of the *Mahabharata*, as the 'warriors who gyrated to destruction like moths into fire were all fired by selfishness, or were victims of selfishness'. Selfishness, he writes, exposing perhaps the real problem 20th century critics have in judging Billy Kwan's actions, 'is basic for Smith, for the Gita, it is altruism that is basic' (Chaitanya, 25).

This is one fundamental aspect of the synthesis of ancient traditions which Zimmer was writing about. The *Vedas* prescribed sacrifice to the gods so that the gods would reward man with rain and prosperity. Zimmer interpreted the native Indus Valley philosophies—from which there are nevertheless no extant documents—as arguing that such selfish, outward expression merely complicated the effort to remove the impurities on the soul. The *Gita* teaches that one must perform his required work, including sacrifice, but not with reward in

mind. As Tacey argues, man must see himself as part of the divine creation, for, Chaitanya adds, man is free—and these two concepts are not contradictory. Krishna, the supreme God, tells Arjuna, the generalised man, to consider the reality of nature and choose how he will act—Chaitanya calls this 'the partnership of God and man in the divinisation of history'. Krishna is not promising rewards for Arjuna's actions, but that 'if God and man work together, this world will see established an order of justice, prosperity and well-being for everybody' (Chaitanya, 26).

8.3.2. Time and Destiny

Zimmer discusses the dichotomy of arguments present in all ages of Hindu literature concerning the relative importance of will and fate, or personal valour and time in the struggle for life and success. The first argument holds that the valour of the unyielding hero eventually leads him to victory. Zimmer sees in this view 'something of the British bulldog attitude, though without the Christian belief that the right cause will prevail, and that a humble acceptance of one's own sufferings as punishment for shortcomings and faults will have redeeming power'. The second, however, confers to time (*kala*) supreme power, noting that the hero-conqueror prevails not because of his prowess or strength or holy advisors but because he is riding the wave of time, which carries him to success when the cycle favours him, but which will then carry him to destruction when it favours his enemies (Zimmer, 1969, 99-100).

The question is of the force of human will and action versus fate. Traditions such as Buddhism assert the existence of free will, moral responsibility, and transmigration. The individual human is responsible for his own enlightenment. Human effort is central to this situation, 'even though, paradoxically, the aim of the renouncer in these traditions is to subdue human effort as part of the means of preventing accumulation of *karma*'. The other view, exemplified by the Brahmanist tradition, places reliance on the gods who exercise the workings of fate and time (Bailey, 157-59).

Greg Bailey has shown, however, how the two arguments are bound together. While fate is determined by the cosmic order of the Triple World (*dharma*), individual actions bring

about that fate, and the failure of such action can bring about the collapse of *dharma*. In the *Ramayana*, Brahma allows the demon Ravana to name the boon he has been promised. In doing so, Brahma allows Ravana to announce his own fate. Ravana, who as a demon is engaged in struggle with the gods, demands that no god be able to kill him. Brahma then arranges for Vishnu to descend to the earth in the form of a human, Rama, who is to kill Ravana and restore *dharma* to its rightful place. Brahma also orders the gods to be reborn on earth as monkeys and bears to assist Vishnu, and even they are obliged to act in order to uphold the cosmic order (Bailey, 140-144).

This coupling of fate, or the will of god, with the free will of man corresponds to the Supreme Utterance of the *Bhagavad Gita*, in which Krishna tells Arjuna that choosing to act makes him the sacred instrument of fate. Accepting this marriage of fate and free will is the greatest hurdle facing Billy Kwan in *The Year of Living Dangerously*, and serves as a foundation for the development of Mike Langford in *Highways to a War*, who must learn that his actions can maintain professional disinterest yet still impact on the greater world around him. Time demands action, especially in Southeast Asia of the 1960s and 70s, a period seen by Koch as one in which the gods and other forces of good will 'be the ones filled with impotent rage, while the demons, triumphant now, set up their own ungodly rule' (Zimmer, 1969, 100).

The ultimate vision of reality presented in the *Bhagavad Gita* and the *wayang kulit* necessarily allows the fratricidal war between the Pandavas and the Kuravas to continue as the Supreme Utterance, the sacred command to act, is meant for all men, good and evil, to follow. In the same way, Billy is allowed to die heroically even without Sukarno having seen his banner. The world has seen it, however, and many will recognise in it a new herald of *kala*, time. Sukarno's approaching fall has been revealed through Billy Kwan's dramatic act. Guy Hamilton, initiated into the spiritual world of the *wayang kulit* and instructed by Billy in the *Bhagavad Gita*, understands, as few others can, the significance of Billy Kwan's act, which is to have taken up arms in the sacred cosmic battle for the Soul.

8.3.3. The Four World Ages

Before discussing Billy Kwan's act, however, it is important to discuss the Eastern cyclical concept of time adapted by Koch to his post-modern thought. According to the theory of the four World Ages, from the Tantric scriptures said to have been directly handed down by Shiva in the first millennium AD, the timeless universe is divided into *yugas*, ages, or cycles limited in time. The *Maha-Yuga*, 'great age', represents a complete cycle corresponding to one day (*kalpa*) in the life of the god-creator Brahma, which comprises the four ages of the cosmos. The first age, the *Krita-Yuga*, begins with the creation of the universe and its population by men, gods, demons and all other beings. It is characterised by wholeness and completion, manifested in the full and uncontested rule of *dharma*, the righteous law of the cosmos. Men are born virtuously, and all beings perform unquestioningly the duties and obligations which *dharma* requires of them. Yet, with the progress of the life of the universal organism, there is a loss of the completeness of *dharma*. In the second age, the *Treta-Yuga*, *dharma*'s presence in the universe is atrophied to three-quarters, with the fourth quarter then filled with its opposite, *adharma*, the absence of righteousness. Living beings begin to fall into spiritual decline. Dharmic duties are no longer spontaneously carried out but must be learned. The third period, *Dvapara-Yuga*, is the age of a dangerous balance between virtue and immorality. The irrevocable loss of *dharma* and its correspondent replacement by *adharma* means that the perfection of the spiritual order can no longer exercise its influence on the universe. Men are vulgar, blinded by passion, crave possessions and wealth. True spirituality is only attainable through ascetic practices. By the arrival of the fourth age, *Kali-Yuga*, the presence of *dharma* in the universe has shrunken to one quarter, and the collapse of the created cosmos is at hand. 'Kali bedeutet das schlimmste von allem; auch „Streit, Zank, Spaltung, Krieg, Schlacht" (verwandt mit *kal-aha*, „streiten, zanken")' (Zimmer, 1986, 18-21). *Kali-Yuga* is the 'Black Age' of universal destruction, characterised by the 'vulgar traits of common despotism', a loss of spiritual dignity, and the ascension to power of 'the strong, the cunning, the daring, and the reckless—those able to inspire greed and fear' (Zimmer, 1969, 106). It is an age where evil

has ascendancy over good; where wrong is right; where the loved are hated; where everything is upside down and backwards. It is also the present age.

In Sukarno's Indonesia, in wartime Vietnam, in Cambodia under the approaching spectre of the Khmer Rouge, even in the artificiality of modern Singapore and among the expatriate Australians in Kuala-Lumpur, the workings of *Kali-Yuga* is unmistakably evident in the Asian images of Christopher Koch and Blanche d'Alpuget. Despite the convictions of such as Billy Kwan, it hardly even matters which side is prevailing. Guy Hamilton notices after the end of the communist putsch, with the rightist forces of General Suharto in control, how all of the political signs on the avenues have been altered. The messages of *konfrontasi* are still there; only the objects of the attacks have changed, like shadows whose light/dark contrast has been reversed, or like a mirrored image which is itself reflected back into the glass:

> Jakarta's violent children had been unleashed against their heroes: and the vehemence was the same and the terms were the same as those they had used against their former bogies. It was like a dream in which things became their opposites, and the city no longer seemed real (*YLD*, 291).

The period of *Kali-Yuga* has, after all, not reached its conclusion, and demons defeated are replaced by more, and more powerful, demons.

What better metaphor could be found for a writer who sees society in degeneration, whose very country was founded on penal policies of the mother country which can only be described as wicked, whose nation then embarked on a campaign of genocide and forced assimilation of the aboriginal people, whose region has been swept by a holocaust of such vehemence that it seemed to crown the evil achievements of the 20th century? Koch is working closely with a world which the modernists demonise as lost and headed for oblivion, though, searching for a way out of this despondency, he finds in such Eastern concepts as that of the four World Ages a response to the fatalistic modernist outlook. For the final period of cosmic extinction, *Kali-Yuga*, will ultimately be followed up by a return to *Krita Yuga*, the first era of creation and renewal.

8.4. Billy Kwan, the *Bhagavad Gita*, and the Fractured Soul

The key to understanding *The Year of Living Dangerously* lies, to paraphrase Billy, in understanding the *Bhagavad Gita*. The key to the *Bhagavad Gita* is the Supreme Utterance of Krishna made to Arjuna before the epic battle between the Pandavas and the Kuravas. Arjuna, as leader of the Pandavas who aim to win back the land taken unjustly from them by the Kuravas, rides before his army as it forms up before the battle. There Arjuna sees his brothers, uncles, cousins, nephews, teachers and friends lined up on both sides, poised to slaughter each other. He is taken by deep regret, and doubts whether he should give the order for the battle to begin. His charioteer, friend and advisor, Krishna, reveals himself as the Incarnation of the Creator, Preserver, and Destroyer of the world, and delivers the Supreme Utterance, telling Arjuna, and the world,

> Time am I, the Destroyer great and mighty, appearing here to sweep all men away. Even without thee [and thine act of leadership] none of these warriors here, in their ranks arrayed, shall remain alive. Therefore, do thou arise, win glory, smite the foe, enjoy in prosperity thy lordship. By Me, and Me alone, have they long since been routed. BE THOU NOUGHT BUT MY TOOL (*BG*, 11.32-33; as translated in Zimmer, 1969, 384).

This concept of time as 'great and mighty destroyer', which is inextricably, and somewhat contradictorily, bound with the workings of the free will of men to effect the regeneration of creation and the cosmic order, is one of the pivot points in the Asian novels of C. J. Koch.

It is tempting (or rather just habit) for a Westerner to feel frustration in this cosmic doubleness where free will must exist alongside predestined fate, as Cowie does in his analysis of *The Year of Living Dangerously*, where

> man is reduced to nothing much more than the status of a pawn, interesting perhaps but still a pawn, pushed about the cosmic gaming board or plucked from its ambivalent chequered surface at the caprice of two contrasting destinies, one apparently playing for the good of his immortal soul—but *which one*, however?—and the other, with spite and malice, plotting out the nearest moves towards his eternal ruin. (Cowie, 96)

This again is putting Koch and his novels into a modernist Western tradition where he does not belong. Billy Kwan is not a pawn in an absurd world ruled by mean predestination, but is following Arjuna's example in heeding Krishna's words and taking the critical step beyond his

considerations and hesitations to ignore the consequences and act. The *Gita* does reiterate the inescapable force of *karma* when Krishna tells Arjuna that nature will compel him to fight the battle he longs to avoid:

> Because thou art in the bondage of Karma, of the forces of thine own past life; and that which thou, in thy delusion, with a good will dost not want to do, unwillingly thou shalt have to do. (*Bhagavad Gita* 18.60)

Yet, alongside this statement of predestination, Krishna reaffirms Arjuna's freedom of will:

> I have given thee words of vision and wisdom more secret than hidden mysteries. Ponder them in the silence of thy soul, and then in freedom do thy will. (*BG*, 18.63)

The interaction of fate and free will is an important theme throughout the *Mahabharata*. Zaehner notes that, while it 'stresses time and again the primacy of fate over human effort, it none the less compares the two to the rain which prepares the ground and the seed that man puts into it (5.78.2-5): the two are interdependent and work in harmony together'. *Karma* is a universal phenomenon of which human *karma* is but a part, and 'the cosmic *dharma*' and 'fate' are other terms for God's will. It is therefore precisely 'man's co-operation with fate' which 'justifies him and earns him a place in heaven or that causes him to enter into God' (Zaehner, 107).

8.4.1. Billy Kwan's Sacred Battle for the Soul

It is clear that Billy is searching for such a way to exercise his will in co-operation with *dharma*, but has been unable to bring himself beyond an intellectual commitment in which he is, like Arjuna, overwhelmed by the contradictions. He is therefore looking for a surrogate, a man of action rather than of thought, and thinks he has found one in Guy Hamilton. When he organises Hamilton's interview with the Indonesian Communist Party chief, Billy says the interview needs a 'good instrument to transmit it', adding, 'I've chosen a good instrument' (*YLD*, 36). Cookie agrees that Hamilton's natural inclination to act without being inhibited by considerations of the 'natures, intensities, and needs' of those around him made him 'the perfect vessel for Billy Kwan's purposes' (*YLD*, 38). Hamilton finally comes to sense those purposes after the PKI interview which makes him an instant celebrity, mixing a feeling of

triumph with that of being used (*YLD*, 40), though he does not yet get it since, as his first name implies, he is 'easily taken in and deficient in self-knowledge' (Roskies, 38). Hamilton will be required to submit to several sessions of mocking and ridicule before his awareness improves.

While Hamilton will continue to be influenced by Billy's manipulations, it is still Billy Kwan himself who must take action. Ironically enough, it is only after he becomes distraught by Hamilton's wayward behaviour, travelling out of Jakarta to report on the PKI's march through the countryside and also to meet the Russian Vera Chostiakov when he should be with Jill, that Billy is motivated to take direct action.

Billy loses his self-mastery in the Wayang Bar and gets himself excluded from that group. Then, after practically moving in with Ibu and her children, the infant boy Udin dies. Nowhere in the novel does Billy show any definite suicidal tendencies, though he does exhibit deep frustration and pain in his ostracism and Udin's senseless death, and the action he chooses to take against Sukarno will result in his own death. Cookie confers that Billy is an unlikely suicide candidate, saying about Billy's deciding to become the instrument to remove Sukarno: 'until the very late stages, there is nothing really irrational or deranged about this process' (*YLD*, 241). Cookie does finally question Billy's moral judgement, but he also cites the *Bhagavad Gita*, 2:32, in looking for an explanation. Cookie's analysis recalls David Tacey's theses of rejecting formalised Christianity and humanism in order to find a new spirituality, saying:

> Perhaps he was inspired by Krishna the charioteer (Dwarf Semar's mighty counterpart in the *Bhagavad Gita*), steeling Arjuna for spiritual battle: *'There is a way that opens the doors of heaven, Arjuna! Happy the warrior whose fate is to fight such a war'*. (*YLD*, 241)

This might just reflect Cookie's desire to remember Billy in a heroic light, but in an interesting alteration to the text of the *Bhagavad Gita*—Koch is using the Mascaró translation—Christopher Koch has singularised the original's *warriors*, the effect of which is to individualise the text and make it uniquely fit the particular case of Billy Kwan. He also reminds us at this definitive moment of the perspective of the *wayang kulit* on these matters, with Billy following the model of Semar, who combines the qualities of the three Pandava

brothers, then both 'permits and demands a struggle for order and justice' in the world (Geertz, 273). James Brandon writes that the *wayang kulit* puppets are not necessarily enacting a drama of Pandava versus Kurava at all.

> They and their actions are merely the external, symbolic representation of the conflict which takes place within every man's spirit, with the puppets standing for different aspects of a single personality: Judistira is selflessness; Ardjuna, introspection; Bima, pure will. (Brandon, 16)

Billy sees the decision to act as a moral one based on the teachings of the *wayang kulit* and on the *Bhagavad Gita*, which warns in the couplet immediately following that cited by Cookie, 'But to forgo this fight for righteousness is to forgo thy duty and honour: is to fall into transgression' (*BG*, 2:33). Accepting this duty, like Semar and the three Pandava brothers, selflessly, with premeditation, and of free will, to act in the name of righteousness, Billy writes in his dossier: 'This is enough. Ibu and Udin will be revenged. There must always be an instrument to end tyranny's folly' (*YLD*, 240). At the same time, Billy draws on the prophecy of the book of *Revelation* for justification. He had always had doubts, and early wondered about the ominous numbers of Sukarno's birthdate: 'The 6th of June: the double six! Dread possibility: is this the mark of the Beast? Is this the source of his charismatic power?' (*YLD*, 130). Now he is seeing such signs everywhere:

> You do, after all, bear the mark of the Beast, I believe. The Satanists say their new age begins next year, in 1966: the double six again! Is it possible you were marked to precipitate this new era, whipping the people to frenzy with your lies of glory—yourself in a secret frenzy fed by violence and by lust. Terrible violence is simmering, simmering. Your country is sick with the fever of evil: is it possible that the Beast has chosen Java as a crucible? Is it possible that here is where those marked by the Beast and those still struggling for the light must confront each other? Is this your Konfrontasi? (*YLD*, 242-43)

Finding further symbolic reference in *Revelation xiii, 4* to the Chinese communist (the dragon) support of Sukarno's *konfrontasi*, Billy writes with growing conviction:

> 'And they worshipped the dragon which gave power unto the beast; and they worshipped the beast, saying, Who is like unto the beast? Who is able to make war with him?' (*YLD*, 243)

Billy's last hope for Indonesia lies in the Muslims, and yet he sees that they cannot act against Sukarno, who is rapidly falling under the control of the Communists. Billy writes in

his files: 'The Muslims can do nothing against you themselves, Sukarno, since the people are still deluded by their god-king, their Ratu Adil. Yes, the Muslims need an instrument.' Billy Kwan has finally stopped being the philosophical photographer—the ultimate Peeping Tom—and accepted his role as the instrument of God. Deciding conclusively to act for 'a country where love of God and freedom of the spirit can survive', Kwan directly addresses his fiend, Sukarno: 'You talk of "swinging the steering wheel over", to a new stage of revolution. I must swing the wheel over instead: this will be my destiny!' (*YLD*, 242).

8.4.2. Billy's Spiritual Victory

Considering Koch's attempts 'at a definition of the Australian soul as one infected with a dream of an ideal "Otherland"' (this is the term Koch uses in *The Boys in the Island* to describe an early version of his mythopoeic land), Paul Sharrad writes that 'it is possible to see Robert O'Brien's journey (physical and spiritual) through India as an attempt to find a philosophy that will prove compatible with a Western desire for structured beliefs and meaningful action'. He compares this with other efforts, such as that of Patrick White who 'is intent on exposing the festering spiritual life beneath the surface of Australian society in order to proffer the values of European enlightenment and mysticism to heal and control', but argues that 'Koch is seeking a less "Austrophobic" answer' from which will come 'a faith resistant to the dangers of a landscape that destroys neat historical and rational constructs' and which leads to the despair and destruction of people like White's protagonist, Voss (Sharrad, 1984, 219). Billy Kwan shares traits of these protagonists who are 'scapegoats, outcasts from society who suffer on its behalf to discover private bliss and a redemption unwanted by the community they leave behind' (Sharrad, 1984, 216), but moving Kwan out of the bush, which destroys men like Voss, and into Asia gives him the chance to achieve that faith in the human spirit and will to action.

Koch draws that sense of faith and action out of the *Gita*, in which Krishna tells Arjuna that righteous action is true pleasure and will lead one out of pain, while the pleasures of inaction or of desires, cravings and passion are the impure pleasures of darkness:

> There is the pleasure of following that right path which leads to the end of all pain. What seems at first a cup of sorrow is found in the end immortal wine. That pleasure is pure: it is the joy which arises from a clear vision of the Spirit. (*BG*, 18:36-37)

It is Guy Hamilton who first seems to understand this when Billy is killed. Billy had explained to Hamilton that to master others one must first learn to master himself (*YLD*, 81). Hamilton and Jill Bryant both understand that Billy was trying to master them. Jill says, 'Billy wanted us to be a perfect pair of lovers' and Hamilton says, 'he thought he and I would be perfect friends' (*YLD*, 258), but only Hamilton knows that Billy has finally learned to master himself. This means that Billy, the cameraman with the 'ceaseless mental life' (*YLD*, 71), forever ruminating over questions of right and wrong, of good and evil, of man and God, has finally calmed his Self. Krishna teaches Arjuna:

> Do thy work in the peace of Yoga and, free from selfish desires, be not moved in success or in failure. Yoga is evenness of mind—a peace that is ever the same. (*BG*, 2:48)

('Yoga' is one of those difficult-to-translate Sanskrit terms. Mascaró has chosen not to translate here at all, depending on the text to clarify it. There are many meanings of the term as it is used in the *Gita*. The verb means unite, prepare, get ready for battle; The noun means yoking, preparation, discipline (Callewaert, 97). Koch, probably because in current English it refers to a form of exercise which has as much to do with New Age pop culture as with Indian philosophy, avoids the term altogether, though this does not mean that Krishna's message is avoided as well.)

In his argument for an Australian re-enchantment, David Tacey notes how the 'great religions have long taught that the ego cannot be its own master and cannot achieve absolute freedom'. The ego must forgo its delusional drive for absolute freedom, and consciously choose to serve.

> The ego's task in the psyche, like humanity's task in creation, is to serve a greater reality (Jung), to attend to the needs of an Other (Eliage), to further the incarnation in this world of unmanifest Being (Heidegger). The ego can either *choose* a life of service or *be made to serve* in various involuntary and destructive ways. The choice is between a relative freedom or no freedom at all. (Tacey, 185)

Billy Kwan must loosen his attachment to the mastery of the *dalang*. He has to learn not to act out of hatred, fear or anger, for revenge too would be work done for reward, which the *Gita* says 'is much lower than work done in the Yoga of wisdom' (*BG*, 2:49). Like Arjuna, Billy has great difficulty facing up to the task before him. He must achieve a sense of the universe in which he is personally implicated, and learn 'that he should derive his imperative for action from the nature of reality' (Chaitanya, 21). That nature, and the goal of realising it, is made clear in the *Gita*, though necessarily in terms which remain rather beyond the powers of the human mind:

> When thy mind leaves behind its dark forest of delusion, thou shalt go beyond the scriptures of times past and still to come. When thy mind, that may be wavering in the contradictions of many scriptures, shall rest unshaken in divine contemplation, then the goal of Yoga is thine. (*BG*, 2:52-53)

These lines seem written for Billy Kwan personally. The heroic achievement of the novel is not what Western readers might expect, but that one man, his mind once shaking in the dark forest of delusion, achieves the release from passion, fear and anger. The *Gita* also makes the implications of this release clear, and there could be no truer reward for Billy Kwan:

> He whose mind is untroubled by sorrows, and for pleasures he has no longings, beyond passion, and fear and anger, he is the sage of unwavering mind. (*BG*, 2:56)

Guy Hamilton seems also to recognise the dualities inherent in reality as viewed in Javanese religion—the need for the irrational beside the rational, and for a balance between action and compassion. When Jill asks him, 'Why did he do it?', she is asking why Billy unveiled the banner from the Hotel Indonesia window, but also, based on the only information she can have received, why he jumped from the window. Hamilton says simply, 'It depends on what you think he did' (*YLD*, 257). Hamilton knows it was not suicide, and leaves his answer vague, as if his training as a journalist to speak in superficial, unimaginative facts is gagging him, but, having himself made a similar spiritual journey, he seems to know that Billy had finally come to terms with all of his self-doubts and reconciled himself to the teachings of the *Bhagavad Gita* which he had always accepted philosophically but had struggled with spiritually.

This is the novel's critical point, but while the text offers support to this theses of Billy Kwan's triumph, there is little agreement to be found in existing scholarship. The universal tendency is to follow Bruce Bennett, who wrote of 'the shattering disillusionment'—in the realisation that his idol Sukarno and his 'creation' Hamilton have both failed him by succumbing to lust and deception—'which turns his whole life around, and leads to his death' (Bennett, 1982, 11). That Billy believed he was unfurling his banner as the instrument of God is not stated in so many words, but he was clearly following Arjuna's example by moving to assume personal responsibility. Koch's descriptions also make it clear enough that, for Hamilton and Cookie at least, he was not acting out of despair or disillusionment. Billy's spiritual transformation is evident in Cookie's description of Billy's fall:

> I had the impression—although this could have been fancy—that his body was tremendously arched, facing outwards into the warm, upper air like one of the people of the Welcome Monument; as though some ecstasy had removed it from natural laws, and powered it with flight (*YLD*, 248).

Billy's body has changed, symbolising the ascendancy of his victorious soul which had been crippled by his outward appearance. Cookie expects Billy to have 'exploded like a fruit' from the long fall, but instead of a smashed dwarf he finds what resembles a reposed puppet of the sacred *wayang kulit*:

> I had expected him to look small, on the asphalt desert: instead he looked surprisingly big. … All that told of his fall was the dark red pool spreading from beneath him, and the limpness of the body, which recalled a fallen puppet: a puppet of leather (*YLD*, 249).

This is Billy's moment to follow the path of consecrated action, 'free from attachments, and with a mind ruling its powers in harmony' (*BG*, 3:7). He has committed himself unconditionally to sacred battle according to the teachings of Krishna, who promised that 'By sacrifice thou shalt multiply and obtain all thy desires' (*BG*, 3:11). Billy then transcends his dwarf body, takes flight, and heroically enters heaven. One hint of critical agreement with this assessment lies in the thinly veiled title of Sharrad's 1984 article, 'Pour mieux sauter'. Sharrad declines to elucidate on this, but is clearly referring to Billy Kwan's fall from the hotel window which, as Cookie notes, so much more resembles a spring than a fall.

The question is whether it is a sacrificial or a suicidal spring, and whether the text justifies the exaltation of Billy Kwan, especially when so many critics find him to have fallen into deep depression. The answer lies again in understanding Koch's source material, in particular those cited by Kwan himself, the *Bhagavad Gita*, the *Mahabharata*, and *The Gospels*.

8.4.3. The Dilemma of Righteous Action in the *Mahabharata* and *The Gospels*

The *Bhagavad Gita* with its tale of the dilemma faced by Arjuna over choosing a righteous course of action is but a brief part of the *Mahabharata*, which has as a central theme the similar dilemma faced by Arjuna's brother, King Yudhishthira, the Judistira of the *wayang kulit* whose very name means 'King of Righteousness'. The problem comes out of the two, sometimes contradictory notions of *dharma*: 'the *sanatana dharma* or absolute moral order which can never be precisely defined yet is felt to have absolute validity, and the *dharma* of caste and canon law as laid down in the various law-books' (Zaehner, 8). Complicating matters further is the will of God—whether Brahma, Krishna, Hari, Vishnu or another form of the eternal, supreme creative force—which is both the eternal *sanatana dharma* and yet beyond any limitations of *dharma*, time or any other imaginable entity. Yudhishthira is the archetype of the virtue of *dharma*, and so longs and strives for a peaceful and equitable settlement between the Kuravas and Pandavas. Krishna, however, repeatedly forces him to act in ways that are contrary not only to the eternal *dharma* as interpreted by the ancient texts of the *Brahmanas*, 'but also to the *dharma* that the King of Righteousness himself embodies and which the common conscience of the human race acknowledges to be true' (Zaehner, 64). Krishna drives Yudhishthira into violence and untruthfulness, causing in him a crisis of guilt even though he knows that Krishna's will transcends *dharma*. '*His* conscience was the first to protest against a violent and unjust society: there had been no reformers before him' (Zaehner, 171). Yudhishthira's paradigmatic struggle with the ambiguities of justice and virtue has provided strength to all Hindus after him, including Mahatma Gandhi, who 'was in history

what King Yudhishthira was in myth, the conscience of Hinduism that hungers and thirsts after righteousness in defiance of the letter of the law of gods and men' (Zaehner, 184-85).

It is this same dilemma which incapacitates Arjuna in the *Bhagavad Gita* and must be confronted by Billy Kwan and Guy Hamilton of *The Year of Living Dangerously* and by Mike Langford of *Highways to a War*. Koch uses the common Hindu metaphor of light and darkness, which is especially appropriate to characters who are either photographers or in search of the truth. Mike Langford explains the essence of the photographer's art:

> —It's all to do with light, I realize that more and more. What light does to things: to surfaces, faces, small objects, distances. Light's everything. Light's my greatest tool. What else is a camera but a light box? (*HW*, 79)

Billy Kwan makes this clear to the non-photographer Hamilton, who he judges despite his lack of knowledge to be a 'man of light': 'All that matters now is to know what light is, and what darkness is' (*YLD*, 236). This theme of the struggle to discover a righteous path of action and the strength to follow it, central to both novels, is taken from the *Mahabharata* and *Bhagavad Gita*, and as Koch maintains his affinity to relating Eastern and Western traditions, from *The Gospel According to St Luke*.

The Gospels are germane to Koch's themes, and support his assertion that Eastern and Western traditions have more to share than might be supposed. *The Gospel According to St John*, for example, treats the essence of God as the transcendental light of the cosmos:

> In him was life; and the life was the light of men. And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not. (St John, 1:4-5)

The light which is not 'comprehended' by darkness is not that of the material world which is surrounded by darkness, but is the eternal light of God.

> That was the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world. He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not. (St John, 1:9-10)

Like the *Bhagavad Gita*, the Gospels are also revelation of God the creator and of his relationship to man. The famous lines of St John put it best:

> In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by

> him; and without him was not any thing made that was made. In him was life; and the life was the light of men. (St John 1:1-4)

This can be compared to the words of Krishna to Arjuna:

> But beyond my visible nature is my invisible Spirit. This is the fountain of life whereby this universe has its being. All things have their life in this Life, and I am their beginning and end. In this whole vast universe there is nothing higher than I. All the worlds have their rest in me, as many pearls upon a string. I am the taste of living waters and the light of the sun and the moon. I am OM, the sacred word of the Vedas, sound in silence, heroism in men. (*BG*, 7:5-8)

The Gospels are also the stories of God born on earth as a man—an *avatar*. St Matthew tells of the begetting of Jesus by the Holy Spirit: 'Behold, a virgin shall be with child and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us' (St Matthew, 1:23). The poetic John writes, 'And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us' (St John, 1:14).

And finally, they are the tales of the clash of ancient versus modern senses of justice and morality: Matthew writes that when Joseph discovered Mary to be with child before they had consummated their marriage, 'being a just man, and not willing to make her a publick example, was minded to put her away privily', but that 'the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream' telling him not to fear or bow to moral convention, 'for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost' (Matthew, 1:19-20). St John debunks the strong Hebrew sense of ancestral authority in a similar way that Krishna did the *Brahmanic* scriptures when he writes of the Baptist:

> John bare witness of him, and cried, saying, This was he of whom I spake, he that cometh after me is preferred before me: for he was before me. And his fulness have all we received, and grace for grace. For the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ. (St John, 1:15-17)

St Mark writes of how Jesus went into the synagogue and taught on the sabbath 'as one that had authority', and was scolded by 'a man with an unclean spirit'. Jesus ordered the unclean spirit out of the man:

> And they were all amazed, insomuch that they questioned among themselves, saying, What thing is this? What new doctrine is this? For with authority commandeth he even the unclean spirits, and they do obey him. (St Mark, 1:21-27)

The story of St John the Baptist in *The Gospel According to St Matthew* incorporates all of the elements of the conflicting senses of *dharma*. John the Baptist had been preaching to and baptising all the people of Jerusalem and Jordan, and was surprised finally to see Pharisees and Sadducees coming to confess their sins and be baptised. He said to these men, who represented the ancient canon which he considered inadequate for the new kingdom which he heralded, 'O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance'. John warns them not to claim the authority of their heritage, saying 'And think not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father: for I say unto you, that God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham.' He reiterates the closure of the ancient authority in favour of a new righteousness: 'And now also the axe is laid unto the root of the trees: therefore every tree which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire.' Jesus then arrives to be baptised according to Old Testament prophecy, but once this is fulfilled the birth of God on earth is proclaimed, and the new law of virtue and righteousness commences.

> And Jesus, when he was baptized, went up straightway out of the water: and, lo, the heavens were opened unto him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon him: And lo a voice from heaven, saying, 'This is my beloved son, in whom I am well pleased.' (St Mathew, 3:1-17)

The Gospels are bringing the new covenant of God to men, which fulfils but replaces the old covenant, and the problem of the evolution of the human sense of virtue and righteousness was so closely paralleled in the East. While most of Koch's structures, symbols and metaphors are of Eastern origin, some of the most important are Western, and it is the mutual heritage of East and West which fascinates Koch and from which he draws his messages. The shared clash of ancient and new attitudes of universal righteousness gives meaning to Billy Kwan's struggles and actions. When Jesus showed himself to the Apostles after the Resurrection, he confronted Peter three times with the question if he loved him more than the others or not, reflecting Peter's three denials of Jesus after his arrest. Each time Peter answers, 'Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee', and Jesus replies, 'Feed my lambs' and 'Feed my sheep'. This

is the message which Billy Kwan finally gives to Sukarno. To the contrary of the scholars who assume that Kwan was planning an assassination, this was all which was required by the will of God. Peter already feels the brunt of Jesus' attention, and notices how St John then asks Jesus, 'which is he that betrayeth thee?', for the disciples think they should follow the law of Moses and kill the one who betrayed Jesus. Peter asks Jesus, 'What shall this man do?', offering his life in just—according to the Law of Moses—retribution. Jesus answers with a clear, 'If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee?' (St John 1:15-23). In other words, it is my will that these things pass, and if you do not understand because it does not conform to canon law or to your conception of justice, then you must simply accept them, for I am the Son of God.

'What shall this man do?' parallels Mike Langford's question as he is wondering about his role and the motivation for his disinterest in Cambodia's civil war. Christ's answer to Peter corresponds to Krishna's Supreme Utterance, requiring action without attachment to its consequences. 'The whole point about my work is to stay uninvolved,' Langford says, convinced, however, that 'the formula was sounding more and more feeble to me lately, and Chandara seemed to know this. He smiled now as though I were a slow child. Mike, you are coming to middle age like me, he said. As a Buddhist, I know it's time to start acquiring merit. Maybe you should know this too' (*HW*, 278). As Peter must learn to follow God's will unquestioningly, so must Arjuna follow Krishna's will, and Chandara Buddha's; Langford follows this tradition.

Koch, however, does not draw Billy Kwan's question from Peter of *The Gospel According to St John* but from St John the Baptist in *The Gospel According to St Luke*, which picks up on the story told in St Matthew about the Pharisees and Sadducees who were rebuked as unworthy by St John the Baptist. St Luke expands on the story, telling how first 'the multitudes', then the 'publicans', then 'soldiers' were rebuked, and each then asked the question which Billy Kwan asks: 'What shall we do then?'. In answering, John lays out the new law of justice, virtue and righteousness. To the multitudes he says, 'He that hath two

coats, let him impart to him that hath none; and he that hath meat, let him do likewise'; to the publicans, 'Exact no more than that which is appointed you'; and to the soldiers, 'Do violence to no man, neither accuse any falsely; and be content with your wages' (St Luke, 3:7-14).

8.5. Conclusion

This message of Jesus, related by the *Gospels*, and of Krishna, related by the *Mahabharata* and the *Bhagavad Gita*, is also that related by Christopher J. Koch in *The Year of Living Dangerously*, although, while Kwan has been repeatedly compared to Krishna, and Hamilton to Arjuna on the authority of the author in *Crossing the Gap* (Koch, 1987, 25), in the end it is Kwan, not Hamilton, who is faced with the dilemma of Arjuna, Yudhishthira and Peter. He stands before all of those who he loves, Hamilton, Jill, his journalist colleagues, Sukarno, and the people of Jakarta, and struggles with the decision of whether he should and can act, and, if so, how. Should, for example, he give Ibu money, or does that only encourage her to beg? Should he assassinate Sukarno or send him a more subtle message to 'Feed my sheep'—and which offers the better promise of bringing about the dramatic change Kwan knows is necessary? Emulating Arjuna/Yudhishthira/Peter in a way no other character is capable of, Kwan makes the choice which Krishna, St John the Baptist and Jesus Christ demand—to make his intellectual devotion into an aggressive force of action at the centre of his life. He gives what he can to help those who have not, and when the time comes, he gives himself in order to relay the message of self-sacrifice. Billy must die, but he has earned life for his soul. Another consequence of his act, as Maes-Jelinek notes, is that Hamilton's conversion is complete, and through this Hamilton does come to resemble Arjuna.

> His grief over Billy and his anger at the horrors that are beginning to take place in Jakarta show that he is no longer a mere spectator and that he now genuinely cares. The loss of one eye seems to be his penalty for losing Billy, the double or part of himself, who was also his 'eyes' (p. 72), and it is significant that Hamilton is now ready to forsake a chance of recovering his eyesight in order to make sure that he gets on the plane with Jill. (Maes-Jelinek, 33-34)

That Kwan intended to assassinate Sukarno as Koch says was the original idea, is fully unsupported by the text, and is finally irrelevant. Maes-Jelinek argues that meaning and resolution to the novel is to be found only in Hamilton's conversion and in the personal

relationships which survive and raise the historical events to mythological status (Maes-Jelinek, 34). It is certainly Billy Kwan who has most strikingly gone through the terrible personal struggle to clarify the meaning and truth of his existence. Kwan freely chooses to fulfil his destiny when, unveiling his banner, he issues the call for the bloody upheaval whose first days bring the novel and the Sukarno-era to an end.

Following the hybrid model which reflects his own multi-cultural self, Kwan's act is taken with the same profound faith in *dharma* felt by Yudhisthira, with the subtle sense of sacrificing one's will to that of God's demanded by Christ, and with the aloofness to the consequences that Arjuna must accept as he orders the opposing armies to the historic battle which is to destroy India's ancient feudal order and usher in the *Kali-Yuga*, the beginning of the end of time. And yet, without his hybridisation with Guy Hamilton none of this would have been possible. In this sense, the whole argument as to who represents Arjuna and who Krishna is moot. Doubleness is one of Koch's favorite themes, and will therefore be explored, along with d'Alpuget's similar development of the topic in *Monkey's in the Dark*, more closely in chapter 11.

The Divine Feminine

9.1. Introduction

The problem discussed in the preceeding chapter of how to act and think in order to relieve onself of the suffering of the world has always been a—a Buddhist would say *the*—driving force of human culture. This chapter is devoted to Koch's shaping of the divine feminine, the universal metaphor of man's desire and hope, without which one cannot understand his development of the symbols of the masks covering the human personality or of the complementary antagonism of the double worlds, concepts which are discussed in the following chapters. It begins with a look at the potential it offered Koch in his hope for re-enchantment of contemporary culture. Then, after a closer study of the Indian goddesses, it will describe Koch's interpretation of these figures in his novels.

9.2. C. J. Koch's Fascination with the Divine Feminine

In Koch's ontology Asia personifies the feminine forces of the universe—the nurturing mother, faithful wife, inspired sister, relentless seducer, and wicked usurper of masculine roles and prerogatives. This could be construed as rewarmed Orientalist stereotyping, but Koch is drawing on and trying to reassemble ancient associations between the earth and various forms of the Mother Goddess which are at the root of both Eastern and Western cultural traditions, but which have grown infirm in the West. He says that he was fascinated by 'the mysteries and frenzies' of the Greek god Dionysus, associated with vegetation, warm moisture and wine, but that 'the mythology surrounding Hinduism's great goddess became more rewarding than anything in the Greco-Roman pantheon' (Koch, 1987, 12). Koch also found that the figure of Mary, in spite of her mystery of love and intercession for the entire human race, 'left the Western poetic imagination somewhat deprived' by forcing out the older earth goddess whose love and nurturing for man was compensated with blood sacrifice (Koch, 1987, 11). He was especially looking for a vehicle to express his concern with the cultural, spiritual and psychological dualities which blur and invert modern man's perceptions and actions. Dionysus may have been interesting for his double birth, but Koch writes, 'In Hinduism, I had found for

the purposes of metaphor and symbol an entire system based on such dualities, personified by that figure who endlessly dances' (Koch, 1987, 12).

By 'that figure' Koch is primarily talking about Kali, an aspect of the Hindu divine feminine, which is the female aspect of the god Shiva, who is 'the cosmic dancer, the divine lord of destruction' and 'model of ascetic fervor', the archetype of the 'frantic lover and faithful spouse'. Devotion to Shiva is directed to his

> dynamism—this torrential cosmic stream of fleeting evolutions, which is continually producing and wiping out individual existences (this Niagara, of which we are the drops), as it seethes in a roaring, tremendous foam (Zimmer, 1969, 351).

Kali is Shiva's 'eternal female counterpart, his projected energy', who arouses him 'from the timeless contemplation of his own innermost spiritual luminosity' to act as destroyer and creator of the universe (Zimmer, 1969, 141).

This turn to Eastern mythical symbols was entirely appropriate for an Australian writer fascinated with the demise of the British empire and the West's cultural system. Koch writes that he regretted the loss of the European divine feminine, but found that she could be more easily replaced than resuscitated:

> Once as omnipresent as Durga, with names just a various and mysterious, the ancient triple moon goddess of Europe was now a set of figments; she had been reduced to a collection of artefacts in museums, however eloquently Robert Graves might plead for her return. But a very different situation existed in India. There, I found, she was part of a living culture; and discovering her had the impact of the truly strange, and the force of unconscious recognition. She was woman as the incarnation of time and flux and destiny: the Indian counterpart of the White Lady we have banished from our days, but who still haunts our sleep. She was one of those whom the Australian Aborigines have so memorably described as the Eternal Ones of the Dream. (Koch, 1987, 9)

Koch has not abandoned the 'White Lady' of Western tradition. He makes repeated allusions to E. M. Forster's *Passage to India*, for example, which provides important thematic models to Koch, being, as Marjorie McCormick notes, 'much about the cycles of history and the possibilities of new life'. There are the Marabar caves,

> a primeval womb, the reflections of a match light the first conception, birth, and death: 'the two flames approach and strive to unite … the radiance increases, the flames touch one another, kiss, expire' (*PI* 125). The eternal

> cycles of life constitute the pervasive metaphor of this novel (McCormack, 171-72).

And there is Mrs. Moore who, as the novel's personification of the Great Mother Goddess, focuses those cycles of life in the present and 'is able to accept the strong whispers of death that accompany life, even to rejoice in them as necessary aspects of the same process' (McCormack, 173). All of these are, however, heavily outnumbered by the Eastern archetypes as Koch, the personification of eclecticism, has gathered unto himself many metaphors, symbols and myths of East as well as West to compose his new mythology.

Kali appears in some form in all of Koch's Asian novels. As 'Ferry across the Ocean of Existence, womb and tomb, protectress and destroyer, eternal dancer', she is perhaps the most pivotal of Koch's borrowings from Eastern tradition.

> All the shifting subtleties of Hindu thought and vision proved to be embodied in this entity; and her cosmic dance, or 'play' as Ramakrishna called it, could bring pain and joy to humans with equal indifference, since the life force knows no morality, and is of double aspect. (Koch, 1987, 10)

Koch's divine feminine is on one level the beautiful and seductive figure who lures men to their destruction—like the Sirens of Greek mythology. Koch plays teasingly with the allusion in *The Year of Living Dangerously*, where 'the wailing of Sukarno's sirens' (*YLD*, 269) refers literally to the warning sounds of Sukarno's motorcade as he makes his way through the city to visit his girlfriends, and figuratively to the lament of the Sirens—his beautiful Japanese bargirl and other wives, consorts, and indeed all of the feminine land of Indonesia—who have seduced Sukarno, the romantic, idealistic revolutionary poet-hero, into being their *Judistira*, the mythical 'Just Ruler'. Apotheosis as the incarnated Javanese God-King goes beyond human competence, however, and its excesses have proved to be Sukarno's undoing.

In *Across the Sea Wall*, the young, innocent and conventional Robert O'Brien breaks the mould cast for him within the 'Australian Way of Life' by running away into beautiful and erratic Asia with the beautiful and erratic Ilsa Kalnins. Koch wrote that Ilsa was 'a woman too alien, too flamboyant, too much of a troubled spirit' for the limited and unformed young

Australian to cope with (Koch, 1987, 12), a description which could be applied to India as well.

O'Brien had no intention of going to India—he was indeed running away from Australia, but only for the traditional Aussi pilgrimage to ancestral Europe in search of adventure and identity. Yet, he is carried away by the exotic enticements of India and Ilsa. He is enthralled by India's (and Ilsa's) beauty, intrigued by its sense of self and spirituality, shocked by its poverty, oppressed by its heat, and finally physically overcome by its tropical diseases. He finds himself incapable of leaving India or Ilsa, even to save his life, and would surely die there if not brought finally into the mountains to recuperate in the cool, pure air outside the reach of the beggars and the overcrowded, aggressive life of the lowlands, and out of the reach of Ilsa.

The mountains are the realm of the gods, especially of Shiva, who retreats there to accumulate *sakti*, life force, and of his consort and alter ego, the goddess Parvati, the universal mother aspect of the divine feminine. Together Shiva—with Brahma and Vishnu, one of the three supreme gods in the Hindu iconography—and Parvati—a complex personality with many faces and roles—are manifestations of the cyclical force of destruction and re-creation. This cycle is elemental to Asian philosophies, as it was to many, especially ancient, pre-Christian, and medieval, Western philosophies before being overwhelmed by the linear Christian and Darwinist concepts of cosmic development. It is experiencing a resurgence in many post-modern philosophies in the West, including those described in David Tacey's *The Edge of the Sacred*, reacting against the modernist vision of the bleak oblivion at the logical conclusion of a human history which lacks the hope of deviating from an abysmal progression into desolation. Christopher Koch is taking an active part in articulating a new, particularly Australian form of the circular course of history.

The universal, divine mother figure reappears in Koch's Indonesian landscape, which is idealised as a land of milk and honey. When Hamilton ventures into the Javanese highlands, he finds 'a vast patchwork of lawn-green and gold rice fields, like the parklands of a *wayang*

prince', where the brilliant panorama of colour, 'violet, marching volcanoes, jade paddy fields, orange flame trees' are more vivid than in any natural world. This, however, is a Paradise on the surface; just underneath—or, to continue with the *Alice* metaphor, on the other side of that mirror-thin surface—lies Hell. Even the uninitiated Hamilton perceives the duality of the countryside, where

> girls clothed like butterflies swung crescent-shaped knives, harvesting; and they palmed these knives discreetly, so as not to offend Dewi Sri, the Goddess of Rice.
>
> Covert violence, he knew, was stitched into every acre of this tapestry of peace. (*YLD*, 198-199)

There is no contradiction posed by the polarity in this scene. Such subjective judgements as to good and evil are tendencies of Western relativism, whereas in Asian philosophy violence is an integral part of the harvest which provides nourishment for all humanity. This is perhaps the most striking point of divergence between the Sirens of Greek mythology and their Asian cousins. The explanation for the divergence is found in the essential Asian concept of the relationship between the goddess and the cycle of creation and destruction:

> As Saraswati she is the symbol of learning and culture. In her manifestation as Laksmi she represents good fortune, wealth and luxury. When she is Kali or Durga people both fear and respect her. In this aspect she is capable of great vengeance against those who would cross her. Kali demands blood sacrifices to symbolize her strength as the arch enemy of the demons. As Sitala the goddess is able to either cause or cure diseases, particularly smallpox and cholera. Then there are the many small *gramdevis* (village goddesses) found in most Indian villages. Here the goddess is mother of her people, protecting India's vulnerable villages from enemies and natural disasters. (Preston, 10)

Koch's profound concern with the divine feminine stems from his search for a new mythology which will reconcile the real, scientific world man has built and the sense of cultural identity which he can only find in his civilisation. In this, Koch shares the thinking of Northrop Frye, who writes that man is continuously creating a second, mythical world out of his environment. This 'is where our values and desires and hopes and ideals belong, and this world is always geocentric, always anthropocentric, always centered on man and man's

concerns' (Frye, 88-89). A central figure in the hopes and desires of human culture has always been the divine feminine.

9.3. Parvati and Durga: Good Wife, Nourishing Mother, Formidable Protectress

The Eastern counterpart of the West's mythological female figures, from Venus/Aphrodite to the Sirens to Medusa and the Amazons, is the formidable Indian goddess, known as Parvati in her primary, ideal mother figure. Parvati was created by the gods to seduce the reclusive god Shiva out of his ascetic withdrawal in order to engender a child who would be able to defeat a demon who had usurped the gods' power. Shiva later asked Parvati to kill another demon named Durga, who threatened the world. This act established her reputation as a powerful warrior goddess, and also earned her the name of her vanquished foe. As a manifestation of one aspect of the universal mother's personality, the role of Durga, a female warrior of superior power created to deal with a cosmic crisis, is illuminated in the most famous story of her origin. A demon, Mahisa, was promised a boon by the gods for performing heroic deeds. Mahisa demanded invincibility against any male, and then, in a common theme in the Hindu texts, proceeded to defeat the gods and usurp the power of the universe. The gods then created Durga out of the 'fiery energies' of their collective anger:

> This great mass of light and strength congealed into the body of a beautiful woman, whose splendor spread through the universe. The parts of her body were formed from the male gods. Her face was formed from Shiva, her hair from Yama, her arms from Vishnu, and so on. Similarly, each of the male deities from whom she had been created gave her a weapon. Shiva gave her his trident, Vishnu gave her his *cakra* (a discus-like weapon), Vayu his bow and arrows, and so on. Equipped by the gods and supplied by the god Himalaya with a lion as her vehicle, Durga, the embodied strength of the gods, then roared mightily, causing the earth to shake. (Kinsley, 96-97)

Thus equipped, Durga proceeds to slay Mahisa, who can hardly believe that a woman is capable of anything but love. This magnificent goddess of irresistible might is also sexually irresistible to her adversaries. Like Mahisa, they are typically enamoured with her, do not expect her to be their match in battle, and offer marriage to her as they are lured to their deaths, just as the seafarers are helplessly drawn onto the rocks by the Greek Sirens.

An important element in the relevance of Durga to the Australian experience—and the major distinction with the Sirens, who were never more than fringe elements in the Greek mythology—is in this supremacy of a female goddess in a male-dominated cosmos. The Aryans who moved into India were already a paternalistic society, and the warrior goddess Durga seems to come out of the pre-Aryan cultures, and to have subsisted on the fringes of Aryan establishment throughout the millennia of Aryan supremacy. She developed as a wild goddess associated with such non-Aryan practices as drinking liquor and blood, and eating meat. Yet, she was incorporated into the establishment pantheon in medieval Hinduism, where she became something of a female version of Vishnu, protecting the cosmos and order of truth from demons, who are manifestations of ignorance and darkness. Durga then carried on the old matriarchal tradition, 'which eventually leavened the male-dominated Vedic pantheon with several goddesses associated with power, blood, and battle' (Kinsley, 96).

This would make Durga an excellent candidate for the restoration, described by Tacey, of the divine feminine to a role it had in many prehistoric Caucasian societies. This is particularly true in Australia, where the patriarchal forces in society have held sway through the two centuries of European experience there but exist alongside the Aboriginal societies which have maintained strong matriarchal customs and myths. Koch is breaking out of the stereotypical mode of such as Henry Handle Richardson's Polly, who is representative of many Australian women in that she is the *de facto* dominant personality in her household in *The Fortunes of Richard Mahoney*, but who respects the conventional female role by deferring to her far weaker husband, and letting him pretend that her good counsel is his own. Polly does resemble Parvati in as far as she is a nourishing mother, a faithful wife, and, figuratively at least, an inspired sister, but being strong-willed, industrious and discrete are qualities of such a thoroughly Western colonial woman. She is no seducer, and, strong as she is, Polly hardly has any personality at all separate from that which is defined by her home, her husband, and the patriarchal society in which she lives. Accomplishing her heroic victories without the help or protection of a male deity, Durga stands in challenge to this Western stereotype (whose

correspondent is nevertheless imposed on the woman in Hindu society). Durga does not perform household duties, is not submissive to a man, and excels in the traditional male domain of battle.

9.4. Kali: the Great Dancer of Creation and Destruction

The third important manifestation of the Eastern divine feminine is Kali. Parvati is sometimes called Kali, 'the dark one', because of her dark complexion. Parvati, Kali and Durga are treated separately in the Hindu texts, yet the three are taken as manifestations of the same goddess. Parvati is the universal mother, Durga, her warrior-queen aspect, and Kali, her especially ferocious guise as cosmic guardian. In *Across the Sea Wall*, the Indian, Sunder, who accompanies O'Brien and Ilsa into India, describes Kali in terms familiar to descriptions of Parvati and Durga, but he stresses emphatically the vicious mask of this embodiment of the universal mother. He says that Kali is

> the cruelest of all—and yet she's an aspect of Shiva, who's good. She's his female aspect, you see: she's the power of creation. But she's also action; and action can mean mischief. Kali doesn't care: joyful action or destruction, it's all the same to her; it's life, and life is Kali's dance. She wears a necklace of skulls, and her dance never ends: she's the goddess of Time, she's the destroyer, and yet her worshippers pray to her for children and protection. She's mother as well as destroyer, you see (*ASW*, 72).

The personification of Parvati's wrath, Kali, whose name means 'black', is indeed black-skinned, either goes naked or wearing only a tiger or elephant skin and a garland of human heads, and wields a skull-topped staff. Though sometimes described, like Parvati, as beautiful, Kali is often depicted as a wild animal,

> gaunt, with sunken eyes, gaping mouth, and lolling tongue. She roars loudly and leaps into the battle, where she tears demons apart with her hands and crushes them in her jaws (Kinsley, 118).

The bloodthirstiness of Kali is an especially important quality of the Asian concept of the divine feminine. In one story, Durga is fighting a demon but finds that every time she wounds him the drops of his blood falling to the ground turn into duplicates of him. Durga is stymied by this quickly multiplying adversary until Kali springs from her forehead, sucks the demon's body dry of blood, then gobbles up all of his duplicates (Kinsley, 118).

This becomes Koch's most terrifying visualisation of the universal order overthrown. It is midnight, *Tengah Malam*, the time of the reign of the black forces. Kali is a force for universal stability, but is known to become so intoxicated with the blood of demons that she threatens the entire world, and must be calmed by Shiva. This bloodthirstiness is extremely antithetical to civilised Hindu society, and so Kali is closely associated with the lower castes and with those who live outside civilised areas. Her temples are built outside of towns and villages or near cremation grounds. In *The Year of Living Dangerously*, the domain of the goddess Christopher Koch honours by calling her Maha-Kali, 'Great Kali', is the cemetery, and her blood-lust, whetted by the killing of the Communist demons, must be quenched with innocent blood before she ceases her dance of death:

> Out there, at this deepest hour of night, Maha-Kali dances: she of many names, all of which mean Time.
>
> In a few more weeks she will caper in the paddy fields of Java …She will have blood enough then to suit her …. First the PKI will be hunted down; then, as the lust of Durga takes hold, the Indonesian Chinese; then, anyone with whom one has a score to pay—man, woman, or child.
>
> … In circles of lanterns in the paddy fields at night, the cane-knives will chop and chop at figures tied to trees; and trucks will carry loads of human heads—all pleasing to the dancer at the cemetery. (*YLD*, 293)

David Tacey discusses the Australian sense of the significance of blood in spiritual renewal. The new spirit he heralds is scarlet with the blood of instinct, passion and sacrifice of Australian heroes and villains alike. Mike Langford, Guy Hamilton, and Billy Kwan follow in a long line of Australian heroes who must give blood to satisfy this spirit.

> Sacrifices to the *other* in whichever form we acknowledge it must be made by the living. We will have to sacrifice our pride, our arrogance, our hubris, before the old spirit can be allowed to merge with nature and revivify the natural world. (Tacey, 206)

Guy Hamilton gets off with the sacrifice of one eye, but is only beginning his spiritual 're-enchantment'. Billy Kwan almost seems to know more will be expected of him, terrified as he is of the cemetery and Kali's presence there which makes it the symbol of everything which torments him:

> Her presence in the graveyard confronts us with our own death and loneliness, the pain and suffering of all creatures, the violence and spitefulness of human beings, and the piteous condition of all created existence. (Koller, 237)

Yet, Kwan is described as if entering paradise when he sacrifices his life to Kali's ravenous thirst for blood (*YLD*, 248). Ray Barton claims that Langford, after his journey through the Land of Dis and into the hellish Kampuchea of the Khmer Rouge which ends with his crucifixion, has reached 'home' (*HW*, 451), signifying clearly a form of spiritual renewal which, in the Eastern terms Koch is working with, includes not only himself but the entire created cosmos.

9.5. Ilsa Kalnins' Micro-Cosmic Dance

Ilsa Kalnins professes undying love for Robert O'Brien in *Across the Sea Wall*, but he expects only something more docile like that given by Polly to Richard Mahoney. Instead, he finds a mutative double-woman, both creative and destructive, passionate and violent, male and female. She can be Parvati, the Protectress and good wife, and this is what she offers him at the novel's end (*ASW*, 140), but as her name, Kalnins, indicates, she is often Kali. She is the 'Maternal whore, loose in the universe, her destruction and creation all play'. When she makes love to O'Brien, she is 'impaled in triumphant intercourse' (*ASW*, 114) sitting astride him, who is but the 'pale' consort (Cowie, 86). Michael, Ilsa's dance manager who brings him to the mountains to recuperate, makes sure there can be no misunderstanding who Ilsa is: 'She is a woman who roams the world like a warrior. She is a creature whose sex is both powerful and weak: she is both female and male' (*ASW*, 129).

O'Brien observes Ilsa sleeping beside him; perceiving her according to the Orientalist stereotypes which are natural to him. She is the very image of the exotic and unknown, and he senses so many of the discrepancies in her and yet is not consciously aware just how deep the waters are on the other side of the sea wall he has been preparing to cross:

> He stared at her sleeping face, as he so often did, half expecting it to be simplified into innocence. Smooth, unlined, youthfully puffed with sleep, it looked more foreign in unconsciousness—more Russian. And it baffled him by appearing childish, but not innocent; female, but not feminine. It was essentially harsh, this smooth face; he could imagine it cynically and phlegmatically contemplating violence and killing; and perhaps it had, since she had gone through the war. She was so alien to him! The thrust of her lips, the slant of her eyes, were almost brutal. But he loved her, as she slept; what he felt now was perhaps simple enough to be given that name. (*ASW*, 88)

This woman of contradictions embodies all of O'Brien's fantasies of the 'Otherworld'. She is Parvati, Durga and Kali all at once, the mother, warrior and destroyer, and, whether he like it or not, to her he is instinctively, uncontrollably drawn. O'Brien finds repelling contradictions in the mother-protector figure. Though her breasts ache with milk, she has deserted her child, and is, in O'Brien's view, sickly sentimental and capable of great cruelty (Tiffin, 1982, 330).

Both Ilsa and Kali combine contradictory traits into one irresistible personality, which seems to offer to O'Brien what a more Western figure, built on concepts of 'polar opposites', cannot, namely to 'reconcile contradictory attitudes in the colonial that fret him'. Ilsa is, like Kali, a dancer whose dance is the *lila* of creation and destruction. They are both weavers 'of a world of magic illusion'—*maya*, in Hindu terms, the illusion which is the created cosmos. Yet, as O'Brien learns, Ilsa is best seen as the European goddess who dances an illusion which no longer suits his world:

> In the colonial imagination Europe dances before the colonial to weave the illusion of its reality that in one sense renders the colonial's own world a world of shadows. (Tiffin, 1982, 331)

Ilsa's dance destroys the illusion of their 'marriage' when he tries to forbid her to perform a strip-tease, but Ilsa's identity-shirking irritates the identity-seeking O'Brien far more deeply than that. Kali is associated with *akasa*, a concept Koch mentions in *Crossing the Gap*. He writes of discovering Kali's 'identification with infinity: *akasa*, the void', a dualistic concept which he puts among 'the fullest revelation of her mysteries' (Koch, 1987, 8). *Akasa* has a double sense in Sanskrit. It is 'an all-comprehending container, enclosing not only the universe (*loka*), but also the non-universe (*aloka*)' (Zimmer, 1969, 270). It is also the 'brilliant spiritual space' which 'abides within' the individual self, and contributes to the shared identity between the individual and the 'pure Self' (Zimmer, 1969, 430). Helen Tiffin points out that naïve O'Brien has doubts about his venture into the world, and is 'terrified of the striptease which will expose the void in his idea of existence' (Tiffin, 1982, 332).

Koch is mixing his mythological symbols in Ilsa, who, as the abandoned European goddess, is ironically representative of the European culture which has abandoned Australia.

O'Brien unwillingly discovers through Ilsa that he cannot find his identity in Europe, which has lost its ability to nurture, protect and discipline its children, but finds that in India the powerful goddess lives:

> Though he literally drinks the milk from her breasts, he can neither absorb the magic experience from her nor find the security that image might suggest. Europe has rejected her 'children' and can never supply the maternal security her colonials expect even as they rebel against being mothered by her. (Tiffin, 1982, 330)

O'Brien eventually realises that Ilsa is incapable of the love he believes he needs and that she is doomed to remain forever a person on the fringe of society. Ilsa, the East European war refugee, is living the life of an avant-garde artist though she manages it by performing barely above the level of a whore. This is Koch's intriguing image of the European divine feminine, who so very closely corresponds to the Hindu goddess of creation and destruction but who has been rejected by Western culture.

9.6. Ly Keang, Koch's Female Warrior

Ly Keang of *Highways to a War* fits Durga's solitary female warrior image far better than any of the other female characters in Koch's novels, but also retains Western aspects of the divine feminine. She takes Mike Langford as her lover, gaining from him access to the war otherwise denied to women, and giving him new access to the profound feelings of love he had long since repressed. She is the very epitome of projected energy, but is believed by Volkov to have been a virgin until her relationship with Langford. When Langford begins thinking about marriage and children, a life which would be antithetical to his own chosen path in life as well as hers, Keang rebukes him. Kinsley, noting how Durga does not stand in support of any man, provides a clue to Ly Keang's intransigence:

> Durga does not lend her power or *sakti* to a male consort but rather takes power from the male gods in order to perform her own heroic exploits. They give up their inner strength, fire, and heat to create her and in so doing surrender their potency to her. (Kinsley, 97)

Keang gains her power through her relationships, and alters the behaviour of her men. Like Ilsa Kalnins, Keang lives outside social norms and, at a time when everyone else is becoming despondent about the crumbling situation in Cambodia, provides a vision of reality

which, corresponding precisely to a Kinsley description of Durga, is ‘refreshing and socially invigorating’ (Kinsley, 99). Volkov calls her ‘a young woman of spirit, who will do anything’ (*HW*, 266), and she has a reputation of always maintaining a light-hearted attitude in spite of the dire circumstances of her country. Keang becomes the alter ego to Langford, releasing him from his inhibitions, as Madame Phan puts it, ‘to commence living the life you were meant for' (*HW*, 129). This is the role Parvati/Durga plays for Shiva, and like Parvati and Koch’s other Parvati figures, Ly Keang does not allow Langford either to draw on her power or to alter her behaviour. Nevertheless, Koch has written more Eastern symbolism into Keang’s character, and she will be further discussed in following sections.

9.7. Dream, Sleep and the Creative Act

The Asian feminine figure, like Keang who induces Langford finally to take up arms in the fight against the Khmer Rouge, performs this complementary role to the male, without which he would be unable to act. Another version from Hindu mythology of the origin of Durga is that she arises from the god Vishnu ‘as the power that makes him sleep or as his magical, creative power’. When the cosmos is threatened by two powerful demons, the god Brahma orders her to leave the sleeping Vishnu so that he will awake and defeat the demons (Kinsley, 96). This Hindu association between dream and creative power, along with the other dichotomous concepts germane to the divine feminine in both East and West—of time and eternity, death and rebirth, destruction and re-creation—underpins Koch’s vision of the world.

The feminine figure is integral to the masculine figure in a *yin-yang* relationship whereby the feminine represents the active, creative power of dream and sleep. Parvati is the kinetic force, the *sakti*, the projected energy, of the ascetic male figure, Shiva, who would remain secluded in his mountain retreat and meditate, a static force, building up and retaining his energy. The world would literally run out of steam except for the will of Parvati, who entices him to come out into the world and perform his dance of creation. Joseph Campbell writes of this essential division, which he compares to the biblical metaphor of Eve as Adam’s rib, in his editorial note to *Philosophies of India*:

> Male and female, god and goddess, are the polar manifestations (passive and active, respectively) of a single transcendent principle and, as such, in essence one, though in appearance two. The male is identified with eternity, the female with time, and their embrace with the mystery of creation (Zimmer, 1969, 62n).

Billy Kwan remarks how Arjuna, like Shiva or any yogi, builds up his 'spirit power'—his *sakti*—through meditation, and that this causes 'a turmoil in nature' (*YLD*, 81). Without the ordering effects of the female counterpart to the male figure, the turmoil would be merely destructive and not preparatory to re-creation. The 'dancer at the cemetery' performs a cathartic dance which is necessary to transform the restrained masculine heat and energy through the workings of feminine Time, the destroyer, into a creative act. This explains the genesis of the goddess Durga out of the heat and light of Vishnu, as well as many of the subtle, ambiguous images in Koch's novels.

So long as the feminine part inhabits the psyche, the 'owner' of the psyche—to use a Hindu manner of expressing the concept roughly equivalent to that which the West would call the 'person', but with all the masking elements of the 'persona' removed—will remain passive and contemplative. As in the case of Durga leaving the psyche of Vishnu so that he will awaken, or of Parvati manifesting herself to provoke Shiva out of his ascetic meditations, the feminine element of the psyche must separate itself from the masculine element in order to serve its role as the provocative force in the personality. Only under such influence of the expressed feminine element will the masculine figure sway from his endless—and eventually dangerous—building up of passive psychic energy.

Ly Keang plays the Durga role for Mike Langford. She is unmarried, though already rather old for a single Cambodian woman, so that she can fight against the Khmer Rouge and gain revenge for their murder of her father (*HW*, 376). This also permits her to entice Langford out of his journalistic indifference to active participation in the war.

The feminine figure who projects the pent up energy of Billy Kwan and provokes him to act is Ibu, the poor, illiterate woman who lures him into the *Pasar Baru*. This is the shadowy, indigenous quarter which is described in *wayang kulit* terms, endowing it with the *wayang*'s

magic and mystery, where the '*gamalan* music runs on in the steady heat, and the shadows of the card-players on the plank walkway loom to giant size, sway alarmingly, or flatten into nothing' (*YLD*, 126). Billy calls Ibu 'a nullity—a vacuum', when he describes her total, oblivious lack of attachment to the world, yet he simultaneously recognises the feminine ideal in her connected with *akasa*, the 'void', saying 'with what dignity she holds herself together around that vacuum'(*YLD*, 129). Cookie describes photos Billy took of Ibu, including one 'touching and strangely awe-inspiring, shot against the hut's dark interior, and lit from below'. She is 'entirely Asian, more Indian than Indonesian, uncannily like a piece of Hindu temple sculpture: a stone female divinity'. The image is possessed by an eerie double spirit, a synthesis of *alus* and *kasar* qualities, of good and evil, of life and death, which only from a Western perspective would be called ironic. Its 'offered breast looks ponderous enough for stone, and the sickly infant, its eyes closed, appears to be swooning away from the black fruit of the nipple as though from an abundance it cannot bear' (*YLD*, 127). Billy has written below this picture, 'Ibu is Durga incarnate: she is life' (*YLD*, 128).

As creation is linked with destruction, so Durga, who Billy calls life, is also the 'Black goddess' of death. This Ibu/Durga figure is the motivation for Billy to transform thought into force. That the provoked act is necessarily going to be both creative and destructive is essential to Eastern images, and is further reflected in its goddesses, who are, depending on the flow of time, either associated with the earth, fertility and beauty, or death, destruction and ugliness.

9.8. Vera: Billy Kwan's White Sister of Bliss and Disorder

In *The Year of Living Dangerously*, the Russian Vera Chostiakov is a sort of Cold War version of Durga, worked in the materials of a *wayang* puppet. She has the shadow-puppet features of a short upper lip which almost disappears under her narrow, elongated nose, emphatic cheek-bones, a pointed chin, projecting ears, and an unusually thin neck (*YLD*, 162-63). When she visits Hamilton in his hotel room in Bandung, her face grows 'smaller and smaller, until it was the size of a tennis ball', and then grows 'immensely large' (*YLD*, 209), a

characteristic technique of the *wayang kulit* created by changing the puppet's relative position between the screen and light source. Hamilton imagines she has drugged him, though he is perhaps only exhausted and exhilarated after his scrape with death while covering the PKI's Long March. He takes this scene as coming out of a James Bond spy novel, and expects to be tortured by Vera's chauffeur. This fits Hamilton's view of the world, but heightens the farcical aspects of what is very much in the comical style of the *wayang* or an adventure in Wonderland. This clown-figure also resembles a mischievous Javanese or Celtic spirit, or a Shakespearean Puck whose 'unsexing, skull-like' bathing cap 'emphasised the pixy mask of malicious amusement' (*YLD*, 170).

Her Asian eyes, however, are not an earthy, Celtic tone like the green leprechaun eyes which give Billy Kwan a warmness his physical presence otherwise lacks, but are 'blank as glass', a distinctive characteristic of the 'Other' shared with the Indonesians. Her laughter after nearly drowning Hamilton is sadistic and 'distorted her face so that she became almost ugly'. Her long hair falls in 'switches'. Her unshaved arms repel Hamilton, who calls them 'nests of copper hair' (*YLD*, 170), as if she were a Medusa, harbouring in the murky, green water broods of copperhead snakes.

Vera is, however, far more dangerous and complex than Medusa. She is white like Alice's White Rabbit, yet referred to by Cookie as a 'shadow' (*YLD*, 210). She recalls Ilsa of *Across the Sea Wall* in her overwhelming attractive force. It is this Siren-like quality which closely associates her with the bronze nymph of the Oasis pool which appears to Hamilton with a 'dreamlike effect' as he is pulling hard to keep up in a race with Colonel Henderson. Hamilton sees this green bronze nymph, a symbol of the Asian women who are idealised for their elegance, dignity and creative strength, sitting on the end of the pool, watching him along with the crowd, urging the swimmers on, not yet showing her cane knife of fertility and death.

Kwan plumbs the depth of these recondite symbols, writing of Vera: 'It's a daughter of Durga! Every line of that body (corpse-white, as those of the red-haired always are) betrays a daughter of the Drinker of Blood' (*YLD*, 183). The Black Goddess is the ultimate creative,

maternal force in Hindu philosophy, and is comparable to the Black Madonna of Christianity, who identified her universal pre-eminence in her appearance in Guadeloupe saying not that she is the mother of Christ but the mother of God. This is an extremely powerful symbol in both Eastern and Western traditions, and working with the Asian concept of reality, whose circularity requires destruction alongside re-creation, Billy Kwan can play with both images of Durga, in one breath calling her 'Night of Doomsday' and in another saying 'she is life'.

Just what Billy makes out of Vera Chostiakov is much more straightforward, and by the 'red-haired' Billy surely means the Russians. Billy's hatred of Communists is no secret. The only red-haired character in the novel is the degenerate Canadian, Pete Curtis, who merits Billy's charge of 'sad lechery' (*YLD*, 183). Vera represents elements of both to Billy—a Communist and sexual rival of his Jill Bryant. The 'Drinker of Blood' image is somewhat more problematic. It could refer to many societies who have practised blood sacrifice, including any of the old, Western societies like the Aryans, who moved into India 3000 years ago, or the Thugs, the radical, secretive cult devoted to Durga, but also including the mystical sacrifice of the Christian churches, including the Roman Catholic and Russian Orthodox churches. Equally ambiguous is the verb 'betrays'. 'To reveal against one's desire or will' seems to fit the context of identifying just who Vera really is. 'To lead astray; deceive' is, nevertheless, neither ungrammatical nor senseless, and in this case the Drinker of Blood would be Jill Bryant, idealised as the good, Christian, Anglo-Saxon girl. One would have to ascertain which mask Billy (or Christopher Koch) was wearing when he wrote this entry to discover his meanings. A hint may be that at the end Billy's hope, for Indonesia at least, lies in the triumph of the Moslems. And yet, Vera does serve the tangled actions of Durga. Billy's dossier entry,

> Durga! Uma! Kali! You of many names: Time, and Sleep, and the Night of Doomsday! You who offer bliss, and dark disorder! You who soothe our fears, but put them back! You who doom us even with your play! Swollen world-nurse! Hag of death! Dance your fearsome lila! (*YLD*, 183),

is a glorification of Durga, not an attack against her. Billy expresses clearly his fear of the 'corpse-white' Vera who puts Jill Bryant's happiness at risk, but, as 'a daughter of Durga', he

must understand Vera's role in Durga's complex pursuit of purposes which are his own—destroying the old, cold Hamilton, and creating the new, loving one.

Hamilton does not know quite how to react to Vera, and lets himself be drawn to this mysterious female. While Hamilton and Kumar talk at poolside, Vera retreats for some solitary meditation. Then, when Kumar goes in for his nap, she dives into the dark water of the pool. When she does not resurface, Hamilton finally becomes alarmed, and dives in after her. He finds her 'hanging limply in the green', as if she had become part of the aquatic vegetation of the unkempt colonial-era pool, goes to take her arm and pull her up. Vera suddenly rolls over toward him 'like a thing in a dream', opens her eyes and widely smiles. Then, again like a snake, 'uncoiling her white length', she kicks back to the surface. He follows, only to find himself held under firmly by the hair. Badly needing air, he seizes her wrist with all his force and frees himself. Vera then proceeds to make Hamilton feel guilty for reacting forcefully to her 'joke', and, reaching up to hold him in a clear gesture of sexual invitation, she proposes that they meet later in Jakarta.

Vera finally remains an enigmatic figure. As an image of Durga/Kali, the Black Goddess who is continuously dancing creation and destruction, she awakening in Hamilton a lust for life he has repressed, yet leading him away from Jill Bryant and down a road filled with the risk he relishes. She can also be described as the White Rabbit who piques in Hamilton the curiosity to follow her down the hole into her Wonderland. In fact, the dream which is so important to his psychological development, involving the Wonderlandish tunnel with many closed doors, comes just after the pool encounter with Vera.

As a Siren, Vera's call is irresistible to Hamilton. She offers him the sense of risk he hungers for, and Hamilton says, 'It's like meeting someone from the moon', by which he means 'someone not quite real', someone from the looking-glass world. Cookie says that Hamilton's obsession with such a mysterious netherworld is 'the most seductive idea of all'. 'Few of us consciously make contact with that sub-world of espionage which is the myth kingdom of our century' (*YLD*, 186), he says. Yet, she is more than a Siren or Kali-figure. In

a singular reference, Koch has cited the Goddess Uma (*YLD*, 183) when describing her. Uma is a common name for Parvati, the Goddess in her Mother and Good Wife aspect, whose earliest appearance in Hindu literature, Kinsley writes, is in the *Kena-upanishad*.

> Her primary role in this text is that of a mediator who reveals the knowledge of *Brahman* to the gods. She appears in the text suddenly, and as suddenly disappears. (Kinsley, 36)

Vera likewise appears, seems to be of considerable importance, and then entirely and without explanation disappears from Koch's novel—normally a technical fault of a modern writer, but fully in accord with Uma in the *Upanishads*. This prototype also points out some resemblances between Vera and Billy Kwan. There is the multiplicity of their masks, but more importantly is the way both function as mediators of knowledge. Kwan teaches Hamilton in particular and the world in general; Vera, as Russian agent apparently is a professional information collector, who also provokes Hamilton to take count of the information Kwan has been giving him. As this information is about creation and destruction, the dualities of reality, righteous action and thought, and the true self, it is no accident that Koch has chosen to name her 'Truth'. And yet, Vera, like Kwan, and like the closer relationship between the two which Koch fleetingly hints at, disappears from the scene all too quickly. This, in the end, is one *wayang kulit* puppet character who, as Cookie decides, is and must ever remain a shadow.

9.9. Sri Lakshmi

The goddess Koch first mentions in *The Year of Living Dangerously* under the name of Sri Dewi, the Goddess of Rice, returns in *Highways to a War* to play her traditional role, which encompasses not only that of the Parvati-Durga-Kali triumvirate but also replaces the functions of the supreme gods Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva. This goddess, Sri, Sri-Laksmi, or most commonly Lakshmi, is one of the most popular goddesses in Hindu mythology, perhaps because she is associated with fertility, physical health, life-giving rain, the blossoming of organic life, and overall prosperity. Her name, *Sri*, denotes capability, power, and advantageous skills, all important qualities in a fertility goddess. She is also associated with kingship, provides the qualities of power and majesty which are associated with the king, and

her qualities of beauty, lustre, glory, and high rank make her a model Hindu wife. She is especially known as the wife of Vishnu the Preserver, the god who is reincarnated in the *avatara* myths to rid the Triple World of demons who usurp the power of the gods, and to restore *dharma*.

As the goddess of good fortune, she is said to bestow fame and prosperity by her presence, though her departure is signalled by a bad turn of fortune. Mike Langford is intimately associated with Lakshmi at a time when he seems blessed while all around him is crumbling, when he is known by the sobriquet 'the Lucky One'. He considers his Lakshmi-figure his good luck charm. Lakshmi does, however, have a reputation for fickleness and inconstancy. When Ly Keang notices this figure and says, 'it is a shame she has a broken arm' (*HW*, 269), it reflects her refusal to behave according to the model of Sri Lakshmi, who as the consort of Vishnu is the ideal, submissive wife. More significantly, however, it also is a signal that Langford's luck has changed. The time has come for Kali to appear in Lakshmi's place.

This fickle aspect is said to dissipate when Sri Lakshmi is with Vishnu, and yet her comings and goings parallel Visnu's. Both are said to be present when righteous kings rule and dharmic order is maintained in the world. When Sri Lakshmi departs, however, the adharmic effects are immediate, as

> sacrifices cease to be performed, all austerities are discontinued by the sages, all generosity ends, the sun and moon lose their brilliance, the gods lose their strength, and fire loses its heat (Kinsley, 27).

An avatar of Vishnu must then return to the earth to battle the forces of *adharma*. While Vishnu is given due credit as the great warrior-preserver of the universe, the restoration of righteousness to the cosmos is seen as a sign that Sri Lakshmi has, quite simply, come back:

> In the absence of the goddess the worlds become dull and lustreless and begin to wither away. When she returns, the worlds again regain their vitality, and the society of humans and the order of the gods regain their sense of purpose and duty. (Kinsley, 27)

This transcendence of particular qualities, whereby her simple presence restores *dharma*, places Sri Lakshmi clearly beyond the scope of other deities, who are themselves—with the exception of the one ultimate creator—all created beings. As such she is associated with the

lotus, the symbol of the entire created universe. The lotus represents the 'growing, expanding world imbued with vigorous fertile power', and Sri Lakshmi 'is the nectar (the *rasa*) of creation which lends to creation its distinctive flavour and beauty. Organic life, impelled as it is by this mysterious power, flowers richly and beautifully in the creative processes of the world' (Kinsley, 21). Associated with moist, rich soil, and worshipped in villages in the form of cow dung, she assumes the lotus' attributes of purity and spiritual power: 'Rooted in the mud but blossoming above the water, completely uncontaminated by the mud, the lotus represents spiritual perfection and authority' (Kinsley, 21). The Buddha, gods and bodhisattvas are often pictured seated on a lotus blossom, and Sri Lakshmi is then associated with more then the fertility of the moist earth. 'She suggests a perfection or state of refinement that transcends the material world' (Kinsley 21).

Whenever Vishnu is reincarnated as a mortal *avatara*, Lakshmi accompanies him in her role as his helper in the protection of *dharma* (Kinsley, 28). Associated as she is with social order and decorum, Lakshmi's presence heralds righteous behaviour, orderly conduct, and correct social observance, including cleanliness, truthfulness and generosity. Lakshmi and Vishnu provide an intimate 'picture of marital contentment, domestic order, and satisfying cooperation and beneficial interdependence between male and female'.

> The intimacy of the two, indeed, their underlying unity, is dramatically shown in images in which they are merged into one bisexual figure, Vishnu constituting the right half of the figure and Laksmi the left. The interdependence of the two is the subject of a long passage in the *Vishnu-purana*. There Vishnu is said to be speech and Laksmi meaning; he is understanding, she is intellect; he is the creator, she is the creation; she is the earth, he is the support of the earth; she is a creeping vine, he is the tree to which she clings; he is one with all males, and she is one with all females; he is love, and she is pleasure (1.8.15 ff.). (Kinsley, 29)

In the Pancaratra school of modern Hinduism, Lakshmi has assumed a far more important role as the *sakti* of Vishnu. Mirroring the older tradition of Shiva and Parvati, Vishnu, the ultimate creator of the universe, awakens Lakshmi at the end of the night of dissolution, who then assumes the role of 'builder' of the cosmos for which he is simply the 'architect'. She acts according to his wishes, but does so alone, effectively assuming 'the

position of the supreme divine principle, the underlying reality upon which all rests, that which pervades all creation with vitality, will, and consciousness'. Finally, as the dispenser of grace, final bestower of liberation, and ultimately the one by whose activity the universe is dissolved, she has replaced the three great male gods of the Hindu pantheon, Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva (Kinsley, 30).

The goddess' role is determined by her relationship with her male counterpart. Parvati is the ideal wife, but as the bloodthirsty hag Kali she is 'a representation of the aggressive potential of the female when she becomes dominant', and both are positive qualities:

> Not only are the goddesses capable of love and nurturance, they are also a source of justice, playing an important role in the constant struggle between good and evil which permeates the condition of man. (Preston, 12)

In *The Year of Living Dangerously* Lakshmi appears in her destructive form, first in the *wayang kulit* which Guy Hamilton happens to see.

> A lacy, feminine shape with an elaborate head-dress flitted on the screen: when Hamilton asked who she was, the moustached man said it was Dewi Sri; she brought the harvest, he said. I was puzzled to know what the rice Goddess was doing in this sequence of the Pandava cycle; but strange things happen in the *wayang*, and Hamilton insisted that this was how she was identified; she seems to have caught his imagination. (*YLD*, 204)

Hamilton does not get the connection between fertility and destruction which underlies the story of the Pandavas, though Koch subtly infers this by immediately bringing the *femme fatale* Vera on stage. Hamilton must choose between Jill Bryant, who is carrying his child, and Vera, who represents for him his philosophy of emotional detachment, both of whom thus symbolise aspects of Lakshmi. Despite her promotion to undertake each of the parts in the creation-destruction cycle, however, 'Laksmi retains her essential character as a dynamic, positive force that underlies growth, fertility, and prosperity' (Kinsley, 31), which Koch reaffirms by having Hamilton make the dharmic choice of going back to Jill.

9.10. The *Apsarasas*

As long as Mike Langford in *Highways to a War* is associated with Lakshmi his own good fortune is assured, but the time must come that his Lakshmi of good fortune must also be replaced by the Lakshmi of bad fortune. This time is signalled by the arrival of Ly Keang, who

must be described as Koch's amalgamation of the Eastern pantheon of goddesses, and of some important Eastern fairy nymphs as well—the *apsarasas*, who, like Lakshmi, have suffered through the catastrophic advance of the forces of *adharma*.

9.10.1. Guardian Angels Caught in the Storm

The first identified contact Langford makes with the Hindu pantheon, notably including the *apsarasas*, comes with his initial visit to Madame Phan's home in Saigon:

> More Asian objets d'art, some of which Madame Phan identified for him, sat on shelves: stone heads of Buddha; a bronze statue of Shiva; a stone bas-relief of the naked Cambodian nymphs called apsarasas, dancing with serene smiles. (*HW*, 126)

Koch has always acknowledged the importance of such icons as those found in Madame Phan's home, but more significant is how he populates his novels with the real thing. Indeed, Langford's first contact with a spirit-figure comes when he arrives at the cave-like entrance to Madame Phan's home, which is itself not unlike the entrance to the White Rabbit's hole, and 'a small, fantastically narrow figure materialized in the darkness':

> At first, he says, he thought it was a child. But it was a young Vietnamese woman, little more than five feet tall. She wore a white *ao dai*, the silk tunic and pantaloons outlining her body from throat to hip, and her face was an inverted triangle, peering at him through the bars. (*HW*, 123-24)

In Buddhist literature the *apsarasas* are angels or fairies (Jobes, 115), and Langford remarks that the girl is 'Like a fairy looking out of a cave'. She brings him inside, and vanishes 'as though into a crevice', leaving him alone 'in the semidarkness of a sort of anteroom' where 'light came from a remarkable number of candles on shelves and low tables, their flickering causing the whole interior to dance with a golden glow' (*HW*, 124).

In another scene, Langford is visited by an angelic figure after a shrapnel wound in his brain brings him to the U.S. Army operating table. Under anaesthetic, he sees 'the surgeon's face, floating like a pink saucer. Another light shone to one side: softer, but with a bigger glow. I want to be clear about this, but maybe I never can be. The light had a human shape, with tall wings. An angel?' Langford remains sceptical, but the image will remain with and soothe him. 'Just a shape; no face. And yet I knew it was looking at me. It made me feel safe.

Loved, I suppose.' He will later testify that what he feels, after his brush with death, is 'Peace ever since the operation at Long Binh' (*HW*, 181).

Madame Phan's home is a refuge for such spirits as well as for orphans, for all have lost their homes to the cosmic war at the end of the last great age. She is a Bodhisattva-figure, devoting her life to helping those who are homeless or hungry, including, like Langford who helps his NVA captors, members of the Viet Cong. Claudine Phan acts as Langford's mentor and healer. She helps him find his way in Asia, but when he has matured as a saviour-figure and it is his turn to help her, with the Communists poised to enter Saigon, she refuses. Even though she is at great risk of being punished for her Western connections and capitalistic past, and while she is very interested in saving her sons from the Communists, her unfailing compassion for those who need her prevents her from seeking her own salvation.

One of the girls who is harboured by Claudine Phan is Kim Anh, the beautiful but crippled street-girl who Langford takes under his wing. For some reason, she disappears from Claudine Phan's house after spending time convalescing there after the operations Langford arranged to repair the damage to her foot. Langford had planned to marry her, and spends considerable time searching for her, but to no avail. The suggested explanation is that Kim Anh's 'uncle' has taken her away to work as a prostitute, but this is never clearly resolved. What is clear, however, is that a marriage between Kim Anh and Langford would have ended Langford's developing role as a saviour-figure. Her disappearance, however, reinforces that role. An equally likely explanation of Kim Anh's fate, then, is that the Taoist-minded Chinese-French Claudine Phan has spirited Kim Anh away.

Kim Anh's central role in Langford's life came earlier and conforms to the tradition of Indian epic literature when the *apsarasas* descend on earth 'merely to shake the virtue of penitent sages, and to deprive them of the power they would otherwise have acquired through unbroken austerities' (Garrett, 40). The accumulation of psychic energy through the performance of *tapas*—the building up of *sakti* described by Billy Kwan—often led to threats against the position of the gods as rulers of the universe. Harvey Drummond illustrates the

potential strength of *sakti* when Langford confronts the impolite French officials who refuse to buy flowers from Kim Anh, betraying Langford's hidden, violent side. The Frenchman who insults Kim Anh finds himself trapped in an iron grip on his shoulder. He does his best to save face, 'he hadn't wanted to appear too miserly to buy flowers from a crippled girl. But it was also plain to me that Langford had frightened him; that he's sensed a potential for violence that he hadn't wanted to deal with' (*HW*, 166). This is one of the earliest expressions of the violent side of Langford which becomes increasingly important in determining his identity and cosmic role.

9.10.2 Ly Keang—Langford's 'Other Half'

The most significant *apsarasas*-figure in *Highways to a War* is Ly Keang, who fits nearly perfectly the description of the sensuous nymphs, associated with rainwater on the earth, bringing good fortune to the one she favours, causing the madness of love, and even getting Langford to break his determination to retain the journalist's neutrality.

The *apsarasas* belong to the heavenly spheres as the voluptuous nymphs and dancers of the celestial court of Indra, the king of the gods, and are called 'wives of the gods' and 'daughters of pleasure'. Volkov and Langford are among the many who are enchanted by Ly Keang, and are said to have had 'the idea that through Ly Keang, they could tune in to Cambodia at some special level. And she'd probably have encouraged the notion—like a game' (*HW*, 270). The *apsarasas* are said to be of inconceivable loveliness. Koch therefore avoids describing Ly Keang in direct, physical terms. Langford once calls her beautiful, and this assessment garners universal agreement, but she is more often presented in figurative language, as through the 'large, expressive eyes' which establish her nobility by creating 'an impression of Indian ancestry, despite their Chinese almond shape'. She is also 'typically Sino-Khmer' (*HW*, 261), following the pattern—seen in Billy Kwan and Guy Hamilton—of Koch's rather Australian principle of improving characters through hybridisation. Volkov heaps such praise on her, calling her a 'crazy optimist—and a genuine patriot', 'a remarkable girl', intelligent, fearless, and full of electricity, and, not least, 'she makes me laugh.' (*HW*,

365). He also says she is 'a young woman of spirit, who will do anything', though he quickly protects her dignity, saying, 'she is quite possibly virgin' (*HW*, 266). Koch's classical and dignified description of Keang leaves no doubt of her identification as a heavenly creature:

> She wears a traditional dress: a white, high-necked blouse and a dark ankle-length sarong with an embroidered band around the hem. Her thick, loosely waving hair is pulled back from the forehead and temples to expose her ears; held by a comb on top and then falling below her shoulders, it combines with her slender, hour-glass figure to recall an *apsaras* in a temple carving. (*HW*, 256)

The name *apsarasas* signifies 'moving in the water' from their inception when Brahma first churned the cosmic ocean to create the first beings in the beginning of time and space. They are associated with the water of the earth and with the vapours which rise from the earth into the air (Balfour, 122). In the *Rig Veda*, they assist the god Soma to pour down his floods, bringing fertility to the earth (Garrett, 40). Ly Keang is appropriately always active and accompanied with movement, and associated with water and rain. When she comes to Langford for the first time in his apartment, it is a magical, *wayang kulit* scene:

> No lights on in the room. Through the open doors onto the balcony, over by the railings of the market, the petrol lamps of the Khmer traders were blurred and trembling in the rain. Wind, and more thunder. The top of the coconut palm next to the balcony running with water, fronds gleaming and tossing like landed green fish.

Keang enters the apartment like a shadow. The first thing Langford notices is a 'cool finger on my bare shoulder'. She looks up at him in the dark without speaking, searching for something in him.

> She opened her lips, her saliva for a moment in my mouth, starting an electric tingling that would have built and built, if I hadn't let her go. Deadly, that tingling; everything being changed for us, far into the future. I could hear a mosquito whining; then it settled on my shoulder and began to drink my blood. I let it, looking at her. The sting was part of what was happening: a brand. (*HW*, 366-67)

As the divine feminine, Keang is especially part Durga, with the symbolic exchange of blood attending the woman who is known for her combat fatigues and bungle boots and long blue-black hair (*HW*, 264), bringing destruction and re-creation to Langford, and part *apsarasas*, an

irresistible water nymph, whose hair cascades down her back, and who is sent by the gods to the sound of flowing water, both motivating him and changing his life:

> Then we both stared at the rain and the market lamps and the swinging top of the palm tree. Water gurgled in a pipe somewhere. Everything was changed out there, the lights and wild rain belonging somewhere else: somewhere stranger than Phnom Penh, where she and I were going. (*HW*, 368)

Ly Keang's arrival into Langford's life is accompanied by the beginning of the monsoon. She is associated with its symbolism of life which, amidst the sounds of death, includes symbolism of reincarnation. Langford celebrates her as an element of the landscape:

> —I love this time of year, at the beginning of the rains. Light green rice shoots making a film across the paddies; everything coming alive. The women stooping, setting out the seedlings: peacefully planting, this close to the city, as though that sound in the distance isn't really artillery. Pink and mauve lotus flowers and hyacinths opening in the roadside polls. Cambodia beginning to fill with water, shining and winking, reflecting the sky and the big May clouds. Black-and-white herons took off as we went by; marching brown ducks were driven by little boys. Everything was washed and new. So was my life, because of Keang. (*HW*, 370-371)

Mike agrees to take Ly Keang to battle, where, hiding behind a dike, he devotes himself to her, symbol of water and Cambodia:

> —Water: Cambodia is water. Thousands of acres beginning to drown; rice fields and jungle submerging; fish soon breeding among the trees in underwater forests—teeming through the paddies. Cambodia was water, and Keang was Cambodia. Her mouth again: its liquor. … So perfect I knelt in the water in front of her. Paddy water, rain and her body's juice: which was only rain? (*HW*, 372-73)

Langford comprehends that Keang is rainwater on the earth, and paces—childishly, but also like the ghost in his apartment at the end of the novel—, waiting for her return, recognising in her the symbols of rain and fertility:

> I keep wanting to laugh; keep walking about the room; can't keep still. Childish.
>
> —Rain and Ly Keang.
>
> —On my hands the smell of paddy water that I don't want to wash off. (*HW*, 369)

The *apsarasas* are also heavenly charmers who fascinate heroes, and allure austere sages from their devotions (Dowson, 20). Jealous or threatened gods would send them to cause the sage or ascetic to lose his concentration and expend his hard-gained psychic energy. In an

amusing first portrait of Keang, she disrupts the concentration of a sort of Western ascetic. Keang makes a royal entrance into the Phnom Penh Press Centre, 'greeting first one acquaintance and then another. All the journalists she spoke to, male and female, were laughing by the time she moved on', until she passes by a newly arrived *New York Times* correspondent. 'He had a Vandyke beard and the air of a noted intellectual forced to analyze tragedies whose implications could scarcely be comprehended by gross lesser mortals.' He has a 'new and shining and stylishly slanted' Panama hat which attracts Keang's attention. 'She snatched it from Broinowski's head and put it on and posed for him, smiling. It looked very good on her.' Broinowski manages 'a pained smile' but reaches for the hat, 'his face growing uneasy'. She runs off waving the hat in the air to the general applause of the other journalists, followed by Broinowski, whose 'desire to get his hat back far outweighed his dignity', shouting after her. He returns, red-faced and hatless, another sage fallen victim to an *apsarasas*.

Langford still remains Keang's most important victim. She disrupts his sense of professional orderliness (*HW*, 260), points out to him his repressed anger and feelings (*HW*, 270), enthrals him with the beauty of Cambodia (*HW*, 268), awakens self-awareness of his unique role in the Cambodian war (*HW*, 270), and finally even gets him to make the definitive choice to take up a gun against the Khmer Rouge (*HW*, 377-78). Yet, once she has deflated the ascetic photographer's own built-up *sakti*, Keang assumes the role of Parvati, who is the *sakti* of Shiva, to motivate Langford to accept the role for which he is destined. Colonel Chandara, the leader against the Khmer Rouge who will need Langford's help, makes this clear enough:

> If you want to become Cambodian, he said, and make this your home, you should perhaps look at Ly Keang. She greatly admires you. She's a fine girl.
>
> —He'd surprised me again, and I answered carefully. Yes, she is, I said. But I hardly know her. She's closer to my friend Dmitri Volkov.
>
> —She sees death in your friend, he said. She sees life in you. So do I. (*HW*, 279)

An interesting but unexplored element of the *apsarasas* here is how they are the rewards in paradise for heroes who fall in battle. If Koch were writing a saint's life in the tradition of

Indian literature, he would be able to describe the aeons of bliss with Ly Keang in the heavens in the sequel to *Highways to a War*, and which would then be succeeded by reincarnation, on and on. Koch and Langford are, however, more interested in the past. Yet, Adrian Mitchell points out how the epigraph to the novel, James McAuley's 'Warning', cautioning against trying to accommodate the past, might be especially relevant to the role of Ly Keang, who draws Langford back into Cambodia and to his death. Keang embodies for Langford 'the charm and mystery of Cambodia, the novel's Otherland', and, though he might be guilty of trying to get back into the past, Mitchell finds it 'readily comprehensible, even admirable, that he should step away from the sensible, the realistic, and chase after his heart's yearning'. 'The incompleteness of the ending leads to pathos, not tragedy: the sorrows of mankind, not the inexorable moral law, are what this story encapsulates' (Mitchell, 1996, Ancestral Voices, 8).

While Langford's ghost does not find peace at the end of the novel, and this due to the fact that the demons have not yet been returned to their place in *dharma*, one must feel that his relationship with Keang was never meant to be fulfilled in this life. One bit of evidence of what Koch is leaving unworked is in Harvey Drummond's assessment that, for Langford, 'Saigon was the past', 'Phnom Penh was the present, and Ly Keang was the future' (*HW*, 400). The trouble is that Phnom Penh's falling to the 'Black Ghosts' is Koch's representation of the beginning of the end of time.

Symbols of water, the *apsarasas* are naturally shape-changers. Langford notices when Keang first comes to him how Keang's presence can even change the shapes of things around her: 'In the half-dark, I was looking at a woman I'd never seen before. Beautiful: so beautiful. She'd changed everything around her, making the air in the room seem to sing.' Like the *apsarasas*, who are fond of dice and give luck to whom they favour, Keang becomes the source of Langford's good luck. First, she notices the Lakshmi icon in his apartment, stopping 'in front of my big Khmer sandstone sculpture of the Goddess of Fortune: the best piece I have. This is a nice Lakshmi, she said, and looked at me over her shoulder.' She notices that the Lakshmi has lost an arm, a sign of lost strength in Indian symbolic terms. Still, this seems to

be the moment when Keang herself realises who Langford is. She says, almost to herself, that he is called *Mean Samnag*, the 'Lucky One', by the Cambodian troops, and starts recruiting Langford to the Free Cambodian cause (*HW*, 269).

Then, having succeeded at transforming him into a fighter for her forces, she replaces the Lakshmi with her own lucky charm, but it is 'a small, furry toy cat with orange stripes, made in Japan' which mews when tipped. 'Take it to Saigon, she said. A mascot. It will protect you; I've told it to' (*HW*, 422). Ly Keang has given Langford a meaningless kitsch item in the place of an artefact which symbolises the power of Vishnu, and which he truly believes brings him the luck he has always needed to survive his work. Ly Keang is making a terrific blunder, but fate has determined that Cambodia must fall to the 'Black ghosts', and Keang, as symbol of the divine feminine, must also play her role in the turn of fortune whereby the Mother Goddess makes way for the Destroyer Goddess.

The *apsarasas* are sometimes supposed to produce the madness associated with love (Dowson, 20). From the beginning of Keang's attention to him, Langford feels 'a hollowing in the stomach' (*HW*, 269), and this attraction only intensifies until her disappearance with the fall of Cambodia makes Langford mad. Jim Feng says that 'He looked sick, and hardly ate' (*HW*, 411). Langford loses his usual self-control over the frustrations of his commitment to find her when it is suggested that his relentless search for Ly Keang is useless. Feng reports that 'One dickhead correspondent in the Foxhole kept insisting that she must be lost, and Mike punched him up—and that wasn't like Mike' (*HW*, 436). Langford is caught in the descending cycle of time, during which, according to Jainist tradition, the very physical stature of men will diminish progressively, and the earth 'will be an unspeakable morass of violence, bestiality, and grief' (Zimmer, 1969, 227). As the relationship between Langford and Keang also represents the unified male/female force of the universe until the Divine Mother finishes her destructive work and recreates the universe anew, the essential monistic principle of the eternal *dharma* will itself be asunder.

9.11. The Goddess as Time and Change

Koch associates Maha-Kali with Time in a significant leitmotif which he adopts from the *Bhagavad Gita*, though, since 'time' in Sanskrit is not *kali*, but *kala*, it seems he might be employing a bit of poetic license. This provides a clue about the depth of Koch's involvement with the nuances of Hindu mythology, however, for an uncommon variant of Kali's name, and the word for black or blue-marine, is indeed Kala. In addition, the pre-Aryan, Jainist tradition defines *kala*, one of the six constituent elements of the cosmos, as 'time; that which makes change possible' (Zimmer, 1969, 271), paralleling Koch's association of time with the divine feminine, whose universal role is to assure the viability of change.

Koch offers another metaphor of Kali as a second of the six basic cosmic elements to explain her role in providing a possibility of change in a universe which is seen, in reality, as made up of identical, eternal, and therefore unchanging 'life-monads'. O'Brien asks Sunder what Kali looks like. Sunder answers, 'From a distance she's blue-black. But up close they say she has no colour—like water' (*ASW*, 72). This water image refers to the cosmic component of *dharma* (a completely separate concept from the better-known *dharma* which refers to the divine moral order or to rightful action within that cosmic order), which in the Jainist ontology is 'the medium through which movement is possible. *Dharma* is compared to water, through and by which fish are able to move' (Zimmer, 1969, 271). Without *dharma*, as without the divine feminine, there could be no change—thus neither beginning nor end—in the universe.

This seems to be the key to Madame Claudine Phan's poem in *Highways to a War* which says that 'For the fish, it's a question of being alive— They don't worry about the depth of the water' (*HW*, 184). Water is equated with change, and one can reject change no more than a fish can reject water, including that change which embodies evil's conquest over good at the end of time. It might be possible that a failure of the intervention of man's free will as the instrument of the ultimate creative force of the universe would mean the annihilation of that other *dharma*, the right cosmic order. Still, that *dharma* ironically prescribes the establishment

of an age of cosmic disorder ruled by the demons. This *Kali-Yuga*, or final Age of Darkness, must necessarily precede the return of the first age of innocent righteousness. As Madame Phan understands, the fish have no alternative to concentrating on surviving the rhythmic occurrence of even the worst conditions of their water in order to enjoy the clearer and deeper waters to come.

Krishna, who is by the time of the *Bhagavad Gita* understood to be the ultimate creative force of the cosmos, reiterates the association of time and change when he reveals himself to Arjuna as the supreme spirit of the cosmos, the 'vast unity in the body of the God of gods'. He allows Arjuna to see the wondrous infinity of his being, a spirit with no beginning, middle or end, creator not only of the earth and universe, of life and righteousness, but even of the supreme god Brahma himself, and all the gods and goddesses, a form in which all things are one. Krishna concludes his revelation by saying, 'I am all-powerful Time which destroys all things' (*Bhagavad Gita*, 11:10-32).

The goddess known as Parvati, Durga, Kali, and by many other names, is the reification of that specific divine aspect which Krishna identifies as 'Time'. Her intervention is necessary to effect cosmic change, first, by provoking Vishnu out of his sleep and Shiva out of his meditation to work their acts of creation, and second, by destroying the old so that the new may be re-created. The mother image of Parvati and the hag of Kali correlate with the earth mother symbol of Lakshmi, who represents the cycles of nature, fortune and fate, and who in her most modern development is made responsible for the ultimate escape from the cycle of birth-death-rebirth-redeath, which is 'time', into *nirvana*, in which 'time' has no meaning. It is therefore no error for Koch to write of Kali's dance of destruction and creation, of raising her to supreme stature in the cosmic order, and referring to her as 'she of many names, all of which mean Time'. Having honoured her so, the artist Koch, the *dalang* of his universe, then puts her to work provoking the changes necessary in his protagonists.

9.12. Conclusion

In reaching out to these Asian themes and symbols, Koch seems to be concurring with the assessment of David Tacey in the need to reassert the divine feminine in a world diverted from its sense of the sacred partly by the predominance of its male orientation. In India, the Mother Goddess, whose Neolithic origins were overwhelmed for a thousand years by the male divinities of the Aryan pantheon, has reasserted itself and is the chief divinity today. Going by many names—Parvati, Durga, Kali, Devi, Sati, Sri, and many more—, she 'personifies the World Illusion, within the bounds and thralldom of which exist all forms whatsoever, whether gross or subtle, earthly or angelic'. She has 'deluded the world with Her Illusion and conjures up the magic of creation, preservation, and destruction', and spread a 'veil of ignorance before our eyes' which only she can decide to remove to let us enter into her 'inner chamber' (Zimmer, 1969, 569). The divine feminine is a powerful symbol, whose paradoxical significance certainly has a new relevance in a Western society itself paradoxically richer and more powerful than ever and yet bereft of the mythological core which alone can give it meaning. The Goddess reigned countless time as the powerful metaphor of fertility, of the ever-renewing cycles of nature, and therefore of the eternal puzzle of birth, life, and death; Christopher Koch's Asian novels are a literary equivalent of an invocation to the Universal Mother, to re-emerge from the shadows, and re-enchant human culture.

The Masks of Personality

10.1. Introduction

One of the central issues in these five novels is the sense of identity generated through the donning, wearing, and shedding of masks of personality. Writing of C. J. Koch's *The Year of Living Dangerously* in an article which is fully applicable to his other novels and to Blanche d'Alpuget's as well, Marak Haltof says that removing the layers of masks—of both his Asian and Australian characters—is Koch's way of joining the 'discourse on the nature of the post-colonial state of mind, on the notion of Australian identity, and on the Australian perception of its Asian neighbours'. *The Year of Living Dangerously* concerns itself with the motif of 'otherness', which is central to the Australian quest for a sense of identity, with the 'Other' being variously Australia itself, Asia, or simply other people (Haltof, 44). Koch picks up on and advances the Asian sense of the 'Other' within oneself which Blanche d'Alpuget has so well exploited in the internal psycho-spiritual struggles of her principle figures. They offer characters whose 'otherness' lacks essential discriminating factors, so that the 'distinction between "us" and "them", Indonesia and Australia, is not clear' (Haltof, 46). Contact with the 'Other' weakens old prejudices and stereotypes, which allows them to realise that their search for the 'Other' has brought them before a mirror. The 'Other' they are gazing at is themselves; the 'self' which they believed themselves to be is recognized as a superstructure of masks which the search has begun to dislodge.

For some, this is a shattering experience, leading to a loss of the sense of humanity as their fear drives them into refuge from the 'otherness' in which they assuming new and more protective masks. For others the attraction to the 'Other' is too strong, and they effectively exchange one set of masks for another. There remain those, however, whose personalities are recognised as manifestations of the illusory masks obscuring the unflawed essence of their shared humanity. This self-discovery depends on a release from the conviction of an antagonism between 'self' and 'Other', so that the 'individual' might defrock himself of his illusory masks, and find his true being.

This and the following chapter centre attention on those illusory masks worn by the protagonists in C. J. Koch and Blanche d'Alpuget's Asian novels. The comparison of Eastern and Western views of the reality of the 'individual' should help clarify the novelists' formulation of heroic qualities in their protagonists, a topic which has in Koch's case been seen in chapter 7 on the Javanese dramatic form, the *wayang kulit*. The concept of the 'three *gunas*', the elementary and distinguishing components of all created forms of being, which explains much of d'Alpuget's pet concept of 'brutalisation', is then introduced. The details of the 'bestiary' d'Alpuget has written in *Monkeys in the Dark* are studied, with special attention given to her most truly brutalised character, the Indonesian hero-villain, Sutrisno. The focus on d'Alpuget concludes with a review of Antonella Riem's analysis of the psychological brutalisation of the Australian journalist Judith Wilkes in *Turtle Beach*. Supported by a cast of heavily masked actors, d'Alpuget leads her readers from blind sympathy with the protagonist to awareness for the relativity of such concepts as 'values', 'culture', 'self', and 'Other'. The gaze then turns to Koch's use of the concept of the masks of the personality. The effects of the three *gunas* is seen in the descending in the cosmic order, where gods become men, men become animals or agents of evil, and even inanimate objects are demonised. The chapter closes with a look at the various masks in the Wayang Bar, which is largely Koch's further development of the themes borrowed from Lewis Carroll's *Alice* characters with Javanese accent. There remain some very interesting masked figures who are not treated in this chapter as they seem to fit better elsewhere. Chapter 11 gives special attention to the masked doubles, d'Alpuget's Alexandra Wheatfield and Anthony Sinclaire, and Koch's Guy Hamilton and Billy Kwan.

10.2. Eastern and Western Concepts of 'Personality'

The Western concept of 'persona' has its roots in the ancient Greek dramatic tradition of the actor wearing a real, physical mask through (*per*) which he would sound (*sonat)* his role. Zimmer describes how the actor remained separated from his mask; the mask conveyed the features, make-up and traits of the role, while leaving the actor himself an anonymous and

unconcerned being (Zimmer, 236). Thus the origin of the Western concept of 'personality' would be strikingly similar to the Eastern idea, suggesting a common origin at the time when the ancient Aryans were migrating out of their Eurasian homeland southward into India. Later Greek, and Judeo-Christian thought, however, redirected the concept in the West, making the 'actor' and his 'mask' identical. Homer's Ulysses and Dante's Virgil visited in hell old friends and acquaintances who were fully recognisable and often remembered their lives and even the deeds which damned them. It may seem ironic, but even for a man condemned to hell, the loss of 'his *persona* would mean for him to lose every hope for a future beyond death. The mask has become for him fused, and confused, with his essence'. For the more fortunate, Christianity promises the resurrection of the body, 'the resurrection being our regaining of our cherished personality in a purified form, worthy to fare before the majesty of the almighty'. Zimmer considers to be an inconsistency this idea of a personality which is 'declared to have come into being with the mortal act of procreation, and yet is supposed to go on after the demise of the procreated mortal frame: temporal in its beginning, immortal in its end' (Zimmer, 236-37).

From the Eastern outlook this problem does not arise. Traditional Indian philosophy 'continually emphasizes the contrast between the displayed existence of the individual and the real being of the anonymous actor, concealed, shrouded, and veiled in the costumes of the play', but, as expressed in the *Upanishads*, is identical to the

> Spirit which is mind and life, light and truth and vast spaces. He contains all works and desires and all perfumes and all tastes. He enfolds the whole universe, and in silence is loving to all (from the *Chandogya Upanishad*, Mascaró, xv).

Asian spiritual efforts have for centuries been trying to break through the veil into the unfathomed reaches of the Self, as Zimmer explains:

> Piercing and dissolving all the layers of the manifest personality, the relentlessly introverted consciousness cuts through the mask, and, at last discarding it in all of its stratifications, arrives at the anonymous and strangely unconcerned actor of our life (Zimmer, 1969, 237).

While the Western concept clings to the eternal personality, the Eastern sets the eternal soul beyond the illusory layers of personality. The two, as Juan Mascaró writes, are not opposed, but are complementary world views. 'Greece gives us the joy of eternal beauty in the outer world; and India gives us the joy of the Infinite in the inner world' (Mascaró, x).

Yet, there are crucial differences between Eastern and Western visions. For Western, Christian thought, the linked duality of body and soul has come to imply eternal consequences on the soul for the weaknesses of the perishable body. That each individual is born with the sin of Adam and Eve is a basic Western concept, even if derived by 'later generations of Christian apologists', and neither found in the Bible nor in Jewish tradition, but owing its predominant place in the English-speaking world to Milton's *Paradise Lost* (Robert Carroll, 326). This concept is reinforced by the reductionism of modern scientific Humanism, by which anything must be accountable by the five senses. The soul must be stainable like any other material, for non-stainability, according to modern scientific rules, implies non-existence. The stain lies on the eternal essence of man's soul, making it impossible for an individual to gain redemption without the intervention of God's grace.

For Eastern thought, the stain lies on the layers surrounding the soul, on the masks which hide the soul. The masks are real in the sense that they are part of the created universe, but, belonging only to that universe, they are perishable. The individual knows that behind the doom of his physically manifested self is the imperishable Self. This universal Self 'is his own very seed and essence. Release from the doom consists in feeling identical not with the mask but with its all-pervading, ever living substance' (Zimmer, 1969, 349). The individual's *karma* determines whether he goes to a heaven or hell in the period between death and reincarnation, and in what form he will return in, but the individual's Self, which is the inexplicable, unnameable universal Truth, bears no blemish of the misdeeds or faults of the individual. The possibility remains, as well, of uncovering the layers of masks until no more remain, at which point only the pure, unclouded Self exists in the splendour of *moksa*, or *nirvana*, and releasing the individual from the cycles of reincarnation.

Finally, the Eastern view is an interwoven 'vision of action with a consciousness of its meaning'. Mascaró writes that 'the outer world, the world of action of the Immanent' is the focus of the *Vedas*, while the inner world, the world of knowledge of the Transcendent Spirit' is treated by the later (from c. 800 BC) *Upanishads* (Mascaró, xxi). Herein lies the crux which so fascinates both Koch and d'Alpuget, who explore the 'harmony of action and knowledge, of the immanent and the transcendent' as necessary for 'reaching the inner meaning of things'(Mascaró, xxi). They engage their Australian protagonists in unexpected processes of inward discovery provoked by their willing confrontation with an outward reality they hardly understand.

This puts them squarely in line with Australian literary tradition, which seems to dove-tail well with Eastern tradition in this effort. The Australian hero has typically departed from the European tradition of the 'larger than life, legendary figure, endowed with great, even superhuman strength, courage or ability', in favour of an essentially innocent individual, the pioneer, the bushman, either man or woman, who proves himself to be a survivor in the face of extreme adversity, or even the outlaw, rogue or rebel who escapes the shackles of authority and forges into a new, hard but free life. (Bennett, 1991, 123) It is perhaps for this reason that the Australian hero is sometimes able to come to the realisation made in ancient Indian literature of the necessary interdependence of action and thought: 'Into deep darkness fall those who follow action. Into deeper darkness fall those who follow knowledge' (from the *Isa Upanishad*, Mascaró, xviii). The poets of the *Upanishads* were singing the transcendent in the human experience, but their motivation must have been similar to the Australian's, for whom action without thought, or thought without action, could suddenly mean death.

The hero in Australian culture has partly for this reason often been overshadowed by 'the phenomenon of the masked or decapitated hero', as the harsh land proves more than humanly bearable (Bennett, 1991, 122). D'Alpuget and Koch's novels are marked by decapitations and other forms of physical dismemberment, not to produce the sort of degenerate or fallen heroes which typify Western 20th century literature—though these do

indeed reflect just such failure to unify thought and action. Their protagonists' heroic qualities are more on the Eastern model, innate, emanating from the soul which is obstructed by layers of masks. The heroic nature in man can be revealed, but only through a process of self-revelation which is painstaking and even dangerous since underneath each mask lies another, each layer hiding mysteries heretofore unsuspected by the individual. Whether a mask is formed as a shield against the feared or an invitation to the attractive, it functions equally to obscure the reality of being which lies within.

What remains of the individual once all masks are shed is mysterious and difficult even for Indian literature to describe, but that is not the concern here. Koch and d'Alpuget are not writing so much about prospective Buddhas of Australian society—though both Alexandra Wheatfield and Mike Langford are partly fashioned after sacred Indian archetypes (discussed respectively in chapters 11 and 13)—as of the individuals who are made aware of the masks and their illusory effects through encounters with the Asian world. Commenting on his fascination for the workings of personality, Koch says,

> I believe that at the heart of life there is a mystery, and at the heart of every human personality there is a mystery. There is no way in which I will ever know you fully, or you will ever know me. And the most surprising things can happen with personality. Someone whom you feel you know, and have known for years, may suddenly be transformed. They may suddenly be unfamiliar. In that moment, one sees a mask. (Hulse, 25)

Koch adds that individuals are always striving to perfect their personalities, but he doubts the personality can ever be complete, and believes that there are penalties for trying 'to be all things' to oneself or to others, or to live one's life through another person (Hulse, 19).

Seeking to perfect the personality by 'completing' it is a decidedly Western attitude, and represents adding to or setting masks against one another. Success, however, in getting through the smoke to the fire—through the phenomenal masks to the Transcendent Soul—is Enlightenment. The danger, Koch and d'Alpuget point out, is that partial success leaves an individual weakened by the loss off the psychological protection for which the shed masks had been responsible; an individual who has tried but failed could be doomed to living as an animalistic, less-than-human creature.

10.3. D'Alpuget's Bestiary

Blanche d'Alpuget has established the least common denominator of borrowings from classical Asian archetypes with the animalistic portrayals of her characters. Koller describes the Indian concept of the levels of reality as

> ranging from non-existence to empirical existence limited by space and time, to consciousness that is limited only by the conditions of awareness, to an indescribable level that is beyond all conditions and limits whatever. The deeper the level of reality, the more fully it participates in the truth of being and the greater its value (Koller, 6).

Koh Tai Ann notes how d'Alpuget subtly applies this concept—and reinforces Orientalist stereotypes—by describing the speech of her Asians as the incomprehensible, queer noises of animals. Human voices described as the threatening calls of hostile beasts. The Chinese salesgirl who 'shrills' at her customers (*TB*, 53); the aggressive, 'monosyllabic jabbering' of other shopgirls; the 'tiger noise' of the angry Malay man (*TB*, 96); the nurses, waiters, and Minou Hobday who 'quack' and 'yelp'; the 'barnyard racket' of the poor Chinese; and the 'vivid and shrill as birds' Hindu women (*TB*, 204) are a few examples of d'Alpuget's Asian barnyard (Koh Tai Ann, 30).

D'Alpuget's beast characterisations do not stop at the level of language, and it is in *Monkeys in the Dark* where she fully deploys her technique. The title comes from the Independence Day speech of President Sukarno, who has already been crippled by the military seizure of power in the wake of the failed Communist putsch. Sukarno warns against his inevitable overthrow, saying,

> Oh, my people, if you abandon our history you will face a vacuum. You will become meaningless and undirected. Life for you will be no more than running amok. Running amok—like monkeys trapped in the dark! (*MD*, 122)

10.3.1. The Three *Gunas*

Sukarno is warning the people that the reversal of the revolution he has brought to Indonesia will lead to a situation in which they will live both figuratively and, in the next life perhaps literally, like animals, dominated by the forces of evil and basic survival. The significance of the concept for d'Alpuget comes from her sense that 'suffering drives some of

us to brutality and others to madness' (d'Alpuget, 73). Its origins lie in the Eastern concept of reincarnation, in which one's spirit will return in a higher or lower form, depending on the accrued merit of one's earlier lives. It is not that the higher form represents 'progress' towards enlightenment, or the lower form 'regression' into the ignorance of darkness, but that the Soul is either more or less obscured due to a change in the relationship of the elements of 'light' and 'dark' veiling it. This concept is, in turn, based on the pre-Aryan concept of the 'impairments'—including: 'not-knowing-better'; the notion described in Western terms as *cogito ergo sum*; attachment of every kind; repugnance and hatred; and clinging to life—which denote 'anything which, adhering to man's nature, restricts or impairs its manifestation of its true essence' (Zimmer, 1969, 294).

D'Alpuget capitalises on Sukarno's metaphor by making her novel into a sort of modern bestiary, but instead of anthropomorphised animals the human characters are described in animal terms. This is not unusual in Western literature, but d'Alpuget is adopting the Asian view of the Triple World—i.e. the physical realms which are inhabited by the gods, by the demons, and by the plants, animals and men, corresponding roughly to heaven, hell and earth. In the second act of creation, Brahma made the four groups of beings, and to distinguish them, he created their natural qualities, the three *gunas*: *sattva*, *rajas*, and *tamas*, which are responsible for the 'impairments'.

The gods are saturated with *sattva*, which is brightness, crystal purity, immaculate clarity, utter quiet. The demons are essentially similar to the gods, except that they are not immortal and, lacking the light of *sattva*, are dedicated to overthrowing the righteous cosmic order of *dharma*, to replace it with its opposite, *adharma*. Plants and animals are governed by *rajas*, which incites passion, rage, and desire and drives them greedily to devour each other, and by *tamas*, which they share with the minerals, which is darkness, blindness, and the basis of all lack of feeling and ignorance, though at the same time it gives solidity to and frames the universe.

Seeking to escape the Triple World for *moksa* is unfortunately for most created beings out of the question: the gods are too infused by the bliss of *sattva*; the demons are too intent on the establishment of *adharma* in the universe; the animals and plants are too dominated by *rajas* as well as by the same immobilising ignorance of *tamas* which defines minerals.

Humans are unique from the other created beings in that they possess and are pervaded and influenced by all three *gunas*: *sattva*, *rajas*, and *tamas*. Knowing both light and dark, realising the unhappiness caused by *tamas* as well as the joy of *sattva*, and having the motivation of *rajas* to surpass their mediocre existence, humans are endowed with the unique potential to attain *moksa*, or *nirvana* (Bailey, 105). The fortunate combination of the *gunas* is indeed necessary for humans; loss of any one characteristic deprives an individual of the hope of escaping the birth-death-rebirth-redeath cycle of the Triple World.

Zimmer equates the *gunas* and other 'impairments' of created beings with the Western concept of 'personality.'

> They are the bundle of life-forces that constitute the individual and implicate him in the surrounding world. Our clinging to our ego, and our usual concrete conception of what our ego is; our spontaneous self-surrender to the likes and dislikes that guide us daily . . . and which are the most cherished ingredients of our nature—these are our impairments. And through all runs that primitive craving of the living creature, which is common to both men and worms . . . and such a will to live is strong enough, according to the Indian theory of rebirth, to carry an individual across the gulf of death into a new incarnation, compelling him to reach out again for a new body, another mask, another costume, in which to carry on. (Zimmer, 1969, 299)

10.3.2. 'Brutalised' Characters

D'Alpuget presents a decadent world, heavily influenced by the increasing power of demons and *adharma*, where the balance of the *gunas* in humans is upset and most men are driven by the darkness of *tamas* instead of the light of *sattva*. The Australian vice-consul is only important enough to be identified by a first name, but his immoral behaviour—particularly the sexual exploitation of his young female servant who he calls a 'stupid cow' (*MD*, 71)—merits a graphic introduction as the 'man with the face of a sly pig' who 'nosed up' to Alex (*MD*, 22). Juan, the Spanish chargé d'affairs, is infamous for the illegal possession of an orang-utan and for halitosis which he and his pet undoubtedly share (*MD*, 22). Naida, a

beautiful Sumatran socialite who slept with Sinclaire, was jilted, and therefore lost any hope of an honourable marriage to an Indonesian, 'had the face of a large-eyed, slightly irritated panther' (*MD*, 24). Greaves, Sinclaire's spy boss, has 'yellow toad-slit eyes' (*MD*, 40). Julie is the snivelling, shallow embassy wife who d'Alpuget uses to exhibit many of the worst attributes which manifest themselves in the Australian woman forced to live in Asia. D'Alpuget rewards Julie's endless inadequacies with a closet-homosexual husband who humiliates her repeatedly in public, and even joins in when she declines to call Julie's 'small brown marks' freckles, pointing out that 'in Indonesian they were called "fly spots"' (*MD*, 35).

Sutrisno is a cat, not just due to his feline ability to scale the fences of the Dutch barracks to steal rifles (*MD*, 63), but also, as the most 'brutalised' of all the characters in the novel, to his requirements for many lives. Sinclaire, whose purpose in life seems to be to corrupt everyone in town, either as political informant or as sexual partner—his particular prey being his cousin Alex—, is a wolf, though when he brags about his sexual organ he uses the donkey for comparison (*MD*, 6). Maruli, as a Sumatran generally considered to be a wild man, refers to his own member somewhat more nobly as a 'cock' (*MD*, 114).

Even Alex Wheatfield has her animalistic tendency, represented as 'an intense, female instinct' motivated 'by a subconscious force' (*MD*, 29). This is the unleashed rajastic desire which leaves Alex feeling 'cleft from crotch to belly with lust' (*MD*, 80) when Maruli brings her for a weekend of lovemaking in a hotel 'large enough for a medium-sized dog', where they explore their fantasies in the 'Dragon Room' (*MD*, 82). Elsewhere, it is manifested in her recurring dream of wild beasts tearing at each other, an image from her deep subconscious, born of her fallen psychological state and of her experience of the anti-Chinese riots during her first visit to Malaysia.

Interestingly, Alex is the one character who is described in anything other than animal terms. On three occasions, each of which presents a male attitude of female inferiority, she is associated with plants. Sinclaire calls her a 'snapdragon' during an argument (*MD*, 6). Maruli tells her a strange animal story of how his two eldest brothers apparently murdered the Dutch

Brothers, who exercised dominance over them—symbolised by their demanding the gift of a pig at Christmas each year—, as the Japanese were invading, and thereby beginning the revolt against the Dutch. It is a story which establishes Maruli's rise in stature from a village chief's younger son to national hero, but in the telling, Maruli associates Alex with the capitalist neo-colonialists he hates, and, even as he professes his love and enjoys her body, he feels the same disgust for her that he felt for the Dutch Brothers who had whipped and spied on him:

> On the bed beside him Maruli saw a flicker of blue: Alex, he realised, was only feigning sleep and was watching him. He turned to look at her and saw her eyelids tremble. He felt revulsion for her and her kind. Her eyelids trembled in the way the Dutch priests' had done as they had knelt beside Maruli in the chapel, pretending to pray but spying on the chief's son, watching to see if he had truly accepted the Lord.

Alex, who seems to have a cat's luminous eyes, is given the plant association just when her relationship with Maruli is showing signs of distrust and hatred born of *rajas*. The image correlates intense sexual desire with exploitation and profound betrayal:

> Alex was lying in her sarong, watching him and waiting, as the Brothers had waited for their open-mouthed pig. Maruli pushed his hand under her sarong and into her vulva. It was as slippery as a slice of papaya. He rolled away from her and lay on his face on the bed.
>
> After a few minutes he fell asleep. (*MD*, 85)

The papaya image is followed when Maruli tells her 'You bend as sweetly as bamboo'. This comes after he has announced to her the 'marriage' which he considers to have already taken place—with all of the man/wife dominance/obligation associations necessarily attendant—and presented her with her 'wedding ring', a tribal gold necklace which he only wants her to keep safe for him until he needs it to finance his escape from Indonesia (*MD*, 114).

These ironic images of desirous papaya and graceful bamboo reveal Alex's place in d'Alpuget's cosmos. Even though plants are ruled by the lower attributes of *tamas*, such as greed and clinging to life, which are the bane of man's progress towards enlightenment, Alex's plant associations are very attractive, especially when juxtaposed with male-chauvinistic condescension and sexual exploitation. They tend to place Alex on the high road, yet make her

a victim, though, by avoiding the predominant, derogatory animal associations, Alex is usually spared the condemnation of being one of the monkeys in the dark.

She is not always spared, however. Maruli considers her to be of degenerate education. He embarks on her re-education, but has doubts about raising her to a more dignified level: 'He was uncertain how far he could lead Alex to his own habits—she could suddenly shiver with disgust and bolt, like a half-trained animal' (*MD*, 47). Even here Maruli's leading Alex like a horse seems to make her into one, in effect dragging her down to his own animal level. Her greatest fault would be that bendability which leaves her too prone to follow others when her own judgement would serve her better.

This bendability, the horse associations, the abuse and victimisation are all brought together later when Alex is to be doubly betrayed. Her cousin Sinclaire has falsified a *pròces verbal* to make Alex believe that the imprisoned Maruli has only been using her to get out of the country. Sinclaire ingratiates himself with Alex by bringing her to the market to buy durians for Maruli, though he expects she will not bring them once he shows her the *pròces verbal*. As they are leaving the market they come across a crowd of children abusing a mutilated horse which d'Alpuget describes as 'a monster'.

> Both his back legs had been broken; he was dragging himself forward on his front legs, his hindquarters balancing on his knee joints. Every rib was visible and his hide was covered in weeping sores. (*MD*, 169)

Alex bolts from the car and attacks the children, who respond in kind, until Sinclaire forces her back into the car. As Sinclaire points out, Alex has rejected both the foreign community and also the Indonesians. She says she hopes she is not 'brutalised' by Indonesia the way he seems to be (*MD*, 170). Yet, of course she is, and as if to prove both this and the association between Alex and the horse, Sinclaire chooses to give her the *pròces verbal* immediately thereafter, which has exactly the effect of lowering her *sattva*-related 'goodness' that he hopes it will. She does not see Maruli again, but lets herself fall into Sinclaire's trap.

Alex also has the seemingly innocent habit of conversing with animals, a practice which Poppy, her Indonesian secretary, interprets as very dangerous behaviour:

> ‘Ooooh, Miss Alex. It is very bad luck to make an animal your equal by talking to it,’ she said. ‘We are manusia, human beings. Animals are binatang, that is, animals. They have no souls. Therefore we should not speak to them, or we may become like them—without soul. (*MD*, 45)

Poppy mentions that communists also have no souls, reminding Alex ‘of how villagers had hunted down the communists, like wild beasts, and killed them’ (*MD*, 45). One communist, nevertheless, Alex’s watchman Bagong, who even has a cat which he talks to, exhibits *dharmic* traits which make this minor character worthy of Alex’s, and the readers, sympathy, and belie Poppy’s commonly held prejudices.

Colonel James confronts Alex about her relationship with Maruli, which he deems degenerate and contrary to Australian interests. James models white Australian racial prejudices, considering the Bataks, Maruli’s people, to be barely human, saying breathlessly ‘they are only one jump ahead of the New Guinea mob. Eating people until a few years ago. Probably still do. Is that what you like? Do you like the feeling of being with a real savage, a real blackfella, black skin and . . . ?’ Just what makes James breathless, and also establishes his own position along the chain of being, is made clear enough. In his office, decorated with stuffed toads, James reminds Alex that ‘part of our brains comes from reptile ancestors’ (*MD*, 92). He is his own proof, gripped by a hysterical fascination for human/animal copulation. During one of his visits to a blue movie house his reptilian brain gets the better of him: ‘A fat Mexican lady was having congress with a donkey. James cried out, as if he’d discovered the meaning of life, “He’s wagging his tail! Look at him wagging his tail!”’ (*MD*, 52).

Maruli is so repeatedly compared in his looks and habits to a wolf that his affair with Alex could also be seen as sodomy. He, appropriate for a wolf, is seen in various disguises. As Alex’s exotic lover he is quietly ‘curled on the bed like a large black cat’ (*MD*, 68), but at the *sate* restaurant in the wildest part of Djakarta, amongst the poor, the transvestites and the prostitutes, he devours his food, ‘tearing the meat off the sticks with quick, animal movements’ (*MD*, 27). Alex finds this so repulsive that she wants to run away from him, but Maruli’s predatory manner of eating is so terrifying that she is transfixed like a prey (*MD*, 27-28). Maruli, however, is the one character who exhibits sensitivity to, and rejects for himself,

animal associations. Son of a Sumatran chief, he grew up on a jungle island where wild animals were a real and constant threat, and was reared to succeed his father as chief. Alex finds this exotic future enthralling, but Maruli scorns the life of a chieftain, whose role is 'to kill the buffaloes for feasts' and to live 'as a frog under a coconut shell' (*MD*, 28).

In Maruli, d'Alpuget has created a totally enigmatic character. In spite of introducing him as Alex's lover, and making the reader view him as a relatively enlightened human, hardly makes him or his political views attractive. He remains the 'dark, stocky man' whose hair seems plastered to his head and has 'deep-set, almost black' eyes, all of which make him ugly in a decidedly feral way (*MD*, 7). D'Alpuget dresses him in light blue clothes to help separate him from the 'dark characters' when, at times, his actions naturally lead one to wonder about his real intentions. Unfortunately for him, if he is a good character, it is at a time when evil enjoys the advantage of the cycles of destiny. Maruli must fail along with his hero, Sukarno, whose time has passed. When Alex is betrayed by Sinclaire, Maruli bears the brunt of the consequences, being left to the caprices of his jailers, though we can suppose he will return when times are more propitious—should he survive so long.

D'Alpuget's beast fable fits into the Asian scheme of the universe in its fourth and final era, dominated by evil forces and destruction. Djakarta is made out to be the natural site of this fall of civilisation. *Betjak* drivers are 'human draft animals' (*MD*, 166), vegetable sellers at the market have 'veins like earthworms under the skin' (*MD*, 168), and the night turns the most respectable of people into animals. Somehow, d'Alpuget is telling us, here and now, this is all totally normal:

> Outside shops scribes typed letters for the illiterate; in the market raucous gypsies in weird clothes sold cures for infertility, cancer and kidney stones, in two sizes of bottle. And in the slums, the sprawling kampongs, there were stranger people—women who spoke to the spirits and men who could turn themselves into tigers. By day they worked as government clerks and rode on bicycles. The place seemed half-real, half-fantasy, like a nightmare. And, like a dream, it inflamed the imagination. In its disorder, everything was possible. (*MD*, 16)

Just in case the animal allusions were missed or taken as accidental in the composition of her story, d'Alpuget leaves an unmistakable clue of the archetype of her bestiary. The bar in

the Hotel Indonesia where the Westerners hang out is called the Ramayana Bar, and this is the scene of the final kiss between Alex and her cousin Sinclaire, the ultimate act of betrayal and animalistic lust. In Koch's *The Year of Living Dangerously* the same bar is called the Wayang Bar, after the Javanese *Wayang* Shadow Theatre in which the heroic stories out of the epic *Mahabharata* are presented. The *Ramayana* is the second important Hindu epic, sharing with the *Mahabharata* many accounts of Indian mythology, especially the stories of creation, but also the events leading up to the great battle between the Pandavas and Kuravas, which are among the most important of the sacred *avatara* myths. Geertz notes that the *Ramayana* stories are also, though less frequently, presented by Javanese dance troupes in a less refined theatrical form than the *wayang kulit*, whose characters are reduced to clownish behaviour. It is partly for this reason that the *Ramayana* is appropriate as the model for d'Alpuget's satiric, Indonesian novel. Koch affirms that the bar in Jakarta's Hotel Indonesia really was called the Ramayana Bar (Koch, 1987, 20), and d'Alpuget could have simply been leaning on her journalistic tendencies to stick to the facts, but there is one more significant correlation dictating the name's use. The *Ramayana* epic is about the consequences of a boon Brahma has given to the demon Ravana, making him invincible to any foe but a human. The other gods are very concerned by this threat to *dharma* and doubtful about the prospects for any human to kill Ravana. Brahma, however, plans to have Vishnu incarnated as a human to defeat Ravana. To help this hero, named Rama, Brahma orders all of the other gods to be reborn on earth as monkeys and bears. D'Alpuget's is no heroic novel, and lacks the *Ramayana*'s half-monkey hero, Anoman, but it does recall its shuffling of the *gunas* and invoke its cast of characters remade into animals and half-animals.

10.3.3. Sutrisno—Java's 'Coming Man'

Sutrisno is d'Alpuget's most profoundly masked figure, for he has probably the most severe disfiguration to hide. Alexandra Wheatfield's unconventional relationship with the intense, enigmatic businessman proves to be an education into the spiritual journey of an 'Other'. Maruli tells Alex the history of Sutrisno, a peasant boy who had never been to school

but was clever, very strong and as agile as a cat, and who proved his valour by boldly stealing rifles from the Dutch barracks. His success as an independence fighter spoiled his balance of the *gunas*, however, and his humour and long hair made him a favourite of upper-class girls, who would otherwise never have spoken to him. He became full of the passion and desire of *rajas*. This complemented his natural abundance of *tamas*—which deprived him of the light of *sattva* but gave him his earthly solidness—, and the two drove him toward an animalistic being. When caught sleeping with the beautiful girlfriend of the group captain, Sutrisno was offered the just choice of death or castration. Sutrisno, however, true to his dark combination of *gunas*, turned justice on its head and shocked his comrades by choosing the latter. Maruli explains to Alex how they 'all hoped he would ask to be shot. None of us could speak, because we loved him, and we didn't want to be the one to do it' (*MD*, 64).

Sutrisno became a symbolic animal sacrifice in a ritual gone wrong. He was the sacrificial buffalo, but, instead of at a clean and prepared temple, the sacrifice was performed in an unclean buffalo shed that stank of animals. The other boys understood this desecration, crying and beating their heads with their fists; Sutrisno, however, bore himself with the dignity of a true sacrifice of Hindu tradition, squatting willingly on the floor before his accusers, like a practical farm boy 'thinking over the price he would accept for his goat', accepting his fate with honour. Yet, by failing to carry out the ritual sacrifice correctly, they reduced Sutrisno to the level of a captive animal and destroyed the human dignity of all members of the group. When they took him home afterwards, his mother said, 'I had ten children—he was the strongest baby and he is the only son left to me. Is this how you fight the Dutch?' They were all ashamed, and though they said, 'It was his wish. He broke the code', they knew that their code was unjust. Sutrisno later rejoined the gang, but their luck had changed, and the first night they went stealing again they were all caught. Only Sutrisno and Maruli escaped execution. They continued fighting until independence, but neither believed in the same sense of justice and righteousness as before. When Alex reacts with horror to the story, Maruli responds ironically, 'It happened a long time ago, when people were confused' (*MD*, 63-64).

As the novel begins, the last survivor, Maruli, is the focus of Sutrisno's wrath. This antipathy, *dvesa*, is one of the five 'hindrances', and the cause of Sutrisno's inability to escape the ignorance of his crippled ego. In fact, d'Alpuget associates him more with animal images than anyone else. As a grown man who has managed to slither into all camps of turbulent Indonesian politics, Sutrisno is described as a snake (*MD*, 37). His fanatical attendance to the physical exercise makes him strut with the barrel chest and neck of a bull (*MD*, 55). Sutrisno surrounds himself with animal paraphernalia. His house glows at night from the green neon light of a wall-length fish tank. Its walls are adorned with stuffed wild animals which hang, fitting d'Alpuget's theme of human—especially female—brutalisation, among pin-ups of naked women. Amongst his work-out equipment are 'monkey bars', which, except for d'Alpuget's animal metaphor, would be more appropriate on a children's playground. Other seemingly misplaced items include Sutrisno's sexual accoutrements, for which he personally can have no physical use, but which help ingratiate him with such powerful men as the proud, macho General Sugeng, who visits Sutrisno to work out. These articles also help hide his own neutering, and help him find out about such men as Thornton, whose 'gasp of laughter' at a male figure with 'an outsized erect penis' gives away his homosexuality to Sutrisno long before it becomes clear to anyone else (*MD*, 36-37).

In the Asian scheme of things, this devotion to his physical being makes Sutrisno a man who has chosen the human characteristics which resemble those of an animal (*tamas* and *rajas*) over those of a god (*sattva*), and he is a character who neither deserves nor gets much sympathy. D'Alpuget makes it clear that he has led himself down the path of darkness. One of Sutrisno's friends, General Djaya, an honourable soldier and Moslem, if also an administrator in a corrupt regime, sees Sutrisno as a necessary sort of man for the state, but feels 'distaste for Sutrisno whose soul was trapped by the lower forces of the material world' (*MD*, 118). And yet, Alex empathises with Sutrisno's brutalisation, and this shared experience draws the two together. He narrowly escapes a fully deserved assassination attempt which leaves him physically wounded, politically embarrassed and economically disabled, but no one, neither

admirers nor adversaries, doubts he will survive. Recognising that every individual experiences the successes and failures of each of the levels of existence, d'Alpuget excuses Sutrisno's lamentable life. Once he has been humbled by the assassination attempt, Alex comes to him for help to see and secure the release of Maruli, and d'Alpuget puts him in a different light:

> Alex thought at first he was another servant, then recognized Sutrisno's strutting walk. He was bare-footed and wearing the sarong in which he had been praying; his great crest of hair was hidden beneath his prayer cap. His throat was still bandaged.
>
> Seeing the bandage Alex felt a pang of sympathy. For the first time he seemed fully human, even dignified. (*MD*, 155)

This final act of grace is deserved as Sutrisno has survived a series of tests culminating in the attempted decapitation, the metaphor for spiritual disjunction which d'Alpuget fully exploits in *Turtle Beach*. In Asian terms, the beheading also represents a correction of the impious ritual sacrifice of his youth. The wheel of time has come back round, Sutrisno is released from his animal furies, and able to attend to his spirituality. It also signals the downturn of fortune in Alex's spiritual journey, but as she is travelling in unison with her cousin Sinclaire, this topic is dealt with in the next chapter.

10.3.4. D'Alpuget's 'Conflict between Differing Consciences'

In an analysis which a modern Hindu could read as describing the psychological effects of an imbalanced combination of the *gunas*, Antonella Riem presents an interesting critique of the interior violence in the character of Judith Wilkes of *Turtle Beach*. Riem explores the masks which Judith wears to hide the emptiness of her soul, and demonstrates how d'Alpuget manipulates the reactions of her readers to the various masks, and forces them to question their own attitudes towards Asian and Western cultures and societies, which are formed, after all, by the masks the readers themselves wear. Riem says that d'Alpuget 'wants to portray a "conflict between two differing consciences", as a means to analyse different "cultures" or societies' (Riem, 170). At the same time, she is describing d'Alpuget's portrayal of the differing views of just what the masks represent. The conflict seems fundamentally, once again, to be that,

while for an Easterner the masks one wears obscure the reality of the self, for a Westerner the masks are the self.

Typical of the Western construction of masks meant to complete the sense of self is the 'middle-aged, and fetichistically lecherous' Sir Adrian Hobday. Hobday, whose reputation had been as a straight-laced and conventional career diplomat, is obsessed with hermaphroditism, and 'is able to indulge himself with Minou (who sometimes wears a hat with Hermes wings) because he feels that she is that other half of himself which can make him complete. Significantly, with the death of Minou half of his body also dies' (McKeogh, 35). Hobday has in effect crippled himself by basing his personality on masks which are beyond his ability to preserve.

Judith Wilkes' outermost mask is that of the 'strong-willed, independent, self-sufficient and successful woman' (Riem, 171). Her marriage is held to be an ideal one in Australian society—she, the immediately recognised journalist; he, the rising political figure; their two children; the suburban home; et cetera. Underneath this, however, Riem points out how, when d'Alpuget shifts the scene to Malaysia, the reader comes to realise that Judith is a personal and emotional failure. Judith is haunted by the event Riem calls her 'original sin', the short but intense sexual affair, and by the 'contaminating' contact with the violent race riots in Malaysia, which 'provoke a lack of harmony in her own world, a lack of "at-one-ment" that will gradually disrupt her life, her marriage, and the positive aspects' of her personality (Riem, 171). The result of this is that she has become intellectually, emotionally, and sexually frigid. Though she feels how important her 'sin' weighs on her, after she tries to gain 'atonement' by confessing it to a priest, her 'self-willed "social" side' publicly ridicules 'her "frail" self' for seeking the help it desperately needs. This reaction 'is very witty and socially appreciable, it adheres perfectly to the image she has built for herself, but', Riem writes, 'it also mirrors the emptiness behind her mask' (Riem, 171). Judith has chosen sides in the struggle between different layers of her personality, as positivist Western society teaches her to do. She commits herself to the masks she believes are better, and suppresses the rest, where an

Easterner like Kanan or Minou would recognise each mask as a screen superimposed over the soul—certainly giving the self substance and voice, but no more—, acknowledge each as illusory, and maintain some ambivalence towards them all.

The priest's response to Judith's attempted confession, that her sin was 'against yourself' and will bring 'nothing but sorrows and more sins' (*TB*, 54), was, in fact, right on the money. His repeated tag-question, 'd'you understand?', emphasises Judith's 'inability, or unwillingness, to understand anything that goes beyond or beneath her "known" and safe world' (Riem, 172). When Kanan tries to explain basically the same thing in his own words, 'Power over yourself is the only power' (*TB*, 153), Judith rebukes him as well, and reiterates her steadfast misunderstanding as if it were a principle, and yet she is rejecting the very underlying principles of the feminism which she believes she is maintaining.

It is at this point, Riem argues, that 'our "sympathies" as readers start slowly to move away from Judith'. D'Alpuget provides other personalities, other points of view, and 'differing consciences' for those sympathies (Riem, 172). Kanan especially, the professor of Indian history, a man of deep spiritual instincts, who can express without fear his love for both Judith—his lover—and Ralph—his drinking partner. Kanan 'is the perfect counterpoint to Judith, both on the socio-cultural and psychological levels' (Riem, 172). He is a man of deep insight, who 'can know and understand others because he knows and understands himself', a capacity Judith and the other Westerns, who, at best, know only the most superficial of their masks, do not share. Riem notes how d'Alpuget's 'omniscient' narrator ironically identifies Kanan's recognition of his ability 'to read the human heart' as vanity.

While Kanan 'has reached, through Yogic meditation, that still, unshakable inner centre where everything is perfect and pure—universal consciousness—the pure inner source', Judith remains stubbornly caught in her misunderstanding, both attracted to his 'distracting beauty' and angered by his beliefs, which she considers 'superlative garbage' while inevitably pointing out her own lack of 'at-one-ment' (Riem, 174). In contrast, d'Alpuget develops the similarities of philosophical bearing between Kanan and Minou, and does so principally to emphasise the

differences between 'Eastern and Western attitudes towards life, religious feelings and cultural inheritances' (Riem, 175).

D'Alpuget has brought her Western readership through a 'journey of the soul' which, Riem says, would normally have been taken by the protagonist. Judith has not gone along, and 'does not even attempt to understand', while Western readers, who might, like Judith, still misjudge 'Kanan's calm as cynicism or indifference', will nevertheless have progressed to a point where they can understand his point of view. D'Alpuget has 'unveiled the relativity of the values we tend to consider as "universal"', and helps us understand that '"conscience" defines a culture' (Riem, 177). This explains why Minou's death and Judith's rage at Kanan's inaction is so unsettling. Western readers are trained from birth to identify with Judith and see her as right, and yet d'Alpuget makes us feel how shallow and wrong she is.

Those who would jump on Kanan's bandwagon, however, to drink up his expression of Eastern wisdom, which d'Alpuget sanctions with a reputation of integrity, have to admit that he too is compromised. His inability to respond to a public insult might be explained as an Asian's way of dealing with loss of face, but his falsifying of exam results to suit the post-independence system, and his enthusiastic participation at the Thaipusam religious festivities which he openly disparages, are hardly the actions of a man of who merits unquestioned attention (McKeogh, 35). 'Every facet of life in *Turtle Beach* is flawed', McKeogh writes, 'so the reader ought to be suspicious of everything said or described' (McKeogh, 36), and perhaps the reader's also own instinctive response must be held as dubious, for, McKeogh argues,

> Blanche d'Alpuget has adopted the position that an unbiased point of view is impossible. One must agree. No one is capable of having a point of view which is totally independent of that person's culture and background. Therefore it must be biased. Judgement is up to the reader who must identify, as far as possible, his or her own bias. (McKeogh, 37)

Let this be writ large, however. The reader *must* identify his or her own bias not because the author is dead but because d'Alpuget will not let him shirk this responsibility. The voice she gives to Judith Wilkes, which immediately gains the sympathy of her Western readers, is paired with the articulation she gives to characters like Minou and Kanan, who express

d'Alpuget's deep awareness of the Eastern concepts of self. The juxtaposition of these two antagonistic elements in *Turtle Beach* then becomes a subtle but shocking critique of the inability of the Western consciousness to get beyond the masks and know itself beyond the shallow and staged pleasantries it is so used to and which function so well in the modern, Western world. Depend on Blanche d'Alpuget to make a direct and hard slap in the face of her paying readership.

10.4. Koch's Masks

C. J. Koch similarly exploits this metaphor of the effects of the *gunas*, and focuses on how they help or hinder the unmasking of the self. His company of characters includes those who have been 'brutalised' in much the same way as d'Alpuget's characters; others whose self-awareness is stymied by their layers of masks; some who literally relish in their masks; and a very few who come to comprehend in at least a limited way, and then act to realise, the true reality of the unmasked soul. The eclectic approach Koch employs in moulding his characters and themes from sources as widely apart as Lewis Carroll, Rudyard Kipling, and Hindu philosophy and literature, etc., makes an analysis of his method necessarily a bit chaotic. For this reason, this topic has already been discussed in previous sections relating Koch with the *Alice in Wonderland* books, *1984*, the *wayang kulit* and *The Reincarnation of Rama*, the Divine Feminine, and the *Bhagavad Gita*. This section will complete the look at the specific masks of his most important characters, excluding those of Billy Kwan and Guy Hamilton which are covered in the next chapter.

10.4.1. Koch's 'Dehumanising Search for Paradise'

Among the most striking similarities one notices in Koch and d'Alpuget's novels is their treatment of the theme of 'brutalisation' of individuals through the deleterious effects of an imbalance in the three *gunas*. Koch condemns the atheistic communists as soulless dogs (*YLD*, 199), reporting that Aidit, the PKI leader, will 'be hunted down like an animal, and killed' after the failed coup (*YLD*, 282). Pete Curtis, the successful journalist who cannot step out of the shadow of Wally O'Sullivan, is transformed by his anger and frustration into an ill-humoured

lecher who dares the demonic prostitutes to get him when he takes Hamilton to the cemetery (*YLD*, 179), shouting at Hamilton in terms of the thin screen separating the two worlds of the *wayang kulit* to roll his window up to keep them out (*YLD*, 196). Finally, 'furiously hunting some sort of destruction', Curtis disappears into the hell of the burgeoning war in Vietnam (*YLD*, 182-83).

Koch applies this dehumanisation to his variations on the Australian themes of the clash of antagonistic worlds and the search for paradise. Cookie has only one photograph of the group of correspondents. Taken by Kwan, it shows Hamilton and Cookie pedalling tricycle-rickshas which they have taken over from the *betjak* boys in Jalan Thamrin. Cookie's passenger is 'Great Wally, hands on monumental knees, chins held high, looking, in his straining tropical suit, like a figure from the remote Far-Eastern era of Hamilton's nostalgia: a Somerset Maugham character, perhaps'. Hamilton is pedalling 'Kevin Condon, whose sheepish smile is that of a good schoolboy who knows he should not be here'. The 'dog-eared photograph', lending attention to two directions at once, shows Cookie 'not just our lost charade, but Indonesia's double face: its enormous hopelessness; its queer jauntiness' (*YLD*, 58). It enables Cookie to step back in time, and, guided by his imagination, to flip nostalgically through the layers of masks of the characters as to Indonesia itself.

Koch has in all of his novels interwoven the themes of the wearing of masks and of the search for an idealised world. Sharrad writes that the 'balance between ideal and illusion, enchantment and reality is a delicate one, and Koch's protagonists are often exercised trying to bring together the elusive power of dream and the compelling weight of the everyday world' (Sharrad, 1985, 66). And yet, they and the other characters are also often doing just the opposite. Koch parallels the destructive effects of donning masks of personality with those of searching for a paradise in the natural, i.e. the illusory, world, saying that by making 'illusions more important than reality, you will be drained of vitality; you will lose your ability to live' (Thieme, 1986, 22).

The most efficient of such masks is that worn by Great Wally, the famous correspondent who commands the unwavering respect of all in the 'Wayang Club', hiding what Cookie calls 'Wally's secret obsession'. Wally's monumental stature is not just a physical apparition. Pete Curtis, the most competitive of all in the Wayang, defers to Wally as the only real 'journalist: the rest of us were just reporters' (*YLD*, 59), though no one quite knows how Wally gets his stories, ensconced, as he ever is, firmly on his stool in the Wayang Bar. This profoundly enigmatic man must hide his self behind the veil of respectability while indulging in the most forbidden of taboos in the mid-sixties. He exhibits no homosexual or pederastic traits, and clothes his passions with an eating mania, two obsessions which Southeast Asia gives Wally the unique chance to combine. He romanticises his relationships with the young male prostitutes in Singapore, saying, 'I felt like André Gide discovering the beautiful Arab boys' (*YLD*, 60), though in nearly the same breath he admits, 'I'm living on the edge of a volcano' (*YLD*, 59).

Kevin Condon, whose fetish is driving around the *kampongs* searching for exposed breasts, is a heterosexual soulmate of Wally O'Sullivan's. Cookie says 'he was in love with his own frustration, and visual images of the unattainable were, I guessed, at least as important to him as physical consummation'. Condon can not bring himself to enjoy the prostitutes at the cemetery like Pete Curtis, for he is 'looking for a sexual Eden in Java which could not be entered for money'. The ever-sympathetic Cookie says, 'I often wished the green bronze nymph at the edge of the Oasis pool would come to life for him'. Like Wally, Condon is aware of the irrationality of his passion. Though Cookie judges him a 'humourless, finicky man, essentially conformist in every way' his 'humility made him aware that his own earnestness was amusing to us: he would play up to our mockery, caricaturing himself' in both the innocent and lecherous masks he wore. He would say, 'I got the most marvellous photograph today, Cookie—the boobs were *immense*', and with 'dog-like eyes' he would plead for a respite from the fact that 'you can never get to know one of the women'. Then, to

suggestions he visit the cemetery he would respond with a virtuous look, 'I've got no desire for a dose like that madman Curtis' (*YLD*, 61).

President Sukarno is the unanimously recognised central player/puppet master who created 'a theatre of romantic-revolutionary euphoria' to spellbind himself no less than his people (*YLD*, 8). Identifying Sukarno early on as a god-figure, Wally O'Sullivan admits facetiously to Billy Kwan,

> 'No one realises better than I do that the Bung is a god.'
> 'So he is, to the villagers,' Kwan said. 'Have you ever seen him arrive into a village in his white helicopter? To them he's Vishnu, coming down from heaven in his magic car.' (*YLD*, 12)

Great Wally, as ringleader of the Wayang Bar clique endowed with the honorific duty, invokes the many names of Sukarno (*YLD*, 12-13), following tradition of the *Bhagavad Gita* and *The Reincarnation of Rama* as of most heroic literature. Names and titles are affixed to everything in *The Year of Living Dangerously*, from characters to places to years, to raise or reduce them in status, ever reaffirming their importance in the immediate scheme of things, and discretely veiling their true, changeless nature. Wally's sarcastic performance, which demeans the appellations and the man, becomes twisted reality when Sukarno, who in d'Alpuget's novel warned Indonesians of becoming 'monkeys in the dark', literally reduces the entire population of Jakarta to a subhuman level by squandering the nation's wealth and then calling for *konfrontasi* to be turned against Indonesians themselves. This is his cataclysmic *banting stir*, the 'absolute change', a call for *adharma* to overthrow *dharma* in order to create a completely mad world overwhelmed by *rajas* and *tamas*, where men behave like animals, devouring each other and then themselves to satisfy their ravenous hunger. Sukarno, who ceases his god-like visits to his people in the *pasar* but continues his own lavish lifestyle, councils his starving people to solve the severe problem of Jakarta's rat infestation by eating the rats. Cookie eventually recognises Sukarno as 'almost inhuman in his sun-glasses and *pitji*', the 'mask-like props' which had earlier invested him with such dignity (*YLD*, 222). Billy also reluctantly concludes that Sukarno has forsaken his humanity, and, rather than being the hoped-for avatar of Vishnu, has allied himself to 'the beast' (*YLD*, 242).

Billy Kwan is thinking of Satan himself, an extreme case of the apocalyptic scenario in the novel, but all of Koch's Australian protagonists find themselves in an Asian landscape teeming with unruly spirits and minor demons. Guy Hamilton is intrigued by the indigenous quarter where they seem to be emerging from the underworld: 'He liked Pasar Baru, even in this time of increasing violence. From the cave entrances of shops, shopkeepers smiled and muttered invitations, like emissaries of damnation' (*YLD*, 232). Cookie sees them in the faces—European and Indonesian—looking down on Billy's body in the Hotel Indonesia arcade, and notices how some 'wore inexplicable smiles. So there really are devils in human form, I thought' (*YLD*, 250). The earth, normally the realm of men, animals and plants, has been invaded by these demons who should have their own place in the Triple World. Even inanimate objects are vitalised with spirits under these conditions of *adharma*. At the gruesome mutilation and execution of the generals at Crocodile Hole, the most graphic description of the work of bloodthirsty Goddess Kali, Cookie says of the landing lights of the airport: the 'blue lights watch, like evil spirits' (*YLD*, 270).

Cookie is one of the exceptional characters in Koch's novels in that he is not cited for suffering the dehumanising effects of the masks, at least not beyond an undeveloped depressive character and a drinking problem. In his dual role as the father confessor and narrator of *The Year of Living Dangerously*, Cookie understands and wears the masks better than any other. He learns hidden truths from the others, supplementing the information he has from his own experience and Billy Kwan's files. He then assumes the function of the *dalang*, who provides the *wayang kulit*'s two-tiered narrative. Talking of the Wayang Bar, the journalists' refuge from the theatre of confrontation on the outside, Cookie says in his *djanturan* voice that under *konfrontasi* all Westerners had entered a realm of insanity where their personalities were worn like the masks of ancient Greek drama. 'We carried our white faces through the streets like ridiculous badges', he says, and after the stories were filed

> we retreated gratefully to the Wayang, a foreigner's bar in a foreigner's hotel, out of reach of all but the most wealthy and powerful Indonesians. Off-stage, in these cool hours, we could be ourselves, no longer men in white masks (*YLD*, 9).

And yet, Cookie describes the Wayang Bar for its 'artificially heightened good fellowship' and its resemblance to the Shadow Theatre from which it got its name, repeatedly making it clear that the wearing of masks does not end at the entrance to the Wayang Bar.

Cookie claims to dislike his father-confessor role, and says it is simply his being a lapsed Catholic with good listening habits which makes him fit the part. There is, however, a need for someone to wear a father-figure mask among the Wayang colleagues, whose 'isolation from normal life and the day-to-day uncertainty of their position prompted them to self-revelation' in the Wayang, 'with its changeless red candles flickering at intervals around the black mirror-surface of the bar'—the *wayang kulit* ambience which seems to Cookie an appropriate 'confession-box' (*YLD*, 57). Cookie then waits some ten years, time to remove the masks he would have been wearing in the heat of the moment and assume with relish the mask of the *wayang kulit*'s *dalang*, which allows him to assemble from a hilltop farm in dry, cool, southeast Australia the story of Billy Kwan and Guy Hamilton's search for soul and self and paradise.

Paradise, of course, is not a place, but is the state of the perfectly unmasked soul. Koch's protagonists pursue paradise fully ignorant of this, however, and this is especially dangerous in the environment of the cataclysm of Southeast Asia of the 1960s. One might be led to look for a paradise in drugs, which Koch called 'a way of trying to get a visionary experience on the cheap' (Thieme, 1986, 21), and which he deals with in many scenes, though perhaps more succinctly in *Highways to a War* when Mike Langford is accosted by his street children begging him not to go into the La Bohème opium bar to seek release from the pain of the war (*HW*, 197). The clique of journalists have long, orgiastic feasts with drug spiced foods. Such experiences, which represent for them the best of times in old Phnom Penh, are, however, inevitably dehumanising, as Koch shows when the irascible but eloquent Trever Griffiths appears to Harvey Drummond with a horrifying mask. His 'dark eyes shine and insist in the old way, and his paper-white face works with the old inner fury. But as I watch, his face becomes a huge Assyrian mask, with glossy black beard and ringlets, filling my vision.' It is

the effect of the marihuana in the couscous affecting Drummond, but 'the merciless Assyrian king who is Griffiths continues to sit in the darkness in front of me, his eyes flashing anger and death and pillage', and wearing the 'high cone-shaped cap' of a wizard.

Paul Sharrad notes the parallel with the episode of Odysseus and Circe, writing that through the growth in self-awareness Koch's protagonists can achieve 'a breaking of the enchantment of the imperial Circe' (Sharrad, 1985, 65). Sharrad equates the illusions born of colonialist prejudices with those of the enchantress who turned Odysseus' men into swine. Koch has given Circe free rein with the *gunas* to make Sukarno into a god, then a man, a caterpillar and finally a demon; Wally into a cannibalistic, pederastic walrus; the intellectual, Buddha-like Billy Kwan into variously a rabbit, cat or lizard, and then into an unreasoning madman; plus, Koch names the ever-horny but sheepishly shy Condon to sound like 'condom'; and Curtis, who is always hiring the services of whores, like 'coitus'—and all for neglecting the truth of their souls. The movement in this age of darkness is typically from the light of *sattva* to the dark of *tamas*, and is typified by the *rajas* which makes the individuals desire the stupefaction of Circe's wine. And yet, as Sharrad suggests, those who can release themselves from the stereotypes and attitudes inherited from the Empire and nurtured in Australia might neutralise Circe's potion, regain their humanity, and, Koch and d'Alpuget add, with the discipline, concentration and self-awareness of a Hindu ascetic, perhaps something even more than that.

10.4.2. The Masks of Evil

An Easterner is less likely than a Westerner to separate evil characters from good ones. 'Evil' itself is, in the Hindu sense, simply *adharma*, the absence of righteous cosmic order. Evil has its proponents, however. Foremost of these are the demons, who are engaged in an endless struggle for cosmic supremacy with the gods, whose interest lies in maintaining *dharma*, the righteous order of the universe. Mankind's role in the struggle is critical. Men must maintain their link with the gods through sacrifice and their righteous thought and action, else the demons might gain the upper hand and overthrow the cosmic order. As such, while

men (and sometimes animals and plants) are not properly seen as 'good' or 'evil', they are proxies of either good or evil. Koch, like d'Alpuget, puts on centre stage these important Eastern concepts of the agents of lightness and of darkness, and the de-humanising effects of unrighteousness.

10.4.2.1. The Crow

Koch's principle metaphor for evil is a lightless spirit which is accompanied or heralded by a carnivorous crow. The first appearance of the crow is in *Across the Sea Wall*, where in Madras the old stone and stucco buildings of the British Raj stand like tombstones, themselves impaled with unbecoming telephone poles. The verandas, under latticed arches inscribed with *India*, are already occupied by the 'crows which were everywhere, like semi-humorous messengers of doom'. In front of these metaphors of the fallen empire are the commercial stalls which Koch calls 'the real city', displaying 'framed, gaudy pictures which looked from a distance like erotica, but proved close up to be the gods: Shiva, Vishnu, Kali'. The crows have feasted on the imperial carcass, and are waiting for their time to descend on the world which is well on its way to degeneration in its garish display of the falling gods, while 'a soft yet penetrating voice' promises to the worst in men, 'Everything for nothing here' (*ASW*, 90).

In *The Year of Living Dangerously* Koch focuses on a variant of this metaphor of evil, again first seen in *Across the Sea Wall*, the trishaws which follow the central characters, 'like creaking birds', and promising, 'Yes sar—I take you anywhere!' (*ASW*, 90). They become the swarming *betjaks*, the bicycle rickshaws of Jakarta, one in particular which bears the inauspicious name, *Tengah Malam*: Midnight. In *Highways to a War* the trishaw/*betjaks* return as 'cyclos'. When Mike Langford and the other correspondents are going to Madame Dauphine's opium den, the 'Cyclo boys wheeled towards us in a flock, and the party began to climb into the black-hooded machines with shouts and laughter' (*HW*, 243). The journalists are ignoring, however, the ultimate destination of the crow-like vehicles. In a scene which parallels one in *The Year of Living Dangerously*, when Guy Hamilton and Billy Kwan are shadowed by the black *betjak* during their walk (*YLD*, 19-24), Langford takes such a lustful

cyclo for his first visit to Madame Claudine Phan's home. 'The cyclo boy wanted to wait, but Langford told him to go, and paid him off. They boy pedalled slowly away under the streetlights, looking back with lingering reproach' (*HW*, 123). Even when using the cyclo for a more respectable purpose, it waits hungrily for the opportunity to take its client to hell. These crows have made themselves known to Mike Langford since his youth on the Tasmanian farm when 'The ancient, baby voices of crows complained always in the heat' (*HW*, 21). This malevolent, conspiratory heat later torments Harvey Drummond who reports, 'My head ached from the weight of my helmet, and the heat began to seem malignant to me, like a secret weapon of the Viet Cong' (*HW*, 173). The crows, heat, and dried-out landscape are leitmotifs which recall the forbidding Australian outback and which are even waiting on the edges of the shadows to pick away at the remaining bits of humanity when the light is extinguished.

In an especially apt vision in a Cambodia about to be sucked into the darkness, Trever Griffiths pays tribute to another evil bird, the B-52:

> The supreme vehicle of death! Flies as high as fifty thousand feet, with a range of twelve thousand miles. Bombs inside; bombs under the wings. Beautiful as an eagle. At that height, it can't even be seen: you know nothing until the bombs arrive. The crew of a B-52 are innocent: they do not see what they do. But down here, villages disappear into chasms, trees go down like grass, and the noise can make you lose your mind. Terrible beauty, brothers!' (*HW*, 239).

Griffiths does not get much support from the other journalists, not even for his fitting allusion to W. B. Yeats' 'Easter 1916', but his interpretation proves close enough when the Soldiers Three experience a B-52 bombing raid. Though a few miles from the target, Jim Feng finds himself clinging to the earth which 'heaved in a huge spasm' as

> a roar engulfed us unlike anything I'd ever known. I'd never imagined such a sound. It was not a sound, it was something beyond sound; it opened a gaping hole in the world and in my head, making my mind cry out in terror, making the whole world rock and sway. The palms and bigger trees nearby were bending like grass. (*HW*, 312)

Griffiths hardly seems to deserve the horrifying ancient Assyrian mask Drummond imagines him wearing, but this is what Koch says happens when in an 'age of nihilism, which this one clearly is, the impulse to good is perverted, coming out in various forms of fanaticism'. Men

want to do good, he argues, but 'they encounter all sorts of monsters that try to tempt them' (Mitchell, 1996, Interview, 72). The real monster is not Griffiths, but it does find in Griffiths' vehement criticism of American policy in Vietnam a vehicle for infiltrating Drummond's mind.

Another such vehicle for the infiltration of evil is the crow-like vagrant Luke Goddard, who was also at Langford's farm, living in a shack which smelled 'like the den of an animal' (*HW*, 52). He 'had always been the carrier of some malicious intention' (*HW*, 55), and 'seemed not to be human, but instead to be a black spirit in the landscape, passing with bent head'. Goddard is the first of the 'Black Ghosts' who Langford captures in his camera, and also the first to disturb him in his sleep, when

> in his dark jacket, he came into Mike's dreams. He came through the window of the sleepout and tugged at the counterpane, trying to draw Mike out into the night of a hundred years ago. And now his stern face had changed: it was young, noble and refined: a dark prince of the air. (*HW*, 52)

Goddard is Langford's first evil tormentor. He follows Langford who is courting his first love, Maureen Maguire, the farm-worker's daughter, threatens to expose them to his father, and finally rapes the girl, leading to her family's disappearance and causing the psychological turmoil which will eventually lead Langford into Asia. Goddard's part in the novel is limited, however, as he does not really belong to its period, but is somehow connected with it through the distant past, associated perhaps with the Aboriginal sense of the Dreamtime in opposition to the Western sense of history, and with the Indian theme of reincarnation within the literary tradition of a good character being bedevilled through a series of lives by an evil one. For Langford, Goddard remains an image of his memory, strongly connected with the stinging nettles of the dusty gully on the farm: 'Like stained and mildewed cloth, their smell itself stained, the dark green weeds recalled something terrible: something in an ancient life that had to be paid for' (*HW*, 51). Goddard, the crows and trishaws are not so much evil in themselves as they are heralds of the turn of the wheel of time, recalling the failings of men to perform their duties to preserve the scheme of *dharma*, and announcing the coming age of *adharma*, when they shall scavenge the remains of evil's destruction.

10.4.2.2. The 'People Over There', and the War on the Edge of Reality

Mike Langford makes new contact with the evil figures when he arrives in Indochina. At first, he expects he has found them in the Viet Cong, but then realises that while the people sometimes call them the Black Ghosts, the real demons are not these soldiers:

> When I filmed these dead VC close up, their faces surprised me. I'd imagined them as some sort of demon, I suppose. But instead, lying there in their black pyjamas and those crude rubber sandals they make out of car tyres, they had faces just like those of the ARVN troops. Very young: peasant boys. (*HW*, 143)

The VC are very much like the ARVN soldiers Langford goes into the field with and gains mutual respect for. They are better called 'The People Over There' as Koch gives them generally positive while ambiguous presentation, but they are caught up in the chaos of *adharma* welling over Southeast Asia. Harvey Drummond experiences this breakdown of reality during a firefight. He finds himself running without direction, surrounded by the whining and cracking of bullets, exploding mines, shouting and cursing, and falling bodies strewing the earth, until he along with all of reality loses identity:

> I was no longer Harvey Drummond; I was an anonymous dreamer, the landscape of whose dream kept maliciously breaking up, while he tried to get back to the place where he'd left his real life behind. Pebbles and pick dust and emerald leaves were all in bits, in disconnected fragments, bright and precise, flying by me. I'd lost the Soldiers Three, and badly wanted to find them. (*HW*, 174)

The world becomes a battleground from which he and the others on the ground seem unconnected. The warriors are insects, some invisible, others 'insidiously throbbing', and the scene is dominated by the orange and yellow colours which Koch repeatedly uses to symbolise the world of dream and irreality.

> Helicopter gunships had now appeared over the trees, insidiously throbbing, searching like intelligent insects, spraying the invisible VC with fire. Other choppers were dropping smoke grenades to mark the VC position, and lurid orange and yellow smoke clouds began to fill the clearing, making it like an outrageous fairground. (*HW*, 174)

The war in Indochina is not like other wars. It is fought on that edge of reality which, Koch writes, transgresses the barriers of the looking-glass. The images are typically of a horrendous typhoon coming out of another reality, 'a nightmare vagueness, and this dry, huge,

empty, yellow-and-green dish of land, under these towering clouds, was the axis of that vagueness, hiding the black-clad Others' (*HW*, 225). There are the ever-present 'contemptuous; even malevolent' onlookers, the cyclo drivers and the 'Unsmiling Chinese waiters in white shirts and black trousers' who are also present in the Wayang Bar in *The Year of Living Dangerously*, and who 'stand like sentinels around the walls, watching us' (*HW*, 234). Koch repeatedly gives us Westerners watching Asians watching Westerners, and it is to emphasise the ambiguities in determining which are agents of good and which of evil, and to remind the reader of the interrelation in the identity of self and other.

10.4.2.3. The Ogres

The Americans are recognised more as victims of the war of *adharma* than forces for it, yet their bombs clearly serve the demons' purpose of bringing unnatural terror to the world. Captain Danh compares the Americans to demons by trying to be gods and upsetting *dharma*, though the North Vietnamese and Viet Cong have learned through their righteousness to avoid the bombs which the Americans believe will win the war.

> So the Americans are deluded. They sit in the sky like gods pressing buttons. But when we shoot them down over Hanoi, they don't look like gods. Wars are won on the earth, in the end—and this is our earth. (*HW*, 415)

The Americans come closest to the ranks of demons with the fall of Saigon, amidst a scene dominated by madness and darkness. Jim Feng remembers how 'Thousands of people were hammering at the closed gates and on the walls with their fists, demanding, pleading, weeping'. The city had lost its power supply and was bearing the collapse under the dark and rain. The American helicopters come in, Koch's soulless insects, to evacuate a lucky few and thoughtlessly abandon the rest to the descending wheel of fate:

> the whirring and beating of twin rotors filled the blackness, and the choppers hovered and tilted, the glaring white lights in their noses guiding them down. Young Vietnamese climbed the walls and made it to the top, but the big Marine guards kicked and fought them off. Other Marines lobbed tear gas canisters into the crowd. What are you doing? I thought. You came here long ago to help them against their enemies; how can you do this to them now? (*HW*, 415)

The help promised by the *kasar* Americans is proving to be as faithless as Aubrey Hardwick had predicted it would be (*HW*, 92), and the Western aliens who had carpet-bombed their land were now beating their retreat to the dismay of the South Vietnamese:

> And these people had now faced the fact that what they most wanted they were never going to have: they would never be lifted out by one of those giant green choppers that were the only things that could save them. All they could do now was to watch the white lights that kept on coming down through the dark, like lights from another world ... . I heard that they were still there at dawn, watching the sky. They were waiting for the helicopters that were only in their minds, coming to rescue them from tomorrow. (*HW*, 415-16)

To call the Americans here *kasar* is confusing novels, but it remains appropriate in Koch's interpretation of Asian literary tradition to apply the Javanese concept of *alus* and *kasar* and to avoid Western distinctions of good and evil. What is important as far as Koch's presentation of the Americans is concerned comes out of the way he handles them according to the rules governing the ogres of the *wayang kulit*. Phillip Cowie argues that the forces of the PKI, whose beliefs and political support come from an 'overseas kingdom', 'represent the ultimate despicable side of creation, i.e. the *wayang* ogre element' (Cowie, 88). This would, however, equate the indigenous Wayang of the Left with the foreign ogres, which is simply not logical. It is the Americans who fit the ogre role in Koch's novels. They play no major roles, and seem to be the most foreign of the foreigners, avoiding direct contact with the indigenous peoples as much as possible, significantly by not learning their languages. Some of them are the physically strongest figures, and they come from a powerful foreign land, but they lack the most basic refined characteristics of speech and behaviour. This makes the Americans the personification of badness, if not downright evil. This is the one point upon which all the Asians (and most other Westerners) in the novels can agree, no matter how antagonistic they are with each other. These are all characteristics borrowed from the Javanese Shadow Theatre:

> If there is a purely "bad" side in *wajang* it is the ogres, non-Javanese who reside "overseas" in foreign lands and who embody every trait detestable in Javanese eyes. Their coarse bodies bulge obscenely, they are smelly and bad-mannered, they shout and leap about unthinkingly, they stare with open eyes and gaping mouths. Their kings may be described as brave and powerful, … But the typical ogre … has no redeeming feature. (Brandon, 19-20)

What must not be forgotten, however, is that even Bima, the powerful brother of Arjuna and Judistira Pandava, is himself half ogre, yet the three together make up the perfect combination of dharmic qualities. This saves the Americans from an abysmal characterisation, as does the fact that Koch has other characters, non-existent in the *wayang* but present in the cataclysm of Southeast Asia, who really are the personification of evil. The Khmer Rouge are—or at least are fully possessed by—the demons of the Hindu Triple World. Before discussing the Khmer Rouge, however, it would be useful to distinguish them from the other communist fighters in the war in Vietnam and Cambodia.

10.4.2.4. Vietnamese Forces of *dharma*

The NVA and VC are also caught up in the firestorm of the cosmic cataclysm, but Koch again follows the manner of the *wayang kulit* in giving them varying degrees of refined and unrefined characteristics. While the mostly undefined VC are, like the Khmer Rouge, clearly aligned with the demons and forces for *adharma*, their vague portrayal leaves them outside of Koch's condemnation, and in death they seem, as in the above-mentioned scene (*HW*, 143), to be defrocked of their masks of evil. At the same time, Koch makes some of the Communist forces, especially Captain Danh and his men, unquestionably into forces of *dharma*. During the long captivity of the three journalists, Koch avoids the brutal scenes of hatred and retribution which typify historical accounts of Westerners taken prisoner during the war in Southeast Asia. Rather, he displays the simple, redeeming human dignity of the captors, a distinction which flies in the face of his ogre-like Americans when Danh explains to Volkov the strong will of the North Vietnamese foot soldiers:

> They know very little about politics, he said. Often they have marched hundreds of kilometres; they have been bombed until they feel crazy; they are half starved, and homesick for their villages and their families. But they believe in their country. (*HW*, 318-19)

Jim Feng remarks how the 'North Vietnamese and Viet Cong soldiers had not been real to us' as they 'had seen them only as prisoners, or the dead' (*HW*, 313), but his own captivity has made them real and human. This gives Danh an opening to debunk the Western myth about the Communist bugaboo when he says, 'Marxism is not a religion for us that cannot be

changed: Marxism is a tool to help us free our country. Do you understand?' (*HW*, 326). Koch's presentation of the NVA constantly underscores their simple, pragmatic and honourable humanity, and by association that of other communist nations, as in the following description of the quality of their equipment and sympathy of their men and women:

> … a North Vietnamese convoy; a row of four military trucks, Soviet-built, solid and old-fashioned, with bicycles tied to their radiators. They were filled with NVA troops in their baggy green cotton uniforms and sun helmets—at least a third were young women. (*HW*, 330)

The North Vietnamese seem more like innocent and inquisitive new kids on the block than some forbidding enemy when the Soldiers Three see 'the young male and female soldiers staring at us curiously as they went. One or two women smiled, and a group of young men waved to us' (*HW*, 331). In the most defining scene of NVA sense of discipline and purpose, Captain Danh's tired and hungry troops take two live chickens from a village which had refused to offer them food. Danh orders them to return them:

> We do not come to rob them; we come to free them.
>
> The two men turned away without a word, and trudged off into the darkness. I waited for some mutter of protest from around the fire; even perhaps some anger. But there was none; only silence.

Feng realises then, he says 'that the North would win the war' (*HW*, 332). It is not a question of might, but of righteousness.

This is not to say that Koch is absolving communism, but that he is relying again on the themes of the *Bhagavad Gita* and the *wayang kulit*, namely that good and evil are qualities of cosmic order, and that when men tend to their duties within that order the illusory masks of the personality can be removed. The morning after the maddening American evacuation, the symbols of evil—whirling fans, the colour yellow, expressionless Chinese waiters in starched white jackets—quietly create a false air of normality. Feng notices unusual swarms of insects—symbols of the soulless—at the Palace grounds, 'hovering and shimmering', and in the extremely still and hot air 'the whirring of the insects began to sound to me like some mechanical alarm system, warning us of what was to come' (*HW*, 417-18). Langford and Feng are waiting at the Presidential Palace when the first North Vietnamese Army soldier arrives.

He has a simple 'broad brown country face', but also the fierce, hard 'killing shine' they had earlier seen in Khmer Rouge fighters. Langford tells him that they are Australian, hoping to deflect the evil in the soldier's eyes. 'The soldier frowned and looked puzzled; then I saw the shine go out of his eyes. He lowered his gun, and I knew we were going to live' (*HW*, 420). Vietnam will not become a paradise, but it is not because the NVA are permanently corrupted by their association with demons.

10.4.2.5. *Les Autres*—Dehumanised Soldiers of the Dark Age

The Khmer Rouge, however, are so brutalised. Even their NVA allies consider them thieves (*HW*, 330) and uncivilised (*HW*, 332). Koch's evidence to this are numerous, among the most striking being that the Cambodian troops never leave their dead, 'no matter what the risk'. The Khmer Rouge mutilate the bodies since 'Buddhists believe that any mutilations and deformities will go with them into the afterlife' (*HW*, 274). This behaviour can not be explained except that the Khmer Rouge revolution is primarily over that reality which lies beyond the edge of this world.

Unlike the VC, the Khmer Rouge seem irredeemably possessed by demons. In the first description of them they are all very young, brown-skinned Khmer peasants with long wavy hair and the red-and-white checked *krama* typical of Cambodians, but, unlike the curious, waving NVA, the Khmer Rouge stare directly and lifelessly at the captured journalists. Jim Feng suspects 'they came from forest and mountain regions which had very little contact with the outside world', but their brutalisation is so profound that they resist material presence. They are mere shadows in black pyjamas, even though they are standing directly in the headlights of an NVA supply truck. In addition, Feng notices a horrifying look in the faces of these agents of annihilation:

> In the lights of the truck, which put strong shadows on their faces, their eyes seemed to shine with anger at something: something they didn't understand; something which made them all the more hostile because they didn't understand it. It was as though something larger then themselves had taken possession of their spirits, filling them with malice.

Feng puts the terror of these Black Ghosts into contemporary Western terms, saying they reminded him of 'the sort of street gang you have to fear' (*HW*, 330).

Harvey Drummond remarks how the Khmer Rouge suddenly appeared during the American bombing of Cambodia. Most Cambodians, he says, 'simply called them *les autres*: the Others', adding the standard facts of the 'Other' stereotype that 'No one knew anything about them' and that 'we seldom got close enough to see their faces.' Drummond delivers a further truism about 'others' and Australians as well, saying they 'belonged to a dream at the edges too; but now they were moving to the centre' to which 'all highways led' (*HW*, 216).

In the dead quiet centre of that storm lies *angka*, which Donald Mills calls 'A true Communist society, all in camps, all obeying orders, where you'd have to get permission to sleep with your wife'. *Angka* is, in fact, *adharma*, 'Back to basics: no Western technology, no money, no cities. Pure' (*HW*, 432). Colonel Chandara reports on the testimony of Cambodian refugees, who report how the Khmer Rouge eliminate all manifestations of *dharma*. Everyone who is educated, middle-class, or even wears glasses or has a book is executed.

> They make mountains of bodies. They are like the Nazis. The towns are emptied; the temples destroyed; the monks slaughtered. This is true barbarism, which wants to smash everything that is civilized…. Envy has become a religion: they call it *angka* … . It is a new Dark Age. No books for the people to read; no medicine to heal them when they fall ill; no law to protect them; no family life; no religion to comfort them; no music but the music of propaganda, played over loudspeakers. (*HW*, 443)

The special role of men in the Triple World is thereby destroyed along with all other aspects of *dharma*. The demons have robbed humans of their propitious balance of the three *gunas*. Under the rule of *angka*, the youngest and least able to reason are recruited to fight, and given power to adjudicate life and death in the simplest, most horrible terms:

> 'Children with automatic weapons. Anything they envy or don't understand must be evil: must be killed and destroyed. When executing, the Khmer Rouge don't waste bullets: they use hoes, and other simple methods.' (*HW*, 443)

The effects of their confrontation with the demons is exemplified in the captivity of the Soldiers Three. Though at the hands of the NVA, they literally descend into hell, are agonised by their physical pain, forget who they are, and finally are dehumanised. Jim Feng tells the

tale of the nausea and spasms from his dysentery, of the leeches clinging to their legs and feet, and of the mud sucking at their feet as they struggled to keep up with the forced march. The only apparent escape was 'to sink into the warm red mud and stay there'. Nature itself becomes their enemy. Even the rain nearly takes on a mineral-like nature governed by *tamas*, becoming 'so solid that we seemed to be walking under water', but retains its rejuvenating, dharmic quality as it flows over the three men, cleansing their dry eyes and mouths. Jim Feng, who knew he was ready to die and becoming an animal, finds strength in Mike Langford's comfort, in his own thoughts of roots and identity, and in a poem whose theme is *sattva*:

> I had no thoughts, but I kept myself going by reciting again and again some lines that came back to me from the poem about the Herd-boy star. It was my great comfort; I heard my father's voice reciting it too.
>
> *Far away twinkles the Heard-boy star;*
> *Brightly shines the Lady of the Han River …*
> *Her bitter tears fall like streaming rain*. (HW, 338)

If they had been captured by the Khmer Rouge, there would have been no chance to find relief in the rainwater or memories of home. As with the Khmer Rouge guerrillas who forfeited their souls or Mike Langford who forfeited his life, there is little hope of holding off the demons once one gives himself into their hands.

10.5. Conclusion

That the world could reach the point described by Blanche d'Alpuget and Christopher J. Koch is nothing new; history has recounted the horrifying story all too well. What the Western sense of history fails to do is explain the causes beyond linear strings of causal relationships leading from colonialism, to the Japanese invasion in W.W.II, to attempts to reinstate colonialist or ersatz-colonialist regimes in the post-war period, to communist revolutions, to spiralling increases in involvement of the Cold War adversaries in the region, and to ever-worsening atrocities committed by all sides. Early in his presidency, Lynden Johnson declared that the war in Vietnam would be for the hearts and minds of the Vietnamese people, and yet Westerners have never managed to deal very well with the Asian side of the human equation. It is perhaps for this reason that one finds d'Alpuget and Koch bringing out novels about the fall of Sukarno and the war in Southeast Asia so long after the fact. They serve as part of the

healing process for Australians when they help convey the trauma felt by the Asians in the conflicts they fought against each other, and which each side saw fundamentally as wars between 'ourselves' and 'the others'.

Horror used to be one of the major cultural themes of Western expansion into Africa, the Americas and Asia, and was often best treated when done so in terms of the analogy of the horror inevitable in constructing perceptions of the 'self' and the 'Other'. D'Alpuget and Koch have broken away from this Western perspective, however, offering horror not as something which is inherent but which is foreign to the human being, an intruder which gains access to the spirit through an unbalanced mix of the three *gunas*. This leads to the dehumanisation of all of the major characters in the novels studied here, and of such seemingly *alus* men as Cambodia's exiled Prince Sihanouk, who Koch condemns as 'Cruel, like all selfish people, with much blood on his hands' and much worse than the pleasure-seeking clown he is reputed to be. Retreated to Peking to live in luxury with his Chinese patrons where he became allied with the Khmer Rouge, the Prince, who had seen his fortune turn for the worse, was driven away from the clarity of *sattva* which was the centre of his education and upbringing, towards the greed and desire ignited by *rajas* and the stubborn willingness to ignore the plight of his people caused by *tamas*. Colonel Chandara could not more clearly warn Mike Langford of this when he says that in order to 'keep power for himself, he would do anything; he would deliver this country to demons' (*HW*, 276). The proof of the effects of this dearth of *sattva* in favour of *rajas* and *tamas* are the Khmer Rouge Killing Fields which shall forever be recorded as part of mankind's history.

The Masks of Doubles

11.1. Introduction

Having centred attention in chapter 10 on the influence of the three *gunas* in concealing the personality of men behind masks of illusion, the focus now turns to two special cases in which Blanche d'Alpuget and Christopher J. Koch bring in the themes of the double characters. Doubles are a familiar theme in Australian and other Western literature, but tend to be treated as polarities, as in the Australian sense of self as a paradise or hell; as ambiguously near to or far from the centre of civilisation; as land of innocents open to an impending invasion of the yellow hoards or as that of the 'Coming Man' answering the call to rescue old Mother England (which is an example of doubled doubles); as lying geo-socio-politically in the East or in the West; as white or non-white; as a society of settlers introducing civilisation or of invaders destroying civilisation; as founded on the sweat of free immigrants or of transported convicts. The implication of such doubles is to direct concentration to conflicting judgements and views, producing the good/bad, strong/weak, innocent/cunning, cultured/crude views which culminate in the attitudes which underscore the stereotypal separation of 'the self' and the 'Other', and which typify the Orientalism which identifies Australia with the imperial/Western 'self' and the colonialism which renders it an 'Other'.

The Asian tradition deals with doubles, or multiples, however, more as composites, as seen in the Great Goddess, who is primarily recognised in the three more powerful aspects as Parvati, Durga, and Kali, and even in myriad other forms depending on the occasion (as discussed in detail in chapter 9), and in the three Pandava brothers of the *wayang kulit*, Judistira, Arjuna, and Bima, who together make up the complete man (as covered in chapter 7). The results then—just the opposite of the Western trend—are namely to bind disparate parts, formed from the illusion of natural entities, into the whole, which is the true, timeless, spaceless, limitless and indescribable Self. C. J. Koch finds his affinities with these metaphoric figures which cause the dissolution of the distinction between 'self' and 'Other', and which in the Australian case of mixed races and cultures he calls 'hybrids'. He presents

several variations on the theme in his Asian novels, including most often those which are composed of two characters, as Robert O'Brien and Ilsa Kalnins in *Across the Sea Wall* (Koch's most primitive development of the motif, reviewed in chapter 6); and Ly Keang and Mike Langford in *Highways to a War* (whose close association is addressed in chapter 9). Blanche d'Alpuget has presented her concept of the search for psychological self-reconciliation, which she terms 'at-one-ment', in many brutalised characters, principally Judith Wilkes, Minou, and Adrian Hobday in *Turtle Beach* and Sutrisno in *Monkeys in the Dark*, plus in the cultural doubles represented by Wilkes and Kanan, and Minou and Hobday in *Turtle Beach*, and Alex and Maruli in *Monkeys in the Dark* (treated variously in chapters 4, 6, and 10).

The most developed and central treatment of the combined themes of the masks of the personality and doubles is the focus of this chapter. In C. J. Koch's novels it is found in the conjunction of Guy Hamilton and Billy Kwan of *The Year of Living Dangerously*. Indeed, Kwan is a racial hybrid with multiple, disjointed yet highly developed cultural manifestations who must find his completeness through binding with a socially, intellectually and culturally fractured and underdeveloped Hamilton. In d'Alpuget the zenith of this development is in the relationship between Alexandra Wheatfield and her cousin Anthony Sinclaire in *Monkeys in the Dark*, which traces its origins in the Indian tradition of the progressions of the saints' lives, recounting the combined spiritual journey of two characters, one who is seeking *dharma*, and another who is bent on dragging them both towards *adharma*.

11.2. D'Alpuget's Australo-Asian Sacred Biography

As seen in the birth of Vishnu as Arjuna's charioteer Krishna and other examples given in earlier chapters, even gods can therefore take on lower, human or animal form without debasing their intrinsic beings when the defence of *dharma* requires them to do so. More common, of course, is the transmigration of a human soul into the body/personality of an animal due to an over-accumulation of *tamas*. Blanche d'Alpuget expands on her use of this brutalisation metaphor in two significant ways to develop the central theme of the spiritual

journey of Alexandra Wheatfield. One is the subplot of Sutrisno and Maruli, both Indonesian versions of the Australian 'Coming Man'—hard-working, strong individualists who come to quick prominence followed by their growing desire, fall, and dehumanisation. In the second instance, that dealt with here, d'Alpuget draws on Indian sacred biographical literature where a 'dark' character pulls himself and the 'saint' he accompanies into greater risk of self-delusion and regressive reincarnation.

11.2.1. The Spiritual Journey of Alex Wheatfield and Her Dark Brother

Anthony Sinclaire has little of the experience or canniness seen in Sutrisno and Maruli, but shares the preponderance of 'hindrances' in their personalities, which motivate him ever to upset the order of things as he works to establish himself morally and socially above all others. Alexandra Wheatfield is young, innocent, and rather too inspired by her goodness, a fault caused by a lack of solidifying *tamas* in her character. In a case of attracting opposites, Sinclaire is as driven to darkness as Alex is to light, and the question is only which one will ultimately prove strong enough to impart direction to both. In this sense, *Monkeys in the Dark* is just one episode in the story of the spiritual journey of Alexandra Wheatfield and Anthony Sinclaire. Part one includes all background material which is recounted after the fact and which serves to associate metaphorically Alex Wheatfield with Sutrisno, Maruli and Sinclaire, and to establish her role as a spiritual heroine satisfying both Australian and Asian paradigms: Born into a wealthy, aristocratic family, she and her sisters exhibit exceptional qualities of independence and fortitude to go along with their beauty. Young Alex is, however, seduced by her cousin Sinclaire. After a years-long secret affair, Alex is forced to have an abortion. She takes all of the blame and disappointment of her family on herself, never divulging the name of her lover. The result is that her share of the inheritance is reduced, and this to the advantage of Sinclaire's. Part two includes the events represented as current: Alex and Sinclaire are reunited in Djakarta when Sinclaire helps her get a job as the assistant press officer in the Australian Embassy where Sinclaire is working as a recruiter of Indonesian informants. The strong attraction between the cousins remains, and Sinclaire's activities throughout the novel

are centred around his quest to reconquer his cousin. In the end, Sinclaire achieves his goal due to an act of profound betrayal, which also results in Alex's Sumatran lover being abandoned, possibly to die, in an Indonesian prison. The novel ends with a kiss in a dark bar, leaving the reader to expect more episodes of Sinclaire and Alex's impossible relationship.

This sort of plot is certainly not unusual in Western literature, but especially resembles the Indian tradition of a series of biographies of a saint, showing the progress of the individual towards spiritual realisation. Zimmer explains that

> in India, the homeland of reincarnation, one biography is not enough; the lives of saints and saviors are provided with preludes—infinitely expansible—of earlier saintly existences, which follow, in general, a consistent pattern. Showing the spiritual hero first on lower, even animal, planes of existence and experience, enacting his characteristic part of the magnanimous being, they follow his gradual progress (with its blissful interludes between lives, spent in one or another of the traditional heavens, reaping the rewards of earthly virtue), until, having progressed through many levels of experience, he at last arrives at that supreme state of embodied spirituality which distinguished his actual, historical biography. (Zimmer, 1969, 185)

Equating Alex Wheatfield with an Indian spiritual hero may seem far-fetched, but we are only dealing with one of the earlier 'lives' of an individual whose family name associates her with the Goddess of Fertility. It is, however, the formal structure which counts here foremost. If the novel can be described as a feminist work, which it can but not without some difficulties, it can also be put into an Indian formula, which even resolves some of the problems of the former. After gaining further in experience and self-discovery through a long series of lives, Alex should finally be strong enough to overcome the evil influences of her dark cousin, saving herself and him as well. D'Alpuget's recurring images of movement between planes of existence places her work with at least one foot into that Indian formula, making the *leitmotif* of the novel the transmigration of a soul through the levels of existence, either towards a more spiritually enlightened realisation of self or, more often, into brutish depths of a reality of dark ignorance.

The relationship of Alex and Sinclaire fits squarely into the scheme which Zimmer describes as fundamental in Indian literature, exemplified by the history of the saint Parsvanatha:

> One of the most striking features of these tales of the earlier lives of Parsvanatha is the emphasis throughout on the ruthless opposition of a dark brother whose development is the very antithesis of that of the savior. Parsvanatha increases in virtue, but his dark brother, simultaneously, in evil, until the principle of light represented in the Tirthankara finally wins, and the brother himself is saved. (Zimmer, 1969, 185)

Sinclaire is much more than a Western antagonist, belonging clearly in the group of individuals whose movement towards evil parallels the protagonist's towards good. Birth into an aristocratic family indicates, under the Indian system, good progress in previous lives, but does not preclude regression or the assumption of a dark brother role. Just as Sinclaire's evil role would be a continuation from earlier lives of interference with Alex's spiritual development, her light would tend to counteract the brutalising effects of the *karma* accrued by his darkness, preventing his slip into darker levels of existence. There is no direct information beyond the present lives of Alex and Sinclaire, but, when seen in these terms, her light and his darkness tend to pull each other along in a microcosmic struggle of *dharma* and *adharma*.

Sinclaire is what Western psychology would call Alex' alter ego, representing a dark side of her mask. He is a foil to Alex, but is not just the setting which accentuates the beauty of her diamond. It is only when the setting and diamond are placed together that there is beauty and light. They mirror each other enough to make others think they are brother and sister, and d'Alpuget makes it very clear that he is the wilder side of the animal aspects of the twin-cousins, writing, 'Sinclaire's wolfish features were an exaggeration of Alex's small, neat ones'. Yet it goes deeper than surface resemblances. There was 'something in their bone-structure, in their long-limbed build, that announced in each the flesh of the other'. Alex and Sinclaire are metaphors of the self/other double. Separately, they are weak and incomplete; together, they make up a round, developed and formidable character.

Their opposing attitudes are exhibited in their faces—Alex's is described as 'candid' while the wolfish Sinclaire's is 'resourceful'; Alex's eyes are the same as Sinclaire's, only 'drawn larger and more innocent'. Most importantly perhaps, Alex's 'hair was dark sherry colour, almost red' (*MD*, 7), which establishes her place within the scheme of Jainist colour symbolism, where 'the prudent, honest, magnanimous, and devout are fiery red' (Zimmer,

1969, 230). That it is too dark to be fully red indicates how, while Alex is nearly always prudent, honest, magnanimous, and tends towards the devout, her fiery personality still lies under the strong influence of masks which her dark brother can exploit, and is therefore itself darkened. Sinclaire's name refers obviously to his lack of lightness, and Alex's, which means 'defender of men' (Morris, 31), indicates that she is not only engaged in the revelation of her own self but also in a defence of Sinclaire against the forces of darkness which have overcome him.

As the dark brother, Sinclaire is the *agent provocateur* in Alex's life, though she usually manages to make the best of each of the uncomfortable situations he puts her in. First, when they were young, she had to hide the fact that they were always running off together. She handled her pregnancy with extreme dignity and courage while he slunk off with the share of the family inheritance which was denied her as punishment for her transgression. Then, having lured her to Indonesia, he makes sure that she gets off on the wrong foot. When they are observed bathing nude together, Sinclaire, infamous for his sexual caprices, declares gleefully, 'By next Friday your name will be mud in the coffee-party set' (*MD*, 7).

Sinclaire sets out to infect Alex with his condescending attitudes. He continually reminds her of her social class, and tells her that the other Australians in Jakarta are 'second-rate' (*MD*, 44). His boss, the embassy spymaster, is 'the Iron Man' to all but Sinclaire, who prefers to call him 'the Strangler' in another early example of the spiritual decapitation metaphor (*MD*, 9). Betty James, wife of the military attaché, a 'forthright woman of middle age' who the others call 'the General' (*MD*, 9), is derided by Sinclaire for her hysteria over melted ice-cream (*MD*, 44). Sinclaire disdains his professional rival Thornton, who is proud of having made it from humble beginnings to his post with the Foreign Service, and who speaks better French than Sinclaire, though it is Sinclaire who still manages to be the one invited to the Ambassador's home on Sundays for tennis.

His contempt for non-whites is even greater. While the newly arrived Alex is reduced to tears by the streetboys who taunt her, Sinclaire just jeers sarcastically back at them (*MD*, 17),

an action which is key to distinguishing Sinclaire from Maruli, the other wolf character and his rival for Alex's love. When Sinclaire learns that Alex has a lover, he immediately confronts her about his race, telling her having an Indonesian lover could be construed as a security breach. She declares him to be an Arab, and does not flinch when Sinclaire reduces the man to a stereotype by asking if it is a 'town or desert' one. When Alex throws Sinclaire's racist condescension back in his face, calling him a spy, he nearly knocks her over as he storms off in a huff, complaining sulkingly, 'That was unkind' (*MD*, 45).

Again, the motif of the good and bad brother is common in Western literature. It is, however, not so easy to find in contemporary Western literature the sort of continuous hammering away of the bad brother on the good one, trying to win him over to the side of evil, and succeeding repeatedly in causing partial downfalls of the good one, who still persists in the principles of enlightenment and is therefore capable of continuing the struggle against the cosmic forces which infect the dark brother. Western tradition would prefer have one destroy the other, while in the Eastern that would mean the destruction of both. If the two become united in Western tradition, it is only to fight a common threat, and once that threat is defeated the unity is dissolved. In Asian tradition disunity is the only real threat, and so the polarised individuals must struggle until the two 'others' succeed in forming a single 'self'.

The Indian hero's eventual victory is also not so much a reflection of the superiority of good over evil as it is of the movement of time. Zimmer explains the Asian argument of blank fatalism where

> the most valorous fighters in the course of history, it is declared, have failed, time and time again. Brave men have fought in vain, to the last stroke, against rising tides that have swept all away, while men of comparatively little valor, delighted by all the blandishments of Fortune, have sat proudly and safely in the seat of the hero. For in history there are times and tides. There are mounting periods, when everything supports the hero-conqueror. He rides the wave. His very faults and deficiencies turn to his advantage. No reversal can break his career. And his enemies, though great with valor and backed by superior resources, struggle in vain to halt his triumphant march. 'Time' (kala), the supreme power, favors him—that is all. But time proceeds in cycles, now expanding, now contracting. The hero's career only happens to coincide with a period of increase (Zimmer, 1969, 99).

Each of the five novels in this study, nevertheless, occurs at a moment distinguished by a disastrous change in this cosmic fortune. *Monkeys in the Dark* concludes with a series of victories for Sinclaire which d'Alpuget foreshadows with a clear image showing that the turn of the wheel of time has turned down for Alex as for the whole city, writing that 'a cloud like a grey goblin was rearing' over Djakarta 'with dark, thickened limbs' (*MD*, 162), leaving the mosquito-filled air so 'feverish and sticky' that even the native plants were dying 'under the glaring metal sky' (*MD*, 164).

It is time for Sinclaire to plan his final assault on Alex. Failure, he muses disingenuously, would fritter away his 'ability for affection'. 'He would be clever and heartless and whoever he married would become heartless, too, in order to survive with him'. She would spend money on clothes, the opera, and on 'fashionable young painters who took drugs and who would sleep with her while he was at board meetings'. Sinclaire recognises that he is vulnerable to this 'sort of fate', and yearns for Alex as his only way out. Other women were more glamorous or intelligent, but were empty-headed or tasteless; Alex had 'a lovely, haughty turn of the head', was compassionate, and had 'a sort of wisdom in her, an intuition to love'. In what is certainly the most telling definition of the differences of perspective between Alex and Sinclaire, he thinks 'she would do the good thing, not the right thing'—knowing that he would do just the opposite. Sinclaire can justify treating Alex like a 'sedulously-recruited agent' to win her love, yet also knows that 'he yearns for her because she was his, his own, his kind—and yet, she was better, more worth having' than he (*MD*, 164-65).

Sinclaire brings Alex to buy durians for the imprisoned Maruli, but insists that she eat some herself as 'a sign of going troppo'—a symbolic weakening of her exterior bonds—in the local market frequented by the city's richest, but where the distinctions between the working men and animals have broken down. The sight of 'the cartmen with their dumb, crushed faces and their magnificently-muscled bodied' further distress Alex's tendency to *sattva* and good. The sellers promise that the durian are aphrodisiacs and induce pregnancy, and, indeed, their 'putrefying odour' causes Alex to retch. As she gags, someone calls her 'an Albino',

prompting her to prove her mettle and eat the fruit. This apparent victory for Alex is, nevertheless, really Sinclaire's. She is recognised for her good Bahasa and familiarity with local custom, until she realises that she is being debased by the affair. Sinclaire, on the other hand, indulges himself in this 'brutalisation' he calls 'going troppo' (*MD*, 165-68).

Alex, now exhausted, irritable and dirty, is further dehumanised by the market children who pinch at her arms and legs with their 'grubby, thieving fingers' until they rush off to harass a crippled horse. She rushes to defend the horse, but is then attacked by the children. Sinclaire drags her back to the car, and calls her 'a mad white woman', though it is for having done what is good instead of what is right. He accuses her of having rejected both foreign and Indonesian communities, telling her 'These are vile times', and, when he says she would 'be better off back in the clan', he means that only through identification with an 'in-group' and its perspectives and attitudes can she gain the sense of right and wrong, which she lacks, to offset the sense of good and evil, of which she arguably possesses too much. Then, while she is at her weakest, he shows just how Machiavellian the clan's sense of right from wrong is by betraying her with the falsified *procès verbal* which is to destroy not only her loyalty to Maruli but to her own feelings.

11.2.2. The Kiss of Betrayal

The final kiss, representing a victory of Sinclaire's sense of right over Alex's sense of good, comes appropriately with Alex wearing the black dress Sinclaire bought for her, in the darkness and shadow of the Ramayana Bar. Read as a modernist, feminist, or post-colonialist novel, Alex must be a failed character. In the many battles of gods and demons of the great *Ramayana* epic, however, evil takes many victories when the cycles of the *mandala* put it on the ascendant. The epic's end, the defeat of the demon, reflects the strategy of the Indian saint, which is to wait for a favourable shift in the time, shed the 'hindrances' which would weaken him against the demon, and conclude the battle when fate is on his side. The ultimate goal of a Hindu saint, however, is still to break out of the cycles of time, thereby attaining enlightenment for himself and for his evil brother as well.

The apparently unsatisfying conclusion of d'Alpuget's novel is an important element to her narrative which is pinned it to the cultural theme, which underlies so much of Australia's literature, of the sense of place and Self and exile. The return of Alex to Sinclaire is, as Annegret Maack notes, fouled by being the result of political intrigue. Maack argues further that 'es bedeutet aber auch die Rückkehr zum Clan, den sie versteht, und Rückkehr zu sich selbst, denn Anthony ist ihr Abbild' (Maack, 130). This argument that Alex's kiss with Anthony represents a return to the fold of her clan is hard to dismiss in terms of Australian tradition, and could be thus read as the final brutalisation of Alex Wheatfield. It seems, nevertheless, an extremely cruel and self-denying return, especially in light of the history of their incestuous relationship, which Anthony, to protect his inheritance, never admitted, and Alex, to protect him, never betrayed. Bruce Bennett's observation is that Sinclaire's betrayal of Alex with the false 'confession' of Maruli, through which he believes he is saving her, indicates how he shares

> the self-deception of other Australians in the novel, whose ideals of 'civilized' behavior mask their self-interest, fear and misunderstanding of the multitudinousness and complexity of South-East Asia, from which they must retreat into a sterile indifference (Bennett, 1991, 204).

These two conclusions are justified to a point, but the trouble is that they both seem to be too satisfied with the outcome. Maack's interpretation sees Alex's final choice as a sort of 'return of the prodigal daughter', yet it is a return to a hellish landscape which, while certainly in the tradition of Australian literature, does not fit d'Alpuget's voice very well; Bennett's perception that Sinclaire believes he is saving Alex misses the point that he is consciously saving her only for himself. The self-deception is no more shared with Alex than are his other values.

Alex Wheatfield is no Judith Wilkes, who does finally choose to return to the comfortable, materialist fold and has reconciled furthering her career and even maintaining her identity at the cost of losing her young children—a thoroughly unfathomable act for any mother, even in the feminist-led late 20th century. Yet both are forced into positions where there are extremely high pressures for the activation of racial stereotypes they would otherwise suppress; as Bodenhausen and Macrae argue, resisting such normative pressures for

stereotyping, whether subtle or overt, may require even in a low-prejudice individual an all-too-rare strength of character (Bodenhausen, 38). In Judith Wilkes' case, the result is the return to the clan which Maack describes, with an active assumption of contemporary, white Australian stereotypes and values which she previously strove to overcome. With Alex Wheatfield this collapse to the intergroup pressures is more the compliance of one who has been exhausted by the obstacles on the way. There is yet no reason to conclude that the symbolic donning of the black dress and the kiss in the shadowy bar means she has made the same final choice as Wilkes, though there is the danger described by Bodenhausen that even a reluctant or insincere acquiescence can finally snowball into the personal endorsement of previously rejected stereotype belief (Bodenhausen, 39). This endorsement is so painfully clear with Judith Wilkes that one does not want to know any more about her at the end of *Turtle Beach*. In contrast, one cannot help but feel that the evil kiss is not at all the end of Alex and Sinclaire's story, that she is not so much reluctantly or insincerely acquiescing to Sinclaire as recognising her present weaknesses, and biding her time. Still, neither adherence to the Western sense of what constitutes a complete story nor respect for the Eastern sense of the illusion of victory and defeat obliges d'Alpuget to continue on to complete the tale of Alex's journey. Judging from the volumes of stories of the lives of the Indian saints, any hope of reaching any definitive conclusion about Alex Wheatfield would perhaps be as much an illusion as the hope that Australia will soon solve its identity problem.

11.3. C. J. Koch's Eclectic Heroic Construction

Fortunately, even while the end leaves the reader unsatisfied, one knows enough about Alexandra Wheatfield and Anthony Sinclaire to make a judgement over the significance of that dark kiss and of what is to follow. Judging from the critical readings of *The Year of Living Dangerously*, the same can not be said of Koch's heroic twin figure(s), Billy Kwan and Guy Hamilton. The main problem is apparently that Koch's many sources cause enough contradictions and ambiguities to confound even the most careful scholarly reader. For this reason, it is necessary to comb through the heroic construction, first as individual characters to

show the strengths and weaknesses of each, then as a doubled entity to explore how, according to the Eastern traditions Koch accesses in the creation of his characters, only by surpassing the individualities of identity can whole characters be achieved. Special consideration is given to the dwarf, a metaphor central to d'Alpuget's novels as well as in Koch's, and which defines both Billy Kwan's perception of self and his relationship with Guy Hamilton.

11.3.1. Guy Hamilton

Guy Hamilton's armoury of masks is probably the most impressive of all of Koch's figures, excluding that of the chameleonic Billy Kwan, making him the most fascinating of confidants for Cookie, who calls him 'relaxed yet guarded', 'closed' and 'forbidding', yet 'likeable'. Hamilton 'had a trick of sitting still and forbiddingly expressionless, watching you' (*YLD*, 65)—which also happens to be the quality in Kwan that Hamilton finds irritating and 'most Chinese in him' (*YLD*, 83). Unlike Kwan, however, who would leave one wondering what the enigmatic expression meant, Hamilton would snap out of his trance-like expression, 'run his fingers through his lank, dark hair, and greet you, and all was well' (*YLD*, 65). Of course, one might be reassured but still not know what Hamilton's expression had meant.

The rolling flickers of obscurity in Hamilton's personality parallel the more flagrantly worked ambiguities of Kwan's, suiting him for the role as Kwan's alter ego and protégé. Hamilton

> is at the same time a creature of doubts and deceptions (most of them practiced on himself), his vacancies giving the lie to the cocky poses he loves to strike and to the posturing which is his occupational hazard. A hero, yes; but also a prize fool; and … he is also a prig; … and also a political innocent (Roskies, 44).

Hamilton seems to be a man motivated by his ambiguities, possessed of 'a worldliness keen for *engagement* but vitiated by a disabling complacency and an element of self-contempt' (Roskies, 44). Cookie wonders why such a good-looking man would be 'over-fastidious where women were concerned—perhaps nurturing some wound, or in-grown, sterilising fantasy' (*YLD*, 62), and determines the self-conscious quality in Hamilton as coming from being that

type of man who 'walks a stage, followed always by eyes: admiring or wistful or resentful eyes, as the case may be' (*YLD*, 65).

The sometimes adversarial, other times disciplined father-son relationship with Colonel Henderson explains many of the riddles in Hamilton's personality to Cookie, who, like most others, finds the British Security Officer to be dislikeable, cold, patronising, and a 'subject for satire' (*YLD*, 62). Hamilton admits that Henderson is a 'real *pukka sahib*' and an anachronism in the new post-colonial world, but betrays his own Orientalist hankerings when he regrets not having been born in Henderson's era of real heroes and men. Cookie believes the respect Hamilton shows Henderson goes beyond the resemblance Hamilton sees with his father who disappeared into the Japanese death camps in W.W.II. Hamilton exhibits 'an old-fashioned quality entirely out of kilter with the impression he gave of being an ambitious and pragmatic loner. He had certain sentimentalities; an almost Edwardian strain of romanticism' which he finds 'touching: the secret vulnerability of the invulnerable' (*YLD*, 64). In Henderson, Helen Tiffin points out, Hamilton is searching for a false illusion much in the same way that Robert O'Brien was searching in Ilsa Kalnins for the European experience he felt he lacked. Hamilton 'learns through his experience with Henderson just what cold comfort England can offer' (Tiffin, 1982, 333). In addition, while Henderson probably saves his life, his refusal of Henderson's symbolic saving of his wounded eye indicates how Hamilton has learned how post-colonial Asia is more his world than either England or empire, and that living culture is more important than cultural or genetic ancestry.

Cookie notices a 'sort of aura' about Hamilton, who always seems on the verge of having something happen around him. This would describe the ideal newsman, but Cookie says it goes farther than that, in a description foreshadowing the hero of *Highways to a War*: 'He was one of those people who are secretly waiting for something more: that vast and glorious happening, delicious as speed, bathing everything in gold, which perhaps never comes at all' (*YLD*, 65). This seems to be precisely Koch's attitude towards his white Australian

protagonist: if not for his crossing paths with the Chinese-Australian Billy Kwan at just the right moment in the political/mythical conjuncture, nothing likely would ever have happened.

11.3.2. Billy Kwan

Even Hamilton admits that without Kwan, 'I would never have got started here' (*YLD*, 67). Kwan's role as chief *provocateur* is so complicated with multiple layers of masks that it affects everyone in the novel. Cookie explains that 'no one wanted to dismiss a dwarfish half-caste Chinese in our age of conformist tolerance', and Kwan delights in baiting them all, especially the radical academics, conservative diplomats and liberal journalists, to test their indulgence of his eccentricities. Billy was a 'sharp-tongued iconoclast' who could assume any role to wreck his torment 'on friend and foe alike' (*YLD*, 66), and on himself as well. Cookie says that everyone took for granted that Billy's erratic behaviour 'sprang from a certain anguish over his identity', and asks, 'who did Billy truly wish to be?'

> Perhaps, with his archaic slang and public school accent, his 'old ma-an' drawled in mockery (of himself or of us?) he played an upper-middle-class Australian or Englishman of the pre-war era. Yet sometimes he played a special role as an Asian: he was to go through Confucian Chinese and Japanese Zen phases. (*YLD*, 67)

Billy Kwan knows all his favourite roles, and in playing them he wears all the masks necessary to cover up whoever he really might be. He views himself as a *dalang*, or puppet master of the *wayang kulit*, but there is something terribly wrong with his behaviour, something nearly evil, whose roots are in his unhappiness with the world's rejection of him. He has created a world in which he plays the central role, but his self-image is tainted by the failure to maintain a healthy, respectful disinterest in his creation. 'Here, on the quiet page, I'm master', Billy writes in his files. 'I can shuffle like cards the lives I deal with … They can lock me out of their hearts, dear Friend, but not out of their lives. They are tenants of my secret system, whether they like it or not' (*YLD*, 108).

11.3.2.1. The Masks of Kwan

Billy's identity is closely linked to the identities of his 'puppets', including the *wayang kulit* puppets on the walls of his apartment and also the real figures he has manipulated in his

dossiers. While it is not correct to say, as Haltof does, that Billy is destroyed by his disillusionment with his puppets (Haltof, 49), Kwan does ignore (consciously or not) that fact that by abusing his puppets he is abusing his own perception of self. Indeed, the act of destroying the *wayang* puppets will mark Billy Kwan's triumph of spirit over desire; he relinquishes his masterly control over them, and recognises that they are but the illusion and their symbolic shadows the reality. Billy Kwan's error is not that he becomes disillusioned by his creation, but that he seeks to remove himself from his prejudiced world and gain a sense of absolute freedom through his power-oriented ego. When he becomes aware of his power game and chooses to end it, then he has achieved the essential wisdom of Krishna's Supreme Utterance, which can today be reformulated as follows:

> The modern individual, paradoxically speaking, only achieves a degree of freedom when he or she renounces the illusion of complete independence, and accepts, along with ancient and premodern humanity, that he or she exists in relationship with an Other who must be propitiated, served, and recognised. (Tacey, 186)

Kwan's dilemma is that he is one of the 'puppets' in his own dossiers, and he is consequently unable to free himself from his largely self-imposed bondages.

Cookie believes that, 'since his race was double and his status ambiguous', Billy choose to multiply his masks indefinitely. Billy agrees with this assessment, telling Hamilton 'I am Gemini—the same sign as Sukarno. He and I have two faces—the hard and the sentimental' (*YLD*, 82). Koch's ubiquitous theme of doubleness is grounded in his belief 'that we contain within us the seed of other, alternative natures', but which might be exaggerated as 'a product of the cultural schizophrenia' which is part of Australia's inheritance (Thieme, 1987, 456), and never more evident than in the character of Billy Kwan. He is on the surface 'a comic type with unusually malicious flaws in his nature'. As 'a dwarf Buddha in a Hawaiian shirt' (*YLD*, 71), he is 'the personification of a ridiculous contradiction'. But as the writer of his dossiers, the *dalang* of his secret shadow world, he is 'a many-faceted, deep-souled, sensitive, highly complex though highly eccentric man', who gets caught up in the gathering intensity of the world he tries to observe and control (Cowie, 89-90). Sukarno, like Kwan, is 'a small man

with a volcano inside', and he is a 'colonised man', but one who is 'apparently asserting himself successfully', which creates the condition 'where questions of self-definition and identity are important; where various stances and attitudes must be tried out, paraded and asserted as a colonial people seeks to re-form its own identity and style' (Tiffin, 1982, 333). Kwan motors around Jakarta gathering information on his scooter in emulation of Sukarno in his white helicopter, who is emulating the supreme God Vishnu riding across the cosmos in his chariot. Kwan displays amazing capacities at appearing at the right place at the right time and then disappearing again, much like the shadow figures on the *wayang kulit* screen, but ubiquity for a man travelling without a police escort proves an exhausting practice, and, like even Sukarno who has that benefit, Kwan eventually loses control over the world he has created.

Cookie tags Kwan variously as a medieval wandering scholar and a puritan, and Wally warns Hamilton that Billy's predilection to committing himself to causes could be dangerous. 'Since I've known him—from our fervent student days—he's been a Buddhist, a Methodist, and then he entered the Church of Rome. He hasn't been a Communist yet,' Wally says, adding nevertheless that he knows Billy is a liar by claiming not to speak Bahasa. Wally then questions his parallel claim not to speak a word of Chinese and asks Hamilton, 'Have you ever considered that he might be an agent?' (*YLD*, 68). It is an interesting question, for, in order to defragment his self, Billy must indeed become an agent—of Krishna—, and he can only do so not by cloaking but by defroking himself of his masks.

11.3.2.2. The Dwarf

The dwarf, as the mask which underlies all the others of Billy Kwan, is possibly Koch's most important metaphor in *The Year of Living Desperately*. Kwan is just one of the novel's variously strange and surprising cast of dwarves which serves as a mirroring device, much like Alice's looking-glass world, with which Koch directs critical attention to the other characters attitudes, prejudices and perspectives. The dwarf is also among Koch's most successful attempts at infusing the vitality of Eastern mythology into desiccated Western symbols. The reason for this is the dwarf's nature as an attractive/repulsive, outwardly ugly and weak, yet

inwardly wise and powerful, figure. He first suits Kwan's purposes of mastery over the human theatre he has created, and then becomes one of the principle vehicles for Kwan's relinquishing of those self-deceiving intentions and his unification with Guy Hamilton.

11.3.2.2.1. The Disfigured, Noble 'Other'

Koch first introduces his dwarf figure in *Across the Sea Wall* in the person of a beggar who among all the beggars who 'rose from under their feet' like the 'dust that rose everywhere; the mustard-coloured dust which was the floor of India', terrifies Ilsa:

> '*Annas master, annas master! Annas mastair!*' Disease blotted the faces; hunger made them frown and grimace. And here was a legless dwarf, three feet high, in a white turban, with a large, dignified, almost intellectual face with serious straight eyebrows, who circled among the feet of the four, swinging himself, with horrid expertness, on his hands. This was the first time O'Brien had seen Ilsa frightened.
>
> 'Ah! He is horrible! Like a spider! Make him go away!'

This dwarf-beggar has no legs, but the spider image makes him both a soulless insect and a many-armed god. His dual description—at once grotesque and dignified—is found in d'Alpuget's *Monkeys in the Dark* when Alex and Maruli are eating at an indigenous restaurant:

> Another beggar was now standing at the entrance to the tent, a tall man in faded khaki. One of his arms was missing. As Alex squinted at his silhouette in the doorway she saw that his left leg also was gone—his trousers on that side were pinned up and hanging hollow. He held a rough crutch in his left armpit, while jerking forward, the stump of his right arm as if it still had a hand attached to it. Strangely, he made no wail for money as beggars normally did.
>
> As she continued to look at him she realised that his face was beautifully structured: a long, noble nose and full, chiselled mouth. Flesh had wasted from him and his pointed cheekbones seemed about to break through the skin. (*MD*, 48)

The character reappears in *The Year of Living Dangerously*, where the symbol of brutalisation is similarly developed. In one instance he is a cripple much like the one out of d'Alpuget, 'a man with no legs, who propelled himself across the floor to us with wooden blocks tied to his hands, blocks which hissed and shuffled slyly on the tiles at our feet, as we fumbled for our money' (*YLD*, 89-90). Another appearance has a true dwarf, but one who is again dehumanised—taking Kwan with him—and presented as a gift to Guy Hamilton as a joke on Kwan:

> He was a hunch-backed Indonesian dwarf: a genuine midget, with close-cropped hair like a black cat's fur, and wide-set eyes. He had a tin cup around his neck for money, and was dressed in a brown shirt and a sarong, from beneath which peeped his fantastically abbreviated brown legs and stubby bare feet. He couldn't have been more than three feet high: his extended arms were like flippers - ending, I noticed, in tiny infant hands whose fingers were strangely splayed. Compared to him, Billy Kwan (at whom I dared not look), was a normal man. (*YLD*, 91)

The juxtaposition of the desperation and nobility of beggars in these books comes out of both Eastern and Western traditions. Billy Kwan explains many of the Western sources and cites others in his files, including Gervase of Tilbury's *Otia Imperialia* about the 'high-minded' dwarf-king of the Antipodes, Bilis, who became Beli, who Kwan calls the 'prototype of nearly all mythological dwarfs, and of Pelles, in the Grail Legend' (*YLD*, 108). Kwan sees Bilis/Beli as his model, and Koch clearly invokes this name in creating Billy. As the short form of 'William', being 'will + helmet' (Morris, 1466), the name also fits Billy well. William is the heroic figure out of English children's literature whom Billy tells Hamilton he had wanted to be but could not because of his Chinese face (*YLD*, 84), and this is just one of many reasons that the adult Billy protects his self-image with a helmet of pure desire. The close association of Billy Kwan and Guy Hamilton has similar Western antecedents, specifically in the story found in Kwan's files about the Pelles of Arthurian legend, who was split into a knight and his dwarf servant. Billy calls Hamilton his 'giant brother' (*YLD*, 116), and this is echoed by the journalists of the Wayang Bar who call them 'Sir Guy' and the 'squire'. Eastern traditions include many stories of gods who come to earth disguised in the form of dwarfs, beggars, servants, or other lower-caste humans. These characters, especially those with physical disabilities, seem to have the special ability, directly related to their 'otherness', to interact in the world otherwise divided between those men who are *kasar*, or coarse, and *alus*, or refined, since they themselves share character aspects of each and benefit from seeing the world through dual perspectives. Kwan, with all of his inexplicable contacts in Indonesian politics and society, is certainly one of these, yet needs Hamilton to complete his self. Still, as in the relationship between Arjuna and Krishna, it is Hamilton the knight who must attend to the teachings of Kwan the servant, for Kwan's favourite dwarf is, like Krishna, really a god.

11.3.2.2.2. The Deified 'Other'

Among the several appearances of dwarves in the Eastern tradition is that of the avatar Vamana. Vishnu condescends to be born as a wretched Brahman dwarf in order to correct the behaviour of a king who is virtuous but neglects to perform the sacrifices to the deities required to uphold the dharmic system. This early Hindu avatar becomes the Javanese Semar, the dwarf companion to Ardjuna in the *wayang kulit*, who incorporates the heroic elements of later incarnations of the avatar into the dwarf character.

Semar is described by Clifford Geertz as 'the wonderfully comic and wise shadow-play clown and the greatest of Javanese culture heroes' (Geertz, 23), and also, in a twist on the knight/servant theme, 'both god and clown, man's guardian spirit and his servant, the most spiritually refined inwardly and the most rough-looking outwardly'. He is 'the lowest of the low' and yet the father of all men and all spirits:

> Semar is said to be the eldest descendant of 'He that is One' (i.e., God), elder brother to Batara Guru. Batara Guru became king of the other gods—Wisnu, Brama, Kala—who followed him, but Semar became a man—a fat, awkward, ugly-looking man, full of rough talk, comic stupidities, and hilarious confusions. (Geertz, 276)

His role expanded with time to make him also father to the prophets of Judeo-Christian and Moslem traditions and of the peoples who profess those faiths which have become so important in Java. Semar represents a realistic, moderating role in the *wayang kulit* amongst the three other major characters, each of whom represents a psychological extreme in the spectrum of human experience. Judistira, the Just King, is praiseworthy for his unworldly sensitivity, but so compassionate that he is unable to act; Bima is possessed of a commitment to action so strong that his underdeveloped will is left inflexible; Ardjuna invokes divine order and justice for application in the human context, but to a point of being cold and merciless. Semar, the divine fool, combines the qualities of the three through his comprehension of the human condition 'into a truly *alus* outlook, an outlook which brings an emotional detachment and an inner peace in the midst of a world of flux but yet permits and demands a struggle for order and justice within such a world' (Geertz, 273).

11.3.2.2.3. Billy Kwan's Mythopoeic, Intertextually Constructed Self

For the purposes of this study, Semar must be viewed for his relation with the man who brings him out of the *wayang kulit* and into his own world of flux and struggle for order and justice. Billy Kwan develops a mythopoeic scheme, drawing on Western and Eastern sources, of his ideas about the origins, identity and powers of dwarfs, which he uses to construct his own identity. Semar is certainly the most appropriate and fortunate of all of the models he tries on, but Kwan must learn that Semar's sense of detachment and peace comes not from wearing the masks of a wise-fool, ugly dwarf. Kwan remains a sophisticated pretender until he understands that it is through the refined, *alus* outlook that Semar accepts his reincarnation into a lower world which he had not merited. Kwan's sense of self must, like Semar's, incorporate all of his own, multifarious and often undeserved, qualities and blemishes, in order to gain a true perspective on the reality of his world.

In the dossier on dwarfs, however, Kwan develops his own self-image in a way to avoid direct recognition of Semar's *alus* perspective and to hide the truth of his own identity:

> In Celtic mythology, the kingdom of the dwarfs below the earth, filled with precious metals, is called the Antipodes. Joke: I'm a dwarf from the Antipodes: and my files are my underground work—my secret mine of paper.

He adds Javanese mythology, which raises Semar to a nearly supreme role in the universe, equating him with Vishnu, the supreme god and guardian of Java, who also 'sometimes takes the guise of a dwarf' (*YLD*, 156). This confusion of identities of Vishnu, Sukarno, and Semar with Kwan boils portentously like a witch's pot through the novel. The concept that Billy could be the reincarnation of any god, much less the supreme god, seems outlandish for a Western novel, but Koch takes to the idea of avatars and reincarnation, and, with a Javanese sense of humour, he invests it with much potential for disaster.

Christopher Koch follows the model of the *wayang kulit* in making his dwarf the pivotal character. He leaves no doubt where Kwan thinks he should be placed in the scheme of things and sets up the double heroic construction in the introduction of the one shadow puppet which attracts Hamilton's attention because of its 'unusual grotesqueness':

> ... a fat, hunch-backed, bald old man, whose pug face was painted gold. 'What about that one?', he asked. 'Is he *kasar* or *alus*?'
>
> 'Ah, now, he's special,' Billy said quickly. 'That's Semar. He's a dwarf who serves Arjuna. But he's also a god in disguise—the old Javanese god Ismaja.' He fingered the bald, gilded head. 'My patron,' he said lightly. 'The patron of all dwarfs.' (*YLD*, 82)

Billy Kwan does closely resemble his mythical patron in a physical sense, yet, like his other idol Sukarno, he cannot live up to 'divine' billing in that he cannot combine the attributes of Judistira, Bima and Ardjuna into a whole man. Billy tries instead to influence the actions of Jill Bryant, Guy Hamilton, the other members of the Wayang Bar clique, and his 'little family' in the *pasar*, and uses his form of meditation—composing his files—to mould a world which fits his interpretation of the human situation. His success is remarkable, but also shocking, as Billy fails to recognise how his own fractured identity dominates the identies of the others. He will not accept the Javanese understanding of humanity, which he grasps intellectually, that the distinction between *alus* and *kasar* has nothing to do with telling the 'goodies' from the 'badies'. In the *Bhagavad Gita* and the *wayang kulit*, the antagonistic forces are for the most part *alus*, yet never devoid of *kasar* attributes. While Billy Kwan himself is especially notable for his mix of *alus* and *kasar* qualities, in his attempts to categorise people and things he is adding to the layers of masks—in effect, trying to obscure the distinctions between *alus* and *kasar* which do not happen to fit his outlook—rather than removing the masks.

Geertz makes an astute comparison between Semar and Shakespeare's *miles gloriosus*, Falstaff, which might be used to explain the idiosyncrasies of Kwan. Though they come from very different traditions and world views, their *kasar* physical attributes and the important *alus* supporting roles they play for Ardjuna, Prince Hal and Hamilton are unmistakably similar. Semar and Falstaff, and we can add Kwan as well, also satirise the very societies and theatrical forms in which they perform:

> They furnish a reminder that, despite over-proud assertions to the contrary, no completely adequate human world-view is possible; and that, behind all the pretence to absolute and ultimate knowledge, the sense for the irrationality of human life, for the fact that it is unenclosable, remains. (Geertz, 277)

Billy Kwan, however, forgets, or ignores, this example. Compared to Semar and Falstaff, who revel in their comic functions, Billy is just too serious about himself and his ideas. He sees himself as Semar, the father of all men and spirits, in order to justify his simultaneous identification with the *dalang*, the creator/puppeteer of the *wayang kulit*, with Sukarno, the creator/puppeteer of post-colonial Indonesia, and the archetypal Shiva, the God of creation and destruction. His dossiers reveal how his desires for Vishnu-like power over men without the selfless humour of Semar dooms Kwan to re-enact the injustices of Sukarno:

> Here, on the quiet page, I'm master—just as I'm master in the dark-room, stirring my prints in the magic developing-bath. And here, among my files, I can shuffle like cards the lives I deal with. Their faces stare out at me from these little pieces of glazed card: people who will become other people: people who will become old, betray their dreams, become ghosts. But they wait, in my files, to see what I'll do with them. Charting their blind course on paper, I own them, in a way! (*YLD*, 108)

Billy may identify with his wise-fool forefather, but he is finally undone by his hopeless desire to get the world to function according to the view he considers best. Yet getting undone turns out to be just what Billy needs to free himself from all of the frustrations born of his desires, and to become a man of engaged but disinterested action like Semar, Arjuna and Falstaff.

11.3.2.3. The Caste War

Related to the ambiguities of the balance of *alus* and *kasar* and the true nature of man is the problem of the mixing of castes, which also comes up in these images of beggars and dwarfs of both Koch and d'Alpuget. Hindu tradition has Brahma create the castes when he creates the Triple World. Gods, demons and men are supposed to maintain their designated places in the cosmos, even though Brahma himself violates this system when he asks Vishnu to be reincarnated as the *avatara*.

The *Bhagavad Gita* is itself ambiguous on this question. Krishna seems to reaffirm the role of the hereditary-based caste system within *dharma*, and yet tells Arjuna: 'The four orders of men arose from me, in justice to their natures and works' (Mascaró, 4:13). Noting the ambiguity of the expression 'their natures', which could refer either to one's preordained caste

or to one's will, B. M. Matilal proposes that Krishna is saying 'one should try always to be one's own self, not somebody else' (Matilal, 52).

The ambiguous nature of *dharma* and its influence on mankind's thought and action is dealt with in chapter 8, "The 'Divinisation of History' and the Duality of Justice". Here, it should suffice to be said that 'be oneself' is the message C. J. Koch has adopted. Breaking caste, when it denies this principle, is shown to be the flaw in the major players like Sukarno, but the problem is writ large on Billy Kwan, the dwarf who wants to be anyone other than himself. He would join Sukarno and play the role of Krishna, or personify the wise-fool qualities as Semar, or vicariously experience life as a tall, handsome, successful and loved man through Guy Hamilton, even while his indecision on how to act makes him resemble Prince Arjuna more. Billy is a half-caste Chinese angry at an Australian society which wants to pigeonhole him into the 'restaurant or fruit-shop business' (*YLD*, 19). He is continually trying to cross over the established social barriers, whether with so-called progressive members of society who he wishes to bait (*YLD*, 66), or as a cameraman posing a journalist's question at a Presidential press conference (*YLD*, 265), or as an applicant for a secondary school teacher job who is refused due to an inappropriate 'appearance' (*YLD*, 18). He wavers from one ideology to another, is Sukarno's most fervent supporter early in the book and his most committed opponent at the end, and by wreaking all of his so carefully wrought contacts and friendships he seems almost intent on succeeding as a social failure. Of all the characters in *The Year of Living Dangerously* who are based on characters in *Alice in Wonderland* or the Hindu epics, Billy Kwan is the only one who seems designed after several—if not all—of them at various times.

This does not mean that switching vocations or aspects of personality is not desirable; indeed, the *Gita* sanctions it. An important part of the sense of reconciliation in the *Bhagavad Gita* is set at the individual level. One might be predisposed to one element of personality, either to extrovert action, to inner contemplation, or to effusion of feelings and emotions, yet not be completely lacking in the other elements, for the 'personality hankers after the

satisfactions to be realised from the other two elements'. The result of this personality synthesis is that 'a tripartite war may be replaced by a triple psychological concordance' (Varma, 73). Billy Kwan, a specialist in keen, dialectical philosophy, ultimately must incorporate the more regressive aspects into his personality. He must decide who he is in a full sense. Billy reveres and even evangelises the *Bhagavad Gita*, but is wrongly intent on understanding it rather than being inspired by it.

> A mystical text is not only a communication about the experience of the mystic; it is mainly an invitation that stimulates; as a result, the *Gita* is not meant to be understood intellectually, it is to help one seek liberation. (Callewaert, 98)

The crux of this is that the educated historian-cum-professional cameraman-cum-avocational philosopher must become a believer, a calling without any of the technical or educational requirements of the others. Only then can Billy Kwan stop asking the objective questions, which only provoke his passion, desire, and anger, and separate him from his world, and understand how to start acting with the subjective—i.e. involved—disinterest required by Krishna. Bruce Bennett makes a similar observation about Guy Hamilton when he writes how the successful reporter's chief quality 'appears to be detachment: to become *engagé* is to become a poorer journalist, though perhaps more human'. Hamilton's professional detachment invades his personality to the point that there often seems to be a foreign voice in his head giving a reporter's account of what is happening to his body. His drive to be a successful journalist shatters any hope of accepting his self until he can seize the message of involved detachment through Kwan and his experiences in the Javanese highlands, in particular of the *wayang kulit*. 'That tension between a necessary detachment and an equally necessary involvement', Bennett notes, 'is also one of the chief inner dramas' of these and the other 'recent Australian novels set in South East Asia' (Bennett, 1982, 11). This is, in fact, what Mike Langford in *Highways to a War* must learn, and what d'Alpuget's protagonists, who are otherwise better at sympathising, fail (in Alex Wheatfield's case) or choose not (in Judith Wilkes' case) to learn.

11.4. Billy Kwan and Guy Hamilton—Koch's Heroic Double

One cannot fully consider Billy Kwan and Guy Hamilton without finally taking the two as one personality. They have already been viewed in terms of the *Alice* books of Lewis Carroll in Chapter 5, according to the Javanese *wayang kulit* in chapter 7, and in the above discussion of Semar. This section turns to archetypes of the double personality found in the ancient Hindu Scriptures as it attempts to complete the analysis of the Kwan/Hamilton double.

Guy Hamilton's Australian Broadcasting Service office is a little, fractured theatre where Kwan and Hamilton have little chance of being upstaged as they are in the bustling Wayang Bar and elsewhere. The suspiciously conservative secretary, Rosini—the silent Tiger Lily—, serves coffee, dressed carefully in the 'national dress to dissociate herself ideologically from this *Nekolim*'—i.e. *neo-colonialist*—'company she worked for'. The assistant, Kumar, secretly serves the *Partai Komunis Indonesia*, yet wears a 'veil of absolute courtesy and neutrality' at work (*YLD*, 175). Billy reigns, sitting up like Buddha on the desk he has squatted, reading philosophy. Hamilton governs, and, while he feels the distance created by the masks, the operation is satisfyingly efficient and makes a minimum of demands on his own masked self. He is more amused than distressed by Billy's 'ceaseless mental life'. They wear complementary masks, the sense of humour of each 'interlocked well with the other's, and they played roles caricaturing themselves: Hamilton a callous journalist, Kwan a sensitive intellectual' (*YLD*, 71). Hamilton and Kwan complete gaps in each others' personalities, just as Koch's Indonesia functions as an absent part of Australia's Western identity (Haltof, 46). And yet, it does not at first seem likely that the two can become truly close.

11.4.1. The Deceiving Search for Identity

As with the Australian and Asian struggle to work out a new relationship, Kwan and Hamilton's collaboration is made up of a strong mix of attraction and distrust. Hamilton, who need not yet doubt Kwan's loyalty, nevertheless wonders early on about Kwan's purposes, and dislikes 'the idea that he was not what he seemed, or was in some way deceiving him' (*YLD*, 71). Kwan, who desperately needs a surrogate agent to act for him (a topic covered in chapter 8), is angered and frustrated by Hamilton's resistance to his will.

The sense of deception becomes urgent as early as Hamilton's first visit to Billy's apartment, where he comes closer to his squire's array of masks and icons. Billy's room is 'a teeming box of clues', where a bewildering array of photographs covered almost every inch of wallspace. Hamilton takes special notice of what appears to be Billy's strange iconography: a photograph of Jill Bryant, the Javanese shadow puppets, a crucifix, photographs of the poor of Jakarta, photocopies of dwarfs, and, like the matching bookend to the Jill Bryant photo, 'a print in lurid colours, of an Indian goddess, blue-fleshed, hair dishevelled, dancing on the pale, prostrate form of a man' (*YLD*, 79)—namely, Kali, the goddess of destruction. The deception is that Billy's photography is part of the secret dossiers of which Hamilton is supposed to remain another ignorant subject. Yet, the deception is more complex than that, for it creates, as Nettlebeck notes, not so much the true story of the people of Jakarta as a looking-glass world into which the viewer gazes without realising that it mirrors himself (Nettlebeck, 18). Alongside Hamilton, of course, stands the most deceived of viewers—Billy Kwan himself.

In this room of secrets, these two men of secrets begin to discuss their pasts and identities. Surprised and touched by Billy's apparent sincerity, Hamilton forgets his own reticence to form close bonds to another, and touches Billy on the shoulder. Billy, however, rejects this attempt to show compassion. Hamilton understands that Billy can not respond, and that 'he had touched a being to whom he could not get closer' (*YLD*, 84). Marek Haltof takes the common scholarly view that this inability to unify their spirits is a representation of the Australian/Asian failure to identify with each other. Haltof writes,

> On the one hand, Hamilton is an 'object of desire' and worship for Kwan, on the other, an object of manipulation and creation. As in Gothic novels and horror films dealing with the relationship between the creator and the creature/monster (e.g., the Frankensteinian motif) the creature becomes a source of disappointment for the creator who inevitably cannot completely control his creation. (Haltof, 52)

This much is certainly correct, and associations with the Australia/Asia relationship are germane, but the line of reasoning leads in the wrong direction. Haltof sees in Kwan's inability to control his creations a helplessness which afflicts his personality and leads to his 'tragic death', which would suggest the absurdity that Koch is representing a tragic

helplessness in the relationship between Australia and Asia. Sharrad hits the mark when he notes how 'the ostensibly bleak endings of the novels mark a "getting of wisdom" that indicates a breaking of the enchantment of the imperial Circe'—i.e., liberation from the brutalisation as discussed in chapter 10. Rather than projecting a 'defeatist, closed view of life', Koch's work 'moves towards an opening up of possibilities born of self-assessment' (Sharrad, 1985, 65). Haltof unfortunately is focusing on the traditional themes and forgetting the text. Koch is certainly not failing to leave enough literary clues which point to the crux of Billy Kwan's problems—that he remains for most of the novel a man of thought, not of action, and is therefore severely disappointed with himself long before Hamilton and Sukarno and the others disappoint him. One might argue as much about Australia which, rather than shoulder its own responsibilities, so often acquiesced to the leadership of Britain or America in its relationship with Asia, and then found so much to blame in them. Yet, also like Australia and Asia, both Billy Kwan and Guy Hamilton make progress, however reluctantly, in understanding and building their relationships, in particular with each other.

11.4.2. The 'Noosphere', & the Metaphor of the Chariot

When Wally wonders if Billy might be an 'agent', he is joining Cookie and everyone else in puzzling over just who the real Billy Kwan is. Kwan characteristically avoids the question about the true nature of his own self when he broaches the theme from the angle of the true nature of the 'self'. He asks Hamilton what he thinks of a concept from the philosophy of Teilhard de Chardin called the 'Noosphere'. Straight man Hamilton says, 'Thanks for lending it, but it was too heavy for me, matey.' To which wise-fool Kwan, who must yet implement his new idea, says, 'But what a marvellous idea that we've reached a new stage in evolution: that thought is a *force*. That's what the Noosphere is, old man' (*YLD*, 70).

This is a metaphor about the nature of man which can be traced back at least to the *Upanishads* from about 800 BC. At a time when the Greek scientist-philosophers were looking outward and seeing a universe which directly refuted the old concepts of nature and caused the collapse of their religious-mythological system, the Indian philosophers were

looking inward and seeing an 'all transcending, truly supernatural principle from which the forces, phenomena, and divine directors of the natural world proceeded' (Zimmer, 1969, 357). Attention was turned from the gods, but their existence was not threatened as it was in the Greek world. Instead, the focus was on the unseizable, indestructible, and unbound source of cosmic energy itself, from which streamed gods, demons, men, and all of creation.

The *Upanishads* provided the metaphor of the chariot to explain the reality of man's existence. Man's self was pictured as the rider of a chariot, his body was the chariot, his intellect was the charioteer, and his mind was the reins. His sense organs were the horses, and the objects of his senses were the roads. The individual, made up of self, body, organs and mind, is what one recognises as the 'experiencer' of the universe. The intellect, which Zimmer describes as 'intuitive discernment and awareness' (Zimmer, 1969, 363), manages the organs and sense objects, just as a good charioteer does his horses and the road, while the rider, the individual man, makes his way through life gaining experience and self-fulfilment.

The intellect, then, is the source of the individual's power. In the *Bhagavad Gita*, this intellect is personified by the charioteer Krishna, and the individual rider is Arjuna. After altering the quality of Arjuna's senses, Krishna reveals his true self as 'irradiated by a light' which is both immanental—flowing out of the 'inner man' within the individual—and transcendental (Chaitanya, 20). This intellect which binds the self to the cosmic fountainhead is the elemental, universal energy, and is therefore certainly that force which Billy Kwan says de Chardin called the 'Noosphere'. Indeed, Purushottama Bilimoria mentions the contemporary role of the *Bhagavad Gita* in leading 'human beings to the next stage of evolution of their consciousness, by revealing to them a deeper wisdom and a method of achieving their final goal'. He discusses the theory of 'spiritual evolution', particularly analysing the *Bhagavad Gita*'s 'relation to the work of the Catholic scientific thinker, Teilhard de Chardin' (Bilimoria, 86).

It is in this relationship which Billy Kwan can be seen, and sees himself, in the role of the charioteer Krishna and Hamilton the rider. Recalling Krishna's enhancement of Arjuna's

vision, Kwan is called 'Hamilton's eyes' during their discussion of the Noosphere (*YLD*, 71). Of course, in light of Billy's multiple masks, seen exhibited in the *Alice in Wonderland* allusions, he also plays the role of Arjuna, the rider of the chariot whose dogmatic analysis of the situation facing him leads to a spiritual dilemma which precludes the action required of him. It is only the surface of the problem that this complex man can be seen as Krishna, Semar or Arjuna, as the White Rabbit darting down the hole into the looking-glass world, as the *dalang* manipulating his puppets, as a little Buddha meditating on his desktop, or a pint-size Vishnu motoring around Jakarta and bringing on his scooter small doses of light to the poor of the *Pasar Baru*. Kwan's true puzzle is learning to transform his thought into force; indeed, his idea that 'thought is force' seems at first to be an attempt at avoiding the necessity of action—if he could just will action hard enough. He must first simplify himself—or rather, uncover his self. He must overcome his egoistic interests, his fear of consequences, his criticism of Wally, Curtis and the other journalists, and let go of his anger at Hamilton, Jill, Ibu and Sukarno for resisting his will. Billy's destiny is to defrock his self of its clouding masks, in order to purify his thought, and, just as de Chardin postulated and Krishna commanded, transform it into the force of action.

11.4.3. Koch's 'Double Man' as Consummate Hero

This defrocking is unfortunately a task which is beyond Billy Kwan's competence, for he is far too involved in his passive, intellectual ruminations to become a man of active force. At the same time, the defrocking needed to free Guy Hamilton from his own prejudices and inhibitions cannot be accomplished without outside influences. Koch has created in Hamilton and Kwan 'a sort of double hero' (Koch, 1987, 22), following the double metaphor of the charioteer and rider of the chariot as personified by Krishna and Arjuna and of the three Pandava brothers of the *wayang kulit*. Kwan and Hamilton 'were two aspects of the one: mystic and simple soul, thinker and man of action; both of them products of a dying colonial world' (Koch, 1987, 23), each needing his 'complementary other' to become whole.

Seeing them together is like watching a ventriloquist and his dummy: one tall, handsome and rather stiffly formal, the other small, a bit grotesquely shaped, witty and moody, which leads Wally O'Sullivan to name them 'Sir Guy and the Black Dwarf' (*YLD*, 43). Koch repeatedly likens Billy to a puppet, giving him a 'waxen, fixed face' (*YLD*, 234), and describes him as a doll or child, as when Hamilton surprises Billy alone in the locked ABS offices: 'Without a word, Billy threw himself into the chair, and lay like a broken doll, shoulders hunched to his ears. He blinked at Hamilton expressionlessly, utterly attentive: an obedient Chinese child' (*YLD*, 32). These are Orientalist clichés, but Koch is using them much as d'Alpuget does, drawing the reader into the stereotypes of the Asian-Australian Billy Kwan and the colonial-sentimentalist, Anglo-Saxon Guy Hamilton, then, like a *dalang* finessing the shadows on the *wayang kulit* screen, blending, combining, and finally reversing their chimerical personalities.

They are a team with their obligatory, standard comic lines, like the glib dialogue whenever they set out after a story:

> 'Is all the sound equipment in the boot?'
> 'Yes—and no one helped me to put it there.'
> 'What about the old Bell and Howell? Is he loaded?'
> 'On the front seat, old man.'
> 'Any hairs on the lens?'
> 'You worry about the words, Hamilton.' (*YLD*, 74)

It is the time-honoured routine of confusing which of the two is the dummy which is most richly developed, notably marking Hamilton as the one dwarfed by atrophied emotions, ridiculed for his inability to assess the rules of his new professional and personal situation, and mocked by his colleagues. Billy meanwhile assumes the roles—all variations on the puppeteer theme—of the *dalang* puppet master, impersonator of President/God-king Sukarno, and incarnation of Vishnu. This is part theatrics, but surpassing the mundane is a quotidian affair for Kwan, and much about him defies explanation, including his extraordinary personal contacts and the insider's access to certain prominent figures, which enables him to bestow on the earnest but green Hamilton the career-making interview that the other correspondents can

only dream about. At each crucial moment, however, Kwan becomes the dummy again, and lets Hamilton perform the actions which he has carefully thought out and prepared.

11.4.4. Getting to the Soul of the Matter

The integration of Kwan and Hamilton into a whole reflects the Hindu principle of the unification of opposites, represented in Shiva and Parvati, who are sometimes pictured as one god made up of one half of each, and neither Hamilton nor Kwan alone equals more than an incomplete personality. Kwan and Hamilton are a pair of attracting opposites—like *yin* and *yang*, male and female, spring and autumn, or any other manifestation of the principle of dualities where one without the other is meaningless. Yet, there is an internal violence involved in the union of opposites, and the relationship of Kwan and Hamilton makes for considerable releases of energy.

The explosion comes after Billy has got himself excluded from the Wayang Bar clique and suffered the death of the infant Udin which he blames on Sukarno. Hamilton has profoundly angered Kwan by rejecting his will that he stay with Jill Bryant and gone instead to the highlands, covered the communist march, met Vera Chostiakov, and experienced the *wayang kulit*. Kwan is literally alone, and disappears. Hamilton feels the loss of his counterpart. This is the nadir of their personal confrontation, and, when then they cross paths in the *Pasar Baru*, the two personalities are like fusing atoms being forcibly fused, their bursting physical bodies showing the first signs of the union:

> Billy laughed contemptuously. Hamilton continued to hold his wrists. So they stood, chests heaving, sweat oily on their faces, the whites of their eyes catching the dull light.' (*YLD*, 234)

Hamilton, still a man of action without a clue, asks what he did to harm their friendship, and Billy, though still delusional about himself, justifiably throws the question back at Hamilton:

> 'We were a good deal more than friends, old man. You don't seem to understand. You did nothing to *me*—the harm you did was to yourself.'

Then, topping this identification between the two, Billy, the squire/dummy/side-kick, delivers the blow which could only come from a superior:

> There are only two sorts of men, Hamilton—men of light and men of darkness. You were incomplete—I knew that. You were mainly concerned with yourself. But you *were* a man of light, and that's why I chose you. (*YLD*, 235)

At this point the conventional critical analysis that Billy Kwan becomes disillusioned with himself and his world is undeniable, and when he says 'you *were* a man of light', as if Hamilton, in choosing to go to the highlands instead of to Jill, is now a man of darkness, Kwan is judging himself just as harshly.

Most Western readers might recoil and take Kwan's words as a sign of megalomania, but in the Eastern tradition this is no more than a stark statement of the profound relationship between the Guru and his disciple. Karan Singh notes how in 'the *Upanishads* the Guru uses the term "Saumya" for the disciple, meaning "dearly beloved"; they looked upon their disciples as even more close to them than their own sons, because whereas the physical father gives only physical birth it is the Guru who gives us the real spiritual birth'. He stresses the centrality of this relationship, expressed in what he calls 'one of the most moving verses in the *Bhagavad Gita*' (Karan Singh, 5):

> I bow before thee, I prostrate in adoration; and I beg they grace, O glorious Lord! As a father to his son, as a friend to his friend, as a lover to his beloved, be gracious unto me, O God. (*BG*, 11:44)

Friendship can indeed be one of the strongest bonds possible, reaching beyond the limits of the father and son relationship, and for Billy and Hamilton, as for the Guru and his *Saumya*, and for Krishna and Arjuna, the bond reaches even to the plane of the lover to his beloved. 'This is what makes it so significant. It is a relationship of trust, faith and devotion. Krishna is urging his friend, not threatening him' (Karan Singh, 5). Billy's seemingly threatening, angry, hurt words are a cry in the encroaching dark urging Hamilton, once and for all, to listen, for he senses that it is critical that Guy open himself to his eternal soul. Billy is so desperate because he knows that, in order to open himself to his own soul, he needs his 'other half' to accompany him.

Having certified, in this admittedly ambiguous manner, the depth of their relationship, Billy goes on with his answer to Hamilton's question, which he has now significantly reformulated as 'what have we done to hurt ourselves?':

> All that matters now is to know what light is, and what darkness is. And you knew. If we lose the capability of sensing that, we lose everything. We worship shadows, we worship foulness. And there's nothing so *tedious* as foulness. (*YLD*, 236)

Hamilton understands Kwan to be criticising his visit to the prostitutes at the cemetery, and yet he fails to recall the other association he had made with his profession when he called his position in the Sydney news-room 'a bloody cemetery' (*YLD*, 33). Hamilton understands Billy to be talking only about prostitution in the carnal sense, but Billy makes it clear that he is also attacking those who prostitute the masses with their dehumanising, pornographic culture:

> Desire, lust, then anger: that's the sequence for the sensual man, and for our whole society. You're angry *now*, aren't you? … Well, the Black One must have laughed to see you there. … We've begun to give de Sade to the masses, along with their cornflakes. The torment of a degenerate psyche for whole populations! Copulation no longer amuses them: love's an enema at some mad health clinic—they look up each other's anuses, old man, like sad monkeys. The clinic's a waiting-room of Hell. (*YLD*, 236)

The 'Black One' at the cemetery is, of course, Kali, the Goddess of Destruction, who is so wild that her temples must be erected outside of settled areas, often near cemeteries. Kwan may be forgetting that she is an aspect of the Great Mother, the giver of fertility, health and good fortune. He is not yet ready to recognise her fully, for he certainly knows that Kali demands a blood offering to change from her aspect of terror to that of the bestower of life. Hamilton, ever slow to grasp Kwan's meanings, tries to deflect what he takes as a diatribe, calling it sexual frustration. Billy retorts with some of his most important lines, recalling d'Alpuget's *leitmotif* while using a vocabulary of the flesh but focusing on the spirit:

> Ah—one of the great lies, old man, is that little cliché: that to be concerned with the death of love, with the abuse of the body, is just frustration speaking. But it's not for nothing that evil's so much tied up with losing our sexual integrity. It's through our bodies that we most easily enter Hell. How else? When we abuse each other's bodies, then we become demons. Poor sick monkeys! But the spirit doesn't die of course; it just becomes a monster. (*YLD*, 236-37)

Now feeling abused, Hamilton asks if visiting the cemetery or seeing Vera deserves this. Billy first reminds Hamilton how he has abused his love to further his career through stories of the desire, lust and anger earlier mentioned: 'Stories! Is that what life's about? What's a bloody journalist, really? Nothing but a Peeping Tom.' He then forces Hamilton to confront the reality of his love, Jill's love and pregnancy, Hamilton's own inconstancy, but formulates it according to his own view of their world:

> You slow idiot: I put you on course; I made you see things; I gave you the woman I loved, who loved you, who's carrying your child: she needed all your understanding, all your constancy. … I *created* you! (*YLD*, 235-37)

This statement literally stops Hamilton in his tracks while Billy, who needs to examine the relevance of his words to himself, turns and runs away. Billy's vision is still distorted by his terrible anger and hurt. He is right philosophically, but insisting on his creation of Hamilton shows how he is still searching for a stand-in who will act rightly. If he is to act for the right reasons, he must also let Hamilton chose for himself how to act, according to the model of the charioteer Krishna, who ends his revelation and discourse with Arjuna by saying:

> I have given thee words of vision and wisdom more secret than hidden mysteries. Ponder them in the silence of thy soul, and then in freedom do thy will. (*BG*, 18:63)

Krishna is reminding Arjuna that the will of god (i.e. fate) must be confirmed by the virtuous action of man, else *dharma* will be overwhelmed by *adharma*. Kwan, who would be Krishna, must listen to his own words, and recognise that his self-deceiving desire leads to his own crippling lust and anger. Kwan must recognise that he and Hamilton together are Arjuna, the intellectual warrior whose attempt to judge the profane world according to sacred virtue leaves him at the critical moment unable to act to restore dharmic order, until the whole man, by the silent guidance of his soul, can combine the qualities of thought and action.

Kwan directs his chastising about 'desire, lust and anger' at Hamilton, but he finally realises that he is railing at himself. When he sorts out his philosophic dilemmas and comes 'to know what light is, and what darkness is', he stops worshipping the shadows of Sukarno, of the communists, and of his own photographic and literary creations. In destroying his *wayang*

kulit puppets, he is ending his worship of the illusory shadows of the shadows which symbolise reality on the *wayang* screen. At the same time, Hamilton grows emotionally capable of recognising his own worship of his profession, thereby freeing himself to make a commitment to Jill and to life which is personified in their child. Together Billy Kwan and Guy Hamilton are freed from their frustrations and able to chose a course of action which upholds the sacred order of *dharma*. 'That man is free to make or mar his destiny is a fundamental conviction' of the poet of the *Bhagavad Gita* (Chaitanya, 16), and this, ultimately, is the central message Koch is relaying in *The Year of Living Desperately*.

Billy Kwan must be seen in the light of a man in search of his eternal self, or else he does, as many critics find, become an utterly pathetic character driven insane by his pain and frustrations; Guy Hamilton must also be seen, considering his quest to escape his own professional and emotional cemeteries, in this light, or he must be judged a man of little substance, prone to fantasy and self-illusion, and driven by social conventions rather than inspired by personal conviction. Failing to see Kwan and Hamilton as a heroic double would also condemn the novel to being nothing beyond a sordid statement of the absurdity of human aspirations in a futile and meaningless life, crassly and inaccurately labelling it an Orientalist, neo-colonialist, and post-modernist gospel—or to put it as Billy Kwan might, literary cornflakes.

11.5. Conclusion

This chapter has endeavoured to demonstrate two central elements in the development of characters of d'Alpuget's *Monkeys in the Dark* and Koch's *The Year of Living Dangerously* in order to identify their dependence on Eastern variations on the theme of doubles. Despite its critical acceptance, *The Year of Living Dangerously* is not a popular novel of clever plot twists, post-colonial historical events, and post-modern anti-heroes, but is a metaphor of the revelation of self once the distinguishing, debilitating masks of personality are defrocked to display the essential, non-individuating soul. Separately, Kwan and Hamilton are nearly everything the other says he would not be; together they become more than either alone ever could have been,

and form a hale and hardy man. The chaotic cyclone of identities into which they tumble threatens their survival, but once they find the unified eye of the storm they are drawn together intellectually, physically, emotionally and spiritually in a calm singular force of perspective, thought and action.

Monkeys in the Dark imposes at its centre—a structural expression of Blanche d'Alpuget's distinctive sense of irony—a digression. Veering from a straight novelistic account of d'Alpuget's leitmotif of brutalisation, the tale of Alexandra Wheatfield and Anthony Sinclaire's journey places the traditional Australian themes of the struggle for identity and survival in a hostile world into the form of sacred Indian biography. Like Koch's Kwan and Hamilton, d'Alpuget's protagonists are deeply engaged in a struggle for unification of opposing forces, but d'Alpuget's Indian model allows her to put them into the context of the rise and fall of fate and fortune, of the threatening accumulation of *karma*, and of the sense of the personal responsibility born by each individual for himself, for his companion, and for the world he lives in. This borrowed structure imposes symbolic meaning on the usually vacuous sort of descriptive images found in western novels and which d'Alpuget is so attentive to, as the colour of a character's hair, eyes or clothes, his name, his diction, or how he eats. And it gives decidedly humanising direction, albeit circular rather than the standard linear development, climax, anti-climax, and denouement, to characters in a plot which would otherwise be merely an episodic excursion to a dead end.

Encountering the 'Otherworld'

12.1. Introduction

This study has repeatedly focused attention on antagonistic yet attracting doubles, from C. J. Koch's looking-glass metaphors and Blanche d'Alpuget's double-edged stereotypes, to the two-sided screen of the *wayang kulit*, the mother/destroyer goddess, and, in the last chapter, the companion protagonists. At this time, the gaze will turn to the Australian consciousness of its world as doubled metaphor for both that which is good and nurturing, and evil and devitalising, drawing on all three of Koch's Asian novels, but especially on illustrations from his latest, *Highways to a War*. David Tacey writes that 'Australians construct images of the land that are either paradisal or demonic. We have traditions of art and literature at both ends of this mythopoetic spectrum' (Tacey, 111). Reinforced by the cultural implications of Australia's sheer size, it's varied, often oppressively harsh climates, and, not least of all, the influence of the Aboriginal culture for whom the land is not only sacred but the very source of cosmic meaning, C. J. Koch presents worlds which are permeated with magic, spirits and mythical beings.

Koch seems obsessed with individual attempts to live, or to make others live, in one's 'dream world'. Native to Tasmania, a strange land in the cold mists off the Australian mainland, which has itself historically been on the far edge of Western civilisation, he feels that this 'Otherworld' really does exist out beyond the borders of the 'real world', where, like Alice's Wonderland or Rip Van Winkle's Sleepy Hollow, it need not abide by the physical laws of this world. 'Life to me', he says, 'is always on the edge of the condition of dream. At any moment reality may begin to blur at the edges' (Hulse, 25). Koch bases his metaphor on such Western archetypes, yet develops it according on the Eastern concept which holds that everything we consider 'reality', including the personality itself, is but illusion and beyond comprehension. Koch adopts the point of view where this world is simply a reversed or shadow image clinging precariously at the edge of another, strangely discernible reality, positioned across the interface which lies along Southeast Asia:

> In the tropics, the pane through which we view reality is very thin. The colours are so unnaturally bright; they can suddenly cause the pane to seem to dissolve. The world becomes two-dimensional; a tapestry behind which something else waits to announce itself. (*HW*, 230)

Koch plays off one world against the other like the two sides of the *wayang kulit*'s screen since they exist simultaneously and are in semiotic competition with each other. As he applies this to the war in Southeast Asia, however, he weaves the metaphor into a struggle between *dharma* and *adharma*, insisting on the danger that the 'Otherworld' break through the shadow screen and demand recognition of its legitimacy over this world which has usurped its position as the dominant or true reality.

Koch, however, does not take sides in this macrocosmic struggle. There are elements of paradise and of hell on both sides of the tapestry Koch creates; one cannot have the one without accepting the other, just as it is in the unique blend of *sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas* which bestows humanity on man. Tacey concurs that working from either of the extremes to the exclusion of the other leaves no room for cultural or spiritual development. Seeing the bush as an Arcadia amounts to 'projecting an ego-syntonic ideal' and 'engaging in Freudian wish-fulfilment' which leads to a psychological denial of any possible threat to the sense of stability and safety. Seeing the bush, however, as a landscape of 'pure horror' leaves the cowered ego unable to respond. 'When the interior is demonic and ego-dystonic, the ego will not venture into it, and thus cannot be transformed'. The ego in such a hell remains frozen and condemned 'to a petty existence at the surface of life' (Tacey, 112).

The same crippling, bipolarisation is made in the Australian perception of Asia. One approach has been to romanticise it, accentuate the allure and mystery of its arts and culture, and create of it an oriental utopia. Another has been to picture it as 'responsible for everything that is wrong with the world—economic exploitation, political corruption, social breakdown, ecological ruin' and so on (Gerster, Bali, 355). Either way, Australia's 'literature of the other' gleefully rummages through it all:

> 'Other', 'abnormal', 'aberrant' types of people are explored, revealing new resonances, depths, and insecurities about 'normal' people. Everything taken for granted is unpacked, disassembled, and re-explored. (Tacey, 114)

The prevailing attitudes manifested in the literature reflect not only how Australia sees Asia, but 'the way Australians define their place in their part of the world, and by extension, themselves' (Gerster, Bali, 354). Australian constructions of Asia and Asians is part of an ambivalent Western heritage of fear and desire toward 'racial and cultural Otherness' in which Asians are sometimes 'troped as potential or actual aggressors, and at other times portrayed as victims of our own imperial activities in the Asia-Pacific region' (Gilbert, 177). What once seemed clear and simple in the sense of national and personal identity has become complex and distorted as Australia tries to come to grips with its world. Yet it is the breakdown of its pat, inherited sense of identity which frees the Australian ego from the constraints of its colonial past, much like Alice's lazy boredom frees her to follow the White Rabbit down the hole into Wonderland. Then the masks of the personality begin to fall away, allowing the self's hidden desires and impulses to be explored, so that out of this human chaos a passage opens through which the 'Otherworld enters human reality and transforms it from within' and makes 'unprecedented claims on reality, so that the fantastic and the real are now difficult to separate' (Tacey, 114).

12.2. Confronting the 'Self' in the 'Otherworld'

In *The Year of Living Dangerously*, C. J. Koch unified traditional Australian concepts of doubleness, in which a polarised reality is seen from one perspective, with the Javanese *wayang kulit* structural form in which a unified reality is represented by a double perspective separated by the shadow screen. Ensconced in the shadowy confines of the Wayang Bar, Koch's group of correspondents discuss and work out—under the superior light of their own sense of reality—the problems and possibilities of Sukarno and of the Western nations, mete out justice, and bring into sharp and conclusive focus the distasteful grey zones of confrontation. This Western light, however, which seems so bright when enveloped in the darkness of the bar, loses its brilliance when exposed to the blinding light outside, where these professional, Western men become simple, ridiculous players in the mad and thoroughly grey world they are so keen on analysing.

Guy Hamilton is one who will not stay on the Westerners' side of the screen, but accompanies Billy Kwan outside to the *Pasar*, the indigenous quarter. He finds there not only a world where his Western perspectives lose their currency, but also a borderland where two opposing worlds appears to be engaged in such an intense struggle that distinctions as between good and evil, joy and strife, or reality and imagination become senseless or disappear:

> All the brown faces, floating in flatland dark, were theatrically lit from below, by the brazier, by the flames, and all seemed to smile. Young men in white shirts and sarongs walked by hand in hand. Doorless huts gave glimpses of public privacy, frozen in yellow flames: a table with a candle on it; a small, naked girl playing on a straw mat; a middle-aged woman in a sarong and incongruous brassière, heating water in a discarded can over a little fire. The rooms were so small they were little more than boxes, and could not be stood up in: children's playhouses. It was not hard to see the place as gay, and the poverty as a game. (*YLD*, 20-21)

This is Sukarno's Jakarta, a world which is not real in any Western sense. The façade of shiny new banks veil the poverty of the debt-ridden capital; a vast, Western-style department store is empty of customers; and all is crowned by heroic monuments 'topped by ecstatically gesturing figures like ghosts from the Third Reich or Stalin's Russia'(*YLD*, 28). Koch makes it clear, however, that the difference between reality and the fantastic is often one of point of view or of preference, and that even the pragmatic Western nations are inevitably drawn toward the fantastic world when he writes:

> Engineer Sukarno flew over it all in his special white helicopter, supervising operations; and we in the Wayang Club watched as eagerly for the choppers comings and goings as those villagers on whom the President would descend, as Billy Kwan had put it, like Vishnu in his magic car.
>
> The world was convinced: fifty-five countries now had foreign missions here, and those of the US and USSR were lavish. The more Bung insulted them all, the more they did to prop up his dream. (*YLD*, 28)

Further images paralleling the earthly world with the world of the shadow theatre appear throughout the novel, always serving to emphasise the duality of the two. When Hamilton and Jill Bryant talk alone at Wally's party about love, marriage, Billy and themselves, Cookie sees them through the frame of the double doors of the veranda as images on the shadow screen. They are expressionless and cannot be heard, and yet their images, somehow distant in time and space, carry profound meaning:

> There was no sexual interest to be read in their faces; and they did not smile. yet I had never seen a couple who seemed more inevitably intended for sexual linking. They looked cooler than the rest of us: she in a pale blue dress of some sort of linen; the big man in one of his innumerable safari suits. Dark and fair in their lit frame, they had ceased for a moment to be themselves, and resembled the human shadows of universal wish. (*YLD*, 103)

In drawing on his many metaphors and symbols from East and West, Koch is working out his ideas on that 'universal wish'. He says that all of his novels, including *The Boys in the Island* and *Doubleman* as also *Across the Sea Wall*, *The Year of Living Dangerously*, and *Highways to a War*, involve the search for 'a region of the imagination that doesn't exist in this world', but which one half-remembers from childhood and carries into adult life, a theme Koch admits he may have first encountered in Wordsworth's "Intimations of Immortality" (Hulse, 18). Guy Hamilton's desire to rediscover the imperial Asia of his father; Billy Kwan's preoccupation with dwarves, spirits and avatars; Robert O'Brien's urge to let himself be shaken out of his conventional life; these are all images of the 'universal wish' for some 're-enchantment' of the sort David Tacey writes about. Even the landscape, Koch says, shares this wish and 'is waiting for something to happen' (Hulse, 18).

Also like Tacey, who mentions the ill-directed efforts of many to find a new sense of spirituality in bogus New Age philosophies, Koch is concerned with the excess that comes with the West's preoccupation with illusion. The Western world, he believes, is 'ensnared by illusion' fed it in film, television, and literature. Koch says that this is 'perhaps inevitable in a society that's lost its central belief-system' (Hulse, 21), leading to a self-centered 'masturbatory society' (Hulse, 22). The problem is not so much with the world of imagination and illusion, which Koch presents positively, as in his metaphors of the hop fields at Clare farm and in the NVA bunker, but in the delusion which comes from a 'permanent attraction to illusion' (Hulse, 23). 'Devotion to illusion and obsession with the past, as well as belief in magic as a force to influence and control and dominate other minds, all lead to psychic ill-health and disaster' he says (Hulse, 23). Examples to this are ubiquitous in Koch's novels. The principle ones include Robert O'Brien's physical breakdown following his emotional/spiritual disappointment; Billy Kwan's disillusion when he realises that his heroes

Sukarno and Hamilton, on whom he pinned his own ego, cannot live up to his fantasies about them (Hulse, 21-22); Guy Hamilton's inhibitions due to his fixation on the past and on seeing his in the terms of a James Bond novel; and Mike Langford's catastrophic inability to get on with his life as Cambodia falls to the Khmer Rouge.

Koch is not leaving his characters in the lurch, despite widespread critical analysis which has reached this conclusion, but is setting them out on the perilous journey into the interior of the self. This is just the sort of more balanced approach than has been traditionally used in Australian literature that Tacey argues for when writing that images of the landscape, of the divine being, and of the deep unconscious, all metaphors of the 'Other', must be recognized not simply as good or evil, but as complex, awesome, subtle, and many-sided before they can assist in this transformation of the Australian sense of Self.

Such a transformation is necessary in the face of the cultural and psychological changes which make up the 'post-modern condition', in which 'we are awash in a sea of otherness' so overwhelming that the very landscape, both physical and spiritual, has been 'dissolved into the ambiguity of otherness' and become unrecognisable.

> We have stepped out of the old Newtonian 'building-block' image of reality and entered instead a world closer to the new physics and quantum science, where 'things' have been dissolved into energies, and even energies are not mechanical, predictable, objective, but changing, mystical, and affected by the subject who observes them. (Tacey, 112-15)

Australian writers benefit from the Aboriginal concept in which the world 'is at the centre of everything; at once the source of life, the origin of the tribe, the metamorphosed body of blood-line ancestors, and the intelligent force that drives the individual and creates society' (Tacey, 148). Compared to this, Tacey sees the traditional Western view of nature as 'barren, empty, unalive', so that our own world is the truly 'alien' one.

> Although our story grants god-like powers to the individual, the individual actually feels not super-human but sub-human in the post-modern world. A sense of almost complete unreality and alienation plagues contemporary life. We feel isolated, lonely, rootless, disconnected. (Tacey, 150)

The feeling of isolation and barrenness in one's own home while a dynamic and supposedly life-nourishing though, apparently for some good reason, unknown land seems attainable has led Australian writers to explore the journey into the 'Otherworld' as part of the search for self.

Underpinning Australia's 'chimerical search for national selfhood', Graham Huggan writes, is 'a rhetoric of restlessness'. The need for definition is countered by the desire to elude definition, and 'generations of Australians have sensed that they might better understand their country, or themselves, by leaving it' (Huggan, 1993, Age of Tourism, 169). The result might only be that the 'imagined landscapes' of 'Asia' sometimes become 'the site of a Western and specifically first-world touristic nostalgia for the lost moment of hegemonic power in European history'. In any case, Asia becomes 'the limit or borderline of the symbolic order', and recedes into and merges with the chaos of the outside (Nettlebeck, 16). This might, as Nettlebeck points out, play into the hands of those who support the rehabilitation of nationalist ideals in Australia, but it also serves those who see in the dialectic of order and chaos the promise of the 're-enchantment' of society. The novels of Blanche d'Alpuget and C. J. Koch, like their counterparts in the genre, involve journalists in Asia invariably making 'a journey inland, up a high mountain, into the heart of darkness', where they play out roles in the universal theme of Eastern passion, the dark side, and overcoming a Westerner's rational inhibitions (Broinowski, 1992, 182-83). This may have become a stereotype in the Western perception of Asia, but it is no accident that the writers use the structural motif. 'Hindus believe that the invisible is reached through the visible' (Preston, 61), and the outward journeys to 'Otherworlds' of Judith Wilkes, Alex Wheatfield, Guy Hamilton and Mike Langford have the value of symbolic inward journeys into the souls. This is not just a *Bildungsroman* or search for a 'secret sharer' in the Western tradition, but a movement toward a union with the 'Other' within the self, a union which promises to either make the individual whole or destroy him.

12.3. The Journey into the Demonic, Sacred 'Otherworld'

The disparate threads of Australian themes of the self, the 'Other', and the landscape which C. J. Koch weaves into Asian motifs into a surprising fabric of light and dark, of the mysterious and the familiar, of Self and 'Other' closely recalls the Aboriginal view of the unity of physical and spiritual worlds and the self, and should be recognised as his most important break with Western tradition. Koch makes the most of this theme of the 'border country' between realities where all of his and d'Alpuget's protagonists tread, since, for one thing, it fits perfectly with his *leitmotif* of doubleness, but, for another, it allows him to elude constraints for linear and rational representations of reality. 'Koch delights in the use of dichotomy and oxymoron', Cowie writes, 'to produce a fascinating texture of confusion and contradiction' with which he develops not only his characters but also his central concepts of escape, the real world and dream fantasy (Cowie, 84). The drama he creates 'subsists in the interaction between the real social setting and the allegorical weight of dream and quest' which manifests itself in 'a nameless inner urge towards personal completion' in 'vaguely possessed, non-heroic, middle-class figures' (Sharrad, 1984, 216). This 'urge' to get to the edge of the two realities and stand in both worlds seems stronger and more central to the novels than the principle characters themselves, with the danger being of slipping irretrievably from one's own world into the other.

12.3.1. The 'Otherworld' of the Self

Koch's absorption in the parallel, conflicting realities stems also from his personal experiences in the fifties as a young man who, during the voyage from Australia to Europe, decided to disembark with two friends to travel overland the length of India. In 'Crossing the Gap' Koch describes this several months' journey which 'was regarded as madness' by those companions they were leaving, as though 'India would literally swallow us up'. Even to the young Koch, 'India hadn't seemed within the bounds of the possible', but was a land on the edge of reality, where he reports having seen 'the ghost' of the British Raj still lingering some seven years after its demise (Koch, 1987, 3-4). This experience inspired his first novel, *Across*

the Sea Wall, about a young Australian's 'discovery of that world just over our fence, which we then seldom thought about and which lay between us and the northern hemisphere' (Koch, 1987, 7). This would reappear in *The Year of Living Dangerously*, where, at twenty-nine, Guy Hamilton 'had passed into that border country where middle age is still remote, but where failure (for the ambitious) can scarcely be afforded' (*YLD*, 30). Hamilton has also passed into a country where the people feel 'hunger and pain and threat at the edges of their green world'. It is, Hamilton realises, probably to protect themselves from this alien world that the *wayang kulit* exists. He compares the *wayang* to the comic books of his childhood when he lay in hospital surrounded by 'agonised coughing, groans, distant crashes' of the sick and dying. He erected 'them on his chest like screens between himself and the unthinkable landscape beyond his bed' (*YLD*, 202-03).

Billy Kwan understands better than the ever-childish Hamilton the dangers of the 'Otherworld', which he closely associates with Vera Chostiakov, the beautiful Russian embassy employee. Kwan writes in his dossier on Hamilton, 'I sense the invasion of Durga's darkness in you: she who turns time into sleep, and love into lust, and life into death: the Black One, the dancer in the burial ground' (*YLD*, 178). Indeed, a week later, Hamilton acquiesces to Pete Curtis' encouragement, and makes a visit to 'that territory on the city limits ruled by the lady of many names: the cemetery at Kebayoran' (*YLD*, 179). As in the *wayang kulit*, the interface between perspectives of reality is symbolised by the source of light, which in Jakarta is no longer fixed or even rational, especially as one approaches the cemetery. On a moonless night in a city where electric power was rapidly failing, 'Hamilton found himself navigating in an almost total darkness', the only lights being the irregular, interworldly glow from the 'meditating windows of bungalows' (*YLD*, 180) and the racing 'Indonesian Army jeeps, their headlights swinging alarmingly, like searchlights' (*YLD*, 181), or like the sacred lantern of the *dalang* gone out of control. Strangely, there are two street lights near the cemetery which are working as though from their own power sources. One illuminates a group of *banshees*, Jakarta's transvestite prostitutes, 'dressed in elaborate national dress, their high-piled hair

gleaming'. The other lights a 'crowd of some twenty women', their faces 'pale triangles in the sickly light', dressed in 'shabby Western garb: cheap cotton frocks, or tight black skirts and blouses', their hair hanging on their shoulders. The decadence of the district repulses Hamilton. He realises that 'the stately, serene kampong women' he had imagined he could find there 'would for ever remain remote; figures in a bas-relief, and not for sale' (*YLD*, 181). This Orientalist dream deflated, he abandons the evening with Curtis, who angrily gets out of the car. This is the last time Hamilton sees Curtis, who haunts Hamilton as a man 'furiously hunting some sort of destruction' (*YLD*, 183). Hamilton too is driven by what Cookie calls a 'metaphysical' yearning 'for that vast, ultimate event which would change everything' (*YLD*, 274). Having come so close to following Curtis both into the Kebayoran cemetery and into Vietnam (and therefore, into another cemetery), Hamilton has displayed the lust which is as 'intense as an ascetic's lust for visions' (*YLD*, 276), and which Koch will demonstrate in *Highways to a War* similarly serves to gain access to the 'Otherworld' Buddhists call 'the other shore'. That, however, is a topic for chapter 13.

Billy Kwan, like a *dalang* who is losing control over his shadow-casting lantern, denounces Hamilton's desire for visiting the cemetery, and also European culture's blind degeneration and Orientalist stereotypes, writing in his dossier: 'Fool, you fool, from a continent where ignorance is virtue, where bogies exist only in old, wicked countries overseas—or in your perverted Fleming thrillers!' (*YLD*, 183). Cookie likewise mixes Asian and European terms to describe Hamilton's 'mysterious lust':

> Since his curious dream in the bungalow at Tugu, which continued to echo in him, he had been tantalised as ignominiously as Kevin Condon by the remote beauty of Javanese women: those serene figures in tight batik kains and kebayas, with their Attic shapes, who had cycled by on the road to Tugu' (*YLD*, 180).

These are the forms of the Goddess who most attract Hamilton, and who make a return to Southeast Asia an inevitable event for him in the end. Just as inevitable, however, is the fact that the screens of comic books, like the screen of the *wayang kulit*, is but a thin barrier between two realities which are set to come crashing together. It is in *Highways to a War* that

Koch completes his image of these enrapturing, terrifying worlds, where his protagonist must recognise the antagonistic demonic and sacred aspects of the world, of the human soul, and, therefore, of himself.

From his boyhood home, the farm called Clare, in Tasmania, Mike Langford keeps memories of the cool valley he loved and of the farm and the old house which he did not. Like the farm, which has the green hop glades juxtaposed with the dank gully, the farmhouse Clare has two spirits, one of life with 'the kitchen, the house's centre of power and warmth, controlled by Mike's mother' (*HW*, 25); the other of the 'dark, old century', the dim, formal sitting room, 'like an empty stage set, waiting for some momentous action to begin. No action ever did; and Mike and I were not encouraged to go in there' (*HW*, 24). The central element of his memories, however, reach beyond Langford's immediate experience and into the events defining the second spirit of Clare. He has dreams of 'bits of some life a hundred years ago that he didn't want to know about' (*HW*, 18), about the convicts and the heat, and also about Black Ghosts, but which all predate the plot of the present novel. What remains are such details as the forbidden zones on the farm—the hop kiln and the pickers' huts—and in the house—the room at the end of the front hall—, which are but scattered pieces of a puzzle. These zones are much like the closed doors in the dream of Guy Hamilton, delineating psychological barriers, except that the doors at Clare are just barely, but progressively, opened. It remains for Ray Barton to return to Clare after news of Langford's disappearance in Cambodia, and then to travel to Southeast Asia to collect the pieces of the puzzle and try to put them together.

12.3.2. The Looking-Glass Barrier Between Two Worlds

The Asian landscape then comes into play, though the elements are similar. The heat and dust, along with the torrential rains, the mountains and colours are of importance, especially in defining the two dominant spirits in Asia. These represent the two sides of the looking-glass—on one side exists the realm of the apparent, real world, and the other is a reality of dreams and illusion. As in the Alice books, the barrier between these two, normally

separate worlds is breached, and it is never quite clear in which world one stands. Koch describes, for example, how the rains which belong to late April might suddenly arrive in March, revealing 'the dry, yellow, dead-flat land to the southeast' and the mountains on the Vietnam border which had been hidden by the haze, but now 'stood straight up out of the plain like a mirage'. Among them are Cambodia's magic mountains, where holy men inhabit old Buddhist shrines and pagodas, and guerrilla groups, bandits, and spirits inhabit caves. Koch writes, 'They're not very tall, but they're eerie: peaks of whitish rock, with green vegetation, like mountains in a vision' (*HW*, 274-75).

The mountains form part of the political border between Cambodia and Vietnam, and also the metaphysical border between two worlds. Another division is marked by the Mekong River—that between the regions of control of the forces of the Army of North Vietnam and of the Khmer Rouge, allies in the war against the successors to the colonialist Indochinese regimes, but enemies in the macrocosmic war between forces of *dharma* and *adharma*. Koch allows himself to indulge in a symbolic crossing of the Mekong, likening it to the Hindu/Buddhist idea of crossing the river to Nirvana. Jim Feng tells of how the Soldiers Three experienced escaping Khmer Rouge territory with their North Vietnamese captors. The river itself begins as an unknown, and the other side is impossible to discern:

> I smelled the Mekong before I saw it; then its big brown spaces appeared, shining under a half moon. The black trees of the far-off east bank were hard to make out; there were no lights over there … . (*HW*, 297)

Section 13.7. discusses the *Bodhisattvas* and *Tirthankaras*, the figures who are to guide those who are crossing the river to the other bank to *nirvana*. It is important here only to note how Koch is fulfilling the ancient, pessimistic Jainist philosophy when he has an 'old bent Cambodian in a limpet-straw hat and black pyjamas' (*HW*, 297) ferry them across the Mekong. According to the Jainists, at the end of the present, catastrophic cycle of time, while humans' physical size will have shrunken with their moral strength, the *Tirthankara* saviors will have disappeared entirely as the earth becomes 'an unspeakable morass of violence, bestiality, and grief' (Zimmer, 1969, 226-27), leaving the atrophied peasant to steer Langford, Volkov and

Feng onto the river. As the one world of suffering disappears behind them, the other of relief immediately begins to take form. Feng says, 'Out on the water, I breathed in the soft, cooler air, and looked about me'. From the middle of the stream, he can just make out the distant shapes, and says to Langford, who is to be revealed as a Bodhisattva-figure, 'You got your wish, I told Mike. We're going to the east bank' (*HW*, 297). The journalists fear crossing over to the 'east bank' of the Mekong as it is a land of no return. For Langford it is, on one level, an unimaginable photo opportunity, but, on another, it is the land of the imagination which he has been searching for since he was a boy reading his comic books.

They reach the other bank, and find it to be dark and out of time, but civilised. The North Vietnamese, once only known as the shadowy People Over There, begin to take shape in the dark, at first as silhouette images among the 'long, ghost-white rows of rubber trees', and then slowly becoming human:

> We were marched quickly between stilted houses, where people stood looking down at us from the verandahs. Lit from behind by oil lamps, they were just black shapes. I heard someone laugh: a woman. (*HW*, 298)

Though either side of the river appears real to those who are there, the opposite side is always beyond perception. 'Crossing the river' represents a passage between worlds which are experienced respectively as 'real' and either 'unreal' or at least 'unknown' depending on one's perspective. Koch's development of this key metaphor will be further analysed in the following sections on 'The View from the "Other Side of the River"' and 'The Double World', but some preparatory attention ought first be turned to the Hindu concept of *maya*.

12.4. The Two Sides of the Real

While much in Australian literature dwells on the idea of the 'Otherworld', C. J. Koch distinguishes himself by placing his characters smack in the passage between the two worlds. From this vantage point, they can see the 'shadow screen' from either side, and perhaps even be free from normal constraints of either one, but they are, as Wally O'Sullivan put it, at 'the edge of a volcano' (*YLD*, 60). This section examines Koch's application of the Eastern sense

of reality to his journalist-adventurers in *Highways to a War*, the 'Soldiers Three', who find themselves swept across the border between one world and the other.

12.4.1. *Maya*, the Illusion which *is* Reality

To understand *maya*, one must first understand the Brahmanic concept of the Self, which is basically that underneath all of the layers of masks of personality lies a formless, timeless substratum which functions as the 'paramount controller' and also as the 'unconcerned witness' of all phenomenal activity (Zimmer, 1969, 412). This enigmatic Self is formed of a particle of Brahman, the changeless divine being who evolved the perishable universe and its creatures out of his own boundless transcendent essence. Like Brahman, the Self engages in actions while remaining aloof to processes and consequences. Such concerns belong to the various masks which envelop, conceal and obscure the Self to make up an individual personality. Brahman, the supreme creator, maintainer and destroyer of the cosmos is, as the Lord of Maya, the unconcerned source of 'all the transfigurations in the sphere of changes' (Zimmer, 1969, 412-13).

Maya might be described as the medium in which that ultra-cosmic, 'profoundly hidden, essential yet forgotten, transcendental Self' (*atman*) is transfigured into the phenomenal self, 'the naively conscious personality which together with its world of names and forms will in time be dissolved' (Zimmer, 1969, 11). It 'denotes the unsubstantial, phenomenal character of the observed world, and of the mind itself—the conscious and even subconscious stratifications and powers of the personality' (Zimmer, 1969, 19).

Formed of the root *ma*, 'to prepare, form, build', (Zimmer, 1969, 339) *maya* is the vocabulary of creation. It is the source of all change, and is considered the 'ubiquitous power of self-transmutation' (Zimmer, 1969, 339). As the cosmic creative power, it is manifested in the goddess who embodies the union of illusion and power, Maya-Sakti, or 'the power of self-misrepresentation' (Zimmer, 1969, 427). In this sense, all creation is misrepresentation, and even the supreme god Brahman must be considered the ultimate, sublime misrepresentation of reality. In its denotative meaning of 'deceit, trick, the display of an illusion, fraud, any act of

trickery or magic, a diplomatic feat' (Zimmer, 1969, 122), *maya* is delusion, yet it is the foundation of all creation, and therefore is very closely associated with *prakrti*, or 'nature'. In a passage which seems key to C. J. Koch's use of the concepts of *maya*, *sakti* and time, as well as of the *wayang kulit*, Krishna says:

> God dwells in the heart of all beings, Arjuna: thy God dwells in thy heart. And his power of wonder moves all things—puppets in a play of shadows—whirling them onwards on the stream of time. (*BG*, 18.61)

Koch's application of this concept is closely pinned to his *leitmotif* of 'doubleness' in human personality, and corresponds to the eternally creative flowing and mixing of opposites in the erotic Brahmanic life-philosophy vision of the world.

> There is a continuous circuit of metabolism, an unending transformation of opposites into each other. And this reality of becoming is what is mirrored in the Brahmanic monist conception of maya. The perpetual motion of things turning into each other is the reality denoted by the icon of the Goddess. The female conceives by the male and transforms his seed into their common offspring, a new formation of their substance. Such is the miracle of the enigma, Maya-Sakti. (Zimmer, 1969, 599-600)

In this dualistic, perpetually renewing concept of a universe created of Brahman, 'the world illusion' reaffirms the fundamental Brahmanic thought which has always asserted, from the ancient Vedas to modern Tantrism, that the 'One is both at once'. The illusion is then equal to the reality, and 'is not to be rejected but embraced' (Zimmer, 1969, 575). For Koch's protagonists, embracing the illusion as reality proves to be their only adequate strategy for survival.

12.4.2. The View from 'The Other Side of the River'

This Eastern concept of 'the other side of the river', *nirvana*, being unknowable and indescribable, Koch resorts to the more concrete lines of Alice's Wonderland or Rip Van Winkle's Sleepy Hollow to develop his illusory yet real 'Otherworld'. The NVA and their captives make a long forced march, enduring hardships where even nature seems determined to annihilate them. Finally the cataclysm of a B-52 bombing raid, whose mere shock waves deafen and nearly kill them, opens the next world up for them. They arrive at the NVA compound, entered through a trapdoor to underground safety, but have left the world of space

and time. Feng reports that 'we found ourselves climbing down a ladder, one by one, through a hole that went straight into the earth. And now there was no more rain: no more water.' They are confronted by shadows in the tunnel. 'Strange soldiers appeared to greet us: young men and women in pale green uniforms', Feng says, both relieved and mystified 'to see the delicate, elf-like faces of the Vietnamese girls'. He is not sure 'whether any of these people were real, or whether I was hallucinating' (*HW*, 342-43). Feng's complete confusion resembles that of Alice when she first descended into the White Rabbit's hole:

> I didn't know where I was, or how much time had gone by, or whether it was day or night. I only knew I was underground. Distant voices and laughter had woken me, so distant they seemed like dreams, and it seemed to me that I'd entered some old fairy story, and had come into an underground citadel of goblins, where time and the days and the seasons had no meaning. (*HW*, 343-44)

Feng finds that the 'dry earth smell made me feel safe', and the Soldiers Three are soon rejuvenated in the womb-like confines of the 'red-brown earth' bunker (*HW*, 344). Their metamorphosis is soon complete, both spiritually and physically, so much that when their old clothes, metaphor of the perspective from which one defines the 'Other', are returned to them before their release, they no longer appear to be theirs: 'Sitting here in our NVA fatigues and Ho Chi Minh sandals, it was strange to see these clothes; they seemed to belong to other men, and to come form another reality' (*HW*, 346). This change in identity is also shown in Feng's attitude about his Rolex. He deeply regretted its confiscation when they were captured, but when it was returned, he is not correspondingly relieved. It rather proves the NVA cause to be stronger and more righteous than that of the South Vietnamese and their Western allies, and that the North Vietnamese, as epitomised by Captain Danh, represent the forces of the justice and virtue of *dharma*.

Langford, Feng and Volkov have discovered how, once one has moved from one world to the 'Otherworld', the two change identities. Reality, as in the *wayang kulit*, depends on which side of the screen one watches from. Just where and what the NVA bunker was remains, for those who did not accompany them to the 'east bank', like *nirvana*, unknowable. Speculation is that it was part of the COSVN complex, Central Office South Viet Nam, the

NVA's central headquarters for South Vietnam., reportedly located in Cambodia. Yet, even COSVN remains in obscurity, as Harvey Drummond asks:

> Did it even exist? I still wonder. Like so much else about Cambodia and the war itself, COSVN was a secret inside a secret. The sanctuaries and the unofficial bombing both had an existence on the level of rumour, and the Central Office in the jungle lay in the realm of legend: a final secret at the heart of things, tantalizing the Americans. (*HW*, 215)

The mystery of the NVA tunnels recalls the White Rabbit's hole, the doors of Hamilton's dream, and, among many other instances, of Clare farm, where the hopfields 'are represented as rows of green tunnels, the hop-pickers are a somewhat fey folk, keeping to themselves, disappearing and re-appearing' mystery-like, and give 'access to a green underworld, to a kind of enchantment; and there is an appropriate musty smell that goes with it'. Both the hop fields and the NVA bunker imply entry into a world of faery, and, Mitchell writes, the constant repetition of this 'device of structural echoes' which keeps inviting us into another world demonstrates that there is 'a pattern which exists outside of us. We are not all the world that there is', and the world, like Mike Langford, is largely unknowable (Mitchell, 1996, Ancestral Voices, 5).

It is the secret hideout of a secret enemy in a secret war, in a world Koch describes as lying somewhere on the edge of reality. Cambodia was at first somehow not a serious land to the correspondents. Harvey Drummond says, 'We saw it as a country of make-believe: our land of Holiday'. They did not care then that it was nonsense to think so. 'Phnom Penh was our place to escape to from Saigon and the war: our capital of pleasure, and of opium trances at Madame Delphine's' (*HW*, 214). Phnom Penh itself was a city which had escaped the violence of its historical and temporal landscape, 'a city of charmed peace, in a kingdom that had once reached to Malaya. Old Phnom Penh, which no longer exists, which will never exist again, was a French city on the Mekong coloured Mediterranean pink and cream' (*HW*, 213). This dream land, whose 'noises were the magic, muted sounds that come to you in a doze' (*HW*, 214), belongs to the world of fancy, but threatens to overwhelm the real world. The Khmer Rouge too 'belonged to the dream at the edges', but 'were suddenly moving to the

centre' (*HW*, 216). The Americans' bombing of Cambodia would cause the break in the barrier between the real world and the dream world, and 'the real war' (*HW*, 216), which had until then been confined to Viet Nam, would invade the 'land of holiday', as if Alice's looking-glass had been shattered and the 'Otherworld' were spilling uncontrollably out.

12.4.3. The Double World

On Saigon's Tu Do street, the centre of South Vietnam's bustling capital's schizophrenic activity, these scrambled worlds are embodied in diametrically opposed images of the Vietnamese woman, one highly dignified and the other thoroughly degenerate, who attract the young men pouring in as the war heats up. The first rides 'sidesaddle on the backs of motor scooters as though on magic steeds from Annamese legend, all in their national dress: the clinging, semitransparent *ao dai*, with its tunic and matching pantaloons—mauve, green, red, white'. These are the very image of the *alus* puppets of the *wayang kulit*: 'Straight-backed, dignified and ethereal, black hair streaming, silk gowns fluttering, they'd passed with eyes averted, with the modesty of another time, their small, pointed faces delicate and remote.' The second, 'their sisters here in the Happy Bar', could be *kasar* puppets in a modern version of the *wayang*. They have 'so much mascara and lipstick that their faces were like those of clowns; and instead of the *ao dai*, they wore grotesquely brief miniskirts, low-cut blouses and coloured camisoles—their small breasts enlarged with padded bras to please the Americans (*HW*, 103).

One can choose which side of the screen to view reality's theatre in this *wayang*-like construction of the universe, though a Westerner can never be quite sure in which reality he is treading when he enters Southeast Asia at the end of the last great world age. His first impression is of the artificiality of his protective cocoon against the threat of an outrageous and alien world: 'The hot, elemental excess out there is unreal, watched from this air-conditioned chamber: an image on a cinema screen' (*HW*, 429). One might seem still to be on the side of the *dalang*, watching the mechanical works of the shadow theatre, as when Jim Feng notices how 'Huge jungle moths circled around the lamp, and their shadows crossed the paper' (*HW*, 300); Or one might be seeing through to the other side of the looking-glass, as when Feng,

exhausted and ill from the long, forced march through the jungle, feels fear with such detachment that it is as though the fear does not exist in the same world:

> I stood clinging to my stick, swaying, knowing that I would fall into the mud at last, and not get up. My fear came through a screen: fear felt by somebody else. If the B-52s bomb me, let them, I thought. In a way, I wanted it. (HW, 340)

Eventually, one can fall through to the other side, as the three journalist colleagues—appropriately nicknamed the *Soldiers Three* after Kipling's 'Otherworld' adventurers—have done. Harvey Drummond notices how Mike Langford seems especially at home on the other side:

> His face had an expression of meditative peacefulness I can only describe as dreamy. He didn't speak again, and no one attempted to make him do so. He lay in the hammock, smoking, and I had little doubt that he was coming down from some enormous height: from that escarpment near death where he'd lingered with Captain Samphan.
>
> I also began to suspect that it was a place where he needed to be. (*HW*, 233)

Langford's apartment in Phnom Penh also lies on the very edge between the two worlds:

> The latticework at the end of the balcony and the fronds of a palm tree that reach up here from the street cast a dream-grid of shadows. The calligraphy of eternal Holiday; of old Cambodia. (HW, 267)

Like his literary forebear, Billy Kwan, the 'dwarf Buddha in a Hawaiian shirt' (*YLD*, 71), Langford resembles Buddha, who in his own time chose to remain with the people even though his enlightenment enabled him to cross the river to *nirvana*:

> Mike is enthroned in an outsize rattan rocking chair the back of which is like a fan: a Manila chair … . … he smiles at something out of sight, his expression sleepy and content. (HW, 267)

It is an image noticed by Ray Barton, who sees a sign of the otherness in 'the dreamy, almost infantile calm' in Mike's face: 'Faintly smiling, he seemed to be gazing into the distances of some mythical sea: a place where I couldn't follow him' (*HW*, 50). Harvey Drummond sees Mike and Dmitri departing for that other place which he can only describe as a 'dream': 'I know he has his being there, in the dream: he's one of those people who do. Then he disappears' (HW, 222).

Koch makes much of the objects of this world which are left when an individual passes into that 'Otherworld' which is recognised as death. In Volkov's room, for example,

> A white shirt and a pair of pale blue cotton trousers hung on a chair, dropped there carelessly; a pair of sandals was by the bed. The terrible mute voices of objects abandoned for ever! They speak much more distinctly than anything else, at a death. (*HW*, 361)

It is such articles of material reality which expose the illusion of what we call the 'real world', and imply the truer reality of such as Volkov's soul.

Volkov is one of the victims of the Land of Dis which is found in all the Asia novels of d'Alpuget as well as Koch. He, Billy Kwan and Mike Langford are those 'who cross boundaries and commit themselves to individuals or to the people generally in Asia', and 'whose sympathy proves fatal' (Koh Tai Ann, 31). Of the major characters, Judith Wilkes, Alex Wheatfield, Wally O'Sullivan and most of the others indicate their antipathy to Asia by hanging on to the material figments which come out of their experience there. Guy Hamilton is one of those who manages to benefit from Asia without being sacrificed to it, though he literally gives up an eye—as one of the sense organs, the individual's attachment to the material—in doing so. The material symbolises the depth of commitment each has to his experience in Southeast Asia, which, as Koh Tai Ann writes, exists 'as an extension of the Australian imagination, providing the drama and background for the white protagonists to explore their identity, find (or lose) their direction and work out their destiny' (Koh Tai Ann, 31).

As such, Koch and d'Alpuget are writing patently Australian novels, whose basis in historical fact need not be especially considered in judging their success. And while these are not novels 'about Asia', they are built upon a fundament of Asian symbol and metaphor. The old, well-defined colonial opposition of Great Britain/Australia is gone, and for Koch this is replaced by a new and as yet unexplored polarity of the real world and the dream world, both of which are seen not only to be 'real' but to be double aspects of one reality. His characters are driven by Wordsworthian childhood memories of a better world which, with adulthood, seems to have fallen, and in which self-identity has become entangled in delusion, and should

serve to remind us of the debt owed by the English Romantics to the Hindu transcendentalist writings. Koch certainly makes the child father to the man, to paraphrase Wordsworth, in giving both Guy Hamilton and Mike Langford innocent awareness of reality which they have lost through the experience of age.

12.5. Colour symbolism

The dualities inherent in the Hindu cosmology which fascinate Koch so much can also be seen in his use of colour symbols. Koch's landscape is predominately coloured in red and brown earth tones. Red and brown can be either benevolent or malevolent, depending on the circumstance—usually determined by their water content. Dry, like the red Australian soil, is generally a good omen, characteristic, for example, in the dharmic tunnel refuge of the North Vietnamese Army. Wet, on the other hand, means monsoon downpours, foot sores, fungus, and 'mud, mud, mud' (*HW*, 328), even while it does not entirely lose its link with the cleansing and life renewing spring rains. There is a high degree of universality in colour symbolism, but Koch owes a lot to nuances of the system which has developed in Hinduism.

Indian colour symbolism is based in the Jainist concept that the life-monad—the only real aspect of the individual and fundamental essence of the entire cosmos—is a pure, colourless crystal which is 'defiled by a physical karmic coloring substance … which darkened its intrinsic light' (Zimmer, 1969, 550). The perfect colour, then, is white, and belongs to souls who are 'dispassionate, absolutely disinterested, and impartial'. Next is yellow, or rose, like a lotus, which shows 'compassion, consideration, unselfishness, non-violence, and self-control'. Fiery red is the colour of 'prudent, honest, magnanimous, and devout' character. Dove-grey, the colour Blanche d'Alpuget always clothed Alex Wheatfield's Sumatran lover in *Monkeys in the Dark*, indicates the 'reckless, thoughtless, uncontrolled, and irascible'. Dark blue typifies 'roguish and venal, covetous, greedy, sensual, and fickle' types. Black, the most tainted colour, belongs to 'merciless, cruel, raw people, who harm and torture other beings' (Zimmer, 1969, 229-30).

In addition to this Indian system, Koch is using the adapted colour symbolism of the *wayang kulit*, in which variously painted leather puppets are used within a complex system including colour, body size and facial configuration to indicate the mood or emotional state of the characters. A white face shows youth or innocence; Yellow indicates dignity and calmness; Red typifies tempestuousness, aggressiveness or fury; Black can mean anger or strength (Brandon, 50-51).

The colour most closely associated with Mike Langford is the yellow of his hair; his compassion and consideration are correspondingly never brought into question, though he struggles in a very human way with self-control, and Ly Keang does manage to get him to break his commitment to non-violence. Koch points out such details as the reddening in his complexion when he sings (*HW*, 394), or the bright red shirt he wears the first time he ventures out into the Vietnamese countryside and nearly gets killed. In addition, the theme of his innocence and youth are closely related to his colouring. Volkov's hair is 'rope yellow' (*HW*, 244), apparently rather darker than Langford's, corresponding to his relatively higher level of passion and lack of innocence.

In contrast, when Hong Kong native Jim Feng is described as having a yellow face, he is ill from the report eye-witness account of Langford's death. Yet, he is still calm and dignified in his pain, and looking out the door at the 'musing and peaceful' green and mauve hills of Cambodia which have nevertheless swallowed him up (*HW*, 446). The first NVA tank to roll onto the grounds of the South Vietnamese Presidential Palace flies 'a huge National Liberation Front flag' with, Koch carefully points out, a 'yellow star' (*HW*, 419), an obvious tribute to the dignified compassion and self-control of Captain Danh and his men, and to their fight for the restoration of *dharma* in Vietnam.

Cambodia is also a 'dry, huge, empty, yellow-and-green dish of land' (*HW*, 225). This innocent landscape, lying 'under towering clouds'—Jainist symbol of the veil of ignorance cutting off the light (Zimmer, 1969, 550)—, is particularly vulnerable to the 'axis of that vagueness, hiding the black-clad Others' (*HW*, 225), and is compared ominously to Australia's

own vast and, in context of the surging forces of *adharma* which would have no reason to stop at the borders of Southeast Asia, seemingly unprotected continent. The border region between Cambodia and Thailand is 'a flat red wasteland that's waterless and parched and burning, resembling inland Australia'. Dryness is no longer fortuitous but demonic, and grey-green is the colour of the 'juiceless' 'smudges of vegetation' which represent the desolation of the once yellow-green landscape (*HW*, 437).

While light green is the colour of the regeneration of life, Koch's use of green regularly attenuates the positive implications of the yellow which is its neighbour in the spectrum. There is always something unresolved in Koch's depiction of the eyes of Billy Kwan and Guy Hamilton in *The Year of Living Dangerously* as green, where they seem connected to the eyes of the ephemeral Cheshire Cat. In *Highways to a War* Claudine Phan has 'surprising grey-green eyes' (*HW*, 401), but she, unlike the cat or Langford's other women, refuses to let herself disappear. Rather, she is a manifestation of the divine feminine in the time of destruction. She is like Parvati, the Mother Goddess, who will bring the spring back to the world, but must first wait out the ascendancy of the forces of evil, and then hope that her Kali-aspect will prevail over the demons. Grey-green is also associated with the Black Ghosts who hide in the dark shadows of the palm trees. When Langford finally chooses to become a fighter, as the Khmer Rouge are trying to overrun his position, his focus is less on the enemy trying to kill him than on how 'the shining, dark green leaves of the mango got very distinct just above me' (*HW*, 378). Green is the most ambiguous colour on Koch's palette. He alludes to its varied symbolism when he discusses the meanings of trees.

> Quiet against the sky, they are a decoration in a book, or a pleasant park to create peace; they are perhaps a refuge from danger. But then again, they are the treacherous cloak that hides danger itself. Which were these trees? (*HW*, 354)

Yellow is the predominant symbolic colour in *Highways to a War*, and while it generally conforms to the Jainist and *wayang kulit* systems, it can be rather puzzling. In *The Year of Living Dangerously*, Jill Bryant has, very logically, blonde hair; so does her rival, the enigmatic Russian operative Vera Chostiakov, who apparently drugs Guy Hamilton in order to

interrogate him—which could be another expression of the same dignified, calm, selfless and perhaps even non-violent self-control, even if the compassion is lacking. Most interestingly is how in *Highways to a War* Koch pushes this ambivalence of the colour yellow, from Langford's hair to Madame Delphine's opium, until it takes on a metaphoric value of an escape from reality to the dream world.

Madame Delphine's opium den is replete with dual images of collegiality, mirth, decadence and evil. It stinks of open drains, an image it shares with the entry to the office of the ex-CIA men Donald Mills and Aubrey Hardwick, who are best described as duplicitous; but this unappealing sensorial quality is tempered with an atmosphere of the *wayang*. A single electric bulb disrupts the outside darkness, a big, dim mosquito net hangs above the patrons like a cloud, fans slowly turn, and straw mats on the walls are worked in gold and chocolate. It is no wonder that Harvey Drummond calls it 'a confusing place'. The opium he inhales brings 'with it love of the world and my friends; love of the world inside me. I lay bathed in yellow delight'. It is significant that he is bathed in yellow 'delight' and not yellow 'light' in this scene where yellow signifies not 'enlightenment' but the *maya* of delusion.

At Madame Delphine's, the correspondents are all enjoying a trip into a dream world, but it is an ominous one where the blissful sighs come from 'motionless shapes of my colleagues' and 'from out of the dark on all sides'. Drummond reports how 'They all spoke on a calm purring note I'd not heard before: the voice of opium'. Time itself becomes a yellow substance there, slowed 'to the ooze of honey'. Madame Delphine is the *dalang* there, 'her lamp creating big shadows', and her clients lay their heads on wayang puppet-like leather pillows, leading Harvey Drummond to find that he 'was in two places at once'. He feels, contrary to the normal tendency of perceiving the world one is in as the 'real' one, that the world he perceives is unreal, with white grass and a green sky, and recognises that it exists inside of himself (*HW*, 282-83).

Two other men who live uneasily between worlds are Colonel Chandara, the anti-Khmer Rouge rebel leader, and Donald Mills, the alcoholic ex-spy. Chandara places yellow roses in

his rebel headquarters to soften the impact of the spartan surroundings and his own intense eyes. Ray Barton finds this to be 'carefully contrived formality', but does not grasp the point that Chandara is seeking to reconcile his antagonistic worlds when he rightly calls Chandara's flower adorned office 'a child's imitation of the adult world' (*HW*, 439). Donald Mills wears a 'jarringly vivid' yellow shirt and white trousers, ostensibly an attempt to submerge the events of his life, which are anything but compassionate, impartial or innocent, behind masks of dispassionate and unselfish souls. These are very different men, and yet Mills and Chandara share the recognition that they are standing on the edge of a volcano, and both are trying desperately not to fall in.

12.6. Descent into the Underworld

Mike Langford, however, is from the very beginning preparing his own descent into the volcano called Dis, a journey which resembles Dante's descent into the spiralling circles of hell. Langford perceives Asia from the very start as something of an underground world. When he arrives in Singapore and is driven down the old city he encounters images which resemble those experienced by Guy Hamilton on his arrival in Jakarta:

> Dim and shadowy, the old road from Paya Lebar was very different from the freeway that brings the air traveller of today into Singapore from Changi: it was a glowing and teeming tunnel of life, walled and roofed over by the dim fronds of palms, and by giant, snake-limbed banyans and rain trees. Dusk became blue-tinged darkness there: malam, the big Malay night, flaring and glimmering with the little mysteries of kerosene and oil lamps. (*HW*, 68)

Further descending, Langford, Jim Feng and Dmitri Volkov arrive in Vietnam, laughing as if it were breathing. Unlike Dante, however, they cannot exit this circle, for this is the land of time and meaning,

> the place where their youth casually vanished. It vanished while they shot the action; vanished while they joked. Jokes were their food: more necessary than whisky, or the many other stimulants the region and the period had to offer. They were high on everything, in those years, but their greatest high was risk: that sprint along the near edge of death they never tired of repeating (*HW*, 98).

The image of going underground fits Koch's allusions to *Alice in Wonderland*, though its successive points of entry are more numerous and each one brings them deeper into Dis, a

realm distinguished by reversals of natural order, where dreams have priority over the material, and where the forces of chaos and *adharma* reign.

Harvey Drummond describes Phnom Penh as a theatre when he and Dmitri Volkov ride a cyclo out into the night:

> Here were the actors, just as I remembered them: monkey peddlers, kerbside dentists, soothsayers, cigarette makers, dark-faced Khmer hawkers squatting beside braziers, pale-faced Chinese shopkeepers in their doorways, and the beautiful, full-bodied women with their warm, Sino-Indian faces.

Phnom Penh is no longer part of the real world, Drummond concludes, but remains frozen in time, 'and the thing that was gathering in the countryside could perhaps be ignored'. He cannot, however, ignore the half-naked children he sees dodging about under the streetlamps. He thinks they are playing games until he sees 'that they were catching insects that swarmed in the light, and putting them into jars for food' (*HW*, 244-45). As the population comes to rely on Koch's symbol of soullessness for sustenance, the Cambodian Army, never steadfastly in the real world, slips ever more into the dream world. When the Soldiers Three are released by the NVA their first contact with the Cambodians is with a chimerical army. Feng reports how

> some four hundred metres away, where the road ran into blue hills on the horizon, were a group of military trucks and armoured personal carriers, with soldiers standing beside them. We stopped, and narrowed our eyes in the heat: a shimmer rose for the bitumen, and the soldiers and vehicles seemed to dissolve and re-form in the air, like a dream. They didn't seem to see us. (HW, 354-55)

During the Soldier's Three capture, they descend into the rabbit-hole underground bunker of the NVA, finding it warm, dry and full of human brightness, while outside it is wet, dark and threatening. Another entry into the looking-glass dream world is made on couscous night at the Jade Pagoda, 'A mutual therapy session for emotionally dislocated corespondents. A station for the dressing of psychic wounds. A trapdoor into trance' (*HW*, 233). Trapdoors can often only be opened from one direction, and the journey into Dis is proving ever more dangerous. Langford's Saigon children understand this when they see him heading for the bar/brothel called La Bohème. This recalls Billy Kwan's dossier comment, about Guy Hamilton's relationship with the mysterious Vera Chostiakov, of 'the invasion of Durga's

darkness in you: she who turns time into sleep …' (*YLD*, 178). Langford similarly goes like Rip Van Winkle to drink the liquor which gives entry into the land of dream, to escape the real world where his friend, the South Vietnamese Captain Trung, has been killed in action. The children desperately implore him not to disappear into the bar. They have the most to lose should he not return from a visit to a place he typically would avoid. Langford's fate is set, however, and he is destined to continue on.

The Land of Dis is like a black hole, progressively absorbing more people and land into it. All of Southeast Asia is being drawn into it, and when it takes Volkov and Ly Keang, Mike Langford is also irretrievably lost. He knows when he re-enters the forbidden Cambodia of the Khmer Rouge that he will have no real chance to get out, but he also grasps that only in Cambodia can he find his own self.

12.7. The Land of Faery

Attaining oneness with the transcendental Self is the goal of all Eastern ascetic endeavours, but can only be achieved through obliteration of the phenomenal self—hardly a useful symbol for an Australian writer like Koch, for whom the 'otherland' (his earliest term for the concept which appears in his 1979-revised *Boys in the Island*) refers 'to all the possibilities of the self which lie somewhere in the past of childhood or remain in the future over the horizon' (Thieme, 1987, 454). Alongside the Eastern mythology, therefore, Koch sets the Western, which offers a transitional world between those of the 'real' and the 'imagination'. The green world of elves and faeries is Koch's door to the 'Otherworld'. Koch explains his handle on the faery myth: 'Fairyland is enchanting: it may well be a glimpse of paradise—for which we all long. Fairyland has been seen by the Irish in particular as a halfway region between Heaven and this world', and therefore may have the power to bring 'the other world within reach' (Hulse, 22). Entry is not without its risks. 'The things that are most desirable can sometimes lead to our destruction', Koch says. The very freshness and intensity of childhood

> becomes a trap if we wish to prolong it. Love that is lost, if we try to cling to it, will destroy us. Mourning too long for the dead, as the people knew who

> write the fairy-tales, can also wither us and take away our present. All these things that may be good, and may have very wonderful reasons behind them, can't be pursued too long (Hulse, 24).

Concerned as they are with deliberate or inadvertent passage into the 'Otherworld', Koch's novels are populated by faery-like people guarding the portals into those promising, forbidding worlds.

Aubrey Hardwick, whose first name means 'King of the Elves', and whose last name could certainly be interpreted as a derivation of the Old English *wicca*, giving something like 'the stern/troublesome wizard' (Morris, 86), is the manifestation of excessive devotion to the dream world. His great influence on those around him begins beneficially and with considerable clarity, and does give his protegés—particularly Mike Langford—some access to the 'Otherworld', but at some point this always becomes self-deception, and Uncle Aubrey's invitation to his world leads to their destruction. Koch's final analysis is that the European myths of Fairyland 'weren't tales for children, but parables of warning' (Hulse, 21), and that spiritual health comes rather from 'crossing the gap', or, in other words, embracing and living in both worlds, for, as the Brahmans assert, reality is in both.

12.8. When Worlds Collide

For Westerners, this double sense of reality has usually been limited to less serious situations than encountered by the journalists of the novels in this study, who find themselves at first straddling these two worlds, and are then so caught up living '*inside* things like the war in Vietnam' that they are paralysed. Cambodia, Harvey Drummond reports, 'tugged at our collective memories', was both 'strange yet half-known', a hybrid of France and 'regions outside geography: regions that tantalized the mind, almost recalled and yet not, like a whole mislaid life'. Even the people, 'whose faces hinted at an antique India', were an 'oddly familiar' hybrid. The men 'sometimes seemed more Western than Asian, and the women were beautiful: figures from Indian frescoes'. This is the good dream of Cambodia which the correspondents come to believe in, all the while knowing that a nightmare exists parallel to the

dream. Langford more than the others is drawn to the good dream of Cambodia, and haunted by the bad dream.

> He knew about the bad dream, waiting on the edges, but he wanted to believe that the good dream would continue. I think he was like a sleeper who wakes up and can't bear the dream to end, and goes back to sleep to try and get inside it again. (*HW*, 212-14)

The nightmare finally proves inescapable. After Volkov dies in his arms, Langford despondently talks of the fate of old Cambodia now that the rain and bombs are difficult to tell apart, and the demons are making their final assault on civilisation:

> The rain got harder, as though it was trying to drown out everything that had happened: drown out what I'd done. The afternoon rains go on, and the bombing goes on. Everything coming down. For the first time, the Khmer Rouge haven't pulled back with the wet season: they're still trying to take the city, fighting on in the rain, the mud. So the B-52s go on bombing, quite close: you can hear the explosions through the roar of the rain, and the thunder. Nothing but red mud and ruined villages, out in the countryside: everything being destroyed. Cambodia being destroyed. (*HW*, 366)

The overbearing oppression by the world of the bad dream world over the dharmic world takes its toll on the correspondents. They resort to drugs, trying to smother the oblivion of one unreal world under that of another. Drummond says they all came to Madame Delphine's 'to numb themselves to what was outside: the bombing, the ruined countryside, the people half crazed from grief, rocking the bodies of dead children on their laps'. They can hide in opium's oblivion, but the realities of the adharmic world wait for them. 'The atmosphere of the city had become unnerving, Drummond says, 'The power had gone off again: the fans had stopped working and the room was stifling' (*HW*, 281).

Yet, by this time, Mike Langford has taken up his place in the 'Otherworld', already assuming the role he will only later consciously make as a fighter in the macrocosmic war. Drummond notices how Langford acts more like a supernatural warrior than a journalist, as he moves for shots during a firefight,

> dodging, weaving, hitting the ground and rolling, seeking anything that gave him cover: even the bodies of the fallen. He was quite uncanny: very graceful and controlled, seeming always to know where the fire was coming from. I suspected that he saw himself as magically invulnerable; … I half resented him, and I remember thinking: He's not a photographer, he's a bloody soldier. (*HW*, 174)

Claudine Phan tells Langford point blank that continuing to risk his life going out with the ARVN 'means that you live in a dream', and are 'always likely to disappear'. 'It's sad, being a warrior' she tells him, sounding rather like Krishna lecturing Arjuna before battle, because 'you'll always be alone'. Langford has already learned Krishna's lesson not to be interested in the tangible results of his profession, but when she tells him 'you're the sort of warrior other men love, because you're what they wish to be', she is not flattering him. He is indeed a hero, but his war is too dangerous for most men since his enemies are demons. She continues, 'You'd make a good father. But if you have children, they'll end up orphans, won't they?'(*HW*, 187). Langford has slipped, along with all of Cambodia, through the looking-glass into the 'Otherworld' called the Region of Dis, one of the final battlefields of the demons' macrocosmic war which began with the *Kali-Yuga* and the bloodbath depicted in the *Mahabharata* .

12.9. The Land of Dis

In *Highways to a War*, the invoking of this Black Age is a *leitmotif* which takes the form of a personification of universal upheaval called 'Dis', the strangest and most invasive of 'Otherworlds' imaginable. Koch writes of the 'calm voice' of the disappeared and presumed dead Mike Langford emerging from 'the darkness' of 'that tropical kingdom of Dis he was lost in, beyond the Thai border', recounting its tale of an Asia of times long past (*HW*, 66). Dis is home to the Grim Reaper figure, cutting down the youth of Langford and his cameraman companions during their glory years covering the war in Vietnam. Langford is now dead, but the others cling to the profession, trying vainly to be again what they once were:

> It's time for them to hang up their irons.
> But how can they do that? The greatest high of all will be gone then: the one presided over by Dis, commander of the dead, whose other name is Meaning. (*HW*, 98)

In introducing Dis into his Asian novels, Koch is incorporating an important Western mythological symbol into his ontology. Dis is, first, the name of the all-powerful god of Celtic mythology whose description by Jobes seems written especially for Koch. He carries a

hammer, the symbol of creative power, paralleling him with the Hindu gods—Brahma, Vishnu, Shiva, etc.—, variously considered to be the ultimate creators of the universe. Dis Pater, related to the Greek Jupiter, was the Roman form. As the chief god of the underworld and king of the dead, he rides a car drawn by four black horses, and carries with him the keys to the infernal regions. Dis Pater also shared the dual creation/destruction and fortune/misfortune roles of the Celtic and Hindu deities, as he was worshipped in Roman antiquity as the giver of riches. Dis was considered by the Gauls to be their ancestral father, which recalls Billy Kwan, who insists that he is directly descended from the dwarves of the ancient world through his Irish mother (*YLD*, 94). Dis' resemblance to Kwan's dwarves goes much farther, as well, being a god of wealth, possessor of fertility, metals and minerals, and inhabiting the underworld. He is also associated with a cup or magic cauldron (Jobes, 450-51), the archetype of many tales of entry into the dream world, including the intoxicating drink given to Guy Hamilton by Vera Chostiakov, and the drugs taken by Mike Langford and the other correspondents, both of which share many features with Rip Van Winkle's visit to Sleepy Hollow, also a land of dream, illusion and the dead.

Rip Van Winkle is summoned to help an ancient-looking fellow carry a keg of liquor into the hollow. Once there, he sees a similar 'company of odd-looking personages … dressed in a quaint outlandish fashion', playing a game of six-pins which 'whenever they rolled, echoed along the mountains like rumbling peals of thunder'. One of them, 'a stout old gentleman, with a weather-beaten countenance', who appears to be 'the commander', wears a curved sword from his broad belt, not unlike the curved blade of the sickle carried by the Grim Reaper. What most strikes Rip, however, is 'that though these folks were evidently amusing themselves, yet they maintained the gravest faces, the most mysterious silence, and were, withal, the most melancholy party of pleasure he had ever witnessed'. The strange folk stare at Rip 'with such fixed statue-like gaze, and such strange, uncouth, lack-luster countenances, that his heart turned with him, and his knees smote together'. They bid him to serve to them the liquor he has helped carry into the hollow, which they quaff 'in profound silence', and then go

back to their game. Left alone, Rip finally succumbs to the temptation to taste the liquor. One taste provokes another until 'his senses were overpowered, his eyes swam in his head, his head gradually declined, and he fell into a deep sleep'. When Rip awakens, he finds the strange folk as well as his dog have disappeared, his rifle rotted and rusted, his joints turned stiff and weak, and finally discovers that time itself has vanished (McQuade, 337-38). While Washington Irving's 'Rip Van Winkle' might be considered no more than one of many good examples of the 'Otherworld' myth common in world literature, such various details as the title 'commander', attention to descriptions of the faces of the folk and the landscape, as well as its renown make it very hard not to see it as another of Koch's many archetypes to his Asian novels.

Dis was also a Roman name for the underworld or world of the dead. Dis Pater was the chief god of the underworld, the king of the departed. The Encyclopaedia Britannica identifies Dis Pater as 'Rich Father', the greatly feared brother of Jupiter, who through his wife is associated with both creative and destructive forces. Proserpina, a Roman adoption of the Greek goddess Persephone, was kidnapped and taken to the underworld by Hades. Her mother was so distraught that she neglected her duties concerning the fruitfulness of the earth. Her father, Zeus, then ordered Hades to release her, but having eaten one pomegranate seed, Persephone had to stay four months each year in Hades. She is therefore identified as the goddess of vegetation and abundance during the part of the year she inhabits the upper regions of the earth, and as the goddess of death during her annual sojourn in the underworld.

In Norse mythology, Dis refers to a female attendant or any mythic female being. Jobes writes that the word originally meant 'sister', and referred to the female spirits who dispensed fate and acted as guardian beings who followed a person from birth to death. The word is the singular form of *disir*—'which see'—, and is also the word in Sanskrit and Zend for 'law', and is 'probably the root for *dzhyrna* (day), whence the word "discern"' (Jobes, 450). This can be applied to the journalists, called in all fairness Peeping Toms by Billy Kwan, and who fit the Norse definition as onlooking attendants and interpreters to cosmic events. As 'law', *dis* has

direct association with 'word' and, therefore, 'meaning'. The 'greatest high' for Langford and his friends was reporting from the battlefield. Working in the midst of death, and taking the risk of being killed even while remaining uninvolved, became everything to them. It became the meaning of their lives. Death in Western and Christian tradition is also 'meaning', either taken as the final reality, or as the unique way to achieve resurrection in eternal life. In the Eastern tradition death represents a failure to achieve purity of the Self, or Enlightenment, and yet a soul is allowed to return to the earth for another life, and another chance at self-revelation. While suffering death is the ultimate pain and that which each created entity must seek to avoid, it is the necessary precursor to the microcosmic renewal of an individual, enabling another opportunity to achieve Enlightenment, which will free the individual from the curse of further deaths. On the macrocosmic scale, the dissolution of the fourth age of *Kali-Yuga*—the age of cosmic death and putrefaction—is an equal and indispensable part of the universal cycle.

Koch's association of 'Dis' with 'meaning' is an especially important yet paradoxical element, with so many correspondences and shared roots in both Eastern and Western tradition that it becomes something of a labyrinth in Koch's symbolic scheme. Adrian Mitchell remarks that this is one of the many instances in which Koch reveals

> the spiritual agencies we are really confronting in these fictions, giving them their proper names. A potent mystery is encountered and identified; but of course can never be fully explained, or it would not have retained its enduring authority as mystery. (Mitchell, 1996, Ancestral Voices, 8)

It might be tempting to say that in his eclectic semiotic constructions Koch either never tries or is not quite able to bring all of the disparate elements together into a unified whole. This would be a serious argument against his work's success, but in his defence one must see that the Asian symbols he is working with are not liable to being tidied up. Zaehner calls Hinduism 'a vast and apparently incoherent religious complex', and does so without an iota of disrespect. Koch is trying to avoid the sin of Orientalism, which would be to appropriate Asian symbols and use them as suits his purposes. Rather, he is following Zaehner's counsel to 'attempt, at his peril, to distil from the whole mass of his material the fine essence that he

considers to be the changeless ground from which the proliferating jungle that seems to be Hinduism grows' (Zaehner, 3). It is important for this reason to try to follow Koch's path through the jungle of symbols and meanings, to find the constructs he too must have discovered in his searches, and, as a critic, to avoid imposing Orientalist or other prefabricated interpretations or judgements on his work.

Koch is weaving together very disparate threads of both Eastern and Western traditions in interpreting the search for self and truth in Asia. Mike Langford does not complete his search, but the narrator comes to understand the re-creative role Dis plays in nature. Ray Barton senses the presence of Langford's incomplete, restless soul, haunting his old apartment in Bangkok, waiting to be reborn. He also recognises in Mike Langford the face of Langford's mysterious convict great-great-grandfather, implying that it is he who had returned embodied as Mike Langford to further his search, but having arrived again in the 'region of Dis', here the Cambodian killing fields, will have to return again:

> In a region of Dis beyond the Thai border, a row of crosses rises from the paddy field's red earth, in the motionless and terrible heat. I see flames reach up for him, like the heat's choking essence. But then there are other upright poles about him, and now he's somewhere else. (*HW*, 450-51)

Koch has published the prequel to *Highways to a War*, which is the story of that great-great-grandfather, and has made it clear enough that the two novels together are in the Eastern tradition of telling the series of lives of a holy man, though without promising to tie up all of his loose threads, which could only occur at the moment of enlightenment. Each successive life is necessary in the path of enlightenment of a soul, which is its re-identification with the cosmic Soul. In the same way, this last, destructive age of the world, the *Kali-Yuga* is indispensable to completion of the cycle before there can be a return to the holy *Krta Yuga*, the first, creative age in a new cycle of time (Zimmer, 1969, 375).

12.10. Closing the Circle of Time and Place

Ray Barton remarks that Langford speaks to him from Dis, implicitly giving credence to the possibility of Langford's reincarnation, but also suggesting an inability to come to grips with the gravity of the situation.

> He waited in the darkness behind my chair. The calm voice waited on the tapes, and my grief was ambiguous. Reason said he was probably dead, but emotion said he might still be alive: it was just possible, and the mixture of affection and bafflement that he'd stirred in me as a boy was back again. It reached out to me now from that tropical kingdom of Dis he was lost in, beyond the Thai border. (*HW*, 66)

Yet Dis is not only the 'infernal region' to which Langford is condemned in death. He was already there when he was living his cameraman's life, covering the Southeast Asian wars, a land astride the looking-glass, where reality and irreality, and where good and bad dreams, flow together. The surviving journalists are unable to leave Southeast Asia even though the wars are over, Cambodia is closed tight, and there is little more to do than hang out in bars. They are all caught outside of the mandala of time, and even applying the term 'surviving' to them is to be done with attenuation. Ray Barton comments that they should, like the ageing gunmen of the old Western movies, 'hang up their arms', but that they cannot forsake the high induced by death (*HW*, 98). This is the same high in which the Goddess Kali herself gets caught up—the bloodthirsty rampage begun to fight against the demons, and which must be brought to a halt by a blood sacrifice before she destroys all of the cosmos.

Koch remains optimistic that the cycle of time will continue to turn, and the universe will be re-created with the return of the holy *Krta Yuga*. For while Barton senses Langford in 'a region of Dis beyond the Thai border', where 'a row of crosses rises from the paddy field's red earth, in the motionless and terrible heat', he also believes him among 'hidden voices' which 'murmur among bright leaves'. Here Langford escapes the 'choking essences' of the fire's heat. It is a homeland, protected and illuminated by cool nature: 'Walled and roofed by green, by a green like light itself, he hangs in a blessed coolness; the underwater cool of the hop glades (*HW*, 450-51). It is in such a lost, forbidding place as Dis that the Australian is to experience a rebirth of spirit. 'It is only in exile, at the edge of the known world', David Tacey writes, 'that the voice of revelation and guidance is heard', and one is returned, like the Israelites of Moses, to his spiritual homeland. Koch especially identifies this metaphor with his native Tasmania as with Asia, and seems to compose his images to Tacey's specifications:

> After contact with archaic nature and the red earth, spirit rises again in a form that is qualitatively different from our ancestral English or European spirit. Spirit will be 'savage' in the sense of being untamed, primordial, or Wordsworthian, romantic, or consoling. (Tacey, 205-06)

In fact, just the opposite is probably the case, as Koch surely figures in Tacey's readings in the Australian literary tradition treating man, the land, the animating force which binds the two, and the spiritual crisis which has befallen the Australian identity and its sense of place and time.

Home, in Koch's Asian novels as in the works of many Australian writers, is 'a place to be escaped from, but also a place to be returned to' (Huggan, 1993, Age of Tourism, 177). Applied in an Asian sense, 'home' comes to symbolise the state called *nirvana*, which is both 'enlightenment' and 'extinction', or *moksa*, 'release'—the place from where we come and to where we long to return, either individually or universally. Koch uses the ambiguity of the terms to his advantage. While Robert O'Brian and Guy Hamilton have made strides towards self-realisation when they leave Asia, neither has progressed enough to really know where 'home' is, and both feel compelled to continue their journeys. Billy Kwan, on the other hand, has learned the lessons of the *Bhagavad Gita*, and through his selfless action achieves his 'home'. He is the only one of the many major characters in any of the Asian novels of Koch and d'Alpuget who does not in the end seem to demand another chapter to his story. Mike Langford is also a sacrifice to the turmoil of Southeast Asia, but his story does not seem to have reached its end, even though Koch promises that through his immolation in Cambodia he has reached the 'underwater cool' of home. The ambiguity of Langford's death establishes the mood of the entire novel, which is about the search for this man who seems to have put himself beyond the reach of both death and life. *Highways to a War* does not question the Western precept that no man is immortal, yet it does propose to set it alongside the Eastern tenet that each man continues the human journey to completion in *moksa*. The narrator's recognition of Langford's great-great-grandfather in Langford himself underscores this indestructible circularity of life, leaving at least one man's conviction that, while the man is almost unquestionably dead, the spirit of Robert Devereux/Mike Langford is not lost.

12.11. Conclusion

This conviction is nevertheless undermined by more of Koch's puzzling images. The heat rising from the paddy field's red earth in the 'region of Dis' where Langford dies is 'motionless' (*HW*, 451), as if it belongs more to his world of still photography than to this world of material and change. It is not only this which leaves the novel with an entirely unsatisfying ending, however. There is also Ray Barton's tendency to reconstruct events according to the rules of the Western historian. These are the rules the Western reader would normally be best prepared to accept, but attitudes concerning reality and illusion, place, time and the self should be affected enough by the novel to cause him to question the perspectives and judgement of even the otherwise open and acute narrator. As this chapter has endeavored to show, the events of Mike Langford's life have become so ensnarled in the confusion of antagonistic worlds whose interface is the terrible battleground called Dis that the clean, scientific linearities of this-worldly nature cease to function.

The question is, then, what does Koch offer to replace the Western principles of history, time, and self in such an 'Otherworld'? Many of the answers have been dealt with in detail in earlier chapters, but there remain some doubts about the application of Koch's constructions to the Australo-Asian context. The next chapter will try to resolve these problems, and in doing so will attempt to identify the one remaining of all the perplexing protagonists of these novels, *Highway to a War*'s Mike Langford.

Crossing to the Other Bank

13.1. Introduction

Entangled in the problems of Australia's identity and world view are the conflicting senses of the role which place and time, or 'history', play. Recent theory, Jeff Lewis notes, would have us understand history as 'a quantum series' of 'random and self-reflexive events that defy structural, categorical or teleological definition' (Lewis, 54). Chaos theories are perhaps the best Western thought presently capable of offering in reformulating the ancient wisdom of Buddha that 'everything is the result of a vast concurrence of causes and conditions, and everything disappears as these causes and conditions change and pass away' (Bukkyo Dendo Kyokai, 80). The Western theoretical approach proves unsatisfactory when removed from the laboratory environment and used to address the issues of the identity and role of humanity, however, leaving us 'perhaps duty bound to unlock broader referential and heuristic patterns in order to account more fully for the multiple contingencies directing our personal and social destinies' (Lewis, 54). The Eastern approach to history, once its 'Otherness' is embraced, meanwhile proves especially useful in this discussion over defining and identifying Australia's relationship with the Southeast Asian community.

C. J. Koch, this study has argued, is exploring just such patterns according to the principle of his central metaphor of hybridisation. Earlier chapters have looked at how the fusion of antagonistic forces create such hybridisations as of character, of perspectives of reality, of the divine, and of worlds. This final chapter will concentrate on conflicting perspectives of 'history', a topic which is generally current today, but is especially so in Australia, where the re-emergent Aboriginal perspective is so strongly at odds with the Western one, and would put to question the white Australian view of the existence of Australia. It will argue that Koch has brought linear Western and cyclical Eastern constructions of 'history' together to re-examine contemporary attitudes about the 'Self' and the 'Other' insofar as they concern the sense of time and place, and also to reinvigorate what he considers the West's deflated human and spiritual values. It will use *Highways to a War* as

res explicanda, and the last point will be to show how that novel's protagonist, Mike Langford, must be considered in terms of a hybridised view of history. First, however, attention ought be given to the critical stance in which Koch and d'Alpuget have been interpreted as neo-Orientalist writers.

13.2. Time, Place, and the De-Orientalist Critique

Edward Said's theory of the cultural and linguistic as well as political and military imperialism inherent in the 'Orientalist' world view has been applied to the Australian context by Broinowski and others, leading into various directions. Under one predominant view, known as 'Asianification', 'Orientalist' stereotypes and discriminations would be abandoned, and the 'Australian population and culture would produce an economic landbridge to Asia—and hence access to the region's economic magic pudding' (Lewis, 56). This economic process would then lead back to a socio-cultural 'De-Orientalism'—'the deconstruction of Orientalist imagery' (Lewis, 59). Asianification has led to a rewriting of 'the archive' of 'Australian canonical texts' in order to celebrate ideals of multiculturalism and pluralism (Lewis, 60), but has also caused a backlash in the form of a neo-nationalism which reasserts the perceived values of the Anglo-Celtic culture, and emphasises the weaknesses and absurdities inherent in De-Orientalist attempts to redefine 'true' and 'false' parameters of cultural difference.

Writers such as d'Alpuget and Koch have found themselves caught in a cross-fire. While participating in the vanguard of 'Asianification', their protagonists are 'confronted, challenged to the very centre of his or her cultural being, dislodged, affected, changed in some fundamental way even as she or he returns to the security and familiarity of the "home" culture' (Lewis, 65). They would seem to be the very symbol of the sort of questioning the old assumptions and preconceptions central to 'Asianification', but 'De-Orientalist' critics have found their texts to be 'examples of racism, jingoism and xenophobia', with protagonists who 'maraud about the South East Asian countryside, exploiting its citizens and re-instituting White European cultural, racial, sexual and economic supremacy'. Lewis calls this 'a "re-torturing"

of the language and imagery of contemporary texts in order to make them conform to the De-Orientalist project, a history of goodies and baddies' (Lewis, 63). For this reason, De-Orientalist criticism tends to fail to see past the stereotypical racism and sexism, to return to the example detailed in chapter 4, which d'Alpuget uses to force the reader, rather than the author, to 'take responsibility for what he/she sees or fails to see' (McKeogh, 35).

Susan McKernan chimes in that Koch is indeed furthering Orientalist imagery in his 'fascination for the different' (McKernan, 433), which she attributes to a 'tourist mentality—that the unknown, the alien, must necessarily be both glamorous and threatening' (McKernan, 434). In deliberately distorting his pictures of Indonesians and, especially, of women, Koch 'promotes Australian racism' (McKernan, 434). Her examples include the interpretation, in *Across the Sea Wall*, that it 'is only by losing all his money and succumbing to an Indian disease that O'Brien can restore himself to health and the sanity of life in Australia' (McKernan, 435); and 'Koch's portrayal of women demonstrates his method of taking a reality and loading it with moral and spiritual overtones', as in the recurrent female face pictured as 'the child face which may hide cruelty or vulnerability' (McKernan, 436). Koch is neither interested in ordinary Indonesians, but only those who are diseased and deformed, nor in ordinary women, but only those who 'bear the burden of Otherness'. Since he offers no ordinary Indonesians or women in his novels, 'and because this kind of writing depends on the association of character and moral quality, it is difficult not to hold Koch responsible' for the idea that Indonesians and women 'are evil' (McKernan, 437). McKernan concludes,

> The difficulty with Koch's view of good and evil as states of psychic health is that it seems to propose normality as a good. To be physically deformed, to have a 'foreign' face, to be homosexual—to be Other in any way—is to be associated in Koch's novels with evil and corruption. (McKernan, 438)

This example illustrates how pretending to take the high road of political correctness can subvert the objectivity of literary criticism. Since we are talking about De-Orientalism here, it is essential to refer back to Edward Said's description of what Orientalism is in the first place, which is 'a whole network of interests inevitably brought to bear on (and therefore always involved in) any occasion when that peculiar entity "the Orient" is in question'. Orientalism is

a figment of the discussion and analysis of this entity by all of the interested institutions, created 'by making statements about it, authorizing views of it, describing it, by teaching it, settling it, ruling over it' (Said, 3). The result was 'a body of ideas, beliefs, clichés, or learning' which in the nineteenth century developed a 'separate and unchallenged coherence' about the East's 'sensuality, its tendency to despotism, its aberrant mentality, its habits of inaccuracy, its backwardness'. Orientalism gathered to itself 'epistemological status' from its ivory tower which in turn assured it an aura of moral neutrality and objective validity (Said, 205). And yet, Said points out, Orientalism has always been vulnerable to the fashionable currents of thought, including 'imperialism, positivism, utopianism, historicism, Darwinism, racism, Freudianism, Marxism, Spenglerism'. Orientalists have always had 'the ambition to formulate their discoveries, experiences, and insights suitably in modern terms, to put ideas about the Orient in very close touch with modern realities' (Said, 43).

To this list we can now add the so-called De-Orientalists who, after reading Said's work, have decked out a contemporary form of latent Orientalism in new clothes. McKernan's criticism harks back to a vocabulary, cited by Said, of the late 19th century 'biological determinism and moral-political admonishment' which saw Orientals as 'backward, degenerate, uncivilized, and retarded', and equated them with 'delinquents, the insane, women, the poor' and other such 'lamentably alien' elements of Western society. Orientals in this context were seen 'not as citizens, or even people, but as problems to be solved or confined' (Said, 207). Indeed, the temptation is great to see Koch and d'Alpuget as joining the old-school Orientalists, relying on clues of the sexist and power-hungry male cliques, their nostalgia for empire, and condescension of Asians, dwarves, beggars and women, but this should be taken as a triumph of their work. When the characters of Koch and d'Alpuget leave themselves open to accusations of Orientalist inclinations, it is a reflection of the socio-cultural baggage they are bringing with them from the West, and not a call by the novelists for a return to old-guard Orientalism. It would be more accurate to see such as Alexandra Wheatfield, Guy Hamilton and Mike Langford as inheritors of the line of 20th century Orientalists of the mode

of T. E. Lawrence who, Said writes, though still burdened by their sense of Occidental 'technological, political, and cultural supremacy', had ceased to see themselves as distant overlords or academics, and found themselves 'standing at the very rim of the East-West divide' with the hope of bringing the two together (Said, 145-46). This shift from an academic to an 'instrumental attitude' has been carried forward another generation by d'Alpuget, who literally gathers up all of the crumbs of latent Orientalism in contemporary Australian society, balls it up and flings it back in the faces of those who have strewn it out, and by Koch, whose characters also stand at that volcanic rim at the edge between two worlds, not with the intention of establishing the dominance of one over the other but finally forging the two into one as had never been deemed possible or even worthwhile before.

While the De-Orientalists are engaged in the inhibition of clearly negative stereotypes, it is not accurate to judge d'Alpuget and Koch among those miscreants who are reacting against the constraints of political correctness—a rebellion which Bodenhausen and Macrae attribute at least partly to a backlash against 'the effort required to avoid stereotyping' (Bodenhausen, 40). D'Alpuget's and Koch's ambiguous works, with their sometimes subtle though always provocative voices, just do not lend themselves well to the agenda of P.C. interpretation precisely because they are not only failing to suppress stereotypes, but are purposefully activating them. This is not because they feel political correctness threatens their freedom of speech, but to bring the stereotypes—the great majority of which are undoubtedly latent—to the surface where they can be re-examined. Asianification, on the other hand, is the tar of good intentions which paves the De-Orientalist road to hell. Is it far-fetched to note how 'Asianification' rings suspiciously of Richard Nixon's 'Vietnamisation', with its reliance on capitalist economic principles to solve Southeast Asian problems while washing Western hands of the region's deep socio-political shortcomings? It could be that the cuffs on the ear received repeatedly from d'Alpuget and Koch, in the form of showing how the Australian sense of the 'Asian Other' defines the 'Australian Self' more than the 'Asian Self', and that

suppression of perceptions of the Asian is in fact the suppression of that of the Australian himself, is the reason for the De-Orientalist barrage against them.

The P.C. voice nevertheless has its rightful place in the contemporary cultural dialogue, including the debate of the place of d'Alpuget and Koch in the Australian canon. The sense of history in fictional works about Australians in Asia, which necessarily bring with them heavy loads of prejudices and preconceptions, certainly needs to be re-examined. 'Nothing is ever as it was or as good as it used to be', and to look for 'the authentic' Asia, which would somehow correspond to the images one has learned to expect there, would prove a futile exercise in contemporary Asia. That 'even the most dispassionate of literary travellers have their heads turned by nostalgia', Robin Gerster writes, is exemplified by C. J. Koch, whose *Across the Sea Wall* and *The Year of Living Dangerously* present 'Asia in essentially ambivalent ways', but with a vision 'firmly set on possible future orientations for Australians as they reassess redundantly colonialist, Anglocentric affiliations'. So much is confirmed by Koch himself in his 1981 essay, *Crossing the Gap*, but Koch's gaze, Gerster argues, turns radically back in his latest novel, *Highways to a War*, with a narrator who 'craves' the old Singapore, and 'abominates' the modern, sanitised city it has become, and a protagonist whose nostalgia for colonial Phnom Penh could be characterised as an obsession. Koch's vision has become 'suffused by a hankering for a picturesque colonial "East" that has passed into history' (Gerster, Bali, 359). Gerster's article focuses on travel literature and its obsessions, but while Koch employs techniques of the travel writer, his Asian novels progressively strain against such a De-Orientalist critique. Koch is rather delving into the nostalgia as a vehicle for the development of his Austral-Asian motifs of time, place, meaning, and reality.

Koch admits to an 'obsession' with the past, which he says 'has great meaning and poignancy', but is openly offended at what he calls the 'totalitarian criticism' which would prescribe his works into a 'fashionable' postmodern or postcolonial niche. 'The romantic, "colonial" view of Asia is not the author's, but that of the central character Mike Langford' (Mitchell, 1996, Interview, 70). A writer is, like any parent, not the most objective critic of his

literary children, and his protectiveness ought to be excused as well as expected, but his point is well taken. Koch draws on many Western and Eastern views and attitudes, in *Highways to a War* picking up the threads left by *The Year of Living Dangerously* to explore through flashbacks and memory—often, but not always, nostalgic—the motif of history. Koch is interested in what history represents, what Australia's role in it can and should be, and most pointedly, in exploring what he calls 'the mystery of personality' (Mitchell, 1996, Interview, 70), which functions in a semiotic network with place and time. Koch belongs to and yet is redirecting the Australian literary tradition of searching for the Australian soul in a landscape which is variously idealised or demonised. Koch looks inward into the Tasmanian landscape, but also outward into Asia, in order to find 'a "hybrid" local identity that will incorporate other Indo-European cultural elements from the former empire'. He employs a 'structure of extended flashback' in *Highways to a War* as in *Across the Sea Wall*, looking both forward and backward at each moment, emphasising 'the pull between breaking free to the future and remaining prey to memories of the past' (Sharrad, 1984, 220). Koch takes this Janus point of view to show not only how beginnings and endings are inextricably bound, but also how each leads to a re-creation of the other, and thereby, writes Sharrad, 'to free us of the tyranny history has exercised over our colonial souls' (Sharrad, 1984, 219).

13.3. Conflicting Interpretations of 'History'

'Time in the everyday world', writes Susan Stewart, 'depends upon a sense of "time in the abstract" that is historical (serial and linear) and infinite', without knowable beginning or end. 'As fictions move away from realism and the temporality of the everyday lifeworld, the paradoxical specter of infinite time emerges with its problems of origin and ending' (Susan Stewart, 117-18). C. J. Koch is working with both of these Western senses of time, and also with Eastern conceptions. As his protagonists arrive at the mythical level of infinite time, they cross a barrier where the Western sense of referential, linear time fades into an Eastern one which is still both serial and infinite, but is circular and, as strictly part of the created universe, pure illusion.

Aubrey Hardwick expresses the conventional idea of historical time, held by those who see Australia as existing out on the fringes of civilisation. Australia was so far outside of the civilised world that history did not occur naturally there, but only when forced to from the outside:

> History's a game that's played for keeps, in my sort of work—and it will be in yours. But for most Australians, it's a dimension of reality that's only found on TV—don't you agree? The reason Australia's half asleep is that it's *outside* history. The Japanese nearly woke us up, but they didn't quite get there. So we went on sleeping. I wonder who *will* wake us up? What do you think? Sukarno? The Communists in Asia? Is the domino theory true or false? (*HW*, 91)

Ray Barton, the novel's narrator, avocational historian and, sometimes at least, Koch's personal mouthpiece, reluctantly concurs with this theory when he ruminates about Tasmania, the farthest part of far-off Australia, to which he, Mike Langford, and Christopher J. Koch are native:

> People from elsewhere say it's a place where nothing happens. I say a hundred and fifty years have happened; but there's a sense in which they're right. Battles, revolutions, concentration camps, bombing raids and the many other consequences of history are far off in another hemisphere. (*HW*, 15)

Harvey Drummond offers another theory of history—one which gives the novel its name and seems most to express the position of C. J. Koch on the inevitable surge of time which is slinging not only Australians but everyone else as well beyond a cosmic edge of reality, and making Australia a fitting metaphor for the puzzling nature of time and space:

> Highways! How they lead us on: we for whom the present is everything, yet never enough! Highways have always brought me joy: highways on which we move at speed, and which go out across flatness to some edge that's beyond the possible, as this one was doing. (*HW*, 222)

Ray Barton repeats this symbol as he discusses the bidirectional continuum formed by past, present and future, a *leitmotif* in the novels of C. J. Koch:

> So far off now, 1965! It begins to seem almost as far as 1848. Yet neither of these years is as distant as we think: unfinished roads stretch from them both, and run to where we stand. (*HW*, 146)

Billy Kwan, another of Koch's historians, had to learn two vital lessons while he was recording history with his photography of the present. The first is that his view of the world

was caught up in delusion of control and manipulation. His photography, rather than recording the reality of Asia, was just a tool of his anxiety and desire (Nettlebeck, 18). The second, the message of the *Bhagavad Gita* and the *Gospels*, is the import of his present individual action on the future condition of the world. Jim Feng is no historian, but understands this participation of each individual in the cosmic order. He remembers what happened to his own family in revolutionary China, and yet recognises justification for much of its suffering within the greater, cosmological picture, which deemed that, for those who had reneged on their dharmic role, time should come to an end:

> But even my father says that his class was no longer fit to rule. They had failed the people: they did too little to stop the suffering. They had lost what the emperors had lost: the Mandate of Heaven. (*HW*, 121)

It is a fate which Koch also shares among all the journalists who remain in Thailand after the end of the wars in Southeast Asia. The professionalism of their jobs had required them to be uninvolved, and they are therefore condemned to lurk, truly lost souls, on the edge of the land of Dis (*HW*, 98).

In Western philosophy time is, along with length, height and depth, one of the cold dimensions which delineate the universe. Koch's characters live linear lives in Australia. Guy Hamilton sees his news-room job in Sydney as heading only towards the grave. Billy Kwan is travelling from one socio-cultural point to the next, never looking back to the past he has rejected, finding satisfaction with the present, or reasonably hope to reach a destination in the future. Mike Langford can only look toward his escape from the past and present represented by Clare Farm. Only as children can Hamilton, Langford and Ray Barton experience time in more Eastern terms of an elementary, active and non-linear force in the cosmos. Hamilton grows up in his memories of his father and pre-war Singapore. Langford and Barton measure time as a repetition of summers which free them from the rest of the year. All three shield themselves from the Western time with their imaginations, aspects of their personalities which are given more import by the dual Eastern concept of reality and which allow them to escape time's shackles. As grown men, Koch's characters find similar comfort in Eastern time's

active qualities, as seen with Jim Feng when he, Mike Langford and Dmitri Volkov are captured by North Vietnamese Army troops:

> And I talked of the things I missed about our lost home, which I hadn't thought of for years. I spoke these things aloud because it gave me a sort of peace. The past is a story, and we cannot help get back into it, so our yearning for it is sweet and not too sharp. I wouldn't let myself think about Lu Ying now, because she belonged to the present, and I found this too painful. (*HW*, 334)

Feng also acknowledges the distinction between such remembrances, with its import of profound reality, and hard history, whose unfiltered record often evokes only raw emotion, when he talks about the last photo ever taken of Mike, Dmitri and him, together with Captain Nguyen Van Danh:

> There is no sadness like the sadness that fills you when you look at the faces in such a photograph. They are not older , as they would be in life, or faded, as they are in your memory. They are real—real all over again. And that pierces; pierces. No; perhaps I couldn't bear that picture. (*HW*, 348)

There is an element of fiction which belongs to the 'reality' of history. Noting the young journalist who idolises Mike Langford, Harvey Drummond remembers how Mike had once similarly idolised Aubrey Hardwick—a theme Koch had earlier developed with Guy Hamilton's admiration for the old and anachronistic Colonel Henderson in *The Year of Living Dangerously*—saying that 'legend always dwarfs reality'. Drummond calls history a 'hall of mirrors: reality emulating some previous legend, and then itself becoming legend, while not quite believing it can be so—transfigured only by death' (*HW*, 390-91). Donald Mills declares the ultimate dream of spy Aubrey Hardwick is to get control of the machine which transforms history into legend. What has driven him throughout his ruthless career, the 'glory' for which he has always plotted to achieve, is to write the definitive history of the Australian intelligence service (*HW*, 432). The desire for access to the most secure files and most secret facts, and then the power to impose the spin which creates the 'truth' of history, would verify his position, and his view of Australia's position, in the world.

Dmitri Volkov is the character who most closely represents the Western idea of the incessant, forward movement of time. He is also a student of history, especially the philosophical history of the French and Russian revolutions, and feels the direct consequences

of history as the grandson of a Russian count who was forced to flee the Russian revolution. Volkov is told by Captain Danh, the North Vietnamese group leader who controls the fate of the three captured correspondents, that the North Vietnamese and Viet Cong are fighting to reinstate the rightful order which was overturned during Vietnam's colonial history. Volkov responds:

> 'To begin the world over again': yes. That is very exciting idea when you are young. But I put it to you, Captain: we cannot begin over again. To begin again is impossible: what results is destruction; murder. Tyranny by the worst: those for whom destruction is their food, and who in fact want nothing but power. (*HW*, 323)

Koch would say that Volkov is both right in seeing the inevitability of terror accompanying the re-beginning of the world, and wrong in believing a return through time to be impossible. Ray Barton discusses the accessibility of the past, as though the highway Harvey Drummond spoke about were not a one-way street. Barton develops this idea in *Highways to a War*, using the Western psychological symbol of open and closed doors which Lewis Carroll used in *Alice in Wonderland* and which Koch previously used with Guy Hamilton in *The Year of Living Dangerously*. Barton emphasises the truth learned by Hamilton and Kwan, however, that the choices which each individual makes are essential in the progress of time. By coalescing past, present and future, where even the past offers opportunities for exercising free will, Barton adheres to the Asian view of the circularity of time, the essential Buddhist teaching of causation, and to the *Bhagavad Gita*'s tenant of the essential nature of free will in upholding the right order of an otherwise deterministic cosmos:

> The past, I see now, waits always for us to open its doors; and once having done so, we can choose to open our spirits to its thin, helpless voices, or else turn away. Both choices have their consequences. (*HW*, 40)

Asian philosophy offers the concept of re-beginning the world as an obvious step in the course of history, and, in *The Year of Living Dangerously*, Koch's world is shaking in the earthquake of the last of the four Great Ages of Hindu tradition, bringing the destruction and dissolution of *adharma*. *Highways to a War* occurs in the epicentre of the earthquake. The righteous order of *dharma* is, after countless millennia since the creation of the cosmos,

overwhelmed by the antagonistic forces of disorder. The past, including all of history, is obliterated by demons. Yet, even *adharma* is a part of *dharma*, and the possibility remains that *dharma* be restored through righteous action of gods and men. Then the world will indeed begin over again with the cyclical return of the first Great World Age.

13.4. The *Betjaks*

What appears to be one of the most important discrepancies in Koch's presentation of adharmic forces is the association of enigmatic Billy Kwan, champion of the forces of light, with the black *betjak* named *Tengah Malam*, 'midnight'. The tricycle-rickshaw is a *leitmotif* developed in *The Year of Living Dangerously* and *Highways to a War* as a cumbersome but practical means of transportation not just through the bustling streets of Southeast Asian cities but also, as evidenced by their names from the jungle and the *wayang kulit* and their eerily ritualised, animalistic calls and sounds, into the mythical world of dream and magic:

> As soon as they sighted Hamilton and Kwan, most of the *betjaks* creaked into motion like a flock of ponderous birds, wheeling towards them. … with their black canvas hoods, their sides painted in hurdy-gurdy colours with pictures of volcanoes and *wayang* heroes, and lettered with names such as *Tiger* and *Bima*, they belonged to another time. The riders, in ragged shorts and singlets, … rang what sounded like cow-bells, and made low-voiced cries that were oddly confidential. (*YLD*, 16-17)

In *Across the Sea Wall*, Koch introduces this metaphor and its association with entry into the 'Otherworld'. O'Brien, Ilsa, Sunder and Carleen are visiting the city of Madras. 'Keeping pace at the kerb were trishaws, following persistently, like creaking birds. *'Yes sar—I take you anywhere!' '* They see the market 'hawkers squatted under tattered awnings, among oddments: pocket combs, shoelaces, hair oil, betel-nut.' Behind the market is 'a line of stone commercial buildings' which are 'the leavings of the British Raj: Edwardian and Victorian façades of stone and stucco, impaled with factual telephone poles.' They sense how the 'stalls were surely the real city', but Koch notes how the imperial structures, whose windows had 'latticed arches, saying *India*' are a point of transit between the 'real' and 'Other' worlds. Koch's ontology is even in this early novel being developed, but this is not yet the time for the demons to rise to power. It is, Koch notes, only 'Zenith: noon', but the signs are clear that the nadir is quickly

approaching. The market stalls display 'framed, gaudy pictures' of the gods of creation and destruction, Shiva, Vishnu, Kali, but from a distance they already look 'like erotica'. And so, while 'a soft yet penetrating voice reached O'Brien through the other cries', offering him 'Everything for nothing', the crows wait, 'perched on their verandas: crows which were everywhere, like semi-humorous messengers of doom' (*ASW*, 90-91).

In *The Year of Living Dangerously*, one of the *betjaks* continues to follow even after being shooed away by Kwan, who wants to expound on philosophical concepts of self and right action while he brings Hamilton for a walk into the mysterious indigenous quarter called *Pasar Baru*. It is driven by a rider in black shirt and shorts, its lurking presence makes Hamilton feel uncomfortably isolated. This is the *betjak* called *Tengah Malam*, 'Midnight', a variation on the carnivorous crow symbol and apparent force of darkness. Billy Kwan, as a force of light, would not seem its likely confederate.

Yet, the black *betjak* is Koch's symbol of the herald of *Kali-Yuga*, the age of universal collapse into chaos, and comparable to the Western 'Grim Reaper', symbol not only of the arrival of death but also of the change of time. Having finished his first philosophical discourse, presented Hamilton with the Chinese poem which represents their friendship, and promised to pull a rabbit out of a hat by getting Hamilton an exclusive interview with the Communist Party chief, Billy mounts into the *betjak* which has persisted in following as if it were clear all along that he would do so, telling Hamilton, 'I'd take a *betjak* home, if I were you' (*YLD*, 17-24). It is more than a simple suggestion for his security, for Kwan has just finished his discourse on the realities of life for both journalists and the people in Indonesia, and delivered to Hamilton the central question of the novel, 'What shall we do then?' (*YLD*, 21). Kwan is telling Hamilton to follow Alice down the rabbit hole, take the *betjak* into the 'Otherworld', cross over to the other side of the *wayang kulit* screen, where one might gaze on reality from another angle, and become a better witness of truth.

Tengah Malam reappears in front of the Hotel Indonesia at the moment of Billy Kwan's death, the very picture of the end of time—old, tired, emaciated, beyond feeling:

> A single *betjak* man had separated himself form the rest, and pedalled with weary deliberateness across the stony ground towards us. He was all in black: loose black shirt, open to reveal his prominent rib cage, and black shorts. He wore a limp, wide-brimmed straw hat. The side of his *betjak* bore the yellow legend: *Tengah Malam*. He was not young, as most of the other *betjak* boys were; he would never again wear a cheeky grin as they did; his gaunt face had the dull and stricken calm of the immemorial Asian coolie. He seemed to look at us from a zone of weariness where not even despair is felt, because that is feeling, and such weariness is fathoms deeper than feeling.

He wears a mask of death, a cardboard-coloured face, which shows its paucity of blood, but also likens it to a puppet in the *wayang kulit*, and he is clothed like a bird of carrion. His demeanour indicates knowledge of what is to pass; as a toiler for the force of time he certainly knows past, present and future. He does not belong to the other, brightly-coloured *betjaks*, but to the darkness of night which is defined by the 'great wheel of lights' in front of the Hotel Indonesia. Though he displays the disinterest in the results of his work which Krishna demands, there is no doubt that the *betjak* is not an uninvolved witness to Billy's fall:

> Hamilton shook his head at him. The dark eyes in the skull-like, cardboard-coloured face, with its knobbed cheek-bones, looked back without resentment. He sat, one foot on the pedal and the other on the ground, staring at us quietly for a moment longer; then he turned his ponderous machine and rode creaking away, in his flimsy, crow-black clothes, not back to the squadron of other *betjaks*, but out onto Jalan Thamrin, and so into the night. It was as though he had despaired permanently of our ever paying for his hire (*YLD*, 247).

In spite of the *betjak*'s association with evil, it is not a force of evil, but of time. The *betjak* has come to bring Kwan 'home' after his heroic action; the novel ends before Hamilton's time comes, but he senses that it is waiting for him as well, hiding in his imagination:

> His good eye burned, and he closed it for a moment. As soon as he did so, a dark shape pedalled and creaked across his middle distance: a *betjak*, whose rider wore a black shirt, black shorts, and a limp straw hat, and the name of whose machine was *Tengah Malam*: midnight. (*YLD*, 295-96)

The black *betjak* rides by in his mind as if to remind Hamilton who ultimately rules. This ruler is not the evil manifested by the demons who threaten the cosmos with their adharmic rule, but is the wheel of time. *Tengah Malam*, is simply the 'midnight' rider, announcing the change of one's fortune, another's death, and the moment of the demons' rise to predominance.

13.5. The Wheel of Time Whirls out of Control

As discussed in chapter 8, the turn of the wheel of time inevitably determines as part of the dharmic order the rise and fall of heroes and malefactors. The problem is that when the demons usurp the rule of the universe, even the cycle of time itself is threatened by the chaos of *adharma*. This threat is manifested in the ubiquitous images of time out-of-joint in *Highways to a War*. Mike Langford, who is said to remain 'in the 1950s' since he slicks his hair down with Brylcreem (*HW*, 161), wakes up from the dysenteric delirium he suffers early after his arrival in Asia, and finds himself in 'Singapore of the 1930s' (*HW*, 87). The Cambodian Army he accompanies into battle, brave but poorly led soldiers who are equipped with outmoded U.S. and French army surplus weapons, and slaughtered by the Viet Cong and Khmer Rouge, is said to 'operate as though it's in the Middle Ages: they haven't had a serious war since then' (*HW*, 224). Westerners see the sexual mores of the Cambodian middle class as proof that it is 'the nineteenth century here' (*HW*, 266). Relics of Empire keep turning up, as the oil lamp at Madame Delphine's opium den, a symbolic source of light and heat surrounded by the burgeoning darkness, an 'antique: a lamp from the nineteenth century, still burning here in Asia' (*HW*, 280). Claudine Phan's Saigon home is 'formal and imposing' but has 'a sense of dustiness', with 'dim and grimy' walls, stuffy air, and seems not to have been changed since the thirties, all of which gives it 'an air of being stuck in time' (*HW*, 402).

Southeast Asia is in the quiet, shrinking eye of the strengthening demonic storm, and the Australians posted there feel the threat more than all others. Other Westerners can pull up their stakes and head home before the storm hits, but the Aussis have always expected to be left behind. Aubrey Hardwick, sounding like Guy Hamilton before him, laments the end of the era of British imperial rule as only an Australian can: 'The most successful empire since Rome's: finally gone. And Australia naked: our shield in Asia taken away.' He says that the British built Singapore 'out of a swamp, and brought British freedom and justice to the eastern seas'. Hardwick invokes Kipling, and says Mike Langford belongs to the 'last generation of children of the British Empire' but that 'the sun is finally setting. How can the Brits know what *we*

feel, we children of the old Dominions? It was always unrequited love; and now the beloved is departing' (*HW*, 92-93).

The Asian future awaiting Australia is a Siren figure, an irresistible force drawing the wayfarer to his death. Mike Langford arrives in Singapore thinking, 'This is the place I've always been waiting for' (*HW*, 69), but when he arrives in Vietnam for his first job it is like descending into Hell:

> Coming down the gangway, squinting in the blinding heat that rebounded from the tarmac, greeted by smells of aviation fuel and the roar of afterburners, Leica round his neck, camera bag over his shoulder, Langford was entering his future: that war whose remorseless sequences would devour the rest of his life. (*HW*, 99)

The war is devouring not just the rest of Langford's but everyone's lives. Inside the artificial environment of JUSPAO, the American public affairs office, the air-conditioning freezes time as well as space, leaving the journalists to sit waiting for their press conferences 'like aging students' (*HW*, 190). War-torn Saigon itself is seen by Harvey Drummond as 'exhausted now: debauched; doomed; threatening', a landscape whose 'time got lost down a funnel' (*HW*, 195)

Neither people nor places age properly. Mike Langford is consistently described as looking too young for his age. Ray Barton sees recent photos of Langford before his disappearance in Cambodia, and notices that 'Langford looked nearer to twenty-eight than forty'(*HW*, 9), that his face had 'the strong planes of adulthood, and yet it was still very boyish' (*HW*, 50), and still, Barton notices, somehow Langford 'already looks dead' (*HW*, 9).

Koch spices the novel with such details as that the helplessly broke Langford is waiting for a cheque to come from the newspaper called the *Age* (*HW*, 82), and that the ARVN soldiers 'treated me like a kid, on that first patrol: one who needed help with the simplest things (*HW*, 139). He emphasises the casual youth of the NVA soldiers who capture Langford, Feng and Volkov, describing the enemy as 'laughing, exchanging jokes and cigarettes and even clowning with each other like schoolboys' (*HW*, 317). Yet, the disjointedness of the appearances of age is never to be taken lightly, but is a sign of the collapse of the cosmic order.

When the three journalists are released, their NVA captors are seen as having aged far too rapidly and heading toward untimely deaths. Jim Feng reports how one of them 'looked very weak, with his thin body and the drooping, old man's eyelids in his boy's face' (*HW*, 349). Langford's driver in Phnom Penh, Vora, 'a man in vigorous middle age, always neat and lively and well dressed', escapes from Cambodia after the fall to the Communists, bringing news of the horror of the Khmer Rouge *angka* and Langford's execution. Ray Barton sees how 'the small, bent figure that shuffles into the room is that of an old man, and the faded blue shirt, black short and rubber shower sandals are the outfit of a street beggar' (*HW*, 441). Vora is a man broken by the sight of the devil:

> He's somehow familiar, and his face is gentle and likeable. His hair is still black, but there are white streaks in it, and his skin is very wrinkled. Looking up at Jim with an expression that's half delighted and half stricken, he has his brows raised high, and this has put a large number of horizontal corrugations across his forehead. Now in his late forties, he appears close to seventy. (*HW*, 442)

And yet, once he has relieved himself of his news, Vora cries 'in a way that Westerners seldom do: like a child, his mouth open, his eyes staring in a sort of sad amazement, the back of his right hand held against his cheek' (*HW*, 445). It amazes Barton to see this, but for those who spent years of their lives in Southeast Asia, time is no longer expected to move steadily forward as in the West.

In journalists, Koch has found professionals who are fascinated with the fleeting moment:

> We journalists love the ephemeral, and there's no hunger so exquisite as hunger for the ephemeral; … I wouldn't be this high in an hour or so, but the moment lives on, its fragile structure built on air, like all our best moments. (*HW*, 220)

Being at the right place at the right time makes journalists feel special. Paradoxically, when the place and time no longer exist, the memory regenerates—and improves—them. The Nurseryman reminisces about an idyllic, pre-war Phnom Penh, whose time has even been fixed to quiet perfection:

> Soon we'll be the only ones who remember the magic peace. […] The French planters drinking coffee at their kerbside tables. The caravans of oxcarts

> coming in from the country, with all the country's fruits. Upswept shafts like the prows of boats. Straw piled on their awnings; the kids and dogs trotting beside them.

Then, recalling how Koch placed the sun at the zenith in India before the onslaught of the demons (*ASW*, 90), the Nurseryman asks:

> Was it always noon when they came?
> […]
> Yes: the noon hush. No guns to break it then; no sound of bombers. Just the oxcarts, coming into town in lines a mile long. (*HW*, 283)

And yet, unlike the other journalists who prefer to let nostalgic memory take over from and improve time, Mike Langford is driven 'to freeze the moment' (*HW*, 163), and not only with his photographs. As Harvey Drummond postulates why Langford went back into Cambodia, freezing the present is not enough: 'He went to get back into the past' (*HW*, 209).

13.6. Mike Langford—A Man Outside of Time; or A Ghost Caught in Time?

Harvey Drummond notices how Langford does not properly belong to the present, though just where he does belong Koch leaves unsettled. Drummond says that Langford belongs to the dreamscape of time. It is a description which harkens back to Koch's allusion to Lewis Carroll's Wonderland, and clearly establishes Langford as a lonely wanderer from some 'otherworld':

> Only out there, on that edge to which we were speeding, was I promised all the answers I never seem to find: out there, where the world would at last change. It's an edge I often see in dreams: the only place where we ever actually reach it. Langford has appeared in a number of these dreams, since he disappeared. The highway runs at night then, with far, tiny lamps strung along its utmost edge. I see Mike going there on foot, to a final windy rim: a place where he belongs. I know he has his being there, in the dream: he's one of those people who do. Then he disappears. (*HW*, 222)

Mike Langford's old colleague and friend, Rex Lockhart, who seems in his short appearance to be a reincarnation of Wally O'Sullivan, introduces the central theme of *Highways to a War* of the development in Langford of a post-modern heroic saviour figure more designed according to Asian than to Western tradition. Like so many others, Lockhart loved Mike Langford, though it is hinted that his love goes beyond the boundaries of the acceptable. In fact, the relationship of Mike Langford with Rex Lockhart and Lockhart's wife

makes it clear early on that both men and women fall in love with Langford, and while this love is rarely expressed in sexual terms, it is never rejected by Langford. Generally Langford's love remains platonic, but one of those rare occasions when it is sexual is with Lockhart's wife. Lockhart is, however, a man of his place and time, and remains silent about the relationship. His frustration comes out when he criticises Langford for having got himself killed in Kampuchea. Saying Mike has made the 'ultimate departure', he tells Ray Barton 'he's bloody dead, short of a miracle'. Langford, however, is not a man of his place or time, but is rather the protagonist of a Koch saga of reincarnation. This much Lockhart grudgingly allows, saying 'Now he *really* can be a hero, and a saint'. Lockhart would evidently have preferred keeping Langford for himself, and though not as a saint, he admits that 'a lot of people will make him into one' (*HW*, 11).

The common people of Singapore's Boat Quay are immediately attracted to Mike. There the 'Chinese traders greeted him by name, and chatted with him. Malay shopkeepers and their tribes of assistants, who often had no English at all, crowded about him in the alleys where he shot pictures'. It is more than just the ubiquitous accosting of Westerners for their largess. A chair would be brought out onto the path for Langford to sit on. 'Enthroned', Koch writes, he would pass around cigarettes 'among the broad, smiling brown faces, waving his hands in the way that he had when he was trying to communicate' (*HW*, 80).

People commit themselves to Langford because he commits himself to them, which is most striking in cases of the dispossessed. He sees the bar girls in Saigon 'as damsels in distress'(*HW*, 104), and encourages the child thieves and hawkers, all war orphans, some injured by bombs and shrapnel, with gifts and money. Harvey Drummond claims that he and the other correspondents 'felt pity for them', but adds 'at the end of a hard day their insect persistence could be maddening; no foreigner could move without their chanting persecution'. Yet, while he sees the kids as less than human, and admonishes Langford's encouragement of them, he admits that 'greed for handouts couldn't entirely account' for their devotion to him (*HW*, 162).

Westerners are not exempted from the attraction to Langford. In the photo hanging in the Foxhole Bar in Bangkok he 'looks supernaturally young, and at the same time like a man from a much earlier era'. The memorial which the journalists have chosen to hang of Langford 'seems idealized, and has the appearance of an icon' (*HW*, 203). Harvey Drummond is one of Langford's admirers, and devotes a lot of time to explaining the attraction he had 'for men and women alike'. It was more than his 'unusual risk taking, his quick success, and his blond, country-style good looks', he reasons. 'It had something to do with the soft-spoken, uncanny amiability which had made me feel safe. It was something he extended to everybody: a sort of low-key yet vital affection; a calm concern.' The closest Drummond can get to explaining his sense of who Langford is resides in his description of Langford's unconscious face after being hit during a firefight in South Vietnam:

> Dead white, the blood cleaned away from it, the heavy eyelids closed under their high-arched brows, it had become a different face. It resembled a piece of nineteenth-century sculpture, I thought: one of those pieces deriving from classical antiquity. It was a face that tended to change a lot: did you ever notice that? He could appear plain or good looking; tough or sensitive: sensitive to the point of being feminine. (*HW*, 179)

Drummond is putting together various pieces of the puzzle Koch is creating about Mike Langford, the reincarnation of his nineteenth-century great-grandfather, perhaps even an avatar of classical Indian tradition, whose dualities mirror the descriptions of Shiva or Vishnu. He says it has to do with 'mortality and its opposite', leaving the distinct problem of just what the 'opposite of mortality' is open. If it is life beyond the limits of time, making Langford therefore an avatar, that is, the reincarnation of a great spirit sent to restore *dharma*, then his story would be one of redeeming the world from the adharmic rule of the demons. If, on the other hand, the opposite of mortality is the inability to die, then Koch's novel becomes a traditional, Western ghost story. The evidence is there to indicate it is at least partially the latter.

Ray Barton says that, as children, playing hide and go seek with Mike Langford 'was like hunting something gone insubstantial' (*HW*, 33). As an adult he remains evanescent. Harvey Drummond reports, 'He suddenly materialized among us, standing in the middle of the

room in stained combat fatigues, with a large white wound dressing taped to his forehead. He seemed pale and tired, but cheerful' (*HW*, 156). Langford lacks corporeal substantiality, remaining unaffected by the opium, alcohol, and 'every other physical stimulus and stress' he subjects himself to (*HW*, 280-81). After his disappearance there are reports of his ghost haunting his Bangkok apartment, coming up the gravel path, climbing the stairs, pacing back and forth in his jungle boots 'like somebody worrying about something', and scaring the downstairs neighbours (*HW*, 448).

In addition, the novel follows the precedent of *The Year of Living Dangerously* in its collection of ghostly beings. Notable are the *neak taa*, the mischievous Cambodian mountain spirits. There are also the Viet Cong, who are called the 'Black Ghosts' by the peasants, inhabit the shadows of the banana trees (*HW*, 142), and 'have invisible roads through the paddy fields'. Jim Feng warns Mike 'you can never tell whether they are there or not' (*HW*, 118). For Langford, they seem be familiar to him from some earlier experience. 'Black Ghosts! Where had I seen them before?' he wonders. *Highways to a War* does not provide any conclusive answer to this question. All that is clear is that, from his very first experience with them, he is aware of a role which pits him against them, and of their belonging to another world. Langford interprets this to be a two-dimensional world like that of his camera, and is determined to send them back there in any way he can. 'For a moment I had them in my viewfinder, and I felt no more fear at all; all I wanted to do was capture them. That was all that was real: what was inside the frame' (*HW*, 142).

The Viet Cong, in spite of their ghostly images, are largely ennobled by Koch, and can be compared to the prankish *neak taa*. In contrast are the Khmer Rouge, who also resemble the *neak taa* by inhabiting the cavernous mountains of Eastern Cambodia, and share the guerrilla characteristics of the VC, but who are far worse than either of these. The Viet Cong are fighting to restore righteous rule to their homeland, but the Khmer Rouge are, in C. J. Koch's universe, the very demons who usurp the ruling position of the gods and overthrow the rule of *dharma*. It is against these evil spirits that the avatar/saviour must battle.

Harvey Drummond describes the strange but essential influence people like Langford have on others: 'they haunt us', he says in appropriate, ghost-story idiom, but describing at the same time the function of a saviour to overcome the threat of an end to time. 'We grow old, we shrivel up, we die; we're a sad lot of creatures, ultimately; and yet certain human faces can make us disbelieve it—or at least forget it for a while' (*HW*, 180). Saviours too resemble ghosts in some ways, but are neither mischievous nor evil beings. They are

> very human, yet a little more than human, in some way. They talk in an ordinary manner, these people: they eat; laugh; walk in the streets; sit in a pool of sun in a coffee shop, or the artificial light of a bar: yet nothing dissolves the film of strangeness that surrounds them. (*HW*, 179-80)

Drummond wonders then, 'How are they different?', and his answers point back to the themes of time and the harmony of *dharma*. 'They change our lives like music; they put time and disappointment on hold; they even make us forget that final sadness of reality, and of our miserable physical decline.' As to how they captivate those around them, he suggests 'a particular shape of eye; a smile; a set of the mouth' and most importantly 'the spirit behind the face: by a sort of easy daring, an always lighthearted ease with life that's magical'. All of this boils down to something like the *avatara* myth of the reincarnation of a great soul.

> It's a face which in its youth—recurring in many variations, male and female—can never be devalued, never obliterated. Growing old, disappearing, it's always replaced. No telling where it will reappear, in the famous or the obscure. In the end, it's beyond analysis. It's what makes us immortal. (*HW*, 180)

This, Drummond argues, is the key to understanding Mike Langford. Yet, it is not an *avatara* myth, for Koch gives no indication that Langford represents anything more than the return of his great-great grandfather, an Anglo-Irish political activist who is transported to Van Diemen's Land—an interesting, probably heroic figure, but still no Vishnu. Nevertheless, Koch is creating a mythical character on the lines of the Asian reincarnation concept by emphasising how Langford's story extends far beyond the limits of the life of one individual. Langford, he says, 'like all of us, is not just himself by a product of ancestors. Not only physical characteristics but the ancestors themselves recur in us, their spirits are inside us' (Mitchell, 1996, Interview, 72).

13.7. The *Bodhisattva*

By about the second century BC, concurrently with the development of the philosophy of the *Bhagavad Gita*, a Buddhist philosophy was arising in India which held that the Buddha was 'to be revered as a divine being', and that, in fact, numerous Buddhas 'assist the devotee in his attempt to realise the Buddhahood latent within him' (Zimmer, 1969, 508). This was an important break from tradition, by which each individual must rely on his own endeavours to imitate the world-renunciation of Gautama Buddha in order to achieve the crossing of the stream to *nirvana*. This older *Hinayana*, or 'Lesser Vehicle', is a difficult and lonely doctrine intended for those who had already reached a degree of self-revelation which enabled them to become monks. The new view, called *Mahayana*, or 'Great Vehicle', made Buddhism accessible to the masses who were not able to pursue the monk's rigorous spiritual efforts, but could gain the help of a *bhakti*, sort of a 'personal saviour', augmented by prayer-wheels, incense, gongs, rosaries, mantras, and a whole pantheon of Buddhas, for the same end.

One of the essential figures of Mahayana Buddhism is the *Bodhisattva*—one who is on the brink of awakening into enlightenment. These persons are very similar to the much older tradition of Jainist *Tirthankara*s, the 'Crossing-Makers' or 'Ford-Makers', saviours who acted to help those who were ready to escape the cycle of time, and cross 'through the torrent of birth and death to the yonder shore' (Zimmer, 1969, 224). Gautama Buddha was a *Bodhisattva* before achieving enlightenment under the Bo Tree. He then taught his doctrine of renunciation for many years before his death, when he reached *nirvana*, and was freed from the birth-death cycle. Another *Bodhisattva*, Avalokitesvara, personifies the highest ideal of the Mahayana Buddhist tradition. As he achieved enlightenment and was about to enter *nirvana*, the sound of a general thunder rose in all the worlds. Avalokitesvara knew this was the lament of all created things at his departure from the realms of birth. In his compassion, he renounced the boon of *nirvana* until all beings without exception should enter before him, in effect committing himself to remain a *Bodhisattva*—and not enter *nirvana*—forever.

The *Bodhisattva*, then, is one who is sublimely indifferent and compassionate, and who remains 'at the brink of nirvana for the comfort and salvation of the world'. By assuming a world-redemptive role, he makes himself available to all who invoke him 'to deliver creatures from the darkness of their woeful lives-in-ignorance' (Zimmer, 1969, 534-35). This seems almost too much for Mike Langford, who might compare better to the *Tirthankara*s. One of the most important of the *Tirthankara*s is Aristanemi, who is famed for his physical prowess and intellectual attainment. He is noted for 'his unostentatious, mild disposition, as well as his rejection of luxury and adoption of the ascetic life' (Zimmer, 1969, 225), all characteristics which describe Mike Langford.

Koch is creating a hero to confront this world's needs, but does so according to this Asian tradition. Mike Langford is a renouncer in the tradition of Indian ascetics. He abandons the world around him, and goes underground towards the forbidding 'Otherland' Koch calls 'Dis'. He has nearly no possessions, gives away what he earns, and with his *camera obscura* makes his destiny, both good and bad. After leaving Tasmania, the home to which he is otherwise very attached, he quickly renounces on his goal of going on to London, and decides 'to live poor' in a room in a Chinese shophouse. 'I like the idea of getting to know Singapore from underneath. I have one bag of clothes, this new tape recorder, and the Leica that I hope's going to make my fortune' (*HW*, 67).

Mike's room is suitable only for one who is moving outside of, or underneath, society, an ascetic: in Indian terms, a renouncer, a yogi; and he invests himself in his new life appropriately.

> The place is of a kind that very few Europeans in Singapore except the most desperate would ever contemplate renting, even for a few nights. The furnishings are like those in a hostel for derelicts: two metal chairs; a Laminex-topped table; a bare electric bulb. (*HW*, 69)

Toilet facilities are not mentioned, though it is clear that Langford's Tasmanian background is especially suitable to what otherwise would be simply what Australians call 'going Troppo'—the form of madness which afflicts many Westerners who visit and lose themselves in the

Third World. 'His upbringing had made him in many ways indifferent to the comforts and luxuries of this century; it would stand him in good stead, in Asia' (*HW*, 69).

When he devotes himself to the search for Ly Keang, it is called 'religious commitment, not to be questioned' (*HW*, 436), and this application of Krishna' Supreme Utterance is how Langford has lived all of his life. His devotion leads Harvey Drummond to wonder about the motives behind the outer calm and inner power which enable Langford to overcome the fears and passions normal to men. Drummond says he

> soon came to notice two things that weren't quite ordinary about him: his unchanging calm and gentleness, and the impression he gave of having a secret life. I'm sure the air of secrecy wasn't conscious; he was never pretentious. It was simply an atmosphere he created around him, probably without knowing it. (*HW*, 158)

Searching for the source of his secret life, Drummond mentions Langford's contacts with Donald Mills, the 'resident spook for the Australian Secret Intelligence Service', and his relationship with Claudine Phan, the Saigon 'Dragon Lady', but especially important 'was his preoccupation with the outcast, the vulnerable, and those who were fighting for doomed causes' (*HW*, 159). Others see Langford as 'fighting for losers', and his commitment to Cambodia when the onslaught of the Khmer Rouge is proving irresistible would normally support such an analysis. Langford, however, has 'become like a lover: unable to accept that some final disaster could happen to deprive him of the loved one' (*HW*, 260). Yet, Langford's true commitment is not for Cambodia or its corrupt rulers, but, he explains, for 'the men and the women. They're what matter. They're what always matter.' Harvey Drummond notes that such a pronouncement from anyone else would be 'obvious; even innocuous', but from Langford, this man with the secret life, whose philanthropy was taking on ever new, greater proportions, it is taken without question:

> Was it something in his voice? Time's projector has jammed; we're all fixed in stillness. I look down at my hand on the table and can't move it, and look back again at Langford. His face, in the light of one of the wall lamps, seems suddenly like a fanatic's: stony and angelic. (*HW*, 241-42)

Langford is becoming a sort of saint in the tradition of the *Bodhisattva*. He is no hero of imperial or modernist traditions, nor can roots be readily found in other post-modern heroic

formulae. Jim Feng identifies it in rather Confucian terms as 'the power of his silence, and the calm in his face' (*HW* 326). During the worst of the ordeal of capture, when they were forced to march through ankle-deep mud and were sick from fatigue and dysentery, Mike kept all three of the journalists, as well as many of their NVA captors, from despair with his silly jokes and soft encouragement. Feng says, 'His voice was a half whisper, and it somehow soothed you' (*HW* 339). He even extends his help to the NVA. When Weary falls sick with malaria, shivering in regular spasms, his eyelids half-closed, his face a bad yellow colour and shining with sweat, Mike ignores his own exhaustion and takes up his pack (*HW*, 328). Mike's perseverance influences everyone equally, excluding perhaps Lenin, who is the one truly evil character amongst the North Vietnamese. Feng, with the others marching together in single file, remembers watching 'through the gloomy green light' as Mike moves away to walk with Captain Danh at the front, taking on a position of power. His equality with Captain Danh—and perhaps his dual role as servant and counsellor to Danh along the lines of Krishna to Arjuna—and his willingness to sacrifice himself (as symbolised by his loss of one arm) is shown through his bending 'to speak in Danh's ear, gesturing in that way he did, but only with one hand, since the extra pack impeded him'. The magnanimity of Danh—important in showing how it is Mike who moves up in stature through the hard times rather than Danh who moves down—is maintained by his willing acceptance of Mike joining him at the point, listening to him, and even once turning to look at him and laughing (*HW*, 329). Mike's effect has reached even to those he might consider the enemy. This goes beyond the assertion Feng and Volkov make that as journalists they are always neutral, which, as has been shown through Koch's application of the *Bhagavad Gita* in *The Year of Living Dangerously* as in *Highways to a War*, cannot be taken as the author's position on the matter. A better explanation of Langford's ability to empathise with the North Vietnamese, and further, to gain and restore their confidence, is Feng's statement that

> Nothing ever changed Mike, I thought; nothing ever could, it seemed. And I found myself looking at him as a child looks at a certain kind of adult, believing that such an adult has the ability to solve any problem, and to remove all fear from the world. (*HW*, 326)

Jim Feng says during their capture, 'He was tender with me, and it somehow healed me, and brought back my courage' (*HW*, 340), and yet Langford's compassion and influence are multifaceted, sometimes becoming relentless and confrontational. When Volkov drops from exhaustion, and Lenin is about to shoot him, Mike shows how he could also be 'like a buffalo: one that would charge'. Langford slowly squats down 'next to Volkov, his eyes never leaving Lenin's'. He picks Dmitri up and, though suffering from the same dysentery and exhaustion as the others, carries him. Lenin watches him, 'his eyes shining with anger' and 'still wearing his grin of hate', but, though hungering for an excuse to do so, he does not shoot (*HW*, 341-42).

Something appears to be protecting Langford from Lenin, the one member of the NVA group who has a pathological hatred of the Westerners. Later, when Volkov is shot on the road, Langford carries him to the side, and Feng is amazed that he was not also shot when so exposed. Jim Feng postulates that Lenin had ordered Dmitri killed; the one Asian among the correspondents, Feng is naturally the most steeped in Taoist pragmatism. Still, he is resistant to accepting Eastern points of view when they do not fit his purposes. This leads to Feng's often logical but only conjectural explanations for things. He does nevertheless admit that 'there was something supernatural' about Langford which was guiding and protecting him. 'Nothing', Feng notes, 'seemed to break him or change him' (*HW*, 339). One key to this steadfast association of Langford with the *Tirthankara* and *Bodhisattva* lies in the discipline of *tapas*, by which the ascetic cultivates in himself 'a state of psychophysical heat', which bestows on him 'a certain sovereignty over the forces of the macrocosm by virtue of the conquest of the parallel forces in the microcosm'.

> The glowing ascetic cannot be crushed or frustrated by the forces of his environment—nature, the weather, animals, or society. Asserting his superior strength, he defies them. He is fearless and cannot be intimidated; he is in control of his own reactions and emotions. (Zimmer, 1969, 536)

C. J. Koch carefully develops the required ascetic characteristics in Mike Langford, without which he could hardly be considered as being of the lineage of the *Tirthankara*s or *Bodhisattvas*. At the same time, to write of Langford as such a holy man just would not be

taken seriously. Koch resorts to another Eastern solution to this problem: To prevent a holy man from accumulating too much *sakti*, with which he might threaten their position, the gods would try to trick the ascetic into expending his energy. One classic example is of the jealous god Indra who would send a beautiful *apsarasas* to seduce the powerful ascetic, and drain him of his power in sexual bliss. A true *Bodhisattva* would not be vulnerable to such attraction, since he is entirely without ego, and therefore feels no temptation (Zimmer, 1969, 537). Mike Langford, whose weakness to Ly Keang is demonstrated in chapter 9, is so vulnerable, and therefore, no true *Bodhisattva*. Still, even the Buddha lived as a less than unassailable man before attaining enlightenment and becoming a *Bodhisattva*, and Koch strenuously supports Langford as one who seems destined for some kind of similar, though westernised, role of 'Ford Maker'.

Langford is not especially willing to assume the role, and yet does question the motivation for his disinterest. He is moving towards embracing the concept of the Supreme Utterance—which requires engaged disinterest—in a salient passage when Langford tries to tell Chandara why he cannot fight, and Chandara tells him why he can:

> —…The whole point about my work is to stay uninvolved, I said. A corespondent can't be involved.
>
> —But the formula was sounding more and more feeble to me lately, and Chandara seemed to know this. He smiled now as though I were a slow child. Mike, you are coming to middle age like me, he said. As a Buddhist, I know it's time to start acquiring merit. Maybe you should know this too.

Langford asks 'how he could be a Buddhist and a soldier at the same time', and Chandara's answer prepares the foundation for one who would assume the *Bodhisattva* role.

> —Because I'm not a monk, he said. Only they can follow the Eightfold Path. I'm a man of passions, you can see that. But Buddhism's tolerant of people like me. It only asks that we live our lives as well as we can. And this is what the Khmer Rouge threaten too. They used to pretend to respect Buddhism, just for propaganda; now they mock it, and desecrate the pagodas and say there is no spirit: that human beings are only clay. That's how we know they are people of darkness, who'll destroy goodness. (*HW*, 278)

This affirms the role of virtuous action according to 'The Great Vehicle' view of Buddhism, and identifies again for Langford, whose determination to remain uninvolved even in the face of such evil has become perverse, just who the Khmer Rouge are.

Langford, along with Colonel Chandara, Captain Trung of the ARVN, and Claudine Phan, lends himself well to Heinrich Zimmer's interpretation of a candidate for Bhodisattvahood. He is one who sacrifices himself wholeheartedly, 'in a spirit of humility and self-effacement, performing virtuous deeds while suppressing relentlessly every impulse to self-aggrandizement and display' (Zimmer, 1969, 544). Early in the novel Langford makes a display for the benefit of the antipathetic Volkov, grabbing a suspected bomb off a table in a bar and heaving it out into the open street. It has the expected effect of impressing Volkov, and though Langford attests to have known that it was not a real bomb, most people would have retained enough doubt to have chosen a less hazardous path out of the bar. Later, however, in a scene indicative of a more experienced man, Langford reacts fearlessly in the face of real danger, yet sympathises with the fear felt by his colleagues, and restores a sense of normality not only to Drummond but to nature itself:

> He smiled as though we were meeting in the street, and put a calming hand on my shoulder. The air around me became almost normal, and the dust I lay on was real dust. I huddled beside him, shaking uncontrollable as though from a chill. I've never been so glad to see anyone, but I found I couldn't speak: partly from lack of breath, partly from a paralysis in my throat. Langford looked at me and saw my state. But there was no condescension in his expression and no judgment; just serene concern. He seemed to have no fear himself, and yet he treated my fear as a reasonable phenomenon. This was a courtesy he'd extend to many others, in the years to come. (*HW*, 175)

Langford here exhibits the kind of virtuous, egoless action which 'require a faith in the yet unknown, a humble courage, and generous willingness to take a blind jump into the dark' (Zimmer, 1969, 545). These are not such foreign virtues where Langford comes from, which once prompts Drummond to remark how Langford 'never looked more like a country Australian' (*HW*, 394). Yet, as much the unassailably professional journalist Langford seems to be, such acts 'open to us a new outlook. A magical change of scenery is produced—a new order of values emerges. Because it is a fact: one is transformed by one's deeds, either for better or for worse' (Zimmer, 1969, 545). Ultimately, a key to understanding Koch's novel is expressed in 'all of the later Indian philosophic disciplines dedicated to the realization of the hidden truth through an attainment of individual perfection'. Langford's story, from the past to

the present and into the future departs from the Western tradition of the *Bildungsroman* in that it 'is not that of progress, growth, evolution, or expansion into greater external spheres, but Self-recollection' (Zimmer, 1969, 546). This certainly explains Ray Barton's realisation that in one of the last photos of him Mike Langford 'looks older: another interior face has emerged through the skin'. Most of Langford's multiple layers of masks of personality have fallen away, leaving an image of the nearly bare self. He seems to Ray Barton to have 'a nineteenth-century appearance', and the 'long, hollow white cheeks and far, washed-out eyes are a mid-Victorian gentleman's'. Barton recognises how it represents some deep ancestral source to the Langford he knew, namely the image of Langford's great-great-grandfather (*HW*, 450). It is an image which Barton does not quite understand, and which Koch declines to expound upon, but it is far more revealing than other, earlier and more deeply masked pictures of Langford.

At the same time as he is bucking the Western literary traditions he belongs to, Koch is introducing elements of sacred Indian literature in which demons and ascetics have always endeavoured to usurp the power of the universe. They have, nevertheless, always eventually failed. Their attempts and failures to seize the universal dominion are recognized as part of the cosmic order which ordains their subordinate places. Still, at the end of the *Kali-Yuga*, the last of the great world ages, the successful overthrow of that dharmic order must occur. Claudine Phan criticises Langford and tries to make him understand the reality of the *Kali-Yuga* when she refuses to flee Saigon before the fall. Langford, she says, 'wants to keep everything fixed, like his photographs. Yes? Fixed and not changing—nothing and no one ever lost.'

> 'But everything gets lost in the end, Snow—everything and everyone. Don't you know that, yet? Can't you live with it? We all have to live with it, every moment. Every moment, every day of our lives, we watch people and things being lost. And some day we'll be lost ourselves. You are so tough—can't you be tough about that yet?' (*HW*, 405)

Ironically, the fall of the cosmic order too is part of the cosmic order, and, much in the way that the death of nature in winter is necessary before its rebirth in spring can occur, it must precede any re-beginning of the first great age. The danger, however, always exists that the

demons will maintain their grip on power, that the wheel of time will cease to turn, and that the chaos of *adharma* will inextricably dominate the cosmos.

The apprentice *Bodhisattva*, Langford must learn, is ill equipped to battle the demons at the end of time. This may only be due to the fact that Koch is mixing relatively incompatible, even if closely related, sources—the *Bodhisattva* comes out of Buddhist tradition, and the avatar of the Hindu. Ultimately, the goals of all of the Indian philosophies remains essentially the same, and the *Bodhisattva* perfectly realises Krishna's Supreme Utterance to act without interference of ego, which justifies at least Koch's progress from the one to the other. And yet, battling the demons Koch has conjured up seems too big a job for a *Bodhisattva*, and requires a true avatar—a reincarnation of the ultimate creative force in the universe on the lines of the Krishna of the *Bhagavad Gita*. There is no evidence that Koch is creating an avatar here—Langford as Vishnu incarnate would be even worse than as a *Bodhisattva*—though he plays with the idea often enough. In *The Year of Living Dangerously* President Sukarno imagined himself to be one, and even Billy Kwan, before he got better control of his ego, entertained similar dreams. Koch makes Langford the reincarnation of his great-great-grandfather, not of any god. In the meantime, however, Koch also has the demons send the gods tumbling from their position in the heavens, disrupts the continuity of time and space, and rushes the beautiful *apsarasas* who welcomes Langford to Madame Phan's home off to seek refuge where she can. Koch's world needs help.

Adrian Mitchell touches upon just who or what Mike Langford is when she writes that,

> like the heroes of traditional epic, Mike's meaning resides not so much in himself as in what he represents. He has certain distinctive qualities: he has the heroic qualities of innocence and selfless bravery, he is youthful, and defeats time for a time, and he is an idealist. In some respects he is almost unworldly, yet he is also strongly attached to this world, and to the people of this world. (Mitchell, 1996, Ancestral Voices, 6)

Langford 'satisfies the longing of others to believe in that rarity, a greater because common good', and since he is both ordinary and special and also that, as Koch makes clear, his life extends beyond the limits of his birth and death, he is 'the sign of what makes us immortal,

which is to say spiritually alive. In such a face is the evidence of the soul of humanity' (Mitchell, 1996, Ancestral Voices, 7).

Koch drives home the feeling that Mike has somehow escaped from time and mortality through the persevering faith of Jim Feng, whose 'Oriental, even Confucian view, without the doubts and second thoughts of the Western witnesses', holds ever to the fact that his disappearance has never been resolved. That, Mitchell notes, 'is an escape from time and mortality, an apotheosis that takes place in the minds of the witnesses (and reinforced by the unconfirmed reports that he had been crucified by the Khmer Rouge, *les autres*)' (Mitchell, 1996, Ancestral Voices, 9). The apotheosis, Koch insists, is only in the minds of Langford's old close colleagues and admirers. Even while Mitchell is absolutely correct to write that he somehow escapes time and mortality, one is left confronted with the unsatisfactory image of Langford hanging on the cross in the Khmer Rouge killing field, and wondering if Koch has gone to all this trouble working Eastern images and symbols into his novel only to end up with a trite and rather glib Christ-symbol.

Obviously not. And though Langford is a symbol of sacrifice, his crucifixion is a mockery by the Khmer Rouge of the sacrificial rite. Just what Langford is, indeed, remains the question at the centre of the novel, but the answer must be assembled by the reader. C. J. Koch loves puzzles, and the pieces of Mike Langford's identity are strewn all over the novel. Koch is not, however, the type of writer to leave such a puzzle unresolvable, and so, while preparing Langford's role with all of the above-mentioned details, Koch shows us exactly what Langford is in a few short, subtle passages.

13.8. The 'Buffalo Boy': Koch's *Agnus Dei*

The first piece is in the narrative of Harvey Drummond, who tells about when he, Langford and two other journalists travel out from Phnom Penh to cover a battle, followed by other journalists who know that Langford knows where the action will be. The action, at first, is no action at all. The Cambodian Army command post 'proved to be a thatch-roofed peasant hut' standing before a 'little grove of coconut palms'. The only movement is of the chickens

picking for food (*HW*, 226). The Cambodian soldiers are relaxing in the shade of the coconut grove, cheerful, smiling and laughing in their 'fantastic, almost festive' uniforms, the checkered Cambodian peasant scarf/turban, and the 'sacred Buddha amulets hung in pouches around their necks' (*HW*, 227).

The hut's inhabitants are not to be seen, 'except for a single small boy in black shorts, seated on a buffalo at the roadside: he chewed a blade of grass, and watched proceedings' (*HW*, 226). The presence of the buffalo boy, the second piece of the puzzle, would be unremarkable except for his association with the soldiers, also just boys, whom he foreshadows and symbolises:

> Many of them were no older than ten, and their old French rifles looked bigger than they were. They wore floppy olive fatigues and green berets, and all their large dark eyes shone with bright expectancy, like those of a team of little boys waiting for the start of a football game. Some were playing, climbing palm trees, shouting and throwing down coconuts. (*HW*, 227)

The boy soldiers, who have an obvious affection for their fatherly sergeant, assemble behind the lines of older soldiers when the troops begin to advance on the Khmer Rouge in the trees. One of them, however, 'who appeared to be about twelve, was standing at the head of all the troops, holding the Cambodian flag'. The flag, whose 'device was the towers of Angkor Wat', symbolises 'Cambodia's days of ancient glory', and bearing it is a very special honour:

> The boy's beret was at a jaunty angle, and his face had a cocky expression: teacher's pet, chosen for the most privileged of all duties. Another order was shouted, and the troops marched directly up the road behind the boy with the flag. (*HW*, 229)

This is one of the moments where Koch describes his favourite theme of the movement from this world into the 'Otherworld', the theme covered in chapter 12. According to Hindu philosophy, 'the invisible is reached through the visible' (Preston, 61); the buffalo boy has symbolic value which must be substantiated by the flag boy in the same way that in many Hindu ceremonies the celebrated god or goddess will be represented by a clay or plaster figure. As they are battling the Khmer Rouge, who represent the adharmic forces of evil, the Cambodian Army is marching through a looking-glass into a dream world:

> In the tropics, the pane through which we view reality is very thin. The colours are so unnaturally bright; they can suddenly cause the pane to seem to dissolve. The world becomes two-dimensional; a tapestry behind which something else waits to announce itself. This was happening now, and I fought against vertigo, knowing I might never get out of here. On the road, in a blue screen of gunsmoke, the troops were marching on with suicidal directness, firing towards the tree line as they went. They seemed to have no notion of taking cover in the paddy field; Langford was right, they were fighting a medieval battle. A man not far from me was crawling towards the ditch, dragging a shattered leg. Already the brown road was littered with bodies; but the boy carrying the flag was still marching at the head of the line: a gallant little page who bore a charmed life. (*HW*, 230)

Koch is bringing his Western characters from a quaint, relaxed Rip Van Winkle sort of world, deep into the 'Otherworld' of 'Dis', which is strange and unbalanced due to its domination by the Khmer Rouge who are oversaturated with the ignorance of *tamas*, and have become adharmic agents of the demons.

In the long view of things, considering the flow of the wheel of fate and the overthrow of *dharma* by *adharma*, it is inevitable that the goddess Kali—who is responsible for both destruction and rebirth—becomes enraged with bloodthirst. This is not only the reality for humanity, but for the whole of the created cosmos. Koch's buffalo boy is the macrocosmic representation of the microcosmic fate of the gallant and courageous flag boy, whose charmed life must follow the flow of the tides of time:

> But then he fell, and it would have been like a child pretending to be killed in a schoolyard game except for his limp, small stillness, and the blood that spread from under him. The troops marched around him, firing their automatic weapons. His green beret had come off in the dust, and one half of my mind expected his mother to come and gather him up. Instantly, another little page raced forward to pick up the standard, raising it high and proudly marching as the other had done: an image repeating itself. (*HW*, 230)

The battle is quickly disintegrating, and while the next boy comes forward to take up the flag with the mythical device of Angkor Wat, the journalists are scrambling to get out of harm's way, under the calm, watchful gaze of the buffalo boy, who seems to know the battle has just begun:

> Now we were all in Black Bessie, where Vora appeared to have been sitting all the time. The cabin was full of heavy breathing and the stink of our sweat. The other correspondents had followed our example, and were already making off in their motorcyclos, but the boy on the buffalo was still here at the roadside, staring as though as a passing circus. (*HW*, 231)

Only Langford, who has returned to the car as a ruse to shake off the other journalists, stays behind with the buffalo boy to see the fight. Harvey Drummond expects him to die there, but Vora 'seemed not be worried about him: he had a confidence in Langford's skills as though they were supernatural', and tells Drummond how he had been nicknamed '*Mean Samnang*, the Lucky One' by the troops (*HW*, 232). While half the Cambodians are lost in the battle, in fact, Langford is unharmed though clearly overwhelmed by his experience. Hammond describes how he returned, 'an expression of meditative peacefulness I can only describe as dreamy', quiet and contemplative, in another image which recalls Rip Van Winkle. Hammond says, 'I have little doubt that he was coming down from some enormous height: from that escarpment near death where he'd lingered with Captain Samphan' (*HW*, 233).

To solidify Langford's association with the buffalo and flag boys Koch gives the third scene, when Ly Keang first visits Langford at his apartment. Keang is the *apsarasas* accompanying Langford the warrior, or she is the warrior goddess Durga, but either way she recognises Langford as the sacrificial offering necessary to quell Kali's bloodthirst, and invites him into the 'Otherworld' at the same time she makes it clear that his luck is about to change. She asks why he is so dedicated to Cambodia. He says that he always felt at home in the countryside there, to which she responds in no uncertain terms:

> —That's because you're from a farm, she said. Here we'd call you a buffalo boy. (*HW*, 269)

There is no cause to doubt Ly Keang's love for Langford, but in her symbolic role as the goddess she heralds the turn of his fortune. She stops in front of his Khmer sandstone sculpture of Sri Lakshmi, the Goddess of Fortune, and says, 'This is a nice Lakshmi'. Keang is the enchanting *apsarasas* for a moment, the Goddess of Fertility and the earth, and then she becomes the Lakshmi which is Kali:

> —She cleared her throat, and looked at the Lakshmi again. A pity she's lost an arm, she said, and her voice sounded smaller, as if it came from a distance. Does she bring you luck?
>
> —I believe so, I said. I touch her every time I leave to go into the field.
>
> —You're superstitious. But perhaps Lakshmi does look after you, she said. That's why you're *Mean Samnang*. (*HW*, 269)

At this moment Langford's luck changes; his Lakshmi is mutilated, for Koch as for d'Alpuget a sure precursor to further disjunction. The loss of the charm of the Lakshmi figure and the abrupt change in Langford's life reflects the Hindu habit of spending huge sums on the life-size figures used for the annual celebrations of the goddess which, after two or three days of jubilation and honouring her, are thrown into the river one by one to the cheers of the crowds. It is not that the Lakshmi has turned against Langford, but only that 'an image is only an instrument with no value once it has filled its purpose' (Preston, 61). Langford has not become 'unlucky', but he can no longer be just a photographer. The time to assume his fated role as the buffalo boy has come. Outside of this role, he has no longer any purpose.

Just why he is the chosen one is not part of the solvable puzzle. Looking for reasons would be a Western reaction. It is simply his *karma*, which is the result of earlier lives, and it is fate, or the will of God. Yet, he is well groomed for the sacrificial role. Ly Keang reiterates what many of Langford's colleagues have said, when she talks of his photos:

> —No one else takes pictures like these. I remember your cover on the American newsweekly: the little boy with the flag being killed. Everyone talks about that picture.
> —There are plenty of photographers as good, I told her.
> —No, you're the best, she said. (*HW*, 269-70)

She recognises the dualistic qualities in him which bind him to Eastern heroes like Arjuna and Yudistira, who must resolve dilemmas caused by the problematic relationship of fate and free will. Others see these apparent contradictions in him as well, but insist they are abnormalities in his character while she sees them as his true worth:

> —This is why I've come to see you: because you talk like this. Everyone says Mike Langford never gets involved. But I think you're full of anger, and many other feelings. (*HW*, 270)

And she sees the Shiva resemblance, though she reveals this as subtly as Parvati must have done when she went to awaken the powerful, reclusive god out of his meditations, completing him as his wife, and provoking him to share his *sakti* for the creation of the world:

> —And you live alone, she said. She shook her head, pursing her lips: mocking. Not so Lucky One. (*HW*, 271)

As symbol of the divine feminine, Ly Keang complements Langford, and Koch makes clear that they would make a good union. Yet fate denies them such 'luck'. They will be separated with the fall of Phnom Penh; Ly Keang will disappear behind the border; and Langford will die in the Land of Dis trying to reunite himself with her. Still, Keang is joking, as if she understands on some level of her consciousness that he is indeed the 'Lucky One', who is chosen by fate to bring the wheel of fortune back round, and return the 'good luck' of *dharma* to Cambodia and the world. Langford is necessary because Kali, the ultimate demon destroyer, must be mollified before she in her frenzy destroys the whole world. Langford is first the one who has luck, but becomes the one who brings luck. This is paralleled by the buffalo boy, who is first seen as the boy who has a buffalo, but who becomes the boy who, through his association with the flag boys, is the buffalo—the sacrificial offering.

For a better clarification of the 'buffalo boy' role, one must go to the ritual sacrificial celebrations central to Hindu practice. The offerings can, and usually do, take the form of such as pumpkins, cucumbers, gourds, the sacrificial milk carried by Kanan in *Turtle Beach*, or clarified butter, products of the sacred cow, to the figure of the celebrated god or goddess, and poured into the sacrificial fire. An animal, however, can often serve as the offering. 'In ancient India horses were offered to the deities', writes Preston, but today's sacrifices are restricted to less expensive animals. Most common are chickens and goats, but significantly include, at the top of the list in monetary value, buffaloes (Preston, 62). Devotees to goddesses like Kali offer blood not because they are fierce but because they are life-giving. The sacrificial blood offering is a necessary exchange with the gods. 'In order to give life, they must receive life back in the form of blood sacrifices' (Kinsley, 146). Yet, when animal offerings are made in celebrations to the Great Goddess in her 'unmarried', and therefore dominant, form, it is because she 'inspires tremendous fear in her people. They offer blood sacrifice to cool her potentially destructive temper' (Preston, 63). Only then can she bestow the fertility, health and luck with which she is associated on her devotees. The meaning of and motivations for the sacrificial celebrations vary, and while there is considerable opposition in

India to animal sacrifice, 'tampering with the sacred rites of Hindu temples is a dangerous and unpopular enterprise' (Preston, 69). The 'common thread of meaning which is reflected in both the sacred scriptures and the folk level', is that

> it establishes hope where there is doubt and fear. The Hindu sacrifice is also concerned with the reality of death and evil. Its overriding theme is the promise that ignorance will lose its battle with truth. (Preston, 69)

It is in his incorporation of these Indian concepts that Koch's Mike Langford departs from Western traditions of visits to the 'Otherworld'. Like Alice, after his overnight, 20-year sleep, Rip Van Winkle returns home without much consequence. There had been a revolution against King George III and a new democratic nation created while Rip was in Fairy Land, but the upcoming elections remain the topic of choice, and so he quietly goes home to live with his daughter. Other Western sources of the theme of the imagination, time and journeys to an 'Otherworld' have a more serious tone, but few quite share the Eastern gravity of the symbolic meaning which Koch is trying to bring to his story.

> The elaborate rites in the sacrifice are intended to make the animal a symbolic vehicle for communication with the supernatural. It is considered to be something of tangible value which the devotee is able to offer as a gift to please the goddess and aid her as she struggles on his behalf. Evil is thus vanquished only when man is willing to play his part in the divine drama. (Preston, 69-70)

The point of all this is that the animal replaces man as the worthy sacrifice. The practice of animal sacrifice and human sacrifice fulfils ancient Vedic rites which are necessary to maintain the co-operation between men and gods in the struggle to uphold *dharma*. 'The animal offered to the deity is ultimately a symbol which man places on the sacrificial altar to redeem his soul from its inevitable fall into the depths of darkness, ignorance and despair' (Preston, 70). This is a role for which Mike Langford has been well prepared, and while human sacrifice may have been officially abolished in the early 20th century, to Koch it is once again necessary as the demons have already become so powerful.

Langford's association with the buffalo boy is foreshadowed and given import throughout the novel, especially in such passages as when Jim Feng describes Langford's succouring function during the Soldiers' Three capture. Feng says Langford could be tender,

but also, as when confronting Lenin, 'like a buffalo: one that would charge' (*HW*, 341-42). Colonel Chandara, after Mike takes up an arm for the first time and the two of them survive a Khmer Rouge attack, repeats the moniker given Mike by the Cambodian Army soldiers: 'No doubt about it, *Mean Samnang*, he said, you really are the Lucky One' (*HW*, 378). Chandara is at the same time reinforcing Langford's association with Sri Lakshmi, the Goddess of Fortune, as also the bringer of luck role which Ly Keang has identified for him in being associated with the 'buffalo boy'.

After their capture and release by the NVA and Volkov's death, Ly Keang visits Mike at his apartment. He indicates that he also understands his role as the human sacrifice necessary to satisfy Kali's bloodthirst. She kisses him, and whispers, 'You're alive':

> —Yes, I'm alive, I said. But Dmitri isn't. I'm sorry.
> —But she didn't understand me.
> —I'm sorry too, she said. (*HW*, 367)

She may not consciously understand that he is assuming blame at that moment in which he is indicating his readiness to offer himself in order to quench Kali's hysterical blood rampage. Subconsciously, however, she knows, and indicates her respect for his fate to be the sacrifice.

In a note citing earlier works by Mircea Eliade (*Yoga: Immortality and Freedom*. Princeton: Princeton U. P., 1958) and Philip Rawson (*The Art of Tantra*. Greenwich, Conn.: New York Graphic Society, 1973), Preston emphasises the importance of such readiness in the choice of a sacrificial offering:

> Human sacrifice was performed even during the early part of the twentieth century (Rawson 1973: 48). The temple of the goddess Kamakhya in the border state of Assam was famous for human sacrifices. The victims were volunteers, admired for their desire to be sacrificed and given special honorary treatment. Human sacrifice seems to have been performed for the sake of agricultural fertility. (Eliade 1958: 305, 306)

The willingness was always in Langford's character, from his readiness to stand up to his strict father, to enduring the physical pains of his first arrival in Asia, to listening carefully to the outlandish wisdom of Madame Phan, to going into the field with ARVN troops, to supporting the street children, to sharing the hardships of the forced march with Feng, Volkov, and their NVA captors, to putting aside his camera to help carry the wounded from the field,

and finally to his readiness to expose his own life to protect Dmitri, Ly Keang, and others. These actions always won for Langford the admiration of his fellows. Though few were willing to follow his example, many were keen on making him into a legendary, even mythological figure.

The contradictions in Langford's character can be explained by this rendering of history into myth, and also by the fact that this story is not yet completed. Langford dies, but Koch, like Blanche d'Alpuget with Alex Wheatfield, leaves no doubt in the mind of the narrator that he lives on, and his story will continue. One last, subtle clue of his hybrid Eastern/Western role lies barely hidden in his name. Michael comes from the Hebrew 'Mikael', meaning 'who is like God' (Morris, 828); as the one who must supplicate himself before Kali to bring her terror to an end, he can be compared with Jesus Christ, the *agnus dei* of Christian tradition. Yet, for Mike Langford, destiny has chosen a role to stay in the birth-death cycle as a 'Crossing-Maker' or 'Ford-Maker'. He is to help others realise themselves, yet fording the stream to the 'yonder shore' is, for the man surnamed Langford, an especially long crossing.

13.9. Conclusion

The argumentation of this chapter has been directed towards this final point, that Mike Langford has an essential role in upholding the cosmic order, along the lines foreseen for man in the ancient *Vedas* of respecting the requirements for sacrifice. In order to reach this conclusion, it has been necessary, first, to debunk the De-orientalist criticism which makes Koch an expropriator of Eastern symbols and metaphors, and a nostalgic re-writer of history. Second, this chapter has endeavoured to demonstrate Koch's spin on the greater question of what history really is, a troubling issue which is central to the Australian sense of identity. It then has been able to present Mike Langford as the completion of an ontology which Koch has developed throughout his Asian novels, drawing from many ancient and recent sources, and from both Eastern and Western traditions. It cannot be denied that Koch does not hesitate to mix his pretexts together, but while this may be called 'distortion' by some purists, this is really the *bricolage* which must be allowed any artist as part of the creative process.

It is interesting that Koch prefaces *Highways to a War* with the warning that the novel is companioned with another, later written and published novel about the great-great-grandfather, for *Highways to a War* has far more to do with Koch's other Asian novels, especially with *The Year of Living Dangerously*. Mike Langford is more of the completion of the heroic protagonist which was earlier seen in Guy Hamilton and Billy Kwan. The story of Mike Langford is no more complete than that of the two others, but Koch has tied up many of the hanging threads left by Kwan and Hamilton, who inspired considerable philosophical introspection, but whose double journey into the soul still leaves, for Hamilton especially, so much to be revealed. Many of those puzzling aspects of Koch's universe, as the circularity of time, the complex roles of man, demons, and the divine within the cosmic scheme, the double aspect of reality, and the antagonist yet interdependent qualities of all created things have been brought into focus through the lens of Mike Langford. That is quite a lot for one man, even a fictional one, and although Koch's narrator, Ray Barton, does not quite get the meaning of his friend's life, other voices are there to attest to the myth-making effects of this man's life. Whether Langford really did have some tie with the supernatural or if it were just in the minds of his admirers, finally, is less important than the fact that those admirers did believe it so, for the creation of meaning out of non-meaning is what myth is all about.

Concluding Remarks

This study has tried to introduce the Western and Eastern pretexts to the Asian novels of Blanche d'Alpuget and Christopher J. Koch. In spite of the sheer number and inevitably interrelated nature of the topics, the goal has been to make a coherent argument for their importance to critical analysis of the novels and to the whole issue of whether traces of the Australian identity can be found in Asia. A dissertation should not be so long, and yet it seems obvious that this one has taken but the early steps in the criticism of the Australo-Asian relationship as it is represented in these two writers' novels.

Each chapter of this study could be further developed into a major study on its own. More interdisciplinary work should be done on these novels' focus on the principles of stereotype activation and repression. The concepts of Australia's Asian 'looking-glass', the 'Otherworlds', whether of faery or Dis or Wonderland, and the access they give to self-revelation still need clarification, and especially need to be applied to the white experience with Aboriginal and Asian Australians, as also to the Australian landscape. Specific pretexts of both Western and Eastern origins need to be more extensively studied and related to the novels. Koch especially leaves a trail of hints of where to look, from Rudyard Kipling, Somerset Maugham and Ian Fleming, to Gervase of Tilbury's *Otia Imerialia*, and the *wayang kulit* play, 'The Reincarnation of Rama'. The extensive tradition of Hindu literature seems begging for much closer study and application to the novels of Koch and d'Alpuget. In addition, there are other novels which ought to be included in these studies. Robert Drewe's *Cry in the Jungle Bar* would be a good candidate, but has proved hard to acquire, and there are many other works of fiction, and even more in drama and poetry which are devoted to the same themes.

Alas, the scholars do not seem so interested. Koch and d'Alpuget's unorthodox approaches to their writing do not win many prizes for making readers and critics feel good. Shocking the readership into awareness of its own latent stereotypical prejudices, or dragging a bag of old and discredited symbols and myths back onto the Australian scene in order to re-

establish a sense of identity between man and his universe which has been lost in the West, even when the need to do so is fully recognised, is just not appreciated. Contemporary Australians would apparently just as well forget these images as they bear the stain of Orientalism, which seems to lay a certain amount of guilt on white Australia, and therefore threatens Australia's future economic relations with the Asia-Pacific region.

While both Koch and d'Alpuget have enjoyed continued popular success for their novels, they have dropped off of the radar screens of Australian criticism. Scholarly interest developed through the 1980s, and reached a peak in 1992, but forces of political correctness seem to have made them anathema. And this has happened even though Australian intellectual circles are actively engaged in the very same search for self, soul and identity which Koch and d'Alpuget are devoted to. The fact is that it is time for the scholarly community to turn their attention back to the genre of the Australian novel set in Asia, devote more time to the necessary research into the Asian pretexts, and give such writers as d'Alpuget and Koch the credit due them for their efforts in uncovering the true Australian identity from the layers of masks which obscures it from view. If this work aids in rekindling the debate, then it will have been more than successful.

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