

# Gerry Turcotte: 'The circle is burst' : Eschatological discourse in Louis Nowra's *Sunrise* and *The Golden Age*

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PLAYWRIGHT AND NOVELIST Louis Nowra focuses much attention on the 'outcast' in society: the amnesiac in *Albert Names Edward*, the son of Catherine the Great locked away since childhood in *Inner Voices*, and the blind woman in *Visions*, to give but a few examples. If Nowra's protagonists are outcasts, however, it is from a society whose linguistic and social codes are predicated upon the interface of old world systems of codification with new world experiences: a type of the colonial situation as it were. Nowra's outcasts are transplants in a transitional society, armed with an inadequate or alien lexicon. His plays, therefore, exhibit a fascination with the concepts of resettlement and renaming; they explore with marked insistence the retreat of these unstable characters into the 'countries of the mind,' to use Patrick White's phrase,<sup>1</sup> in order to escape both traditional hegemony and newworld pressures.

Nowra's plays, therefore, are replete with characters with communication difficulties; people who live within themselves because no language exists for them to express their 'inner voices,' or to allow for the communion of the inner landscape with the outer. Nowra's voiceless characters, however, are not without a personal language. For Nowra, as for many contemporary writers, voicelessness *is* a type of speech, and his plays portray his outcasts' struggle to give voice to this private language. If Nowra's characters betray an urgent need to find a legitimate voice, then it is not surprising that the conflicts in most of his plays manifest a particularly strong linguistic bias. Nor is it surprising to discover that the dominant characters are wordsmiths, or, at least, have learned to use language as a tool for control and manipulation. Further, the loss of power in almost every Nowra play is related to a concomitant loss of an adequate power of expression.

Opposite: Melita Jurisic, Nicholas Opolski (crouching), Graham Harvey, Edwin Hodgeman, Valerie Bader, Ron Graham, Daphne Grey, Scott McGregor, Sonia Todd in the Nimrod Theatre Company's production of Louis Nowra's *The Golden Age*. (Photo: Branco Gaica)

Although all Nowra's plays are concerned with the development or the suppression of the inner voice, his two most recent plays, *Sunrise* and *The Golden Age*, are his most accomplished and complex works in this area. Each represents characters who are outcasts of a sort, struggling to articulate a confused vision of a changing landscape.<sup>2</sup> In Nowra's plays, voicelessness emerges as a type of vision, and hence as a type of incipient language, which must be nurtured into expression. Moreover, the tension which arises in the plays is not merely between an old and a new world, but between the various *types* of colonial worlds which make up the colonial landscape. The state of disjunction which is incumbent upon any type of relocation, is, historically, a temporary one. American literature is an excellent example of the reforging of old and new-world 'languages' to create an authentic and individual new voice. For Nowra, however, the incubatory voiceless state is neither a hopeful nor a temporary prognostic. His colonial figures are rarely successful, rarely demonstrate the emergence of a strong and distinctive voice. Edward may espouse a confident philosophy at the end of *Albert Names Edward*, but his language is clearly Albert's and reflects the latter's artificial and invidious linguistic codes. Similarly, Juana regains her voice at the end of *Visions*, but, as Veronica Kelly has pointed out, 'what she "sees" is totally out of congruence with the surrounding reality ... [She] is...speaking with Lynch's voice.'<sup>3</sup>

What makes Nowra's plays uncomfortably hard-edged, however, is not simply his obsession with the unvoiced, but his rather successful paralleling of this idea with a larger and more political frame of reference. His plays focus on the wider social dangers which are immanent in humanity itself: war, greed, nuclear madness. What emerges through his paralleling is an eschatological discourse which overshadows

all optimistic possibilities presented in the drama. Nowra sets up, on the micro-social level, a temporary, solvable situation, then undermines the restrained optimism completely by setting the situation within a macro-social perspective — one of imminent global destruction, for example. The prognosis for his characters, therefore, whether emblematic of the language of a European tradition or of a newer hybrid colonial society, is, without exception, grim.

That *Sunrise* is rife with the unvoiced is obvious from all but the most superficial reading. The play is peopled with translators who cannot communicate: a refugee-poet who must translate his experiences into 'rude English' in order to express his past; a scientist who worships the silence which existed between himself and his father, and who prefers it to communication with his own son; an advocate whose manipulation of legal language resulted in the freeing of a rapist, and whose inadequate dealing with language to defend an Aboriginal almost resulted in the latter's execution; a child whose parents have imposed different world-views on her so that she has lost her ability to deal with any of them; an old man whose stroke has robbed him of his speech, and so, of his self-respect. There is so little communication that one character is prompted to exclaim: 'What this household needs is an interpreter.'<sup>4</sup> More than in any other Nowra play, the characters in *Sunrise* are 'islanders,' seeking to translate their own private languages sufficiently that others can understand them. And beneath it all — beneath the forebodings concerning the nuclear age, the questioning of the role of the individual in society, the reflections on the nature of translation — is the theme of imperial domination, and of the colonial's desperation to be free of an insidious influence.

*Sunrise* is set in the Australian countryside, on a former Aboriginal site called Honey Ant Dreaming. The occasion is the sixtieth birthday celebration of the wealthy patriarchal scientist, Clarrie Shelton. The play unfolds over two days, during which time the Shelton family reunites, reenacts past rituals, and reaffirms old tensions and animosities. The setting is crucial. The estate was once 'only a bald hill' (p.16) which the Sheltons tried to tame and convert into a civilised, artificial replica of a former world. The landscape, however, was not so easily converted. As Clarrie explains to Eva, 'We planted hundreds of shrubs and trees the first year but the sun burnt them up, so from then we concentrated on natives' (p.16). It is a victory for the landscape which is crucial and foreboding, an apt metaphor for the struggle between old and new worlds. Clarrie's attempts to impose white European forms on the Aboriginal landscape are effective, but temporary. For the entire time period covered by the play, the house — symbol of the Shelton empire — remains unshaken. Although the Sheltons compromise of necessity and accept the native vegetation, the estate maintains a genteel order, replete with tended garden and fairy lights. But behind the facade, the estate is not as perdurable as it seems, for it is constantly under threat of being devoured by the bushfire. And it is made clear that Clarrie's world is a static one — a 'petrified daydream' as David calls it — without hope of a future. If Clarrie's estate survives, it is as an island isolated from the reality of its environs. It is, to use Clarrie's words, the 'calm centre' surrounded, at least in his dreams, by 'a pink mist, a fog of unreality' (p.53). As the play unfolds, the calm is shown to be riddled with tensions; the fire rages both within and without.

The dichotomy between old patriarchal moorage and new world deracination is represented by Clarrie on the one hand, and Venice on the other, although each world is shown to lack a future, to lack security. The very tenuousness of Clarrie's hold on the landscape suggests the finite nature of his world. But there are other hints as well. As Richard points out near the end of the play, Clarrie is 'The last of a people who believe that if you have the money you can buy up all the land you want ... at the expense of everyone else' (p.39). There is a sense that Clarrie is the last of a breed, or, to quote Richard again, that it 'is the twilight of [his] era' (p.39).

if Clarrie represents an imperial arrogance, however, it is of a specifically colonial nature. Implicit in his confident self-assurance is very much the inferiority complex endemic in the new-world patriarch. This emerges clearly through Clarrie's attempts to vindicate himself for his role in the atomic tests. Part of his defence is simply that 'I was an Australian scientist, it was an English bomb ... we were bloody lucky if they allowed us to polish it' (p.39). Culpability, it seems, is mitigated by nationality. In other words, Clarrie emerges as a familiar Nowra protagonist: the colonial figure attempting to maintain an artificial or non-indigenous tradition in unsuitable conditions. One thinks of Lillian and her father in *Inside the Island* holding tea parties and teaching the Aboriginals how to play cricket; or of Madame Lynch in *Visions* attempting to create a *salon* environment in Paraguay based on Parisian conventions. David's sarcastic comment

about Clarrie's typical Australian estate makes the point succinctly: 'So Australia — an English garden, Japanese tea rooms, an American-designed house, Danish furniture' (p.6). Clarrie's world is one of reluctant adaptation.

Where Clarrie adheres to European forms rather than embracing either the 'double vision'<sup>5</sup> of post-colonial life or the Aboriginal customs of the land which he has tried to overwhelm, Venice clings to a tribal or primitivistic African tradition while eschewing the values of her mother's world. Venice's citizenship in her father's adopted country, however, is equally spurious. Her father's talismanic letter, which she carries around together with her African doll, is written in a language neither she nor her mother can read. Further, her dreams of Africa are particularly nightmarish, filled with sacrificial offerings, geckoes, and apparitions that speak in 'an incomprehensible language' (p.20). As the reader is reminded. Venice was born in the desert and is a child of isolation.

There is a pointed significance in the fact that both of Venice's parents are translators — intermediaries between worlds of language — and yet cannot communicate with each other. It is not enough to understand the language, Nowra seems to be saying, it is necessary to become it as well. In this respect, Alex is the truest translator. As Irene puts it: 'He became so immersed in the language and culture of the people he studied that he became one of them' (pp.37–8). Unfortunately, to do this he had to surrender his former language. The impossibility of the syncretism of two worlds is manifest in all of Nowra's characters; in their inevitable unilateral allegiance to a personal, narrow wordscape. Alex must abandon one world to know another, while Venice, caught between two, is said to be 'vanishing.' It is almost as if Venice has been designed to disprove Richard's theory of assimilation: 'Think what would happen if we amalgamated these cultures; a unique alchemy of history. We would be a model for everyone' (p.17). Venice's deracination vindicates David's gloomy retort: 'You're an optimist Richard, and history always proves the pessimist right' (p.17).<sup>6</sup>

Clearly, Venice's quest, in *Sunrise*, is to find a legitimate language of her own. She must sift the silences of the vocabularies of her two worlds in order to find that authentic language; without it she is inarticulate in both cultures. In view of Venice's quest, it is fitting that the tension between Clarrie's world and her own emerges as a linguistic battle. The anagrammatic games, for example, are referred to as a 'duel' (p.37), and the characters' engagement in these duels transforms their languages into private ones which exclude all others. As Clarrie points out: 'She's the only one who can match me' (p.15). Citizens of neither world, each is expert in a false median language of anagrams and games. Without relinquishing their privileged languages, however, neither Clarrie nor Venice can transform the 'hybrid' language into a legitimate alternative. The bond between Clarrie and Venice is easily explained as the result of their mutually recognised displacement and can be read parabolically as well, one can understand the colonial's reluctance to reject totally one world before another is fully secured. Both characters fear that moment of complete disengagement and the prospect of freefall terrifies them.

If the metaphor of the battle between Clarrie and Venice is carried through to its end, one could say that Venice is the ultimate victor *and* heroine. As John McCallum has pointed out, Venice 'understands the play within the play, which the family performs, "The Blind Singer and the King", in which the person loved becomes a tiger, stalking and killing. She kills her beloved grandfather, Clarrie, in an attempt to kill the tiger in him; but unlike the play within the play there is here no conventional happy ending.'<sup>7</sup> Venice's victory is hollow, for she has killed the only person with the means to kill the tiger in *her*. In any event, the landscape into which she emerges after the murder is a nuclear one. The play seems to suggest that the 'hybrid' of a 'head of a monkey sewn onto a dog,' which David describes as 'silly,'<sup>8</sup> is not so much ridiculous as tragic. Perhaps the analogy ought to be of the mating of a horse and a donkey, which, like the marriage of Venice's two worlds, produces a sterile offspring. (The connection of sterility with racial extinction is later centralised in *The Golden Age* through Mac's genital malformation and his eventual suicide.) But, even if the offspring were fertile, the nuclear threat precludes the possibility of regeneration. Alex's promise that Venice will one day understand his letter is undermined completely; for time, in the guise of that cataclysmic sunrise, is against her.

The prognostication for the future of a colonial race is more ambiguous in *The Golden Age* than it is in *Sunrise* though the two plays share startling similarities which suggest a parallel direction. Where the

nuclear tests of 1959 and the imminent bushfire serve as an encroaching external threat to civilisation in *Sunrise*, the approaching war, its outbreak, and the grim portentous conflict between Russia and the United States (suggesting further global unrest), serve as a similar external threat to civilisation in *The Golden Age*. The actual play is set in a 'part of Tasmania [which] is one of the most unexplored regions on earth.'<sup>9</sup> The region is specifically referred to as an 'underworld' and as 'the burial ground of nature' (p.8) establishing it as an island among islands and emphasising the Aboriginal antiquity of the area. Like Honey Ant Dreaming, the Tasmanian bush is 'another world' into which Peter and Francis enter, very much symbols of white colonial society. In many ways, Peter and Francis are synonymous with Clarrie Shelton. They, and their world of genteel values or of white industrial prowess, represent an imperial force very much concerned with authoritatively reshaping the landscape.

In *The Golden Age*, as in *Sunrise*, power is shown to depend upon the control of language. Ayre is but one of the characters who illustrates this dictum. She is Queen of the colony, not necessarily because she is older, but because she carries in her mind the history of her people which is embodied in the language she speaks. Accordingly, she sees her fading memory and her concomitant loss of language as a fatal prognostic for her race: 'We is dead,' she chants, 'Nowt tongue...nowt 'istory'(p.22). Without language, there can be no self. Hence her desperation to make Betsheb the 'repository of their culture' (p.29) by teaching her the 'words' and slogans of the past. William Archer's concerted attempt to 'translate' the colony into terms which his society can understand is yet another example of the quest for power proceeding through the control of language. Mrs Archer tells us that William 'will make us understand them' (p.34), using an expression which suggests that cognition is linked to language. William must 'decipher' their language, and he considers this decoding as an act of domination. As he tells Mac, 'I'm going to conquer you, I'll find out everything. *Understand* you' (p.36).<sup>10</sup>

That William could gain power in this manner is easy to believe if it is remembered that the members of the colony are defined entirely according to their language (whether or not that language is suited to them). They are 'the last members of a group that goes back to the 1850s, during the gold rushes' (p.28). The colony was the brainchild of an escaped convict who dreamed of founding 'his own town, independent of the rest of mankind' (p.29). As an oecist, Simpson was not of the best of stock; but then again, neither were his followers. They were 'Criminals, retards, the lost, the desperate' (p.29). Essentially, they were misfits who spoke an alien language even in their own society. Like Venice, the people of the lost colony whom Peter and Francis discover are hybrids who do not belong anywhere, yet who are encumbered with the linguistic remnants of another world. Ayre and her people have developed a 'word salad' (p.29) imbued with myths and traditions that do not relate logically to their situation. Dissociated from the original points of reference — decontextualised — the faithfully remembered traditions become meaningless. One thinks of Peter's anecdote about the timbermen who continued their ritual of cutting down the Huon pine trees even though the men had been forgotten in the wild. The bathetic nature of that empty ritual is a sad complement to the colony's similar continuation of tradition. The rendition of *King Lear*; the panning for fool's gold in a society without a monetary base; the Victorian postures: all describe a world to which the outcasts do not belong.

Faced with this false language of ritual and tradition — of symbol without referent — the majority of the outcasts have lost their voice. Francis's comment that 'perhaps they didn't feel the necessity of speaking' (p.29), is not as naive as it seems. Angel and Mac both have the capacity to speak but have chosen not to; Betsheb prefers not to but does so merely under Ayre's pressure to continue the oral tradition. The two possibilities — of voicelessness and of the perpetuation, in some form, of the given voice — delineate abstractly the resources open to the colonist. The first represents a position of acquiescence, of yielding before the task of using an inadequate, inherited language, thus literalising the metaphor of impotence which threatens the clan. The second appropriates and reshapes the foreign language and, in recoding it, legitimises the past it seeks to reflect by somehow *rewriting* history.

The idea of 'past' in *The Golden Age* is complicated by the introduction of a binary tension or movement both toward and away from the past. The dyadic movement is truly puzzling: Francis maintains that 'One should forget the past' (p.36) — thus taking up the first possibility: of acquiescence — while preaching to Peter that one must remember 'all unpleasant memories' — suggesting the second possibility: that of recoding: 'If we heard that cry, then our sense of ourselves would be deeper' (p.53). There is suggested in this remembrance a development — a progression — beyond a certain fixed notion of the past.

At the conference at which this paper was delivered, Professor Chaman Nahal offered *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* as an example of a work which promulgated a positive vision of cultural synthesis.<sup>11</sup> If Mark Twain's book is an example of cultural progression through synthesis, then, it would seem, Nowra's work epitomises a literature of irresolution — of what can be called perpetual disjunction. Nowra allows the dual tension earlier described (that is, between capitulating to, or translating, a powerful antecedent voice) to stand as incommensurable or unresolved. What he proposes as the resolution to the conflict is quite different; it is a picture of an ineluctably downward-spiralling civilisation moving toward extinction. And neither the past, nor the rewritten present, are shown to contain a hope for the future of civilisation. His rejection of the latter — the rewritten present — is suggested through the failure of those characters most actively attempting to develop a private inner voice. One thinks of characters such as Venice or even Betsheb, though the latter's fate is rendered rather more ambiguously.

Nowra also rejects the idea of a genetically *pure* language — one untainted by external influence. And here one could argue that the concept of language is metaphorically represented through the genetic, that is, the historic. Purity of lineage, and, therefore, purity of language, has not proved a particularly reliable safeguard against extinction. All the so-called 'great' civilisations in Nowra's plays are shown to be in a state of imminent collapse, or to have fallen completely and ignominiously. The idea of the 'Golden Age' rather cleverly reflects both these concerns. Applied to the colony, it is an ironic comment on memory, and on the validity or appropriateness of the past. Used in its Ovidian sense, it provides an ironic comment on the impossibility of an isolated, pristine culture ever surviving. Ovid describes the harmonious Golden Age as an age of islanders — a time where the idea of colonialism is absent. To quote from the prose version of the *Metamorphoses*: 'Never yet had any pine tree, cut down from its home on the mountains, been launched on ocean's waves, to visit foreign lands: men knew only their own shores.'<sup>12</sup> Nowra's portrayal of the demise of insulated civilisations suggests the ironic intent of the title of the play and forces the reader to look on the islanders in Nowra's own works as doomed figures, even though it is clear that they are not the 'pristine' equivalents peopling Ovid's text.

The bleakness of *The Golden Age's* ending is suggested by the tone of Nowra's *oeuvre* as a whole. His plays are filled with the flavour of the *fin d'époque*, of so-called 'great civilisations' crumbling. It is this sense of 'the magnificent's' inevitable downfall which imparts to Nowra's plays their quality of tragedy, and which undermines any glimmer of hope which may appear therein. The overwhelming sense of nostalgia which infuses all his plays is two-edged. One voice bemoans the demise of the great eras such as the fall of the Greek and Latin empires which Elizabeth Archer calls 'our greatest period of civilisation' (p.27). Another laments the passing of the Aboriginal civilisations due to the influx of stronger, though by no means 'better,' cultures: the Australian Aboriginals come immediately to mind, though the Paraguayan and the Black African experiences are also suggested in his work.

Nowra seems to augur the inevitable return of an 'original' landscape. Hence images such as that at the end of *The Golden Age* where the wilderness has almost erased all signs of the colony's presence. The return is more often merely an impending one, such as is found in *Sunrise* or *Inside the Island*.<sup>13</sup> Nowra seems truly to believe that the 'original' landscape is more durable than any pseudo-civilising construct modern humanity can impose. This emerges through the motif of the bridge in *The Golden Age*. Francis, though not a wordsmith, is an engineer who dreams of building bridges and of dealing with technologies capable of 'conquering [the] chaos' (p.8).<sup>14</sup> That this power is temporary and spurious however is revealed through Francis's dream, near the end of the play, of the bridge collapsing 'like a pack of cards' (p.50). The power to make the bridge collapse, however, is *not* the chaos of the 'original' landscape's reassertion, despite the poetic justice this would evince. Nowra is too much the realist not to recognise that, in fact, the great destructive force is more closely related to the power which Francis symbolises than to anything Betsheb might represent. It is this 'force' which Nowra identifies through Clarrie's statement concerning the power of the human mind unwittingly to create demons in its ostensible attempt to control the chaos (interestingly an Ovidian term). As Clarrie puts it, the atomic bomb 'had come into being because men had imagined it. We wanted it! We had made it real! We were now capable of making real anything we imagined' (p.40). What is clear is that Clarrie's — and perhaps Nowra's — sense of humankind's ability to reshape the landscape according to their dreams is a negative one, for he recognises the human inability to control the imagination. As Francis puts it: 'It's as if this century has imagined a monster, concocted it from the deepest underworld

of its brain and now it has escaped and is devouring everything' (p.50). Humankind has dreamed up the war, for example, but it has gone beyond its control.

It is this fact which renders pathetic the idea of nature's inevitable return. As earlier mentioned, Nowra very clearly stresses the inevitability of the 'original' landscape's return, and recognises it as *stronger* than the so-called civilising influence; but, in the end, he always underscores this with the even stronger idea of the irrespensible 'creature' which will obliterate that landscape — a creature which society has released and which is removed from any moral, logical, or even human limitations. The 'by-blow' of the imagination is more lethal than the progeniture of any civilisation. More frightening still, is the possibility that ultimately it may be civilisation's *only* offspring.

The conflict, then, seems to be between memory and imagination. But the memory which Francis calls for is not necessarily the spurious hollow recollection of tradition; that pined after by Elizabeth, Clarrie or even Lillian in *Inside the Island*. Rather, it is a type of memory which Betsheb *may* possess; one which recollects the 'unpleasant' with the good, which maintains a balance between one's creative and one's destructive acts; the type of memory which rewrites history and which Francis describes when he says 'if we heard [the cry of our wrongs] then our sense of ourselves would be deeper' (p.53). The language of return is one which mixes honest self- evaluation with a spiritual (re)vision of the future. But the formula is too simplistic, as Nowra's ambiguous ending suggests. Francis may claim superiority for Betsheb's type of memory, and may believe her to have 'true' roots, but he is compelled to believe this if only because there is no alternative which can help him maintain the vestiges of sanity. One knows that despite Francis's belief in Betsheb's 'pure' heritage, her 'true roots,' the mosaic of her past is identical to his, and the dreams of 'the goldy time' (the Golden Age) ignore the bleakness which resulted in the colony's initial exile. Francis's belief that Betsheb will 'teach me how to see' (p. 54) the golden time of her imagination is an unrealistic delusion, and an unsatisfactory solution to the social dilemma: one which endorses the inner vision, the private language, and one which ironically ignores history rather than rewrites it.

The 'movement' in Nowra's plays does not change from one to the other: the plays depict outcasts struggling toward a new language which will make it possible to articulate their isolated selves, and they all end by showing the return of the characters to the retreat of their inner landscapes. In *The Golden Age* the phrase 'Nowt more outcastin'" initially signalled the escape from the exile of the Tasmanian wilderness, but the repetition of the phrase in the play's closing line refers to an escape from internment in society at large. The conclusion, then, is a bleak one. The old 'magnificent' traditions are dead or are in decay. Hindsight shows that the happy ending of the play within a play, *Iphigenia in Taurus*, is spurious. Iphigenia and Orestes return to a crumbling empire, and their combined voices cannot spark the 'renewal of our breed' (p.52). Similarly, in *Sunrise*, the old world symbol is tenuously perched on the edge of the abyss. It is not coincidence that Peg Shelton, who is described as having the power of naming,<sup>15</sup> listens to Wagner, and, specifically, to the *Götterdämmerung*. As Nowra well knows, the final movement of the Ring cycle depicts the *Twilight of the Gods*, an epic musically and symbolically; it is one which signals in some ways the end of the nineteenth century, and which represents mythopoeically the collapse of great cultures, of great eras.

Nowra's plays are significant additions to what can be called, rather grandiloquently, eschatological dramaturgy (a style that has been referred to as 'Apocalypse Nowra'). His plays espouse a philosophy of the end of things but can suggest no alternative, hence their unsettling impression. Orestes' comment to Iphigenia that 'Lady, I think we shall reach home!' (p.52) is echoed in Francis's comment that it is only after humanity has honestly surveyed its past that 'we shall have reached home' (p.54). When read in context, what both comments make clear is that home is the landscape of islanders. And in Nowra's plays the islands, like Venice, are ineluctably sinking out of sight. As Ayre avers in *The Golden Age*, 'The circle is burst' (p.17); there is no continuity. In the end, no one is left to transmit the language of islanders.

1 Patrick White, *Voss* (New York: Viking, 1957), p.440.

2 I use the term 'vision' together with 'voice' in the manner suggested by Coral Ann Howells, when she wrote 'Our way of seeing is structured by the forms in which our language enables us to "see" .' See 'Re-visions of Prairie Indian History in Rudy Wiebe's *The Temptations of Big Bear* and *My Lovely Enemy*' in *Revisions of Canadian Literature*, ed. Shirley Chew (Leeds: University of Leeds, Institute of Bibliography and Textual Criticism, 1984), p.61.

3 Veronica Kelly, 'A Mirror for Australia: Louis Nowra's Emblematic Theatre,' *Southerly*, 41 (1981), p.449.

4 Louis Nowra, *Sunrise* (Sydney: Currency, 1983), p.13. Subsequent references will be to this edition, cited parenthetically in the text.

5 Helen Tiffin, 'Comparative Methodology.' *World Literature Written in English*, 23 (1984), p.26. Clarrie, of course, cannot help but be subject to the double vision — it is a given of his situation. Nevertheless, it is something against which he is always, though futilely, fighting.

6 In view of her metonymic role, Venice's name is particularly apt: 'Venice' evokes an exoticism as mysterious in some ways as the dark exoticism of African ritual and landscape; it also suggests the false perdurability of an old-world culture inexorably sinking under the burden of its obsolete traditions.

7 John McCallum. 'The World Outside: Cosmopolitanism in the Plays of Nowra and Sewell,' *Meanjin*, 43 (June 1984), p.292.

8 In a conversation with Richard. David claims that 'Australians never take root ... We follow European and American culture as if we were lip- readers trying to make out what's being said. Other countries have their roots in something ... That's their torture, to have to die for a vision. Our torture is to have no vision worth dying for. We're a silly hybrid' (p.16).

9 Louis Nowra, *The Golden Age* (Sydney: Currency, 1985), p.8. Subsequent references will be to this edition, cited parenthetically in the text.

10 Emphasis added. There are, of course, many more examples, but in the interest of space these will have to suffice.

11 SPACLALS Conference, Massey University, 9- 13 February. In a comment from the floor. Professor Nahal suggested that Huck's departure 'for the Territory ahead of the rest' and Jim's concomitant freedom, forecast a new type of post- colonial society, one arrived at through progressive synthesis.

12 Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, trans. Mary M. Innes (1955; London: Penguin, 1983), p.31.

13 In *Inside the Island* Lillian surveys the damage which the crazed soldiers have wrought, and, blind to her own devastating role in the affair, proclaims, as she is preparing to return to England, 'The grass will soon grow back — at least the soil is never ruined by fire,' (Louis Nowra, *Inside the Island/The Precious Woman* [Sydney: Currency, 1981], p.90). Fittingly, her comment is made as she leaves the soil she could not tame; Lillian, however, maintains her ownership of the land. This lurking control is consistent with the eschatological bent of Nowra's writing as it will be defined in the following paragraphs of the main text.

14 Although Francis is not specifically referred to as a wordsmith, the word-oriented nature of his role as an engineer is metaphorically represented in the *book* he carries: *The Structure of Single Span Bridges*. Betsheb refers to this book as 'Thy Word' (p.23), a phrase deliberately meant to equate the work, at least symbolically, with the colony's own book. This latter work was written by the oecist in animal's blood and is preserved by Ayre despite her inability to read it. This idea of the work as yet another symbol of language being imposed over another, and of word being imposed over landscape, is reinforced by Betsheb's theft, early in the play, of Francis's watch, compass and book (p.25), symbols of time, place and history respectively.

15 Actually, she is said to have 'a great talent for giving names to humans and animals that will be a burden to them for the rest of their lives' (p.10).

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