

Cicero, Karina R.

Time and language in Patrick White's "A fringe of leaves"

Tesis de Licenciatura en Lengua y Literatura Inglesa
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Universidad Católica Argentina

Facultad de Filosofía y Letras

Departamento de Lenguas

“Time and Language in Patrick *White’s A Fringe of Leaves.* ”

Student: Karina R. Cicero

Tutor: Dr. Malvina I. Aparicio

**Tesis de Licenciatura
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Introduction

A Fringe of Leaves starts, just like two of the most significant events in Australian history - colonisation and immigration- with a journey across the sea.

Journeys often entail changes in one's personality. Sometimes, radical ones. Travellers have always ventured to meet the unexpected in order to find answers to unasked questions having as a consequence a different approach to existence. In *A Fringe of Leaves* (1976), written by 1973 Nobel Prize- winner Patrick White, the character of Ellen Roxburgh assesses her whole existence through the hardships she faces during her journey to and within Australia. Here I will show what changes Ellen's trip brings to her conception of the world, how these changes will influence her construction of identity and the way they will affect her language.

Various aspects of Australian society are depicted in the narrative and all of them will leave an imprint on Ellen's identity. Ellen will realise that suffering might bring about a positive outcome, just like Australian settlers had to face harsh weather, a barren soil and a menacing nature before they could reap the benefits from the land and make a peaceful living in these new settlements. These were the vile conditions under which the penal colonies in Australia were founded.

Australian society was originally built upon the concept of punishment. A British citizen who was sent to Australia was deprived of the benefits of a first class citizenship. Aborigines and convicts were at the bottom of the social scale. The only difference between these two groups was that convicts were at times able to be granted a pardon and could become *squatters*.¹ Some aborigines were entitled to this right later in history, more reluctantly, by the stations' owners.

¹ Workers in occupied land without title or permit. They became known as squatters. Unlike squatters in the United States, however, those in Australia were for the most part men of substance from the middle and upper classes of British society. "Squatters became the landed gentry of Australia—the so-called *squattrocracy*—and their wealth made them the most powerful economic segment of the population." http://www.mongabay.com/reference/new_profiles/439.html

Next on the scale were Scottish, Irish and Asian immigrants of some substance, who were legally granted a plot of land to work on and started prosperous stations in New South Wales and Van Diemen's Land.²

At the top of the social pyramid, we can find English subjects, who generally had some military rank or an administrative post of some kind, and who by no means were considered particularly respectable back in England either. That is to say, more likely some blunder in their professional career had earned them the job in Australia.

As time progressed, all these segments of society were combined and merged to give origin to what can be called "Australianness". One of the events that resulted in the modifications of social segments was the discovery of gold in 1851, which also caused the British to regard the colonies differently. "Australianness" is a combination of cultural backgrounds, personality traits, religious attitudes and English social varieties that resulted in the Australian national identity.

It appealed to me to base my work on an Australian novel because Australia is endowed with mystery. Its centre is a desert of which not much is known and Australia's Ancient Spirits or Totemic Ancestors appear to sleep under the big masses of rock. It is this blend between nature and myth which has drawn my attention to Australia. Another aspect which emboldened me to focus my study on Australia is its colonial past, its dependence on a hegemonic power, which closely resembles Argentina's position in the eighteenth century,

Argentine society has also had to build itself from consequences of the colonial period, later combined with Italian, Spanish, British and German

² The social model described corresponds to the period between 1825 (when the penal colonies were near their end) and 1870.

immigrants among others. This had as a result our identity, which proves hard to define as it has been hybridised.³

Mixing past, present, future, and imperial and colonial cultures within [...] fiction [...] deliberately strives after a new language and a new way of seeing the world.
(Ashcroft et al., 1989, p. 35)

It is that lack of precision to delimit our identity which fascinates me and lured me into analysing an Australian text such as *A Fringe of Leaves* from a socio linguistic perspective. It is due to this construction of our own identity that Argentines could become ideal readers of this Australian novel.

Therefore, what Argentina has in common with Australia is that both nations could be considered to have been at one time post- colonial. That is to say, a combination of cultural backgrounds, language, moral precepts and social conventions were brought to these territories by settlers, to be later abrogated and appropriated by the oppressed nations. Just like Spanish has been twisted to accommodate to Argentine's reality and identity, so have Australians abrogated and appropriated English to fit their need for self definition. *A Fringe of Leaves* is a testimony to that exercise.

I intend to approach my subject from a post- colonial perspective: in the case under study, a settlers' colony. This implies a careful examination of that part of society which, transplanted into another land for different reasons, splits from its original core of values and traditions and even against its grain begins to develop features of its own, slowly but surely, which will turn their adherence to the old country obsolete and will call loyalty into question.

The term post- colonial is used to cover all the cultural expressions affected by the imperial power from the moment of colonisation until the present. The spread of the English language as a political and cultural phenomenon has often called for

³ The creation of new transcultural forms within the contact zone produced by colonisation
(Ashcroft, et al., 2003, p.118)

an identification with the rules of the British Empire. But what should accompany the instruction in the language are tools for the learner to communicate within the constraints of a foreign language. Such communication is achieved by means of comparison, description and association of notions. For the Empire, the only way Australians had for relating to their British heritage was by imitation, and no other option was available to them. England, being an island, has as her only resort to rely on her own people or perish. Culturally, this principle was transported to Australia as an unarguable rule.

Before the emergence of nations adopting English as their official language, mostly in the nineteenth century, it was unthinkable to identify the English language with other expressions in Literature that were not the canonical texts dealt with at the metropolitan centre of the Empire. A decentralisation of the canon gradually took place. But what purpose would such process serve?

The imperial perception of the world (regardless of the geopolitical position of the colony) imposed on the colonies reshaped their knowledge in order to have them emulate the metropolitan model of culture. A culture clash took place in terms of binary oppositions: civilised/ wild, centre/margin. These oppositions displaced the colonial states onto the margins and thus they became the negative term of the polarity.

Savage, native and primitive were terms which represented the antithesis of what the Empire stood for: civilised, British citizenry, the one who belongs in the culture and is therefore allowed to make use of the language in a position of power.

A “privileging norm” was enthroned at the heart of the formation of English Studies as a template for the denial of the value of the “peripheral”, the “marginal”, the “uncanonised”. Literature was made as central to the cultural enterprise of Empire as the monarchy was to its political formation. (Ashcroft et al., 1989, p. 3)

The tension this situation brought about resulted in an endeavour to emphasise how different these emergent nations were from the imperial centre.

Once the Empire controlled the language it enforced English over the colonies. Overpowering native languages, English reshaped information and endowed it with the imperial overtones which the colonial communities assimilated and adapted to. In the case of Australia, as white settlers spoke English, they bore the burden of being constantly reminded that the British model should be respected and considered the key to become an active member in their own community. The alien language would serve an incomplete purpose; gaps would be found between the language and the surroundings of the settlers, as a logical consequence of what in post- colonial theory is called *displacement* which led them to question if the language or the land were inappropriate. Even though language was the same as that of the metropolitan centre, the landscape, nature and situation did not match the identity the settlers brought with them anymore from the old country. However, as settlers became attached to this new, strange land, their identity became permeable and some traits developed as response to the new land and blend with their old traditions. As a result, a new national definition was born, bearing in its culture the imprint of hybridisation and syncreticity⁴ of clashing origins which reflected a constant construction of identity.

Not only linguistic terms but themes or realities that needed to be portrayed found no correspondence in British styles and genres. The British imperial power exercised pressure by encouraging the colonies to emulate the centre's cultural models. So, when it came to literature, the issue of 'authenticity' was at stake.

So when elements of the periphery and margin threatened the exclusive claims of the centre they were rapidly incorporated. [...] It caused those from the periphery to immerse themselves in the imported culture, denying their origins in an attempt to become "more English than the English". (Ashcroft et al., 1989, p. 4)

Endowing the subaltern culture with negative connotations proved an

⁴ "The process by which previously distinct linguistic categories, and, by extension, cultural formations, merge into a single new form." (Ashcroft et al., 1989, p.15)

easy task when in control of the media. So, colonial, uneducated meant backward, rudimentary and lacking identity. This simple psychological association results in unwilling allegiance to the centre of power. By circulating negative stereotypes through literature, anthropology and the media, the original pre-colonial conception of the world does not match their current experiences in an alien land. Colonials develop a conception of themselves as marginalised subalterns of the central power. Their desire to become part of the centre is what weakens their own authenticity.

Language becomes the medium through which a hierarchical structure of power is perpetuated, and the medium through which conceptions of “truth”, “order”, and “reality” become established. Such power is rejected in the emergence of an effective post-colonial voice. (Ashcroft et al., 1989, p. 7)

The further the people's characteristics moved away from the model imparted by the centre of power, the more it should be admonished, rejected and silenced. One instance of this silencing process were publications in Australia, which were meant to constitute an echo of what was being read in England as regards theme and characters. A pure Australian voice had no way of being heard as the publications that were available were supported by the authorities and should be fit for publishing in Melbourne, Sydney (main urban centres in the late nineteenth century) or London. The Sydney *Bulletin*, founded in 1880 by J.F. Archibald, channelled most of the voices which did not identify with British literary models. Though of highly controversial content, the *Bulletin* served the purpose of popularising literature and reflecting Australian reality.

At first it seemed much like its predecessors and contemporaries, opening with a serial entitled “Adrienne, a Love Story of the Lancashire Cotton Distress”. But it was politically and economically chauvinistic and satirically opposed to colonial pretentiousness. (Goodwin, 1986, p. 36)

A new kind of English would develop and endow the Australian with a new voice. But to assert this new voice, old bounds with the centre of the Empire had to be severed. And a mental detachment from the central model took place before the political termination of British rule over Australia through the Australia Act in 1986. This Act was the final step towards independence, which was lived, in legal terms, as a continuing process rather than as a single determining event.

The voiceless are to regain their primal voice. Imperial rules are abrogated- cut short, disobeyed- and appropriated- reshaped, adapted according to the colonies' own cultural background and assumptions- so that a new, hybridised culture, built with components from both worlds, is born to resignify the emergent nations in a post- colonial reality. Authenticity is thus re- established.

By challenging assumptions imposed by the central power, the marginal nation ceases to be the "other" in order to become central, to speak with its own voice in its own culture. Previously dictated ideological projections are rejected and English is appropriated and taken to advantage in order to construct a hybridised identity.

The Bulletin was founded at a time when the Australian population was predominantly urban (to a much greater extent than in England or America), but much of its fiction was set in the bush, and this, together with its sketched and paragraphs and its tone, caused it to be known as "the bushman's bible". It was read and contributed to by drovers, shearers, miners, fencing- contractors, bullock- team drivers ("bullockies") and small farmers. (Goodwin, 1986, p. 37)

Post- colonial literatures give voice to those who had been silenced. They enable the emergent nations to resignify their conception of the world and to name an identity forged in suffering and oppression. Ellen Gluyas, being a synecdochical representation of Australia, experiments speech changes as a consequence of the process of colonisation. As it is mentioned later on, she is instructed to write a journal by her English mother-in- law to learn to express herself. But such procedure is disregarded once she is in Australia because it does not match what

she feels or what she needs to communicate. English is appropriated by Ellen once she is in Australia in order to fit her needs - just like language should serve the people it represents- by twisting meaning, by disregarding grammar rules, by adopting a hybridised variety or by renaming the world in a counter- discursive mode.

[...] the alienating process which initially served to relegate the post- colonial world to the “margin” turned upon itself and acted to push that world through a kind of mental barrier into a position from which all experience could be viewed as uncentred, pluralistic and multifarious. Marginality thus became an unprecedented source of creative energy. (Ashcroft et al, 1989, p. 12)

A pre- colonial state of innocence proves difficult to be regained as the colonial period has left an imprint upon these societies which has ironically also contributed to their own national definition.

No two colonial processes are the same; setting, political, socio economic and historical circumstances differ in each case and that concert of variations gives origin to a unique post- colonial experience. However, certain traits in the colonial process remain common to all cases. The configuration of the spatial dimension and the outcome of historical events enable us to construct a unique condition within post- coloniality. This reception is what opens the Argentine reader a possibility to identify with Ellen Roxburgh. After all, colonialism has affected most of the nations in the world. I daresay there is no nation in the world which remains immune to the ripples of colonialism one way or another.

This novel seems to be written in RS- English (received standard British English), but as the narrative time progresses and settings change, Ellen’s careful English shifts to her Cornish vernacular. It is my purpose to analyse the significance that these changes acquire and their origin, from a post- colonial perspective.

A Fringe of Leaves is based on a true story. It refers to the shipwreck of the Stirling Castle on May 22,1836, in Australia, (Fig. 1) north of Fraser’s Island (Fig.

2), discovered by Captain James Cook in 1770, and to its only survivor, a Victorian English lady, Eliza Fraser, Captain Fraser's wife.⁵

John Curtis' account in *The Shipwreck of the Stirling Castle* together with the surrealist artist Sydney Nolan's series of paintings (Fig. 3) constituted a source of inspiration for Patrick White's writing. This novel combines classic descriptions and imagery with a unique style of free indirect discourse. This novel, published in 1976, is considered a canonical post- colonial text in Australia.

In *A Fringe of Leaves*, Mr. Austin Roxburgh and his wife Ellen are in Australia visiting Austin's brother, Garnet. Mr. and Mrs. Roxburgh belong to different social backgrounds. Ellen Gluyas had been a rough Cornish girl until she met Mr. Austin Roxburgh, a learned man from Cheltenham, who suffers from a poor health. Her endeavours to assist him in all his ailments make him fall for her, and they eventually get married. As Mrs. Roxburgh, she is trained by her mother-in-law, old Mrs. Roxburgh, to become ladylike, just like she had previously been trained by her father to run their farm house. In Van Diemen's Land, Australia, (Fig. 4) Ellen falls from grace when she commits adultery with her brother-in-law, Garnet. As a consequence of this affair, Ellen gets pregnant with Garnet's child. On their way back home, their ship sinks near Moreton Bay (Fig. 5) and Ellen suffers a miscarriage, Mr. Roxburgh is speared by natives and Ellen is taken prisoner. She is treated as a slave and is forced to carry out tasks such as digging for yams, hunting opossums, nursing a child and collecting fruit. While with the natives, she meets Jack Chance, a convict who had bolted. He is her key to freedom. He leads her through the bush back towards a farm. When about to enter farmers' territory, Jack

⁵ They struck a reef hundreds of kilometres north of what came to be known later on as Fraser Island. They then launched a boat and landed at Waddy Point on Fraser Island. It was here that she was captured by Aborigines. She was found by John Graham, an escaped convict who had lived for six years with the Aborigines, and is said to have gone naked to get their confidence. Eliza later married another sea captain (Captain Greene) and returned to England.

feels he cannot trust her promise of seeking an official pardon for him and escapes. Ellen is then taken care of by the Oakes family and later on, the Commandant in charge of Moreton Bay prison, Captain Lovell, welcomes her as his guest in his house until she is fit to go back to England.

Ellen meets Miss Scrimshaw, a minor character whose startling comments prepare the reader and constitute a foreshadowing of the events to come. She could be compared to a minor actor in a play who speaks a prologue to anticipate the audience what is to come. Miss Scrimshaw's appearances both at the beginning of Ellen's journey and at the end, may make *A Fringe of Leaves* a kind of framed narrative, as, from Miss Scrimshaw's point of view, she was not a stranger to Ellen's story and she can claim she made the acquaintance of the protagonist of such an ordeal. What Miss Scrimshaw may tell other people about Ellen's adventures is an implied narrative within the narrative:

Every woman has secret depths with which even she, perhaps, is unacquainted, and which sooner or later must be troubled. (White, 1976, p.20)

Miss Scrimshaw is referring to the assumptions that will be challenged in Mrs. Roxburgh's life once she sets foot in Australia. And these assumptions include moral values such as faithfulness within wedlock, the credibility and purpose of religious rites and the predominance of political ideologies as regards the imparting of justice in the colonies, all of which will be tackled in the present work.

Patrick White has *narratised* the post- colonial process in *A Fringe of Leaves*, so that this novel can be read alternatively as an adventure novel or as an exemplary account of the social, political and psychological changes that people have experienced as a consequence of imperial domination.

In the present work the way messages are conveyed by Ellen through different varieties of the same language will be closely studied. These linguistic shifts are to symbolise different stages of post- colonial reality in a settlers' colony, specifically in Australia.

The common themes of the literatures of settler colonies- exile, the problem of finding and defining 'home', physical and emotional confrontations with the 'new' land and its ancient and established meanings. (Ashcroft et al., 1989, p. 27)

The changes a person's speech experiences throughout his/ her life may indicate a change in surroundings, psychological traumas, or political ideologies that respond to a single way of expressing ideas. From a strictly post- colonial perspective, language in certain colonised communities around the world has changed either because a new one has been imposed on them by the colonising power, or because their settings differ and they need to adjust to them, which is the case with the settlers' colonies. This work will be focused on the fact that Ellen's language undergoes changes according to the social groups and surroundings she finds herself in and her role within groups (daughter, wife, slave, prisoner, rescued guest) which will define the way she regards relationships with her own self and with those who surround her, as well as with her religious and moral assumptions, just like settlers had to change their assumptions once they experienced displacement.

That Ellen's language changed from a Cornish vernacular to an upper- class English standard variety once she was married to Mr. Austin Roxburgh was to be expected. But there are sudden changes in Ellen's speech from Standard English to Cornish vernacular, or taking over other character's accent which pose a more complex question as to what factors are triggering these shifts off.

Psychoanalysis uses language as a means to apprehend the contents of the unconscious. According to Sigmund Freud, a person's self dwells within the unconscious realm of their personality. The unconscious stage is the most difficult section to fathom because it is not in contact with reality and lurks behind a barrier or *censor* which represses its contents lest they should cause distress to the speaker. This censor is part of the conscious stage.

However, parts of the unconscious are manifested to the conscious stage by using techniques to bypass the censor. These techniques are slips of the tongue or pen, also called *Freudian slips*. These slips are to be analysed as a means used by the conscious stage to disguise some unconscious element that was able to get through the barrier. But when the slip is identified by the analyst, the question he should ask is: Why would this avoided element cause distress when allowed to come out on the conscious stage? The issue at stake is that many elements of our unconscious are likely to complicate the normal course of events if allowed to come to the surface of our psyche, because they may challenge moral or social conventions in a way that may have as its consequence social marginalisation or ostracism. But what happens when social and moral conventions are regarded differently, should our censor be reprogrammed to fit the new assumptions?

Furthermore, there are other techniques by which the unconscious dodges the censor, and they appear in dreams. The language of dreams is constituted by symbols due to the fact that the purpose of dreams is, according to Freud, to show repressed fears or desires. Accordingly, many contents in dreams are not easy to verbalise, as they all would express, after analysis, things hard to admit.⁶ However, the language in dreams is not to be taken literally; it is to be carefully interpreted.

Among the features of dreams, timelessness is ever present and the rules of logic do not apply. In some cases, the idea of a person is represented by a number of persons in a number of places. This feature is called *condensation*. Or in some other cases, the idea of a person or place is represented by another idea closely associated to it, which is called *displacement*. These techniques are some of those essential for the elaboration of dreams to take place or *traumarbeit*, a German term which literally means: dream work. This process transforms the latent contents of

⁶ Al efectuar [tal labor] revelaría muchas cosas íntimas que prefiero permanezcan secretas; cosas que tampoco yo me había dado clara cuenta hasta que el desarrollo de este análisis las ha puesto ante mis ojos y que aún a mí mismo me cuesta trabajo confesarme. [...] todo sueño con el que emprendiera mi labor investigadora conduciría sin remedio a cosas difícilmente publicables. (Freud: 19)

the unconscious into manifest content, by means of images. All these terms, coined by Freud, will be put to work in this study.

As the present work focuses on literature, language will be its principal concern. How language and literature avail themselves of ideas developed by psychoanalysis. In literature, condensation and displacement can be translated, for example, into *metaphor* and *metonymy* respectively. Jacques Lacan expounded these views in his lecture during the Congress of Rome in 1953: *Function and Field of Speech and Language in Psychoanalysis*.

The important part begins with the translation of the text, the important part that Freud tells us is given in the elaboration of the dream- that is to say, in its rhetoric. Ellipsis and pleonasm, hyperbaton or syllepsis, regression, repetition, apposition- these are syntactical displacements; metaphor [...] allegory, metonymy, and synecdoche- these are the semantic condensations in which Freud teaches us to read the intentions- ostentations or demonstrative, dissimulating or persuasive, retaliatory or seductive- out of which the subject modulates his oneiric discourse. (Lacan 1977b: 58)

Based upon the teachings of Freud, Jacques Lacan developed his language-oriented psychological theories and contributed most significantly to literary criticism. Lacan suggested that language itself is a set of symbols, therefore a representation of reality. Humans cannot express their ideas exactly by using language, because language does not keep an iconic relation with what it represents. Words, as they are arbitrarily attributed to concepts in reality by means of conventions, do not represent what they mean to every person who uses them. So, the words each person decides to use reveal traits of the speaker's personality and should thus be thoroughly analysed. Furthermore, Lacan explained how the mind is constituted by means of three orders: the Imaginary, the Symbolic and the Real. The first one of these three orders refers to the relationships and interactions of the subject with what surrounds him. That is to say, how he identifies and therefore builds on his own identity by relating with the outer world. The Symbolic order is the one that classifies the world and knowledge about it. Lastly, the Real is

the realm of objects and experiences, which stands outside the Imaginary and the Symbolic orders.

Reading assumptions are challenged in the narrative as the social, religious and linguistic conventions are overthrown through Ellen's experience in Australia. So, Ellen will need to readjust the way the Imaginary works for her, as her surroundings are changed. Furthermore, she will have to reclassify the world and refer to it from a different perspective, as she will have attained new notions which will modify the way the Imaginary and Symbolic orders function. "Man speaks, then, but it is because the symbol has made him man," explains Lacan (1977b, p. 65) in the Congress of Rome in 1953.

"Any shift of equilibrium among Lacan's three orders has the same effect on the psychic system." (Ragland-Sullivan, 1986, p.131) Thus, the origins of Ellen's dissociative identity disorder⁷ can be explained as a lack of balance between the Symbolic and the Imaginary orders.

To begin with, a political change takes place in Ellen as she becomes a gentle lady in England by marrying Mr. Austin Roxburgh in an upward movement from her farm in Cornwall. Ellen is forced to assimilate this change by embracing all the social conventions, rules and values of the new status. All these are disregarded once she is in the natives' camp, as they prove obsolete.

From an ethnographical perspective, Ellen, a white Anglo-Saxon protestant lady, needs to accommodate her expectations to her life among aborigines. She overcomes shame and prudishness as regards clothing conventions and she needs to do without the luxury and comfort she had been used to while in England.

⁷ "Dissociative Identity Disorder is a severe form of dissociation, a mental process, which produces a lack of connection in a person's thoughts, memories, feelings, actions, or sense of identity. Dissociative identity disorder is thought to stem from trauma experienced by the person with the disorder. The dissociative aspect is thought to be a coping mechanism -- the person literally dissociates himself from a situation or experience that's too violent, traumatic, or painful to assimilate with his conscious self." WebMD Medical Reference, (2010)

As she spends time with the natives, she learns to value their traditions and customs because she is able to understand their conception of the world.

Ellen's condition poses a twofold question: Who is she subjected to? Ellen had already had a subservient and submissive attitude with her husband, his circle of acquaintances and her mother-in-law, all of which she obeyed and respected with no objection. However, in Australia, she finds she is not only a woman in the nineteenth century society, a person who is not entirely free to make her own decisions; but also a prisoner in a foreign land. She has a nineteenth century European education and she is forced to the menial tasks performed by women in an Australian aboriginal society. Her woman status only adds to her helplessness while at the camp. Then, when back among gentrified settlers, Ellen is regarded as a misfit, not only for having been among natives, but also for speaking her mind in a way no lady was used to doing.

However, the very fact of being a woman saves her life. When the aborigines find her on the beach, they assess her condition. Being blacks of a hunter type, it was expected that they would dispose of Ellen as they had done with Mr. Roxburgh, on account of his being weak and ill. But Ellen is spared. From the natives' perspective, white men could qualify as food, beasts of burden or sexual partners. Ellen qualifies because she is young and strong, so she would make a good worker, and as she had had a miscarriage, she would be fit to breastfeed. This was a value that could not be wasted in dry Australia.

Metonymical images are used widely in post-colonial works as they constitute a resource through which certain aspects of colonial reality are reflected on the language of the text for the reader's benefit. In this work, metonyms are not used in their traditional sense, that is to say, as figures of speech which substitute the name of one thing for the name of something else closely associated with it. Metonymy in post-colonial literature is a device which enables the writer to communicate aspects of each character or their community through the variety of

language they use. It is a way of subverting the text and its grammar so as to convey traits of the social, cultural and political reality in which the text had its origin in a subtle way.

[...] while the tropes of the post- colonial text may be fruitfully read as metonymy, language variance itself in such a text is far more profoundly metonymic of cultural difference. That variance itself becomes the metonym, the part which stands for the whole. (Ashcroft et al., 1989, p.52)

Furthermore, metonymy is a resource that allows the language to refer to the subversive or counter discursive characteristics of post- colonial societies, without causing the centre to repress that expression, as its meaning is not overt.

This process can parallel to that of the censor function which prevents distressing elements from emerging into the conscious realm.

Since metonymy bypasses the laws of censorship (Lacan called it the trope of the Unconscious), it enables the return of the repressed, the articulation of that which has become taboo in a colonized world. (Frow & Morris, 1993, p.38)

Displacement, from a post- colonial perspective, as well as a change of place, in this work implies a change of time, and that will constitute a focal point of this study.

Displacement is a consequence of colonisation, both in the case of settler colonies and in that of invaded colonies, as in both cases language is transported to an alien land and a new surrounding is named by means of a language that may not be apt for the task.

The gap which opens between the experience of place and the language available to describe it forms a classic and all pervasive feature of post- colonial texts. (Ashcroft et al., 1989, p. 9)

In the present work, even though Ellen changes environments - from Cornwall to Cheltenham, and then to Australia- the most significant changes in her speech occur in Australia, when transferred from one social group to another.

It should therefore be emphasised that the kind of displacement referred to in this work is a displacement *along time* in connection with the language used by Ellen. And, taking into account that time does not prove an obstacle for Ellen to adopt different personalities it may be stated that the notion of time ceases to exist altogether in her mind.

Whether today's or tomorrow's or yesterday's it was all one by now, a continuous seamless tapestry, its details recurrent and interchangeable. (White, 1976, p. 312)

Timelessness is an ever present element in Australian texts and this narrative is no exception. The disregard of the rules of chronology epitomises the *Adamic* condition to be mentioned later on and the language of the unconscious. Ellen digs deeper in her mind in order to relinquish a balance among her inner voices and thus build her identity.

In order to be able to study Ellen's changes in speech, the following division will be implemented, illustrating different stages of Ellen's journey:

- *The Cornwall Stage*: The first stage in Ellen's life. She lived on a farm in Cornwall with her father, and she spoke a Cornish vernacular variety. Her mother had died and the absence of affection may have caused her to adopt a motherly attitude towards her husband-to-be during his stay at their farm, which eventually enabled her to become Mrs. Roxburgh.
- *The Cheltenham Stage*: During this stage Ellen was forced to abandon her Cornish vernacular and replace it by a Standard English variety. She is also compelled by her new surroundings to acquire manners and rules of

etiquette she had not been used to. Her true self lies buried behind these newly acquired conventions, together with the frustration of not being able to conceive a child.

- *The Australian Experience Stage*: This stage can be in turn divided into three parts:
 - 1- Van Diemen's Land: While visiting her brother-in-law, Ellen commits adultery, which results in her being pregnant with Garnet's child. Ellen finds she is connected to nature in a new and sublime way in this strange land. However, she is aware of the pain and rife brutality of the prison nearby and the hostility of nature.
 - 2- Ship: Probably the most relevant part of the trip is Ellen's encounter with Oswald, a young boy. He stirs emotions related to motherhood in her that had been latent for a long time and which are reflected in her spontaneous and sporadic speech lapses.
 - 3- Shipwreck: She becomes aware of a miscarriage. Ellen and some of the crew members who survived the wreck manage to get to an island. There, Ellen realises how abusive and resentful some people can be (e.g. Mr. Pilcher). Ellen learns how to cope with the loss of her unborn child, as well as with the death of her husband at the hands of the aborigines.
- *The Silent Stage*: Ellen cannot understand the aborigines' language and she is unwilling to make the effort to learn on the grounds of her trauma. For a period of time, she remains unresponsive to what she hears the

aborigines say. Later on, she learns to decode some of the aborigines' body language. Meanwhile, not knowing how to respond, Ellen remains silent and resorts to her inner self, thus losing touch with her new surroundings. This alienation gives way to hallucinations and eventually oversimplification of her inner language.

- *The Jack Chance Stage:* Jack Chance embodies Ellen's "chance" to escape her imprisonment in the camp. It is with him that Ellen goes through a rebirth as regards her relation with nature and with herself. Ellen's speech undergoes several changes, from her Cornish vernacular, to Standard English, at times interspersed with the issue of "Mab's personality".⁸
- *The Return Stage:* After a period of confusion, during which she takes over different identities, Ellen attains sovereignty over her speech and masters it to convey her true self and to disregard what she no longer considers a central value in her life. This is how she is able to achieve her independence and build an identity which includes her experience.

⁸ Mab: (short for Mabel?) Jack's lover in UK, whom he killed out of jealousy. Ellen episodically identifies with her. Queen Mab: In British folklore, a bewitching fairy who rules over men's dreams. Ellen's dreams give way to her identifying with Mab and to her feeling a connection with the land (originated in the Australia Dreamtime), so this name might have been deliberately chosen bearing these notions in mind by Patrick White.

In order to allow a change in language, the speaker should experience a shift in the conception of the world around him. Ellen starts a journey, and that is the first step to have one's surroundings altered. That is how Ellen's continual shifts from one variety to another occur. These sudden shifts are brought about by her quest for self definition, hallucinations or memories and by changing of setting (a party, the natives' camp).

The process of naming and classifying what surrounds humans is regarded as an *Adamic* vision of the world. A central problem rises among the white European settlers in Australia and that is to go back to "indigeneity". Their primal relation with the world as new and not given by another culture is something they long to experiment. The impossibility of this condition stems from the experience of using a variety of English in an alien land to name items of flora and fauna that do not exist in England. However, this "re-naming" of the universe that takes place in settler colonies could be considered as a second *Adamic* vision, in which the colonial subject is to establish a new *Adamic* relation with the world around him.

A political philosophy rooted in elation would have to accept belief in a second Adam, the recreation of the entire order, from religion to the simplest domestic rituals. (Ashcroft et al., 1995, p.372)

What Derek Walcott (1930, St Lucia I.) describes in the excerpt of his essay *The Muse of History* is the direct consequence of displacement and the relationship between the imported language and the new place. However, the return to origins is deprived of the innocence formerly bestowed on it, as it is suggested in *The Muse of History*.

Ellen faces this second *Adamic* relation with the new world that surrounds her in a number of occasions. The first instance of her having to use her language to define new experiences in her life can be summarised in the keeping of her

journal, imposed by her mother-in-law as well as in the faithful observance of the countless rules of etiquette she learnt while in the process of becoming the young Mrs. Roxburgh.

Australia, as a post- colonial nation, sought to re name myths imported from the centre of the Empire in order to appropriate them.

Settlers do not feel at home in the place they have colonised once the original occupants are driven away from it. They find themselves alone, in an alien land and that unless they reclassify the world that surrounds them, they will not be able to adapt to the new territory.

Out of this sense of displacement emerges the discourse of place which informs the post- colonial condition. (This) “not - at- homeness” motivates the reconstruction of the social and imaginative world in post- colonial writing. (Ashcroft et al., 1989, p. 82)

This is to be demonstrated in Australian poet A. D Hope's (1907- 2000) *Imperial Adam*, where the myth of how the first human beings were created and Cain begotten is deconstructed and retold from another perspective, constituting an instance of appropriation of a metropolitan biblical myth.⁹

Strategies of appropriation... seize the language, re- place it in a specific cultural location, and yet maintain the integrity of that Otherness, which historically has been employed to keep the post- colonial at the margins of power, of “authenticity”, and even of reality itself. (Ashcroft et al., 1989, p. 77)

By means of appropriation strategies, the authenticity of an emerging culture is asserted; dismantling former assumptions which kept it marginalised, silenced and deprived of the opportunity to seek its self determination. In order to

⁹ “And Adam knew Eve his wife; and she conceived, and bare Cain, and said, I have gotten a man from the LORD.” Gn 4, 1, King James Bible.

re- shape the Australian identity on the myth of Adam and Eve from the Bible, Hope included elements which are not mentioned in the original work, such as the animals acting both as beholders of the act and as mid wives. Hope's choice of this particular episode of the Bible holds great significance as Australian settlers' situation resembles the *Adamic* condition mentioned above.

Pregnancy and birth are depicted as unpleasant processes, with an ominous result. A.D. Hope's naturalistic poem dismantles some assumptions which have constituted the basis of Christian faith and regards the outcome of Adam and Eve's love as the beginning of hate on Earth,

“...Then from the spurt of seed within her broke
Her terrible and triumphant female cry,
Split upward by the sexual lightning stroke.
It was the beasts now who stood watching by: [...]

And saw its water break, and saw, in fear,
It squaking muscles in the act of birth,
Between her legs a pigmy face appear,
And the first murderer lay upon the earth.” (Heseltine, 1972, p. 193)

In this poem by A.D. Hope, violent scenes are justified by the cynicism contained in the knowledge of what is to come. Experience allows the colonial child to be prepared for the events that are to follow. Innocence is long lost and myths acquire a new but bitter meaning. This feeling of disillusionment is symbolised by images such as “terrible and triumphant cry”. It is also worth noting that the female cry is “split upward” by a “stroke”, all of which denote a violent and shocking act and that is witnessed by the beasts because it clashes with their own nature. The birth is depicted as the defeat of love, as the woman lies, all of her strength extinguished, and the “pigmy face”, a distorted and marginal image, is empowered to set a new trend on earth.

Ellen is English- born but her Australian experience has “colonised” her, and though she may go back and live among her fellow countrymen again, she is forever changed. This fact epitomises the knowledge that it is impossible to attain a pre- colonial state. This assumption constitutes a post- colonial form of irony and ambiguity.

Abrogation and Appropriation

Ellen, after being made a prisoner, was deprived of her traditions, language and religion. We see the aborigines as the oppressors compelling an English woman to submit to their commands. The once marginalised are the ones who are now the centre and it is their rules that are to be followed now. Ellen’s inner language becomes simpler and historical facts are silenced. The fact that historic records are challenged is to do with the oral tradition prevalent among Australian aborigines. One assumption within this tradition is that words have the power to bring to life what they represent. Ellen, possessed by this power, brings Mrs. Roxburgh and Mab to life in order to solve her inner struggles. She has the power to change history, and thus to change her present situation. However, as she tries to put this into practice once she is back among the settlers, she is regarded as a misfit by the gentrified settlers she meets at Commander Lovell’s since the assumptions of oral tradition are not accepted within the metropolitan culture.

This narrative abrogates the assumptions found in history and appropriates them. The history of colonisation is narrated from the “other” point of view. In other words, the colonised, in this narrative, is the one who oppresses. Ellen, an English lady, contrary to what happened in history, is enslaved by the aborigines, who have typically been oppressed and marginalised by white men.

A Fringe of Leaves is the process of colonisation seen through Ellen's eyes. The settlements in Australia were founded by the English in order to serve the purpose of penal colonies. Ellen is to become a prisoner of sin in Australia because she has committed adultery. According to her Christian faith, sin enslaves, deprives one's soul from freedom. She is to atone for her sins in Australia. She also takes over Mab's "licentious" personality and bears the burden of Jack's crime. Bearing all this in mind, she could be considered a holy character. She is sacrificial, by subduing herself as a Jack's *redemptor*, liberating Jack from the burden of guilt.

Ellen escapes reality by resorting to her inner life. The feeling of isolation that preys on her is so overwhelming that her inner self becomes as vast as the universe that surrounds her. She is unable to fit in the social groups she is made to live with- either in England or in Australia. From a post- colonial point of view, this is a central theme, as the quest for origin and identity constitutes one of the tenets of this theory. It is essential to point out how the colonised differs from the citizens born in the centre of the Empire.

To make these differences noticeable and have them speak for themselves, the colonised becomes the centre of the narrative, so as to disregard all formerly imposed standards which may have deprived colonies of their identity. However, the original pre- colonial state is impossible to retrieve.

Furthermore, Ellen's quest for self- definition parallels Australia's struggle for nationhood. The colonised state seeks independence from its 'mother' or oppressor state by trying to build its identity. But this separation usually originates in the emergent nation's capacity to emulate the coloniser. The colonised, instead of being an 'other' land which holds differences with the metropolitan centre, becomes a separate state of the 'same' kind, as Chris Prentice suggests in his essay *Some Problems of Response to Empire in Settler Post- Colonial Societies*:

“The image it produces is valued on the basis of its specular similarity to British cultural and institutional *models*.” (Tiffin & Lawson, 1994, p. 47)

However, this identification with the ‘mother’ state is not the final stage of autonomy. This process is what can be seen from an external perspective, but internally the emergent nation, in order to emulate the coloniser state, needs to repress its own codes, conventions and traditions. “...the repression of the excess of Nation’s libidinal self, those haunting Others which cannot be reconciled to the image of National Sameness.” (Tiffin & Lawson, 1994, p. 47)

This situation is unable to hold for a long time; the new nation disregards the cultural and social conventions of the centre of the Empire. As a consequence of this diving into autonomy and integrity, the new nation experiences guilt for not having acted as the dutiful ‘daughter state’.

Guilt is a pervasive theme in White’s narrative as Ellen seeks to atone for her sins all throughout the novel. Just like Australia, in her quest for national definition and identity, Ellen fell from grace, from the coloniser’s perspective when she committed adultery and cannibalism.

However, these sins are compulsory if the final stage, selfhood, is to be attained. Ellen feels guilty over having disregarded the vows she had made, but she is to understand, as time progresses, that a new Ellen is about to emerge and that her assumptions should be challenged if she is willing to embrace a new identity. She cannot cling to the metropolitan assumptions anymore, and by finding a way to atone for her sins, she finally frees herself from the imperial restraints. The theme of guilt will be dealt with later on, in connection to Christian faith and its rites.

Ellen’s experiences and feelings become the prism through which the reader witnesses her adventure, and thus it can be stated that certain aspects of

the events that go on around her fall into oblivion mostly during the Silent Stage. She finds that hunger, cold, discomfort, physical pain become unimportant to her. These trivial sentiments would no longer divert her from her thoughts. She reaches depths which she had never suspected were in her. Moreover, some of her moral principles become obsolete once among the natives and what is considered a sin amongst the English now becomes common and socially accepted in her new surroundings. Thus, the concept of sin is subjective in this novel, and this should be borne in mind in order to grasp what circumstances lure Ellen into sheltering in her inner self.

The Cornwall Stage

Ellen Gluyas' upbringing and background account for young Mrs. Roxburgh's vitality and nerve to overcome the obstacles and hardships of living with the aborigines. The fact that Ellen had not always been a lady might have helped her survive, as she had been used to working hard and to endure harsh treatment. Furthermore, the lady had covered the Cornish girl so effectively that for years the latter had not been allowed to come out to resurface. Among the natives, such restraints are dropped and if in danger, they reappear. This is showed in the episode when Ellen is forced to climb trees in order to hunt for opossums, as described below,

If her strength or courage threatened to desert her, a firestick was held beneath her person, and the fear of burning drove her higher- or else it was the spirit of Ellen Gluyas coming to Mrs. Roxburgh's rescue. (White, 1976, p. 263)

One of the factors that caused Ellen to be ready to overcome harsh situations may have its roots in her relationship with her father. His abusive attitude towards Ellen may have contributed to her accepting Mr. Roxburgh as a husband,

because he was weak and appreciated her assistance, showing gratitude as no man had ever done before.

If Ellen Gluyas wholly believed, it was because she led such a solitary life, apart from visits to the cousins, flagging conversations with an ailing and disappointed mother, and the company of a father not always in possession of himself. (White, 1976, p. 50)

It is evident that Ellen lacked excitement in her life, and that her isolation had its origins at this stage. Having led a solitary existence, Ellen had no choice but to devote her time to nurture fantasies in her otherwise dull routine.

She had never been as far as Tintagel, but hoped one day to see it. Her mind's eye watched the ship's prow entering the narrow cove, in a moment of evening sunlight, through a fuzz of hectic summer green. (White, 1976, p. 51)

The trip across water to a place which will define her individuality, such as Tintagel, is a foreshadowing of the process she will go through. That is to say, she has cherished a trip to Tintagel so much that this image anticipates the changes she will have to endure in order to attain her self definition. This image adds up to those beliefs mentioned above, and those day dreams that fill Ellen's head in order to escape her oppressive reality. This image demonstrates the significance of the *journey* in Ellen's life and the symbol of water stands for the unconscious level of the mind. So it can be inferred from this that Ellen will have to dive into her unconscious in order to retrieve her authentic self and that achievement will bring about self completion. She will have attained all she had wished for.

Besides, the tough experiences Ellen has to go through as part of living on a farm give way to an early loss of innocence. However, these experiences gave Ellen the tools to defend herself later on when she would have to face challenging situations on her own.

For instance, when her father sells a calf named Beat they had bred and to which Ellen had grown attached she is unable to stand up to her father and defend the animal because she knows it would prove pointless and it would give vent to further abuse.

She wrapped a sack about her shoulders and said she would stay behind. He cursed her for behaving unsociably, or for being an imbecile, or both, before plodding with their pretty Beat into the not- far- distant yard. (White, 1976, p.64)

She chooses to look impassive to insults instead; an attitude she will repeat while with the natives.

When Mr. Roxburgh proposes, Ellen might have felt that was the long awaited opportunity to break free from her farm and all the painful memories that were attached to it.

It was Ellen Gluya's hope that she might eventually be sent a god. Out of Ireland, according to legend. Promised in marriage to a king, she took her escort as a lover, and the two died of love. (White, 1976, p. 50)

However, becoming Mrs. Roxburgh did not fulfill her needs for self definition. Ellen's quest was not yet over. This is evinced in the fact that the narrative is not yet influenced by her Cornish vernacular as often as it will be later on.

The Cheltenham Stage

Being in the company of people belonging to various social groups influenced Ellen's changes of speech. These changes are due to the fact that once she finds herself among new people; a new role is imposed on her in that new society.

A set of social and moral conventions that have to be observed by Ellen tear her further apart from her original self and an impossible nature to abandon her former self may become what could be regarded as the origins of her split personality disorder, which will prove overtly evident later on.

She felt only remotely related to Ellen Roxburgh, or even Ellen Gluyas; she was probably closer to the being her glass could not reveal, nor her powers of perception grasp, but whom she suspected must exist none the less. (White, 1976, p.92)

Her craving for an identity becomes palpable in this quote, as she longs to be related to one of the names she has borne along her life. She is lured into becoming only a wife, a lady, leaving Ellen Gluyas behind. She is tempted to become a mother and have her existence revolve around that condition. But repeated failure to conceive leaves her in despair. Having lost her mother, Ellen finds comfort in acting as a protective motherly figure for her husband who suffers from a poor health. Furthermore, having been accepted by the Roxburghs meant being close to old Mrs. Roxburgh, who, despite her seemingly preposterous impositions regarding rules of etiquette, constitutes a motherly figure of guidance for Ellen.

However, Ellen understands she cannot escape what she once was. She is all and one at the same time. Thus can her subservience to Mr. Roxburgh be explained. Being associated with somebody or with some mother/ wife function will define her as a woman, and that is what she is after: self- definition.

One of the most relevant pieces of advice Ellen ever received from her mother- in- law was to keep a written record of her thoughts.

After her marriage, her mother- in – law had advised her to keep a journal 'It will teach you to express yourself, a journal forms character besides by developing the habit of self- examination. (White, 1976, p. 47)

From a strictly post- colonial point of view, this imposition could be compared to the introduction of writing by the white settlers forced on the communication of Australian History. Before the arrival of the English, natives in Australia would make their history known by the practice of story- telling in Oral Tradition. These stories, which constituted their history, would dwell in their memories long enough to be communicated to younger generations. Written records were an alien element which the natives later adopted.

Simon Ryan explains in his essay: *Inscribing the Emptiness, Cartography, Explorations and the Construction of Australia*, where Australia was regarded as a blank page to write on by the newcomers, as if being completely the opposite of England (from a cartographic point of view) were reason enough to change it according to the centre's conventions.

The antipodality of Australia joins with its construction as a *tabula rasa* to produce the continent as an inverted, empty space desperately requiring rectification and occupation. (Tiffin & Lawson, 1994, p.116)

Old Mrs. Roxburgh, by encouraging Ellen to write a journal, is forcing her to embrace metropolitan assumptions. Her reason for doing this is that Ellen is different from the Roxburghs and she is to be modelled to their liking. Ellen is made to feel as the *other*, and therefore, she needs to accommodate to new codes in order to be treated as an equal. Furthermore, old Mrs. Roxburgh suggests in which way topics should be expounded therein, to which Ellen never objects.

But too often the Aborigines were observed through British eyes and culture and put down in British forms. Aboriginal culture became as distorted as others seen through British eyes... (Ashcroft et al., 1995, p.229)

As the British forged the feelings the aborigines wanted to express by forcing them into the written word as Muroodoo suggests in his essay *White Forms, Aboriginal Content*, Ellen's feelings cannot have been portrayed as purely

as if she had used her own words. But what can be interpreted from this encouraging attitude is that old Mrs. Roxburgh does not consider Ellen's way of expression valuable enough to be included in a journal.

A blank sheet, of course, intimates that there has been no previous history, but also teleologically constructs the future as a place/time for writing. (Tiffin & Lawson, 1994, p.127)

The passive attitude Ellen adopts is a crucial characteristic which enables her to undergo the process of colonisation.

However, writing bears the imprint of identity, thus it is to be considered a useful tool to carry out that quest, so common in post- colonial literature. Before having to live up to Mrs. Roxburgh's expectations of keeping a journal, Ellen had written on a whim, in attempts to make her identity transcend. As a young girl she had cherished nothing more than a trip to Tintagel.

One evening as the light of the elms started to wane, she found herself scratching on an attic window with a diamond... she printed on the glass *Tintagel* in bold, if irregular letters, and then was ashamed, or even afraid of what she had done. (White, 1976, p.77)

However, that desire remains a secret as she feels embarrassed of even giving a hint of the humble origins of her wishes. She learns to conceal them even more effectively once she is part of her husband's family.

She remembered she was the farmer's daughter who had married an honourable gentleman, and corrected her speech, and learned to obey certain accepted moral precepts and social rules, most of them incongruous to her nature. (White, 1976, p. 80)

Ellen disregards the rules of etiquette several times throughout the narrative, providing several examples of abrogation.

First, she needs to re- accommodate her manners in order to fit with Mr. Roxburgh's circle of acquaintances.

As she had conciliated Austin Roxburgh and his mother by allowing herself to be prinked and produced, she accepted when some elderly lady from her own tribe advanced to adjust a sulphur topknot; it might have been old Mrs. Roxburgh adding or subtracting some jewel or feather in preparation for a dinner or ball. (White, 1976, p. 268)

She therefore acquires new rules of behaviour which she is to disregard as soon as she starts living with the natives, and both stages converge at some point, as Ellen realises she is still a subject to somebody else's will. Ellen is an alien among the aboriginals, her identity is deconstructed and she is forced to rebuild it so as to belong to that group.

She attains a certain sense of belonging by joining the aborigines in their rituals and traditions. Ellen, a Christian, is compelled by the aborigines and by her extreme hunger to hunt for food and as a last resort, when hunger is unbearable, to eat human flesh. Some of these acts go against her beliefs, but she disregards, once again, all the rules she had been taught in order to appropriate the newly imposed social and moral parameters.

The Australia Experience Stage

1- Van Diemen's Land

Ellen's voice is silenced while she is in Van Diemen's Land. A figural narrator becomes bolder through the use of free indirect discourse and instances of direct speech are scarce. This metonymical use of the narrative symbolises the puzzlement Ellen is going through as she discovers a new dimension of sensual pleasures.

...to bask beneath the lashes in an experience of sensuality she must have awaited all her life, however inadmissible the circumstances in which she had encouraged it.

But this was only the briefest sensation. (White, 1976, p. 116)

The narrative also works with places of indeterminacy that are constituted by the information Ellen chooses to repress and leave unsaid as a way to convey hypocrisy and reluctance to change.

She hated the shaggy, inscrutable mountain, the lush pastures with their self-engrossed flocks and herds, the name "Dulcet", whatever had taken part in rousing inclinations she should never have allowed access to her consciousness. (White, 1976, p. 118)

Ellen's endeavours not to think of the casual affair she had with Garnet in *Dulcet* again are repeated throughout the narrative as a deed of repression and self-punitive technique to atone for her flaw. However, even if she does not want to admit it at this point, the first step towards self-definition has already been taken. As much as Ellen hates *Dulcet* and its owner, they have contributed to the process of building her identity. Conventions have begun to be challenged and the narrative will gradually become decentralised.

When she finds herself at sea, on her way back to England, the educated accent she had forged for years of thorough training lapses into Cornish, sporadically at first, then her true concealed self as symbolised by this accent is heard fighting to come out into the light on a more regular basis.

These changes can be interpreted as to have been caused by the impact her marital lapse may have had on her religious convictions, by the distress she may have felt at her miscarriage, at sea, of the baby by Garnet, and the death of her husband at the hands of the natives soon after the wreck.

2- Ship

The image of the ship and the passage through water constitute a symbol for the unconscious. Ellen is ready to take a closer look at her inner self without being aware of it; she will be drawn to actively engage with her identifying process by means of the experiences that stem from these trips. Her changes in speech represent the stages she goes through while accommodating to the newly discovered traits of her personality which had been latent, paralysed, under environmental pressure.

Some of these speech changes are spontaneous within the constraints of a single social group, as shown below, before the shipwreck; she meets the boy, Oswald on board,

For her part, she was reduced to childhood by the boy's logic, so that she kneeled beside him at the very moment when his limbs were stirring with an instinct to get to his feet and assert his manhood by leaving her.

Lapsing spontaneously into her first language, she begged, 'Cuns't I stay with 'ee'" (White, 1976, p.164)

Motherhood in Ellen can be studied from a post- structuralist perspective, as in what is not mentioned overtly in the text. Pregnant by Garnet Roxburgh, this event invests the text with a degree of ambiguity which is, as we have said, typical of post- colonial texts. It begins with the arguable issue of whether she consented or not to the sexual intercourse with Garnet. It is of relevance to point out that this happened only once and under particular circumstances. She had lost her way on horseback through the shrubbery and Garnet showed up with the intention of taking her back to *Dulcet*. What can be inferred from this event is that Ellen longed for a child and that Garnet's unethical behaviour caused Ellen to experience passion in a way she had never done before or even imagined. This pregnancy represents her grace as well as her fall from grace, because through this trespass she is ready to bear a child, a deed she had not succeeded in achieving with her husband. Furthermore, an event her unsuspecting husband was proud of.

After she is stripped naked by her aboriginal captors, Ellen manages to make a garment to cover her nudity out of a vine, "It was her first positive achievement since the event of which she must never again allow herself to think." (White, 1976, p. 245)

The text is not communicating overtly that she actually considered having begotten Garnet's child a triumph. But as it had meant challenging and violating a precept, the narrative repressed this event constituting a metonymy for the fact that Ellen allegedly regarded it as one of lesser importance.

And yet Ellen is unable to part with the notion of her past sin and she knows she will live to atone for it. Despite the joy that act had awakened in her, as a self-imposed punishment she was not to indulge in the thought of it again. This event is then not to be brought to the conscious level of her mind or to the surface of the narrative for that matter.

The conventional assumptions surrounding the concepts of motherhood are related to bliss, love, and tenderness. These assumptions are challenged by what Ellen experiences in the camp. When she is forced to breastfeed an aboriginal child, she finds how different the role of a mother proves to be in this new setting. A new conception of the world is beginning to dawn on Ellen, starting by deconstructing the role of women in society, which had been reduced solely to motherhood. She finds the task tedious and uninspiring, which could be decoded as inhumane among her fellow country men in England. However, there has always been a calling for motherhood in Ellen, which becomes evident when she is with Oswald, marked by a sudden and conscious change from Standard English to vernacular Cornish (the first one), in order to come closer to Oswald. Ellen feels the need to go back to her original self, that is to say to the girl she used to be, so that Oswald would trust her and let her be his companion.

William Wordsworth records in his poem *My Heart Leaps up when I Behold*:

My heart leaps up when I behold
A rainbow in the sky:
So was it when my life began,
So is it now I am a man,
So be it when I shall grow old
Or let me die!
The Child is father of the Man:
And I could wish my days to be
Bound each to each by natural piety. (Palgrave, 1875, p. 45)

The most significant verse of this poem is “The Child is father of the Man”, as the origins of what a Man is lie in his innocence. Ellen’s going back to her original Cornish vernacular is a crucial step in the process of identification. And Oswald, by allowing that communion between them, testifies to Ellen’s link with her past which has not thus entirely faded. The girl she was at the beginning will show the way to her true identity and will thus enable her to fully command her destiny.

Ellen already knew she was pregnant, and her shifting to Cornish accent for the boy Oswald’s benefit represented how motherhood and her origins were combined in her own perception of herself. However, Oswald’s death by drowning while catching fish foreshadows Ellen’s miscarriage while on a boat after the shipwreck.

Although he was still being tossed and turned by surf boiling in and out of submerged potholes, she knew she would never see him again, unless as a wraith to be coerced out of her already over- haunted memory. (White, 1976, p. 215)

Ellen bears with guilt on account of her affair with Garnet and of Oswald’s death because he died fetching shellfish for her and it can be noted how she resorts to repressing those thoughts or memories again which might cause distress or an unbearable sense of guilt.

3- *Shipwreck*

What should be borne in mind is that these sudden changes of speech

and consequently of personality become more frequent in Ellen as time progresses.

The reason for her unconditional allegiance to Mr. Roxburgh's poor health and her obligation to comfort his condition as much as possible are met with scorn by Mr. Pilcher, the Bristol Maid first mate, who misinterprets her attitude as gratefulness for his lifting her up socially. But she replies to his remark as follows:

I was never anybody's servant. If Mr. Roxburgh asked me to be his wife, it was- I believe- because he loved me. In a sense I am under obligation but choose to serve someone I respect and love. (White, 1976, p.221)

So as to show Mr. Pilcher her disregard for material possessions, Ellen gives him one of her rings, a valuable one, after he had implied he needed it more than her. When they meet again, years later, at Captain Lovell's, Mr. Pilcher realises he had acted out of spite and gives the ring back to her as a gesture to atone for past mistakes. Regaining her ring portrays Ellen's reconciliation with her past life and having accepted it back has as an ultimate meaning that her life will be subdued according to her decisions.

Ellen's life had been punctuated by moments in which her will was overwhelmed by surroundings and social conventions. In the above comment, Ellen is asserting she got married to Mr. Roxburgh because he had asked her to. Only when she found herself among the aborigines did she realise how superficial her obedience to social precepts and forms had been, not providing her with tools to communicate something which might prove useful to her current situation,

Had she known the language, she might have commanded someone to fan her or tell her a tale. Incidentally, she realized that her life at Cheltenham had been a bore. (White, 1976, p.286)

Ellen wears a shawl during her journey from England to Australia, a fringed shawl which she hoists as a shield, as if the garment could protect her from glares, impious weather, and boredom.

Sometimes toiling uphill, sometimes teetering sideways with little, drunken steps, she held tightly to the points of her elbows inside the pretty, fringed shawl. (White, 1976, p. 166)

The image of her shawl is a foreshadowing of the protection she will seek later when, lost in the bush, she weaves a fringe of leaves to cover herself with. Conversely, the shawl is shown to act as a tool for nurturing and survival, just as the fringe of leaves will protect her later on.

She dipped her shawl and wrung it into the tin cup and only sucked the woolen fringes which had sopped the water out of the rocks. (White, 1976, p.220)

In this passage, the fringe's importance is anticipated as a means for her survival. What remains as a bond with the lady she used to be before she was captured is held tight to her by means of the fringe.

Her only other immediate concern was how to preserve her wedding ring. Not by any lucid flash, but working her way towards a solution, she strung the ring on one of the runners straggling from her convolvulus girdle, and looped the cord, and knotted it, hoping the gold would not give itself away by glistening from under the fringe of leaves. (White, 1976, p. 245)

When faced with situations which may have death as their outcome, Ellen resorts to her other self in search for comfort, which she is unable to find among people who surround her. When isolated from her peers and incapable of coping with situations of extreme pain or despair a hint of dissociative behaviour looms over the horizon almost unnoticed.

The restraints she had been taught to cultivate made it difficult for Mrs. Roxburgh to cry, when Ellen Gluyas would probably have blubbered out loud, for witnessing something of the slow death of a ship. (White, 1976, p. 188)

After the crew had repaired the boats, they set sail towards another area, where they were attacked by the natives. It is while they are sailing that Ellen suffered the miscarriage. "On her the waters in the doomed boat reached higher, almost to her waist it seemed, clambering, lapping, sipping the blood out of her flaccid body." (White, 1976, p. 227) These waters cover her and are the ones which welcome her stillborn child, who will later rest in the bottom of the sea. The sea took away her child, just like it had done with Oswald.

This stage serves the purpose of preparing Ellen for the hardships she will go through once she is captured by the natives and her husband is killed. The protecting image of the fringe will preserve her wedding ring as a token of the bond with the late Mr. Roxburgh and with her old life.

The Silent Stage

During her first encounter with the aborigines, Ellen is forced to part with her articles of clothing. Through this action, the natives are depriving her of one of the many social and cultural conventions she is to leave behind throughout the novel. These conventions were regarded as a shield behind which Ellen found protection.

They ran from her trailing the ultimate shreds of her modesty, as well as the clattering armature... (White, 1976, p. 244)

Ellen is now deprived of what is usually considered to be respectable and dignified. Without her clothes on, she is not to be regarded as a lady anymore. However, this symbol may serve as a foreshadowing of how she will modify her views. These garments and the notions of what respectability means will prove

unnecessary for Ellen as time progresses. Her assumptions will move from the centre towards the margins and the reality she is living will be deconstructed into reflections of other possible realities she might have to adapt to.

While with the natives, Ellen is forced to acquire a new set of rules in order to survive and live in harmony in this new society. Language is excluded from the natives' rules as she is not able to decode, let alone emulate, their verbal utterances; only their body language and paralinguistic features. Despite the lack of verbal communication, the natives succeeded in passing on some of their customs to Ellen.

"She cut her finger on the sharp end of the shell she was using. She sucked the wound, before remembering to rub it with charcoal." (White, 1976, p.286) She emulates what she had seen the aborigines do as a last resort because the only means of communication that proved successful when communicating with them was body language. Ellen is to some extent silenced by the aborigines, as they have been silenced by the white oppressors, because she does not speak their language and is forced to interact with them regardless of this fact. This forced linguistic isolation is another factor which may have caused Ellen's split personality to emerge into the surface of her consciousness.

The only thing the natives did not take from Ellen was her wedding ring; a synecdochical representation of her dead husband. It is an object related to him and which embodies what he meant for Ellen. "What she did feel was the wedding ring bumping against her as she walked, a continual source of modest reassurance." (White, 1976, p.245)

So, the ring takes up her husband's role. Ellen feels she is not yet lost, as part of her identity remains intact. However, what the ring stands for is to be transformed throughout the narrative:

She might have bartered her body, she thought, to one of the scornful male blacks in return for his protection. To indulge in such an unlikely fancy could not be regarded in any degree as a betrayal, (...) and daylight struck an ironic glint out of the concealed wedding ring. (White, 1976, p.256)

Ellen's moral and social conventions have been deconstructed and marginalised. Bartering her body for protection, in her opinion, might not prove such an unholy or irrational idea as her present condition urges her to do so, and within the social group she interacts with, this action would be considered acceptable.

Suddenly, the sole presence of her wedding ring and all the values it represents become preposterous. Furthermore, this symbol goes unseen and its meaning unheard. Ironically, painstakingly, she still preserves it.

The fringe of leaves represents her ability to preserve her personal sense of dignity and respectability, even though most of it had already been taken away from her by circumstances. Her reputation and social standing seem to be enacted by the fringe of leaves, and as such, she takes care to keep it fresh and operational. This is Ellen's way of making her former moral values and social status prevail, especially because the fringe is the place where her wedding ring is entangled and thus kept from the eyes of the natives. It constitutes all of her possessions.

Isolation from her peers and her inability to communicate with the aborigines lead Ellen to hope for contact with people who speak her own language. As this proves unattainable, her mind conjures up images of those people she used to be in contact with, giving her advice or commenting on the events of her new life with the blacks. She takes trips to her inner self. She feels the gap between language and experience, which can be compared to the early period in life when human beings are unable to speak and understand some notions they hear from others, commonly called silent period. "Real language acquisition develops slowly, and

speaking skills emerge significantly later than listening skills, even when conditions are perfect.” (Krashen, 1981, p.6)

This period lies between the encounter of the first words or sounds that startle us and the actual ability to respond to them in effective verbal utterances. During this state, she can only presume what the chattering around her is about. Isolation and loneliness prove more tangible than ever.

The prisoner concluded that the natives were at their prayers, for their wails sounded formal rather than spontaneously emotional. (White, 1976, p.249)

It is under these circumstances that she meets people who are long gone such as old Mrs. Roxburgh. She is so isolated that her inner self becomes as vast as that unknown land that surrounds her and she finds herself trying to explain her reality and making excuses for her current state to Mrs. Roxburgh, for instance.

‘You haven’t forgotten all you have been taught?’ ‘The words’ Ellen could only mumble, ‘seem to be falling away.’ This was what she truly feared in the event of long association with the blacks. (White, 1976, p.259)

This vision might have originated in the fact that Ellen feels completely disconnected from the manners and events that used to flood her existence. She longs for the reassuring surrounding of her husband’s circle of acquaintances and the predictability of her life in England. However, it is slowly dawning on Ellen that she had never imprinted her own distinctive mark on her existence.

“But are you not keeping up the journal? I only suggested it to help you learn to express yourself.” (White, 1976, p.259) At this point, after old Mrs. Roxburgh’s words, it is noted that Ellen had been taught to express herself in a certain manner which would accommodate the social group she was immersed in. At the same time, it can be inferred that Ellen had also been instructed as regards what to express. So her feelings and opinions had been limited to the phrases which were suitable to be uttered according to socially accepted conventions.

Moreover, what goes on in the outer world remains irrelevant to her, as the voices in her mind prove more meaningful. And she has never been taught how to communicate the experiences she is living now while at the camp. No former teachings would have been up to the task. Unable to communicate these new sensations, she recoils within herself. She falls into oblivion to violence, hunger, cold, physical pain and suffering. She reaches depths within herself she had never expected existed.

In *A Fringe of Leaves*, Patrick White communicates the simple and rudimentary nature of the ideas Ellen conceives while in the company of the natives. This process of simplification of Ellen's inner language takes place as she finds herself not only deprived of her own Standard English input, but also cut off from any kind of input in her mother tongue. It has been noted that Ellen usually emulates the variety of English she is exposed to. Yet, none of the "englishes"¹⁰ that Ellen adopts throughout the narrative are appropriate to name the reality she is living now.

Ellen only listens to the natives speaking their language and although she can make out certain notions, they still remain too scarce to nurture her speech functions. Ellen cannot but interpret a few basic notions and therefore it may be expected that her inner self (the voice of her thoughts) has toned down its complexity. The narrative becomes simpler for a while in order to reflect this stage of development. Ellen's own language could be regarded as a way of drawing closer to one's individuality and origins. Even though it may sound like a nonsensical humdrum for those who surround her now, it serves the purpose of comforting her. One instance of this use of language is seen when she is confined to nursing the child in the camp.

¹⁰ We need to distinguish between what is proposed as a standard code, English (the language of the erstwhile imperial centre), and the linguistic code, English, which has been transformed and subverted into several distinctive varieties around the world. (Ashcroft et al., 1989, p. 8)

She continued rocking her disgusting charge. Once she caught herself saying aloud 'Sleep, sleep' And by grace of some mechanism, 'Sleep- my darling,' more for her own comfort than the child's; the sound of her voice, she realized, was a consolation. (White, 1976, p. 247)

The narrative turns simple in order to describe this state. This could be regarded as a metonymical use of the language.

Some expectancy, evening smoke, or the men's return from hunting made the women restless. A kangaroo was put to roast. (White, 1976, p. 286)

Only sensations are communicated. This does not imply, however, that feelings are diminished. According to the reality Ellen is now immersed in, the rendering of these basic ideas is more than sufficient. Her inner language has been accommodated to her new reality.

The significance of the women's restlessness mentioned above is becoming more than logical to Ellen. Their day circles around food and the way they can obtain it. Ellen's mind is shaping according to this interest.

Ellen's life in Australia is portrayed in the language of dreams as the Western notion of time fades from her mind and the symbols she learns to decipher among the aborigines become more telling.

Time is a dimension Ellen has to learn to appraise in a different way while at the natives' camp, as they measure time by the position of the sun. She figures out the approximate time of day by looking at daylight, but she must have definitely lost track of weeks and months gone by as seasons in Australia work inversely to those in England.

Therefore, timelessness can be regarded as a constant condition of Ellen's stay in Australia and it also happens to constitute a most prominent characteristic of post- colonial texts. This serves the purpose of metonym for the fact that colonised territories were deprived of their own history when they became a new

chapter in the coloniser's history books. As their folk tales and legends were silenced by the irruption of the new narratives (new faith, new events), the notion of cyclic time the natives were used to was also pushed aside, replaced by lineal time. The most effective way to portray this chronological imposition is by means of timelessness and paralysis in post- colonial texts,

[...] all deliberately set out to disrupt European notions of history and the ordering of time. (Ashcroft et al., 1989, p.34)

In this novel, Ellen seems to enter the dimension of myth time, disregarding the concept of lineal time. So, time as the western world regards it is unheeded as Ellen measures the passing of time with markers taken from nature. Ellen finds herself within a chronology that is ruled by the myth of eternal return and rebirth, in other words, a cycle which gets repeated, and which for western societies would mean the cancellation of progress. This is how the concept of paralysis is present in Post- Colonial texts. By not measuring or regarding time as Europeans do, natives are thought to be stagnant in an eternal present. This is not entirely true, as a cyclic motion, chronologically speaking, also implies an upward movement. It is an attempt to re-enact a "historyless" world, escaping perpetual recrimination. Progress is possible even if time is not set in a lineal motion.

Patrick White's extensive use of symbolism as when he enters the realm of dreams suggests that every element in the narrative can be deconstructed to acquire a variety of significations. Some elements left unsaid also serve a significant purpose in reaching the contents of a person's unconscious level. Dreams are said to communicate repressed fears and wishes. A number of Ellen's dreams are retold in the narrative. She struggles hard throughout to face her own self. Some of Ellen's dreams and how they help make sense out of the narrative are apparent as in the following,

During the night she returned to her body from being the human wheelbarrow one of the muscular male blacks was pushing against the dark. There was no evidence that her dream had been inspired by any such experience, but she fell back upon the dust, amongst intimations of the nightmare which threatened to re- shape itself around her. (White, 1976, p. 249)

Ellen's unconscious creates images for her dreams from the elements and events witnessed by her during her life at the camp. Ellen had noticed the natives' vigorous bodies, and had secretively craved for them. This dream represents her desire to fulfill her need to give and receive love. It could be said that this dream symbolises her eagerness to find pleasure in a more natural kind of love, different from the one she used to know.

However, fear troubles this dream too. Influenced by the grunts and groans she heard during the night inside the hut she shares with others, she might have been afraid of becoming an instrument of some such depraved practice. The use of the word *wheelbarrow* is to be studied closely as it condenses two concepts. Firstly, it refers to a common practice of sexual intercourse among the aborigines and which Ellen considered perverted as she might have never either experienced or witnessed the position. Secondly, the image of a wheelbarrow represents Ellen's role among the natives. She was often used as a beast of burden. Furthermore, this dream epitomises the use of double meaning in the symbolic language of dreams.¹¹

These contents are communicated through dreams because Ellen cannot express them openly. Her still unmodified moral and social frame of mind would not allow her to rationalise these notions. However, they have found an outlet in her dreams to surface Ellen's consciousness.

¹¹ ...el doble sentido de las palabras, pero el análisis de los sueños nos muestra que se trata de un proceso regular y corriente. Por la labor de la condensación del sueño se explican también determinados componentes del contenido del mismo que le son peculiares y no se hallan en la ideación dispuesta. (Freud, 1995, p. 36)

She awoke stiff and cold except where the embers touched her, still surrounded by the sighs, the breathing and dreaming of others, while her own dream faded into ash-colours, and she realized that it was not Austin but Garnet Roxburgh who had possessed her. (White, 1976, p. 255)

Once she is facing these unpleasant thoughts of which her dreams are made, Ellen adopts a moralistic attitude and endeavours to repress them. She feels disgusted by this dream, as she continues to claim to have loved her husband. But it can be surmised that Ellen is not only disgusted by the image of her adulterous past, but also that she is disgusted with herself for having enjoyed remembering that episode in her life. Ellen and the narrative repress these ideas.

In another instance of repression, Ellen, who has just committed cannibalism, represses the causes and details of the whole event, and the narrative translates it into a constant presence in her mind and an ambiguous endeavour not to remember it : “In ‘not remembering’ she continually recalled the incident of incalculable days ago.” (White, 1976, p. 273)

What is unmentioned is thus regarded as more genuinely significant than what is overtly expressed. The narrative will not verbalise what is continually recalled, but the reader infers it. Ellen makes an effort not to remember her “flaw”, but her zeal to forget it will only make it more memorable. The fact that Ellen does not express when exactly the incident took place is partly due to her own rational denial of the episode, but also to that kind of timelessness which is a central part of Ellen’s mindscape.

Instances of Mrs. Roxburgh struggling with Ellen Gluyas are noted when fear overtakes her. Even if it did not constitute a threat to her life, when the natives are devoted to improving her image according to their beliefs and assumptions, she tried to defend herself and two of her personalities are summoned.

‘Leave off, can’t ee?’ Ellen Gluyas shrieked, and then, as Mrs. Roxburgh took control, ‘Why must you torture me so? Isn’t it enough to have killed my husband, my friends?’ (White, 1976, p.251)

Ellen’s role in the camp was confusing for her. On the one hand, she was treated as a slave, beast of burden, nurse to be reprimanded coarsely and often; but on the other hand, she was the centre of special ceremonies where she was anointed and ornamented according to the natives’ fashion. Furthermore, her animal instincts begin to take prominence as she spends more and more time in the camp. As a beast, as a captive, she is fed leftovers.

Ellen learnt to hunt, search the children’s heads for vermin, dig for yams, scale fish and be made an exhibit to be sported before members of other tribes. She was often made into a being for adoration as they sat in a circle to contemplate her. “Their faces were the glass in which she and they were temporarily united, either in mooning fantasy or a mystical relationship.” (White, 1976, p.267)

After having consented to cannibalism, Ellen reached a state of epiphany and self awareness she had not experienced before. She accommodates this ritual as a spirit- nourishing one which accompanies her through her hardships.

...so she could not have explained how tasting flesh from the human thigh- bone in the stillness of a forest morning had nourished not only her animal body but some dark need of the hungry spirit. (White, 1976, p. 274)

The human thigh can work as a symbol for the male sexual organ. Having devoured a human thigh, she is not only appropriating a more liberal approach to sexual relationships, but also symbolically cannibalising her husband, who had been her only man. As he had detached her from her original self, had “eaten” her, by imposing his surname for her to adopt and upper- class rules to follow; now it is her turn to actively devour those conventions, use them as nourishment and disregard them for good. Her “other” self had been eaten. The Empire is cannibal

too, as the colonial subject is assimilated by the Empire and made to nourish it with its qualities. By Ellen committing cannibalism, she is reversing the symbolical cannibalism she had endured at the hands of her husband.

She also accommodates this symbol as a sacrament so as to classify it within her western Christian understanding. This trancelike experience is associated in her mind to the sacrament of the Holy Communion. She appropriates this ritual and makes it her own by means of the elements her cultural background had provided her with. Ellen had learnt throughout her upbringing that the Holy Communion is performed to give testimony of the union among the members of the Christian community. "When at last she sat up, her eyes were closed, her lips parted to receive- the burnt sacrifice? the bread and wine?" (White, 1976, p.284)

Later in the narrative, during the course of another ritual, made up of dances and chanting, Ellen experienced an insight as to what might have happened to her husband's dead body after he was speared by the blacks. "Her vision was making her cry out: one of his legs had been torn off at the hip; she could smell the smell of crackled skin." (White, 1976, p.283)

She was so possessed by the spirits summoned by these rituals that she grew more receptive to the formerly concealed messages her mind created from the numerous stimuli constantly being flashed before her eyes. This constitutes evidence that the land and its nature had already established bonds with her.

During her stay with the aborigines, she finds she needs to commit certain acts that would be considered unthinkable under different circumstances. However, she resorts to actions which reduced her to the condition of an animal when she finally lets go of her former social rules and her new universe is decentralised towards the cultural standards the natives dictate, "Her eyes were bulging as she strained to chew, her lips running with fishy fat, and she all but growled a warning at one of the dogs, [...]" (White, 1976, p. 273)

However, despite appearing as an instinctive action, this experience is measured as an ecstatic peaceful feeling flowing through her which resembles the peace attained after partaking of religious rites,

The ecstasy of physical passion she had experienced with her husband scarcely ever, and with her regrettable lover it had not so much passion as a wrestling match against lust. ... She could at least truthfully confess that ecstasy had flickered up from the pit of her stomach provoked by a fragment of snake flesh. (White, 1976, p. 266)

She experiences changes in her conception of the world. Her morals are altered as she lets in new rules and conventions even if there are no verbally expressed precepts to follow. Even so, her mind does not feel fully freed from Christian morals and she resorts to silence, to confiding her darker secrets to her inner self and restrains herself from bringing them back to consciousness. She pretends they never took place. "In the light of Christian morality she must never think of the incident again." (White, 1976, p.272)

Ellen will eventually feel closer to the natives and share some of their feelings. When the child she was nursing dies, she is utterly moved by the incident.

"Can't'ee see she is gone? She's dead!' It sounded the more terrifying for being unintelligible to her audience, just as her emotion, her bursting into tears must have seemed disproportionate to those who had not shared her sufferings... For the first time since the meeting on the beach, the captive and her masters, especially the women, were united in common humanity." (White, 1976, p. 261)

She resorts to her Cornish vernacular to express her sorrow over the child's death, and this variety allows her to be united with the native women, as she is speaking through the voice of her original identity, which still needs to be brought to the surface of her personality and be made prevalent without resorting to shocking or exhausting situations.

However, she has found herself in pleasant situations while at the camp, and in many of those, children were involved. While among them, she feels relaxed, safe in the knowledge she will not be judged. She feels then at ease and gives vent to her inner child, who speaks through her in Cornish vernacular just like she had done while at sea when she met Oswald. Some motherly instinct might have stirred within Ellen, “ ‘I’d give’ee a kiss if tha wudn’ take fright’ Ellen told her. ‘Or wud’ee?’” (White, 1976, p. 250)

Two apparently opposite experiences, such as her bourgeois/ gentrified life in Cheltenham and her life in the camp, half naked, being bought and sold as a slave and forced into whimsical traditions, met at a given point. These two seeming extremes are faced with each other when she realises the strain she goes through in order to keep up with, in her view, nonsensical customs, a feature common to her two kinds of life.

Ellen Gluyas had not encountered a more unlikely situation since forced as a bride to face the drawing- rooms of Cheltenham. The difference in the present was that she had grown numb to hurt, and that those she had loved and wished to please could no longer be offended by her lapses in behaviour or her scarecrow person. (White, 1976, p. 243)

However, the teachings and traditions the natives have been imparting to her became deeply rooted in her, as once her mother-in-law’s teachings had been. So effectively has she absorbed these precepts that she copied their behaviour almost unconsciously.

The whole of her life now revolved round the search for food, which her own aggravated hunger made seem the only rational behaviour. It was in any case what she had accepted as the answer to the hard facts of existence before she had been taught the habits and advantages of refinement. (White, 1976, p. 253)

Ellen here symbolises the colonial child, who, once removed from his land and culture, is forced to recreate a new identity in a new and alien land.

She flung the bone away only after it was cleaned, and followed slowly in the wake of her cannibal mentors. She was less disgusted in retrospect by what she had done, than awed by the fact that she had been moved to do it. (White, 1976, p.272)

It is noted in the above quote that sin is finally accepted by Ellen. Eating snake flesh is a symbol of incorporating sin in her body. She is, from this moment on, open to stealing, fornication and cannibalism, which are regarded by the Christian faith as sins, but in her current surroundings these precepts lack moral strength. These religious beliefs make no sense at all in an alien context.

It is interesting to study the image of the snake flesh Ellen consumes as an example of hybridity. For the natives, snake flesh might have proved a nutritious food which abounded in the bush, probably a most common delicacy among them. However, in the light of an English Anglican upbringing, the snake carries about other significations than just edibility.

From a psychoanalytic perspective, the snake is a phallic symbol, that is, the realisation of power. Ellen, by craving and eventually consuming it, obtains the power to materialise her desires.

In the Bible the snake is the very embodiment of Satan. The snake is portrayed as an attractive yet cunning and deceitful animal which lures Adam and Eve into their first sin and make them therefore banished from the Garden of Eden.

As Ellen consumes the piece of snake flesh, all of these assumptions merge and result into an ecstasy, subverting previous negative connotations attached to the image of the snake.

Ellen's image of religion is unsurprisingly lost and she lacks the will to recover it. She is shocked into the awareness that religion had always been imposed on her, and that she had never felt inclined to it. However, her inner self

dictates she had committed morally bad deeds, which she is to bury at the back of her mind and thus endeavour not to let them resurface into the conscious level of it.

Later in the context, Ellen will not have to wonder if what she is doing is morally right or not, as she will find, to her puzzlement, that her language and actions are no longer a part contained by a set of rules issued by a community, since Ellen and Jack will constitute a community by themselves. Freedom becomes a dimension that at the beginning Ellen does not know how to measure, as she had never been in such control of her actions and speech before.¹²

The Jack Chance Stage

After Ellen sails from the island to the mainland together with the aborigines in order to join another tribe, she notices Jack Chance, the convict. He had bolted from one of the prisons in Moreton Bay and his role within that tribe was to entertain the aborigines with his acrobatics.

She could tell that he was respected and envied. What most distinguished him from his companions was an axe, or hatchet, which he wore in his woven belt. She wondered how he had come by his hatchet. It was so much coveted by the other blacks, who would stroke it, and some of them attempted to prise it away from its owner. (White, 1976, p.279)

The hatchet is cherished and feared by the natives and that constitutes the source of Chance's power. Analysed as what Freud referred to as the *phallus*, the realisation of power is what enables one to materialise one's desires.

¹² ...en el elemento reglado del lenguaje, la articulación de libertades y la posibilidad, para los individuos, de formar un todo pueden organizarse sin la intervención de una fuerza o de una autoridad, sin renuncia ni alienación. (Foucault, 2009, p. 111)

The hatchet also represents an item the natives cannot have and thus fear. As much as they endeavour to produce a similar object, they will never obtain one of such characteristics, for it is made of British steel.

The prospects that lie beyond the possession of such a weapon are vast. One of them is that this hatchet will enable its owner to kill another human being instantly if well mastered. Therefore, as a weapon, it is superior to any of the weapons the aborigines can make.

Ellen senses the power contained within this simple object. She feels lured to it. She knows she must possess it, despite being scared of the possibility that such an item could be turned against her. "But she would have liked to know where he got the hatchet." (White, 1976, p.279)

Ellen identifies this object as a symbol of power, so she is determined to find out about its origins and that inquisitive nature is what causes her to follow Jack Chance into freedom. She craves for the freedom the hatchet allows its owner; the power to leave the camp and abandon her imprisonment forever.

However, as time goes by, Ellen becomes acquainted with the fact that Jack had been convicted after the murder of his unfaithful lover, Mab. Ellen is afraid of the use Jack might give to his hatchet. "Now that they were again lovers he might suspect her of faithlessness, and kill her in the night with his little axe." (White, 1976, p.324)

The notion that the ambition for power and freedom may bring about distressful consequences is evident in Ellen's thought. The image of the suspecting axe epitomises the way colonial nations have struggled for independence and how these fights had countless deaths as a result. During the first times English settlers set foot in Botany Bay and later in Van Diemen's Land, aborigines were massacred in a period known as the Black Wars. Most of these violent incidents stemmed from the need to defend white settlements, or to avenge

previous attacks, which created an uninterrupted chain of attacks and counterattacks between settlers and natives.

For nearly 100 years, the frontier conflicts were ignored, forgotten or denied. During the 19th century, urban Australians knew and cared little about what was happening on the edges of civilization. (Marks, 2009)

This “Australian Silence”, widely criticised in the passage above, entails betrayal between settlers and natives and implies that unspoken agreements may suddenly be broken. The level of uncertainty that Ellen experiences while with Jack, is closely connected with the situation portrayed in Australian history as regards how silent vows cannot be kept for a long time. Ellen had promised Jack to be granted an official pardon if he got her back to civilisation, but he found it hard to believe. Jack took a chance to bolt from prison. But he missed the chance of being given a pardon through Ellen towards the end of the novel. As he might have felt more identified with the land than with the settlers, he sensed a pardon would prove unattainable and unlikely to happen in the settlement in Moreton Bay.

Jack Chance also symbolises the chance Ellen gets to love freely without moral restraint and without guilt. Ellen realises they have been through similar experiences and that their spirits have endured more than can be put into words. Therefore, their first contact is made through non verbal communication; as their own language, which they shared, had long stopped being useful for either. “The man stood mouthing sounds like an idiot, or one in whom time or shock had destroyed his connections with the past.” (White, 1976, p. 280)

Thus, language, no longer a tool for interpersonal communication, becomes simpler and simpler in order to satisfy basic needs. For Ellen and Jack had learnt to rely on body language, facial gesture and paralinguistic features (such as pitch, tone or junction) in order to make sense out of their surroundings.

Ellen felt drawn to Jack Chance because she had nothing to lose now. Taking another risk would not constitute any loss to her present state. She accepted her reality, coming at random from an unknown source which, she had learnt by now, she could not command.

She had reached a stage where she could not have felt frightened nor disappointed, only detached from everything that had ever happened or might still be in store for her. (White, 1976, p. 281)

Ellen was thus dragged into Jack's freedom. She had longed for all that he was offering her, but when the time came, she resisted. She was forced to relinquish slavery. It is of utter importance to mention how an English man is showing Ellen the path to freedom. Colonial reality is subverted and decentralised by Patrick White in this novel, where the aborigines are the oppressors and the English are slaves. Furthermore, Ellen feels oppressed as well while she is being freed from the blacks. However, Jack is he who will enable Ellen to experience freedom in sexuality and later in love. "He was steel to her more passive lead..." (White, 1976, p.288)

Instead of achieving a pure state of freedom, she feels oppressed in a different sense, as she is to abide by Jack's rules if she wants to survive and reach civilisation. She finds it hard to obey his commands as some of her assumptions are still struggling to become decentralised in her conception of the world. She needs to learn to cope with the fact that Jack is a convict and a murderer. So, once more, Ellen accommodates her language and conventions, this time according to her new companion.

The fringe's symbolic value is fluctuating as its meaning will prove preposterous later on. Once Ellen has had sexual intercourse with Jack Chance, the reason why the fringe should stay in place and protect her becomes obsolete. She no longer knows what social status she is preserving or to which extent respectability can be kept by means of a fringe of leaves. "She allowed him to free

her of the girdle of vines, her fringe of shed or withered leaves, which had been until now the only disguise for her nakedness.” (White, 1976, p. 299)

Not only does Jack liberate Ellen from her enslavement, but he also frees her from her previously imposed social conventions. Nakedness is not to be concealed as its negative connotation has been challenged by the natives’ social and moral assumptions. As there is no offence in being naked, the reason for keeping the fringe of leaves is as withered as the fringe itself. Jack shows Ellen that nakedness is not something to be ashamed of and she assimilates this by means of a shift in her conception of the world and new social conventions.

While she waited she picked a flower not unlike a jasmine, white but scentless. Smelling the flower made her feel trivial and superfluous. Drops of sweat fell upon the immaculate petals. (White, 1976, p. 302)

This visual image can be interpreted as a metaphor of Ellen’s physical union with Jack. In fact, she is symbolised by the flower that lacks a distinct smell, which renders her identity yet to be defined on this strange land. Ellen’s eagerness to smell the flower even though she is aware that it lacks fragrance represents her inquisitive nature and her indefatigable struggle to come to terms with her own self.

It was sad they should destroy such a sheet of lilies, but so it must be if they were to become re- united, and this after all was the purpose of the lake: that they might grasp or reject the other at last, bumping, laughing, falling and rising, swallowing mouthfuls of the muddy water. (White, 1976, p.317)

After Ellen had seen some native girls diving for lily roots, she had an idea of what she wanted to perform in order to pay homage to Jack; a harmonious dance and at the same time a fruitful dive under water.

She had an epiphany when she saw some girls playfully swimming in the lake, and that consisted of the fact that one day she would feel elated in the

company of someone she loved. A man to whom she could offer what she had learnt to relinquish from under muddy waters.

The flowers, lilies, resemble the one she had smelled pointlessly, knowing it lacked fragrance. In the symbolical figure to be analysed now, lilies are destroyed for the sake of her eagerness to offer Jack a meal.

Her attitude towards nature is changed. She regards nature as a means to survive, and not just a pleasurable object to behold and enjoy. She takes action in order to contribute to Jack's hard work of rescuing her. Ellen Gluyas comes out on the surface and the lady is left at the bottom forever.

In this instance, the beauty of the flowers conflicted with knowledge acquired during her enslavement by the blacks, but without giving further thought to it, she plunged in, and began diving, groping for the roots as she had seen the native women. (White, 1976, p.316)

However, the lake stands for a union of a spiritual kind. And that union is to prevail above the previously established physical one. Despite Ellen's disgust at his withered and rotten teeth, she still finds pity disguised as love within herself and she bestows gifts of gratitude on Jack. Her awareness of being disgusted by Jack's physical appearance is mainly what triggers off her eagerness to please him.

Jack Chance too, was climbing, but she hardly dared look back in the direction of the ground. She was afraid of falling. (Or was it the broken hands? The rotted teeth?) (White, 1976, p.318)

Despite the differences established between Ellen and Jack by their upbringing and social background, it should be noted that they felt more united with each other than they did with other people and that union is symbolised by the lake. They felt as one, and having acknowledged each other's miseries, they still felt they belonged to each other in that land where they were outcasts.

Ellen is made to readjust her language and way of communicating once more when she elopes with Jack. However, some parts of her re-accommodating system fail to work effectively in every situation and some instances of dissociative identity occur.

This condition originates in the religious conventions which still haunt Ellen's mindscape. She may be considered a holy character as she seeks to redeem her own sins, to atone for her trespasses; as long as atonement has as its purpose to compensate Jack for all his sufferings.

What she offered was in some measure, surely, a requital of all he had suffered, as well as remission of her own sins? Of deceit, and lust, and faithlessness. (White, 1976, p. 307)

Ellen accommodates Jack into her conception of the world as an unpleasant ordeal she has to go through in order to be forgiven for her sins. She is the one who is there to comfort Jack after all the pain and sorrow he had endured.

As a consequence, according to white western Christian conventions, they were both sinners. They both sought forgiveness after having repented. Their love is depicted with religious and sacramental overtones through heavily ornamented language, as if to epitomise the act of holiness it is representing.

Before she could evade the consequences of this too-precipitate encounter, she was seized by the hand, and whether she liked it or not, forced to depend on her abductor for any further step she might take in the savage dance. (White, 1976, p.287)

...but looked ahead and saw the convict laid open and bleeding from hacking a path for them. On catching up, she noticed that some of the thorns had remained embedded, and that the blood they had drawn still oozed to the extent that it hung tear- shaped from the wounds. (White, 1976, p.303)

Sacrifice is implied throughout the narrative. These passages are heavily loaded with visual images of the pain and suffering Jack endures for the sake of saving Ellen. These images entail an element of sorrow that is represented by the tear-shaped drops of blood on Jack's back. Thorns are a symbol of sacrifice, especially if interpreted in the light of Christian faith. Ellen regards Jack as her saviour, the one being who is to suffer in order to spare her and endow her with a new life.

For Australian artist Norman Lindsay, the portrayal of a woman taking the place of Christ shows the extent to which Australian women have been associated to pain and suffering for their loved one's sakes along history. (Fig. 7)

Such as Australia witnessed the sacrifice of its Indigenous peoples through the process of colonisation, Ellen is willing to sacrifice for the sake of her self-definition and also to give Jack the opportunity of being granted an official pardon. In addition to this act of sacrifice, Ellen's rescue, carried out by Jack in a way that most resembles imposition rather than voluntary elopement, symbolises the religion imposed on the natives by the colonial power. Ellen seems unwilling to be rescued at the beginning, but it can be inferred that her attitude stems from her fears and the fact that she does not know if she can trust Jack. "Always joined: it was ordained thus by the abductor become her rescuer." (White, 1976, p. 288)

This apparent paradox symbolises a religious imposition in the sense that while the white colonisers claimed that in the god they preached the natives would find freedom, in the natives' understanding, freedom could not be found in something which was being imposed on them. Ellen had to depend on and blindly believe in Jack. She was being asked to perform an unfathomable act of faith. And she did so. She totally relied on a perverted form of salvation in order to be rescued just like the indigenes were forced to trust the colonisers' *God Lord of Hosts*.

As she had been taught to be servile to her husband, she obediently follows Jack through their escape. However, this new union between them is not enacted

by a holy sacrament such as matrimony, neither are they endowed with the chastity found in the ones who receive such a sacrament.

However, this instance of servitude towards a man is not the first deed of sacrifice in Ellen's life. As it has already been mentioned, she spent her married life subserviently loving Mr. Roxburgh, denying herself and adapting to his conventions. Once he is dead, she finds her efforts futile, but still she guards her wedding ring as a token of her long lost dignified social standing.

Love takes a less dignified face by Jack's side. Aspects Ellen had never been ready to admit to her mind conformed now the essence of what might be regarded as love. A more basic kind of affection is professed by Ellen. She even has thoughts that might have made Mrs. Roxburgh blush. This, combined with the postponed need to come to terms with her sexuality paves the way for Ellen to become Jack Chance's lover.

Could she love him? She believed she could; she had never realized how much she had desired to love without reserve and for her love to be unconditionally accepted. But would this man of lean, disdainful buttocks, love her in return? (White, 1976, p. 302)

Her inner self, having been silenced for years, is coming to the surface of her thoughts, unleashing her innermost feelings. In the past, she would have felt embarrassed by such sentiments, but her experience has freed her from oppressive social and moral structures, leading her into a nature oriented existence.

When she is alone with Jack, during her escape from the natives, Ellen takes some time to adjust to the identity she is to adopt. Sometimes, she is Ellen Gluyas, so as to make Jack feel more comfortable by showing him they have similarly humble origins. However, she tends to behave and speak like Mrs. Roxburgh as an unconscious reflex behaviour at intervals. This may be due to the fact that she had not learnt any other way of addressing strangers. She sounds

patronising and preposterously refined, which may cause Jack to set a distance between them. “‘You must tell me how you trap the birds.’ Mrs. Roxburgh encouraged.” (White, 1976, p. 293)

However, Ellen Gluyas and her common touch prevail, showing how Ellen’s speech and therefore identity accommodate to the reality she is faced with. Just as colonised peoples have done throughout history.

Mrs. Roxburgh might have felt put out by the evidence of what she knew to be uncouthness, but Ellen Gluyas crawled gratefully enough into the luxurious privacy offered by this shelter. (White, 1976, p. 289)

Once freed from the blacks’ camp, she finds that time has lost its meaning to her; it has vanished and she finds it pleasant as she starts to regard herself in her natural state. She has become a nude wandering creature in a timeless paradise of her own. However, Ellen is aware that this period in which the passing of time does not trouble them will come to an end. So, as the image of Ellen and Jack in a paradise of their own evokes Adam and Eve’s first experiences in the Garden of Eden, the main difference between both cases is that Adam and Eve did not know their stay in Eden would be cut short by their own undoing. In Ellen’s case, most of her efforts come down to reaching “civilisation”, even though her eagerness to prolong the trip endlessly struggles inside of her,

Seduced by the mystery of timelessness she might have chosen to prolong the journey rather than face who would quiz them upon their unorthodox arrival. (White, 1976, p. 306)

As she spends time with Jack Chance in the bush, she suffers hardships with him in order to show gratitude to her saviour and this thankfulness accompanies Ellen throughout her stay with Captain Lovell. Ellen puts her respectability aside and jeopardises her reputation in order to appeal to Captain

Lovell for a pardon for Jack, who was not her husband and with whom she tacitly acknowledged to have had an intimate relationship. Ellen remains inflexible as regards her pledge to help Jack despite her inner voices, which assure her she is to be punished for her fall from grace.

Even though she feels a deep connection with the land, she is far from being as bound to it as a native would be. However, she is conscious of the fact that her senses have been awakened to new experiences in this strange place. And the means which connect her with the spirit of the land are Jack and the love that binds them.

As she covered him with her breasts and thighs, lapping him in a passion discovered only in a country of thorns, whips, murderers, thieves, shipwrecks, and adulteresses... (White, 1976, p. 311)

Her dreams also blend the spirit of the land with her own. That is to say, the dreams she has while at the natives' camp are influenced by the creative energy which inhabits Australia and which, according to the natives' oral tradition, constitutes the principle of their life: the *Dreamtime* or time of creation. The Dreamtime, also called *Altjeringa*, is that sacred time in which ancestral Totemic Spirit Beings created the world. So, the Dreaming world was the old time of the Ancestor Beings. They emerged from the earth at the time of the creation. Time began in the world the moment these supernatural beings were "born out of their own Eternity"¹³.

The supernatural Beings, or Totemic Ancestors, resembled creatures or plants, and were half human. They made the natural elements: Water, Air, Fire. They made all the celestial bodies: the Sun, the Moon and the Stars. Then, wearied from all their activity, the mythical creatures sank back into the earth and returned to their state of sleep.¹⁴

¹³ <http://aboriginalart.com.au/culture/dreamtime2.html>

¹⁴ <http://aboriginalart.com.au/culture/dreamtime2.html>

Therefore, to Indigenous people the land has a spiritual value. According to aboriginal tradition, dreams are endowed with a creative power which Ellen succeeds in assimilating at the same time as she binds her spirit with that of the land.

The Biblical myth of Creation, Genesis, has many points in common with the Dreamtime myth. For instance, Eve was created from one of Adam's ribs, which was taken by God while Adam was asleep. So, according to the Old Testament, a period of dreaming entails creation as well.

And the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam and he slept: and he took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh instead thereof...¹⁵

In the novel, Ellen dreams of the realisation of love, such as she had never experienced but of the kind she has longed to feel. It can be ascertained that Jack and Ellen were first created in her dreams before they became a real unity.

According to Freud, dreams represent repressed fears or desires which have not been satisfied during daytime. So, during the period referred to as dream elaboration, the innermost desires are transfigured into symbols and images closely associated to them, which is then considered as the manifest content of dreams and are the images we remember when we wake up. Thus, dreaming is a way of coming close to the fulfilling of ardent ambitions.

The Dreamtime is closely associated with the nurturing land, the land which endows creatures with life. A motherly figure. This figure reflects Ellen's ambition to become a mother and the fact that she almost achieved it in Australia, where, if connected with the spirit of the land, one can reach the ambitions portrayed in one's dreams.

A constant element of mistrust is present between Ellen and Jack as they come from different social backgrounds. Jack suspects she might part from him as

¹⁵ <http://etext.virginia.edu/etcbin/toccer-new2?id=KjvGene>, *King James Bible*: Gen, 2, 21.

soon as she feels dependable enough to find her own way back to civilisation. Ellen is aware of this and her awareness breeds guilt. “‘Why- if you love me’, she breathed, ‘will you not believe in my gratitude- and love?’” (White, 1976, p.319)

Feeling constantly a misfit, even when she thought she might feel at ease with Jack, Ellen became Mrs. Roxburgh again at the sight of the farm house at the distance. This time, she remained in that role, only making the difference in social background between them more evident and thus too painful for Jack to endure. He was clearly far from elated to have reached civilisation lest he should be imprisoned for a second time.

‘I believe I look forward more than anything to my first mouthful of tea- from a porcelain cup.’ Then, to jolly her servant, she asked, ‘Do you enjoy your tay, Jack?’ He could only bring himself to mump, ‘It’s too long since I tasted what you’d call tea. At the settlement, ’twas no more’n green stuff- sticks- if the crow minder ever smuggled us a pinch.’ (White, 1976, p.322)

Ellen cannot disregard the cultural boundaries set between the convict and herself. Furthermore, she cannot help emulating a lady again once she is back among English settlers. The social and moral conventions that had been overthrown in the bush would soon be restored around her once again, not due to Ellen’s willingness but due to the pressure the whole English gentrified society would exercise upon her. Ellen fears what opinions the bond she had tied with the convict would foster. “Even if the pardoned convict respected the laws of decency, would society think to see her reflected in his eyes, or worse still, the convict in hers?” (White, 1976, p.329)

The Return Stage

Various instances of hallucinations take place in the Oakes’ station once she is back in civilisation. “Poor Pa! I’d know your breathin’ everywhere. You

always was more silence than words. You never knowed me like I knowed my father.” (White, 1976, p.346)

This hallucination, by means of which she believes Mr. Oakes, on one occasion when he takes turns with his wife to take care of Ellen during the night, is her father, retrieves her Cornish girl world and the language, pronunciation and intonation change accordingly.

On another occasion, she speaks to Mr. Oakes as though he were one of her acquaintances while in the company of the late Mr. Roxburgh, “Oh, Mrs. Daintry, do you fancy chocolate? Or will it make us liverish?” (White, 1976, p.346)

Ellen keeps being transported from one moment of her life to another, acquiring new interlocutors and changing the variety of English to be used in each surrounding. She decides to break with her past, refusing to continue being Mrs. Roxburgh, whose name was granted by her husband and deleted her identity as well as her Cornish name and cultural heritage. Mab is the name of Jack’s former partner and the victim of his jealousy crime. She had too been unfaithful, and identifying with Mab, Ellen takes over her personality to erase Jack’s guilt from the world. If Mab is alive, he is no longer a criminal, therefore he can be acquitted. “Poor Jack! My dearest husband!” (White, 1976, p.339)

However, all these sudden changes of personality are unconscious and so ephemeral that they are regarded as hallucinations born of a fever and unheeded by those surrounding Ellen.

It should be borne in mind that Ellen’s language changes not only as she is transported but also as time progresses. Time is a key factor in the shifts her language experiments. Furthermore, the land is portrayed as an ally as time progresses, making Ellen feel welcome and encouraging her to wonder if she is really an alien in Australia. Communion with the land and its inhabitants, which

after a long struggle finally takes place, demonstrates that Ellen attained cultural maturity and self- definition.

When Ellen is rescued, the universe surrounding her changes once more and further adjustment needs to be done, causing great strain on her psyche, showing that her resilience has a limit. Furthermore, she doubts of the moral condition of every object that surrounds her, as a consequence of her never having the opportunity to judge by herself and of adopting other people's views,

Over all, the sun, which she no longer knew whether she should love as the source of life, or hate as the cause and witness of so much suffering and ugliness. (White, 1976, p. 348)

However, her being welcomed by the Lovells meant keeping the promise she had made to Jack. They now shared an indelible bond as he had saved her life, and she had pledged to obtain a pardon for him. The image Ellen creates of herself in front of the gentry is one in which all her past actions converge. This image is not to abandon her as she believes she can see through people thanks to the eye opening experiences she has been through. She is firmly convinced that people are aware of her sins and vices.

Now that she is among Christians again, the time has come for Ellen to atone for all her proceedings which may prove immoral in this new surrounding.

Her most drastic personality crisis takes place when she is in Mr. Oakes' station, before moving to Captain Lovell's house, and this originates in the degree of responsibility laid on her shoulders by the promise she had made to Jack. She is determined to help him carry the weight of guilt and also to demonstrate that she is committed to him. "I'm not Mrs. Roxburgh, whatever you may think. I am Mab, but can't tell you her other name." (White, 1976, p.337)

Once she is back among gentrified settlers, Ellen will wear the clothes they had generously donated. These garments will represent charity, which is accepted with guilt from Ellen, as she feels she does not deserve such honour, and apart from that, with a kind of reflective puzzlement due to the fact that she had already lost touch with the purpose of wearing such clothes.

These outfits represent Ellen's forgotten social masks, which she is to don again, after countless days living obliviously as regards them.

When she had put on the fresh petticoats she also found, and over them the pretty dress, and finished by tying its sash in cobalt silk, she saw that from being so long without hem, she had overlooked the stays. (White, 1976, p. 359)

In Joan Lindsay's novel *Picnic at Hanging Rock* (1967), a group of students go on a school trip to Hanging Rock for a picnic on St Valentine's Day, 1900. Three of the girls and one teacher disappear on the Rock and nothing is known about them until one of them, Irma Leopold, is found unconscious on one of the boulders, unharmed, fully clothed except for her feet and alive.

When Irma is rescued, she is taken to the Fitzhuberts' manor for her recovery. There, a maid in charge of attending to Irma, Mrs. Cutler, makes an unexpected finding.

Greatly for Mrs. Cutler's surprise, the lamb had been brought in just as she had been lying on the Rock, without a corset. A modest woman, for whom the word corset was never uttered by a lady in the presence of a gent, she had made no comment to the doctor, who had simply assumed that the girl had very sensibly gone to a school picnic minus that tomfool garment responsible in his opinion for a thousand female complaints. Thus the valuable clue of the missing corset was never followed up nor communicated to the police. Nor to the inmates of Appleyard College where Irma Leopold [...] had been seen by several of her classmates, on the morning of Saturday the fourteenth of February, wearing a pair of long, lightly boned, French satin stays. (Lindsay, 1967, p. 91)

The maid's silence as regards the absence of the undergarment gives way to a misinterpretation of what might have happened to Irma or to any of the other missing ladies on the Rock. Even though not much light would have been cast on the mystery of Hanging Rock, a different interpretation of the facts should have arisen from the acknowledgement that Irma had lost her stays on the Rock. The overlooking of such a vital piece of information in connection to underwear portrays how irrelevant they are considered by the Australians in both narratives. In the Australian bush, conventions are overlooked and disposed of as they do not serve any practical purpose. Assumptions imported from the centre of the Empire are ignored, as an instance of cultural abrogation.

However, Ellen finds her garments could act as a protection from indiscrete looks and questions from curious settlers. Clothes constitute a code which hides what is too odd to discuss with other people. "Mrs. Roxburgh was more than ever glad of the veil falling from the brim of her bonnet. It dimmed lights and concealed thoughts." (White, 1976, p.356)

It will be noted how clothes function as a means of concealing, according to Ellen's thoughts, her own sins (those abominable acts she committed while with the blacks) from the sight of the settlers. However, she believes they were able to see through her and spot behind her appearance her many trespasses and offences against their precepts and commands. Therefore, conditioned by what she knows the gentrified people thought of natives and convicts, Ellen's approach to reality appropriates the text by using derogative terms associated to social humiliation, such as *stripped*, *miscreant*, to signify she might be regarded as an immoral creature as therefore a lower class citizen.

Mrs. Roxburgh realized that she was standing stripped before Mrs. Lovell, as she must remain in the eyes of all those who would review her, worse than stripped, sharing a bark- and- leaf humpy with a 'miscreant'. (White, 1976, p.357)

I ask for nothing for myself. Only a pardon for my poor husband. I am the one who has committed the crime. I think he could not believe in me. For that reason, he ran back. (White, 1976, p. 343)

Ellen explains Jack's sudden decision not to go back to civilisation by taking over Mab's personality. As we have said, Ellen feels identified with Mab because she has also been unfaithful to her husband. Jack dreads returning among English settlers lest he should be executed for having bolted. This fear blends with Ellen's fear and gives way to an immense sense of guilt within her. This guilt, together with the burden of unfaithfulness make Ellen commiserate with Jack and fear she might be punished as well.

It is to be expected that Ellen's language should twist and change when exposed to the above mentioned factors. Language reflects and "bears the burden" of the history of a nation. In Alan Lawson's essay *The Discovery of Nationality in Australian and Canadian Literatures*, this burden is explained:

When the cultural identity in question is that of a people transported to a new and strange place, the physical environment assumes unexpected importance and the language undergoes great strain. (Ashcroft et al., 1995, p. 169)

Mab and Mrs. Roxburgh's voices are blended. Mab asks for a pardon for Jack, who committed the crime on account of her. If she had not been unfaithful, he would not have been a murderer. Consequently, Jack was unable to trust her. Here is where the two personalities blend, in mistrust. Jack, having been deceived by a woman before, was prevented by his own experience from believing Ellen when she promised to help him obtain a pardon.

As regards Ellen, she did what Christianity considers a mortal sin and that is to eat human flesh. Furthermore, she often compares this abomination to having been unfaithful to her husband. When in Van Diemen's Land she gets lost in the bush, among trees, shrubs and flowers, all damp and entangled, she begins to visualise the end of her quest for her true self.

The delicious cool, the only half- repellent smell of rotting vegetation, perhaps some deeper prepossession of her own, all were combining to drug her, at first with mild insidiousness, then with overwhelming insistence. (White, 1976, p. 92)

This image constitutes a flash forward of her restrained desire to consummate a long extinguished passion and her subsequent fall from grace. Ellen feels transported to an oneiric stage by the land. In fact, these images converge in her repressed desires that were awoken by her brother in law's gallant compliments.

One factor which may have contributed to her committing adultery is that she might have felt identified with her brother in law, Garnet, as they were both unable to find their own place in society. She bore his child until miscarriage at sea. This death was the first of a series of misfortunes which Ellen considers to be the punishment for her fall from grace. She feels guilty for Austin Roxburgh's death and for Jack's imminent death in the bush. By being unfaithful, she has brought death to her loved ones, and thus she feels the need to atone.

You won't persecute me? And string me up to the triangles? No one will believe, but a person is not always guilty of the crimes they've committed. (White, 1976, p. 337)

Ellen here deconstructs the meaning of the word *guilty* as she deprives it from the responsibility of committing a certain immoral act, for two reasons:

- a) After her stay with the blacks and how it challenged her moral and religious assumptions, she no longer holds the same good/evil concepts her Christian upbringing had taught her.
- b) She openly considers, after hearing about Jack's crime and the unfortunate circumstances under which it took place, that the victim can play a major role in the murderer's will at the time of

committing a crime. That is to say, that Mab's unfaithfulness to Jack compelled him to murder her.

Even though a person's acts are always considered to be morally good or evil, it can be ascertained that some circumstances may bias people to act accordingly. As regards Jack, the situation he lived with Mab may have caused him to react violently, but his having murdered her out of jealousy is far from being justified.

Consequences of Ellen's time with the natives and with Jack are noticed in the way she now addresses people, with no restraints and taking little heed of conventions. As she speaks to Lieutenant Cunningham once in Mr. Oakes' station, she points out that she is aware of the brutal treatment convicts receive while in prison, and seeks to challenge the assumption that it is well- deserved justice.

Lieutenant Cunningham suggests she should avoid discussing what does not concern her. In her reply, an ironic and defying attitude is noticed; an attitude that would have never been associated with Mrs. Roxburgh's former submissiveness.

It does concern me- why the good and the bad are in the same boat- and the difference between killing and murder. Until we know, we shan't have justice- only God's mutton for Sunday dinner- those of us who are lucky enough. (White, 1976, p. 342)

She proposes that justice is not exercised in full in the penal institutions in Australia, and that those who are killed in these prisons just serve the purpose of scapegoat, mainly because no person will bring to account one responsible for such deaths. And the detachment with which she treats the subject implies she does not agree with the English settlers and how far she has come to distancing

herself from British settlers and authorities, even if she shares their cultural background and language.

[...] the notion of difference, of an indecipherable juncture between cultural realities, is often just as diligently constructed in the text as that of identity. (Ashcroft et al., 1989, p. 57)

This distance she establishes between the English settlers and herself, regarding opinions and procedures, can be interpreted as an instance of abrogation. That is to say, a breach between what is imposed or prescribed by the centre of the Empire and how the marginalised subjects will use and interpret it to signify their own experiences, imprinting their identity by means of the metropolitan discourse. Furthermore, the narrative itself is influenced by Ellen's prejudiced ideas against Captain Lovell's army rank. So, her arrival at his homestead is portrayed as if she were being arrested for her crimes. This represents the extent to which she is committed to obtain a pardon for Jack. She regards herself as a criminal because Jack had confided in her, and therefore she could be considered his accomplice.

Captain Lovell's hand guided his guest out of the carriage and compelled her up the veranda steps. [...] 'Come!' he commanded the prisoner. 'Everybody has been waiting to see you.' (White, 1976, p.356)

This is an example of how Ellen's perceptions take over Patrick White's narrative and thus his language is subverted in order to accommodate the character's perspective. "Instead she stood awhile enjoying the moist, palpitating air before returning voluntarily to the prison to which she had been sentenced, a lifer from birth." (White, 1976, p. 359)

It is worth mentioning at this point that Ellen had never been so much aware of prison life as she was while in Australia. Therefore, after having established a

bond of affection with a convict, and being now living in the house of a Captain, it is to be expected that Ellen might herself empathise with prisoners and feel as if in prison herself. This imprisonment she is experiencing represents her failure at finding her own place both in society and in the world. In the quote above, "returning" would mean parting with nature, with that which had awakened her to the sensual experience. But it is important to note that "returning" does not mean going back to her childhood, but to that community which she had been imprisoned by.

However, in Moreton Bay, nature no longer provides her with the protection and support she had found back in the bush. Nature is no longer friendly and does not know her anymore. "A palm leaf cut her hand as the result of her looking to it for support."(White, 1976, p.359)

It is difficult not to read in these lines the extended metonymy of what the Australian landscape meant for Ellen.

However, a certain rebellious attitude is sensed in Ellen when exposed to Christian religion once more, when she is strongly advised by Captain Lovell to see the chaplain, Mr. Cottle. She does as she is told despite the fact that the concepts of religious beliefs and the existence of God had long started to blur her understanding. Society has distanced her from nature. "As for Mrs. Roxburgh, she accepted once more the fate of chains that human beings are imposing on her." (White, 1976, p.383)

We hear in this comment that the conversation between Ellen and the chaplain is part of a set of social and moral obligations that human beings have created in order to keep harmony within a certain community. But Ellen, having lost religious interest after her experiences in the bush, finds them obsolete. These conventions are unique to each community, having as a result an arbitrariness of concepts which should be disregarded if one is to understand another culture. This does not mean that the narrator rejects faith, but that the way it is

institutionalised and imposed on the characters for purely social convenience, in this case on Ellen, does not contribute to her present state and escapes the hybridised concept of religious beliefs she has formed after her various experiences.

Ellen, coming from another community, finds it preposterous to take the Christian religious rites up again. Furthermore, Christianity itself begins to lose meaning and power within her mind and her heart, as Christianity is said to be about love, and she can only associate white Christians to violent penal measures.

As in the episode below,

If she could have stayed her tears, but over those she had no control, as she sat re-living the betrayal of her earthly loves, while the Roxburghs' LORD GOD OF HOSTS continued charging in apparent triumph, trampling the words she was contemplating. (White, 1976, p. 390)

the words she was contemplating were GOD IS LOVE, painted in irregular letters in the chapel built by Mr. Pilcher, who sought redemption through worship. In other words, having survived the shipwreck, he considered himself most fortunate to have been spared when he had not always been the best of Christians. However, it is difficult for Ellen to do without the concept of a warrior like God, who punishes the sinner with the same cruelty with which convicts are punished in this penal colony. These ideas are associated in her mind and they are what prevents her conversation with the chaplain from being a harmonious interchange of ideas, and makes it end in a seizure of neurotic pleas for forgiveness on behalf of the prisoners, in particular, on Jack's behalf. A faint, slight shift to Cornish vernacular is noticed. It is due to the fact that while with Jack there was no need for Ellen to pretend or emulate an accent that would match the social and cultural circle that surrounded her. So, her true self is allowed to flow and speak her mind. However, the variety Ellen resorts to during this final stage of her

realisation is an example of how her speech is now hybridised in a new variety that will reflect her identity in an effective and fulfilling way.

‘What- yes, it is! Don’t let them, for God’s sake! They’ll flay the skin off’s back. They’ll beat the soul out of ’n- and that’s worse, a thousands times, than killing a man!’(White, 1976, p.387)

When she is back among English settlers, Ellen’s constant fear of being “found out” symbolises the suffering the colonised underwent. She had been in contact with every section of society in Australia and from such communion she has learnt to empathise with other people’s experiences; she has made them her own.

“Mrs. Roxburgh’s distress was not relieved.
‘Shall I have to listen to the prisoners’ screams as they receive the lash?’”
(White, 1976, p. 342)

She endured every phase of the process of construction of her own identity through being colonised by Australia and the consequences are drastic and long lasting. One of them is what is known in psychiatric terms as dissociative identity disorder or multiple personality disorder, which is manifested through spontaneous utterances which adopt traits of Ellen, Mrs. Roxburgh or Mab’s personality. Her vision of reality has been fragmented as a result of the colonising process she underwent. Being unable to accommodate one’s personality to reality is a problematic that most post- colonial texts pose. Her language variance is a metonym of the hybridised nature of a Post- Colonial society, regarding social assumptions and traditions. And the narrative accompanies this process by showing traits of dissociative identity disorder as well.

They hoisted Mab to higher than she had been accustomed. She lay squirming amongst the wool and feathers.
‘Do tha want to suffocate me?’ she cried. (White, 1976, p.337)

This episode takes place in the Oakes' station, while she is being tucked into bed. The narrative is appropriated by Ellen in such a way that she has finally managed to become the central character. The language, her identification are symptomatic of the process that is taking place. She is no longer the *other*, and her vision comes now from the centre of the narrative.

Furthermore, throughout the novel, we have witnessed changes of emphasis as regards the centre of the narrative and consequently whose assumptions are being respected. At times, the conventions which were made central were the natives'; pushing Ellen aside, marginalising her.

"The men on the other hand paid little attention to what they must have decided on the beach was no more than a woman of an unprepossessing colour." (White, 1976, p. 245)

Here, the aborigines on their first encounter with Ellen decide that she is not like them, and in that difference a reason dwells not to include her in their thoughts. The natives are sure that their own colour is the "right", the "normal" one, aesthetically speaking. Thus Ellen becomes the *colonial other*; the being who stays on the margins of what is conventional and acceptable. So, the narrative is decentralised.

In this same way, Ellen's conception of those of her own cultural background are displaced from the centre of her identity and are thus marginalised, in such a way that she no longer feels identified with them. "They've murdered Mr. Roxburgh, but will the whites – kill Jack?" (White, 1976, p.339)

In her use of the word *whites* to refer to people of her kind, and race, she is distancing herself from them, so as to signify that she no longer belongs to that social group and that she has become a separate individual, different from them. Furthermore, she internalises the process of colonisation in such a way that she even uses the coloniser's codes to refer to the imperial outsider. She calls them by using the colour of their skin as a significant characteristic, just like they had

themselves done with the natives. Thus, the whites are now marginalised in the narrative, they become the *other*.

Decentralising the narrative is one of the techniques used in post- colonial texts in order to convey diversity in a monolingual narrative, and Ellen's dissociated behaviour serves this purpose.

...monoglossic texts can employ vernacular as a linguistic variant to signify the insertion of the outsider into the discourse. In the same way, the vernacular appropriates the language for the task of constituting new experience and new place. (Ashcroft et al., 1989, p. 57)

The polyphonic nature of White's narrative signifies the complexity of a language within a nation seeking self definition, and this process is closely connected with the various voices Ellen adopts throughout the novel. It used to be unthinkable to write a canonical text in English using a substandard variety of that language. However, in this novel several varieties are found, all of them coming from the same character. Ellen symbolises Australia after colonisation and a western witness to the hardships of being a colonial subject. A whole new concept of colonisation emerges and is interpreted by western standards. The narrative functions as a counter discourse to what had been recorded in history about colonisation.

The Post- Colonial writer, whose gaze is turned in two directions, stands already in that position which will come to be occupied by an interpretation, for he/ she is not the object of an interpretation, but the first interpreter. (Ashcroft et al., 1989 p.61)

In the last chapter of *A Fringe of Leaves*, Ellen is ready to leave Australia and is already moving towards the future of which she knows nothing yet. Still, it is suggested in the narrative that Ellen perceives life as a wide range of possibilities to help herself from and to learn about. Ellen no longer feels a prisoner within a

social class but a citizen of the world, a person free enough to define her identity by means of the decisions she makes. This new vision of her situation is paralleled to the new role of Australia in international affairs in the post-war period. The Eden on Earth; a place for salvation within a new world.

In Brahms' essay: *Entering our own Ignorance, Subject- Object Relations in Commonwealth Literature* this renewal is well accounted for,

[...]in countries like Canada, Australia and New Zealand, we also find a strong sense of 'beginnings', as a sense that life as a nation has only just begun and that the future is still being made. (Ashcroft et al., 1995 p.66)

Ellen cannot but feel renewed by the experiences she has lived. Now the turning point of a colonial nation that is becoming post-colonial is symbolised by Ellen's life and that is inevitably the moment of self-definition.

Ellen becomes a new Ellen when she realises she is ready to leave Australia neither an English settler nor a native Australian but as a hybridised human being.

These characteristics appear in the final interaction of the narrative between Mr. Jevons, a prominent merchant, also a passenger on the *Princess Charlotte*, which is carrying Ellen back to England. Indeed, after he accidentally spills some tea on her dress, she is quick to reply to his apology,

"Tisn't mine and 'tisn't spoiled," she insisted.
She may have touched his hand an instant, for the trembling was stilled, more by surprise than by command.
'It is nothing, I do assure you, Mr. Jevons,' she repeated in what passed for her normal voice. (White, 1976, p. 404)

Ellen uses here two varieties of English to soothe Mr. Jevons's uneasiness. And, even though her first utterance startles the gentleman, it doubtlessly succeeds in calming him down. Mr. Jevons accepts both varieties and regards them as substantial components of Ellen's identity.

This dialogue between Ellen and Mr. Jevons also represents an understanding of each other beyond what those people around them can imagine. Social conventions are disregarded, as portrayed in their lack of interest in the tea stain on Ellen's dress. This unheeded stain is a flash forward of Ellen's attitude in the future. New codes are to be created and the old models are to be disregarded in order to follow a new life. She has found her real self. She did not have the need to pretend or simulate in front of Mr. Jevons. Ellen indulges in the comforting knowledge that she can combine her identities and be loved and accepted wherever she is as she has been accepted by Mr. Jevons.

Furthermore, Ellen's assumptions are changed and that attitude is her salvation. "What seemed the loss of tradition was its renewal. What seemed the death of faith, was its rebirth..." (White, 1976, p. 373)

Argentine Reception

Argentine readers of *A Fringe of Leaves* may have felt genuinely identified with the problematic that poses Ellen's quest for self and the changes she faces along the way. Argentina, as a former Spanish colony acquired its independence and right to self definition through struggle, both political and psychological.

Argentina chose to identify strongly with European cultures throughout her history. Claimed for the Spanish crown, the territory that now is Argentina and her inhabitants speak Spanish as a given language, confess to Catholicism as her faith and originally took the form of a viceroyalty as a political regime, disregarding the natives' customs and bio geographical characteristics.

Immigration played a fundamental role in Argentinean history, as wave after wave of European immigrants arrived and settled in different areas of the country,

giving those areas their particular flavour, as from 1880 onwards until after the First and Second World Wars.

The diversity originated in these emigrational movements paved the way to the phenomenon commonly called “melting pot” all over America, which seeks to symbolise cultural hybridity in one image. The search for homogeneity of population through education, transport and communication created the illusion of a unique Argentine identity and endowed the territory with a sense of nationhood and distinctive traits, most of which were however inherited from European or native ancestors. This situation is possibly at the origin of much of the theoretical questioning and the popular unrest that we are experiencing till today in our country.

As well as immigration, there are other historical facts which have gone to the defining of Argentine sense of nationhood.

The one that affected many people of my generation most drastically was the military dictatorship which governed intermittently our country between 1976 and 1983.

Meant to repress activist subversive groups at various points in the country, this government put into practice a number of abusive control measures which had as a consequence 30,000 “disappeared” or missing who were inhumanely imprisoned, tortured and eventually killed in detention centres. Pregnant women among them were killed after they had given birth and much uncertainty was generated as to the fate of these babies.¹⁶ The places of indeterminacy people of my generation had to fill in are vast. It is not unusual to meet people who have doubts about their origins and have questioned the fact that they were adopted

¹⁶ The Abuelas of Plaza de Mayo are a group of Argentinean women who have searched for over 200 missing children since its founding in 1977. These women know some of their own children and grandchildren were born in clandestine detention centers while their mothers were prisoners or “disappeared” with their parents by members of the security forces.

during the dictatorship. The inalienable right to know about one's roots and to investigate one's origin is what will later enable one to define one's identity.¹⁷

To assist the Abuelas, a group of thirteen conceptual artists from Argentina (Carlos Alonso, Nora Aslan, Mireya Baglieto, Remo Bianchedi, Diana Dowek, León Ferrari, Rosana Fuertes, Carlos Gorriarena, Adolfo Nigro, Luis Felipe Noé, Daniel Ontiveros, Juan Carlos Romero and Marcia Schvartz) have set up an installation called "Identidad" in which pictures of "disappeared" youths are displayed, one next to the other, with a mirror in between, so that those young people who have doubts about their origins can see their faces along with the faces of those who could have been their parents. (Fig. 7).

Upon seeing Identidad when it opened in the Centro Cultural Recoleta in Buenos Aires, three people discovered "who they were" before they had been adopted by military families (Reuter, 2006)

As Patrick White has taken the problematic of the quest for true identity to a novel, so has this group of artists with the concern of our generation's quest for their origins.

Australia has also witnessed some instances of native children being separated from their parents by English settlers in order to be turned into useful and loyal subject to the English crown. Those children also belong in a generation whose uncertain origins raised the issue of the quest for identity in Australia and keeps it alive.

¹⁷ "El derecho a la identidad es un derecho inalienable. Cada ser humano nace con ese sello individual y único, que es ser hijo de un papá y una mamá, con herencias ancestrales diversas que a veces no nos explicamos, pero que surgen en una música, en una acción vocacional." (Estela Barnes de Carlotto, <http://coleccion.educ.ar/coleccion/CD10/contenidos/biblioteca/vid9/popw.html>)

Conclusion

The present work has sought to analyse Patrick White's *A Fringe of Leaves* from a post- colonial perspective, by focusing on Ellen's speech, its manifold modulations and the factors that caused them.

Ellen's life has been studied as an allegory of the process of colonisation, dismantling unrealistic moral rules. Furthermore, it has been explored how Ellen is the colonial child, one who has been enslaved, imprisoned, forced to use the oppressors' code and managed to twist it in order to express her identity. To possess the language is to attain power. To speak the language effectively is the first step to gain self- definition. But whose language is it worth using?

Ellen's answer to this question is: Everyone's.

At first, Ellen anxiously lives with all of her personalities, but it takes her time and pain to attain a balance among them. She is finally able to understand she is all of them simultaneously and she reaches a sense of fulfilment when all her personalities have spoken and have defined themselves. The integration of all of them has as its result a new unique identity which sets Ellen free.

At the time the novel was written, Australia had long stopped being the place Ellen Roxburgh knew. However, the struggle for self definition was not yet over. After the hardships that went into the shaping of Australia, it became an Eden on Earth towards the mid twentieth century, a refuge to those Europeans escaping the horrors of the Second World War. Australia was no longer an inhospitable and remote wild land, but a singular nation where peace and prosperity were possible.

According to Sneja Gunew in her essay *Denaturalizing Cultural Nationalisms: Multicultural Reading of "Australia"*, Australia is a metaphor of atonement for past sins, namely the ones prisoners were doing time for in that

country. As time went by, those penal institutions were closed down but their significance lingered on as if there was something sinful worth being reminded of. That prejudiced thought is to be modified by a crossing of the boundaries. Australians had found another way of atoning for sins; instead of imprisoning its trespassers, it welcomes them with the promise of a new life. No event in history should be omitted, for if that happened, consequences would follow in a different course of events. Consequently, penal colonies in Australia were a necessary step to be taken in order to achieve this new concept of a self defined country. In Sneja Gunew words:

The penal colony (textually speaking) was on its figurative journey towards redemption and reincarnation into the promised land, the lucky country." (Bhabha, 1990, p. 111)

Ellen undergoes several identity crises throughout the novel, as she represents the colonial self, whose origins are uncertain or difficult to identify. Australia, being a settlers' colony, faces the following challenges: Where do I belong? What is my place in this newly transplanted, displaced society?

As Allan Lawson states it in his essay *The Discovery of Nationality in Australian and Canadian Literatures*, the sense of continuity that is felt interrupted in settlers colonies where the landscape and climate are different from England's, only encourages the colonial subject to wonder "*Who am I when I am transported*". (Ashcroft et al., 1995, p168) Being English descendants but having been raised in a land away from England, preserving English language and customs creates inner conflicts. And Ellen is the evidence of how deeply these conflicts affect post-colonial peoples.

She wished she was still the girl who understood the moods of nature through close association with them, or the lady she had studied to become, acquiring along with manners and a cultivated mind a faith in rational man. (White, 1976, p.321)

She had already changed her lifestyle once, after marrying Mr. Roxburgh and taking to drawing rooms and dinner parties. Before that, she had lived on her farm, in contact with nature. Neither of those two personalities she had known well was of any use in Australia. All the social and moral conventions she had painstakingly learnt did not serve any purpose. There was not a place in society where she would not feel an alien. A Cornish farm girl would feel as much a misfit as an upper class English lady as among the blacks or the English settlers in Australia. This distress caused by her pointlessness leads to her using her social skills in inappropriate situations as in the following instances.

Constant preoccupation with the inevitable made her twitter. 'Do I look a fright, Jack? My awful hair!' It worried her more than her nakedness; for hair is a curtain one may hide behind in an emergency. (White, 1976, p.330)

Mrs. Roxburgh could not have explained the reason for her being there, or whether she had served any purpose, ever. (White, 1976, p. 333)

As she dragged her skirt over the stones and tufts of uncharitable grass, it saddened her to think she might never become acceptable to either of the two incompatible worlds even as *they might never accept to merge*. [my emphasis] (White, 1976, p.371)

She is fully conscious of the fact she will never belong as she identifies with all of them at the same time, and with none. And as she adopts yet another identity, it is evident that her eagerness to break with her previous personality proves obsolete, since essential parts of her original self invade her later acquired alter- egos and will not let her dispose of what she has experienced. Ellen is a combination of all those stages she went through, and all of them add up a new trait in her character, imprinting it with such bitterness and energy as time will not erode. So, these two worlds *might accept to merge*.

Patrick White communicates through his narrative that being Australian is not a matter of having been born there or having lived there. It is rather about

beliefs and how those beliefs affect behaviour. Patrick White died in Australia, but lived most of his life away from it.

And such combination generally results in hybridity, which is a characteristic of every post- colonial culture. Ellen is one and all, she has been oppressor and oppressed, and that process is what has enabled her to construct her self. As Walcott suggests in the essay, *The Muse of History*, the post- colonial child is an example of syncretism between the colonised and the coloniser, and a component of both is perennial in its soul.

Who, in the depth of conscience, is not silently screaming for pardon or for revenge?
(Ashcroft et al., 1995, p.371)

Ellen embodies both elements of the colonial struggle. She is the symbol of the hybridised subject which combines coloniser and victim in the same corporal reality.

She is all and one at the same time, and her existence cannot be measured by pre existent colonising parameters. As it was translated by Ellen's speech and its shifts, she undergoes a process of growing at the end of which she works on the Imaginary and Symbolic orders and is able to successfully interact with her surrounding and accommodate her vision of the world accordingly. As those interactions are enacted by means of language, she is finally able to talk back and therefore, she becomes the owner of her language.

Why does Ellen need to struggle to become the mistress of her own language? Because later, after the events that are told in the narrative, she will make use of that voice, in an existence where she will be accepted as a hybridised human being. In the meantime, the narrative evinces Ellen's struggle to verbalise her appropriation of her experiences in Australia.

But what do we make of the function of Patrick White's narrative?

In the fashion of saints, who wrote diaries telling how they attained sainthood through hardship and suffering, so has the narrator in *A Fringe of Leaves* told us Ellen's story, with the exception that she does not come to sainthood in the end but to the mastery of her own language.

And why should Ellen's life be levelled to that of saints? Not because her life has set a model, but because there is an inversion of values in post- coloniality and the life of a woman who committed sins according to the Christian faith is regarded in this novel as worthy of being recorded and read. Ellen transcends her origins to experiment a wider existence and a true one.

As diary writing had been imposed on Ellen by her mother- in - law, in order to improve on her way of expressing herself, this novel serves Patrick White's purpose of giving voice to the voiceless. More specifically, he gives voice to Ellen, as he tells her story from her point of view, as Ellen is an internal focaliser in the narrative and events are referred to as they unfold before Ellen's perceptions. Patrick White's choice of an internal focaliser that sees the action through Ellen's eyes has as its purpose to portray White's hybridised vision. An acknowledged homosexual, White was reticent to reveal his true self lest it was met with scorn and rejection. So has Ellen avoided intimate interactions with gentrified settlers in order not to be judged by her past deeds. Patrick White is not subduing a female character to speak through a male narrator. Rather, his feminine side is the one that assesses the world through Ellen's eyes, as she is the channel White uses to verbalise his hybridised identity.

Ellen attains freedom from preconceived assumptions and from men. However, Ellen never actually *tells* about her experiences to other characters in the narrative. That is due to the fact that in the Victorian society in which the narrative is set there is no room for a lady telling such things. They would have been regarded as immoral, indecent and mentally disturbing; all of which might have caused Ellen to end up ostracised from society on the grounds that she was not fit to be part of that community.

So, Patrick White is giving voice to someone who, during the fictional time in the narrative, will not be able to express her doubts or regrets about what she has been through. This is the reason why this narrative exists; this is the journal Ellen would have written if she had so wished.

Ellen's story and Australian history have one thing in common and that is the prevalent component of shame. Both of them have spent time atoning for their sins (Ellen being an adulteress and Australia, a penal colony settled by warring the natives away) and, more often than not, have found they have not succeeded in cleaning their names, as shame remains.

To get rid of shame, history can twist recorded facts and appropriate them to suit its self-serving purpose. But literature takes those twists to advantage and parodies facts, or, as is the case of this novel, allegorises them in order to show Australia's struggle to construct self-determination.

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Appendix



www.geographicguide.net/oceania/australia.htm

Fig. 1



<http://www.doaustralia.com/states/qldimages/FraseMap.jpg&img>

Fig. 2



Sailing Boat and Coast (Fraser Series)
www.savill.com.au/webphotos/203286_lr.jpg

Fig. 3



www.folkcast.co.uk

Fig. 4

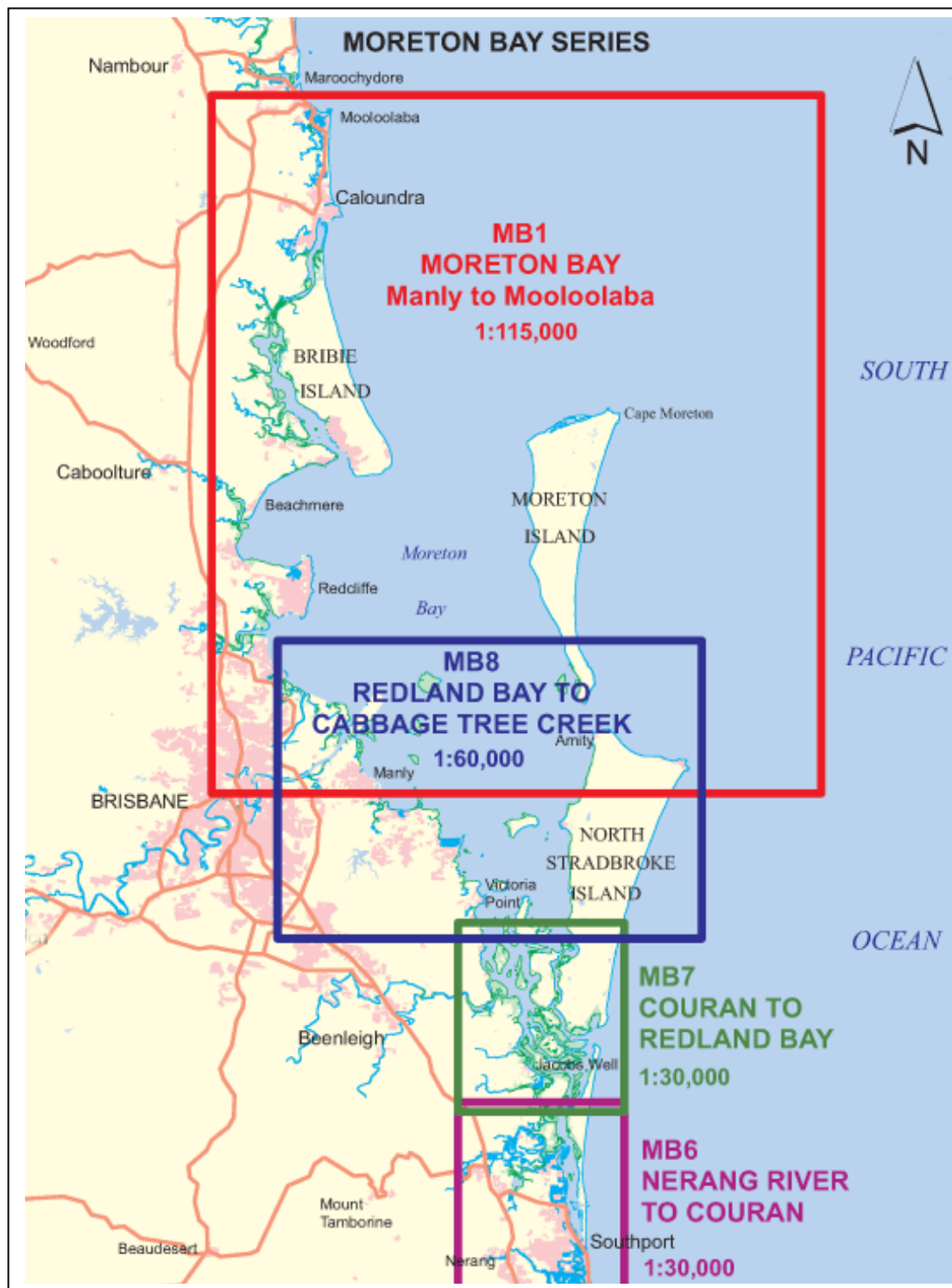


Fig. 5



<http://www.dropbears.com/a/artists/gallery/lindsay>

The Crucified Venus by Norman Lindsay

Fig. 6



Fig. 7