

Antonella Riem Natale

'A Kind of Blessing': David Malouf and the Spirit of the Embodied Word

Abstract I: Il corpo, lo spirito e la parola creativa sono elementi particolarmente significativi nell'opera di David Malouf: il suo linguaggio immaginativo e poetico dà voce alle sfumature più sottili della vita, rivelandone sia la dimensione spirituale sia quella creativa. La mia analisi si basa sul lavoro dell'antropologa e storica Rian Elsler e sulla teoria della parola creativa in contrapposizione al termine scienziata di Raimon Panikkar. Nella presente analisi, utilizzerò le prospettive interculturali e di partnership proprie del lavoro di Panikkar e di Eisler come base filosofica e critica al fine di evidenziare in che modo Malouf dia forma ad un mondo di epifanie spirituali, in cui le realtà della vita quotidiana sono trasmutate in una dimensione spirituale attraverso l'intensità dell'immaginazione creativa.

Abstract II: Body, spirit and creative word are significant elements in David Malouf's work: his imaginative and poetical language gives voice to the subtleties of life, revealing both their spiritual and physical dimensions. My analysis is based on the work of the anthropologist and macro-historian Riane Eisler and on Raimon Panikkar's theory of the *creative word versus scientific term*. I will use the intercultural and partnership perspectives of Panikkar and Eisler's work as a philosophical and critical background to show how in his work Malouf gives form to a world of spiritual epiphanies, with the *realities* of everyday life transmuted into a spiritual dimension through the intensity of the creative imagination.

Body, spirit and creative word are significant elements in David Malouf's work: his imaginative and poetical language gives voice to the subtleties of life, illuminating

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simple actions, events and gestures, and revealing both their spiritual and physical dimensions. The *creative word* (Panikkar 2007) is a constitutive element of his oeuvre and manifests the essential connection between body, nature and spirit through a distinctive language which reveals a deep spirituality within the physical and natural realms. This language is rooted in Malouf's desire to 'translate' new place(s) into the already formed 'body' of English (language and literature) and offers the reader a new way to the 'other': a *partnership* (Eisler 1987) world-view where mutually respectful and caring relationships constitute an effective alternative to the usual binary patterns of domination based on gender inequalities, top-down hierarchies and violence. As Andrew Taylor observes, "predominant in Malouf's fiction is the urge to explore and challenge difference and boundaries" and the lyricism in his novels "springs from the same urge to go beyond difference" (Taylor 1999: 5). This urge, as I shall demonstrate in this article, is creatively embodied in Malouf's *partnership* and *creative word*.

My analysis is based on the work of the anthropologist and macro-historian Riane Eisler (1987) (1), extensively implemented since 1998 by the *Partnership Studies Group* within the study of world literatures, languages and education (2). In this article I employ the terms *partnership* and *dominator* according to Eisler's *Cultural Transformation Theory*, an interdisciplinary paradigm which examines cultural differences, gender relationships and, more extensively, creative processes of reinvention and re-imagination, in order to find new ways of making 'difference' productive rather than destructive, as "diversity is not automatically equated with inferiority or superiority" (Eisler 2002: 161). Similarly, Raimon Panikkar's theory of the *creative word versus scientific term* (3) points out the need to further investigate 'the word' as an expression of creativity and what he calls *dialogic dialogue* based on its symbolic, poetic and spiritual power, far from the scientific and westernized *dialectical dialogue* which presupposes the primacy of a technical 'term', which is limited to a mere object of thought (*Logos*). In this article I will use the intercultural and partnership (4) perspectives of Panikkar and Eisler's work as a

philosophical and critical background to show how Malouf gives form to a world of spiritual epiphanies, with the *realities* of everyday life transmuted into a spiritual dimension through the intensity of the creative imagination.

When considering the creative word Panikkar relies heavily on the centrality of language in different cultural and spiritual traditions:

From letters, a word is formed with its own meaning. From words, a sentence is formed with its own meaning. That meaning carries an image. Once an image is formed, you begin to feel good or bad ... For example take the word fool. Now if you say these letters – F-O-O-L – one at a time, in themselves they don't carry any meaning. But when you combine these letters and say 'Fool!' it really has its own power (Shantananda 2003: 236-237).

Malouf is interested in studying how this process of assembling sounds and letters creates a *meaning* and thus gives life to different realities or narrations. Our innate capacity of associating sound with objects and learning different languages is a magnificent instrument both to apprehend the infinite multiplicity of words and tongues and realise that the words we speak, the feelings and ideas they express, have a significant impact on the way we imagine and then actualise what we call reality.

In his writing (and speaking), Malouf is intensely aware of this power of words and he chooses them with care. For Malouf language is a means to express beauty and, at the same time, a physical and spiritual instrument which touches both the cosmos and our inner Self. In keeping with Panikkar's view, Malouf also perceives language in silence, the highest form of communication, beyond speech: "The best question is asked in silence and the answer is given in silence" (Muktananda 1989: 490). Whereas 'scientific terms' see silence simply as a pause in linear positivistic thought, where terms are used to define and limit and can often lie in order to control, 'creative words' are intertwined with physical experience in its intense secret connections with the spiritual world.

Many of Malouf's characters are seen in dialogic dialogue one with the other: Johnno with Dante, Ovid with the Child, Adair with Carney and before that with Fergus and Virgilia, Priam with Somax and then with Achilles, Achilles with Patroclus and then with Hector (even if after Hector's death), and many others. These characters are very different from one another, but there is a bonding that slowly takes place in their dialogue. In their words we hear echoes of the soul's language, speaking of our shared humanity on this living planet. Malouf's language is often solid and pragmatic, 'realistic' one would say, describing everyday little acts and realities, minutiae, small details:

The reason I'm particularly interested in those things – like shelling peas and all the rest of it – is because the body in a way discovers itself in doing certain things, and so does the mind. Often people in my books are not saying anything to one another – they are communicating by doing something together ... *Ironically, as a writer, I am quite interested in non-verbal communication. Our bodies are sort of thinking things out a lot of the time or thinking themselves out through activity, and that is one of the reasons I am interested in those things* (Turcotte 1990: 58, my italics).

In this simplicity and non-verbal communication Malouf works from the highest levels of speech, where, as Coleridge knows, Imagination is the soul's instrument of creation. In its inner rhythms, significant pauses and musical qualities, language makes us feel the poetic energy that gives shape to sound, interspersed with eloquent silence. Malouf is a *rhapsodos*, a singer of "woven words" (Brennan 2011: 5), interlacing life and light. The aim of his singing, resounding and weaving of words is that of telling stories (in both poetry and prose), of inviting us on his imaginative journey in order to experience aesthetic beauty and find deeper meanings for our lives, and the two are always conjoined. Malouf comments thus on the musical and metaphorical qualities of his work:

Musical, I think that's certainly true. But I think that's true of the way all my books are shaped. I don't usually think of the forward drive of the book as having to do with plot, but with *exploration of things which are announced first, sometimes almost like metaphors in a poem, say*. You then explore both ends of the metaphor and let those spawn other oppositions, other comparisons, and then explore those. I think that's the way almost all my books work, and I think I learned really to shape a novel the way I'd learned to shape a poem. I sometimes referred in the past to the books therefore having a kind of poetical structure in that kind of way, or musical, if one wanted to say that (Daniel 1996: 1, my italics).

Metaphors give shape, sound and foundation to Malouf's art. In *Ransom* the breadth and depth of the opening scene, with the Sea/Mother metaphor and its lyrical undercurrent flow, sets the tone for this intimist tale, where we enter the heroes' souls, rather than follow their great feats of war. Its opening is far from the commonly accepted idea of 'heroic', with Achilles listening to the (silent) murmur of the sea, yearning for his mother's presence:

The sea has many voices. The voice this man is listening for is the voice of his mother. He lifts his head, turns his face to the chill air that moves in across the gulf, and tastes its sharp salt on his lip. The sea surface bellies and glistens, a lustrous silver-blue – a membrane stretched to a fine transparency where once, for nine changes of the moon, he had hung curled in a dream of pre-existence and was rocked and comforted (Malouf 2009: 3, my italics).

The scene reveals the human and more gentle side of the 'hero', with which we can identify. If, as Malouf says, he "explore[s] both ends of the metaphor and let those spawn other oppositions, other comparisons, and then explore[s] those", here he plunges the reader into a soft, dreamy state of 'pre-existence', based on partnership flexibility. The sea-mother-Thetis represents a partnership approach to life: fluid, emotional, welcoming, and full of understanding and love. Then Malouf

starts exploring oppositions, for Achilles cannot take refuge anymore in his mother's arms; he is an adult man now: "the man is a fighter" (Malouf 2009: 4), totally alone in the face of his responsibilities, his desire for revenge and his guilt for Patroclus' death. Malouf takes us to the other end of his poetic metaphor, into the archetypal male dominator world. In a dominator warrior society, the motherly all-embracing sphere must be left behind when boys are old enough to enter their fathers' realm of fighting, stoic suffering and violent death:

He had entered the rough world of men, where a man's acts follow him wherever he goes in the form of story. A world of pain, loss, dependency, bursts of violence and elation; of fatality and fatal contradictions, breathless leaps into the unknown; at last of death – a hero's death out there in full sunlight under the gaze of gods and men, for which the hardened self, the hardened body, had daily to be exercised and prepared (Malouf 2009: 6).

The negation of the Mother's *water* emotional world leads men to violence – the only possible outlet for their repressed feelings. Achilles' fury against Hector's dead body is his only means of venting his grief and guilt for Patroclus' death: "the tears he brings fall inwardly, his cheeks are dry ... But it is never enough. That is what he feels. That is what torments him" (Malouf 2009: 33).

Ransom tells of an inner journey towards a more peaceful partnership model of life, represented by what stereotypically dominator societies ascribe to the 'feminine', but which, in reality pertains to all genders. Malouf is not interested in competing with Homer, but in having a dialogic dialogue with the *Iliad* and its myth of war and grief, finding how it can *cor-respond* with us now (that is respond with the heart), drawing out previously unheard resonances. After his moving and illuminating meeting with Priam, at the end of the novel Achilles attains an inner timeless dimension that harkens back to the novel's opening:

In the stillness that follows – for the noise his men are making no longer comes to his ears – Achilles feels immobilised and outside time.

This morning, on the beach beyond the line of Achaean ships, he had stood staring out across the gulf and felt that it was not space his mind was being drawn into, but the vast expanse of time, at once immediate in the instant and boundless, without end (Malouf 2009: 185).

Stillness, reconciliation and peace are born from that trope of unity and belief that breaches boundaries (of time, space, nation, personality, ethnicity, language, culture). The poetic creative word bridges differences and leads us to a dimension where suffering and division are transcended in our common humanity and in the simplicity of nature and things other-than-human. To reach this state we must return, if temporarily like Achilles, to that feminine and partnership dimension that is excluded by the dominator paradigm.

This is the only way to peace and reconciliation: the immaculate body of Hector does not enrage Achilles anymore, he feels cleansed of his guilt and anger, ready to face his destiny, truly a hero now that, through compassion, he can open himself to his enemy, who existed only in the dominator world. In the end Achilles realises, as he watches the body of Hector being prepared for burial, the business of life is no more than “[b]eing turned this way then that in the hands of women”, “naked as he began” (Malouf 2009: 194).

In *The Conversations at Curlow Creek*, Michael Adair, the officer, and Daniel Carney, the prisoner, are also entrapped in the dominator paradigm where revenge is disguised as justice, based on the principle of ‘an eye for an eye’. This very Australian and intensely poetical novel revolves on their nocturnal dialogic dialogues that recall personal and colonial history in realistic detail and reveal their psychological and spiritual development. Here too, within the partnership world, differences fade (officer/prisoner, memory/dream/reality, night/day, present/past) and boundaries become permeable: the other becomes the sign of my Self; identity (personal and national) is malleable and open to multiple layers of

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transformation. At the beginning of the story we have the three young Irish friends, Adair, Virgilia and Fergus, who share a deep relationship that is constantly mutable (friends, half-brothers, would-be-lovers) and has:

[i]ts own language too, in which thoughts passed from one to another so easily that it scarcely mattered which of the three had given shape to a new thought or produced the code word that from now on would be a new element in their speech. A joke might be the beginning of it, or a new name for some object that had previously been designated by common syllables and only now revealed the special colour and glow that would make it part of their private world (Malouf 1996: 86).

So it is intimacy, affective relationship, closeness, that shapes language and gives depth and meaning, 'special colour and glow' to our world. This same nearness is created between the grown up Adair, an army officer now, and his prisoner, Carney, whose very name connects him to *carnality* and the physical body in both its fleshly beauty and its heaviness and anguish. He belongs to the damned and poor of the Earth and Adair, in his "sympathetic understanding" (Malouf 1996: 130), is unable to condemn him. In his final baptismal immersion in the Aboriginal waters of Curlow Creek, Carney is redeemed, his body "dazzling" (Malouf 1996: 218) and glowing with spiritual light:

Slowly the man turned and stood with lowered head, observing with a child's interest the paleness of his feet through the swirling water. Almost done with himself now. With the business of washing off the long accumulation of dirt and sweat and blood, with the heaviness of the flesh. In the modest pleasure of standing clean in the sunlight. In touch with that live element that on all sides was at play about him (Malouf 1996: 217).

Water, fluidity and light are interlaced: every word here is carefully chosen both at descriptive and symbolic levels. This evocative depiction shows the destination of

Carney's final journey beyond the body and its 'heaviness', beyond his personal and national history, into the spiritual dimension of the Australian bush. Like sea-mother-Thetis, the river's water is lively and liquid; it has a comforting energy that is maternal and of *partnership*. The troopers are staring open-mouthed, embarrassed by the sight of the man's exposed flesh and vulnerability; they are annoyed yet, at the same time, feel compassion, sympathy, even remorse for the prisoner's wounds and 'blue-black and livid' marks:

they felt imposed upon, reduced to mere onlookers, to standing by and waiting on *his* time while, with O'Dare's permission it seemed, this fellow took all the time he needed, all the time in the world it might be, to just stand there idly running water over himself (Malouf 1996: 217).

This is Malouf's creative word at its best: simple, intense, evocative while describing the facts of the body and its 'reality' with sharp clarity. At the same time he creates empathic and spiritual echoes in us readers, causing us to reflect on life and on the absurdity of killing other living beings, be they human or animal. A similar nakedness is present in another outsider in the novel, the black guide Jonas. He challenges definitions and remains a mystery for Adair and the other troopers; he manifests physical presence and intensity, total focus on the present moment that renders him alert to everything around, and to the workings of his soul. He belongs to the place, embodying a denser and deeper darkness which eludes the scientific term but can be embodied in the poetic word:

He was, Adair thought, even under his name of Jonas, an opening there into a deeper darkness, into a mystery – of the place, of something else too that was *not-place*, which might also be worth exploring – but all traffic through it, in either direction, was blocked (Malouf 1996: 122).

This impenetrable darkness of the land and the Aboriginal is an embodiment of that universal lyrical comprehension that whites like Adair have lost under the rule of the dominator paradigm that seeks to objectify and control everything through the scientific term. Jonas' place-non-place is Malouf's main focus. The act of incorporating place through colonial exploitation must be transformed in a true act of embodiment where, through the trope of unity and belief, white settlers can become one with the land and those in it. Malouf is profoundly sceptical of the superiority/inferiority ranking of whites and blacks/outside; rather, he stresses the inability of scientific language to provide a deeper understanding of reality (Ramsey-Kurz 2003).

In the novel *Ransom* Somax has many affinities with Carney and Jonas: he too is the physical, simple man, the one who knows life beyond the walls of Priam's princely palace and who will lead him and teach him and, in the end, poetically tell his story. With Somax's help, Priam will abandon his rigid world of form and norm and appreciate the ordinary way of life the carter represents:

And he looked at the old fellow who had revealed these things to him with growing respect.

He knew things. The life he had come from, and had to some extent brought along with him, was full of activities and facts that, for all that they were common and low, had an appeal (Malouf 2009: 128).

These low and ordinary activities appeal to Malouf and to us; they represent our world and an opening towards something else: transcendence, a metamorphosis of the body, the blossoming of the soul. This happens in the very physicality of words:

I think there are some people for whom words, when they start dealing with them, somehow *remain invested with all the physical qualities* that they refer to. It's a configuration of mind ... and then there is another kind of writing which is

an attempt to recreate the world *through* the words ... That means that for some of us a particular word in referring to an object has the *real, sensual, tactile, voluminous quality of the object*. Once again, we get back to the body. I would say that what I am doing when I am writing *is shifting my body around, letting it travel and explore*. That is what I feel. *It is very, very physical* (Turcotte 1990: 60, my italics).

In *An Imaginary Life*, Malouf 'shifts his body around' incarnating his sensual and tactile words in the exiled Latin poet Ovid. Ovid's initial detachment from Tomis, its natural beauties and the voice of its people manifests the dominator-oriented paradigm of the Roman (British) Empire that he has absorbed and accepted. In Augustan Rome, Ovid was the dispassionate, sophisticated ironic poet – irony being the "trope of scepticism, and division" (McDonald 1988: 46), an instrument of the dominator rationalistic view. If at the beginning Ovid ignores and despises the Getic language, later he finds it "oddly moving. It isn't at all like our Roman tongue, whose endings are designed to express difference, the smallest nuances of thought and feeling" (Malouf 1980: 65).

After experiencing the epiphany of the poppy flower, he appreciates the "trope of belief and unity" (McDonald 1988: 46), the capacity of language to connect the creative word with infinite worlds: "This language is equally expressive, but what it presents is the raw life and unity of things. I believe I could make poems in it. Seeing the world through this other tongue I see it differently. It is a different world" (Malouf 1980: 65). Ovid starts to appreciate that linguistic and cultural differences do not mean superiority/inferiority and that the world is transformed according to the coloured lens through which we read it. He is looking for a language "whose every syllable is a gesture of reconciliation" (Malouf 1980: 98), a "speech in silence" (Malouf 1980: 97), and this revelatory understanding will finally bring him to experience the texture of the word poppy on his tongue, literally and metaphorically, which creates an inner explosion of joy and blossoming creativity:

Poppy. The magic of saying the word made my skin prickle, *the saying almost a greater miracle than the seeing*. I was drunk with joy. I danced. I shouted. Imagine the astonishment of my friends at Rome to see our cynical metropolitan poet, who barely knows a flower or a tree, dancing about in broken sandals on the earth, which is baked hard and cracked in some places, and in others puddled with foul-smelling mud – to see him *dancing and singing to himself in celebration of this bloom* (Malouf 1980: 31, my italics).

The passage continues with a series of emotionally charged verbs suggesting heightened energy and passion: flowers explode, burst, unfold, spring, spread, open, the gods quicken (Malouf 1980: 32); colours are “magic syllables” and Ovid is “making the spring” (Malouf 1980: 31). This choice of words expresses a language of harmony and unity, the fusion of poet and Nature in the creative and blissful word. Transformed by the power of his imagination he uses synecdoche, “the trope of belief and unity” (McDonald 1988: 46) that is the core of Eisler’s partnership paradigm, and he becomes Flora and Persephone, giving names to flowers: “opening out [their] secret syllables” (Malouf 1980: 32). In this way, “language ceases to be language and becomes, perhaps, a universal lyrical comprehensiveness” (Taylor 1999: 6).

In Malouf’s short story “The Only Speaker of His Tongue”, the lexicographer is not interested in universal lyrical comprehensiveness or the secret sacred syllables of life, but wants to study the Aboriginal man of the title, keeping him at a safe distance by using the third person pronoun ‘he,’ which represents the objectification of the other using scientific terms. According to Panikkar, the use of scientific terms requires us to restrain our imagination and look for an exact (one-dimensional) correlation between terms and concepts. Like Ovid with the child, the lexicographer is led to abandon this dismissive rationalistic attitude by the Aboriginal’s pregnant and poetic silence. Perceiving the other’s fragility and mortality, the lexicographer realises, with guilt, the devastation of lands,

languages, peoples, wrought by the colonizing dominator power. His voice is muted as he senses the loss as if it were his own: the loss of language, culture, the very life of his people. He acknowledges their shared humanity. In a moment of deep unity with the other, the lexicographer reverts to the creative language of partnership, giving voice to deep emotions and the inner poetry of things:

I feel his silence ... *Things centre themselves upon him* – that is what I feel, it is eerie – as on the *one and only repository of a name* they will lose if he is no longer there to keep it in mind. *He holds thus, on a loose thread*, the whole circle of shabby-looking trees, the bushes with their hidden life, the infinitesimal coming and going among grassroots or on ant-trails between stones, the minds of small native creatures that come creeping to the edge of the scene and look in at us from their other lives. *He gives no sign of being special...*

I must confess it. He has given me a fright (Malouf 1982: 71, my italics).

In the lexicographer's profound fright that we all would feel in the face of such loss and destruction, Malouf articulates a form of English language which bridges differences, putting everything in poetic relation. He transcribes the dialogic dialogue among peoples, nature, inanimate things, stories and lands, illumines them from within. He draws on that inner vibration that makes simple words resound more deeply, showing empathy, understanding and interconnectedness rather than separation, violence and fear.

In *Remembering Babylon*, Malouf faces the conflict between white dominator settlers and Aboriginal partnership communities from the perspective of Gemmy, who has gone 'bush', entering landscape and letting it completely reshape his soul. Even if he 'returns' to white society for a while he remains an amphibious creature – he is depicted as a half-fish half-human when the Aboriginal women find him stranded on the beach, covered in shells and little animals (Malouf 1993: 22). He crosses boundaries between cultures and is balanced, as in the opening scene (Malouf 1993: 3), between worlds he

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incarnates fully in himself. His choice, at the end, is to be absorbed again in the country. As Malouf says, "he represents a kind of pioneer spirit of what that landscape and that continent might do to you if you really and completely committed yourself to it" (Papastergiadis 1994: 85). Like Carney, Jonas, Jordan and the Child and many others, he has a deep knowledge of the Australian landscape and its secrets, but for the settlers: "The country he had broken out of was all unknown to them. Even in full sunlight it was impenetrable dark" (Malouf 1993: 8). Gemmy knows the language of the place, with its secret meanings understood and felt in the deepest silence; he, unlike Adair with Jonas, has opened the breach and entered into this otherness, transmuting himself; he feels and perceives the place as full of meanings, he knows animals, peoples, plants, figures of landscape, water springs, birds, he is interconnected, something that, according to Malouf, white settler society will have to learn.

In the story *Blacksoil Country* the settlers as a community lack this sense of communion with the other. Most of them fear the Aborigines and want to keep them *outside* the artificial boundaries they create to protect their possessions and lives. However the Aboriginal populations do not recognise 'fences' since they are custodians rather than owners of the land, and they cross them inadvertently or possibly use them to create occasions for encounter. The protagonist's father shoots one of the Aborigines who were trespassing, unknowingly, on his plot of land, and in retribution his son Jordan is killed. Jordan is the only one in the family who loves both the country and the Aborigines he meets in his exploratory wanderings; his is the narrating voice and only at the end do we understand that he is a ghost in blacksoil country. He is twelve, but, as he tells us, he can show us this country as if drawing on aeons of knowledge and experience: "I been in it long enough". We follow his story, similar to many we heard about in accounts of the process of settlement, about the absurd violence and the whites' all-consuming fear of the Aborigines. Fear and violence always go hand in hand. Jordan is a wise and ancient soul; an Ancestor now, he knows no difference

between himself and the blacks exterminated in revenge for his death: “*And me all that while lying quiet in the heart of the country, slowly sinking into the ancientness of it, making it mine, grain by grain blending my white grains with its many black ones*” (Malouf 2000: 130, my italics). As in Ovid's final metamorphosis, Jordan is also finding his true nature in meeting the other and the country at the moment of death. He reveals what vanden Driesen calls “white indigeneity” (Malouf 2000: xxvi), the opportunity for the white settler to finally belong to the land as do the Aboriginals, a possible reconciliation, which is as yet incomplete. Jordan does it through his slow fusion with the other and the landscape, cell by cell, transmitting his knowledge and wisdom to those who can feel it in his eternal love:

And Ma, now, at the line, with the blood beating in her throat, and his shirts, where she has just pegged them out, beginning to swell with the breeze, resting her chin on a wet sheet and raising her eyes to the land and gazing off into the brimming heart of it (Malouf 2000: 130, my italics).

And *me* – and *Ma*, only a vowel's difference between Jordan and his mother, and the consonant *m*, resounding in the universal *OM* of creation, the first sound all children utter, *mmmm* like mother; they are united through the conjunction *and*, which indicates consonance, relationship, union and belief. *Me* is “lying quiet in the heart of the country”, and *Ma* is hanging garments on the line, an action that often appears in Malouf as an image of revelation:

Morning gets into its stride
with clean straw flying
and mares' tails. Outer garments,
rinsed and wrung dry
of their yesterdays, take
to the sky, lighter than souls (“As It Comes”, Malouf 2007: 8).

As I have noted, everyday actions often acquire in Malouf a special epiphanic and revelatory significance; they manifest the spirit in outward bodily forms; they stand as metaphoric and synecdochic instruments signalling unity, belief, harmony, partnership and peace. For the first time, possibly, Jordan's mother raises her eyes towards the horizon that previously terrified her: a clear sign that she is feeling something new arising in her, a form of love, as yet unrevealed and unacknowledged, for the land where her son's *body* lies. His father's shirts, swelling in the breeze, are a sign that he too is being traversed by a new breath, the *spiritus* of the land he inhabits, that will welcome his body after death, through the same slow merging his son is experiencing. Then they will both "take to the sky, lighter than souls". Deep spirituality can be found in the brimming heart of nature and the body: it abides in the physical and natural realms; the continent is slowly transforming the colonisers' outlook, creating new secret openings into the not-yet-known other – be it landscape or Aboriginal, manifesting a partnership world-view in the language of silence, gesture, poetry and rhythm.

Malouf achieves his narrative and poetic interconnections by translating the English language into a different 'sphere' of knowledge where it does not have to divide and discriminate, like Latin, but rather find new poetic spaces in the gap between name and landscape, in a more fluent and flexible form that facilitates transnational and transcultural understanding. Malouf makes room for the flow of imagination – his, his characters' and ours; he offers us the possibility of connecting and relating things in a wider web of life, not limited by the scientific term, but opened up by the power of speech, manifesting 'unity and belief.' Moving beyond colonial exploitation into caring and mutual partnership we can become one with the land and the other, and most of all ourselves:

[Adair] pauses a moment and pinches off a corner of the loaf, the salty sweetness of the crust in his mouth *a kind of blessing*. He chews as he walks on, his saliva mixing with its sugars and *driving new light into his heart, refreshing his mouth like common speech* (Malouf 1996: 213-14, my italics).

In the end, like Daniel Carney, we are all saved (Malouf 1996: 207) and share bread's salty sweetness, a kind of blessing, like Malouf's common speech, refreshing our very soul.

NOTES

1. Riane Eisler is a social scientist and author whose work on cultural transformation has inspired scholars and social activists. Her research has impacted many fields, including history, economics, anthropology, psychology, sociology and education. She has been a leader in the movement for peace, sustainability and economic equity, and her pioneering work in human rights has expanded the focus of international organisations to include the rights of women and children. Eisler is known for her 1987 bestseller *The Chalice and the Blade: Our History, Our Future*, now in 23 foreign editions. See: <http://www.rianeeisler.com/> and <http://www.partnershipway.org/>. The third Italian edition, with a new special epilogue by Eisler and a glossary on partnership language by Stefano Mercanti, was issued by Forum University Press, Udine, in 2011. See: http://www.forumeditrice.it/percorsi/lingua-e-letteratura/all/il-calice-e-la-spada/il-calice-e-la-spada/libro_view.
2. *The Partnership Studies Group* (PSG, http://all.uniud.it/?page_id=195) applies Riane Eisler's partnership model to world literatures, languages and education. By analysing the works of authors writing in the varieties of English including those of indigenous populations, the group explores the way these authors use the coloniser's word to transform the dominator values of colonisation and globalisation into cooperative and partnership codes, where often the dynamics at work are caring and sharing rather than exploiting and dominating (http://all.uniud.it/?page_id=198).
3. Raimon Panikkar was a leading scholar in interreligious and intercultural

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dialogue in world cultures throughout the second half of the twentieth century; his many publications were translated into French, German, Chinese, Portuguese, Czech, Dutch, Tamil and many other languages. See: <http://www.raimon-panikkar.org/english/laudatio.html>. Scientism is sometimes synonymous with positivism, however, while positivism may be used in a neutral way, scientism often has a negative connotation as it commonly identifies an exaggerated form of scientific thought that becomes unscientific in its exclusion a priori of all that cannot be (yet) demonstrated. This explains why Panikkar chooses 'scientistic term' rather than using the more common adjective 'scientific' (2007: 96-125). Panikkar appreciated science but not its degeneration. Being very concerned about language(s) and its manifold shades of meaning, he created neologisms which his proof-readers sometimes tried to correct and normalise. Panikkar stresses the distinction between creative word and scientistic term, where the creative, analogical and mythological function of the word is juxtaposed to the scientistic term of the Logos, which is devoid of symbolic echoes and of positive creative complexities. The scientistic term restrains and separates, pinning and limiting things to a specific and often univocal meaning that circumscribes and confines life into stereotypical patterns rather than opening up it to worlds of interconnected and dialogic significances. For a further analysis of this theme see: Riem *et al.* 2013.

4. In this article I use the term partnership according to Riane Eisler's theory and it does not carry any economic connotations whatsoever.

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