

A Web of Horizons: "Otherland" in Christopher Koch's *The Doubleman**

Hena MAES-JELINEK

And there she lulled me asleep,
And there I dreamed—Ah! woe betide!
The latest dream I ever dream'd
On the cold hill side.
John Keats, "La Belle Dame sans Merci"

So I reverted to the past when she was the unspoilt
focus of my innocent love.

Iris Murdoch, *The Sea, The Sea*

In his recently published *L'art du roman* the Czech novelist Milan Kundera writes:

Through the Modern Times Cartesian reason corroded one after another the values inherited from the Middle Ages. But at the very moment of the total victory of reason it was pure irrationality (force determined on its own will) which took over the world scene because there was no system of generally accepted values to oppose it.¹

This collapse in our century of a commonly held, firm system of beliefs and the breakdown of traditional values have, as we know, radically transformed approaches to life and art. The sense of living in an unstable world in which anything could happen, from the loss or destruction of a familiar environment to total extinction in deliberately planned genocides or unwilled nuclear catastrophes, has bred uncertainty, insecurity and a profound anguish. They have given rise to a search for alternatives, spiritual and philosophical as well as cultural, whether in the form of original vision or as mere ways of escape. Comments on such phenomena may have become commonplace, but the need for moral or

* C.J. Koch, *The Doubleman*, London, Chatto & Windus, 1985. All references are to this edition and are given in the text.

¹ Milan Kundera, *L'art du roman*, Essai, Paris, Gallimard, 1986, p. 25, translation mine.

spiritual guidance and its expression in art remains a crucial preoccupation in our world and it inevitably comes to mind as one reads Christopher Koch's latest novel, *The Doubleman*, which can be read as an indictment of the spiritual confusion that prevails in the Western world.

C.J. Koch is an Australian writer, who felt very early that he wanted to become an artist; parts of his first novel, *The Boys in the Island* (1958), were written at the age of seventeen. Yet he did not become a full-time novelist until he was forty, when he gave up a well-paid job as a radio producer and executive with A.B.C. to devote his time to writing. Thirteen years elapsed between his second novel, *Across the Sea Wall* (1965) and *The Year of Living Dangerously* (1978), which immediately became a best-seller and was adapted into a film by Peter Weir. *The Doubleman* is another winner for which Koch has received the Miles Franklin Award, the most prestigious literary prize in Australia.

Koch's work stands apart from much contemporary writing in Australia and from a major trend in post-colonial fiction, in which the cultural identity of former colonies is either asserted or now taken for granted. He grew up in Tasmania, an island which in some areas, its climate and its architecture is said to resemble Britain more than the Australian continent, and where an indigenous culture was slower to develop. Koch does not deny his lingering attachment to the predominantly British tradition in which he was brought up and has not given voice so far to an uncompromising Australianness.² As a matter of fact, he has explained that a tension produced by "a lost landscape and society" lies at the core of his writing, a tension responsible for a "pathos of absence"³ which he thinks is discernible in Australian literature generally. No doubt, many Australian writers and critics would strongly disagree with this view but it certainly applies to Koch's own writing. He also stands apart from major trends in contemporary fiction through his steady attachment to realism, which he considers as a duty to his readers.⁴ Koch started as a poet and thinks that fiction has now replaced narrative poetry. As has often been observed, his fictional mode of writing is poetic and attempts a fusion between dream and reality. It derives its peculiar quality from the association of a realistic

² Koch writes: "I was a child of the British Empire. I don't feel apologetic about this... I grew up in the 1930's and 1940's, when the British monarch was still King-Emperor of India; and my home was an island state that prided itself on being a 'second England.' Feeling for what it called the mother country has only recently withered away there: it's been a long dream and it still lingers." "An Australian Writer Speaks," *Westerly*, Vol. 25, No. 3 (1980), 69.

³ C.J. Koch, "Literature and Cultural Identity," *Tasmanian Review*, No. 4 (1980), 2.

⁴ Koch made this point in a lecture he gave at the University of Liège, 2 April 1984.

type of narrative (in plot, structure and characterization) with a metaphorical style and a symbolic treatment of its predominantly romantic material. Koch transcends the limitations of a realism mainly concerned with "real time and place"⁵ through his characters' perception of "other" worlds, a mythical dimension and the strong impact of the unseen.

In his first three novels "otherness" is to be found in places and ways of being both real and imagined: the enchanted fictitious worlds of adolescence and youth, indissociable from the Australian mainland for the Tasmanian boy who feels at once trapped yet fascinated by the beauty of his island; England and more generally Europe, impossibly far-off centres of *real* life to the then colonial imagination; visited alien lands, India and Indonesia, and their mythology but also their nameless crowds subsisting outside the pale of the world's concern; woman and the mystery she represents in the eyes of the male protagonists. Most of these aspects of otherness are brought together in *The Doubleman* and explored at greater depth, although it must be pointed out that, like E.M. Forster whom he admires, Koch is a novelist of the understatement, whose work from the beginning has been simmering with unobtrusive complexities. Since his first novel also, he has presented otherness as an intrinsic constituent of the human condition. Its very title, *The Boy in the Island*, the unexpected *in* rather than *on*, suggests the existence of an inner world metaphorically represented by Tasmania, the dream-world inhabited in childhood and adolescence, evoking loss at many levels: a Wordsworthian loss of pre-existential paradise,⁶ which Koch associates with the "Edenic urge" expressed by the Australian poet James McAuley; the loss of the exterminated aboriginal population of Tasmania; the loss of the Northern hemisphere, particularly England; and finally the loss of the island itself and its formative influence when the young protagonist leaves it for the mainland. It is this sense of loss and of human incompleteness which drives Koch's characters beyond the horizons of their familiar environment, to the Australian mainland, Asia and Europe, perhaps significantly never reached so far by his heroes.

A minor yet prophetic incident in *The Boys in the Island* seems to forebode the impossibility of ever reaching the "otherland" as it lives in the imagination. Since early childhood the young hero has looked upon Lutana Rise, a distant hill visible from his home, as the gateway to that other world. Whatever their form in Koch's fiction, the dream-world and the marvellous are always rooted

⁵ Blake Morrison, *The Movement*, English Poetry and Fiction of the 1950s, Methuen, 1980, p. 163.

⁶ As expressed in "Intimations of Immortality." Koch shows through his work a strong affinity with Wordsworth and Keats.

in geographically recognizable places, and his narratives are intensely visual. When eventually the boy runs to the top of the Rise, he is expelled from it by the gruff old man who lives there. Yet after his return from Melbourne at the end of the novel, the challenge to travel beyond familiar horizons does not abate.

Koch's fiction is usually based on this pattern of incursion into, and return from, a land of enchantment. The hero's experience of an alien world confronts him not only with problems of vocation and self-definition but also of social and cultural identity and, at a further remove, with the metaphysical implications of his perception of the duality of the universe. Both *Across the Sea Wall* and *The Year of Living Dangerously* take place in Asia, the discovery of which brings home to the major characters that, as Australians, they have more in common with the former colonial outposts of that continent than with Europe.⁷ In the second of these novels otherness is illustrated both in the dualistic team which the journalist Guy Hamilton forms with the dwarf Billy Kwan and in the suffering Indonesian people whom Kwan alone seems to feel for. By the time Hamilton leaves Indonesia, the "web of horizons"⁸ envisioned by the protagonist in Koch's first novel has largely materialized, opening out on a multiplicity of other worlds.

These are now sharply focalized in *The Doubleman*, their power and fascination together with its inherent dangers warningly emphasized, for Koch no longer sees otherness as an exclusively desirable counterpart to the limited self but shows that for both the individual and as a cultural, even political phenomenon, enchantment can be a source of arrested development and, paradoxically, a means of destroying the other. This ambivalent approach is evident in the evocation of Tasmania, where the first part of the novel takes place:

Who were we, marooned at forty-two degrees south?... In the cold, virgin rain-forests of the south-west wilderness, where it rained and snowed eternally, where rivers ran underground, and where men had walked in and never walked out, wild flowers and exquisite little tarns continued unseen, as they had done throughout time. Settlement was in the island's pastoral midlands, and the mild, kindly east. (p. 24)

The other island's name had been Van Diemen's Land. It was a name that had rung and chimed in Cockney and Irish songs of

⁷ On this subject see Helen Tiffin, "Asia, Europe and Australian Identity: the Novels of Christopher Koch," *Australian Literary Studies*, Vol. 10, No. 3 (1982), 326-335. See also John Thieme, "Re-Mapping the Australian Psyche: the Asian Novels of C.J. Koch," *Commonwealth, Essays and Studies*, Vol. 6, No. 1 (1985), 81-90.

⁸ *The Boys in the Island*, Angus and Robertson, 1974, p. 8.

hate; the name of the British penal colony that had once been synonymous with fear throughout the Anglo-Saxon world. At the place called Hell's Gates, on the savage west coast, a penal settlement so terrible had been created that convicts had murdered each other to secure the release of hanging, or had fled without hope into the icy rain-forest to leave their bones there and sometimes to turn cannibal... When transportation ended, the native-born colonists changed the island's name to obliterate the dread; to make it normal. As clean young Tasmania, it would start anew, the horrors forgotten.

But were they?... Sometimes it seemed to me that the fusty odour of fear, the stench of the prison ships, was still in Hobart; and a tragic, heavy air, an air of unbearable sorrow, even in sunshine, hung over the ruined, sand-stone penitentiary and the dark blue bay at Port Arthur, south of Hobart, where the tourists went. Was it possible that the spirits of the convicts were silently clustered in the air... Were the floggings and the shackles still invisibly here, hanging above the dark green bush? Still somehow repeated, for eternity? (pp. 24-25)

The contrasting landscapes and double historical legacy of the island shape the protagonist's consciousness from a very early age. Excellent novels have been written before about the shameful episodes of Tasmanian history.⁹ But *The Doubleman* may be the first novel by an artist actually born in Tasmania, whose family settled there in the 1840s, in which the main character fully "digests" the past as part of his psychological make-up in much the same way as George Lamming's characters in *In the Castle of my Skin* recognize the existence of slavery, formerly a forbidden subject, as part of their Caribbean inheritance. "The land," says Koch's narrator, "[is] not innocent" (p. 61).

The first part of *The Doubleman* takes place in the early forties and is entitled "The False Knight upon the Road," while the epigraphs to each chapter are from "Thomas the Rhymer" and "Tam Lin." These references to Scottish ballads point to the remote Celtic ancestry, on his mother's side, of Richard Miller, the protagonist and I-narrator, who throughout the first part shows that his young imagination was nourished by the fairy-lore of the distant northern hemisphere. In the first chapter, "The Mask of Paralysis," a series of images imprinted in his memory introduce several strands of narrative. The striking opening paragraphs show the boy Richard, then aged twelve, heaving himself up, literally and symbolically, on a single crutch along the steepest hill in Hobart towards the church, the Archbishop's Palace, and his school run by the

⁹ See Hal Porter's *The Tilted Cross* (1961), Patrick White's *A Fringe of Leaves* (1976) and Robert Drewe's *The Savage Crows* (1976).

Christian Brothers. His chief emotions are nausea and dread, from which he is sometimes temporarily distracted by unease at meeting in a side lane an unknown ominous figure, the "Doubleman" and "False Knight" of the titles, who once talks to him. Two major influences in the hero's life are thus established from the start. First, an Irish Catholic childhood. Although the educators are not jesuits but the Christian Brothers looked down on by Stephen in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, their extreme jansenism and occasional injustice produce in Richard and his cousin Brian Brady a revulsion reminiscent of Stephen's in Joyce's novel. The second major influence, which was soon to overshadow the first and was then embodied in the "Doubleman," was fascination with the supernatural.

The paralysis dealt with in chapter one is, in concrete life, infantile paralysis which strikes Richard at the age of eight. He sees it as a creature, an intruder or a white-faced master, whose mask reminds him of Mr Punch. He was to free himself from its grip and to vanquish his infirmity by stages except for a slight limp, though the spiritual effects were harder to overcome. Indeed, paralysis is clearly a metaphor for different kinds of spell. It has been suggested that the pain which hits Richard in the back "like a great silver club" (p. 11) is a meaningless simile.¹⁰ But although at the time the child was only struck with terror, the club is obviously the magic wand that bewitches him and makes him an addict of Fairyland as a refuge from his illness. His grandfather's gift of a toy theatre which he peoples with figures he fashions from Dullac's illustrations of fairy books, enables him to recreate on the stage and around him the life of Elfland and its legendary beings. Although he was not aware of it then, Richard's attachment to these legends and fairy tales express his fascination with a culture he can only enjoy at second hand.¹¹ Twice at least the adult narrator connects the colonial status with the quality of life and the culture available in his country a hundred years later. Tasmanians are compared to the prisoners in Plato's cave studying the shadows of English culture on the wall, the plays of Noel Coward and the novels of Cronin, Priestley and Graham Greene (p. 24). "We were living, when I grew up," he writes, "in the half-light of that Empire the ultimate end of whose bridge of boats was Hobart"

¹⁰ *The Times Literary Supplement*, 7 June 1985, 644.

¹¹ Koch has expressed a similar fascination in the first of a series of articles by various Commonwealth writers on the theme "The Colonial Visits 'Home'": "No English man or woman will ever be able to experience what a colonial Australian or New Zealander of British or part-British descent felt about England. We were subjects of no mortal country; hidden in our unconscious was a kingdom of Faery: a Britain that could never exist outside the pages of Hardy, Kenneth Grahame, Dickens and Beatrix Potter; and yet it was a country we confidently set out to discover." "Maybe it's because I'm a Londoner," *Kunapipi*, Vol. 8, No. 1 (1986), 7.

(p. 24).¹² Enchantment with far-off England was an inevitable product of expatriation, giving one a sense of the missing real world twelve thousand miles away. Paralysis is thus also a social phenomenon inherent in the crippling, as yet undigested circumstances of colonization in Tasmania:

Poor Van Diemen's Land! The leg-irons and the lash of a hundred years before still hung near, like bad dreams; now, suburban and respectable under your new name, you found your children in irons once more, tormented by pains more searching than the lash. Through the streets of Hobart in the 1940s, the children claimed by the epidemic were wheeled by in chairs, or lurched on their crutches. They horrified and fascinated me before I became one of their number, in those years of the War. (p. 8)

As this passage suggests, Miller's reaction to the disease is, even before he catches it, ambivalent. So is his response to the "otherworld" which his love of books, tales listened to on the radio (sowing the seed of his future vocation), and a sensitiveness sharpened by illness open to him.

The yearnings of childhood and the conflicting temptations, spiritual and sexual, of adolescence are expressed with great imaginative sympathy. In his "secret life of dreams" (p. 15) during his convalescence Richard invents for his theatre texts and characters of his own, among whom a witch, a golden-haired elf-queen whom he calls Titania, and a black-cloaked man who clearly prefigures "the Man in the Lane" he was to meet on his way to school.¹³ At once an incentive to imaginativeness and a means of escape, Richard's "otherworld" is the major influence in his psychological development, though even as a young boy, he senses that, like Van Diemen's land, "Elfland is not entirely innocent" (p. 22). It impresses upon him the distinction between illusion and reality and, above all, as Bruce Clunies-Ross has rightly pointed out,¹⁴ it establishes the link between enchantment and art, themes that are central to the novel and to contemporary fiction generally but also recall Koch's affinity with Keats. One is reminded of the "Ode to a Nightingale" and the "Charmed magic casements, opening on the foam / Of perilous seas, in faery lands forlorn."

A few years later at school a visiting Franciscan monk awakens him to the beauty of the Tuscan landscape and art and makes him aware of a milder

¹² V.S. Naipaul presents a fairly similar view of colonial culture in *The Mimic Men*. But, as the title of his novel indicates, his presentation of it is much more ironical and derogatory.

¹³ An important structural feature in Part I is the web of allusions to Shakespeare (*A Midsummer Night's Dream*), English Romantic poets and above all, English and Scottish ballads.

¹⁴ Review of *The Doubleman*, *Kunapipi*, Vol. 6, No. 3 (1984), 101-3. The publication of this issue was delayed until 1985. The review did not appear before the novel.

form of catholicism which temporarily satisfies his need of "private ecstasies" (p. 37). Yet soon afterwards both he and Brian fall under the spell of Broderick, a remarkable guitar player, who turns out to be the "Man in the Lane" of Richard's childhood. As before, he seems to suffer from a secret wound or illness and in the rest of the novel comes to stand for deadly fascination and the spiritual sickness of the world. He teaches Brian the guitar. Then with another of his pupils and closest disciple Darcy Burr, the young men are cautiously initiated into mysteries other than the Church's. Later still when Richard leaves university to work in a bookshop with Broderick, "The Basement" where the latter reigns supreme becomes the symbol of the underground world and the unseen which Richard and Darcy discuss endlessly: Celtic and Greek mythology but also the more sinister practices of occultism which in some mysterious way makes Darcy responsible for the emotional breakdown of a young girl.

Meanwhile enchantment also lures Richard through Deirdre Dillon, a "shape-changer" (p. 80) whose name strongly recalls the celtic legends of his childhood and gives her a mythological dimension,¹⁵ and who becomes his flesh-and-blood Titania. In actual life she is a young mother born in Tasmania, now married to a wealthy Sydney business man. Richard first met her on his uncle's farm set in a windy landscape reminiscent of "some remote Scottish moorland" (p. 58) but also haunted by the memory of the doomed Aborigines, their last survivor "Queen" Trucanini (so powerfully evoked in Drewe's *The Savage Crows*) and their evil spirits. His first vision of Deirdre is a forbidden one (Artemis surprised by Acteon) since he catches sight of her by chance as she comes out of her bath:

Golden, beautiful, her pale hair drawn up in a bun, she shines in the light of Mick's kerosene pressure lamp above her head, her body white as its flare, white as the breakers on the beach, whose sound comes muffled here. She is real and yet not; she may vanish; and her reality is made more unlikely by the fact that she's a stranger. . . . It's only when she bends over the bassinet and murmurs to the infant that I finally admit that I'm not spying on a vision: that I'm not intended to see her. (p. 65)

To the end of the first part she remains an "Elle-maid" and inaccessible temptress for she insists on chastity while her frequent allusions to Richard's crippledness can be seen as a token of her power over him.¹⁶ Commenting earlier on Broderick's mesmerism, Richard had said that "All enthrallment is an

¹⁵ See W.B. Yeats's play, *Deirdre* (a dramatization of the legend) discussed in this volume by Jacqueline Genet. In Koch's novel Deirdre refers to Yeats as a favourite writer.

¹⁶ As Darcy later reminds Richard, cripple children in Ireland were considered as changelings.

arrested past: the prolonged, perverse childhood from which some souls never escape" (p. 52). He then realizes that his attachment to Deirdre is also an "enslavement to the past" (p. 9). Both the "doubleman" and the "queen of fairies" bring to mind British novels which deal similarly with the dangers of enchantment. The title of John Fowles's *The Magus* expresses the same ambivalent power as *The Doubleman*, though Conchis, a more aggressive and spectacular spell-binder, turns out to be more beneficent. With none of his financial means, Broderick is never explained and remains mysterious throughout. The other novel, closer in spirit to Koch's, is Iris Murdoch's *The Sea, The Sea*, whose protagonist remains to his old age under the spell of his childhood sweet-heart, Mary Hartley Smith. In both novels enchantment by a woman known in one's youth represents a sterile attachment to the past as well as a strong "Edenic urge." *The Doubleman* also illustrates Murdoch's view that "All spirituality tends to degenerate into magic. . . . And a less than perfect meddling in the spiritual world can breed monsters for other people."¹⁷

An extract from Keats's "Fall of Hyperion" prefaces *The Boys in the Island*. As one reads the second part of *The Doubleman*, the opening of the same poem comes to mind:

Fanatics have their dreams wherewith they weave
A paradise for a sect.

Each of the epigraphs in the first half of the novel now offers a link between Part One and Two ("The Abyss"), in which their more threatening implications come to the fore in the adult world. The Abyss is both the underworld from which European D.P.s have emerged and the First Cause of Gnostic belief. There is a seven-year gap between the two parts during which, like the hero of "Thomas the Rhymer," Richard is unseen, enchanted by art as he tries to become an actor in Melbourne. Preferring to create illusion to being one of its tools, he fulfils his childhood dream by becoming a radio producer in Sydney. At this time also he encounters and marries Katrin Vilde, a talented singer and Estonian refugee, who has emigrated to Australia with her grand-father and her young crippled son. Shortly afterwards, Darcy Burr and Brian Brady reappear, having worked their way to genuine excellence as a folk-group. Like Tasmania in Part One, King's Cross in Sydney now becomes the seat of various kinds of lostness and otherness, "A dormitory of Displaced Persons" (p. 133), as well as the focus of the cultural ferment and transformation that was taking place in Australia in the late 50s and 60s partly under the impact of European migrants of all nationalities.

¹⁷ Iris Murdoch, *The Sea, The Sea* (1978), Panther Books, 1985, p. 445. See also her earlier novel, *The Unicorn*.

The Vildes represent the victims of “the century’s two great tyrannies,” (p. 157) Nazism and, for Estonians, the communist take over. They are archetypal exiles, who lost everything in the catastrophic disruption of peoples and societies in World War Two, finally escaping to Australia from a German D.P. camp. In many ways Katrin is the exact counterpart of Richard. Her father was killed by the Russians in Estonia as his was by the Japanese in New Guinea. Katrin at sixteen was also a dreamer. Estonia had become for her a “lost Paradise . . . a landscape that glowed . . . with the crystal, transcendent light of the ultimate North,” (p. 188) and she too longed for another world as she looked beyond the flat horizon of Dillingen-on-the-Danube. Her own love of fairy tales materialized when she fell in love with a Hungarian gypsy violinist (*her* false knight) who disappeared after seducing her. Just as Richard’s early crippledom suggests a corresponding spiritual state and, possibly, the lingering stasis of colonial culture, so Jaan Vilde’s (Katrin’s son was run over by a car at the age of six) could also be seen as the fruit of perverse enchantment in a Europe ravaged by the megalomania of a sinister arch-hypnotist.

A significant feature in the novel is the implicit parallel between the paralyzing effects of dictatorial will-to-power in Europe and Darcy Burr’s “abuses” of enchantment. Still an enthusiastic disciple of the now vanished Broderick, he is an original musical editor and interpreter, who takes clever advantage of the folk-revival of the 60s to launch his “ballads of the supernatural” (the English and Scottish ballads of Dick’s youth) and to promote his group, The Rhymers, to popularity. He also encourages interest in the surrogates that have begun to replace traditional religion: mass occultism, magic, gnosticism (knowledge is more important than faith and is a means to power), and above all that easy way to artificial paradises, drugs. The variety of worlds evoked in the novel, the Vildes’ experience as *Vertriebenen* in Germany, Burr’s ruthless attempts to manipulate and sacrifice others to his ambitions, the hysteria of group intoxication by pop music (to which only Brady, the true artist, remains indifferent) illustrate at different levels Koch’s vision of spiritual illness in the twentieth century and its side-effects: a resurgence of irrationalism and the decline of liberal humanism. That it should be enacted by average, even if talented, characters, reminds us of Koch’s belief that “no soul is ordinary.”¹⁸ So that to paraphrase the Australian poet Les Murray, it is also a “People’s Otherworld” he creates through Darcy’s strategies of escape.

¹⁸ Koch’s point is that a character whose life and personality are ordinary does not necessarily have an ordinary sensibility. Letter to Paul Sharrad, 11 April 1983, reproduced in Sharrad’s so far unpublished doctoral dissertation, *Open Dialogue: Metropolitan-Provincial Tensions and the quest for a post-colonial culture in the fiction of C.J Koch, Raja Rao and Wilson Harris*, Flinders University of South Australia, Appendix.

Richard himself, though very sensitive and imaginative, is no great artist and has been living at second hand since childhood, still doing so when, as a radio and T.V. producer, he exploits the talent of others and to some extent also attempts to exert will-to-power. As to Darcy, he fails because of two inner contradictions. He talks of love and freedom but loves no one and nothing except his own ambitions and he means to reach freedom at other people’s expense (“The others’ll be our instruments” [p. 227]). When Deirdre reappears to persuade Richard to let her stepson, Patrick, join The Rhymers, Darcy invades their lives and tries to encourage an affair between Deirdre and Richard. But unlike Fowles’s Conchis, Darcy is a mere apprentice sorcerer who does not reckon with other people’s emotions. When Patrick accidentally kills Deirdre, his psychologically arrested but still fascinating stepmother whom he loves, Darcy’s power collapses together with his ambition to take The Rhymers to England leaving a distraught Richard behind.

It has been suggested that the ending is something of an anticlimax. I disagree with this view, for Deirdre’s death on the pagan rocks of the Australian coast clearly means the end of enchantment for Richard. She disappears the way he had once seen her emerge “from a cleft in the granite barrow” (p. 83). Actually, the end is inconclusive. Richard sees Darcy in the sunset glow and for a few seconds mistakes him for Broderick who “would always wait; he would wait through eternity” (p. 326). Whatever form he takes, the “doubleman” represents the manifold temptations luring men to the prison of enchantment. Richard is now free from it and from his childhood “district of second-hand” (p. 326). How he will develop remains uncertain. At the height of crisis he had entered a Catholic church during Evening Mass and had been moved by the familiar service. Whether or not he will go back to the Church is also doubtful since he describes his participation in the final service in equivocal terms: “the ghetto appeals to Mary and to the order of angels, in which I joined” (p. 314). One reviewer at least identifies Koch with Miller and asserts that, through his main character, the novelist offers Christianity and the spirit of God as a remedy to the world’s evils. I do not think that Miller and Koch can be so easily identified. For the first time Koch has used a first-person narrator, who is more sophisticated and articulate than his earlier protagonists. This allows for more introspection but it is also a means Koch uses to emphasize the narrator’s self-deceptiveness while distancing himself from Miller. Nevertheless, Christianity does appear as the one available means of saving and possibly controlling humanity since the characters’ only choice is between Christianity and Paganism. At one stage old Mr Vilde, a convinced Lutheran, explains to Richard the link between Godlessness and “the worst sickness of all,” i.e., will-to-power, and what he sees as a return to Paganism:

This is a sentimentality of the present time: to explain all evil as insanity. Not to believe that monstrous things can be done by

people who are sane. Hitler was never insane... he had embraced evil... The Nazis were very much interested in witchcraft—paganism. Naturally, they had denied Christ, now they had need of the Other... Giving up the rituals that are God's, we go back instead to other rituals. I think we go back now to Paganism: to magic, fear, witchcraft. I see it in your newspapers, and on the television. We look for the old rituals that lead always to sickness, and to blood. (pp. 216–217)

Vilde's assertion that ordinary and "normal" people are capable of deliberately embracing evil is now a familiar one and cannot be questioned. But while wholly subscribing to Koch's distinction through the novel between fake and genuine spirituality, I remain unconvinced by his presentation of the Judeo-Christian tradition as the keeper of the humanism he adheres to, even if it is offered as a means of saving the Western world only. Indeed for all its extraordinary achievements, this tradition has been as barbaric as the Paganism it has always fought. Nor are its values necessarily superior. There is no need in Cavafy's words to "wait for the Barbarians." They grow with any civilization and undermine it from within. Of course, my opinion that the distinction Pagan/Christian does not hold and that men in any society and at any time are equally capable of good and evil is no comment on Koch's achievement as a novelist. Moreover, he has dealt very sympathetically with forms of spirituality other than Judeo-Christian in *Across the Sea Wall* and *The Year of Living Dangerously*. *The Doubleman* is his most ambitious work so far. While exploring the nature of enchantment as well as the attractions and pitfalls of imagination in an Australia once considered "innocent" (in opposition to experienced Europe) in much the same sense as North America, he records a change in the Australian sensibility at a turning point in its cultural history. If with regard to his spiritual life the hero's perspectives remain fragile, like modern man's everywhere, he is now free of the shackles of Van Diemen's land, free from the colonial syndrome and of existence at second hand. In *The Year of Living Dangerously* the half-Australian hero, formerly committed to Britain, realizes that "in the end the other hemisphere would claim him" and that Australia is part of the Southern world, not an appendix to Europe. In an interview he gave in 1985 Christopher Koch said:

Although I haven't yet expressed it in my work, enormously important to me. I seem to have had a badge put on me of being an interpreter of Australian experience in Asia, and that's fair enough; but from the time I was twenty-two and went to Europe, Europe had a profound attraction for me.¹⁹

¹⁹ "Christopher Koch on *The Doubleman*, a Conversation with Adrian Mitchell," *Southerly*, Vol. 45, No. 2 (1985), 135.

This statement brings to mind the contradictory impulses that have so far stimulated Koch: a strong attachment to European culture and the need to express an intense personal sense of place. In *The Doubleman* he seems to have exorcised the two and as a result to have solved the tension. Significantly, Miller refuses to go to Europe, to take "the greatest trip of all" to a hemisphere that was "only dream" (pp. 305 and 308). Reality for him is in Australia. Which reminds us that exile to and from Australia is another important theme closely linked with enchantment. Its role in this novel cannot be discussed here. Suffice it to say that the alienating effects of physical displacement are naturally seen in the Vildes and the other "Balts" in *King's Cross*. But the exile of the imagination, the narrator's and, at a further remove, the author's, is what gives the novel its deeper significance.