

## Human-Nature Relationship in David Malouf's *Lone Pine*

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### Abstract

*This article is an appraisal of David Malouf's 'Lone Pine', a book he wrote as part of Australia's short stories which Barry Oakley edited and compiled. The writer in this book contrasted Australian hinterlands with its cities (wilderness or bush) in which he describes Australia's interior as unsettled and under-developed. He then eventually pointed out the gradual and systematic imposition of western civilization on Australia pointing most aspects of its modern history. Ultimately, the article examines how Europeans have left discontented legacies that are struggling to harmonize Australian native cultures with the foreign ones alien to the land.*

**Keywords: Lone Pine, Western Civilization, Australian outback, History, Culture**

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### I. Introduction

*Lone Pine* is a short story written by David Malouf. It is part of an anthology of Australian short stories that was compiled and edited by Barry Oakley. In the story readers are presented with the Australian outback – wilderness or bush. The writer highlighted key aspects of the Australian bush which contrasted sharply with its cities. David Malouf was born on 20 March 1934 (age 89) in Brisbane, Australia. His father was a Christian Lebanese while his mother was English-born Portuguese Sephardi Jewish descent. Malouf is a Novelist, Short story writer, and Playwright. He had written many books. Malouf is openly gay.

### II. Background to David Malouf's Writing

Malouf wrote of the gradual and ambiguous imposition of western civilization on Australia. His writing also featured almost all aspects of Australia's modern history. He knows his setting intimately – a dangerously settled backwater in the Australian interior. His description of Australia's interior shows a wild, unsettled and underpopulated area. There is no form of development in these areas.

In contrast to the Australian backwater towns, the large in cities Australia are quite developed. He is writing from a colonial outpost upon which Europeans have left a deep and discontented legacy and which

struggles to reconcile a native culture with one forcibly imported from abroad. The Australian outback is harrowingly stark and its recalcitrance to western civilization is quite evident.

In the short story *Lone Pine* we see the Australian outback as a place where there is violence, ambiguity, indeterminacy, unsettledness. This is a place where there is no civilization. A sort of jungle justice prevails. It is dry, yellow, and burned-looking with just the occasional green patch or a pine.

### III. Conceptual Framework

The concept of *man's relationship to the physical or natural environment* will be used to analyze Malouf's short story *Lone Pine*. This concept can be situated within the broader theory of *Ecocriticism*.

Glen A. Love explains this concept thus:

*"If we are to believe what modern ecology is telling us, the greatest of all intellectual puzzles is the earth and the myriad systems of life which it nourishes. Nature reveals adaptive strategies far more complex than any human mind could devise. Surely one of the greatest challenges of literature, as a creation of human society, is to examine this complexity as it relates to the human lives which it encompasses" (Love 230-231)*

### IV. Discussion and Analysis

In *Lone Pine* there is a clear relationship between the characters and the physical or natural environment. Harry and his wife May took a holiday and decided to explore the Australian outback or bush. The countryside is barren – no vegetation cover. There is only the occasional pine.

*"Driving up here was dreamlike. As the miles of empty country fell away with nothing to catch the eye, no other vehicle or sign of habitation, your head lightened and cleared itself – of thoughts, of images, of every wish or need. Clouds filled the windscreen. You floated." (LP 347).*

The barrenness of the land and its silence, tend to have a sort of positive feeling for Harry. In this sense, the environment even though it seems harsh and forbidden, acted for Harry as a force for release from the mundane thoughts and images of his life. Within the short story like the rest of Malouf's fiction, there is a motif of discovery or exploration.

Harry's caravan is symbolic of newcomers, travelers, tourists or holiday makers in the Australian outback.

*“A flash of grey and pink flared up out of a dip in the road. Harry jerked the wheel. Galahs! They might have escaped from a dozen backyard cages, but were common up here. They were after water. There must have been real water back there that he had taken for the usual mirage.” (LP 347)*

The presence of the Galahs is a further indication of human-nature relationship. Harry feels they might have escaped from a backyard cage. In Australia the galah is usually kept as a cage bird. The name has its origin from the Australian *aboriginal* language of northern New South Wales. The presence of the Galahs also indicates the availability or lack of water in the Australian bush.

*“Back in Hawthorn they had a paper run. Seven days a week and twice on weekdays, Harry tossed the news over people's fences on to the clipped front lawns: gun battles in distant suburbs, raids on marijuana plantations, bank holdups, traffic accidents, baby bashings, and the love lives of the stars. He knew the neighborhood – he had to: how to get around it by the quickest possible route.” (LP 348).*

Harry and May know the city and its life. They have a close relationship with its nuances and space. They left that life in order to experience how it is in the outback. Despite the complexities of city life there is some form of order. This is apparent in the fact that within the city security was assured. When Harry and May left for the outback their house was well secured from intruders.

However, there is no basis for comparison between the outback and the city. The bush is underdeveloped and dangerous. In the city their routine is quite predictable. But life in the Australian bush is both unpredictable and basic. (LP 350).

*“He got up, meaning to slip outside and take a leak. But when he set his hand to the doorknob, with the uncanniness of a dream happening, it turned of its own accord. The young fellow who stood on the step was as startled as Harry was... She saw the gun then, and foggily, behind this brutal boy in the red shirt, the others, the woman with the baby.” (LP 354)*

The Australian outback is harsh and brutal. This reality is exemplified in the rag-tag pitiless family that attacked Harry and May. They took over their caravan in the middle of the night. There is a marked difference between the city dwellers and those in the outback. Australian bush dwellers are living a harsh and impoverished life. Their contempt for people from the city is quite apparent in the cold and heartless manner they sent Harry and his wife outside their caravan. Harry and May were brutally murdered by these Australian outback dwellers.

## V. Conclusion

In *Lone Pine* we see a motif of the wilderness. The Australian outback is dry with little vegetation. It is undeveloped and sparsely populated bush. The relationship between human and nature is obvious but tenuous. The outback is unsafe – there is no security – a very dangerous place for foreigners and city dwellers like Harry and his wife May.

Malouf is chronicling the condition of the Australian bush in contrast to the cities that are modern and developed. The Australian natives – the *Aborigines* – are discontented with the legacy of European colonialism and are thus, struggling to reconcile their native culture with the imposed colonial culture.

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