

## Chapter 6 *Highways to a War: Towards Masculinities*

So far off now, 1965! It begins to seem almost as far as 1848. Yet neither of these years is as distant as we think: unfinished roads stretch from them both, and run to where we stand.<sup>1</sup>

Ancestral narratives are largely about origins and results: while the last chapter explored the ancestral origins of the Devereux-Langford gender identity, this chapter examines its result in the life of the descendant, Michael Langford. It is true that *Out of Ireland* gestures towards the need for reconfiguring masculinity, and this gesture is even more pronounced in *Highways to a War*.<sup>2</sup> This is similar to Keneally's revision of national identity through ancestral narratives. However, Koch enacts this type of change more reluctantly and incompletely than Keneally, because he is more concerned with portraying the dangers of conventional masculinity than advocating a revolutionary plan for change.

Unlike Keneally's identification through ancestry, *Beware of the Past* narrates an ancestry based on absence. Instead of cultural memory there is a conspicuous lack of it. Koch is deeply concerned with the phenomenon of 'Hiding the Stain', especially in Tasmania, where many families suppressed their convict origins in order to maintain respectability. This is a legacy of the past which people of Koch's generation are intimately familiar with: a kind of wound, or deep scar upon the inner life of men, women and whole families. The novel constantly evokes echoes of this painful past, most obviously in the locked storeroom which hides the Devereux journals and portrait. Koch portrays a paternal inheritance which is conditioned by domestic violence and dysfunctional paternity in the figure of Michael's father, John. In Koch's novels, ancestry operates through myth and memory, which leads the reader to wonder how much Langford's life might have been different if he had known Devereux as his ancestor.

Langford eventually reproduces the mistakes of the past: just like Devereux, his life is shaped by the conventions of adventure narrative. Langford's adventures in Asia as a combat cameraman function as a rite of passage which serves to develop and cement his identity, and particularly his gender identity. During

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<sup>1</sup> Christopher Koch, *Highways to a War*, Milsons Point: Random House, 1995, p. 146.

Langford's time in Asia the reader comes to discover what kind of man he is, and how far he has achieved a change in the masculinity Devereux exhibited. When Langford goes to Singapore for the first time he escapes his island-prison home: both the ordeal he experiences there and his potential for achievement establish the Asian adventure narrative. Chasing the big story in Vietnam, Langford discovers that war is a type of adventure where you can prove yourself and discover your identity. However, this episode self-consciously romanticises and idealises both war and adventure: eventually the brutal reality of violent conflict is impressed upon the reader. The dream of adventure collapses completely when Langford moves to Cambodia: this is a story of love and tragedy where Langford loses a nation, a woman and his life. As in *Out of Ireland*, the adventure of violence is revealed as an illusion which is highly self-destructive, just like over-investment in the *aisling*.

Indeed, this association between the nation and a female figure is one of the most significant connections within *Beware of the Past*. Not surprisingly, Langford's relationships follow the pattern of his ancestor's: he inherits and reproduces the gender relations which characterised the life of Devereux. Koch depicts a direct inheritance of the traditional perceptions and representations of women, a reproduction of the 'male gaze' which depicts the operation of a nationalist discourse which identifies the nation with a female in need of protection. This ultimately puts the male line in self-destruct mode, with Langford continually making the same mistakes and provoking the termination of the patrilineal chain. Langford dies for an illusory *aisling* vision, the association between nation and gender which proved so devastating for Devereux's emotional wellbeing. In this way, Langford does not develop much further than his ancestor, for he has no opportunity to learn from his mistakes.

In addition to the male gaze, Langford inherits Devereux's *doppelgänger*, a dual nature which contrasts with the portrait of a classic adventurer hero. Langford's gender identity is fundamentally divided along the same fault lines as Devereux's: he is a poet-warrior whose compassionate side conflicts with his acceptance of violence as a means to an end. This double nature is most evident in Langford's secret life, the part of himself that he keeps hidden from even his best friends. Just like Devereux, he dreams of violence as a way to effect sociopolitical

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<sup>2</sup> Koch, *Highways*.

change, and his decision to take up the gun in the cause of Cambodian nationalism is a major contributor to his fate. Ultimately, Langford's dual gender identity is never integrated or made coherent: there is no healing or reparation and he dies unredeemed.

*Highways to a War* is not very successful in transforming masculinity in concrete ways. The title *Beware of the Past* is quite revealing: Koch presents a warning about blind inheritance, and emphasises the need for intergenerational change. In this way, these novels attempt to move towards new conceptions of masculinity, without actually enacting such changes. For Devereux and Langford there is only death and no hope: the line is ended, and the potential for change through that ancestral narrative is cut short. Perhaps Koch's work also implies that hybridity is what provides hope for mankind, meaning men specifically in terms of their gender identity. As with nation, gender may be revived through the adoption of hybrid models of identification and belonging. In this way Koch and Keneally are actually moving in a similar direction by attempting to reshape personal and communal identities through ancestral narrative.

### **Amnesia: Ancestry as a Wound**

The past, I see now, waits always for us to open its doors; and once having done so, we can choose to open our spirits to its thin, helpless voices, or else turn away. Both choices have their consequences.<sup>3</sup>

The main difference between Keneally and Koch's ancestral narratives is that while Keneally is concerned with reclaiming and identifying with ancestors, Koch employs ancestry *in absentia*. *Beware of the Past* revolves around an intergenerational act of forced amnesia, an ancestral narrative which the descendant knows nothing about. It is, nonetheless, important. The revelation of Langford's ancestry provides the answer to the novel's crucial question, which Barton has been saving up for Cliff Langford: 'Why did he take that risk?'<sup>4</sup> Going into Cambodia after the fall of Phnomh Penh was virtual suicide. Of course, even in amnesia the ancestral narrative is still significant as the basis for identification, and issues of inheritance and the living past are still paramount. For Michael, suppressed convict

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<sup>3</sup> Koch, *Highways*, p. 40.

ancestry is an unhealed, festering wound that ‘chafes and rankles’, as it did for the Bettanys. This is an ancestral narrative which is inflected with great pathos and tragedy, like *Bring Larks and Heroes*.<sup>5</sup>

*Highways to a War* represents the outcomes of the ancestral origins narrated in *Out of Ireland*, and Koch evokes numerous echoes from the past in order to draw attention to the great secret locked in the storeroom. The figure of Devereux acts as an unseen, ghostly presence in the life of Michael Langford, who cannot help but inherit his ancestor’s flaws and repeat his ancestor’s mistakes. This ancestral relationship is symbolised in the dysfunctional paternity of John Langford: domestic violence and continual animosity are the outcomes of ‘hiding the Stain’. As he discovers more and more about how other people perceived Langford in Asia, Raymond Barton narrates *Highways to a War* with an emphasis on the power of myth and memory. Barton produces a synthesis of memories which endows Langford with immortality, since he will never have children. This emphasis on myth and memory underscores the pain and trauma which is suppressed along with the Devereux-Langford ancestry.

In *Highways to a War* the past constantly intrudes on the present, despite great efforts to lock it away. As the narrator, Barton’s deep interest in history shapes the narrative: he admits, ‘It’s true I’m fond of history’ and expresses his sense of belonging in Tasmania.<sup>6</sup> He is particularly interested in the atmosphere of the locked room, which turns out to be the central symbol for Langford’s repressed ancestry. Other brief references to *Out of Ireland* suggest how the past lives on in the present, and is accessible through dreams. In Singapore, Langford is horrified by great red cockroaches: ‘They’re bloody monsters: never saw any of such size. Had a dream of being locked in a room even worse than this one, and the bastards were crawling everywhere, eating me’.<sup>7</sup> This clearly evokes Devereux’s time on the convict hulks at Bermuda, and appropriately it is in dreams that the unknown past is revealed. According to Langford’s first lover, ‘The past used to get into his dreams ... bits of some life a hundred years ago he didn’t want to know about.’<sup>8</sup> While the past is not directly narrated as in *Bettany’s Book*, it survives and intrudes

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<sup>4</sup> Koch, *Highways*, p. 56.

<sup>5</sup> See Chapter Three for a discussion of this novel. Actually, Langford is quite similar to Phelim Halloran: a passionate and idealistic, but tragic, figure, who leaves no heirs.

<sup>6</sup> Koch, *Highways*, p. 15.

<sup>7</sup> Koch, *Highways*, p. 84.

upon the present in various ways. Indeed, Langford's psyche is reaching towards the sublimated presence of Devereux.

This communion between the past and present is centrally located on the Langford farm, which has inherited the name of Devereux's home county, Clare. The hermit from the foundation of the farm, Tom, also has an inheritor in the mysteriously dangerous Luke Goddard, who once led the young Mike on explorations of the land.<sup>9</sup> One important location is the gully, the site of Devereux's act of killing Lynch and O'Donnell. 'And then Goddard went down into the gully: a place of fear and gloom. That was where the stinging nettles were: spiteful, stained weeds from an older, stained century, an older country, making Mike know he'd come too far.'<sup>10</sup> The glaring references to 'the Stain' evoke the figure of Kathleen O'Rahilly, one of the people who 'were said to have eaten' the stinging nettles, 'in the other hemisphere'.<sup>11</sup> Koch portrays the hop fields of the farm as an Otherworld in exactly the same terms as in *Out of Ireland*: 'It was another climate here, and a differently coloured world ... the green of another hemisphere, brought here and planted by Langfords of long ago'.<sup>12</sup> This is a distinct settler culture which is transplanted from Europe, and specifically Ireland. The atmosphere of the summer climate also persists through generations, hinting at 'the true secret of Clare and of the land'.<sup>13</sup> Even 'The Time of Glare' persists through the centuries: 'It was about two-thirty: a bad time of day, I reflected later'.<sup>14</sup> Despite the repression of memory, the past is embedded in the landscape, although it is more strongly evoked in particular spaces.

One of these places is the kiln, the site of Devereux and Kathleen's first sexual encounter. Upon the orders of John, this is a forbidden zone, and when Mike and Ray trespass upon this space the atmosphere of the past becomes palpable. 'I began to have a sense of being stifled, as though we were sealed in a box, and of trespassing upon something invisible; something very old and sad, hanging like the smell of last year's hops in the big, warm quiet.'<sup>15</sup> Perhaps Barton has a particular

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<sup>8</sup> Koch, *Highways*, p. 18.

<sup>9</sup> Koch, *Highways*, p. 51.

<sup>10</sup> Koch, *Highways*, p. 52.

<sup>11</sup> Koch, *Highways*, p. 39.

<sup>12</sup> Koch, *Highways*, p. 27.

<sup>13</sup> Koch, *Highways*, p. 30.

<sup>14</sup> Koch, *Highways*, p. 38. 'The Time of Glare' is a chapter title from *Out of Ireland* – it is when Devereux and Kathleen first made love in the kiln, as well as the time O'Donnell abducted her.

<sup>15</sup> Koch, *Highways*, p. 24.

sensitivity to the resonance of the past, but this strong connection between the two novels is also revealed in Mike's dreams.

It always felt as though there was someone else in there somewhere: someone you couldn't see. And I always know in the dream that there really is someone – someone else in the kiln besides us, even though I know I can't see anyone.<sup>16</sup>

This is the closest Langford ever comes to knowing his ancestor Devereux, and he even dreams of asking his girlfriend Maureen to come out of the kiln, just as Devereux asked Kathleen to move to America. However, the kiln is just one place where the past lives on, and a minor one at that.

The locked room is the heart of the family secret, and the main symbol of 'the Stain'. It is the place where John Langford has buried his ancestral narrative out of shame, and thus forms the basis for the 'lost document' device. When Mike and Ray, as boys, enter this forbidden zone, 'I knew immediately that we'd found the core of the house's secrecy: the cell which contained its essence'.<sup>17</sup> Both novels revolve around this core of secrecy: it forms the link between them and is the explanation for Langford's life. Barton is highly sensitive to the presence of the past, but the musty smell of it is at odds with its living, vibrant legacy.

It was a worrying smell; even faintly alarming. Since then, I've learned not to be deceived by it. The odour that comes up from that deep, dry shaft isn't what you should attend to if you want to see the past as it really is. Nor am I misled any more by the faded, crimped and dried-up appearance of old objects. These provoke sadness, but that isn't how things were, back then; we're merely looking at corpses. The past is alive, and full of juices. It continues in a dimension which neither human wishes nor human indifference can affect, even if the relics it leaves behind are dead – just as our own precious objects will soon, soon be dead.<sup>18</sup>

Ultimately, the past cannot be denied; it may be repressed, but this is likely to cause more pain and trauma than revelation. Koch focuses on the human dimension of this kind of inheritance: 'Much more was locked up in that house than the storeroom at its core. Hearts were locked; the Langfords wouldn't show grief except through

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<sup>16</sup> Koch, *Highways*, p. 54.

<sup>17</sup> Koch, *Highways*, p. 39.

<sup>18</sup> Koch, *Highways*, p. 42.

silence'.<sup>19</sup> As well as outright rejection, some Langfords show complete indifference to the past: Cliff and Marcus 'had no interest in old pictures. Not much interest in ancestors either'.<sup>20</sup> When John dismisses the journals as merely full of politics and filth, he is covering up the angry rejection of his ancestry. As an amateur historian and native of the island, Barton is acutely aware of the persistent shame regarding Tasmania's past.

For John Langford, it would have been the greatest shame imaginable. *Convict stock*: now I understood his anger. The threat all Tasmanians secretly feared: it had come up through the fathoms of the years to violate him, to disgrace and diminish him: to enlist him in its squalid and gloomy ranks for ever. And he had wanted simply to reject it; he had locked it away and hidden it, as his father and grandfather had done. But he could not hide it from himself. It had always been here, like evidence of an hereditary illness.<sup>21</sup>

The Langford ancestry is an illness, a chafing wound which has not healed. The centrality of the paternal figure in Michael's early life indicates a male inheritance, although its patrilinear descent is disrupted by a conscious act of repression. Nonetheless, Michael Langford cannot help but to relive his ancestor's life, most clearly in his escape from Tasmania: 'He was the one who got away'.<sup>22</sup>

Issues of intergenerational inheritance are central in *Beware of the Past*, and Devereux's legacy manifests as a type of dysfunctional paternity. This ancestry is embodied in the painting which Ray and Mike find in the locked storeroom, and the ancestral identification is simplified into a physical likeness: 'Getting closer, I saw the family likeness. Except for the colour of his hair, the man was an adult version of Michael, and also resembled Ken. The eyes were the same blue, and the narrow nose was the Langford nose'.<sup>23</sup> When he inherits the painting as an adult, Raymond sees more clearly that it 'had the power to hint at its subject's spirit', and is struck again by the family likeness.<sup>24</sup> So the ancestral identification is still in effect, although it is ultimately based on an absence. This inheritance is mirrored in the figure of Luke Goddard, the hermit who echoes Old Tom from *Out of Ireland*. Just

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<sup>19</sup> Koch, *Highways*, p. 45.

<sup>20</sup> Koch, *Highways*, p. 57-8.

<sup>21</sup> Koch, *Highways*, p. 59.

<sup>22</sup> Koch, *Highways*, p. 15.

<sup>23</sup> Koch, *Highways*, p. 41.

<sup>24</sup> Koch, *Highways*, p. 57.

as Koch portrays a cycle of male violence through Goddard's rape of Maureen, the Devereux-Langford ancestry is centrally concerned with masculinity through the generations and its outcome as a type of dysfunctional paternity.

John Langford is the last to pass on the Devereux legacy to his sons. Any reader familiar with the family traits would recognise the characteristic duality in Koch's first description of John, but he displays an additional edge of ruthlessness.

He had a soft, precise voice that made everything sound official, and he was shorter than his three grown sons; but he appeared big because of his powerful shoulders and upright posture. The sleeves of his clean khaki shirt were rolled above the elbows, and his tanned forearms, planted on the table, were heavily muscled from hard work. But the head was scholarly: large, bald and tanned, with a few strands of darkish hair, oiled and slicked back, a narrow nose and a very thin mouth. He wore sinister rimless spectacles, and had the potential to become frightening.<sup>25</sup>

It is because of the family's dark secret that John is dangerous: anger and violence simmer just beneath the surface of his polite personality. Marcus comments, 'Some people carry the past on their backs like a saddle ... My father did. It ate into his hide. I reckon this stuff affected him, sitting in here.'<sup>26</sup> This deep tragedy inherited from a dark, shameful past is what really conditions Mike's relationship with his father. When John discovers the boys 'prying' in the storeroom, Ray senses 'that he was angry not merely at Mike and me but at something else: something inside the storeroom'.<sup>27</sup> With his acute awareness of the living past, Ray is right on the mark: the strain of 'Hiding the Stain' has turned John Langford into a bitter, twisted man who is unable to open his heart to his own family. In this way the shame of convict ancestry scars the emotional life of the Langford sons forever. The father-son relationship here is a dysfunctional type of paternity which mirrors the more significant ancestral identification between Devereux and Mike.

When he escaped Tasmania, Devereux left a legacy of violence which affected Langford males for generations. The anger at the past has its outcome in corporal punishment which amounts to domestic violence, and later punishment through farm labour.

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<sup>25</sup> Koch, *Highways*, p. 25.

<sup>26</sup> Koch, *Highways*, p. 60.

<sup>27</sup> Koch, *Highways*, p. 43.

When he was younger, he'd been beaten with a leather strap for any misdemeanors John Langford regarded as serious: a bad school report; tasks around the farm neglected. These beatings were administered on the bare legs, and were savage: he'd once shown me the welts. Since the age of thirteen, the beatings had stopped; but for entering the storeroom, his punishment was to do heavy farm work ten hours a day until school went back, with half-hour meal breaks and no break at the weekends.<sup>28</sup>

This punishment has a timeless, ritualistic quality about it. The details of the leather strap, the bare legs and the ending at thirteen suggests that this was a method of punishment handed down through generations of men, and the forced labour seems an even more degrading type of psychological and emotional abuse. This does anything but inspire respect: 'He really hated his father, did you know? The only person I believe he ever did hate.'<sup>29</sup> Mike himself is bitter and resentful, feeling that John is closer to the hermit Luke than his own sons: 'He'd sooner listen to Luke Goddard than me.'<sup>30</sup> John is rejected by Ken, who races off on his motorbike because his father would not lend him the car to go to his girlfriend.<sup>31</sup> Ken subsequently dies in a road accident, and when his mother dies of a broken heart it is clear that John's rejection of his own origins has broken up the family completely.

Through all this Mike seems to have the suspicion that something is going on beyond his understanding, but he cannot forgive his father. Soon after the storeroom incident Mike shows a deeply intuitive insight in a comment which Ray has always remembered: 'Sometimes I don't think I'm his son ... I think I'm the son of someone better.'<sup>32</sup> Here Mike's spirit is reaching out towards the ghost of Devereux: he needs a myth of origins which embodies a forbear who is someone other than a bitter and twisted old man. His ancestral narrative is the key to his origins, but only the reader and Raymond are able to understand the close connection to Devereux. Michael Langford is the unwitting inheritor of Devereux's qualities, and his follies. Devereux's staunch idealism and his drive to protect the less fortunate are evident in the creed which Mike lives by, and which is written on each one of his notebooks:

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<sup>28</sup> Koch, *Highways*, p. 43.

<sup>29</sup> Koch, *Highways*, p. 18.

<sup>30</sup> Koch, *Highways*, p. 37.

<sup>31</sup> Koch, *Highways*, p. 46.

<sup>32</sup> Koch, *Highways*, p. 44.

*You have never lived  
Until you almost died;  
And for those who fight for them  
Life and freedom have a flavour  
The protected will never know.*<sup>33</sup>

This is how Devereux lives as an absent presence in the life of Michael Langford. Due to the disruption of the linear, genealogical connection, this ancestral narrative must be constructed through the gaps of myth and memory.

Like Keneally, Koch employs the power of myth and memory to construct the ancestral identification between Devereux and Langford. The same processes that enable ancestors to act as a myth of origin in a national sense also contribute to a more personal form of identification: here, ancestry is used to explore and articulate gender identity rather than national identity. Furthermore, the ancestor is actually absent, so the focus is on lessons that might have been learnt rather than how the ancestral narrative has guided and informed the life of the descendant. The centrality of myth and memory in this process is clearly demonstrated in the narrative Barton constructs of Michael Langford's life, 'a life whose memories I seem chosen to preserve'.<sup>34</sup>

Before launching into the narrative proper, Barton suggests that he may enrich Langford's personal diaries, and his synthesis of various recordings and interviews certainly bears the marks of myth-making. He even admits that he might 'take some of the liberties of the novelist' in his construction of the story.<sup>35</sup> Sorting through the materials he feels a surge of nostalgia and refuses to believe that Langford might actually be dead. The novel clearly and self-consciously makes a legend out of Langford's life, and Barton reinvigorates both Langford and Devereux as he stares at their portraits side-by-side, 'their smiles one smile, repeated on two different faces'.<sup>36</sup> It is a tribute to Michael that Barton constructs his life as a legend.

Mike's friends in Asia also remember him fondly, with a sense of nostalgia which echoes and builds on Barton's. Jim Feng remembers Mike's early days in Singapore clearly and fondly, and his precise description of Mike's situation indicates that he holds a special place in his memory.<sup>37</sup> Harvey Drummond also

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<sup>33</sup> Koch, *Highways*, pp. 63-4.

<sup>34</sup> Koch, *Highways*, p. 147.

<sup>35</sup> Koch, *Highways*, p. 65.

<sup>36</sup> Koch, *Highways*, p. 61.

<sup>37</sup> Koch, *Highways*, p. 76.

recounts meeting Mike for the first time clearly, noting Mike's 'old-fashioned' nature, particularly in terms of his relationships with women.<sup>38</sup> Mike's mythified life is based on particular memories of his seemingly incredible actions, such as saving Jim and Dmitri during their capture by the North Vietnamese Army. Remembering how Langford carried Dmitri on his back to save him from being abandoned, Jim says, 'People say many things about Mike: I say he was a hero'.<sup>39</sup> Furthermore, he is an adventurer hero.

Casting Langford's life as a heroic myth is a deliberate strategy by Koch, because it gestures at the hidden presence of Devereux throughout the ancestral narrative. In his author's note Koch clearly states how his depiction is based on real-life combat cameramen Neil Davis and Tim Page, among others.<sup>40</sup> Like any figure of myth, Langford is a composite of several historical figures, but he is also a unique creation which Koch uses for specific purposes.

Myth and memory are the raw materials of Koch's ancestral narrative. Langford is an unwitting outcome of Devereux's life, and the two novels have so many structural and thematic similarities that they cannot be read in isolation. Devereux's life-story is the key to understanding that of Langford, and the focus is on forgotten connections and the potential for learning an abandoned past. Reflecting on the state of ageing combat journalists, Barton suggests how they are institutionalised and cannot let go of the war: 'the greatest high of all will be gone then: the one presided over by Dis, commander of the dead, whose other name is Meaning'.<sup>41</sup> This deeply veiled and complex line suggests that *Highways to a War* is a search for the meaning of Langford's life, the reasons why he re-crossed the border and why his gender identity proved to be so self-destructive. It also evokes Dis, a central mythical figure in *Out of Ireland*. Devereux is the key to these questions, and the two novels work in parallel as an exploration of male gender identity in crisis.

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<sup>38</sup> Koch, *Highways*, p. 104.

<sup>39</sup> Koch, *Highways*, p. 342.

<sup>40</sup> For his sources see Koch, *Highways*, pp. xiii-ix. For examples of Page's photography with his own commentary, see William Shawcross (introd.), *Tim Page's Nam*, London: Thames and Hudson, 1983.

<sup>41</sup> Koch, *Highways*, p. 98.

## Adventures in Asia

Langford's life most clearly echoes Devereux's because it is cast as adventure. Langford's career in Asia is even more clearly cast as adventure, as he becomes immersed in a climate of action and intrigue during the Indochinese conflict of the 1960s and 1970s. This scenario is foreshadowed in the early stages of the novel as the dream of adventure takes shape in Mike's and Ray's adolescent minds. Ray tells how, as boys, they were influenced by various adventure narratives inherited from Mike's brothers, father and grandfather. These consisted of both British classics such as Kipling, Haggard and Ballantyne, but also an American serial which contained the classic adventure comic strips of the era: Tarzan, The Phantom, Flash Gordon.<sup>42</sup> Koch suggests the pervasive influence these narratives had on the young boys' minds: 'We were really studying these texts for clues to an alarming and seductive adult cosmos that was waiting in the future ... I glimpsed for a moment the degree to which the books in the wardrobe must be influencing him'.<sup>43</sup> In many ways Mike's adult life is an attempt to enact these adventure narratives, because they formed the basis for the beginning of his life-narrative and mapped a path to manhood.

However, even in these early stages Koch undermines the dreams of adventure with the realities of violent conflict. Ken Langford, having fought in New Guinea, serves as a prime example of this. Initially he is heroised: 'Mike admired him uncritically; if there was anyone on whom he modelled himself, it was Ken'.<sup>44</sup> However, his experience of war has given him dark secrets: he suffers from bad dreams and wakes up screaming, and when he discovers the boys playing with guns he is shocked and angry.

You pick up a rifle and it gives you big ideas, he said. You think it makes a man of you, holding a gun. That's all bullshit, boys. You don't feel quite so good after you've used it on someone. Only mad bastards

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<sup>42</sup> Notably, this shift from British to American adventure reflects the post-war shift of global cultural hegemony. For a discussion of post-war adventure fiction see Martin Green, *The English Novel in the Twentieth Century [The Doom of Empire]*, London, Routledge, 1984.

<sup>43</sup> Koch, *Highways*, pp. 31-2.

<sup>44</sup> Koch, *Highways*, p. 26.

find that enjoyable ... So don't you young blokes think it's fun, killing people. It's no bloody fun at all.<sup>45</sup>

This speech introduces the backlash against adventure which is enacted in *Highways to a War*, and it also suggests the crisis of masculinity which Koch depicts. Michael still pursues his dream of adventure by trespassing on the forbidden zones of Clare: the locked storeroom and the hop kiln.<sup>46</sup> It is this transgression of boundaries which constitutes the adventure: he desperately wishes to go out into the world to prove himself in action. Ray finds it rather old-fashioned when Mike says with a dreamy expression on his face, 'It'd be good to serve your country'.<sup>47</sup> However, Mike is not destined to be a soldier: he is certainly an adventurer, but of a new type. When he suggests that he wants to 'cover the trouble spots abroad', Ray can see him dreaming of adventure: 'Faintly smiling, he seemed to be gazing into the distances of some mythical sea: a place where I couldn't follow him'.<sup>48</sup> The dream of adventure is one thing Mike inherits from Devereux, and it is this dream which he pursues when he travels to Asia.

Langford's adventures in Asia progress in three broad stages. The first is when he arrives in Singapore, and his difficulty in finding work as well as his near-starvation and serious illness functions as a rite of passage, an induction into his life of adventure. When he travels to Vietnam to cover the burgeoning conflict there, he experiences war as an exhilarating adventure, and earns a reputation for fine photojournalism, risk-taking and heroic deeds. However, this dream of adventure soon crumbles when he moves on to Cambodia, where the heightened danger and threat of imminent violence turns the love of a lifetime into tragedy. On one level, the pursuit of adventure is what leads Langford to his death, but it also draws attention to his sense of himself as a man. It is ultimately his dysfunctional male gender identity which conditions his relations with women and reproduces the fatal duality which is directly inherited from Devereux.

Langford's first adventure into the world takes him to Singapore, and his experience of deprivation works as a trial by fire, laying the foundation for his further adventures in Vietnam and Cambodia. Upon his approach to the city, he

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<sup>45</sup> Koch, *Highways*, pp. 34-5.

<sup>46</sup> Koch, *Highways*, p. 23.

<sup>47</sup> Koch, *Highways*, p. 32.

<sup>48</sup> Koch, *Highways*, p. 50.

dwells on the moment of arrival, sensing ‘that his life’s new direction lies here’.<sup>49</sup> His time in Asia is central to his identity-formation, and this episode establishes motifs which recur later in the novel. His rural upbringing is a good preparation for the lack of creature comforts he encounters in Singapore and elsewhere, conditions which would have deterred a city-bred man.<sup>50</sup> These privations foreshadow the conditions he is to experience as a combat cameraman. Upon his arrival in Singapore, he lives poorly to save money, but the room in a Chinese shophouse suits him: ‘I like the idea of getting to know Singapore from underneath’.<sup>51</sup> However, Langford’s perspective is not the only one the reader has access to: a range of competing voices present various perspectives of the place, with Barton as a kind of mediator.

Initially, Singapore is represented in terms that evoke the conventions of traditional adventure narratives, the quaint sort of ‘local colour’ which is used in classic adventure fiction.<sup>52</sup> It is Barton who sees the place this way, and his familiarity with adventure fiction means that such representations are quite self-conscious. During Langford’s first taxi ride, ‘Asia was disclosed to him for the first time, like a video show arranged for his pleasure’.<sup>53</sup> Barton depicts Langford as a Western spectator, a neo-colonialist type of voyeur who consumes a vision of the place in a superficial way. This is reinforced by a multitude of different sounds: music, voices, vehicles, people.<sup>54</sup> Later, the local colour is reinforced as Barton describes Langford’s photographs of various types of food, and tells of his visits to food stalls which only serve Singapore’s poor.<sup>55</sup> As Langford ‘breathes in Singapore’, the enigma and exoticism of the Orient is reinforced as he considers the ‘puzzling’ array of sounds he hears, and notices the ‘mysterious litter of Asia’.<sup>56</sup> This first encounter with Asia is in a classic Orientalist tradition, and depicts the place as mysterious, exotic and inviting.

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<sup>49</sup> Koch, *Highways*, p. 71.

<sup>50</sup> Koch, *Highways*, p. 69.

<sup>51</sup> Koch, *Highways*, p. 67.

<sup>52</sup> These types of colonialist representations are discussed in depth by Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*, London: Routledge, 1992. The also echo Hamilton’s first night in Jakarta in *The Year of Living Dangerously*.

<sup>53</sup> Koch, *Highways*, p. 68.

<sup>54</sup> Koch, *Highways*, p. 70.

<sup>55</sup> Koch, *Highways*, p. 81.

<sup>56</sup> Koch, *Highways*, pp. 70-1.

However, other perspectives of Singapore soon come to the fore, and cast off the 'local colour' motif. Sifting through Langford's photographs of his time in Singapore, Barton sees them as historic: 'Old Singapore, old colonial Asia, had lingered here just long enough for him to capture it in black and white. Soon it would be replaced by a sanitised metropolis of the late twentieth century'.<sup>57</sup> Besides adding an extra perspective to the representation of Singapore, Barton gives voice to a historical viewpoint which contrasts with Langford's wide-eyed wonder. Aubrey Hardwick expresses the colonialist nostalgia of a certain generation: he sees the end of the British Empire in the new independence of Singapore, is afraid that Australia will be left vulnerable, and gives a heroic status to Raffles, 'that marvellous man who built this place out of a swamp, and brought British freedom and justice to the eastern seas'.<sup>58</sup> These differing perspectives introduce historical and political factors to enrich and extend Langford's vision of Singapore as simply exotic and mysterious.

Within a short time Singapore comes to assume a very personal significance for Langford. During an interview with a potential employer, Langford sees him as a 'guardian of the gate of the fabled land', who correctly surmises that Langford's move to Singapore was 'a bit rash'.<sup>59</sup> He crushes Langford's hopes of finding a position, and Mike is again left to his own devices and means. Soon he establishes a close relationship with the place, paradoxically feeling at home: 'his love affair with Singapore is in his pictures, and the pictures are wonderful'.<sup>60</sup> The obvious reasons for him being in Singapore at all are his quarrel with his father and discontent with farm life, but he is actually operating on the basis of deep unconscious urges, which Barton is well aware of.

He moved about Singapore in a long, waking dream, shooting pictures he'd never sell, in the grip of that fatal obsession which refuses to let things go. He wouldn't let them dissolve; wouldn't let them die; wouldn't ever resign himself to seeing them drift away on the stream.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Koch, *Highways*, p. 73.

<sup>58</sup> Koch, *Highways*, p. 92.

<sup>59</sup> Koch, *Highways*, p. 72.

<sup>60</sup> Koch, *Highways*, p. 74.

<sup>61</sup> Koch, *Highways*, p. 79. This tenacity might be eroded if Langford was aware of MacAuley's 'Warning'.

Without actually saying so, Barton is implying that Langford is following the impulse to adventure that he has inherited from Devereux. Singapore is merely the first stage in this adventure; it is a crossing-over which turns out to be a very trying rite of passage indeed.<sup>62</sup> Unable to find work, Langford's money runs short and he is forced to eat cheaper and cheaper food. Eventually, he becomes seriously ill from the local food, and his audio diary becomes delirious; he has visions which blur the line between reality and illusion in bizarre ways.<sup>63</sup> When Feng and Donald Mills visit him they realise his desperate condition and convince him to let them help him.<sup>64</sup> In this way Langford is saved just in time from destitution and an ignominious death.

After he is rescued, fed, and attended to by a doctor, Langford meets his real benefactor, Aubrey Hardwick. Early in the novel his professional status is unclear, but at this stage Aubrey acts as a father-figure and mentor to Langford.<sup>65</sup> He is a very keen judge of character, and correctly guesses that Langford has Irish ancestry, demonstrating his knowledge of Irish history.<sup>66</sup> He reflects on the rapid changes occurring in the Asia-Pacific region, and especially what they mean for Australia. After giving a very brief background to his life, Aubrey says, 'But enough of my youth. Here are you with your youth on the wing, and we have to do something for you.'<sup>67</sup> Although at this stage his role is deeply mysterious, Aubrey is clearly a benefactor for Mike: he suggests that he may be able to use his contacts to find Mike work in Vietnam.

Langford began to see that he stood on the brink of everything he'd ever wanted: that he had only to walk through the door ... Uncle Aubrey was the envoy of the future, smiling at the entrance to the world. He swung the door open and Langford hurried through, without a second's thought.<sup>68</sup>

Pursuing an adventure in Asia upon the impulse of his ancestral memory, Langford is recruited by Aubrey, an enigmatic figure who seems to know everything. Aubrey

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<sup>62</sup> This rite of passage by crossing over borders is central to Koch's work: see Koch, *Crossing The Gap: Memories and Reflections*, London: Chatto and Windus, 1987.

<sup>63</sup> Koch, *Highways*, pp. 83-4.

<sup>64</sup> Koch, *Highways*, p. 86.

<sup>65</sup> Koch, *Highways*, p. 95.

<sup>66</sup> Koch, *Highways*, p. 91.

<sup>67</sup> Koch, *Highways*, p. 89.

<sup>68</sup> Koch, *Highways*, pp. 90-3.

himself refers to the type of adventure fiction Langford read as a child when he quotes Kipling.<sup>69</sup> The reference is very apt, because what the reader doesn't know at this stage is that Mike is being drawn into the Great Game: his enthusiasm and youth has been recruited by the Australian Intelligence Service.<sup>70</sup> There is a hint of this when Aubrey suggests that Mike should keep in contact with Mills.

Let him know from time to time the way you see things going in the country ... Just give him the flavour and feel ... You'll show your appreciation eventually, dear boy, I've no doubt of it ... There's a *quid pro quo* for everything in this life: haven't you noticed that yet?<sup>71</sup>

This suggests a brutal Machiavellian reality behind the dreams of adventure. In this way, Langford is truly drawn into a life of adventure: without knowing it, he is recruited as an espionage agent. This is a deep undercurrent in the novel, but it is both a crucial driving force behind the adventure narrative as well as a partial explanation for Mike's going into Cambodia after the fall. However, at this stage Aubrey is mainly an agent for moving Langford into the next stage of his adventure: Vietnam, where he experiences action, camaraderie and the consolidation of his gender identity.

Vietnam is where Langford's life of adventure really begins: the war is an exciting, action-filled experience which provides opportunities as well as dangers. Langford thrusts himself into the front line of battle and finds himself in his element: Aubrey was correct in his assessment that 'Action's more your line'.<sup>72</sup> This environment of high risk and constant danger means that the men who act as combat journalists form a unique and special bond, and sadly, those who survive often continue to chase the dream of adventure.<sup>73</sup> This male camaraderie is one of the aspects which raises the issue of male gender identity, and Langford's sense of himself as a person and a man is clearly developed in Vietnam. However, as the action moves towards Cambodia it appears that Langford disregards the opportunities for a redefinition of identity. In other words, he slips back into the old habits of his forefather. Barton sees Langford driving towards his tragic fate:

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<sup>69</sup> Koch, *Highways*, p. 93.

<sup>70</sup> Rudyard Kipling, *Kim: authoritative text, backgrounds, criticism* (ed. Zohreh T. Sullivan), New York: W.W. Norton, 2002 [1901].

<sup>71</sup> Koch, *Highways*, p. 96.

<sup>72</sup> Koch, *Highways*, p. 91.

‘Langford was entering his future: that war whose remorseless sequences would devour the rest of his life.’<sup>74</sup>

It is the prevalence of action during Langford’s time in Asia which most clearly identifies the narrative as adventure fiction. During his first introduction to Langford, Volkov tells of a disturbing ambush which resulted in the mutilation of Western soldiers.<sup>75</sup> Almost immediately this kind of action breaks out into the narrative itself, as the men in the bar become convinced that a bomber has left a dangerous parcel. Here Langford demonstrates that he is a man of action by collecting the parcel like a professional footballer and casting it into the street where it can do less harm.<sup>76</sup> However his prowess is challenged when he first sees real action; when Langford and Feng are shot at by guerrillas, Langford falls into the ‘cameraman’s daydream’ and nearly gets himself killed.<sup>77</sup> What is truly intriguing about this episode is that Langford senses an ancestral memory: ‘I seemed to have seen them [the ‘others’, the Viet Cong] before, in some other situation I couldn’t quite recall; but I didn’t have much time to think about it just then’.<sup>78</sup> This echoes Devereux’s experience of violent conflict, and the narrative begins to cast Langford as an inheritor of his ancestor’s life experiences as well as his mistakes and faults.

While Langford is still beginning his career, Feng warns him that an addiction to battle and action is something that has ruined the lives of many men. ‘I’m telling you this because I think you may become like me ... You are the type. You could come to like war too much, and be good for nothing else. Look at Dmitri: he’s like that. He has had one failed marriage, and no woman stays with him for long.’<sup>79</sup> However, this warning (the first of many) goes unheeded: Langford does go into battle and proves his mettle by slogging through the jungle with a South Vietnamese Unit.<sup>80</sup> He again demonstrates his heroic qualities by keeping his cool in order to get good film, and he learns early that he has to shut off his feelings to do the job.<sup>81</sup> Langford thus develops the precise attributes of an adventure hero: he

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<sup>73</sup> Koch, *Highways*, p. 98.

<sup>74</sup> Koch, *Highways*, p. 99.

<sup>75</sup> Koch, *Highways*, p. 107.

<sup>76</sup> Koch, *Highways*, p. 110.

<sup>77</sup> Koch, *Highways*, p. 118.

<sup>78</sup> Koch, *Highways*, p. 117.

<sup>79</sup> Koch, *Highways*, p. 120.

<sup>80</sup> Koch, *Highways*, p. 136.

<sup>81</sup> Koch, *Highways*, p. 141, 143.

is able to maintain his composure under pressure, he is capable of shutting off his emotions when he needs to, and he demonstrates brute strength, courage and endurance, taking risks which no other journalist is prepared to.

Vietnam is Langford's apprenticeship as a combat cameraman and heroic adventurer: he captures action on film very effectively and quickly becomes successful and wealthy.<sup>82</sup> His heroic qualities become magnified within the narrative of Harvey Drummond, who sees himself as no man of action, and who is amazed at and slightly resentful of Langford's character. 'Then ... he was off again too, dodging, weaving, hitting the ground and rolling, seeking anything that gave him cover: even the bodies of the fallen.'<sup>83</sup> Langford is clearly in his element, and his love of action is the strongest marker of his masculinity.

However, even within the Vietnam episode Koch suggests the danger to life and limb, and the potential for the dream of adventure to collapse into nightmare. During a firefight Langford is seriously wounded and a piece of shrapnel enters his brain.<sup>84</sup> Even though he survives with his faculties intact, the inherent danger and futility of war is made obvious, and the serious concern of Langford's friends infects the reader, who also comes to care for Langford. Here Koch foreshadows the novel's tragic conclusion, where Langford is swallowed up in his dream of adventure because his sense of gender identity is so confused. He is warned even more clearly about the game he is getting into, specifically in terms of the information he is providing to Hardwick. 'Don't play those games for Aubrey, Snow. Don't trust him, or you'll eventually be sorry.'<sup>85</sup> At this stage the reader is only dimly aware that Hardwick is a spymaster, but Koch again and again indicates the danger of playing the Great Game and of living the dream of adventure.

Another convention of adventure fiction which Koch deploys is male camaraderie in a high-risk situation. This type of male bonding is particularly relevant to constructions of masculinity because men reflect and reinforce their ideas of manhood through their friendships with other men. This bond is particularly strong within the experience of battle. 'Because in battle everything matters ... And in battle, you are all drawn together. You are close to those around

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<sup>82</sup> Koch, *Highways*, p. 164.

<sup>83</sup> Koch, *Highways*, p. 174.

<sup>84</sup> Koch, *Highways*, p. 177.

<sup>85</sup> Koch, *Highways*, p. 185.

you in a special way: you see the best in everyone.’<sup>86</sup> This is precisely the kind of relationship which develops between the main male characters, and after seeing action with Feng, Langford feels that they will probably be friends for life.<sup>87</sup> It is a particularly fraternal, masculine relationship that they share: ‘Most combat cameramen ... regard one another as brothers’.<sup>88</sup> Koch connects this in an obvious way with the tradition of adventure fiction: Langford, Feng and Volkov come to be known as the Soldiers Three, a reference to the title of a collection of Kipling’s short stories.<sup>89</sup> This plays upon these men’s role as non-combatants, but nevertheless participants, in the war.

While this male camaraderie is established as a dominant aspect of this novel’s adventure, it is also undermined in subtle but important ways. Notably, the closest and most intimate friendship Langford has is with a woman, Claudine Phan: Barton notes, ‘in someone as private as Langford, I find the bare fact of this confession remarkable’.<sup>90</sup> While it is mostly Claudine’s personality which elicits this openness, this friendship still undermines the idea of Langford as a simple adventurer hero who can only relate to his comrades-in-arms. Furthermore, the bond with the other men is challenged by various episodes which emphasise their difference, and depict deep conflicts between them.<sup>91</sup> Like the men of *Young Ireland*, they are inclined to attack each other personally, to cut close to the bone and take advantage of each others’ weaknesses, to act like ‘cruel children’.<sup>92</sup> Although these conflicts are quickly reconciled, they still qualify the camaraderie between men in a context of adventure.

This close bond is both emphasised and reinforced by the acute grief which the group feels at the loss of any member. Harvey recounts the sense of loss after the death of Volkov, and tries to save him in his dreams: ‘Run, Count, I’d say, and it would seem to me that if he ran hard enough, he’d run back into life’.<sup>93</sup> This kind of grief is also exemplified by Feng, who refuses to believe that Mike is dead. This immediately places the narrative squarely in a tradition of adventure fiction where

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<sup>86</sup> Koch, *Highways*, p. 120.

<sup>87</sup> Koch, *Highways*, p. 121.

<sup>88</sup> Koch, *Highways*, p. 178.

<sup>89</sup> Koch, *Highways*, p. 150.

<sup>90</sup> Koch, *Highways*, p. 129.

<sup>91</sup> This is very similar to the divisions and conflicts between Devereux and his comrades in *Out of Ireland*.

<sup>92</sup> Koch, *Highways*, p. 155.

<sup>93</sup> Koch, *Highways*, p. 361.

male camaraderie is a dominant theme, but also undermines this dream of adventure by highlighting the grief and sadness at the futility of losing friends in war.

For Koch, adventure fiction narrates a journey where identities form and develop: adventure is a rite of passage where men can discover who they are and what their place is in the world. The Singapore episode marks an important beginning in Langford's identity-formation as he survives an ordeal of starvation and disease. In Vietnam Langford truly begins his life as a combat cameraman: 'Down there in the Cradle, a life began which Langford saw as his true one. It was a life that would last for a decade, and die with the war.'<sup>94</sup> The novel has already established his idealistic nature, which Claudine confirms; this is an idealism that only strengthens during his time in Vietnam.<sup>95</sup>

Langford's idealism takes root when he travels with a South Vietnamese unit, and comes to understand that the soldiers there are like many of the farmers' children in Tasmania.<sup>96</sup> He can relate to them and identify with them, and he is able to see the human qualities even in North Vietnamese soldiers during the captive episode.<sup>97</sup> It is the value of the common man that Langford has respect for, and this respect is not dulled by borders or ideology.

However, the precise nature of Langford's identity is called into question constantly throughout the narrative. He is asked whether he was once a soldier, since his endurance and strength on long marches is noticed by the South Vietnamese.<sup>98</sup> He denies it, but this nonetheless raises the crucial question of whether Langford is prepared to use violence to defend what he believes in, despite the fact that the early parts of the novel depict him as nonviolent. However, Claudine is always very apt in her appraisals of Langford: 'It's sad, being a warrior: and that's what you are, of course. It means you'll always be alone. You're a warrior because battle is what you want most, and the comradeship of men. Don't deny it'.<sup>99</sup> Notably, however, Claudine casts Langford as a warrior rather than a soldier, which suggests that although he is determined to fight for what he believes in he may be loath to have recourse to violent means.

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<sup>94</sup> Koch, *Highways*, p. 132.

<sup>95</sup> Koch, *Highways*, p. 131.

<sup>96</sup> Koch, *Highways*, p. 139.

<sup>97</sup> Koch, *Highways*, p. 314.

<sup>98</sup> Koch, *Highways*, p. 144.

<sup>99</sup> Koch, *Highways*, p. 187.

The war in Indochina is the perfect setting for an idealistic warrior-figure like Langford to demonstrate his character. At one point he openly challenges the American military establishment and their whitewash of a major defeat in which Langford's friend was killed by an American helicopter.<sup>100</sup> In a basic sense Griffiths is right: 'The man's a rebel, underneath, in spite of his eccentric devotion to the cause of the South Vietnamese'.<sup>101</sup> However, it is precisely his devotion to the cause of South Vietnam which demonstrates both Langford's rebelliousness and his warrior characteristics: many people remember him as a man devoted to lost causes.

What this means is that Langford's idealism is dangerous for him, just as it was dangerous for his silent ancestor Devereux. This danger is clearly foreshadowed in the episode involving Kim Anh, an orphaned, crippled girl from the streets of Saigon whom Langford takes under his wing. He raises enough money to have her disability treated in Sydney, but is shattered when he returns to convalesce in Claudine's house to discover that Kim has disappeared. He gets very drunk and then does something very uncharacteristic: he visits a brothel despite the remonstrance of the street kids he has adopted.<sup>102</sup> This sense of betrayal and grief is the dark consequence of his blind idealism; and this particular inheritance from Devereux seals Langford's fate.

The Singapore and Vietnam episodes of this novel build the dream of adventure, with some foreshadowing of the disillusion to come. However, in Cambodia the ancestral narrative turns full circle: Langford suffers an anonymous death and the complete destruction of his dream. To start with, Koch narrates more manly action along the lines of conventional war adventure. However, as the Khmer Rouge move in and the fate of Westerners in Phnom Penh is sealed, the dream of adventure falls into abject tragedy as Langford meets his fate. He is drawn into danger by various forces, including a peculiar loyalty to Hardwick, but it is undoubtedly his blindly romantic attitude towards his lover and her nation that leads him into death and apotheosis.

At the outset it appears that the Cambodia episode will simply reproduce the cycle of action and male bonding that is established earlier in the novel. On his very

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<sup>100</sup> Koch, *Highways*, p. 192.

<sup>101</sup> Koch, *Highways*, p. 194.

<sup>102</sup> Koch, *Highways*, p. 196.

first assignment in Cambodia Langford uses an old trick by sending his driver away from the battle as a decoy to the other photographers, and then covering the action alone and getting the ‘scoop’.<sup>103</sup> His return is almost magical; he has courted death and returned unscathed, which serves to further reinforce his heroism. Again within the context of a dangerous war, the men develop a strong sense of camaraderie to help each other get through it.

Couscous night at the Jade Pagoda.

A mutual therapy session for emotionally dislocated correspondents. A station for the dressing of psychic wounds. A trapdoor into trance.

Only the special sadness of the war in Cambodia could have produced couscous night. There was nothing like it in Vietnam.<sup>104</sup>

Here Koch emphasises the particularly therapeutic nature of male camaraderie; it is a self-defence mechanism for these men. The compassionate and sensitive Harvey Drummond is, appropriately, the one who realises that the men were ‘emotionally dislocated’ and suffered from ‘psychic wounds’. Even the friendly competitiveness between them becomes dangerous: Feng notes that there was an ‘extra rivalry’ between them, even though they weren’t competing for stories. ‘But they all played that game, those bloody cameramen, even when there was nothing to be gained. It was the way they were.’<sup>105</sup> Feng suggests that there was a particular calling in their natures to become more competitive: this is an example of masculinity gone haywire, where men will blindly risk themselves and each other under a type of subconscious power drive.

The special bond between Langford, Feng and Volkov is strengthened when they are taken prisoners by a unit of the North Vietnamese Army. Their camaraderie becomes a literal bond when they are tied together as prisoners and taken on a forced march.<sup>106</sup> This camaraderie is also expressed later when they reassure each other, sharing their fears, hopes and dreams; they are clearly doubtful of their chances of survival.<sup>107</sup> ‘My heart lifted when I found that my brothers were with me

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<sup>103</sup> Koch, *Highways*, p. 231.

<sup>104</sup> Koch, *Highways*, p. 233.

<sup>105</sup> Koch, *Highways*, p. 280.

<sup>106</sup> Koch, *Highways*, p. 296.

<sup>107</sup> Koch, *Highways*, p. 327.

still. If we were going to die, we would die together.’<sup>108</sup> However, their bond is truly cemented when they experience a B-52 bombing raid which strikes fear into them.<sup>109</sup> This way they learn what it is like for the adversaries of the American military.

Experiencing the bombing raid does more than to cement the relationship between the Western men: it also provokes more communication and understanding between the Westerners and the North Vietnamese soldiers. It is soon after this shared experience that Langford, Feng and Dmitri are allowed to join the unit in eating their evening meal. They come to know the Others as human beings, not just NVA.<sup>110</sup> They even become engaged in a political conversation which serves to highlight both the similarities as well as the differences between the two groups of men.<sup>111</sup> Even Dmitri, the staunch anti-Communist, forms a friendship with Captain Danh, based upon mutual respect and a humanist kind of understanding.<sup>112</sup> The ‘Common Pot’ episode serves to complicate the situation markedly, as the Western correspondents come to an understanding of the North Vietnamese soldiers based on a mutual human respect and the shared ritual of eating. This dining with the enemy is no standard adventure fare.

The captivity episode also serves to reinforce Langford’s heroic status. When Mike offers to carry a sick soldier’s pack for him, Feng expresses his amazement: ‘I began to find Mike’s powers of endurance awesome’.<sup>113</sup> However, it is not just physical endurance that Langford demonstrates: he displays real strength of spirit which is able to revive the others when they have lost all hope.<sup>114</sup> His strength and selflessness is further demonstrated when he carries Dmitri who is suffering from malaria, and Feng is unequivocal in his estimation of Langford: ‘People say many things about Mike: I say he was a hero’.<sup>115</sup> Langford is depicted as a kind of bounteous saviour when the three men are released from captivity; there is a sense that it is his strength and hope that has enabled them to survive.

However, even this minor success is tainted with sadness and tragedy. As they make their way to safety they must cross a highway: they are ambushed by

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<sup>108</sup> Koch, *Highways*, p. 305.

<sup>109</sup> Koch, *Highways*, pp. 311-2.

<sup>110</sup> Koch, *Highways*, p. 314.

<sup>111</sup> Koch, *Highways*, p. 320.

<sup>112</sup> Koch, *Highways*, p. 326.

<sup>113</sup> Koch, *Highways*, p. 329.

<sup>114</sup> Koch, *Highways*, p. 339.

guerrillas and Dmitri is shot dead.<sup>116</sup> This is the dark result of the adventure: Mike's heroism is futile as one of his closest friends is killed in front of him. The effect on both Mike and Feng is sharp: 'Mike frowned at me, his face bewildered, as though he'd just learned something he'd never imagined before'.<sup>117</sup> This tragedy foreshadows the tragedy of Mike's fate, which goes hand in hand with the collapse of the dream of adventure.

After Volkov's death it becomes more and more apparent to everyone that the Khmer Rouge will win the war, and the fate of the city is heavily foreshadowed in the narrative of Harvey Drummond: 'No one could quite believe that the end would actually arrive, even though it loomed over the city like a thunderhead cloud'.<sup>118</sup> Koch is particularly adept at depicting this anticipation of catastrophe; *The Year of Living Dangerously* uses similar devices to portray the last days of Sukarno's regime. However, in this case the fall of the city cuts much closer to the bone: Langford has made such a personal investment in the cause of Cambodian nationalism that the fall of the city parallels his own personal fall.

Langford's fate is hinted at by various people: Roger Clayton, a former fan of Langford's, claims that Mike is losing his professionalism and that he is irrevocably committed to a lost cause.<sup>119</sup> Those who know him know that Mike is not simply a 'war-nut', as Carr suggests.<sup>120</sup> Claudine knows the danger Langford is likely to expose himself to: she warns Harvey to ensure that he does leave the country, that he can't feel responsible for everybody.<sup>121</sup> The narrative winds inexorably towards the fall of both Phnomh Penh and Michael Langford, not to mention the entire Devereux-Langford line since Michael's brothers died as bachelors.<sup>122</sup>

When the Khmer Rouge finally takes over, Mike and Harvey are temporarily in Saigon, and Mike feels cheated out of the closure in Cambodia. He can hardly believe that the airports have been shut down; he responds with a kind of rage, and the reader knows how far from the truth Carter is when he assumes that Mike is upset about losing his belongings and his apartment.<sup>123</sup> He is losing much more

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<sup>115</sup> Koch, *Highways*, p. 343.

<sup>116</sup> Koch, *Highways*, p. 355.

<sup>117</sup> Koch, *Highways*, p. 357.

<sup>118</sup> Koch, *Highways*, p. 381.

<sup>119</sup> Koch, *Highways*, p. 383.

<sup>120</sup> Koch, *Highways*, p. 206.

<sup>121</sup> Koch, *Highways*, p. 406.

<sup>122</sup> Koch, *Ireland*, p. x.

<sup>123</sup> Koch, *Highways*, p. 409.

than that, and it has already been made clear that he intends to return and fight with the Cambodians.

At the end of the novel Barton meets Donald Mills, a former associate of Hardwick, and he poses the central question that the reader has been led to ask: why did Langford go back into Cambodia after the fall? Mills begins by explaining why Mike gave ASIS help in the sixties: 'Yes, Mike was an idealist. And the nature of the idealist is that he never learns – right?'<sup>124</sup> Whilst providing a good answer in terms of Langford himself, this also gestures back to the hidden life of Devereux, as the answer to the question of Mike's motivation always will. However, Mills eventually gives Barton a more direct answer: Mike went back over the border to try and save Ly Keang, because Hardwick had told him that she was still alive, although he actually knew better.<sup>125</sup> On one level, Mike sacrificed himself to save the woman he had chosen to protect; he died attempting to fill the role of saviour.

However, Langford was also a victim of the espionage activities of Hardwick. While he refused to work directly for Aubrey, Mike had no idea that Hardwick had recruited Ly Keang as a 'stay-behind', someone to report on the new regime. He then sent Mike in for further information, primarily to fulfil his own career ambitions, his dreams of becoming the ultimate ex-operative.<sup>126</sup> It was not because he was working directly for Hardwick that Mike re-crossed the border: he was manipulated by Aubrey who used Mike's love for Ly Keang to further his own career. The Great Game is really just an excuse for gross exploitation.

However, the real reason for Mike's self-sacrifice goes beyond his loyalty to Hardwick or even his sense of responsibility and love for Ly Keang. Mike hints at his central motivation himself during one of his last meetings with Harvey, when he states that he intends to stay behind in Cambodia after the fall. 'It's not for Aubrey ... It's for us; for Cambodia ... Ordinary people get used and abused all the time in this world – I learned that when I was young. And I'm on no one's side but theirs now, Harvey: the ordinary people here.'<sup>127</sup> In a general sense it is Mike's idealism which produces this kind of motivation, but more specifically it is his nationalistic loyalty, his deep commitment to the Cambodian cause. This is

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<sup>124</sup> Koch, *Highways*, p. 428.

<sup>125</sup> Koch, *Highways*, p. 433.

<sup>126</sup> Koch, *Highways*, p. 430.

<sup>127</sup> Koch, *Highways*, p. 393.

something he has inherited unknowingly from his absent ancestor, Robert Devereux. Drummond suggests this when he discusses Langford's relationship with Aubrey.

Uncle Aubrey was a figure from that War of wars which had loomed over both our childhoods, and which dwarfed the present conflict as legend always dwarfs reality ... I wonder if it's always like this, as eras give way to one another? A hall of mirrors: reality emulating some previous legend, and then itself becoming legend, while not quite believing it can be so – transfigured only by death. There's a pathos about it, don't you think?<sup>128</sup>

Although Drummond is actually referring to Aubrey, Koch is actually identifying Langford with Devereux. The reference to mirrors is deliberate and significant: Langford is unwittingly inheriting the faults of Devereux because he is unable to learn from his ancestor's mistakes.

Ultimately, it is in the adventure conventions of *Highways to a War* that Koch most clearly establishes the connection between Langford and Devereux, and which casts into relief the central issue of male gender identity. While the Singapore and Vietnam episodes establish Langford's adventures in Asia, his time in Cambodia leads to a complete dissolution of the dreams of adventure, leading to both his fall and the fall of the cause to which he has sacrificed his life. Apart from the adoption of an adventure narrative to tell of Langford's inheritance from Devereux, there are two other main ways that ancestral identification through gender is established. The first is through the representations of and attitudes to women, and the second is through the use of the split figure which undermines the integrity of the traditional adventurer hero.

## The Male Gaze: Perception and Representation

A crude canvas poster I can't forget waved above a bar, strung from bamboo poles: a Vietnamese girl got up as an American Playboy bunny. She wore the required tights and rabbit's ears and tail, but her face seemed full of woe: an ambiguous lure for the American troops who lurched across my path. All for them, these parodies of American pleasure, flowering on the grave of rue Catinat!<sup>129</sup>

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<sup>128</sup> Koch, *Highways*, p. 390-1.

<sup>129</sup> Koch, *Highways*, pp. 195-6.

Koch's challenge to static gender identity through ancestral narrative is clearly evident in the way men perceive and relate to women. Rather than condoning the attitudes of his male characters, Koch is actually portraying men who act as examples of dysfunctional masculinity.<sup>130</sup> These men perceive women as passive or in need of protection, or understand them according to stereotypes and idealisations rather than as individual human beings. In such cases the personalities and agency of female characters is limited, which demonstrates male power in action.<sup>131</sup>

Just as Devereux had an unhealthy relationship with the women in his life, Langford also attracts bad luck with his old-fashioned attitudes. On one level he merely reproduces traditional gender relations by coping with loss through paternalistic behaviour: he is inclined to see women as the damsels in distress from classic adventure fiction. With the love of his life Langford exactly reproduces Devereux's identification of his beloved with the doomed nation she represents. Here the idea behind the *aisling* is inherited wholesale into a new century. Just like Devereux, Langford's idealisation of his beloved and her nation leads him to grief. It is because of the dysfunctional masculinity passed through the Devereux-Langford line that their line of descent is cut short.

Langford reproduces traditional gender relations through his attitudes towards, and perceptions of, the women in his life. This tends to force the female character into a preconceived notion of who she is, which is not only unfair to her but also leads to negative outcomes for Langford. This first becomes apparent in his relationship with the picker, Maureen, whose introduction is depicted with the same self-conscious portraiture as that of Kathleen in *Out of Ireland*.

She wore a white linen sun hat and a green cotton dress that was too big for her – probably an older sister's – but nothing could disguise her prettiness, which was of the white-skinned, freckled kind. She had prominent cheek-bones, and her blue eyes were wide-set and somewhat slanting: an unusual feature which I decided was explained by her being a picker. At fifteen, I still thought of the pickers as an alien tribe.<sup>132</sup>

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<sup>130</sup> This is clear in the way that many of the combat journalists cannot maintain a relationship with a woman, especially Dmitri: see Koch, *Highways*, p. 253.

<sup>131</sup> As in the last chapter, this reading is using theoretical terms which Koch himself would avoid, but which clarify the reading of his gendered themes. Coined by Laura Mulvey, the term 'male gaze' was first used to describe cinema which stereotyped and objectified women by placing them within a particularly gendered vision. See Maggie Humm, *Dictionary of Feminist Theory*, Sydney: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1989.

<sup>132</sup> Koch, *Highways*, p. 29

What at first appears to be a simple description quickly demonstrates how the girl is being objectified. The description begins with a note on how quaint her hand-me-down clothes make her look, although they cannot disguise her dominant feature: her prettiness. This is undoubtedly to explain Langford's attraction to her, but the description goes further by specifying the type of prettiness she demonstrates. It becomes more and more clear that, as a person, she is being forced into a particular mould, that she is subject to a male gaze. Even her unusual features serve not to underscore her individuality or personal background, but to demonstrate how she belongs, in Barton's adolescent view, to an 'alien tribe'. This is only an introductory example of the male gaze at work in this novel, for Maureen disappears when she is raped and beaten by a local hermit living on the property.<sup>133</sup> As well as precipitating the conflict between Michael and his father John, this event depicts the cycle of male violence and power as well as the silencing of the female.

As a grown man in Asia, Langford demonstrates the same potential for idealising women, or forcing them to fit a particular stereotype. His traditional attitudes may have been cultivated in a rural upbringing, but were also shaped by the type of reading he engaged in. The novel clearly demonstrates that Langford's formative reading years gave him definite ideas about gender relations and the types of roles men and women were supposed to fit into, an obvious process of socialisation.

And we couldn't be casual about its [adventure fiction's] women, who had now altered their dimensions for us. There was a blonde and beautiful American adventuress called Burma, and an equally beautiful villainess (to use the terminology of the time), called the Dragon Lady ... That Dragon Lady, Mike would say, and he'd shake his head and grin: I think he was in love with the Dragon Lady: a Eurasian who was as alien to us, in our Anglo-Saxon island, as a being from another planet. And certainly we were both in love with Burma.<sup>134</sup>

Barton emphasises that he is using the terminology of the time and thus is aware that he is expressing notions which are now clearly out of date. This makes it clear that Langford tends to reproduce traditional gender relations by fitting individual women into images of stock characters from adventure fiction. He is led to expect a

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<sup>133</sup> Koch, *Highways*, p. 54.

Dragon Lady in Claudine Phan, and describes her servant girl as ‘Like a fairy looking out of a cave’.<sup>135</sup> When he does actually meet her he sees a tableau of Claudine playing the piano which he cannot help but see as ‘a kitsch idea of nineteenth-century Europe: a painting on a chocolate box’.<sup>136</sup> While he is aware of the artificiality of the scene, he is not self-aware enough to realise that this image is a result of his own perception. Right at the end of the novel Harvey Drummond dispels any simple notion of Claudine’s character by underscoring her individuality: ‘I believe that Claudine Phan used to be called a dragon lady. She certainly wasn’t that anymore ... But the woman I met was more impressive than any dragon lady’.<sup>137</sup> Because of his reticence, Langford’s actual idea of Claudine is difficult to identify precisely.

Maureen and Claudine are only minor examples of Langford’s preconceived notions of women: his dysfunctional gender identity is clearest in his persistent tendency to see women as passive and in need of his protection. This is an obviously paternalistic attitude: he is known as a benefactor to the street kids as early as his introduction to Singapore: he was a ‘Pied Piper for such kids, from the beginning’.<sup>138</sup> He holds this attitude towards women, too, as is evident from an early encounter with the Vietnamese bar girls: ‘I’m sure he already saw the bar girls as damsels in distress, whom he had to do something about’.<sup>139</sup> It is when such attitudes coalesce into a focus on one individual that the real danger becomes manifest.

As with Devereux, Langford’s heavy emotional investment in a particular image of femininity and its embodiment in one person leads him to grief and despair. The first time he does this it is clear that he is setting himself up for a fall. He tells Harvey about the orphaned cripple Kim Anh and his feeling of responsibility: he feels he has to get her out of the shantytown, and wants to marry her. Harvey ‘wondered whether Langford could actually save Kim Anh from the future ... He [Langford] saw Kim Anh as ephemeral; perhaps not quite real. I’ve wondered since if he saw the other women he’d loved in the same way’.<sup>140</sup> He still

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<sup>134</sup> Koch, *Highways*, p. 32.

<sup>135</sup> Koch, *Highways*, p. 124.

<sup>136</sup> Koch, *Highways*, p. 124.

<sup>137</sup> Koch, *Highways*, p. 407.

<sup>138</sup> Koch, *Highways*, p. 85.

<sup>139</sup> Koch, *Highways*, p. 104.

<sup>140</sup> Koch, *Highways*, p. 169.

tries, though: he arranges and pays for specialist surgery in Sydney to make her able-bodied, and enables her to work at Claudine's to make her safe from predators in the slums. However, all these efforts are to no avail: after his injury, Langford is grief-stricken to realise that Kim Anh has disappeared, presumably of her own free will.<sup>141</sup> Her image has slipped through his fingers, and his despair is exactly the same as what Devereux experiences. 'So when I say that he was romantic about bar girls, I mean that some sort of idealism was involved – presumably founded on pity. And pity can be romantic, wouldn't you agree?'<sup>142</sup> It is precisely this romantic idealism which Langford has inherited from Devereux, and his love life takes the same course as that of his ancestor, especially in the figure of Ly Keang.

My impression was that for Langford, she became Cambodia.

You'll probably find that fanciful and sentimental. All right, maybe so. But I have this notion, Ray, that we never love another human being so completely as when that human being is part of something else. Something which we're in love with, or ready to be in love with, before we ever meet them. Something which becomes part of our dreaming of that woman; that man. Do you see? A place; a piece of the past; a country; a half-remembered life which that isn't even ours, but for which we foolishly ache.<sup>143</sup>

As with Devereux's, Langford's earlier relationships with women serve to prefigure and foreshadow the love of his life. Langford reproduces exactly the mistake of his ancestor, which was to identify his beloved with the nation she belonged to and to invest too heavily in this idealised image of woman-as-nation. During a confessional moment Dmitri confides to Harvey his deep but pessimistic sense of how men and women relate to each other. 'Why do men and women quarrel? When to love each other is the greatest thing in life? ... Because each wants the other to be *someone else*.'<sup>144</sup> As with Lenoir in *Out of Ireland*, this is an almost direct interjection of Koch's voice, because Dmitri's insight reveals one of the central issues at stake in the characterisation of Devereux and Langford.

On his search for Langford, Barton's first introduction to Asia takes him to the Foxhole bar in Bangkok, which is full of war correspondents who are stuck in the dream of war and who refuse to believe it is over. One associate simply labels

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<sup>141</sup> Koch, *Highways*, p. 182.

<sup>142</sup> Koch, *Highways*, p. 189.

<sup>143</sup> Koch, *Highways*, pp. 364-5.

<sup>144</sup> Koch, *Highways*, p. 253.

Langford as one of the ‘war-nuts’ who had no life outside the war. In contrast, Harvey has a much more sophisticated and compassionate understanding of Langford.

‘You want to know why he did it – why he went back over the border. Nobody really knows, but I’ll give you my opinion. He went back to get into the past.’ ...

‘Cambodia was Mike’s adopted country ... He fell in love with it; a lot of the correspondents did. Mike more than most: and he wanted that life back. Just about everything and everyone he cared about was there, including the woman he was in love with ... And now that the Communists had won, he was locked out of the two countries he’d made the whole point of his life.’<sup>145</sup>

Drummond’s analysis makes much more sense in the light of Langford’s ancestral narrative. It is more than the nostalgic sense of endangered beauty which Harvey connects with the ‘false hope of peace’ he remembers on his arrival.<sup>146</sup> The narrative reveals that Langford has forged a fully-fledged *aisling* out of his image of Ly Keang, who clearly stands for Cambodia in the same way that Kathleen O’Rahilly stood for Ireland. In this way Langford unwittingly but completely inherits Devereux’s romantic nationalism, which manifests in a type of dysfunctional masculinity which denies the individuality and agency of the beloved woman.

During his first intimate interaction with Ly Keang, Langford expresses how ‘Cambodia’s my home now. I love it here ... I’d felt this from the first time I’d come here. It wasn’t easy to say why: I felt I’d always been meant to come to Cambodia. I like the countryside; I like the Khmer people; I liked the Army troops I spent my days with. We understand each other’.<sup>147</sup> Koch implies that Langford is acting upon ancestral memory, that he is pursuing a fate which is almost predetermined by the life-story of his ancestor. It is certainly very clear that Langford commits the same mistake as Devereux, and even dies for his *aisling*.

Langford and Ly Keang’s relationship is consummated soon after the NVA capture episode, when Langford is still wracked by grief and guilt over the death of Dmitri. She insists on following Langford out into the field, and after the

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<sup>145</sup> Koch, *Highways*, p. 209.

<sup>146</sup> Koch, *Highways*, p. 216.

<sup>147</sup> Koch, *Highways*, p. 268.

excitement of a firefight their lovemaking is narrated by Langford in a particularly dreamlike sense.

– Water: Cambodia is water. Thousands of acres beginning to drown; rice fields and jungle submerging; fish soon breeding among the trees in underwater forests – teeming through the paddies. Cambodia was water, and Keang was Cambodia. Her mouth again: its liquor. We struggled, wrenching at blackened clothes. Fish in water. When I pulled her half out of the paddy and up against the sloping dyke, I was trembling too. Keang. Gold against smooth red mud, breasts pointing at the sky, shining and streaming. Body-hair thin black strands of silk: hollows and secret fruit left bare. So perfect I knelt in the water in front of her.<sup>148</sup>

This embodied carnality echoes Devereux's first sexual encounter with Kathleen. To the extent that Langford speaks poetry, this passage is an *aisling*: he worships, idolises and idealises Ly Keang and explicitly identifies her with Cambodia. In relation to *Out of Ireland* it is clear that this is an inherently unhealthy basis for a relationship: it represents a type of dysfunctional male gender identity whereby the man is unable to respect or appreciate the woman on her own terms, and only sees her as an image of something else. Notably, this leads to abject grief and despair for the man himself, and for Langford it leads him directly to death.

Langford's unhealthy relationship with Ly Keang is the main reason he went back into Cambodia after the fall of Phnomh Penh: he was in pursuit of her. It is particularly his image of her as a representation of Cambodia which drives him, and this he has inherited directly from his ancestor. While Hardwick does lead Langford to believe that Ly Keang may have survived and needs his help, it is not really a dream of adventure or a love of the Great Game which pushes him back into danger. Right at the end of the war, Drummond mentions to another correspondent that Langford has a lot invested emotionally because he regards Cambodia as his home.<sup>149</sup> This is quite an understatement: Barton is the only one who has access to Mike's tape files as well as the narrative of Devereux's life, which together explain the deep emotional, psychological and spiritual investment Langford has made in his image of Ly Keang as Cambodia. Singing his *aisling* loudly to himself until he

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<sup>148</sup> Koch, *Highways*, pp. 372-3.

<sup>149</sup> Koch, *Highways*, p. 382.

is deaf to reality, Langford stumbles into his fate and brings an end to the Devereux-Langford line.

### **Inheriting Devereux's Doppelgänger**

Koch's most sophisticated challenge to traditional masculinity in adventure narrative is effected through the use of the split-figure. The 'doubleman' is a character type which surfaces again and again in Koch's fiction: Chapter Five explored how Koch has continually had recourse to the split figure to explore themes of gender in his novels. Indeed, *Out of Ireland* represents Koch's most complete and significant depiction of the split-figure yet. Devereux's dual nature serves as an important ancestral precedent for the duality of Langford's character in *Highways to a War*.

Langford inherits Devereux's dual nature completely, and it leads him to the same kind of tragic fall which Devereux experiences. Notably, Langford's dual nature is not clearly expressed like Devereux's, so the reader must rely on other people's reports. He certainly does not express himself openly; others see him as a man with secrets, and the reader can only agree. As the narrative progresses towards the inevitable fall of Phnomh Penh, Langford's secret life comes more out into the open, and it becomes clear that the pursuit of his secret desires will lead him to his death. Just as with Devereux, Langford's duality is most apparent in terms of his attitude to violence, and as the idealistic man of passion comes to the fore Langford comes to rely on violent means in an effort to effect change in the world. Ultimately, Langford's character is divided unto death – he is unable to learn from Devereux's experience of duality and falls victim to the same mistakes. Although this explores a crisis in traditional notions of masculinity, Koch does not go so far as to depict new forms of identity except through vague implications.

Michael Langford is consistently depicted as a man with deep secrets: even his closest friends, who form a bond with him through life-threatening adversities, sense that he is retreating further into a secret life as the events in Indochina reach their dramatic and violent conclusion. Koch also suggests the duality of Langford in more obvious ways, particularly with reference to his ancestor Devereux. Reflecting on Devereux's portrait, Barton aptly observes Devereux's dual nature.

There was something not ordinary about the man: an intensity, coming out of the picture, that I hadn't the knowledge to diagnose, at that age. Looked at in one way, he had the musing, neurasthenically refined expression of a Victorian poet. But then this began to seem wrong: the face had a blade-like readiness for action that I didn't associate with poets: more with sportsmen or military officers, or the leading actors in films. Both possibilities existed, and strangely blended. He would be a man capable of lightheartedness; of all sorts of fancies – but one who would not tolerate fools, or fail to challenge annoyance. Getting closer, I saw the family likeness.<sup>150</sup>

It is precisely this 'family likeness' that is emphasised here: Koch is underscoring the ancestral identification between Devereux and Langford. This duality is exactly what the Colonial Surgeon and amateur portrait artist Howard was at pains to represent in the painting. This split-figure is drawn from classic adventure fiction, and notably it also relates to Langford's childhood reading of adventure comics: 'The [fictional] American boy Terry was clearly Mike's alter ego'.<sup>151</sup> This suggests a process of socialisation whereby Langford's own character is divided into that of an adventurer hero and that of a small boy growing up in rural Tasmania. Barton also acts as Langford's alter-ego, at least in his own eyes.

Forty, I said. Maybe you've only made it to forty. No further ever, now. Four months younger than me. November child and July child. You the arrow in the air; I the crab under the rock. Now I've got your hoard, under my rock. What am I going to do with it?<sup>152</sup>

This is a further Othering, another alter-ego which structures the entire narrative in terms of doubles and split-figures, as in *The Year of Living Dangerously*. In this way Barton acts as Langford's shadow, following the course of his life. However, it is Langford's secret life which helps us understand how his gender identity is fragmented, and how this relates back to his ancestral precedent, Robert Devereux.

Barton reflects on his childhood friendship with Langford, and suggests that he always held an aura of secrecy around him. 'We'd confide, as we got to know each other; and yet I'd always feel that he kept things back; that he could never quite be known. Secrecy infected that whole household; it permeated the farm like

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<sup>150</sup> Koch, *Highways*, p. 41.

<sup>151</sup> Koch, *Highways*, p. 31.

<sup>152</sup> Koch, *Highways*, p. 61.

the hop smell; it was in Mike's bloodstream.'<sup>153</sup> Secrecy itself is passed down through an ancestral connection. The family's big secret is embodied in the character of Devereux; he is 'the Stain' that is being hidden even from Michael himself. The hidden side of Mike's character lasts his whole life, and Barton notes that this aura of secrecy only increases as Langford enters adulthood.<sup>154</sup>

Barton is primarily concerned with pursuing this secret through the novel, and he feels that the audio diaries bequeathed to him by Langford are a kind of entry into his secret life. 'There was an inner life I'd half suspected, but had seldom been given a glimpse of; now it was all in my hands, more complex and intense than I would have thought possible – to be dealt with as I wished.'<sup>155</sup> The Langford family secret is actually revealed early in the novel, with the discovery of the Devereux portrait and diaries. However, Barton's task is to discover how far this secret is responsible for his untimely fate, and particularly his suicidal re-entry into Cambodia after the fall of Phnomh Penh.

Clues are given by Langford's wartime friends and colleagues. Harvey Drummond notes one unusual thing about Langford: 'the impression he gave of having a secret life'.<sup>156</sup> Drummond conjectures that this secrecy is to do with Hardwick's, Mills's and Langford's intelligence activities, or that it revolves around his relationship with Claudine Phan. However, this is only part of it: Captain Trung gets closer to the truth when he asks why Langford is determined to cover the war with a South Vietnamese unit: although Langford never answers, it is clearly to do with his idealistic nature inherited from Devereux.<sup>157</sup> Drummond suggests that Mike's secret life has a lot to do with Kim Anh and the scrupulous respect he accords to bar girls.<sup>158</sup> Langford's life is haunted by the ghost of Kathleen O'Rahilly, and Devereux's feelings of guilt at failing to protect her.

As the novel progresses, Langford's secrecy comes to revolve more and more around his idealistic commitment to the cause of the Vietnamese (and later Cambodian) people. One of the few deep insights into this aspect of his personality is when Langford tells of a meeting with Colonel Chandara, a Cambodian Army officer and kind of mentor who goes on to form the resistance movement against the

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<sup>153</sup> Koch, *Highways*, p. 23.

<sup>154</sup> Koch, *Highways*, p. 49.

<sup>155</sup> Koch, *Highways*, p. 63.

<sup>156</sup> Koch, *Highways*, p. 158.

<sup>157</sup> Koch, *Highways*, p. 145.

Khmer Rouge. This is a long diary entry, where Langford implies a close connection with Chandara and indicates his desire to join his cause.<sup>159</sup> Ly Keang's intention to stay and fight after the fall of the Government forces also hints at Langford's secret life: it becomes clear that he is willing to fight beside her for the Cambodian cause.<sup>160</sup> Finally, as the novel draws to a close, Drummond becomes certain that Langford is retreating further and further into his secret life: 'as things neared their end in Cambodia ... I began to feel unsure that I really knew him'.<sup>161</sup>

The strict secrecy which revolves around Langford creates a distinct problem for analysing Koch's characterisation. It means that the textual evidence for Langford's dual nature is quite scarce. Langford is tightlipped even in his most intimate audio diaries, in contrast to Devereux who uses his journal as a confessional, a place to express his deepest passions, desires, and secret thoughts. The two novels together make it very clear that secrecy and duality are the main weaknesses of their protagonists. This is the way Koch challenges traditional masculinity through ancestral narrative.

The legacy of Devereux, the core of Mike's secrecy, comes to the fore in the late stages of Langford's life. Devereux lives on in Mike's idealistic commitment to a national cause, but it is that of Cambodia, rather than Ireland. However, the main faultline for Langford's split identity is precisely the same as Devereux's: the role of violence and its relation to masculinity. Just like Devereux, Langford is a poet-warrior: he is essentially a pacifist who is fiercely committed to an idealistic cause, although he ultimately resorts to violent means to preserve his own life and fight for his ideals. This fragmentation of male gender identity is directly inherited from Devereux, and eventually inclines Langford to make the ultimate blind sacrifice.

Although the evidence for Langford's secret life is scarce, Koch makes it clear that he is divided in exactly the same way as Devereux. Like his ancestor, Langford demonstrates this division through his confused attitude towards violence. As a child and young man Langford is deeply affected by his brother Ken's experience of war in New Guinea. Ken is wracked by nightmares, and he scolds the boys Mike and Ray when he catches them playing with guns. He tells the story of

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<sup>158</sup> Koch, *Highways*, p. 188.

<sup>159</sup> Koch, *Highways*, pp. 274-9.

<sup>160</sup> Koch, *Highways*, p. 370.

<sup>161</sup> Koch, *Highways*, p. 380.

the first man he killed, and says sternly, 'It's no bloody fun at all'.<sup>162</sup> While Mike begins as a natural pacifist, circumstances draw him towards advocating violence, just as they led Devereux towards his fate.

Langford begins his time in Asia with a strong reluctance towards using violence. The early parts of the novel contain no suggestion that Mike is anything other than a friendly, easygoing, compassionate man who is nonetheless given to bouts of idealism and passion. However, as the narrative progresses it becomes evident that there is a dark potential within him. At one point he takes issue with a French official who shoos away a poor girl selling flowers: he grips the man tightly by the shoulder and makes his intention clear: 'it was also plain to me that Langford had frightened him [the French official]; that he'd sensed a potential for violence that he hadn't wanted to deal with'.<sup>163</sup> This is a brief but crucial scene in terms of Langford's duality because it foreshadows how he resorts to violent means later in the novel.

Throughout the whole novel, but particularly in the action scenes, Langford demonstrates many of the characteristics of a soldier but he staunchly remains a non-combatant. During his first outings with the South Vietnamese military, Captain Trung notes Langford's strength and endurance under the grinding, Spartan conditions of jungle patrol. He asks 'Were you once a soldier? I hear Australians are good jungle fighters'.<sup>164</sup> Harvey is amazed at Langford's athleticism, courage, and his ability to act under pressure in a firefight: at this point the more sedate journalist thinks, '*He's not a photographer, he's a bloody soldier; he's hooked on this*'.<sup>165</sup> As he becomes more experienced Langford demonstrates his courage and resourcefulness when he scoops the other journalists by luring them away from the scene of battle, thereby sacrificing his own safe transport.<sup>166</sup> However, his courage, endurance and heroism is most clearly evident in Part Two, Chapter Three: 'The Common Pot'.<sup>167</sup> Here Langford provides physical, psychological and emotional support to Feng and Volkov during their capture by the NVA. It is here that his warrior-like qualities are shown in the most pacifistic manner, and he is wary of Ly Keang's attempts to recruit him into Colonel Chandara's outfit. At the beginning of

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<sup>162</sup> Koch, *Highways*, p. 35.

<sup>163</sup> Koch, *Highways*, p. 166.

<sup>164</sup> Koch, *Highways*, p. 144.

<sup>165</sup> Koch, *Highways*, p. 174; italics in original.

<sup>166</sup> Koch, *Highways*, p. 232.

their relationship, Langford strongly resists her entreaties to become a soldier and fight for Cambodia.

- You are really a soldier, she said. When are you going to put down that camera, and take up a gun?
- Never, I said. I won't kill people.
- But you don't want us to lose Cambodia, she said ... You love Cambodia, you said. So you have to fight for what you love, don't you know that?
- Not with a gun ... I'll go on carrying the wounded ... I'll send out pictures to show what's happening. But I won't pick up a gun.<sup>168</sup>

Far from scapegoating Ly Keang for Langford's death, Koch's ancestral narrative draws attention to the divisions and weaknesses within the man's own personality.<sup>169</sup> This dialogue plays to the crucial division within Langford's character: whether or not he is prepared to use violence to fight for what he loves. This is central to the issue of his masculinity: Langford feels he must take action in the world, and he is almost inevitably fated to repeat the mistakes of his ancestor. The logic of the double-novel leads inexorably towards this fall.

Indeed, when it occurs, Langford's resort to violence is strongly reminiscent of Devereux's: he fights first in self-defence but later because he is threatened with losing what he is most attached to. As the war in Cambodia draws towards its tragic conclusion, Langford fades out of focus for most of his friends, and rumours begin to circulate about him. Clayton suggests that Langford is losing his professional objectivity by beginning to fight alongside the Cambodian troops, violating the basic rule of war correspondents.<sup>170</sup> While the reader might be disinclined to trust such rumours, Langford tells in his audio diary of how he first started fighting to protect his own life, and echoes Devereux's voice perfectly: 'I've used a gun, and now everything's changed'.<sup>171</sup> He has finally given in to the passionate side of his nature which is capable of violence. The description of shooting an enemy who is approaching dangerously echoes the parallel episode of *Out of Ireland*. Langford

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<sup>167</sup> Koch, *Highways*, p. 288.

<sup>168</sup> Koch, *Highways*, p. 374.

<sup>169</sup> This is the central objection to McKernan's argument against Koch: he is actually more concerned with the fragmentation of masculinity than constructing women as Eve-like figures who lure men to their death.

<sup>170</sup> Koch, *Highways*, p. 383.

<sup>171</sup> Koch, *Highways*, p. 377.

also echoes Devereux's hesitant triumphalism and the sense of bonding with another through battle.

– So we're still here, you and I, he [Chandara] said. I knew you'd use a gun one day, Mike. Now you're one of us. Now you've become a soldier after all.

– In that moment, for good or bad, I felt that what he said was true. We'd fought to save our lives together, he and I, and a link had been formed like no other, which would tighten. Some day, I'd fight with him for Cambodia: it had always been going to happen.<sup>172</sup>

This final line strikes the keynote of this ancestral narrative: Langford is doomed to repeat the mistakes of his ancestor because he is unable to learn from his example. He inherits Devereux's *doppelgänger* completely. His gender identity is irrevocably fragmented, and his divided attitude towards violence is symptomatic of Koch's more complete challenge to conventional masculinity.

*Highways to a War* has an essentially negative aim: to portray a process of ancestral identification where absence and amnesia is dominant. This serves to demonstrate the disastrous ramifications of failing to identify with one's ancestral origins. In the case of Devereux and Langford, duality is the central aspect of their characterisation, a duality which is harmful and self-destructive for both ancestor and descendant. This reflects both male attitudes to women and men's own inability to reshape their gender identity in positive ways.

Because the lines of memory are disrupted, Langford is denied the opportunity to learn from his ancestor's life story and the Devereux-Langford line is terminated. Ray sees little hope that the surviving brother Marcus will continue the line. 'He was still a bachelor ... for whom talking was difficult, and who'd nailed up the fence of bachelorhood as such men often do, moving in his private gullies of quietness.'<sup>173</sup> Marcus is a parallel, but smaller example of dysfunctional masculinity: he is even further from the process of self-actualisation which Mike had begun to move towards.

Ultimately, the tragedy of *Beware of the Past* is that Michael Langford is unable to learn from Devereux's mistakes and is thus fated to repeat them. He is unable to redefine his gender identity into something which is more fulfilling and

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<sup>172</sup> Koch, *Highways*, p. 379.

<sup>173</sup> Koch, *Highways*, p. 56.

less self-destructive. For this reason he leads himself to his own death, and simultaneously terminates his family line. In this way he suffers the same tragic fate of Phelim Halloran: he has no offspring to remember him, no 'larks and heroes' to validate his life and carry forward his legacy into future generations.<sup>174</sup> This explains Barton's clear desire to narrate Langford's life-story.

### ***Beware of the Past: Towards Masculinities***

This double-novel has complex contradictions and tensions at its core. Undoubtedly the overall outcome is negative and tragic: Langford suffers a terrible fate and he is not able to provide the world with descendants to remember and honour him. This is largely related to a dysfunctional type of masculinity which he inherits from Devereux, and which he is unable to reshape in more positive ways. In this way Koch narrates a crisis of traditional masculinity, suggesting that the addiction to dreams of adventure, the perceptions and representations of women, and the duality of the artist-warrior character are the weaknesses in this type of masculinity. This serves to fragment male gender identity and challenge it in the most fundamental ways. There is little reparation, healing, or attempt to reintegrate the competing aspects of masculinity, which Koch ultimately leaves shattered.

In light of this, it is clear that arguments like McKernan's are missing the point of Koch's novels. He is not only not advocating the sexist and racist views McKernan accuses him of: his novels actually depict a crisis of masculinity and highlight the self-destructive nature of male power. His characters illustrate the persistent lure of conventional masculinity, and emphasise the need for constructing new forms of gender identification. If anything, Koch might be accused of saying too loudly *Beware of the Past*, rather than 'embrace the future'. His ancestral narrative does not go far towards advocating strategies for change, although this really reflects some readers' preference rather than the author's own aims.

An optimistic or wilful reader may well be able to use these novels as a basis for new forms of maleness. This kind of reader may even choose to read them in a reverse order to that in which Koch published them, in order to foreground the

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<sup>174</sup> See Chapter Five for a discussion of *Bring Larks and Heroes*.

(potential) transformation of identity.<sup>175</sup> Koch does take some steps towards suggesting ways in which masculinity might be redefined; he gestures towards more pluralistic ways of understanding male gender identity. On the one hand, he begins to attempt to reshape the warrior archetype: Langford is a distinctly new type of warrior who attempts to reject the credo that the end justifies the means. Furthermore, Koch seems to suggest that a new humanist type of hybridity has the potential to reintegrate, heal and repair the intergenerational trauma which *Beware of the Past* draws attention to. However, the reader must make some effort to produce such an interpretation; Koch himself is extremely reticent about promoting change, given his distrust of revolution and transformation. The next steps need to be taken by readers themselves: perhaps it is in the process of experiencing the narrative that we are nudged towards new masculinities.

Langford inherits Devereux's warrior qualities completely: he is idealistic and determined, with a strong survival instinct and a drive to defend what he believes in. However, his childhood experience of domestic violence and his vicarious experience of war (through his brother Ken) have produced a change in the way he thinks of men's role in the world. He is initially deeply distrustful of justifications for violence: he shoots pictures, not people, and at first strongly resists Ly Keang's attempts to convince him to take up arms. This reticence contrasts sharply with Devereux's uncritical attitude: as a militant nationalist, he takes it for granted that violence is an appropriate means to an end, and he lusts for revenge against the enemies of his nation. Langford, at least, starts out as a committed pacifist.

Rethinking the ways in which masculinity is connected to violence is of course the first way to begin to reshape male gender identity. The fact that Langford inherits a warrior nature but attempts to reforge it into a non-violent form of identification demonstrates real potential and hope for the future. What Koch does is to show how difficult this path is: transforming a warrior nature is not something which can be done easily or in a short space of time. He suggests that Langford needed to understand and connect with his ancestral narrative to be able to make this transformation more successful. Langford is eventually entrapped within a cycle of violence which persists over generations. When his fundamental sense of

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<sup>175</sup> See Chapter 2 for a discussion of the reading order of these novels.

selfhood is challenged and his new home and lover are threatened, he slips into conventional, militant means for defending what is valuable to him. Ultimately his masculinity cannot help but be expressed through violence, as much as he attempts to forge a pacifistic warrior identity.

Koch also suggests by implication that ideas of new humanism and hybridity may provide hope for mankind, meaning men in terms of their gendered identity.<sup>176</sup> In terms of this thesis, new humanism can be taken to mean a way of understanding humans in the natural and social world which moves beyond the categories and classifications of Enlightenment humanism. It is also post-colonial in the sense that the masculinity as depicted and constructed in colonialist adventure fiction is under revision. While moving beyond the fragmentation and binary logic of Enlightenment humanism, Koch also has recourse to basic human values such as courage, determination and compassion.

Throughout his fiction Koch depicts scenes of barbaric inhumanity, such as the torture and massacres of post-Sukarno Indonesia. In *Highways to a War* the emphasis is on the brutality of the Khmer Rouge, and the violent fate which awaits their enemies. This is epitomised in Jim Feng's observation of one victim.

The upper part of a man's corpse lay on the red earth, in the bars of light and shadow, hacked in half at the waist. Just the upper half: there was no sign of the lower part or the legs ... His eyes were open and glaring, his lips set in a snarl of agony that made the face like an animal's. Huge gleaming brown entrails protruded from this half-body, looking not like part of a human being but like the tubing in the engine of an old car: they were black with the flies whose hum seemed louder and louder here. The smell was very bad.<sup>177</sup>

Echoing both *Heart of Darkness* and *Lord of the Flies*, the half-corpse is depicted as non-human, mechanical: part of Koch's concern is to wonder how humans can commit such atrocities.<sup>178</sup> This emphasis on inhumanity serves to further reinforce the essential humanity of a character like Langford: he transcends the categories of nation, culture and gender which produce destructive identifications, and his deep and simple humanity is a beacon of hope for all characters.

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<sup>176</sup> Like 'male gaze', these are terms which Koch himself would avoid using, but they do substantiate the reading.

<sup>177</sup> Koch, *Highways*, p. 351.

<sup>178</sup> Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness* (ed. Robert Kimbrough), New York: Norton and Company, 1988 [1899], William Golding, *Lord of the Flies*, London: Faber, 1965.

It is through his heroic actions during their capture by the NVA that Langford's humanist qualities show through. He supports and cares for his close friends, but he also communicates with his captors: he perceives the spark of humanity which makes them individuals with desire, hopes, and fears like anyone else. His appearance has 'an almost feminine prettiness' and he has a compassionate, tender side which heals Feng and gives him the courage to survive.<sup>179</sup> However, it is in his attitude towards the ordinary people of Vietnam and Cambodia that Langford's humanism is most clearly shown: 'The Yanks call them gooks and slants ... They don't see them as human beings. They say that they're all cowards, and that their women are whores. That's not bloody true.'<sup>180</sup> It is the basic respect that he accords to all people as humans which characterises Langford. He is a 'new humanist' in the sense that he doesn't demarcate between people in the way others do.

Finally, it is in the notion of hybridity that Koch's hope for the future of humanity rests. Claudine Phan is a hybrid character, a blend of French and Vietnamese culture which is presented by the text as a natural, resilient form of self-identity.<sup>181</sup> It is the uncompromising, purist myth of origins which promotes the fanaticism and inhumanity of the Khmer Rouge, but by revising humanism through hybridity, male gender identity may be transformed. What is crucial, though, is an understanding of what has gone before in the lives of our ancestors; otherwise we are likely to repeat their mistakes, as Langford did Devereux's.

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<sup>179</sup> Koch, *Highways*, p. 23; p. 340.

<sup>180</sup> Koch, *Highways*, p. 159.

<sup>181</sup> Koch, *Highways*, p. 184.