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***BABYLON***

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## CHAPTER II

### Male Identity in *Remembering Babylon*

#### 2.1 Introduction

*Remembering Babylon* is a recognized novel published in 1993. In *Remembering Babylon*, the story essentially centers on Gemmy Fairley, a civilized boy who lives with the aboriginal people. This novel won major awards of Australia like International IMPAC Dublin Literary Award in 1996, Prix Baudelaire (France) in 1995, Los Angeles Times Book Prize and Best Novel in 1994. It also won the awards of Commonwealth Writers Prize, South-East Asia and South Pacific Region, Best Book from the Region Award in 1994, Prix Femina (France). In 1994, it won the Best Foreign Novel, New South Wales Premier's Literary Awards and in 1993 Christina Stead Prize for fiction. It was shortlisted for the Man Booker Prize, Miles Franklin Award and NBC Banjo Award for fiction in 1994. *Remembering Babylon* is a prime example of the novel dealing with the theme of male identity. This chapter presents how Malouf explores male identity through his characters.

#### 2.2 Plot and Setting

In the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, in settlement of Queensland, Australia the story of the novel takes place. Three children, Lachlan, Janet and Meg of the village playing a game at the edge of the area and their life are turned upside down by the appearance of a man. A remarkable figure stumbles out of the bush. He appears to be white, but acts like an

Aboriginal. He was a ship's boy who was abandoned in the north of Australia. He was thirteen year old who spent sixteen years with the aboriginal tribe who found him. Name of that boy is Gemmy. He does not remember his language and culture.

At the beginning, Gemmy creates a movement in the village. Although, the savage mentality people want to help him and the McIvor family takes him to live with them. This family includes the children, who found Gemmy, are a daughter of the McIvor Janet, and nephew, Lachlan Beattie. The McIvor family is from Scotland. They had come to the Australia for the purpose of a good lifestyle.

The European settlers are looking towards the blacks in a different point of view. They are divided into the two major groups. First group of settlers believes that blacks should be killed because they could not become the original Christians and they are savage. The second group is a warm hearted settler, who believes that black people could be tamed, and a tamed person becomes their servants. Both groups are tries to win Gemmy's confidence for knowing information about the plans of black peoples. Gemmy knows everything but remains silent. Gemmy realizes that he can no longer stay in the village.

The McIvor family also realizes this thing, and they send Gemmy away from the settlement to live with Mrs. Hutchence. In some days, he goes from there in the wilderness. At the time of living, with Mrs. Hutchence Gemmy writes about what he thinks on the seven pieces of paper. The minister of the settlement, Mr. Frazer had written Gemmy's life story which based on that paper. At the end of the novel, Lachlan is the minister in the government. Janet has become a nun.

## **2.3 Male Characters**

### **2.3.1 Gemmy Farley**

Gemmy is a central character of this novel. He first lived as a rat-catcher. Willett is his owner, and as a small child, Gemmy was beaten continuously as well as maltreated and molested. He loves Willett and has a sense of belonging there. He accidentally burns Willett's place down and runs away from that place. He is picked up by someone who places him on a ship. Again, on the ship he was mistreated and eventually thrown overboard off the coast of Australia by the Irish and Mosey awful people. After flailing about in the sea, the McIvor children found him and had taken him in their village. When Gemmy entered the village, all things were new for him, but as time passed he learned and understood their culture and land. Then he made his way to the Beattie's settlement, unintentionally creating indelible changes to Lachlan, Janet, Jock, and the entire settlement. Gemmy lived with them for 16 years, and when he realized that he was not safe there, he disappeared from the settlement. After that, he lived with the white settlers. White settlers did not believe in Gemmy. They caught Gemmy talking with the natives and attacking him. That time also, he was saved by Jock McIvor.

### **2.3.2 Lachlan Beattie**

Lachlan Beattie is a cousin of the McIvor children from Scotland. Lachlan's father was dead in a mining accident. Malouf describes Lachlan as a real masculine character with power, strength, and a protective nature. Lachlan was the first to find Gemmy, and after seeing an unknown person protect her cousin's sisters, he was twelve years old. In the beginning of the novel, he was a male character of the Malouf.

### **2.3.3 George Abbot**

He was a schoolmaster. He was a man of twenty-six with the manners of an older man even than that. He was just nineteen. He was very ambitious person. He wants to gain respect in the society. He did not wish to be seen as a boy. He was a very aggressive man.

### **2.3.4 Jock McIvor**

Jock McIvor was a headman of the McIvor family and father of the Janet and Meg. He gives shelter to a Gemmy but face problem at settlement because of Gemmy. At first he also not likes Gemmy but slowly he changed and once saved Gemmy. It shows the Jock's development towards Gemmy.

### **2.3.5 Mr. Frazer**

He was the minister of the settlement. He was doing botanic work for garden. He was a very much aware in his life. He wants to develop the settlement area. He knew that their land having so much potential. It gives a real gold. He want to discover new things and in this work he taking help to Gemmy.

## **2.4 Concepts of Masculinity & Gender**

*Remembering Babylon* is reflecting Malouf's concern with masculinity. Lachlan Beattie, a 12 year old Scottish child who finds Gemmy in the bush, was faced with a number of challenges in the opening of the novel which prove his masculinity. Standing 'very sturdy and purposeful, two paces in front of his cousins'(P3), Lachlan shows how he was dominant over both his female cousins and the 'black' that was approaching them,

by displaying a very strong and commanding pose. This was similar to what he had done earlier, 'stepping resolutely in front' (P2) of his cousins, doing what 'his manhood required him to do' (P2). This conveys the notion of masculinity as being something inherited from previous male generations, certainly in an era when 'nightmare rumours'(P2) and 'superstitions' (P2) dominated the fear of the unknown at the time. The 'stepping resolutely'(P2) in front of his cousins conveys to the audience the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century belief that women, especially British, 'white' women, needed to be sheltered from such forces, and men had the responsibility to protect them. The concept of masculinity is certainly explored during the text, as with many of Malouf's novels, especially when Hector Gosper and George Abbott are at Mrs. Hutchence's house talking to Leona.

Men and their actions are often described as animalistic by David Malouf. Gemmy to them is an animal that must be tamed and controlled. He is described as:

A scarecrow that had somehow caught the spark of life got down from its pole, and now, in a raggedy, rough-headed way, was stumbling about over the blazing earth, its leathery face scorched black, but with hair, they saw as it bore down upon them, as sun-bleached and pale-straw as their own (P3)<sup>1</sup>

This is how the children saw him when they captured him during the boys' game of "hunters on the track of wolves" (P1). These children have learned to classify others as inhuman, and it was "the boy's intention to confront it" (P3). It was not until the adults took Gemmy away that Lachlan's imagination and "the power of make-believe" (P4) came to light. Other references of Gemmy's animalistic behavior are

found on P8 (mongrel), P24 (raised on all fours, whine), P31 (scurried on all fours), P33 (on all fours) to name a few. Gemmy, however, is not the only male who has animalistic features. The men, in general throughout this text take on very aggressive, savage tendencies. For example, when the men are trying to figure out what Gemmy is describing to them, they turn it into a game where each man wants to be right. Malouf writes as follows:

Eager to be right, they vied with one another, got hot under the collar, shouted, and when they were defeated, went mean at the mouth and sulked. Others thought it a fine chance to act the goat (P10)

They would get so frustrated by not knowing what was said by Gemmy that:

...some men would grow hot under the collar and begin to push him about; to the point at times where they had to be restrained (P35)

As the novel continues, and Lachlan grows he becomes more animalistic himself. This is an indication of the need by humans to become closer to nature. Malouf writes as follows:

He had a savage need to convince people of things; but had first, he knew, and he withered at the old injustice of it, to convince them about himself. (P100)

Jock himself is described as a very aggressive man when he realizes how much his family was put in danger the night that Gemmy was attacked:

That was when the real fear, the real anger took him. That in the middle of the night his wife and daughter should be standing out under big clouds at the edge of the dark, hanging together and watching him drag a helpless creature, half out of his wits, back from a moment of senseless bullying while the men who had done it – neighbours! – were creeping home to crawl in beside their own wives, safe in bed. (P115)<sup>2</sup>

The men in this novel are afraid of what they do not know. They believe that the aboriginals and anyone else who is not white, British and well-known do not have the same rights as they do. They came to Australia to colonize the land and call it their own, but there is the sense that the men who were sent there were learning that they were sent to a land that was:

About the size of France and all the Germanies combined, wild, cut in two by the southern tropic, and largely, as yet, unpeopled... [Sir George] is alternately intoxicated by the largeness of the undertaking and depressed that in being set down, at more than forty, at the ends of the earth, he may drop from sight (P153).

The men in this novel, early on, prove that women and children they live among do not hold the same rights as they do:

Janet McIvor, who had also been there and seen all that occurred, though no one seemed interested in her version, was surprised that he was allowed to get away with it...."Me and Meg found him, just as much as



Lachlan," Janet McIvor put in, seizing her opportunity, but no one paid heed.(P6)

The ideas of gender are also shown at the opening of *Remembering Babylon* by David Malouf. The ideas are presented in ways not easily obvious and appeared childish at first, such as the game in the snow. However, later on the concepts are explored in a lot of detail and served as the primary ideas presented in the novel.

The concept of Gender is shown as Lachlan exudes power and takes responsibility over them even though Janet is elder. This shows how male-dominant society was as even at that young age Lachlan felt a compulsion to do "what his manhood required him to do"(P2), protect the girls. Lachlan stands "resolutely" (P2) in front and even though they are only a few meters behind him, they feel a "hundred yards" (P3) away from Lachlan. Gemmy is also very un-masculine in the beginning and is bossed around by Lachlan; he appears to be at the girls' level. It is also interesting to note that Lachlan gets all the attention and praise for finding Gemmy and the girls get none as if they are not important.

## **2.5 Male Identity in *Remembering Babylon***

David Malouf's use of male identity can be seen in a variety of characters and their relationships with other characters. Lachlan and the relationship he has with Gemmy serve to show the power each holds over the other. Lachlan uses Gemmy as a means to take charge of Gemmy and brings him back to the village.

In the village as a native boy, Lachlan dominates over Gemmy and tries to catch the attention of townspeople though he is a

child. It shows that each boy always wants to become a real man. Lachlan's male identity reflects when he brings Gemmy in the village, at the time of playing a game and with the relationship of Gemmy. At the time of game playing, he forced to his female cousins to join in that shows his male dominance over the female. Janet and Lachlan's relationship are also based on the male female identity. Lachlan holds a stick over Gemmy as a gun is showed Lachlan's position of power. Lachlan has a highly influenced by his community and this show through his masculine traits. Though other people think that Gemmy has dumb, unintelligent and unmanly boy, he shows his masculine power later in the novel.

## **2.6 Symbols of Male Identity**

Throughout *Remembering Babylon*, Malouf uses symbols to communicate and enhance the theme of male identity of the text. Examples of this include the stone, the rain, Gemmy himself, the gun, etc. Rain are used to show how men wash the last remnants of their previous life in order to give them freedom. Stone represents the male power. Gemmy himself shows how one man can break cultural barriers and stereotypes. Gun represents power, western values, and western culture. Even a make-believe gun in the hands of a small boy has powerful implications. It also represents masculine values. Lachlan feels an obligation to defend instantly and uses a stick to create a symbol of western masculinity.

## **2.7 Characteristic features of Male Identity in *Remembering Babylon***

### **2.7.1 Power and Control**

In the world, many communities follow patriarchal culture. In such communities men dominate the females. The power and control are central to men's self-identity. Real men have been power and control over others. If any man does not have the power and control, he is not treated better than a woman. Every man always tries to be in control over others. It is always seen in the patriarchal society that men always control their families.

In the novel, males are dominating over the female, which is one of the characteristic features of the male identity; this can be seen in the relationship between Lachlan and Janet. From the very beginning Lachlan gets all the credit of bringing Gemmy while his cousins are ignored. Though Lachlan has been younger than Janet because of him is male, he dominates over them. Malouf gives importance to male characters throughout the novel which is seen in the description of women characters when Malouf describes the settlement area, he describes women as follows:

...women in sunbonnets, and barefoot youth who, with nothing to do in the evening, came to sit with their feet up on the rails of the verandah and tell raw jokes, practice their spitting, and flick cigarette butts with a hiss into the trough(P5).

It shows that women cannot do any work without making jokes. The fact that, in the first chapter, the kids' game is represented the difference, between males and females in European society. The boy was

leading the game with the two girls. This demonstrates that the children are being brought up in a society where males are dominant over females. Lachlan, the only male character out of the three, takes the lead and decides the game no matter the opinion presented by the girls and represents the patriarchal society.

David Malouf thinks power as main characteristic features of the male identity by using male characters. Their relationship with each other reflects the characteristic feature of the power.

#### **2.7.1.1 Gemmy's power**

At the beginning of the novel, Gemmy shows the childlike nature, unintelligent and unmanly character. Gemmy has a power of intelligence. He is smart and cool minded boy. Through these characteristic features, he slowly wins the hearts of all people and tries to uniting the blacks and whites.

Gemmy does not show his power with an action or any masculine traits, but it shows through his intelligence. At early encounter, Lachlan and other children are shocking Gemmy's presence because of the unknown person. The language, which uses Gemmy, is totally new for Lachlan and townspeople. This is the advantage for Gemmy because it makes nerves Lachlan and townspeople, which is shown through these lines;

the idea of a language he did not know scared him(P3).

#### **2.7.1.2 Lachlan's power**

Lachlan is the main character in this novel, which shows the real masculine traits. He is influenced by the native peoples and thinks that

power has provided the best life in the community. When they bring Gemmy in the village, he tries to attract peoples towards his power. He has good leading power which shown when he is leading the girls on a hunt. He is leading not only because of leading power but also power of gender as a boy. Lachlan's idea of power is explored through following lines,

He thought that if he allowed the man to go on using it, he would see how weak they were and get the advantage of them. (P3)

The man, who has a power, is respected in society. At the early age, Lachlan wants to obtain this power for control over Gemmy. Though Gemmy seem a dumb character, he is using Lachlar for gain power. Lachlan has shown his power in the starting of the novel through including two bore girls in a game.

All his gift for fantasy and his will too, which was stubborn (P1).

This line explores his desire for power as he stubborn. Stubborn means a control in a critical situation. When he uses a stick as a gun, he shows power. Lachlan's stance makes Gemmy helpless, and the power asserts Lachlan to take authority on Gemmy. This authority allows him to take prison Gemmy. As he returns to the village, he is neglected by the people because he is a kid. Though he is a kid, he shows his power in interaction with Gemmy.

### **2.7.1.3 George's power**

George Abbot is an important character in this novel. He does not want to a powerful man or leader. He wants to get the higher class. He tries to gain power for that ability through superiority. He wants

to become a noble person to whom people give respect through social power. George Abbot is representative of a common Australian with a different power. He thinks that intellectual ability is a real power. This power lies in eyes of the beholder. George is reading French book shows his value of knowledge.

### **2.7.2 Mankind's Fear of the Unknown**

Malouf explores mankind's fear of the unknown through the settlers. The introductory passages are exploring the unknown creature. The description of the unknown creature "...was a scarecrow" (P3) does not belong to humanity. This dehumanizing process continues when they refer him "it" (P3). Though the natives are very strong, they frightened of unknown.

When Gemmy brings at the settlement area by children all people gathered there for seeing the unknown figure. They are at once frighten and curious. As word spreads in the settler town, they all come to view this "specimen" (P4). Here, Malouf shows us their curiosity, their fear, simply with the lines,

this specimen of – of what? What was he? (P4).

As Malouf explores male identity in this novel, he also wants to present the un-masculine traits of the village people through their fear of the unknown.

The description of Gemmy gives unmanly by Malouf. Gemmy was in a critical situation when Lachlan holds the gun on Gemmy, who replies,

Do not shoot,' ... 'I am a B-b-british object! (P3).

That time Lachlan does not understand the language.

The idea of a language he did not know scared him (P3)

It shows that Lachlan was a little bit scared, but he think that if he allows to use this language to the man he would see how weak they were and get the advantage of them, so Lachlan moves the stick towards the man and says,

Stop that,' he yelled. 'Just steik yur mooth (P3).

Here, Malouf presents how Lachlan was disturbed and a little disgusted by Gemmy's display of unmanliness.

### **2.7.3 Aggression**

Aggression is the man's major characteristic feature. In this novel' Lachlan shows his aggression at the time of Gemmy's interaction. George Abbot has also aggressive nature, which reflects through his power based relationship with children. He is a schoolmaster. He always thinks that he has been forced to move Australia. This miserable thing takes out his aggression on his pupils.

### **2.7.4Protectiveness**

The beginning of the novels hints at themes the novel will explore later. After seeing unknown person, Lachlan is ready to protect his cousin, which is one of the masculine traits. He believes in the power of the weapon and takes a stick to show that he is a real man always ready to face challenges. David Malouf's *Remembering Babylon* utilizes the opening of the novel to present its view on major themes and illustrate major conflicts in the text. A discussion of male identity, the opening chapter also presents a man vs. society conflict between the settlers'

village and Gemmy, the half aboriginal, half British man who is at the centre of events.

As the head of the McIvor family, Jock is also having the qualities of protectiveness. At the settlement area, he faces very critical situation regarding Gemmy. After some time, Jock changes his behavior and feelings towards Gemmy. At first he feels disgust, but gradually finds himself defending Gemmy when his neighbors are worried. The turning point of Jock's acceptance towards Gemmy comes when the neighbors have kidnapped Gemmy. They kidnapped Gemmy from his bed and taken him away from their hut to beat him up. Jock goes there after them to help Gemmy. After carrying him back to the shelter of the lean-to of their hut Jock going in with him so that he can comfort him and laying next to him:

Laying aside his rifle, he crawled with him into that musty, dark smelling place, and did a thing he could not for his life done a week, perhaps even an hour ago: he sat huddled close to him in the dark, and when he shivered, drew him closer, pulled the old moth-eaten blanket around the two of them, and with the man against him, heard his juddering breath, and smelt it, while the outside moonlight fell on the cleared space round the hut where his wife and children waited. (P115)

This shows how Malouf presents the male characteristic feature, protectiveness through Jock that every elder man in the house always protects us in every situation. Though Jock little bit disgusts Gemmy, he protects him in a bad situation.

### **2.7.5 Obsession with Success**

Every man has been eager to get success, and it gets through the new discoveries or the new dimension towards life. In society success is often related with the person's income as well as his/her prestige, fame, and power. So for getting a higher status, men are always



related with the work and spending much of their lives working as well as planning for work. It gives them income as well as prestige, fame and power. Every man is obsessed with success, and this is one of the major important characteristic features of men. Mr. Frazer is the most aware character when it comes to the changes that occur, and are needed in this community. He wants that they have to rub their English eyes and look again towards country.

We must rub our eyes and look again, clear our minds of what we are looking for to see what is there. It is not strange, this history of ours, in which explorers, men on the track of the unknown, fall dry-mouthed and exhausted in country where natives, moving just ahead of them, or behind, or a mile to one side, are living, as they have done for centuries, off the land? Is there not a kind of refractory pride in it, an insistence that if the land will not present itself to us in terms that we know, we would rather die than take it as it is? For there is a truth here and it is this: that no continent lies outside God's bounty and his intention to provide for his children. He is a gardener and everything he makes is a garden... We must humble ourselves and learn from them. The time will come when we too will be sustained not only by wheat and lamb and bottled cucumbers, but by what the land itself produces, tasting at last the earthly sweetness of it, allowing it to feed our flesh with its minerals and underground secrets so that what spreads in us is an intimate understanding of what it truly is with all that is unknowable in it made familiar within. (P118-119)<sup>6</sup>

These lines beautifully express Mr. Frazer's thoughts and intentions towards this land. He is a man who believes in new discoveries and new success. Here, Malouf shows that men are obsessed with success which is one of the features of male identity.

### 2.7.6 Status and Achievement

Men gain status by being successful in all they do. Men are successful when they use their physical power, intellectual power and ambition in work. If they are successful, they get achievement.

In this novel, Gemmy realizes that Lachlan has achieved the status through true power with a following quote,

It was just a stick, but that did not mean it was harmless, what it stood for, and the boys fearful, but fearless stance was more important than a stick or a gun, and had an indelible impression on him. (P32)<sup>3</sup>

This stance and attitude shows power of him and it achieves the status in society. Though it was a stick, his stance is fearful. Moreover, Janet McIvor possesses a different power of Gemmy, in comparison to that of Lachlan,

His power lay in your recognizing that he possessed it. It was the power that he was a boy; because one day, the authority he had claimed in raising the stick to his shoulder would be real...The girl's power was entirely her own. She needed no witness to it. (P33)<sup>4</sup>

Also, it seems as though Gemmy, by his own choice, gives Ellen McIvor power over him,

...he had so little experience in his life of either the domestic or the feminine. It pleased him to find the things he could do to make her life easier, and all the more to see the shy, offhand way she had accepted him. (P33)<sup>5</sup>

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However Gemmy, unlike on previous occasions, does not give or allow Jock McIvor to have any power or control over him whatsoever and as a direct result of this Jock becomes troubled, as Jock does not wish to get on the wrong side of his friends, in which the reader could assume some degree of power or control over Jock. However, Gemmy quickly realizes that; this could have a negative impact upon himself as well;

... he met in the settlement, where he was always under suspicion, and always, even when no one appeared to be watching, under silent scrutiny.  
(P34)

## **2.8 Conclusion**

Malouf's characters are psychologically intricate and lucid. In the opening chapter, it is Lachlan's character that captures attention. Malouf has a real insight of the male condition. It seems through as he portrays male characters with depth, but without going to great pains to do it. We are immediately aware of Lachlan's masculinity; his need to control, seek power and glory – all this in a twelve year old. Lachlan was “determined to keep hold of the bit of glory he had won.” (P5)

Each character of Malouf represents different masculine traits with some weaknesses and strengths. Among all the characters, Lachlan Beattie has been real masculinity. He has been stereotypical men power. Male dominance is also shown in this novel, through the Lachlan and Janet.

The male condition, particularly how we react to new surroundings and place association unto places is discussed within this novel which is one of the characteristic features of the male identity.

Gemmy and Lachlan come from another area, but they lives very strongly in the new world and make a new identity over there. Both are always ready to face new challenges. Each male character in this novel presents the masculine traits through his behavior.

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