

# Comparison of House Function Between David Malouf's 12 Edmonstone Street and Jessica Anderson's Tirra Lirra by the River

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**COMPARISON OF HOUSE FUNCTIONS BETWEEN  
2 DAVID MALOUF'S *12 EDMONDSTONE STREET* AND  
JESSICA ANDERSON'S *TIRRA LIRRA BY THE RIVER***

**Baharuddin,<sup>1</sup>Eka Fitriana<sup>2</sup>**

**Intisari**

Dalam konteks studi kebudayaan tidaklah sekedar tempat tinggal namun juga merupakan refleksi kontekstualisasi nilai-nilai budaya penghuninya. Tulisan ini dimaksudkan untuk membahas peran latar yang berkaitan dengan aspek-aspek keruangan rumah dalam novel-novel Australia. Fungsi ruang dalam rumah-rumah yang tersirat dalam novel karya Malouf dan Anderson akan menjadi perhatian utama dalam analisa ini. Dalam diskusi ini dikemukakan bahwa pemetaan ruang dan definisi batas-batas dalam rumah-rumah di Queensland seperti terlihat dalam novel mengindikasikan hubungan antara penghuni ruma dan dunia luar yang selanjutnya mengarah pada etos dan identitas masyarakat Australia. Perspektif ini yang juga turut membentuk karakter penghuni yang tinggal dirumah-rumah tersebut.

*Keywords:* House Function, ethos, identity, Queensland

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## I. Background

The house plays a very important role in Australians novels and stories because it reflects some of the essential elements of the Australian identity (Ferrier 40). Furthermore, every part of the house is important because each has its own function that should not be neglected. In addition, the house also represents a variety of social structures that signifies many different cultural positions within society (Whitlock 76). To further extent, the architecture of the house itself determines the social status of the owners, whether they belong to lower, middle, or upper class family.

From an architectural point of view the Queensland houses are considered to be distinctive compared to houses from other states and regional areas of the country because they are built of timber with a very unique designs. Because of their uniqueness many Australians novels and stories have their setting in a Queensland house. Yet, what distinguished these houses is that they have neither basements nor accessible attics and the most prominent and memorable spaces in the house are to be found under the stumps or on the verandahs (Malouf 49). These spaces can be claimed as both inside and out because they tend to be open and not restricted to any of the rules like inside the house.

## B. Discussion

Since the house is considered to be an important setting in most Australian fictional novels, then, this essay will focus on how houses function in David Malouf's *12 Edmondstone Street* and Jessica Anderson's *Tirra Lirra by the River*. Malouf explains that "each house has its own topography, its own lore: negotiable borders, spaces open or closed (10). Each house member knows these divisions very well, therefore, they try to stay within these borders and obey the rules of the house that they have agreed on. Thus, the contours of the house determine what can be said, heard and observed, 'it is a convention in these houses that nothing is seen or heard that is not meant to be' (Malouf cited



in Whitlock 78).


Frequently, this situation fails to fulfill the dreams of the house members because they are restricted to borders that are taboo to cross. These borders often make the members feel alienated in their own house (Whitlock 79). Yet, for the members who cannot adapt within these borders, they feel alienated as if they belonged to another world. On the other hand, the adaptable members will move to the more open parts of the house like the verandah or to unrestricted space where rules are not applied (Ferrier 46).

In Malouf's *12 Edmondstone Street*, each part of the house functions differently and it is governed by certain rules. However, as Malouf mentions the verandah is not a part of the house because it stands alone outside the borders but it is connected to the house in the same way (22). It becomes the main entrance to the house and functioned as a comfortable place of entertainment because it provides deep shade, cool breeze and it is not restricted by any rules (Malouf 15). Besides, it is also used as the first meeting place as Malouf describes "Visitors are entertained on the verandah..." (14). Moreover, this space is associated with female space where his 'mother's ladies' gather and talk. The verandah can also be used as a safety zone that protects the house from any outsiders because it runs around the house, as Malouf explains:

"Verandahs are no-man's land, border zones that keep contact with the house and its activities on one face but are open on the other to the street, the night and all the vast, unknown areas beyond" (22).

The other space that is associated with the female space is the piano room, where the house members and the 'occasional visitors' gather in the afternoon (Malouf 33). As Malouf describes this space is always cool because it is shaded by the leaves of an enormous mango tree (33). Yet, in the evening this space also functions as a gathering space when the house members listen to the piano being played and to the news. This space has no rules; therefore, each member is free to cross any boundaries within this space. As for Malouf it was in this





space that he was able to reveal the secret of the women's world.

On the other hand, the tool room under the house is considered to be the male domain where swear words, "have none of the shocking quality they might have upstairs" (Malouf 51). In this space formal and polite language is not so important like inside the house. The harsh world of man is clearly represented by the heavy tools such as hammers, snapped blades, nails. This space is again free from barriers because it is not restricted with formal language. Therefore, within this space these swear words were the only language that could be expected to be understood.

In *Tirra Lirra by the River*, the house is described as a traditional Queensland house standing high in the air on tall stamps, with a flight of open steps leading up to the wide verandah and a deep garden front and back. Yet, every part of the house is not mentioned in detail. This is because the boundaries are not as important as in Malouf's story. However, Anderson did mention some parts of the house in detail. Anderson starts by describing the verandah. Its construction is slightly different from verandah that Malouf described in *12 Edmondstone Street*. The verandah in Anderson's story does not go around the house; instead, it is built at the front and at the bank of the house.

Furthermore, the function of the verandah in Anderson's story is also different. Anderson does not use the front verandah as the first meeting place but it becomes the main entrance to the house. Yet, the back verandah is directly facing the garden. Therefore, it becomes a private space that is restricted to the house members and gives no access to outsiders. From the verandah, Nora was able to see the beauty of the nature as she described.

"I open the door to the back verandah and am dazzled, first by the flood of sunlight and the cool black shine of the floor, and then by a view through the glass of a garden so fresh and verdant, so deep and rich and detailed, ...." (Anderson 189).

At this stage, the back verandah becomes the perfect space for observing nature, and it is free from any boundaries. Even though it is built in a different

location, the notion of the verandah itself is still an open space that suits the subtropical environment, which allows the cool breeze to fill the space (Ferrier 41). Since the verandah is considered important, in Anderson's story, it therefore becomes part of the house that cannot be separated.

The next space is under the house. The whole space is closed with vertical slats (Malouf 49). This space as Malouf mythologises as a forest, as dark as anything Grimm (Whitlock 78). Moreover, it is often associated with mystery, fear and death because of its darkness (Whitlock 78). Despite its darkness, this space becomes very useful because of its function as a storehouse where old things such as bed frames and washing tubs are kept (Malouf 49). On the other hand, the space under the house is similar to the verandah/ It is an informal space, not restricted to rules, languages and time, therefore, under the house has a different dimension because the reality cannot be applied within this space. As Malouf mentions:

"...There are no clocks down here. There is not even language....To come down here, up under the floorboards and the life of rooms, is to enter a dream space, dark, full of terrors that lurk behind tree-trunks in the thickest forest..." (52).

Since this space is free from any rules, the boundaries that apply in the house can be crossed under the house, so, anything is possible within this space. Furthermore, under the house becomes the space that is full of magic for Malouf and his sister because everything that has dropped from the house turns out to be magical things that they can play with. Therefore, under the house for Malouf himself is a space that is full of childhood memories because he was free to do anything that he wanted without being watched. In this case, the space under the house is able to tell a story of its own in a different dimension,

Yet, in Anderson's story, the space under the house is not mentioned; however, it is replaced by Grace's glass room that Nora sleeps in. In this glass room Nora reveals all her past life and trying to recall her memories. From this

glass room she is able to see outside freely without any disturbance. Moreover, the glass house offers an awesome view as she describes:

“I sleep in Grace’s glass room, and whenever I rise to draw the blinds against the moonlight, I am enthralled by the brilliance of the scene, the soft yet sharp delineation of the grass, the nasturtium leaves like falling silvery discs, and the weight and mystery of the black shadows.” (Anderson 196).

The notion of glass room is like a cage where rules and boundaries are applied therefore, not all outsiders will have free access to this area. In this case, only people who are close to Nora will be able to enter the room. Moreover, the image of the glass room has reminded her of Lady Shallot from the Arthurian Legend. She was surrounded by boundaries of time and space that she was not allowed to cross. Since she was restricted to these barriers, therefore, she was only able to see the world indirectly from her own space. To some degree, Nora feels the same as Lady Shallot because she has to stay in bed during her early recovery.

Another space that is free from boundaries and borders is the backyard. Yet, this space is completely separated from any rules that govern the house. Like the verandah and under the house, the backyard is a space that offers freedom for the house members. However, the backyard is a place of exile and punishment. Malouf describes that he had been punished and sent to the garden for observing his naked body in the bathroom:

“I am punished for the offence I persist ... I am amused at the attempt to find a place for this low natural functioned in the ‘work ethic’, ... This body talk, which seems to be local, opens into a real social world. So I am invited to speak of my penis, back there – with what appeal to aggression and lawlessness? – as my trigger” (59-60).

Furthermore, the backyard is also a space of his grandfather’s preference because this space has offered him great freedom where he can do gardening. He turns the suburban garden into ‘Mediterranean garden’ so that he can feel



the atmosphere of his home country – Lebanon (Malouf 5). Since he speaks a different language, he feels that he does not belong to the space inside the house; therefore, he exiled himself from the house. The backyard becomes the space where he feels more comfortable because this space is not restricted to rules, therefore, to cross borders and boundaries are possible.

By contrast, in *Tirra Lirra by the River*, the backyard has never been used as a place of punishment. It becomes a place where it is possible to gain pleasure because it consists of beautiful plants that can be seen by the house members. Nora sometimes spends her time walking around the garden on her recovery. The things that she sees amaze her. As she describes, “The longish grass, of which several sections are of an even richer green than the rest, thin out under the big mango tree and canopy of the persimmon” (Anderson 190).

Furthermore, the garden becomes part of an organic entity of an ecosystem that cannot be separated from human beings (Whitlock 44). In addition, the garden is not just a place where she can view the nature’s beauty but moreover the garden is a place of transformation, where the cycle of life can be seen and appreciated. Also for Nora, the garden has a deep meaning because it brings back her memories of her father, “At the end of the garden, where for a decade after my father’s death stood the gradually sagging stable and buggy shed, is uneven hilly area thickly overgrown with green” (Anderson 190).

The garden has also changed her attitude towards her mother and her sister where she began to accept them and the way they are. Moreover, the garden has inspired her to accept life as it is. Surprisingly, Malouf and Anderson have the same intention in describing the backyards. Both of them treated the backyard as an important element that helped to develop their characters in the later stage and helped shape the community where it belonged.

### C. Conclusion

In conclusion, generally, in literature, houses are symbolically linked with cultural identity and social order. However, the mapping of space and the definition of boundaries in the Queensland house, the relationships between its house members and the exterior, become the basic elements of the Australian ethos and identity (Whitlock 81). In relation to this, the sense of home related to a deep human experience that helps shape the characteristics of the people who live in it. As Malouf stresses the imprint of the house upon its inhabitants:

“First houses are the grounds of our first experience. Crawling about the floor level, room by room, we discover laws that we apply later to the world at large; and who is to stay if our notions of space and dimension are not determined for all time by what we encounter there, in the particular relationship of living-rooms, to the attic and the cellar (or in my case under-the-house), of inner rooms to the verandahs that are open boundaries? ... The house is a field of dense affinities, laid down, each one, with an almost physical power, in the life we share with all that in being ‘familiar’ has become essential to us inseparable from what we are” (89).

The house is made up of many different sections. Each section has its own code and conventions. The house consists of a complex relationship of different borders and boundaries. Yet, the house becomes an important element in shaping and directing the way a child sees the world. Furthermore, the house becomes a microcosm of the wider community in which it is situated which signifies many different cultural positions.

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