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We can all learn to appreciate kinds of landscape other than the one we grew up with, to see what is unique and a source of beauty in them. But the landscape we most belong to, that connects with our senses, that glows in our consciousness, will always be the one we are born into.

‘A Spirit of Play’ in *A First Place* (essays) by David Malouf, p. 165

Settings are not just locations for the actions to take place. In a well-crafted story they are spaces that enhance or challenge the characters and show something about relationships. The setting can therefore be the central element or it can support characters and actions.

The settings in *The Complete Stories* are varied and wide-ranging but mostly familiar for an Australian audience. Many stories set in Brisbane capture memories of a childhood past similar to Malouf’s, who grew up in Brisbane. Some stories are set in rural Australia. There are stories set in Sydney and some very domestic settings that could be anywhere. A few stories take place in Europe where Australian characters wander as strangers.

On the next page are two very different settings from Malouf’s stories:

A natural setting

'Out of the Stream' p. 395

Movement takes the reader through the landscape.

Colour imagery moves from monochromatic pallet (*grey, grey-black, silvery, white*) to the suggestion of greater intensity through *green* and *brilliant white* – suggesting change to come.

He made his way along a tussocky path that led away from the main settlement, and along the edge of the dunes to where his grandfather's shack, grey fibro, stood in a fenceless allotment above rocks. There were banksias all leaning one way, shaped by the wind and rattling their dry grey-black cones. It was a desolate place, not yet tamed or suburban: the dunes held together by long silvery grass, changing their contours almost daily under the wind; the sea-light harsh, almost brutal, stinging your eyes, blasting the whole world white with salt. Inland, to the west, great platforms of sandstone held rainwater in rusty pools and the wild bush-plants, spiky green now but when they were in flower a brilliant white, thrust clean through rock.

Nature creates the barriers (*edge*) in a landscape uninterrupted by human barriers – *fenceless*.

Wild nature seen through the banksias has its own way of surviving against the wind.

Not yet suggests that change is imminent.

A domestic setting

'The Domestic Cantata' p. 153

The different parts of the house described in one sentence, that moves from a formal architectural description (*pierced work; solid doors, archway*) to movement – *dancing* and *broke out* – to show the living nature of the house.

It was a big Federation house on three levels, with pierced work above the solid doors and in the archway between the ground-floor rooms, leadlight windows that in the morning threw dancing colours on the walls, and balconies that broke out in unexpected places on a view of palm crowns and glinting water. The children had been more manageable then, and fewer.

There is an element of surprise in the word *unexpected* that suggests the changes to come with a growing family.