THE CAMBRIDGE HISTORY OF AUSTRALIAN LITERATURE

EDITED BY

PETER PIERCE

THE CAMBRIDGE

History of Australian Literature

The Cambridge History of Australian Literature is the most comprehensive volume ever written on Australia's national literature.

This authoritative guide spans Australian literary history from colonial origins, encompassing Indigenous and migrant literatures, as well as representations of Asia and the Pacific and the role of literary culture in modern Australian society.

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PETER PIERCE is Honorary Research Fellow and Professor in the National Centre for Australian Studies at Monash University.

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Peter Pierce

Introduction

PETER PIERCE

At a Sydney rally in support of the federation of its colonies into the Commonwealth of Australia in 1897, one speaker proclaimed what was in effect an Australian version of manifest destiny. Edmund Barton ('Toby Tosspot' to his foes), who would become the first prime minister of that Commonwealth on 1 January 1901, grandly avowed that 'For the first time in history, we have a nation for a continent, and a continent for a nation.'[1] Local poets had been hailing such a prospect for decades, in windy, idealistic verse.[2] The 1890s had seen – largely by means of the Sydney weekly magazine, the *Bulletin* – the rise to authority of some of the leading proto-nationalist, and still among the most enduring, figures in Australian literary history: Henry Lawson, A. B. 'Banjo' Paterson and Joseph Furphy principal among them.

Such an emphasis on nation-making, particularly in the conflation of political and literary chronologies, would colour the writing of Australia's literary history for generations. Indeed there were earlier instances. G. B. Barton's two volumes of literary history were among the New South Wales offerings at the international exhibition of 1867 in Paris. Barton intended that they should be an earnest indication of the 'progress' so far achieved by colonial writers and colonial culture.

In the 20th century, organic metaphors flourished in lieu of literary historical analysis: 'The Novel Begins to Grow Up' (Ewers, 1955); *How Australian Literature Grew* (Heddle and Millington, 1962); from 'a period of infancy' towards 'national maturity' (T. Inglis Moore, 1971). Coincidentally, there was an acrid critical division over the canon of Australian literature, and what kind of development it actually had to show, between radical nationalists and universalists, or cosmopolitans. Often these adversaries were poets and novelists, whose own work evaded such categories, even as they contributed to the melodramatic contest for the threatened corpus of the national literature.[3]

A summary of past literary historical yearnings can be bracing, for they now seem to be so far behind us. The brief of this *Cambridge History of Australian Literature* was not, explicitly, to be 'new', although everywhere – through scholarship and

1 Margaret Rutledge, 'Barton, Sir Edmund', *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, vol. 7, MUP, 1979.

2 See section on Federation poems in Richard Jordan and Peter Pierce, *The Poets' Discovery: Nineteenth-Century Australia in Verse*, MUP, 1990.

3 Peter Pierce, 'Forms of Literary History', in Laurie Hergenhan (ed.), *The Penguin New Literary History of Australia*, Penguin, 1988.

criticism – it is. Nor – even as it takes its place in a series of national literary histories (Spanish and German and Canadian among others) – is its brief the kind of national project to which earlier Australian literary historians subscribed. What is 'national' in the national literature is, however, debated throughout this book.

Australia's post-settlement history differs starkly from those of two other countries whose literatures were principally written in English. Ireland was England's oldest and bitterest colony, and centuries of oppression and resistance, together with geographical proximity, meant that the relationship was compacted of defiant independence and resentful submission. Long ago, Canada was separated from the other British North American colonies, but its writers have ever been as alert to the cultural power of the neighbouring United States as to their cultural heritage from Britain. By contrast, Australian authors have been troubled by their remoteness, a sense of exile created by what was at first an inconceivable distance from Britain, and guilt at the means by which European settlers took possession of the continent.

Exile and doubtful tenure were not the only notes struck, of course. Literary proclamations of Australia's chance to make a fresh beginning, its freedom from what Henry Lawson called 'old world errors, and wrongs and lies / Making a hell in a Paradise', the utopian possibilities that manifested themselves can be heard as well.

Editors Margaret Kelleher and Philip O'Leary, in their introduction to the two-volume *Cambridge History of Irish Literature*, state that their aim was to construct 'an authoritative chronological history'.[4] Neither adjective neatly fits the Australian counterpart. For a start, the contributors are alert to the obeisances, but also to the manifold challenges to claims of authority in Australia. They witness here to the larrikin energies, the effusive self-publicity, the melancholy grandeur and the sardonic humour that all, in happy contradiction, distinguish Australian literature. The evidence with which they deal makes authoritative judgments less enticing and true to the history of this literature than provisional ones.

That is not to say that the contributors in this *History* do not bring the authority of their research and imagination to their chapters. Yet each author knows that the whole work is destined, like its predecessors, to become part of the chequered larger history of Australian literary histories. They are conscious of responding to a particular cultural moment. Perhaps it is one in which, entering an international series such as this from Cambridge University Press, Australian literature can announce itself firmly and unapologetically. At the same time the writers of this *History* also know that this is domestically (if not internationally) a time of crisis for the teaching of Australian literature in schools and universities. The number of texts taught, courses mounted, books in print are reckoned to be in decline; the institutional future of Australian literature to be in doubt. Crucial, if implicit, in the aim of this *History* is to show why such a process should be resisted and reversed.

4 Margaret Keller and Philip O'Leary (eds), *The Cambridge History of Irish Literature*, CUP, 2006.

In returning to the place of *The Cambridge History of Australian Literature* in the field of national literary histories, let two examples suffice. When the poet, publisher and critic Geoffrey Dutton edited *The Literature of Australia* for Penguin in its first and revised versions (1964 and 1976), it met such a dammed-up demand among school and tertiary students and teachers of Australian literature that its sales topped 60,000. In 1988, to coincide with the bicentenary of the European settlement of Australia, Laurie Hergenhan edited *The Penguin New Literary History of Australia*. (Its sales would be a respectable one-tenth of Dutton's. Some of its contributors have survived to write for this *History*.) While Dutton's book had some general and contextual chapters, most dealt with individual authors. No-one had a chapter to herself in the 'new' Penguin history, leading literary critic Harry Heseltine to quip that 'it was hard to see the trees for the wood'. In this *Cambridge History of Australian Literature* a balance has been struck between general and particular literary analyses, but at no stage was it explicitly sought or imposed. Contributors' briefs were to be – if not authoritative – then certainly bold, and genuine literary-critical boldness requires a grasp of detail such as is shown everywhere in this *History*.

It is, however, in large measure a chronological history, as are the other volumes in the Cambridge series. From that basis, an explanation of its internal divisions can proceed. The first part of the *History* takes the account of the national literature to the round figure of 1900, on the eve of Federation. It describes anticipations of Australia, the influence of Romanticism, the complex transportation – not only of felons, their guardians and free settlers – but of the cultural baggage of England, Ireland, Scotland and Wales. Aboriginal Australians do not stand at the beginning of this section, but later, as they make their responses, many of them literary, to the catastrophic upheaval of their lives.

When H. M. Green reached the end of the Fourth (and last) Period of his two-volume *A History of Australian Literature Pure and Applied* (1961) – the longest, solely-authored work of Australian, or of most other, literary histories – he decided on 1950 as his terminal date. In an enervated exhalation regarding this end-point, Green said, 'we seem to be somewhere near it now, but that is almost all that can be at present said'. Green's choice of date has been observed here as well, taking *The Cambridge History of Australian Literature* halfway through its length and into a post-war world. Of course many authors in this second section reappear in the fourth, which follows Australian literary history from 1950 until very near the present.

In between is a shorter third section, called 'Traverses', because the four chapters range across the whole period in which literature has been written in Australia. Their subjects, successively, are children's literature, perceptions of Asia, autobiography, and the intersections of fiction and history. In keeping with the practice of other chapters in the *History*, chronological surveys are wedded to strongly argued and defended arguments about the literature in question. Each chapter in 'Traverses' freely crosses supposed boundaries of genre, but that is also the case in the chapters that nominally

concentrate on poetry, the novel, short fiction and drama in the other three parts. Thus what appear to be conventional generic denominations contain free-ranging, expansive and revisionist literary interpretations.

While the 1988 Penguin literary history had chapters dedicated to women's and to war literature, those subjects have been folded into other chapters here. Such partitions now seem unnecessary. What is obviously novel in this *History* is the inclusion of three chapters whose blunt titles draw attention to the crucial business that they address. 'Britain's Australia' dissects the imaginings of the place to which European settlers came, and then its successive reformations for readers both in Britain and Australia. 'Australia's Australia' examines the continuing importance of a parochial strain in the national literature, especially between the world wars – in recoil from the first of them, and in apprehension of the second. Finally, 'Australia's England' is an analysis of the appropriations of that country by Australian authors, the careers that they sought there and the consequent enlivening or crushing of their art. In this chapter, and indeed throughout the *History*, the material conditions in which literary works were written, published, marketed are always prominent matters of concern. That is, literary and book history as practised here amounts to a form of social history that is beguiling, dense and complex.

As the chapter titles just mentioned indicate, there is a prevailing dialectic in the *History* between the impulses, among works and writers surveyed, to forge a distinctively Australian literature and the deep connection to British cultural heritage; perhaps – to put things in a different way – between parochialism and cosmopolitanism. Yet individual cases show that things were not so simple. From her rural cottage at Greenmount, outside Perth, Katharine Susannah Prichard ventured to the Soviet Union to laud communism in *The Real Russia* (1934). Nettie and Vance Palmer, tenants of Prichard's in the Dandenong Ranges near Melbourne, believed that this was a place where a 'local patriotism' might develop, yet regularly and purposefully they visited England, at once to foster their own careers and the national literature.

Ensconced next to the Red Beret pub at Redlynch beneath the rain forest near Cairns for most of his later life, Xavier Herbert chose to die as close to the centre of the continent as he could manage, at Alice Springs. However, much of the crucial rewriting of his mock-epic of northern Australia, *Capricornia* (1938), had in fact been done during years spent in London. After studying European languages at Cambridge, followed by war service in the Middle East, Patrick White tossed up between settling in Europe or the United States – and chose Australia. He reversed the post-war pattern of expatriation and returned to his home country, albeit as a self-proclaimed Prodigal Son. Rosa Praed, most of whose work continued to be set in her fictionalised version of the colonial Queensland that she had known in her youth, spent the second half of her life in England, embracing hopes of reincarnation and making her third marriage, to the only Muslim peer in the House of Lords.

The commerce between hemispheres for Australian writers (whether in person or through agents, and circumstances permitting) has always been notable, though in

individual cases temporary or permanent, rewarding or frustrating. The story of the publication of their work is as likely to be an international as a national one, although as chapters in this *History* explore, the conditions of overseas publication have varied significantly.

What would have delighted some of these authors (such as the Palmers) and disgusted others (White, surely) was the manner in which successive Australian governments, during at least the last three decades, have employed the products of the national literature as a means of cultural diplomacy. Though the future of this tactic is uncertain, the teaching and criticism of Australian literature, and the translation of a number of its texts into other languages, have spread to dozens of countries around the world. The journal *Antipodes* has been published by the American Association for Australian Literary Studies since 1987. Its sponsors include the Literature Board of the Australia Council and the Cultural Relations branch of the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. Across the Atlantic, the European Australian Studies Association holds bi-annual conferences and publishes their proceedings. Future histories of Australian literature will have to take fuller account of this latest of its engagements in, and entanglements with a wider literary world.

That is also to say that, while a nationalist interpretation of Australian literary in various guises has sometimes seemed hegemonic (not least in inveigling opponents into its terms of debate), this interpretation has always been contested or made besides the point in other ways. In 1930, in *An Outline of Australian Literature*, Green declared that 'every work which can be considered a genuine expression of any aspects of Australian characteristics or ideals has been treated as Australian'. Those 'characteristics' markedly and closely anticipated Russel Ward's *The Australian Legend* (1958), and for Green included 'an independence of spirit, a kind of humorous disillusion, a careless willingness to take a risk, a slightly sardonic good nature and a certain underlying hardness of texture'.

It is easy to criticise the circularity of Green's argument, but worth remembering that his expansive notion of what is 'literature' for literary historical purposes (discussed in sprightlier fashion in his neglected *Australian Literature: 1900–1950*, 1951) has been taken as read by most recent large-scale literary histories of Australia, and elsewhere. If here Green is open, he is also hermetic. Australian literature is that which is 'Australian'. Yet he admits evidence to contradict himself. Christopher Brennan, the most Eurocentric of Australian poets, is 'indeed the most important poet that Australia has yet produced'.

For Green knew, as he wrote in 1951, 'that the world had become more difficult and dangerous, and that Australia was an inescapable part of it'. His reputation as a literary historian has long languished, and to burnish it now may seem only to encourage the return of the repressed, but the compendiousness of his enterprise, the contradictions with which he struggled and honestly voiced, are a caution to literary historians three and four generations after him. Green was aware of what Philip Mead calls, in his chapter, 'the rage for nation' in Australia, the desire by all means to legitimise

and unify the polity of this continent, settled from a continent of divided polities, Europe.

In *Networked Language: Culture and History in Australian Poetry* (2008), Mead elaborated on the 'powerful instincts of national definition that want to settle the question of identity and language, literally, and once and for all, to act as though it was settled from the beginning'. Literature has, as we have seen, been enlisted into the business of nation-building. Yet Mead's chapter in this *History* has been placed last because it points to other ways in which Australian writers have thought of where they have found themselves: 'place, environment and locale have frequently been the most profoundly formative influence on their imaginative work'. Moreover, we might remark, Australia and the Australian nation were not necessarily the same, or equally desirable, notions for our writers. This literary history of Australia (the political, social, geographical and imagined entity) ends with an account of its fissuring into regions on the one hand and into an unburdened place in world literature on the other. Perhaps neither is surprising for authors who have been gifted with a nation for a continent, a continent for a nation.

In any case, such abstractions – however passionately felt and contested – did not persistently impinge upon the creative occupation of the many writers whose works and lives (variously solitary and sociable) form this history. Let us leave these authors now, as we will find them throughout *The Cambridge History of Australian Literature* – travelling, corresponding, settling and uprooting themselves, writing, reading, quarrelling and dreaming.

1

Britain's Australia

KEN STEWART

Britain was never the 'onlie begetter' of Australia or its literature; but colonised Australia has always been, in some sense and degree, British. It is the nature of the relationship, not the fact of it, that appears complex, difficult to define, and dynamic. P. R Stephensen, in one of the less controversial contentions in *The Foundations of Culture in Australia* (1936), insisted that Australian culture is both derivative and local; that distinctive non-Aboriginal Australianness is, whatever else, a variant and product of Britishness. Especially in relation to the period before popular and governmental endorsement of a multicultural Australian nation, that suggestion may not seem contentious; and yet the move from a colonial relationship with Britain towards nationhood has influenced many literary nationalists to deny or disown Britishness; or to define 'Australianness' by jettisoning certain unwanted aspects of 'Britishness' or 'Englishness', while valorising as 'Australian' other preferred traits.

In *The Australian Legend* (1958), for example, Russel Ward uses the words English and British primarily to indicate middle- or upper-class Englishness, and thereby erases cockney and north country Englishness from his discourse. Paradoxically, he demonstrates thoroughly the cultural 'transmission' of a particular English literary heritage, a proletarian one, within colonial Australian literature and culture; but he is unwilling to label this process too obviously as English or British, since he perceives a discrete and distinctive Australianness as excluding Britishness.

For A. A. Phillips (in *The Australian Tradition*, 1958) a key 'Australian' quality is the 'democratic', whereas Englishness is defined in relation to class hierarchy. The Marston currency lads in Rolf Boldrewood's *Robbery Under Arms* (1888) are, ideologically and linguistically, on the way to gaining the Australian-ness that Henry Lawson's typical characters later achieve, but squatter Falkland of the colonial gentry is more 'English'. This class paradigm has exercised inescapable cultural power, understandably when it is remembered that Australia claims to be one of the world's oldest current democracies. Despite the rejection by recent commentators of the methodologies and the particular brands of nationalism of Ward and of Phillips, a similar image of 'British' and 'Australian' necessarily persists. Indeed, it may be encouraged by the use of constructs such as Benedict Anderson's national 'imaginary' (in *Imagined Communities*, 1983), which sets up a preferred and consensual ideal nation, or by those post-colonial theories that

define an ideological or political opposition between Britain as imperial colonising agent and Australia and its settlers as a 'colonised' other. In the late 19th century many settlers began to define 'Australia', the 'coming nation', as an Andersonian 'imaginary': they opted for a construct of nationality not yet validated by political realities or an actual constitution, while maintaining, perhaps covertly, various forms of behaviour inconsistent with new national ideals. In this context, the comparison between 'new' and 'old' was inevitably unfavourable to Britishness. In other contexts – where for example an allegiance to Britain was inseparable from most Australian nationalisms, as the Great War – rejection of the 'Britishness' of Australia was insupportable.

This chapter seeks to discuss British (especially English) literature, ideas and literary conventions in a way that underlines their pre-emptive importance for colonial Australian writing, while acknowledging the possibility of their reconstitution or reformation in local and colonial conditions, and also within international, imperial, or global contexts that bear upon the British-colonial connection. The possibility too that the 19th-century colonial literature affects British culture will not be overlooked.

Imaginary Australia: Terra Australis

Before white settlement of Australia, Europeans imagined or conjectured a territory south of the equator of unknown size and shape. Its position was often believed to be either adjacent to Java, or near Cape Horn. Because the south land was 'Incognita' (a term used on some but not all maps and narratives), Terra Australis could be depicted diversely according to one's purpose. Some narratives sought a detailed verisimilitude, scientifically consistent with the known world; some provided obvious escapist fantasy, designedly incredible; some offered frighteningly or wondrously fabricated tales to induce the credulous into belief (or at least suspended disbelief) in gothic monsters, giant birds and mythical animals. Others aimed at utopian or allegorical constructions, whether political or national, moral or metaphysical in focus; and a few were satirically critical of the known world, directing the reader's attention away from any postulated actual southern site towards Europe itself. The most brilliant satire was Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* (1726, 1735). It was apparently positioned deliberately to create a nowhere-land effect in four uncharted regions of the actual world, two of which, Lilliput and the land of the Houyhnhnms, later turned out to be in or near Australia.

The depiction of Terra Australis as 'mediaeval' or 'modern', 'fabulous' or empirically 'scientific', is well illustrated by Geraldine Barnes in her discussion of contradictions in the narratives of the Dutch explorer William Dampier. In some contexts Dampier chose to display his 'scientific' credentials in careful descriptions of flora, fauna, topography and the Aboriginal people; or if motivated 'imaginatively', or commercially by the saleability of Mandevillean travellers' tales, he could provide monsters and marvels to order, 'indirectly confirming medieval constructions of race by translating them into empirical evidence'.

> Just as Columbus drew on tropes of paradise and romance to describe the wonders of Hispaniola, so Dampier drew upon medieval notions of the antipodes and the monstrous races to describe the hellish horrors of New Holland, with effects that would shape perceptions of Australia and Australians for the next three hundred years.[1]

Especially from the point of view of indigenous peoples, the grab for an African imaginary is comparable. As Chinua Achebe has famously suggested in his attack on Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1902), Africa has been similarly portrayed as a 'metaphysical battlefield devoid of all recognisable humanity into which the wandering European enters at his peril'.[2]

Country without city: before gold

The discovery of Australia by British writers did not necessarily entail its literal, accurate, or scientific representation; it persists as a metaphysical trope or imaginary wonderland in verse fiction and drama to the present day. Both Enlightenment and medieval imaginary narratives serve as alternative prototypes. For example Lady Mary Fox, illegitimate daughter of William IV, wrote *An Account of an Expedition to the Interior of New Holland* (1837); it is difficult to discover whether she knew of the French antecedents 200 years earlier to her gothicised feminist utopian fictional treatise. Even Lewis Carroll's Alice plummets lightly down a hole to, or perhaps past, an Australian antipodes. Writers who adhered to certain discourses of 'Enlightenment' were disciplined by requirements of empirical accuracy: and the famous narratives of James Cook, Arthur Phillip, John Hunter, Watkin Tench, Charles Darwin and other navigators and explorers that obey this authority contribute to the revered 'annals of science'. Literary historians, however, while obliged to respect such writings, usually find something else (particularly in Cook, Tench and Darwin) that enlivens the prose, yet is not especially scientific; or (as in the case of Sir Joseph Banks) they find the writing dull. Cook is admired for his unconscious autobiographical revelation of the extraordinary skills of self-control, benevolence, and sheer competence and wisdom, later recognised in Kenneth Slessor's poem 'Five Visions of Captain Cook'. In Tench the added dimension includes a wryness and moral charity, an imaginative delight in the novelty of local realities, and compassionate recognition of human similarities as well as exotic differences between Aborigines and Europeans.

Colonial immigrants did not simply bring literature to Australia as 'cultural baggage'; a genie escaped from the baggage to create a 'literary culture', a broad and unconsciously employed heteroglossia that represented forces and ideas beyond the migrant's material individuality. European, American, Asian and Aboriginal influences, from works and dialogue, accompanied and reshaped British negotiations with local topography, climate,

1 From the abstract of a paper sponsored by ARC Network for Early European Research, 2–3 November, 2006. See also G. Barnes and A. Mitchell, in S. Trigg (ed.), *Medievalism and the Gothic in Australian Culture*, MUP, 2005.

2 Chinua Achebe, 'An Image of Africa: Racism in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*', *Massachusetts Review*, 18 (1973).

flora, fauna and Indigenous and white culture. Literature was obliged to fumble with the demands that Australia made on English words, and to refashion its lens to cope with blur. Such a goal could never be realised quickly, unanimously, and absolutely; but the integrity of the attempts helped to create and individuate a colonial literary culture.

For example, any traditional European distinction within Australia between City and Country was impossible to apply in Australia before about 1840, since no city existed. Erasmus Darwin and others could project a city of the future (his 'proud arch, colossus-like'[3] bestrode the harbour in Sydney some 150 years later), but could not represent an unimagined example from the present or past. Even Sydney, Hobart and Melbourne were at first normally suffixed with the word 'Town', as if to reinforce their non-metropolitan status and colonial difference. If a colonial Ben Jonson were to apostrophise Penshurst or Kenilworth, he would find himself addressing an outlying small settlement or sheep station. Whether turretless or factitiously castellated, whether rough or elegantly hospitable, a homestead was never totally a country castle or manor; and its 'lord', the squatter, was a blurred or contradictory counterpart of the quasi-aristocratic type.

Literary representations of the squatter (and his castle) vary ambiguously; they respond as much to demands of 'transplanted' generic conventions and snobbish or romantic escapism, as to practical observation of actual colonial squattocracy. Henry Kingsley and Boldrewood prefer, in their masculine romances, to depict their squatters as typically leonine and judicious, paragons of English decency and quasi-aristocratic good taste; whereas Anthony Trollope's realism in *Harry Heathcote of Gangoil* (1874) uncovers paradoxical financial and social colonial anxieties, and the laborious and frustrating daily grind of squatting life. Joseph Furphy later recognised the squatters of the Victorian period in two forms: as gentlemanly, but never democratic, types (such as his Stewart); and as rapaciously cruel, ill-dressed scrooges, like the actual but legendary 'Hungry' Tyson and 'Big' Clarke. (There were apparently at least three 'Big' Clark(e)s in colonial Victoria, including one known also as 'Moneyed' Clarke.)

Arguably, the term 'bush', used as early as the 18th century to qualify English 'country', gained colonial currency because the English word was not by itself sufficiently useful or viable in a largely unsettled, cityless, non-English, non-aristocratic environment. Colonial 'writing' (vocally transmitted and published broadside material and newspapers, as well as fiction and poetry) spread and reinforced the use of such vernacular terms. Although these terms entrenched new local meanings, they also conveyed a tension with the English 'original'.

The conventions and ideology that shape and inform the most respected 'elitist' literature in Australia between white settlement in 1788 and the gold rushes of 1851 are those of British neoclassicism. In a new settlement literature has a patriotic role: to

3 Erasmus Darwin, 'Visit of Hope to Sydney Cove, Near Botany Bay', *The Economy of Vegetation*, 1792 (written 1789).

announce and celebrate the civilisation of Australian 'wilds', and the imperial importation of models of culture that demonstrate universal laws. Ostensibly, such literature claims colonised space as part of a greater imperium; it elicits pride or elation by erasing or subordinating local distractions or liabilities. Remoteness has no place within a scheme of universal order, unless perhaps it is to signify future achievement. The best account of literary neoclassicism in Australia is still Robert Dixon's *The Course of Empire* (1986), which examines its primacy in painting, architecture and accounts of exploration; it also finds it in the verse, for example, of Michael Massey Robinson, in the 'epic' poetry of Wentworth, and in fiction that culminates, sometimes ambiguously, in Kingsley's *The Recollections of Geoffry Hamlyn* (1859).

Settlement, however, immediately brought challenges to neoclassical orthodoxies from 'home' as well as from within the new community. Robert Southey's *Botany Bay Eclogues*, published in 1793 when Port Jackson was five years old and the poet himself just 19, employed neoclassical forms to undermine their associated ideology. His attack was as radical, and Romantic, as that of his friends Coleridge and Wordsworth on 18th-century poetic diction. The penal colony becomes for Southey a potential Arcady not for gentlemen and ladies but for the abused quasi-Blakean victims of urbanisation, industrialism, imperialism, and (in the case of the 'female transport' Elinor) men. The subversive pastoral dream that Southey articulates anticipates various later Australian romantic literary and political 'rebellions': Charles Harpur's colonial republicanism, and romantic perceptions of 'nature'; the Arcadianism of later 'working men's paradise' immigration schemes and pastoral fictions; and the convict or Australian felon as hero or victim in ballads and fiction, are just three. Stuart Curran's comment, in relation to English literature, that 'Southey's pastorals constitute a watershed in the history of the genre'[4] equally illuminates Australian writing.

Another local anxiety was the perception – not unlikely at the best of times, but probable when reading dutiful public odes – that these trumpetings of the official view, these strivings for effect in an undeniably distant, convict colony, actually drew attention, through their absence in the verse, to unpleasant colonial realities themselves: to privation, separation, loss, and the mediocrity of local poetry. The Augustan conventions of Popean and Swiftian satire were appropriated by William Forster, William Wills, Harpur, Henry Kendall and others to create perhaps the finest of all colonial quasi-neoclassical verse. 'Appropriated', however, is a key term here, since the ideological axioms of the patriotic discourse are often missing. The beautiful and piercing heroic couplets, together with other conventions, are deployed not to endorse or confirm an old order, Roman or British, but perhaps to adumbrate a new cultivated ideal and to address vengefully the follies of particular local enemies.

Accompanying and paralleling Southey's example, but extending beyond it for decades, is the peculiar importance as poet and theorist of William Wordsworth. It

4 Stuart Curran, *Poetic Form and British Romanticism*, OUP, 1986, p. 199.

is tempting but misleading to claim without qualification that Wordsworth's poems and prefaces promoted the ballad form (as Southey transformed the pastoral), and the poeticised democratic 'language of men', and made them suitable vehicles for colonial adaptation and local transformation; and that his focus on natural landscape was especially pertinent to the local superabundance of it. Southey's use of the traditional 'aristocratic' ballad was certainly less suitable for colonial democrats than those, also employed by Wordsworth, dealing with outlawry and rebels; and there was no need for Australian balladists, particularly the Irish, to read Wordsworth in order to find models.

More importantly, Wordsworth became increasingly, for Australian readers and poets, a guarantor of taste and an authority to endorse or to challenge. As an anti-neoclassical role model, he was explicit as well as exemplary: he aimed to ascertain, he wrote in the 1800 *Preface to Lyrical Ballads*, 'how far the language of conversation in the middle and lower classes of society is adapted to the purposes of poetic pleasure', and warned that 'readers accustomed to the gaudiness and inane phraseology of many modern writers [will] look round for poetry' of their kind without satisfaction. Harpur, it appears, modelled his own 'notes' and commentary as well as his verse style on this kind of fabricated rustic curtness and plainness, but claimed that Wordsworth himself (and certainly the 'townie' Tennyson) had to be relieved of the 'namby pamby' element and adapted further to colonial conditions. Harpur began writing in the 1830s, but gained more public recognition after the 1850s gold rushes.

A major difference between the poets is their primary perspective on the rural past. For Wordsworth, abbeys, castles and 'folk' characters (the leech gatherer, the solitary reaper) are guarantors of its sanctity and traditional value. For Harpur, deprived of this possibility in a land recently occupied by white settlers, the wilds are sparsely inhabited by distantly observed, vaguely defined white settlers, sometimes with names like 'Egremont', who appear necessarily small, like feral elves, against a backdrop of natural turbulence and expanse. The artificiality is not necessarily ineffective: but it does make Harpur's settings appear in some poems closer to those of an imaginary world. In other poems, such as 'A Midsummer Noon in the Australian Forest', the 'real' setting is literally untouched by immigrants: the English associations of 'a midsummer night's dream' undergo antipodean semantic inversions as the daytime trance reveals an older and primeval past and virtually untrodden natural landscape.

The gold rushes changed both the Australian colonial identity and the preoccupations and infrastructure of literary culture. The goldfields themselves resembled rough moving cities rather than lonely pastoral outposts. The published non-fictional accounts of hundreds of (mainly British) diggers and travellers established a highly literary genre of educative entertainment, now neglected; it complemented idealised narratives of the adventure romance, and emphasised pain, drudgery, failure, natural ugliness and social excess as well as camaraderie and natural beauty. When many years later Henry Handel Richardson claimed some originality for her attempt to write of one of the 'failures' in *The Fortunes of Richard Mahony* (1930), she was obviously omitting from consideration

these non-fictional visitors' narratives, which she herself used as historical sources. The literariness and quality of these genre pieces, particularly their use of the conventions of set-piece description and travel writing, are still neglected by literary critics, and by historians who deploy them simply as tropeless 'documentary' evidence (see Chapter 5). In some respects, too, these works anticipate the later focus on urban literature, not only because cities and towns are now explored, but also because the goldfields experience, and the infrastructure of its entertainments, conflicts, crowds, daily routine and legal controls, are revealed as themselves quasi-urban.

By the 1880s British immigrants, and visiting novelists, poets and journalists, had adopted and introduced urban 'presence' and preoccupations into Australian literature. The new focus also redefined earlier perspectives on pastoral operations and wilderness in constructions of the 'bush' and the 'outback'. Catherine Spence, Marcus Clarke, Ada Cambridge, Anthony Trollope, Tasma and other contemporaries examine the multifarious dimensions of urban experience. The love–hate of the inured English Victorian urban writer is now colonialised, manifesting itself in displays of both awe and loathing for the city, and contrariwise for the country and outback. Victorian anti-urban sentiment, deriving from earlier English Romanticism, is sometimes projected into the incipient bush nationalism that was demagogically let loose by the *Bulletin*, and particularly A. B. Paterson in 1889 in 'Clancy of the Overflow'.

The gold rushes and urban growth nourished the development of a panoply of British and European literary and cultural institutions. There were libraries, galleries, mechanics' institutes, universities, the press, literary societies, and art schools, book-shops, working men's clubs, women's clubs, bohemian and elitist coteries, theatres – almost everything that London could offer (as literary visitors like Trollope, H. M. Hyndman, R. M. Twopeny, J. A. Froude, G. A. Sala, Mark Twain, R. L. Stevenson and Rudyard Kipling were likely to remark). Especially in Melbourne – by 1890 a cosmopolitan city of almost half a million people, one of the largest in the empire – both elitist and popular, both imperial and parochial manifestations of literary consumerism were colourfully prominent. But one commodity that could not in the colonial period be readily produced locally was the Author: not just a struggling Kendall, but an eminent and presiding Dickens or Tennyson. Authors of such stature never migrated (though Carlyle and Dickens thought about it), as to leave home was to depart from one's literary and financial support base. Australian readers were not necessarily disturbed by the need to look to Britain for their great writers – indeed, the eventual canonisation of local authors was a goal of the same general search; but the process entailed, even unconsciously, a dependency and congruency that younger native-born writers, however 'British', could not entertain.

The following discussion of the use by colonial writers and readers of British texts and literary authors is necessarily selective: space is not available to consider, for example, Shelley, Trollope, George Eliot, Irish balladists, and Robert Burns. Each of these exercised a discrete and different influence on colonial writers and audiences yet also,

though to a lesser extent than the writers examined, contributed to more widely shared colonial preoccupations and discourses. As we shall see, after the growth of larger cities, and the spread of rural population, 'Britain's Australia' was transformed by metropolitan and urban potentials.

Young and free: J. S. Mill

John Stuart Mill, the principal advocate of liberalism and a modified utilitarianism, had taken a close interest in the Australian colonies since the early 1830s when he and his mentor Jeremy Bentham supported Edward Gibbon Wakefield's proposals for immigration. He had sought then to create an agrarian labouring class, arguing (despite his usual utilitarian classical economics and support for Ricardo) that unless the price of land were initially fixed by governments at a level out of the reach of many immigrants, the cost of labour would be too high to sustain a productive economy. Nevertheless, his interest in de Tocqueville's account of American democracy, and his support of colonial immigration, self-help schemes and the creation of a 'prosperous' working class, allied him with liberal radicals who thought and wrote optimistically about Australian pastoral opportunities and 'democracy'. Chartism, the European revolutions of 1848 and their spillover into gold rush immigration, the American rushes of 1849, and colonial goldfield history after 1851 helped to shape the literary and intellectual outlook and writings of a high proportion of literary Australian immigrants and sojourners of the 1850s.

Mill had published *Principles of Political Economy* in 1848. During the gold rushes, while writing *Utilitarianism* and *On Liberty*, he was a controversial public intellectual who wrote regularly in the leading British newspapers and journals on economic, political, legal, social, foreign and current affairs, and on his own political and ethical principles. He was well known personally as well as in print by many of the professional intelligentsia who started to develop a colonial literary culture in the 1850s, particularly those who met in intellectual societies.

His defence of various 'freedoms' (of speech, conscience, 'information' and 'thought') was an essential part of the cultural baggage of the immigrant lawyers who defended the Eureka rebels, and of some of the rebels themselves (particularly the Italian litterateur librettist Raffaello Carboni). Charles Gavan Duffy, a personal friend, had used Mill's arguments in support of Irish political nationalism. R. H. Horne, the most celebrated poet to emigrate, knew him well, and had an array of 'liberal' credentials of his own (having fought Byronically against the Emperor Maximilian of Mexico); Frederick Sinnett, an early editor of Melbourne *Punch* and author of *The Fiction Fields of Australia* (1856), corresponded from Adelaide and Melbourne. On land owned by Arthur Hardy, brother of Mill's (eventual) wife Harriet Taylor, the Glen Osmond Mechanics' Institute was built: Mill and Harriet and her daughter donated about 100 books from their personal library.

Mill should not be regarded as the sole champion of liberalism, or his colonial followers as learned exponents of his every twist of argument. But his authority, example and personal acquaintance were especially pertinent and attractive in colonies where 'freedom', together with sheer space, was becoming a defining quality of the 'new' country. For colonial Australia's most controversial and colourful drama critic, J. E. Neild, Mill was the greatest of living philosophers; his work helped to define the essentials of 'colonial' culture as an independent entity by offering models and vindications of Neild's own specifically 'colonial' critical practices. Neild believed, in Mill's words, that the 'first duty' of a critic is 'to follow his intellect to whatever conclusions it may lead'.[5] The expression of an opinion may never be 'restrained' without detriment to 'mental freedom'. 'Give me leave to speak my mind', from Jaques in *As You Like It*, became the motto of Neild's weekly column: conflict he considered, like Mill, healthier than 'intellectual pacification'.[6] In dramatic performance 'tradition' is useless unless examined and relevant: the 'authority' of convention must be discarded, particularly if 'English' usages are inapplicable in colonial circumstances. 'Coloniophobia' was Neild's anticipatory neologism for 'the cultural'; he saw it as not merely old-world snobbery, but also as an uncritical surrender of liberty to the false authority of the inappropriate or outmoded.

Neild, like most of his literary contemporaries, could not put into practice the principles Mill enunciated in *The Subjection of Women* (1869), which the author himself could not totally master. When the brilliant Achurch–Carrington rendition of *A Doll's House*, the first and greatest of the British productions, was performed in Melbourne immediately after the controversial London success, Neild was among the most vociferous to miss the point, cantankerously satirising Nora's decision to leave her husband and children: 'it is certain that to any competent psychopathologist the circumstance of a woman quitting her home at midnight to study ethics, would supply a substantial reason for certifying to her unsoundness of mind'.[7] His colleague James Smith had advised J. C. Williamson to change the ending to 'My darlings, I cannot leave you!'[8] but Ibsen prevailed, along with an articulate band who acclaimed the play.

The literary journalist, novelist and political activist Catherine Helen Spence corresponded with Mill and in 1865 met him, and later George Eliot, in London. Spence was at first not especially moved by claims for women's suffrage because, like Mill himself, she wrongly found their implementation impracticable and utopian; but her writings reveal familiar Millian 'democratic' phraseology, later employed by the suffragists and Millian 'disciples' Rose Scott and Louisa Lawson. Spence's most passionately pursued cause was Thomas Hare's system of proportional representation, which she had discovered through Mill's advocacy, though Millian axioms underlie her interest in democracy itself. She wrote a defence of Hare in the Melbourne *Argus*, a series of letters on the

5 John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty and Other Essays* (ed. John Gray), Oxford (World's Classics series), 1991, p. 139.
6 Ibid., p. 38. 7 *Australasian*, 21 September 1889. 8 James Smith Papers, Mitchell Library, Sydney.

subject for the *Adelaide Register*, and a pamphlet, *A Plea for Pure Democracy* (1859), all of which Mill read and discussed with her in correspondence before her visit, sending her as well gifts of early copies of *Political Economy* and *The Subjection of Women*.

Spence supplemented her Millian principles with her Unitarian religion, which increasingly expressed itself, perhaps uncomfortably, in the utopianism of her later fiction and journalism; her commitment to 'the soul' allied her with the transcendentalism of Carlyle and Emerson. The contest between Mill and Carlyle in Britain and Australia is a latter-day and local manifestation of what Mill himself saw as that between 'the lofty inspiration of Plato and the judicious utilitarianism of Aristotle';[9] frequently overshadowed in literary histories by local and nationalist impulses, it suffuses the entire colonial and literary scene, especially before the 1890s, but through Bernard O'Dowd and others in the later period as well.

For Ada Cambridge, Mill dominates over Carlyle and transcendentalism in a contest that pervades much of her verse and fiction. *On Liberty* is virtually axiomatic for her, yet the problems and ironies it creates seem to make any triumph merely pyrrhic. Richard Delavel, the hero of *A Marked Man* (1890) and in some ways a counterpart of Cambridge herself, is 'marked' in diverse ways (characterised, targeted, scarred, recognised), but ironically reverses the Victorian 'man of mark' by his efforts and failures to establish himself as the unorthodox Millian 'sovereign autonomous individual'. Trammelled by marriage and social convention, like J. S. Mill he rejects Oxford on the grounds that it forbids freedom of belief. Again like Mill, he is for years barred from the marriage he chooses until eventually 'freed' by a spouse's death to enter a 'companionate' marriage with his invalid helpmate Constance, counterpart of the 'constant' Harriet Taylor Mill. 'I was thinking of all she was to Mill through those best years of his life – what a different man he might have been without her – how much the world, as well as he, might have lost.'[10]

Richard Delavel's harbourside 'camp' is ostensibly a site of freedom, and may be read metonymically as the new Australia that transcends the old and fustian Britain; but its optimistic potential is shaded and ambivalent. In reality the camp is a place to which escape is possible only fleetingly, and by removing oneself from society. Richard's daughter Sue, a young 'woman of the future', is enthused, yet only in her naivety, for all her special liberal education. Cambridge is as aware as Mill that absolute freedom is impossible, though 'undue' interference may be undesirable; yet the hideaway itself seems, for the reader, idyllic, something like a child's cubby-house rather than an indication of real or transcendental Australian potential. As Robert Dingley[11] has observed, the 'real ending . . . takes the form of a question to which the narrative provides no answer: "Oh, what does it all mean?" wailed Sue, in an anguish of bewilderment, overwhelmed by the terrible mysteries with which she was confronted'.

9 Mill, *On Liberty*, p. 29.

10 The parallels and quotation cited here are from Margaret Bradstock and Louise Wakeling, *Rattling the Orthodoxies: A Life of Ada Cambridge*, Penguin, 1991, p. 130 (and circa).

11 In Ken Stewart (ed.), *The 1890s*, UQP, 1996, p. 194.

Educate and emigrate: Thomas Carlyle

Thomas Carlyle's neologisms and quips show at once the nature of an invective as widely heard in the colonies as in Britain. The 'environment', 'cash-nexus', 'the dismal science' (economics), 'economic man', 'captains of industry', the 'sick society' became as familiar to late 19th-century socialists and Marxists, the 20th-century Frankfurt school, and the 20th-century Greens, as to Carlyle's contemporary antagonists of Industrialism, who lionised him in the 30 years or so after 1830. Especially before the gold rushes, Britain's colonies (not only in Australia) became for Carlyle, and followers such as John Ruskin, targets for agrarian rebirth and the establishment of a worthy immigrant yeomanry. There was no point in waiting, no need to consider the claims of Indigenous 'savages'; for the morally uncertain, imperialism was vindicated, made respectable and cleansed of the cheapness of 'colonial adventure' in popular fiction.

Following the discovery of gold, the Australian colonies moved towards the kind of industrialism that distressed Carlyle in Britain. 'The Age of Machinery' (another of his coinages) took over the goldfields and the recently flourishing cities. Richardson's Richard Mahony would have revered Carlyle: to both, the parvenu middle class, prey to the new Mammonism, seemed vulgar and gaudy, and anti-intellectual; capitalists and politicians had forgotten duty, spiritual and moral health, environmental beauty. Richardson in fact studied Carlyle at school, and discovered the seeds of German Romanticism before her expatriation to Germany, and became a Carlyle scholar long before her husband J. G. Robertson did.

Carlyle's colonial presence seemed almost literal. Many of his friends and acquaintances migrated to Australia after the gold rushes; reading groups and literary societies focused on his writings as a matter of literary propriety. Carlyle had supported Charles Gavan Duffy, Victorian premier, in the struggle against the political imprisonment of Young Ireland rebels (despite their differing opinions on the Irish question); Duffy was his friend and correspondent and became his biographer (*Conversations with Carlyle*, 1892). NSW Premier Henry Parkes, considered by the Carlyles more of a nuisance than a friend, was a correspondent and a visitor to the Chelsea house. Thomas Woolner, the pre-Raphaelite sculptor and poet turned gold-digger, had fashioned a celebrated Carlyle medallion and was a close friend. Such connections, and they are numerous, are not simply 'interesting': they confirm a close-knit personal link with England among a colonial literati whose most revered authors and 'heroes' were, inevitably in a small population, kinsfolk who remained at 'home'.

R. H. Horne, the most eminent poet among the gold rush immigrants, had known Carlyle as a quasi-paternal mentor over five years before his publication of *Orion*, the verse epic that suddenly raised Horne to major celebrity in 1842. Carlyle was profoundly impressed by the romantic study of the tension in heroic experience between the human urge towards action, immediate sensation and physical achievement on the one hand, and the need for cerebral thought and poetic

imagination on the other; and Horne would have found similar themes in Carlyle's writings.

Following the *succès d'estime* of *Orion*, Horne collaborated with a publicly unknown, and by him unseen, confidante, the reclusive spinster Elizabeth Barrett, to write critical biographies of Carlyle, Dickens, and other contemporary figures, in essays collected as *The New Spirit of the Age* (1844). Their discussion of Carlyle publicly examines and emblazons the socially troubling antithesis between Carlyle's transcendentalism and Bentham's utilitarianism: 'And from the beginning of the world, the two great principles of matter and spirit have combated – whether in man's personality, between his flesh and the soul; or in his speculative life, between the practical and ideal; or in this form of mental expression, between science and poetry.'[12] Bentham and Carlyle are seen as ideologically opposed combatants.

Horne had personally known Bentham, and tended towards a Shelleyan idealist atheism, and Barrett was sceptical of 'great' heroes and thinkers; they were not unreservedly drawn to Carlyle's side. Having assailed classical utilitarianism for its lack of a genuine aesthetic ('an indifference to poetry and the fine arts except as light amusements'), they attacked both the duplicity of Carlyle's attitude towards Christian orthodoxy, which they correctly saw as rejection masquerading as acquiescence, and the irrelevancy in practical terms of the Carlylean creed. What good was 'soul' as a remedial measure for those who were 'badly clothed, dirty, and without sufficient food'?

> His grand remedial proposals for all the evils of the country, by 'Universal Education', are rather an evasion of Chartism and its causes; for the Chartists say, 'We have enough education to see the injustice of people being starved in a land of plenty; and as for emigration, we do not choose to go. Go yourselves.' [p. 438]

Nevertheless, Horne did go, himself; and Barrett went, with her new husband Robert Browning, to Italy. When a new edition of *Orion* was published and acclaimed in Melbourne soon after Horne's arrival in 1854, the effect was to draw attention, at least among educated readers and the literati, to the particular colonial significance of its allegory and moral conflict. Horne declared in a new eight-page preface, written 'in the far bush, on the lonely lagoons of Warranga', that the central figure

> is meant to present a type of the struggle of man with himself, i.e. the contest between the intellect and the senses, when powerful energies are equally balanced. Orion is man standing naked before Heaven and Destiny, resolved to work as a really free agent to the utmost pitch of his powers for the good of his race . . . He is a dreamer of noble dreams . . . he is the type of a worker and a Builder for his fellow-men.[13]

Horne had decreed, in a prefatory note to the first edition, that his epic fable was 'a novel experiment upon the mind of a nation': the emerging colonial nation should

12 Richard Hengist Horne, *A New Spirit of the Age* (1844), OUP, 1907, p. 436.
13 E. Partridge (ed.), introduction to *Orion*, by R. H. Horne, Scholartis Press, 1928, p. xxvii.

be no exception, its roughness and practicality itself sufficient cause for the need to complement practical activity with intellectual thought.

Three decades later another biographer of Carlyle, his most famous, voyaged to the colonies 'to see them' and purportedly 'to hear the views of all classes of people there'. Perhaps he met a few token working men, but in his delightfully eloquent, idealised but inaccurate account, *Oceana, or England and Her Colonies* (1886), James Anthony Froude mixes mainly with the gentry and professional middle classes, and writes almost as if his master, the Sage of Chelsea, were exclusively their champion. By turning rural Australia into the happy pasture and granary of a new gentry and yeomanry, he seems to want to realise what he imagines to be Carlyle's dreams.

Froude had recently edited Carlyle's posthumous *Reminiscences* (1881), and had published the great *Life of Carlyle* (1882–4) in four volumes. 'There was no doubt', he told the Australians, 'that things were amiss in England.' So he informed them 'how Carlyle had thought about it all':

> According to him England's business . . . was to gather her colonies close to her, and spread her people where they could breathe again . . . Instead of doing this, she had been feeding herself on cant and fine phrases, and delusive promises of unexampled prosperity . . . our country was to be the world's great workhouse, our green fields soiled with soot from steam-engines – the fair old England, the 'gem set in a silver sea', was to be overrun with mushroom factory towns, our flowery lanes turned into brick lanes, our church spires into smoking chimneys. We were to be a nation of slaves – slaves of all the world, slaves to mechanical drudgery and cozening trade, and deluded into a dream that all this was the glory of freedom, while we were worse off than the blacks of Louisiana. It was another England that Carlyle looked forward to – an England with the soul in her awake once more – no longer a small island, but an ocean empire, where her millions and ten millions would be spread over their broad inheritance, each leading wholesome and happy lives on their own fields, and by their own firesides, hardened into men by the sun of Australia or the frosts of Canada – free human beings in fact, and not in idle name, not miserable bondsmen any more.[14]

Froude managed to find sunny England wherever he looked. A squatter's run became a 'great English domain', even an 'English aristocrat's country house'. But it was 'not England only, but old-fashioned baronial England, renewing itself spontaneously in a land of gold and diggers'. The typical squatter's son 'retained the manners of the finest of fine gentlemen – tall, spare-loined, agile as a deer, and with a face that might have belonged to Sir Launcelot'. Even the corn-shocks (naturally it was harvest time) 'were standing English fashion, red and yellow'; and the 'dark-leaved potatoes, untroubled by blight, were in full bloom'.[15]

Nearby the yeomanry prospered. A less exhausted and repressed, but equally prosperous counterpart, of Boldrewood's George Storefield garnered his crops of 'wheat,

14 *Oceana*, Longmans, Green, & Co., 1886, pp. 132–3. 15 Ibid., pp. 107, 102.

oats, barley, peas, beans, potatoes'. 'After the sight of them', Froude wrote, he 'could believe Herodotus's account of the crops grown on the plains of Babylon':

> The human occupiers of these farms live each on his own freehold, or, if tenants, with no danger of disturbance. They have pretty houses, smartly kept and bright with paint; and trellis-vines creep over the verandah fronts, and the slopes or lawns are bright with roses.[16]

Although many Australians were made to feel proud or flattered by Froude's Arcadian enthusiasms, others were dismayed by his misuse of the discipline of history to produce writing often more akin to the pastoral adventure-romance of Kingsley or Boldrewood. Froude's evidence, it is true, was the product of observation and experience; but it was also carefully and misleadingly selected; and his conclusions offered false or romantically exaggerated generalisations.

Not surprisingly, Froude's bold prophecies rarely came true, their failure accelerated by the 1890s depression. He believed, for example, that the empire in its present state would and should continue 'until symptoms have actually appeared of a wish on our part to throw them [the colonies] off, or on theirs to desert us, the very talk of such a thing ought not to be.' He knew that the labour movement, and the Single Tax, would fail in Australia: 'Mr [Henry] George and socialistic despotism will find no audience in these colonies. Perhaps before long they will lose their audience at home.' He expected that the yeomanry (the 'selector class') could 'not chose but be happy', as 'each harvest is as rich as the last'. He anticipated that British farmers – 'gentry and all' – will 'one day migrate en masse to a country where they can live in their own way without fear of socialism or graduated income-tax, and leave England and English progress to blacken in its own smoke.' Fortunately, he observed, the good sense of parliamentarians will prevent the development of political parties based on opposing principles.[17]

Ideal solutions: John Ruskin

John Ruskin, always inescapable within colonial literary culture, has (not unaccountably) become invisible to its historians. The words Victorian, moral, utopian, impractical, and didactic, all of which need to be used carefully to elucidate his writings, are usually employed simply to dismiss, especially by modernists who overlook or undervalue Ruskin's analytical skills, foresight and continuing influence. He was more widely known and read in the colonies than any of his eminent younger contemporaries and successors, including Matthew Arnold and Walter Pater, and probably Marx; but his appeal was diverse and perhaps obscured by the conflicts among his multifarious supporters – Tories, liberals, workers, socialists; painters, poets, and critics. His *Modern Painters* in three volumes (1843, 1846, 1860) was the standard and revered authority; *Sesame and Lilies* (1865) was perhaps the most common of all school prizes; *Unto This*

16 Ibid., p. 110. 17 Ibid., pp. 89, 95, 110, 111.

Last (1860) became a stepping-stone towards socialism, leading to William Morris and Ignatius Donnelly. Every subject on which Ruskin wrote or spoke, and there were scores, was important to idealists in a new country: morality and aesthetics; philosophical idealism; the pre-Raphaelite movement; gothic architecture and mediaevalism; the role and education of women, of governesses, of working men, of prisoners; the technical principles of painting, drawing, and sculpture; criticism of literature and the fine arts; the critique of industrialism, particularly dehumanising working conditions; the nature of work and art; the conservation of architecture and art, and the 'environment' (Carlyle's recent neologism); Ricardo's utilitarian economics; Millian economics and philosophy; the concept of a fair wage; 'single tax'; and the initiatives later realised in the welfare state.

Ruskin's prophetic eminence and literary eloquence were a continuous catalyst in colonial contests and literary debates. His endorsement of English Romanticism gave particular authority to Wordsworth (and rather less to Tennyson despite the later laureate's ascendancy in Britain), and implicitly to much in the poetry of Harpur and Kendall. Moreover his outlines of idealist aesthetic doctrines in *Modern Painters* and elsewhere provided a critical roadmap of principles and theories for many colonial painters, from Conrad Martens to Charles Conder, and for the better art critics, such as James Smith and Marcus Clarke. Doctrines such as the 'pathetic fallacy', a positive critical tool in Ruskin's prototypical usage, and his neo-Kantian critique of Wordsworth's pantheism, helped to keep Wordsworth and landscape verse and painting in an academic spotlight. This was particularly so at the University of Melbourne, where Wordsworth studies developed an individual strength and unique reputation.

A Melbourne law graduate, Alfred Deakin – the first native-born Victorian to publish a volume of verse, and later three times prime minister of Australia – became absorbed as a youth in Mill and Spencer, whom he never wholly abandoned. But as his religious faith crystallised he moved towards philosophical and aesthetic idealism, and to socially reformist liberal radicalism, largely through a sustained reading of Carlyle and Ruskin. His book-length manuscript study of Wordsworth was praised by Walter Murdoch, who also commended less enthusiastically his equally long Ruskinian study of Shakespeare. Always eloquent and affable, yet inwardly racked with needs and anxieties he associated with poetry and religion, Deakin spent his adult life balancing the demands of practical politics against the ideals of poetry, duty and emotional integrity. He recalled 'with great glee', according to Murdoch, how on his way to Bacchus Marsh as a young politician

> he saw a magnificent sunset, and prepared an elaborate description of it, in Ruskin's most grandiose manner, for his next speech, thinking with satisfaction of the sensation he was sure to make by introducing such a passage into an electioneering speech; but when he stood up to face an audience of stolid farmers he felt, instinctively, that this was no place for a Ruskinian word-picture of a sunset.[18]

Perhaps Australia itself was becoming not such a good place for a Ruskinian idealist.

18 Walter Murdoch, *Alfred Deakin: A Sketch* (1923), Bookman Press, 1999, p. 67.

Ruskin had become the Empire's literary superego, its unchallenged word painter of the sublime, roles to which for many years Harpur had earlier and more locally aspired. Although his initial undeveloped contact with Ruskinian doctrines had probably derived from Ruskin's progenitors (Wordsworth, Coleridge, Emerson and Carlyle, on most of whom Harpur published poems and critiques), he wrote his unpublished, apparently final credo, 'A Discourse on Poetry',[19] using words that seem, despite an overwrought and unsophisticated manner, indignant and passionate echoes of Ruskin. It is 'that grateful love of the beautiful, not only in its actual manifestations but also in its conceivable [*sic*] possibilities [which] assuredly inspires in Man an affinity with the Seraph'. Poetry is 'the harmonised expression in language of an exquisite perception of the Beautiful': the poet in a state of moral health articulates for the community the true artefact of Beauty and goodness, and acts as 'word painter' and 'philosopher' (but not of 'the very common-place sort of philosophy' practised by utilitarians). The Benthamites fail to see that 'Art', whether poetry, music or painting, 'will ever be exactly measurable, in all circles, by the real standard of their moral and mental enlightenment', and never simply by pleasure. Thus 'the morality of Poetry . . . is exactly correspondent to its integrity, or to its simple reliance upon the inherent goodness of all natural things': the ideal is Divine, and evil or depravity is never 'poetic', but diabolic.

> As to the causes of those utilitarian animals who are in the sage habit of decrying Poetry as an idle and unnatural art, the influence of which is to enfeeble our heads, and soften, not our hearts, but our hands and feet; – their cavils, I say, are hardly worthy of grave notice, though one were but defending a rhymed treatise on kitchen gardening, or a dwarf epic in blank about the growing of marigold wurzel or the sowing of Cobbet's Corn.

Thomas Woolner, the sculptor and poet who was an original member of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, had known Ruskin since 1851, when the already famous public figure endorsed the younger enthusiasts' much derided aesthetic manifesto in a celebrated letter to the London *Times*. Following the gold discoveries in Australia, the brotherhood had seriously entertained the utopian plan of setting up a camp in Victoria where they would combine digging with more literary exercises. In the event only Woolner (together with one other fringe dweller) made the expedition, which he recorded in brilliantly expressive letters to the Tennysons, the Carlyles, and fellow pre-Raphaelites.[20] Reading his letters was the closest Dante Gabriel Rossetti's coterie came to knowing Australia, though Gabriel later kept a small menagerie of exotic animals in his house and garden, in which a wombat and a kangaroo held pride of place. He was assured by his more sensible brother William that disturbing nightly rustlings were not made by his dead wife's ghost, but by the nocturnal wanderings of his raccoon.

19 Charles Harpur papers, MS A87–1, Mitchell Library, Sydney. Quotations are from the MS 'A Discourse on Poetry'.

20 See Amy Woolner, *Thomas Woolner: His Life in Letters*, Chapman & Hall, 1917.

During his agonising and laborious stint at the diggings, in which his companion died in a flooded creek, Woolner read with awe and exhilaration by his campfire the early works of Ruskin. He revered them not only for their aesthetic and spiritual insights but also for their elevated description, as his own epistolary pen pictures, and his aspirations towards Beauty and the Ideal, reflect. Similar prose became standard among colonial authors: Harpur, Kendall, Clarke, James Smith, Thomas Heney often wrote optimistic detailed Ruskinian set pieces, and Harpur thundered that 'description' should never be lowly ranked. Their colonial typicality is often concealed by the emphases of later critics on gloom, disturbance, fear or the negative 'uncanny', to which Ruskin's influence provides a common antidote. Ironically, however, Ruskin removed the purple from his style, or so he believed, long before some of his colonial disciples followed suit, on the grounds that it had become pretentious and distracting.

Clarke named 'weird melancholy' as the 'dominant note' of Australian scenery (which he contextualises within a discussion of the 'diabolic' Poe). This has for many commentators so exemplified notions of Australian landscape before the 1890s that Clarke's own positive Ruskinian quality and explicit religious ambivalence have been overlooked. To appreciate that this 'dominant' note was not the only or exclusive one he heard is necessary to an understanding of the nature of his Romanticism, and his realism.

Clarke, who in Australia became (among other things) an art critic, would have discovered Ruskin's commentaries on aesthetics and painting while studying art at Highgate School in London with his friend Gerard Manley Hopkins. Hopkins was already a talented amateur artist, and perhaps embryonically a poet of both orthodox Christian and Worsworthian inclinations. His description of Clarke at school as 'kaleidoscopic, thaumatropic, particoloured, harlequinesque' predicts Clarke's multi-faceted talents, volatility, and potential ambivalence (and Hopkins' own 'kinetic style').

Later in Australia, 'training' on sheep stations in the Grampian Mountains of Western Victoria to become a squatter, still an unpublished teenage polyglot, Clarke committed himself quixotically to writing an ambitious project on world religions, reading particularly the works of Carlyle and Ruskin (and Bossuet). For days he would ride among the mountains and plains, solitary and weirdly excited, and would write long Ruskinian pictures, remarkably like Woolner's letters, to his friend Cyril Hopkins (Gerard's brother). He thought of himself at this time as beginning to abandon Christian orthodoxy for a 'kind of mysticism'. The mysticism eventually evaporated, but disappointment over his loss of faith never faded. He told Cyril, despite his own later public and controversial exposure of various fallacious arguments favouring Christianity, that he was envious of believers and ill disposed to ridicule their faith.[21]

21 Information in the foregoing paragraphs is taken from Clarke's letters and Cyril Hopkins' commentary in the latter's MS biography of Clarke in the Mitchell Library. An annotated edition by L. Hergenhan, K. Stewart and M. Wilding is forthcoming, Australian Scholarly Publishing, 2009.

The original serialised version of *His Natural Life* demonstrates Clarke's choice, despite his dwindling or lost faith, to demonstrate structurally the triumph of a tempered Ruskinian and Rousseauesque optimistism. Rufus Dawes survives the cyclone to become an exemplary Carlylean farmer, an almost Whitmanesque paragon of backwoods yeomanry; and Dora's (Sylvia's) daughter Dorcas survives with her diamond talisman of spiritual hope, to realise with Dawes as her stepfather his ideal of the modest home and rose garden of the Victorian gold rush settler. The allegory is irresistibly obvious; the artistic crudity of this later expunged gold rush section never derived from symbolic or didactic uncertainty, but from the heavyhandedness with which the allegory and the lesson is enforced. In both versions of the novel 'divine' Ruskinian landscape description is set against 'diabolic', Poe-like description and 'weird melancholy' to demonstrate how 'a potential Eden became an evil penitentiary'.

James Smith, for over 30 years from 1855 the leading art and literary critic in Victoria, was a self-proclaimed Ruskinite, though the nature of his indebtedness is usually misunderstood. Smith liked to define interrelations among Beauty, Morality, Art and Divinity in familiar Ruskinian terms, but his theatrical criticism in particular does not conform with Ruskin's aesthetic as consistently as has been suggested. The use of detailed, often florid pen pictures to represent, for example, the tragedian G. V. Brooke's brilliant theatrical performances and stage settings provided both contemporary newspaper readers and posterity with magnificently thorough and evocative accounts of theatrical productions; but only at times with Ruskinian critiques.

Smith as Ruskinian played a sensationally antagonistic role in the contest between himself and the young painters of the '9 × 5 impressions' exhibited at Buxton's gallery in Melbourne in August 1889. Paradoxes and uncertainties surface when we seek to define that role, and Ruskin's cultural and aesthetic influence. The publicity generated by the exhibition has assumed historically a greater importance than the quality of those minuscule paintings themselves, because at stake were matters relating to cultural transition, and to the perceived intersection of colonialism, nationalism, internationalism and modernism.

A simplistic account maintains that Smith's angry demolition job on the young exhibitors, and their public taunts in response, parallel in essence the scandalous feud between Ruskin and James Whistler in London in 1877. The latter followed Ruskin's dismissive review of a painting by the young *avant garde* 'coxcomb' whose 'cockney impudence' impelled him to charge 200 guineas 'for flinging a pot of paint in the public's face'. The problem in pressing this analogy is that the Victorian younger generation, Tom Roberts, Charles Conder, James Streeton and Frederick McCubbin, were as strongly and explicitly devoted to most of Ruskin's principles and aesthetics as Smith, and that neither party was absolute and consistent in its discipleship. The astonishing radicalism of Turner, and of Ruskin's appreciation of him in *Modern Painters*, seems never to have been fully comprehended by Smith, or perhaps even by Roberts, though awareness of it was certainly reflected in many paintings by the French impressionists,

particularly Monet, and also in the Whistler painting which Ruskin derided. Recent art historians and biographers (of Turner and of Ruskin) see Ruskin's outburst as aberrant and inconsistent with his own earlier critical practice.

The most explicit connection between the landscape paintings of the young Streeton and Roberts and the verse of English and Australian Romantic poets is contained in the titles of paintings: for example, Streeton's 'Still glides the stream, and shall forever glide' (a line from one of Wordsworth's River Duddon sonnets), and the Shelleyan line 'the purple noon's transparent might'. What the quotations add to the meaning of the paintings is open to discussion, or even conjecture; but it is reasonable to conclude that, at the least, the feeling of trance-like awe and sacredness, the possibly transcendental awareness of natural beauty that is evoked by the paintings, is being articulated as a verbal confirmation, an authoritative guarantee by canonical greats. Whether Ruskin would have enjoyed Streeton's poetic realism and accepted it as Beauty is impossible to know, especially since Ruskin never experienced Australian landscape. But the appreciation and execution of ideally real painted landscape was certainly learnt from Ruskin.

Ruskin's initially unpopular *Unto This Last* (1860) became eventually, especially among socialists, the most damning Victorian rebuttal of the economics of Mill and Ricardo, and implicitly of Adam Smith. Ruskin was taken up by the labour movement in Australia, as in Britain, but the Australian Labor Party experienced success earlier than its counterpart in Britain, and during Ruskin's lifetime.

Ruskin deconstructs Mill and Ricardo by examining central concepts relating to unregulated capitalism, productivity and value; he concludes with 'there is no wealth but life', an enormously influential slogan in the 19th century. Although Ruskinian Tories such as James Smith ignored what they regarded as a socialist aberration, radicals in Australia, including W. H. Holman, George Black and W. M. Hughes, accepted avidly the radical implications. William Morris, the pre-Raphaelite follower of Ruskin and Carlyle, who was converted to socialism, was in contact with trade union newspaper editors in Australia. The radical socialist and labour movements stocked their clubs and bookshops with these authors, and with Ignatius Donnelly, Henry George, and J. S. Mill. The full title of the Melbourne Trades Hall still carries the additional words 'and Literary Institute'.

Moderate expectations: Charles Dickens

In 1838, the first pirated edition of *Pickwick Papers* was published in Tasmania by Henry Dowling. Soon after, a station owner near Grafton, New South Wales, named his property Eatonswill (*sic*), echoing the fictional rotten borough Eatanswill in Dickens' novel. A township emerged, now called Eatonsville, the change of name due more to civic pride than distaste for the novelist. Throughout the reign of Queen Victoria, Dickens was as popular and important in Australia as in Britain, and for similar reasons.

Coral Lansbury argued in *Arcady in Australia* (1970) that his Arcadian projections of Australia in *David Copperfield* and *Great Expectations* derived from a practical urge to promote working-class emigration, and from a nostalgic wish to translate the old 'Britain' before crowded industrialism to the sunny antipodean south. A practical response to Lansbury might stress the obvious: that Australia scarcely appears, except as an informative absence and a fortunate destination, in these novels; if Dickens set out to be overtly propagandist, he was not very successful. A second observation applies to many other commentators besides Lansbury: that to depict a fictional Arcady in Australia is not necessarily to persuade readers, particularly potential emigrants, that the actual colony is Arcadian. Lansbury fails to explore sufficiently how literary tropes and conventions that idealise, distort or abandon historical reality, especially in melodrama or pastoral romance, work to persuade potential immigrants. Arguably, the prospects and destinies of Peggoty and of Micawber are presented as happy gestures rather than realistic endings; and the shock legacy of that ill-favoured fairy godfather Magwitch is not likely to have been accepted as everyday good fortune in either a convict's or a colonist's life. Other references made by Dickens to Australia, in *Pickwick Papers*, *Nicholas Nickleby* and *Our Mutual Friend*, are to the place as a justly punitive convict destination.

Nevertheless, Dickens was more closely familiar with the colonies than his books indicate, and came to see them, in more carefully considered ways than Lansbury suggests, as a worthwhile destination for certain emigrants. Late in his life two of his sons migrated: Alfred D'Orsay Tennyson in 1865, to Hamilton in rural Victoria, and Edward Bulwer Lytton in 1869, to Wilcannia in far western New South Wales. Conjecture that Miss Havisham in *Great Expectations* is modelled on an historically authenticated parallel, the jilted Eliza Donnithorne of Sydney, is regarded sceptically by scholars, who nonetheless point out that contacts in Australia could have told Dickens her story.

Lansbury is more convincing in pointing to Dickens' connection with the colonies as editor of *Household Words* in the early 1850s, though her consideration even of this link is misleading and incomplete. It is true, as she points out, that he wrote an essay on New South Wales, and that he published in *Household Words* several influential essays by Samuel Sidney, who encouraged working-class migration and rejected Wakefield's (and Mill's) advocacy of the necessity of a squattocracy to confirm economic or social caste. Sidney, like Carlyle before him, envisaged a colony populated by small property-owning farmers, translated from the British working classes (of all 'sorts': migration would smooth the rougher ones) into plucky and virtuous sterling yeomanry. Dickens also consulted personally with Caroline Chisholm and others on the subject.

Lansbury fails to mention that *Household Words* carried more diverse and sometimes contrary material than Sidney's encomiums. One of its four staff editors before his migration was R. H. Horne, who had worked with Dickens in the preparation of reports of exploitation, chicanery and squalor relating to the oppressed in Britain, and who after his arrival in Victoria wrote more documentary material about Australia than

any other contributor. Horne and Dickens shared a delight in amateur theatricals, wine, and showing off, and had presented (badly) an enthusiastically rehearsed original comedy before Queen Victoria. Horne wrote colourfully and factually for Dickens about the goldfields and other Australian subjects. In 1859 he published his own well-received account, *Australian Facts and Prospects*, which, with an attached colonial autobiography, shows the influence on his work of his writing for *Household Words*. It is an objectively discriminating yet narcissistic study, emphasising the practical skills required by successful immigrants and ridiculing recent claims of opportunities for 'literary men' made by Frank Fowler in *Southern Lights and Shadows* (1859). But it scarcely endorses the ideal of yeomanry for upwardly mobile working men.

After the first gold rushes (the beginnings of an Australian industrial revolution) the deeper significance of Dickens for the colonies could scarcely be perceived as Arcadian. So far from promising a working man's paradise, he revealed the hellish excesses of urban industrialism at home in Britain, and by implication locally, especially within the colonial cities. Literary politicians and social critics like Parkes, Gavan Duffy, and Deakin could not avoid the perception that local prosperity was accompanied by poverty, sweated labour, class disparity and a raft of social abuses. Deakin, a devotee of Dickens, Carlyle and Ruskin, campaigned and legislated compassionately – against sweated labour, for example, and in favour of destitute widows and children. He was successful in gaining a pension for Marcus Clarke's widow, and in establishing in 1908 the Commonwealth Literary Fund for needy authors or their families. Novelist-journalists such as Clarke and J. E. Neild employed Dickensian styles and devices – extravagant and humorous wordiness, irony, caricature; or blatant pathos – to reveal a 'Lower Bohemia', or a Little Lonsdale Street, that read indeed 'like something out of Dickens'. There is in these writers (partly learnt or reinforced by reading Dickens) a familiar entrancement with sordid vitality, a love–hate celebration of an urban *genius loci*.

In a long obituary Clarke judged that in Dickens we see 'our nineteenth-century existence, with its gambling, starving, pauper-burying, speculating, poisoning and swindling; [its] almshouses, Yorkshire schools, chancery suits, theatres, prisons, . . . banks, frauds on insurance companies'.[22] These are, of course, the themes of his journalistic sketches of Melbourne. Dickens, he argues, uncovered 'the inner side of middle class life', the 'story of the poor clerk, the struggling tradesman'.

'Earth's Greatest Man': Shakespeare

The triumph of 'Shakespeare' on the colonial stage in the period following the first gold rushes would not have been possible without the growth of popular and literary culture and commercial enterprise made possible by immigration, population increase

22 *Argus* (Melbourne), 8 July 1870, p. 7. Reprinted in Michael Wilding (ed.), *Marcus Clarke* (Australian Authors series), UQP, 1976, pp. 629–37.

and urbanisation. English stars such as G. V. Brooke, Ellen and Charles Kean, Barry Sullivan and Walter Montgomery transformed colonial experience both by reinforcing its cosmopolitanism and Englishness, and by fostering local talent, literary criticism and a nuanced Australian response. Shakespeare was good, popular theatrical entertainment, performed by actors whose appeal rested also on their skills in acting farce, melodrama, pantomime and popular comedy; but it was, as well, as emblematised by the Shakespearean bust in the study or vestibule, something far more pervasive and multifaceted within colonial society

Members of the aspirational, autodidactic working class and middle class, like Furphy and his character Tom Collins, enjoyed or approved of the Bard. By the 20th century, decades of Australian proletarian suspicion or incomprehension of high culture and intellectual pursuits also permitted, for example, C. J. Dennis's Sentimental Bloke to shout from his seat for the players in *Romeo and Juliet* to 'put in the boot', and Lawson in 'Mateship in Shakespeare's Rome' to use Shakespeare as a trope to champion Australian nationalism against aristocratic and effete Englishness. For gentlemen critics like James Smith, Shakespeare was at once a Carlylean moral hero and an inspired creator of Beauty. E. E. Morris, a professor of literature at Melbourne University, publicly endorsed Carlyle's proclamation (in *On Heroes and Hero Worship*) that global recognition of Shakespeare by English-speaking peoples would maintain 'virtually one nation' which would 'live at peace, in brother-like intercourse, helping one another':

> Here [Carlyle had said] is an English King, whom no time or chance, Parliament or combination of parliaments, can dethrone!
>
> This King Shakepeare, does not he shine in crowned sovereignty over us all, as the noblest, gentlest, yet strongest of rallying signs; indestructible, really more valuable in that point of view than any other means or appliance whatsoever? We can fancy him as radiant aloft over all the nations of Englishmen, a thousand years hence, from Parramatta, from New York, wheresoever, under what post or parish constable soever, Englishmen and women are, as they will say to one another, 'Yes, this Shakespeare is ours, we produced him, we speak and think by him, we are of one blood and kin with him'.

Morris claimed that his young sons would learn more history from *Henry V* and the patriotic plays than from 'the history books', and suggested that St George should be replaced as patron saint of England by William Shakespeare. Such were the excesses that demonstrate how Shakespeare could be used as an instrument of Empire, patriarchy, capitalism, racism and colonialism.

R. H. Horne believed, representatively, that respect for Shakespeare reflected growing colonial maturity and proper development towards nationhood. When funds could not be found to complete Charles Summers' celebrated public statue, he wrote (in a prologue to a Shakespearean medley preformed at the Melbourne's Theatre Royal on the 300th anniversary celebrations):

Be it not said how we in other climes
To our disgrace, and shame, in future times,
We had no taste for verse except burlesquing rhymes.
Be it not recorded in our books of trade
We left a Summers standing in the shade
Of his own noble work, – oh! Let not this be said.
Be it not found our sense of art was greed
Measured by its value, e'en like market seed:
If elder cities fail, then let us take the lead,
Set up an image of earth's greatest man,
Who has done more than all besides to scan
Nature's wide-open book and show her working plan.[23]

Fitting English caps: Gilbert and Sullivan

In E. W. Hornung's *Stingaree* (1903), the eponymous hero is a dandyish graduate of Oxford who rides a white thoroughbred, and has in his decline taken to bushranging in the Australian outback. He bails up the local mail coach with two long-barrelled revolvers, and demands – not gold, but the latest issue of Melbourne *Punch*, where he can study reviews of recent performances of Gilbert and Sullivan. Rural Australia has become less Shakespearean since Tom Collins recited Shakespeare to his lonely bullock team. From the late 1870s Gilbert and Sullivan had proved as spectacularly successful in colonial cities as in London and New York, and along with pianos, sheet music and rabbits had spread through the bush.

Many of the earliest performances had been pirated by local troupes. While touring London with his own *Struck Oil* in 1879, J. C. Williamson gleefully bought from D'Oyly Carte the rights to perform Gilbert and Sullivan in Australia until 1960. With his partner Musgrave he remained faithful to the unwritten London Savoy charter of English performance conventions, and exploited the home-brand cachet. Helen Lenore (Mrs D'Oyly Carte) came to the colonies to supervise. This insistence on the authorised and popular house style ensured that localised adaptations, with their peculiar relevance and wit, were not available in the major theatres. Nevertheless the Savoy cap often happened to fit colonial wearers, permitting a response to Gilbert's libretti that might be at once global and local ('glocal' in the cant of recent cosmopolitan theory.) Thus *HMS Pinafore* might celebrate colonial class mobility; *Patience* might ridicule not merely the affectations of Wilde and the aesthetes, but also the buffoonery of the privileged 'English' in a practical 'Australian' community; *The Mikado* might appeal (fallaciously as it happened) to the tastes and refinements of local 'experts' in *japonoiserie*; and in

23 *Examiner* (Melbourne), 30 April 1864. For further discussion of Shakespeare in colonial Australia see H. Love (ed.), *The Australian Stage: A Documentary History*, UNSWP, 1984, pp. 52–118; Ken Stewart, 'Much Ado About Everything', *Australian Literary Studies*, 19.3, pp. 269–79; Richard Madeleine and John Golder (eds), *O Brave New World*, Currency Press, 2001.

Princess Ida a specifically Australian type of 'outdoor' feminism could be celebrated in the feisty assertiveness of Ida and her female intellectual friends. Ada Cambridge, Catherine Martin, Miles Franklin, Tasma and others wrote novels with vigorously healthy 'outdoors' intellectual heroines – and colonial plays and verse depicted robust types of 'the Ausralian girl' metonymically representing the coming nation. After the Melbourne production of *Princess Ida* in 1888, female students at the university formed their own Princess Ida Club from which, like Ida's Castle Adamant, male students were barred.

For a detailed demonstration of how regional, national and international conditions, and global capitalist operations, could combine to permit particular colonial audience responses, perhaps the most suitable text is *HMS Pinafore*. In some respects Gilbert's anti-Tory radicalism in this opera is itself inconsistent with the familiar version of Englishness against which 'typical' Australian nationalism defined itself. It celebrates the rise of the 'lowborn', and the corresponding fall of the apparent aristocrat: for 'one was a patrician, and one of low condition'. Technically, aristocracy triumphs, for Ralph's 'true' blood is blue blood; but really, in its emotional impact, an Australian dream of navy-blue rags to riches in epaulettes is translated by the audience through a particular local iconography.

Audiences knew, in 1879, that the Tichborne claimant, a butcher from Wagga Wagga, was in fact a sailor: he was of the same profession, if not rank, as Cook, Phillip, Bligh and other local icons. Another sailor figure after 1885 was the Little Boy from Manly, Livingston Hopkins' metonymic critique and cartoon celebration of Young Australia in a sailor suit. The carnivalesque celebration of the local claimant becomes in the theatre a comic colonial holiday. Interestingly, a sequel to *HMS Pinafore*, *The Wreck of the Pinafore*, in which class hierarchies are not overturned as Buttercup is found to have lied about mixing up the babies, failed in both London and New Zealand, primarily no doubt because it lacked the *élan* of Gilbert and Sullivan, but also one suspects because it overturns their satire of class.

HMS Pinafore also publicly advertises the vices and weaknesses of British military aristocracy in which local colonial resentment is exacerbated by the imperial hierarchical structure of the military. The ruler of the Queen's Nay-vee in the colonial period was widely distrusted in Australia both as a type, on class and national grounds, and frequently in practical reality for incompetence, arrogance and ignorance. A. B. Paterson's first published poem, concerning Australian involvement in the Sudan campaign in which General Gordon was killed, ridicules Gordon's fellow generals. Paterson resumed his attack during the Boer War on the impractical and 'eye-glassed impotents from Piccadilly'. Gilbert had no subversive intention, so far as the colonies were concerned; but his satire could easily be poetically translated and appropriated.[24]

24 For an expanded discussion see Ken Stewart, 'Antipodean Topsy-Turvy: Gilbert and Sullivan in the Australian Colonies', *Southerly*, 67.1–2 (2007), pp. 69–85.

Yellow livery: Oscar Wilde

The example of Oscar Wilde underlines the peril of leaving unexamined the cross-currents of national stereotyping. Wilde was not really an English Tory: he was a liberal socialist, and Irish. But the image of aristocratic dandyism he affected was the reverse of typically Australian. In witty conversation and in his plays and other writings, he employed with pitiless *brio* the convention of Australia as a joke place, a vast and distant outpost overrun by convicts, sheep and wealthy philistines who were to be spurned, unless one was in debt. The British put-down of the 'colonial' (a very different term to 'colonist') was by 1890 a literary and social tradition. It ran parallel to various incompatible Arcadian enthusiasms for adventure, freedom and open air; and it received colonial payback in the (real and literary) treatment of overbearing and effete new chums, snobs and overlords in the colonies. But Wilde's treatment of Australia was a joke for joke's sake, nonchalantly cruel but not commitedly malevolent.

Accordingly, in *The Importance of Being Earnest* when Cecily informs Algernon that Jack has 'gone up to buy [his] outfit' for emigrating, the following dialogue takes place:

> ALGERNON: I certainly wouldn't let Jack buy my outfit. He has no taste in neckties at all.
> CECILY: I don't think you will require neckties: Uncle Jack is sending you to Australia.
> ALGERNON: Australia! I'd sooner die.
> CECILY: Well, he said at dinner on Wednesday night, that you would have to choose between this world, the next world, and Australia.
> ALGERNON: Oh, well! The accounts I have received of Australia and the next world are not particularly encouraging.

When (in real life) Lillie Langtry asked Wilde why he thought of going to Australia he replied, 'Well, do you know, when I look at the map and see what an ugly-looking country Australia is, I feel as if I want to go there to see if it cannot be changed into a more beautiful form.'[25]

A similarly affected Wildean figure had already visited Australian theatre in the comic figure of Bunthorne in Gilbert and Sullivan's *Patience*, which was first performed in Sydney in 1881, seven months after its London premiere. According to contemporary actors' accounts and several critical reviews, actors and audiences were familiar with the cults and crazes of aestheticism. In the previous decade, Kendall (who had published a study of Wilde's mother, the poet Esperanza, in his series on Irish poets), and others had addressed themselves in the weekly press to issues relating to Swinburne, Rossetti, and particularly to Robert Buchanan's *The Fleshly School of Poetry* (1871). The audience would have known, for example, the double significance of Gilbert's allusion to Bunthorne as a 'fleshly poet', especially since Oscar himself was not exactly slender. In 1889 Wilde, in the colonially published *Centennial Magazine*,[26] conjoined his aesthete's pose

25 Richard Ellmann, *Oscar Wilde*, Hamish Hamilton, 1988, p. 196.
26 See ibid., pp. 196, 534.

and dress sense with his affected anti-Australian superiority by publishing his 'Symphony in Yellow' (a titular reference, he explained, to the 'horrible yellow livery' worn by the convicts or transported 'canaries'):

> And far in the Antipodes
> When swelling suns have sunk to rest
> A convict to his yellow breast
> Shall hug my yellow melodies.

Wilde's dandified condescension is the literary enshrinement of an attitude towards 'colonials' that had commenced probably a century earlier. Its comic excess is in effect a self-reflexive confession of its own absurdity, since transportation had ceased many decades earlier; but the attitude continued, more in life than in literature, into the 20th century, and was adopted as well at times by expatriated, velvet-clad bohemian aesthetes, including perhaps Alistair Kershaw, Robert Helpmann, Barry Humphries, Richard Neville and Robert Hughes.

Conclusion

In Australian literary histories the 1890s and Federation sometimes throw an obscuring shadow over the culture of previous decades. Federation as apotheosis transforms earlier literature into a mere process of getting there; and perhaps of being hampered on the way – by Britishness. Emphasis on the 1890s may also lead either to neglect of the various literary nationalisms of previous decades, or to the privileging of 1890s discourses. Discussion of colonialism that conflates political with cultural realities may obscure the modern and anticipatory elements of pre-1890s Australian culture, and lead to an underestimation of the nature and extent of cosmopolitan, global and local forces after the gold rushes. The tyranny of distance had never threatened the transmission of British ideas, institutions and conventions; it was in fact becoming merely an occasional inconvenience or a cause of psychological anxiety, of cultural inferiority caused by a *feeling* of remoteness.

After the gold rushes no Australian newspaper reader, particularly among those who were suspicious of literary and intellectual pursuits, could avoid daily and weekly reminders of the public perceptions of the role of literature – as a discourse, a means of self-improvement, an exemplary and coded embodiment of certain written conventions and proprieties, and an arena for intellectual disputation. Literature encompassed philosophy, criticism, political economy and social commentary as well as the normal 'higher' genres and modes; its leading practitioners included Carlyle, Ruskin and various historians, as well as Dickens, Tennyson and Shakespeare, who were household words. In the 1880s the town planners of Byron Bay named every street after a canonical author, a monument to the now-defunct community sense of the power and value of the literary.

The ascendancy of literature confirmed the British and European connections explored in this chapter, and their later gradual erosion indicated transitions within the British–Australian relationship. The generation of immigrants who had since the 1850s spread the gospel of literature was by the 1880s gradually surrendering certain priorities, not merely because they included more native-born Australians, but also because literature in Britain was losing its mid-Victorian hold. In Australia Art for Art's sake, decadence, and some other British and European movements never caught on; in fact they were derided both by the older generation of local writers and critics and by young authors such as O'Dowd, Deakin, and Walter Murdoch and also the *Bulletin* school. The *Bulletin* (established in 1880) was itself a product of generational change. J. F. Archibald and A. G. Stephens railed against the cant both of the British old world and of the old Australian litterateurs, and in practice championed both internationalist and new local nationalist ideas and movements. As contemporary British writers failed in the 1880s to exert the earlier canonical power, Australian writers and literary culture began gradually to exercise a new and broader cultural influence. The transition was not so much a rejection of traditional international and British literary traditions as an attempt to accommodate new local movements as well. James Smith, H. G. Turner and critics from the gold rush generation sometimes labelled the *Bulletin* school a threat to the traditions and values of literature itself; but young practitioners – such as Henry Lawson, a Dickens-lover, and A. B. Paterson, raised in the bush on Carlyle, Wordsworth and imperial adventure stories – expressed no rejection of English literature despite their own refashioning of its resources. Lawson, however, strongly criticised Romanticism, including Paterson's.

This chapter has attempted to demonstrate several Australian literary transformations relating particularly to democracy and freedom; nature and aesthetic idealism; conceptualisation of City and Country; and literary Arcadias. Australian literary negotiation with British texts, ideas and conventions, it argues, should not of itself be perceived as cultural enslavement, and is creatively inevitable in the formation of a national literature. The discussion of particular authors allows us to appreciate their individuality, as well as their discrete or overlapping Britishness and Australianness, and to understand that colonial writing is not more derivative than any other (especially British). Among several common themes in this chapter, perhaps the most insistent, and the most commonly neglected in histories of 19th-century Australian literature, is the repeated contest between utilitarian materialism and aesthetic, spiritual and moral idealism. That contest is of course derived and evolved from earlier battles between Mill and Ruskin or Carlyle, Hume and Kant, neoclassicism and Romanticism. Yet these earlier contests recast and replay, as J. S. Mill insisted, an ancient conflict between Aristotle and Plato.

2

The beginnings of literature in colonial Australia

ELIZABETH WEBBY

Books arrived in Australia in 1788 with Governor Phillip and the first shiploads of convicts, officials and marines, as did paper, pens and ink. The last items were needed for keeping the records of the penal colony as well as maintaining communication with the mother country. In a sign of the times, also in the cargo were some boxes of type and a wooden screw press, though initially no-one could use it. Once George Hughes, a convict, began to operate the press, he was kept busy printing government notices, though the earliest surviving item is in fact a playbill, advertising a 30 July 1796 performance of Nicholas Rowe's *The Tragedy of Jane Shore* (1714) at the Sydney Theatre.[1] The first play had been performed in Australia a few years earlier, to celebrate the king's birthday on 4 June 1789, which shows that someone had brought a copy of George Farquhar's 1703 comedy *The Recruiting Officer* to Sydney.[2]

From the beginning of Australian settlement, then, books and other items of print culture were being used not only for utilitarian purposes but also for relaxation and amusement. A surprisingly high number of early settlers could read, and by 1890 adult literacy was almost universal. This chapter will trace the importation of books, the growth of libraries and literary societies, the beginnings of local publishing and the influence of educational institutions, including mechanics' institutes and universities. Although most books came from Britain and were by British authors, a growing number were by Americans; classical and European authors were also widely read, but few Australian ones, even though books, poems and plays were also being written in Australia from the beginning of settlement.

1 This playbill was found in a book in the National Library of Canada and presented to the National Library of Australia on 11 September 2007; it can be viewed on the NLA website.

2 For detailed accounts of theatre in early Sydney see Robert Jordan, *The Convict Theatres of Early Australia, 1788–1840*, Currency Press, 2002, and Nathan Garvey, 'Reviewing Australia's first performance: *The Recruiting Officer* in Sydney 1789', *Australasian Drama Studies*, 40 (2002), pp. 26–57. Fictionalised accounts of the first Sydney performance can be found in Thomas Keneally, *The Playmaker* (1987) and Timberlake Wertenbaker, *Our Country's Good* (1988).

Literacy and the availability of books

How many of those who arrived in New South Wales on the First Fleet were able to read and write? Clearly the gentlemen – ships' officers, government officials, doctors and clergymen – could, as could some of the convicts. Literacy rates in Britain at the time suggest that at least half of those in military service could read to some degree. In 1792, Major Grose, commander of the New South Wales Corps, instructed one of the men under his command to open a school; it appears that his fellow soldiers as well as their children were among the pupils. The first generation to be born and educated in Australia achieved a higher rate of literacy than those born elsewhere, perhaps because the ready availability of convict labour allowed children to stay longer at school. A survey of marriage registers kept in and around Sydney between 1804 and 1814 shows that 55 per cent of men and 24 per cent of women born outside the colony could sign their names, as against 63 per cent of men and 44 per cent of women born in the colony. By 1821–4 the number of persons signing the register had, for those born in the colony, risen to 86 per cent for men and 75 per cent for women. Since it was the practice to teach reading before writing, it is assumed that a number of those who did not sign the registers would still have been able to read.[3]

Most of the books brought by the first settlers were of a utilitarian nature, though the prospect of a long voyage and difficulty of obtaining books once in Australia clearly encouraged some to bring recreational reading matter as well. Initial attempts to encourage reading among the convicts focused on collections of tracts, the Bible and other religious texts. The 4000 volumes sent with the First Fleet courtesy of the Society for the Promotion of Christian Knowledge included prayer books, psalters, testaments, Bibles and hundreds of tracts with titles such as 'Plain Exhortations to Prisoners', 'Cautions to Swearers', 'Dissuasions from Stealing', 'Exercises against Lying' and 'Exhortations to Chastity'. These were issued to prisoners and others at the chaplain's discretion.

For many years, books remained in short supply. The educated convict John Grant, for example, wrote to his mother and sister from Parramatta in January 1805 that 'Books are very valuable here, and any friend who would scrape together a few in a Box for me, I would make a collection of Insects for him in return.'[4] The need for books for recreation as well as business can be seen in a letter sent by the 19-year-old George Allen to his brother in England in 1820. Allen, who was training to be a solicitor, asked his brother to send him some law books 'as they will be very useful and indeed essential to me in my profession'. He went on to ask for other books as well:

3 Information on education and literacy in the early years of settlement is taken from John F. Cleverley, *The First Generation: School and Society in Early Australia*, SUP, 1971.

4 John Grant's letter is transcribed in Yvonne Cramer, *This Beauteous, Wicked Place: Letters and Journals of John Grant, Gentleman Convict,* NLA, 2000, p. 84.

> If you are comfortably situated in life and can spare the money (not else) I should have no objection to you sending the Books a list of which I have enclosed and marked No. 2. If you can't spare the Money for all and can for some, do the best you can for me as this place is not like London for amusements, here we have neither society nor places of amusement, there is not [a] library here to spend a few hours in; my only employment after the business of the day is to retire to my own room (for I am the only one of the family now left in Sydney) and read my books of which I am sorry to say I have but a slender stock. I am particularly fond of reading, to me it is the greatest of amusements and therefore a good Library would be a treasure – and such a one as could not be purchased in this colony at any price.[5]

Unfortunately, the two lists of books Allen sent to his brother are lost. We do, however, have some idea of the books owned, and presumably read, by educated men of his class from lists of the contents of private libraries, usually drawn up when they were being advertised for sale. According to a list made in 1800, for example, the library of surgeon and explorer George Bass consisted of around 100 volumes. There were, as one would expect, works on medicine and science, as well as on law, history, travels, and theology. At a time when the classical authors formed so significant a part of a gentleman's education there were also volumes of Horace, Virgil and Homer. In addition to magazines and dictionaries, there were many of the standard English works found in nearly all gentlemen's libraries of this period, such as Bacon's *Essays*, Dryden's *Works* and Gay's *Poems.* But the only works of fiction were translations of *Don Quixote* and *Gil Blas*.[6]

A few decades later, another famous Australian explorer displayed a stronger taste for fiction, indicating the shift towards novel-reading which began in this period, though novels were still looked down on by many. When John Oxley's library was sold by auction in Sydney in August 1828, about half of the 350 or so lots listed in the catalogue were works of fiction. They included such recent publications as Walter Scott's *Tales of the Crusaders* (1825), Fenimore Cooper's *The Prairie* (1827), Anne Radcliffe's *Gaston de Blondeville* (1826) and Mary Shelley's *Last Man* (1826). Oxley was a regular purchaser of the latest English books, a surviving statement of account with the Sydney merchants Berry and Wollstonecraft showing that he spent nearly £41 on books and periodicals in November 1821 and a further £7 13s in November 1822.[7]

Another indication of the growing taste for fiction comes from advertisements in early Sydney and Hobart newspapers for missing books. Before 1820 these were far more numerous than advertisements of books for sale, showing that books were indeed scarce in this period, as John Grant and George Allen claimed. On 17 July 1803, the wealthy emancipist Simeon Lord advertised in the *Sydney Gazette* for the return of his

5 George Allen's letter is held in the Mitchell Library, Sydney, ML MSS 477.

6 See John Earnshaw, 'An Excursion into Vague Realms of Australiana. What Happened to Surgeon Bass's Library?', *Biblionews*, 3 (1969), pp. 14–17.

7 A copy of the auction catalogue for Oxley's books, sold in Sydney on 27–29 August 1828, together with copies of his accounts are in the Norton Smith and Company Collection, Mitchell Library, ML MSS 5328.

copy of Clara Reeve's gothic novel *The Old English Baron* (1777). A week later, the *Gazette* advised that 'The Old English Baron, advertised in our last, returned to his quarters on Monday; and we understand his presence was admitted as an apology for his absconding without leave of absence.'

Andrew Thompson, a settler at the Hawkesbury River, made a similarly gentlemanly plea on 16 December 1804. He was missing many books, including two volumes of *The Spectator*, Milton's *Paradise Lost*, Sterne's *Works*, three volumes of Burns and two of the *Newgate Calendar*. The latter work was, understandably, popular in early Australia. Another prominent emancipist, Isaac Nichols, had advertised on 31 July 1808 for the missing first volume of his set 'in good binding, gilt, and lettered; with a coat of arms on the inside of the cover, the motto, *Dominie dirige nos*.' By 28 April 1810, however, no less than three volumes of Nichols' *Newgate Calendar* were missing and he was losing patience: 'If not restored the person in whose possession either may be hereafter found will be prosecuted.'

This very telling testimony to the popularity of Scott's fiction appeared in the *Hobart Town Gazette* on 10 May 1823:

> Lost, a few days ago, the Novel of 'Ivanhoe', in 3 vols. boards; also, in January last, a pocket Bible in 1 vol. bound in blue Morocco. – A Reward of 3 Dollars is hereby offered for Ivanhoe, and 2 Dollars for the Bible, upon delivering of the same to the Printer.

A few weeks later, on 7 June, the owner of a missing volume of Byron's *Works* offered an even more generous reward of one guinea for its return.

As these last advertisements suggest, among literary authors, Scott, Byron and Shakespeare were by far the most popular and, at least in terms of number of volumes advertised for sale, they remained so until the 1850s. Byron was often seen as too radical and risqué to be safely read by young women, and the works of 18th-century novelists like Richardson, Fielding, Smollett and Sterne were increasingly condemned as crude and immodest as the century wore on; Scott was considered the least reprehensible of novelists. When the Sydney gentlemen, including George Allen, who assembled together in 1826 to form the Australian Subscription Library sent their first book order to London, the only novels requested were Scott's.[8]

The growth of libraries

Clergymen and missionaries were active in early attempts to form lending libraries, since books of the right sort were seen as important for moral control and improvement and so especially necessary in a penal colony. The Rev. Samuel Marsden had argued in

8 David J. Jones, *A Source of Inspiration and Delight: The Buildings of the State Library of New South Wales Since 1826*, Library Council of New South Wales, 1988, p. 12.

1808 in his 'Proposals for Instituting a Lending Library for the General Benefit of the Inhabitants of New South Wales' that what the colonists needed was 'a Public Library to consist of books carefully selected and confined to particular subjects it is obvious from the nature of the Colony should be Divinity and Morals, History, Voyages and Travels, Agriculture in all its branches, Mineralogy and Practical Mechanics'. Clearly, what Marsden had in mind was a library of mainly utilitarian works, to help colonists in their pioneering while also assisting them to overcome the perceived disadvantages of a convict society. Of the 226 volumes he eventually assembled, through appeals in the *Evangelical Magazine* and his own purchases, about half were works classed as Divinity, with Agriculture, 27 volumes, and History, 18, being the next largest categories.[9]

This was anything but a public library, however, since Marsden chose not only the books but also their readers. On 5 March 1814, Free Settler wrote to the *Sydney Gazette* asking about the library he had heard of in England 'consisting not only of a variety of useful School Books, but also of a large collection of Bibles, Prayer Books, Religious Tracts, Histories, Geographies, Travels, Voyages, Biographies, etc.'. After various other letters in response, Marsden himself wrote to the paper on 26 March, saying that the collection was not a public library, but books were lent to 'Settlers, Soldiers, and Prisoners, *at my discretion*'. When questioned further on this matter by Commissioner Bigge in 1821, he claimed that insufficient funds had been raised to establish the library in Sydney on the scale originally planned so he had built a room for the books at his home in Parramatta, where 'gentlemen and others' could read and borrow them.[10]

Methodist missionaries, given their doctrinal emphasis on reading and writing as aids to individual salvation, were even more active in attempts to supply useful and uplifting reading material to early colonists. They were responsible for publishing the first Australian magazine in 1821 and also for establishing the first truly public, even if not totally free, library in Hobart in 1826. The books in the Wesleyan Library understandably emphasised Morality and Religion, with 'Publications that are either frivolous in their composition, or pernicious in their tendency . . . entirely excluded'. Subscriptions were 10 shillings per annum in cash or books, though books 'on the plainest and most important subjects of doctrinal and practical Religion' were supplied without charge.[11]

Despite the support given to the Wesleyan Library by Governor Arthur, himself a Methodist, it clearly did not fulfil all the reading needs of those in Hobart who were not able to join the very selective Hobart Town Book Society, which like Sydney's Australian Subscription Library could blackball people seen as undesirable members. In 1827 the Hobart Town Mechanics' Institute was established along with a library; the *Tasmanian* reported on 22 March that 'donation of Books was urged upon the Gentlemen present, many of whom promised to contribute'. As with earlier libraries

9 Elizabeth Webby, 'Literature and the Reading Public in Australia: 1800–1850', PhD thesis, University of Sydney, 1972, vol. I, pp. 57–8.
10 Ibid., pp. 59–60. 11 Ibid., pp. 47–9.

established largely through donation, the initial collection was far from ideal though additional books were soon ordered from England.

By the time the Sydney Mechanics' School of Arts was established in 1833, the one in Hobart had more or less ceased to function, though it was revived later in the 1830s. On 6 March 1834, the *Sydney Herald* was able to report that the School of Arts had opened its library and reading room: 'upwards of five hundred volumes already adorn its shelves, consisting of works on science, history and general literature, chiefly contributed by the liberal donations and loans of members and friends'. By then, however, mechanics, like most others in the community, were showing a decided preference for fiction over other types of reading. Not that there were all that many mechanics among the School of Arts' membership: the *Monitor* for 7 February 1835 pointed out that, as in Great Britain, 'not more than a score of Members . . . fall under the denomination of Mechanics'. Although the committee could do little about this, it was at pains in its annual report for 1836 to defend the number of literary works, especially recent novels, in its library:

> a taste for reading has to be formed before works of a more philosophical character will be relished or appreciated . . . if any book is likely to accomplish this more speedily than another, it is the works of Scott – containing, as they do, a vast fund of historical information, mixed up, in an agreeable shape, with the manners and customs of different periods.[12]

Given the much more organised nature of the settlement of South Australia, it is not surprising to learn that a South Australian Literary and Scientific Association had been formed in 1834, before the colonists had even left England. Even so, it did not prosper in the early years and in 1839 joined forces with the Adelaide Mechanics' Institute, claiming then to have a library of some 400 volumes.[13] Again there were difficulties and the South Australian Institute was re-established in 1856. By 1861, as Tim Dolin has shown, it had a collection of around 5000 titles, of which about one-third were novels. These were, however, by far the most frequently borrowed works. Although Dickens was the most borrowed author, with nearly a thousand loans in 1861–2, it is fascinating to see that Scott's *Waverley* (1814) remained the single most borrowed title. Dolin also notes that Dickens' *Great Expectations*, published in London in July 1861, was on the institute's shelves and being borrowed by October. This lag of three or so months between a book's English publication and its arrival in Australia did not improve much over the next 100 years.[14]

Mechanics' institutes were established in Melbourne in 1839, in Geelong in 1846, in Brisbane in 1849 and in Perth in 1851. In the second half of the century they gradually

12 *Sydney Mechanics' School of Arts, Report for the Year 1836* (1837), p. 12.
13 Webby, 'Literature and the Reading Public', vol. I, pp. 260–1.
14 Tim Dolin, 'First Steps towards a History of the Mid-Victorian Novel in Colonial Australia', *Australian Literary Studies*, 22.3 (2006), pp. 273–93.

spread out from the capitals to the large and then the small country towns. Although never as successful in attracting working-class members as had originally been hoped, they did cater to the reading needs of many thousands throughout the country.[15] In Victoria alone, over 500 were in existence by 1890, as outlined in Pam Baragwanath's *If the Walls Could Speak: A Social History of the Mechanics' Institutes of Victoria* (2000). The one at Shepparton was being heavily used by writer Joseph Furphy as he built up his *magnum opus*, the novel *Such is Life* (1903).

Literary lectures

In keeping with their initial stress on useful knowledge for the working man, one of the aims of Australian mechanics' institutes was to hold lectures and classes on scientific and technical topics. In the early days of colonisation, however, there was a shortage of qualified volunteer lecturers in these areas, though plenty of educated gentlemen were prepared to give papers on topics of particular interest to them, such as English poetry. Making a virtue of necessity, the Sydney Mechanics' School of Arts proclaimed:

> A knowledge of science, however profound, if unembellished by those graces which literature supplies, is stripped of half its advantages: a relish for the beauties of which our historians and poets afford so inexhaustible a supply, can hardly afford less enjoyment to the majority of persons, than that communicated by the perception of abstract truths affecting the material world. To point out those models among our national authors, upon which the popular taste ought to be formed; to infuse a general sentiment of esteem for those pure and classical monuments of English literature, upon which so much of English glory depends, is an object scarcely beyond the attainment of, and not incompatible with the general designs of this Institution.[16]

The lectures being defended were two on English literature delivered in 1837 by William Cape, headmaster of the Sydney College. In 1838, William à Beckett, later Chief Justice of Victoria, spoke on 'The Poets and Poetry of Great Britain' to a good-sized crowd, including some ladies. As à Beckett's lectures were printed in 1839, it is easy to see why he was a popular speaker: he included plenty of amusing asides, a great deal of quotation from the works being discussed and many anecdotes about the poets themselves. He traced the development of English poetry from its beginnings down to Wordsworth and Coleridge, 'with whom a new school in the art may be said to have been created', though did not discuss the Romantics in any detail, concluding with a few comments on local poets William Forster, W. C. Wentworth and Henry Halloran. In 1839 à Beckett delivered several more lectures on recent poetry; reports in Sydney papers indicate that the work of Wordsworth and Coleridge was not to his taste. The *Sydney Herald*

15 See P. C. Candy and J. Laurent (eds), *Pioneering Culture: Mechanics' Institutes and Schools of Arts in Australia*, Auslib Press, 1994.

16 Quoted in Elizabeth Webby, 'Literary Lectures in Early Australia', *Southerly*, 40.3 (1980), p. 268.

noted on 2 September: 'Of Wordsworth he spoke most contemptuously and turned his poem Peter Bell into ridicule, which we must confess it deserves, but a lecturer should act fairly, and surely there is some part of Wordsworth's writings that deserve praise!' Interestingly, in a further lecture in 1840, à Beckett spoke more positively about the work of Keats and Shelley, as reported by the *Colonist* of 14 November: 'Keats and Shelly [*sic*] are two poets who have been much maligned by the reviewers, and misunderstood by the public. In truth, their genius is of too high an order to meet with that immediate appreciation which more ordinary mortals succeed in obtaining.'[17]

Given the suspicion with which fiction was still regarded in the first half of the century, it is not surprising that most of the earlier literary lectures focused on poetry. Playwright Samuel Prout Hill did deliver three on Drama in Sydney in 1847, while Music and Poetry was the topic of an 1849 address at the Melbourne Mechanics' Institute by one of its founders, Redmond Barry. At Launceston, two lecturers were prepared to say something in defence of fiction. Institute president Frederick Maitland Innes gave the opening address of the 1847 season on 'The Importance of the Cultivation of a Knowledge of General Literature, In Connection with the Circumstances of Colonial Communities'. His theme – the particular need in colonial society for a strong literary culture, as a force for intellectual, social and moral improvement – was widely argued at the time, as George Nadel demonstrated in *Australia's Colonial Culture* (1957). Where Innes differed from others was in his inclusion of fiction among those 'mental pursuits which have the strongest tendency to refine, elevate and enlarge.' Interestingly, he took his examples not from Scott or Goldsmith but from popular recent novels by Dickens and Bulwer Lytton. Later in 1847 a Dr Paton devoted a whole lecture to 'Light Literature', arguing that novels should not be universally condemned 'because some have lent their pen to other than the legitimate and wholesome ends of this species of composition'.[18]

Although universities were established in Sydney and Melbourne in the 1850s and in Adelaide in the 1870s, initially no lectures on English literature were given at any of them. As in England, classics was still the foundation of an education in the humanities, though the stained-glass windows in the University of Sydney's Great Hall feature Chaucer, Spenser, Sidney, Shakespeare, Milton, Pope and Dryden, along with the founders of the Oxford and Cambridge colleges, the kings and queens of Britain and other luminaries. In 1865 G. B. Barton was appointed reader in English literature at the University of Sydney; his inaugural lecture, published as *The Study of English Literature* (1866), stressed the continued importance of classical studies. He did, however, also publish two of the earliest studies of local writing, *Literature in New South Wales* (1866) and *The Poets and Prose Writers of New South Wales* (1866).[19] Barton's appointment ended in 1868, and there was no further teaching of English at Sydney University until

17 Ibid., pp. 269–75. 18 Ibid., pp. 276, 278–83.
19 John M. Ward, 'Barton, George Burnett', *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, vol. 3, MUP, 1969, p. 114.

the appointment in 1887 of Mungo MacCallum as foundation Professor of Modern Language and Literature. Melbourne had established its chair of modern languages in 1882, with E. E. Morris as the first incumbent. Earlier, he had been offered the vacant chair in Adelaide, the first actually to include English in its title: the Hughes Professor of English Literature and Language and Mental and Moral Philosophy.[20]

Book groups and literary societies

Those who could not afford to attend university, or were excluded for other reasons, such as their gender, were able to continue their education through membership of mechanics' institutes and the literary and debating societies which became especially prominent in the last decades of the 19th century. Book groups and literary societies had existed in Australia from at least the 1820s. Initially, at a time when books were still in short supply, their main function was to allow members to share book purchases by giving them access to a communal library. Since public libraries were not yet in existence, and poor roads and inadequate transport made visits to major towns a rare event, many reading societies sprang up, especially in Tasmania. Although information about these is scanty, early groups there included the Campbell Town Book Club, the Norfolk Plains Book Society (1830–4), the New Norfolk Reading Association (1835), the Richmond Reading Society (1835–7), the Bothwell Reading Society (1835–40) and the Pontville Reading Society, as well as the Hobart Town Book Society of the 1820s, mentioned earlier. The books belonging to the Launceston Library Society, established in 1845, were in 1856 combined with those of the Launceston Mechanics' Institute to form the basis of the Launceston Public Library.[21] Similarly, the books owned by Sydney's Australian Subscription Library made up the nucleus of the State Library of New South Wales.[22] Keith Adkins has made a detailed study of the Evandale Subscription Library, established in 1847 in this town near Launceston, which operated until after World War II. Like many other libraries of this type, it initially had a collection of donated books but later ordered books and periodicals from London booksellers.[23]

Although the conditions of settlement in other colonies did not lend themselves to such a strong regional network, a least one group was operating in the Western District of Victoria in the 1840s. In his *The Present State and Prospects of the Port Phillip District of New South Wales* (1845), Charles Griffith refers to a book club 'established in the neighbourhood of the Grange and Warren, 200 miles west of Melbourne, where there are several married settlers, who thus obtain from England all the recent periodicals and

20 Leigh Dale, *The English Men. Professing Literature in Australian Universities*, Toowoomba: Association for the Study of Australian Literature, 1979, pp. 27–39.

21 See Elizabeth Webby, 'Dispelling "the stagnant waters of ignorance": The early institutes in context', in Candy and Laurent (eds), *Pioneering Culture*, pp. 41–3.

22 *A Source of Inspiration and Delight*, p. 16.

23 Keith Adkins, 'Orger and Meryon: Booksellers to the Colony', *Books and Empire. Special Issue of the Bulletin of the Bibliographical Society of Australia and New Zealand*, 28.1–2 (2004), pp. 9–16.

publications'. This supports evidence from other sources that such groups were mainly interested in keeping up with the latest news and literature from home. A ledger kept by one of the book club's members, the squatter Acheson Ffrench, records activities 1845–50. Members paid an annual subscription of £3, and among the works purchased were volumes of the *Illustrated London News* (later to be so frequently imitated in Australia) and *Colburn's Magazine*, Dickens' *Dombey and Son* (1848) and many recent travel books. Of equal note, however, are a number of works in translation, including novels by Alexandre Dumas and Georges Sand and poetry by Friedrich Schiller.[24]

After 1850, as a stronger literary culture began to be established in the cities, informal coteries of literary men were also set up, some of which took a more enduring shape over time. In Sydney during the 1850s, a group of journalists, writers and professional men gathered at the home of lawyer Nicol Drysdale Stenhouse, to discuss literary and other matters. John Woolley, Professor of Classics at Sydney University, was associated with this circle, as were poets William Forster and Henry Kendall. The older men provided much needed mentorship for Kendall, lending him books, arranging jobs and financial assistance and helping him get published.[25] In Melbourne, Marcus Clarke and other writers formed the Yorick Club in 1867, while in Brisbane the Johnsonian Club was established by poet James Brunton Stephens, along with other writers and teachers, in 1878. Named in honour of Samuel Johnson's London 'Literary Club', it was 'instituted for the association of gentlemen connected with Journalism, Literature, the Drama, Science and Art', together with members of the medical and legal professions. The club met monthly for literary lectures and readings, accompanied by good dining and, no doubt, drinking.[26] Other societies associated with particular authors also flourished in Australia at this time. As Ken Stewart has noted, in the 1880s Melbourne could boast societies devoted to the work of Shelley, Burns, and Lamb as well as the largest Shakespeare Society in the world. It had been set up in 1884, with Professor Morris from Melbourne University as first president; members could attend monthly lectures, as well as meeting informally for reading and discussion.[27]

In the last decades of the century, more general literary societies proliferated, mainly in the cities. These allowed men and women to meet, usually in gender-segregated groups, to discuss their reading and debate topics of current interest. When the South Australian Literary Societies' Union was established in October 1883, it consisted of 27 different societies based in Adelaide and its suburbs, with over 1300 members. Some of the groups had been meeting for many years and had substantial collections of books:

24 Brian Hubber, '"Entertainment for Many Solitary Hours": An 1840s Book Group on the Australian Frontier', *Bulletin of the Bibliographical Society of Australia and New Zealand*, 22.2 (1998), pp. 81–92.

25 See Ann-Mari Jordens, *The Stenhouse Circle: Literary Life in Mid-Nineteenth Century Sydney*, MUP, 1965.

26 See Patrick Buckridge and Belinda McKay (eds), *By the Book. A Literary History of Queensland*, UQP, 2007, pp. 24–6.

27 Ken Stewart, 'The Colonial Literati in Sydney and Melbourne', in Susan Dermody, John Docker and Drusilla Modjeska (eds), *Nellie Melba, Ginger Meggs and Friends: Essays in Australian Cultural History*, Kibble Books, 1982, pp. 185–7.

the Adelaide Young Men's Society, for example, had been established in 1876 and held more than 1300 volumes in its library. Despite its name, this society allowed women to join as associate members and 114 did so. Literary societies encouraged writing as well as reading, offering annual prizes for essays on set topics as well as for poems and, later, stories, with winning entries printed in the union's annual *Year Book*. In 1885 a Miss Frances Lewin won the first prize for poetry for 'Found Dead'; the following year she was awarded second place for 'Australia's Heroes'.

By 1889, at least 150 literary societies of this type were operating in New South Wales, according to the *Literary and Debating Societies' Journal* that published reports of meetings of various groups as well as papers read at some of them. As these groups were largely made up of persons intent on self-improvement, the authors discussed were mainly canonical English ones such as Wordsworth, Tennyson, Byron and Dickens. Only two Australian authors were mentioned: poets Adam Lindsay Gordon, whose life and works were discussed at a meeting of the Cleveland Excelsior Class, and Kendall. A paper on Kendall's life and work, read before the Pitt Street Literary Association, was printed in full in the October and November issues of the *Journal*.[28]

Other information about what was being discussed at Sydney literary societies can be found in manuscript journals now housed in the Mitchell Library. 'The Phoenix' was compiled in 1874–7 to record the doings of the Redfern Literary Association.[29] Among the subjects debated by members of the society at their weekly meetings was, on 11 August 1875, 'Was Charles Dickens the greatest novelist of his time?' Recitations of speeches from Shakespeare's plays and well-known poems like 'Young Lochinvar' were also given and debates held against other associations, including the Cumberland Mutual Improvement Society and the Parramatta Literary Society. A decade later, Hugh Wright, a member of the Woollahra Literary and Debating Society, recorded some of the talks he gave at their meetings in 1887, including one on 'The Free Public Library of Sydney' and another on 'Novels and Novel-Reading'. He is critical of the fact that the library kept locked away 'All the leading medical and anatomical works and several works in French', asking 'Is it feared that licentious individuals would be always gloating over them?' He is also critical of the books available through the lending branch of the library, as being 'more fit as babies' toy books than to be in a circulating library', and does not agree with the trustees' decision to buy no more fiction. Fiction, if it has 'an elevating tendency', is approved of, as are too, 'the best of boy's books, such as written by Capt. Marryat, Henty, Capt. Mayne Reid and especially Jules Verne'. In 'Novels and Novel-Reading' Wright not only defends the adventure stories published in magazines like *Boys of England* but the novels of Ouida and even Zola: 'If you skim them with a tainted mind, you may find sufficient to feed a licentious imagination; but by *reading*

28 See Elizabeth Webby, 'Not Reading the Nation: Australian Readers of the 1890s', *Australian Literary Studies*, 22.3 (2006).

29 'The Phoenix', MS journal, ML MSS A4065–67.

them carefully you are instructed about the whims and evils of society.' As he points out, the censoring tendency of the past 50 years is just as fatal to many of the classics of the past, from Ovid and Homer, through to mediaeval drama and poetry and the work of Swift, Fielding and Smollett.[30]

Writing and publishing in Australia

By 1803 George Howe had taken over from George Hughes as Government Printer, and in March began publishing Australia's first newspaper, the *Sydney Gazette*, where an original poem appeared just a year later. Books, along with much else, had been written in Australia from 1788, with officers of the marines Watkin Tench and David Collins competing to see who would be first to get his account of the early settlement to London for publication. While there remained demand in Britain for non-fictional and, later, fictional works about the Australian colonies, London publishers had little interest in collections of Australian poetry. So poems were regularly published in local newspapers and magazines but rarely collected in volumes. One of the ironies of 19th-century Australian literature was that the more obviously Australian a work was, the better chance it had of finding an overseas publisher. So most fiction and non-fiction was published overseas, most poetry and drama in Australia, at the author's expense. Ken Stewart's analysis of the poetry and fiction titles listed in E. Morris Miller and F. J. Macartney's *Australian Literature: A Bibliography* (1950) shows that, between 1850 and 1901, around 830 volumes of Australian poetry had been published, 85 per cent of them in Australia. More than half of the 1000 individual works of fiction listed appeared between 1890 and 1901; 422 of these were published in London, and only 143 in Australia.[31]

These figures reflect the fact that there was no publishing industry in Australia, in the sense in which we understand the term today, during this period. In order to become a bestselling novelist or successful dramatist, it was necessary to move to London, as a number of Australian-born authors did later in the century. Even such a significant publisher as George Robertson of Melbourne, active in the second half of the century, was primarily a bookseller. Almost all Australian book publication before 1890 was at the author's expense, or by subscription. Clearly, it was easier to afford the cost of a slim volume of verse than that of a substantial novel. On the other hand, most Australian novelists did not earn a great deal from books published in Britain, especially if they lived in Australia and had to depend on agents and friends to negotiate with publishers. For them, at least before 1890, serialisation in Australian newspapers and magazines was a much more dependable source of income. It is a mistake, therefore, to assume that authors like Ada Cambridge and Rolf Boldrewood were primarily writing for

30 Hugh Wright Manuscripts, ML MSS B1655.

31 Ken Stewart, 'Journalism and the World of the Writer: The Production of Australian Literature, 1855–1915', in Laurie Hergenhan (ed.), *The Penguin New Literary History of Australia*, Penguin, 1988, pp. 181–3.

an English market, merely because their books were eventually published there. Few authors were able to make a living from writing and these few depended heavily on journalism, supplemented in some cases by the writing of serialised fiction or plays and pantomimes.

Much of the writing done in colonial Australia was, of course, never published. Much was never intended for publication, being in the form of letters, at this period the major means of communication between friends and relatives separated by long distances, the situation of all those who came to Australia during the 19th century. Much was also in the form of journals or diaries, kept by migrants on the voyage out, by explorers during their hazardous expeditions, or by those wanting to record their everyday activities, their dreams and desires, even what they had been reading. In recent years, a good deal of this personal material has been published, quarried by scholars from libraries and archives for the insights it offers into life in the new British colonies. Some fiction and poetry, as the example of the manuscript magazine written by members of Rosa Praed's family demonstrates, also continued to circulate scribally in Australia during the 19th century.[32]

As there was almost nothing in the way of commercial book publishing, most of the literature published in Australia before 1890 appeared in the columns of newspapers and magazines. A remarkably large number of original poems, together with short stories, essays and the occasional serialised novel, can be found in newspapers published in both capital cities and large country towns, though much research still remains to be done for the period after 1850. The large weekly newspapers attached to the main city dailies, which flourished in the second half of the century, such as the *Australasian* associated with the *Argus* and the *Sydney Mail* with the *Sydney Morning Herald*, were particularly significant places of publication for serialised fiction, stories, poems, essays and reviews by writers such as Clarke, Kendall, Tasma, Boldrewood and Ada Cambridge. Other important weekly newspapers were the *Leader*, associated with the *Age*; the *Observer* with the *South Australian Register*; the *Queenslander* with the *Brisbane Courier* and the *Australian Town and Country Journal* with Sydney's *Evening News.*

Literary magazines

Although newspapers were regularly published in the eastern Australian colonies from 1803 onwards, it was to be another 18 years before the first magazine appeared in Sydney in 1821. This delay can be easily explained by the fact that magazines were much more of a luxury than newspapers. The earliest newspapers were established in large part to allow for easier distribution of government notices and general information. Despite initial difficulties in obtaining paper and other necessary materials, most survived because they soon became essential for the advertising of goods, land and commercial enterprises.

32 See Patricia Clarke, *Rosa! Rosa! A Life of Rosa Praed, Novelist and Spiritualist*, MUP, 1999.

This was something that had to be done locally, even though most of the 'news' these papers contained was still coming from elsewhere.

For magazines, however, there was no such commercial imperative. At the beginning of the 19th century few English magazines carried advertisements; quarterly publication was not especially attractive to advertisers and would, in any case, have been out of keeping with the tone of magazines like the *Edinburgh Review*. Magazines therefore relied on the appeal of their literary contents alone. For a magazine to succeed in Australia, it had to offer something that could not just as easily, and usually more cheaply, be obtained from an English import. By the 1840s English magazines, like books, were being imported in great quantities, with delays of no more than four months between publication in Britain and availability in Australia. Australian magazines included work by local, usually unknown, authors while English ones featured the latest productions of the great names of the age, such as Dickens and Thackeray. But Australian magazines also offered representations of local scenery, events and personalities that could not be found elsewhere and, as the numbers of Australian-born rose, there was a growing demand for local content. Even so, few magazines survived for more than a year or two.

The earliest magazines published in Sydney and Hobart were mainly short-lived quarterlies and monthlies. The 1840s saw the end of transportation to New South Wales, an associated rise in free immigration and the development of South and Western Australia and Victoria, all of which began to issue magazines in this decade. The rapid increase in the population of Australia following the discovery of gold in New South Wales and Victoria in 1851 also produced a rapid growth in print culture, especially in Victoria. While this had a particular impact on the development of newspapers, magazines also proliferated. Melbourne became the literary centre of Australia from the 1850s through to the 1880s, with more magazines commencing there in the 1850s than in the rest of the country combined. Although most proved just as short-lived as the earlier ones, several survived for many years, demonstrating that there was now a large enough population of readers to sustain some local productions. The most successful was *Melbourne Punch*, the longest-lasting of many colonial copies of this enormously popular English comic magazine, which in 1855 commenced a run of 70 years. Melbourne also produced a popular fiction magazine, the *Australian Journal*, which ran from 1865 until 1962. According to G. B. Barton, in 1866 the *Australian Journal* was circulating an average of 5500 copies weekly, including 1750 in New South Wales.[33] This was at least equal to the circulation of English magazines of a similar style and cost, again indicating that Australian readers were prepared to support local magazines if their contents and prices were competitive with the imported products.

The *Australian Journal* printed much original fiction with both local and overseas settings though in 1871, when Marcus Clarke was editor, this notice announcing a more nationalistic emphasis appeared in the July number:

33 G. B. Barton, *Literature in New South Wales*, Thomas Richards, 1866, pp. 7–9, 88.

> The Conductor wishes intending contributors to understand that the AUSTRALIAN JOURNAL will publish no 'original' story, the scene of which is laid elsewhere than in the Colonies, or which does not – in some way – treat of Colonial life, or subjects of Colonial interest.
>
> Tales of the West of England, the North of Scotland, India, Baden-Baden, Venice, Kamschatcha, and other places favoured by novelists, can be culled from the English magazines and French *feuilletons*, in much better condition than as manufactured here.
>
> The Conductor is willing to protect native industry in the matter of tale-writing, but the tales must be 'Colonial', and suited for 'Colonial wear', not bad imitations of the French and English imported article.[34]

In the 1870s attempts were made to establish a more highbrow critical journal along the lines of the famous British quarterlies. The most successful of these was the *Melbourne Review* (1876–85). A number of Melbourne's leading men of letters – including the banker Henry Gyles Turner, the writer A. Patchett Martin and the historian Alexander Sutherland – were among the 'literary gentlemen' who launched the review, 'not as a financial speculation, but purely in the interest of literary development'. In its opening address 'To Our Readers', January 1876, the failure of earlier Australian monthly magazines was attributed to their over-concentration on fiction and 'light literature', already abundantly supplied in English periodicals and 'our own excellent weekly papers', together with their 'practice of dealing too exclusively with local topics of no intrinsic interest'. In contrast, in the *Melbourne Review* the emphasis would fall on 'articles on Philosophy, Theology, Science, Art and Politics'. Articles on local subjects would be admitted only if 'They derived their value from their style and treatment, rather than from their containing allusions to places and names familiar to the Colonial reader.'[35]

In one of the many unfortunate examples of wasteful rivalry that dog the history of cultural production in Australia, a competing monthly magazine, the *Victorian Review*, was established in Melbourne in November 1879 by H. Mortimer Franklyn. It ran until 1886, for most of the time being edited by Melbourne journalist James Smith. While the *Victorian Review* initially featured a serialised novel, later issues were aimed squarely at readers who preferred the more serious fare of essays on general and literary topics, accompanied by reviews and poetry. The first issue's 'Prefatory Note' opened with some of the usual high-sounding sentiments, though it can also read as a back-hander against the *Melbourne Review*: 'It is felt by many of the leading men in Melbourne that there is wanting in Victoria a first-class Magazine which shall reflect its highest culture and express the opinions of the best thinkers of the day.' Elsewhere in the preface there were signs of changing attitudes, as in the comment that the journal would be 'distinctively

34 Elizabeth Webby, 'Before the *Bulletin*: Nineteenth-Century Literary Journalism', in Bruce Bennett (ed.), *Cross Currents: Magazines and Newspapers in Australian Literature*, Longman Cheshire, 1981, pp. 22–3.

35 Ibid., p. 26.

Australian in tone'. The old taboos against discussion of religion, politics and other controversial topics were also renounced. In keeping with this change in policy, the first issue of the *Victorian Review* included Marcus Clarke's attack on conventional religion, 'Civilisation without Delusion', which argued that education was the surest way to an enlightened future.

Given the relatively restricted pool of literary talent in Australia at the time, it was inevitable that the *Victorian Review* competed with the *Melbourne* for contributors as well as subscribers. As the *Victorian* had more financial backing and so was able to pay contributors, it was able to attract work from many of the writers who had earlier featured in the pages of the *Melbourne Review*, such as David Blair and Catherine Helen Spence, as well as Clarke. The *Victorian Review*'s demise apparently owed more to the loss of this financial support than to declining numbers of subscribers; it had already won the battle with the *Melbourne Review* but, like literary magazines in Australia today, could not survive without subsidy.

The rapid growth of the Sydney *Bulletin* after its establishment in 1880 marked the beginning of the end of Melbourne's literary dominance. Although the *Bulletin* is now best-known from its promotion in the 1890s of an Australian literary nationalism linked to the bush, the *Bulletin* of the 1880s was a distinctly modern and city-centred paper. It owed its success to adoption of many of the principles of the New Journalism of the late 19th century, largely developed in North America. They included the packaging of news and other items into easily recognisable compartments as well as a greater use of illustrations, headings and subheadings to break up the vast expanses of type found in traditional publications. These changes acknowledged that a wider range of readers, and a wider range of reading situations, now needed to be catered for. Whereas the literary quarterlies of the early 19th century were clearly addressed to the gentleman reading at leisure in his study or club, many of the new weeklies of the last decades of the century recognised the need to appeal to both men and women, including those commuting to work each day on train or tram, in situations where reading would be frequently interrupted. This is perfectly illustrated in a cartoon in the *Bulletin* of 19 July 1880, with the caption 'Railway porters now complain that they have much difficulty in collecting tickets. We wonder why?' The illustration depicts a carriage tightly packed with commuters, all engrossed in copies of the *Bulletin*. The 15 persons represented include four women, old as well as young. While most of the male passengers wear top hats, a few do not, suggesting that the journal appeals to all classes of the community.

Drama and theatre

Theatrical works were among the books carried to Australia on the First Fleet, as demonstrated by the 1789 convict production of Farquhar's *The Recruiting Officer*. There were irregular and intermittent performances in Sydney and elsewhere over the next 40 years, but also considerable resistance by clergy and others to the establishment

of theatre in Australia. Their association with such criminal activities as prostitution and pick-pocketing, it was argued, meant that theatres were not appropriate to penal colonies. But theatrical performances, together with concerts and dancers, were an intrinsic part of 19th-century popular culture, and by the 1830s regular commercial performances had begun in both Sydney and Hobart. Most plays came from Britain, but some local ones were written and the popular Christmas pantomimes always carried some local references.[36]

In the 1840s, an apparent shortage of playscripts resulted in a number of plays by convict Edward Geoghegan being produced in Sydney. Many were adaptations of popular novels, which, with translations of foreign plays, provided much of the theatrical fare at a time when playwrights were paid less than scene painters. Geoghegan did, however, write a local comedy with music, *The Currency Lass*, which was warmly received when performed in 1844. And as early as 1845 an entirely Australian pantomime, 'Harlequin in Australia Felix', was produced in Geelong. We know of it only from a newspaper advertisement, though scripts of some of Geoghegan's plays have survived as copies in the Colonial Secretary's archives, since they needed to be officially approved before production. Ironically, most of the plays printed in Australia during the 19th century, invariably at the authors' expense, were never performed. These were typical closet dramas of the time, blank verse tragedies heavily Shakespearean in language and form, and set in ancient Rome or 16th-century England. Popular comedies and melodramas set in Australia such as *The Currency Lass* were rarely considered literary enough to warrant publication, even if their authors could have afforded this, though pantomime libretti were sometimes published as souvenirs.

Pantomimes flourished in Melbourne and other large centres during the second half of the century, with the adapting of traditional stories for local audiences providing employment for Clarke and other writers. Some actor-managers produced successful melodramas set in Australia, the most popular being adaptations of Clarke's *His Natural Life* and Boldrewood's *Robbery Under Arms*. But the theatrical entrepreneur J. C. Williamson, who dominated Australian commercial theatre in the last decades of the century, had no time for local playwrights. He concentrated on bringing the latest London successes to Australia, as well as such international stars as Sarah Bernhardt, who toured in 1891. This meant Australian audiences were able to keep up with what was being seen, as well as what was being written and read, in England. In some cases, they even had the advantage of audiences in other parts of the world. In September 1889 Melbourne became the second city after London to witness a professional production of an accurate English translation of Ibsen's *A Doll's House*. Actors Janet Achurch and her husband Charles Charrington had mortgaged their salaries for a forthcoming

36 For more information on colonial theatre see Harold Love (ed.), *The Australian Stage: A Documentary History*, UNSWP, 1984, and entries in Philip Parsons (ed.), *Companion to Theatre in Australia*, Currency Press, 1995.

tour of Australia for Williamsons to fund the London production that led, in critic William Archer's words, to Ibsen becoming a household name in the English-speaking world.[37] Local writers and dramatists had to struggle to make a living in large part because 19th-century Australian readers and audiences were so well provided for from overseas.

37 See Deborah Campbell, '*A Doll's House*: The Colonial Response', in *Nellie Melba, Ginger Meggs and Friends,* pp. 192–210.

3

Early writings by Indigenous Australians

PENNY VAN TOORN

When the first boatloads of British settlers disembarked in Sydney Cove in early 1788, they carried the artefacts, implements and practices of late 18th-century literacy into Indigenous Australian life-worlds. Aboriginal people were using several modes of graphic signification, in rock paintings and engravings, on message-sticks, and in the ground drawings that accompanied oral storytelling. The clans around Sydney Harbour painted images of birds, sea creatures and animals, as well as abstract designs on rock, bark, wooden weapons, animal skins and human bodies. In addition, piercing, scarification and other inscriptions of the body were used to signify the wearer's identity, intention, social affiliations and level of religious initiation. Important also were the fleeting, intangible 'logograms written into the air',[1] the ceremonial dance movements central to Indigenous religious practice, and the hundreds of readable hand signals and other body movements necessary for silent communication while hunting, or to convey information to people out of earshot.[2]

Not all modes of signification were practised in all parts of Australia. Indigenous cultures differ from region to region. Yet everywhere, whatever combination of signifying systems was used, Aboriginal people had for thousands of years been engaged in practices of communication and storing and retrieving information that might broadly be called writing and reading. Consequently, for Indigenous Australians, the arrival of the British in 1788 did not trigger a shift from Aboriginal orality to European literacy, but rather an entanglement between radically different reading and writing cultures. As Aboriginal people assimilated European material culture into their life-world without a set of instructions, the implements of inscription and the characters of the roman alphabet were 'not what they were made to be by Europeans but what they have become' in the eyes of Aboriginal people.[3]

1 A. Gaur, *Literacy and the politics of writing*, Intellect, 2000, p. 33.

2 W. E. Roth, 'The expression of ideas by manual signs: a sign-language', in D. J. Umiker-Sebeok and T. A. Sebeok (eds), *Aboriginal sign languages of the Americas and Australia*, vol. 2, Plenum Press, 1978, pp. 273–301; A. W. Howitt, 'Gesture language', in ibid., pp. 303–15.

3 N. Thomas, *Entangled Objects*, Harvard UP, 1991, p. 4.

Practices of literacy

There is only one roman alphabet, but many ways of practising literacy. Reading and writing practices are always shaped by micro-historical circumstances, and they are invariably entangled with ideology, power dynamics and institutional structures. Missions and reserves were not the only places where Indigenous Australians first engaged with reading and writing. In the past, as today, Aboriginal people have developed their own cultures of literacy.

On occasions, Indigenous Australians developed cultures of writing with little or no modelling or guidance from Europeans. In traditional contexts, Aboriginal people formed their own ideas about writing on the basis of their own practices, values and needs. Writing was from the outset perceived and evaluated through Aboriginal frames of reference. Yet it entered Indigenous life-worlds embodied in particular material forms and social practices. Writing's uses are not self-evident; it has no inherent self-evident meanings or capabilities. In traditional settings, therefore, writing's value, meaning and manner of use depended on how it was perceived by Aboriginal people using their own cultural objects and practices as points of reference.

On missions and reserves, Indigenous children and young adults learned to read and write in tightly regulated institutional environments, as part of the oppressive but 'elevating' apparatus of formal schooling, colonial governance and Christian proselytising. These sites of reading and writing were dynamic, complex intercultural zones where literacy became a powerful political practice and, if conditions were right, writing was carried out in traditionally oriented ways. On missions and reserves, European etiquettes and ideologies of writing were formally taught to Aboriginal people, but long-established Indigenous perceptions and social protocols of reading and writing sometimes continued. Aboriginal people on missions and reserves thus had a dual perception of literacy and its associated material culture. Although young people were formally schooled into literacy, much writing took place in secret, out of sight of mission and reserve staff, often at the behest of elders who had not been schooled in the arts of writing and reading alphabetic script. On missions and reserves, European conventions cloaked practices of literacy based on Indigenous proprieties.

Missions and reserves were administered bureaucratically. Bureaucracies are a means of governance through writing. As well as insulating officials from the consequences of their decisions, the bureaucratic administration of Aboriginal people's lives had two other important effects. First, the bureaucratic system interpellated each Aboriginal person as an individual and a member of a particular race; second, bureaucratic governance induced the production of written documents by Aboriginal people themselves. The apparatus set up to administer the protection of Aboriginal people thus elicited

a great deal of Aboriginal writing, especially when Aboriginal people saw how their letters and petitions could carry their complaints over the local reserve manager's head, and make their views known to higher authorities in the city. With regard to writing, colonial governance was thus not only repressive, it was also malignantly productive. It required Aboriginal people to produce written texts and to exercise individual agency. The bureaucratic system demanded, in other words, that Aboriginal people become authors in the European sense.

The places within which Aboriginal people did much of their writing in the 19th century had much in common with the institutions where Europe's vagabonds and paupers were confined and disciplined. To 'open up' the land for pastoralism and agriculture, colonial governments enclosed Aboriginal people on mission stations and government reserves. These were poorly funded, badly resourced and inadequately staffed. In them Aboriginal people were subjected to tight regulation, strict discipline and close surveillance. Some nuclear families were allowed to live together; others suffered the removal of their children to dormitories. Aboriginal people whose subjectivity was formed through affiliations with places, kin and spiritual beings were each assigned a Christian name and a new individual identity in terms of their gender, age, marital status and degree of colour.

Literacy and the Stolen Generations

In the Sydney region, the first Indigenous Australians to read alphabetic script were the so-called orphaned children who, from 1789 onwards, were taken into the homes of white, self-proclaimed philanthropists and used as servants. From those early colonial times, the history of Aboriginal literacy cannot be separated from the history of the thousands of children who were removed from their families to be raised in non-Indigenous households or in institutions. The practice of child removal which began in the early years at Sydney Cove became institutionalised on the missions and reserves that were established during the protectionist era in the middle decades of the 19th century. Schools, and sometimes empty promises of schooling, were part of the long history of separating Indigenous children from their families. Many people associated schooling and literacy with child-stealing. In the early 1840s, an Aboriginal leader in Victoria 'complained in his anger that the white fellow had stolen their country and that I [the district Protector, E. S. Parker] was stealing their children by taking them away to live in huts, and work, and "read the book like whitefellows" '.[4] The issue was not that literacy itself is inherently and inevitably pernicious. For Indigenous Australians – as for Native Americans and the First Nations, Métis and Inuit peoples of Canada whose children were removed from their families to be educated in residential schools – the

4 E. S. Parker, Report, 1 January 1842 to 31 August 1843, quoted in M. F. Christie, *Aborigines in Colonial Victoria, 1835–1886*, SUP, 1979, p. 126.

problem lay not in literacy *per se*, but in the harsh, institutional settings in which literacy was imparted to their children, and in the severing of the intergenerational channels of learning.

In Australia today, these children are known as the Stolen Generations. Their history became a matter of public knowledge and debate in 1997, after the publication of *Bringing Them Home: Report of the National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from Their Families*. This 700-page report, which received intense media attention, contains evidence that Aboriginal parents had had their children torn from their arms, or were deceived into relinquishing their children for their own educational good.[5] The complex implication of Aboriginal literacy and schooling with cultural genocide is a sensitive issue. Without at all denying the profound hurt and the ongoing suffering caused by the separation of Indigenous children from their families, it remains true to say that a significant number of Aboriginal parents saw formal schooling as potentially empowering, and were keen to see their children educated, preferably in day schools where they were able to continue living at home with their relations. Schooling was usually preferred over domestic service or pastoral work, where violence and mistreatment were not uncommon and there was little opportunity to secure a better future. Writing from a domestic placement in the town of Clare in South Australia, for example, an Aboriginal mother, Jessie Lindsay, wrote to the Native Protector in 1896, asking him to

> see that my daughter Grace Power is sent to school at Point Pearce. I hear that she is working in a married person's cottage. I was asking why was it she is writing so badly as she writes to me from time to time & I don't see any improvement . . . I wish her my daughter to go to school as she is not 14 year of age yet . . . I wish her to go to school and look after her little sister . . . If she is not removed from that person's cottage I shall go down and take her away.[6]

If literacy eroded Indigenous cultures and worldviews, it was not due to the alphabet's allegedly inherent ability to reproduce speech in graphic form. One cannot just read and write: one has to read and write *something*. Far more damaging was separation from their families, and the de-authorising of Aboriginal knowledge and spiritual beliefs. Unlike writing, reading leaves no necessary trace. Yet repetitive copying of words on paper is a means of documenting and securing a memory of what has been read.

What did Aboriginal people read and write?

What kinds of texts did Aboriginal people create and read in colonial times? And under what circumstances were their writing and reading abilities learned and practised? On

5 See *Bringing Them Home: Report of the National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children From Their Families*, Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, 1997, pp. 280–3.

6 Jessie Lindsay to Mr Hamilton, Native Protector, 17 September 1896, South Australian Aborigines Department, Correspondence Received, South Australian Public Record Office, GRG 52/1, 1896, Item 38.

all missions and reserves, all children were required to attend school, but for the boys especially, there were many distractions, as they were required to help with the physical work necessary to make cash-strapped institutions financially viable. Off the missions and reserves, children were occasionally taught by educated friends and patrons. Some taught themselves by copying what others did. Almost none read poetry and novels; some read the Bible; and an unknown number wrote letters to relatives and friends. Significant numbers read newspapers or had the paper read aloud to them. As in Europe, where newspapers formed a basis of the formation of imagined national communities, Aboriginal groups developed a sense of common history and a shared future. On 12 April 1907, 18 Ngarrindjeri men on Point Macleay Mission in South Australia published a petition in the *Adelaide Advertiser* demanding 'more food and less prayer' after reading in the newspapers about the successful demands of the Coranderrk residents in Victoria.[7]

As Aboriginal children practised writing and reading their lines about British culture heroes such as Captain Cook, and the Christian virtues of hard work, they were learning things other than spelling and penmanship.[8] One can only speculate as to what was going on in their minds as their schoolteachers instructed them to write:

Captain Cook.
Captain Cook.
Captain Cook.
Doing nothing is the hardest of work.
Doing nothing is the hardest of work.
Doing nothing is the hardest of work.

A whole page of each of these lines was penned in impeccable copperplate in 1896 by Jessie Lindsay's 13-year-old daughter, Grace Power, at the request of the South Australian Native Protector, who wished to disprove Lindsay's assertion that her daughter's writing was deteriorating.[9] In the eyes of the white settler community Grace Power's copperplate, and the content of the lines, reflected well on the Protector's professional expertise as a builder of literacy and moral fibre among his Aboriginal charges.

Another white-sponsored display of Aboriginal penmanship was produced in the early 1850s as a gift for the Rev. Matthew Hale by a young Kaurna man at Poonindie Mission in South Australia:

Whenever I take my walks abroad,
How my poor I [*sic*] see.
What shall I render to my God
for all his gifts to me?

7 Point Macleay Natives, 'Want More Food and Less Prayer', *Adelaide Advertiser*, 12 April 1907. Bain Attwood and Andrew Markus (eds), *The Struggle for Aboriginal Rights: A Documentary History* (A&U, 1999) pp. 56–7.
8 Grace Power, South Australian Aborigines Department, Correspondence Received, South Australian Public Record Office, GRG 52/1, 1896, Item 287.
9 Ibid.

Not more than others I deserve,
yet God hath given me more;
for I have food while others starve,
or beg from door to door.
The poor wild natives whom I meet,
Half-naked I behold,
While I am clothed from head to feet
And covered from the cold.
While some poor wretches scarce can tell
Where they may lay their head,
I have a home within to dwell
And rest upon my bed.
While others early learn to swear
And curse and lie and steal,
Lord, I am taught your name to fear
And do thy holy will.
And these thy favours day by day
To me above the rest,
Then let me love thee more than they
And try to serve thee best.[10]

Although the writer was not the author of these lines, he was expressing his regard and gratitude to Matthew Hale who had taught him the Christian virtues.

Colonial fantasies of Aboriginal voices in poetry and prose

Indigenous Australian speech was first described in writing when the First Fleet arrived in Botany Bay on 18 January 1788. Watkin Tench recorded that a group of some 40 Indigenous Australians assembled on the beach, 'shouting and making many uncouth signs and gestures'. Tench also described their 'muttering', their 'immoderate fits of laughter', and their practice of 'talking to each other at the same time with such rapidity and vociferation as I had never before heard'. He pronounced the local people 'noisy, clamorous, and insistent' and noted that they repeated several times the word *whurra*, 'Be gone!'[11] The message was clear and unequivocal.

From the time of first contact, Governor Arthur Phillip and some of his officers tried to describe the local languages and transcribe Aboriginal utterances. As well as recording words and phrases from the languages of Port Jackson, they remarked on the nature of Aboriginal speech, the characteristic sound patterns of the local languages, and the varying tones and modulations of Indigenous voices. In a context where there

10 Published in J. Harris, *One Blood*, 2nd edn, Albatross Books, 1994, pp. 342–3.

11 Watkin Tench, *A Narrative of the Expedition to Botany Bay; with an account of New South Wales* . . . (J. Debrett, 1789), reprinted in Elizabeth Webby (ed.), *Colonial Voices* (UQP, 1989), p. 54.

was initially no shared vocabulary at all, cross-cultural dialogue often depended on sign language and modulations of voice.

Tench noted the 'muttering' of an old man as he touched the clothing of a white boy. He also mentioned the local people's 'loud exclamation' upon seeing that the newcomers' clothing served as a second skin. When a young man, Arabanoo, was captured in late 1788, Tench described the captive's 'most piercing and lamentable cries of distress'. As Arabanoo's anguish subsided over time, he participated in the newcomers' after-dinner language games, complying with his captors' urgings to 'repeat the names of things in his language, which he never hesitated to do with the utmost alacrity, correcting our pronunciation when erroneous'.[12] The First Fleet journals contain transcriptions of words in the Indigenous languages of the Sydney region. Such documentation was extensive enough to allow a present-day linguist such as Jakelin Troy to reconstruct what she calls 'the Sydney Language'.[13]

Meticulous as they aimed to be regarding the Aboriginal languages, some of the early colonists lapsed shamelessly into cross-cultural ventriloquism when it came to recording Aboriginal speech in English. Tench's rendition of Bennelong's justification for assaulting his wife, for example, echoes the stentorian tones of a villain of gothic romance. According to Tench, Bennelong proclaimed, ' "She is now . . . my property. I have ravished her by force from her tribe, and I will part with her to no person whatever until my vengeance shall be glutted." '[14]

Colonial Australian poetry affords many fanciful, inauthentic samples of Aboriginal speech in English. As Elizabeth Webby has noted, fictional portrayals of Indigenous Australians in verse were shaped primarily by literary conventions of the day,[15] and by Enlightenment theories of economic and cultural advancement. Considering themselves as having progressed to the highest level of civilisation, Europeans positioned themselves at the vanguard of cultural advancement and deemed Indigenous peoples to be the least culturally advanced because they had not progressed beyond hunting and gathering. In poems such as 'The Native's Lament' and 'The Gin', Aboriginal speech is rendered in conventional literary English, with some Indigenous words included to lend authenticity to the narrator's voice. 'The Native's Lament', published anonymously in the *Colonial Times*, 5 May 1826, is a dramatic monologue in which a fictional Aboriginal speaker declaims the manifold losses and injustices he has endured as a result of the coming of Europeans to Van Diemen's Land, now known as Tasmania. At a time when racial violence in Van Diemen's Land was intensifying dramatically, 'The Native's Lament' presented readers with the fantasy of a Pallawah (Indigenous Tasmanian) man in the literary role of the rustic swain, expressing his love for his

12 Tench, *A Narrative . . .*, pp. 58–9.
13 Jakelin Troy, *The Sydney Language*, Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, 1993.
14 Quoted in J. Kenny, *Bennelong: First Notable Aborigina*l, Royal Australian Society with Bank of New South Wales, Sydney, 1973, p. 37.
15 Elizabeth Webby, 'The Aboriginal in Early Australian Literature', *Southerly*, 40.1 (March 1980), p. 45.

country in rhyming couplets of anapestic tetrameter, with lashings of alliteration and assonance:

> Oh! where are the wilds I once sported among,
> When free as my clime through its forests I sprung;
> When no track but the few which our fires had made,
> Had tarnished the carpet that nature had laid;
> When the lone waters dashed down the darksome ravine;
> O'erhung by the shade of the Huon's dark green;
> When the broad morning sun o'er our mountains could roam,
> And see not a slave in our bright Island home.[16]

A similar form of ventriloquism can be seen in Hugo's poem, 'The Gin', published in the *Sydney Gazette* on 16 July 1831, when frontier violence was rife in New South and Queensland. Webby suggests that this poem articulates white colonial guilt and documents traditional Aboriginal life-ways and languages.[17] In the first six stanzas, Toongulla, a young wife and mother, celebrates the beautiful, bountiful land and sea shores of 'Coodge' (Coogee, now a popular surf beach in Sydney). When Toongulla's husband Bian fails to return to camp for their evening meal, however, she fears he has been lured away from his family by the white man, and she yearns hopelessly for a time when the intruders will depart:

> 'Avaunt ye from our merry land!
> Ye that so boast our souls to save,
> Yet treat us with such niggard hand:
> We have no hope but in the grave.'[18]

Aboriginal speech was represented in prose as well as in poetry. In 'Warrup's Account: Smith, A Lad of Eighteen, found dead, May 8th, 1839', George Grey renders the testimony of a fictional Western Australian tracker, Warrup, in language designed to pass in England as authentic Aboriginal English:

> 7th day. The next day away, away, away, away, returning on our tracks returning, on our tracks returning. At Barramba we sit down; we eat bread and meat; they eat fresh – freshwater mussels; the natives eat not fresh-water mussels.
>
> . . . Away, away we go (I, Mr Roe, and Kinchela), along the shore away, along the shore away, along the shore away. We see a paper – the paper of Mortimer and Spofforth. I see Mr Smith's footsteps ascending a sand-hill; onwards I go regarding his footsteps. I see Mr Smith dead. We commence digging the earth. . . .[19]

Although the conspicuous repetitions create an impression that Warrup's account may have been accurately transcribed, the poetic syntax (for example, 'well do the horses

16 Ibid., p. 46. 17 Ibid., p. 47. 18 Ibid., p. 49.
19 George Grey, *Journals of Two Expeditions of Disovery in North-West and Western Australia, during the years 1837, 38 and 39*, vol. 2 (T. & W. Boone, 1841), pp. 346–50.

feed', 'greatly did I weep, and much I grieved') is unlike authentic transcripts of Aboriginal English of the period. Warrup's 'testimony' drifts between fiction and fact, prose and poetry, scientific reportage and literary narrative. Grey's writings were products of a pre-disciplinary era when fiction and fact intermingled routinely. Despite Grey's extensive Aboriginal word lists and his renditions of Warrup's Aboriginal English, readers engage with little other than Grey's literary stylisations of Aboriginal speech. Authentic or not, Grey's ethnological 'research' helped win him the governorship of South Australia from 1840, and of New Zealand from 1845.

Less encumbered with literary flourishes was the 1849 report by Galmarra (often referred to as Jacky Jacky) on the death of explorer Edward Kennedy in Cape York.[20] Galmarra's Wonnarua country was thousands of miles to the south in the Hunter Valley, north of Sydney. After Kennedy was speared to death in 1848, Galmarra made his way back to Sydney alone. His narrative of Kennedy's final days is lucid and engaging, if perhaps rendered melodramatic by a white editorial hand:

> I said to him [the badly wounded Kennedy], 'Don't look far away,' as I thought he would be frightened; I asked him often, 'Are you well now?' and he said 'I don't care for the spear wound in my leg, Jackey, but for the other two spear wounds in my side and back,' and said, 'I am bad inside, Jackey.' I told him blackfellows always die when he got spear in there (the back) . . .
>
> He said, 'I am out of wind, Jackey;' I asked him, Mr Kennedy, are you going to leave me?' and he said, 'Yes, my boy, I am going to leave you,' he said, 'I am very bad, Jackey; you take the books, Jackey, to the captain, but not the big ones, the Governor will give anything for them;' I then tied up the papers, he then said, 'Jackey, give me paper, and I will write;' I gave him paper and pencil, and he tried to write, and he then fell back and died, and I caught him as he fell back and held him, and I then turned round myself and cried.[21]

At one end of the spectrum of fictional Aboriginal voices, we have what might be called tame speech; at the other end we have wild speech, utterances that remain outside the realm of coherent language and intelligible meaning. The term wild speech comes from Charles Harpur's poem 'The Creek of the Four Graves' (1845), which tells the story of a white settler who ventures into the 'wilderness' with four 'bold and trusted men', seeking additional pastures for his livestock. On their first night in the bush, a band of Aboriginal men attack the explorers, killing all but one, whom they pursue for some distance before abandoning the chase. Harpur's descriptions of the strange, wild landscape, the bloody attack, and the ensuing chase all appeal strongly to the mind's eye. He also, however, engages the reader's aural imagination by creating a soundscape as well as a landscape. Prominent in the soundscape of the early part of the poem are

20 *Sydney Morning Herald*, 6 March 1849; reprinted in Ken Goodwin and Alan Lawson (eds), *The Macmillan Anthology of Australian Literature*, Macmillan, 1990, pp. 274–5.

21 Ibid.

the 'terrific cries' of the Aboriginal warriors as they burst out of hiding to attack the explorers. Insofar as these yells and screams are imagined as wordless cries, they suggest that the Aboriginal men, like the land, are dangerous and uncultivated. Harpur indicates that these are wild men, 'whose wild speech no word for mercy hath'.

The belief that Aboriginal people had developed only primitive, wild languages and crude modes of speech both reflected and reconfirmed colonists' racist belief in the legal fiction of *terra nullius*, the idea that prior to Britain's claims of discovery and ownership, Australia was a land belonging to no-one. Nor did Pidgin English afford Aboriginal people intelligibility or respect. In their study of Indigenous voices in the colonial South Australian press, Foster and Mühlhäusler found that Aboriginal speech, if heard at all, was either mediated or invented by the dominant colonial culture. Pidgin English was initially viewed as a middle ground, a no man's land where speakers of different languages could meet. By the 1880s, however, its initial neutrality was giving way. Pidgin became 'a marker of childishness and social inferiority, and that [was] . . . eventually appropriated by white society as part of the exotic background against which colonial nationalism developed.'[22]

Bennelong, Biraban, and Benjamin: early Indigenous authors of alphabetic writing

In early colonial times, before Aboriginal people had learned to read and write alphabetic script, they exercised their authority by dictating to an amanuensis the exact words they wished to be recorded on paper. This mode of authorship began in 1796, when Bennelong dictated a letter to Mr Phillips, steward to the British Home Secretary, Lord Sydney, one of the most powerful men in the world at the time. Mr Phillips and his wife had nursed Bennelong through a grave illness during his visit to England in the early 1790s.[23]

The difference between transcription and dictation is significant. When a person dictates the exact words that they wish to be written down, they assert a form of authority that is not manifest when their words are merely being 'collected' as objects of European knowledge, with or without the speaker's awareness and permission. With dictation, the scribe is accountable to the Aboriginal speaker. To dictate is to specify the exact words that are to be written down, and the text is usually read back to the author to verify its accuracy. Authority lies with the speaker, not with the amanuensis. Whether wording a message, or ruling an empire, to dictate is to assert one's authority.

22 Robert Foster and Peter Mühlhäusler, 'Native Tongue, Captive Voice: The Presentation of the Aboriginal "voice" in colonial South Australia', *Language and Communication*, 16.1 (2006), p. 1.

23 For a facsimile copy and further discussion of Bennelong's letter, see Penny van Toorn, *Writing Never Arrives Naked* (Aboriginal Studies Press, 2006), p. 55.

> Sidney Cove
> New South Wales Augst 29
> 1796
> Sir,
> I am very well. I hope you are very well. I live at the Governor's. I have every day dinner there. I have not my wife: another man took her away: we have had murry doings: he spear'd me in the back, but I better now: his name is now Carroway. all my friends alive & well. Not me go to England no more. I am at home now. I hope Sir you send me anything you please Sir. hope all are well in England. I hope Mrs Phillip very well. You nurse me Madam when I sick. You very good Madam: thank you Madam, & I hope you remember me Madam, not forget. I know you very well Madam. Madam I want stockings. thank you Madam; send me two Pair stockings. You very good Madam. Thank you Madam. Sir, you give my duty to L^{d} Sydney. Thank you very good my Lord. very good: hope very well all family. very well. Sir, send me you please some Handkerchiefs for Pocket. you please Sir send me some shoes: two pair you please Sir.

The unknown amanuensis seems to have recorded Bennelong's words verbatim but used English spellings of the day, not attempting to reproduce his pronunciation phonetically.

Bennelong's letter is the earliest example of Indigenous Australian authorship in alphabetic script, and it used a range of discourses audible in the voicescape of Port Jackson. In certain respects, the letter conforms to British colonial epistolary norms. Like many a letter from the colonies, it offers polite greetings, snippets of news and requests for articles to be sent out from England. Bennelong had sat with Governor Phillip at his writing desk as he penned his official and personal correspondence. By looking on and conversing with Arthur Phillip, it is possible that he gained his understanding of how letters worked as carriers of information, articles of exchange, and a means of reaffirming social ties. In other ways, however, the letter deviates markedly from polite late 18th-century social decorum, most obviously by addressing several people in turn, alternating between familiar and formal registers, and asking bluntly and abruptly for specific gifts. Reading Bennelong's letter entirely in relation to British colonial epistolary norms would, however, be inappropriate: such an approach would deny the influence of Bennelong's own culture. Equally inappropriate would be any attempt to analyse the letter exclusively in relation to a discrete, timeless, 'Aboriginal' cultural order: to do so would be to ignore the intercultural entanglement between the British and the Indigenous peoples of Port Jackson.

During the eight and a half years between the arrival of the first British settlers in January 1788 and the production of Bennelong's letter in August 1796, Bennelong was himself an important agent and medium of interaction between the British colonists and the Indigenous clans around Port Jackson. In terms of its language and socio-political functions, the letter is a product of the intercultural entanglement that Bennelong so vividly evokes when he mentions in the same breath his spearing and his regular dinners with the Governor. To understand the cultural and socio-political dynamics at work in Bennelong's letter, it is necessary to contextualise it historically, both as a verbal text

and a material object. While Bennelong's letter is comparable to the genres of colonial bureaucratic writing to which Bennelong was exposed, it also serves a purpose in the cycles of communication and gift exchange that is typical both of English patronage systems and of Aboriginal kinship networks. In this context, Bennelong's authorial practices can be seen as a product of his individual agency working within the dynamic intercultural contact zone that emerged after 1788.

Another early Indigenous co-author was Biraban, an Awabakal clan-head of high degree and a custodian of the Eaglehawk ceremonies, who worked from the mid-1820s to the early 1840s near Lake Macquarie north of Sydney with missionary Launcelot Threlkeld, translating the Bible into the Awabakal language.[24] Many words and phrases were recorded in Threlkeld's copious notes. They were sounded out and explained by Biraban, who was also called Eaglehawk. Biraban inspired Eliza Hamilton Dunlop's poem 'The Eagle Chief', published in the *Sydney Gazette* on 21 April 1842. Biraban was also a clandestine historian. Occasionally, in the process of supplying Threlkeld with ethnographic information, Biraban documented some of the sad facts of his life. For instance, among the 'Specimens of a Dialect of the Aborigines of New South Wales', in Threlkeld's book *An Australian Language*, we find Biraban's announcement that he is married to a woman he calls Patty, and that their child has died.

> *Bo-un-to-a* – the feminine pronoun, she.
> *Unne bountoa Patty ammoung kin-ba.*
> This she Patty with me.
> This is Patty with me. [Patty was Biraban's wife.]
> *Ammoung katoa bountoa wa-nun.*
> Me with she move-will.
> She will go with me.
> *Wonni bountoa tea unnung tatte ammoun-ba.*
> Child she to me there dead mine.
> My child there is dead.[25]

Biraban is only one of many people who have smuggled their perspectives and histories into official written records. During the 1884 inquiry into the treatment of Aboriginal prisoners on Rottnest Island in Western Australia, a Nyoongar man known as Benjamin delivered the following oral testimony, knowing that his evidence would be included in the official written report:

> I come from Eyre's Sand Patch. I am here for stealing; another blackfellow 'coax'em' me. I have just arrived here. I little bit like Rottnest. I am going back at lambing time. I get plenty to eat. I am warm, but have a rotten blanket. I only half work'em. The Warders are kind and not sulky. I will not return to prison when I once get away from this. I walked from Eyre's Sand Patch to Albany naked, with a chain on my neck. My

24 For a transcript of Biraban's account of his dream, see ibid., p. 47.
25 Quoted in Launcelot Threlkeld, *An Australian Language as Spoken by the Awabakal*, ed. John Fraser, Sydney: Government Printer, 1892, p. 135.

> neck was sore from chain. I knocked up from the long walk. Policeman Truelove no good. He hit me for knocking up. Policeman Wheelock a good fellow, nothing sulky. I like ship, I was not sick. I do not like walking so far. I came with a bullock chain round my neck from Eyre Sand Patch to Albany. When it rained my neck was very sore from the chain. I have the same blanket I came with a fortnight ago. I had a cold in Fremantle. The doctor saw me at Fremantle, when I was ready to come to Rottnest. I was ill, and when I got here I was very ill. My trousers and shirt I came from Albany in are now in the Prison. I gave them to a native this morning. I did not get any from the Prison. What clothes I have on were obtained by inter-change with other natives. I had no clothes given me from Eyre Sand Patch to Albany. I was quite naked all the way, no clothes or blanket. Three of us came from Fremantle, we were a little ill. One of us was left behind at Fremantle, sick. He has now come over. My companions have the same clothes and blankets that they came with. My clothes and blanket were obtained at Albany.[26]

Comparing Benjamin's testimony with that of the other prisoners, it becomes apparent that his statement was not a monologue, but rather a set of answers to a series of questions that are not included with the testimony. The transcript is in fact only one half of a dialogue, and each prisoner was asked the same questions in the same order. Yet Benjamin manages to break out of the constraints imposed by the fixed agenda. He puts on record the fact that policeman Truelove abused and humiliated him by forcing him to walk, naked and in chains, all the way from Eyre Sand Patch to Albany. Benjamin's testimony returns again and again to this humiliating experience. Nothing the questioners do can divert Benjamin from his story. By returning time after time to what *he* wants to divulge for the record, he asserts his narratorial authority.

Early Aboriginal authorship and traditional Indigenous law

One of the most significant sites of early Aboriginal writing was Coranderrk Reserve, established in 1863 north-east of Melbourne in Victoria. William Barak and his cousin Simon Wonga were the traditional leaders and primary spokesmen on matters concerning country and community at Coranderrk. As a boy in 1835, Barak had witnessed John Batman's illegal treaty, through which vast tracts of land were allegedly surrendered by the traditional owners in return for blankets, flour, tools and trinkets. The Coranderrk residents often wrote as a collective, knowing that this was necessary if they were to be heard and taken seriously by the government authorities responsible for their protection and welfare. Their solidarity was partly based on their longstanding connections. The Coranderrk residents were members of the Kulin Confederacy, an alliance based on intermarriage, ceremonial connections and language ties.

26 *Report to the Committee to Inquire into Treatment of Aboriginal Native Prisoners of the Crown in this Colony*, Legislative Council, Perth, 1884, Paper 32.

One of William Barak's major achievements was to bring the Coranderrk community together as a formidable political force. Each of the large Coranderrk petitions serves as a snapshot of a political body in the process of constituting itself on paper. The following petition was produced in late 1881, after almost half a century of serious disruption to traditional ways:

Coranderrk Station,
November 16th 1881.
SIR,
We want the Board and the Inspector, Captain Page, to be no longer over us. We want only one man here, and that is Mr. John Green, and the station to be under the Chief Secretary; then we will show the country that the station could self-support itself.
These are the names of those that wish this to be done.
Wm. Barak, X
Thos. Mickie, X
Dick Richard, X
Thos. Avoca, X
Thos. Gilman ,X
Johnny Terrick,
Lankey, X
Spider, X
M.Simpson,
H. Harmoney
Alfred Morgan,
Robert Wandon,
Alick Campbell, X
Thos. Dunolly,
Alfred Davis,
Willie Parker,
Willie Hamilton, X
XJohnny Charles,
Jemima Wandon,
Emma Campbell, X
Jenny Campbell,
Lizzy Charles, X
Eliza Mickie, X
Roy, X
Ellen Richard, X
Harriett, X
Annie Hamilton, X
Mary, X
Jessie Dunolly,
Louisa Hunter, X
Dinah Hunter,
Caroline Morgan, X
Maggie Harmoney

Lizzie Davis
Metild Simpson, X
Edith Brangy
Mary Ann McClennan,
Bella Lee,
Alice Grant,
Thomas Dick,
William Edmond
Alexander Briggs,
Abel Terrick,
Finnemore Jackson,
Joseph Hunter
John Patterson.[27]

This petition is typical of many produced at Coranderrk. These documents were particularly powerful weapons in the hands of Coranderrk's Aboriginal community because they carried the people's complaints and requests over the reserve manager's head to his superior, the Chief Protector in Melbourne, who would request a report from the reserve manager, who was then required to defend his decisions and actions. The order of names on many of the Coranderrk petitions reflected the traditional social structure based on gender, age and land. The local clan-head, William Barak, is almost invariably at the top, followed by the other senior men (who all sign with crosses), then the younger men (who could write their own names), then the older (usually non-literate) women, then the younger (literate) women, and finally the children, who wrote their own names if they were old enough to attend school. The ordering of people's names on paper can be taken as evidence that when the senior clan-heads were on their own traditional country, the social process of producing written texts could in fact consolidate the authority of the older generations. This finding is contrary to the expectations of media theorists such as Jack Goody and Walter J. Ong, who see writing itself as the cause of a shift of power from the old to the young.[28]

The Coranderrk community was not always unanimous in its views, however.[29] Diane Barwick has argued the residents were divided by intersecting lines of social difference based on language, age, moiety, totem, gender, caste, and clan. Some social categories were traditional to Indigenous cultures; others, such as the distinction between 'half-castes' and 'full-bloods', were imposed by white legislators. Despite the resilient sense of solidarity of the Coranderrk community, rifts and factional disputes periodically

27 'Minutes of evidence taken before the board appointed to enquire into the condition of the Aboriginal station at Coranderrk', p. 98, Victorian Public Record Series 1226, box 4, Public Record Office Victoria. For their valuable advice and assistance, my sincere thanks go to Victor Briggs, Kerry Paton and Gayle Harradine at the Koori Heritage Trust, Melbourne; Jim Wandin, Joy Murphy (née Wandin) and Judy Wilson at Healesville; Margaret Briggs Wirrpunda and Zeta Thomson at Worawa Aboriginal College, Healesville; Irene Swindle at the Koori Coop, Healesville; and Jeannette Crew and Steve Ross in Sydney.

28 Walter J. Ong, *Orality and Literacy*, Methuen, 1982.

29 Diane E. Barwick, *Rebellion at Coranderrk*, Aboriginal History Inc., 1998, p. 8.

erupted. In 1883, for example, Mrs Jeannie Rowan complained that 'as the half-castes and blacks are kept unfriendly with one another the blacks are unable to get their complaints put down in writing excepting by little children, whereas up till this time the half-castes always did the writing for all the people at the station'.[30] At Coranderrk and other reserves and mission stations, those who were able to write penned the letters of those who had not been taught to express their requests and complaints on paper. This division of the labour of writing remains today, as a significant number of Indigenous life-writers engage editorial assistants to help them turn their life-stories into a manuscript suitable for publication as a book.

In Indigenous Australian societies, the most powerful spiritual and ceremonial knowledge has always been the responsibility of the older, fully initiated men, although women have their own important spheres of sacred knowledge and political influence. This gendered gerontocratic social structure is preserved by customary laws that restrict the flow of particular types of knowledge between men and women, and from the old to the young and the unworthy adults. The most potent songs and ceremonies were not disclosed to the uninitiated. Young people had to wait until their elders decided they were ready to receive these songs and ceremonies that activated the powers of the spirit world.

Yet for those living on missions and reserves, literacy and the English language were powerful tools of another kind, tools that enabled Indigenous people to communicate with new authorities within colonial institutions that were radically reshaping their world. As young people of both sexes became literate and fluent in English, their ability to negotiate with government authorities gave them political opportunities and a social status they would not otherwise have acquired at such an early age. In this context, Ong's prediction of a change in the balance of power between the young and the old is supported. At Coranderrk Reserve, the growth of alphabetic literacy thus created the potential, but not the inevitability, for certain kinds of power to shift from older to younger generations, and from males to females. Unlike most forms of European writing, where the author and scribe are one, the Coranderrk community devised an effective distribution of responsibility when they created their petitions. The senior clan-head was deemed the author, whether or not he was able to write. A trusted literate young kinsman served as a scribe, and the relevant members of the reserve community were deemed the owners.

A different culture of writing developed in Tasmania at the Wybalenna Settlement on Flinders Island off the north-east of Tasmania. The mixed Pallawah community that had been sent to Flinders Island spoke different languages and in some cases were long-time enemies. Because no-one was on his or her traditional land, power was up for grabs. Two literate youths, Walter George Arthur and Thomas Brune, were able to use their literacy to form a close association with Commandant George Augustus Robinson. In

30 Ibid., p. 278.

so doing, they gained privileges that they would not otherwise have had at such a young age. Arthur and Brune acquired significant influence by writing a small newspaper in which they doled out criticism of their countrymen and exhorted their elders to be good Christians.

No-one belittled the elders at Coranderrk Reserve in Victoria, where literacy did not destabilise the traditional land-based gerontocracy. The authorship role of William Barak and Simon Wonga was based on their seniority in the land-holding clan upon whose traditional land Coranderrk was established. Neither Barak nor Wonga had been taught to read and write, but because the reserve was located on their clan estate, their power remained largely in place. The male head of the host clan was considered to be the leader and spokesperson for the reserve or mission community.

The people of Coranderrk did not limit themselves to writing by hand. Taking advantage of the press, they lobbied publicly for their rights and articulated their complaints in the public sphere. So determined was the Protection Board to de-authorise the Coranderrk residents' letters and petitions that on at least one occasion it hired detectives to investigate whether their written protests were forged. A police detective was sent to the reserve to gather handwriting samples from suspected Aboriginal forgers. In the archives, these documents are labelled as exhibit 'A', 'B', and so on. After comparing these samples with the handwriting used in the body of the Coranderrk residents' petitions, the Protection Board found to its embarrassment that the petitions had in fact been penned legitimately by Thomas Dunolly, and that they genuinely expressed the views of all the signatories.

Aboriginal men were by no means the only ones to take up the pen in defence of their communities and families. *Letters from Aboriginal Women of Victoria, 1867–1926* (2002) offers plentiful evidence that Aboriginal women wrote numerous letters both to family members and to government officials. Writing mainly for themselves and their families, rather than for larger community groups, women addressed colonial officials on a wide range of issues, including matters to do with children and family, land and housing, their right to personal freedom, the behaviour of mission and reserve managers, and their need of financial and material assistance. Like those of their menfolk, these women's letters show how they viewed their own lives, and interpreted the broader political context within which they and their families were living.

On some missions and reserves, girls received more schooling than boys, whose labour was needed for outside work. Nonetheless, scribes were almost invariably men. A significant exception is the petition penned by Betsy Banfield in October 1893, from William Barak and thirty other members of the Coranderrk Reserve community to Charles Officer, vice-chairman of the Protection Board.[31] As in many other petitions, land was the issue. Why was a woman chosen to serve as scribe for Barak? Was it because her English was good and her handwriting very neat? Or because she was the

31 Australian Archives, Victorian Office, B 313/1, Item 221.

daughter of one of Barak's speakers, Taungurong leader Thomas Banfield, who had died earlier that year? Paradoxically, innovations in textual production may have maintained Indigenous traditions.

The most educated, accomplished and prolific Indigenous woman writer of the late 19th and early 20th centuries was Bessie Flower Cameron, a member of the Meananger (Benang) people whose country is in the south of Western Australia. Born in 1851 near the town of Albany, she grew up at Annesfield, an Anglican residential school run by Anne Camfield.[32] For such institutions, literate young men and women were a public relations asset: they showed taxpayers and mission supporters that their money was indeed 'uplifting' the Aboriginal race. In February 1868, several of Bessie Flower's letters were published in the *Church of England Newspaper* in Western Australia, the editor's aim being to refute recent criticism of the Annesfield Anglican mission in the local papers.[33]

Most Aboriginal literacy at the time was functional, rather than for pleasure or intellectual stimulus. Bessie Flower was highly educated and she enjoyed reading literature as well as 'improving' informational texts. Mrs Camfield noted that

> Bessie . . . was never without a book in her pocket by day or under her pillow at night. Her love of reading often brought her into scrapes, from reading at inconvenient times but it was improving to her as (though she liked to read stories as well as any girl) she is much interested by History, Travels and more serious works.[34]

Mrs Camfield obviously viewed reading as a good thing in general, but she endorsed the prevailing view that romantic fiction was a frivolous, morally suspect feminine genre that compared unfavourably with serious masculine non-fictional material. Bessie spent two years at a model school in Sydney, where she studied academic subjects such as English literature and language, arithmetic, history, geography, and scripture, while also developing her ladylike accomplishments with lessons in piano and singing. Returning to Albany in 1866, she became assistant teacher to Anne Camfield at Annesfield, and served as organist at the local Anglican church.[35] As a young Aboriginal woman with a middle-class white education, her social standing was highly ambivalent and precarious.

In 1867, Bessie and her younger sister, Ada, were among five young Nyoongar women who travelled to Ramahyuck Mission Station in south-eastern Victoria, where Christian Aboriginal women were urgently needed as wives for the young male Kurnai converts. She married Donald Cameron, and the young couple spent their leisure time writing

32 Biographical information about Bessie Flower Cameron is from Bain Attwood, '"In the name of all my Coloured Brethren and Sisters", a Biography of Bessie Cameron', *Hecate*, XII.1–2 1986), pp. 9–53; Bain Attwood, *The Making of the Aborigines* (A&U, 1989), and Elizabeth Nelson, Sandra Smith and Patricia Grimshaw (eds), *Letters from Aboriginal Women of Victoria, 1867–1926*, History Department, University of Melbourne, 2002.

33 Rev. Brown, Editorial, 'The Aborigines in Western Australia', *Church of England Newspaper*, 1 February 1868, Bessie Flower, Letters, La Trobe Collection, State Library of Victoria, MS 12117.

34 Quoted in Attwood, '"In the name of all my Coloured Brethren and Sisters"', p. 14.

35 Ibid..

letters, reading newspapers and 'self-improving' books.[36] Bessie's authority derived from her writing skills, not her connection to relevant sites. Although a foreigner, she wrote to the newspapers in the name of the Aborigines of Ramahyuck Mission Station, and defended Chief Protector Hagenauer against public criticism.[37]

While anthropologist A. W. Howitt had been impressed with Bessie's and Donald's immersion in a culture of books and writing, the Rev. Murdoch MacDonald, visiting Ramahyuck three years later, in 1877, thought that Bessie's 'literally constant' reading was too much of a good thing.[38] The Rev. Hagenauer complained that, although 'her superior education helps her wonderfully well, she was by no means as useful' as she could have been. The Rev. MacDonald opined that 'it would be better on the whole if she looked to her house more and read less', a view voiced today by many men whose wives spend 'too much time' reading popular women's romances.[39]

Bain Attwood has argued that Bessie Flower Cameron 'internalised what amounted to European domination, and did not perceive it as destructive', largely because she was taken from her family at a very young age.[40] As she grew older, however, she suffered as a result of the racially based paternalism of white men such as the Rev. Hagenauer and Captain Page, who placed her needs second to those of her unfaithful Aboriginal husband. Her reading doubtless played a major role in structuring her social and moral awareness; in her writing we can see over time her transformation from a deferential, submissive girl, to an assertive, self-authorising woman who wanted to live outside the judgmental gaze of white male authority figures. Her writing not only reflected this change; it also facilitated it. Being able to express her views publicly, especially when she wrote on behalf of her 'coloured brethren and sisters', must have given her a tremendous sense of power and achievement and a feeling of belonging and social worth, even though her birthplace was far away.

Hidden cultures of literacy

To varying degrees, tacitly or overtly, Aboriginal writing and reading in the colonial period were practised in accordance with residually traditional social and cultural values. Biraban, for example, despite his close, 15-year collaboration with missionary Lancelot Threlkeld, interpreted the Bible in the light of his own traditional spiritual beliefs. At Coranderrk Reserve from the 1870s to the 1920s, the Aboriginal community generated letters and petitions to satisfy bureaucratic requirements, but did so in accordance with traditional land-based and kin-based protocols. The rise of Aboriginal literacy by no means superseded their cultures of the voice. In colonial institutions,

36 Ibid., p. 29.
37 Bessie Cameron to R. Brough Smyth, AAV B 313/1, Item 163.
38 Attwood, '"In the name of all my Coloured Brethren and Sisters"', p. 33.
39 Quoted in ibid., p. 33. See Janice Radway, *Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy and Popular Literature* (University of North Carolina, 1984).
40 Attwood, '"In the name of all my Coloured Brethren and Sisters"', p. 45.

orality has always been a medium of fleeting, unverifiable transgression, a mode of speech-crime that leaves no material trace. On the Wybalenna Settlement on Flinders Island in the 1830s and 1840s, for example, Pallawah people's breaches of verbal propriety were difficult to detect or document. Especially when congregating together, the people in Wybalenna knew they could break the verbal rules with minimal danger of getting caught and punished. In 1838, for example, at the marriage of Walter George Arthur and Mary Ann Cochrane, the Aboriginal guests 'mispronounced' the toast. The words 'good health' morphed into what sounded suspiciously like 'go to hell'. This breach remained unpunished. In the crowd assembled at the wedding celebration, it would have been difficult to identify exactly who said what, and whether any improprieties were accidental or deliberate. Commandant Robinson had no option other than to turn a deaf ear, or explain away the subversive speech acts as mere Native errors.[41]

Words for writing

What words do Indigenous Australians apply today to identify the activities and objects that in English are called 'writing'? And what do these words suggest about their perceptions and attitudes towards books, paper, and the tools of reading and writing? The Burrarra and Gun-nartpa peoples of Arnhem Land use the word *jurra* to refer to footprints and tracks, as well as books and lines made on paper.[42] For the Yidindji communities in Cairns and Yarrrabah, the closest thing to the phonocentric European concept of writing is the term *gijaada gurrun*, which means 'language in marks'. *Gurruna* means 'speech' or the verb 'to speak'. Yet Yidindji people also refer to writing with the word *manyjam*, which denotes scars, marks on a tree and cracks in the ground.[43] The Yidindji term *gijar gunda* refers to a variety of activities, objects and inscriptions, such as making cicatrices during initiation ceremonies, or drawing, painting, and writing. A mark painted or drawn on a shield, a person, or on paper is called *gijar gunda*, as are the stripes on a policeman's sleeve, or any marks that look like drawing; for example, the stripes on a snake, or a spider's web, or a piece of paper with lines on it, including money. *Gijar gunda* can also refer to the object on which the marks are made. *Gigar gunda* means 'to place, make a mark, sign a name'. The Yidindji word *gurrun* means language, story, news, or a piece of lawyer vine bent in a certain way and sent as a message stick. So the Yidindji people understand the European idea that alphabetic writing works as a phonographic script, and the European function of the written signature as an individual identifying mark, but they also associate writing with the

41 Robinson, Flinders Island Journal, 16 March, 1838, in N. J. B. Plomley (ed.), *Weep in Silence*, Blubber Head Press, 1987, p. 543.

42 K. Glasgow (comp.), *Bururra-Gun-nartpa Dictionary*, Summer Institute of Linguistics, Berrimah, NT, 1994.

43 R.M.W. Dixon (comp. and ed.), *Words of Our Country: Stories, Place Names and Vocabulary in Yidini [Yidindji]*, the Aboriginal language of the Cairns–Yarrabah Region, UQP, 1991.

ceremonial scarring that signifies a male's transition to manhood. The Yidindji use the same term for message stick and writing. While adopting the conventional Western idea of the alphabet as a code for spoken language, they have also added other meanings and associations based on their environment, social practices and traditional graphic art traditions. In colonial times, Aboriginal people developed their own cultures of writing. Today they are pursuing new directions in the digital age.

4

Australian colonial poetry, 1788–1888

Claiming the future, restoring the past

VIVIAN SMITH

Australia was imagined before it was settled, sung about in ballads before the first convicts arrived at Botany Bay, and celebrated by English poets before the books of its own poets started to appear. But the poems of this period, whether popular or literary, bear all the hallmarks of the long 18th century to which they owe their formation, their cult of genres, and their formalities of diction and decorum.

There are two main currents in the poetry written in English in Australia since 1788 when Australia was first settled by the British as a penal colony. One is popular, based on the songs, ballads and sea shanties and simple narratives brought here by convicts and settlers. This is vernacular verse which develops in diverse ways as the century progresses. The other stream is learned and literary, drawing on the whole European cultural heritage, using language that is consciously heightened or refined. These streams are not strict parallels; many of the best Australian poets have tried to merge both in their writing. They have tried to link what is best in popular writing – its vigour, its common touch – with the sophisticated verbal inventiveness and daring, the intellectual exploration of other traditions. Much of the earliest Australian poetry is anonymous, popular and ephemeral: the song, the ballad, the skit and the lampoon predominate. The first poems published in book form were extended odes and narratives that expressed a sense of confidence in the progress of British civilisation and the future glory of Australia.

The first writers found the landscape monotonous and unfriendly. There were challenges in a new climate, contacts with the Aboriginal inhabitants, the naming of the incredible flora and fauna – acacia and eucalyptus, echidna and platypus. The constructing of an Australian identity and consciousness was begun. The artistic transformation – the imaginative possession – of the country is a long and continuing process which starts with the first writing that appeared here.

Early Australian literary poetry bears the indelible stamp of the highly cultivated amateur, and it presents us with a body of work as fascinating in its own way as the products of the first Australian painters. Until recently this early poetry tended to be dismissed or slighted for being derivative. However, literary texts can become interesting in new ways, and these foundation poems, for all their fixed and formalised language, are now taking on new significance.

It is fitting, given the country's history, that the first official Australian poet should have been a freed convict, Michael Massey Robinson. English-born and Oxford-educated, he is remembered now for his odes written to be recited at royal celebrations (the birthdays of George III and Queen Charlotte, 4 June and 18 January) and military occasions. Robinson is often regarded as the poet laureate of Macquarie's administration (1809–22), the celebrant of his attempts to bring the light of civilisation to the Great South Land.

> But when BRITANNIA's Sons came forth to brave
> The dreary Perils of the length'ning wave;
> When her bold Barks, with swelling Sails unfurled,
> Trac'd these rude Coasts, and hailed a new-found World;
> Soon as their Footsteps press'd the yielding sand,
> A sun more genial brighten'd on the land:
> Commerce and Arts enrich'd the social Soil,
> Burst through the gloom and bade all Nature smile.
>
> *Sydney Gazette*, 8 June 1811

The spirit of James Thomson's 'Rule Britannia' dominates many of these highly formal and sedate odes, as does the conviction that the British settlement will bring all the benefits of the Enlightenment.

Barron Field, a friend of Wordsworth and Lamb, arrived in New South Wales in 1817 as a judge of the Supreme Court of New South Wales, where he resided for eight years and claimed to be the first 'Austral Harmonist'. His tiny volume *First Fruits of Australian Poetry* (Sydney, 1819) is still valued for its depiction of the colonial scene and its local fauna and flora ('Botany Bay Flowers') and its second edition (1823) for its celebration of Captain Cook and Sir Joseph Banks. Field is now best known for his poem 'The Kangaroo', an exuberant oddity that tries to say as much about the creation as it says about Australia. In its attempt to capture new subject matter (the kangaroo and the black swan) in an established literary form adapted from Milton and Marvell, as well as in its awareness of Australia as a land of contradictions, it sets a pattern for a large part of 19th-century Australian poetry which tries to link the old world and the new. In the curious 'On reading the controversy between Lord Byron and Mr Bowles', Field reflects the situation of many 19th-century writers who respond just as intensely to what is happening overseas as to what is around them; he also brings in one of those references to America which are so frequent in the earliest poetry written here.

William Charles Wentworth's *Australasia*, published in London in 1823, is one of the most authoritative of the early poems with its robust epic vision and its patriotic assertion of the progress of British civilisation. Constructed of rough-hewn couplets, this extended ode celebrates the development of a new Britannia in another world and is marked by a rugged individuality of touch. It has long been valued for the descriptions of an Aboriginal corroboree, its account of the fate of La Pérouse's expedition, and its depiction of early Sydney and its surroundings. It seems to have

inspired Thomas K. Hervey's *Australia* (1824), written at Trinity College, Cambridge, and also celebrating 'that spirit of enterprise which leads Great Britain to extend her researches and her arts through all parts of the earth'. There is no evidence that Hervey ever visited Australia, but his well-informed poem was already into its third edition by 1829. Hervey was convinced that Australasia was 'destined to act a mighty part upon the theatre of the world'. His poem dwells on nature's oddities – the emu, the black swan – and after celebrating the great explorers – Hartog, Dampier, Tasman, Cook – concludes with a vision of the future and the growth and development of Sydney and Hobart. It is a curiosity of considerable neoclassical charm.

The 18th-century European mode of locating poems in specific genres is characteristic of early colonial poetry; there are epistles and odes and attempts at panoramic and epic visions. The descriptive, meditative poem derived from Goldsmith, Thomson and Cowper was the most frequent, as in the work of the Australian-born Charles Tompson, one of the most appealing of the early writers whose *Wild Notes, from the Lyre of a Native Minstrel* appeared in 1826 when he was only 20 years old. Like the 18th-century poets he imitated, Tompson aims at typical, moral generalisation, but there is a Goldsmith-inspired delicacy of feeling and individuality of observation in his poem 'Black Town', with its reference to an early attempt to educate a group of Aborigines.

> Ill-fated hamlet! From each tottering shed,
> Thy sable inmates perhaps forever fled,
> (Poor restless wand'rers of the woody plain!
> The skies their covert – nature their domain)
> Seek, with the birds, the casual dole of heav'n,
> Pleas'd with their lot – content with what is given.
> Time was, and recent memr'y speaks it true,
> When round each little cot a garden grew,
> A field whose culture serv'd a two-fold part,
> Food and instruction in the rural art.
> The lordling tenant and his sable wife
> Were taught to prize the sweets of social life,
> And send their offspring, in the dawn of youth,
> To schools of learning and the paths of truth.

Tompson, one of the most sensitive and melancholy poets of his time, also affirms certainties and stabilities, and patriotically celebrates Britannia's civilising and Christianising mission.

Two other poets, John Dunmore Lang and William Woolls, belong to this phase. Lang's *Poems: Sacred and Secular* was published in Sydney in 1873, by which time he had become a most important figure in the colony of New South Wales. This volume – an attractive example of colonial printing – carries the following information under the author's name: 'Minister of the Scots Church, Sydney; recently and for many years, one of the representatives of the city of Sydney, in the Parliament of

N.S.Wales; hon Member of the African Institute of France; of the American Oriental Society; and of the Literary Institute of Olinda, in the Brazils'. It is especially interesting for the poetic sequence *A Voyage to New South Wales, A Poem: Or Extracts from the Diary of an Officer in the East*, written during the author's first voyage to Australia in the years 1822 and 1823. It is an exceptionally buoyant work in *ottava rima*, unlike many of the other poems of the time which are encased in neoclassical couplets. Lang seems to have been much influenced by Byron, whose devil-may-care attitude he adopts throughout the sequence, a record of the voyage from England to Rio de Janeiro and across the great southern ocean to the coasts of Van Diemen's Land and on to Port Jackson. Some sections of this poem, 'Colonial Nomenclature', which celebrates the use of Aboriginal place names, and his 1824 critique of Barron Field, have been anthologised, but the whole poem needs to be recovered to complete our enjoyment and understanding of early colonial poetry. Other poems in this volume, particularly the hymns, show the influence of Cowper; there are skilfully turned translations from Gellert and Burger as well as a translation of an Aboriginal song; there is one of the first attempts to write a national anthem, and poems about bushfires and birds – the cape pigeon and the albatross – and even a pleasant poem to his horse. Dunmore Lang brings a number of different notes to early Australian poetry, but because of his fame in other areas his achievement in verse has been somewhat overlooked.

William Woolls' *The Voyage: A Moral Poem written during and descriptive of a Voyage from England to New South Wales* (Sydney 1832) remains one of the less noted poems of its time. Divided into five cantos, it approaches New South Wales from Africa rather than South America; it lacks the dash and bravura of Lang's voyage poem, but it describes the tropics, whales and sharks and flying fish and a mariner-victim of a shark's voracity: 'O! for a Hogarth to depict the scene: / Now all is dread, now all again serene'. Canto Five, which celebrates the art of navigation, contains its predictable dream vision of the future with the dissemination of art and science as 'Albion's sons spread o'er the plain' and with

> Good men enforcing Gospel truths.
> Thus blest indeed, the happy coast
> Will ever see the light of day
> Till the dread trump will close the scene
> And the great globe itself dissolve away.

Woolls is determined to express the eternal truths of religion and the human lot. In *Australia* (1833) he continues belatedly in the steps of Wentworth, admitting that his six cantos are addressed 'more immediately to the people of England' than to those of New South Wales, but he confidently asserts the future greatness of Australia, and his commitment to the moral improvement of the colony and its inhabitants. In Canto Six he celebrates the development of a colonial verse tradition, including references to all

the poets already mentioned as well as Henry Halloran. From the beginning poets are starting to take possession of the country.

The 18th-century tradition of verse-making as a cultural accomplishment of the educated person is the background from which much early Australian poetry arises. Robinson, Field, Tompson, Wentworth, Lang and Woolls, whether native-born or born in England, were all well-schooled writers from comfortable backgrounds. Their highly talented and conservative poems, studded with Latin tags and classical references, and ripe with quotations from the great poets in the English canon, display their educational credentials and opportunities. They observe the literary decorum of a passing age, but they often strike an authentic note and signal contemporary attitudes and events.

The change to a more centrally shaping sense of the poet's calling came with Harpur and Kendall, Australian-born poets with a sense of vocation who wanted to live for poetry, so to speak, but were never able to live from it. With them the second phase of 19th-century Australian poetry begins.

Charles Harpur: 'founder of the country's poetic heritage'

Charles Harpur was one of the most underestimated of Australian 19th-century poets, and his work is still not adequately edited more than a century after his death. The son of Irish ex-convicts, Harpur was considered arrogant and abrasively self-assertive, his radical republicanism and fiercely independent spirit not designed to ingratiate him with the local conservative establishment. In 1845 he published *Thoughts: a Series of Sonnets* (the first sonnet sequence to appear in Australia). It is divided into two sections; one, of 17 items, deals with his poetic calling and ambitions; the other five – 'Specimens of Love Sonnets' – are concerned with his love for Mary Doyle, the woman he finally married. *The Bushrangers, a play in five Acts and Other Poems* (1853), contains some of his most enduring poems: 'The Creek of the Four Graves', 'The Bush Fire', 'To the Comet of 1843' and 'The Dream by the Fountain'.

Like most of the colonial poets, Harpur was well read, with knowledge of the work of Dryden, Milton, Marvell, Wordsworth, Keats and Shelley as well as of Emerson and Edgar Allan Poe. Although critical of many aspects of the colonial society he found himself in, he was a deeply patriotic poet with an abiding love of country. He always thought of himself as an Australian poet and responded as one to questions as varied as the war in Crimea, the Irish question and the developing new independence in various European countries. He was one of the most forceful of the long line of Australian poets who wanted to define 'This Southern Land of Ours':

> What would pygmean statesmen but
> Our new-world prospects blast,
> By chaining native enterprise
> To Europe's pauper past.

'For we are neither English, nor Irish, nor Scotch – but Australians: and our career as a race should be full of boldness and invention, and as little imitative as possible.'[1] Attitudes like these mark a new phase in Australian development and draw a line between his work and that of his predecessors. But Harpur also insisted, 'though utterly a republican in my politics, speculatively, I yet believe, that it will be best for Australia to continue, during the present century (at the very least) a part of the British monarchy . . . Great Poets and Genuine lovers of poetry are always democratic'.[2] A sense of individual responsibility for the country's welfare and improvement inspired all his writing.

Images of architecture and sculpture feature in Harpur's poetry. He often composed on a grand scale, but he was also highly responsive to details of the weather – storms, clouds, rainbows, moonlight, starlight, dusk and dawn – as well as drought-stricken landscapes. For all his ruggedness, some of his most attractive poems are those of precise observation and sensuous and airy enjoyment, as in the sharply observed 'A Midsummer Noon in the Australian Forest', one of his best-known reflective pastorals, or in 'A Rural Picture', which remained for too long an unknown part of the Harpur oeuvre.

> All simple sights of rural life to me
> Are fresh or beautiful. Look down the stream,
> Where past the first broad shade a dappled cow
> Stoops her meek head over the grassy brink,
> And then, with rapid and strong gulphs, indraws
> The liquid joy: and though at length sufficed,
> Still over it she keeps her neck declined
> And breathes her herby breath upon the water,
> Ruffling the image of herself below.
> As there, with pendant head and dappled sides,
> It stands reversed: Herself and Shadow, – both
> Total expressions of an utter comfort.

Harpur was a wide-ranging, prolific poet who wrote in all the major poetic forms. He was determined to be, like Wordsworth and Shelley, a philosophical and intellectual poet as well as a dramatist. He said of his own work: 'Poetry has never been a mere art with me but always the vehicle of earnest purpose. Nay, rather might I say, that it has always been the audible expression of the inmost impulses of my moral being, the very breath of my spiritual life.'[3] In 'The Dream by the Fountain' he records how the

> Muse of the forest enjoined on him:
> Be then the Bard of thy Country! O rather,
> Should such be thy choice than a monarchy wide,
> Lo, 'tis the Land of the grave of thy father!
> 'Tis the cradle of Liberty! – Think, and decide.

1 Elizabeth Perkins (ed.), *The Poetical Works of Charles Harpur*, A&R, 1984, p. 506.
2 Michael Ackland (ed.), *Charles Harpur: Selected Poetry and Prose*, Penguin, 1986, pp. 22, 46.
3 Charles Harpur, 'My Own Poetry', in ibid., p. 33.

Harpur is a serious political poet and satirist, ranging from pointed squibs and quatrains that attack restrictive ideas to a work like 'The Temple of Infamy' that ridicules his political enemies. His philosophical sequences and long poems display his strenuous intellectual reach. 'The World and the Soul' (originally 'Geologia', 1847) is a daring poem about the soul and its place in the scheme of things, where Harpur speculates on evolution and the development of man and the growth of art, music, poetry, religion and virtue. He celebrates the indestructible power of the soul to progress towards 'Perfection' through 'Creation and advancement' up to 'the unfailing consciousness of God'. This strangely moving and impressive poem asserts his belief in spiritual evolution and the power of knowledge to lead man to final enlightenment. The religious and philosophical views are embedded in the currents of belief and thought of Harpur's time, but the poem has a note of affirmation and conviction that lifts it above the level of the speculative versification of its period. Harpur's sense of personal dedication and election is apparent in all he wrote. This is expressed directly in a poem like 'The Dream by the Fountain', indirectly in his narrative and landscape poems, which communicate a sense of the grandeur and glory of God to the awed spectator. Poems like 'The Temple of Infamy', and the short poems on literary themes in which he attacks rival styles and literary enemies and attempts to demolish restrictive ideas, have edge and relevance even today. Classical and biblical subjects and references give Harpur scope for his preoccupation with the sublime; they also give him the chance to inscribe himself into the large tradition of the European Romantics.

Harpur's nature, landscape and narrative poems, in which he tries to come to terms with the Australian environment, are still his most widely read. Many later writers have focused on the monotony of the Australian landscape, merging their sense of its social and cultural limitations with the sense of the repetitive sameness of the land. Harpur emphasises its picturesque and dramatic qualities, his verse enlivened by a sense of discovery and revelation. Working within the late 18th-century and early Romantic tradition of descriptive and landscape poems, his subjects and titles – 'The Bush Fire', 'Dawn and Sunrise in the Snowy Mountains', 'A Coast View' – echo those of many colonial paintings from Henry Gritten to Eugene von Guérard. There is the same sense of views, visions and vastness, the awe-inspiring spectacle, but Harpur has a unique way of closing in on detail: 'A Coast View', for instance, is a fine example of how he brings broad survey and close-up observation together. He has a sharp eye for rock formations and clouds, eagles and sea birds. His long poem 'The Kangaroo Hunt' contains some remarkably precise observations on the magpie and the sulphur-crested cockatoo.

Harpur believed in the use of verse as a political instrument; he knew how to nurse a grudge and hug a resentment; and historians of colonial culture have paid attention to the part he played as a reformer in his society. He took his role as a public poet seriously, but his scope and ambition have never been accurately weighed. *The Sorrows of Chatterton, or Genius Lost* (1836–7) is contemporaneous with Alfred de Vigny's play *Chatterton* (1835) and both are concerned with the trials of poetic genius in its attempt

to remain undefeated by the world's neglect and disregard. Chatterton was a key figure for the English Romantic poets – Shelley, Keats, Coleridge and Wordsworth – and the question of the poet's role in society was a vexed one for the European poets of the time. The example of genius destroyed by a hostile and uncomprehending world had a particularly strong resonance for Harpur and Kendall in the remote antipodean colony.

Among Harpur's most ambitious poems are *The Tower of the Dream*, published in pamphlet form in 1865, and *The Witch of Hebron*. *The Tower of the Dream*, a blank-verse narrative with song interludes, recalls the atmosphere and trappings of a gothic novel with touches of Poe fantasy, and it is curiously effective as an early Romantic exploration of the world of dream and vision, sleep and music. Open to various allegorical interpretations, it can be seen, through its images of night and darkness, to show the forces of tyranny preventing the dreamer's union with love and liberty, or the poet's longing to be reunited with his anima. It can lend itself to Freudian and Jungian schematisations. It is part of the age-old power of the Eden theme in literature, the search for primal unity, to be able to provoke a whole range of resonances.

The Witch of Hebron, which he boasted to Kendall was 'as magnificent as an oriental palace and terrible as a thunderstorm',was Harpur's last major achievement, his attempt to round off his career with a poem of epic proportions.[4] It is a powerful narrative of nearly 2000 lines of blank verse, drawing on the oriental moral tales so popular in the 18th century. The seven-part narrative tells of a mysterious beautiful woman possessed by an evil spirit. Rabbi Joseph, a wise doctor, exorcises the spirit that then tells the story of its various transformations. Caught in the struggle between good and evil, it has passed through various reincarnations in search of salvation. Like Faust, it is given new life in return for his soul. It comes under the influence of the evil spirit Sammael but is rescued by divine angels and becomes a lion and an eagle. Under the renewed influence of Sammael it inhabits the bodies of women and is finally reborn as the daughter of Rabbi Josephi's friend Bin Baghal. As the woman dies, she begs the rabbi to pray for her.

Classical and biblical subjects were as important to colonial as to European Romantics, and they gave Harpur, always an eclectic poet, the same opportunity to display his preoccupation with the sublime and the visionary as did his larger landscape poems. Australian readers have always rated Harpur's landscape and nature poems more highly than the rest of his work because in them we see the process by which aspects of Australia were named and colonised and transformed. But no understanding of the colonial poets is complete without some knowledge of their works based on classical, biblical and oriental themes, which relate them directly to similar poems written in England and Europe at the same time. Equally significant are the poems in which he explores the inner realms of the human psyche. A neglected poem like 'The Drowned,

4 Charles Harpur to Henry Kendall, Euroma, 19 January 1867, in ibid., p. 166.

Alive', where he tries to fathom the last moments of a dying man, add another dimension to colonial poetry.

Henry Kendall: 'Native Australian Poet'

Henry Kendall, the most obviously lyrical of the major colonial poets, was a writer of exceptional facility and virtuosity. His work fell into partial eclipse until the latter half of the 20th century, when the slow revival of interest in colonial culture started to gather momentum. Compared with Harpur's craggy and austere will, Kendall can at times seem glibly fluent, but he remains by any reasonable criterion an outstanding poet.

His first volume *Poems and Songs* (1862), published when he was 23, is a work of extraordinary precocity and technical fluency. In it he declares his ambition to be a 'Native Australian Poet', and from the first his poetry reflects his local environment, especially the landscapes of the coast south of Sydney, with its creeks and waterfalls, ferns and moss, its lyre-birds and native trees, its forests and mountains, seen through a veil of feeling and longing. Kendall is not a clear objective observer like Harpur: he is more impressionistic and weaves a more cunningly emotional music, centred on effects of light and an atmospheric play of green and gold. But Kendall was as patriotic as Harpur and gave added voice to the aspirations towards nationhood of his time. He had a strong feeling for particular places and loved using local names in the titles of his poems. He records significant happenings in the history of the country, especially the exploits of the explorers, but from the beginning his idealising tendencies dominate. In his personal poems he expresses a longing for Aidenn (Eden) – the possibility of a perfect life – and a yearning for an ideal love relationship. A pervasive melancholy sets the emotional tone and a recognition of his own shortcomings forms the subject matter of some of the most poignant of his personal lyrics. His sense of the ideal was so acute that it seemed humanly unattainable. Kendall was haunted by a vision of a world beyond this world, a virgin world of 'unknown shores', 'undiscovered skies' and 'cliffs and coast by man untrodden', 'the land where man hath never been, the country where ethereal glory shines'. Images of yet unrevealed parts of Australia suggest a space where the ideal might be recovered. In his early poems we see him

> Yearning for a bliss unworldly, yearning for a brighter change,
> Yearning for the mystic Aidenn, built beyond this mountain range.

The longing is often incarnate in a lost love and linked to a geographical image 'beyond this mountain range'.

Kendall's attempt to present the life of the Aborigines, even to incorporate some of their words in his laments and death songs – ' Kooroora', 'Urara' and 'Ulmarra' – is an important aspect of his early poetry, probably influenced by Harpur's example in 'An Aboriginal Mother's Lament'. The representation of the Aboriginal and the

attempt to understand Aboriginal life that one finds in poems like Eliza Dunlop's 'The Aboriginal Mother' and Honora Frances Kelly's 'King Jimmy' is a strong vein running through colonial poetry, but there are shifts of tone as the century progresses. Kendall preserved ambiguously comic exercises like 'Black Lizzie' (1877), 'Black Kate' (1880) and 'Peter the Piccaninny' (1880), and there is a coarsening when we come to some of James Brunton Stephens' pieces which point to shifting attitudes. By 1898 A. Patchett Martin was declaring: 'you cannot write epics on the Australian blacks: you might as well compose a sonata on a monkey'[5] – a sideswipe at George Gordon McCrae.

Leaves from Australian Forests (1869) shows Kendall coming into his full range and power as a poet, though the years since his first book were a time of personal hardship. Although he was supported by a group of friends and had a strong sense of belonging to a literary milieu – he was a well-read and highly competent critic – his books did not sell well or provide him with an income. He had family and money troubles, and in 1869, six months before his book was published, he moved to Melbourne, at that time the literary centre of Australia, where he thought his prospects would be better. It proved an unwise decision.

Leaves from Australian Forests includes nature and landscape poems, love poems, commemorative verses, and those memorial poems which are such an important contribution to the elegy tradition in Australian poetry. There are narratives with Australian subject matter, and others based on biblical and classical themes: 'A Death in the Bush' followed by 'The Voyage of Telegonus'. The colonial painter Robert Dowling saw no discrepancy between painting one large canvas of a 'Group of Natives of Tasmania' and another of a 'Sheikh and his son entering Cairo on their return from a pilgrimage to Mecca', and there was no sense of discrepancy in Kendall who drew on the life and history of the world around him as well as the whole range of his European inheritance. Tennyson, Browning, Arnold, Rossetti and Swinburne explored classical and biblical subject matter, and it was natural to Kendall to work in this area.

Leaves from Australian Forests features some of Kendall's most achieved lyrics – 'Moss on a Wall', 'Araluen', and 'Arakoon', poems of dreams, nostalgia, loss, and of moments of recovered peace and wholeness in a landscape where the setting heals and restores. It also contains 'Bell Birds' and 'September in Australia', the two lyrics by which Kendall was best known. Both are musicalised idealisations of real places and things and show Kendall moving in the same direction as a number of European and English poets (Verlaine and Swinburne, for example) who were exploring the possibilities of the extreme musicalisation of verse:

> By channels of coolness the echoes are calling,
> And down the dim gorges I hear the creek falling;
> It lives in the mountain, where moss and the sedges
> Touch with their beauty the banks and the ledges;

5 A. Patchett Martin, *The Beginnings of an Australian Literature*, Henry Sotheran & Co., 1898, p. 30.

Through brakes of the cedar and sycamore bowers
Struggles the light that is love to the flowers.
And, softer than slumber, and sweeter than singing,
The notes of the bell-birds are running and ringing.

Kendall wants to evoke moods and feelings as well as things remembered, but he lacks the accuracy of observation that can capture an intangible state. An example of how sound can dominate over sense is the curious line in 'September in Australia': 'wild wings with the halo of hyaline hours', where the alliteration seems to be intended to express a sense of a halcyon moment, but fails to do so because no field of reference for the sound pattern is set up in the lines.

Although Kendall's reputation rested for many years on his lyrics, the four main narrative poems in *Leaves from Australian Forests* show the range and variety of his talent. 'The Voyage of Telegonus', 'King Saul at Gilboa', 'A Death in the Bush' and 'The Glen of Arrawatta' have been increasingly admired since A. D. Hope's 1973 reassessment. Hope wrote of 'King Saul at Gilboa', 'what is astonishing about the poem is the tragic force of its language, and the tense, driving energy of its verse'. Writing in heroic couplets, Kendall is able to suggest the rise and fall, the ebb and flow of the energies involved in battle, and the whole has a controlled emotional logic that makes it one of his finest poems. The need to reinterpret an old story, yet to keep close to fact, gives his narratives a crispness of line that makes them structurally more compact than some of the lyrics with their often unpruned exuberance. Critics have recently speculated on an autobiographical, psycho-sexual subtext in these poems, but they all show affiliations with other poets: 'Saul at Gilboa' to Tennyson's 'The Passing of Arthur'; 'The Voyage of Telegonus' to Matthew Arnold's 'Sohrab and Rustum'; Rossetti wrote a 'Lilith', Arnold a 'Merope'. 'Ogyges', Kendall himself remarked, was 'after the manner of Tennyson's "Tithonus" and Horne's "Orion"',[6] while the pervasive influence of the Wordsworth of 'Michael' can be sensed in settler narratives like 'The Glen of Arrawatta' and 'A Death in the Bush'. Whatever the personal elements, one cannot overlook the seriousness and scope of Kendall's literary ambitions here. If he was not exactly competing with his mentors, he was asking to be compared with poets overseas who had dealt with similar material. Kendall's Australian narratives owe much to Harpur's poems on the early days, particularly 'The Creek of the Four Graves'. They in turn influenced other attempts to depict the pioneering days and to give poetic shape to the history of the country.

Songs from the Mountains (1880) contains some of Kendall's finest poems and several new points of departure. Kendall had a high sense of the poet's calling, but in some of his satires, and in poems like 'Jim the Splitter' and 'Bill the Bullock Driver', he espouses the more openly sardonic vernacular approaches of the time. The poems written in 'The Shadow of 1872' – 'The Voice in the Wild Oak', 'Narrara Creek', 'Mooni' – as

6 T. T. Reed (ed.), *The Poetical Works of Henry Kendall*, Libraries Board of South Australia, 1966, p. 103.

well as 'Araluen' and 'On a Street' are marked by the conflicts and tragedies of his own life; all have curious touches of pathos, and a poignant distinction.

Two of the most important poems in the book are 'To a Mountain', the opening poem, in which he addresses the sources of his poetic inspiration; and 'The Sydney International Exhibition' (1879), originally entitled 'Australia', one of the long line of poems to bear that title. 'The Sydney International Exhibition' recalls the aspirations of Wentworth's *Australasia* (1823) and with its admiration for the discovery and settlement of the country looks forward to the series of so-called 'voyager poems' of the late 1930s and 1940s that start with Kenneth Slessor and Robert FitzGerald. In an opening address to Calliope, the muse of epic poetry, Kendall claims

> What though the face of thy fair heaven beams
> Still only on the crystal Grecian streams –
> What though a sky of new, strange beauty shines
> Where no white Dryad sings within the pines:
> Here is a land whose large, imperial grace
> Must tempt thee, goddess, in thine holy place! . . .
> And shall Australia, framed and set in sea,
> August with glory, wait in vain for thee?

Australian colonial poetry is haunted by a phantom epic on the subject of the discovery of the Great South Land and the construction of 'Australia'. A number of poets contributed reports and sightings – imperial and national – but it remained unwritten as a single concerted work. Kendall's 'Australia' gives a better outline than most of the shape it could have taken. It celebrates in forceful couplets Australia's past, its natural beauty and gradual discovery, from the first explorers to the arrival of Captain Cook in 'the bay of flowers' making way for the later appearance of Arthur Phillip and the First Fleet. It sketches in the development of Sydney itself, 'the shining city of a hundred spires', and foresees the future of the nation, posing a question that continues to haunt Australian poetry:

> Where are the woods that, ninety summers back,
> Stood hoar with ages by the water track?
> Where are the valleys of the flashing wing,
> The dim green margins, and the glimmering spring?
> Where now the warrior of the forest race,
> His glaring war-paint, and his fearless face?
> The banks of April, and the groves of bird,
> The glades of silence, and the pools unstirred?

Kendall's poem celebrates the benefits of colonial expansion – the carving of a city out of the wilderness – and proudly proclaims the qualities that have gone into the development of the nation:

The human hands of strong, heroic men
Broke down the mountain, filled the gaping glen,
Ran streets through swamp, built banks against the foam
And bent the arch and raised the lordly dome.

The various styles found in Kendall's poetry reflect his cultural situation. A colonial poet, he celebrated his developing nation in the authoritative impersonal tones and moulds of Augustan public poetry, which survived here long after they had fallen out of fashion in England. His personal sorrows and regrets were voiced in plangent lyrics that draw on Victorian Romantic traditions, including parlour songs. Kendall himself believed that his descriptive nature poetry was his best. He wrote to J. Brunton Stephens on 5 June 1880, 'I was born in the forests and the mountains were my sponsors. Hence I am saturated with the peculiar spirit of Australian scenery.'[7]

Kendall's 'To a Mountain' is often read as an assessment of his whole poetic career. It praises the mountain landscape, the rivers, the green and gold of foliage and light and it contrasts the endurance and spiritual force of the mountain with his own fraught and unstable world:

. . . These are the broken words
Of blind occasions, when the World has come
Between me and my Dream. No song is here
Of mighty compass; for my singing robes
I've worn in stolen moments. All my days
Have been the days of a laborious life,
And ever on my struggling soul has burned
The fierce heat of this hurried sphere. But thou,
To whose fair majesty I dedicate
My book of rhymes – thou hast the perfect rest
Which makes the heaven of the highest gods!

Kendall frequently lamented 'the lot austere / that waits upon the writer here', but whatever the difficulties of his life, his poetry gives a strong sense of context, of being embedded in the life and society of his time. Like Harpur's aspiration to be 'the founder of the country's poetic heritage', Kendall's to be recognised as a 'Native Australian Poet' was fulfilled.

Adam Lindsay Gordon: 'gentleman in exile and a national school of Australian poetry'

Adam Lindsay Gordon landed in Adelaide at the age of 20 and, after his death, became the most famous and popular poet of his time. He is the only Australian to be given

7 Leonie Kramer and A. D. Hope (eds), *Henry Kendall*, Sun Books, 1973, p. xvii.

a place in Poets' Corner in Westminster Abbey – as the poet of Australia – and the only Australian included in the Oxford Standard Authors series. His Anglo-Australian background gave him a wider appeal than that available to either Harpur or Kendall, and he was long thought to epitomise the colonial experience. Gordon's directness and sense of purposeful energy, his image as the bushman who was a gentleman's son, devoted to the classics and the sporting life in a country where horsemanship was appreciated, found the popular recognition which eluded Harpur and Kendall. Gordon had an uncommon knack for catching the mood of the moment. Even his once notorious description of Australia as a 'land where bright blossoms are scentless, / And songless bright birds' captures the sense of difference and estrangement felt by many newcomers. His marvellous image of the knotted and weirdly patterned trunks of the eucalypt – which he compares with Egyptian obelisks, insect-marked in a way that suggests hieroglyphs – shows an extraordinary individuality of response, inaugurating a vein of almost surrealist observation later poets exploited. Poems like 'An Exile's Farewell' and 'Early Adieux' gave authority to the notion that Australian colonial poetry was 'a poetry of exiles' but Gordon also popularised images that have become Australian icons. He has a fine Byronic sense of the surf and swimming; he is the laureate of the wattle as well as of the horse. No wonder Marcus Clarke saw in his work 'something very like the beginnings of a national school of Australian poetry'.[8]

Gordon's work opens still unexplored spaces in colonial poetics. He is a more varied poet than is usually recognised. His first published book, *The Feud* (1864), written to match a set of engravings, has a consistently strong narrative line and illustrates how important Gordon's Scottish heritage was to him. He was able to use the tradition of ballad poetry – through the border ballads to Macaulay, Scott, Southey and Campbell – to forge new links with the emerging Australian bush ballad tradition. But for all his love of the life of action and adventure, Gordon was a literary poet, fond of the classical writers and Latin tags: his work appealed to a learned audience as well as to a wide one. *Ashtaroth* (1867) for example – his attempt to revive the Faust theme – shows the influence of the gothic novel in colonial Australia. Much in Gordon anticipates Paterson and the whole range of Australian balladists, but there is a sense of melancholy and pessimistic self-reproach in poems like 'Wormwood and Nightshade' and '*Quare Fastisgasti*' that is uniquely his own. Gordon always referred to his poems as 'ballads' and 'rhymes', suggesting verse that is direct and down to earth, but that is only part of the story.

Sea Spray and Smoke Drift (1867) contains one of Gordon's most characteristic poems, 'Ye Wearie Wayfarer', which begins:

8 Marcus Clarke, 'Preface' to Adam Lindsay Gordon, *Poems*, Robert A. Thompson & Co., 1898, p. ix.

Lightly the breath of the spring wind blows,
Though laden with faint perfume.
'Tis the fragrance rare that the bushman knows,
The scent of the wattle bloom.

This easy evocation of a typical Australian scene – rider resting under tree, horse rolling on the ground – depicts a time, a place, a mood familiar to all his readers; but the whole poem is saturated with memories of England and the times of his youth. The linking of two sites and times together in a relaxed, conversational way was the great source of Gordon's appeal.

We cannot hope to understand the colonial experience as a whole without Gordon's poetry: its salutary common sense, its stoic fatalism. People wanted Gordon's expressions of practical wisdom; his emphasis on fortitude spoke to their needs; and his responses to the Australian landscape touched a common chord. *Bush Ballads and Galloping Rhymes* (1870), published the day before Gordon shot himself, features the poems by which he is best known, 'The Sick Stockrider', 'How We Beat the Favourite', 'A Dedication', 'From the Wreck', 'The Romance of Britomarte', 'Wolf and Hound' and 'The Rhyme of Joyous Garde'. 'The Sick Stock Rider', the most famous of them all, is an elegy for the vanishing of the whole Anglo-Australian phase. The subject had already appeared in verse from the 1840s, but Gordon's poem with its 'dying fall', its reminiscing note and its celebration of a shared past has given it classic status. Its roll call of names and its *ubi sunt* theme suggest some of the possibilities and limitations of colonial life and its rhythms, the acceptance of, and resignation to, the inevitable. The poem achieved its immense popularity by touching the great commonplaces of human thought and feeling. Barcroft Boake wrote to his father in 1889: 'there is not a bushman or a drover who does not know a verse or two of "How we Beat the Favorite" or "The Sick Stockrider" . . . Gordon is the favourite – I may say only – poet of the back blocker.'[9]

Gordon's reputation has waxed and waned over the years with the fluctuations of interest in colonial culture; critics are now finding more and more biographical subtexts in his work as they explore his melancholy and his daemonic and reckless self-destructiveness. Harpur and Kendall wanted to write themselves into the European tradition, while asserting their place as *Australian* poets. Gordon simply did so without question or struggle. His poetry like theirs carries a fair amount of high Victorian cultural luggage and draws on Arthurian legends, the Faust theme, Spanish bullfighting, the *femme fatale*, military exploits and the war in the Crimea. 'The Sick Stockrider' sums up his response to the colonial experience he knew so well. All the major colonial poets had a profound impact on the poetry of their time: Harpur and Kendall through their depiction and transformation of the landscape; Gordon gave the bush ballad its authority and status.

9 Barcroft Boake, *Where the Dead Men Lie and Other Poems*, A&R, 1913, p. 200.

Women poets, 1826–1888

Women wrote prolifically in the colonies and were responsible for some of the best and most enduring poems in the archive.[10] Among the early writers, Mary Leman Grimstone, who arrived in Van Diemen's Land in 1826, Mary Bailey and Eliza Dunlop remain for the most part uncollected; Fidelia Hill has been republished recently in Adelaide. Women poets of the next generation – Caroline Carleton, Caroline Leakey, Ada Cambridge, Emily Manning (Australie), Mary Hannay Foott and Catherine Martin – added to the palette of colonial verse. Leakey's nostalgic 'English Wild Flowers' expresses the longing for Home of the woman in exile; Emma Anderson's 'Evening', a premonition of her early death. Moods of depression and states of isolation, the sense of being in unfamiliar and uncongenial surroundings, are particularly well caught by such poets. Mary Hannay Foott's 'Where the Pelican Builds' brought a new inwardness to the more robust bush song and ballad tradition, suggesting the ghostly presences of the European ballad. Carleton, on the other hand, whose national 'Song of Australia' (1867) was one of the most popular poems of the time, focused, like her male counterparts, on public issues rather than the private self.

Manning and Cambridge reflect the crisis of faith – the issues of doubt and belief – which marked Victorian poetry: Manning in a dissatisfaction with the human lot, Cambridge in relation to the position of women in marriage and questions of female sexuality. Manning, who had a strong social conscience, was preoccupied with dualities, whether between the rich and the poor, the young and the old, the healthy and the maimed, the advantaged and the disadvantaged. Her few nature and landscape poems, which respond sensitively to the Australian scene, are among the finest that the century produced. The beautifully sustained 'From the Clyde to Braidwood' strikes a freshly personal note while still using the recurring point of comparison between the old world and the new. The richly detailed 'The Weatherboard Fall' is an impressive meditation on the role of art in the scheme of things.

Cambridge and Martin, now better known for their novels, made significant contributions to 19th-century poetry. Martin's long narrative poem, *The Explorers* (1874), came close to being the epic the time was seeking. Where earlier attempts look to the 18th century and its values, Martin's poem belongs to Victorian poetry with Tennyson as a guiding presence. A modern mix in rhyming couplets, it is divided into five parts, centred on the story of Burke and Wills and the failure of their 1860–1 expedition to cross the continent from south to north. This event also fired Kendall ('The Fate of the Explorers' and 'Christmas Creek'), R. H. Horne ('The Explorers'), Gordon ('Gone'), Emma Frances Anderson ('Thoughts Suggested by the Fate of Mr Burke and his companion, Australian Explorers, who died in the bush') and Margaret Thomas ('Death in the Bush').

10 Patricia Clarke, *Pen Portraits: women writers and journalists in nineteenth century Australia*, A&U, 1988, gives a detailed survey of the field.

For a while it looked as if the theme of doomed exploration would supersede that of the discovery of the Great South Land and the celebration of the triumphs of British and colonial enterprise. The image of Australia Felix was starting to waver. Martin's main focus is on the course of the expedition and the death of the explorers; a final dream-vision celebrates the meaning of exploration and its significance for the future of Australia, free of want and 'the evils of the old world' – a recurrent note in Australian verse. It is a finely structured poem, with a skilful management of tone and mood, the landscape details acutely observed.

Cambridge's outspoken *Unspoken Thoughts*, published anonymously in 1887, spoke of the woe that is in marriage. She later withdrew the volume from circulation for reasons now impossible to determine. Cambridge had a clear awareness of the position of women in the society of her time as well as of social injustice and inequalities. Like many Victorians she suffered a loss of faith, and early critics perceptively compared her with Arnold, Clough and Tennyson. As a clergyman's wife, she was particularly aware of the way habit and rigid convention can deaden spiritual spontaneity. Her book is a striking assertion of independence.

Australian colonial literary production had an extraordinary density and intensity, given the population at the time. Every colony has its own separate history of publishing and literary activity. Nevertheless there was always a sense of metropolitan culture and civilised values associated with London, the headquarters where the reputations were made and the rewards and honours found. London – England – remained significant reference points until decades after World War II, and the need for overseas recognition was an important element in the development and shaping of most Australian writers. The editor of Harpur's posthumous *Poems* (1883) stated in his preface: 'the editor of these poems brings them to the press with the conviction that they deserve the best attention of the literary public of Australia, and with the hope that they may earn – what their author always coveted – some sympathetic recognition from the sons of song in England.'[11]

Colonial subject matter and poetic forms

During the whole colonial period the never-ending process of assimilating the landscape, of describing it and naming new places, animals and plants and capturing them in verse continues, as does the recording of local historical and political events. One can trace the appearance in colonial poetry of the first black swan, the first branch of wattle, the first kangaroo, the first lyrebird. *The Poets' Discovery: Nineteenth-Century Australia in*

11 Charles Harpur, *Poems*, ed. H. M. Martin, George Robertson, 1883, p xiii. This volume has an elegantly designed opening page with a message from Mary Harpur, the poet's wife: 'This book, the work of one of the earliest of our national poets is dedicated to the Australian People in the belief that, while it has a special claim to their regard, it will be found not unworthy to take a place in the literature of every English-speaking community.'

Verse (1990) brings a huge amount of colonial verse production into focus. The topics of its 200 poems, some by writers of modest ability, include Aborigines, absence, bush deaths, bushrangers, Chinese, convicts, drought, droving, exile, explorers, gold mining, gum trees, horses, kangaroos, pubs, poets and alcohol, rivers and streams, sheep, sport, squatters, suicide, war, wilderness and women – add cemeteries and gaols to the list and we have the staple subject-matter of Australian colonial verse, encapsulating large swathes of its history. Colonial poets were also consistently responsive to major political and historical happenings in other countries – Italy, the Crimea, Poland, New Zealand, the United States of America.[12] Harpur, for instance, has a sonnet 'On the Easter Illumination of St Peter's at Rome' (1850); Henry Halloran wrote a memorial tribute on the death of his Royal Highness Prince Leopold, Duke of Albany; and Mary Hannay Foott addressed poems to Tolstoy, Charles Dickens, Napoleon III, William II and General Gordon. Australia never lost its sense of connectedness to Europe and the rest of the world. Even writers like Harpur and Kendall saw Australia as part of European history.

Translation and satire

Another manifestation of the sense of connection to Europe is the large body of translation that forms a staple ingredient of colonial poetic production. One of the most sustained works was the version (1854) by the explorer Sir Thomas Livingstone Mitchell of the great Portuguese epic *The Lusiads* by Camoens (1572), a work of great significance for its period. Harpur has passages from Homer; Gordon was familiar with the Greek and Roman classics and also translated from the French and Spanish. Clarke, Mary Bailey, Henry Halloran and many other colonial writers were adept translators of classical verse. It is striking how frequently poets were translated in colonial times. Catherine Martin produced substantial versions from the German of Chamisso, Herder, Uhland, Heine, Goethe and Schiller. Her volume *The Explorers* also contains a translation of Act 1 of Racine's *Phèdre*. Lang and Foott made skilful translations from German poets. There were various attempts across the different decades to present versions of Aboriginal laments and songs. Both Lang and Manning wrote a number of hymns, perhaps following the example of William Cowper and his imitators, and there was a firm tradition of hymn writing at the time, best seen in the work of Cambridge.

A clear line of satire runs through Australian colonial writing, from the anonymous pipes that flourished in the first years of the settlement in New South Wales, through Wentworth, to the vigorous political satires of the 1830s and 1840s; from *The Van Diemen's Land Warriors* (1827) by Pindar Juvenal, the first separate volume of verse published in Tasmania, to Henry Lingham's observations on social life and culture,

12 See subject index of Richard Jordan and Peter Pierce (eds), *The Poets' Discovery: Nineteenth-Century Australia in Verse*, MUP, 1990.

Juvenal in Melbourne (1892). These poems have their merits, as well as documentary and historical interest, like the more ambitious and vitriolic satires of Harpur and Kendall, William Forster and Maxwell Miller that are so deeply embedded in the literary and political issues and controversies of their time. Political questions involving the constitution, land reform, transportation, immigration – particularly at the time of the gold rushes with the influx of the Chinese – and the developing republican debate fuelled much of the argumentative and topical verse of the time.[13] If the satirical viewpoint implies a condemnation of an existing state of affairs and a vision of another order of things that contrasts with the one under review, then some of the sharpest and freshest colonial satires are found in the convict ballads with their affirmation of the larrikin spirit – in Frank the Poet's 'A Convict's Tour to Hell' (1839), for example – in some of the bush ballads, and even in some of the light verse of poets like Patchett Martin and Victor Daley, who also wrote as Creeve Roe. Humorous verse of the late 1870s and 80s – like Kendall's character sketches and Brunton Stephens' 'My Chinee Cook', 'My Other Chinee Cook' and 'Quart Pot Creek' – predate a style of writing that becomes extremely popular in the *Bulletin* of the 1890s – patronising, affectionate, at once self-deprecating and self-assertive, with all the complications and ambiguities that caricature and cartoon entail. Some of these poems can seem arch to modern tastes, but they also illustrate the uneasy relationship between inherited European culture and its relevance to available local subject matter.

Whether lyrics, squibs, satires or extended narratives, Australian colonial verse draws on the European cultural heritage in its depiction of local experience and knowledge. On the whole, colonial writers interpret Australian reality through the English, American and European authors of their time. There is some Victorian moralising in the literary poetry; newspaper verse which pinpoints immediate events and topics is often sharper and crisper. The best poems are immediate and unpretentious, part of the attempt to forge an Australian identity and to find and define some sense of personal and national stability. There are many writers and many voices, but Australian colonial poetry – apart from the major figures – is not poetry of great diversity. There is a certain homogeneity of style and forms, though the level of verse craft and technical surefootedness is always impressive. As Brian Elliott points out in his pioneering study *The Landscape of Australian Poetry* (1967), Australian colonial poetry displays no exciting formal pluralism.[14] Given the state of Australian society at the time, one would not expect to find any of the revolutionary movements or shifts in taste that occur in 19th-century French poetry, for instance, none of the eccentric poets that one finds in Victorian, or American, poetry – though Kendall and O'Dowd were familiar with the

13 For more on this see Brian Elliott and Adrian Mitchell (eds), *Bards in the Wilderness: Australian Colonial Poetry to 1920*, Nelson, 1970, pp. xxiii–xxiv and passim; and Vincent O'Sullivan, *The Unsparing Scourge: Australian Satirical Texts, 1845–1860*, Centre for Studies in Australian Literature, University of Western Australia, 1988.

14 See the chapter 'A Ramage of Small Voices' in Brian Elliot, *The Landscape of Australian Poetry*, F. W. Cheshire, 1967, pp. 120–34.

work of Walt Whitman. There were no experiments with free verse or prose poetry before the advent of modernism.

First maps of Australian verse

By 1880 the major exploration of Australia had been completed, the *Bulletin* founded. Kendall's death in 1882 marked the close of an era. To mark the centenary of 1888 it was time to start drawing up a map of Australian poetic achievement. Douglas Sladen, the writer and historian who was briefly in Australia, brought out three stocktaking anthologies: *Australian Poets, 1788–1888*, dedicated to Edmund Gosse, one of the leading men of letters in England, *Australian Ballads and Rhymes* and *A Century of Australian Song*. Sladen saw Australia as the country of the future and he wanted to showcase the poetry of the Australian colonies for readers in the Old Country – 'To lay before the English public A Selection of Poems inspired by Life and Scenery in Australia'. These were prescient anthologies, knowledgeable and thorough, intended to expand the poets' audience, and they set a secure foundation for the study of 19th-century Australian poetry. Sladen highlighted the best known poets of the time and focused on signature poems: 'The Creek of the Four Graves', 'A Storm in the Mountains', 'Bell Birds', 'September in Australia', 'To a Mountain', 'From the Clyde to Braidwood', 'The Sick Stockrider'; he included humorous poems by Brunton Stephens, one of the laureates of the dominion of Australia and, later, of Federation. If Sladen wanted to exhibit present achievement he also wanted to feature the past. He included important early texts by George Barrington, Barron Field, William Charles Wentworth; a valuable appendix of Bush Songs which pointed the way to Banjo Paterson's landmark *Old Bush Songs* (1905); the 1862 *Athenaeum* review of Kendall's manuscript *Poems* and a long scholarly note on Barron Field's *First Fruits of Australian Poetry*. He included numerous women writers – Emma Anderson, Caroline Leakey, Mary Hannay Foott – either in the body of the anthology or in the long historical survey that introduces it, giving a strong sense of the continuing tradition of Australian colonial verse. It is a remarkable collection for its time, and it has never been fully appreciated.

By the end of the 1880s Henry Lawson, Banjo Paterson and Christopher Brennan were emerging. With them Australian poetry moves in new directions, as the colonies moved towards federation, but their work also maintains continuities with the poetry that preceded them.

5

No place for a book?

Fiction in Australia to 1890

TANYA DALZIELL

If the film *The Proposition* (2005) is anything to go by, 19th-century Australia was, at first glance, no place for a book. Set in a Queensland frontier town in the 1880s, the film opens with a dramatic shoot-out, establishing the idea that 'the outback' was brutal and bloody. Later, books make brief and telling appearances. We see blurred glimpses of them on the shelves of an English-style homestead, the home of Captain Maurice Stanley, who repeatedly proclaims his determination to civilise the land and its inhabitants. Stanley's wife Martha is shown alone, holding a volume and framed against a beautiful, desolate landscape, a shot that registers a sense of the escape and other-worldliness books might offer a woman marooned in this harsh, masculine environment. Books and reading are not only aligned in the film with the feminine, the melancholic and the domestic, however. The Irish outlaw Arthur Burns quotes poetry and is pictured in his cave-refuge with numerous books, making an interesting parallel with the Stanleys' homestead that complicates differentiations between law-enforcer and criminal. It also draws attention to the recruitment of literature, both in terms of thematic content and the cultural value it has been variously assigned, to assist in the fixity of social distinctions, especially in colonial contexts where they often seem ill-assured. And we are left to wonder whether the heavy books that lie open and ordered before Stanley on his study desk, as he casually consents to the murders of captured Aboriginal men, authorise such actions in legal terms, scientific theory or imaginative narrative, and if books to follow might record at all these lives soon-to-be extinguished.[1]

Archival photographs of white colonials and Aborigines accompany the opening and closing credits of *The Proposition*, lending it an air of historical authenticity and hinting that it is the visual realm of photography and film that is best suited to tell the truth about 19th-century Australia – of racism, of English–Irish tension, of frontier life for both women and men – in the face of the potential, and subsequently demonstrated, complicity of books in colonial projects.[2]

1 John Hillcoat, dir. *The Proposition*, Surefire Film 3 Production, 2005. An overview of representations of the Irish in colonial Australia appears in Fritz Clemens, 'Language, Change and Identity: The Irish in Nineteenth-Century Australia', in Tadhg Foley and Fiona Bateman (eds), *Irish Australian Studies: Papers Delivered at the Ninth Irish-Australia Conference, Galway, April 1997*, Crossing Press, 2000, pp. 57–81.

2 Postcolonial studies have contributed greatly to understandings of the roles fiction has played in imperial and colonial projects. Central theoretical texts include Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, 'Three Women's Texts and

At the same time, though, the film is arguably faithful less to the possibility of representing 19th-century Australia 'as it was' than to now familiar images that contrive such a time and place. The prostitutes who are the unintended casualties of the opening shoot-out recall stock orientalist imaginings of exotic, non-white female sexuality repeated in factual and fictional narratives in Australia and elsewhere in the British empire during the 19th and 20th centuries.[3] Their particular counterpart in colonial Australia was the 'Asian horde', figured most rabidly in William Lane's invasion novel, *White or Yellow? A Story of the Race War of A.D. 1908* (serialised in 1888 in 12 episodes in the *Boomerang*, the weekly Brisbane newspaper Lane co-founded and edited): its dystopic centrepiece is the spectre of Chinese migrants who 'overran everything'.[4] The lingering shot of Martha's bare unblemished shoulder as she bathes in an enamel tub relies on twinned notions around which colonial endeavours in Australia frequently turned,[5] namely that white (English) women embody the highest qualities of civilisation symbolically and a profound vulnerability physically, and which come together in the film's deeply disturbing *dénouement*, the rape of Martha.[6] Arthur Burns' Indigenous female companion is depicted as a mystical healer, a recognisable role for the 'native woman' in colonial narratives when not denigrated as the epitome of the primitive or cautiously approved of as a noble savage: her presence hints at miscegenation and as such, within the logic of colonial narratives founded in racial hierarchy and prejudice, further marks Burns, by association, as an outsider.

This figure of the rebel outlaw, tied with the genre of the Western that *The Proposition* exploits,[7] has itself a long history in Australian social and literary culture, most notably in the form of the bushranger which dates from at least Thomas Wells' *Michael Howe: The Last and Worst of the Bush Rangers of Van Diemen's Land* (1818) and David Burn's three-act play, *The Bushrangers* (performed in 1829 in Edinburgh); it finds one of its better-known representations in the aristocratic figure of Captain Starlight in Rolf

a Critique of Imperialism', *Critical Inquiry*, 12.1 (1985) pp. 243–61; Gauri Viswanathan, *Masks of Conquest: Literary Study and British Rule in India*, Faber & Faber, 1990; and Firdous Azim, *The Colonial Rise of the Novel*, Routledge, 1993.

3 For an influential account of these sexualised orientalist figures, see Alison Broinowski, *The Yellow Lady: Australian Impressions of Asia,* OUP, 1992.

4 William Lane, '"White or Yellow?" A Story of the Race-war of A.D. 1908', *Boomerang*, 14 (18 Feb. 1888), p. 9.

5 These figures found particular expressions in fictions that have come to be identified as captivity narratives. See Robert Dixon, 'Israel in Egypt: The Significance of Australian Captivity Narratives', *Writing the Colonial Adventure: Race, Gender and Nation in Anglo-Australian Popular Fiction, 1875–1914,* CUP, 1995, pp. 45–61; Kay Shaffer, *In the Wake of First Contact: The Eliza Fraser Stories*, CUP, 1995; Chris Healy, *From the Ruins of Colonialism: History as Social Memory*, CUP, 1997. See also Catherine Martin, *An Australian Girl*, 3 vols, Richard Bentley & Son, 1890, p. 86; J. D. Hennessey, *An Australian Bush Track*, Sampson Low, Marston & Co., 1896, p. 85.

6 This scene, with its images of sexual assault, is troubling not only in terms of affect – the event is shocking – but also with respect to its seemingly uncritical reliance on rape as a means by which Charlie Burns, the brother to whom Stanley directs the proposition, is enabled to settle his brotherly and moral allegiances. See Carol Hart, 'Portraits of Settler History in *The Proposition*', *Senses of Cinema* 38 (2006) http//:www.sensesofcinema.com/contents/06/38/proposition.html, accessed 3 June 2007.

7 Brian McFarlane, 'Brokeback and Outback', *Meanjin*, 65.1 (2006), pp. 65–71.

Boldrewood's best-selling *Robbery Under Arms* (first serialised in the *Sydney Mail* in 1882–3 and later published in revised form in 1888, and again in 1889).[8] With Starlight killed in a battle with the police, Dick Marston narrates the tale from his proper place behind bars awaiting execution: there is no questioning of lawful authority here. The story is told of cattle-duffing and bushranging in colonial New South Wales, of romance and betrayal (most notably by Warrigal, who negotiates with skill both Indigenous and non-Indigenous worlds, and is consequently regarded in the text with some distrust and ambivalence), and Marston is eventually granted his freedom. He marries his true love, Gracey Storefield, and heads to country Queensland 'right away up on the Barcoo', a place of new beginnings and opportunity: it is populated by fair-minded white settlers and station owners who are always willing to lend 'a helping hand' to a man who has 'given up cross doings, and means to go straight for the future',[9] quite unlike the depiction of frontier Queensland and its populace in *The Proposition*.

Such observations of *The Proposition* (and *Robbery Under Arms*) are not simply criticisms of culturally available images and narratives *per se*, as they might well be construed. They also strive both to recognise how 19th-century Australia now comes to us, and we to it, in the early 21st century, and to give an inkling of the demands the '19th century' continues to make on the present. While there are too many to list here in any categorical or comprehensive manner, the number of recent fictions alone that variously engage with this past attests to the ongoing imaginative force of 19th-century Australia and the narrative forms it takes. The tripartite structure of Gail Jones' *Sixty Lights* (2004), for instance, recalls the three-volume novel, and the interweaving of snapshot-like scenes from Charles Dickens' *Great Expectations* with the lives of Lucy and Thomas Strange, orphaned in colonial Australia in 1860, demonstrates the power of narrative (and the image) to shape actions and interactions in the imperial world. Brian Castro's *Birds of Passage* (1983) links the story of Lo Yun Shan, an emigrant to Australia from Kwangtung during the gold rushes in the 1850s, with the life of Seamus O'Young, an Australian of Chinese descent, who finds and translates Shan's journal, with the effect that distinctions between past and present begin to make little sense, and an unobtrusive but compelling challenge is posed to the tendency in many historical as well as fictional accounts of 19th-century Australia to (re)produce 'a ubiquitous white past'.[10]

This ongoing fictional-critical interest in 19th-century Australia signals, furthermore, how the processes of colonisation at this time, together with pushes towards nationalism that were attended by their own myth-making machinations, prompt many novels

8 The film echoes the siege of Glenrowan in 1880, in which Ned Kelly was captured, and Kelly's Jerilderie letter of 1879. See Ned Kelly, 'From the Jerilderie Letter', in Elizabeth Webby (ed.), *Colonial Voices: Letters, Diaries, Journalism and Other Accounts of Nineteenth-Century Australia*, UQP, 1989, p. 449.

9 Rolf Boldrewood, *Robbery Under Arms*, ed. Paul Eggert and Elizabeth Webby, UQP, 2006 [1882–3], pp. 602, 603.

10 Hsu-Ming Teo, 'Future Fusions and a Taste for the Past', *Australian Historical Studies*, 118 (2002), p. 131.

(and writers) today to assume a responsibility of historical recuperation and restitution at the same time that they treat history and fiction themselves as subjects of some concern. Peter Carey's *Jack Maggs* (1997), like *Sixty Lights*, engages with Dickens' novel, placing the colonies in Australia at its centre (rather than at the periphery as a site of criminal banishment, as in *Great Expectations*) and giving voice to characters that are routinely marginalised in realist English Victorian fiction. Jean Bedford's *Sister Kate* (1982) aims to insert the story of Kate Kelly into the legend of the 19th-century bushranger Ned Kelly. In a very different, epic mode, Alexis Wright's *Carpentaria* (2006) foregrounds Indigenous knowing and being in a way that confounds triumphant colonial and nationalist narratives and projects, past and present, with the debris of 19th-century white settlement: 'thousands of bits and pieces of chipped and broken china – sugar-bears, yellow chickens, spotted dogs, and pink babies of lost cargo' litter the Gulf of Carpentaria of the text.[11]

To presuppose we can speak of 19th-century Australia as though it were something unmediated, then, not only reinscribes a model of empirical history that was itself one of the most durable inventions of the European 19th century. It also sidesteps the possibility that fiction (including filmic fiction), with its tropes and narrative techniques, has a part in determining how the past(s) is conditionally and partially known, remembered, distributed and forgotten.

From this point, it is useful to remember that any easy reference to fiction that seems to assume a shared understanding of writing and reading is itself misleading in this context. Like that of history, the category of fiction, if it can be put this way, was under construction during the 19th century in colonial Australia as well as elsewhere. Debates over what might constitute fiction and who might read it and why, together with practical matters of printing and distribution, were tied up in colonial Australia to a significant degree with the intricacies and contradictions of empire-consolidation and nation-building that those fictions often, but not always or necessarily, detailed.

This is why *The Proposition* serves as a useful if unexpected prelude to this chapter. It is a reminder of the petitions the colonial past (partly by means of fictions and images both from then and of now) presents to the present. It also suggests some of the multiple forms and discussions that books and reading were involved with during this period. And it is a salutary caution: any effort to provide a history of 19th-century Australia and its fictions is itself likely indebted to, if not embedded in, many of the representational practices it presumes as its object of knowledge, and as such is open to contestation, revision and expansion.[12]

11 Alexis Wright, *Carpentaria*, Giramondo, 2006, p. 61.

12 Reflections on the narrative quality of literary historiography include Hayden White, *Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism*, Johns Hopkins UP, 1978, and *The Content of Form*, Johns Hopkins UP, 1987; and Georg Lukács, *The Historical Novel*, trans. Hannah Mitchell and Stanley Mitchell, Merlin Press, 1962. Compare the recent heated debate involving Inga Clendinnen, Mark McKenna and Kate Grenville, among others, over the roles and responsibilities of history and fiction (see Chapter 16).

Necessary materials

In a felicitous coincidence for this chapter's allocated historical sweep, it was in 1889, the year following the centenary of British invasion/settlement in Australia, that George Burnett Barton paused to reflect on the state of literary affairs in the colony of New South Wales; he concluded ruefully, if not a little irritably, in the *Centennial Magazine*: 'it may be assumed that there are many men in the colonies, to say nothing of women, who would willingly make their appearance as authors if they had the facilities for the purpose that writers have in England'.[13] Barton, it must be admitted, was by no means a dispassionate commentator on the subject. He was himself a magazine editor and journalist, among other distinctions,[14] and the author of *Literature in New South Wales* (1866), a detailed account which, together with his edited collection, *Poets and Prose Writers of New South Wales* (1866), was commissioned for the Exposition Universelle of 1867 in Paris that showcased the achievements of French as well as British colonies.

A glance at *Literature in New South Wales*, with its critical interest in, and chronological ordering of, newspaper publications, poetry, fiction, geography, oratory and theology, among other topics, suggests at least two striking features for its readers today. The first is the taken-for-granted flexibility and expansiveness of the term 'literature'. It is almost impossible to imagine a book retailer or critic in the present day filing a volume of ethnology or law under the grouping of literature as Barton does. The second is a particular model of history shaping the work. It is one that invests in history as an inevitable, progressive dimension of existence and stresses the importance of evidential documentation.

Barton's testimony that 'it has not proved an easy matter to procure the necessary material' is partly a call for a collection to be established 'in the interest of the public' of locally written literature, otherwise thoughtlessly disposed of: 'Newspapers and magazines are thrown aside as soon as they appear.'[15] Of course, private libraries accompanied to the colonies those emigrants who could afford to transport them, and who believed they could not do without them; informal networks, in which volumes were exchanged, were perceived as especially useful in the face of any regular or reliable supply of new books.[16]

In 1821, the pooling of a number of 'gentlemen's collections' resulted in the library of the Philosophical Society of Australasia.[17] Following thereafter were subscription and

13 George B. Barton, *The Status of Literature in 1889*, Mulini Press, 1993 [1889], p. 14.

14 On his death in 1901, the weekly *Bulletin*, declared Barton to be the 'first purely literary man produced by New South Wales': cited in Victor Crittenden, 'Introduction', in Barton, *Status of Literature*, p. ii. Although this says more about the desire of the *Bulletin* to construct and champion local men of letters than about Barton himself, it is not without foundation.

15 George B. Barton, *Literature in New South Wales*, Thomas Richards, 1866, p. 2.

16 See Wallace Kirsop, 'Bookselling and Publishing in the Nineteenth Century', in D. H. Borchardt and W. Kirsop (eds), *The Book in Australia: Essays Towards a Cultural and Social History*, Australian Reference Publication and Centre for Bibliographical and Textual Studies, Monash University, 1988, p. 18.

17 Peter Orlovich, 'The Philosophical Society Library, 1821–1822', *Biblionews and Australian Notes and Queries*, 1.2 (1966), pp. 9–12.

circulating libraries, including Mullen's, together with free lending libraries sustained by the mechanics institutes established in Hobart Town (1827), Sydney (1833), Adelaide (1831), Melbourne (1839), Brisbane (1842) and Perth in the Swan River colony (1851).[18] The institutes were modelled on British organisations and underpinned by the certainty that reading was a morally uplifting pursuit, particularly for the working classes, even though these libraries were frequented more often than not by the (lower) middle classes who were also newly identified as a ready market for imported and heavily discounted 'colonial editions'.[19] An introductory note to such an edition of Rosa Praed's *Longleat of Kooralbyn, or Policy and Passion: A Novel of Australian Life* (1881) details the rationale of the colonial edition: 'The favourable reception which was accorded to this story of the Antipodean life when it first appeared in three-volume form in London . . . warrants the experiment which is now made of a special edition, in a more popular form, for Australian readers.'[20] In his research on the colonial bookselling trade, Wallace Kirsop notes dryly: 'one is entitled to suspect that the primary aim [of English publishers] was not to satisfy – with taste and sensitivity – the special requirements of colonial readers but to dump excess stock'.[21] With the world now demarcated in terms of DVD region codes – Australia is no longer colonial pink on the world map, but rather region 4 – this determination to control various aspects of book publication and distribution is not unknown.

In the penal colonies (of which Adelaide was not one; the Swan River colony only became one in 1850, having been 'settled' in 1829) the promotion of reading took on a particular urgency. At first blush this had little to do with profit-making: it was thought to assist in the desirable erasure of the 'taint' supposedly entailed by the transportation of convicts from England to Australia, beginning with the departure from England in 1787 of the First Fleet, which left with a printing press on board but with no-one skilled to operate it. (See Chapter 2.) Luckily for the government of New South Wales, whose standing orders were in need of issuing, George Howe, apprenticed to the trade, was transported on the charge of shoplifting, and he took up the role of government printer in 1800. Howe subsequently enjoyed a successful career in publishing commerce, establishing in 1803 the newspaper, the *Sydney Gazette*, which ran until 1842.

It is the disgrace not so much of the convict as the penal system itself that is confronted unflinchingly in Marcus Clarke's novel *His Natural Life* (serialised in the *Australian Journal* 1870–2, revised for novel publication in 1874) and Caroline Leakey's book, *The Broad*

18 See George Nadel, *Australia's Colonial Culture: Ideas, Men and Institutions in Mid-Nineteenth Century Eastern Australia*, F. W. Cheshire, 1957.

19 See Graeme Johanson, *A Study of Colonial Editions in Australia, 1843–1972*, Elibank Press, 2000.

20 R.[osa] M. Praed, *Longleat of Kooralbyn, or Policy and Passion: A Novel of Australian Life*, Australian edn, Richard Bentley & Sons, 1887 [1881], n.p.

21 Wallace Kirsop, *Books for Colonial Readers: The Nineteenth Century Australian Experience*, Bibliographical Society of Australia and New Zealand and Centre for Bibliographical and Textual Studies, Monash University, 1995, p. 11.

Arrow: Some Passages in the History of Maida Gwynnham, A Lifer (1859): both novels challenge the injustices of transportation and the abuses of power the penal system encourages. *The Broad Arrow* prudently counsels that it 'is not wise to trust the best of men with unlimited power'. It traces the degradation suffered by Maida, who is transported to the penal colony of Van Diemen's Land where she works in domestic service, having been tricked into forgery and erroneously convicted of infanticide. Leakey's novel centres on the domestic realm and the management of convict servants, among whom Maida's class superiority is made obvious. As a consequence, though, her punishment is doubly difficult to endure – 'over and above the usual miseries of convict life, [Maida] has loss of *caste*' – that is, until her wilful pride gives way to a model of Christian femininity founded on humility and submission, and she dies.[22] By contrast, Clarke's text, much revised in novel form and notable for its insistent intertextuality and melodrama, forwards a secular, masculine world in the post-gold-rush era, which turns around displaced female sexuality.[23] It focuses on Rufus Dawes, transported for a robbery he did not commit and convicted for his part in a mutiny he was attempting to thwart. In colonial Australia, he is subjected to the unrelenting, spectacular violence of the penal systems of Macquarie Harbour, Port Arthur and Norfolk Island, 'repeatedly flogged for violence and insubordination'.[24] This exposes the lawlessness of the law, but also sets the admittedly nightmarish scene for faith in humanist fortitude rather than religious salvation (at least in the serialised version; in the novel Dawes also meets an unhappy end).

Another text detailing convict life is Henry Savery's *Quintus Servinton; A Tale founded upon Incidents of Real Occurrence* (1830–1). A fictional autobiography, its eponymous hero is also inclined to forgery and transported to Australia for his crime. Servinton's self-possessed demeanour is unfavourably set alongside his long-suffering wife, whose moral and virtuous superiority is made abundantly clear: 'never was it more touchingly – and more delightfully displayed – than in the case of Emily', she of heaving bosom and 'a plentiful flood of tears'.[25] The autobiographical work *The Memoirs of the First Thiry-Two Years of the Life of James Hardy Vaux, A Swindler and Pickpocket; Now Transported for the Second Time, and For Life* (1819), dedicated to the commanding officer at the Newcastle penal settlement, includes in its second volume the 'New and Comprehensive Vocabulary of the Flash Language', a handy resource for magistrates endeavouring to decode the slang of felons brought before them. (In his 1793 volume, *A Complete Account of the Settlement at Port Jackson, Including An Accurate Description of the Situation of the Colony; of the Natives; and Of Its Natural Productions*, the explorer and military office Watkin Tench made reference to 'the *flash*, or *kiddy* language' of the convicts and

22 Oliné Keese [Caroline Leakey], *The Broad Arrow: Some Passages in the History of Maida Gwynnham, A Lifer*, Bentley, 1887 [1859], pp. 257, 139.

23 Ian Henderson, 'Treating Dora in *His Natural Life*', *Australian Literary Studies*, 21.1 (2003), pp. 67–80.

24 Marcus Clarke, *His Natural Life*, ed. Lurline Stuart, UQP, 2001 [1870–2], p. 270.

25 Henry Savery, *Quintus Servinton: A Tale founded upon Incidents of Real Occurrence*, ed. Cecil H. Hadgraft, Jacaranda Press, 1962 [1830–1], p. 253.

noted: 'In some of our early courts of justice, an interpreter was frequently necessary to translate the deposition of the witness, and the defence of the prisoner.')[26] The title character of James Tucker's *Ralph Rashleigh, or The Life of an Exile* (1844–5?) is regarded immediately by a fellow convict at the Emu Plains camp to which he is sent as a 'motherless cub, all your sorrows to come'.[27] Remarkably, these foretold miseries take form straight away: Rashleigh suffers injury as he labours under the orders of the obsequious overseer – 'a little bandy-legged chocolate-cheeked Jew'[28] – whose physical misshapenness, racial inferiority and diminutiveness register disturbing anti-Semitic tropes and sentiments.

While these fictions, however troubling, may constitute part of the 'necessary material' for any specialised collection of 19th-century fiction in Australia today, it is unclear if they were in mind, and in any nascent collections, at the time Barton was considering colonial literature. During his travels in colonial Australia in the early 1870s, the English author Anthony Trollope observed with a novelist's ethnographic eye, and with some surprise and satisfaction, the use in the colonies of numerous libraries' collections, noting the 'excessive thumbing of . . . Macaulay's essays, Dickens' novels, some of Scott's novels, Tennyson and *Pilgrim's Progress*'.[29]

Some 30 years earlier, Louisa Meredith had despondently detected with respect to the colony of New South Wales: 'the circulating libraries are very poor affairs, but, I fear, quite sufficient for the demand, reading not being a favourite pursuit'.[30] Money-making was routinely cited as the preferred pursuit in the colonies, and its association with vulgarity in Victorian England gives the seemingly contradictory comments by Meredith and Trollope a certain edge. Such concerns with settlers' reading habits, at once plentiful and deficient, are voiced throughout the 19th century; they are less (repetitive) remarks on colonial customs than suggestive of the power attributed to reading and books for the marking out of the proper civility and taste in Australia, and of those who presumed to remark on these matters.

Australian titles are conspicuous in their absence from Trollope's catalogue that, while admittedly small and oriented to what Trollope was educated to find with his literary affiliations and affections, brings into relief Barton's call for an otherwise 'insensible' audience to encourage the production and collection of 'local' literature.[31]

26 Watkin Tench, *A Complete Account of the Settlement at Port Jackson, Including An Accurate Description of the Situation of the Colony; of the Natives; and Of Its Natural Productions*, G. Nicol & J. Sewell, 1793, p. 138.

27 Giacomo di Rosenberg [James Tucker] *Ralph Rashleigh, or, The life of an exile*, ed. Colin Roderick, A&R, 1952 [1844–5?], p. 79.

28 Ibid., p. 80.

29 Anthony Trollope, *Australia and New Zealand*, vol. 2, Chapman & Hall, 1873, p. 257.

30 Mrs Charles [Louisa] Meredith, *Notes and Sketches of New South Wales, during a residence in that colony from 1839–1844*, John Murray, 1844, p. 49.

31 Barton, *Literature in New South Wales*, p. 10. As well as her extensive and invaluable work on 19th-century Australian literature, Elizabeth Webby has demonstrated the presence of English literature in colonial Australia in the first half of the 19th century, which Trollope's account only points towards. Webby, 'English Literature in Early Australia, 1820–1829', *Southerly*, 27.4 (1967), pp. 266–85; 'English Literature in Early Australia,

Rough groundwork: organising writing into fiction and history

The complaint Barton makes regarding the unavailability of necessary material, furthermore, is also motivated by concepts of history-making and history-writing – here the two are tightly woven – dependent on the idea and actuality of an archive. Yet the unacknowledged upshot of this reliance on documentary evidence is that the central assertion of *Literature in New South Wales* – 'the rough ground-work of a "national literature" has been laid'[32] – appears value-free and matter-of-fact, a found knowledge, when such comment was far more likely to be politically charged, particularly for an audience in the colony of New South Wales where nascent nationalist rumblings were certainly not unheard of.

The controversial Presbyterian minister and member of the New South Wales Legislative Council, J. D. Lang, for one, was a political voice at the time for nationalism and a federated Australian republic. That is, when he was not being imprisoned for libel and debt delinquency, overseeing his break-away congregation or rallying against Irish Catholic immigrants.[33] He particularly objected to the single women recruited and trained in the domestic arts by Caroline Chisholm, to whom Mary Theresa Vidal ostensibly directed her moral stories in *Tales for the Bush* (1845). In a letter to the third Earl Grey, Secretary of State for Colonies, Chisholm wrote of the apparently desperate need in Australia for the influence of '"God's Police" – wives and little children – good and virtuous women'.[34] For Chisholm, emigrant women, with their purported moral superiority and civilising influence, were of far more value to the colony than books and, for that matter, the clergy (among whom J. D. Lang would count himself). For Vidal, God's police took the form of pious mistresses in whose service female servants, oftentimes encoded as explicitly Irish, were expected to be gratefully engaged.

Servants are repeatedly identified in Vidal's tales as a class in need of dire moral instruction: such stories work to confirm their apparently innate but surmountable slovenliness, impertinence and ungodliness. Mrs Jellicoe, in Clarke's *His Natural Life*, declares servants to be worse than convicts and intones that she has 'a fresh one every week'.[35] More subtly, though, Vidal's stories, first issued in sixpenny parts, instate the rightfulness of an English class system that did not transport easily to the colonies in Australia. As Mary (a servant in Vidal's 'Ruth Walsh') declares in relation to the positioning of English dress as a signifier of class in the colonies: 'it looks queer and

1830–1839', *Southerly*, 36.1 (1976), pp. 73–87; 'English Literature in Early Australia, 1840–1849', *Southerly*, 36.2 (1976), pp. 200–22; 'English Literature in Early Australia, 1840–1849', *Southerly*, 36.3 (1976), pp. 297–317.

32 Barton, *Literature in New South Wales*, p. 4.

33 J. D. Lang, *Popery in Australia and the Southern Hemisphere, and how to check it effectually: an address to evangelical and influential Protestants of all denominations in Great Britain and Ireland*, Thomas Constable, 1847.

34 Caroline Chisholm, *Emigration and Transportation Relatively Considered: In a Letter to Earl Grey*, John Ollivier, 1847, p. 17.

35 Clarke, *His Natural Life*, p. 236.

old-fashioned here, and I cannot fall into it somehow'.[36] In the context of the popularity of the tales in England as well as Australia (many editions were issued), *Tales for the Bush* was as much a collection of stories for the middle classes of the imperial centre *and* the outposts of empire as it was for their servants, and, more specifically, for the women of these middle classes, given the importance of feminine conduct to the representation of imperial and colonial culture to itself.

As well as denouncing the supposed disproportionate number of Irish immigrants, Lang was involved in theorising the origins of cannibalism in Polynesia; composing poetry; ruminating on religion and education in the United States of America; and writing the two-volume *An Historical and Statistical Account of New South Wales, both as a Penal Settlement and as a British Colony* (1834), among other contributions to what might be termed transnational literary culture.[37] For the prolific Lang, territorial borders did not seem to restrict the scope of his intellectual inquiries, and he appears keen too to exhaust the possibilities of language. 'Although Dr. Lang is an indefatigable writer . . . There is little evidence of revision in his pages, although there is much of the necessity for it', was Barton's assessment of *An Historical and Statistical Account of New South Wales*,[38] which to a reader today might seem firm but fair; there is certainly much material that might be thought of as extraneous.

It was a view shared by some of Lang's and Barton's contemporaries. In the words of one English reviewer, which Barton quotes, Lang's work in places sorely tests the 'confidence in the coolness and impartiality of the historian' because it reads like a 'controversial pamphlet'.[39] Another critic writing in the *Westminster Review*, whom Barton also cites, mischievously declares: 'His [Lang's] life has been a very stirring one, according to his own account of it; and he *does* give an account of it – so minute, indeed, that he might have entitled his work, *The History of Dr. Lang, to which is added, the History of New South Wales*.'[40] A less roguish reader might soberly suggest that the comments of Barton, together with those of the English reviewers, signal the shaping of a consensus-of-sorts across the reading British empire on what forms history might take, what objects it might address itself to and what purposes it might serve.[41] For these

36 Mary Teresa Vidal, 'Ruth Walsh', *Tales for the Bush*, Mulini Press, 1995 [1845], p. 27.

37 J. D. Lang, *View of the Origin and Migrations of the Polynesian Nation; demonstrating their ancient discovery and progressive settlement of the continent of America*, Cochrane and M'Crane, 1834; J. D. Lang, *Poems: Sacred and Secular, written chiefly at sea, within the last half-century*, William Maddock, 1873; J. D. Lang, *Religion and Education in America, with Notices of the State and Prospects of American Unitarianism, Popery and African Colonization*, Thomas Ward & Co., 1840.

38 Barton, *Literature in New South Wales*, p. 124.

39 'The *Eclectic Review*, in one of its "Brief Notices," thus summed up Dr. Lang's historical merits on the same occasion', ibid., p. 129.

40 'On the publication of the third edition, the following criticism appeared in the *Westminster Review*', ibid., p. 128.

41 Historical accounts of the colony of New South Wales should abide by, it seems, David Hume's directive – '*drop all minute circumstances*, which are only interesting during the time or to the persons engaged in the transactions' – which encapsulated the shift during the 19th century to the idea of history as an empirical science: Hume, *The History of England from the Invasion of Julian Caesar to the Revolution of 1688*, vol. 2, Liberty Classics, 1983, p. 3, emphasis added. Hume's works were often part of the private 'gentlemen's' libraries in the

men it would seem that history is not (in the manner of 18th-century European *belles lettres*, for instance) a matter of rhetoric and persuasion, but rather one of detachment and documentation. It is a particular idea of history that becomes part of the knowledge it arranges. What is further gleaned from these reviews of Lang's volumes, moreover, is not so much the deliberate prising apart of history from autobiography, pamphleteering and fiction, but rather the organisation of knowledge and writing into such categories by which the (colonial) world is then attempted to be ordered and known.

Amenities for authors

The greater part of Barton's *Literature of New South Wales* offers an oblique entry into an aspect of a historiography that would come, together with fiction, to write 19th-century colonial Australia, with significant consequences for those Indigenous people in particular whose lives often did not leave the kinds of evidence it was trained to see and value. In contrast, the main concern of its prefatory remarks, which are reiterated some 22 years later in the *Centennial Magazine*, are directed at the *future* of literature in Australia. For Barton (and he is by no means alone in promulgating this romantic idea), literature is the gauge of community character, but as things stood at the times of his writings in 1866 and 1889, this disposition was looking bleak. Not only was literature in New South Wales marked by 'slavish imitations', but its intended colonial readership also exercised a distinct lack of 'patriotism' when it came to local literature, and there was little to speak of with regard to regional publishing opportunities.[42]

Marcus Clarke depicted a gallery of lower bohemian Melbourne misfits – 'the beggars, the liars, the impostors, the thieves, the vagabonds, the drunkards' of whom he writes in one of his (anti-Semitic toned) *Australasian* sketches in 1869.[43] (His imagining of 1860s Melbourne stands in stark contrast to its depiction in Tasma's *Uncle Piper of Piper's Hill*, first serialised in 1888 in the *Australasian*, published in book form in 1889.) Barton lamented how 'Men of genius have wandered through our streets without the means of earning bread . . . [and others] have led a life which was nothing but hopeless and protracted struggle.'[44] It is this complaint regarding the lack of structural support for writers in colonial Australia that Barton specifically returned to in the *Centennial Magazine*; his comments on the need for amenities for authors in Australia comparable to those available in England must be read in this light rather than in terms of a desire to see the replication in the colonies of English ways. After all, it was the very structure

colonies. As George Nadel observes, J. D. Lang and Daniel Deniehy, a radical democrat in colonial New South Wales whose interests ranged across law, politics and literary culture, both owned several: *Australia's Colonial Culture*, p. 79.

42 Barton, *Literature in New South Wales*, pp. 13, 14.

43 Marcus Clarke, 'A Cheap Lodging House' (1869), in *A Colonial City: High and Low Life. Selected Journalism of Marcus Clarke*, ed. L. T. Hergenhan, UQP, 1972, p. 165. Clarke writes on the same page: 'curious that in all the several depths of human misery one finds a Jew who contrives to live out of it'.

44 Barton, *Literature in New South Wales*, pp. 12.

of the 19th-century fiction publishing industry, centred as it was in England, that so frustrated Barton.

In significant contrast to many commentators on 19th-century literature in Australia who came before and after him, Barton, at least in the *Centennial Magazine*, addresses economic issues perceived to be facing authors seeking publication for their books in the colonies rather than offering aesthetic evaluations of the end-product. 'Of all the books that have been published here', Barton laments, 'I do not know of one that can be said to have repaid the author for the time and labor devoted to the task of producing it.' Relying on a comparison recognisable today, Barton bemoans the apathy of 'the public' towards literature in contrast to an exultant enthusiasm for '*le sport* in all its varieties' (with French encapsulating, it would seem, the author's mordant attitude to athletic activities), and which translates into 'large sums of money so readily obtainable when required'. In short, Barton rehearses an argument that continues into the present regarding public funding of the arts, and literature particularly, at the same time that he constructs and berates a philistine public, which does not seem to know what is good for it, and takes aim at publishers as well as the authors themselves. The publishers, Barton decries, take none of the risk but expect to profit from book sales, 'charging forty percent of the receipts'. And worse, Barton proclaims that writers are little aware of 'their own interests'.[45]

For the author in 19th-century Australia, apparently lost in the fog of false consciousness, neither monetary compensation for 'time and labor' nor fame is forthcoming, with one qualification worth mentioning. It is recognition in Australia (or at least Sydney) that Barton values most: fame in London is one thing, but such an achievement would leave the author 'very much where it found him [*sic*] in Sydney'. What is required to shake writers out of their complacency and redress their poverty, Barton counsels, is an 'Australian Authors' Society . . . in order to protect their own interests'[46] in their own country. Protectionist and isolationist to a degree, such an innovation was also nationalist and anti-imperialist, directed at countering what was perceived by many contemporaries as the persistent colonial habit of looking to England for confirmation of literary status and cultural value, and finding little comfort. As it happens, it was in 1899 that an Australian Literature Society was established in Melbourne to support and study Australian literature; the government-funded Commonwealth Literary Fund commenced its support of writers in 1908; and in 1963 the Australian Society of Authors was founded to promote and protect the interests of writers in Australia and New Zealand.

Despite overlooking the support governments did extend on occasion to authors – Louisa Meredith was awarded a pension of £100 by the Tasmanian government in 1884 for her distinguished contribution to the arts and sciences – it is important to recognise further, particularly for the purposes of this chapter, that Barton's emphasis

45 Barton, *Status of Literature*, pp. 9, 10, 11, 12. 46 Ibid., pp. 12, 13.

in his *Centennial Magazine* writings is on the production of literary fiction in novel form. Barton notes, in passing, that 'the columns of a weekly newspaper form the only available means of publication open to a novelist', and complains that remuneration for contributions is meagre. Barton goes on to state that 'Facts of this kind [demonstrate that] there is no market here for literature even in its most popular forms.'[47] It is not certain that such 'facts' do confirm this objection, but the detail to be acknowledged is the importance of newspapers for local fiction publication in Australia in the 19th century.

Pipes – screws of paper – were one of the early means of mass media in the colonies by which verse-writers circulated anonymous materials mocking figures of authority. The more 'respectable' colonial newspapers, magazines and journals quickly came to figure as important vehicles for shaping and promoting fiction, as well as poetry, political debate and the reporting of events deemed of interest to the reading public. Admittedly, it is difficult to generalise about these publications. Lurline Stuart's patient and extensive bibliographical research into literary periodicals published in 19th-century Australia reveals their variety, 'comprising literary and university reviews, magazines about books, monthly magazines and miscellanies, family journals, political, religious, humanist and spiritualist journals, general and illustrated weeklies, educational magazines, musical, theatrical and sporting papers [perhaps much to Barton's disgust], trade and advertising journals an popular overseas weekly papers and magazines'.[48] Many of these literary-oriented enterprises were active, isolated and short-lived.

In contrast, and from the 1860s in particular, the newspaper press found itself part of a wider communications network that involved the telegraph, the railways and the submarine cable laid between Australia and England by John Pender's British–Australian Telegraph Company. The speed of these technologies collapsed time and space in ways hitherto unknown, both confirming imperial ties and contributing to the creation of the imagined national community. Elizabeth Morrison's painstaking work makes known that by the end of 1891, 605 newspapers were in publication in Australia and at a conservative estimate, 'At least one-third of these 600 or so papers carried one or two installments of fiction each week.'[49] By no means were all of these fictions local. Ada Cambridge's short story 'The History of Six Hours', for instance, is preceded on the same page of *The Australasian* by the serialised version of the 76th chapter of George Eliot's *Middlemarch* (1872); the column directly following Cambridge's story contains a review of Sir Joseph Fayrer's *Thanatophidia of India* (1872) a scientific text on snake poisoning.[50] The prices of colonial editions undercut local publishers, and the costs

47 Ibid., p. 10.

48 Lurline Stuart, 'Introduction', *Australian Periodicals with Literary Content 1821–1925: An Annotated Bibliography*, Australian Scholarly Publishing, 2003, p. ix.

49 Elizabeth Morrison, 'Serial Fiction in Australian Colonial Newspapers', in John O. Jordan and Robert L. Patten (eds), *Literature in the Market Place: Nineteenth-Century British publishing and reading practices*, CUP, 1995, p. 308.

50 A[da] C[ambridge], 'The History of Six Hours', *The Australasian*, 15 Feb. 1873, p. 198.

in Australia of imported ink, paper and printing were exorbitant.[51] Understandably, would-be authors often looked to place their work either with English publishers, which largely coordinated and controlled the imperial book market, or with local magazines and newspapers whose editors and owners, with their own political and revenue-raising agendas, were seeking to attract regular, paying readers: serialisations in particular were thought to encourage recurrent consumption. Newspapers also came to provide relatively steady employment for some writers, including Marcus Clarke, who wrote weekly sketches in the *Australasian* between 1867 and 1870: these columns were collected as *The Peripatetic Philosopher* (1869). Clarke subsequently edited the (then) monthly *Australian Journal* 1870–1, which during that time had a policy of publishing original fictions focused on colonial themes and settings.

Clarke's literary journalism, if it can be termed thus, falls outside Barton's emphasis in the *Centennial Magazine* essays – that the material object of the book is the sign, *par excellence*, of literary achievement and cultural capital, with the faint hope of some financial recompense too. (This status accorded novel writing had not always been the case: in *Literature in New South Wales* Barton assures his readers that literature has now 'become an honourable profession', suggesting that fiction writing was, in the past, treated with some suspicion, aesthetically, morally and commercially.)[52] Working with this model of fiction writing and production, Barton is unable to entertain the possibility that other forms of writing, and their appearances in contexts other than books, might question the notion of literature, and literary achievement, in which he invests and point to the importance of expanding such a category of fiction if the scope of imaginative writing in colonial Australia is to be grasped at all. After all, fiction, like history, was itself a malleable category in 19th-century Australia, with Clarke himself aware both of the various modes of writing on which his *Australasian* sketches drew and the demands of the market. He states in self-deprecation and with comedic result in the preface to *The Peripatetic Philosopher*:

> How comes it, you not unnaturally ask, that this fellow thrusts himself into Print, and publishes a preposterous book, full of stale jokes, and borrowed metaphors, and stolen thoughts and hashed-up ideas of other people? The answer is a straight-forward one – 'I publish it simply because I think it will sell.'[53]

The debates about the status of fiction for thinking about writing (in) Australia in the 19th century are less straightforward.

In 1864, for example, William Walker cast an eye over literature in Australia for an appreciative audience in Sydney.[54] He remarks that when speaking of Australia he is

51 For a comprehensive list of publishers, see Ian Morrison, *The Publishing Industry in Colonial Australia: A Name Index to John Alexander Fergusons's* Bibliography of Australia, 1784–1900, Bibliographical Society of Australia and New Zealand, 1996.

52 Barton, *Literature in New South Wales*, p. 11.

53 Marcus Clarke, *The Peripatetic Philosopher*, George Robertson, 1869, p. 2.

54 The humorous weekly, the *Sydney Punch*, was a little less admiring of Walker's speech, lampooning the presumption to lecture on Australian literature: Anon. 'Mr. Punch's Lecture on Australian Literature (N.B.– No connection with Walker's ditto.)', 8, 15 October 1864, pp. 160, 163.

rather referring to New South Wales, for the reason that 'for many years [this colony was] the only Australia recognized or generally known'.[55] (For someone writing today in Perth, whither characters in television soaps are routinely exiled when their removal from the script is required, this synecdochical quality of New South Wales carries a certain contemporary resonance.) Walker, in the course of his lecture, makes casual reference to three novel fictions only: Louisa Atkinson's *Gertrude the Emigrant: A Tale of Colonial Life* (1857) and *Cowanda; or, The Veteran's Grant* (1859), and Alexander Harris' *Martin Beck* (an 1852 reissue of *The Emigrant Family, or The Story of an Australian Settler*, 1849). Walker, not having read the latter, seems to have thought little of it. *Gertrude the Emigrant*, by contrast, is praised as 'instructive and fascinating' – an evaluation shared by Barton, who commented in his earlier work that it was 'a production of more than average merit'.[56] *Cowanda* is said to be 'very nicely written', notable for being 'not so large or pretentious as its predecessor'.[57] Atkinson was keenly interested in the natural sciences and literature – like both Georgiana Molloy, who botanised in what she nominated in one of her letters 'this iniquitous Colony',[58] the Swan River colony; and her near-contemporary, Louisa Meredith, who wrote and illustrated books on botany and landscape in the colonies of New South Wales and Tasmania and in Melbourne, as well as autobiography, poetry, children's books, novels and social sketches.

Atkinson's novel *Cowanda* moves between urban Sydney and life on a small holding in New South Wales and features a naturalist, Frank Maclean. He literally stumbles into a goldfield diggings site for the purposes of keeping 'a journal of my proceedings, which I hope to have published',[59] as he informs other characters. Ellen Clacy also ventured to the goldfields, those in Victoria predominantly, and subsequently published her 'proceedings', *A Lady's Visit to the Gold Diggings of Australia in 1852–53* (1853). Part travelogue, travel-guide, history, ethnography and adventure romance, with letters, shopping lists, newspaper extracts and diary entries included, this writing resists easy classification.

Atkinson's fictional Maclean does not doubt his assumption to report on the gold rushes that gripped the eastern colonies during the 1850s and 1860s (the gold boom in the west of the continent occurred during the 1890s). In contrast, Clacy is well aware of her status as a woman observer and writer. She strategically presents her text, and her presence in the colonies, in terms of providing much-required information for concerned female relatives in England, 'the many mothers, wives and sisters . . . whose hearts are ever longing for information respecting the dangers and privations to which their relatives at the antipodes are exposed'.[60] In other words, Clacy looks to and

55 William Walker, 'Australian Literature: A Lecture, &c.', Mulini Press, 1996 [1864], p. 3.
56 Barton, *Literature in New South Wales*, p. 111. 57 Walker, 'Australian Literature', pp. 20, 21.
58 Georgiana Molloy, letter, 8 December 1834, in Lynne Spender, ed., *Her Selection: Writings by Nineteenth-Century Australian Women*, Penguin, 1988, p. 12.
59 Louisa Atkinson, *Cowanda, The Veteran's Grant, An Australian Story*, ed. Elizabeth Lawson, Mulini Press, 1995 [1859], p. 65.
60 Ellen Clacy, *A Lady's Visit to the Gold Diggings of Australia in 1852–53,* Kessinger, 2003 [1853], p. 1.

extends one of the roles that white women in the colonies were expected to fulfil: the careful keeping and crafting of letters and journals,[61] whose style and content was possibly informed to some degree by fictional writings that, in turn, were shaped by letter-writing conventions. (The largely epistolary novel, *The Guardian*, 1838, by 'An Australian', Anna Maria Bunn, suggests this productive intersection between the literary and letter-writing.) Such letters were sent overseas and, if they reached their intended destinations, were widely read by family and friends eager to be apprised of everyday activities and antipodean curiosities. The concluding sentence of Ada Cambridge's novel, *The Three Miss Kings* (serialised in the *Australasian* in 1883; published as a novel in 1891), impresses the importance of women's letter-writing for the maintenance of relationships between family members who are otherwise dispersed across the imperial world as a consequence of the plots of colonial romances: 'weekly letters of prodigious length [are] left as a sort of hostage to fortune, valuable if not altogether trustworthy security for the safety of . . . dearest possessions', Cambridge writes.[62]

Gertrude the Emigrant takes its cue too from women's reporter-responsibility role, and makes passing reference to the goldfields and their hazards. Mr Tudor, the eventual husband of the eponymous protagonist, warns against the folly of fortune-hunting by means of gold prospecting: 'many lost their all', he instructs an eager, elderly prospector. The latter dies, not entirely unexpectedly, following a rock fall that occurs during the digging of a pit and directly after their exchange, but not before he confesses to Tudor that the pursuit of wealth has left him spiritually depleted. Such an admission underlines Tudor's moral authority. Gertrude's marriage to this man in the last pages of the novel, as an emigrant ship passes across the background, consolidates her own class status and its attendant advantages. Becauses she has emigrated to colonial Australia and found employment as a domestic servant, Gertrude's class standing is obscured, although her fine breeding is never really in doubt: her ability to arrange flowers, for example, a skill deemed significant in the domestic lives of middle-class women, demonstrates that her 'taste and knowledge were so vastly superior' to those for whom she worked.[63]

What are you? Books of travel in disguise

If it had been published a little earlier than it was, however, *Gertrude the Emigrant* might well have been one of those novels Frederick Sinnett criticised in his essay 'Fiction Fields of Australia' (1856) for being 'too apt to be books of travel in disguise'.[64] At the time of Sinnett's writing, emigration to the eastern colonies in Australia by free settlers

61 For examples, see Lucy Frost, *No Place for a Nervous Lady: Voices from the Australian Bush*, Penguin, 1985.

62 Mrs Cross [Ada Cambridge], *The Three Miss Kings: A Tale of Colonial Life*, Melville, Mullen & Slade, 1891 [1883], p. 314.

63 Louisa Atkinson, *Gertrude the Emigrant: A Tale of Colonial Life*, ed. Elizabeth Lawson, School of English and Australian Scholarly Editions Centre, University College, ADFA, with Mulini Press, 1998 [1857], pp. 281, 111.

64 Frederick Sinnett, *The Fiction Fields of Australia*, intro. Cecil Hadgraft, UQP, 1966, p. 31.

was on the increase, motivated in part by the promise of prosperity. The decision to venture across the world, moreover, was informed and encouraged by 'hundreds of books, pamphlets, newspaper accounts, advertisements and official brochures [that] attempted to direct [to Australia, rather than to North America] the flood of free immigration from Britain and Ireland'.[65] Not all texts of this sort were necessarily celebratory. Meredith's *Notes and Sketches of New South Wales* (1844) makes reference to both the preponderance of pesky insects that 'seem to pervade this colony in one universal swarm' and the deplorable taste exhibited by many in Australia in dress, manner and vocalisation.[66] The authorial intent of emigration-themed publications varied between profit, propaganda, travel advice and moral guidance, so it is perhaps not surprising that these diverse interests are also registered in some of the fiction of the time.

Atkinson's Gertrude is an emigrant, after all, and the novel is a handbook of sorts in at least two ways. It details a unique antipodean Arcadia, with great enthusiasm, in (old) English terms and from an authoritative, panoramic height that a painter or a photographer newly experimenting with elongated daguerreotypes would appreciate:

> A green knoll rose above the cottage, thinly wooded by large old Eucalypti, grey and rugged, with scanty leaves scattered over the lofty branches; what a prospect rewarded the ascent! for miles spread out the alternating farms and wood; now rising into an eminence, now sinking abruptly into a vale, or widening into a little plain; and beyond, all those ethereal shades of blue mountains – then the fiery kiss of the sun upon the distant horizon, and the lighting up of the before grey cloud, as if to proclaim once more 'Peace on earth, and good will towards man.'[67]

Aesthetically patterned and naturally possessed of Christian qualities, the good will of the picturesque colonial landscape stops short of the Indigenous inhabitants who 'are nearly extinct now, in this part of the country' but extends invitingly to others who know and appreciate knolls and vales. At the same time, though, the novel is an ethical and spiritual guide, attending to the domestic experiences that many women might face in the colonies and from which Gertrude herself comes to learn: 'whilst with a heart just expanding to womanly affections, she fell into the emigrant girl's common error, an attachment which her mature judgment, and strengthened Christian character condemned', Atkinson writes.[68]

Harris' *Martin Beck* is overlooked by Walker but singled out by Sinnett for particular attention – in his opinion the book 'possesses comparatively little merit as a novel'.[69] It is another such emigration fiction. It rehearses the conventions of romance and melodrama, following the fortunes of the members of the Bracton family who 'had

65 Bob Reece, *Australia, the Beckoning Continent: Nineteenth Century Emigration Literature* (The Trevor Reese Memorial Lecture 1988), University of London, 1988, p. 1.
66 Meredith, *Notes and Sketches*, p. 45.
67 Atkinson, *Gertrude the Emigrant*, p. 260. 68 Ibid., pp. 292, 263.
69 Sinnett, *Fiction Fields*, p. 42.

now betaken themselves to the enterprise of founding a home at the antipodes'. Besides useful travel advice – Harris reminds his readers that 'On opposite sides of the equator, the seasons of the year are, of course, reversed', and provides an overview of how Christmas is celebrated in the Australian bush – the book is replete with sub-plots. Perhaps the most intriguing turns around the ominous character Martin Beck, 'a fine and rather handsome young man of American-negro descent [who] grew up, with all the fire of Africa in his veins [and] became painfully sensible that he was an alien in his native land' of Australia.[70] Lieutenant Bracton's first question to Beck – 'But *what* are you?' – illustrates a (racialised) denial of subject-hood, which Beck then seeks for himself through his efforts to garner wealth and influence. [71]

Thomas McCombie's *Adventures of a Colonist; or, Godfrey Arabin the Settler* (1845) resembles Charles Rowcroft's *Tales of the Colonies* (1843) before it and *An Emigrant in Search of a Colony* (1851) after it, and William Howitt's *A Boy's Adventure in the Wilds of Australia* (1854). They all share *Martin Beck*'s interest in explaining what is assumed to be the strange otherness of the colonies in Australia. *Adventures of a Colonist* follows in form the self-acknowledged example of Washington Irving's sketches. (These were available for purchase from James Tegg's Sydney bookshop in the late 1830s and their author was eulogised in the weekly journal *The Southern Cross* by Daniel Deniehy, widely celebrated in colonial Australia as a politician, orator and man of letters.) It pauses in the narrative of the pioneering endeavours of Godfrey Arabin to discourse approvingly on topics such as the 'great grazing-land classes' that organise as the Pastoral Association to remonstrate against 'increased taxation'. McCombie's novel, with its vision of colonial Australia as a pastoral paradise for capitalist emigrants on which the 'future greatness of England' is to be founded,[72] has much in common too with Henry Kingsley's romance *The Recollections of Geoffry Hamlyn* (1859), although the latter does not offer advice such as 'Every emigrant who can land in Australia with £500, and who is contented to live the life of a farmer with stock, ought to bring a wife with him' with the same frankness of phrase as that demonstrated in *Adventures of a Colonist*.[73]

This turn of expression, however, is not clear evidence for Sinnett's claim that authors of these so-called books of travel are 'but voyagers sailing under the false colors of novelists'.[74] Rather, Sinnett's comments themselves are revealing for what they say about 'novelistic colours', which were arguably many-hued (to enlarge a rather hackneyed metaphor) in Australia during the 19th century rather than 'false'. Emigration fiction, if it can be grouped loosely as such, cannot be easily dismissed in terms of its apparent failure to achieve some pure form or theme, and can be usefully understood as part of wider efforts to know the British Empire and the parameters of fiction itself, dual concerns that Sinnett's essay implicitly rehearses.

70 Alexander Harris, *Martin Beck: or, the Story of an Australian Settler*, Routledge, 1853, pp. 8, 1, 16, 17.
71 Ibid., p. 17, emphasis added.
72 Thomas McCombie, *Adventures of a Colonist; or, Godfrey Arabin the Settler*, University of Sydney Library, 1997 [1845], pp. 5, 34, 130. Available online at http://setis.library.usyd.edu.au/ozlit/
73 Ibid., p. 143. 74 Sinnett, *Fiction Fields*, p. 31.

Romance and realism

For Sinnett, Catherine Helen Spence's novel *Clara Morison: A Tale of South Australia during the Gold Fever* (1854) is an exemplary book. Spence, who today is identified as an important social reformer and feminist (the latter a term she would not have used herself), presents in *Clara Morison* an account of the Adelaide gold rush period that focuses less on the goldfields, as the title might imply, than the domestic spaces in which colonial women work and live. Like many 19th-century novels, *Clara Morison* details the arrival in Australia of a well-bred young woman who is forced into service before marrying a squatter. This domestic romance plot did more than unite happy heterosexual couples, however: it examined marriage as an institution embedded in systems of value and exchange that reached well beyond any notion of a 'free' union.

Nearly 30 years after the publication of *Clara Morison,* Mr Jacobsen in Praed's *Miss Jacobsen's Chance* 1886) devises to coerce his daughter into a marriage that will serve his political interests. Stella Courtland in Catherine Martin's *An Australian Girl* (1890) is deceived into rejecting her preferred companion, the erudite and English Dr Anselm Langdale (who shares with Stella a passion for ethnography and metaphysics); she marries instead Ted Ritchie, a knockabout Australian bloke who turns out to be by no means Stella's scholarly compeer and distressingly intemperate. The latter failing is shared by Harvey Lomax in Praed's novel *The Bond of Wedlock* (1887). An intellectual mismatch in marriage partners is also rued by Richard Delavel in Ada Cambridge's novel *A Marked Man* (1890; first serialised in the *Age* in 1888–9 as 'A Black Sheep'), but it is something with which the protagonist of *An Australian Girl* must stoically deal.

As Martin's text suggests, romance fictions took on a particular role during the latter part of the century in Australia as a means by which to dramatise, negotiate and expose the entangling of white female desire with colonial and nationalist concerns. Stella's marriage to Ritchie, instead of Langdale, positions these two characters as the 'Coming Australian Couple'; Praed's *Longleat of Kooralbyn* also privileges, in the end, the marriage of Honoria Longleat, the daughter of the premier of Leichardt's Land (notionally colonial Queensland) to Dyson Maddox, the solid Australian suitor, rather than to Hardress Barrington who, banished to the colonies, is devious, dissipated and (worst of all) English. In Tasma's short story, 'How a Claim Was Nearly Jumped in Gum-Tree Gully' (1878), the arrival in the colonies of Dave's sweetheart Tilly (rather than the English male suitor who enters numbers of colonial romances) underscores an ideal of 'mateship' her sexual presence heightens and threatens. Writing settlement as heterosexual romance – Dave's claim to land is marked by the carving into a tree of his initial with that of his betrothed – Dave's nameless mate continues the thematic conjoining of desire and colonisation, couching fidelity to his friend and repressing his want for Tilly in terms respecting gendered capitalist proprietorship: ''Tisn't a claim as

any one can jump!'[75] Sexual competitiveness and extramarital desire are also entertained in Cambridge's *A Woman's Friendship* (serialised in the *Age* in 1889), although the story largely takes place in the urban Melbourne setting of the 1888 Centennial International Exhibition rather than 'the bush', and it is a wedded woman who must ultimately suppress her desire for an unmarried man. Written and published during a time in which discussions over nationalism were increasingly articulated in the colonies in Australia, the virility of the British Empire was under scrutiny. (A cluster of colonial adventure romances, which included J. D. Hennessey's *An Australian Bush Track*, 1896, and Praed's *Fugitive Anne*, 1902, register such anxieties.) As the so-called Woman Question debated the social positions and sexual proprieties of middle-class women, these romances often played out such concerns through their white female characters.

Many contemporary commentators, though, seem to have read romance fictions quite differently. Cambridge and Praed were acclaimed by A. Patchett Martin in his evaluative historical survey of 19th-century Australian literature, *The Beginnings of an Australian Literature* (1898), for the reason that they were understood to write with an 'unfailing touch of truth'.[76] Desmond Byrne, author of the review *Australian Writers* (1896), commended *An Australian Girl* on similar grounds, declaring it comprised 'the most perfect description of the peculiar natural features of the country ever written'.[77] Prior to these end-of-the-century assessments of Australian fiction to date, which appear to value realism implicitly as both an interpretive framework *and* as a preferred mode of representation, Sinnett had declared *Clara Morison* to be 'Decidedly the best Australian novel that we have met with'.[78] Perhaps in part this was because of Spence's emphatically non-travel-book-like description of Adelaide on first impression: 'The grass was scanty . . . there was not one flower to be seen, the sun was scorchingly hot; the wind . . . blew as if out of a furnace; the cart jolted . . . while passengers abused the weather, and prayed for a railroad.'[79] What impressed Sinnett most about *Clara Morison*, though, was that it appeared to adhere to what he understood as the correct qualities not only of fiction *per se* – that he has to detail these characteristics suggests that their common recognition cannot be assumed – but also a model of fiction that treats in the 'right manner' the 'suitability of Australian life and scenery' for novel-writing.[80]

With a focus clearly on the writing alone, the part that context or readers, such as Sinnett himself, might have in the production of shifting definitions of Australian fiction is not, and cannot be, entertained. At first look confused and contradictory, Sinnett's assertion that *Clara Morison* deserves praise for the reason that it is both 'thoroughly

75 Tasma [Jessie Couvreur], 'How a Claim was Nearly Jumped in Gum-Tree Gully' (1878), in Michael Ackland (ed.), *A Sydney Sovereign*, A&R, 1993, p. 56.
76 A. Patchett Martin, *The Beginnings of an Australian Literature*, Mulini Press, 1998 [1898], p. 28.
77 Desmond Byrne, *Australian Writers*, Richard Bentley & Son, 1896, p. 25.
78 Sinnett, *Fiction Fields*, p. 34.
79 Catherine Helen Spence, *Clara Morison: A Tale of South Australia during the Gold Fever* in Helen Thomas (ed.), *Catherine Helen Spence*, UQP, 1987 [1854], p. 17.
80 Sinnett, *Fiction Fields*, p. 22.

Australian' and not really Australian at all, with 'local colouring . . . the accident – the portrayal of human life and interest being the essential'[81] is an exemplary grappling with the intersection of two projects-in-process during the 19th century: the shaping of an idea of 'fiction', in the form of the novel, and the making of 'Australia'. The universalist aims of humanistic novel fiction, at least as Sinnett describes and values these 'colors' in the mid-19th century, and especially in the light of those much maligned books of travel, are at odds with one image of the colonies in Australia as specific, if not unique. 'Australian fiction' is charged at this moment with the task of negotiating these seemingly incommensurable interests, an undertaking that continues throughout 19th-century writing in Australia.

Scientific fictions

Part of this assignment is to be resolute on a distinction between Australian fiction and 'any quantity of things illustrative of ethnology, zoology, and botany': it was necessary for the sciences and literature to be separated in order for a work of art to be fully realised, at least in Sinnett's view, which was not his alone.[82] That Sinnett insists on this distinction suggests that the lines between fiction and science were often blurred. During the late 18th and 19th centuries, the colonies in Australia, their native flora and fauna and their Indigenous populations, were the subjects of a great many scientific enquiries and 'discoveries'. Captain James Cook's first voyage into the Pacific (1768–71), which saw Cook hoist the British flag on the eastern part of New Holland, was itself part of an ambitious scientific experiment underpinned by Enlightenment confidence in reason and quantification that sought to map the universe by observance of the transit of the planet Venus across the sun. Accompanying Cook was the botanist, Joseph Banks. His schooling in natural history and Linnaean binomial nomenclature provided a framework by which he might presume to observe (and indeed possess through knowledge) the new world before him, a world that quickly came to confound many of the assumptions of such paradigms. New languages and narrative forms were required to make intelligible what prevailing models could not describe. They had a lasting outcome on the organisation of ways of interpreting and understanding the world more widely as science itself came to be a specialised, autonomous field in the 19th century, with branches and sub-disciplines including ethnology, zoology and botany, and which claimed for itself a certain precedence among other forms of knowledge.

That Sinnett might have borrowed from sciences for both the title of his study (fiction as a controlled field) and his objective critical posture is glossed over in his determination to separate out fictional art from science. Nor is there any recognition that his assessment of what he identified as the formal realist principles of *Clara Morison* – 'it was only necessary for the author to put her people down then and there, and to

81 Ibid., p. 35. 82 Ibid., p. 35.

let them play their parts easily and naturally around the circumstances by which they were surrounded'[83] – might have anything in common with scientific epistemological procedures and analytical methods that found expression in laboratory conditions. If Sinnett sought to police the borders between science and fiction, the very means by which he attempted to do so were dependent on their intersection, a juncture that scientists and writers of fiction in 19th-century Australia often traversed.

Much might be made of the publication of Cambridge's short story in the *Australasian* alongside Eliot's serialised *Middlemarch* – the appearance of the latter suggests the role that colonial newspapers and syndicated serial publications had in creating a consensus across the British empire on what literary culture might look like. But its appearance side by side with the review of a recent scientific text says something about the possible mutual familiarity of ideas in fiction and science, and the non-surprise that readers at the time might have felt in seeing the two placed together in this way.

The terms by which scientific knowledge was produced were often attractive to fiction. Not apart from the realist study of the world that Sinnett accords Spence's work, which recruits scientific methods for aesthetic purposes, fictional efforts to determine Australian 'types' – such as the Australian Girl in Martin's novel of that name – were underscored by both nationalist feeling and a desire to order through typology, which 19th-century science promoted. Another instance of the intersection between science and fiction is detective fiction, a genre popular with readers in the colonies and England, if the outstanding success of Fergus Hume's *The Mystery of a Hansom Cab* (1886) is any indication. Detective Gorby, assigned in that novel (with its illustrative photographs) to the case of the hansom cab murder in Melbourne, exercises deductive abilities that depend on the existence of immutable laws that permit the narrativisation of observed phenomena: 'He looked keenly round the room, and his estimate of the dead man's character was formed at once.'[84] Writing detective-crime fiction some 20 years or more before Hume, Waif Wander (Mary Fortune) provides in her short story, 'Memoirs of an Australian Police Office, no. 4; Traces of Crime' (1865), an intriguing abutting of two conceptions of worldly order – religious and scientific deduction – that, at the time of her writing, were often understood as rivals for epistemological pre-eminence. Fortune places her detective on the goldfields to track down a tattooed man suspected to have committed a heinous crime against a woman, and has him concede, when the last clue falls into place: 'Well, this does indeed and most truly look like the working of Providence.'[85] Whether by science or by divine intervention, the moral and social *status quo* is confirmed in these detective fictions.

In turn, the sciences were sometimes indebted to the narrative structures and figures of fiction. In his well-respected *Gatherings of a Naturalist in Australia: Being Observations*

83 Ibid., p. 36.
84 Fergus Hume, *The Mystery of the Hansom Cab*, Jarrolds [1888], p. 44.
85 W[aif] W[ander] [Mary Fortune], 'Memoirs of an Australian Police Officer, no. IV, Traces of Crime', *The Australian Journal*, 2 Dec. 1865, p. 221.

Principally on the Animal and Vegetable Productions of New South Wales, New Zealand, and some of the Austral Islands (1860), George Bennett, 'a leading figure in the colony's scientific life',[86] allows himself some literary licence when attempting to describe the affective quality of bioluminescence; curiously, the topic itself – non-observable affect – is not something that a naturalist might be expected to comment on in the first place. Having determined that its routine description at sea as 'liquid fire' is insufficient, Bennett turns to spooky gothic tropes and follows the trajectory of fairy-tales into dark places to relate responses to its form in fungoid plants:

> The effect produced by it on the traveller, when on a dark night he comes suddenly upon it glowing in the woods, is startling; for to a person unacquainted with this phenomenon of the vegetable kingdom, the pale, livid and deadly light emanating from it conveys to him an impression of something supernatural, and often causes no little degree of terror in weak minds, or in those willing to believe in supernatural agencies.[87]

Bennett distances himself immediately from such intellectual timidity by relating that *his* knowledge of the plants and their property of light suitably derives from his rational observation of them in a carefully regulated room.

Pluck and reason were similarly prized in the published journals of 19th-century inland explorers such as Thomas Mitchell, Charles Sturt, Ernest Giles and Edward Eyre. Not all of them were strictly scientists in the way that Bennett would understand himself to be as a naturalist, but they were expressly charged nevertheless with providing the Colonial Office with scientific information about the Australian interior to assist in the ownership and development of the British Empire. The modes by which explorers variously rewrote the obligatory diary entries kept during the journey, however, owe much to the narrative structures of melodrama, heroic adventure and the epic.[88] In turn, adventure romance fictions including J. F. Hogan's *The Lost Explorer* (1890) and Ernest Favenc's *The Secret of the Australian Desert* (1895) drew on explorer experiences (as well as the popular success of H. Rider Haggard's imperial romance novels whose narrative plots, tropes and value systems they emulate). While Favenc's other works include *The History of Australian Exploration from 1788 to 1888* (1888), these two novels are directly interested in the fate of Ludwig Leichhardt – his disappearance in 1848 while attempting to cross the Australian continent continues to haunt Australian literature – and implicitly perform the work of empire through displacement: erupting volcanoes, rather than human will and violence, clear the land of its Indigenous occupants, leaving it free for colonial endeavours and imaginative projections.

86 Ann Mozley Moyal, ed., *Scientists in Nineteenth Century Australia: A Documentary History*, Cassell, 1976, p. 74.
87 George Bennett, *Gatherings of a Naturalist in Australia: Being Observations Principally on the Animal and Vegetable Productions of New South Wales, New Zealand, and some of the Austral Islands,* John Van Voorst, 1860, pp. 58, 59.
88 See Ross Gibson, *The Diminishing Paradise: Changing Literary Perceptions of Australia*, Sirius, 1984; Robert Dixon, *The Course of Empire: Neo-Classical Culture in New South Wales 1788–1860*, OUP, 1986; Paul Carter, *The Road to Botany Bay: an Exploration of Landscape and History,* University of Chicago Press, 1987; Simon Ryan, *The Cartographic Eye: How Explorers Saw Australia*, CUP, 1996; Paul Genoni, *Subverting the Empire: Explorers and Exploration in Australian Fiction*, Common Ground, 2004.

We informed you: writing Aboriginality

There were physical and fictional efforts during the 19th century and beyond to erase Aborigines from colonial view – endeavours that, during the latter half of the century, were frequently embedded in popularised scientific (racial) theories such as evolution and emerging disciplines including biology and ethnography – and to deal with invasion/settlement by the British. In the face of these efforts, Aboriginal people utilised a number of written forms and genres: 'letters, poems, essays, pamphlets, newsletters, newspaper articles, petitions, manifestoes, speeches, interviews, anecdotes and traditional stories'.[89] As Penny van Toorn has shown, Aborigines practised cultures of reading and writing that negotiated introduced or imposed literacy and Indigenous procedures; they also worked as translators of religious texts and as collaborators with ethnographers.[90] The work of William Barak, Ngurangaeta of the Wurundjeri people, with the anthropologist A.W. Howitt, resulted in the publication of *Kamilaroi and Kurnai* (1880). This text may well have been of some interest to Stella Courtland in *An Australian Girl*, given that she is said to be 'always interested about the niggers' and looking to expand 'her collection of Aboriginal myths and customs'.[91] It is unclear, though, if she would, or indeed could, have entertained the protests against the treatment of Aborigines living on the Coranderrk Reserve articulated in a letter Barak signed with others in 1882 and submitted to an inquiry:

> We informed
> you by these few lines
> that we dont want
> a strange manager
> here only the one
> we ask for please.
> We also dont want
> the Central Boards,
> and the present Inspector,
> to be no longer over
> us.[92]

Politicised Aboriginal subjects do not fit neatly into Stella's conception of indigeneity as an anachronistic object of ethnographic study. Nor do they seem possible in Ellen Liston's short story, 'My Neighbour's Mystery' (1869). In this piece, a curious gentleman residing in South Adelaide, having heard mutterings through the fence regarding the

89 Penny van Toorn, 'Early Aboriginal Writing, and the Discipline of Literary Studies', *Meanjin*, 55.4 (1996), p. 754.

90 Penny van Toorn, *Writing Never Arrives Naked: Early Aboriginal Cultures of Writing in Australia*, Aboriginal Studies Press, 2006.

91 Martin, *Australian Girl*, vol. 1, pp. 30, 162.

92 VPRS 1226/P0 Supplementary Inward Registered Correspondence, unit 4, X1857 Aborigines & Coranderrk Inquiry, William Barak letter, available on-line at http://www.prov.vic.gov.au/nativepolice/documents/01226_u004_001.html. Barak and Coranderrk are discussed in Chapter 3, above.

placement of Harper Boulton down the well, suspects his neighbours of being 'murderer[s], or at least . . . bodysnatcher[s]'. As it turns out, much to the embarrassment of the teetotal would-be-detective, Harper Boulton is a brand of beer, bottles of which have been put in the well for the purposes of cold storage; the suspicious objects over which he espied his female neighbour hastily throw a cloth are, in fact, 'two blackfellows' skulls'. The young neighbours are 'warm supporters and students of the twin sciences – physiology and phrenology – and were always craving the possession of skulls and skeletons'. The minor misadventure turns out happily; the accused 'literally shouted with laughter' when the neighbour confesses his fears, and are immediately reconciled with the contrite gentleman.[93]

It is difficult to know how contemporary colonial readers would have responded to this story which, in formal terms, feels a lot like the case-of-mistaken-identity plot of a half-hour television sitcom, complete with signposts for canned laughter: 'and then they all laughed again'.[94] The skulls are revealed in Liston's story to be those of 'blackfellows'; this shifts the neighbours from the roles of potential murderers and bodysnatchers – violators of the humanity and bodily integrity of white people, apparently – to (amateur) scientists. The revelation says much about the cultural authority that sciences were accruing to themselves and more about their racialised assumptions and practices in 19th-century Australia – Aborigines, as a race dying out, as the missing evolutionary link, are proper objects of study – that fictions had a part in imagining and consolidating. The Tasmanian Aboriginal Centre is now negotiating the return of Indigenous skulls 'discovered' in Vienna's Museum of Natural History to Tasmania and the Northern Territory, and institutions such as the Manchester Museum in England only recently agreed with the Foundation for Aboriginal and Islander Research Action to repatriate its colonial collection of Indigenous skulls. In the knowledge of such moves, it is almost impossible to read the story in the light-hearted manner in which it seems to have been intended, and was most likely read. The colonial 19th century has arguably not come in Australia to a neat reconciliation or conclusion, as Liston's story promises, and its legacies continue to be grappled with today.

93 Ellen Liston, 'My Neighbour's Mystery', in Fiona Giles (ed.), *From the Verandah: Stories of Love and Landscape by Nineteenth-Century Australian Women*, McPhee Gribble, 1987 [1869], pp. 48, 49, 46, 48.
94 Ibid., p. 49.

6

Romantic aftermaths

RICHARD LANSDOWN

> Knowledge was never a matter of geography.
> Quite the reverse, it overflows all maps that exist.
> Patrick White, *Voss*

It is a cliché of intellectual history that the United States is a product of Enlightenment optimism. 'Next to the introduction of Christianity among mankind,' the contemporary English commentator Richard Price argued, 'the American revolution may prove the most important step in the progressive cause of human improvement.'[1] It was on the basis of a tradition of such commentary that Leslie Fiedler wrote 180 years later: 'Insofar as America is legendary, a fact of the imagination as well as one of history, it has been shaped by the ideals of the Age of Reason.'[2]

By contrast, Australia came into being at the end of a century of intellectual pessimism inaugurated by the counter-revolution we call Romanticism: a counter-revolution with which in substantial measure we are still coming to terms. 'We hold these Truths to be self-evident,' Thomas Jefferson and his co-authors of the Declaration of Independence wrote in 1776, 'that all Men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Happiness'. When the Commonwealth of Australia came into being on New Year's Day, 1901, very few truths were self-evident any more; this included the core truth of Australians' ideological choice between 'The Land that belongs to the Lord and the Queen' (as Henry Lawson put it in 'A Song of the Republic', 1887) 'And the Land that belongs to you.' As far as the world at large was concerned, moreover, the set of ideas by means of which the Western mind had organised its affairs since the Renaissance seemed to have corroded irretrievably in the hands of thinkers like Darwin, Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud. Indeed, such thinkers had wholly reconceptualised what the 'unalienable' elements in humanity might be.

It is another cliché of intellectual history that neither America nor Australia took a major part in the Romantic rejection of Enlightenment optimism. The United States is

1 Richard Price, *Observations on the Importance of the American Revolution, and the Means of Making it a Benefit to the World* (1785), p. 6.
2 Leslie Fiedler, *Love and Death in the American Novel*, rev. edn, 1966; Penguin, 1982, p. 36.

fundamentally a Lockean project, as Fiedler reminds us, and neither it nor New South Wales was in a position to assist that group of (primarily) German and English writer-intellectuals that sought to demolish 18th-century confidence in reason, secularism, and the spread of knowledge. Both places missed the boat, it seems, or contributed to Romanticism only belatedly, after the major works had been carried out in Europe. Broadly speaking this is true. The years 1788 to 1860 are as good as any others to date the Romantic era, but Robert Dixon provides plenty of evidence to suggest we should equate that very timeframe with the dominance of neoclassicism in Australia.[3] 'The Romantic period proper seems to have missed Australian poetry altogether', write Richard Jordan and Peter Pierce. In his 1981 survey of Australian poetry Vivian Smith, too, elides the Romantic movement. 'There is much to engross the 18th-century specialist in the work of the first verse writers,' he remarks, 'much to engage the reader of Victorian poetry and the student of Victorian and colonial attitudes in the work of Harpur, Kendall and Gordon; who represent particular phases of colonial and Victorian feeling.'[4] Where the Antipodes are concerned, the long 18th century kissed fingers with the long 19th century, leaving nothing in between. 'Historically, it was as if Australia was some Rip Van Winkle', as Paul Kane neatly puts it, 'who fell asleep as a neo-classicist and awoke as a Victorian.'[5] Dixon explains this non-appearance of the Romantic revolution in terms of an intervening imperialist ideology ('the course of empire' envisioned in certain canonical notions of progress derived from the Scottish Enlightenment of Ferguson, Millar, and Robinson) that drove out or smothered latent tendencies to Romanticism. (Certainly, the grovelling poet-laureate of Macquarie's colony, Michael Massey Robinson, speaks in his 'Ode for the Queen's Birthday 1816' of 'maturing REASON'S dawning ray' and 'Wisdom's scientific Lore' spreading 'from Shore to Shore' and displacing pagan darkness as it went, even in New Holland: 'Hope cheered the Dawn, and led the Course to Fame!' These are not very Romantic attitudes.)

Kane makes the also reasonable point that 'Throughout the high romantic period, there were more convicts in Australia than any other group': hardly a promising seedbed, he suggests, for Romantic aspirations 'to more expansive modes of being.'[6] But reservations need to be entertained about a view of the Romantic movement based wholly in expansiveness. In part and at times it did indeed impatiently seek freedom; but then so did the Enlightenment. What characterises Romanticism more profoundly, I feel, is its growing recognition that expansive modes of being (self-evident truths like equality,

3 Robert Dixon, *The Course of Empire: Neo-Classical Culture in New South Wales, 1788–1860*, OUP, 1968.

4 Richard Jordan and Peter Pierce (eds), *The Poet's Discovery: Nineteenth-Century Australia in Verse*, MUP, 1990, p. 2; Vivian Smith, 'Poetry', in Leonie Kramer (ed.), *The Oxford History of Australian Literature*, OUP, 1981, p. 274.

5 Paul Kane, *Australian Poetry: Romanticism and Negativity*, CUP, 1996, p. 10. Kane's monograph is much the most sophisticated treatment of romanticism's paradoxical influence on Australian poetry; the approach I take in this chapter is broader, less literary-critical, and more historical.

6 Ibid., p. 15.

for example) were difficult to achieve in the world it felt it had to confront – a world vastly more complicated than the practically feudal one confronted by the *philosophes*. Romanticism loved freedom, but it loved truth more; it released Shelleyan skylarks, certainly, but it watched many of them return to earth with a thud.

The Romantic Antipodes

I said that neither America nor Australia contributed directly and first-hand to the Romantic counter-revolution, and that both places generally felt the influence of the movement by means of intellectual dispersal and delay. But both places in time and in turn made cultural mileage out of two Romantic ideas in particular: landscape and its Indigenous inhabitants. From the earliest days, Australia provided Romantic sensations as well as neoclassical ones where these categories were concerned. Here is the French explorer Bruni D'Entrecasteaux at Recherche Bay, Tasmania, in January 1793:

> It will be difficult to describe my feelings at the sight of this solitary harbour situated at the extremities of the globe, so perfectly enclosed that one feels separated from the rest of the universe. Everything is influenced by the wilderness of the rugged landscape. With each step, one encounters the beauties of unspoilt nature, with signs of decrepitude; trees reaching a very great height, and of a corresponding diameter, are devoid of branches along the trunk, but crowned with an everlasting green foliage. Some of these trees seem as ancient as the world, and are so tightly interlaced that they are impenetrable.[7]

D'Entrecasteaux voices a peculiarly Romantic paradox about nature: that it speaks to and is a part of us, deeply and ineluctably, yet that it is a separate and uncaring system, too. ('We receive but what we give', as Coleridge had put it in the 'Dejection' ode: hardly a comforting or expansive interpretation of the natural world.) Under the circumstances of isolation and desolation at Recherche Bay, nature produced diverse feelings for D'Entrecasteaux, accordingly: vague ('difficult to describe'), specific (solitude, perfect enclosure, separation), and powerful ('Everything is influenced'). But despite the emotional power it wields over those who respond to it, nature remains awesomely distant and separate, in its mystery (unspoiled yet decrepit, branchless yet crowned with foliage), its antiquity ('ancient as the world'), and its aloof integrity ('so tightly interlaced that they are impenetrable'). To be perfectly enclosed in something utterly unspoiled is immensely desirable, but it comes at the price of pure isolation.

Another French explorer who registered this proto-Romantic feeling of trespassing on a fragile and uneasy idyll was François Péron, at King Island in December 1802, witnessing the destruction of its elephant seal population:

7 Bruni D'Entrecasteaux, *Voyage to Australia and the Pacific, 1791–1793*, trans. Edward Duyker and Maryse Duyker, MUP, 2001, p. 32.

> Until now, the animals of which we are speaking, guided by some wise instinct, have known how to conceal themselves from the wrath of the human race. Far from the regions in which it dwells, secluded on wild and lonely islands, these great seals were able, without enemies or fears, to outdo each other in multiplying and growing. Henceforth everything is changed for them; and if it was formerly possible for them to find protection from the voracity of the inhabitants of these climes, they will not now escape the mercantile greed which appears to have sworn the annihilation of their race. Indeed, the English have invaded these retreats, which for so long protected them; they have organised massacres everywhere, which cannot fail shortly to cause a noticeable and irreparable reduction to the population of these animals.[8]

The world of nature is one of wise instinct, incomprehensible to humanity, seeking shelter from destruction at the extremities of the globe. The unfortunate elephant seal is, from the Romantic point of view, a sentimental object safe only when it is enclosed both in space ('wild and lonely islands') and in time ('Until now'; 'Henceforth'). Moreover, the human race (or 'the English' in this case) is no casual exterminator but a guilty species, intent – 'sworn . . . invaded . . . organised' – on violent eradication.

There is a significant proportion of Romantic nostalgia for lost perfection and dread of human destructiveness in both D'Entrecasteaux and Péron. But what if the wild and lonely island of Australia, instead of being a scene of destruction, became one of redemption? And what if the species concerned was not the old-growth forest or the elephant seal, but erring, fallen humanity, cast up on its shores in the form of British convicts? The first of Robert Southey's *Botany-Bay Eclogues*, written at Oxford in 1794,[9] is the story of Elinor, a convict in 'The livery of shame' and 'at the farthest limits of the world' who reflects on her youth:

> Ah! little thinking I myself was doom'd
> To tempt the perils of the boundless deep,
> An outcast, unbeloved and unbewail'd.

Though 'The fields of England' are 'still present' to Elinor's 'exiled eyes' she understands her new environment to be a fitting one:

> Welcome, ye savage lands, ye barbarous climes,
> Where angry England sends her outcast sons,
> I hail your joyless shores! My weary bark,
> Long tempest-tost on Life's inclement sea,
> Here hails her haven; welcomes the drear scene,
> The marshy plain, the briar-entangled wood,
> And all the perils of a world unknown.
> For Elinor has nothing new to fear
> From cruel Fortune; all her rankling shafts

8 François Péron, *Voyage of Discovery to the Southern Lands*, 2 vols, trans. Christine Cornell, Friends of the State Library of South Australia, 2003–6, vol. ii, p. 40.

9 Robert Southey, *Poetical Works*, 10 vols, Longman, 1837–8, vol. ii, pp. 71–4.

> Barb'd with disgrace, and venom'd with disease,
> Have pierced my bosom, and the dart of death
> Has lost its terrors to a wretch like me.

This daughter of Cain is 'doom'd' either by inheritance or character, for part of the pessimistic nature of Romanticism is its stress on determinism. She half makes, half reflects the wilderness she sees around her:

> Welcome ye marshy heaths, ye pathless woods,
> Where the rude native rests his wearied frame
> Beneath the sheltering shade; where, when the storm
> Benumbs his naked limbs, he flies to seek
> The dripping shelter. Welcome, ye wild plains
> Unbroken by the plough, undelved by hand
> Of patient rustic; where for lowing herds,
> And for the music of the bleating flocks,
> Alone is heard the kangaroo's sad note,
> Deepening in distance.

'Welcome wilderness', Elinor concludes: 'Nature's domain!' Southey's poem is a portentous intellectual combination of Romantic guilt and ecological sensitivity: it seems that only when moral agents themselves are exiled can they see or imagine the environment in its pristine state, before human intervention ('Unbroken by the plough, undelved by hand'). The lowing herds and bleating flocks of Augustan pastoral ('where Industry's encourag'd Hand', as Robinson put it in his ode for Queen Charlotte, 'Has chang'd the lurid Aspect of the Land') have been left behind at home, replaced by an altogether more dismal and forlorn landscape.

Explorers

It is fitting that in Elinor's savage and barbarous place of exile the 'rude native' is even more unhoused than she herself. She has fallen from grace with civilisation, but he has never known it, and the 'sheltering shade' and 'dripping shelter' are all that protect him from the sun and the rain. This is not that man fresh from the gods described in Montaigne's 'On the Cannibals', or the inhabitant of the negative Utopia spoken of in Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, or Rousseau's child of nature from the *Discourse on Inequality*, roaming free and solitary in the woods before the reign of iron and corn. Nothing and no-one parents the child of nature at Botany Bay. On the contrary, the savage of Romantic literature is generally *ig*noble, either in the sense of being wicked and resolutely godless or in the sense we find in Southey here, of being simply pitiful. In time writers in Australia would make a kind of compromised return to the noble savage myth, but one which evicted for all time the fancies of Enlightenment speculation. In that process the most fascinating meeting-places of post-Enlightenment belief and Australian reality are not in the colony's imaginative writers, but rather in the accounts

left by the country's (new) explorers whose spirit and attitudes are worth analysis in the context of Romanticism. Not that 19th-century explorers of Australia could be called Romantics as such, still less poets of Southey's stripe – or even 'poetic' souls of Péron's variety. Most were either military officers (like Oxley, Sturt, and Mitchell) or men of science (like Leichhardt). But whether they willed it or whether they knew it, their responses sometimes betrayed attitudes that were new to the region, and very different from those of, say, a Joseph Banks.

Born in Prussia in 1813 and widely educated in Europe, Ludwig Leichhardt certainly had a potentially Romantic pedigree, but like most Australian explorers of the first half of the 19th century he generally subordinated the lyrical impulses he felt to the task in hand. His journals show him to be by turns a dreamer, a stargazer, and an animal-lover,[10] and certainly he is more candid than most about his feelings. 'How often have I found myself', he wrote, 'in these different states of the brightest hope and the deepest misery, riding along, thirsty, almost lifeless and ready to drop from my saddle with fatigue.' But, contrary to our general understanding of the sources of Romantic feeling – an understanding that is sometimes loose – such moments of introspective emotional affect are less significant than what is elicited from him by contact with other people, Aboriginal people: 'our sable friends' as he called them (whether sardonically or sincerely, it is hard to tell).[11] There is the compromised noble savagery of the austere life, for example, which he and his fellow travellers experience on their travels:

> The state of our health shewed how congenial the climate was to the human constitution; for, without the comforts which the civilized man thinks essentially necessary to life . . . we were yet all in health; although at times suffering much from weakness and fatigue. At night we stretched ourselves on the ground, almost as naked as the natives, and though most of my companions still used their tents, it was amply proved afterwards that the want of this luxury was attended with no ill consequences. [p. 299]

But there are also morally richer acts of interpersonal assessment:

> I had not . . . the slightest fear and apprehension of any treachery on the part of the natives; for my frequent intercourse with the natives of Australia had taught me to distinguish easily between the smooth tongue of deceit, with which they try to ensnare their victim, and the open expression of kind and friendly feelings, or those of confidence and respect. I remember several instances of the most cold-blooded smooth-tongued treachery, and of the most extraordinary gullibility of the natives; but I am sure that a careful observer is more than a match for these simple children of nature, and that he can easily read the bad intention in their unsteady, greedy, glistening eyes. [pp. 506–7]

A passage like this shows Leichhardt well on the road to a post-Enlightenment response, and therefore well on the road to a Romantic one. It is couched in the terms of European

10 See Ludwig Leichhardt, *Journal of an Overland Expedition in Australia, from Moreton Bay to Port Essington . . . During the Years 1844–1845*, Boone, 1847, pp. 265–6, 280–1, 438–9.

11 Ibid., pp. 267, 503.

superiority, needless to say, but his comment is by no means simplistic, for these people are most emphatically not the children of nature whom Rousseau dreamed of finding among the Caribs, and their intentions must quite positively be read, in their *eyes*. Leichhardt presents himself as a supremely confident interpreter and is condescending, accordingly, it is true; but these are fellow human beings that he is interpreting, not noble savages or other alien species of that kind. In any event, these are not simple people superannuated by the course of empire.

Leichhardt has a more significant passage even than this last; one that most modern readers would pass over without comment. (Our tendency to do so in fact confirms that we are still living within a Romantic consciousness: one that most significantly takes certain things for granted when one person writes about another.) At one point on his travels, Leichhardt's party came across a solitary Aboriginal woman:

> Whilst riding along the bank of the river, we saw an old woman before us, walking slowly and thoughtfully through the forest, supporting her slender and apparently exhausted frame with one of those long sticks which the women use for digging roots; a child was running before her. Fearing she would be much alarmed if we came too suddenly upon her . . . I cooeed gently; after repeating the call two or three times, she turned her head; in sudden fright she lifted her arms, and began to beat the air, as if to take wing, – then seizing the child, and shrieking most pitifully, she rapidly crossed the creek, and escaped to the opposite ridges. What could she think, but that we were some of those imaginary beings, with legends of which the wise men of her people frighten the children into obedience, and whose strange forms and stranger doings are the favourite topics of conversation amongst the natives at night when seated round their fires? [pp. 190–1]

There is no need to prove that Leichhardt had read any of Wordsworth's many poems of encounter with such people ('The Old Man Travelling', for example) before writing this. The nature of the encounter is Romantic by virtue of the pattern of response – not of the woman to the explorer, but of the explorer to the woman. The scene is iconic in its very inception: an old woman walking, with a child running before her like an image of impatient youth under the tutelage of old age. Leichhardt twice supplements a denotative expression with a connotative one: 'slowly' with 'thoughtfully', 'slender' with 'apparently exhausted'. Abruptly the white men's act of interruption – which they strive to soften by the only means at hand: cooeeing – turns the woman into an emblem of fragility and flight; and just as abruptly the explorer's thoughts seek out what he imagines to be her own ('shrieking most pitifully'), and seek out their origin in the culture from which (he imagines) she comes. There is no need to make exorbitant claims of or for cultural equality in such a paragraph: for Leichhardt the elders of her tribe are as inferior to the Westerner as the elderly woman is inferior to them and as the child is inferior to her. But she has forced him to see what he looks like to her and her people ('strange forms and stranger doings'), and no 'rude native' of Southey's imagination could have done that.

Edward John Eyre, too, came across a Wordsworthian solitary on his travels, male this time instead of female: 'a poor emaciated native,' he records, 'entirely alone, without either food or fire, and evidently left by his tribe to perish there'. 'He seemed almost unconscious of our presence, and stared upon us with a vacant unmeaning gaze . . . the probability is that he died a very few hours after we left him.'[12] Like Leichhardt, Eyre cannot stop himself treating the man as an individual, however much his scientific and philosophical impulses intervene:

> Such is the fate of the aged and helpless in savage life, nor can we wonder that it should be so, since self-preservation is the first law of nature, and the wandering native who has to travel always over a great extent of ground to seek for his daily food, could not obtain enough to support his existence, if obliged to remain with the old and the sick, or if impeded by the incumbrance of carrying them with him; still I felt grieved for the poor old man we had left behind us, and it was long before I could drive away his image from my mind, or repress the melancholy train of thoughts that the circumstance had called forth. [p. 41]

This is a minor instance of the course of empire, and the nomadic way of life being encountered by the civilised one, exactly as the Scottish Enlightenment predicted. 'Still I felt grieved', Eyre says – rather than reassured, that is; and he found himself, like Wordsworth (a fellow virtuoso in using the word 'still'), unable either to drive away the dying indigene or repress the melancholy set of reflections the old man set in motion. It seems that a law of nature of the kind the Enlightenment was tremendously set on revealing tells only half the truth of such an encounter, and that pathos and empathy are more than a match for rationalism and objectivity. Contrary to expectation the individual resists classification, and the witness finds his map of humankind unreliable accordingly.

Eyre found this dying remnant of his tribe on his way north out of Adelaide, *en route* to the great saline lake that bears his name. Driven back from there, and before undertaking his spectral journey to the west along the shore of the Great Australian Bight, Eyre recuperated on the South Australian peninsula which also bears his name, and heard of an awful event: the spearing murder of a local twelve-year-old settler child, alone at home, by a group of Aborigines. Now *all* his latent sympathies are manifested: for the dead boy, certainly, but also and more significantly for the perpetrators of the crime. Like Leichhardt, Eyre cannot stop pursuing the nature of reality into the mentalities and attitudes of these apparently morally opaque people.

In doing so he makes a set of points each and any of which were fundamentally inaccessible to neoclassical forms of cultural thinking. 'Our being in their country at all', he says, first and foremost, is 'altogether an act of intrusion and aggression' as far as Aborigines are concerned (as opposed to a variety of cultural inevitability, for example,

12 Edward John Eyre, *Journals of Expeditions of Discovery into Central Australia . . . in the Years 1840–1*, 2 vols, Boone, 1845, vol. i, p. 41.

predicted and legitimated by the course of empire). Europeans' motives for coming are incomprehensible to the Indigenous peoples, and therefore suspect; 'presence and settlement . . . do, in fact, actually dispossess the aboriginal inhabitants'; and Europeans not only seize Aboriginal land but settle 'the best and most valuable portion of it', so not merely moving Indigenous peoples from habitual places of visitation but therefore and in fact breaking up the pattern of their way of life at the profoundest level. From these initial points – in themselves a kind of indictment – come others, where Eyre's focus switches to the Westerners themselves. 'We ourselves have laws, customs, or prejudices, to which we attach considerable importance', he notes; 'so have the natives theirs, equally, perhaps, dear to them'. In other words, not only do *all* peoples have observances and ordinances, but some of those laws subsist alongside or indeed are made up of 'prejudices', made 'dear' on emotional grounds rather than legalistic ones. This amounts to a form of Romantic relativism, where what one believes matters less for its truth than for the amount one invests in it. There is no Enlightenment scale of civilisation here, or 'maturing REASON'S dawning ray' adjudicating between that in which the Aborigines place their sense of justice and that in which Europeans do. Finally, Eyre remarks, there is the entire theatre of contact between those settlers 'who have placed themselves on the outskirts of civilization' and who are therefore free from both the protection and the restraint of European law, and those whose customs are so trespassed upon: a theatre of suspicion, fear, violence, and bloodshed that itself takes a hand in events – there is no blank slate or neutral environment at the settling fringe.[13] Even a decent settler will, by dispossession, drive those he has dispossessed to extremities:

> Nor ought we to wonder, that a slight insult, or a trifling injury, should sometimes hurry them to an act apparently not warranted by the provocation. Who can tell how long their feelings had been rankling in their bosoms; how long, or how much they had borne; a single drop will make the cup run over, when filled up to the brim; a single spark will ignite the mine, that, by its explosion, will scatter destruction around it; and may not one foolish indiscretion, one thoughtless act of contumely or wrong, arouse to vengeance the passions that have long been burning, though concealed? With the same dispositions and tempers as ourselves, they are subject to the same impulses and infirmities. Little accustomed to restrain their feelings, it is natural, that when goaded beyond endurance, the effect should be violent, and fatal to those who roused them; – the smothered fire but bursts out the stronger from having been pent up; and the rankling passions are but fanned into wilder fury, from having been repressed. [pp. 172–3]

Here we can see Enlightenment universalism ('the same dispositions and tempers as ourselves', as James Cook himself might have said) shifting into the fundamentally individualistic moral psychology of Romanticism, to the effect that anything 'smothered',

13 Ibid., pp. 167, 168, 169.

'pent up' or 'repressed' is doubly dangerous by virtue of being so. ('Better murder an infant in its cradle', William Blake said, 'than nurse an unacted desire', and Byron's doge Faliero makes the connected point, voiced by Eyre himself as a Romantic cliché, that ''tis the last drop / Which makes the cup run o'er, and mine was full / Already'.) This moral-psychological individualism has implications for ideas of natural justice, too, and in hindsight we can recognise in Eyre's discussion the extent to which both Enlightenment universalism and Romantic sentiment have contributed to the post-colonial guilt in modern Australia that he anticipates.

For no apparent reason, Eyre's discussion of the Port Lincoln murder is accompanied by a picture of 'Native Graves'. Such pictures and related verbal descriptions punctuated European accounts of Australia from the earliest days, and are found in narratives by Péron, Flinders, and Sturt as well as Eyre. Major Thomas Mitchell also made a habit of visiting Aboriginal cemeteries. Sometimes such places are for him ones where nature has reclaimed its own in an act of recuperative sympathy:

> Each stood in the centre of an artificial hollow, the mound or tomb in the middle being about five feet high; and on each of them were piled numerous withered branches and limbs of trees, no inappropriate emblem of mortality. I could scarcely doubt that these tombs covered the remains of that portion of the tribe swept off by the fell disease which had left such marks on all who survived. There were no trees on this hill, save one quite dead, which seemed to point, with its hoary arms, like a spectre to the tombs. A melancholy waste, where a level country and boundless woods extended beyond the reach of vision, was in perfect harmony with the dreary foreground of the scene.[14]

This is one kind of fittingness, highly Romantic to our post-Wordsworthian eyes. Another, more 'civilised' form of interment is recorded elsewhere:

> It was extensive, and laid out in walks, which were narrow and smooth, as if intended only for 'sprites;' and they meandered in gracefully curved lines, among the heaps of reddish earth, which contrasted finely with the acacias and dark casuarinæ around. Others gilt with moss shot far into the recesses of the bush, where slight traces of still more ancient graves proved the antiquity of these simple but touching records of humanity. With all our art, we could do no more for the dead than these poor savages had done. [p. 321]

Here the ideal clearly remains neoclassical – more Gray's country churchyard than Wordsworth's thorn, more André Le Nôtre than Capability Brown, more lawn cemetery than blasted heath. Nature itself is 'laid out' in gracefully curved lines, and is organised into elegantly meaningful contrasts of light and shade, culture and nature. The universalism is almost pure here: with all our art *we could do no more*, and there is

14 T. L. Mitchell, *Three Expeditions into the Interior of Eastern Australia*, 2 vols, 2nd edn, Boone, 1839, vol. i, p. 262; 'These natives . . . bore strong marks of the small-pox, or some such disease, which appeared to have been very destructive among them', p. 261.

no difference between the intrepid explorer and the 'rude native', the churchyard and the burying ground.

But a bleakly Romantic and progressivist (as opposed to Rousseauesque and primitivist) moral underlies Leichhardt's old woman, Eyre's dying man, and Mitchell's graves. Early 19th-century Europeans are fascinated by senescence and mortality because they are sure the Aborigines are *dying out*. In his great cycle of American settlement, Fenimore Cooper's Mohicans are heroic because they are the *last* and because they, unlike their rivals the Iroquois, will not trade that heroic status for political advantage among the Europeans squabbling over their land. In what he called Australia Felix – essentially, inland western Victoria – Mitchell was sure he had come across 'the Australian Hesperides': but with what impact?

> A land so inviting, and still without inhabitants! As I stood, the first European intruder on the sublime solitude of these verdant plains, as yet untouched by flocks or herds; I felt conscious of being the harbinger of mighty changes; and that our steps would soon be followed by the men and the animals for which it seemed to have been prepared.[15]

The Indigenous occupants are written out of the story so completely as not even to be speculated about. An intruder Mitchell might be, but these lands, like those of milk and honey from which the tribes of Israel ejected the Canaanites, have been 'prepared' for his kind and their cloven-hoofed followers, not for the Aborigine. In his northern exploration out from Brisbane, Mitchell rediscovered Southey's 'rude native' of 1794: 'Two old grey-haired men sitting silent in a gunya behind . . . sat doubled upon their hams opposite to each other, under the withered bushes, naked, and grey, and melancholy – sad and hopeless types of their fading race!'[16]

Mitchell's position is fundamentally a confused one, in common with many of his time. The noble savage of the 18th century still exists, but now he is as deterministically doomed as Southey's Elinor. 'Such health and exemption from disease; such intensity of existence', Mitchell rhapsodised, with a quintessentially noble savage pacing in front of him, 'must be far beyond the enjoyments of civilised men, with all that art can do for them; and the proof of this is to be found in the failure of all attempts to persuade these free denizens of uncultivated earth to forsake it for the tilled ground.'[17] But an irreversible fate is at work: 'The only kindness we could do for them, would be to let them and their wide range of territory alone; to act otherwise and profess good-will is but hypocrisy'; the fate of the Aborigine, in fact, is 'that which took place on man's fall and expulsion from Eden' (65–6). *That* is what makes him a Romantic savage, because he is at once the first man all over again, driven out by the Anglo-Saxon serpent, and

15 Ibid., vol. ii, pp. 127, 159.

16 T. L. Mitchell, *Journal of an Expedition into the Interior of Tropical Australia in Search of a Route from Sydney to the Gulf of Carpentaria*, Longman, 1848, 30.

17 Ibid., p. 65. This is the noble savage of W. C. Wentworth's 'Australasia' of 1823: 'Unshackled wanderers, enthusiasts free / Pure native sons of savage liberty', and so on.

the last man of his race, left to look at a dying fire and an empty landscape as his world is taken from him.

Buvelôt and Clarke

We left the Australian landscape in the hands of an imaginist like Southey, safely ensconced at Balliol College, Oxford, describing 'The marshy plain and briar-entangled wood' of New South Wales with 'the kangaroo's sad note' ringing in his ignorant ear. For Southey, as for many early Romantics, Australia figured as a kind of fresh start for the guilt-ridden wanderer, as Tahiti was imagined to be for Fletcher Christian and his *Bounty* mutineers. To jump forward many years to the 1870s is to leave that myth behind, naturally enough, and to replace it with the deeper human associations incurred by settlement, though still coloured by the wishes and the expectations of the new arrivals.

A reflection-cum-evocation of these associations emerged with particular power in a short essay Marcus Clarke wrote to accompany a photograph of a colonial painting in the National Gallery of Victoria: Louis Buvelôt's 'Waterpool Near Coleraine'. The essay is a legend in the Australian legend because it was the source for Clarke's preface to Adam Lindsay Gordon's collection of poems, *Sea Spray and Smoke Drift* (1867), where Clarke boldly claimed that 'the dominant note of Australian scenery' was precisely the 'dominant note of Edgar Allan Poe's poetry – Weird Melancholy'.[18] 'The Australian mountain forests', Clarke continued, in quintessentially Romantic terms, 'are funereal, secret, stern. Their solitude is desolation. They seem to stifle, in their black gorges, a story of sullen despair.' It is in the Gordon preface that most readers encounter this famous formulation, but it was Buvelôt's painting that put it in motion, as Clarke meditated on the changes predicted and categorised by the Scottish Enlightenment and the course of empire, revealed in one particular locality: how an area in the far west of Mitchell's Australia Felix passed from the 'shepherd pioneers of our new civilization' to 'the agriculturalist and farmer' of more recent times.[19] But again and most interestingly the course of empire and the neoclassical sequence of settlement (hunter-gatherer, nomad, pastoralist, industrialist) is now itself in retrospect a source of Romantic sentiment.

'The scene', Clarke wrote, 'is a little valley, shut in by the upreaching stretches of the downs':

> A waterpool in the foreground reflects the deeper tints of the upper sky, and from either bank rise into intermingling bewilderment of branches, the reft and splintered trunks of two ancient gum trees. A little herd of cattle rest lazily on the verge of the clearing, and

18 Michael Wilding (ed.), *Portable Australian Authors: Marcus Clarke*, UQP, 1976, p. 645.

19 Marcus Clarke, 'Waterpool Near Coleraine', in Bernard Smith (ed.), *Documents on Art and Taste in Australia: The Colonial Period, 1770–1914*, OUP, 1975, pp. 133–6.

> some horses are approaching from the distant timber belt. On the margin of the pool a few ducks, the property of the new lord of the soil, preen their plumage; the axe of the settler rests against a hollow log; and the well trodden path to the water would seem to lead to a home at a little distance. But all the accessories of the scene are subordinated to the prevailing sense of quiet. All is hot, silent, still, and dreamy. The mopokes have not yet begun their wild chattering cries. The air is heavy with the intense hush of the last instant of a dying Australian summer's day, and the old gum trees stand alone with motionless branches and folded leaves beside the solitary pool.

The pathos of pessimism, retrospect, and Romantic revenance creeps like ivy over reassuring signs of life, settlement, and industry. Mere laziness becomes heavy, and a mere 'sense of quiet' gives way to the 'intense hush' of a 'dying . . . day', around the graveside of which the gum trees stand still, leaves reverently folded. Buvelôt has 'selected a subject which at once touches that sense of the poetic which dwells in awakened memories and suggested contrasts of past with present', and it is a remark like this that takes us to the source of Clarke's fascination, which is surely Wordsworth once again. Wordsworth has a famous pool beneath a 'melancholy beacon' in the 12th book of the 1850 *Prelude*, but that is emphatically 'naked' and unsettled; Clarke's is not a literary allusion properly so called, but a vision of Australia through temporarily borrowed eyes, eyes for which the landscape is necessarily a *paysage moralisé* by virtue of the human life that is in it, which the witness has perceived in terms of its impact upon nature and vice versa. As so often in Wordsworth, that which is human is suggested indirectly in Buvelôt, by the tools, instruments, pathways, and beasts that humanity converts to its use, expressing the power and the fragility of the settler instinct in one blow. As so often, also, the least animated of the living things before us are the most articulate: in this case the two gaunt giants whose roots are in the pool, bewildered and bewildering alike. 'Sheer force of association at such time', Clarke suggests, 'brings to mind many melancholy imaginings of scenes of bygone happiness and unthinking enjoyment of present good, which were all-potent realities to the forgotten folk who once lived out their little lives beneath the shade of the still living witness of their hopes and their decay.' The overwhelming note is of mortality, and the day when this particular 'lord of the soil' will fail to return to collect his axe.

Clarke guides his readers unfailingly to the colonial and post-colonial paradox of Australia, noted on many occasions (not least by A. D. Hope in his poem 'Australia'): that by comparison with 'historic England' Australia must seem a 'Land of the Dawning', but that in fact it is infinitely *older*:

> The lonely horseman riding between the moonlight and the day, sees vast shadows creeping across the desolate and silent plains, hears strange noises in the primæval forests, where flourishes a vegetation long dead in other lands, and feels, despite his fortune, that the trim utilitarian civilization which bred him, shrinks into insignificance beside the contemptuous grandeur of forests and ranges coeval with an age where European scientists have cradled his own race.

Still, the primeval only exists on sufferance, in the corner of the European eye when that eye is alone amidst it, as is the case with the benighted horseman. In Australia the primeval is perforce 'the Grotesque, the Weird, – the strange scribblings of Nature learning how to write': 'the beauty of loneliness', 'uncouth', hieroglyphic, 'haggard', and 'distorted'. The trim utilitarian civilisation deriving from England and dwarfed by the bush remains powerful enough, destructive enough, to have driven 'the wandering aboriginal, the solitary shepherd [and] the travelling stockman' away alike, and taken the waterways into sole ownership. 'The time-worn gums shadowing the melancholy water tinged with the light of a fast-dying day', Clarke concludes,

> seem fit emblems of the departed grandeur of the wilderness, and may appear to poetic fancy to uprear in the still evening a monument to the glories of that barbaric empire upon whose ruins the ever-restless European has founded his new kingdom. Glorified for a last instant by the warm rays of the sinking sun, the lonely trees droop and shiver as though in expectation of the chill night which will soon fall alike on the land they have surveyed so long and the memory of the savage people who once possessed it.

So much for the course of empires.

Three Romantic poets

Thus far I have concentrated on prose examples of Australian Romantic consciousness, or dawning consciousness. (Prosaic in form, but not in content, I hope.) And it has been England's most prosaic poet, Wordsworth, who has been the presiding genius of Australian Romanticism, accordingly. But as a significant part of its rejection of Enlightenment rationalism, what Clarke called 'poetic fancy' is the ultimate form of Romantic expression, and in due course, naturally enough, Australian writers made use of it. Three Australian poets in particular have been seen in these terms, I think rightly: Charles Harpur, Adam Lindsay Gordon and Henry Kendall. All three display Romantic – or 'Romantic' – characteristics in their lives as well as their works. All died younger than they should have (Kendall of that most Romantic of all diseases, tuberculosis); all led lives marked by tragedy (the loss of children in the cases of Harpur and Gordon); none made much money or received much popular acclaim (Kendall was an alcoholic; Gordon, a suicide). As writers, all were prolific to the point of prolixity, as many of their English forebears were. Like the English Romantics, too, they were formally inquisitive. We rightly associate Gordon with *Bush Ballads and Galloping Rhymes*, for example, but he also wrote a poetic drama, *Ashtaroth*, the hero of which, inevitably, is called Hugo. Harpur wrote satires and epigrams as well as abbreviated epics like 'The Kangaroo Hunt' and *The Witch of Hebron* ('A Rabbinical Legend'; see Chapter 4). Kendall is associated with sensitive lyrics like 'The Last of His Tribe' (a powerful instance of the dying Aborigine theme, noted above), but he also wrote the viciously ungenerous 'Peter the Piccaninny', a satire on Aboriginality and Wordsworth alike. But all three found their

true metiers in the same places the English Romantics did, by and large: in the lyric (sometimes of ode-length) and the narrative poem, both of which are inherently alien to the Augustan poetic perspectives of Alexander Pope or Samuel Johnson.

In content as well as form, Harpur, Gordon, and Kendall display Romantic and anti-Enlightenment features. The lyric's foundation lies in the cult of spontaneity, of the grasped impression or wavering mood, rather than in heavy-duty, prefabricated intellectual reflections on the state of mankind (the vanity of human wishes, for example). Its basis is inevitably personal, to the point of solipsism, and, as we have seen in Clarke's lyric prose on 'The Waterpool Near Coleraine', the mood is often that of nostalgia – a feeling hardly considered worth recording in the Enlightenment. But the Romantic lyric can be ironic, also, in an idiom unanticipated by Augustan thought and feeling. In 'To My Sister', for example, Gordon knowingly adapts Byron's lachrymose poems on his exile to his own Australian emigration, aged 19:

> Sister, farewell! farewell once more
> To every youthful tie!
> Friends! parents! kinsmen! native shore!
> To each and all goodbye!

(And so on and so forth, *à la* 'Childe Harold's Good Night'.) The Romantic narrative poem, similarly, bears no relation to the Popean epistle: it is unique, singular, and wholly resistant to generalisation or intellectual summary. The narrator is compelled to speak, the auditor compelled to listen, not out of intellectual recognition but out of emotional sympathy. Coleridge's 'The Rime of the Ancient Mariner' is the most famous instance. The story of Australia, such poets believe, is best told not in course-of-empire style stereoscopic summaries of the kind provided by Michael Massey Robinson or W. C. Wentworth (though, to be fair, Kendall wrote a sentimentalised version of such productions in his prize-winning puff, 'The Sydney International Exhibition'), but in any number of 'real' tales – yarns, as Australians were already coming to call them – derived from authentic Australian conditions and shedding light on the Australian character in both landscape and people. Harpur, in particular, offered up many such narratives, simple but dramatically effective because of their flattened perspective and close-up depiction. 'The Creek of the Four Graves' is the best known and most brilliant: a tale of ignoble savagery if ever there was one, but balanced by its sister-poem, 'The Spectre of the Cattle Flat', where a white man's treachery receives its just desert. In such stories that highly Romantic quality, the sense of place, is a key ingredient, just as it was for Byron's 'Turkish Tales' and Wordsworth's ballads and tales of northern rural life.

The three great Australian Romantic poets are examined in detail by Vivian Smith in Chapter 4, and this is not the place for extended discussion; but three pieces, constantly anthologised and widely read, each reveal facets of the inheritance the writers shared. In what appears a simple mood-sketch or lyric recapitulation, Harpur's 'A Midsummer

Noon in the Australian Forest' reveals a quintessentially post-Enlightenment psychology of attention. The poem has its origin in powerfully Wordsworthian declarative simplicity ('Over plains and over woods / What a mighty stillness broods') that itself gives way to ('broods') a kind of negative activity. Even the most active creatures of the earth, the insects, are one by one cast into stillness and into the opposite of their normal habits by the 'vast and slumbrous' reign of summer: the crickets avoid the sunlight, the 'busy ants' stop working, and the cicada ceases its ubiquitous throbbing call. Even the characteristic human activity, we would say, which is uninterruptedly to apply its attention to the world around it in a way very different from the insects, is nearly arrested. Nearly; but not quite, for the winged and noisy arrival of a 'dragon-hornet' (not a dragonfly, and not a wasp either, for this insect has 'shards': wing-cases) suddenly awakens the quiescent mind of the narrator, not just into consciousness but into the desire to communicate what he sees ('see! / All bedaubed resplendently'). In Clarke's essay on Buvelôt, heat and stillness suggested death, but in Harpur's poem there follows an ecstatically detailed description and evocation of life, reaching a climax as the insect's wing-cases catch the light 'like gems on fire'. With the beetle's departure, silence returns, or seems to, until we realise that this silence was always itself made up of background noise: the trickling of water in a creek, the rustling of leaves overhead. True silence, we are given to understand, is a strain on our attention and therefore less conducive to relaxation than such 'white' sound which muffles distractions: another fact about human mental existence. Harpur's 'Musing thus of Quietness' ('Hidden from Noon's scorching eye', but developed from the perspective of a human one) turns out to be something more profound than a simple nature-piece. The poem is about a topic most Augustan poets would have thought beneath their dignity (though it is true both Marvell and Pope could have done it justice): the human animal's resistance and submission to rest, its inability wholly to stifle its appetite for sound and movement, and its glorying in the glory of nature.

One of the achievements of Harpur's poetry in general and 'A Midsummer Noon in the Australian Forest' in particular is his methodical and lucid (and Wordsworthian) handling of metre. By contrast, Kendall has struck readers as occasionally being given to the metrically facile (as Byron could be, of course). But in 'Bell Birds' the metrical fluency is entirely at the service of the poem as a whole. The rippling rhythm enforced by a constant pattern of alliteration (worthy of Old English verse) but punctuated by a highly stressed couplet rhyme – 'By channels of coolness the echoes are calling, / And down the dim gorges I hear the creek falling' – enacts the harmony the poem is about, between the presence of water and the rhyming call of the bird which brings 'thirsty far-comers' to it. This harmony spreads from the experience of bush-travellers up to Jehovah's covenant with Noah after the Flood:

> The silver-voiced bell-birds, the darlings of daytime!
> They sing in September their songs of the May-time;

When shadows wax strong, and the thunder-bolts hurtle,
They hide with their fear in the leaves of the myrtle;
When rain and the sunbeams shine mingled together,
They start up like fairies that follow fair weather;
And straightway the hues of their feathers unfolden
Are the green and the purple, the blue and the golden.

The poem is careful to retain, even flaunt, its Australian quality; it could come from nowhere else, just as Coleridge's conversation poems could only have been written in England. Here October is 'the maiden of bright yellow tresses' not because of autumnal leaves, but because of wattle blossom; here December is 'fiery', not damp and cold; and the Australian September is the May time of old Europe transposed to the southern hemisphere: the spring of New South Wales, when the unexpectedly dry months of winter, governed by westerlies, give way to showers from the south. 'When shadows wax strong' in bright sunlight, and when shadows disappear altogether during storms, the birds fall silent in fear. It is when rain and sun 'shine mingled together' that these apparently dull birds show their iridescent, rainbow-like plumage. In a landscape of droughts and flooding rains the bell bird is an icon of providence and faith, not just for travellers but for pastoralists as well. Being songbirds they constitute a pledge for poets, too, but only at a remove, only in nostalgic retrospect. 'Often I sit', Kendall intones in the final stanza, like the perennially dejected and backward-glancing poet of British Romanticism,

. . . looking back to a childhood,
Mixt with the sights and the sounds of the wildwood,
Longing for power and the sweetness to fashion,
Lyrics with beats like the heart-beats of Passion;

Pent as he is 'in the city and alleys', like a Lake Poet transplanted to Cambridge or Christ's Hospital, the poet can create his visions only imaginatively – but create them he does, and in doing so overcomes the depression that is their origin.

Gordon's 'The Sick Stockrider' has suffered from becoming swept up with Banjo Paterson's later horse operas, irresistible as they are. (By no means is Gordon's poem a 'galloping rhyme' like 'Clancy of the Overflow', for example.) It, too, possesses a pronounced Romanticism, above all in its retrospect, nostalgia, and the sense of place. Nor is it absurd to compare it to high-Romantic treatments of horse and exhausted rider such as Byron's Mazeppa or the nameless knight of Keats' 'La Belle Dame Sans Merci'. In all three cases the rider's connection with his mount is something existential: an index to the life within him that is passing away. The horse is important because it is something wild but temporarily tamed, and therefore associated not only with nature (to which the rider must return in death) but also, in this case, with the life of childhood, destructive and uncaring as childhood sometimes is:

> Let me slumber in the hollow where the wattle blossoms wave,
> With never stone or rail to fence my bed;
> Should the sturdy station children pull the bush flowers on my grave,
> I may chance to hear them romping overhead.

In death the stockrider will become an unfenced horse, re-attuned to the child he himself once was. Children's romping is a natural destructiveness, living on – the stockrider can now see – in adulthood, when he pursued a group of bushrangers:

> Hard behind them in the timber, harder still across the heath,
> Close beside them through the tea-tree scrub we dash'd;
> And the golden-tinted fern leaves, how they rustled underneath!
> And the honeysuckle osiers, how they crash'd!

It follows that this kind of life is another model of attentiveness or vigour, to be compared with Harpur's more passive, dreamy ideal. One way of responding to tea-tree, fern, and honeysuckle is to hear such plants crumpled beneath your horse as you gallop through them. 'Care' is something the stockrider has had no need for and never thought of until he needs the care of others, and the others have mostly died themselves – young, as the myth demands. Like Wordsworth's Simon Lee, Gordon's Stockrider has outlived himself as well as his peers, and his retrospect – a 'hot, slow, sleepy, silent ride' – encompasses the glory of Australia's past and youth, when a known and charted landscape drew strength from the threat presented by the lawless 'Starlight', and by absorbing the random destinies of men like Hughes, MacPherson, Sullivan, Mostyn, and Carisbrooke: names that suggest an Anglo-Celtic settlerhood as emphatically as Clarke's duck pond and axe. (Though Carisbrooke was the Isle of Wight prison of the English King Charles I from which he was brought to trial and execution in 1649, so this is not a cosily uncontentious catalogue.) The poem is not pessimistic so much as stoical: 'when life is ebbing, how those days when life was young / Come back to us', though we were too busy to attend to them as they passed. 'For good undone and gifts misspent and resolutions vain, / 'Tis somewhat late to trouble' because consciousness and conscience were the very things that youth disregarded when arguably they might have made a difference. Like Harpur's and Kendall's poems, this is one about consciousness and its quality, mingled yet substantial, recording only what one person can.

'The animal force and feeling of Byron,' Harpur once wrote, 'with the mental sensuousness of Keats, the moral depth of Wordsworth, and the gorgeous ideality of Shelley, in equal proportions and intimately blended in the constitution of one man, would make *him*, perhaps, a perfect Poet.'[20] Harpur was intelligent enough to know that such a creation could never be – or never be a poet, at any rate, whose make-up is never likely to be one of equal proportions and intimate blendings. That very discovery is a rejection of Renaissance and Enlightenment aesthetics and psychology, which still

20 Michael Ackland (ed.), *Charles Harpur: Selected Poetry and Prose*, Penguin, 1986, p. 45.

entertained the fantasy of the 'universal' or harmonised individual, in whom separate human qualities such as those Harpur listed could be reconciled and would support each other. And his comment reminds us that Romanticism is greater than a sum of its parts, even when they are writers as prodigious and inimitable as the four he listed. As H. G. Schenk wrote many years ago,

> Romanticism is still the most recent European-wide spiritual and intellectual movement . . . Far from being confined to literature in general, or poetry in particular, it manifested itself also in varying degrees in music and the visual arts, historiography and social thought, and in man's general outlook on life in this world and the next.[21]

Explorers took it with them on horseback just as poets voiced it in their studies. Nor was Romanticism only 'European-wide', but a sea change in the Western world. It lapped not just the shores but the very centre of the Australian continent; and Australian writers are swimming in it still. It is only because it makes us up that we find it difficult to see.

21 H. G. Schenk, *The Mind of the European Romantics: An Essay In Cultural History*, Constable, 1966, p. xxi.

7

Australia's Australia

PETER PIERCE

In two of the most plangent questions posed in an Australian poem, the young man who is the subject of Les Murray's 'The Trainee, 1914' asks, ' "Is war very big? As big as New South Wales?" '[1] Ardent, fearful, bewildered, he is readying himself to leave ante-bellum Australia and in particular its *locus classicus*, the world of rural innocence and purity. This 'real Australia', as many have called the outback, will be forever lost, irrevocably compromised by the experience of war. Perhaps the trainee will survive to return to the rural life that he had left, to become part of that recovery and redefinition of what was, and was not, Australia in the decades between the world wars. That effort is the subject of this chapter.

Its title, 'Australia's Australia', invites comparison with Chapters 1 and 12, 'Britain's Australia' and 'Australia's England'. The focus of this chapter is on assays made of Australia – by novelists, painters, poets, art historians, polemicists, lexicographers among others. This is no search for an Australian quintessence, although some of those considered here may have believed in it. The recoil from the Great War is explored as a significant impetus for a parochial, inward-looking gaze. That metropolitan culture, open to the outside world, whatever its discontents, remained of vital importance is undeniable, as is the fact that so many artists and writers – far from turning away from Europe – took themselves to live there.

In 1928, Norman Lindsay's second son, Raymond, an artist and journalist, entered his historical canvas, 'Major Johnston Announcing the Arrest of Governor Bligh, January 1808', in the annual exhibition of the Society for the Arts. Writing in the *Bulletin*, Cecil Mann thought the quality of the work comparable to that of Norman at the same age. Dame Nellie Melba, the famous Australia diva, was also an admirer. She bought the painting, not for herself, but to present to the Geelong Art Gallery (she had given her last Australian concert in that city earlier in the year). Melba took the chance to give stern counsel to the young painter: 'Get out of this country. It's no good for any artist.'[2] Shortly afterwards, Melba went back to Europe for a last, extended visit.

1 Les Murray, *The Ilex Tree* (with Geoffrey Lehmann) ANU, 1965.

2 Related in a memoir by his brother, Jack Lindsay, *The Roaring Twenties: Literary Life in Sydney New South Wales in the Years 1921–6*, Bodley Head, 1960.

The degree to which artists in the 1920s and 30s heeded such advice by turning away from Australia is remarkable. Geoffrey Serle gave a long list of them in *From Deserts the Prophets Come: The Creative Spirit in Australia* (1973).[3] They included Raymond Lindsay's brothers Jack and Philip, Graham and Colin McInnes, Frederic Manning (author of *The Middle Parts of Fortune*, pseudonymously published in London in 1929 and for Ernest Hemingway the finest novel of the Great War), novelist Martin Boyd (like Manning a war veteran), the historian Alan Moorehead, and some distinguished female authors: Barbara Baynton, Catherine Duncan, Velia Ercole, Miles Franklin, Mary Fullerton, Henry Handel Richardson, Helen Simpson and Christina Stead. (What they achieved is one of the concerns of Chapter 12, 'Australia's England'.) Here the focus is on those who stayed in the country, or who came home to it, often after war service.

Some went back to the land, even though most were city-bred and educated. They were influenced by the ideological viewpoint that privileged the country over the city. That is an old notion, but one given particular focus by the Great War and what was surmised of its aftermath. In London on 1 February 1916, at a special meeting of the Empire Land Settlement Committee of the Royal Colonial Institute, Lord Curzon farewelled the novelist Rider Haggard, who was to lead a mission to the dominions on the institute's behalf. Its object was to investigate the possibilities for resettling some of the returned soldiers from a war that was yet nearly three years from its end, in the outflung, predominantly white countries of the British Empire. These were among Curzon's words:

> Do you believe that the great majority of ex-servicemen will be willing to go back to the factory, the workshop or the office stool . . . They will want to settle down somewhere on the land, where they can lead a healthy life, earn an honourable living, bring up their families and, even as on the battlefield, may continue to do some service to the state.[4]

Trench warfare, apparently, would give ex-soldiers a taste for the outdoor life.

Nonetheless, in Canada, New Zealand, South Africa and Australia, this ideal – for which Haggard earnestly proselytised on his travels – was implemented in soldier settlement schemes after the war. The return to rural, rather than urban, Australia was posited as a choice for physical and moral health. Thousands of farmers without experience, and their families, would suffer from another shibboleth of the 'real Australia', crippled by properties that were too small and unmanageable levels of debt repayment. Yet their endeavours received wholesale support from those who would not share their labour. As Stuart Macintyre remarked, 'the poet, the eugenicist and the immigration enthusiast were united in their preference for the country over the city. The concentration of population in the towns was blamed for the decline of the birth rate.'[5]

3 Geoffrey Serle, *From Deserts the Prophets Come: The Creative Spirit in Australia,* Heinemann, 1973.
4 Peter Pierce, 'Rider Haggard in Australia', *Meanjin*, 36. 2 (1977), p. 124.
5 Stuart Macintyre, *A Concise History of Australia*, CUP, 1999, p. 213.

Several Australian authors experimented with other kinds of rural retreat, rather than expatriation, between the wars. Katharine Susannah Prichard's months-long stay at Turee Creek Station in the Pilbara yielded the novel *Coonardoo*, the short story 'The Cooboo' and the play *Brumby Innes*. On 1 November 1926 she wrote from there to Hilda Esson: 'we seem to be cut off from the rest of the world by long shimmering plains, blue hills and pink, mottled with purple, dove-grey millions of miles of mulga, the mirages and forms of red dust, infinite, exquisite skies'.[6] Authors Vance and Nettie Palmer settled in the early 1920s in a house that Prichard owned at Emerald in the Dandenong Ranges, then practically remote from Melbourne. In 1932 they spent eight months at Green Island off tropical Cairns. Jean Devanny lived for a good deal of the 1930s in Far North Queensland. A strike of sugar-cane cutters at Innisfail is fictionalised in her novel *Sugar Heaven* (1936).[7] Xavier Herbert moved to that part of the world as well, to Redlynch, then a township outside Cairns. Perhaps the most famous of these internal exiles was the neurasthenic journalist and naturalist, E. J. Banfield, who settled on Dunk Island off the North Queensland coast in 1897 and remained there till his death in 1923. The most famous of a series of books about this experience was the first, *The Confessions of a Beachcomber* (1908). Aptly, Banfield chose words from Thoreau for the epitaph on his grave.

The title of Drusilla Modjeska's study of 'Australian Women Writers, 1925–1945', *Exiles at Home* (1981),[8] anticipates a somewhat different emphasis. These women, she reckons, were essentially exiles within their own homes, forced to cope with family demands. Not for them the escape into masculine, bohemian worlds such as that of the Lindsays and their *Vision* circle. Modjeska traces the network of women writers that Nettie Palmer built around herself and which – because of their geographical dispersal and domestic circumstances – 'relied extensively on correspondence'. Reflecting the constrictions of their home lives on their careers as writers, many of the novels by these women were 'passionate in their criticism of the effects of marriage'.

Numerous Australian writers after the end of the Great War sought to make discoveries in and about their own country, whether by physical expeditions into inland and other remote regions, or by journeying back in time to the pioneering past. Something of what they found and imagined of Australia's Australia is mapped here. To begin with two examples, significant inquiries into Australia published in the last year of World War II: Sidney Baker described the purpose of *The Australian Language* as 'an examination of the English language and English speech as used in Australia, from convict days to the present, with specific reference to the rise of indigenous idiom and its use by Australian writers'. His epigraph came from W. K. Hancock's seminal work *Australia* (1930): 'Here, surely, is new wealth, expressive of a distinctive and vigorous life, material

6 Ric Throssell (ed.), *Wild Weeds and Wind Flowers: The Life and Letters of Katharine Susannah Prichard*, A&R, 1975, p. 50.

7 Jean Devanny, *Sugar Heaven*, Modern Publishing Co., 1936.

8 Drusilla Modjeska, *Exiles at Home: Australian Women Writers, 1925–1945*, A&R, 1981.

for an individual literature.'[9] What at first struck Baker (a New Zealander) as 'distinctive' was slang, but from there his scope broadened grandly and often humorously in this – one of the most ambitious surveys of Australianness.

In the same year, Bernard Smith published *Place, Taste and Tradition: A Study of Australian Art Since 1788.*[10] Owning his debt to William Moore's *The Story of Australian Art* (1934), Smith based his book on lectures that he had given to the New South Wales Teachers' Federation Art Society. The context in which it was produced was one of international crisis, albeit one now coming to an end: 'We were living through some of the worst days of World War Two, when the victory of Hitler in Europe and Hirohito in the Pacific seemed all too likely . . . the writing of *Place, Taste and Tradition* provided me with a surrogate: it was my contribution to the war effort.' This revaluation of Australian art would be followed by Smith's studies of the art of Cook's voyages and of the First Fleet, and by a path-breaking excursion east of the continent: *European Vision and the South Pacific* (1960).

It was in fiction, however, that the deepest and some of the strangest soundings into Australian life were made in this period. Though in fact he never strayed further from his native New England than New York, H. P. Lovecraft's literary excursions were as extravagant as those of his mentor, Edgar Allan Poe. He trawled 'the huge expanses of the South Pacific', set his story 'At the Mountains of Madness' in Antarctica, used 'an old number of an Australian journal, the *Sydney Bulletin* for April 18, 1925' for its account of the fate of a derelict ship 'found at sea' in 'The Call of Cthulu' (1926) and – in 'The Shadow Out of Time' (1934)[11] – ventured deep into the interior of Western Australia. Aware of Professor Nathaniel Wingate Peaslee's occult research, a Pilbara mining engineer writes to him of his discoveries, adding that 'the blackfellows have always been full of talk about "great stones with marks on them" and seem to have a terrible fear of such things'. So an expedition is mounted. What Peaslee found, 'on the night of 17–18 July 1935' when perhaps he was 'drawn back to the pre-human world', may have been 'wholly or partly an hallucination', yet 'its realism was so hideous that I sometimes find hope impossible'.

This freak of a febrile imagination is still worth dissection. Between the wars, Australian authors of fiction showed a signal lack of interest in the Pacific, let alone in Antarctica. Far outback Australia, however, which had earlier been colonised by such Rider Haggard–inspired romances of lost civilisations as Rosa Praed's *Fugitive Anne* (1903), would be revisited, but more in the spirit of hideous realism than of fancy and often in tales of the implacable blighting of hope. The most distinctive kind of Australian fiction between the wars was a naturalised version of the saga: stories of pioneering, of struggles against seasonal and elemental forces, as well as the constraints of domesticity,

9 Sidney Baker, *The Australian Language*, A&R, 1945. W. K. Hancock, *Australia*, Ernest Benn, 1930.

10 Bernard Smith, *Place, Taste and Tradition: A Study of Australian Art Since 1788*, Ure Smith, 1945.

11 H. P. Lovecraft, 'The Shadow Out of Time', first published in *Astounding Stories* (June 1936); reprinted in *The Dunwich Horror and Others*, Arkham House, 1963.

of the dispossession of the Indigenous peoples. These were minatory tales of how fragile was the hold that could be exercised over places so far from Australia's coastal cities.

Naturalising the saga

Saga fiction was a legitimising enterprise, in praise of European pioneers who settled vast and seemingly intractable stretches of land. The painter Frederick McCubbin's triptych 'The Pioneers' (1904) was a paean to their endeavours. Patrick White's novel *The Tree of Man* (1955) was a long, ironic reflection on that painting and a revision of the commonplaces of the saga form for a post-war readership, just as *Voss* (1957) attempted the same revision of quest romance. Both the cases of White and of Australian narrative painting suggest another of the wellsprings of inter-war saga, and its attempt to discover – not new lands, for only Lovecraft would revive such mysteries – but the nature of Australia's Australia.

This generative impulse is a profound reaction to the experiences – at first and second hand – of the Great War. Dramatising eras of pioneering in a fabled national past, saga recoils from the bloody recent memories of the war (though not to the point of being unwilling to shed blood). The gaze of saga turns inwards to Australia and its past, as though the war had been a disastrous overseas delinquency that the recollections of arduous toil in more innocent times, work demanding of heroism of a different kind, will reprove. For many of those who fought, the war entrenched parochialism after their homecoming, rather than enlarging their sense of the world. Many ex-servicemen turned gladly home, became introspective, preferred taciturnity, maybe became narrower of view because of what they had endured. Many, of course, went back to the land, where – according to C. E. W. Bean, the official historian of Australia in the Great War – the Anzac spirit had been nurtured. The 'real Australia' (his phrase) that Bean had found in western New South Wales early in the 20th century, while researching his books *On the Wool Track* (1910) and *The Dreadnought of the Darling* (1911),[12] demanded the values of resilience, mateship, courage, improvisation, that would sustain the Australian troops who went ashore at Gallipoli at dawn on 25 April 1915.

Nor was Bean a solitary exponent of such a view. In May 1918 Arthur Streeton, who had recently been appointed an official Australian war artist, wrote to his fellow painter Tom Roberts:

> it's necessary to see and know [the Australian soldier] to properly appreciate the manhood of Australia. Absolutely. The fights against flood, fire and drought [the trinity of saga tribulations] in the bush all tell in the field here – and bring out the finest in them . . . it has to be seen and observed here – which is a privilege.[13]

12 C. E. W. Bean, *On the Wool Track*, A. Rivers, 1910, and *The Dreadnought of the Darling*, A. Rivers, 1911.
13 Quoted in Betty Churcher, *The Art of War*, Miegunyah Press, 2004, p. 17.

This comes from a man city-bred, as was Bean, as was George Lambert, who had celebrated pioneering toil in rural Australia in his painting 'Across the Black Soil Plains' (1899) and whose 'Anzac, the Landing, 1915' would be earmarked for the first exhibition mounted by the Australian War Memorial on Anzac Day 1922. In *The Art of War* (2004), Betty Churcher teased out the vital link between Lambert's two paintings: 'These heroes of the outback become the prototype for the typical Australian character – tough, resourceful, anti-authoritarian, and loyal to mates – characteristics that many of the young recruits from the cities felt they shared with the recruits from the bush.'[14] Of Lambert's Palestinian war landscape paintings – particularly 'The Charge of the Australian Light Horse at Beersheba, 1917' – Churcher contends that they 'set in train a new vogue in Australian landscape painting'. That is, they encouraged painterly attention to the arid regions of the continent, directed the artists' gaze deep inland, as in Hans Heysen's works depicting the Flinders Ranges in South Australia. Such paintings were a counterpart of the saga fiction that flourished in the 1920s and 30s.

The authors and the suggestive titles of that fiction include Eleanor Dark's tale of the first years of European settlement in New South Wales, *The Timeless Land* (1941); and *A House is Built* (1929), by M. Barnard Eldershaw, which deals not with the bush but with the affairs of the Sydney merchant dynasty founded by James Hyde. Other works are the six novels that Miles Franklin wrote as Brent of Bin Bin; *Up the Country* (1928), set in the Monaro district in the 1850s, was succeeded by *Ten Creeks Run* (1930), which dramatised upheavals in the next generation of several squatter families. The journalist and newspaper editor Brian Penton finished two parts of a projected saga trilogy, the bluntly titled *Landtakers* (1934) and *Inheritors* (1936), which also treat of successive generations, this time in the pioneering Cabel family in rural Queensland in the second half of the 19th century.

A House is Built shared the 1928 *Bulletin* fiction prize with Prichard's *Coonardoo*. Its publishing fortunes were no smoother. Both books were rejected by the Australian publisher Angus & Robertson, so that their authors looked to London (to Harrap and Cape respectively), where the novels were published in the following year. It was not until 1960 that the first Australian edition of *Coonardoo* appeared, achieving sales of 20 000 in that year and soon finding its way onto school syllabuses (see Chapter 8). But in 1928 the problem was, for at least one of the *Bulletin* judges – Gallipoli veteran and editor of the magazine's Red Page, Cecil Mann – the eponymous heroine, the Aboriginal woman Coonardoo (whose name meant 'The Well in the Shadow'). He remarked that 'With any other native, from fragrant Zulu to fly-kissed Arab maid, she could have done it. But the Aboriginal, in Australia anyway, cannot excite any higher feeling than nauseated pity or comical contempt.'[15] (Or perhaps more: near Coniston

14 Ibid., p. 23.

15 Throssell, *Wild Weeds and Wind Flowers*, p. 54. (For the *Bulletin*'s Red Page, or literary section, see Chapter 8, below.)

in the Northern Territory in that year of 1928 the last recorded large-scale massacre of Aborigines occurred.)

Mann's view was seconded by the venerable Australian poet Mary Gilmore (who three decades before had been part of the New Australia experiment in Paraguay), when in December 1928 she wrote to Nettie Palmer (a close friend of Prichard's), 'What an appalling thing *Coonardoo* is. It is not merely a journalistic description of station life, it is vulgar and dirty.'[16] Presumably this is because the novel includes an act of miscegenation between Hugh Watt, owner of the Pilbara cattle station Wytaliba, and Coonardoo, albeit one so chastely described as almost not to have happened. The *Bulletin*, which had serialised the novel, had unctuous second thoughts: 'Our disastrous experiment with *Coonardoo* shows us that the Australian public will not stand stories based on a white man's relations with an Australian Aborigine.'[17]

In this reckoning of driving forces behind saga fiction, *Coonardoo* features in other ways. It covers three generations in the lives of the Watt family (to the point where Wytaliba is lost), and stretches to the late 1920s in its temporal compass, that is, to the time of the novel's completion. Yet the Great War (in which Prichard's husband, Hugo Throssell, won a Victoria Cross at Gallipoli), is altogether elided. In her 1967 monograph on Prichard, Henrietta Drake-Brockman quotes her as saying that the war was 'too scarring to be treated casually . . . better to ignore its anguish and repercussions, here, in a tragic black-and-white situation it did not alter'.[18] Not only *Coonardoo*, but saga fiction in general turned away from the supposedly crucial episode in the making of Australia. It turned inwards, to the remote parts of the continent, and backwards in time, to that pioneering era in which proto-national values supposedly were formed. The saga generously contained historical fiction, travelogue, myth-making and moral exempla. Indeed in one important sense the form was history-making as well, because these narratives of the Australian past were a vital source of information for general readers in an era where the professionalisation of the teaching of Australian history had hardly begun.

One of the most prolific of authors of saga is now one of the least known. Tasmanian-born Noel Norman – as Louis Kaye – published 13 novels in the 1930s, all with Wright & Brown in London. The first was *Tybal Men* (1931),[19] a quintessence of the saga novel. The second edition had a fulsome foreword from the prolific author and sometime resident of Australia, A. A. G. 'Smiler' Hales, who recorded how an expedition in search of local colour for his 50th novel had been interrupted when 'this new man's manuscript blew in upon me'. Faithfully, powerfully, it dealt with 'the life of the burning west'. This was the 'strangest, grimmest novel written by any man on Australian back block life since Marcus Clarke'. In a perhaps more apposite comparison, Hales found *Tybal Men* 'in its way . . . as true a picture of Australian back block life as Miss Schreiner's

16 Ibid., p. 54. 17 Ibid., p. 55.
18 Henrietta Drake-Brockman, *Katharine Susannah Prichard*, OUP, 1967, p. 37.
19 Louis Kaye [Noel Norman], *Tybal Men*, Wright & Brown, 1931.

[*The Story of an African Farm*, 1883] was of South African veldt life'. Here was a triumph of hideous realism: 'He has looked at life in the raw, fierce, relentless, semi-savage life, and he has written the things he saw.'

While still in his teens, and during the Great War, Norman ran away from his Hobart home and worked in outback Western Australia, a crucial experience for his fiction. As Louis Kaye, he soon found popular and financial success, though scant acclaim in his own country. Stories of his were published in the American *Saturday Evening Post* (fetching up to $US1500 each), in Canada, and in the *Strand* magazine and the *Illustrated London News* in England. In 1933 Norman deplored the failure of most Australian writers to confront 'our plains and desert country'.[20] He was a determined exception.

The Tybal men of his first novel are the three Maclean brothers: Alan, married to the querulous Zillah, a wife unfitted for station life (as was Hugh's wife Mollie in *Coonardoo*); Vivian, a veteran of the Great War; and the knockabout Don Mac. The two generations before them are briefly sketched: the redoubtable Scots pioneer in 'a wild, mad land', Angus Maclean, and his scapegrace son James who died 'in a drunken fight with a nigger'. Now the three sons are trying to save their sheep property in the south of Western Australia. Their adversaries include drought, but also the banks and dirty politicians: 'fighting with words, with mind and tongue, with cunning' is not the Maclean way. As James declares to his sister Katy, 'Our enemies are coming from behind us now.' Alan is of like mind: 'He would think of the cities, the Australian cities huddling on the coasts with their swelling population, as fat parasites on the land, and the sweat and labour of the land.' (In A. D. Hope's 1939 poem 'Australia', those cities would be likened to 'five teeming sores'.)

Saga is often the vehicle of such peroration. Radical and iconoclastic views can be ventilated even if the larger narrative is patriotic, of nation-building. Men in states of extremity, such as the Macleans, more readily vent their feelings against the metropolitan world that trammels the efforts of those who work on the land. Norman, who would be dismissed from the ABC during World War II for his left-wing views, gives Vivian a set-piece denunciation of militarism. Here is an uncommonly talkative revenant, who speaks from the pain of his 'war-broken life' to condemn ' "the war-makers and the war-lords and the statesmen who want their names in the history books!" ' Wars are not accidents, but are ' "worked up for years" '. He is disgusted by the ' "patriotic cant and hysteria" ' and declares that ' "the enemy you meet on the battlefield . . . is not your enemy" '. (This sentiment is reiterated in some of the novels that Martin Boyd wrote after World War II that drew on his active service in the Great War.) Vivian dies, raging. Tybal is saved by an improbable stroke of luck and literally on the last page. The short, prolific and instructive career of Louis Kaye was fairly begun.

The most famous of the inter-war saga novels also takes advantage of the form's welcome for discursive and declamatory passages of a radical temper, even though this

20 Michael Roe, 'Noel Norman', *The Companion to Tasmanian History*, University of Tasmania: Centre for Tasmanian Historical Studies, 2005, p. 252.

might be regarded as contrary to the conservative, chronicle structure of the saga. The novel is Xavier Herbert's *Capricornia* (1938),[21] which developed from the tellingly titled work-in-progress called 'Black Velvet' to a panorama of northern Australia in the early decades of the 20th century. Much of the elaboration and revision of the novel was done while Herbert and his wife Sadie were in London in 1930–2. Crucial to the completion of the novel was P. R. Stephensen, ultimately unthanked as editor and first publisher of *Capricornia*. An expansive note is struck at the beginning, 'When New Westminster was for the third time swept into the Silver Sea by the floods of the generous wet season.' Thereafter much of the action is set in the newly established regional centre of Port Zodiac (where mingle Filipinos, Japanese, Chinese, Malays, Aborigines and the European vanguard) and along the railway line that stretches south into the hinterland.

The roll of more than 100 characters includes the Shillingworth brothers, the bastard half-caste son of one of them – called Naw-nim, then Norman – the blustering patriot Tim O'Cannon, Andy McRandy, Yellow Elbert, the southern lawyer Bightit. The mock-epic element of Herbert's narrative is signalled by those over-determining names. The mood of the work is remarkably buoyant, considering how many of the characters violently die. The issue of miscegenation – evidently so controversial when *Coonardoo* was judged 10 years before – is now an unexceptional commonplace of life in the north. Yet there are savage interpolations about the treatment of Aborigines, notably of life in the Compound set aside for them: ' "Most Aborigines who had been born in freedom preferred to do their starving in the bush. And all the while the nation was boasting to the world of its Freedom and Manliness and Honesty. Australia Felix?" '

At various points in the novel, its loquacious characters debate whether Aborigines are dying out or not (the ' "last big shout-out of niggers by jonnops was in 1928 . . . last big one that was made public I mean" '); the justice or otherwise of the White Australia Policy (this in a region further from the realisation of such a stern ideal than any in the continent); the fate of an adventurous female pilot; the Great War, especially as it affects cattle prices; the feasibility of a railway line all the way south from Port Zodiac to Churchtown (Herbert's mocking name for Adelaide); the economic cycles of boom and bust in the north; the extent of the danger posed to Australia by the Japanese. *Capricornia* is a saga alert to the world elsewhere, as befits a novel set in a port facing in one direction towards Asia, rather than enmeshed within the boundaries of a cattle station.

One of Herbert's principal, polemical spokesmen is Joe Digger, in private a poet and novelist, who lectures Oscar Shillingworth on the virtues of the Binghis (from the local Aboriginal word *binggay*, meaning elder brother): ' "Their code of simple brotherhood is Christianity to me." ' Angrily he asks how it is that

21 Xavier Herbert, *Capricornia: A Novel of Northern Australia*, The Publicist, 1938.

> 'All sorts of evil breeds – the sex-mad Hindoos, the voodooing Africans, the cannibals of Oceania, all dirty, diseased, slaving and enslaving races – are being helped to decent civilised manhood by the thoughtful white people of the world, while we of this country, the richest in the world, just stand by and see out black compatriots wiped out. They'll be like the Noble Redman some day – noble when gone!'

The saga form accommodates such iconoclasm, but how far Herbert's predominantly metropolitan readers were touched by its moral burden, rather than its exoticism, is uncertain.

More disconcerting might have been Andy McRandy's welcome of the prospect of a Japanese invasion. For by this means, Australia might truly discover itself: ' "It'd be the making of us. We need sumpen like that to bring out our character, to make a real true creation of us." ' Its hectic vitality unabated many decades later, its desires for the Australian future still largely unresolved, *Capricornia* is the culmination of the saga novel in the national fiction. This unmatched testament to Australian nihilism concludes with harsh, mocking sounds not of the human world: 'The crows alighted in a gnarled, dead coolibah near by and cried dismally, "Kah!-Kah!-Kaaaah!" '

Facts and fictions

One of the distinctive and best-selling kinds of prose works written in Australia in the inter-war years shifted back and forth across the unpatrolled boundary between fact and fiction. Some of the titles of books by William Hatfield indicate this constructive straying. Hatfield came from England to Australia in 1911, before he had turned 20, and worked for a decade on cattle stations in remote parts of the country – northern South Australia, Queensland, the Northern Territory. *Sheepmates* (1931) was a semi-autobiographical reminiscence of this time. *Desert Saga* (1933) followed the fortunes of an Arrernte (Arunta) Aboriginal boy. Then there were documentary and descriptive works: *Australia Through the Windscreen* (1936) and *Into the Great Unfenced* (1940).

Frank Clune's career began at the same time as Hatfield's, with an account of his varied work and wanderings, *Try Anything Once* (1933). In the four subsequent decades, this Gallipoli veteran produced more than 60 books, although a number of them – particularly those with historical subjects – were ghosted by Stephensen. Clune's name appeared on two dozen books of travel, in two of the earliest of which he followed the course that Bean had set 30 years before. These were *Rolling Down the Lachlan* (1935) and *Roaming Round the Darling* (1936).

Another of the most prolific of Australian authors, and a few years older than Clune and Hatfield, was Ion Idriess. In common with a number of the male authors considered here, he was a veteran of the Great War. But his production issued from sedentary circumstances: most of his books were written at a dedicated desk at Angus & Robertson in Sydney. Before that his life was altogether more active. A member of the Light Horse,

he used that experience for his second notable literary success, *The Desert Column* (1932). After the war, Idriess worked as a coastal seaman, drover, opal-miner, rabbit-exterminator, and journalist. He achieved fame with a work altogether more fanciful than those occupations might have suggested. This was *Lasseter's Last Ride* (1931), the story of a fabled reef of gold that Harold Lasseter had first glimpsed near the western edge of the Macdonnell Ranges in 1900. Backed by the Australian Workers' Union, he set out to rediscover the reef in 1930, but died of exposure in January 1931.

The possibility of finding the reef of gold has continued to tantalise. Certainly Idriess was fascinated by the treasure that might be dug up or harvested in distant parts of Australia. In his curious and revealing hybrid work, *The Yellow Joss and Other Tales* (1934), Idriess claims that

> the stories in this volume record happenings or incidents in men's lives which interested me during the years of wandering among the bushmen and natives of Cape York Peninsula; the pearlers, trochus and beche-de-mer getters of the Coral Sea; the native islanders of the Torres Strait; the 'beachcombers' of the Great Barrier Reef, and along the eastern coast and in the Arafura Sea to the west. [22]

Purportedly the stories are 'transcripts of fact or are largely based on fact'. Louis Becke, Idriess' most important predecessor, especially for his tales of the islands of the South Pacific, might have made the same claim.

The illusion of fact, indeed of ethnographic inquiry, is heightened by the use of photographs. Here are pictures of Queensland mining camps, Darnley Island in the Torres Strait – 'Off Which is the Divers' Graveyard' – and, smoking a very large pipe, 'A Meditative Oriental, Thursday Island'. Men are driven by desperate dreams of riches, as they search for sandalwood, pearls, ambergris, 'a wonderful orchid', beche-de-mer, or follow a 'lost soul's track' in search of gold. In the depths of the Great Depression, Australia is apparently full of fabled riches for the recklessly adventurous. Even radium is hunted on an island in Torres Strait. This is the Boonya, 'the spirit light' which (in an unwitting nod to Lovecraft's story of the same year) 'may originally have come from some lost civilisation'. Idriess' factions are deeply escapist, briefly freeing readers from metropolitan misery by the hope of the treasures that Australia harbours.

National self-respect

There were more high-minded visions of Australia's possibilities than this. Stephensen the great enabler of *Capricornia*, was – like Herbert – an ardent advocate for the national future. A Queensland Rhodes Scholar for 1924, he was nearly sent down from Oxford for his radical opinions. Remaining in England, he worked with Jack Lindsay and Jack Kirtley at the Franfolico Press; set up the short-lived Mandrake Press which

22 Ion Idriess, *The Yellow Joss and Other Tales*, A&R, 1934.

published D. H. Lawrence; returned to Australia in 1932, where he was again involved in various publishing ventures. In January 1935 he chaired a reception for the Czech communist and journalist Egon Kisch (whom after protracted and comic misadventures the Australian government managed to deport) and Katharine Prichard to establish the Sydney branch of the Book Censorship Abolition League. In the following year, his 'Retort Courteous' to a disparagement of Australian literature by Professor George Cowling of the University of Melbourne, was published by W. J. Miles. This was *The Foundations of Culture in Australia: An Essay Towards National Self-Respect*.[23]

His three-part essay conceded that 'our national Australian history is comparatively brief', but proceeded undeterred. With a confidence that sounds Emersonian, Stephensen declared that 'for us, each decade of our history is packed with love and legend and significant national experience. A decade of our own history is more important to us than a century of history from elsewhere.' He enjoined Australians to 'Populate or Perish'; inveighed against Toc H and the Boy Scouts, which 'strengthen a puerile sentimentality about England and the Empire'; mused that if things 'go smash elsewhere', Australians may have to accept the responsibility as 'principal guardian of white civilisation, of white culture, of white traditions upon this earth'. Defiant, defensive, the essay signalled Stephensen's political shift to the right and towards isolationism, even as he attacked Australia's 'hermit intellectuals' for not protesting against the 'monstrous Customs censorship of books which is making Australia's name stink throughout the world'. In 1941 Stephensen was one of the founders of the Australia First movement. March of the next year saw him interned with 15 others. It was August 1945, in the last month of the war, before he was released.

The South Australian poet Rex Ingamells was one of those who joined Australia First in 1941, although he escaped Stephensen's fate. *The Foundations of Culture in Australia* had been a seminal influence and provoked Ingamells' sympathetic response: another manifesto, if in a minor key, the pamphlet *Conditional Culture* (1938).[24] The title meant what it said: 'the blossoming of a distinctive Australian culture depends on certain conditions'. The enemies of a such a development were the jingoism that had attended Australia's participation in the Great War and the disdainful opinion of outsiders (such as the English-born Cowling) about distinctive features of Australia. Ingamells quotes the English author Norman Douglas on the introduction of the eucalypt to the Mediterranean basin: 'this eyesore, this grey-haired scarecrow, this reptile of a growth'; 'no plant on earth rustles in such a horribly metallic fashion . . . it is like the sibilant chatterings of ghosts'. (Fabian Socialists Beatrice and Sidney Webb had been similarly unimpressed by the gum tree during their visit of 1898.)

For remedy, Ingamells turned inwards, announcing to the world the advent of a word, and a movement: ' "Jindyworobak" is an Aboriginal word meaning "to annex,

23 P. R. Stephensen, *The Foundations of Culture in Australia: An Essay Towards National Self-Respect*, W. J. Miles, 1936.

24 Rex Ingamells and Ian Tilbrook, *Conditional Culture*, F. W. Preece, 1938.

to join", and I propose to coin it for a particular use. The Jindyworobaks, I say, are those individuals who are endeavouring to free Australian art from whatever alien influences trammel it.' Language must be purged 'of Old World associations'. The history of Australia 'abounds in a wealth of dramatic material', but little use has been made of 'Australia's primaevalism'. Only four novels meet Ingamells' stern standard: Clarke's *His Natural Life* and three sagas – *Landtakers*, *A House is Built* and Richardson's trilogy, *The Fortunes of Richard Mahony* (1930). Ambivalently, Ingamells sees salvation in 'The Culture of the Aborigines'. If they are now 'a degenerate, puppet people, mere parodies of what their race once was, [yet] the laws, the customs, and the art of the Australian Aborigines went to make a culture which was closely bound in every way to their environment'. *Capricornia* (in some ways a much more ambitious manifesto) echoed these sentiments in the same year. Annexing the teachings of the original Australians was the Jindyworobak mission, one sadly more flaccid than flamboyant in Ingamells' prescription: 'from Aboriginal legend, sublimated through our thought, we must achieve something of a positive outlook on life'.

In 1933, as a spin-off from the *Official History of Australia in the War of 1914–8*, edited by Bean, the Australian War Memorial published a collection of reproductions in colour and duo-tone of paintings of that war (Lambert's among them). It was called *Australian Chivalry*.[25] The frontispiece depicts a nonchalant digger, cigarette in hand, looking across the ruins of a battlefield to his unexpected counterpart, an armoured, crusading knight. From the horrors of war is plucked this mollifying, dignifying, if distant connection. It was a bold, ideological move by the editor, J. L. Treloar. In effect he was offering another recipe for the cleansing of Australia (as did Ingamells, Herbert and the Customs Department), but more precisely an alternative to the recently created legend of Anzac. That legend had its origins in German *Sturm und Drang* Romanticism, in the notion that fledgling nations, such as Australia was in 1915, enlist in history through participation in war.

By contrast, *Australian Chivalry* looks away from the blood sacrifice, the corporate heroism, the fecund failure of Gallipoli, proffering a tentative, alternative set of values: 'honour', individual moral choice, the enduring power of 'compassion', 'self-sacrifice and altruism'. That is, inspiration was sought in such qualities as might build a nation in peace as well as in war. The book intended to remove its readers from reflection on the terrible recent losses in the Great War by transporting them back to the supposedly chivalrous time (or out of time) when virtues such as those the Australians also showed (besides those martial ones of the Anzac legend) were sovereign. But Treloar had still another aim for *Australian Chivalry*, one animated by his anxieties about the moral and literary hygiene of the nation. Introducing the book, he expressed the hope that it would 'idealise the men who served and thus to some extent counteract the debased outlook in many recent war books which have aroused hostile criticism and resentment'.

25 J. T. Treloar (ed.), *Australian Chivalry*, Australian War Memorial, 1933.

Presumably he had in mind such recently published fiction of the Great War as Manning's *The Middle Parts of Fortune*, Hemingway's *A Farewell to Arms*, Remarque's *All Quiet on the Western Front* (which the Nazis banned and burned in 1933).

Banning and disparaging

Treloar was not seeking to interdict such books, but to provide a wholesome alternative to them, albeit of an utterly different kind. The Australian Customs Department took a sterner view. In 1928, the handful of books to be banned from importation into Australia included Balzac's *Droll Stories* and cheap editions of Boccaccio and Rabelais. But by 1936, an astonishing 5000 titles were prohibited from entry. Joyce's *Ulysses* led the way in April 1929, and was soon to be in distinguished company. Excluded too were works by Defoe, Huxley, Orwell, Dos Passos, Hemingway, Colette and Norman Lindsay. It was against such government action that Stephensen, Prichard and other leaders of the Book Censorship Abolition League fought. Their protests were so successful that much of the censorship had been rolled back by the end of the decade, soon however to be succeeded by the control over war news that would so enrage Brian Penton, and others. Censorship – keeping Australia healthy by banning contaminating foreign influences and ideas – was the dark counterpart of the desire to encourage the national well-being by a return to the soil.

Only the second Australian book to be banned – the first was Norman Lindsay's *Redheap* (1930) under different legislation – was J. M. Harcourt's *Upsurge: A Novel* (1934.[26] In his preface to the facsimile edition of 1985, Richard Nile noted some of the work's distinctions: 'the first Australian novel to employ the literary techniques of socialist realism, the first to be banned under the guidelines of the Commonwealth Censorship Board and the first to be the subject of police prosecution'. Born in Melbourne in 1902, Harcourt headed west in his teens, working as an assistant surveyor at Kalgoorlie and a pearl-sheller at Broome – that multi-ethnic location where Prichard set a pot-boiler, *Moon of Desire* (1941). Unlike Idriess' questers, his £2000 share from the discovery of a pearl let him return to Perth as a journalist and – for a few years – a novelist.

Upsurge was the second of only three. Prichard hailed it as the first Australian proletarian novel. A former colleague, in an ungallant review, recommended the novel for those readers who 'carry prohibited Parisian picture cards in their pocket wallets and scribble on walls'. Harcourt's Marxist politics appear to have given as much offence as the book's sex scenes. Magistrate Riddle is threatened with a stick of gelignite up his arse, while the man who made that threat later feels 'a constriction of his throat and a swelling of his genitals' while he gazes upon an impossible object of desire. (He goes to a brothel for relief.) A loose woman, on Rockingham Beach, 'laughed and sighed and

26 J. M. Harcourt, *Upsurge: A Novel*, John Long, 1934.

submitted'. Harcourt may have courted the ban. In any event, his notoriety saw him elected as the first president of the Book Censorship Abolition League in 1935.

The Great War, as Stuart Macintyre remarks, had seen 'excessive censorship of news from the front'. He also emphasises the signal importance of the catastrophe that swiftly followed the Armistice: 'the idea of Australia threatened by modern evils was symbolised by the influenza epidemic that struck Europe at the end of the war'.[27] In Australia in 1919, 12 000 died of the so-called Spanish Influenza. Macintyre comments: 'as with the virus, so with other pathogens. Seditious and obscene publications were censored, degenerate art condemned, undesirable aliens deported.' The scale of censorship has been noted, as has the ham-fisted attempt to rid Australia of Egon Kisch. Here the presumed enemy took the form of ideas, reified in books and in certain meddlesome individuals. What, however, was the threat that art, 'degenerate' or not, posed to Australia?

Robert Menzies (who as attorney-general had led the action against Kisch) became prime minister for the first time from 1939 to 1941. Before he lost office, this proponent of an Australian version of the Royal Academy for the arts was able to observe how he had always felt that French art was decadent, and that this was proven by the fall of France. Menzies' feelings about Germany (which he visited in 1938) and the Nazis were ambivalent, rather than fondly supportive, as has been contended. That there were pro-Nazi sentiments abroad in Australia in the 1930s is indisputable. Eric Campbell, leader of the right-wing New Guard, applauded Hitler's regime for its 'cleansing of alleged subversives and degenerates'.[28] Presumably he meant homosexuals, communists and – of course – Jews. The latter were the target of the period's most flagrant and inflammatory attack on artistic modernism, *Addled Art* (1942) by Sir Lionel Lindsay, brother of Norman.[29]

The cartoon on the book's cover comes briskly to the point. An ape with artist's beret and palette throws expressionist, futurist (rotten), surrealist (guaranteed putrid) and cubist eggs at the Venus de Milo. Inside, acknowledgement is made to the Melbourne *Herald* newspaper for permission to reproduce works from the Exhibition of French and British Art sponsored by Sir Keith Murdoch. Some of these gave Lindsay particular offence and ammunition for his diatribe. The paintings became prisoners-of-war, unable to be returned to Europe till 1946. War and the threat of invasion provided the metaphor for Lindsay's preface. Australian art is 'undefended, threatened by the same aliens, the same corrupting influences that undermined French art, both supported by powerful propaganda'. Modernism's victory, he alleges, was not won 'by honest fighting, but was written into existence by lurching critics, corrupted in most instances by interested dealers'.

Lindsay next elaborates on Menzies' sentiment: 'a contributory cause in the fall of France – the writing was on the wall when the Jew Stavisky was discovered to have

27 Macintyre, *Concise History*, p. 162. 28 Ibid., p 173.
29 Sir Lionel Lindsay, *Addled Art*, A&R, 1942.

bribed more than half the members of the Chamber of Deputies – modern art was the outward visible symbol of a spiritual malady'. Besides its Semitic context, the 'freak' of modernism, Lindsay declares, has its origins in 'the age of speed, sensationalism, jazz, and the insensate adoration of money'. While he concedes that 'because of the vileness of the Nazi persecutions, pity for the Jew is justly world-wide', Lindsay evidently feels that this concession is sufficient to justify his attacks on Jewish dealers and artists. Modigliani is 'the Italian Jew', Chagall 'the Russian Jew'. Picasso's mind, in its 'mercurial restlessness, expediency, flashness marks out not the Andalusian but the Jewish constituent in his character'. Picasso's 'Guernica' Lindsay judges to have been 'inspired by the Muse of Abortion'. Hope he finds in unexpected quarters: 'Even the ultra-modernist poet T. S. Eliot recants, crying loudly upon tradition as he lapses into the arms of Mother Church.' Modernist painters' worst crime was in 'abolishing fine drawing'. Lindsay's final chapter is a trenchant call for 'Return to Subject', but he has particular subject matter in mind. The painter Tom Roberts had informed him of 'the importance of painting our characteristic life, which he rightly centred in the pastoral industry'.

Of like mind was the art critic J. S. MacDonald. Seriously wounded at Gallipoli (when he was 37), MacDonald studied the art of camouflage and was commissioned as a war artist in 1918, as Streeton had been. His study of another renowned Australian landscape painter was published in 1916 as *The Art of Frederick McCubbin*. After the war MacDonald abandoned painting for art criticism; he was director successively of the National Gallery of New South Wales and the National Gallery of Victoria. There his attacks on modern art and especially the 1939 *Herald* exhibition led to his dismissal in 1941. Sir Keith Murdoch, owner of the *Herald* and sponsor of the exhibition, was chairman of the trustees of the gallery. Again in common with Lindsay, MacDonald's preference was for the Australian bucolic and the moral virtues that it was supposed to foster. Of the work of McCubbin's friend Streeton, MacDonald said: 'we can be the elect of the world, the last of the pastoralists, the thorougbred Aryans in all their nobility'.[30] Nostalgic depictions of rural life are judged the epitome of Australian art as Lindsay and MacDonald advocate this version of what and where the veritable Australia is, and should be.

Little magazines and anthologies

Plenty disagreed. In the second number of *Australian New Writing* in March 1944 (there would be only four, appearing in each year from 1943 to 1946), V. G. O'Connor assailed *Addled Art*, beginning with an epigraph purportedly from the erstwhile painter Adolf Hitler: 'Cubism, Dadaism, Futurism, Impressionism and the rest have nothing in common with our German people.' Prichard was one of the editors of *Australian New Writing*, which may explain its dual direction: to the world at war, and to the continuing

30 Quoted in Robert Hughes, *Things I Didn't Know*, Random House, 2006, p. 214.

daily life in Australia.[31] Prichard's novels were dedicated to revealing working Australia to itself, notably the timber industry in Western Australia in *Working Bullocks*, the opal-mining fields of New South Wales in *Black Opal* (1921), the pastoral industry in *Coonardoo*, the gold-fields in a trilogy published in 1946–50. But she was also a founding member of the Communist Party of Australia in 1921 and author of a laudatory account of Russia, where she had travelled in 1933. Proudly reprinted in the magazine is a cable of New Year's greetings from the presidium of the Union of Soviet Writers in Moscow. We have a rant from David Hyman on 'Literature and the People's War', but also understated stories of the Melbourne waterfront from John Morrison (another communist) whose place of work it was. French author Romain Rolland, who the editors falsely claim was killed in a Nazi concentration camp in 1943, provides what is effectively the epigraph for *Australian New Writing*: 'Art, in truth, is always involved in the battle of its age.'

Born in fervour – cultural and political – this 'little magazine' had the short and hectic existence common to the breed. But it was also contemporary with the beginnings of magazines that would have astonishing, long, and as yet unfinished lives. *Southerly*, 'The Magazine of the Australian English Association', was first published in September 1939.[32] There were stories by Dal Stivens and Kylie Tennant, and an essay on 'Psychoanalysis and Poetry' by A. D. Hope, which denounced the encroachment of the former on literary criticism. (Hope would be quoted as one of 'our critics' by the editors of *Australian New Writing*: 'It is not surprising to find their puerile view of present day history matched with an equally puerile view of the duty of the artist.') The first number of *Southerly* also had poems by James McAuley and Harold Stewart, who in 1944 would conceive the Ern Malley hoax while stationed at the Victoria Barracks in Melbourne, and by the Professor of Greek at Sydney University, Enoch Powell, who would shortly leave to enlist in the Royal Warwickshire Regiment – as an Australian. Both of his poems, obliquely, quietly, were concerned with the coming of the war.

In 1940, in Brisbane, Clem Christesen founded perhaps the most important of Australian little magazines. *Meanjin* was purportedly named for the Aboriginal word for the land on which Brisbane stood. Its leanings were broad left, and it was less doctrinaire than *Australian New Writing*. In 1945 Christesen was enticed by the University of Melbourne to remove himself and the magazine south. There it has remained, often in fractious relations with its host.

In effect, such magazines as *Southerly* and *Meanjin* were in each issue a mini-anthology. There had, however, been specific surveys of what Australia had to yield, for instance in the 1928 anthology *Australian Short Stories*, chosen by George Mackaness.[33] The collection's aims were patriotic and parochial. Selected were 'representative stories

31 *Australian New Writing*, Current Book Distributors, 1943–6.
32 *Southerly*, Australian English Association, 1939.
33 George Mackaness (ed.), *Australian Short Stories*, J. M. Dent & Sons, 1928.

written by native-born Australians'. They were drawn from 'the cream of the thousands of Australian short stories typical of Australia and her "makers" '. This was, Mackaness believed, the first such collection since the *Bulletin Story Book* of 1901.

The contents list is a roll call of distinguished authors and of stories that would go on to become favourite anthology pieces, including Henry Lawson's great, grim jest, 'The Loaded Dog'; Edward Dyson's 'A Golden Shanty'; and Prichard's 'The Cooboo'. (Her *Working Bullocks* is described in passing as 'probably the finest novel ever written in Australia'.) Here also, are works by Barbara Baynton, Louis Becke, Randolph Bedford, John le Gay Brereton, Marcus Clarke, Zora Cross, Ernest Favenc and H. M. Green, for 'A Leander of the Hawkesbury'. Green's own turn towards Australia's Australia, *An Outline of Australian Literature*, was published in 1930. More indicative of the book's purpose as a literary discovery of Australia are those titles which focus on one or other of the many distinctive national types. Here are 'The Half-Caste', 'The Drover's Wife', 'The Parson's Black Boy', 'The Emancipist', 'The Tramp'.

Another significant anthology, and the first in what would become a long, if intermittent series, was*: Australian Stories 1941*, selected by Cecil Mann.[34] The contents were certified hygienic on the dust jacket: 'Perhaps the most striking quality common to all these stories is their naturalness – a naturalness based on sincerity, absence of artificiality, acute observation, and imaginative insight.' Frank Dalby Davison, who served with the British army on the Western Front, is represented by 'Return of the Hunter'. This story tells of how ex-Great War sniper, Tug Treloar, kills a marauding dingo. Since demobilisation, he has experienced 'a descent from glory'; 'somehow life had run a fence around him'. Even the outback world of his youth has lost its savour. The hiatus of the war cannot be overcome. Here also are stories of miscegenation – Prichard's 'Marlene' (evidently Mann had forgiven her for *Coonardoo*) – and of life on the dole by Tennant; a Depression story, 'Dry Spell' by Marjorie Barnard, which identifies 'apathy' as the chief enemy to Australian society and ends in the optative mood: 'We must take up the burden of remaking our world.'

Concluding: disgruntled patriotism, acrid optimism

Others were not so sanguine. In 1943, Bean, official Great War historian and prime mover behind the Australian War Memorial in Canberra, let alone chief proponent of the legend of Anzac, wrote a book of disgruntled patriotism, *War Aims of a Plain Australian* (1943).[35] He lamented the

> deadness that fell on Australia between the two wars – deadness in political, social and religious efforts – the deadness of vision that led every party in Australia to seek external safety in isolation when the only system that could offer security to even the most powerful nation was a collective one – for this deadness we are all of us responsible.

34 Cecil Mann (ed.), *Coast to Coast*, A&R, 1941.
35 C. E. W. Bean, *War Aims of a Plain Australian*, A&R, 1943.

How just is this reckoning? What can be conceded and what contested in Bean's view of Australia in that interregnum of peace?

In his ambivalent poem from four years earlier, one of the many to bear the title 'Australia', A. D. Hope reflected on the native land to which he had returned after a not altogether satisfying time at Oxford. First encountered was 'A nation of trees, drab green and desolate grey'. Human creativity had, it seemed, produced nothing, for this was a country 'Without songs, architecture, history'. 'The river of her immense stupidity' flooded 'her monotonous tribes from Cairns to Perth'. Then comes one of the most famous reversals (and puns) in Australian poetry:

> Yet there are some like me turn gladly home
> From the lush jungle of modern thought, to find
> The Arabian desert of the human mind,
> Hoping, if still from the deserts the prophets come . . .

Hope nimbly shifts from metaphorical to literal desert; turns away from 'modern thought' and implicitly from Europe, to see what Australia might make of itself. This is an acrid optimism that has its counterparts, in many different registers, in the responses to Australia's Australia that have been considered here.

8

The short story, 1890s to 1950

BRUCE BENNETT

Short stories are written by individuals but they are influenced by other writers, critics and publishers. More than other literary genres, short stories are dependent on newspapers and magazines or anthologies for first publication. The literary activity of short story writers may therefore be represented as an individual struggling for self-expression, but a more comprehensive and realistic view includes writers, editors, publishers and readers in a continual process of interaction – each adjusting or readjusting their role in relation to the others' needs and requirements. This interactive process may affect the length of stories, whether they entertain or instruct, and their shape or form.[1]

This chapter will give most attention to individual short story writers and collections of their work from the 1890s to about 1950 in their literary, geographic and historical contexts. Special attention will also be given to newspapers and periodical publications as well as books, and responses to them by readers and critics. Questions of evaluation arise. For instance, can any Australian writer of short stories between the 1890s and 1950 be called 'great'? A combination of favourable critical responses, contemporary popularity and sustained attention by publishers over time would place Henry Lawson in this category. But what does such categorisation mean? In particular, how are such qualitative judgments to be distinguished from commercial considerations? An example is the case of Steele Rudd, whose successful marketing and transmutations of his Dad and Dave stories into plays and films extended his reach beyond Lawson's. Is Rudd really a master of the form, or just a populariser? Writing under the pseudonym Rann Daly, Vance Palmer sought to extend his range into commercial, or popular, fiction; Xavier Herbert, as Herbert Astor, attempted a similar challenge. Such role changes suggest a distinction in writers' minds during this period between short fiction as 'art', or at least as considered literary form, and popular or journalistic short stories. The tension between these standpoints will be considered as this discussion proceeds.

In retrospect, the 1890s to the 1950s can be seen as a period of high activity and competing demands for short story writers. From Jessie Couvreur (Tasma) and Rosa Praed to Katharine Susannah Prichard and Marjorie Barnard we can see the strength of writing by women in this genre. Lawson and Rudd may seem the dominant male

1 See Bruce Bennett (ed.), 'Introduction', *Cross Currents: Magazines and Newspapers in Australian Literature*, Longman Cheshire, 1981, pp. ix–xii.

names, but Vance Palmer, Hal Porter, Frank Dalby Davison, Alan Marshall and Peter Cowan indicate a surprising range of approaches and styles in short fiction by men.

Predecessors, 1850s to 1880s

The first century of writing and publishing in Australia was dominated by the urge to tell stories, only a fraction of which found their way into newspapers, magazines or books. The short story as a consciously shaped literary form in 20th-century Australia has its roots in the 19th century and owes much to the often highly literate writers and publishers of newspapers and magazines. In particular, the prominence of the short story before 1890 owed much to the editors and publishers of the *Australian Journal* (1865–1962), the *Australasian* (1864–1946), the *Colonial Monthly* (1867–70) and the *Town and Country Journal* (1870–1919).

Any attempt to discredit the life of the short story in Australia before the rise of Lawson in the 1890s should be resisted, as Cecil Hadgraft's anthology *The Australian Story Before Lawson* (1986) demonstrates. Special attention should be given in the mid- to late 19th century to short stories by John Lang, Mary Fortune, Marcus Clarke and Tasma.

Lang's short story output includes *Botany Bay, or True Tales of Early Australia* (1859), published by Ward Lock in London, and *Fisher's Ghost and Other Stories of the Early Days in Australia*, published by E.W. Cole in Melbourne. Lang is an interesting case of an Australian expatriate whose literary career, initiated in Australia, continued to blossom in Britain and India despite (or thanks to) the 'larrikin' element in his personality discerned by his biographer Victor Crittenden.[2] Although best known in Australia for his stories of the convict period and its aftermath, Lang also used his forensic skills as a lawyer to dissect British colonial society in India. Lang was published in Dickens' *Household Words*, *Fraser's Magazine* and other prominent British periodicals as well as in the *Mofussilite* – a newspaper which he edited in India.

Mary Fortune wrote articles, stories and poems under the pseudonym Waif Wander for the *Australian Journal*, but restricted herself mainly to crime stories from the 1870s to 1909. She became a genre writer before her time, foreshadowing female crime writers of the late 20th century such as Jennifer Rowe and Jan McKemmish. Fortune's collection *The Detective's Album* (1871) represents a small sampling of seven stories from the hundreds she wrote for the *Australian Journal*.

The contribution of Marcus Clarke to short story writing in Australia is enormous. Many of his stories first appeared in the *Australasian* and the *Colonial Monthly*. Three volumes were published in his regrettably short lifespan of 35 years, and a fourth after his death in 1881. The influential writer and critic Michael Wilding brought Clarke's

2 See Victor Crittenden, *John Lang: Australia's Larrikin Writer, Barrister, Novelist, Journalist and Gentleman*, Mulini, 2005, p. xii.

short fiction back into prominence with his University of Queensland Press Portable Australian Authors edition of 1976 and the subsequent volume *Marcus Clarke: Stories* (1983). Clarke's humorous, anecdotal Bullocktown stories prefigure in some respects Henry Lawson's 'upcountry' stories. Clarke's speculative fiction, somewhere between essay and narrative forms, resurfaced a century later in the 1970s and 80s as a new generation of Australian writers grappled with the demands of fantasy and science fiction.

Couvreur, under the pen name Tasma, wrote a number of stories first published in the *Australasian*, the *Australian Ladies' Annual* and other periodical publications in the 1870s. Some were brought together in *A Sydney Sovereign* (1890). Born in London, Couvreur moved to Tasmania (hence her pen name) as a small child. She suffered a failed marriage in Victoria, and spent long periods in Europe. After obtaining a divorce, she married a Belgian journalist and lived in Brussels. Michael Ackland's edition of *A Sydney Sovereign* in 1993 has returned Tasma's nuanced and artful stories 'Monsieur Caloche' and 'The Rubria Ghost' to well-deserved contemporary notice.

The 1890s legend revisited

Literary historians are prone to create and sustain special formative periods in a nation's literature which then act as a turning point in their narratives. The Renaissance (now more often called the period of Early Modern English Literature) plays this role in histories of British literature; and the era of Transcendentalism has been called upon in some American histories. In Australia, we have the 1890s. This decade has attracted many competing definitions and interpretations as to both function and value. An influential book has been Vance Palmer's *The Legend of the Nineties* (1954), which noted a commonly expressed view of the 'romantic aura' that suffused 'the last days of a dying century' and influenced subsequent views of the period.

From this mindset, it followed that there was a 'quickening' of Australian culture in the 1890s, especially in its literature, and that this was informed by the expression of national ideals leading to Australia's formation as a nation in 1901. Ken Stewart has described the saturation publicity for a view of Australia as a 'young' country in advertising and popular culture:

> In the 1890s Australia could be represented as a beautiful and athletic young woman, her torch lighting the future; or a young bushman or axeman, an allegorical emblem of industry; or a baby blowing bubbles, naïve, lovable, immature, or a little boy, often from Manly.[3]

But Palmer and subsequent commentators on the 1890s did not buy this line. Palmer, for example, recalls the economic depression and the narrow and isolationist view that

3 Ken Stewart (ed.), 'Introduction', *The 1890s: Australian Literature and Literary Culture*, UQP, 1996, pp. 1–2.

prevailed in white Australia's attitude towards China and the Aborigines. This critical stance towards social attitudes and ideology reached its apogee in Humphrey McQueen's damning indictment of political and cultural attitudes he found in this decade in *A New Britannia* (1970), from a 1960s 'new left' perspective.

The chief proponent of a positive legend of the 1890s is Russel Ward in *The Australian Legend* (1958). Ward's generally celebratory account of proletarian radicalism and democratic values proposes a 'noble frontiersman' as the chief symbolic figure of the 1890s. However, Ward does not romanticise the harshness of conditions in which his itinerant bush workers and poets operate: he celebrates rather the spirit of endurance, stoicism, irony and hope in which these were faced by his predominantly male writers.

Australia's first major literary historian, H. M. Green, was also struck by 'a mood of confidence and romantic optimism' in the 1890s which would darken during two world wars and breed 'disillusion' in the 1950s, when Green wrote his *History of Australian Literature* (1961). Along with the ballad, the short story was the literary form to watch: for it demanded 'less literary experience and staying power' than the novel and gave the 'gifted amateur' a chance to shine.[4] Hence the short story could be considered both relatively representative and democratic. Green's history set a pattern in giving primary attention to Lawson's short fiction both for its representative Australianness and its artistry. In *The Australian Tradition* (1958), A. A. Phillips brought together notions of Lawson as a 'craftsman' of short stories and an Australian democrat.

The generation of Australian literary historians in the 1980s and 90s were less likely than Green to single out the 1890s as Australia's formative literary decade and gave less prominence to the short story as its distinctive genre. Leonie Kramer's *Oxford History of Australian Literature* (1981) is divided into three genres – fiction, drama and poetry – and gives no special attention to the short story or the 1890s. Literary histories of Australia edited by Hergenhan (1988) and Bennett and Strauss (1998) do not give special or separate status to the 1890s when they consider literature in an extended period from the 1850s to World War I; though, in the latter history, Susan K. Martin does offer a revisionist account of the 1890s from a feminist perspective.[5] Elizabeth Webby's *Cambridge Companion to Australian Literature* (2000) does not privilege the 1890s or the short story in its section on fiction from 1900 to 1970. However, claims and counterclaims for the short story in the 1880s and 90s are discussed in Bennett's extended study of the genre, *Australian Short Fiction: A History* (2002).[6] This *Cambridge History* volume reasserts the strength and variety of short fiction by Australians by giving separate chapters to achievements and developments in the genre from the 1890s to 1950 and 1950 to the present.

The varying treatment of the 1890s by literary historians can be better understood in the context of several book-length studies by literary critics, cultural theorists and

4 H. M. Green, *A History of Australian Literature*, vol. 1, pp. 573–4.
5 See Bruce Bennett and Jennifer Strauss (eds), *The Oxford History of Australian Literature*, OUP, 1998, pp. 89–104.
6 See Bennett, *Australian Short Fiction: A History*, UQP, 2002, chs 2–3.

editors of anthologies. Chris Wallace-Crabbe's selection of critical essays *The Australian Nationalists* (1971) adopts a conventional view of cultural nationalism in the 1890s, but the essays he collects dig beneath surface appearances in their studies of a canon dominated by Lawson (four essays), Furphy (three), Baynton, Paterson, Brennan and O'Dowd. Leon Cantrell's anthology *The 1890s* (1977), on the other hand, has a wide-ranging selection of stories, verse and essays. Cantrell's introduction states that 'the short story or sketch has come to be regarded as the nineties' most characteristic literary product'.[7] But Cantrell draws on verse and essays as well as stories to argue that the 1890s are marked by 'a sense of alienation and loss'; the stories by Lawson, Baynton, Dorrington, Dyson and others express 'the horrors of outback life'; that 'egalitarian mateship is less common than loneliness and betrayal'; and that most writers, like their readers, lived in cities rather than in the bush.

John Docker's *The Nervous Nineties* (1991) benefits from previous studies, but broadens the canvas into popular culture. Docker gives little attention to the short story as a genre, but concludes that the decade was a golden age of literary journalism, feminism and fantasy literature, which was not dominated by nationalistic sentiment.[8] In a lively introduction to a selection of critical essays, *The 1890s* (1996), Ken Stewart considers the literary evidence and notes the popularity and increasing influence of romance Australian-style. Stewart returns to the short story as a powerful genre in this decade. Drawing on Cecil Hadgraft's research, Stewart notes that 140 collections of stories had been published before 1894, when Lawson's first volume appeared. But what takes Lawson to the top of this list for Stewart is his achievement in instituting 'an original and proletarian voice and innovative forms'.[9]

National and international influences: The *Bulletin* and Louis Becke

Legends of the 1890s attach themselves to the *Bulletin* magazine, and with good reason. Taking its name from the San Francisco *Bulletin*, the Sydney *Bulletin* was founded in 1880 by J. F. Archibald and John Haynes. It overcame early financial and production problems to attain a character of its own in the late 1880s, and thereafter became a national legend. The success of the *Bulletin* can be attributed in large part to its expanding stable of alert, vigorous and ambitious prose writers who for the most part accepted Archibald's preference for 'sturdy nouns', strong verbs and a 'boil it down' dictum that discouraged sub-plots or elaboration. The *Bulletin* became known as a vehicle for vernacular 'bush realism' during the Archibald years, and particularly from 1896 to 1906, when Archibald was assisted by A. G. Stephens as editor of the literary

7 Leon Cantrell (ed.), *The 1890s: Stories, Verse and Essays*, UQP, 1977, p. xiii.
8 John Docker, *The Nervous Nineties: Australian Cultural Life in the 1890s*, OUP, 1991, pp. 233–41.
9 Stewart, *The 1890s*, p. 8.

section known as the Red Page. One of the triumphs of this editorial duo was that it attracted working men to the magazine as writers, readers or listeners.

Yet the Bushman's Bible, as the *Bulletin* was sometimes called, was much more than this, as indicated in studies mentioned previously by Cantrell, Docker and Stewart. The actual catholicity of the *Bulletin* has been brilliantly demonstrated in Sylvia Lawson's *The Archibald Paradox* (1983), in which she describes the magazine as 'a parade of expressive tricks and marvels – a whole print circus', with Archibald, the editor, as 'circus master'.[10] A. G. Stephens brought an international flavour, critical acumen and flair to the Red Page. European classics were not simply to be revered: they were to be considered as practical resources for Australian writers. Stephens also exhorted teachers and parents to instil a love and respect for Australia, reminding them 'in how many ways Australia is worthy to be loved – both the actual land and the national ideal'.[11] This grafting of an Australian cultural nationalism with an international outlook set a pattern for later cultural nationalists such as Vance Palmer, who was similarly influential.

In the first five years of the 1890s, three short story writers of international stature visited Australia – Robert Louis Stevenson in 1890–1, Rudyard Kipling in 1891 and Mark Twain in 1895. None of these was a metropolitan writer. The Scot, the Indian-born Englishman and the American all had distinctive styles, settings and subject matter. To an emergent generation of Australian short story writers, these three writers were of special interest. Although authors of short stories in the late 19th and early 20th centuries were often intent on reproducing Australian settings and dialogue, a number recognised that they needed to consider patterns and styles of writing from elsewhere, as Stephens had proposed. Twain's famous deadpan style of narration, Kipling's vernacular realism and Stevenson's ability to create atmosphere and tension interested Australian writers, and influenced some. Each of the visitors wrote chiefly about men and reinforced notions that short fiction was especially suited to 'frontier' societies and situations.

The national frontier for Australians has most often been defined as the 'outback' – those relatively unexplored regions of inland Australia where the way of life contrasts most dramatically with life in the cities. It is interesting therefore to find Archibald and the *Bulletin* encouraging readers to think also of the Pacific Ocean and its islands as an alternative Australian frontier of the literary imagination. This redefinition occurs in the short stories of George Lewis Becke who, as Louis Becke, became the most prolific short story writer of his time following his debut in the *Bulletin*, publishing eight volumes of his stories in the 1890s and another 10 before his death in 1913, most with the well-known London publisher, Unwin.

Becke's stories of the Pacific were compared with those of Stevenson, and he was also described as 'the Rudyard Kipling of the Pacific'. These writers were known to each other. Becke met Kipling in London. After Stevenson's death in 1893, Becke wrote

10 Sylvia Lawson, *The Archibald Paradox: A Strange Case of Authorship*, Penguin, 1983, p. xi.

11 See Stephens, 'Henry Lawson's Poems', in Colin Roderick (ed.), *Henry Lawson Criticism, 1894–1971*, A&R, 1972, p. 14.

an appreciative commentary about him in the Sydney-based *Town and Country Journal*, which prompted Stevenson's widow to write to Becke that her husband had taken a 'keen interest' in Becke's work and had hoped to talk with him. The interest was mutual. Becke was clearly a reader of Stevenson and Kipling and was also compared with Herman Melville as a chronicler of life on the high seas. More surprisingly, Becke was sometimes compared with Joseph Conrad. In fact, Conrad was a highly introspective, totally different kind of writer. Conrad himself recognised this. After reading Becke's first volume of stories *By Reef and Palm* (1894), Conrad said he admired 'the perfect unselfishness' in Becke's telling of his stories.[12] Becke's reading of, and interaction with, these celebrated authors was precisely the kind of attention to major artisans that A.G. Stephens recommended to all writers for the *Bulletin*.

In Becke's case, there was little danger of an 'anxiety of influence' in his interaction with European and American writers. Becke had done his fieldwork during an adventurous career as a trader in the South Pacific. He grew up at Port Macquarie, New South Wales, but left school at 14 and sailed to San Francisco with an older brother. He returned to Sydney for a time and in 1872 stowed away on the *Rotunah* for Samoa. From this time until 1886, Becke worked mainly as a trader in the Pacific Islands, where his adventures included working for the American pirate and blackbirder, Captain W. H. 'Bully' Hayes.

For two decades before Stevenson's death, Becke had been running a small trading cutter between islands such as Upolu, Savaii and Tutuila.[13] While there were hints in some British newspapers that Becke's stories were 'indebted' to Stevenson, the *Bulletin* correspondent Massingham responded vigorously that Becke's stories were incomparably stronger than Stevenson's, 'which seem to me clearly derived from [Becke's]': 'No one dreams of comparing [Becke's] total achievement with Stevenson's, but in Becke's special sphere Stevenson is a weakling by comparison; all his art fails to reach the eloquence of Becke's simple touch of nature.'[14]

H. M. Green was more measured and cautious: 'Becke's range and understanding are much wider and more thorough, and he could do some things that Stevenson could not.'[15] Becke's biographer, the American academic A. Grove Day, judiciously remarks that such comparisons are invidious because neither tried to rival the other on his home ground:

> Stevenson, a highly civilized refugee from Western Europe, always saw the South Seas as a region of mystery and paradox, and only with great pain was able to make a home in the rain-forest heights above Apia. Becke was Pacific-born, and grew up doing jobs that at the time were not tinged with any sense of glamour.[16]

12 A. Grove Day, *Louis Becke*, Random House, 1966, Preface and pp. 133, 137.
13 Ibid., p. 133. 14 From the *Bulletin*, 4 April 1896, cited in ibid., p. 135.
15 H. M. Green, *A History of Australian Literature, Pure and Applied*, rev. edn, A&R, 1984, vol. 1, p. 569.
16 Grove Day, *Louis Becke*, p. 136.

These comments seem apt. Stevenson's artful narration and sense of the exotic serve a romantic worldview, whereas Becke, more closely acquainted with his region, regards life in the Pacific with the practised eye of a trader who considers himself a realist.[17]

The 'touch of nature' in Becke's stories that the *Bulletin* correspondent praised was a virtue sought by many contributors to the magazine's pages. It implied a rejection of literary artifice and sentimentality. In keeping with this approach, Becke's tales of encounters between white traders and Indigenous people in the South Pacific often include direct and unsentimental narratives of relationships, personal and sexual. Such relationships are not subjected to subtle psychological analysis. Becke's first published story in the *Bulletin*, ''Tis in the Blood' (1893), sums up in its title the author's view of the power of instinct and passion in human lives which can disrupt families and communal bonds. As a counter-balance, Becke also shows the durability of community and blood ties among islanders in the Pacific who can resist the short-term blandishments of traders and other white invaders of these islands.

The majority of Becke's tales are told by white traders such as himself. But 'The Doctor's Wife' in *By Reef and Palm* presents problems of race and social conflict from a Polynesian point of view. Becke's story focuses on a Polynesian widow who observes that in sexual matters the white nations are 'as the beasts in the forest – the wild goat and the pig – without reason and without shame'. Their 'heat of desire' overcomes their moral scruples. The story she tells the white man is a parable, in which a rich *foma'i* (doctor), weary of the routines of white people, settles on an island where he has many lovers including the speaker herself. But the doctor revisits his home country, Australia, and returns to the island with a white wife, who is ostracised by the islanders. The white woman and her husband seem cursed, as do their two children. She leaves the island but her husband stays behind, marries a local woman and has three healthy children. This, it seems, is the triumph of Polynesian society, which accepts certain outsiders and absorbs them into its social fabric. It should be noted, however, that other stories by Becke show disruption to traditional ways of living in the Pacific islands caused by the white intruders. As author and commentator, Becke presents himself as neither an imperialist nor a reforming radical, but as a travelling trader who looks upon good and bad with ironic humour and enjoys the spectacle of changing fortunes in the exchange of goods and relationships in the Pacific.

Australian pasts revisited: Ernest Favenc, Price Warung

Two phases of Australian history are recalled in stories by Ernest Favenc and Price Warung – the era of exploration and the age of convictism. By the time the *Bulletin*

17 See Bruce Bennett, *Homing In: Essays on Australian Literature and Selfhood*, API Network, 2006, pp. 147–55.

commenced publishing Favenc's tales of exploration in the early 1890s, he was known as the author of a monograph on Western Australia and a history of Australian exploration. Favenc's special interest was in the tropical northern areas of Queensland, Western Australia and the Northern Territory. After migrating from England in 1863, he worked on cattle stations in North Queensland. In 1877, he led an expedition to study the possibility of a transcontinental railway line to Darwin. Favenc's accounts of his travels in outback Australia established him as a latter-day explorer, but his tales and historical romances used history and geography as authenticating devices for exploration of the dark side of human nature.

Favenc's first collection, *The Last of Six: Tales of the Austral Tropics*, was published by the *Bulletin* company, third in its series of book publications. This volume was revised and republished in London in 1894 as *Tales of the Austral Tropics*. A scholarly edition of the latter volume was edited by Cheryl Taylor and published in the Colonial Texts series in 1995. Taylor has remarked that Favenc's 'authoritarian and judgmental attitudes' were those of 'the North Queensland frontier where he worked as a young man'. The predominant point of view in his stories is that of the explorer on his own or the isolated station owner. Attitudes towards women, Aborigines and the Chinese are of his time. At its best, Favenc's short fiction recreates the sense of space, heat and aridity of northern Australian landscapes and their toll on white Australians.

A number of Favenc's characters are driven mad by the land. In 'Spirit-Led' for instance, the stifling heat of the Gulf of Carpentaria country provides a setting and atmosphere for an out-of-body experience reminiscent of Conan Doyle.[18] Rolf Boldrewood's preface to *The Last of Six* enthuses about Favenc, the intrepid explorer–writer who has 'tempted the Desert Sphinx, gazed upon gold matrix and opal hoards which gleamed in mockery of the exhausted wanderer'. These comments refer to Favenc's story 'A Haunt of the Jinkarras', in which fanciful speculation rivals Rider Haggard's novel *King Solomon's Mines* (1885) but without Haggard's narrative drive. The confidence shown in Favenc's tales by the *Bulletin* editors shows how open the magazine was to fiction that could move from documentary realism to metaphysics and fantasy.

William Astley, who wrote under the pseudonym Price Warung, migrated as a small child to Melbourne from his birthplace in Liverpool, England. Astley became an itinerant journalist in country towns before settling in Sydney in 1891. A socialist in outlook, he opposed British imperialism in his adopted country. The convict system became his principal target. Warung's exhaustive research into convicts and convictism in Australia was turned to dramatic effect in ironic and satiric short stories.

In restricting stories to about 3000 words or less, the *Bulletin* set a pattern that persisted in newspapers and magazines for most of the next century. An avid reader of documents and lengthy historical accounts, Astley was spurred by Archibald's 'boil it down' approach to create characters representative of the System and place them in

18 See Ernest Favenc, *The Last of Six: Tales of the Austral Tropics*, Bulletin Newspaper Co., 1893, pp. 35–49.

stories that usually turn on a single major incident. Somewhat less prone to theatrical flourish than his predecessor in tales of the convict period, Marcus Clarke, Astley nevertheless used techniques of melodrama to heighten his effects.

Astley interviewed a number of survivors of the convict system before they died. As Barry Andrews observed, Astley's narratives are often organised around several static, striking scenes with a strong climax. Narrative develops from dialogue or from the author or editor.[19] In his worst moments, says Andrews, 'Astley grips his Victorian quill with a railler's zeal', but he is at his best when detached 'behind a satiric mask'.[20]

Warung's prominence was due largely to his series 'Tales of the Early Days' in the *Bulletin* 1890–2. When he left the *Bulletin*'s payroll to assume editorship of the *Australian Workman*, Astley's output declined, partly due to ill-health and addiction to drugs. But his interlinked tales around the figure of Convict Hendy showed a continuing attachment to a field of storytelling he had made his own.

Lawson and legend

Lawson's first published story, 'His Father's Mate', appeared in the *Bulletin* in December 1888 when he was 19. His first book *Short Stories in Prose and Verse* was published by his mother, Louisa Lawson, in 1894. The *Bulletin* and Lawson's mother were major formative influences on him as a short story writer. However, the literary territory which Lawson forged grew largely from his feelings about his Norwegian Australian father, Niels Hertzberg Larsen (Peter Lawson) and the land which he, Louisa and their sons settled at Eurunderee, between Gulgong and Mudgee, in New South Wales, in the late 1860s and 70s. In 1883, Louisa and Peter Lawson separated when Louisa moved to Sydney and became active in publishing and the women's movement.

Lawson's deafness from the age of nine and the discord between his parents play their part in psychoanalytic studies of Lawson (for instance Xavier Pons' *Out of Eden: Henry Lawson's Life and Works*, 1984). Whereas Becke and Favenc, for example, could be described more straightforwardly as 'masculine' types, Lawson's sensitivity could be seen as 'feminine'. A. G. Stephens wrote in 1895 that 'it is the woman in him . . . that makes his talent glow to the white heat of genius . . . His capacity for emotion is Lawson's best gift.'[21] The 'inward' quality in Lawson's most celebrated short stories grows from his poetic ability to capture the emotion of a moment.

The Lawson legend grows from projections of the man and his writings onto an incipiently national stage. In 1893, the visiting English journalist Francis Adams proclaimed that, 'The one powerful and unique national type yet produced in Australia . . . is that of the Bushman.'[22] Two years later, Stephens pronounced that Lawson was 'the voice

19 Price Warung, *Tales of the Convict System*, ed. B. G. Andrews, UQP, 1975, p. xxx.
20 Ibid., p. xxxi. 21 Stephens, 'Henry Lawson's Poems', p. 14.
22 Adams, *The Australians: A Sketch*, T. Fisher Unwin, 1893, p. 165.

of the bush, and the bush is the heart of Australia'.[23] Christopher Lee has attempted to locate the birth of the Lawson legend in a phase of national and personal insecurity, characterised by 'The first wave of feminism, the great economic depression, the defeat of Labor in the national strikes of the 90s, together with the end of the century anxieties over the future of both the Empire and the genetic hygiene of the Anglo-Saxon type . . . '[24]

A predominant note in Lawson's short fiction is nostalgia for a world of men and action (and perhaps for his father's world of work). Lawson located his fiction chiefly in the region of his childhood and youth between Mudgee and Gulgong, 'out west' from Australia's biggest city, Sydney, where he lived most of his adult life. Lawson took excursions further west in New South Wales to Bourke and beyond and he also spent periods in Western Australia, New Zealand and London. From the 1880s Lawson knew he was a problem drinker, and some of his travels were attempts to escape the temptations of easily accessible alcohol in Sydney. Not surprisingly, an internal debate about 'Sydney or the bush' recurs in Lawson's overlapping autobiographical writings and short fiction. A crucial point came for him around the turn of the century when he turned to the rhetorical use of the capital 'B' for Bush and Bushman. This coincided with his return from London, judicial separation from his wife Bertha, increasing alcoholism and mental instability, and a resort to rhetoric and repetition rather than experience to fuel his art.

The editor of Lawson's collected work, Colin Roderick, notes that Lawson, 'uneducated in the leisured prose of the nineteenth century, wrote in the plain speech-based idiom of bush and slum'.[25] Lawson wrote more than 200 short stories and sketches. What characterises the voice in his stories, Roderick acutely noted, was a sense that Lawson was speaking 'confidentially, and not to a vast anonymous public'.[26] This made his stories particularly well suited to later adaptations for radio. An important literary influence on his early fiction, Lawson himself said, was the American Bret Harte, whose stories of the California goldfields offered settings similar to those he knew and the kinds of informal dialogue used by itinerant American working men. But many of Lawson's stories cut deeper than Harte's when they dealt with the vulnerability of relationships and confrontations with mortality.

As we have seen, publishers and editors of the *Bulletin* contributed to the increasing profile of the short story in the 1890s by producing single-author collections. Warung and Favenc were beneficiaries of this policy, and so was Lawson when his second volume, *While the Billy Boils*, was published by the *Bulletin* in 1896. The pressures of marketing are evident in classifications of Warung as the writer about convicts and Favenc about explorers. Lawson could not be classified so easily, for he wrote about city and bush with humour and pathos and introduced a variety of characters. Stephens'

23 Stephens, 'Henry Lawson: An Australian Poet', *Bulletin*, 5 Jan. 1895, p. 3.
24 Lee, 'The Emasculation of Henry Lawson', *Meridian*, 13.1 (May 1994), p. 3.
25 Henry Lawson, *Short Stories and Sketches, 1867–1922*, ed. Colin Roderick, A&R, 1972, p xiv.
26 Ibid.

comments about Lawson's arrangement of stories in *While the Billy Boils* reflect an editor's frustration at a book failing to exploit its full potential through poor construction and arrangement. Stephens likened Lawson's second volume of stories to 'a bad cook's ragoût' and contrasted it with Twain's more organised approach with a set of characters who 'pass from chapter to chapter'.[27]

Stephens' hankering after the simplifying structures of a novel raises questions of aesthetics and genre. Arguments have raged about this issue since Stephens' intervention. A comprehensive scholarly edition of *While the Billy Boils* is required.[28] Discussions of poetic *livres composés* by Christopher Brennan and others in the 1890s seem not to have impacted on short fiction. But a different aesthetic from that of Stephens (and Roderick who followed Stephens' precepts) has been presented by Brian Matthews. In Matthews' view, *While the Billy Boils* has an 'inner logic' based on a 'more or less though not tightly chronological sequence': for 'in the world that is evolving in the pages of *While the Billy Boils* change, rumour, distance, mistakes, and misrepresentations make a mockery of most "certainties" '.[29] If this postmodern aesthetic is preferred to Stephens' call for coherence in the arrangement of Lawson's work, Lawson's second volume, *While the Billy Boils*, should be read in its original form. It can be considered then as a precursor to Frank Moorhouse's 'discontinuous fictions' of the 1970s and 80s.

A variety of reasons can be adduced for considering Lawson's fifth volume of stories, *Joe Wilson and his Mates* (1901), his best. Perhaps the most convincing argument is that the Joe Wilson stories explore greater depths of feeling and layers of identity than early stories such as 'The Man Who Forgot' or 'The Union Buries Its Dead'. Joe Wilson is presented as 'a bushman with a past'[30] – a past that reveals elements of Lawson's personal traumas and confusions at this time leading to the breakdown of his marriage, his wife Bertha's hospitalisation in an asylum and his own increasing alcoholism.

Literary factors also play a part in the dramas of *Joe Wilson and his Mates*. Lawson's period in London 1900–2 enabled him to get a feel for British editors and magazines, and he contributed to magazines such as *Blackwood's, Cassell's, Chambers'* and *The Argosy*. New literary relationships with publisher William Blackwood and publishers' reader Edward Garnett enabled Lawson to see the value of psychological realism in fiction without losing his Australian identity or sense of humour.

Yet a sense of sadness permeates the scenes from a marriage in *Joe Wilson and his Mates*. In 'Water them Geraniums', one of the most powerful tales, a young couple setting out on married life in the Australian bush are forced to anticipate their future when they encounter 'a gaunt, haggard bushwoman' and her family who have been reduced to what seems an inhuman level of existence. Joe Wilson, the sensitive but indecisive

27 Stephens, 'Henry Lawson's Poems', p. 14.
28 Paul Eggert and Elizabeth Webby are researching a new scholarly critical edition of *While the Billy Boils*.
29 Brian Matthews, 'Henry Lawson's Fictional World', in Leon Cantrell, (ed.), *Bards, Bohemians and Bookmen: Essays on Australian Literature*, UQP, 1976, p. 182.
30 Brian Matthews, *The Receding Wave: Henry Lawson's Prose*, MUP, 1972, p. 4.

narrator, realises – 'like a whip-stroke on my heart' – that Mary and he would be worn down to this level if they remain in the bush. Above all, the anaesthetising of feeling, and the ability to care for others, seems threatened; and Lawson's stories express the need, if not the resurgence of this capacity to care.

Expatriate writers, editors

Since Lang in the mid-19th century, Australian short story writers had been exporting their literary talents to England and other countries. A running record of Australians in Britain is contained in the *British Australasian* (1884–1923), a London-based weekly. With Philip Mennell as editor 1892–1902, the *British Australasian* recorded the visits of many Australian writers in addition to Lawson. Some Australian writers, editors and publishers chose to stay in Britain for extended periods or even made it their place of residence. Marcus Clarke called these the 'AAs', or Anglo-Australians.

Arthur and Harriet Patchett Martin were AAs who collected and edited substantial anthologies of Australian stories and verse in Britain from the late 1880s. *Oakbough and Wattle Blossom* (1888), edited by Arthur Patchett Martin, contains stories and sketches by Australians in England including Rosa Praed, C. Haddon Chambers, Douglas Sladen, Mennell and Martin himself. Harriet Martin's selection, *Under the Gum Tree* (1890), was followed by *Coo-ee: Tales of Australian Life by Australian Ladies* (1891) who included Tasma, Praed, Margaret Thomas and Martin herself. Using Australian bush imagery as a form of exotica in the London metropolis, the Martins established a recognisable niche from which certain Australian writers could reach a wider audience. An anxiety about readership and belonging is evident in the introduction to *Coo-ee*, in which Harriet Martin expresses her hope that the stories in the anthology might 'linger pleasantly around the Bush Station and by the English fireside'. Another expatriate editor and writer was Queenslander Lala Fisher, whose volume *By Creek and Gully* (1899) features stories by a wide range of expatriate writers in Britain including E. W. Hornung, Hume Nisbet and Becke.

The most substantial Australian writer of fiction from British soil in this period was Rosa Praed, who published as Mrs Campbell Praed. Although she was principally a novelist, Praed also published selections of her stories including *Dwellers by the River* (1902), *The Luck of the Leura* (1907) and *A Summer Wreath* (1909). Many have Australian settings based on memories of her childhood and youth on properties in central and northern Queensland. Indeed, *By the Book: A Literary History of Queensland* (2007) reclaims Praed, along with a later expatriate short fiction writer, Janette Turner Hospital, as significant contributors to the literature of their home state.

A tendency towards romantic and sublime descriptions of landscape in Praed's fiction is counterbalanced by vignettes revealing the frequent discomforts of station life caused by centipedes, scorpions, mosquitoes and other creatures. Praed began writing in the 1860s when she was living on her family's station in the Upper Logan; she

maintained contact with station life from her adopted home in England through regular correspondence with her sister.

Although Patricia Clarke's biography *Rosa! Rosa!* (1999) gives little specific attention to Praed's short stories, they represent an interesting microcosm of her work. Praed tends to work scenically – she wrote plays as well as novels and short stories. Her recurrent themes are romance and its frustrations, societal pressures to conform and spiritual inspiration and solace. Two stories in *The Luck of the Leura*, 'Gwen's Decision' and 'Aurea', indicate something of her tonal range. In 'Gwen's Decision', a snakebite leads in bizarre fashion to the happy resolution of a courtship. By contrast, in 'Aurea', a woman called Brenda who lives on a remote station contracts sandy blight – a form of acute conjunctivitis – and is blinded. When the woman's younger sister, Aurea, arrives to help out, Brenda is consumed by jealousy at her husband's evident attraction to her beautiful sister who seems like a younger spirit of the woman he had courted and married. Praed's embrace of spiritualism and the occult takes many forms. Her most anthologised story, 'The Bunyip', draws on an Anglo-Australian fascination with this imaginary creature of Aboriginal legend. But the mythological Bunyip is also suggestive of a world beyond reach of the senses – a realm explored in different ways in some of Praed's later novels.

Whereas Praed made her whole writing career in Britain after she arrived there in 1875, Louise Mack and Barbara Baynton wrote and published significant short stories in Australia in the 1890s before they sailed for London in 1901 and 1902 respectively. Having published short stories in the *Bulletin*, Mack established herself in England and Italy as a prolific writer of light romance for children and adults. From 1904, Baynton moved regularly between Australia and Britain where she became a high society figure. Unlike Mack, Baynton did not publish much new work after her move to Britain.

Fortunately, the strength and originality of Baynton's *Bush Studies* (1902), first published by Duckworth in London on the recommendation of Edward Garnett, has been recognised by critics and by subsequent Australian writers including Vance Palmer, Peter Cowan and Thea Astley. Palmer wrote that there was something 'savage and remorseless' in Baynton's stories, yet their 'unshrinking honesty' fascinated him. How had Baynton gained her experience of 'this tough, primitive life which cut more deeply into the bone than anything written by Lawson?'[31] Despite the small output, Baynton was compared regularly with Lawson; and in the 1980s, a feminist consciousness brought her short fiction to centre stage for a time. The edition by Sally Krimmer and Alan Lawson of Baynton in 1980 for the University of Queensland Press's Portable Australian Author series helped to focus this renewed interest in her work.

Two of Baynton's stories have been regularly anthologised and analysed by literary critics – 'Squeaker's Mate' and 'The Chosen Vessel'. Both examine the degradation of women in the Australian bush. 'Squeaker's Mate' bears the marks of Zolaesque

31 Palmer, *Overland*, 11 (Summer 1958), pp. 15–16.

naturalism with its 'objective' treatment of a woman made mannish by a working life in the bush. She is the 'mate' of Squeaker who, as his name suggests, is more mouse than man – and a travesty of popular stereotypes of the courageous bushman. When Squeaker is accidentally crippled by a falling tree, she and her dog – a true mate – resist the callous disregard of the ignoble Squeaker and demonstrate the power of the survival instinct in all species. In 'The Chosen Vessel', a woman who lives with her child in an isolated hut in the bush is stalked and murdered by a lascivious bushman. In the longer version of 'The Chosen Vessel', which was excised from the *Bulletin* but reinstated in *Bush Studies*, a horseman passes by but is so caught up in private reverie that he fails to notice the stricken woman and her child. He is a travesty of the biblical good Samaritan. As Kay Schaffer has noted, Baynton's writings 'shake up, disturb and deflate masculine values';[32] they also show the powerlessness of institutions such as the church and schools to civilise white Australians.

Humour and nostalgia: Steele Rudd's selectors

Unlike Baynton's white settlers living on the edge of savagery, Steele Rudd presents his small-time farmers as rough but likeable men and women whose sense of humour is their saving grace. Like Twain, Rudd has been described as a humourist, but this requires qualification. Rudd's battlers pit their wits and bodies against the heat, drought and depressions of Australia and come through laughing. The events narrated in *On Our Selection* (1899), *Our New Selection* (1903) and later volumes generally occur in 'the long safety of the past', where they acquire 'the glow of nostalgia, a little sentimental pride, and the magical effect of turning everything into merriment'.[33]

If Rudd's characters are rudimentary philosophers, they are certainly not in the mould of Emerson and Thoreau: no school of Transcendentalism could be woven around these Australians' homespun theories and observations. But they are dreamers and schemers. The narrator in 'Dad's Fortune', in *Stocking Our Selection* (1909), watches his father looking out over the Great Dividing Range in eastern Australia and remarks: 'Splendid country, Dad considered it – *beautiful* country – and part of a grand scheme in his head. I defy you to find a map more full of schemes than Dad was.' Mother is not a reflective soul either: her prescribed role is to feed and clothe the family, and to provide a check on Dad's excesses and follies. Dave's fate is to be bitten by snakes and to be disappointed in love: he is Dad's comic sidekick and, like the stuttering Joe, he represents the narrator's (Steele Rudd's) generation.

Steele Rudd is himself an invention. The author, Arthur Hoey Davis, was born in 1868 in Drayton on the Darling Downs in Queensland and became a public servant,

32 Kay Schaffer, *Women and the Bush: Forces of Desire in the Australian Cultural Tradition*, CUP, 1988, p. 169.

33 Robert White, 'Grim Humour in the Stories of the 1890s', in Alan Brissenden (ed.), *Aspects of Australian Fiction*, UWAP, 1992, pp. 21–2.

then a writer and publisher in Brisbane. He chose the name Steele Rudder in the early 1890s for humorous articles on rowing in the Brisbane *Chronicle*. The slightly truncated Steele Rudd was then given the dual roles of pseudonymous author and a member of the fictional Rudd family – not appearing as a character in his own narratives, however, until the seventh of the 10 Rudd volumes, *From Selection to City* (1909).

Although described in the 1970s as a 'failed artist', Rudd enjoyed enormous popularity in his own lifetime.[34] Other media assisted him. *On Our Selection* and other volumes were adapted for radio, stage and film productions. While the Dad and Dave routines were initially home-grown productions, expressing a distinctly 'Australian' character, they collided with Hollywood influences in Ken Hall's Cinesound direction of *On Our Selection* in 1932. By 1938, in Rudd's volume of stories *Dad and Dave Come to Town*, American influences recur, including the figure of the dumb blonde and the fast-talking newspaper reporter.[35] Such influences seem not to faze Frank Moorhouse, however, who observes that Rudd's characters of 'the British white settler culture' will represent 'the Australian' for the foreseeable future and that Rudd is 'part of the bedrock of our culture'.[36] More recently, Julieanne Lamond argues that Dad Rudd is 'a figure who has come to haunt Australian politics as well as our culture': he is one of the 'ghosts of the ordinary that have been used to draw us together'.[37]

Immigrants and travellers

The short story has served as a vehicle for immigrants and travellers in Australia since the early 19th century. Between 1900 and 1930, many writers in newspapers and magazines followed the influence of the *Bulletin*, the *Lone Hand* and *Smith's Weekly* in encouraging anecdotal, 'up-country' narratives which highlighted the idiosyncrasies of Australian people and places. Nathan Spielvogel and Paul Wenz followed these leads from their German Jewish and French backgrounds respectively. Scot Hume Nisbet and Englishman E. L. Grant Watson also reflect these tendencies.

A school teacher in the Wimmera district of Victoria, Spielvogel presents himself in his first volume *A Gumsucker on the Tramp* (1906) as a wanderer in the Jewish tradition but also as a patriotic Victorian (a gumsucker – because colonial Victorians were supposed to suck the gum from acacias). Spielvogel's short stories in his first and subsequent volumes give voice to men and women of the 'way back' Wimmera district of Victoria where he taught. Wenz's European background also interacted with his Australian experience – in his case as a farmer in New South Wales. Born in 1869 in Reims to a German father and French mother, Wenz was educated in Paris where one of his fellow pupils

34 See Van Ikin, 'Steele Rudd as a Failed Artist', *Southerly*, xxxvi.4, pp. 363–76.
35 John Tulloch, *Australian Cinema: Industry, Narrative and Meaning*, A&U, 1982, p. 30.
36 'Introduction', in Moorhouse (ed.), *A Steele Rudd Selection*, UQP, 1986, p. xv.
37 Lamond, 'The Ghost of Dad Rudd, On the Stump', *JASAL*, 6 (2007), p. 31, <www.nla.gov.au/openpublish/index.php/jasal>.

was André Gide. Under the pseudonym Paul Warrego, his first book of stories, *L'Autre Bout du Monde* (1905), was published in Paris and was followed by *Sous La Croix du Sud* (1910). While bringing their European origins into their narratives, both Spielvogel and Wenz were principally interested in a strange new world.

Born in Stirling, Scotland, in 1849, Nisbet visited Australia in the 1860s, 80s and 90s. His prolific output includes many stories which present Australia as a remote and exotic land, as in *The Haunted Station and Other Stories* (1893). An Australian-born Chinese detective, Wung-Ti, appears in several of Nisbet's novels and stories. In Nisbet's melodramatic tales, showing the influence of Walter Scott and Maria Edgeworth, Australia is a country haunted by its colonial past. Grant Watson's short stories derive from a more modern, scientific standpoint. His book *Innocent Desires* (1924) contains seven stories set in Australia, which derive from several visits from his native England. Watson was a member of Alfred Radcliffe-Brown's expedition to study the marriage customs of Aborigines in north-western Australia in 1910–11. This experience informs a number of his stories which question European conventions and show the power of the unconscious and instinctual behaviour. In Watson's stories, sexual desire crosses ethnic boundaries and threatens 'civilised' behaviour.

Stories of travellers from Australia to other countries in this period are exemplified in A. G. Hales' stories of war and adventure in South Africa and elsewhere in *Camp Fire Sketches* (1902), where the hardships of the Australian bush are a perfect prelude to war on the veldt. Harley Matthews' *Saints and Sinners* (1918) and William Baylebridge's *An Anzac Muster* (1921) show the contrasting literary styles and attitudes to war of a realist and a fabulist respectively.

Indigenous pioneer: David Unaipon

Unaipon's *Native Legends* (1929) is the first published collection of stories by an Aboriginal Australian. In his short memoir, *My Life Story* (1951), Unaipon describes his upbringing as a member of the Narrinyeri tribe on the lower Murray river in South Australia. Like his father, Unaipon was 'educated and trained' by the Aborigines Friendly Association missionaries at Point McLeay Station. Unaipon says that 'the Aborigines greatly resented the incursion of the newcomer in their domains' and that they were 'shattered by contact with white civilization'. Nevertheless, he concedes that Christian missions gave Aborigines 'the inner Power to reconstruct their lives'.[38]

Native Legends contains legendary tales of Aboriginal Australia, cross-fertilised with Christian imagery and narrative. Yet his focus remains firmly on his Aboriginal subjects – their beliefs, values and behaviour. A central concept is 'telepathy', which enables Aboriginal people to communicate across distances without speech and to empathise

38 See Unaipon, *My Life Story*, Aborigines Friendly Association, 1954.

with fellow creatures.[39] White civilisation has diminished this capacity to communicate telepathically.

Unaipon's legends dramatically realise his belief in 'the companionship of earthly creatures'.[40] In 'Youn Goona the Cockatoo', for instance, he employs several levels of discourse to show how humans, birds and animals can interact. These occur at an ethereal or spiritual level, in the natural world, or in domestic circumstances. Unaipon is especially adept at mimicking Youn Goona the spirit Cockatoo speaking with his spirit wife Bhoo Yooah. But his range also extends to demonstrating the savagery of the natural world, as in 'Kinie Ger, the Native Cat'.[41]

Unaipon's stories derive principally from his Narrinyeri people but they seem to float free of all communal constraints in their protean, shape-shifting play with imagery and narrative modes. In 'Hungarrda', subtitled 'Jew Lizard', the lizard is totemic and Aboriginal and also an Old Testament prophet who can sing of a journey whose travellers are 'cast forlorn and shipwrecked upon the shore of a strange land'. In such moves, Unaipon draws his readers towards different modes of understanding from those of well-meaning white Australian writers who seek a rational social justice for Aboriginal Australians.

Realists and romantics: Katharine Susannah Prichard and Vance Palmer

Prichard and Palmer are the two most consistent Australian exponents and advocates of the short story genre in the first half of the 20th century. They each published four volumes of stories, which are complemented by many reviews, interviews, articles and essays that show their engagement with the genre both as artists and critics.

Prichard's son and biographer, Ric Throssell, has written that a short story published in a magazine or newspaper was often the only way his mother had of 'earning a few pounds in the bad years of the Great Depression' but that even then she saw a short story as 'a work of craftsmanship rather than a mere potboiler'.[42] Prichard's stories were first published in ladies' journals or magazines such as *Steele Rudd's Magazine* and the *Bulletin*, and she won the Art in Australia short story competition in 1924 with 'The Grey Horse'. Forty-six short stories are included in Prichard's *Kiss on the Lips* (1932), *Potch and Colour* (1944), *N'goola* (1959) and *Happiness* (1967).

Prichard's aesthetic was that of a realist with a focus on the subject rather than herself. In a talk for ABC radio in Perth in 1940, she claimed to 'dislike all subterfuges and tricks of the trade for gaining effects', and invoked a realist's 'honesty' while

39 See Susan Hosking, 'Introducing David Unaipon', in Nena Bierbaum, Syd Harrex and Susan Hosking (eds), *The Regenerative Spirit*, Lythrum Press, 2003, passim.

40 David Unaipon, *Native Legends*, Hunkin, Ellis & King, [1932?], pp. 4–5.

41 See Unaipon, *Aboriginal Legends, no. 1: Kinie Ger, the Native Cat*, Hunkin, Ellis & King, [192?].

42 Cited in K. S. Prichard, *Tribute: Selected Stories*, ed. Ric Throssell, UQP, 1988, p. viii.

admitting that 'every artist creates his or her own technique, derived of course, from the technique of all the others, or as many as can be assimilated'.[43] Prichard's early model was de Maupassant's *Contes Normands* and she observed the French writer's maxim that 'psychology in a novel or story exists in this: to show the inner person by their life'. Yet the anthropologist was a stronger influence than the psychologist as she strove to reveal 'ways of living' in Australia.

Prichard's stories are infused with place, whether it is the Darling Range east of Perth in 'The Grey Horse' or 'The Cow', the eastern goldfields of Western Australia in 'The Siren of Sandy Gap' or the north-west of Australia in 'The Cooboo'. In each case, the physical and social environment enters the lives of individuals and shapes them. The author's method of storytelling is to adapt her voice to these different environments – from the gentle, observed narratives of people and incidents around Greenmount to the apparently casual prospectors' yarns in the goldfields and the songs and stories of Aboriginal women in the north-west.

Throughout her career, Prichard was a communist and an Australian cultural nationalist. When she travelled to New York early in her career, she was told that her stories were too Australian. But she turned against commercial, formula fiction and later earned the praise of left-wing American writer, journalist and historian C. Hartley Grattan.[44] Influenced early by political exiles from Russia whom she had met in Paris in 1908, who told her of 'the struggle for a different social system in their country', Prichard was also deeply affected by the Great War in which her brother was killed.[45]

Her desire for peace and social justice and her reading of Marx and Engels led Prichard to join the Australian Communist Party in 1920 as a founding member. This guiding light of her early career as a short story writer and novelist limited her creativity in later work, such as her story 'Communists are Always Young'.

Prichard's Aboriginal stories, along with her novel *Coonardoo* (1929), bring together her beliefs, ideals and compassion and provide a different perspective from Unaipon's. They reveal her as both a realist writer and romantic. In 'The Cooboo', the Aboriginal baby of the title is the focus of his mother's frustration and suffering and he becomes a symbolic victim of the wider tragedy of the Aboriginal people. A later story, 'N'goola', follows an old man's search for his daughter who was stolen by white authorities; the story ends with the reunion of the pair. The latter story is more focused on issues of social injustice in black–white relations than the former and was dedicated to the Australian Trade Unions which 'defend . . . the struggle of all peoples for peace and a good life'.

Like Prichard, Palmer was a student of the short story, was socially engaged and was influenced by European realists such as de Maupassant, Chekhov and Gorky. But the

43 K. S. Prichard, *Straight Left: Articles and Addresses on Politics and Women's Affairs*, Wild & Woolley, 1982, pp. 126–7.
44 Laurie Hergenhan, *No Casual Traveller: Hartely Grattan and Australia–Connections*, UQP, 1995, p. 34.
45 See K. S. Prichard, *Why I am a Communist*, Current Book Distributors, [195?], p. 7.

trajectory of his career in short fiction was different from hers. Palmer learnt the vagaries of short fiction by adapting to the requirements and expectations of different Australian magazine publishers including those of the *Bulletin*, the *Triad* and the *Australian Journal*. Indeed, Palmer's short fiction offers 'a useful reference point for the study of magazine culture during the 1920s and 1930s'.[46] Whereas Prichard became fixed on notions of realism, Palmer took more notice of the modernists and his later stories have a reduced emphasis on plot. Palmer wrote in 1944 that 'a short story may be a dialogue, a study of character, a poetic reverie; anything that has a certain unity and movement of life'.[47] As a broadcaster and literary commentator, Palmer championed the short story. By the 1940s he saw it as a special form for its times.

The critical attention given to Palmer's later short fiction culminating in *Let the Birds Fly* (1955) has overshadowed his earlier collections *The World of Men* (1915), *Separate Lives* (1931) and *Sea and Spinifex* (1934). Spanning the Great War and Depression, these volumes avoid melodrama in their representation of moments of insight into the lives of men and women in Europe and Australia in situations of adversity. While the lessons of the European realists are generally observed, Palmer's early work also registers a quiet compassion in his treatment of the 'separate lives' of his characters and their historical situations. Between 1920 and 1924 he wrote a number of potboilers under the self-mocking pseudonym Rann Daly but subsequently returned to more serious fiction.

From 'Father and Son' (*The World of Men*), to 'The Red Truck' (*Let the Birds Fly*) Palmer shows situations in which father–son relations are tested. In *Let the Birds Fly*, though, a number of stories explore the psychology of girls and young women and their various rites of passage. In 'The Rainbow-Bird' (*Sea and Spinifex*) Palmer engages the reader in a pre-adolescent girl's apprehensions of mortality; and in 'Matthieson's Wife' (*Let the Birds Fly*) his narrator reflects on the life of a young woman married to an old man in a country town. What gives this story intensity and complexity is the ebb and flow of the narrator's feelings, both sexual and romantic. Despite his disillusionment, romance springs eternal.

Women at crossroads: Richardson, Stead, Barnard

In Australian as in British fiction, women have often been criticised as authors and promoters of a false romanticism. George Eliot analysed this trend in her essay 'Silly Novels by Lady Novelists' (1856). In early- to mid-20th-century Australia, Henry Handel Richardson, Christina Stead and Marjorie Barnard tested and often rejected conventional romance in their fiction.

46 Roger Osborne, 'Behind the Book: Vance Palmer's Short Stories and Australian Magazine Culture in the 1920s', *JASAL*, 6 (2007), p. 61, <www.nla.gov.au/openpublish/index.php/jasal>.

47 Vance Palmer, *Coast to Coast: Australian Stories, 1944*, A&R, 1944, Foreword.

Richardson's *The End of a Childhood* (1934) contains a long story, 'The Adventures of Cuffy Mahony' – an extended postscript to Richardson's trilogy *The Fortunes of Richard Mahony* (1930) – followed by sketches of childhood and youth and stories of death and dying in Europe. With the addition of two stories, this volume was republished by Angus & Robertson as *The Adventures of Cuffy Mahony and Other Stories* in 1979.

Richardson's 'sketches of girlhood' reject common notions of romance and entertain a broader view. ' "And Women Must Weep" ', for example, presents a girl/young woman being dressed by her female guardians for her debutante's ball and the awful anticlimax of the occasion. Other stories show the attraction of young women for each other. In 'Life and Death of Peterle Luthy', set in old Strasbourg, Richardson's feminist views are powerfully expressed through Mamsell Mimi, a barmaid in a popular restaurant who lives freely and robustly and recognises that 'men were too great a nuisance: one had always to be dancing to their tune'. Nevertheless, women's responsibilities to the species are recognised: they bear the children and sometimes, as in this story, bury them too.

Like Richardson, Stead's contribution to short fiction is overshadowed by her novels. Yet Stead's *The Salzburg Tales* (1934) and later stories collected in the posthumous volume *Ocean of Story* (1985) have great literary merit. Likewise Stead's four novellas in *The Puzzleheaded Girl* (1967) demonstrate her ability to write with dramatic force in shorter forms.

The Salzburg Tales are a reminder of the power of dreams, magic and fantasy in Stead's fiction. Stead has traced the origin of these tendencies to her father's storytelling when she was a child, which included Aboriginal legends, the Arabian Nights and tales of the brothers Grimm.[48] Conceived from the first as a single book, *The Salzburg Tales* follows in the tradition of Boccaccio's *The Decameron* and Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales* and was inspired by the author's memories of a visit to the Mozart Festival in Salzburg in 1930.[49] Stead's volume contains 40 stories largely orchestrated by the figure of the Jewish Centenarist in Salzburg, who organises centenary festivals in honour of the great composers. Historical figures from the cultures of Europe ranging from Mozart to Don Juan are dramatised. The tales proliferate in forms including jokes, legends, anecdotes, folk and horror stories.

Ocean of Story contains stories of a generally more realistic cast than *The Salzburg Tales*, set in Australia, Europe, America and Britain. Autobiography, narrative and commentary combine in a volume that features the observations of a peripatetic traveller and thinker. From 'The Hotel-Keeper's Story', set in post-war Switzerland, to '1954: Days of the Roomers', set in London, and 'Lost American', set in Paris, Stead reveals the gains and losses of the transient life. Many of the individuals in these stories seem 'lost' in the cities of the world where their fates reflect Stead's understanding of the human condition.

48 See Stead, *Ocean of Story: The Uncollected Stories of Christina Stead*, ed. R. G. Geering, Viking, 1985, p. 4.
49 Chris(tine), Williams, *Christina Stead: A Life of Letters*, McPhee Gribble, 1989, p. 102.

Unlike Richardson and Stead, Barnard was also a historian. Her literary joint ventures with Flora Eldershaw included biographical histories of Australia's early settlement by Europeans. Like Palmer and Prichard, Barnard and Eldershaw saw a role for themselves in contributing to a national culture in the inter-war years.

Most of Barnard's stories in *The Persimmon Tree* (1943) were published previously in the journal *Home* or the annual *Coast to Coast*. The title story is Barnard's most anthologised work: 'short, matured and succinct', as Barnard and Eldershaw had described Palmer's short fiction at its best. But the territory it traverses is different: the situation of lonely, middle-aged women in the city is depicted with sensitivity but an avoidance of sentimentality. The imagery, rhythms and controlled emotion in 'The Persimmon Tree' align it with modernist poetry of the inter-war years.

Barnard remarked in 1981 that short stories were 'the most private sector' of her literary output.[50] 'The Broken Threshold' in the posthumously published collection *But Not for Love* (1988) reveals some of the difficult 'private' territory in Barnard's short fiction. This story examines two kinds of self-sacrifice, that of a missionary and a woman who stays at home. When the missionary dies he seems transfigured, while the homebody remains unnoticed and alone. If thwarted relationships and lost love hover around this story, the inner life of the protagonist, Bethia, reveals her as rebellious and alive in spirit.

Men at work: Herbert, Casey, Davison, Marshall

Despite an increased number of Australian newspapers, magazines and journals which published stories or sketches between the 1920s and the 1950s, the *Bulletin* remained a favourite among recognised male authors. Xavier Herbert, Gavin Casey, Frank Dalby Davison and Alan Marshall, for example, all published in the *Bulletin*. Their stories hark back to the 'bush realist' tradition of the 1880s and 90s while engaging with contemporary applications of mateship and masculinity. The world of work extends notions of the outback to tropical northern Australia, the eastern goldfields of Western Australia, rural Victoria and southern Queensland.

Herbert's short stories range from the 1920s to the 1950s. Russell McDougall's *Xavier Herbert: South of Capricornia* (1990) collects those first published under various pseudonyms in magazines such as *Smith's Weekly* and the *Australian Journal* between 1925 and 1934. The *Australian Journal*, edited by Ron Campbell, carried the majority of these male adventure romances with illustrations highlighting the melodramatic incidents with which they were laced. Many of the stories have a *Boys' Own* flavour.

The only volume of Herbert's stories published in his lifetime, *Larger than Life* (1963), contains 20 from the 1930s to the 50s, most of which first appeared in the *Bulletin*.

50 Barnard, Author Statement, *The Contemporary Australian Short Story*: special issue of *Australian Literary Studies*, 10.2 (Oct. 1981), p. 188.

Some have been anthologised, including 'Kaijek the Songman' (1941) and 'Miss Tanaka' (1963). These show Herbert was capable of producing complex stories with plausible situations of inter-racial tension.

Casey's stories of the Western Australian goldfields in *It's Harder for Girls* (1942) and *Birds of a Feather* (1943) recall Lawson's from eastern Australia a half-century earlier. They also recall Harte and Twain. Yet the boisterous comic element which sometimes erupts in the fiction of his predecessors is seldom found in Casey's stories. They are characterised by the quiet desperation of men and women who struggle to make a living and give meaning to their lives.

In 'Short-Shift Saturday' two of the narrator's workmates have learnt that they are dying of 'the dust'. They seek diversions from their confrontations with death in drinking beer, sexual adventures, practical jokes and storytelling. Casey's images of the town and its mines (based on the Kalgoorlie he knew) are graphic. This is frontier Australia enjoying itself while it can. But the narrator is troubled. His marriage is drifting, he wants to restore contact with his wife but seems unable to do so. A mood of melancholic nostalgia also appears in other finely tuned stories by Casey such as 'That Day at Brown Lakes'. Casey's version of this new Australian frontier features the low-key disillusionment of ordinary Australians rather than a triumphant pioneering venture.

Davison's first book of stories, *The Woman at the Mill* (1940), is dedicated to Vance and Nettie Palmer and acknowledges the Lawson bush realist tradition. Like Herbert and Casey, however, Davison puts his own stamp on the *Bulletin* legacy in the inter-war years. While Davison's boyhood in rural Victoria influenced him, the stories in *The Woman at the Mill* are set in marginal farming country in south-east Queensland where Davison farmed as a soldier settler from 1919 to 1923. As in Lawson's Joe Wilson stories, Davison's stories test the proposition that the Australian bush is 'no country for a woman'. The nomadic impulse is strong in Davison's men and this links them with the Indigenous people rather than white women whose typical wish is to 'settle down'.

If Herbert, Casey and Davison seem temperamentally at odds with their environment, Marshall is a physical misfit. Known as 'the polio kid' because he contracted poliomyelitis and was crippled when he was six, Marshall enacts in his five collections of stories and his best-selling autobiography *I Can Jump Puddles* (1955) the role of a sympathetic outsider who has learnt to overcome his disabilities.

Marshall's title story in his first volume, *Tell Us About the Turkey, Jo* (1946), presents the point of view of a boy who tells of various accidents and injuries which have befallen him. When a new baby sister is born, Jo insistently tells how he was once chased by a turkey. This comical and serious attempt to gain attention demonstrates the boy's psychological vulnerability and his need for reassurance. Subsequent stories show a search for camaraderie among working men and reinforce the sense of a broader human need for mateship and solidarity.

Looking backwards and forwards: Peter Cowan

Cowan's first two books of stories, *Drift* (1944) and *The Unploughed Land* (1958), derive largely from his experience as an itinerant farm labourer in the south-west of Australia in the 1930s and service in a clerical role for the Royal Australian Air Force in Victoria in World War II. Later he taught at Scotch College and the University of Western Australia where he was an editor of *Westerly* 1963–93. Cowan's influential career looks backwards towards aspects of the bush realist tradition, forward to impressionism, surrealism and other experiments in the genre.

Although Cowan's stories of itinerant bush workers link him with Lawson and Rudd, his technique in the 1940s already showed a shift towards modernist forms of expression. During the war, Cowan became acquainted with Max Harris and the *Angry Penguins* group as well as John and Sunday Reed and painters such as Albert Tucker and Sidney Nolan. He was also learning from American writers, when he could find them in the bookshops, including Sherwood Anderson, Hemingway, Faulkner and Dos Passos.

Cowan's first volume, *Drift*, has a cover by Tucker and 15 stories in three sections: 'Yesterday', 'Between', 'Now'. Two had previously appeared in *Angry Penguins*, one in *Coast to Coast*. The fact that Cowan was published in *Angry Penguins* and not the *Bulletin* indicates a change from other Western Australian short story writers of the 1940s such as Henrietta Drake-Brockman and John K. Ewers. Cowan's realist-impressionist style builds on Palmer's later work, while the most noticeable overseas influences are Chekhov and Hemingway. Like them, Cowan gives close attention to external detail but his main theme is the impact of depression, war and the Australian landscape on individuals. Spare with his language, like Hemingway, Cowan experimented with structure and style, moving in his seventh volume, *Voices* (1988), to an expressive minimalism.

As editor of *Westerly*, Cowan encouraged writers to experiment with short fiction, and *Westerly* became a vehicle for a wide array of storytelling modes. The Depression and war years were the crucible in which his dedication to short fiction was forged. Cowan's views have continued to challenge young writers to test the limits of short fiction:

> It is the form and pattern, the style, the degree of implication possible, the whole business of technique, which gives the short story its significance as a literary form. The pleasure in writing a short story comes from trying to adapt these formal and aesthetic considerations to the subject; the pleasure in reading, of course, from discovering the successful blend.[51]

As Stephen Torre shows in Chapter 19, many blends of short fiction vied for attention in the latter half of the 20th and the first decade of the 21st century.

51 Cowan, Author Statement, ibid., p. 196.

9

Australian drama, 1850–1950

PETER FITZPATRICK

From one perspective – the one that has until recently dominated attempts to map Australian drama and theatre in the second half of the 19th and the first half of the 20th centuries – the terrain looks decidedly barren. Writing for the theatre added to the challenges faced routinely by the post-colonial novelist or poet (the discovery of a distinctive voice and a willing publisher) the problem of actually getting the script to the stage, and of finding the many willing and able hands that were necessary to take it there. The successes were few, and modest at that. Louis Esson's Pioneer Players staged five full-length plays in Melbourne from 1922 to 1926 and 12 one-acters, only two of the seasons lasting for more than 'one consecutive performance', as Esson wryly put it. Yet the playwright somehow gained in this context a heroic importance that seems incongruous in the light of the Pioneers' record and standard of production.

It suited the myth to see the writer as an intrepid explorer in a barren land, and to adapt the powerful Australian iconography of a continent empty and unknown at its heart. Esson certainly liked to see himself as that kind of pioneer, and the fact that his journeyings mostly ended in disaster simply added to the strength of the metaphor and the status of the playwright. The myth rested on the assumption that there were no footprints in that particular desert. It was a seductive idea, seemingly confirmed during the first six decades of the 20th century by the almost complete absence of plays by Australian writers from the commercial stage. The related perception that Australian drama through the century is a series of births, deaths and renaissances owes something to shifts in the national culture and economy, but perhaps even more to the systematic denial and forgetting of what had gone before.

From another perspective – the one that now prevails in Australian theatre histories – the landscape is a much more fertile one. Pockets of lively activity are visible everywhere, not just in cities but in remote country towns. Richard Fotheringham observes that 'For just under one hundred years – from 1832 until 1930 – live theatre flourished as a commercial industry in Australia.'[1] Its popularity, he argues, is to be understood not merely in terms of a desire for diversion but as part of a complex and defining set of

1 Richard Fotheringham (ed.), 'General Introduction', *Australian Plays for the Colonial Stage, 1834–1899*, Academy Editions of Australian Literature, UQP, 2006, p. 1.

evolutionary rituals by which a colonial society compensated for being a long way from 'home':

> By the 1860s the largest cities could expect perhaps a hundred different professional productions of many kinds every year: grand opera, comic opera, Shakespeare, society comedy, 'problem' play, melodrama, pantomime, vaudeville and variety. . . . The importance of all this activity is unquestionable; any history of Australia in the period to 1830 written as if such cultural institutions did not exist or were marginal to more serious subjects is missing major sites of public activity, discourse and display. In a society largely devoid of the pre-industrial European festivals, British Australians turned for their pleasure-making to horse-racing carnivals, sporting contests and the theatre. Because these occasions were where people from different classes and walks of life were seen in close proximity at the same time, they in turn became the dominant metaphors of a society trying to imagine itself as a diverse yet unified community that shared common interests and concerns.[2]

And the 'tyranny of distance', which was conventionally understood to exacerbate the creative isolation of the artist, was clearly much less of an obstacle than might have been expected.[3] As scholars like Veronica Kelly have shown, touring between the colonies, and even between Australia and New Zealand, was a common element of the theatre in the last two decades of the 19th century.[4] Entrepreneurs such as George Coppin and Harry Rickards, and the ubiquitous 'Firm' of J. C. Williamson, both established performance companies in the capitals and imported marquee names from Europe to travel more widely. Williamson's list of stars included Dion Boucicault in 1885, Janet Achurch in 1889 and Sarah Bernhardt in 1891, while Harry Rickards around the turn of the century took performers like Marie Lloyd, W. C. Fields, Florrie Ford and the escapologist Houdini on his standard circuit through Sydney, Melbourne, Adelaide and Perth. The economics of bringing a costly headline act to the Antipodes depended on making the most of all the significant population centres that Australia had to offer, and regional towns such as Geelong and Newcastle frequently saw them too. The seasons were characteristically short, but that resulted in a regular turnover of attractions rather than long periods between drinks.[5]

2 Ibid., p.xxiii.

3 The term was coined by Geoffrey Blainey for the cultural consequences of the vast distances between the pockets of settlement scattered along the eastern and southern coasts of Australia, and between their developing urban character and 'the outback'.

4 Williamson had extensive interests in a number of theatres in New Zealand, and several in South Africa. As Barbara Garlick notes, tours to Asia were also relatively commonplace. Australian companies performed, to mostly British expatriate audiences, in India, China, Japan, the Philippines and Java: 'Touring', in Philip Parsons and Victoria Chance (eds), *Companion to Theatre in Australia*, Currency Press, 1995, pp. 609–12.

5 Harold Love notes that the pattern of the short run applied equally to the resident joint stock companies: 'in the 1860s it was not unusual for a theatre to offer five or six different programmes in the course of a week with two or more items – at the very least a three-act drama and a farce – on each programme'. He cites John Spring's doctoral research on Melbourne theatre in that decade, which identified 12 356 performances as having been given of 1223 works, of which the most popular (*Hamlet*) played for just 95: 'Stock Companies, Travelling Stars and the Birth of "The Firm" (1854–1900): Summary of Theatrical Events', in Harold Love, ed., *The Australian Stage: A Documentary History*, UNSWP, 1984, p.56

These signs of colonial communities vigorously seeking entertainment and cultivation seem at odds with the unsympathetic *terra nullius* through which Esson saw the Australian playwright attempting to forge a path. These conflicting accounts of theatre in Australia are not simply a case of the gap between a playwright's self-adulatory perception and the social reality, nor of the historical constructions favoured by one generation of critics being exploded by the scholarship of the next. There is a measure of truth in both readings, and the sense that these are coexistent, as well as competing, explanations creates problems for anyone attempting a coherent overview. Thus Dennis Carroll, after noting that 'In general, the nineteenth-century commercial theatre in Australia was far more encouraging to the local play than its twentieth-century counterpart', can assert two pages later without any apparent sense of contradiction that 'The birthdate of Australian contemporary drama can fairly be fixed in the year 1909, when an art critic, William Moore, presented the first of four Australian Drama Nights to decorous, well-dressed middle-class audiences at Melbourne's Oddfellows Hall.'[6] In part what is at issue is a familiar implicit distinction between 'theatre in Australia' and 'Australian Drama': the former understood to be a matter of recorded performances, of works and dramatic subjects and writers and theatre artists who may or not be themselves Australian, and the latter involving stage plays by, for and usually about Australians. In part, too, there's an assumption about what constitutes 'Australian contemporary drama', for which the seriousness of the writing is as much a prerequisite as the nationality of the writer. From the latter perspective, the key distinction is not in the end between local and non-local, but between commercial and literary theatre.

This is the distinction that mattered for Esson when he wrote about the pioneering playwright's need to find images of cultural distinctiveness and to bring them to the stage. In his own work, Esson sought those images in two areas. One was, predictably, the outback, the location of Russel Ward's characterisation half a century later of 'the Australian Legend':

> According to the myth, the 'typical Australian' is a practical man, rough and ready in his manners and quick to decry any appearance of affectation in others . . . he is usually taciturn rather than talkative, one who endures stoically rather than one who acts busily. He is a 'hard case', sceptical about the value of religion and of intellectual and cultural pursuits generally. He believes that Jack is not only as good as his master, but, at least in principle, probably a good deal better, and so he is a great 'knocker' of eminent people unless, as in the case of his sporting heroes, they are distinguished by sporting prowess . . . [7]

The ethos and manner of the stoical bushman sets the tone of Esson's one-act plays *Dead Timber* (1910) and *The Drovers* (published in 1920, but unperformed until the Pioneers' 1923 season), and is grimly followed all the way through depression to despair in the

6 Dennis Carroll, *Australian Contemporary Drama*, rev. edn, Currency Press, 1995, pp. 9, 11.
7 Russel Ward, *The Australian Legend*, OUP, 1958, p. 1.

three-act *Mother and Son* (1923). A figure who characteristically does little and says less – and whose world seems to exclude so many of the feelings and thoughts that make life worth living, let alone worth writing about – is not a promising subject on which to build a national drama. Esson sought an alternative source for what might be unique about his country in the larrikin subculture of the city: one-acters like *The Woman Tamer* (1910) and *Mates* (1923) revel in it, while *The Bride of Gospel Place* (1926) employs it as a vivid backdrop for a doomed romance. He was attracted to this second line of interest as much for the social artifice that it rejected as for the reality it opened up:

> Nothing in our present society is wildly desirable, but, if one had the choice, it would be better to live in a slum area than in a bourgeois suburb. The slums have more character, perhaps base character, and decidedly more potentialities. Life is more vivid and picturesque there. People dance, and have passions, and live, in a sense, dangerously. In the suburbs, all is repression, stagnation – a moral morgue.[8]

For Esson, the cosmopolitan bohemian, both models were wonderfully exotic. He had never seen the outback, and his experience of the slums was confined to a few torch-lit tours in the reassuring company of a constable; but he knew, at least, which Australians he did not want to write about, and those were all the ones he knew.

Esson is a particularly instructive case-study – for the definition of what an Australian play and an Australian playwright might be, for the preconceptions surrounding the idea of a national drama, for any analysis of the intersection of notions of the serious and the popular, the authentic and the imaginary, the derivative and the new. While he was not precisely representative of Australian playwrights of his time, he articulated – and, to some extent, enacted – a version of the nationalist aesthetic in its most extreme, but also its most coherent, form.

It was not that Esson, and others who were similarly inclined to invent an Australian theatre, were unaware of other footprints in the sand. They saw them there, but chose not to take them seriously. Bert Bailey, the actor–director–producer of the immensely successful Dad and Dave plays based on Steele Rudd's short stories, was certainly finding ways to reflect theatrically the qualities that Ward would later distinguish as elements of 'the legend' – the iconoclasm, the resilience, the scepticism, the roughness and the readiness. What Bailey saw, but Esson found perhaps demeaning, was the comic dimension of those versions of what was distinctively Australian. Something in his own temperament, or the model that he found at the Abbey Theatre in the Irish playwright J. M. Synge,[9] or in his sense of what made for literary significance, persuaded Esson that

8 Louis Esson, 'The Suburban Home', *Bulletin*, 21 April 1911.

9 Esson eagerly embraced Synge's encouraging words about the rich dramatic potential of the outback, with 'all those shepherds going mad in lonely huts'. He did not take account of the cultural differences that made mad Irish solitaries at least poetically more interesting than grimly taciturn Australian ones – nor did he note the perverse and extraordinarily narrow conception of the dramatic on which Synge's advice rested. For a detailed account of Esson's work, see Peter Fitzpatrick's dual biography *Pioneer Players: The Lives of Louis and Hilda Esson*, CUP, 1995.

the appropriate dramatic genre for the depiction of Australia was either epic or tragic. He believed that Bailey's version of the pioneer myth, and C. J. Dennis' immortalisation of Melbourne's larrikin culture, were worse than irrelevant:

> No decent Australian play has as yet been done professionally. *On Our Selection* and *The Sentimental Bloke* have done a lot of harm. But a few decent works would create a different impression of what an Australian play might be. We can only hope for the best.[10]

But the conspicuous footprints left by giants of the popular theatre like the actor–managers George Darrell and Alfred Dampier suggested a potential in the genre of comic burlesque that Esson refused to see. A play like Darrell's *The Sunny South* (1883), for example, found its subject precisely in the conflicting claims of national and cultural affiliation that Esson experienced, but refused to admit, in either his polemics or his plays.

The conventions of bush melodrama allowed Darrell, and a number of successors, to juxtapose the practical morality of the colonies, rough-hewn but true, with the tired or absurd protocols of the old world. The bluntness of a genial 'Anglo-Australian' hero like Matt Morley in *The Sunny South* might cause consternation in the drawing-room, and provides the basis for plenty of amusement in the audience, but it is consistently the agent of satire, not its target; the upstart from the colonies brings with him an energy that is presented as the only hope of reinvigoration for an effete English aristocracy. And he comes, conveniently, with a set of values that are the best of British:

> CLARICE: Do you like the Colonies?
> MORLEY: Like 'em? No.
> CLARICE: No?
> MORLEY: No – I love 'em – liking's not the word. There's a chance out there for everybody with pluck and determination, and there's scope for brains as well as muscle. There's freedom of opinion, liberty of the subject, and a reverence for the grand old Flag that waves over all!!!!
> IVO: You don't go in for dynamite and disloyalty?
> MORLEY: Not much! The Queen and the British Empire! And those who don't like it, let 'em make tracks and clear out.
> IVO: Not a bad sort of place – I should not mind trying it myself.
> MORLEY: Do you no end of good. Knock the masher la-di-da out of you in no time.[11]

When Morley comes into his British patrimony (with the necessary substance supplied by the money he has made on the Australian goldfields), there is no debate about what he is to do next. He returns 'home', of course, accompanied by his Currency Lass, Bubs, to claim and revivify the Chester estate. It is a compromised kind of national assertion, fed in part no doubt by Darrell's ambitions of London success for his show. Darrell scored

10 Louis Esson to Vance Palmer, 20 January 1928, Palmer Papers, NLA, MS1174/1/3069.
11 George Darrell, *The Sunny South*, ed. Margaret Williams, Currency Methuen Drama, 1975, act 1, scene 1, p. 23.

a notable triumph there in 1884, though it was cut short when, as Morley, he suffered a serious knife wound in one of the play's regular lively skirmishes with bushrangers. Dampier took his bush melodrama *Robbery Under Arms* (1890), adapted from Rolf Boldrewood's novel,[12] to the West End a few years later, following its popularity at Melbourne's Alexandria, but the critical response was dismissive. Dampier allowed his bushranger heroes to be morally reclaimed at the end; the love of a good woman brings out, and makes respectable, their intrinsic gentlemanliness as the curtain gently falls:

MISS ASPEN: Two bushrangers in the family – how romantic!
STARLIGHT: Bushrangers no longer. But men, who having passed through the furnace, are purified, who have sounded the depths of true woman's devotion, and are now contented, happy.
AILEEN: And oh! How dearly loved![13]

But for the London critics the glorification of bushranger heroism, and the treatment of the police as uniformly vicious and venal, was not to be condoned. Managing the transactions between the values of the local and parent cultures, between melodramatic convention and 'real life', and between nationalist populism and imperial loyalties, could be a tricky business. As the work of scholars like Fotheringham and Williams has shown, though, it was a territory that was surprisingly rich and much revisited in early attempts to put Australia on the stage.[14]

Not all the major commercial spectacles were bush plays. *Marvellous Melbourne* (1889), written (to some extent) by Dampier with J. H. Wrangham, was a loose miscellany of city life, starting at Spencer Street Railway Station and visiting most of Melbourne's quirkier places, including a scene in a Chinese opium den courtesy of the outrageously stereotypical Hang Hi. The plot, such as it was, was a blossoming romance, culminating when the heroine's horse duly saluted in the Melbourne Cup. The *Argus* critic observed tartly that 'Every attempt has . . . been made to create fun by local allusion fit only for burlesque.'[15] But the patchwork quilt created in the show was a wonderfully good-humoured celebration of the city, and a rich repository of its history. That it was also shamelessly commercial was part of its charm – and part of the entrepreneurial boomtown that it represented.

Mainstream (profitable) theatre has rarely found common cause with alternative (financially disastrous) theatre, and the theatrical attempts to market or explore

12 Dampier's adaptation was attended by the novelist on opening night, who seems to have approved, and was certainly delighted with the boost to royalties from his novel. It followed a series of successful dramatisations of Marcus Clarke's novel *For the Term of His Natural Life* under the pointed title, *His Natural Life*, in particular those by George Leitch and Dampier (with Garnet Walch), in 1886.

13 Alfred Dampier and Garnet Walch, *Robbery Under Arms*, Currency Press, 1985, act 5, scene 2, p. 112.

14 Margaret Williams, *Australia on the Popular Stage, 1829–1929: An Historical Entertainment in Six Acts*, OUP, 1983, offers a detailed (though still not exhaustive) account of the subject, which reflects the spirit of rumbustious enterprise that characterised it. See also work of non-academic historians such as Eric Irvin, *Australian Melodrama: Eighty Years of Popular Theatre*, Hale and Iremonger, 1981 and John West, *Theatre in Australia*, Cassell Australia, 1978.

15 *Argus*, 21 January 1889.

conceptions of a distinctive Australian identity through this period reflect those predictable tensions. But perhaps the critical consideration, in trying to understand the contradictory characteristics of the theatre of the time, is the status and legitimacy of the script. For Esson, the script was a complete creative work; the international theatre of his time was a story of the great playwrights – Ibsen, Chekhov, Strindberg and Shaw, and then O'Neill and the ideological challenges of early Brecht. For Dampier and Darrell, the script was the relatively negotiable playground in which actors with stuff to strut met a public that paid to be interested and entertained, and of all the components in that transaction the script was the one that had the greatest potential for change. The variety format in which writers like George Darrell placed their stories and invested their finances was open to almost infinite adaptation, in response to current events or fortuitous newcomers to town; Fotheringham has shown how immediate and integral was the relationship between theatre programs and sporting events, for instance, which meant that celebrities like the victorious horse and jockey in the Melbourne Cup, or the touring England cricketers, could always be accommodated in a featured role.[16]

Esson's kind of theatre could never find room for a racehorse. On the other hand, its emphasis on the integrity of the script tended to mean that actors were functionaries and directors an unnecessary luxury; the amateurism of the Pioneer Players, in the end, was less a matter of whether or not the company was paid, than of the lack of genuine knowledge as to how a theatrical production might work. Esson, who had no theatrical experience at all, found nothing particularly strange in being the man who directed the casts of his plays at the Pioneers; Darrell, who would have seen his theatrical know-how as the precondition for anything he came up with as a playwright, approached the business from a different direction altogether. The disjunction between theatre as a public profession and drama as a solitary art influences every debate about the state of Australian theatre, from the middle of the 19th century to the middle of the next.

The discovery of a voice

Each of the worlds in which Esson sought to dramatise the distinctiveness of his culture came with the attractions of its own idiom. The bushman myth founded its points of epic climax on the power of understatement. Ward's emphasis on the taciturnity of that figure, his avoidance and distrust of things emotional, is directly reflected in Esson's choice of minimal monosyllables for the moment in *The Drovers* when Alec the Boss farewells the mortally injured Briglow Bill, his best mate for more than 20 years, and the drover who has to be left behind if the rest of the cattle drive is to have any chance of getting through to its destination:

16 Richard Fotheringham, *Sport in Australian Drama*, CUP, 1992.

ALEC: So long, old mate.
BRIGLOW: So long, Alec.[17]

The words gain meaning from all the things that are not able to be said. But it is a card that cannot be played too often, and reflects a profound limitation for the playwright who sets out to stage the archetypal conflict between man and nature that is at the heart of the outback myth. It exacerbates the more general problem of representing elemental action within the frame of the proscenium stage; *The Drovers* does not present the stampede that is its catalyst, but deals with the sequence of halting leave-takings that is its aftermath. Stampedes, like natural disasters, are not particularly suited to the stage. Dorothea McKellar in 'My Country' may have felt, as she claimed, that 'For flood and fire and famine / She pays us back threefold', but for the playwright the savage moods of the sunburnt country proved a tough and unrewarding subject.

Similarly, the world of the urban 'push', though its denizens were mostly more quaintly loquacious, was hard to move beyond first impressions. As Dennis found, its hard-boiled vernacular left some room for human feeling, but predominantly of a comic and sentimental kind. That was not the self-consciously significant kind of theatre that Esson wanted to write; nor, of course, like the legendary world of Briglow Bill, did it have much to do with Australian culture as it might be recognised or lived by the people sitting in the stalls. The notion that their reality was too bland or too boring for dramatic representation was not a promising basis for a contract between playwright and audience.

The success of the Bert Bailey comedies, like that of *The Sunny South* 20 years earlier, rests partly in its local idiom – just as David Williamson, Jack Hibberd, John Romeril, Alexander Buzo and other New Wave playwrights of the late 1960s and early 70s delighted their audiences by presenting them with a version of the way Australians really spoke, obscenities and all. Dramatically, though, the effectiveness of these adventures in language depended on their juxtaposition with other ways of speaking that were conspicuously not Australian at all, and that were often wide open to satiric attack for their stuffiness or affectation. That tendency was given an added dimension in the bush melodramas, where the retrospective focus of their plots gave some of the outback vernacular a charm and quaintness that was already playing to cultural nostalgia.

The nobly-born Morley in *The Sunny South* reflects his colonial experience through the rhythms of his speech more than his idiom. Matt speaks normally in exclamations, as a sign of his splendid virility; his loyalty to the Empire ('the grand old Flag that waves over all!!!!'), though, is a four-exclamation-marks enthusiasm. The quirkiness of the local ways of speaking was largely entrusted to secondary comic figures like the digger Ben Brewer, and Johnny Jinks, a Currency Lad; the romantic leads, Morley and even Bubs the Currency Lass, speak a much more neutral if invigorated English:

17 Louis Esson, 'The Drovers', in *Dead Timber and Other Plays*, Hendersons, 1920, p. 44.

BEN: I'm a digger, I am, and I ain't much on palaver, but what I says I means and what I says I does, and what I says, old pal (*to* MORLEY) is as we've struck it hot – that's what we have, struck it hot.

BUBS: Good for you, Benny, old man! We're in!

BEN: What did I say that night to my mates! Here, Bub and Matt, why, says I, I has a presentiment as how the Queen's Birthday is going to turn up trumps, and I'm going to work for luck, says I, on speck. Did I say that or didn't I?

MORLEY: You did, Ben, old man, you did.

BUBS: Right you are, Benny, old man.

BEN: Well, I'm a digger I am, and what I means I says, and what I says I does. So this morning I goes to the claim and we've struck it hot, that's what we have – and it's there.

JINKS: Show it up, Benny, old toucher!

BEN: It's the Queen's Birthday as brings him forth – it's the Queen's flag as covers him – and here he is – the Birthday Nugget!

BUBS: My word, he is a beauty.[18]

The pattern is slightly adapted in Bert Bailey's Rudd plays, neatly classified by a *Sydney Morning Herald* critic as requiring Polonius to add 'farce-bucolical' to his catalogue of dramatic forms.[19] Dad's syntax is every bit as contorted as Ben's, but overlaid with a spluttering energy that springs from his constant irascibility. It is juxtaposed not only with the neutral idiom spoken by his regular enemies in the squattocracy, but, in the most successful of the series, *On Our Selection* (1912), with that of his native-born daughter Kate and her native-born admirer, Sandy. The conventions of melodramatic characterisation override the claims of credibility, but in this case the comic figure is, of course, not an engaging part of the décor, but the centre of the play.

Dad's contempt for the government's scheme for assisted land settlement, which becomes the basis for his agreement to run for parliament, is filled with the fiercely proud independence of the frontier battler, though strong opinions are less decisive than marital politics in his launching of an unlikely career:

DAD: I wouldn't be much good in parliament.

MOTHER: No, Mr Maloney. He wouldn't be any good at it.

DAD: *[rising]* Why wouldn't I? Of course I would. I'd tell some of those fellers wot I think of them and wot they're doin' to the country, the robbers . . . Wot's the good of puttin' people on the land who don't know the difference between a jug of milk and a lizard. *[He sits down]* I get fresh machinery and money when I went on the land? No! My wife and children lived in a bark humpy. They worked in the yards, in the paddicks, on the drays, and beside the stack. They 'ad courage, they 'ad 'earts, that's 'ow my family faced the land. And there is 'undreds of families doin' the same this very day.[20]

18 *The Sunny South*, act 3, scene 2, p. 37.

19 7 August 1916, review of *Duncan McClure and the Poor Parson*, quoted in Williams, *Australia on the Popular Stage*, p. 255.

20 Bert Bailey, *On Our Selection*, ed. Helen Musa, Currency Press, 1984, pp. 132–3.

In the later years of the character and the genre, Dad retained his distinctive asperity and speech rhythms, as exemplified in his dismissal of the new schoolteacher's plans to bring cultivation to the locals in Steele Rudd's *Gran'dad Rudd* (1918):

> GRAN'DAD: Oh that don't matter to me. I was known in the old country meself once, but I'm an Australian now and don't want to know anyone who is anythin' else. You ain't got no intellect and science in the old country like we have here![21]

There is a touch of affectionate satire in this depiction of Dad's jingoism, but, particularly in the context of the conversational blandness that surrounds it, the primary emphasis is on the indulgence of an endearingly defiant national pride.

Characteristically, the quirkiest Australianisms in the bush melodrama and its folk-comedy successors were reserved – oddly enough – for Old Australians, most of whom, like Dad Rudd, were born in England. The effect is to reinforce a sense of cultural distinctiveness that is shaped by the past, and can be fondly regarded at a distance by a contemporary audience that is already a little more sophisticated than that. In the theatre of popular nationalism that Esson chose to disregard, the action was often framed by that implicit irony, or at least self-consciousness, and its negotiations of colonial status were in consequence less simple than they might have looked.

The exploration of competing systems of value through the juxtaposition of contrasting voices was taken to a new level of sophistication in Betty Roland's *The Touch of Silk* (1927).[22] Here the emotional focus is all with Jeanne, the attractive and stylish young Frenchwoman who finds herself among the heat, dust and flies of the Australian outback following her marriage to Jim, a battling farmer. Her elegance of phrasing and winning charm are set against two forms of the local vernacular – her husband's grim taciturnity, and the suffocating banalities of her malevolent mother-in-law, who determinedly calls her 'Jan' to show how unimpressed she is with silly foreign ways.

For Esson the central subject would have been the tragic suffering of the doomed farmer, as he placed the narrative in *Dead Timber* and *Mother and Son*. Bailey would instantly have placed the focus on the comic potential of Mrs Davidson's manipulations and malapropisms. Roland's decision to throw Australianness into relief rather than to make it a subject in itself freed her to develop a subtle and unsettling critique of her culture, and one that works theatrically. Rather than attempting to present directly images of the dried-up land that produces diminished people and no crops, Roland allowed it to be inferred as an imaginative presence outside the windows of the pretty little room that is at first Jeanne's refuge, and then her prison. As a solution to the problem of staging a distinctive Australian iconography within a frame of domestic realism, Roland's strategy is comparable with Ray Lawler's in *Summer of the Seventeenth*

21 Quoted in Williams, *Australia on the Popular Stage*, p. 252.
22 Betty Roland, *The Touch of Silk*, Currency Methuen Drama, 1974.

Doll (1955). Lawler's self-consciously retrospective treatment of the bushman myth in the characters of Roo and Barney happens not in the tough outdoors where they cut their cane, but in the highly feminised domestic environment in Melbourne to which each summer they come south for 'the lay-off'. The myth, both in terms of its values and the iconography of the place where they are forged, is realised and critiqued in terms of how it is perceived, not – as Esson sought to do in *The Drovers*, for instance – how it is supposedly enacted in its natural environment. The displacement of the myth, in *The Touch of Silk* and in *The Doll*, induces a process not unlike a Brechtian 'making strange' which enables it to be represented not only more critically but, paradoxically, more vividly.

Finding ways to represent a distinctive accent and vocabulary that were more than simply representational was one of the challenges in the evolution (or invention, from some points of view) of an authentic national drama. The evidence suggests that this was a project most successfully conducted in the context of other, more neutral, stage languages, since this placed the focus immediately on the tensions within colonialism, rather than simply presenting a tour of local cultural idiosyncrasies. The related task of finding images of the country itself was also, apparently, dependent on establishing a contrasting context; the land was more powerfully present when it was constructed as an imaginative or metaphorical construct than when it was represented by a stark tree on a picture-frame stage. Not all Australian playwrights dealt with these subjects: writers like Arthur Adams maintained for the most part a focus on social comedy, or on poetic fantasy, while the expatriate Haddon Chambers had a successful West End career not dealing with images of Australia at all.[23] But for most playwrights of the period these challenges seemed compelling, if not compulsory. They were confronted with a self-consciousness, and often a sense of ideological mission, that could easily become disabling.

The search for a distinctively Australian voice in the playscripts of this period had obvious implications for the discovery of an appropriately representative Australian accent and acting style in performance. The strategy employed by Bert Bailey in the first decade of the century was substantially the one adopted in the theatre of the next 50 years. Quirky comic and 'character' roles licensed a colourful vernacular and the broad, flat, nasal accent in which perhaps the majority of Australians were understood to speak. Serious or romantic roles called for a vocabulary and a manner that had not travelled far from the West End. This general dichotomy, in the evolution of Australian theatre and the society it attempted to represent, is a consistent feature of the period under discussion, and frequently an explicit concern in the texts as they negotiate the delicate matter of post-colonial self-assertion.

23 The New Zealand-born Arthur Adams was a prolific and diverse writer, best known for *Pierrot in Australia* (1910, London season 1912), the romantic comedy *Mrs Pretty and the Premier* (1914), *The Wasters* (1914) and *Gallipoli Bill* (1926).

The coming of the cinema

Fotheringham's assertion that 'For just under one hundred years – from 1832 until 1930 – live theatre flourished as a commercial industry in Australia' draws its confident exactness about dates from two significant moments in the history of the Australian stage. One is Governor Bourke's granting of the first licence for theatrical performance to Barnett Levey, which enabled him to begin regular shows in the saloon of his Royal Hotel in Sydney on Boxing Day in 1832, and to open in the following year Australia's first designated theatre, the 800-seat Theatre Royal. The other bookend for this age of prosperity is supplied by the dominance of film, and of Hollywood sound movies in particular, in the competition for a mass audience. There are good and obvious reasons why that contest should be especially keen in a period of economic depression, and certainly Hollywood's increasing stranglehold over outlets for distribution ensured that the contest was soon resolved. But the relationship between film and theatre in Australia is a little more complex than the one-horse race of the early 1930s suggests.

For a significant period in the early years of the 20th century, theatre and cinema generally shared venues, and quite compatibly. The early multiple bills for imported film characteristically included 'live' dramatic and musical items as well, perhaps drawing on the first phase of the new genre when magic lantern shows had been another kind of novelty act on the carnival and novelty circuits. And certainly, at the end of that first decade, the explosion in films made by and about Australians coincided precisely with the high point in Bailey's stage career with the Dad and Dave comedies. There is a suggestion in the years just before World War I that the appetites for cinema and stage-shows actually fed and supported one another, rather than being locked in mortal combat.

The number of local features released in 1911 and 1912 reached a level unequalled until 1975, a peak year in the much later revival. The year 1911 saw the most prolific output, with no less than 52 narrative fiction films making their appearance.[24]

In part this explosion was simply a reflection of the demand for product. The proliferation of cinemas, their necessarily rapid turnover of programs and the popular appetite for 'the pictures' put a lot of pressure on the market for importation, and there were, for a time, clear advantages in the cost and predictability of supply in drawing on local material. But there were signs, too, of a genuine interest in local subjects. Initially, the field was dominated by films set in colonial times, following in the footsteps of Australia's first features, *The Story of the Kelly Gang* (1906), *Eureka Stockade* (1907), *Robbery Under Arms* (1907) and *For the Term of his Natural Life* (1908) – films which, like the bush melodramas of Darrell and Dampier, drew on novels and events of mythic scale from Australia's recent past. As in the popular melodrama, too, there was a particular vogue for the bushranger story, ushered in by Cozens Spencer (*The Life and Adventures*

24 Graham Shirley and Brian Adams, *Australian Cinema: The First Eighty Years*, A&R with Currency Press, 1983; rev. edn, Currency Press, 1989, p. 24.

of John Vane, the Notorious Australian Bushranger in 1910, and *Captain Starlight*, *Captain Moonlite* and *Captain Midnight, the Bush King*, all in 1911), and the actor–director John Gavin (*Thunderbolt* and *Moonlight, the Bushranger* in 1910, followed by *Ben Hall and his Gang*, *Frank Gardiner, King of the Road*, and *Keane of Kalgoorlie* in 1911). So popular did the bushranger film become that the New South Wales Police Department, fearing it might have an evil influence on impressionable audiences, banned the subject altogether in 1912.

This burgeoning of films about iconic Australian subjects was not only coincident with a couple of particularly good seasons on the popular stage. These were also precisely the years of William Moore's Annual Drama Nights in Melbourne, where small audiences of literati could watch evenings of one-acters about other iconic subjects, and where, according to Dennis Carroll, 'The birthdate of Australian contemporary drama may fairly be fixed.' As Louis Esson tried to squeeze his vision of the vast, brown, hostile land into the cramped confines of the Oddfellows stage and a more-or-less realist performance aesthetic, the medium to which those evocative images of limitless horizons were much more obviously suited was flourishing in sympathy, just down the road.

The early films could capture the distinctively Australian images, but of course the distinctively Australian voice was for a time beyond its scope. But even in the early 1930s, when the dominant screen accent was American, there were moderately successful attempts to encourage cross-pollination between Australian theatre and film. Frank Thring, founder in 1930 of Australia's first dedicated sound film studio, Efftee Films, not only produced nine feature films and more than 300 'shorts' until his sudden death in 1936, but staged regular seasons of stage plays and, especially, musicals at Melbourne's Regent, Princess and Garrick Theatres throughout that period. Partly his policy was a shameless strategy for getting the most out of the performers he contracted; he saw no compelling reason why an actor shooting a film during the day should not appear on stage in the evening. But partly it reflected a genuine belief in the complementarity of the mediums, and for a while it seemed to be vindicated.

Thring also staged the major Australian musical between the wars, *Collits' Inn*, in 1934, which was scheduled to be filmed after its successful Melbourne and Sydney seasons.[25] Set in the Blue Mountains in the 1830s, *Collits' Inn* was yet another tale told about bushranging, with a romance plot at its centre that opens up a range of conflicts between loyalties to the laws of the old country and a robust colonial iconoclasm. Mary the innkeeper's daughter has to choose between two men who love her, Bob Keane the bushranger and Captain Lake the redcoat who is determined to hunt him down. Both are good men, if in rather different ways; Mary's preference for Lake is

25 The soundtrack recorded on film for the movie that was never made is held at the National Film and Sound Archive. The playscript of *Collit's Inn* (music and lyrics by Varney Monk, book by T. Stuart Gurr) was published by Currency Press in 1990, ed. John West.

almost apologetic, as though the values of the new society turn conventional models of respectability inside-out (and redefine in that process the archetypal opposition in the musical between the lovers and the community that opposes them). As in the turn-of-the-century theatrical melodramas, the use of the vernacular is largely confined to comic characters on the periphery of the main action (though the involvement of the comic actor George Wallace in the role ensured that Dirty Dick made an irrepressible bid for centre-stage). The music reflects this social division: the songs in the romance plot are squarely based in the world of operetta, while Wallace's songs are classic music hall.

Thring had noted the prevalence of musicals among the early Hollywood talkies; the first sounds heard in the first sound film, *The Jazz Singer* (1927), were of Al Jolson's singing, and the blockbuster musical *Showboat*, which appeared in the same year, was almost immediately adapted for the cinema. He had perhaps noted, as well, the significance of the Broadway musical in articulating the powerful mythologies of the new frontier for American audiences. Like the Western film, the musical dealt with communities under threat or in transition. Characteristically, like the bush melodramas of the late 19th century, its focus was retrospective, suggesting that the understanding of the defining metaphors of a culture is to be approached through its history, rather than adopting the contemporary focus that the modernist theatre seemed mostly to require. Not that the Australian forms of the species came close to *Showboat* or *Oklahoma!* in musically mythologising the culture that produced them. The popular triumph of *Collits' Inn* prompted some imitations: Thring himself commissioned another Monk–Gurr collaboration, *The Cedar Tree* (1934), and in the same year J. C. Williamson was sufficiently impressed to put aside the Firm's customary avoidance of the local product and stage its own Blue Mountains musical, *Blue Mountain Melody*. Neither show was successful, and after that, writing for Australian musical theatre became the exercise in deep disappointment that it has remained, with few and fleeting exceptions, to the present day.

Certainly, the kinds of things that playwrights and critics seemed to be demanding that the straight theatre in Australia should do – represent the distinctive images of a national culture and give voice to an evolving sense of shared identity – were things that had not been asked of the straight theatre in other places, and had, appropriately, never been delivered by it. The forms of entertainment in which American culture was defined and proselytised were the cinema and the musical. It is unlikely that either genre would have come close to Esson's criteria for 'decent Australian plays' – but perhaps that was precisely the problem, and understanding why it might be so illuminates Australian drama not only in the period under discussion, but at all times.

Australian plays were for too long encumbered with the primary responsibility for indulging the national self-consciousness; it was only when that broad commission was given energy and specificity by the political movements of the late 1960s and early 70s that Australian drama took its decisive next step, and its most significant and sustained

in the century. The coming of the theatrical New Wave was, like the brief flurries of activity in 1910–12 and in the early 1930s, paralleled by a corresponding explosion in Australian cinema.

New theatres, little theatres

Australian drama between the world wars (and indeed for the decade that followed the second of them) relied heavily for its survival on two very different theatrical outlets: one was the New Theatre movement, a resilient cultural organisation that emerged in the early 1930s from the Communist Party of Australia and other enclaves of the political left; the other was the essentially amateur repertory theatre that flourished improbably in all the capital cities, but had its most prominent incarnations in the Independent Theatre in Sydney, and in the Gregan McMahon company and later the Little Theatre in Melbourne. These theatres had in common their cultivation of original Australian writing in a period that was particularly discouraging, though in neither case was that commitment a high priority, and in neither did that kind of work comprise anything like the lion's share of its repertoire. They shared too a recognition of the contribution of women, as writers, directors and organisers, that was notably absent from the mainstream and commercial theatre. Doris Fitton, founder and matriarch of the Independent, May Hollinworth at the Metropolitan, Irene Mitchell at the Little, were among the most influential presenters of new work in the country. Writers like Oriel Gray, Mona Brand, Dymphna Cusack and Betty Roland with New Theatre, directors like Hilda Esson (wife of Louis),[26] and actor–writers like Catherine Duncan found scope for their talents there that the mainstream theatre consistently denied them. Of course, the two enterprises had their amateurism in common, too, which confirmed their marginalisation from what others defined as the main game.

McMahon's Melbourne Repertory Theatre, which in many ways set the pattern for the 'little theatre' movement, was dedicated to the production of important plays, the modern classics in particular, of which some were occasionally Australian. It was McMahon who promoted and directed the Shavian comedy *The Time Is Not Yet Ripe* (1912), Esson's least representative play but, ironically, his best-known and perhaps most accomplished work for the theatre. McMahon's program for Australian theatre was a nationalist agenda of sorts, but it had more to do with raising the standards of local productions and the expectations of local audiences in the course of demonstrating that Australians might meet the highest of standards. His publicity brochure for the third season in 1913 declared the aim of 'affording playgoers some opportunity of witnessing types of drama that can but rarely be seen on the boards of the commercial theatre, of

26 The fullest analysis of Melbourne New Theatre, and of Hilda Esson's contribution to it, remains the PhD thesis by Angela O'Brien, 'The Road Not Taken; Political and Performance Ideologies at Melbourne New Theatre, 1935–1960,' Monash University, 1989. See also Michelle Arrow, *Upstaged: Australian Women Dramatists in the Spotlight at Last*, Currency Press with Pluto Press, 2002.

encouraging local dramatic authorship, and of assisting in the training of local histrionic talent'. [27]

The ambitions, and the balance of repertoire, at the Independent and the Little were similar, as were those of the societies that sought to emulate McMahon's in other states. It made them sometimes vulnerable to charges of dilettantism and of a precious social exclusiveness: 'The repertory societies set up in each State (Adelaide 1908, Perth 1919, Brisbane 1925, Hobart 1927, Canberra 1930) were all capable of serious work but from the outset they generally carried an air of social chic.'[28]

However, some of these groups staged notable new Australian writing. At the Little, Ray Lawler's first play, a vaguely historical farce named *Hal's Belles*, first appeared in 1946; more significantly, one of the Independent's stalwart actors, Sumner Locke Elliott, had two major plays staged there – *Invisible Circus* (1946) and *Rusty Bugles* (1948). The latter achieved some helpful notoriety in its use of what was then regarded as 'colourful language', and was sufficiently controversial to make a successful transition to the commercial theatre in the following year. It remains an interesting play for its approach to the familiar quest for an Australian stage language that could be striking and subtle at the same time.

Rusty Bugles abandoned the normal obligations of dramatic action; indeed its author, a little defensively perhaps, asserted that 'This is a documentary. It is not strictly a play. It has no plot in the accepted sense.'[29] Elliott's approach to the exploration of cultural stereotype, like Roland's in *The Touch of Silk* and Lawler's in *Summer of the Seventeenth Doll*, was to transplant it. In this case, the neutral location and the desultory rhythms of life in camp, where a bunch of 16 assorted soldiers stuck at an ordnance depot in the Northern Territory are doing little and going nowhere, throw the focus on how the men reveal or disguise themselves in conversation. The result is a play that draws heavily on the power of its subtext to disclose the tensions within the group, and within each member of it. Where Esson in *The Drovers* relied on his audience inferring the things that the characters could not say and the playwright could not dramatise, Elliott's broader and more diverse range of languages both illuminate one another and enable a genuine analysis of the ways in which masculinity is constructed.

The programs of the New Theatre movement could hardly be dismissed on the grounds of ersatz glamour, though they were probably equally (and just as unfairly) open to accusations of artistic self-indulgence. In New Theatre's case, however, the overriding political objective, and the popular suspicion of ideas and ideologues, ensured that their social reach remained very limited. That commitment, and the dutiful obeisance

27 Brochure held by the State Library of Victoria. The most extensive analysis of McMahon's long career remains that by Margery Morgan and Dennis Douglas. 'Gregan McMahon and the Australian Theatre', *Komos: Quarterly Journal of Drama and the Arts*, ii.2(1969).

28 Pamela Heckenberg and Philip Parsons, 'The Struggle for an Australian Theatre (1901–1950) and the Decline of the Chains: Summary of Theatrical Events', in Love, *The Australian Stage*, p. 132.

29 Sumner Locke Elliott, 'Prefatory Note' to Eunice Hanger (ed.), *Three Australian Plays*, University of Minnesota Press, 1968, p. 26.

to Soviet realism in much of the group's practice, allowed relatively limited and fairly circumscribed opportunities for local writers. There were significant new plays by writers like Rice and Odets, as well as a host of doctrinaire works by approved Europeans, to be brought to the attention of the faithful in Australia, and these tended to have priority. But the intellectual constraints were not so tight that they excluded a number of substantial new plays exploring issues of race and gender, and it is impossible to imagine where else, in this period, they might have been produced.

There were significant male writers in the New Theatre stable: Dick Diamond, whose folk musical *Reedy River* (1953) was New Theatre's most spectacular hit, and Jim Crawford, whose *Rocket Range* (1947) combined its protest against the Maralinga nuclear tests and the cultural prejudices that lay behind them with a particularly ingenious solution to the representation of the Indigenous 'other'.[30] But Diamond and Crawford were the only Australian men to have more than one play produced by the organisation's Sydney branch. Mona Brand, on the other hand, had 12 plays produced at Sydney's New Theatre, and Oriel Gray 11.[31] Elsewhere in the theatre, it seemed clear that there was only one position less favourable for a successful career in writing for the stage than that of Australian playwright, and that was that of female Australian playwright.

Brand and Gray are significant figures in the evolution of Australian drama, and, until recently, appallingly neglected ones. The marginalisation and deep suspicion of New Theatre was no doubt part of the reason for this omission, as was the scarcity of published editions of their work. But the gender issue is self-evident. (It is wonderfully focused in the fact that Gray's *The Torrents* tied with Lawler's *Summer of the Seventeenth Doll* for the 1955 Playwright's Advisory Board Award with its attendant promise of professional production, and then in the stark contrast between the performance histories of the two plays.)[32] *The Torrents*, which reappraises aspects of Australia's history and mainstream cultural assumptions in the context of a young female journalist's assertion of her independence and right to a career in a provincial town in the 1890s, provides an apt framework for exploring its subsequent theatrical life.

Working with New Theatre imposed ideological constraints as well as providing opportunities. While both Gray and Brand produced a number of primarily agit-prop works (Gray's *Marx of Time*, 1942, and *Let's Be Offensive*, 1943; Brand's *Out of Commission*, 1955, and *On Stage Vietnam*, 1967), their awareness and exploration of complexity is

30 Indigenous characters were customarily represented as speaking in Pidgin that was almost always comic, occasionally (as in *The Drovers*) lyrical, but rarely an instrument for the exchange of ideas or feelings, and always considered as quaintly novel against the normative standard of Anglo conversation. Crawford's solution was to give his Indigenous characters two languages – a slightly demeaning Pidgin which they adopted whenever white men were present, and a highly sophisticated version of 'King's English' with which they conversed among themselves, and analysed the crudity with which the local constable addressed them.

31 Michelle Arrow points out that 'Of the eighty Australian-written productions at Sydney New Theatre from 1933 to 1968 (including revivals), forty-four of them were written or co-written by women': *Upstaged*, p. 165.

32 *The Torrents* remained unperformed until its undistinguished amateur productions at New Theatre (Adelaide 1957, Melbourne 1958); by this time 'The Doll' had enjoyed its successful London season and was in production for a Hollywood feature film (incongruously starring the American actor Ernest Borgnine and the Englishman John Mills in the roles of Roo and Barney).

the principal source of dramatic strength in their writing. Both engage with attitudes to gender and racial prejudice in ways that avoid stereotypes, and the easy laughs and anger that they can feed. Those subjects are not the sole preserve of the political left, of course; nor does it have a strikingly good record in putting those principles into practice. As complications of a class-based reading of the world, treatments of sexism and racism were always potentially problematic in their relation to New Theatre's rationale. Gray in *The Torrents*, *Had We But World Enough* (1948) and *Burst of Summer* (1960) and Brand in *Here Under Heaven* (1948) and *Strangers in the Land* (1952) were as concerned to understand as to condemn the bigotry they exposed, and they did so characteristically in the social milieu of the bourgeoisie; this occasionally made for tensions in their relationships with the theatre to which both gave the best part of a lifetime.[33]

The novelist Dymphna Cusack moved even further from Marxist orthodoxy in her all-female play about poisonous relationships in the staff room of a girls' high school, *Morning Sacrifice* (1942). The force that moves the work from cosy large-target satire to tragedy – or at least to serious melodrama – is the repressed sexuality that most of the staff have in common, and that proves particularly destructive in a couple of twinset-wearing closet lesbians whose vindictiveness had seemed merely petty. Like Brand and Gray, Cusack located her political analysis within domestic interiors, and in the context of the psychological dynamics of relationships, that neatly fitted the perimeters of the proscenium stage and the naturalistic conventions that normally governed it. So did Katharine Susannah Prichard, another playwright better known as a novelist. Although Prichard produced her share of didactic pieces for the Workers' Theatre Group and New Theatre in Perth, her most distinguished play, *Brumby Innes* (1927),[34] like Cusack's, not only eschewed an ideologically approved analysis but offered a reading in terms of sexual psychology that implicitly challenged it. May, a city girl visiting Australia's wild west, is attracted to the resident alpha male, Brumby Innes, a man accustomed to doing what he likes with the local black women. He rapes her, then marries her, then installs her as 'one of Brumby's mares'. Prichard's treatment of Brumby's dark sexual power, and May's decidedly primal response to it, owes more to D. H. Lawrence than to Marx for its intellectual lineage; its depiction of female sexuality would be problematic in any theatre, let alone one as conscientiously reconstructed as that of Australia's left.

During the decade after the end of World War II, Australian theatre seemed to be marking time. There were occasional tours by high-profile visitors like Laurence Olivier and Vivien Leigh, but these tended to be conceived not as interesting embellishments of Australian theatre life, but as reminders that there was nothing there. Keith Macartney in 1947 lamented that 'we still lack a truly national voice in the theatre, the most social of

33 Brand in particular was subjected to censure for the middle-class setting of *Strangers in the Land*, the world-weary ennui of Giff, its central character, and the lack of a directly empowering role in the play for any of its Malayan resistance fighters. See Arrow, *Upstaged*, p. 179.

34 Though Brumby Innes won the Playwriting Competition conducted by The Triad in 1927, it had to wait 45 years for its premiere production by the Australian Performing Group in 1972.

the arts'.[35] Yet throughout that period, the same persistent industry, the same pattern of initiative, frustration and resilience, was asserting itself on the edge of public awareness as had been there between the wars, and – if in very different forms – when Esson looked for a national theatre and could see nothing there in the early years of the 20th century. It was still there, in a fashion, in popular entertainment; it was newly there in radio drama, which from the early 1930s provided not only gainful employment for writers and actors in Australia but an arena for their professional development. The iconography of the outback, so resistant to the realist stage, could be imaginatively realised without restriction in the radio play and the popular serial. Works like Gwen Meredith's long-running family sagas *The Lawsons* (1942–8) and *Blue Hills* (1949–76)[36] gave a credible and distinctive voice to rural Australian society in a way that was possibly more truthful and certainly more culturally influential than any epic drama that Esson could dream.

Douglas Stewart, who attempted drama with an epic sweep in plays like *Fire on the Snow* (1941) and *Ned Kelly* (1942) and signaled his seriousness of purpose by writing them in verse, conceded the magnitude of the task of staging myths on that scale by writing them for radio.[37] Not only the focus on poetic language, but the monumental ponderousness of much of the action, made that a good choice. When Stewart reiterated in 1956 the need for a 'truly national' drama, it was still with the sense that it was something yet unborn:

> It is of course a fact that literature does serve, even in a sense create, the nation . . . The playwright, I think, creates the myths by which the people live: the heroic, gigantic, legendary figures, fathers of the race, ancestors, spiritual or actual, to which the living man can point and say: 'That is what I am made of; that is what makes us different from other people; that is what I believe in.'[38]

It was a noble but excessively weighty expectation. And perhaps it was always misconceived. Cultural distinctiveness is always achieved best in drama when the focus is on something else, just as the fact that Australian writers seem engaged in a search for a sense of distinctive national identity may not be a sign that the quest has so far failed but a proof of its success. What characterises and substantiates the culture is precisely that questioning of what it is, and whether it really exists.

35 Quoted in Rees, *A History of Australian Drama*, vol. 1: *The Making of Australian Drama 1830s to 1960s*, A&R, 1953, p. 240.

36 Meredith's two serials ran for a total of 5795 performances over 33 years. See Leslie Rees, 'Gwen Meredith', in Parsons and Chance, *Companion*, p. 364. Other significant long-running serials were, inevitably, *Dad and Dave* (from 1936), and the homely suburban fare of *Fred and Maggie Everybody* (from 1936) and *Mrs 'Obbs* (from 1940).

37 *The Fire on the Snow* was conceived for radio; *Ned Kelly* was originally written for the stage, but premiered (in an abridged form) on ABC radio.

38 Douglas Stewart, *The Australasian Elizabethan Theatre Trust: The First Year*, pp. lv–lvi.

10

'New words come tripping slowly'

Poetry, popular culture and modernity, 1890–1950

PETER KIRKPATRICK

Australia in the first half of the 20th century was one of the most urbanised countries in the world and embraced modernity – city living, new technologies, the mass media – with a passion second only to that of the United States; and yet, without strong literary-intellectual or avant-garde traditions, Australian poetry in this period seems, at first glance, anti-modernist. The radical poet Lesbia Harford was one who hoped for a new kind of verse that might express a new social order. In 1917 she wrote:

> Into old rhyme
> New words come tripping slowly.
> Hail to the time
> When they possess it wholly.

Harford yearned for a poetic language adequately to express the modern age. Even so, she could hardly have envisaged the experimentalism of 'high' modernists such as Ezra Pound, H.D., Marianne Moore and T. S. Eliot. If the avant-garde was slow to have an impact – other than a negative one – on Australian poets during this period, we need to acknowledge that there are many ways of being modern.

The history of poetry, as of any literary form, is inseparable from its readers, the uses they make of it, and the modes by which it is transmitted and consumed. In the 19th century that readership and those uses and modes proliferated within everyday life in ways that we today, for all the possibilities of cyberspace, can barely imagine. At the beginning of the period covered by this chapter poetry was still commonly published in Australian newspapers, as it had been throughout the Victorian age. Verse was also frequently spoken – in suburban parlours, in schools, in theatres and on concert platforms. Indeed, most people were capable of reciting part if not all of at least one favourite piece. By the middle of the 20th century, though, within the span of a single lifetime, newspapers rarely published poetry and, outside eisteddfods and the occasional radio program, its public performance was virtually extinct. Poetry had become a minority art form, increasingly the sole preserve of cultural elites who published and discussed it in little magazines, or studied it silently on the page in universities.

This transformation was not unique to Australia, of course. Throughout the English-speaking world poetry moved from being a broadly popular to an unpopular, largely

highbrow, art form. This can partly be explained by changes in the modes of mass communication, and in particular the invention of radio – as we will see.

The rapid expansion of cities following the Industrial Revolution had produced vigorous urban societies that hankered after new forms of information, entertainment and self-improvement. The great variety of the Victorian press was a function of this dynamic context, its scale a response to rising mass literacy. Benedict Anderson has described the ability of newspapers to create 'imagined communities',[1] and in the 19th century the verse they published reflected this. The literary ballad, in particular, built to hold a narrative, proved readily adaptable to a range of journalistic demands, from lowlife sketch to heroic set piece, from patriotic prayer to satirical squib. In Australia the bush ballad, a racy sub-genre created by Adam Lindsay Gordon in the 1860s, came to prominence in the pages of the Sydney *Bulletin* 20 years later.

The *Bulletin* was a weekly paper which, under the doughty editorship of J. F. Archibald from 1886, took a continental view of Australian life and invited copy from readers across the six colonies with the aim of national self-fashioning. Known as the Bushman's Bible, its literary offerings helped construct a frontier-based, chiefly masculine and frequently humorous version of Australian identity that remains popular, and marketable, to this day. Long before Crocodile Dundee and Steve Irwin, there was the Man from Snowy River, 'a stripling on a small and weedy beast', who galloped onto its pages on 26 April 1890, hellbent on subduing a mob of brumbies to retrieve a valuable racing colt.

Identified only by where he comes from, and seen rather than heard in the poem, the Man from Snowy River becomes an agent of the land itself: less a human character than a rough-riding metonymy. This gives him the superhuman power to become one with both his horse and the landscape: 'he raced him down the mountain like a torrent down its bed'. Paterson's language also nods to epic, from the infernally 'terrible descent', to the later description of the 'pine-clad ridges' as 'battlements', which accords with the tale's chivalric qualities. Correspondingly, by the end of the poem the Man's feat has passed into legend: 'The man from Snowy River is a household word to-day, / And the stockmen tell the story of his ride.' Such has been the power of Paterson's factitious folklore that this statement is now perfectly true.

Paterson went on to invent another piece of Australian folklore in 1895 with 'Waltzing Matilda'. Though he loosely based it on recent events in western Queensland, he deliberately abstracted time in the fairy-tale opening, 'Oh! there once was a swagman camped in a Billabong', and mythopoeic conclusion, 'And his ghost may be heard as it sings in the Billabong'.[2] It is hardly coincidental that Paterson edited the first collection of Australian folk ballads, *Old Bush Songs*, in 1905.

1 See Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, rev. edn, Verso, 1991, ch. 2.

2 This is Paterson's own version published in *Saltbush Bill, J.P., and Other Verses* (1917). In the popular version the lines are: 'Once a jolly swagman camped by a billabong', 'And his ghost may be heard as you pass by that billabong'.

The bush ballads share the form and, to some extent, the content of folk poetry, but their broad and continuing popularity – particularly in the country – blurs their fundamental difference from traditional bush songs. Rather than being collected from oral sources, the bush ballad is distinctly modern, the product of a literate, predominantly urban nationalism.[3] As well as from Gordon, the *Bulletin* bards adapted their work from popular overseas models, notably the ballads of Rudyard Kipling and Bret Harte – though the 19th-century fashion for ballad poetry ultimately derived from the *Lyrical Ballads* of Wordsworth and Coleridge. As a demotic form, balladry embodied the romantic urge to speak in what Wordsworth called 'language really used by men'; but by appealing to a pre-industrial sensibility, it was also a mode of creative anachronism. Paterson began his introduction to *Old Bush Songs* with a long quotation from Lord Macaulay's preface to *Lays of Ancient Rome*, which argued for balladry as a function of the course of empire: 'Such is the origin of ballad-poetry, a species of composition which scarcely ever fails to spring up and flourish in every society, at a certain point in the progress towards refinement.' Paterson commented, wilfully contracting the historical process: 'So far as materials for ballads go, the first sixty or seventy years of our history are equal to about three hundred years of the life of an old and settled nation.'[4]

That verse was commonly recited by all classes at this time enhanced the status of the bush ballad as quasi-folklore. Yet the Victorian performance of poetry was less a folkloric remnant than another product of modernity; in this case, the widespread diffusion of elocutionary practices that infiltrated many forms of spoken expression – from the exercise of reading aloud to sermons and political oratory. Designed to facilitate class-mobility through 'proper' speech, elocution sought to regulate diction along pseudo-scientific lines but, as an unintended corollary, also stimulated a fascination with dialects and deviations.[5]

Recitation, employed as an instrument to discipline the voice (especially in schools), could thus serve to liberate it into other idioms; from the comic character 'turns' of music hall, to the political intonations of literary nationalism:

> Australia's a big country
> An' Freedom's humping bluey,
> An' Freedom's on the wallaby
> O don't you hear 'er cooey?
> She's just begun to boomerang,

3 See Graeme Davison, 'Sydney and the Bush: An Urban Context for the Australian Legend', in John Carroll (ed.), *Intruders in the Bush: The Australian Quest for Identity*, OUP, 1982. Davison's view that the bush legend was largely the work of bohemian writers in the city is challenged by Richard Waterhouse: see *The Vision Splendid: A Social and Cultural History of Rural Australia*, Curtin University Books, 2005, pp. 163–5, 176–7.

4 A. B. Paterson (ed.), 'Introduction', *Old Bush Songs: Composed and Sung in the Bushranging, Digging and Overlanding Days*, 5th edn, Cornstalk, 1926, pp. x–xi.

5 See Peter Kirkpatrick, 'Hunting the Wild Reciter: Elocution and the Art of Recitation', in Joy Damousi and Desley Deacon (eds), *Talking and Listening in the Age of Modernity: Essays on the History of Sound*, ANU E Press, 2007.

She'll knock the tyrants silly,
She's goin' to light another fire
And boil another billy.

Henry Lawson's 'Freedom on the Wallaby', written for the Brisbane *Worker* in 1891, carries republican zeal in the grain of its aggressive vernacular, and was composed on the tongue. A. G. Stephens recalled Lawson from this time 'pounding out his rhymes, often aloud, as he paced to and fro'.[6] Both Lawson and Paterson had poems in popular books of recitations such as *The Coo-ee Reciter* (1904) and the *Bulletin Reciter* (1901), which went through many editions and by 1940 had sold over 250 000 copies.

While they were twin pillars of the *Bulletin* literary pantheon, Lawson and Paterson were opposites in terms of class and temperament. Both had bush upbringings, but whereas Lawson's family scratched a living from a poor selection, Paterson was a squatter's son. Their differences were played out in the poetic 'debate' they cooked up in the *Bulletin* in 1892. Lawson fired the first salvo with 'Borderland', which depicted the outback as a blighted hellhole; a place

Where, in clouds of dust enveloped, roasted bullock-drivers creep
Slowly past the sun-dried shepherd dragged behind his crawling sheep.
Stunted peak of granite gleaming, glaring like a molten mass
Turned from some infernal furnace on a plain devoid of grass.

Paterson responded 'In Defence of the Bush' with a bucolic vision of the *volk* in full cry:

But you found the bush was dismal and a land of no delight –
Did you chance to hear a chorus in the shearers' huts at night?
Did they 'rise up William Riley' by the camp-fire's cheery blaze?
Did they rise him as we rose him in the good old droving days?

The *Bulletin* debate was about how Australians should read their landscape: was it a wasteland characterised by maddening isolation, or a pastoral place where communities of happy rustics sang old bush songs? Was it Lawson's outback hell, or Paterson's New Arcadia?

In *Preoccupations in Australian Poetry*, Judith Wright described this opposition in terms of the landscape's 'double aspect', a phrase that has both historical and existential implications:

> Australia has from the beginning of its short history meant something more to its new inhabitants than mere environment and mere land to be occupied, ploughed and brought into subjection. It has been an outer equivalent of an inner reality; first, and persistently, the reality of exile; second, though perhaps we now tend to forget this, the reality of newness and freedom.[7]

6 A. G. Stephens, 'Henry Lawson: An Obituary', in Leon Cantrell (ed.), *A. G. Stephens: Selected Writings*, A&R, 1978, p. 261.
7 Judith Wright, *Preoccupations in Australian Poetry*, OUP, 1965, p. xi.

Among the *Bulletin* balladists, by far the bleakest poetic vision was that of Barcroft Boake, whose 'Where the Dead Men Lie' evokes a haunted frontier 'Where brown Summer and Death have mated'. For Scottish-born Will Ogilvie, on the other hand, the bush was wholly an adventure. The title of his best-known collection, *Fair Girls and Gray Horses* (1898), indicates his main interests, and in a poem like 'The Bush, My Lover' the land is a sweetheart rather than a *femme fatale*. The fates of the poets fitted their temperaments: Boake hanged himself with his stockwhip at 26, while Ogilvie returned to Scotland and lived in tweedy, countrified contentment until 93.

That nature was so often made to do the work of culture, and that landscape continued to form such a dominant, if ambiguous, trope in Australian poetry throughout this period gives the impression that Australian poets were less engaged with the wonders and disillusionments of modern life than their British or American counterparts. And yet, as Richard Waterhouse shows in *The Vision Splendid*, his cultural history of rural Australia, by the end of the 19th century industrialisation had radically changed land use and, in consequence, the shape of the land and the activities of those who lived on it. The result was the 'more complete inclusion' of the country 'in a national – indeed, an international – market economy'.[8] In 1889 Lawson lamented that 'The mighty bush with iron rails / Is tethered to the world' ('The Roaring Days').

The 'old' bush of the pioneers was rapidly retreating into the past, which is one reason why the poets of the 1890s were so keen to memorialise it. Paterson was nostalgic for pre-industrial frontier life because it offered freedom from the conformity of urban mass society. For the city-dwelling speaker of 'Clancy of the Overflow', 'the hurrying people daunt me, and their pallid faces haunt me / As they shoulder one another in their rush and nervous haste'. His longing to 'change with Clancy' and 'take a turn at droving' completely neglected the hardships of the drover's life. The anti-pastoral vision of Lawson, on the other hand, acknowledged the contemporary politics of rural labour: 'Ah! we read about the drovers and the shearers and the like / Till we wonder why such happy and romantic fellows strike' ('The City Bushman').

Despite the great popularity of balladry in the 1890s, it was versatile Irish-born Victor Daley who was possibly the most representative poet of the period. Daley's politics were radical – he claimed Fenian descent – and he produced excellent topical and satirical verse for the *Bulletin* and other papers. Daley's other mode drew from Aestheticism, however, and would not have been out of place in *The Yellow Book*. Donning this mask, he could without irony insist that 'fair Romance' was alive and well and willing to be wooed:

> Do they deem, these fools supreme, whose iron wheels unceasing whirr,
> That, in this rushing Age of Steam, there is no longer room for HER?

8 Waterhouse, *Vision Splendid*, p. 179.

He once likened the setting sun to 'a peony / Drowning in wine' ('A Sunset Fantasy'), and in the well-known 'Dreams' longed to go gentle into that good night:

> My songs and sonnets carven in fine gold
> Have faded from me with the last day-beam
> That purple lustre to the sea-line lent,
> And flushed the clouds with rose and chrysolite;
> So days and dreams in darkness pass away.

This is very much high-end poetry, and a world away from the demotic verses Daley wrote under the pen-name Creeve Roe (Irish Gaelic for Red Branch). In these he castigated the bloated capitalist – 'His is the Glory that is Grease, / The Grandeur that is Rum' ('Hats') – and sanctified the sufferings of the working class: 'my true name is Labour, though priests call me Christ' ('His Name').

Like other Victorian poets, including even Tennyson (who wrote light verse in Lincolnshire dialect), Daley was aware of the diversity of his audience, but it was an audience that had became increasingly split by the exclusionary forces of an incipient modernism. He had wanted some of his Creeve Roe poems to be included in his first collection *At Dawn and Dusk* (1898) to offset the more rarefied pieces,[9] but editorial preference was for serious over light verse, with a view to impressing literary opinion in London. The book's failure to make any mark at all was a deep disappointment to Daley's bohemian friends.

Daley's poetic gifts for both popular and more exalted forms, for sharp topicality as well as dreamy lyricism, were shared by many poets of the period – which is what makes him so representative. Indeed, especially after A. G. Stephens became its first official literary (or Red Page) editor in 1896, much of the poetry of the *Bulletin* itself comprised late-romantic or symbolist-influenced lyrics – a fact that literary histories sometimes overlook, especially when stressing the exceptionalism of Christopher Brennan. Poets who combined what might be called verse journalism with a serious dedication to high art included Louisa Lawson (Henry's feminist mother and editor of the *Dawn*), Arthur Adams, David McKee Wright (both later Red Page editors) and Mary Gilmore (women's editor of the *Worker*), to name some of the most prominent. The poet-journalist tradition would continue in a much attenuated way into the 1920s and 30s, notably in the work of C. J. Dennis on the Melbourne *Herald* and Kenneth Slessor on *Smith's Weekly*, and finally ended with Ronald McCuaig, last of the *Bulletin* court poets, in the early 1960s.

Like most of his peers, Daley was a metropolitan poet; but among Stephens' protégés was the remarkable John Shaw Neilson, who worked as an itinerant rural labourer for most of his life. Neilson was born in South Australia, but his family became pioneers in western Victoria, and from the age of nine he grew up under the huge skies of the

9 Harold Oliver (ed.), 'Introduction', *Australian Poets: Victor Daley*, A&R, 1963, pp. v–vi.

Wimmera and Mallee regions – landscapes that form the backdrop to much of his verse. Though he had little formal schooling, his Scottish father (also called John) had none at all, but was an award-winning, locally popular poet. In those days uneducated did not mean unlettered. Neilson's own early verse was first published along with his father's in the *Nhill Mail*, and he even had a poem in the *Bulletin Reciter*. But it was not until he came under Stephens' wing that he gradually gained a national reputation. Playing a literary Svengali to the self-effacing Neilson, Stephens regularly altered what he saw as rough lines and verses, though with growing self-confidence Neilson eventually learned to stand up for himself.

Because of his 'peasant' origins and lowly working life, there has been a tendency to regard Neilson as a naive lyricist, as what A. R. Chisholm called our 'sweetest singer'[10] – a reputation that downplays not only his intelligence, but also the humour and occasional bitterness in his work. Despite his long years working in it – or rather because of them – for Neilson the bush was not a field of heroic male action, as it was for many of the balladists. Instead, with all its hardships, nature was romantically full of beauty and animistic insight.

Coming from semi-desert country, Neilson was especially drawn to water birds, notably brolgas, whose elegance of form and movement spoke deeply to his own instincts, as in 'The Crane is My Neighbour': 'He bleats no instruction, he is not an arrogant drummer; / His gown is simplicity – blue as the smoke of the summer'. 'Native Companions Dancing' captures the birds' courtship in a frieze of words:

> On the blue plains in wintry days
> The stately birds move in the dance.
> Keen eyes have they, and quaint old ways
> On the blue plains in wintry days.
> The Wind, their unseen Piper, plays.
> They strut, salute, retreat, advance;
> On the blue plains, in wintry days,
> The stately birds move in the dance.

The verbal patterning in this poem highlights a more abstract, purely aesthetic quality also evident in Neilson's verse that takes its cue from symbolism. Sydney Long's contemporary Art Nouveau painting 'The Spirit of the Plains', featuring a ballet of brolgas dancing across the canvas to the music of a flute-playing nymph, might almost have been intended as an illustration.

Chisholm's statement that Neilson 'was probably not acquainted with Symbolist doctrine and practice, at any rate in a direct and significant way'[11] overlooks the fact symbolist thought had already infiltrated early 20th-century Australian art, and that local

10 A. R. Chisholm, 'A Study of Shaw Neilson', in Chisholm (ed.), *Shaw Neilson: Selected Poems*, A&R, 1973, p. 1.
11 Ibid., p. 16.

examples were everywhere to be found. Certainly Neilson read Stephens' own journal, the *Bookfellow*, where it was discussed, and owned a copy of *The Heart of the Rose*, which contained Nettie Palmer's translation of Verlaine's *Art Poétique*.[12] The symbolist influence is apparent in Neilson's synaesthesia, as in the translucent opening of 'Love's Coming':

> Quietly as rosebuds
> Talk to the thin air
> Love came so lightly
> I knew not it was there.

Yet this simile also takes a step beyond symbolism and towards imagism: to what Ezra Pound called 'an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time'.[13] The tension between metaphor and meaning is played out in the dialogic structure of Neilson's most celebrated poem, 'The Orange Tree', where the girl finally responds to the speaker's badgering questions with

> – Silence! the young girl said. Oh, why,
> Why will you talk to weary me?
> Plague me no longer now, for I
> Am listening like the Orange Tree.

In its evocation of an experience beyond the margins of thought, Hal Porter described 'The Orange Tree' as 'like reading smoke'.[14] Yet the poem emerged directly from the poet's working life: 'When I was working up at Merbein I could not help noticing the beautiful light on the trees in the afternoon.'[15] This was symbolism with its sleeves rolled up.

The poetry of Hugh McCrae was often compared to that of Neilson for its lyrical beauty, although he played a very different kind of tune. McCrae is not always as rumbustious as he is in 'I Blow My Pipes', but it gives a glimpse of the life-affirming physicality of his verse, as well as its Eurocentrism:

> I blow my pipes, the glad birds sing,
> The fat young nymphs about me spring,
> The sweaty centaur leaps the trees
> And bites his dryad's splendid knees;
> The sky, the water, and the earth
> Repeat aloud our noisy mirth . . .

12 Helen Hewson, 'Introduction', *John Shaw Neilson: A Life in Letters*, MUP, 2001, pp. 13–14. *The Heart of the Rose* was a Melbourne literary journal edited by Bernard O'Dowd that ran for four issues – each under a different title – in 1907–8.

13 Ezra Pound, 'A Few Don'ts by an Imagiste', in Peter Jones (ed.), *Imagist Poetry*, Penguin, 1972, p. 131.

14 Hal Porter, *The Extra*, cited in Hewson, *John Shaw Neilson*, p. 290.

15 Shaw Neilson to James Devaney, 28 October 1934, in ibid., pp. 277–8.

His first and most substantial collection was titled *Satyrs and Sunlight* (1909), the *Sunlight* giving it a local slant. 'Ambuscade' from that book reads like 'The Man from Snowy River' acted out by centaurs. Yet the creatures of Graeco-Roman mythology make up only one of McCrae's poetic troupes, which also include mediaeval, 18th-century, *commedia dell'arte* and, occasionally, oriental figures. Such figures were also favoured by his close friend, the artist Norman Lindsay – so much so, in fact, that it remains an open question who most influenced whom. As Robert Hughes wrote of Lindsay, 'his art was a costume party'.[16]

Neilson's best work survives because it builds on the more modernist elements of his late romantic style, such as strength and simplicity of imagery and colour – qualities that ally it with imagism – and an avoidance of archaic language. McCrae's poetry, on the other hand, failed fully to modernise its sources and so seems more historically circumscribed, more like pastiche. Something as melodramatic as the following, for example, is now hard to take seriously, though it might be reclaimed as kitsch:

> The curtains sway; they open from my bed –
> When, lo, the ghastly slime-surrounded head
> Of the foul dragon Tantacalladon!
> The thunders roar, the night is filled with wan,
> Pale images; and white Alcaphra leers
> Under his turban, till his jewelled ears
> Flick like the marish flame old goblins wave
> Above the dead rogue in the cross-road grave.
>
> 'Tantacalladon'

In his day, though, McCrae was a major figure. Lindsay regarded him as having 'fathered' Australian poetry into being, virtually single-handed,[17] and Slessor similarly honoured him, claiming him as 'kin' to the Elizabethans.[18]

The fact is that McCrae's theatrical brio and candid sensuality stood out from the mainstream of bush balladeers, topical wits and bloodless second-rate poetasters that filled the local literary marketplaces. Strange to say, he *looked* modern because he seemed a universal poet, one who could take inspiration from all ages and, thereby, transcend them. To that extent, too, McCrae's verse, like Lindsay's art, functioned as what Hughes called a 'tradition-substitute'.[19] As for his modernity, Norman's brother Lionel advised readers in the *Lone Hand* 'not to be led astray by the dress of [McCrae's] poems – Greek chlamys or English Lincoln-green are of no moment; the spirit that animates them is that of the early twentieth century'.[20] For his contemporaries, it was

16 Robert Hughes, *The Art of Australia*, Penguin, 1981, p. 84.
17 Norman Lindsay, 'Hugh McCrae', *Bohemians of the Bulletin*, A&R, 1965, p. 126.
18 Kenneth Slessor, 'Australian Poetry: 3. Hugh McCrae', in Slessor, *Bread and Wine: Selected Prose*, A&R, 1970, p. 110.
19 Hughes, *Art of Australia*, p. 86. 20 Cited in Slessor, 'Australian Poetry: 3', p. 102.

McCrae's vitalism that linked him to the *Zeitgeist*, although these days he sounds more like Rupert Brooke than D. H. Lawrence:

> I kissed her breasts; and she, with golden eyes
> Like the hot panther leaning to the brook,
> Bloomed into passion, while her thirsty cries
> Throbbed through the night till all her body shook.
> 'Sensual Love'

Writing sex can set a trap for any author. Bernard O'Dowd once seriously described a bed as a 'Benign necropolis of maidenhead' ('The Bed'), and it gives a fair hint of his poetic manner: humourless, overblown, and relentlessly allegorical. Yet O'Dowd was a major figure in the Melbourne scene, where he worked for many years as a public servant and, later, parliamentary draughtsman. Radical, and eclectically intellectual, he had a Shelleyan faith in poetry's central role in the betterment of humanity, as expressed in his 1909 manifesto, *Poetry Militant*. There he called upon 'the poets hidden among the people, the young and appointed saviours of the people, to come out into the open with the other soldiers of reform'.[21]

O'Dowd's early sequences *Dawnward?*, *The Silent Land* and *Dominions of the Boundary* were all written in ballad metre – not the loping lines of the bush ballad, but the Common Measure of hymns. Densely crammed with ideas and allusions, their impact is a triumph of compression over comprehension. His reputation rests on the long discursive poem *The Bush* (1912), where the pentameter line permitted some relaxation of his allegorical shorthand. O'Dowd's bush remains an abstract symbol, even so: a focus for historical, cultural and political speculation rather than a real landscape.

Christopher Brennan was for Sydney what O'Dowd was for Melbourne: a local hero whose reputation, even today, does not travel well beyond his home town. Both wrote notoriously knotty, difficult to understand poems and, partly for that reason, both had passionate followers and converts. Brennan corresponded with Mallarmé, O'Dowd with Whitman: very different masters. Yet Brennan's reputation is currently stronger than O'Dowd's for reasons similar to those that explain why Neilson now seems to matter more than McCrae: the incipient modernism in his work, linked to symbolist influences – although whether he can truly be styled 'modernist' is a matter of some debate.

A brilliant classical scholar, Brennan pursued a tenuous career as a librarian and academic until the University of Sydney eventually employed him on a permanent basis to teach modern languages and literature. Like a good Victorian, he had taken up poetry as a religion after abandoning his Catholicism around the age of 20. Brennan's status rests on the sprawling, discontinuous sequence simply titled *Poems*,[22] his own highly

21 Bernard O'Dowd, 'Poetry Militant', *The Poems of Bernard O'Dowd*, Lothian, 1941, p. 30.
22 Often rendered as *Poems (1913)*, the date printed on the title page.

original version of a French symbolist *livre composé*, semi-dramatic and symphonic, and bound together by recurring poetic symbols like musical leitmotifs.

At the heart of *Poems* is a gnostic quest for Eden, which is less a state of primal innocence than of spiritual wholeness – a version of O'Dowd's metaphysical bush, perhaps. The book begins with a section called 'Towards the Source', which seeks an exalted redemption through love, taking its inspiration from Brennan's early relationship with his wife, a marriage that quickly soured. In the second section, 'The Forest of Night', the speaker remains restless, and Eve is replaced by Lilith, 'Lady of Night', symbolising the elusive nature of all absolutes:

> All mystery, and all love, beyond our ken,
> she woos us, mournful till we find her fair:
> and gods and stars and songs and souls of men
> are the sparse jewels in her scatter'd hair.

Lilith is thus the decadent *femme fatale* on a cosmic scale. Up to this point Brennan follows a high romantic path: what James McAuley would describe as the 'Magian Heresy', whereby poetry 'sought to be the principle of its own mysticism, to divinize itself; poetic imagination was itself to be the Logos'.[23] As Brennan put it:

> What do I seek? I seek the word
> that shall become the deed of might
> whereby the sullen gulfs are stirr'd
> and stars begotten on their night.

The last sections of *Poems* abdicate this role, however. The best-known of them, 'The Wanderer', while still couched in heroic terms, embraces a contingent notion of existence as becoming, as endless movement, projecting the speaker as a kind of epic *flâneur* who 'knows / no ending of the way, no home, no goal'. In the last of the book's 'Epilogues', Brennan is back in history, on a George Street tram in 1908, repledging his faith in Eden, but as 'promis'd only', never realised, whose promise now takes in the spiritual urges of his fellow Sydneysiders: 'one with my own, however dark, / and questing towards one mother-ark'.

Like so much else about Brennan's life, *Poems* was inopportune, appearing shortly before Christmas 1914 and promptly disappearing under the weight of the Great War.[24] If early critics, such as Randolph Hughes, tended to over-hype Brennan, the tendency among more recent commentators has been to damn with faint praise. Most critics sense there is something more or less 'modernist' going on in Brennan's work, but

23 James McAuley, 'Journey into Egypt', in Leonie Kramer (ed.), *James McAuley: Poetry, Essays and Personal Commentary*, UQP, 1988, p. 185. Recently Katherine Barnes in *The Higher Self in Christopher Brennan's Poems: Esotericism, Romanticism, Symbolism*, Brill, 2006, has argued in favour of Brennan's hermeticism in 'exploring the notion of a higher or transcendent self constituted by the union of the human mind and Nature . . . Brennan's understanding of esoteric and mystical currents put him in a privileged position for understanding the religious affinities of certain aspects of Romantic and Symbolist thought', pp. 2, 8.

24 Axel Clark, *Christopher Brennan: A Critical Biography*, MUP, 1980, p. 213.

baulk at his language, which seems of its period. Even so sympathetic a critic as Terry Sturm has described his verse as 'uneven, remaining enmeshed in the stylistic mannerisms of the late nineteenth century'.[25] Vivian Smith elegantly condensed this ambivalence towards Brennan when he remarked that 'he will not go away, and he cannot be tamed into perfection'.[26] Brennan's style can in some ways be compared to the 'free music' machines that composer Percy Grainger invented in the latter part of his life. The experimental music these devices produced was radical, extraordinary; but unfortunately later developments in electronics rendered their mechanically produced sounds redundant, taking Western avant-garde music in other directions. That fact does not make Grainger less of a *modern* composer, though.

Though Brennan ended his *Poems* on the streets of Sydney, he remained the poet as hierophant, and that mystique further enhanced his bohemian reputation as one of the wonders of Sydney. Unlike every other poet so far considered in this chapter – even McCrae, who had a minor career as an actor, and starred in a silent film about Gordon – Brennan had no significant connection with popular culture. But, with the possible exception of Ern Malley, he fitted the role of the damaged romantic-modernist genius in a way that no other Australian poet ever has, especially after his shabby decline following dismissal from the university. 'A star in exile; *not* constellated at the South', as McCrae described him.[27]

Just as unconstellated was Lesbia Harford, and a more different poet to Brennan is hard to imagine. Many of Harford's colloquial, unpretentious lyrics were written to be sung: 'As natural as the song of a bird', recalled one of her lovers.[28] That simile disregards the surprising modernity of Harford's work, in particular its acute understanding of class:

> When you go in to town about eleven
> The hurrying, morning crowds are hid from view.
> Shut in the silent buildings at eleven
> They toil to make life meaningless for you.
>
> 'The Invisible People'

From a genteel poor background, Harford studied law at the University of Melbourne where she became involved in socialist circles. After graduation, in solidarity with the proletariat she took jobs in clothing factories, eventually joining the Industrial Workers of the World – popularly known as the Wobblies – in 1917.[29] Her commitment was a hard road made harder by a congenital heart condition, which helped to kill her at 36.[30]

25 Terry Sturm (ed.), introduction, *Portable Australian Authors: Christopher Brennan*, UQP, 1984, p. [xv].
26 Vivian Smith, 'Poetry', in Leonie Kramer (ed.), *The Oxford History of Australian Literature*, OUP, 1981, p. 337.
27 Hugh McCrae to Rupert Atkinson, [1932?], in Robert D. FitzGerald (ed.), *The Letters of Hugh McCrae*, A&R, 1970, p. 91.
28 Guido Baracchi, 'Rebel Girl', Baracchi Collection, MS 5241/39, NLA.
29 Jeff Sparrow, 'Signed Up in a Rebel Band: Lesbia Harford Re-Viewed', *Hecate*, 32.1 (2006), p. 11.
30 Her *ADB* entry says she died from tuberculosis: Lesley Lamb, 'Harford, Lesbia Venner', *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, vol. 9, MUP, 1983, p. 196.

As Drusilla Modjeska observed,[31] Harford's verse is aligned with a radical tradition in Australian poetry going back to Lawson; it includes Mary Gilmore who, like Harford, was also concerned to describe women's experiences. But Harford's verse is minimalist, personalised and anti-domestic. She embodies her vision of the revolution as a lover:

She is not of the fireside,
My lovely love;
Nor books, nor even a cradle,
She bends above.
No, she is bent with lashes,
Her flesh is torn.
From blackness into blackness
She walks forlorn.
But factories and prisons
Are far more fair
Than home or palace gardens
If she is there.

Harford in fact wrote more love poetry, much of it homoerotic, than political verse. Even so, for her the personal was political:

For no two lovers are a single person
And lovers' union means a soul's suppression.
Oh happy then the moment of love's passing
When those strong souls we sought to slay recover.

Her factory poems celebrate the everyday lives of her fellow workers; like Gertie, who arrives at work more cheerfully one day after having dreamt of her homeland ('The Immigrant'); or Maisie, who shyly but proudly reveals her lovebites ('An Improver').

Open to ordinary experience, with a freshness and frankness that eschews Victorian mannerisms, these are perhaps the first unambiguously modernist poems by an Australian. Yet until fairly recently Harford was a tantalising mystery. Very few of her poems appeared in her lifetime and, until 1985, only one slim, safe selection had seen print. No doubt the radical qualities of her work, both formally and politically, were a hindrance. Jeff Sparrow further suggests that her link with the syndicalist IWW 'almost certainly contributed to her long neglect' by the communist left.[32] Nonetheless, Harford never pressed her poetic claims too strongly and, despite the accessibility of her verse, seems to have written more for personal pleasure, to share with her close friends, than for publication.

Harford's reticence may also have been a response to the low status accorded women's verse in the public sphere. Ann Vickery writes in *Stressing the Modern*, 'As in other

31 Drusilla Modjeska, 'Introduction', in Modjeska and Marjorie Pizer (eds), *The Poems of Lesbia Harford*, A&R, 1985, p. 32.
32 Sparrow, 'Signed Up in a Rebel Band', p. 9.

countries, it was common for Australian critics to dismiss women's poetry as frivolous or slight.'[33] Mary Fullerton was another unforthcoming poet, whose strikingly original later verse was written in England largely for private circulation. When it was finally published in two collections in Australia under the pseudonym 'E', the modernising influence of Emily Dickinson was clearly evident:

A holiday from Use:
Beauty storms me
With her impetuous
Inutility.
While this fire warms me
I'll let Want go,
And laugh, remembering
My cold self in the snow.
'Interlude'

More forthright was Zora Cross, the 'shocking' sexual passion of whose *Songs of Love and Life* (1917) made her briefly popular – Vickery compares her to Edna St Vincent Millay[34] – but also elicited hostile responses from some male writers.

The breakdown of old power structures during the Great War unleashed possibilities for social transformation, and the verse of Harford and Cross responded to these. Elsewhere the reaction was more conservative and patriotic, focusing on the conflict in Europe and the Dardanelles. Like many lesser scribblers, Brennan wrote some orotundly jingoistic poems, collected as *A Chant of Doom and Other Verses* (1918), whose success surprised him. It was during the war that Dorothea Mackellar's 'My Country', written in 1908, achieved the anthemic status it has possessed ever since. Mackellar's love of country consecrates the old dualistic view of the bush by yet again feminising its 'wilful, lavish' diversity: 'Her beauty and her terror / – The wide brown land for me!'

Many soldiers wrote poetry, as shown by *The Anzac Book* (1915), a miscellany of prose, verse and drawings produced by the troops at Gallipoli and edited by C. E. W. Bean. The outstanding soldier poet was Leon Gellert, whose *Songs of a Campaign* swings between turbid allegory and stark realism. 'The Wrecked Aeroplane', for example, begins 'Unhappy craft of Daedelus reborn / That liest prone with white wings torn'. This is immediately followed by 'The Jester in the Trench', which might almost have been written by another poet:

'That reminds me of a yarn,' he said;
And everyone turned to hear his tale.
He had a thousand yarns inside his head.
They waited for him, ready with their mirth
And creeping smiles, – then suddenly turned pale,

33 Ann Vickery, *Stressing the Modern: Cultural Politics in Australian Women's Poetry*, Salt, 2007, p. 12.
34 Ibid., p. 190.

Grew still, and gazed upon the earth.
They heard no tale. No further word was said.
And with his untold fun,
Half leaning on his gun,
They left him – dead.

After the war, under the sway of Lindsay, Gellert opted for the allegorical mode with *The Isle of San* (1919), although he later produced a series of light verses on local wildlife in the style of Ogden Nash, *Those Beastly Australians* (1944).

The real poetic success story of the war was C. J. Dennis' *The Songs of a Sentimental Bloke* (1915), which sold an extraordinary 100 000 copies in four years.[35] In a sequence of comic ballads, Bill, a roughneck larrikin, tells of his reformation through marriage to Doreen, his 'precious bit o' fluff'. The great popularity of the Sentimental Bloke marks a point in time when Australians could take delight in an urban self-image. Through his gentrification, Bill even manages to accommodate high culture, as in 'The Play', his justly famous retelling of *Romeo and Juliet* in larrikinese. *The Songs* themselves achieved crossover appeal, and were filmed twice – Raymond Longford's 1919 silent version is a classic – and translated into a play, a musical and a ballet. If Dennis' Bloke speaks more like a stage cockney than a member of the Melbourne underclass, his knockabout, salt-of-the earth character nevertheless channels elements of the old *Bulletin* school – which is hardly surprising, since the individual poems first appeared there. But Bill chooses suburban bliss with his domestic angel over the male separatist ethos of the push, and is rewarded by *deus ex machina* Uncle Jim with an orchard. Going bush with his family, the Bloke's redemption is completed by a demotic vision of Brennan's Eden: 'An' I am blest, becos me feet 'ave trod / A land 'oo's fields reflect the smile o' God.'

Yet the drift of post-war life was in the other direction, towards the big smoke. Jack O'Hagan's well-known song, 'Along the Road to Gundagai' (1922), with its simple, nostalgic picture of a childhood home 'Where the blue gums are growing / And the Murrumbidgee's flowing', further suggests how deeply citified Australians now were. The lyrics dream of returning to the bush because to grow up – psychologically, nationally – implicitly involves leaving it. Though the song draws on the ballad tradition, O'Hagan's real inspiration lay in Tin Pan Alley. At the time of composition he had never been to Gundagai, and only came to write it following rejection of an earlier ditty called 'Down Carolina Way'.[36] Gundagai, Carolina: in the new mass culture such local details were transferable.

From the 1920s, with the development of radio and the electronic reproduction of sound, lyrical poetry was increasingly consumed in the form of popular song – a trend that continues unabated to this day. The rise of broadcast media also reined in

35 Jennifer Alison, 'Publishers and Editors: Angus & Robertson, 1888–1945', in Martyn Lyons and John Arnold (eds), *A History of the Book in Australia, 1891–1945: A National Culture in a Colonised Market*, UQP, 2001, p. 32.

36 'John Francis "Jack" O'Hagan', *An Unofficial History of Brighton Cemetery*, <http://www.brightoncemetery.com/HistoricInterments/150Names/ohaganj.htm>.

the press and produced a growing monopolisation of newspapers, notably during the Great Depression when many greater and lesser mastheads crashed. Concentration of ownership also tended to constrict diversity and abet tabloidisation. The journalistic market for verse was rapidly drying up. In most major metropolitan newspapers the space once taken up by a soulful sonnet or topical lampoon was given over to something more profitably eye-catching: a photo, an ad.

Radio silenced poetry in a more literal way as well. The wireless spoke in a friendly, intimate voice to the very heart of the modern home – a voice that made older forms of public speech that had evolved in a world without microphones seem overly rhetorical and histrionic. Radio not only offered alternative entertainment to reading, but the new domestic soundscape it created was inimical to older elocutionary styles of performance, and to traditional recitation. The days of both the professional and amateur reciter were now numbered. Ronald McCuaig was writing 'Topical Choruses' on items from the daily news for station 2BL in the late 1920s, but these were sung and, in any case, the practice did not last. By 1950 John Thompson would be experimenting with new ways of broadcasting verse at the ABC with a view to attracting a bigger audience for it. His high hopes were disappointed, though: the days when poetry performances were genuinely popular were by then well and truly over.[37]

The decline of poetry in everyday life can only partly be blamed on the transformation of the mass media in the early 20th century. The evolution of modernism and its rise to cultural authority after the Great War had an obvious role to play, for modernism was antipathetic to both the mass media and the everyday life that it served. Free verse did not lend itself to histrionic recitation in quite the same way as traditional metres, since a lot of modern poetry was designed to be difficult, requiring close, silent study in order to yield up a meaning.

The short-lived Sydney journal *Vision* (1923–4) offers a local version of the little magazines that elsewhere characterised the modernist avant-garde. As it despised modernist experimentation, the *Vision* agenda was hardly cutting-edge, yet what it had in common with overseas journals like *Blast* or *The Egoist* was an outright rejection of popular culture and 'herd' society, expressed in a dismissal of artistic nationalism. *Vision* had a strident contempt for the vernacular realist tradition of the *Bulletin*, and sought instead to sublimate art into the realm of the eternal, basing its program on the vitalist aesthetics of Lindsay's 1919 essay *Creative Effort*. As Norman's son, Jack, the journal's main driving force, argued in a leading essay in the first issue, 'It is a short-sighted Nationalism that can be proud only of verse about shearers and horses, and measures the reality of a work by its local references.'[38] Instead, the aim was nothing less than an Australian-led Renaissance, kitted out in the costumes and stage props of Norman's art.

37 Kirkpatrick, 'Hunting the Wild Reciter', pp. 67–70.
38 Jack Lindsay, 'Australian Poetry and Nationalism', *Vision*, 1 (1923), p. 34.

With all its pretensions, *Vision* also resembled the international avant-garde in its critical reaction to the spiritual malaise left by the Great War. Rather than conceive an art that might speak to that disenchantment, however, it rejected modernity out of hand. Slessor, the poetry editor, was a stylishly dressed young journalist who affected to hate the new-fangled age which he had to report. Even before he joined the magazine, in 'Marco Polo' he dreamed of going primitive:

> And, tired of life's new-fangled plan,
> I long to be barbarian.
> I'm sick of modern men, I wish
> You were still living, Kublai-Khan!

Disillusionment with modern life led many artists to dream of exotic elsewheres. The Australian expatriate W. J. Turner, who was associated with the English Georgian poets, longed for a mystical South America: 'Chimborazo, Cotopaxi, / They had stolen my soul away!' ('Romance'). Rather than looking for redemption in nature, though, Slessor's poem seeks it in the highly wrought *chinoiserie* of the Khan's pleasure dome. This romantic faith in artistic transcendence – that art and the imagination can finally rescue us from the meaningless of the everyday – Slessor derived in part from Lindsay.

But by the end of the 1920s Slessor became less inclined to visit the barley-sugar landscapes of romantic fantasy and found himself 'beating off the stars, gazing, not rhyming' ('Stars'). For one of the young lions of Sydney journalism, it was no longer possible to be a barbarian – not even imaginatively so. Slessor had joined *Smith's Weekly*, a populist, belligerently nationalist paper that took over from the *Bulletin* as a shaper of Australian identity, especially as embodied in the returned digger, whom it venerated. Despite its political conservatism, however, it was innovative in content and design, and willing to take risks – even with poetry. Between 1928 and 1933, on top of his other journalistic duties at *Smith's*, Slessor wrote the occasional series of light verses known as 'Darlinghurst Nights'. In these humorous reflections on Sydney and its fashions, he found a relaxed lyrical space in which to reinvest some of the fantasy elements from his earlier poems into everyday life, and the result can transform the city into pastoral:

> When Cucumber Kitty comes mocking the city,
> The boulevards burst into bud,
> The dusty old alleys breathe Roger and Gallet's
> And daffodils blaze in the mud.

The witty, agile versification of these poems links them to the contemporary songs of Cole Porter, Lorenz Hart and Noël Coward.

Slessor also wrote light verse for *Smith's* that touched directly on recent events. 'Passenger by "Greycliffe"', in the issue for 11 November 1927, refers to loss of 40 lives

eight days earlier when the steamer *Tahiti* collided with the ferry *Greycliffe* in Sydney Harbour's worst maritime accident. The 'Passenger' in the title is Death:

> Sometimes he lights a lantern far below;
> The cloudy waters melt, the shadows pass,
> Foam turns to crystal; down a tunnel of glass,
> We gaze at things forgotten long ago.
> The Harbour opens like a sepulchre
> Its golden trap-door, air and birds one side,
> And on the other, sea-flowers in the tide
> And white, dead bodies; and the Passenger.

In this fugitive, almost forgotten piece lies the germ of Slessor's later poems about the harbour. First, there is a magical transformation, as there so often is in his earlier, more rococo works; only here it is a deathly sea-change, revealed like the opening of a tomb. But, as in Ariel's song in *The Tempest*, the beauty of the language redeems the horror, and it unfolds as an eternal moment, as a thing 'forgotten long ago' brought back into the present. That language is also built upon what Slessor called 'concrete images', based on an 'abhorrence of abstraction'[39] – which was one positive, modernist legacy of *Vision* and Lindsay.

Slessor's 'big' poems from the late 1920s and 30s – 'Captain Dobbin', 'Five Visions of Captain Cook', 'Five Bells' – as well as some smaller ones – 'Out of Time', 'Metempsychosis' – are obsessed with the passage of time, and what British cultural historian Tim Armstrong calls 'a desire to wrest agency from modernity's appearance as an inevitable flow'.[40] 'Five Visions', in particular, might be seen as an attempt to create – to borrow a phrase from the American critic Van Wyck Brooks – a 'useable past': 'So Cook made choice, so Cook sailed westabout, / So men write poems in Australia'. Memory is crucial in all these works; no more so than in 'Five Bells' where, as 'the flood that does not flow', it stands in opposition to the dark waters that roll over Joe Lynch as an image of time as flux.

Because it represented real, lived time, as distinct from the abstract ticking of clocks – 'Time that is moved by little fidget wheels' – memory was also important to Slessor's contemporaries. In a Bergsonian way it was equated with consciousness itself. Furnley Maurice's *Melbourne Odes* (1934) take as their focus the changing fabric of the city and seek, through memory, to make sense of the onrush of progress:

> Roll on, proud thoroughfares! Roll on, O Cadillac and Chevrolet!
> Roll over a city that is gone, over a lovelier city way;
> The perilous cranes, the crashing walls, mad drills that wrench our nerves apart,
> Barter their trucks of rubble spawls for a changed town and a changing heart.

39 Slessor, 'Australian Poetry: 4. Norman Lindsay', in Slessor, *Bread and Wine*, p. 124.
40 Tim Armstrong, *Modernism: A Cultural History*, Polity, 2005, p. 11.

R. D. FitzGerald's prize-winning 'Essay on Memory' (1938) construes its subject in opposition to history as a form of vital collective unconscious:

> for Memory does not fail though men forget,
> but pokes a ghost-finger into all our pies
> and jabs out the dead meat, a grim Jack Horner,
> mocking the mild dream, half guess, half lies,
> of History babbling from his chimney-corner.

Australia's short European history seemed flat, uneventful and inauthentic: a function of what Peter Pierce has called, more generally, 'the *topos* of colonial absences'.[41] In an article in the *Age* in 1935, G. H. Cowling, Professor of English at Melbourne University, infamously complained about the lack of tradition in Australia – including an absence of ruins – and felt that 'a poetry which reflects past glories' was therefore impossible.[42] *Vision*'s old world dress-ups were one response to this perceived lack of a 'vital' history; the celebration of memory was another. Still another was to appeal to a neglected *pre*history.

By the late 1920s interest in Indigenous culture gradually began to shift beyond anthropology and into the mainstream. The consolidation of Australian nationhood during and after the Great War, and the final closing of the frontier – the last known wholesale murder of Aborigines, a series of events known as the Coniston massacre, took place in the Northern Territory in 1928 – meant that some unfinished business of invasion and settlement might at last be addressed. Collections of Aboriginal mythic stories began to appear: James Devaney's *The Vanished Tribes* (1929), but also those recorded by Indigenous polymath David Unaipon, which were published without acknowledgement under the title *Myths and Legends of the Australian Aboriginals* (1930). Gilmore included ground-breaking poems on Aboriginal subjects in *The Wild Swan* (1930) and *Under the Wilgas* (1932), some of which incorporated Indigenous words:

> Land of Mirrabooka,
> Land of Kollarendi,
> Lo, we have wakened thee,
> We of the Northland.

(Gilmore's glossary gives *Mirrabooka* as the Southern Cross, and *Kollarendi* as 'coolabah blossom'.)

It was in this context that the Adelaide-based Jindyworobak poets emerged, whose vanguard comprised Rex Ingamells, Wilfred Flexmore Hudson and Ian Mudie. Ingamells' 1938 nationalistic essay 'Conditional Culture' was their founding manifesto,

41 Peter Pierce, *Absences*, University of New England, 1993, p. 3.
42 G. H. Cowling, cited in P. R. Stephensen, *The Foundations of Culture in Australia: An Essay Towards National Self-Respect*, 1936, introduction by Craig Munro, A&U, 1986, p. 20.

and among the conditions set down to 'free Australian art from whatever alien influences trammel it' was 'an understanding of Australia's history and traditions, primeval, colonial and modern'.[43] The inclusion of 'primaeval' traditions was radical. When Ingamells came to write a narrative history of Australia in the form of an epic poem, *The Great South Land* (1951), he included the continent's pre-history, offering a theology based on the Dreaming – rendered from Arrernte as *Alcheringa*:

> Alcheringa is this Land's very soul,
> its bold and subtle essences imbue
> Australian scenes forever, constitute
> a bright allure and stern hypnotic power;
> it is the breath of sacred Yesterday,
> with import for Today and all Tomorrow,
> proof of primaeval first discovery,
> by nomad people, of the Great South Land,
> and how to live with it, in harmony
> of arduous enterprise, the life of good.

An interest in Aboriginal culture was only part of the Jindyworobak platform, but it was a significant part – especially for Ingamells. He took the name of the movement, meaning 'to annex, to join', from the glossary of Devaney's *The Vanished Tribes*, and the emphasis was on annexation rather than joining. In effect, many Jindyworobak poems tried to ventriloquise Aboriginality. The limits of Ingamells' thinking become evident in his own early macaronic verse, in which the interpolation of Indigenous words is both baffling and potentially comic. Take the much-quoted 'Moorawathimeering', translated in the requisite glossary as 'the land of the Lost, a sanctuary for outcasts':

> Into moorawathimeering,
> where atninga dare not tread,
> leaving wurly for a wilban,
> tallabilla, you have fled . . .

This might seem an unlovely hybrid, a bastard concoction that speaks more eloquently of its author's intentions than it does about the poem's putative subject of banishment (*tallabilla* is rendered as 'outlaw'). Max Harris implied that it was in effect a nonsense rhyme when he referred to it as a 'serious Jabberwocky'.[44] Yet the alienating effect of the language is mimetic of the exile that the poem describes. The white reader is linguistically cast out, and to find the way in has to learn a new code – but it is a faux, Jindyworobak code. Ingamells was not a student of Indigenous languages but lifted his strange lexicon from Devaney.

43 Rex Ingamells, 'Conditional Culture', in John Barnes (ed.), *The Writer in Australia: A Collection of Literary Documents 1856 to 1964*, OUP, 1969, p. 249.

44 Max Harris, 'Dance Little Wombat', in Brian Elliot (ed.), *Portable Australian Authors: The Jindyworobaks*, UQP, 1979, p. 261.

Underlying Jindyworobak Aboriginalism is a longing for the 'primitive' as both a critique of, and solution to, the problems of modernity – a case of going back to the future. As such, it can be situated within a wider modernist impulse that includes Picasso's interest in African tribal art, or even dadaist sound poems such as Hugo Ball's

> jolifanto bambla ô falli bambla
> grossiga m'pfa habla horem
> égiga goramen
> higo bloiko russula huju . . .[45]

For the Jindyworobaks, though, the need to assert national identity tended to constrain innovation at the same time as inviting it. Their experimental phase was short lived, and after World War II they were gradually subsumed in a wider lyrical current that Ivor Indyk has labelled 'pastoral';[46] it included poets as diverse as Judith Wright, Douglas Stewart and David Campbell, whose main careers lie beyond the period covered by this chapter.

When the avant-garde finally arrived in Australia it did not speak in an Indigenous tongue, nor in a white male vernacular, but in the language of the subconscious. The journal *Angry Penguins* (1940–6) was established by Harris in Adelaide, but later bankrolled and published in Melbourne by the wealthy art patrons John and Sunday Reed. Harris, who had been a member of the Jindyworobak Club, rapidly transformed himself into the Bad Boy of Australian poetry, a born-again surrealist with an iconoclastic flair who cocked a snook at older literary proprieties.

The prominence of *Angry Penguins* serves to show that, though the *Bulletin* was still a power in the land, the management of poetry had substantially shifted from the control of journalists, popular publishers and elocutionists and into the hands of elites, who were often connected with academia. The 1930s saw an upsurge of small magazines, including the modernist journal *Stream* (1931), edited by Cyril Pearl, then a student at Melbourne University. Harris was also a student, and *Angry Penguins* began under the auspices of the Adelaide University Arts Association. Other university-linked journals which appeared at the same time but which still survive as major players are *Southerly* (Sydney, 1939), and *Meanjin* (Brisbane, 1940; Melbourne, 1945).

Though it ran for only three issues, *Stream* is noteworthy as a precursor to *Angry Penguins*. Its poetry editor was Bertram Higgins, who had worked as a literary journalist in London before returning to Australia in 1930. Here he self-published the remarkable *'Mordecaius' Overture* (1933), an apocalyptic poem in splintered voices that recalls Eliot's *The Waste Land*, but takes the contrapuntal form of that work to a higher level of

45 Hugo Ball, from *Tenderenda the Fantast*, in *Blago Bung Blago Bung Bosso Fataka: First Texts of German Dada*, ed. and trans. Malcolm Green, Atlas, 1995, p. 137.

46 See Ivor Indyk, 'The Pastoral Poets', in Laurie Hergenhan (ed.), *The Penguin New Literary History of Australia*, Penguin, 1988.

abstraction. Higgins' modernism was intellectual and cosmopolitan. Mordecaius is a Tiresias-like figure whose experience of the destruction of Pompeii in 79 CE is refracted through memories of Christ's crucifixion, and the poem gestures towards revelation while all the time withholding it:

> Arrears are demanded in a bill of dreams –
> With a sense of falling and a flow of gleet,
> Sundry pressing deaths on the left side:
> He who from the cave crops out – who shouts
> Vexing the prophecy with flushed face;
> She of the soundless robe, of tranquil mien
> Who evades the embrace (*they* fulfilled it on the breathless edge)
> On the edge of the living dream.

That Higgins brought out *'Mordecaius' Overture* privately suggests that he was unwilling, or perhaps unable, to find a local publisher. Ronald McCuaig could not even get a printer to typeset his lyrics of modern love and its discontents, *Vaudeville* (1938). Deeming the collection too hot to handle, seven turned him down, fearing prosecution. As Deana Heath has written, 'between 1901 and the Second World War, Australia had arguably the severest censorship laws of any democratic country',[47] and they extended their authoritarian influence into the general community. Yet McCuaig's anti-romantic depictions of sex are troubled rather than titillating. 'The Commercial Traveller's Wife' in the poem of that title offers herself to the speaker, her lodger, who rebuffs her with 'Look at yourself in the glass':

> She faced the mirror where she stood
> And sort of stiffened there.
> Her eyes went still as knots in a bit of wood,
> And it all seemed to sigh out of her:
> 'All right,' she said. 'All right, all right, good night,'
> As though she didn't know if I'd heard,
> And shuffled out without another word.

McCuaig was forced to produce *Vaudeville* himself on a galley press in his Potts Point flat and distribute it privately. There was a lesson there for other young modernists about the danger of breaking moulds, especially in public.

Harris' bumptious conduct of *Angry Penguins* annoyed many who were not as convinced of his genius as he was. Among those were two increasingly conservative Sydney poets, James McAuley and Harold Stewart. Each had heard the siren song of modernism but managed largely to avoid temptation – though McAuley was more sorely tried than Stewart. The tale of their baiting of Harris through the invention of the

47 Deana Heath, 'Literary Censorship, Imperialism and the White Australia Policy', in Lyons and Arnold, *History of the Book*, p. 69.

fictitious, recently deceased modernist poet Ern Malley is now well-known. Harris was taken in hook, line and sinker, and brought out a Malley commemorative issue of *Angry Penguins* in 1944. The hoax was soon revealed in the Sydney *Sunday Sun* and, as a result of world-wide publicity, injury was added to insult when Harris was made to stand trial in Adelaide for publishing an indecent work.

Argument continues over the merits of Malley's oeuvre, *The Darkening Ecliptic* – improvised by McAuley and Stewart in a single afternoon – though these days more people see at least some artistic value in the poems than do not. As fractured 'surrealist' works they shift between romantic melancholy, 'It was a night when the planets / Were wreathed in dying garlands', and low farce, 'There is a moment when the pelvis / Explodes like a grenade'. The farcical aspect was fully exploited by the *Sunday Sun* in its exposé, which positioned Harris' statement that Malley was 'one of the two giants of contemporary Australian poetry' (the other, D. B. Kerr, had co-edited *Angry Penguins*) alongside absurd samples of the poems and the unexalted facts of the deception.[48] The paper was thus able to draw upon the resentment of its readers, who had grown up with a very different understanding of the uses of poetry and its place in their lives, towards literary mandarins like Harris who had transformed it into something exclusive, wantonly obscure and pretentious. The public impact of the hoax was a product of this shift in the politics of readership, of who now 'owned' and controlled poetry as a cultural institution.

This chapter began with one kind of hero, and it ends with another. The Man from Snowy River was an imaginary figure but over the years acquired a solidity through familiarity, so that many stockmen (falsely) claimed to have been Paterson's inspiration. He has even appeared in popular films, the first as early as 1920, as well as his own television series. Ern Malley is a very different creation, since he began as a seemingly real person and has been trying to disappear ever since:

> It is necessary to understand
> That a poet may not exist, that his writings
> Are the incomplete circle and straight drop
> Of a question mark
> And yet I know I shall be raised up
> On the vertical banners of praise.
>
> 'Sybilline'

Owing to his immateriality Malley maintains only a marginal position in popular culture, but has a celebrated place among cultural elites. If no feature films or TV series have been made about him, Sidney Nolan and Garry Shead have painted him, and Peter Carey has adapted his story in the novel *My Life as a Fake* (2003). In his own way, then, Malley is as much a legend as Paterson's horseman – but among quite

48 'Ern Malley, the Great Poet or the Greatest Hoax?', *Sunday Sun*, 18 June 1944, *Fact*, p. 1.

a different set of people. That make-believe working-class surrealist, the tormented, loveless garage mechanic dead at the age of 25, represents the ultimate triumph of modernism. Back in 1890 a poem like 'The Man from Snowy River' could project a version of Australian identity in memorable, folkloric measures. But by 1944 Ern Malley was struggling to speak in a 'No-Man's-language appropriate / Only to No-Man's-Land'.

11

Australian fiction and the world republic of letters, 1890–1950

ROBERT DIXON

> Lacking much that cosmopolitan sophisticates draw upon, the Australian has nevertheless had to compete with the world.
>
> Miles Franklin, *Laughter Not for a Cage*, p. 214.

In London in June 1935, two Australian writers met on a train bound for Paris. Christina Stead, then 32, had only just moved back to London from Paris, where she and her partner William Blake had lived since 1929. Nettie Palmer, then 52, was struck by the younger woman's worldliness: in her diary, she described Stead as 'assured, perfectly dressed, tailored and supple', and found no trace of an Australian accent in her 'nodding sing-song voice'. For her part, Stead described Palmer as a 'good-natured, schoolteacherish woman, totally without flair or imagination'.[1]

Stead and Palmer were travelling together as Australian representatives to the International Congress of Writers for the Defence of Culture, a mass meeting of intellectuals against fascism held in Paris in June 1935. They spent a good deal of time together during the five days of the congress but did not warm to each other. They were two very different types of Australian writer. Though fluent in French and German and widely read in European and American literatures, Nettie and her husband Vance were energetically promoting the idea of a distinctively national Australian literary culture. Her landmark book, *Modern Australian Literature*, had appeared in 1924. Believing that many Australians were either indifferent to art and ideas or else subservient to overseas cultures – the old high culture of Europe and the new mass consumer culture of the United States – Nettie believed that 'the future of an Australian literature depends on ourselves as critics and readers and enthusiasts'.[2] Stead, by contrast, had been deeply affected by her life in Paris, where she and Blake mixed with the Left Bank's vibrant community of writers, editors and artists. Her literary tastes were modern, even modernist; her influences were American and European, not Australian; and from Stead's international perspective, Nettie's vision of a national literature seemed as narrow and provincial as her appearance. Stead's first published work, *The Salzburg*

1 My account of this meeting derives from Hazel Rowley, *Christina Stead: A Biography*, Heinemann, 1993, pp. 167–74.

2 Nettie Palmer, 'Our Own Books: Do We Evoke Them?', Brisbane *Courier*, 11 August 1928.

Tales (1934), had recently appeared to international acclaim. Reviewers in Europe and North America welcomed her as a new Australian writer with cosmopolitan tastes. Nettie had seen Stead's books in the window of Sylvia Beach's bookshop in Paris alongside those of Hemingway and Gertrude Stein. During the congress, she insisted that the Australians sit together but Stead declined, sitting instead with the English contingent.

In their different personal styles, literary tastes and careers in writing, Palmer and Stead personify two different ways of being an Australian writer in the 1930s, especially in their chosen relationships to what Pascale Casanova calls 'international literary space' or 'the world republic of letters'. This is organised around the great literary capitals of Paris, London and New York, where 'universal' aesthetic values take precedence over national affiliations. Paris is the 'Greenwich Meridian' of world literature, conferring modernity and world standing on the writers it takes up regardless of their original language or national culture. Palmer knew that this is 'what the French call the "crowning" of a significant work' or author; in Australia, she regretted, 'there is no procedure for crowning'.[3] Within world literary space, separate national literatures compete for prestige, though ultimate recognition can come only when a writer escapes from the 'literary province'. The internal configuration of each national literature, in turn, mirrors the international literary world as a whole: it is structured by a rivalry between national and cosmopolitan values, between '"national" writers (who embody a national or popular definition of literature) and "international" writers (who uphold an autonomous conception of literature)'.[4] The reserve that Stead and Palmer felt in each other's company was not, then, purely personal: though both were Australian, they embodied the conflicting styles, values and loyalties of the 'national' and the 'international' writer. Perhaps they also experienced something of the rivalry that can exist between them.

Recent work on the history of publishing suggests a further reason why any history of Australian fiction in the first half of the 20th century must now take an international perspective. Throughout this period, having a novel published almost always meant being published first in London and New York. Almost all the major Australian novelists of the first half of the 20th century – from Henry Handel Richardson through Katharine Susannah Prichard and Christina Stead to Patrick White – were published initially in London and New York, and then distributed in Australia. The responses of overseas reviewers were eagerly awaited at home and had a powerful effect on a writer's domestic sales and reputation. It was only later – often decades later – that some titles were picked up and reprinted in Australian editions by Australian publishers. But the history of publishing and what has been called the 'new empiricism' in Australian studies have not always informed previous literary histories, which too often discuss Australian fiction

3 Nettie Palmer, 'What Oft Was Thought', ibid., 5 May 1928.

4 Pascale Casanova, *The World Republic of Letters* [1999], Harvard UP, 2004, p. 108; see also Christopher Prendergast (ed.), *Debating World Literature*, Verso, 2004.

without recognising its initial place of publication and reception – its material location in world literary space.[5] This was also a time when a number of Australian writers – like Stead, Richardson and White – had, in Casanova's phrase, escaped from the literary province, reshaping their writing and professional personas according to international trends: Richardson's appropriation via Danish and German literature of an originally French literary naturalism, and Stead's and White's absorption of literary modernism in Paris, London and New York in the 1930s.

Australian writers and 'the Paternoster Row Machine'

Recent research on publishing in the period 1890 to 1950 makes London and New York central to any consideration of the careers of Australian novelists. As Richard Nile and David Walker argue, London was the 'production centre for Australian literature', the place where careers in writing were initiated and sustained; where reputations were made or broken.[6] London was not only 'a powerful and richly mythologised literary centre', it was the commercial heart of the English-speaking literary world. Henry Lawson resented the power of what he called 'the mighty Paternoster Row Machine' – the square mile of central London encompassing Covent Garden, the Strand and St Paul's, where most of the great publishing houses were located: Constable, Dent, Heinemann, Hodder & Stoughton, Hutchinson, Lane, Longman, Macmillan, Methuen, Unwin, and Ward, Lock. All were significant publishers of Australian literature.

These London-based companies were at the centre of an international book trade, colluding with Australian booksellers to retain their dominance over the Australian market. As in other English-language settler societies, bookselling in Australia was controlled by a production and trading cartel, the Publishers' Association of Great Britain. Under the Net Book Agreement, signed on 1 January 1900, the cartel adopted fixed retail prices throughout the industry and could withhold stock from non-compliant booksellers.[7] As a result, the British book industry became more efficient, as bookshops became better stocked and booksellers worked to a guaranteed margin, but in the dominions the dominance of the British cartel encouraged the local book trade to operate as importers and retailers, rather than as publishers committed to fostering new national literatures. Even the largest of the Australian houses, Angus & Robertson, consistently placed its bookselling operations ahead of its publishing activities.

The landscape of the international book trade was also shaped by the Berne International Book Copyright Agreement of 1886. This organised the world's book trade

5 See Robert Dixon, 'Australian Literature and the New Empiricism', *Journal of the Association for the Study of Australian Literature: The Colonial Present* (2008), pp. 158–62.

6 Richard Nile and David Walker, ' "The Paternoster Row Machine" and the Australian Book Trade, 1890–1945' in John Arnold and Martyn Lyons (eds), *A History of the Book in Australia, 1891–1945: A National Culture in a Colonised Market*, UQP, 2001, pp. 3, 7; see also Richard Nile, *The Making of the Australian Literary Imagination*, UQP, 2002.

7 Nile and Walter, ' "The Paternoster Row Machine" ', p. 9.

into trading blocs, which remained relatively separate until they were broken by the rise of multinational corporations in the late 20th century. Manufacturers and traders in the United States had their own huge domestic market but were kept out of Canada; British companies commanded English-language rights throughout much of Europe, and in all Britain's colonies and dominions. Nile and Walker describe Australia as the jewel in this book-trading empire. With its high standard of living and high literacy levels, it became the largest off-shore market for British books, consuming a quarter of all exported titles: 'by the 1920s, 3.5 million books were sold annually . . . at a profit to British publishers of over a million pounds'.[8]

Thus for Australian writers, who complained of the absence of a local publishing industry, it was not only more financially rewarding but often only possible to publish overseas. The Publishers' Association black-banned authors who managed to secure a publication deal in their own country. Australian writing published in Britain received the 'colonial' royalty rate, half the usual rate, so Australian authors could expect only three or four pence, equivalent to a 5 per cent royalty, on a book retailing at six shillings. This situation was accepted as the norm until the 1950s, when Dymphna Cusack, who played a leading role in establishing the Fellowship of Australian Writers, challenged her British publishers. In 1953 she rejected Heinemann's offer for her novel *Southern Steel*, and negotiated a contract with Constable for the full 10 per cent royalty.[9]

After the Great War, Australia's importance to the British publishing industry was enhanced by the loss of its European markets. In Australia, the demand for British books continued unabated until the Great Depression of the 1930s, and then revived again after World War II. While London had its publishers' district around Paternoster Row, Sydney had is Booksellers' Row in Castlereagh Street, where the shops were largely stocked with titles that bore a London imprint. The effect of this overwhelming British presence was the discouragement of 'national' publishers motivated by a sentiment to produce nationally inspired books for the local market. As Nile and Walker demonstrate, aspiring Australian publishers were simply out-gunned by the scale of the British operation, and if Australians wished to retain their position as one of the largest reading publics among English-speaking peoples supplied by good bookshops, they had to accept their dependent status: 'Until the Second World War, Australian publishers were intimidated by the ability of the British cartel to land books at cheap prices in a market where the arrival of a single shipload of stock could discourage even the most enthusiastic purveyor of locally published Australian literature.'[10]

While Australia writers lamented the absence of a local publishing industry, the tastes of Australian book buyers, as David Carter shows, were largely international and middlebrow, and novels favourably reviewed in London or New York were more likely

8 Ibid., p. 10.
9 See Debra Adelaide, 'How Did Authors Make a Living?', in Nile and Walker, *History of the Book*, p. 86.
10 Nile and Walker, '"The Paternoster Row Machine"', p. 12.

to attract Australian readers than the local product.[11] Cultural-nationalist writers like Nettie Palmer found this difficult to accept:

> Alone among the adult and literate nations, we have no serious belief in the importance of giving full expression to our developing mental life. We have a lack of publishing houses, of quarterlies, of reviews. . . . We are content to be consumers, returning nothing to the world from which we import so freely. . . . What then will temper the world's verdict on us as a mere desert fed on tinned literature from overseas? Nothing but the habit of publishing books here.[12]

The cultural and economic power of London and New York – where Australian authors were published simultaneously under agreements between British and American publishers – was inescapable, leading the editors of *A History of the Book in Australia* to describe Australia in the first half of the 20th century as 'a national culture in a colonised market'. For Australian writers, Nile and Walker conclude, 'the complex art of owning and disowning London, of courting its influence and resenting its power, was central to the psychology of authorship'.[13]

Pursuing literature in Australia: from the first Commonwealth decade to the Great War

In 1901, Australia became a nation and the first federal parliament sat in Melbourne's Exhibition Buildings. Looking back on that great national occasion, Nettie Palmer made a connection between the rise of distinctive national cultures and the rise of national literatures: 'Perhaps the chief possession of Australian writers in the year 1901 was this consciousness of nationhood. . . . What [Australia] was to mean . . . lay in the hands of her writers, above all, to discover.'[14] It is difficult now to recover Palmer's belief in the centrality of literature to the national culture: in the era of global mass media and the internet even Australian cinema, which played that role in the 1970s and 80s, no longer seems as important as it did. Were Palmer's hopes for a national literature well founded? What was the state of Australian writing in 1901? What institutional support was there for local writers? In that year, two of Australia's most famous authors published major works: Miles Franklin's *My Brilliant Career* and Henry Lawson's *Joe Wilson and His Mates*. But they were not published in Australia. The publishing history of these now canonical works is indicative of the thinness of the local publishing industry in the decade after Federation and its connections to a wider, international context.

11 David Carter, 'The Mystery of the Missing Middlebrow, or, The C(o)urse of Good Taste', in Judith Ryan and Chris Wallace-Crabbe (eds), *Imagining Australia: Literature and Culture in the New New World*, Harvard UP, 2004.

12 Nettie Palmer, 'Will Dyson: Creative Militant', Brisbane *Courier*, 4 January 1930.

13 Nile and Walker, *History of the Book*, p. 17.

14 Nettie Palmer, *Modern Australian Literature: 1900–1923*, Lothian, 1924, p. 5.

Lawson's first books were published locally after individual stories and poems had appeared in the Sydney *Bulletin* and other periodicals. *Short Stories in Prose and Verse* was published by his mother, Louisa Lawson, through her *Dawn* press in 1894; it helped Lawson establish his reputation, A. G. Stephens hailing him as 'the voice of the bush'.[15] *In the Days When the World was Wide* and *While the Billy Boils* were published by Angus & Robertson in 1896. In 1897, *While the Billy Boils* was taken up by Simpkin, Marshall and Co., a second-tier English publisher, and after enthusiastic British reviews Lawson decided that he must go to London to advance his career. In the essay 'Pursuing Literature in Australia', he complained of the lack of local support for 'purely Australian writers' and the impossibility of earning a living by the pen in a small and provincial society.[16] Colin Roderick suggests that Lawson's earnings from writing at this time were in fact reasonable.[17] But he had come to see London as the Mecca of modern world literature, and believed that real success, even for a 'purely Australian writer', could only be found there:

> My advice to any young Australian writer whose talents have been recognized, would be to go steerage, stow away, swim, and seek London, Yankeeland, or Timbuctoo – rather than stay in Australia till his genius turned to gall, or beer. Or, failing this – and still in the interests of human nature and literature – to study elementary anatomy, especially as applies to the cranium, and then shoot himself carefully with the aid of a looking-glass.[18]

No matter how great their talent, an Australian writer was nothing until 'recognized' abroad. On 19 January 1900, Lawson wrote a begging letter to the governor of New South Wales, Earl Beauchamp, requesting a fare to London – Roderick describes it as 'a masterpiece of mendicancy' – and on 20 April, with vice-regal support, Lawson and his wife Bertha embarked on the *Damascus*. At a meeting of the Dawn and Dusk Club the previous night, some 40 artists, musicians and writers had assembled to bid him farewell. In his toast, Stephens acknowledged Lawson to be 'the man who has best represented Australia in literature' but conceded 'there may be a bigger chance in London'.[19]

London, then, was not necessarily hostile to the incipient national literature but might be the place for its ultimate 'crowning'. Soon after his arrival, Lawson was introduced to the literary agent J. B. Pinker, who represented other émigré writers in London, including Henry James and Joseph Conrad. Pinker submitted Lawson's work to leading publishers, including Blackwood and Methuen. The debates and symposiums leading up to Federation had created a strong British interest in Australia, so that the very Australianness that made Lawson a phenomenon at home also made him appealing to

15 A.G. Stephens, *Bulletin*, 5 January 1895. 16 *Bulletin*, 21 January 1899.
17 Colin Roderick, *Henry Lawson: A Life*, A&R, 1991, pp. 201–2.
18 Quoted in Brian Kiernan (ed.), *Portable Australian Authors: Henry Lawson,* UQP, 1976, p. 210.
19 Quoted in Roderick, *Henry Lawson*, p. 216.

British readers as the authentic voice of a new nation. In 1901, Blackwood issued a selection of his earlier work as *The Country I Come From*, and new material, most of it written in London, appeared in *Joe Wilson and His Mates* (Blackwood, 1901) and *Children of the Bush* (Methuen, 1902).

Joe Wilson and His Mates contains some of Lawson's finest work.[20] It includes the four linked stories in the Joe Wilson series – 'Joe Wilson's Courtship', 'Brighten's Sister-in-Law', 'Water Them Geraniums' and 'A Double Buggy at Lahey's Creek' – and 10 other stories, including 'The Loaded Dog' and 'Telling Mrs Baker'. William Blackwood wrote, 'It may be claimed for Lawson that he . . . is one of the very few genuinely democratic writers that the literature of "Greater Britain" can show.'[21] John Barnes wrote in 1985, 'There is an obvious awareness of a foreign audience in Joe Wilson's explanations [such as his account of what it means to be 'on' Gulgong] . . . that some Australian readers find irritating.' Yet as David Carter argues – and as Blackwood recognised at the time – the literary nationalism of the *Bulletin* and its writers was 'a statement of its modernity, a way of placing Australia in the contemporary world'.[22] The new Australian writing was associated *internationally* with the social and moral development of the new nation, and Lawson was hailed in London as its epitome. When he returned to Australia in 1902, he wrote in 'Succeeding: A Sequel to Pursuing Literature', 'My advice still is: Go to London – don't bother about . . . Timbuctoo.'[23]

My Brilliant Career provides a less sanguine perspective on the Australian writer's relation to international literary space. Franklin finished the first draft on 25 March 1899, and Elizabeth Webby begins her account of its subsequent publication with the question, 'What, at the end of the nineteenth century, did a nineteen-year-old living in the Australian bush do with a completed manuscript?'[24] Aware that Lawson had published with Angus & Robertson, Franklin sent her manuscript to the Sydney bookseller with a note: 'Herewith a yarn which I have written entitled "My Brilliant (?) Career". I would take it very kindly if you would read it and state whether or not it is fit for publication.' Robertson declined, and Franklin sent the manuscript to J. F. Archibald, the editor of the *Bulletin*. One of his staff replied, 'Not having time to read your ms through, I cannot pronounce upon the merits or otherwise of the plot and general handling', and recommended that she send it on to Stephens' literary agency. In the meantime, Lawson himself had offered to read it and agreed to approach Robertson again on her behalf. On the eve of his departure in April 1900, and with no word from Robertson, Lawson took the manuscript with him to London, where Pinker successfully

20 See Kerryn Goldsworthy, 'Fiction from 1900 to 1970', in Elizabeth Webby (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Australian Literature*, CUP, 2000, p. 106.

21 Quoted in Roderick, *Henry Lawson*, p. 236.

22 John Barnes, *Henry Lawson's Short Stories,* Shillington House, 1985, p. 33; David Carter, 'Critics, Writers, Intellectuals: Australian Literature and Its Criticism', in Webby (ed.), *Cambridge Companion*, p. 262.

23 *Bulletin*, August 1902.

24 Elizabeth Webby, 'Introduction', *Miles Franklin:* My Brilliant Career *and* My Career Goes Bung, Harper Perennial, 2004, p. v.

placed it with Blackwood, though a number of conditions were imposed, including the alteration of many idiomatic words and expressions. When Franklin received copies of the Blackwood edition in September 1901, she wrote angrily pointing out, 'it would have been wise and fair to have allowed me to see the proofs of the story that I could have corrected the many irritating mistakes and substitutions in the matter of slang and idiom'.[25]

Drusilla Modjeska describes *My Brilliant Career* as 'a feminist intervention into the nationalist tradition in the literature of the 1890s'. On the one hand, it points to the harshness of life for women in the bush, the drudgery, the anti-intellectualism, the stifling of their creativity. On the other, it upholds the traditions of nationalism through its depictions of bush landscape and characters. As Modjeska argues, its feminism is also to be found in its playful use of conventions associated with 19th-century women writers. While adopting the pattern of feminine romance, it refuses its traditional resolution: 'Sybylla meets Harry and the two are put through the trials and tribulations that young lovers have to overcome in every romantic novel; yet Sybylla refuses him not once, but twice.'[26] Disappointed with both the production and reception of *My Brilliant Career*, which many readers took to be autobiographical, Franklin withdrew it from publication and it was not reprinted until after her death in 1954. She approached Pinker, Blackwood and Angus & Robertson with other manuscripts, including 'The End of My Career', but without success. Recently returned from London and buoyed by his own success, Lawson warned, 'It would be a big come down from a leading British publisher to an Australian one.' In 1905, Franklin left Australia for the United States, where she was to live for many years, taking with her a number of unpublished manuscripts. 'The End of My Career', a sequel to *My Brilliant Career* which further interrogates romance conventions from a provincial perspective, was eventually published as *My Career Goes Bung* (1946).

Joseph Furphy**,** whose own nationalist novel, *Such is Life*, was published locally by the *Bulletin* in 1903, was among those who urged Franklin not to leave for America. An idiomatic account of bush life in the Riverina district, *Such is Life* is nonetheless 'a novel based on a theory of the novel', as A. D. Hope observed.[27] Its mannered style and complex literary allusions reflect this provincial writer's profound absorption in the classics of British literature, including Shakespeare, Sterne, Dickens and the King James Bible. Furphy and Franklin met briefly in Melbourne in 1904, and over the next few years he wrote encouraging her to remain in Australia and use her talent in developing an Australian tradition of democratic literature: 'stay among the eucalypts, Miles,' he urged, 'and earn the adoration of your countrymen by translating the hosannas and elegies of the bush into vernacular phrase'.[28]

25 Quotations in ibid., pp. v–ix.
26 Drusilla Modjeska, *Exiles at Home: Australian Women Writers 1925–1945,* A&R, 1981, pp. 34, 35.
27 A. D. Hope, *Native Companions: Essays and Comments on Australian Literature 1936–1966*, A&R, 1974, p. 55.
28 Quoted in Modjeska, *Exiles at Home*, p. 39.

Franklin would later claim Furphy as 'a founding father of the Australian novel', and ironically, given her many years abroad in the United States and England, she used him as a benchmark in her dismissive accounts of expatriate writers, including Henry Handel Richardson.[29] Born in Melbourne in 1870, Ethel Florence Lindesay Richardson was educated at the Presbyterian Ladies' College but left Australia in 1888 to study music at the Leipzig Conservatorium. She there met her future husband, John George Robertson, then a PhD student and later a professor of German literature. Robertson and Richardson lived in Munich and Strasbourg before settling in London in 1903. In his biography of Richardson, Michael Ackland describes how, with Robertson's encouragement, her wide reading turned her from a provincial music student into a formidable European literary intellectual. Her diary indicates that in the late 1890s she was reading a hundred or more books a year, drawn largely from European literature and philosophy. The influential Danish critic Georg Brandes' *Main Currents in Nineteenth Century Literature* was an important guide, as was Robertson's own *History of German Literature*. In 1897, she read systematically through the works of Stendhal and Flaubert, then, in 1898, Flaubert again, together with Nietzsche, Schopenhauer, Balzac, Zola, Turgenev and Tolstoy. Already fluent in Danish and German, she also studied French and Italian, and read d'Annunzio's *Il Fuoco* in Italian when it was published in 1900. 'So thorough was her immersion in the intellectual heritage and languages of Europe', Ackland notes that 'by 1901 . . . her native tongue was in danger of eroding'.[30]

These and other European influences are manifest in Richardson's first novel, *Maurice Guest* (1908). In his essay 'The Art of Henry Handel Richardson' (1948), Robertson describes it a 'mosaic of influences', locating its 'literary provenance' in continental Europe, specifically in German and Scandinavian literature, and as 'the last link in the chain [of naturalism] which practically began with *Madame Bovary* in 1856'. He identifies its thematic antecedents in the German *Kunstlerroman*, such as Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister*, but suggests that its objectivity and authorial distance are drawn from Flaubert and Stendhal. In their scholarly edition of *Maurice Guest* in its original state – prior to the heavy revision required by its London publisher – Clive Probyn and Bruce Steele also point to the influence of Jens Peter Jacobsen's *Niels Lyhne*, which Richardson translated from Danish as *Siren Voices* (1896). She wrote of the 'new world' which this book opened to her: 'a romanticism imbued with the scientific spirit and essentially based on realism'.[31]

While her first two novels, *Maurice Guest* and *The Getting of Wisdom* (1910) drew on her own life as a student in Leipzig and Melbourne, her great trilogy, *The Fortunes of Richard Mahony*, drew on the letters of her parents Walter and Mary Richardson

29 Franklin, *Laughter Not for a Cage*, p. 127.

30 Michael Ackland, *Henry Handel Richardson: A Life*, CUP, 2004, pp. 152–3.

31 Quotations in Clive Probyn and Bruce Steele (eds), 'Introduction', *Maurice Guest*, The Academy Editions of Australian Literature, UQP, 1998, p. lii.

from 1854 to 1877, and on published sources relating to the early history of Victoria.[32] Begun in London in 1910, it appeared initially as three separate volumes: *Australia Felix* (1917), *The Way Home* (1925) and *Ultima Thule* (1929). Probyn and Steele suggest that in 'its combination of naturalism, history and allegory', the trilogy may be read as 'a narrative of settler colonialism' and a searching critique of its materialist values.[33] The restlessness of the Irish-born, Edinburgh-educated doctor, Richard Mahony, as he moves twice between Britain and Victoria, and the link between his own 'fortunes' and Victoria's boom and bust economy from the 1850s to the 1890s, offer a fictional account of colonial history. Richardson's intention had been 'to treat the chief features of colonial life in epic fashion', beginning with the Eureka Stockade in 1854 and, in an early though partly unrealised plan, culminating in the Gallipoli campaign in 1915.[34]

Richardson's novels were first published in London by William Heinemann, who issued colonial editions and arranged for simultaneous publication in New York. *Maurice Guest* did not have an Australian edition until 1965. *The Getting of Wisdom* appeared in Oxford University Press's Australian Pocket Library series in 1946. The complete *Mahony* trilogy was first published by Heinemann in London in 1930 and by Norton in New York in 1931. The first Australian edition was published by Heinemann in Melbourne in 1946, and Penguin Australia published a paperback edition, based on the 1930 edition, in 1971. Richardson's last novel, *The Young Cosima*, first published in London and New York in 1939, had no Australian edition until 1976.

Not only the publishing history of Richardson's novels but also their reception suggest that her reputation was made abroad and then imported back into Australia. *Richard Mahony* is often regarded as 'the great Australian novel' yet, as Probyn and Steele observe, 'Richardson herself had little patience with or interest in such an accolade, and . . . saw her trilogy as a contribution to . . . a distinctly European genre of novel writing.'[35] Heinemann's 1930 omnibus edition was a response to the commercial success of *Ultima Thule* in the United States, where it was named Book of the Month in the September 1928 edition of the New York *Book Club Journal*. The major reviews establishing its reputation were Gerald Gould's in the London *Observer* (13 January 1929), Arnold Palmer's in the *Sphere* (19 January), and Hugh Walpole's in the New York *Herald Tribune* (28 April). All placed it within the English and European traditions of the novel: Palmer wrote, 'I see Henry Handel Richardson as another Balzac.'[36] It was this international acclaim that allowed cultural-nationalist critics in Australia to reclaim and promote Richardson as national literary property. Nettie Palmer championed her as an Australian novelist who had won international acclaim, believing this would boost the cause of Australian literature. In 1929 she assured readers of the Brisbane *Courier*

32 See Elizabeth Webby and Gillian Sykes (eds), *Walter and Mary: The Letters of Walter and Mary Richardson*, Miegunyah Press, 2000.

33 Clive Probyn and Bruce Steele (eds), 'Introduction', *The Fortunes of Richard Mahony,* Part I: *Australia Felix*, Australian Scholarly Publishing, 2007, pp. viii–ix.

34 Quoted in ibid., p. ix. 35 Ibid., p. x.

36 Quoted in 'Introduction', ibid., Part III: *Ultima Thule*, p. xiii.

that the novel had already 'captured English critics in spite of its subject', and in 1941 proposed that 'its universal acceptance as a masterpiece has definitely raised the hopes of our literature, both among writers and readers'.[37]

Like other Australian writers of the first Commonwealth decades, Katharine Prichard's career followed the pattern of early publication in local magazines, British and American publication of her major works of fiction during her lifetime, followed by belated, limited publication in Australia. In 1908, Prichard made her first visit to London and Paris as a journalist for the Melbourne *Herald*. After two years she tried freelance writing and journalism in the United States, then returned to London from 1912 to 1915, where she was involved in feminist and Fabian socialist circles. She wrote *The Pioneers* in her Chelsea flat as an entry for the 1915 Hodder & Stoughton All-Empire Novel Competition, winning the prize for the best Australian novel: it was published by Hodder & Stoughton in 1915 and in New York by G. H. Doran in 1916. Drawing on her experience as a governess in Gippsland after leaving school in Melbourne, *The Pioneers* won wide critical acclaim in Britain, the United States and Australia. Ric Throssell notes, 'It secured her reputation abroad and made it possible for her to return to Australia.'[38] Prichard later recalled, 'As I emerged from Paternoster Row, and came out on to Ludgate Hill . . . it was as if all London lay before me.'[39]

Prichard returned to Australia in February 1916 after five years abroad. After travelling in country Victoria and New South Wales, she settled initially at Emerald in the foothills of the Dandenongs near her schoolfriends Nettie Palmer and Hilda Esson. On the back of her success with *The Pioneers*, *Windlestraws* (1916) was published in London by Hodder & Stoughton. A romance with a British setting, it was written for a British audience. At Emerald, she also wrote *Black Opal*, drawing on a recent visit to the opal mining town of Lightning Ridge, which was published in London by Heinemann after the war in 1921.

Prichard's next novel, *Working Bullocks*, was hailed as a major achievement in Australian literature. Written after her marriage to Hugo Throssell and their move to Greenmount in the Perth Hills, it drew on her observations of timber-getting communities in the karri forests south west of Perth, and was published by Johnathan Cape in London in 1926 and in New York the following year by Viking. Vance and Nettie Palmer recognised its lyrical celebrations of labour and the bush as a fulfilment of their own hoped-for national literature. Nettie was thrilled by its 'creative lyricism' and the way it invoked an authentic way of life that was distinctively Australian: 'From slang, from place-names, from colloquial turns of speech, from descriptions of landscape and people at work', she argued, ' . . . it is a break through that will be as important for other writers as for KSP herself.'[40]

37 Reviews quoted in *Australia Felix*, p. x.

38 Ric Throssell, *Wild Weeds and Wind Flowers: The Life and Letters of Katharine Susannah Prichard* [1975], A&R, 1990, p. 27; see also Nile, *Making of the Australian Literary Imagination*, ch. 1.

39 Quoted in Throssell, *Wild Weeds and Wind Flowers*, p. 26.

40 Quoted in ibid., p. 46.

The Roaring Twenties

Looking back on the first two Commonwealth decades in *Laughter Not for a Cage*, Miles Franklin gave an account of literary history that was definitive of cultural nationalism. There had been a great flowering of Australian fiction in the 1890s, culminating in the works of Lawson, Furphy and Franklin herself, followed by a period of relative quiet and then a dramatic rebirth of the Australian novel in the late 1920s – this was the 'break through' heralded by Prichard's *Working Bullocks* in 1926 and confirmed by *Coonardoo* in 1929. Franklin attributes the hiatus of the 1910s and early 1920s to the rise of a cosmopolitan and expatriate sensibility, represented by Richardson, above the determined provincialism she admired in Furphy. This anticipates Casanova's model of the competitive relations between national and international writers within national literatures. Franklin laments:

> Following Anzac [in 1915], the promise of the nineties seemed to have been dead or silent . . . The universality approved was a kind of cosmopolitanism that might be rooted anywhere, for it was considered crude and limiting to be rooted in Australia. . . . Those with a different point of view persisted in provincialism.[41]

She dates the 'Reappearance of the Australian Novel in Force' to 1928.

Franklin was right to detect a hiatus in the novel, though there were other reasons than cosmopolitanism, not least the popularity of sentimental nationalist poetry. In 1916, for example, the first edition of C. J. Dennis' *The Moods of Ginger Mick* ran to almost 40 000 copies, and by the time of its publication in London in December 1917, 63 000 copies had been printed.[42] Using Grahame Johnston's *Annals of Australian Literature* as a guide, Modjeska points out that in the decade between 1917 and 1927, there were 27 novels published and 87 volumes of poetry, but in the years from 1928 to 1930, there were 106 novels and only 57 volumes of verse.[43] There was also a generational change: Catherine Helen Spence died in 1910, Furphy in 1912, Rolf Boldrewood in 1915, Lawson in 1922. And at the beginning of the century a new generation of novelists was born who came to prominence in the late 1920s and 1930s: Eleanor Dark, Xavier Herbert and Henrietta Drake-Brockman were born in 1901; Dymphna Cusack, Alan Marshall and Stead in 1902.

Not only were the early 1920s dominated by poetry, but literary groups were dominated by men. As Peter Kirkpatrick demonstrates, the period's major literary group clustered around Norman Lindsay and the magazine *Vision*, whose aesthetic was oriented toward Europe and defined itself in opposition to literary nationalism. It spurned the bush, seeing the artist – and especially the poet and the painter – as an artist-aristocrat dedicated to the pursuit of transcendental Beauty and ideal values of

41 Franklin, *Laughter Not for a Cage*, p. 145.
42 Philip Butterss, 'Introduction' to C. J. Dennis, *The Moods of Ginger Mick*, Australian Classics Library, SUP, 2008.
43 Modjeska, *Exiles at Home*, p. 5.

Mind.[44] In his memoir, *The Roaring Twenties* (1960), Jack Lindsay could see that there had been a fundamental conflict between the idea of a national literature and a literature more open to what he called 'the world heritage', a 'break between our conception of high art and that of national expression'. 'We were unaware at the time', he recalled, 'how the novel was breaking into a new dimension through H. H. Richardson, K. S. Prichard and Vance Palmer.' Lindsay acknowledged that in leaving for London when he did, he turned his back on the problem of 'overcoming the conflict between a national literature and a literature fully absorbing the world heritage'.[45]

Advocates of the national literature: the 1920s and 1930s

It was against this background that Vance and Nettie Palmer, Miles Franklin, P. R. Stephensen and others came forward as advocates for a national literature, placing their hopes in the appearance of the great Australian novel.[46] In their arguments they consistently opposed this emergent national literature to 'bohemian', 'expatriate-minded' and 'cosmopolitan' writers – the terms were interchangeable and uniformly pejorative – who worked and lived abroad, and absorbed international trends, especially literary modernism, which was resisted by the generation whose tastes were formed before the Great War.

Nettie Palmer was the most important critic of the period.[47] She was committed to bringing into being through her literary journalism a vibrant national literature, albeit within a framework informed by her own profound knowledge of world literature. Believing that a literary tradition is made rather than given, her idea of a national literature was in part material and institutional, in part idealistic and organic. It could not come into being without a viable local publishing industry; without systematic reviewing and the writing of biographies and critical studies that would create a public sphere for Australian literature; but it must also be a living network of writers, readers, critics and 'enthusiasts'. As Modjeska demonstrates, Palmer through her extensive personal correspondence helped to create a new kind of literary institution that was an alternative to the bohemian clubs of the 1920s: 'it was a peculiarly female literary group with the writers separated not only by distance, but by domestic ties'.[48]

Palmer wrote a remarkable body of reviews and essays that are now little known because they were published in newspapers and periodicals – there were rarely more

44 Peter Kirkpatrick, *The Sea Coast of Bohemia* [1987], API, 2007.
45 Jack Lindsay, *The Roaring Twenties,* Bodley Head, 1962, pp. 226–7.
46 See Patrick Buckridge, '"Greatness" and Australian Literature in the 1930s and 1940s', *Australian Literary Studies*, 17.1 (1995), pp. 29–37.
47 See Deborah Jordan, *Nettie Palmer: Search for an Aesthetic*, History Department, University of Melbourne, 1999.
48 Modjeska, *Exiles at Home*, p. 16.

lasting outlets for publication.[49] In 'Our Own Books. Do We Evoke Them?', she describes the national literature as both a nascent industry and 'a living culture', a community of writers and readers. Her view of the relation between national literatures and international literary space is more complex than Franklin's. A national literature must not be allowed to become provincial in the negative sense – it must be in vital contact with the standards set by other national literatures – but at the same time its health depends on its internal well-being and integrity. It must attain a sufficient material infrastructure and scale of operations, a sufficient density, to survive on its own terms, and this requires dedication, even a deliberate 'narrowness', on the part of its advocates. Hers was a strategic provincialism:

> Any of us who support the development of Australian literature as a necessary and healthy part of life are said to be narrow. People see us knocking the one nail on the head, and suppose we are not interested in other nails. Personally, I knock that nail because I know, as an Australian, that only an Australian is likely to do it. All my life I have cared passionately for overseas literature, but they are not depending for their existence on what casual Australians may write about them.[50]

These were the main arguments of Palmer's pioneering book, *Modern Australian Literature, 1900–1923* (1924). Without a systematic critical, historical and bibliographical apparatus, there was no other record of Australian literature than 'the scattered books themselves'; there was as yet no Australian tradition, for 'in our literary history . . . promising movements tend to run into the sand'; and 'the facilities for ordinary publishing hardly exist', leaving Australian literature vulnerable to imported culture.[51]

Like the Palmers, their friends Louis and Hilda Esson had travelled widely and were well read in world literature but shared their cultural nationalism. In an essay on 'Nationality and Art', Esson recalled how his meeting with the Irish playwright J. M. Synge in London in 1905 had turned him toward literary nationalism. 'I loved Paris', he recalled, '[and] Australia appeared to be a far-off land. . . . How was it possible to make any literature about people who knew nothing except how to drive cattle and shear sheep?' But Synge 'despised anything abstract and cosmopolitan', and believed that 'every country had its own material for literature'. He encouraged Esson to tell him all he could about 'the life of the bush'.[52]

Paradoxically, then, cultural nationalism in Australia had international roots. In 1911, during his second stay in London, Vance Palmer came under the influence of A. R. Orage, the editor of the *New Age*. Contrary to the dominant socialist internationalism of the day, Orage wanted English socialists to reconcile their politics with the traditions

49 See Vivian Smith (ed.), *Nettie Palmer: Her Private Journal Fourteen Years, Poems, Reviews and Literary Essays*, UQP, 1988.
50 Brisbane *Courier*, 11 August 1928. 51 Palmer, *Modern Australian Literature*, pp. 55–9.
52 Louis Esson, 'Nationality in Art', *Bulletin*, 1 February 1923.

of Englishness; to become less cosmopolitan and more concerned with the 'national character'. This had important implications for literature: a writer would find the national character among the folk rather than among the city's middle classes. Orage confirmed ideas that Palmer had already begun to develop about Australia. With its short history and lack of a traditional folk culture, Australia was vulnerable to the problems of urbanisation and industrialisation, and the appeal of cheap popular culture from America. But the cause of cultural nationalism meant taking an international perspective on Australian affairs. As Palmer realised, nationalism was not the opposite of internationalism – to be 'colonial' or 'Imperialist' was.[53] A genuine internationalism meant a dialogue among independent nations, each with its own vernacular culture. 'A society is provincial', Palmer wrote, only 'when it looks to some other centre to set its standards.'[54]

But in speaking of an Australian national culture, Palmer was unable to invoke an achieved tradition like those of England, Ireland and France. An Australian culture lay in the future and it was the writer's, especially the novelist's, task to nurture its growth. It is the precariousness of the cultural-nationalist project in Australia – poised between what never was and what did not yet exist – that led David Walker to describe it as moving from dream to disillusion within a decade. In the pre-war years, he observes, 'those converted to the cause of the emerging national culture . . . were . . . awaiting the transformation of their society'. After the war, the national culture they hoped for had manifestly failed to evolve. 'Australian society had become *more* urban, *more* commercial, *more* bourgeois'. Palmer's vision of an original new democracy receded into 'a haunting dream of what Australian society might have become if it had honoured the spirit of the 1890s'. In the name of the old 'Lawson–Furphy tradition', Palmer had resisted literary modernism, but his vision of the national character was anachronistic and at odds with the reality of post-war Australian society.[55]

These contradictions in the cultural-nationalist project help to explain Vance Palmer's limited success as a novelist. In the years 1910–17 he wrote potboilers under the pseudonym Rann Daly for both the national and international markets.[56] Palmer's serious novels were published under his own name, but these were less commercially successful, and were often programmatic illustrations of his ideal of a manly, democratic Australian culture originating in the bush. Early novels –*The Shantykeeper's Daughter* (1920), *The Boss of Killara* (1922), *Cronulla: A Story of Station Life* (1924), *The Man Hamilton* (1928), *Men are Human* (1930), *Daybreak* (1932) – were outback or 'station' novels: the first two were published in Sydney by the innovative NSW Bookstall Company, but the last three were published in London by Ward, Lock and Stanley

53 Vance Palmer, 'The Need for Nationalism', *The Worker*, 9 August 1917; see also Carter, 'Critics, Writers, Intellectuals', p. 263.

54 Vance Palmer, 'Povincialism in Literature', *Bulletin*, 7 January 1926.

55 David Walker, *Dream and Disillusion: A Search for Australian Cultural Identity*, ANU Press, 1976, pp. 196, 201.

56 Ibid., pp. 213–17.

Paul.[57] In these novels, Walker observes, 'manliness, work, space and the bush signify the casually democratic air Palmer favoured, while women, intimacy, the city, the suburb and the drawing-room threatened this world'.[58]

After moving to Caloundra in south-east Queensland in the 1920s, Palmer found an ideal setting for his central theme of an authentic life governed by the rhythms of nature and manual work, which he believed to be under threat from the increasingly urban, cosmopolitan society of post-war Australia. In *The Passage* (1930), Lew Callaway is a fisherman who operates his own boat and plans to set up a co-operative. His brother, Hugh, mixes with salesmen, speculators and tourists; he is drawn to fast cars and fast women, and aspires to leave the Passage for a more glamorous, more modern world: he 'wanted to be in some centre where he could . . . feel . . . that he was part of a city that was linked to other cities all around the world'. Their different outlooks come into conflict over a proposal to build a modern tourist resort at Lavinia, near the Passage, that will change its lifeways for ever. Hugh is excited by the prospect, but Lew sees it as 'an artificial growth, a place that depended on a flow of life from outside'.[59]

The Swayne Family (1934) transfers these themes to Melbourne in what is essentially an anti-city novel. Digby Swain has left Jaffra, the country town where he was born, for the suburbs; his son Ernest, an artist seeking a more authentic way of life, is drawn back to Jaffra. The recurring contrasts in Palmer's fiction are between the authentic and the inauthentic life; the manly and the effeminate; the local and the cosmopolitan; the city and the bush. In a café in Melbourne's Lonsdale Street, Ernest Swayne criticises people who have 'lost their guts and become bits of mechanism': 'Was there something about the town itself, with its dull, middle-class dignity, its geometric streets, flat suburbs, [and] featureless surroundings, that sucked all the passion out of people?'[60] These themes were also carried forward into Palmer's later mining novels, the Golconda trilogy, all published by Angus & Robertson – *Golconda* (1948), *Seedtime* (1957), *The Big Fellow* (1959) – and summed up in his seminal non-fictional study, *The Legend of the Nineties* (1954).

Although Vance Palmer's novels were much praised by critics of the succeeding generation, Walker suggests that the 'pale fiction' he created in the 1920s was 'a damaging failure' for a man who had dedicated his energies to the creation of a national literature. In a telling comparison, he argues that as a critic of the middle classes and an advocate for organic communities, Palmer was a pale shadow of his English contemporary, D. H. Lawrence, whose own Australian novel *Kangaroo* (1923) arguably had a much greater impact on Australian readers. His commitment to 'the legend of the 1890s' was anachronistic in the 1920s and 30s, leaving him unable to respond to the vitality

57 See Carol M. Mills, *The New South Wales Bookstall Company as a Publisher*, Mulini Press, 1991.
58 Walker, *Dream and Disillusion*, p. 178. 59 Quoted in ibid., p. 180.
60 Quoted in ibid., p. 186.

of modern life in the Australian cities and to the achievements of expatriate writers like Richardson and Stead, who embraced to varying degrees cosmopolitanism and modernism.

P. R. Stephensen and *The Foundations of Culture in Australia* (1936)

Another manifesto of literary nationalism was P. R. Stephensen's *The Foundations of Culture in Australia* (1936). Stephensen understood that Australian culture was coming into being at the same time as an emerging 'world-culture' based on globalising systems of travel, communication and finance. He describes it with the term 'internationalism', which he understands as a competitive world-order of *individual* nations: 'the very idea of internationalism implies many separate nationalities . . . remaining distinct in local customs, and cultures'. Stephensen distinguishes between the 'creation' of national cultures and their 'appreciation' abroad: 'cultures must remain local in creation and universal in appreciation'. Implicitly, then, he distinguishes internationalism – the positive circulation of distinctive national cultures within 'world-culture' – from transnationalism, cosmopolitanism and expatriatism, in which the writer is cut off from the sources of his or her national culture. At its best, internationalism involves two-way traffic between distinct national cultures. Stephensen's purpose is to advocate a national culture that is sufficiently strong to survive the rigours of the international economy, in which strong national cultures 'bastardise' weaker ones.[61]

Like Franklin and the Palmers, Stephensen considers that Australian culture, after a brief flowering in the 1890s, went into a long decline that he calls 'the Vast Open Spaces of the Australian mind'. In repudiating the new imported, middlebrow culture, Stephensen echoes the English critic F. R. Leavis in *Mass Civilization and Minority Culture* (1931). His concern with mediocrity, with salesmanship and advertising, and the influence of America was therefore part of an international trend in the 1930s toward reactive cultural nationalisms in the 'literary provinces':

> If, in Australian bookshops far and wide throughout the Commonwealth, nine hundred and ninety-nine books and magazines of a thousand on show are English and American; if, in the cinema-theatres of every Australian city, suburb, town, township and hamlet, practically all the films shown are American and English; if, on the wireless stations cluttering every millimetre of the Australian ether, gramophone records of English and American origin are broadcast and rebroadcast *ad nauseam*; if, in the columns of the Australian press, a priority is given . . . to news from overseas – in all these disseminations of overseas culture . . . I detect nothing more sinister than a *superior salesmanship*, a superior

61 P. R. Stephensen, *The Foundations of Culture in Australia: An Essay Towards National Self-Respect*, W. J. Miles, 1936, pp. 17–18, 28.

> marketing and distributing technique, on the part of the vendors of the ubiquitous overseas culture-stuff.[62]

But Stephensen also railed against the local product when it failed to meet his standards. Poet and journalist Mary Gilmore and travel writer Ion L. Idriess, for example, 'have had no lack of publication and appreciation here', but they are 'competent and entertaining', not 'profound, nor finally significant, writers'.[63]

In a scathing section headed 'Export of Genius', Stephensen – who had only recently returned from living in London[64] – is critical of Australian expatriates who have not faced up to 'the work of building up a culture here':

> Consider . . . the formidable list of Australian novelists . . . in England and Europe . . . Jack Lindsay, Philip Lindsay, Helen Simpson, Henry Handel Richardson, Christina Stead, Mary Mitchell, Christopher Morley, Frederic Manning, Alice Grant Rosman. . . . Had these people remained here, and dealt with the realities of Australia, instead of with the fantasies of European glamour and European antiquity, they would with ease have created a body of Australian literature which . . . would by now have been enough to make Australia's name and quality resound as one of the most highly cultivated and civilised nations upon the earth. But no; the shirkers, they have cleared out, funked their job.[65]

The Foundations of Culture in Australia is therefore a call to work, a call to create the journals, publish the books, and generate the readership that will bring into being a national literature strong enough to survive internationally as both an import and an export culture. Like Nettie Palmer, Stephensen realises that it must be brought actively into being by its advocates: 'Slowly . . . the Australian public will come to realise that it *wants Australian books*.'[66]

Between the wars: 'Reappearance of the Australian novel in force'

By the end of the 1920s, it was apparent that big changes were taking place in Australian literature. The main concern of writers had been the lack of support for Australian fiction from a viable local publishing industry, and many of the literary institutions that were now set up were intended to offer support for writers, striving to build an institutional density that would allow the national literary culture to flourish in a world literary space dominated by London and New York.

The year 1928 was a crucial one. The first annual literary award, the Australian Literature Society's Gold Medal, was established, while the Sydney *Bulletin* announced a prize for the best novel in each of the three succeeding years. The first competition,

62 Ibid., p. 105. 63 Ibid., pp. 106–8.
64 See Craig Munro, *Inky Stephensen: Wild Man of Letters*, UQP, 1992.
65 Stephensen, *Foundations of Culture*, pp. 121–3. 66 Ibid., p. 110.

which closed in June 1928, attracted 542 entries. First place was shared by Prichard's *Coonardoo* and M. Barnard Eldershaw's *A House is Built*. Vance Palmer's *The Passage* won in 1929. The year 1928 also saw the inaugural meeting of the Fellowship of Australian Writers in Sydney. John le Gay Brereton was elected its first president and branches were soon established in the other states. Its mission was to promote the interests of writers through its meetings, lectures and publications, but it also acted as a lobbyist, as in its proposals during the 1930s to widen the charter of the Commonwealth Literary Fund. Its members included the Palmers, Flora Eldershaw, Dymphna Cusack, Miles Franklin and Katharine Prichard.

Prichard's prize-winning novel *Coonardoo* was the product of a visit to Turee Station in the far north-west of Western Australia, where she witnessed at first hand the conditions of pastoral settlement. It was serialised in the *Bulletin* from 5 September 1928, then published by Jonathan Cape in London in 1929 and Norton in New York in 1930. Although Prichard was later to deny it, the influence of D. H. Lawrence was evident in the novel's modernist style, in its critique of middle-class respectability, and its primitivist treatment of Aboriginal culture. Its lyrical descriptions of bush life and powerful recognition of inter-racial sexual relations caused controversy in Australia. Mary Gilmore wrote to Nettie Palmer, 'It is not merely a journalistic description of station life, it is vulgar and dirty.' As a consequence, the *Bulletin* declined publication of Palmer's *Men Are Human*, which deals with similar material; the editor, S. H. Prior, informed him, 'our disastrous experience with *Coonardoo* shows us that the Australian public will not stand stories based on a white man's relations with an Australian aborigine'. Prichard insisted on its realism, telling Douglas Stewart, 'I'd rather *Coonardoo* was thrown on the scrap heap and forgotten than be regarded merely as background and poetic symbolism.'[67] Reflecting on the changing reception of *Coonardoo* from 1928 to 1988, Jennifer Strauss argues that 'While there may be some justice in later feminist and postcolonial criticism which finds Prichard guilty of a double essentialism in her representation of Coonardoo as a passionate woman and a primitive Aborigine, the work should not be denied radical status within its own time.'[68]

Coonardoo was followed by *Haxby's Circus*, which was runner-up in the Jonathan Cape Prize Novel Competition, and published by Cape in 1930 and Norton in New York in 1931 under Prichard's original title, *Fay's Circus*. It was informed by her research into Wirth's Circus. The pioneering American Australianist C. Hartley Grattan commented on 'the very range of life she has encompassed in her novels', calling her 'the hope of the Australian novel'.[69] Her study of the circus and its performers reflected Prichard's Marxist-informed understanding of the effect of specific forms of social organisation on character, and she was increasingly drawn at this time to the principles of social realism. In the 1930s, communism was to become one of the main intellectual formations

67 Quotations in Throssell, *Wild Weeds and Wind Flowers*, pp. 55–6.
68 Jennifer Strauss, in Bruce Bennett and Strauss (eds), *The Oxford Literary History of Australia*, OUP, 1998, p. 124.
69 Quoted in Throssell, *Wild Weeds and Wind Flowers*, p. 60.

through which Australian literature, at the height of cultural nationalism, would again be connected to international literary space: it was the International Congress of Writers for the Defence of Culture that brought Stead and Nettie Palmer together in Paris in June 1935.

In the early 1930s Prichard travelled to Russia, and despite her established reputation this was the first opportunity to visit her publisher in London. Following her husband's suicide and her urgent return from Russia, she threw herself into political work for the Communist Party, the Movement Against War and Fascism, and the Republican cause in the Spanish Civil War. Nettie Palmer worried that this was affecting her writing, and therefore her inspirational role in the emerging national literary culture. She wrote to Alan Marshall seeking his support for a lessening of Prichard's Party commitments, explaining, 'she's very important to all of us, and her international reputation in England, America, [and] Russia – makes it more possible for Australian literature to gain consideration'.[70] The tensions between art, politics and middle-class values are reflected in *Intimate Strangers*, published by Cape in London in 1937.

A sign of the improving support for writing, in 1941 Prichard was awarded a one-year fellowship from the Commonwealth Literary Fund to write a trilogy based on the history of the Western Australian goldfields. In his reference in support of the application, Walter Murdoch noted that 'she is certainly the only contemporary Australian novelist who has won high reputation both in Britain and in the United States'.[71] Each of the three volumes – *The Roaring Nineties* (1946), *Golden Miles* (1948), *Winged Seeds* (1950) – was published by Cape in London and the Australasian Publishing Co. in Sydney.

Prichard explained in the introduction to *The Roaring Nineties*, 'I have tried to tell not only something of the lives of several people, but also the story of an industry.' The central thread concerns three generations in the family of Sally Gough, from the earliest gold discoveries set against the background of the great world-historical events of the period: the Great War, the Russian Revolution, the Depression, the Spanish Civil War, and World War II. The lives of individual characters are filled out with yarns of goldfields characters, mining statistics, quotes from official reports and other historical documents, motivated by an underlying socialist realism. In an important essay for the London *Tribune*, Jack Lindsay explained that it 'vindicates her position as the most important Australian novelist, the main exponent of the school of critical realism'. In a lecture on Australian literature in October 1943, Prichard had used the language of theoretical Marxism to explain the writer's role in society: 'those who are Marxist . . . see more clearly the need to direct the attention of the people to the most vital phases of the class struggle'. But when *Golden Miles* was published she acknowledged, 'I'm afraid its straight left won't please some people.' Prichard correctly anticipated the hostile reception of the trilogy outside the communist press. The *Bulletin* dismissed *Golden Miles* as 'outright propaganda'. *Winged Seeds*, published during the Cold War, attracted

70 Quoted in ibid., p. 77. 71 Quoted in ibid., p. 106.

even stronger criticism. The London *Times* pronounced, 'Australia appears to be more addicted than England to a parrot-like Communism'; the Sydney *Bulletin* described it as 'dutifully promoting Communist jargon twisted into situations to justify political theories'.[72]

Eleanor Dark's career was also shaped by overseas publishers and the domestic force of her overseas reputation, even though she lived entirely in Australia. The daughter of writer Dowell O'Reilly, she was born in the Federation year of 1901. In 1922 she married Eric Dark, a doctor, and the couple settled at 'Varuna' in Cascade Street, Katoomba, which became another node in the growing network of writers, readers and literary intellectuals that one contributor to the *Bulletin* described as 'Reading Australia'.[73] Sustained mainly by correspondence and occasional visits, this network included the Palmers in Melbourne, Prichard in the west, and Marjorie Barnard and Flora Eldershaw in Sydney. There were also other writers in the Blue Mountains, including Eric and Barbara Lowe, Osmar White and Zora Cross, who introduced Jean Devanny to the group after she arrived from New Zealand in 1929.[74] Although there was still virtually no local publishing industry in the 1920s when Dark seriously began to write novels, it was relatively easy to publish short fiction in the local press. Like Rann Daly, Dark was writing potboilers, and the techniques of romance, detective fiction and other popular genres became a permanent feature of her style, even after she began to absorb modernist techniques. Her character Lesley Channon in *Waterway* (1938) 'scattered through the weekly and monthly journals stories . . . at whose fatuity she scowled or giggled according to her mood'.[75]

When she finished the manuscript of *Slow Dawning* in January 1926, Dark asked whether Angus & Robertson would read it. They replied, 'On the whole we would advise you to send your story to England.' Her stepmother, Molly O'Reilly, took it with her to London, where she placed it with the literary agent John Farquharson, and it was published there by John Long in 1932. While engaging with contemporary feminist issues, it does so within the conventions of international magazine fiction. The main character, Valerie Spencer, is a young doctor who negotiates the demands of her profession with the attentions of different men, including a philandering colleague and her childhood sweetheart. Years later, Dark confessed to Devanny that she had written it 'dishonestly, deliberately . . . with the object of making money'.[76]

For her second novel, Dark tried hard to secure local publication and approached P. R. Stephensen at the Endeavour Press. Farquharson warned, 'While it is of course a good thing to try and publish in Australia . . . prior publication there would make it impossible to find a publisher in either [London or New York].' Dark wrote to Nettie Palmer, asking if this were true and asserted, 'If it is, it is high time someone tried

72 Quotations in ibid., pp. 130, 135, 126, 141, 143, 156–7.
73 'A Woman's Letter', *Bulletin*, 8 November 1923.
74 Barbara Brooks with Judith Clark, *Eleanor Dark: A Writer's Life*, Pan Macmillan, 1998, pp. 77–8.
75 Quoted in ibid., p. 82. 76 Quotations in ibid., pp. 95, 120.

to establish a precedent.' When Farquharson and John Long asked for alterations as a condition of publication, she replied, 'I am anxious that it be published first in my own country', adding, 'If you can arrange subsequent or even simultaneous publication in London, excluding Australian rights, well and good.' With the aid of a subsidy, *Prelude to Christopher* was published in Sydney by Stephensen and Co. in 1934. While still drawing on the conventions of magazine fiction, it shows modernist influences: its narrative present occupies only a few days, while the past is filled in by cinematic flashbacks and stream of consciousness. It is a novel of ideas, dealing with the international issues that engaged the Darks and their circle, including eugenics, social justice, the role of women in society, their relation to biology, and the relations between individuals and the state. Both its style and its themes led to mixed reviews. Marjorie Barnard told Nettie Palmer that she found it 'pretentious, over-written and unconvincing', but it was generally accepted as another landmark Australian novel, the *Australian Women's Weekly* expressing surprise that a work of this kind had been published outside London or New York.[77]

With *Return to Coolami*, Dark achieved a new level of international success, partly because of her return to romance formulas: Nettie Palmer described it as being written in '*high* magazine style'. Unable to publish again with Stephensen, who was in financial trouble, Dark sent the manuscript to Curtis Brown in London, who became her new literary agent. *Coolami* was published there by Collins in January 1935, and its success led to the first British publication of *Prelude to Christopher*, which was nominated the *Evening Standard* Book of the Month. Curtis Brown's New York office arranged for publication by Macmillan in the United States in 1936, where it was widely reviewed. Dark's next novel, *Sun Across the Sky* (1937) was published in the same way in London and New York. Based on a car trip by two couples from Sydney to a sheep station in western New South Wales, the romance plot of *Return to Coolami* manages to raise in complex ways a number of distinctly modern ethical issues. Quoting one of the American reviews, Dark described it self-deprecatingly to Miles Franklin as '"a novel for the porch and hammock trade" . . . Anything less highbrow could hardly be imagined'. Yet her biographer, Barbara Brooks, offers a compelling explanation for its success, which was based upon her balancing international publishing trends with her own concerns as a serious Australian woman writer: 'She was trying to find a style and a form that would bridge gaps many of her contemporaries found it hard to cross – between the innovations of European modernist writing and the conventions of popular writing, and between an urban woman's consciousness and concerns about national identity and national culture.'[78] It was through these kinds of accommodations that Australian writers negotiated the fault lines between national and international literary space.

Dark's balancing of the different demands of well-made narrative, modernist experimentation with time and point of view, and the novel of ideas was most successfully

77 Quotations in ibid., pp. 127–8, 129–38. 78 Quotations in ibid., p. 147.

realised in *Waterway* (1938). Following Stead's *Seven Poor Men of Sydney* (1934) and Dymphna Cusack's *Jungfrau* (1936), this was Dark's great novel of modern Sydney. *Waterway* describes a day in the lives of a group of people in the harbour suburbs of Vaucluse and Watson's Bay, culminating in a ferry crash based on the *Greycliffe* disaster of 1927 (see Chapter 10). Brooks describes it as 'a between-the-wars novel, a novel about a city divided by economic issues, looking back to the Depression and forward to the coming war'. These various crises – personal, financial, ethical and political – 'bear down on the characters the way the boat bears down on the ferry'. Reviewers recognised the Australianness of *Waterway*, and 'the fostering of a national consciousness' was one of its explicit themes – one of its characters is a publisher based on Stephensen – but the main business of its publication was conducted, via Curtis Brown in London, with Macmillan in New York, whose office Dark visited during her only overseas trip in 1937. She complained to Curtis Brown that *Waterway* was unavailable in leading Sydney bookshops, yet her friends, the Evatts, saw it displayed on a bookstall at Victoria Station in London.[79]

In November 1937, Dark's English publisher, William Collins, described her novels of the 1930s as 'one-day action books' – this was in reference to her adoption of modernist narrative techniques. She replied that she had commenced a new work, 'a semi-historical book about Australian life' covering some 200 years. *The Timeless Land* was to be the first in a trilogy of historical novels about early-19th-century Australia: it was followed by *Storm of Time* (1948) and *No Barrier* (1953). *The Timeless Land* was finished in August 1940, and sent to Curtis Brown. War-time paper shortages delayed publication until September 1941, and then Collins determined that it was cheaper to print in Australia than Britain, so *The Timeless Land* was actually published in Sydney in 1941. But the influence of overseas reviews remained persuasive and in July, Dark received news from New York that it had been selected by the American Book-of-the-Month Club. Marjorie Barnard wrote, 'American success *is* success'[80] – it was the recurring pattern of 'crowning' by overseas reception.

The Timeless Land sold exceptionally well both in Australia and in the United States, and was widely regarded as the most important Australian novel of the post-war decade. After the Book-of-the-Month Club nomination, Macmillan sold 120 000 copies in that year alone, launching it in the *New York Times Book Review* as 'a novel of towering stature'. Richard Casey, Australia's ambassador to the United States, wrote to say that he had seen people reading it on the train from Washington to New York. In Australia it was set on secondary school reading lists, and Dark was invited to give talks and lectures on its themes. *The Timeless Land* become one of the most important ways a generation of readers learned about Australian history. Deeply informed by Dark's original research in the Mitchell Library, it was also innovative in interpreting the settlement of New South Wales from multiple points of view, not least those of Aboriginal characters such

79 Ibid., pp. 183, 191, 200–202. 80 Quoted in ibid., pp. 205, 207, 248.

as Bennelong. It was at once positive about the achievements of settlement and critical of its mistakes. In an essay on 'Australia and the Australians' (1944), Dark argued that against the development of 'the people's consciousness of themselves as a nation' must be seen 'the ignorance and greed that used the land too recklessly' and, 'heaviest upon our conscience, the blunders of our dealings with the black Australians whose land we stole'.[81]

The commerical writers: Idriess, Clune, Upfield

As Stephensen's low regard for Idriess suggests, cultural nationalists not only championed Australian literature against expatriate and overseas authors, but also against commercially successful national writers like Arthur Upfield, Idriess, Frank Clune and Ernestine Hill, whom they either ridiculed or simply ignored.[82] Idriess' books were virtually ubiquitous in middle-class Australian homes of the period, and were sold using the modern, American-style advertising methods that Stephensen and the Palmers deplored. While Angus & Robertson had declined to publish first novels by a succession of serious Australian writers from Franklin to Dark, its commissioning editor, Walter Cousins, collaborated with Idriess to establish a series of bestselling titles. The statistics bear out their success. The first edition of *Flynn of the Inland* (1932) sold out within weeks, a print run of 2000; a second edition of 2500 sold out within a month. By June 1945, 24 editions later, 56 924 copies had been sold. *Gold Dust and Ashes*, about gold prospecting in Papua, was published in 1933; over the next decade it was reprinted 19 times, selling over 40 000 copies. *Drums of Mer*, also published in 1933, was the first of Idriess' four historical novels set in Torres Strait. In the decade to 1944, it was reprinted 14 times and sold just under 24 000 copies.[83]

The popularity of these writers points to the importance of what David Carter calls the middlebrow in Australian literary history. Middlebrow culture was associated with a range of cultural institutions that emerged in the 1920s and 1930s, such as subscriber book clubs (including the American Book-of-the-Month Club), book societies, and bestseller lists. In the 1920s, middlebrow culture was still largely an imported affair, sustaining the authority of literary reputations established in London and New York: Angus & Robertson depended for its survival upon reprints of popular middlebrow bestsellers from overseas. It was on the back of such success that novels like *The Fortunes of Richard Mahony* and *The Timeless Land* were able to return home, their reputations enhanced by nomination in the United States as Books of the Month. By the 1930s, however, Carter argues that middlebrow culture was beginning to 'absorb to itself the

81 Ibid., pp. 356–8; 'Australia and the Australians', *Australian Weekend Book* 3 (1944), pp. 9–14, quoted in Brooks, *Eleanor Dark*, pp. 293–4.
82 See Nile, *Making of the Australian Literary Imagination*, pp. 154–6.
83 Figures cited in Beverley Eley, *Ion Idriess*, ETT, 1995, pp. 144, 398–400.

idea of the national', as seen in such local bestsellers as Hill's historical novel about explorer Matthew Flinders, *My Love Must Wait* (1941). This 'national middlebrow' reaches its peak in the late 1940s consequent upon a significant thickening in the institutional context: the appearance in Australia of book societies, book-of-the-month selections, radio book shows, commercial book reviews, and the rise of little magazines. In 1940, for example, J. O. Anchen, a senior inspector of schools in Victoria, published a guide to *The Australian Novel*. It supplied readers with a list of '50 first-class books' and a recommended 'top ten' that mixed highbrow and popular authors without anxiety: Henry Handel Richardson, G. B. Lancaster, Xavier Herbert, Tarlton Rayment, Christina Stead, Michael Innes, Leonard Mann, Arthur Upfield, Kylie Tennant and Myra Morris.[84]

Christina Stead and Patrick White

The most extreme case of an international Australian writer long alienated from national literary space is Christina Stead. Stead left Australia in 1928 at the age of 26 and did not return until 1974 at the age of 72, having spent 46 years abroad. Her biographer, Hazel Rowley, argues that 'No major writer of any nationality has been more truly cosmopolitan than Christina Stead. . . . And yet, as an Australian expatriate who set her novels in Europe, New York and . . . England, she was rejected by her compatriots as "un-Australian".'[85] In the heavily autobiographical *For Love Alone* (1944), Stead says of James Quick that he saw 'Whitehall from the American viewpoint' and 'the White House as from . . . some Middle-Western State'.[86] Quick's mobile, multi-layered perspective suggests the layered cosmopolitanism of both Stead and her partner, William Blake. One of the great challenges in approaching Stead's life, her career in writing and her body of work is therefore to see them all as richly cosmopolitan artefacts, as products of a collision between her originary Australian experience and the many social networks, intellectual formations and cultural institutions of the three great capitals of the world republic of letters in which she lived and worked: London, Paris and New York.

The centrality of London and New York in the publication history of Stead's novels is striking. *The Salzburg Tales* (1934) was published in London by Peter Davies and New York by Appleton-Century; there was no Australian edition until 1966. *Seven Poor Men of Sydney* was also published by Peter Davies in 1934 and Appleton-Century in 1935; an Angus & Robertson edition appeared in 1965. *The Beauties and Furies*, set in Paris, appeared in 1936, again with Peter Davies and Appleton-Century, but there has been no Australian edition. *House of All Nations* was published in 1938 by Peter Davies and Simon & Schuster, and in Sydney by Angus & Robertson in 1974 – the year of

84 Carter, 'The Mystery of the Missing Middlebrow', pp. 189–90.
85 Rowley, *Christina Stead*, p. viii. 86 Quoted in ibid., p. 166.

Stead's return to Australia. *The Man Who Loved Children* first appeared in New York with Simon & Schuster in 1940 and in London with Peter Davies in 1941, and was reprinted by Holt, Rinehart & Winston in 1965. It was eventually published by Angus & Robertson, again in 1974. *For Love Alone* first appeared in New York with Harcourt Brace in 1944, in London with Peter Davies in 1945, and then in Sydney with Angus & Robertson in 1966.

Miles Franklin described *Seven Poor Men of Sydney* as 'Seven Poor Men of Bloomsbury', implying that Stead was too much influenced by overseas fashions.[87] This great novel of Sydney was indeed written deep inside international literary space, in Paris. Stead arrived there in 1928, that landmark year in the 'reappearance' of the Australian novel, though as Rowley observes, she 'had taken a very different path from those writers who stayed in Australia'.[88] In Paris, as we have seen, she and Blake mixed with artists, writers and editors, kept up with debates in modernist journals like *Transition*, and visited Sylvia Beach's famous bookshop in the rue de l'Odeon. Stead was reading Joyce, Yeats, Pound, T. S. Eliot, Virginia Woolf and Thomas Mann. Her early fiction was profoundly influenced by contemporary modernist fiction, as is evident in its sudden shifts of tone and register; its fascination with language, with dream and fantasy, with Nietzsche and Freud; and its frequent references to other literary texts. Rowley argues that Stead was especially influenced by Joyce, carefully reading and re-reading *Ulysses*: 'Like him, she was writing about the modern city. Like him, she lived in exile and wrote from memory about her city of birth.' The Sydney of *Seven Poor Men* is mediated by Paris and by international modernism: its characters, its settings and its dialogue are drawn from the people and places Stead knew in Paris, including Blake, who was the origin of Baruch Mendelssohn. For Dorothy Green, 'It was *Seven Poor Men of Sydney*, rather than any early Patrick White novel' that heralded the arrival of modernism in Australian literature.[89]

While Stead's modernism is now understood, the extent of her involvement in the institutions of the political left, both in England and the United States, and the influence of Marxist theory on her fiction, require further examination. In London from 1934, Stead mixed with Blake's circle, which included communist journalists and intellectuals associated with the *Daily Worker* and the *Left Review*. At the International Congress in Paris in 1935 she was close to the English delegation; her account of the congress in the July issue of *Left Review* declared that the task of the writer was to 'enter the political arena . . . and use the pen as a scalpel for . . . cutting through the morbid tissues of the social anatomy'.[90] In New York from 1935, Stead was close to Mike Gold, the founding editor of the *New Masses*, the principal communist weekly in America, and she joined the communist-affiliated League of American Writers in 1937. While working on

87 Franklin, *Laughter Not for a Cage*, p. 172. 88 Rowley, *Christina Stead*, p. 122.
89 Ibid., p. 130, and quote, pp. 129–30. 90 Quoted in ibid., p. 173.

House of All Nations, her novel about the corruption of the European financial system, Stead was also writing non-fiction for the *New Masses* and was close to its literary editor, Stanley Burnshaw. Although Rowley's biography documents these intellectual networks, her view that 'Stead's commitment was to her writing, not politics' seriously underestimates their connection.[91]

As for most Australian writers of this period, the influence of British and American publishers and editors on Stead's writing also remains little understood. They include Peter Davies in London and, in New York, Stanley Burnshaw at *New Masses*, Clifton Fadiman and Max Schuster at Simon & Schuster, and Pascal Covici at Viking. Davies had accepted *Seven Poor Men* in 1931, but fearing it was too difficult asked Stead to write something more accessible first: the result was *The Salzburg Tales*. He and his assistant, James Grant, were closely involved in the revision of *Seven Poor Men*. In New York, both Fadiman and Burnshaw were actively involved in Stead's writing process in the late 1930s. Rowley describes Fadiman as 'the most vigorous promoter of Christina Stead in America': he edited *House of All Nations* and his notes were 'extremely detailed'. In *The Man Who Loved Children*, begun in New York in 1938, Stead drew on her own childhood but transferred the novel's time and location from Sydney in the 1910s to Baltimore in the 1930s. Rowley argues that she did so at the insistence of her publisher. One reason why British and North American editing has remained largely invisible in Australian literary history is suggested by H. M. Green's response to *House of All Nations* in 1939: 'it does not really concern us, for its author left Australia ten years ago and settled abroad, and the book is cosmopolitan in tone and subject'.[92]

Stead's reputation as one of the major Australian writers of the 20th century is now second only to that of Patrick White. As Simon During argues, White's development as a writer was also shaped by literary institutions and social formations with an international reach: these include his parents' British connections, his own transatlantic gay connections, and the international nature of literary modernism itself.[93] In 1930, as a young man newly returned to Australia from school in England, White encountered recently published work by Australian writers, including *Ultima Thule* and *A House is Built*, but there was no sense in which his taste was formed by an Australian literary tradition of the kind that Nettie Palmer had begun to envisage. As David Marr observes, 'the notion of there being an "Australian literature" was then considered odd and pretentious', and his English education had 'left him untouched by, almost ignorant of, the writing which made up the Australian tradition'.[94] At Cambridge from 1932 to 1935, he read modern languages, specialising in French and German literature, and read widely and deeply in the major works of 19th-century and modern British and

91 Ibid., p. 254. 92 Ibid., pp. 203, 233, 261 and quote, p. 256.
93 Simon During, *Patrick White,* OUP, 1996, p. 4.
94 David Marr, *Patrick White: A Life,* Random House, 1991, pp. 99–100.

European literature: Chekhov, Ibsen and Strindberg; Hardy, Forster, Joyce, Lawrence, Woolf and Mansfield; Stendhal, Flaubert, and Proust.[95]

After Cambridge, White settled in London determined to become a writer. He there met the Australian-born painter, Roy de Maistre, who introduced him to a circle of painters, musicians, critics and writers whose tastes were modernist. Mindful of de Maistre's injunction that a serious artist must be modern, he began reworking a manuscript novel drawing on his jackerooing experience in the Monaro, now informed by the techniques of modern British writers, especially stream of consciousness. *Happy Valley* was published by the London firm of George G. Harrup in 1939. Henry Handel Richardson aptly described it as 'Australia – or a bit of it – seen through Joyce's spectacles'.[96] *Happy Valley* was well received in London, its first print run selling out, and a second carrying endorsements by Graham Greene, Herbert Read and V. S. Pritchett. The Australian journalist Guy Innes concluded an interview with White by expressing the hope that he might one day return to Australia, though considering it unlikely, 'for this author exemplifies Australia's tendency to export its talent, and once that talent departs it seldom returns'.[97]

After the publication of *Happy Valley*, White left London for the United States, where he began his second novel, *The Living and the Dead*, its title taken from the final line of Joyce's *Dubliners*. Its protagonist, Elyot Standish, moves in the exclusive London society to which White's lover, the Spanish diplomat Jose Mamblas, had introduced him. White returned to New York again in 1940 to meet the publisher Ben Huebsch of Viking, who had accepted *Happy Valley* for publication in the United States. Marr rightly describes Huebsch as 'the rock on which Patrick White's career was built'. A liberal Jewish intellectual, Huebsch had published Lawrence and Joyce, and championed modern American authors, including Upton Sinclair and Sherwood Anderson. An idealistic rather than commercial publisher, he nurtured and valued the work of literary writers, and was prepared to carry unprofitable titles in whose worth he believed. *Happy Valley* appeared to great acclaim in New York in June 1940. While British reviews were mixed and those in Australia hostile, the *New York Times* accepted White's style, noting that 'stream-of-consciousness is just one of the weapons with which he attacks the citadel of personality'. Huebsch also accepted *The Living and the Dead*, though the manuscript was rejected by Harrup in London. Marr notes that an important pattern had been set for the next 15 years: 'immediate acceptance of White's work in New York and a struggle to find a publisher in London'.[98] As During argues, White's reputation was first established in New York, then in London, and eventually imported back into Australia. This 'circuit of cultural capital' was characteristic of the shift in Australia's international orientation from Britain to the United States, where publishers and critics alike were

95 Ibid., pp. 127, 177. 96 Quoted in Ackland, *Henry Handel Richardson*, p. 225.
97 Quoted in Marr, *Patrick White*, p. 180. 98 Ibid., pp. 198, 201.

more responsive to modernism.[99] *The Living and the Dead* was published by Viking in New York and Routledge in London in 1941; *The Aunt's Story*, again by Viking and Routledge in 1948; and *The Tree of Man* by Viking in 1955, then in London in 1956 by Eyre & Spottiswoode.

White returned to Australia in 1947, although he and his partner Manoly Lascaris did not settle permanently in Sydney until the following year. But the decision had been made. He wrote to Mamblas, 'I landed here after fourteen years absence, and immediately realised how Australian I have been all the time underneath.'[100] He had brought with him the manuscript of *The Aunt's Story*, which he posted back to Huebsch in New York. White's major novels, written after his repatriation, can be seen as an inflection, through elements of international literary modernism, of some of the key forms of Australian fiction: the pastoral saga in *The Tree of Man*, the explorer's narrative in *Voss* (1957), and the captivity narrative in *A Fringe of Leaves* (1976). His ambivalent view of Australia was announced in the essay 'The Prodigal Son' (1958), in which he describes 'the scenes of childhood' as 'the purest well from which the creative artist draws', while savagely denouncing the provincialism of post-war Australian society in his famous phrase, 'the Great Australian Emptiness'.[101] The importance of White's experiences in Europe and the United States to his formation as an Australian writer is captured in During's observation that 'it was his luck and fate to write just when Australia needed a great writer and there was a transnational cultural infrastructure through which it could produce one for world consumption'.[102]

Miles Franklin's *Laughter Not for a Cage* (1956)

The work of establishing a cultural-nationalist canon begun by Nettie Palmer in the 1920s was taken up at mid-century by Miles Franklin in a series of lectures for the Commonwealth Literary Fund, published after her death in 1954 as *Laughter Not for a Cage* (1956). Her outline of Australian literary history in the first half of the 20th century summed up the cultural-nationalist project while also reducing it to its most polemical form.

Franklin distinguishes between writers who are rooted in their native soil, who write from 'authentic' Australian experience, and 'expatriate-minded' writers who have lost touch with their native culture and fallen victim to international fashions. This is illustrated by a comparison of near-contemporaries Joseph Furphy and Henry James. Both were born into newly formed English-speaking communities; both experienced the dif-

99 During, *Patrick White*, p. 6. 100 Quoted in Marr, *Patrick White*, p. 245.
101 Patrick White, 'The Prodigal Son', in *Patrick White Speaks*, Primavera Press, 1989, pp. 14–15.
102 During, *Patrick White*, p. 4.

ficulties of cultural transplantation. James responded by cultivating 'cosmopolitanism', Furphy by grounding himself more deeply in his native culture: 'One was a man who ran away, and one a man who stood his ground . . . James forsook his native country, Furphy never set foot in another.' Without mentioning her own sojourns in the United States and Britain – or her sexuality – Franklin condemns James as 'a foot-free bachelor of means' who 'coddle[d] his sensitivity . . . in drawing rooms and exclusive clubs, . . . or in cosmopolitan Bohemian haunts'. James doomed himself to a 'double exile'. He betrays no commitment to 'the . . . [American] experiment in national building', but 'turned his back on this mighty new departure' and remains 'haunted by his desertion'. He became 'a literary master' but also 'a man astray'. Furphy, by contrast, neither sought nor gained recognition overseas. 'Rooted to his native soil', he is 'in every sense antipodean', 'a founding father of the Australian novel'.[103]

The contrast between James and Furphy is the benchmark for Franklin's dismissive accounts of Richardson, Brian Penton and Stead as writers who also 'turned their backs' on their own culture while never quite becoming British, European or American. *Maurice Guest* received good reviews only because of Richardson's 'absorption of the Continental approach to her theme'. The Mahony trilogy was written at a time when 'psychology, derived from hearsay and garbling of Freudian theories, was sprung like a blight on society', and 'the misfortunes of Richard Mahony caught this wave'.[104]

Franklin's unbalanced assessments of Richardson and Stead reflect her own refusal of the cultural authority of Paris, London and New York, and led her to adopt a defensive provincialism: 'Then, too, like a very big toad into our backyard puddle plumped Christina Stead's *Seven Poor Men of Sydney*.' Her scorn for Stead reflects her own rejection of modernism, not only for its stylistic pretensions but also for its 'unhealthy' themes. Stead's characters 'cerebrate in analysis of the proletarian upsurge, are introspective self-expositors touched with the brush of the coteries of the Latin Quarter, or Greenwich Village, or Bloomsbury'. She even criticises Penton's *Landtakers* (1934), suggesting that in contrast to her own Brent of Bin-Bin novels he tainted the Australian pastoral saga by 'aping' European trends, which seem belated in the hands of Australian writers:

> Australian novelists have a time-lag in jargon and patter that sometimes heighten and more often becloud thought among the quidnuncs of Bohemian cliques in the big capitals abroad. . . . but the use of jargon merely to be in smart-alec vogue gives them the air of wearing a *chapeau* which is not *le dernier cri* from Paris.

In a back-handed compliment, Franklin acknowledges that Richardson and Stead were 'rewarded by approval as being modern'. Finally, too, her diatribe against cosmopolitanism was a response to what she saw as an emerging academic deference to Europe.

103 Franklin, *Laughter Not for a Cage*, pp. 125–7. 104 Ibid., pp. 147–8.

'The Australian', she believed, 'needs to dismiss from consciousness the bugbear of any necessity to be "universal" or to strain after "world standard" with which misguided academics have saddled him.'[105]

Franklin's parting shot at 'academics' came at a time in the mid-1950s when a new generation of university-based and often Oxbridge-trained critics – including A. D. Hope, G. A. Wilkes, Vincent Buckley and Grahame Johnston – were taking a professional interest in Australian literature that threatened to replace the authority of the earlier generation of cultural-nationalist intellectuals, who were largely outside the academy. Hope's essay 'Standards in Australian Literature', published in the same year as *Laughter Not for a Cage*, advanced a very different cultural mission for Australian literature and a critical practice whose 'universal' values would inspire 'greatness' in Australian writing. 'As is natural in a new country', Hope opined, 'there have been few writers who by the general standards of European literature were at all outstanding.'[106] Franklin and Hope's contrasting values anticipate Pascale Casanova's account of the competitive relations between national literatures in world literary space. While Franklin's cultural nationalism set the tone for one version of Australian literary history, her exclusion of writers who looked to Europe and North America (as others later looked to Asia) for inspiration would occasion a series of revisions by academic critics of later generations.

In a recent overview of Australian literature, Graham Huggan concludes, 'it is now generally recognized . . . that national literatures are globally produced, often by expatriate or diasporic writers who . . . may still choose to market their "Australianness" . . . both for a domestic audience and a larger audience elsewhere'.[107] Casanova's world republic of letters is suggestive of ways to think about the forces that shaped Australian writing in the period from 1890 to 1950: it suggests that a purely inward-looking approach to literary history is inadequate to understand how a national literature is formed in relation to influences that go beyond the boundaries of the nation. It also provides the means to create a slight analytical distance from the cultural-nationalist project, which otherwise remains foundational to Australian literature and its histories. Australian writers were always part of world literary space. This is evident in their physical mobility, and in the shaping roles of their overseas editors, publishers, reviewers and critics. Thinking about Australian writers at this time as belonging not just to the nation but also to an expanded field in which national literatures come into being in complex and competitive relations in world literary space also provides a way of understanding different kinds of career without denigrating the 'expatriate' writer. As *Laughter Not for a Cage* demonstrates, this has not been a neutral concept in literary history but is an

105 Ibid., pp. 172, 179, 225.

106 A. D. Hope, 'Standards in Australian Literature', *Current Affairs Bulletin* (November 1956), reprinted in Delys Bird, Robert Dixon and Christopher Lee (eds), *Authority and Influence: Australian Literary Criticism, 1950–200,* UQP, 2001, pp. 3–5.

107 Graham Huggan, *Australian Literature: Postcolonialism, Racism and Transnationalism*, OUP, 2007, p. 11.

artefact of the period's own cultural nationalism, the benchmark against which nationalist writers defined their values. Perhaps, then, Australian expatriatism does not quite deserve its low reputation. Clive James, who left Australia for London in 1962, argues that the perception of Australian expatriates has changed: 'If there was ever any resentment that anyone went away and stayed away, it has altered now. . . . Australia . . . sends people abroad as a natural part of its productivity.'[108]

108 Clive James, interview, *Sydney Morning Herald*, *Review,* 28–29 October 2006, pp. 4–5.

12

Australia's England, 1880–1950

PETER MORTON

Sailing for Eldorado: 'Home' in the literary imagination

> You're off away to London now,
> Where no one dare ignore you,
> With Southern laurels on your brow,
> And all the world before you.[1]

On 20 April 1900, hot from the success of his first collections of bush ballads and stories, Henry Lawson took ship for England. His mission: to find new material and markets for his work, to test his mettle in a more challenging milieu, and to stop drinking. He was seen off by a group of Sydney writers, none of whom thought it especially odd that a foremost Australian writer should wish to continue his career half a world away; in fact, many shared his ambition. Armed as he was with encouraging letters from publishers and cuttings of British reviews ('the antipodean Kipling' some were calling him), Lawson had reason to feel optimistic. He had dreamed of making the trip for years, and three patrons had had enough confidence in him to pay his family's fare. Everything seemed to augur well.

And indeed England did treat Lawson quite well. Edward Garnett, the man of letters who also fostered the careers in England of Barbara Baynton and Vance Palmer, was helpful about having a word in the right ear. His long-suffering agent, J. B. Pinker, was tolerant and efficient. Publishers were remarkably generous. At a time when a trained clerk was lucky to get much more than a pound a week, Blackwood paid Lawson more than £60 for three stories. Another, Methuen, gave him a £200 advance for *Children of the Bush*, and certainly never saw it back in sales. All in all, Lawson received what was the fairly typical treatment of Australian writers. Even when he returned to Sydney under a cloud, his jaunty advice was still: 'Go to London . . . if you want to do good work, and feel that you can do it, you will need in the first place to live for, say, twelve months in London – for London isn't going to be hustled.'[2]

1 Henry Lawson, 'The Rush to London': probably written 1900; published in *For Australia* (1913). Reprinted in *Collected Verse*, ed. Colin Roderick, A&R, 1967–9, vol. I, p. 386.
2 Henry Lawson, *Collected Prose*, ed. Colin Roderick, A&R, 1972, vol. II, p. 167.

But 20 years later Lawson, by now far gone in his terminal decline, scrawled some lines expressing very different sentiments about that trip:

> We were but married children and but lately put to sea;
> We sailed for Eldorado in the *Golden Vanity*,
> The ship was wrecked in London, and neither was to blame.
> But liars lied in Sydney, and they spread their tales of shame.
> The captain's hair greyed in a year, and not a word said he.
> Oh! would that he had never seen the *Golden Vanity*![3]

The full story of what happened during Lawson's two-and-a-quarter years remains obscure. His wife became suicidal and delusional, his children were boarded out, and in the end he made a precipitate return by himself, abandoning all his plans. Clearly his private experience had been dreadful. Lawson himself later referred to 'days in London like a nightmare'.[4]

Here, then, is the other side of the coin for the expatriate writer. For Lawson's verse captures some of the motives and the tribulations of the many literary Australians who sought Eldorado on their own *Golden Vanity* – the hope of reward, in sales or in reputation, counterbalanced by the fear of failure, of not measuring up There was the risk of missing new opportunities at home and being forgotten; or, alternatively, having to endure without right of reply the envy of colleagues left behind, and the malicious rumours which might be put into circulation. Anyone could be victimised by one or another of the cruel axioms of expatriation: if you didn't go, it was because you were afraid you were no good; if you did go, you were a traitor; if you went and came back, you were a failure.

If you did go, there was the thorny issue of deciding when, or indeed whether, to return home. But in which hemisphere, really, lay home? Was it the place of departure, or of arrival? Was it the port of embarkation, from which so many of the best and brightest, before and after Lawson's time, waved their goodbyes with a mixture of joy and anxiety? Or was it that ancestral world, which was a matter of personal memory or recent family history, given the fact that nearly every person to be mentioned here came from Anglo-Celtic stock? Actually 'home' (in the quixotic sense meaning Britain) was a problematic, exploitable term except for a period around the middle of the 19th century. By the 1890s the journalist Francis Adams was reporting that 'ten years ago England was spoken of affectionately as the Old Country or Home. Now it is "home" or more sarcastically " 'ome". The inverted commas make all the difference, and the dropped "h" contains a class contempt.' So for the sophisticated Australian-born at

3 The poem, titled 'The *Harriet*', is dated July 1920 but was never published; it is printed from an MS in Lawson, *Collected Verse*, vol. III, pp. 392–3. It imitates Kipling's 'The Three-Decker' (1894), which uses the same ship metaphor and is in the same 'fourteener' metre.

4 Quoted in Colin Roderick, *Henry Lawson: A Life*, A&R, 1991, p. 246. The best account of Lawson's London days is Meg Tasker and Lucy Sussex. ' "That Wild Run to London": Henry and Bertha Lawson in England', *Australian Literary Studies*, 23.2 (Oct. 2007), pp. 168–86.

least, the word has been used, in some hands, with a certain self-consciousness for a century or more.[5]

Still, whatever the exact resonance of 'home', it certainly needs limiting as far as the visiting and émigré writers are concerned. 'Home' for them never meant Great Britain: that is, neither Scotland, Wales, Ireland nor even provincial England. It meant London. Other European places might call ambitious youth: Paris for singers, Rome for sculptors and painters, Berlin or Leipzig for musicians, Heidelberg for student life. For the idealistic, there was Switzerland for international politics; for the active anti-fascist, there was Republican Spain. After 1917, for committed communists like the journalist–novelist Katharine Susannah Prichard, the Soviet Union called. And, of course, during the Boer War and the two world wars, thousands of ordinary people went much further afield than Europe. Yet, for writers, there was only one magnet: London. London was the forge and measuring-rod of success.

London was a city of six million at the start of the new century. Thirty years would pass before all of Australia held that many people. It was the modern world's earliest and biggest metropolis. Certainly there were other metropolises emerging in the world – Paris, Berlin, New York. But London was the only *imperial* metropolis. It was sometimes called the new Rome, but that was an understatement. Power radiated from it to every quarter of the globe, as it administered the affairs of 400 million people; and in the other direction, into the richest entrepôt in the world, flowed tribute in the form of people, goods and ideas from everywhere. At the height of empire, *c.*1925, the city at the centre of all that pinkish-red on the globe was itself metonymic for imperial power, and packed within it were other potent metonymies: Buckingham Palace for the monarchy; the Square Mile for finance; the West End for fashion; Big Ben for stable democracy; Whitehall for imperial governance; Bloomsbury and Poets' Corner for literature; Chelsea for art; and finally Greenwich for the ground zero of global space and time.

Of this great human hive, Australians were indisputably the free-born citizens, entitled to define themselves, as Richard Mahony does, as '*Civis Britannicus sum*'.[6] When the Dover cliffs hove into view, they knew that everything that lay beyond was their birthright. 'Hold up your head in England, / Tread firm on London streets', Henry Lawson assured those who were on the same quest as himself. 'For no men are your betters / Who never sailed from home!'[7]

5 Francis Adams, *The Australians: A Social Sketch*, T. Fisher Unwin, 1893, p. 41. See also the relevant entries in W. S. Ramson, *The Australian National Dictionary: A Dictionary of Australianisms on Historical Principles*, OUP, 1988. Yet in 1911 Miles Franklin uses it quite naturally in a letter referring to a brief visit to London from Chicago: 'Perhaps if I had gone straight home to London from Australia I would have looked upon it as a different country': Jill Roe (ed.), *My Congenials: Miles Franklin and Friends in Letters*, A&R, 1993, vol. II, p. 68.

6 Henry Handel Richardson, *The Fortunes of Richard Mahony*, Penguin, 1998, p. 416. Actually, they had no alternative. Throughout this period Australians were British subjects, with exactly the same status as any other Briton. One could not easily opt out of being a Briton: it was not until right at the end (1948) that there was any such category as 'Australian' citizenship at all.

7 Henry Lawson, 'From the Bush', *When I Was King and Other Verses* (1905); reprinted in *Collected Verse*, vol. I, p. 387.

Lawson probably meant his last line to be ambiguous, just as H. H. Richardson made ambiguous the title of the second part of her Richard Mahony trilogy: *The Way Home*. There would be no real home for her doctor-hero in Buddlecombe or London, any more than there had been in Ballarat. But many youthful writers of Australia were not disposed to see either ambiguity or irony in the concept. They went off to allay that unsettling, and sometimes corrosive, belief that reality was *over there*, that one's doom, otherwise, was to be forever on the margin:

> Every afternoon, away in far Australia, there comes over us all a half-past-two-in-the-afternoon feeling, an intolerable *ennui*, a sense of emptiness and discontent, a longing for something large and full that cannot be exhausted. . . . It is our remoteness that pains us. We are so far, far off. Our veins run warm with English blood, and London calls, calls, and we are there, a whole world away. That is the meaning of the half-past-two-in-the-afternoon feeling.[8]

That 'intolerable *ennui*', that appetite for London, could generate an 'almost insane lust'. It did so in the future historical novelist Philip Lindsay, when, trapped in Sydney, he heard from his brother Jack, who had gone on ahead, casual news of the Russian ballet, 'meeting gods like Aldous Huxley in the Café Royal, of actually getting drunk with Liam O'Flaherty! I couldn't believe it, I dared not believe it.'[9] Lindsay writes dramatically, but his and others' attitude is comprehensible enough. It is impossible to exaggerate the sheer power of the English cultural hegemony, and especially so, perhaps, over the literary arts. Stay-at-home writers took their main nutriment from Britain; nutriment which arrived in gobbets at six-weekly intervals. When they picked up a book or a magazine, the chances were these products had been written and produced in Britain, by Britons, and shipped out in bales; when they published a book of their own, they looked for a London publisher either because they had no choice or because they were pursuing the prestige and sales it might bring. They could read nothing, write nothing, criticise nothing, without being reminded that their literary culture was a derivative one, stuck fast in the relationship of colony to metropolis. To dream of a voyage from periphery to centre was a natural enough reaction against this cultural schizophrenia. Indeed, around the turn of the century, Miles Franklin, with precise acerbity, makes her heroine Sybylla Melvyn assert that there are only four things that should keep anyone from leaving for England: Poverty. Ignorance. Misfortune. Incompetence. They ring out like a new set of deadly sins.[10]

Yet it was not an easy journey to plan or make in the early years. The tyranny of distance meant a visit to London, particularly a first visit on a one-way ticket, was a daunting challenge for most impecunious writers. It demanded determination. It was

8 Louise Mack, *An Australian Girl in London*, T. Fisher Unwin, 1902, pp. 240–1.

9 Philip Lindsay, *I'd Live the Same Life Over: Being the Progress, or Rather the Circumgyration of Philip Lindsay*, Hutchinson, 1941, pp. 116, 133.

10 Miles Franklin, *My Career Goes Bung*, Virago, 1981, p. 233. The novel was drafted in 1902, before Franklin left Australia herself for Chicago in 1906.

too disruptive to be the youthful travel ritual which it became in the 1960s, although it was already commonplace enough for the affluent around the turn of the century. The author of *Bush Studies*, Barbara Baynton, frequently travelled to and fro in her later years, though by then she was more the rich socialite than author. One family made the return trip more than 30 times.[11] But the average passenger-list in the years before 1914 yields a more prosaic assortment of people. A semi-autobiographical novel of 1907 gives little studies of a university professor and his family, a tea-planter, nurses, a sallow American, various theatrical folk and 'a table of uneaten missionaries'.[12] Such was a representative cross-section of Australians arriving at British ports: about 2000 a year of them in the 1870s, 10 000 from the 1890s until the Great War, and perhaps a figure climbing above 20 000 in the period until World War II. Writers, intellectuals and other creative and artistic folk constituted only a tiny fraction of these, though collectively they added up to a considerable number.[13]

The period under review takes us roughly from the last days of the clipper, through the era of the coal-fired steamship and that of the diesel-driven passenger liner, and finally to scheduled flying-boat services right at the end, costing a hugely expensive 300 guineas in 1948. The voyage took five to six weeks. A steerage passage in a two-berth cabin for a family of four cost under £40 in 1900 and £38 for the cheapest possible bunk in a six-berth cabin without a porthole in the 1920s.[14] By the mid-1930s, Christina Stead's heroine in *For Love Alone* knows precisely what she needs to scrape together: 'forty-four pounds for the boat-fare, third class, and of course I must have ten pounds to land with'.[15] It had taken Stead herself three years to save what she needed before she left in 1928.

But no matter. Almost all – not quite all – writers understood that, since they wrote in English, their work would always be seen as twigs on the parent tree, and assessed as such. London was the supreme court of literary judgment, and not to appear at its bar to submit to 'a London hearing' (Lawson's phrase) was not to be a writer at all. The unsettling question was that travelling writers were Gullivers who never knew in advance whether they were heading for Lilliput or Brobdingnag. Would their compeers on the other side of the world prove to be, from their point of view, creative midgets or giants? Would publishers and editors beg for their favours, or eject them on to the pavement? Under-confidence in one's powers could be as fatal as over-confidence.

11 Ros Pesman, *Duty Free: Australian Women Abroad*, OUP, 1996, p. 24.

12 Winifred James, *Bachelor Betty*, Tauchnitz, 1908, p. 18. The content of this novel is based on her first trip to England in 1905.

13 Pesman, *Duty Free*, p. 23. K. S. Inglis, 'Going Home: Australians in England, 1870–1900' in David Fitzpatrick (ed.), *Home or Away? Immigrants in Colonial Australia*, Research School of Social Sciences, ANU, 1992, offers similar figures.

14 'Dear God,' moaned Philip Lindsay in his autobiography, 'was there ever so much money in all the world!' His father, Norman, came up with the fare: *I'd Live the Same Life Over*, p. 145.

15 Christina Stead, *For Love Alone*, Virago, p. 241. This part of the novel is set in 1933–4.

Expatriation, or a bullet in the cranium?

> They shrank from the land they were going to, a land of tyranny denounced by English patriots and abandoned by their own grandfathers, a land of unrest, the land of Dickens, poor seamstresses in Poultry and mud-spattered Watling Street, a London, cloud-sunk, an adamantine island chained to the shifting bank of the Channel, the city of Limehouse and Jack the Ripper.[16]

Sentiments such as these were meaningless to the well-heeled Australians who visited Britain as tourists, indulging themselves in one or two trips of a lifetime. If they were journalists, or had literary aspirations, they might well turn their impressions into a chatty book; others kept diaries, which they sometimes restructured into private memoirs afterwards.[17]

Many others, however, travelled on one-way tickets, early in their lives, for a stay of indefinite length, so naturally their attitude to Britain tended to be more ambivalent and to fluctuate over time; but still, for writers, 'the land of Dickens' was a phrase that rang out more cheerfully than otherwise. Dickens' career was, after all, the archetypal author's success story. Their motives for leaving were varied, and often mixed, but it is not wide of the mark to call them economic migrants. There was money to be made in London as well as a reputation. The London literary market-place was the richest in the world. It was also the most competitive, but for those who could produce the goods there were glittering prizes to be had, and even second-raters could scrape a fair living. Local authors sought a London publisher in any case, and since most books on sale throughout this period were British imports, Australian writers risked little in the way of local sales by relocating to England (see Chapter 11).

So the question might well be not: Why go to England? but rather: Why stay in Australia? Making a living – even a bare existence – as a full-time author or freelance journalist was, notoriously, exceedingly difficult in the post-Federation years, and for long after. There were the awful examples of local writers like Price Warung (William Astley, d.1911), author of convict tales, whose wretched career was dogged by ill-health, low pay, and a morphia habit. There was Mary Fortune, an obscure scribbler of detective fiction for 50 years for the *Australian Journal*, who died blind and poor around 1910 and was buried, bizarrely, 'in another person's grave' in a place and at a date forgotten.[18] There were, of course, rare exceptions. Rolf Boldrewood is said to have made £10 000 from his bushranger stories – all of them published in London, however. The two greatest weaknesses of the Australian literary milieu were that it offered so

16 Sentiments given to Jonathan Crow in ibid., p. 189.

17 Travellers' accounts written in this period are discussed by Andrew Hassam, *Neither English nor Foreign: Australian Travellers in Britain, c.1870–c.1970* (Trevor Reese Memorial Lecture), Menzies Centre for Australian Studies, 2000, and Richard White, 'Bluebells and Fogtown: Australians' First Impressions of England, 1860–1940', *Australian Cultural History*, 5 (1986), pp. 44–59.

18 Details from Lucy Sussex, 'Mary Fortune *ca.*1833–*ca.*1910' in Selina Samuels (ed.), *Dictionary of Literary Biography*, vol. 230: *Australian Literature, 1788–1914*, Gale, 2001, pp. 99–112.

few of those useful supplementary jobs such as reviewing or editing or teaching, and almost no opportunities for the miscellaneous writer or literary journalist working in the tradition of what the French call 'high vulgarisation'. What local magazines did exist were in competition with the imported article like the *Cornhill* or *Punch*, copies of which in earlier times could be posted from England for one penny.[19] Certainly there was a handful of journals, at different times: the *Australian Journal* (1869–1962), the *Bulletin* (from 1880), the *Bookfellow* (1911–25), the *Lone Hand* (1907–21); *All about Books* (1928–38), the *Australian Quarterly* (from 1929), *Southerly* (1939) and *Meanjin* (1940): but the idea of actually making a living writing full-time for any of these was laughable.

In Britain, by contrast, the demand from the 1880s onwards for all kinds of literary wares was insatiable. The journalist Raymond Blathwayt records in his autobiography how he had the brainwave of interviewing writers and writing puff pieces about them for the newspapers. They were instantly successful, as Blathwayt recorded decades later:

> On one Monday I was practically starving; on the following Monday the cheques had begun that delightful flow which they have never altogether ceased ever since. It was as though I had gone into an oil district and at once started a 'gusher' . . . never again, I suppose, certainly not within the working life of the young people of the present day, will such a golden era, journalistically speaking, present itself as presented itself to me.[20]

By 1900 the reader had a choice of well over 2000 monthly and weekly titles on the news-stands, and the capital supported more than a dozen daily newspapers. Collectively they consumed vast quantities of non-news material, and an army of freelancers supplied it. It is true that the competition was ferocious. Hopeful new arrivals were up against prodigies like Arthur St John Adcock, who boasted that he never had fewer than 20 manuscripts going around editors simultaneously, and never let a rejected piece lie on his table overnight. Nevertheless, the novelist and president of the Society of Authors, Walter Besant, saw plenty of openings in the New Journalism. The number of papers 'is simply enormous; there seems no end to them', he crowed. Some of the weekly penny papers had circulations in the millions, and all were vying to get the best fiction, the most striking articles. 'They offer', said Besant:

> a means of subsistence – not a mere pittance, but a handsome income – to hundreds of writers. Out of one office alone there is poured every week a mass of fiction representing as much bulk as an ordinary three-volume novel. The daily papers with their leading articles; the high-class weeklies, such as the *Saturday Review*, the *Spectator*, the *Athenaeum*, the *Guardian*, the *Speaker*, and a few others, with their leaders political and social and their reviews, give occupation to a large number of the best literary men and women, and the popular weeklies employ a much larger number of the rank and file.[21]

19 Lurline Stuart, *Nineteenth-Century Australian Periodicals: An Annotated Bibliography*, Hale & Iremonger, 1979, p. 2.

20 Raymond Blathwayt, *Through Life and Round the World: Being the Story of My Life*, E. P. Dutton, 1917, pp. 154, 157.

21 Walter Besant, 'Literature as a Career', *The Forum*, 13 (Aug. 1892), pp. 702–3.

Besant was right. For a particular kind of Australian writer, the fragmented nature of the market permitted a lifestyle inconceivable at home. A good example is Frederic Manning, author of the war novel *The Middle Parts of Fortune* (1929). Scion of an affluent Sydney family, Manning left permanently as soon as he was able, in July 1903 when he was 21. His interests were almost exclusively in classical philosophy and literature. Unashamedly dilatory, and by temperament a fastidious aesthete, Manning lived an isolated life in a country cottage, reviewing for the *Spectator* and happily writing erudite essays for T. S. Eliot's *Criterion* for a tiny audience, supplementing this with a small private income from home. It is hard to imagine anyone less fitted for the rough and tumble of antipodean literary life in the 1920s and 30s. As his biographer says, 'Early and deliberately he had detached himself from his homeland . . . opting for an English identity and literary career suitable to that identity.'[22] In fact, England was the only place he could have *had* a literary career.

The state of affairs that nourished Manning lasted for about 50 years, until the combined effect of the Great Depression, radio, the cinema and glossy picture papers killed off many of the reviewing opportunities and the magazines that printed short fiction and light articles. Newspapers merged and merged again; long-familiar names like the *Daily News* vanished. The literary milieu contracted, then swelled out in a new shape. Clever young people who could manage a bright sentence stopped fraternising in the pubs of Fleet Street and went off instead to write film scenarios, start advertising agencies or join the ever-expanding staff of the BBC. While the good times lasted, however, there were plenty to give heed to Henry Lawson's famous instruction of 1899 that his reader should 'go steerage, stow away, swim, and seek London, Yankeeland, or Timbuktoo' or else, failing that, 'study elementary anatomy, especially as applies to the cranium, and then shoot himself carefully with the aid of a looking-glass'.[23] Lawson himself took the first choice soon afterwards, though his suicide attempt after his return suggests that for him they were not mutually exclusive options.

In fact many had already taken his advice to leave, and even more would do so later. It is not commonly appreciated just how severe a haemorrhage of its intelligentsia Australia suffered in the four decades or so around 1900, especially given its small population. A highly selective sampling of literary figures, broadly interpreted, of those who left permanently for Britain in the seven decades to 1950 includes: Haddon Chambers, dramatist, in 1882, aged 22; A. Patchett Martin, journalist, in 1883, aged 32; Ernest Buley, freelance journalist, aged 31, in 1900; Mary Gaunt, intrepid traveller–explorer, aged 40, in 1901; Winifred James, novelist and journalist, aged 29, in 1903; Alice Henry, feminist journalist, in 1905, aged 48; Albert Dorrington, novelist, in 1907, aged 33;

22 Jonathan Marwil, *Frederic Manning: An Unfinished Life*, Duke UP, 1988, p. 65. Manning did return to Australia twice, in 1925 and 1932, but left again with relief after short visits.

23 Henry Lawson, ' "Pursuing Literature" in Australia', *Bulletin*, 19 (21 Jan. 1899), p. 2. Evidence that Lawson's prescription was taken less than seriously at the Bulletin is suggested by the slightly mocking editorial heading, probably by Stephens: 'Henry Lawson unburdens his soul'.

Sir Frank Fox, imperialist author, in 1909, aged 34; Will Dyson, cartoonist, aged 30, in 1910; the journalist–novelist Helen Simpson, in 1913, aged 16; Spencer Brodney, journalist, in 1914, aged 31; Randolph Hughes, scholar of French literature, essayist and Nazi sympathiser, in 1915, aged 26; David Low, cartoonist, in 1919, aged 28; Chester Cobb, novelist, in 1921, aged 22; Dale Collins, novelist, in 1922, aged 25; Mary Fullerton ('E'), poet, in 1922, aged 54; Pamela Travers, author of *Mary Poppins*, in 1924, aged 18; Jack McLaren, traveller–writer, in 1925, aged 41; Colin MacInnes, novelist, in 1931, aged 17; Alan Moorhead, historian, in 1936, aged 26; James Aldridge, foreign correspondent and children's author, in 1939, aged 21; Alister Kershaw, poet and foreign correspondent, in 1947, aged 26; Russell Braddon, historian and biographer, in 1948, aged 28; Peter Porter, poet, in 1951, aged 22.

This merely representative list could be extended easily. It does not include those who left for a British stay of years, but did return in time to continue their careers in Australia; nor those, like Godfrey Blunden, Catherine Duncan, Tasma and Doris Gentile, who were long-term residents in other countries.[24] Nor does it include the many other talented folk on the periphery of literature, journalism and the media who would certainly have contributed something to the literary climate had they stayed. Helen Bourke has examined the motives of three distinguished academics who moved to North America in the 1920s as part of what was not yet called the brain drain, two of them 'energetic combatants in controversy, provocative in style and sometimes mischievous in their wit': too much so, for them to survive in Australia.[25] Other similarly exuberant talents who were lost forever to England include Samuel Alexander, philosopher, author of the once-influential *Space, Time and Deity* (1920); Robert Lowe Hall, economist and literary patron; Grafton Elliot Smith, the anatomist and anthropologist; Norman Haire, doctor–journalist and sexologist;[26] Vere Gordon Childe, archaeologist and popular prehistorian;[27] Eric Partridge, lexicographer; and a host of others – singers, musicians, painters, scientists, academics, actors.

There was then, as there still is, a question of terminology. Those who left are sometimes called exiles rather than expatriates, though the former term implies compulsion and also a continuing emotional bond to the land of their birth that some, and perhaps most, did not feel. Mary McCarthy once defined the expatriate, as distinct from the

24 The sample also excludes the permanent expatriates or long-term visitors mentioned elsewhere in this chapter. My thanks to Darryl Bennet of the *ADB* for writing search scripts which helped in forming a broad estimate of literary emigration to England in this period.

25 Helen Bourke, 'Intellectuals for Export: Australia in the 1920s' in S. L. Goldberg and F. B. Smith (eds), *Australian Cultural History*, CUP, 1988, p. 106. Herbert Heaton, an economist, left in 1925 and Thomas Taylor, a geographer, in 1928. Both had suffered badly from negative publicity about their views in Australia.

26 Dr Haire (1892–1952) was a controversial figure in both countries. He performed the useless Steinach operation on W. B. Yeats in 1934 to renew his virility. He did spend the war years in Sydney (1940–6), where he had a sex-advice column in *Woman* magazine, but he returned to England and died there. Haire also had theatrical interests. How far he was a conscious charlatan is unclear.

27 Childe, author of popular works in ancient history, was forced from an academic post at Sydney because of his pacifist views in 1918. His career was spent mostly in Edinburgh; he returned to retire in 1957 and committed suicide in the Blue Mountains the same year.

exile, as one whose 'main aim is never to go back to his native land or, failing that, to stay away as long as possible', and that certainly meets most of our cases: that is to say, both those who stayed away for years but eventually returned, and those who became completely and permanently anglicised pretty much from the moment of arrival.[28] Expatriation is voluntary; exile is not. In this sense, Australia had no writers-in-exile, even though some may have liked to dramatise themselves in that role.

However, in practice the distinction is not so clear-cut. There were some semi-voluntary exiles: those kept away by marital ties; those who could not afford the return fare; those who had failed and were ashamed to return; those who had burned their bridges and felt they had to stick it out. For a short time that eccentric polymath, adventurer, engineer and politician Arthur Lynch could not return for the excellent reason that he was in a British gaol, waiting to be hanged for treason.[29] That is why Ian Mair invented the ingenious term 'pomios',[30] to describe them, and why Miles Franklin called them 'exodists' in *Cockatoos*.

Whatever label we give them, we are faced here with the flight of several dozen, at least, of the brightest and most creative minds that Australia produced over 70 years. Yet the loss was generally regarded with equanimity – when it was noticed at all. Just twice in this period influential voices were heard arguing that for the budding author the rush to London was a fool's errand, which could only damage an emerging Australian literary culture. The first came at the end of the nationalistic 1890s, when A. G. Stephens advised his *Bulletin* contributors to 'sit tight and write', by citing examples of local writers who were making a good living without leaving; those writers, at least, who could supply what readers wanted. Never one to neglect an international comparison, Stephens asked: 'How many writers in France have been so fortunate? They with their editions of 250 or 500, when they have gained a world-wide reputation for original power and refined art!' Even more dramatically, he claimed that Ethel Turner, the author of *Seven Little Australians* (1894), which sold 20 000 copies in Australia, worked for an hour a day, completed one book a year, and yet earned a sum 'which many a barrister in his tenth year sighs after vainly'.[31] By the 1920s, when he was writing, Stephens could have pointed to other cases. Edward Dyson, an extreme exception to the general rule, had carved out a career as Australia's best-paid freelance author–journalist, making a phenomenal £600–700 a year by dint of his machine-like productivity. Jeannie (Mrs Aeneas) Gunn published her bush tale *We of the Never-Never* (1908) in London without ever leaving the country, but still sold half a million copies or more. A. B.

28 Mary McCarthy, 'Exiles, Expatriates and Internal Emigrés', *Listener*, 86 (25 Nov. 1971), p. 706.

29 Lynch had fought on the wrong side in the Boer War. Author of about 30 books, including *The Case Against Einstein* (1932), he recounts in *My Life Story* how he lived for a fortnight on two shillings while trying to break into journalism. Later he wrote a column for the *Evening News* called 'The Seamy Side'.

30 That is (presumably), 'pommy Aussies permanently overseas'.

31 A. G. Stephens, 'Australian Literature III' [1921], reprinted in Leon Cantrell (ed.), *A. G. Stephens: Selected Writings*, A&R, 1977, pp. 94, 95. Turner (d. 1958) was in fact married to a barrister and later judge.

Banjo Paterson (d.1941) had made bush balladry pay for a 40 000-acre property near Yass. But such cases were wildly unrepresentative, and for a very long time it remained almost impossible for any independent writer to make a decent living. There is a heavy irony in the fact that Stephens himself, the most influential literary editor the country has ever had, never knew a moment's security, being employed by the week on a wage at best half that of the *Bulletin*'s head cartoonist.[32]

No-one took much notice of Stephens. His opinion that London is a 'filthy hole', the air foul and the climate 'vile, with variations', the men 'beasts of burden' and the women 'beasts of pleasure' sounded like mere rant. When he told the *Bulletin* airily that '*Apart from cash*, there is no profit in "going to London" ', the first phrase probably lost the case for most of his readers.[33] If anything, the pace of expatriation seemed to increase in the period between the Armistice and the onset of the Great Depression. These were the inter-war years, the so-called dry years, when Australia was even more of a cultural desert than it had been in the much-mythologised 1890s. Writers, especially women, seemed to put about as much practical energy into engineering their escape as they put into their writing.

Later, in the mid-1930s, when neo-nationalism was raising a flurry of interest, the editor–critic P. R. Stephensen published his influential long essay *The Foundations of Culture in Australia*, remarkable for its general air of anglophobic indignation and chauvinism. Stephensen unleashed his wit against 'a large colony of young Australian writers and artists, in Chelsea or Bloomsbury, aspiring to set the Thames on fire, because the Yarra and the Parramatta seemed too damp'. '*What's the matter with them all?*' cried Stephensen, succumbing to italics. 'The shirkers, they have cleared out, funked their job . . . . From a national point of view our émigrés may be written off as a dead loss.'[34] Unlike his predecessor, Stephensen did not try to prove that a good living might be made locally if only one had talent and worked hard enough. He makes it a purely moral issue: to leave is disloyal, even cultural treason.

But despite Stephensen's fulminations, the exodus of 'the shirkers' continued. For a century or more, the one-way ticket to Britain – dreaming of it, acquiring it, and finally using it – is a great theme in the socio-economics of Australian authorship. Remarkably, in one case, even the government itself acceded to the idea that the best aid Australia might give to an author was to disburse public money so he could get out of the country for good. In 1938, Vernon Knowles, who had enjoyed a minor success in London with some fantastical tales, but who had returned to Adelaide destitute, was given the large lump sum of £60 to go back to London and stay there. Knowles remains

32 A. G. Stephens, '*Bulletin* Diary. Edited by Leon Cantrell' in Bruce Bennett, ed. *Cross Currents: Magazines and Newspapers in Australian Literature*, Longman Cheshire, 1981, p. 36.

33 A. G. Stephens, 'The Sweet Uses of London: Another View', *Bulletin*, 22 October 1903, p. 2. Italics added.

34 P. R. Stephensen, *The Foundations of Culture in Australia: An Essay towards National Self Respect*, A&R, 1986, pp. 123–4.

the unique case of a reverse remittance-man; he died in England 30 years later having written nothing else of substance.[35]

Representing London

> No city . . . could equal the London of Hogarth and Rowlandson, London of Dickens and Fielding, London from whence Chaucer had ridden through the tunnel of the Bridge's stalls to Southwark that merry April day, over five hundred years ago! And now, at last, here was I in the enchanted city.[36]

Representations of London have been mediated for so long by books, newspapers, magazines and, eventually, film and television, that the city, on a first inspection anyway, tends to be 'read' as a dictionary of quotations. It has been well said that, above all other cities, London is not just '*a* place'; it also 'takes place' as it is defined and redefined in the countless versions of it over many centuries. And the bounds between the physical city and its imaginative reworkings are indefinite and permeable.[37] Novels have always played a large part in this mediation. From the mid-1890s onward there were nearly as many novels being published in Britain as there were books of every other type combined, and by the 1920s a quarter of Britain's entire exportation of books was shipped to Australia, and long continued to be so.[38] Every kind of visitor saw London through the prism of fiction. For the poet and journalist J. H. Abbott, 'Leicester Square' meant not the grimy reality of 1905, but the fields where two aristocrats duelled (in Thackeray's *Henry Esmond*). Even for Henry Lawson, not particularly well-educated, the City meant not the centre of imperial trade, but rather the place where the coach set down Mr Pecksniff's family when they come to town in *Martin Chuzzlewit*.[39] It was not just literary visitors, as Richard White has shown. Many an amateur diarist could find a snippet of English poetry appropriate to the bit of countryside they were traversing.[40]

For those who actually gained the much-desired experience, immediate reactions spanned a full spectrum of feeling and expression. Since England is the mother country it takes no great cultural psychoanalyst to see the oscillation of feeling, the attraction

35 Frank Moorhouse, 'A Balance between Sense and Sensibility', *Australian*, 4 Apr. 2007, gives a good account of this remarkable case: <http://www.theaustralian.news.com.au/story/0,20867,21442943-25132,00.html>.

36 Lindsay, *I'd Live the Same Life Over*, p. 163.

37 Julian Wolfreys, *Writing London: The Trace of the Urban Text from Blake to Dickens*, Macmillan, 1998, and Joseph McLaughlin, *Writing the Urban Jungle: Reading Empire in London from Doyle to Eliot*, UP of Virginia, 2000, develop this idea at length.

38 E.g. Simon Eliot's Fig. 26 shows that 31% of published titles were fiction over the period 1890–9, while the next three named categories did not exceed 12% each. The proportion of British books imported fell to one-eighth during the Depression years, but was up to a quarter again by 1950: see his *Some Patterns and Trends in British Publishing 1800–1919*, Bibliographical Society, 1994, p. 14; Richard White, *Inventing Australia: Images and Identity, 1688–1980*, A&U, 1981, p. 62; Ian Reid, 'Publishing, Fiction-Writers and Periodicals in the 1930s' in Bennett, *Cross Currents*, p. 115.

39 Henry Lawson, 'Letters to Jack Cornstalk. From an Australian in London. London, September, 1900', *Argosy*, 72 (Sept.–Dec. 1900), p. 219.

40 White, 'Bluebells and Fogtown', p. 48.

and the repulsion, as an oedipal conflict. In the melodramatic poem 'When London Calls' by Victor Daley, the city is personified as both enticer and ogress, a tempter for the (male) talented and a seducer of (male) souls:

> She sits beside the ship-choked Thames
> With Sphinx-like lips apart –
> Mistress of many diadems –
> Death in her heart![41]

For Miles Franklin's Ignez Milford, stuck miserably on a Goulburn farm, London appears as a 'mart for all outstanding gifts whether in the fields of science, art, learning, female pulchritude, or sport'. It is a 'big spider' which has 'tentacles enveloping the globe, [and] sucked in everything of worth or otherwise desirable'.[42] The metaphors are muddled, but the yearning is plain. The spider-web analogy was worked out better by the journalist Arthur Adams, who after a couple of years spent on hack journalism produced *London Streets*, a set of melodramatic poetic vignettes where England is symbolised as 'the Web' with at its centre 'silent and full-fed, / A spider, old, contemplative and wise!':

> Ah, far from England float those filaments;
> Weaving old wizardry they touch and claim
> Tribute of souls from unseen continents!
> In that Great Greyness prisoners they lie.
> There, drawn by the great lure of that great name,
> My alien heart, shrivelled and long sucked dry![43]

Ending up sucked dry in London's grey web was certainly a fate to be avoided; but, then, there was Adams' 'old wizardry' to compensate. For there was the sheer romance of the place. Like other great cities, but more so than any other, London could be a Camelot, a Mecca, a Promised Land, a City of Dreadful Night (or Delight). Going there could be an Embarkation for Cythera: a site of sexual initiation or transformation. London with its anonymous multitudes could provide a hideout for transgressive sexuality, especially promiscuity, homosexuality and adultery, if one were discreet.[44] As another immigrant, Joseph Conrad, puts it in *The Secret Agent* (1907) – and he is obviously drawing a contrast with Australia – London was a 'monstrous town more populous than some continents' where there was room for any story, depth for any passion, darkness enough to bury any life.[45] For those not impressed by urban romance, London might simply be an acceptable synonym for escape: escape from a marriage, from respectability, from

41 Victor Daley, 'When London Calls', *Bulletin*, 21 (8 Dec. 1900), p. 15. Daley took his own warning to heart and never left Australia.

42 Miles Franklin [as Brent of Bin Bin], *Cockatoos: A Story of Youth and Exodists*, A&R, 1954, p. 63.

43 Arthur Henry Adams, *London Streets*, T. N. Foulis, 1906, p. 7.

44 White, 'Bluebells and Fogtown', p. 45. Watteau's painting, and a poem by Kenneth Slessor, empowered Stead's imagination, as Hazel Rowley shows in *Christina Stead: A Biography*, Secker & Warburg, 1993, p. 69.

45 'Author's Note' in Joseph Conrad, *The Secret Agent: A Simple Tale*, ed. John Lyon, OUP, 2004, p. 231.

oppressive parents, from stultifying provinciality, or simply from the fear of being left anchored in the cove of one's birth, 'like a rowboat whose owner has died'.[46]

Despite their imaginative familiarity with the place, most young writers found London took some getting used to. It took time to adjust to the rampant poverty and the shameless, flaring vulgarity of the rich. Though it did grow somewhat less flagrant with the passing decades, this disparity was a matter of appalled comment, expressed in remarkably similar terms over a century and a half, from observers of every political stripe and none. In 1865, in one of the earliest impressionistic essays, the novelist and sociologist Catherine Helen Spence, who at the age of 40 made a visit after 25 years away, sounded the first indignant chord:

> The contrast between the wealth and the poverty of England strikes [a visitor] with a strange feeling of awe when he compares the hideous slums of London with the miles of streets in which no one can live on an income of less than a thousand, two thousand, five thousand pounds a year.[47]

Others were more vexed than moved by the sheer apathy of the underclass. Thirty years after Spence, A. G. Stephens offered the wild generalisation that the British workman was happy with his brutish lot: 'Give him meat and drink, a wife to kick, and a little money for cards or so-called "sport," and all the fine democratic ideals may go hang.'[48] Some 40 years later still, Arthur Adams was sadder about the apathy of the poor. 'Life for the poor is bitter: but there are no revolutionaries among the poor of London', he reported. 'They accept their lot. They are soddenly content.'[49]

But such initial impressions, no matter how strong, soon dwindled into acceptance. Jack Lindsay was briefly disgusted on his arrival by the ugliness and poverty.

> We had never imagined that men could live in such a dwarfed and sootied world . . . . The impact of London so depressed us that we did not dare to speak of it for days; above all we felt fooled and humiliated. To have come so far for this . . . along the kerbs were puffy-faced tarts with coats pulled tight round their fat legs.

But soon he acquired an amazingly exotic girlfriend and was buoyed up by an acquaintance with the likes of Nina Hamnett, D. B. Wyndham Lewis, Peter Warlock, Augustus John and the Sitwells, something which he recorded with considerable satisfaction. 'I sat back, enjoying the scene from a remote distance, over a bellyful of beer. "At last I have found my proper Hell," I told myself. "Now I am at home." '[50] Though this comment comes barely halfway through his autobiography, Australia vanishes forthwith, never to reappear. The pull of London was too strong for its less attractive features to figure largely. Miles Franklin did choose to go to Chicago at first, possibly because, like one

46 Teresa Hawkins' fear, in Stead, *For Love Alone*, pp. 284–5.
47 Catherine Helen Spence, 'An Australian's Impressions of England', *Cornhill Magazine*, 13 (Jan. 1866), p. 111.
48 A. G. Stephens, *A Queenslander's Travel Notes*, Edwards, Dunlop, 1894, p. 152.
49 Arthur Henry Adams, 'A Look at London', *Bulletin*, 50 (29 May 1929), p. 55.
50 Jack Lindsay, *Life Rarely Tells: An Autobiography in Three Volumes*, Penguin, 1982, pp. 504, 519.

of her heroines, she had heard that America was a place of opportunity, while 'the beggary of London under its thin crust of paraded luxury and culture and snobbery was a nightmare'.[51] But these words were written long after she had moved to London herself. The city had proven irresistible.

There were other immediate reactions. Since the national status of Australians in England was ambiguous, suffering from an identity crisis was common, and there were various ways of dealing with it. In Mary Marlowe's *Kangaroos in King's Land* (1917), a cheerful account of its young author's attempt to penetrate the theatrical world, three struggling actress–singers confront the issue of self-definition as soon as they arrive. Pert Judy Mason declines to be labelled 'a Colonial' and puts a would-be employer right:

> 'I was brought up to think myself an Englishwoman, we all are, you know, but you soon put me in my place when I came over here.'
>
> 'Really? How do you mean?'
>
> 'Oh! I am a "foreigner" or "from abroad", or "not English". So now I claim a title of my own. If I am not English I must be something, so obviously I am an Australian.'
>
> 'Might I not mistake that for an aboriginal?'
>
> 'I think not. When you speak of Americans, you don't mean Red Indians.'[52]

Another way of ensuring self-definition was to adopt a pose of pugnacious provinciality, the cultural cringe inverted, which was by no means restricted to the vulgar tourist. During his stay Henry Lawson wrote a few nondescript essays on his impressions, which are dreadful in their pointlessly aggressive *nil admirari* tone, especially as he was writing for the middle-brow *Argosy* magazine. The Thames is just a larger Yarra; the famed docks are 'simply big dam arrangements of masonry'; the Bank of England would be better for a scrape down and a couple of coats of stone-colour; the Tube is 'about as hot as the centre of Bulli Tunnel, near Sydney, and a good deal dirtier'; St Paul's 'does not appear much more imposing than a big corrugated iron shed'.[53] Such Bazza McKenzie-like utterances must have confirmed the readers' worst prejudices about philistine Australians. No wonder this drivel horrified his *Bulletin* editor, who called it 'barely second-rate journal-work, destitute of life or power'.[54]

Yet another, less aggressive way of inverting the cringe was to construct a negative vision of London – cold, dirty and riddled with class divisions – through which could be discerned a new Britannia, warm, egalitarian and progressive. It gave visitors the moral authority, or rather the smug licence, it has been wittily said, 'to run a superior

51 Franklin, *Cockatoos*, p. 249.

52 Mary Marlowe, *Kangaroos in King's Land: Being the Adventures of Four Australian Girls in England*, Simpkin Marshall, 1917, p. 121. It is set around 1910.

53 Lawson, 'Letters to Jack Cornstalk', pp. 216–19, and 'Letters to Jack Cornstalk: II. From an Australian in London. England, December 1900', *Argosy*, 73 (Jan.–Feb 1901), p. 77.

54 A. G. Stephens, 'Lawson's Last Book – A Temporary Adjustment' [1901] reprinted in Cantrell (ed.), *A. G. Stephens*, p. 232.

finger through the dust on a foreign window sill'.[55] This sort of horrified complacency typifies Louise Mack's *Australian Girl in London*: 'Here came men and women crooked all to one side or the other. It was terrible to me. Coming from my fair young country it seemed to me that these men and women, whom nobody even turned to glance at, were shouting aloud, "Decay, decay!" '[56] The belief that British life was falling into decadence had a long currency, from the late-Victorian years right through to the 1930s. P. R. Stephensen, the prime neo-nationalist (and later quasi-fascist), thought the novels of Huxley, Lawrence and Waugh proved it. Another version of that kind of response was to imaginatively refashion the capital altogether – or to destroy it. Catherine Spence's *A Week in the Future* is a utopia where the heroine is transported from the Adelaide of 1888 to the London of 1988, where she finds a city transformed from the place Spence herself visited in 1865–6. Miraculously, the population has fallen to just one million, and the horse has given way to the bicycle, but somehow its status remains intact. 'The mother-city of the van had not lost her historic glory through throwing off her surplus population.'[57] Presumably the remainder has given up reproduction or the missing five millions have departed voluntarily for the colonies.

In general, though, the fact is that, although going to England might require unusual determination, once there, the actual experience of 'being in' England produced little that is interestingly analytical (as opposed to descriptive). England was simply too familiar; London life, at least, 'known' long before the train from the Liverpool docks pulled in at Euston. This is responsible for the curiously vapid and peevish tone of the reflections of most visitors, even relatively sophisticated ones. Their *aperçus* rarely rise above the level of comparing the Bay of Naples to Sydney Harbour (to the former's disadvantage, naturally), the warmth of the beer, or the charge levied by even the best hotels to fill a bathtub.[58] Miles Franklin whinged about the wattle in the flower shops being poor stuff from France, with the balls about half the usual size.[59] That subtle observer H. H. Richardson, whose Richard Mahony trilogy offers the best rendition in fiction of the contradictory attitudes of colonists returning to England, gets a laugh out of Mary Mahony's ingenuous response to her first sight of the green fields of Kent: 'With an exclamation of pleasure she cried: "Oh, Richard – how pretty! How . . . how *tidy*! It looks like . . . like" – she hesitated, searching her memory for the trimmest spot she knew; and ended – "doesn't it? . . . just like the Melbourne Botanic Gardens." '[60]

55 Ros Pesman *et al.*, *The Oxford Book of Australian Travel Writing*, OUP, 1996, p. xv.

56 Mack, *Australian Girl*, pp. 140–1.

57 Catherine Helen Spence, *A Week in the Future*, ed. Lesley Durrell Ljungdahl, Hale & Iremonger, 1987, p. 115. Spence was surely influenced by Richard Jefferies' demolition-fantasy *After London* (1885). The idea of cutting Britain down to size was attractive to a certain Australian mentality. P. R. Stephensen thought the populations of the two countries might be equally balanced at 20 million each by the year 2000, and that 'Nothing less than a new and exclusive industrial invention, comparable with the steam engine' could maintain Britain's population at 45 million, the figure current in 1935: *Foundations of Culture*, p. 54.

58 'Bathing in London is a hobby, and often an expensive one. That the English are a clean nation is the first illusion the visitor loses': Marlowe, *Kangaroos in King's Land*, p. 37.

59 Franklin, letter, 1 Mar. 1917, in Roe (ed.), *Congenials*, vol. I, p. 117.

60 Richardson, *Fortunes of Richard Mahony*, p. 349.

Yet Richardson herself offers the trite observation in her autobiography that 'many a time during those first weeks did I wish myself home again, back in a land which, whatever its defects, was at least bright and sunny, and *clean*. Here, even when there was no fog, it never seemed to be properly day.'[61] When she made this mundane observation in the late 1940s, Richardson had been an expatriate for 50 years. One looks in vain for anything from Australian writers with the acuity of Hippolyte Taine's *Notes on England*, still less Henry James' essays like 'The Suburbs of London'. How could it have been otherwise? No-one who was not an Anglo-Celt came from Australia to inspect the strange British Isles; for all those who did come, English institutions were entirely familiar, the culture well understood, as least as mediated through literature; the practicalities of life offered no piquant contrasts. Since nearly all writers came of well-educated bourgeois stock, they had been steeped in English history and literature from birth. The upper-class education received by Martin Boyd was so focused on the British Isles that as a child he was embarrassed to discover the word 'history' encompassed events that had happened in France as well.[62] For the American anglophile Henry James, England was an intriguingly foreign country, which sparked his creativity at first sight. But for Australians it had been different right from first settlement. As K. S. Inglis puts it, emigrants to Australia arrived at the least unfamiliar of the new Britains. The inverse was no less true.

Drawing off the rich cream: succeeding and failing in England

> Every one of any note born to us, by the centralisation attendant upon imperialism is drawn off to London like the rich cream leaving only the plain milk beneath.[63]

The rich cream of Miles Franklin's simile in some cases maintained its sweetly luscious quality in England, but in others it quickly soured. The penalty of failure could be severe indeed, and it was not much comfort having all the rights of a British subject when they granted only the right to sink into the gutter or the right to a pauper's funeral. From the earliest days there were plenty of salutary stories about those who made the trip but failed to make a reputation, or even, in some cases, failed to keep body and soul together at all. One casualty was the poet–nurse Grace Jennings Carmichael. She died in 1904 aged 36, and her three young sons were despatched to a workhouse from which, after an outcry, they were eventually retrieved by private subscription. The grim lesson of her situation was well taken. Henry Lawson, not surprisingly, identified with her fate, and wrote a poem about her after his own dismal return, describing how 'A

61 Henry Handel Richardson, *Myself when Young. Together with an Essay on the Art of Henry Handel Richardson by J. G. Robertson*, Heinemann, 1948, p. 87.
62 Martin Boyd, *Day of My Delight: An Anglo-Australian Memoir*, Penguin, 1986, p. 17.
63 Franklin, letter, 6 May 1929, in Roe (ed.), *Congenials*,vol. I, p. 217.

lonely woman, fought alone / The bitter fight in London town!'[64] Decades later, the authorial voice in *Cockatoos* (speaking from Miles Franklin's own experience) struck a conspiratorial note with the warning of deliberate censorship: 'The facts about those who starved in the Big Smoke until the hat went round to generous compatriots to send them home was not in the Sydney newspapers and did not weigh against the successes.'[65] Those who were not put off before the trip soon heard dismal warnings on arrival. In 1906 J. F. Dwyer, a would-be thriller writer, met a grizzled veteran in a pub who told him that the streets of London were cemented with the heart's blood of men who had come to write. He advised Dwyer to take the next ship home, dropping his stories overboard *en route* for the mermaids to read.

This anecdote appears in Dwyer's *Leg-Irons on Wings*, an example of the literature of the 'struggle in London', a distinct genre in the years after Federation and still not extinct today. It takes the form of novels, semi-fictional and semi-autobiographical in varying proportions, or else semi-fictionalised memoirs, and there are numerous examples, not all of them published. Some are brightly written, breezy narratives produced by young people tasting freedom and adventure, and prepared to struggle to force the metropolis to yield them a living, but even the breeziest can strike a dismal note:

> What chance have you, a wretched, miserable, terrified atom, in this pitiless race? Who, with his own fortune to engineer, is going to stop and listen to your weak puling cry for recognition – much less lend you a hand? Who cares whether you are writing a twopenny-ha'penny book and can't get on with it for want of air?
>
> You are only of use if you are a marketable quantity. You can't be a marketable quantity unless you keep sane, and how can you hope to keep sane in this screaming whirlpool?
>
> I say to myself, 'Betty, my girl, this is not the way to get your foot on the neck of it. Range yourself.' But it is no use. I want to get out of this great brick box before the lid closes down completely. The winter is coming on, and I, who dread the cold so horribly, and have had three months of it at the beginning of the year – not the worse three months either – feel that half-a-year of it on end in the top flat of newly-built mansions, with no companion but the wind moaning up the staircase, will finish everything.[66]

Much more desperate than this were the struggles of the journalist J. H. Abbott, if his *Letters from Queer Street* (1908) is even fractionally autobiographical. Written with an escalating sense of despair to a friend in Sydney, the letters of John Mason, an unemployed and apparently unemployable journalist, offer sombre vignettes of down-and-out life in London. They are full of curious lore, such as how one can enjoy a five-course dinner for a few pence by moving from one street-barrow to another. In the end Mason dies, with a last plea – surely the weirdest plea heard in life or literature from an expatriate:

64 Henry Lawson, *Skyline Riders and Other Verses* (1910); reprinted in *Collected Verse*, vol. II, pp. 290–1.
65 Franklin, *Cockatoos*, pp. 214–15. *Cockatoos* was written in 1927, though not published until 1954.
66 James, *Bachelor Betty*, p. 152.

> They'll plant me in some suburban cemetery near London. I'll rot. Most of my chemical constituents will have been added to the soil of England by the time you would be able to do what I ask; but, nevertheless, there would be some of me left, if only bones. Now, I would like you, old boy, to have my bones dug up and planted 'on the other side'. I want, if I can, to do a little 'daisy-growing' in my own country. Pack my skeleton in a gin-case if you like, and chuck it down an empty mine-shaft; but, if you can, do see to it that I may decompose ultimately into Australian soil.[67]

The autobiography of Philip Lindsay gives a colourful picture of what must have been, in the 1920s, the experience of quite a few would-be writers in London who are now lost to history: a ramshackle, harum-scarum *vie de Bohème,* redeemed by friends – mostly themselves penny-a-line scribblers – always ready with a shakedown bed, a beer and a loan. In his early days Lindsay outdid even the most miserable hack of George Gissing's *New Grub Street* by resorting to the doss-house in the crypt of St Martin's church.

Even in England, ambitious Australians soon discovered, few writers could prosper materially by adhering to the highest standards of 'art' literature then associated with modernism. Those who pursued their own aesthetic ideals, like H. H. Richardson, enjoyed a subsidy of one kind or another, from a spouse or a private income (like Woolf and James) or moneyed patrons (like Joyce), or else were eventually forced to compromise (as Conrad did) by going downmarket or into journalism. Even after *Ultima Thule* surprisingly sold 100 000 copies in America, Richardson still assessed her average earnings over a lifetime at one shilling a week, and admitted she would have starved without her husband's support. There was for many years simply no demand for the controversial or challenging, especially in the lucrative magazine short-story market. Lawson reported in 1902, after his return, that 'simple domestic yarns and true sketches of the better sides of human nature, of man, woman and child nature, go best now. They don't want the other man's wife in England – she's done.' (The last sentence alludes to the New Woman fictions, some of which had small Australian associations, which were now out of favour.)[68] Though this hardly squares with Lawson's own practice in London – a few of the Joe Wilson stories are among his most subtle work – it was a shrewd assessment. Fifteen years later Vance Palmer was supplying this same kind of product, on demand, even to A. R. Orage's modernist *New Age* magazine. Palmer did well because he was versatile enough to meet many markets. He discovered when he arrived in 1905 that 'there were so many papers that almost any literate article or story could find a home if it were sent round often enough'.[69] But it was not quite as simple

67 John Henry Macartney Abbott, *Letters from Queer Street: Being Some of the Correspondence of the Late Mr John Martin*, A. & C. Black, p. 317. An 'editor's note' says 'John Mason was found leaning over the last unfinished sheet of this letter. He lies in Waverley Cemetery, Sydney.'

68 Lawson, *Collected Prose*, vol. II, p. 167. George Egerton (i.e. Mary Chevalita Dunne), author of the sexually radical story-collections *Keynotes* (1893) and *Discords* (1894), was born in Melbourne in 1859. The author of the equally daring *A Yellow Aster* (1894), 'Iota' (Kathleen Caffyn, 1852–1926) lived in Australia, 1880–92. Both died in Britain.

69 Vance Palmer, 'Literary England Today' reprinted in H. P. Heseltine (ed.), *Intimate Portraits and other Pieces: Essays and Articles*, Cheshire, 1969, p. 77.

as that: at the very least, one needed stamina. Palmer himself claimed that he wrote 81 short stories in his first nine months in London, plus many articles. Not all were as fortunate, or as talented. Naturally the failures have left little trace of their trials, though one unpublished account survives of a man who with heroic persistence fought to make his mark for five years before giving up and returning.[70]

Even journalists, who generally were better received, could have a rough time when they had to go cold-calling in Fleet Street:

> Above all, there is something about the buildings that tells you what a mere atom you are. Office upon office looks down on you. You gaze upwards from storey to storey. To think of making an impression on them! At every higher flight you lose so much of your courage.
>
> They steal from you all your need for your battle. They dissipate your will. They weaken your intention. They convince you of your unimportance.
>
> You arrive at your destination in wonder at your coming. Why are you here? What do you seek? Work? A chance? A hearing? Why should you expect any of these? Who are you? No one. What are you worth? Nothing. Who wants you? Nobody.[71]

But London was good to Louise Mack, once she had swallowed her initial ambitions and entered 'the great wild land of serial fiction',[72] or, to put it mundanely, had found work with the Harmsworth press scribbling romantic tales. She charmed the editor W. T. Stead, who had an eye for a pretty face, just as she had aroused the lust of A. G. Stephens at home.[73] She attended Stead's parties and was soon making better money than all her ex-colleagues on the *Bulletin* put together. She wrote ecstatic doggerel about her new life for unappreciative readers back in Sydney, one of whom wrote sourly that her ex-colleague was still showing the imagination useful for a hack scribbling storyettes. Barbara Baynton said scornfully that Mack's idea of a good line, in cobbling together a serial for the *Daily Mail*, was this sort of thing: 'Where had she left her gold pen, with its heavily jewelled handle?'[74]

For a few expatriate novelists who were willing and able to meet a popular market, the rewards could be princely. One of the first was Fergus Hume, whose huge success of 1886, *The Mystery of a Hansom Cab*, sold 100 000 copies in two print runs in the Australian market, and more than half a million via its London publisher, Jarrold. (Hume gained nothing at once as he had sold the rights for an absurd £50.) Taking the hint about where his future fortunes lay, Hume moved to London in 1888 and wrote another

70 His MS account covers the period 1906–11 and is summarised in Gavin Souter, *Lion and Kangaroo: The Initiation of Australia, 1901–1919*, Collins, 1976, pp. 120–7.

71 Mack, *Australian Girl*, pp. 225–6.

72 Quoted in Nancy Phelan, *The Romantic Lives of Louise Mack*, UQP, 1991, p. 120.

73 He confided to his diary in 1896 that she gave signs of needing 'a man who bruised, crushed, thrashed her': A. G. Stephens, '*Bulletin* Diary', p. 53. He probably pursued her during his London visit in mid-1902.

74 Quoted in Penne Hackforth-Jones, *Barbara Baynton: Between Two Worlds*, Penguin, 1989, p. 111, citing Baynton's address to the Writers' Union, 'England and the Australian Writer', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 6 July 1911.

100 or more novels; none matched his first success, but he made a comfortable living. Doubtless his success gave heart to others who fancied themselves capable of pumping out popular fiction. After he arrived in England in 1894, Guy Boothby buckled down to fiction manufacture on a grand scale, setting himself the goal of 6000 words a day. Despite dying at 37, Boothby produced more than 50 novels, the most popular being the *Dr Nikola* series. His motto of 'I give the reading public what they want . . . in return my readers give me what I want' generated an income of up to £20 000 a year. It was a long way from his former job as secretary to the mayor of Adelaide. Equally successful was another Adelaide transplant, Alice Rosman, who moved to London in 1911, turned herself into a full-time romantic novelist in her 40s, gained an immense international readership, and became the *grande dame* of a Bloomsbury salon. Rosa Praed had, years earlier, gained a similar place in top literary, occult and spiritualist circles with her own Anglo-Australian romances, associating with the likes of Sir Richard Burton, G. A. Sala, Rider Haggard, Browning and Andrew Lang.

Other kinds of rewards were possible. The poet Anna Wickham left in 1905 to study singing, briefly had an international reputation and became the intimate of David Garnett, D. H. Lawrence, Harold Munro and Malcolm Lowry. The artist Stella Bowen left Adelaide in 1914 as an innocent young woman to study painting, but when she became the partner of the novelist Ford Madox Ford she moved in quite a different sphere. For nine years, first in rural England and then for a period in 1920s Paris that she herself called 'playtime', she associated with Joyce, Hemingway, Pound, Stein and other luminaries of that legendary time. Playtime lasted right up to the dreadful moment at the end of the 1920s when 'I opened my *Herald Tribune* to see in the right hand corner, "£1 sterling = frs. 103" . . . I knew that I was ruined.'[75] Actually this was an exaggeration, but it was certainly the end of the idyll, though it was England she returned to, not Australia. For Wickham and Bowen, as for Christina Stead (who committed the ultimate cliché of running off to Paris in 1929 with a married businessman), cocking a snook at notions of female respectability led to a life in the cosmopolitan literary world much more interesting than they could possibly have known at home.

Yet another kind of success is that enjoyed by Vance and Nellie Palmer – biographers, critics, social commentators – who were for 30 years the best literary entrepreneurs and arbiters of taste of the period. They were in England, together or separately, in 1905, 1910, 1914, 1918, 1931, 1935, and 1955, for periods of up to two years at a time. What is most impressive is that their visits were always purposeful. Theirs were no quick, touristic trips, but equally there was no question of their staying on. On each occasion they focused on the task of using the experience as a means of reflecting on their Australian cultural identity. They admired the sense of continuity in British literary life, of each successive generation absorbing and building on its predecessors. But they refused to be intimidated by it.

75 Stella Bowen, *Drawn from Life*, Virago, 1984, p. 191.

The Palmers were not the first to see their trips as being, essentially, raiding expeditions. Jack Lindsay had the same idea, originally, when he arrived in 1926. He persuaded himself that he was there just temporarily, 'to get to know something of the literary scene and have a couple of books published, and then return to Australia where the Renascence was scheduled'.[76] In his case, though, the 'web' got him, though he was certainly not sucked dry by the London spider: his productivity was legendary. But the Palmers did not allow that to happen to them.

Of course, these ambitions only emerged gradually. On his first visit in 1905, the young Vance Palmer served the same kind of mournful apprenticeship in turn-of-the-century London as many another:

> those days held little for me but memories of dreary hack-work carried on far into the night, the sound of rejected manuscripts dropping in through the downstairs door, and the depressing smell of cocoa boiled on a tiny petrol-stove . . . my fixed image of London was of a solitary attic and the naphtha-flares of fruit-barrows reflected in the slush of Theobald's Road.[77]

But in Palmer's case this period did not last long: the manuscripts stopped bouncing back and he was soon hobnobbing with the likes of G. K. Chesterton, Ezra Pound, Wyndham Lewis, Frank Harris, A. R. Orage and T. E. Hulme.

The Palmers' stay in 1935–6 is the best documented, thanks to Nettie Palmer's journal *Fourteen Years*. The London section starts on 4 July 1935, when she was 50. She was living in Bloomsbury, in a comfortable way of life, with an easy entrée to any of the literary names she wanted to interview: Mulk Raj Anand, Walter Turner, Rebecca West, Havelock Ellis, F. R. Leavis. Nettie is revealed as a bit of a tuft-hunter, which some of them did not like. H. H. Richardson found her bossy and full of hard little nuggets of fact. But the journal shows she had a gift for noticing and recording the salient detail, and her own lack of competitive feeling means she is always unenvious and sympathetic. Though she offers few generalisations, we are aware that this is not just superior literary gossip. She is asking, with more unabashed cultural egotism than anyone before, what England could do for her, as an Australian with a clear nationalistic agenda, rather than vice versa.

In doing that, neither of the Palmers was unsympathetic to the draw of London. Speaking of Helen Simpson and Jack Lindsay in 1937, in the wake of Stephensen's splenetic attack, Vance Palmer asked what right one had to ask clever people to stay here; for 'what was there in this dusty country, where the chief events were cricket matches and elections, for an imaginative writer to take seriously? Was it worth bringing one's art to a subtle perfection for a people mainly interested in the personalities of third-rate politicians, tennis-players, successful real-estate salesmen?'[78] But he concluded, from

76 Jack Lindsay, *Life Rarely Tells*, p. 489.
77 Palmer, *Intimate Portraits*, p. 47. He is writing here of his first visit in 1905.
78 Vance Palmer, 'Australian Writers Abroad', *Bulletin*, 58 (13 Jan. 1937), p. 2.

his own experience, that the flight to London was no panacea for Mack's 'half-past-two-in-the-afternoon' feeling. In other words, the Palmers confronted head-on what has been called the Archibald paradox: the centre of the dominant culture might be Elsewhere; but, unless one bails out altogether, the task of participating credibly in it must necessarily be conducted Here.[79] And its proponents, like the Palmers, had to be internationalists and nationalists at once.

While in London the Palmers, like émigrés everywhere, tended to consort with their like-minded compeers. Long predating the Kangaroo Valley of a later era, the largest was that clustered around the officers of the *British-Australasian* weekly paper. Founded in 1884 to supply news to investors, expatriates and intending emigrants, it lasted under various names almost to the end of our period. In its heyday, under the editorship (1908–42) of Charles Chomley, it was conveniently located near or inside Australia House, and its contributors included Will Dyson, Vance Palmer, Katharine Prichard, Helen Simpson and Martin Boyd. They earned Baynton's wonderfully cutting label of 'Dingo Dell' – meaning those who played out the role of the 'professional Australian' overseas. (Editorially, despite its readership and location, the *British-Australian* took a caustic view of those seeking fame overseas: 'recognition in Europe is very hardly won, and . . . the vast majority who come to try for it only remain to lament their folly', is one of many warnings it issued.)[80] Early in the century there was another Dingo Dell of journalists gathered around the *Pall Mall Gazette*, headed by Arthur Patchett Martin, who had found it convenient to leave after a divorce scandal. A third Dingo Dell, which soon fell apart, was made up of the Lindsay brothers, Jack and Philip, 'Inky' Stephensen (who stayed for eight years, 1924–32), Brian Penton and John Kirtley, associated with the *London Aphrodite* magazine (1928–9) ('We affirm Life . . . We affirm Beauty' it asserted in its first issue) and the short-lived Fanfrolico Press, which published fine editions of the more scabrous works of classical authors.

Weaning Australia from the teats of London

> In denying that England is, in contemporary reality, 'home' to the Australian-born . . . I am seeking a basis for indigenous culture in Australia, for a state of mind from which Australian culture can emerge . . . we must find our own culture and define it; we cannot suck pap forever from the teats of London.[81]

In 1948 Patrick White, at the age of 36, chose to stop sucking from the teats of London. He felt, he said much later, an increasing desire 'to nuzzle once more at the benevolent teats of the mother country', and in this case 'mother' did not mean England. So, after many years of living as a typical pomio, White repatriated himself

79 By Sylvia Lawson in her biography of the *Bulletin* editor Jules Archibald: *The Archibald Paradox: A Strange Case of Authorship*, Allen Lane, 1983, p. ix.

80 *British-Australasian*, 11 Jan. 1900, p. 72.

81 Stephensen, *Foundations of Culture in Australia*, pp. 31–2.

permanently. He told something about his motives in an influential essay he wrote a decade later, 'The Prodigal Son'. He did look forward to enjoying the fatted calf which welcomed the original prodigal son, for post-war austerity made him eager for good food. But he had no illusions about what awaited him. 'The Prodigal Son' is, at best, just two cheers for repatriation. White found, when he got back, just as expected:

> the Great Australian Emptiness, in which the mind is the least of possessions, in which the rich man is the important man, in which the schoolmaster and the journalist rule what intellectual roost there is, in which beautiful youths and girls stare at life through blind blue eyes . . . .

And so on. Yet despite the gloom, repatriation was the right move for White. Just as a friend had told him, new colours came flooding back on to his palette of effects; and the new struggle he had set himself, 'to create completely fresh forms out of the rocks and sticks of words'[82] led directly to *The Tree of Man* and *Voss*.

When 'The Prodigal Son' appeared in 1958, it seemed a straw in the wind. Was expatriation slowing, and repatriation about to become fashionable? Not at all. Actually, the flow of literary émigrés heading in the opposite direction to White did not slow after 1950; indeed, as the restrictions imposed by World War II gradually vanished, it increased, reaching a peak perhaps 15 years later. As far as one can judge, the motives for going did not alter much either. But what did *start* to change, around 1950, was the nature of the literary relationship with England.

After the war, it was increasingly the United States that seemed to offer writers the most congeniality, the most relevant models, and the best opportunities and rewards if they lived or published there. Then again, the uplifting idea of being a citizen of a global empire, rather than merely an honorary Briton, weakened steadily, especially after the Suez fiasco in 1956. The tyranny of distance eased, air travel flourished, and a 'home visit' was no longer a long-term proposition. Some of the emotional heat started to go out of the idea of the rush to London. Another essay of 1958, 'The Last Expatriate', by Alister Kershaw (which had, in fact, been the irritant which produced White's own essay) argued that the idea of expatriation itself was dying: thus his title. He mocked those who, so he said, thought 'their paint will flake and their lines no longer scan if ever they cross a frontier'.[83] His article was nothing more than a squib, but taken together with White's explanation about why he had repatriated himself, it brings some sort of symbolic closure to the concerns delineated in this chapter. With the globalisation of the book trade, and to a large extent of literature itself, the very concept of being, distinguishably, an 'expatriate', even an 'expatriate writer', began to dissolve. Robert

82 Patrick White, 'The Prodigal Son' in Imre Salusinszky (ed.), *The Oxford Book of Australian Essays*, OUP, 1997, pp. 125–8. The 'nuzzling' phrase was Alister Kershaw's (see below) but White picked it up as defining his own feelings in 1948. Neither man refers to Stephensen's earlier use of the metaphor.

83 Alister Kershaw, 'The Last Expatriate' in ibid., p. 146. Kershaw, resident in France, was a journalist and author of a *History of the Guillotine*.

Hughes once said, optimistically, that in the evolving global village there is no centre and no periphery and therefore the old cultural relationship between metropolis and colony is becoming meaningless. Whether this has become true for Australia over the last 50 years is beyond our present scope, but it is fair to say that knowing exactly how much time Hughes spends in Melbourne or New York is of no interest to anyone except the author himself.

Finally, it is hard to draw definite conclusions about how Australian literature has been shaped by expatriation, or more generally, by the colony–metropole relationship. Of course, it is tempting to speculate what the cost has been, not only in terms of the books that never got written, but also in terms of the benefits forthcoming if they had inserted themselves vigorously in the cultural life of their day. It is natural to suppose that the loss to Australian cultural and intellectual life over three generations, though it has never been properly quantified, and perhaps cannot be, must have been profound. Taking the gloomiest view, one might say that the country suffered from the inverse of Darwinian natural selection: the fittest exported themselves, opening a niche in which the smug, the mediocre, and the dullards prospered.

But such speculations are idle. For one thing, some of the books *did* get written. It is hard to believe that the Mahony trilogy would have been much different if H. H. Richardson, who lived as a near-recluse anyway, had written in the suburban solitude of Melbourne rather than her luxurious house with its soundproof study near Regent's Park. She moved in no English literary circle and her English settings are always described through an outsider's eye. When she sends Richard Mahony doctoring to Leicester, for instance, it is painfully obvious that she either had never been there or else found it entirely uninteresting. For her it is just a conveniently generic industrial town. No residence was needed to write those scenes; a visit to the library would have sufficed. Equally, would it have made much difference if Martin Boyd had spent 30 years of his productive life in Victoria, rather than a mere four? His 'Australian' novels operate in a self-assured, elite anglophile social stratum where British and Australian *mores* are virtually indistinguishable anyway. In the world of *Lucinda Brayford* (1946), for instance, the young sisters 'come out' at Government House, Melbourne and later, across the world, they are presented at court by the high commissioner. The two ceremonies – and the cultures which have produced them – seem indivisible, and it is no part of the novel's objective to contrast them. Twice Boyd made fictions out of Barbara Baynton's colourful life-story (in *Brangane: A Memoir*, 1926, and *Such Pleasure*, 1949), with the heroine each time an adventuress and social climber; and each time for some reason (possibly connected with the libel laws) he stripped out all the fascinating Australian detail, turning them instead into Jamesian, mannered social comedies. Boyd himself quite deliberately, in the second and more considered version of his autobiography, refused to concede that expatriation had had any influence on him one way or the other. He claimed, revealingly, that 'My inner division, if I have one, is the age-long one of the European, between the Mediterranean and the north.' We note Boyd's

geographical orientation: that particular division, it implies, is not one that can trouble an antipodean.[84]

In other cases, the flight to England seems to have been utterly inevitable. Quite a number of the most anglophile expatriates seemed to regard themselves as Britons who by some inscrutable accident had been geographically displaced at birth: a cosmic error that they hastened to rectify as soon as they could. While one cannot know what they might ultimately have made of themselves at home, the parabolas of their actual careers show that they could not possibly have developed as they were able to do in England. Australia was never going to contain a man like the adventurer Alfred 'Smiler' Hales, who left permanently in 1899 and went on to travel the world. Once settled in England he wrote about 50 books, including the rumbustious *McGlusky* tales which alone are said to have sold two million copies. At a very different level, the same could be said of Walter (W. J. R.) Turner. Although he wrote passionately of his bush childhood in his memoir *Blow for Balloons*, Turner predictably absconded in his early 20s. He rose like a rocket in Bloomsbury circles by sheer industry and force of personality. In 1923 he was sketched by the fashionable William Rothenstein, as a man to watch; Aldous Huxley supplied a pen-portrait to go with the sketch, and then mildly satirised Turner in his equally fashionable *roman à clef*, *Antic Hay*.[85] Learned, full of sophisticated and unsettling opinions, and the lover of several clever women, Turner became a prolific Georgian poet, a biographer, one of the great arbiters of musical taste between the wars (he was a provocative music critic for the *New Statesman* for many years), and a man about town: just the kind of glamorous career that was totally impossible in Australia.

More orthodox literary scholars took easily to transplantation. Joseph Jacobs, who left as a young man in 1873 to start his formidable career as an anthropologist and linguist, and who later gained an international reputation as the foremost historian of Judaism, could have had no future in those roles had he stayed. It is equally inconceivable that Gilbert Murray, though he was the son of a NSW politician, could ever have become the profound classical scholar, Regius Professor of Greek, and tireless promoter of the League of Nations, at home. His single return visit in 1892, aged 26, did not detain him long.[86] Similarly, his colleague and protégé at Cambridge, Florence Melian Stawell, another brilliant classical and literary scholar, left in 1889 aged 20, and probably never gave a thought to returning, despite being the daughter of the chief justice of Victoria. No doubt the degree to which such people continued to regard themselves as being in any sense Australian at all, differed somewhat. But mostly they were simply absorbed into English intellectual or scholarly life without tension or regret or a single backward glance. In short, that malaise which is supposed to trouble the

84 Boyd, *Day of My Delight*, p. 239.

85 Casimir Lypiatt's absurd 'Mexican' poem is a mischievous version of Turner's best-known poem, 'Romance'. In *Point Counter Point* (1928) Huxley gives recognisable portraits of Stephensen (as a drunken boor) and Jack Lindsay.

86 It rates only a single line in his entry in the new *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*.

exile – alienation, estrangement, deracination – meant little to many, perhaps most, Australians' experience of Britain, providing they were moderately successful in their chosen field.

Perhaps that too is not as surprising as it may seem at first sight. After all, expatriation within and between the countries of the English-speaking world was and is commonplace. Writers have always been mobile – it is one of the few perks of their trade. Miles Franklin's biographer finds it odd that she wrote her novels of pioneer Australia over a 10-year period at a desk in the British Museum library.[87] But Joyce wrote the greatest of Irish novels while in Europe and never returned home; and D. H. Lawrence, English to the core, did some of his best work in Italy, France and New Mexico, and died abroad. R. L. Stevenson stayed a Scot though he worked in the South Seas for six years, and died there. Expatriation, most obviously of authors and painters to America and southern Europe, has a long history in Britain, especially in the 20th century. (Expatriation *into* England from places other than Australia has been hugely significant too: Conrad, Pound, Eliot, James, Nabokov, Naipaul and a host of others.) In the broad perspective, it is no odder that Franklin gave her *alter ego*, Brent of Bin Bin, the 'address' of seat S.9 in the library's reading room than that the notation 'Trieste–Zurich–Paris' should appear at the end of *Ulysses*.

87 Drusilla Modjeska, *Exiles at Home: Australian Women Writers, 1925–1945*, A&R, 1981, p. 156.

13

Australian children's literature

CLARE BRADFORD

I frame this account of the history of Australian children's literature between two texts: the first Australian-published book for children, *A Mother's Offering to Her Children* (1841), and Shaun Tan's *The Arrival* (2006). *A Mother's Offering* was directed to British-born and first-generation children of British settlers, introducing them to the dangers and wonders of Australia; *The Arrival* follows the journey of a migrant, who leaves his wife and daughter in their impoverished town to seek a better life for his family. It would be an oversimplification to say that *A Mother's Offering* is didactic while *The Arrival* is not, since writing for children is always informed by socialising agendas, overt and covert. Although the texts differ sharply in their mode of address and the subject positions they offer readers, they are alike in their preoccupation with how newcomers to a strange land make sense of the multiple forms of strangeness they encounter. *A Mother's Offering* interprets Australia to child readers, offering explanations for its geographical and botanical features and the lives and culture of Aboriginal people, or 'natives'. *The Arrival* works as a meditation on diasporic and refugee experience, and the processes whereby a stranger becomes a citizen. For my purposes, the two texts function as bookends, drawing attention to the vast shifts of sentiment and representation which characterise Australian children's literature between 1841 and 2006.

A Mother's Offering is unambiguously a children's book. The text is framed as a series of conversations between a mother, Mrs Saville, and her four children, three girls and a boy, so that children outside the book can align themselves with the children within, who listen to stories told by an authoritative, knowledgeable female narrator. The audience of *The Arrival* is not so readily defined, since this text crosses notional boundaries between child and adult readers, and has been especially popular among readers of graphic novels and science fiction. Its subject-matter, which incorporates stories by and about characters who have endured pogroms and wars, implies older children and young adults, the audiences of Shaun Tan's previous picture books including *The Rabbits* (1998) and *The Lost Thing* (2000). Many picture books, even those directed at young children, involve what Barbara Wall describes as 'dual address', engaging children in narrative at the same time that they offer adults the pleasure of recognising allusions and meanings

which will often be unavailable to children.[1] The most illustrious Australian example is Tohby Riddle's *The Great Escape from City Zoo* (1997), which deftly incorporates visual references to Edward Hopper, Rene Magritte and the Beatles into its story about the escape of four animals – an elephant, a flamingo, a turtle, an anteater – from the confines of a zoo, their adventures and eventual recapture (with the exception of the flamingo).

In terms of the readership it addresses, Tan's *The Arrival* differs from *The Great Escape from City Zoo* in that its framing narrative implies readers with some knowledge of 20th-century histories of forced migration and displacement, whereas *The Great Escape* is readily accessible to young children as a story following a schema common in children's literature: when characters leave their home (or place of imprisonment) to embark on adventures, returning at the end of the narrative.[2] Contemporary Australian picture books traverse readerships from babies to young adults as well as the adults (parents, teachers) who mediate texts to children. In another respect too, it is not easy to determine when books are 'for children'. It has always been the case that young readers have appropriated texts intended for a general audience; examples include Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*, Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* and George Orwell's *Animal Farm*. During the last decade the reverse trend has been evident, with many books for children and young adults simultaneously marketed to adults. I focus in this chapter on books directed at young people, while recognising that readerships of such books are often broader than their primary audience.

Australian publishing for children: Antecedents and development

Australian publishing for children developed from British publishing practices and literary models. In the 1740s the British publisher John Newbery recognised the potential for children's books to attract a middle-class market of parents intent on providing their offspring with reading material that would teach them useful social accomplishments as well as moral and religious values. By the time *A Mother's Offering* was published in Sydney in 1841, then, the British children's book industry was already a century old, producing popular material in the form of chapbooks and periodicals, religious fiction published by organisations like the Religious Tract Society, poetry, and illustrated books. In the United States, too, the Puritans had published instructional material for children from the 1680s to supplement the books they imported from Britain, and following the War of 1812 American publishers, responding to the nationalism of the times, increasingly produced books set in the United States and featuring American children as protagonists.

1 Barbara Wall, *The Narrator's Voice: The Dilemma of Children's Fiction*, St Martin's Press, 1991, pp. 35–6.
2 See Cheryl McMillan, 'Metafiction and Humour in *The Great Escape from City Zoo*', *Papers: Explorations into Children's Literature,* 10.2 (2000), pp. 5–11.

The emergence of children's literature in Australia has a good deal in common with the trajectory of Canadian and New Zealand children's literature, where similarly a reliance on British books and literary precedents continued well into the 20th century, tracking the cultural shifts whereby former colonies established themselves as independent nations. Roderick McGillis notes that a distinctively Canadian literature for children began to emerge in the 1970s; before this time, he says, 'much of Canada's literature reflected either the nation's colonial past or the influence of the United States'.[3] In New Zealand, too, according to Betty Gilderdale, the 1970s saw 'a spectacular transformation in both the quantity and quality of New Zealand children's literature'[4] as authors such as Margaret Mahy, Maurice Gee and Tessa Duder gained popularity. Similarly the children's book industry in Australia enjoyed rapid growth in the 1960s, with a phase of energetic development in the 1980s.[5] Contemporary texts for children in these three nations are informed by the particular and local assumptions of the societies in which they are produced; at the same time, the publishing industry exists at the nexus of globalising influences, and multinational publishing conglomerates control a large proportion of literary production for children.

The extent to which 19th-century and early-20th-century children's books can be seen to be 'Australian' relates more to their authorship and content than to their place of publication, since books by Australian and British authors continued to be published in Britain until well into the 20th century. Brenda Niall notes in *Australia through the Looking-Glass* that 'for the greater part of the 19th century the literary perspective from which Australian scenes were created was predominantly that of the outsider',[6] as representations of Australia were generally filtered through a British perspective; and texts were addressed more to the primary audience of British children than to the smaller audience of Australian children. Indeed, many British authors, including W. H. G. Kingston, Frank Sargent and Anne Bowman, produced settler and adventure novels set in Australia without any first-hand experience of the country, relying on travellers' tales and documentary writing for local colour and basing their characters and narratives on British models. Between 1865 and 1884, for instance, Kingston produced seven novels featuring settler families and their adventures in Australia, in which characters typically learn to live off the land and engage in a series of adventures involving bushfires, floods, snakes, encounters with wild Aborigines, bushrangers and mutinous stockmen, and with formulaic closures in which characters are ensconced in homes which reproduce Britain in Australia. In *The Gilpins and their Fortunes* (1865),

3 Roderick McGillis, 'Canada', in P. Hunt (ed.), *Children's Literature: An Illustrated History*, OUP, p. 334.

4 Betty Gilderdale, 'Children's Literature', in T. Sturm (ed.), *The Oxford History of New Zealand Literature in English*, 2nd edn, OUP, 1998, p. 546.

5 See Robyn Sheahan-Bright, 'To Market, To Market: The Development of the Australian Children's Publishing Industry', PhD Thesis, Griffith University, 2004, copy in Australian Digital Theses database, <http://www4.gu.edu.au:8080/adt-root/public/adt QGU20060127.123757> (accessed 7 Apr., 2008), pp. 191–217.

6 Brenda Niall, *Australia Through the Looking-Glass: Children's Fiction, 1830–1980*, MUP, 1984, p. 1.

the narrator addresses British children as potential emigrants, disclosing the agenda of this and other Kingston novels: 'No more need be said than this – that an honest hard-working man who goes to Australia with a family, though he may meet with many ups and downs, may be pretty sure of doing well himself, and of settling his children comfortably around him.'[7]

A Mother's Offering is addressed squarely to Australian children; but the perspective filtered through Mrs Saville's descriptions of Australian geography, flora and fauna is that of a cultured British migrant viewing the new land through British eyes. Charlotte Barton, the 'lady long resident in New South Wales' who wrote *A Mother's Offering*, asserts in the preface that the book's main virtue is 'the *truth* of the subjects narrated'.[8] In this respect Barton's text can be seen as a descendant of influential British works such as *Lessons for Children*, by Anna Letitia Barbauld, published in 1778 and 1779, and Ellenor Fenn's *Cobwebs to Catch Flies* (1783), both of which incorporated information and moral precepts into conversations between mothers and children. The children addressed by Mrs Saville in *A Mother's Offering* are older than those of *Lessons for Children* and *Cobwebs to Catch Flies*, but they are similarly represented as docile subjects and assiduous students. Through their questions and responses they model the values and attitudes of middle-class children of their period.

A Mother's Offering departs from its British antecedents in its emphasis on the exotic and the adventurous: stories of exploration, shipwreck and kidnapping; and accounts of Indigenous cultures and people. As the following excerpt demonstrates, the Saville children are depicted as young explorers and botanists:

> CLARA – The country is very magnificent all about those Mountain Ranges. I dare say there are many wonderful things yet undiscovered. I should like to spend many weeks exploring in the neighbourhood.
>
> JULIUS – So should I; I would take my spears and try to spear some of those beautiful birds for Mama to have stuffed.[9]

The children's reactions and their interests here and elsewhere in *A Mother's Offering* are heavily gendered. Clara's description evokes the picturesque tradition in its emphasis on the grandeur of the scenery and the wonder and awe it arouses; Julius', in contrast, is related to traditions of adventure writing involving energetic action and the manly pursuit of hunting. The metanarrative informing this description – and the entire book – involves an empty land waiting to be discovered by the children and (by implication) readers of the book.

A large proportion of *A Mother's Offering* is devoted to stories of shipwreck. The stories of William D'Oyley, the son of passengers on the *Charles Eaton*, and of John Ireland, an apprentice on the same ship, are captivity narratives, tracing the boys' experience

7 W. H. G. Kingston, *The Gilpins and their Fortunes*, SPCK, p. 64.

8 *A Mother's Offering to Her Children by A Lady Long Resident in New South Wales* [1841], Jacaranda, facs. edn, 1979, Preface.

9 Ibid., p. 9.

when they are 'kidnapped' by Aborigines from Murray Island. Like other colonial captivity narratives, Mrs Saville's account of the wrecking of the *Charles Eaton* and the death of passengers and crew at the hands of Torres Strait Islanders[10] demonstrates the superiority of whiteness through contrasts between civilisation and savagery. Unlike captivity narratives directed at adult audiences, such as the Eliza Fraser stories, which are imbued with prurient pleasure evoked by images of a white woman forced into sexual relations with black men, the stories of kidnapped children in *A Mother's Offering* focus on their suffering and helplessness, and on their longing for home and family. Kay Schaffer notes that colonial accounts of the shipwreck of the *Stirling Castle* depict Indigenous women as particularly cruel to captives, and as embodying a lower form of humanity than Indigenous men.[11] In contrast, *A Mother's Offering*, directed to a young audience of boys and girls (mirroring the Saville children), is concerned with positioning boy readers as future protectors of women, and girl readers as future mothers. This makes for a complex and fraught treatment of Indigenous women: kind and loving like Duppah, the Murray Island woman who takes care of William D'Oyley and John Ireland; or unmotherly and promiscuous like Nanny, described in the chapter 'Anecdotes of the Aborigines of New South Wales', whose story comprises a veiled warning against miscegenation.[12]

A Mother's Offering can be seen as a precursor to the settler narratives and adventure stories (mainly produced in Britain) of the second half of the 19th century. Its descriptions of Australian landscapes position young readers to regard settlers as explorers of country which is unseen until they view it, unknown until they discover it; and the differences embodied in geographical features, flora and fauna are defined in relation to normative European settings. Mrs Saville's preoccupation with botanical names and with close descriptions of exotica such as palm trees anticipates the fiction of other women writers such as Louisa Anne Meredith, whose 'anecdotes of birds and animals' in *Tasmanian Friends and Foes, Feathered, Furred and Finned* (1880) are said to be 'facts, set down simply from our own experience';[13] quasi-scientific information provided in an authoritative tone. The narratives of exploration incorporated into *A Mother's Offering*, as well as its descriptions of geographical and natural phenomena, demonstrate to young readers that the new land and its features are there to be discovered and owned, through physical journeys and the application of European systems of knowledge to the land, its animals and vegetation.

10 See McRose Elu, on incidents of shipwreck in Torres Strait history. Elu points out that 'shipwrecked people . . . in Torres Strait and the neighbouring Papuan coast were often secretly killed in order to "send them back to their origin" ': 'Cooking, Walking, and Talking Cosmology: An Islander Woman's Perspective of Religion', in R. Davis (ed.), *Woven Histories, Dancing Lives: Torres Strait Islander Identity, Culture and History*, Aboriginal Studies Press, p. 145.

11 Kay Schaffer, *In the Wake of First Contact: The Eliza Fraser Stories*, CUP, 1995, pp. 98–9.

12 See Clare Bradford, *Reading Race: Aboriginality in Australian Children's Literature*, MUP, 2001, pp. 83–5.

13 Louisa Anne Meredith, *Tasmanian Friends and Foes Feathered, Furred and Finned: A Family Chronicle of Country Life, Natural History, and Veritable Adventures*, J. Walch, 1880, p. 3.

The descriptions of Indigenous people woven throughout *A Mother's Offering* also anticipate the typologies of Indigeneity which inform settler and adventure novels for young people, and which persist well into the 20th century. Indigenous people feature as barbaric figures intent on murdering travellers; as comic relief (especially in descriptions of Aboriginal people wearing European clothes); as 'good' natives, like Duppah, who wish only to minister to Europeans; and, like Sally, a 'half-caste, or brown child',[14] as tragic figures torn between cultures because of their mixed racial heritage. All these modes of representation are informed by the conviction that 'they' are a lower order of humans, having little in common with the delicately reared Saville children and the implied readers of *A Mother's Offering*. At the very beginning of Australian writing for children, then, the presence of Indigenous people and the violence of colonialism trouble a narrative which positions readers as young colonials. This dilemma – how to represent Australia to young people while addressing the unresolved consequences of the nation's colonial foundation – stalks Australian children's literature to the present.

As writers living or spending extended periods in Australia began to produce fiction for young people, narratives shifted from stories of British emigrant families and individuals re-creating Britain in Australia, to accounts of young characters, the new 'natives' of the country, forging Australian identities. Toward the end of the 19th century British publishers began to employ agents in Australia to commission works for publication, and as the Australian audience increased in number and purchasing capacity, books for children began to reflect an Australian nationalism centred on the bush and young protagonists who identified as Australians. Many of Robert Richardson's short stories and novels, for instance, feature young protagonists who are 'strong and hardy, as a settler's children should be',[15] and whose characters are tested by adventures in rural settings.

Although myths of Australian nationhood at the end of the 19th century centred on the bush, the book which most forcefully promoted itself as Australian, Ethel Turner's *Seven Little Australians* (1894), locates its story of family life in a suburban setting: Misrule, a house 'some distance up the Parramatta River'. Turner's description of Misrule is, however, strikingly bush-like: 'there was a big wilderness of a garden, two or three paddocks, numberless sheds for hide-and-seek, and, best of all, the water';[16] the children – except for the eldest son Pip, who goes to the grammar school – are taught by a governess; and a crucial episode, the death of Judy, occurs in the bush, when the children and their stepmother Esther are holidaying at Yarrahappini, the cattle station owned by Esther's parents.

Seven Little Australians was published in London, winning praise from Mark Twain and George Meredith.[17] In Australia it was immediately popular and is the only 19th-century Australian text still read by children, having attracted a new readership following

14 *A Mother's Offering*, p. 199.
15 Robert Richardson, *A Little Australian Girl; and Other Stories*, Oliphant, Anderson & Ferrier, 1881, p. 8.
16 Ethel Turner, *Seven Little Australians*, Ward Lock, p. 13.
17 Brenda Niall, *Seven Little Billabongs: The World of Ethel Turner and Mary Grant Bruce*, Penguin, 1982, pp. 7–33.

a 1973 television series based on the novel. Turner begins by appealing to an Australian nationalism which seeks to differentiate Australia from Britain:

> Not one of the seven is really good, for the very excellent reason that Australian children never are. In England, and America, and Africa, and Asia, the little folks may be paragons of virtue . . . In Australia a model child is – I say it not without thankfulness – an unknown quantity.
>
> It may be the miasmas of naughtiness develop best in the sunny brilliancy of our atmosphere. It may be that the land and people are young-hearted together, and the children's spirits not crushed and saddened by the shadow of long years' sorrowful history.[18]

The novel is built around the escapades of the Woolcot children, the offspring of a career soldier who has remarried following the death of his first wife. Thirteen-year-old Judy, the instigator of much of the children's mischief, is in the mould of other wilful, rebellious girls in fiction: Jo March in *Little Women*, Anne Shirley in *Anne of Green Gables*. Indeed, Brenda Niall remarks that 'to call Ethel Turner "Miss Alcott's true successor" or "the Australian Louisa Alcott" became a reviewers' platitude and useful phrase for advertisements of her work'.[19] Nevertheless, Turner's narrative follows a far more melodramatic direction than either *Little Women* or *Anne of Green Gables*, in which wild girls are tamed by domesticity and romance. Judy runs away from the boarding school where her father has sent her because he regards her as uncontrollable; she embarks on a week-long walk to Misrule, and develops pneumonia, to be discovered by her father in the shed where her siblings have been harbouring her. The children and Esther are sent for a holiday to Yarrahappini, where Judy dies, crushed under a falling gumtree as she rushes to save the General, her baby stepbrother.

The world of *Seven Little Australians* is that of the Anglo-Celtic, middle-class children implied as its audience. But the citizens of Yarrahappini include a 'bent old black fellow',[20] Tettawonga, who had 'earned' a permanent home 20 years earlier, when he saved the baby Esther and her mother from bushrangers. The cattle station can be read as a metonym for the nation, incorporating a tame Indigenous presence which bestows legitimacy upon the squattocracy represented by Esther's father. Soothing the General to sleep and making 'a billy of hot, strong tea'[21] for the children as they gather around the dying Judy, Tettawonga conforms to the colonial trope of the loyal black servant who demonstrates the benevolence of his masters.

Turner's depiction of Judy's death produces a striking combination of themes and images vital to notions of Australian nationhood and citizenship at the turn of the 20th century. The bush is both a homely space and a place of danger; it is also a settled site where Tettawonga's presence affirms white nationhood. As an unruly feminine subject, Judy is a danger to social order, and must either succumb to a life of domesticity and

18 Ibid., p. 7. 19 Ibid., p. 63. 20 Ibid., p. 146. 21 Ibid., p. 184.

motherhood, or experience rejection. Turner chooses the drastic option of killing Judy off, but her death is also a salvific act which confers life on a young child. In effect, her dying restores order; fittingly, her hilltop grave is surrounded by that most iconic – and orderly – of Australian domestic signifiers, a white paling fence.

The coming Australia and children's texts

Turner continued to write fiction for children and adults until 1928, but none of her subsequent novels was as popular as *Seven Little Australians.* From 1910, when Mary Grant Bruce published *A Little Bush Maid*, Bruce's fiction rivalled Turner's for its appeal to Australian readers, with 15 Billabong books published from *A Little Bush Maid* to the last of the series, *Billabong Riders* in 1942. The Billabong setting is a utopian imagining of the bush, set on a cattle station owned by David Linton, father of Norah, the eponymous bush maid. Much of the action of the Billabong books (apart from the three wartime novels, set in Britain) relies upon interactions between city visitors and Billabong's inhabitants. The city–bush binary runs along consistent lines: city-dwellers are impractical and vain, spoiled by lives of luxury, while the Lintons and their inner circle live simple, outdoor lives and possess a firm moral code. City visitors are almost without exception reformed by their exposure to the 'real Australia' of Billabong, returning to their city lives as improved characters.

Like Misrule, Billabong metonymically represents the nation as white and Anglo-Celtic, but the extensive population of servants and workers at Billabong is organised along lines of class, gender and race. The inner circle comprises David Linton, Norah and her brother Jim; then comes Wally Meadows, a schoolfriend of Jim's, who is adopted into the Linton family (and eventually marries Norah); and on the fringes, various visitors and long-term guests. A class divide separates Brownie, the cook-housekeeper, from the Lintons; and the head stockman Murty O'Toole, the token Irishman, occupies a place equivalent to Brownie in the outdoor world of the station. The next tier of workers comprises housemaids and station workers. At the bottom of the class hierarchy are two figures located at the margins by reason of class and race: Lee Wing, who is in charge of the vegetable garden, and Black Billy, Bruce's equivalent of Turner's Tettawonga. Bruce's depiction of Lee Wing and Black Billy over the 30 years of the Billabong books evinces a shift as the two transmute from stereotypes to trusted retainers; nevertheless, hierarchies of class and race remain intact, signalling to young readers the racial logic that distinguishes Indigenous and Chinese characters from the white inhabitants of Billabong.

The Billabong books proposed a version of Australian nationhood located in the bush and valorising the honesty, directness and work ethic of an idealised settler family. Many of the fantasies that emerged during the first decades of the 20th century projected similar settler virtues onto anthropomorphised native animals: for instance, Ethel Pedley's *Dot and the Kangaroo* (1899), May Gibbs' *Snugglepot and Cuddlepie* (1918), and Dorothy

Wall's *Blinky Bill* (1933). Norman Lindsay's *The Magic Pudding* (1918), which involves a combination of human and anthropomorphised characters, has often been read as a parable about the formation of nationhood, with the pudding representing the coming Australia of the post-war era.[22] The determinedly and self-consciously local emphasis of these books affords a sharp contrast with the work of Ida Rentoul Outhwaite, whose *Elves and Fairies* (1916) and *The Enchanted Forest* (1921) transposed elves and fairies to 'Australian' settings heavily reliant on European fantasy traditions.

Boarding school novels were a prominent component of children's publishing in Britain from Thomas Hughes' *Tom Brown's Schooldays* (1857) to Enid Blyton's Malory Towers series in the 1940s and to J. K. Rowling's Harry Potter novels. Australian school stories have more commonly located their settings in day schools, so that their action is structured by the interplay between home and school rather than by the rivalries and friendships common in novels set in the enclosed world of the boarding school. One of the earliest Australian school stories for girls was Louise Mack's *Teens* (1897), Angus & Robertson's first foray into juvenile literature. The novel's protagonist, Lennie Leighton, is the eldest of four sisters, eager recipients of Lennie's accounts of school life. In its close attention to the Sydney setting, and its comparisons between Lennie's orderly home and the haphazard household of her friend Mabel, the novel is interested as much in social practices as in the world of school. Indeed, its principal focus, in the words of Lennie's mother, is 'what a beautiful thing was the love of these little schoolgirls for each other'.[23]

My focus so far has been on juvenile books produced by mainstream publishers in Britain and Australia. However, for many Australian children from the 1890s to the 1950s the principal reading material was school readers produced by state Education Departments: the *Victorian Readers*, the *Queensland Readers*, the *Adelaide Readers*, the *Tasmanian Readers*. Charles Long, author of the preface to the Eighth Book of the *Victorian Readers*, articulates its objectives: 'The young readers were to begin at home, to be taken in imagination to various parts of the empire, to Europe, and to the United States of America, and thus to gain knowledge of their rich heritage and acquire a well-founded pride of race.'[24]

The readers comprised poetry, non-fiction and fiction drawn principally from British canonical sources. Notions of 'literary merit' and of 'sound morality'[25] governed the selection of texts, with a strong emphasis on canonical works and – in the case of Australian material – writing that celebrated the achievements of explorers and settlers. The Eighth Book of the *Victorian Readers*, for instance, comprises 85 separate pieces,

22 See Christopher Kelen, '*The Magic Pudding:* A Mirror of Our Fondest Wishes', *Journal of the Association for the Study of Australian Literature*, 6 (2007), pp. 65–78.

23 Louise Mack, *Teens: A Story of Australian Schoolgirls*, A&R, 1897, p. 260.

24 *The Victorian Readers: Eighth Book*, 2nd edn, Government Printer, Melbourne, 1940, p. v.

25 Ibid.

over half of them by British authors. Of the 29 Australian authors represented, only one (Amy Mack) is a woman, with the Australian texts dividing between descriptions of the land, accounts of life in the outback, and stories of heroism and adventure. Even for the time of their publication in the late 1920s the *Victorian Readers* comprised a conservative array of texts that foregrounded Britishness and promoted mythologies of Australian identity centred on rural life and settler achievement. The *Victorian Readers* were used in all Victorian state schools until the 1950s; and they are strikingly similar in their composition and selection of texts to readers produced in other states. The influence of the school readers on young Australians can be explained by the pervasiveness of their use, and by the fact that most children had few other sources of reading material until school and public library services developed during the 1950s and 60s.

The post-war baby boom in 1950s Australia coincided with a tendency across Western nations to redefine concepts of childhood and youth. The invention of the teenager in the 1950s; the influence of Benjamin Spock's *Baby and Child Care* (1946); the emergence of children and young people as consumers, among other factors, produced an emphasis on the needs and interests of children. Jan Kociumbas notes of the Australian context that 'well-to-do white children . . . became, in the 1950s and 1960s, the objects of intense pedagogical and commercial attention'.[26] In line with these developments, children's publishing became an object of adult concern, and increasing numbers of Australian publishers developed juvenile lists. The Children's Book Council of Australia (CBCA) was formed in 1958, growing out of the state-based Book Councils established in the 1940s. The CBCA awards have succeeded in drawing attention to children's books, within a celebratory and largely uncritical perspective; it has also privileged a body of prize-winning texts, so shaping perceptions of cultural capital.

The shifts toward increased attention to children's psychological development coincided in Australia with a conservative socio-political ethos, demonstrated by the banning of J. D. Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye* (1951) as an indecent publication by Australian Customs in 1956. Many mid-century Australian books promote the idea that an authentic Australian identity is to be found only in remote pastoral settings. In Nan Chauncy's series of novels featuring the Lorenny family, *Tiger in the Bush* (1957), *Devils' Hill* (1958) and *The Roaring 40* (1963), depictions of the family's life on their isolated Tasmanian farm are mapped onto settler culture mythologies. The identity-formation of Badge Lorenny, the boy protagonist in all three novels, is imbricated with his developing attachment to place – both the family farm and the wild country which surrounds it. Thus, in *Tiger in the Bush* Badge ensures the survival of a thylacine whose existence is a secret known only to the Lorennys and to Harry, an old recluse who lives in the bush. If Harry has 'gone native', refusing to engage with the outside world, Badge is also depicted as the 'natural' custodian and protector of the wild, exemplified by his act

26 Jan Kociumbas, *Australian Childhood: A History*, A&U, 1997, p. 209.

of tricking American visitors into taking a plaster cast of Harry's wombat instead of the thylacine for which they have been searching.

Referring to *Devils' Hill*, John Stephens notes that Chauncy's depiction of the Lorenny family is marked by a 'reflex misogyny' marked by 'the (male) presupposition that selfhood is predominantly defined by acts of courage'.[27]

In a muted, tentative way, Mavis Thorpe Clark's 1966 novel *The Min-Min* interrogates the masculinism which lies at the heart of conventional formulations of mateship and the bush. Sylvie Edwards is the eldest of five children whose father works as a fettler on a railway siding on the Nullarbor Plain. The outback setting represents a world dominated by masculine preoccupations: Sylvie's father Joe neglects his family, spending his leisure time drinking with his co-workers, while Sylvie's dispirited mother, pregnant with her sixth child, dreams of returning to Sydney. When Sylvie's father beats her in drunken anger, and her brother Reg is threatened with a term in an institution because he vandalises the local school, Sylvie and Reg run away to the outstation of Gulla Tank, home of the Tucker family. The min-min which beckons Sylvie away from her dysfunctional family leads not into the desert but to Mary Tucker, who teaches Sylvie how to cook and sew, so inducting her into a feminine world of domestic activities.

Chris Tucker manages a vast sheep station, and the Tuckers are set against the Edwards family as a model of order and discipline. Nevertheless, the novel deals critically with the motivations and behaviour of Chris Tucker and the two acting magistrates who hear the police charges against Reg. Readers are positioned to admire the adroitness with which Mary Tucker undermines her husband's self-righteousness: for instance, she uses the handbrake to ensure that the family car is bogged, thus preventing Chris Tucker from returning Sylvie and Reg to their home. And the events of Reg's trial are described through a perspective that emphasises the limitations of the magistrate's knowledge.[28] Through such strategies the text unsettles a regime of power in which men are ostensibly in control, by pointing to the covert resistance of women and the anxieties which lie beneath the appearance of masculine authority.

The novel ends with the family relocated to Whyalla, where Joe Edwards finds work. Having given birth to a son, Sylvie's mother is staying with her parents, and Sylvie, armed with the skills she has learned from Mary Tucker, imposes an unaccustomed discipline on her brothers and sisters, ensuring that they perform household tasks irrespective of gender. She attends dressmaking classes at the technical school with a view to establishing her own business. *The Min-Min* is a transitional novel in that it promotes female agency in its depiction of Sylvie, while maintaining those gendered binaries that locate women in the home and men in the outside world of work.

27 John Stephens, 'Continuity, Fissure, or Dysfunction? From Settler Society to Multicultural Society in Australian Fiction', in R. McGillis (ed.), *Voices of the Other: Children's Literature and the Postcolonial Context*, Garland, 1999, p. 60.

28 For a discussion of representations of fathers in Australian fiction for children, see Beverley Pennell, '"You're a failure as a parent, Joe Edwards!" Reconfiguring the Male Parent in Australian Realist Fictions for Children 1966–1986', *Papers: Explorations into Children's Literature*, 9.1 (1999), pp. 31–40.

Chauncy's depiction of rural life looked to settler experience as a model of heroic enterprise, while Clark's treatment of the outback critiqued the gendered practices whereby girls and women are treated as marginal. Another representational strand is evident in 1960s novels which projected onto the natural environment a sense of unease about the shallowness of European knowledge and habitation, through narratives in which children struggled for survival in an indifferent or hostile landscape. In Ivan Southall's *Hills End* (1962) a cyclone almost destroys the town of Hills End, leaving seven children to fend for themselves; and in Southall's *Ash Road* (1965) and Colin Thiele's *February Dragon* (1965) young protagonists are caught up in bushfires. Scattered through these survival narratives are allusions to Indigenous knowledge, often set against characters' sense that their purchase on the land is tenuous. In Reginald Ottley's *By the Sandhills of Yamboorah* (1965), for instance, the unnamed boy protagonist, working as a station hand on a property at the edge of the desert, observes an Aboriginal man and reflects that 'He's part of it . . . an' though he's movin', you don't seem to notice.' He himself feels the desert to be a 'great, brown loneliness' which threatens to engulf him.[29]

Cultural diversity and children's literature

Hesba Brinsmead's *Pastures of the Blue Crane* (1964) was one of the first modern Australian texts to engage with race relations, with reference to the sorry history of the indentured labour of Pacific Islanders. The protagonist Ryl discovers after her father's death that he has bequeathed her and her grandfather, Rusty, a run-down house and banana plantation, and Ryl and Rusty – strangers prior to the reading of the will – set out for the country town where their property is located. In part the plot relies on the familiar scenario in which a city-dwelling protagonist is inducted into the 'real' Australia of the bush; in part on a storyline in which two characters (Ryl and Dusty) start out as antagonists and become friends; in part, on its treatment of race relations. Ryl's discovery that she is the daughter of a Kanak woman and that her brother is Perry, a dark-skinned boy whose appearance testifies to his mixed-race origins, is also a moment of revelation concerning inter-racial sexual relations in the past.

The novel does not canvass the race and gender politics of the relationship of Ryl's father and her Kanak mother. Rather, it calls on this relationship to interrogate racial stereotypes and hierarchies in the 1960s setting. Ryl comes to understand that her father's concealment of his marriage has its echoes in the book's present time, when Perry is treated slightingly by one of their friends. Ryl 'instinctively' sides with Perry even before she discovers that he is her brother, but her repugnance for Glen's prejudice is explained in terms of her consciousness of Perry's 'natural' superiority:

29 Reginald Ottley, *By the Sandhills of Yamboorah*, André Deutsch, 1965, pp. 164, 165.

> 'Perry,' she went on, 'I used to be a frightful snob . . . . I would have treated you – well – badly – when I first met you – if I hadn't quickly found out that you're – it's hard to say it – that you're a gentleman! . . . There were a few dark girls at school – girls from Malaya and India – and they were – well – ladies! . . . But why should Glen be horrid to you, when he knows perfectly well that you are *not* stupid, or in any way his inferior?'[30]

Readers are invited to acquiesce in the idea that racism is a function of class norms which define an individual's worth. Within this 'colour-blind' scheme, racialised hierarchies are folded into practices of social exclusion and inclusion.

When the Whitlam Government introduced policies of multiculturalism in 1973 to replace the assimilationist models that dominated political discourses until this time, Australian publishers were quick to produce texts thematising cultural diversity, immigration, community relations and notions of Australian citizenship. In most texts of the 1970s and 1980s, however, views of cultures other than Anglo-Celtic were filtered through the perspectives of Anglo-Celtic, middle-class characters, and multiculturalism was valued insofar as it was seen to contribute to the wellbeing (economic and psychological) of the dominant culture. John Stephens speculates that one explanation for this narrow and limited view of multiculturalism is that 'authors have on the whole not come from the 25 percent of Australians who are of non-British origins';[31] another is that themes of migration and cultural difference tended to be subsumed into a narrative pattern which dominates children's literature, that of personal growth and development.

By the mid-1990s, following the emergence of Pauline Hanson's far-right nationalism and the Howard Government's promotion of an essentialised Australian identity based on Britishness, texts for children and young adults increasingly subjected Australian versions of multiculturalism to a more critical scrutiny. In Allan Baillie's *Secrets of Walden Rising* (1996), the old gold town of Walden is buried under the waters of a reservoir. As the water-level drops during a long drought, Walden rises into visibility until, by the end of the novel, it is possible to walk its streets and explore its buildings.

As the old town is exposed, so its history is brought into the open. Brendan, the novel's focaliser, is an outsider, 'the Pom', and his investigations disclose stories which have been strategically forgotten. His classmate Tony Lee, descended from a Chinese goldminer, tells Brendan stories he learned from his grandfather, how his great-grandfather Lee Weyun and the other Chinese 'had to work on land that nobody wanted. They had to sleep on slopes that people could not walk on. When someone died they were not lowered into a hole, they were slid into the ground like a filing cabinet.'[32] Tony's family memories shape his sense of the precariousness of his alliance with the other boys in the town, who are always liable to turn on him with hostility, as their ancestors

30 Hesba Brinsmead, *Pastures of the Blue Crane*, OUP, 1964, p. 101.

31 John Stephens, 'Advocating Multiculturalism: Migrants in Australian Children's Literature after 1972', *Children's Literature Association Quarterly*, 15.4 (1990), p. 181.

32 Allan Baillie, *Secrets of Walden Rising*, Viking, p. 53.

turned on his great-grandfather and the other Chinese prospectors. The reappearance of Walden's streetscape instantiates old racial hierarchies in that it reveals the tiny shop that Lee Weyun established following the gold rush. Insignificant in comparison with the Empire Hotel, the church and the Emporium, it encodes relations of value still active in the contemporary setting.

Whereas Tony's family have hung on in the town – his father runs the Lee Family Store – no Indigenous presence survives. Brendan's classmate Elliot Cardiff insists: 'Boongs? They were never here.'[33] This vehemence is a marker of the importance he attaches to a fiction he has been told by his family – that the Cardiffs were the first to live on and own land in the region. A more sinister story then emerges, concerning Charley Cardiff, Elliott's ancestor, who provided rum to his farm-workers and sent them out to hunt the Aboriginal people who lived in the hills near the town, until all were dead or had fled.

The novel concludes with a kind of treasure-hunt as Brendan and Bago, the boy who has bullied him, search through the old town for a bushranger's hoard. The treasure turns out to be nothing more than old banknotes which crumble into dust, and a collection of items once prized but now worthless. In the end, what counts as treasure is the tentative friendship forged between Bago and Brendan, boys from different countries who have been brought together by the uncovering of memories. The novel does not, however, provide a consolatory ending. Rather, it positions its readers to engage with the ethical questions that were at the heart of the Australian history wars at the time the novel was published: what responsibility do citizens have toward the past? What constitutes justice for Indigenous people? How is it that anti-Asian sentiments are so close to the surface of national consciousness?

The responsiveness of children's authors to contemporary politics is evident in the many novels and picture books which took up issues relating to refugees and border control during John Howard's eleven years as prime minister. Some of these texts, like Morris Gleitzman's *Boy Overboard* (2002) and *Girl Underground* (2004), seek to engage readers by filtering narratives through the perspectives of young refugees. Others, including picture books such as Tan's *The Lost Thing* (2000) and Narelle Oliver's *Dancing the Boom Cha Cha Boogie* (2005), treat cultural difference and displacement by metaphor and allegory. In *The Lost Thing*, a young boy finds a 'lost thing' at the beach, a 'thing' which does not fit within his world, and which may be read as a refugee reaching an Australian shore. The beach is separated from houses by an enormous, solid wall. Among neat rows of sun-umbrellas, citizens stand apart from each other and look out to sea, so that the beach, far from a playground, is a dystopian space where fear erects barriers and where community connections have been destroyed.

The boy takes the lost thing home, where his parents' reactions are typical of anti-refugee rhetoric in Australia and elsewhere:

33 Ibid., p. 67.

> 'Its feet are filthy!' shrieked Mum.
> 'It could have all kinds of strange diseases,' warned Dad.
> 'Take it back to where you found it,' they demanded . . . [34]

The boy sees a notice in the paper, from the Federal Department of Odds and Ends, offering accommodation for 'troublesome artifacts of unknown origin', but just as he is about to sign a form consigning the lost thing to bureaucracy he hears the small voice of dissent:'If you really care about that thing, you shouldn't leave it here,' said a tiny voice. 'This is a place for forgetting, leaving behind, smoothing over. Here, take this.'[35] A hand gives the boy a business card carrying 'a kind of sign', and at length he finds 'the sort of place you'd never know existed unless you were actually looking for it', populated by hybridised creatures of many shapes and sizes, talking, making music, reading, gesturing. Here at last the lost thing is at home, its strangeness merely part of the general strangeness of the inhabitants of this utopian citizenry.

The 'lost thing' defines itself as alien to the ordered and bureaucratic setting in which it finds itself. Similarly, in *Dancing the Boom Cha Cha Boogie*, Oliver establishes a contrast between the Murmels, who 'did not have a worry in the world, except for the whirligigs', and the Snigs, who survive under a repressive and regimented regime. Three young Murmels are caught up in a whirligig and shipwrecked on the shore of the Grand Snigdom. Here they are at once consigned to a prison in a desert landscape. But a young snig befriends the murmels, who introduce her to new foods, teach her how to play hopsplotch and leap-murmel and show her how to dance 'the jitter-murmel and the boom-cha-cha boogie'.

When the Boss Snig threatens to banish the murmels, together with the young snig they dance the boom-cha-cha boogie and introduce him to the delights of eating waterwoppers: 'The murmels never left Grand Snigdom. And Grand Snigdom has never been quite the same.'[36]

The utopian closure of the narrative, in which the prison is transformed into a children's playground, promotes a vision of new world orders where spontaneity and play supplant a grim uniformity. Instead of focusing on how the young murmels are to accommodate to the demands of the host nation, Oliver treats cultural diversity as a force capable of radically altering political and social life.

Writing by and about Indigenous peoples

The colonial discourses which informed representations of Indigenous people and cultures in *A Mother's Offering* persisted into the 20th century. Jeannie Gunn's *The Little Black Princess* (1905) positions readers to align with a narrative perspective that reinforces distinctions between 'them' and 'us'. Gunn's stories about the relationship between the

34 Shaun Tan, *The Lost Thing*, Lothian Books, 2006. 35 Ibid.
36 Narelle Oliver, *Dancing the Boom Cha Cha Boogie*, Omnibus, 2005.

narrator, the 'little Missus' of Elsey Station, and the Aboriginal girl Bett-Bett are told in a conversational style that reduces the distance between narrator and implied readers, producing the impression of shared amusement at the quaint habits of Bett-Bett and the Aborigines at the station. On one hand Bett-Bett is a 'little pickle', a common turn-of-century figure exemplified by Judy in *Seven Little Australians*. On the other hand, she is powerless to evade a kind of psychic disorder that renders her incapable of becoming 'like us': at the end of the narrative she takes flight, caught between loyalty to 'the Missus' and her desire for 'her people, and their long walkabouts'.[37]

By the middle of the 20th century the 'dying race' trope was losing its potency in the face of Indigenous survival, and children's books turned to Aboriginalist modes of representation, exemplified by Rex Ingamells' *Aranda Boy* (1952). This text adheres to the agenda of the Jindyworobak movement (see Chapters 7, 10); it creates an adventure narrative involving an Aboriginal boy, Gurra, so offering readers an 'authentically' Australian story; as the jacket blurb has it, 'an exciting story for Australian children about the first Australians'. At the heart of Ingamells' narrative, however, is the principle of white superiority. At the end of the novel Gurra, alone of the men of his tribe, resists the call to fight the settlers who appropriate ancestral land. He seeks help from a virtuous white man whom he calls Dongberna (Don Byrne), who protects him and his clan, enabling them to maintain their traditional practices. Thus assimilated within benevolent white rule, Aboriginal survival is represented as contingent upon white power.

Patricia Wrightson's treatment of Indigenous traditions in her novels, from *An Older Kind of Magic* (1972) to the Wirrun trilogy (1977–81), exemplifies how Aboriginalism presents itself as benign and progressive. In her epilogue to *An Older Kind of Magic*, Wrightson refers to the futility of transposing European fantasy traditions to Australian settings, calling for 'another kind of magic, a kind that must have been shaped by the land itself at the edge of Australian vision.'[38] In an essay published in 1980, Wrightson tells how she searched through 'the works of anthropologists and early field workers and of laymen who had lived in sympathetic friendship with Aboriginal Australians'. Wrightson's description of her research is notable for its assumption that non-Aboriginal experts are the proper sources of information rather than Aboriginal people who, she says, 'told [their stories] haltingly in a foreign tongue or with skilled techniques that could not be conveyed in print'.[39] Her trilogy *The Song of Wirrun – The Ice Is Coming* (1977), *The Dark Bright Water* (1979), *Behind the Wind* (1981) – is Wrightson's most sustained attempt at creating a pan-Aboriginal mythology. The series follows the progress of a hero, Wirrun, who is charged with the task of restoring order to the land when it is threatened by hostile spirits. On the face of it, this representation might

37 Mrs Aeneas Gunn, *The Little Black Princess of the Never-Never*, A&R, 1962 [1905], pp. 105–6.
38 Patricia Wrightson, *An Older Kind of Magic*, Hutchinson, 1972, p. 150.
39 Patricia Wrightson, 'Ever Since my Accident: Aboriginal Folklore and Australian Fantasy', *Horn Book*, 56.6 (1980), p. 79.

seem to constitute a homage; but the fantasy genre within which Wrightson works is so shaped and informed by European traditions that the characters, motifs and spirit figures that it deploys are drawn inexorably into Western frames of reference.

By the 1990s, realistic texts were emerging which thematised relationships between contemporary Indigenous and non-Indigenous protagonists. Notable among them are James Moloney's series *Dougy* (1993), *Gracey* (1994) and *Angela* (1998); Phillip Gwynne's *Deadly Unna?* (1998) and *Nukkin Ya* (2000); Pat Lowe's *The Girl with No Name* (1994) and *Feeling the Heat* (2002); and Leonie Norrington's *The Last Muster* (2004). Most are located within the dominant culture and filtered through the perspectives of white narrators or focalising characters whose assumptions about race are tested by encounters with Indigenous people, including (in *Nukkin Ya* and *Feeling the Heat*) romantic and sexual relationships. *The Last Muster*, set on a remote cattle station taken over by a multinational corporation, departs from this pattern, shifting among various perspectives in a subtle account of the complexity of colonial relationships and their consequences in the contemporary setting.

The most significant development in representations of Indigeneity has been the emergence of Aboriginal authors, artists and publishers and the production of texts located within Indigenous cultures which write back to the clichés, stereotypes and sentimentalised versions of Aboriginality that have pervaded much non-Indigenous writing.[40] The first Indigenous text published for children was *The Legends of Moonie Jarl* (1964) by Wilf Reeves and Olga Miller, a work so strikingly different from mainstream picture books that it was received with incomprehension.[41] A decade later, Kath Walker published *Stradbroke Dreamtime* (1972) and Dick Roughsey *The Giant Devil-Dingo* (1973) and *The Rainbow Serpent* (1975). These texts, produced by mainstream publishers, were directed to the non-Indigenous readers who have always comprised the majority audience for Indigenous texts, and editorial processes rendered them sufficiently Western to engage this audience.[42]

The establishment of Indigenous publishing houses such as Magabala Books and IAD Press has enabled the production of texts that inscribe cultural difference more radically, partly because Indigenous publishers seek to produce texts that accord with Indigenous modes of address and narrative strategies. Daisy Utemorrah and Pat Torres' *Do Not Go Around the Edges* (1990), for instance, is a strikingly dialogic text: Utemorrah's autobiographical story is placed along the bottom of the pages, while her poems are placed in the body of each page, framed within Pat Torres' illustrations. The border that runs along the lower edge of each page features the three sacred beings known in Wunambal culture as Wandjinas, orienting the various narrative and thematic strands

40 See Bradford, *Reading Race*, pp. 159–90.

41 See Juliet O'Conor, 'The Legends of Moonie Jarl: Our First Indigenous Children's Book', *LaTrobe Journal*, 79, pp. 66–81.

42 See Jennifer Jones, 'Deemed Unsuitable for Children: The editing of Oodgeroo's *Stradbroke Dreamtime*', *Papers: Explorations into Children's Literature*, 16.2, pp. 156–61.

of the book in relation to the ancient stories of the Dreaming. Relationships between these strands are elusive, as most of the poems in the book connect only tangentially with Utemorrah's autobiographical story. Readers accustomed to the reading practices usual in Western picture books will search in vain for thematic and symbolic interactions between verbal and visual texts, and this very complexity disrupts any simplistic notion that *Do Not Go Around the Edges* can be read as a mixture or blending of elements from different cultures. Rather, its multiplicity of narratives and systems of meaning destabilises the domination of British culture and standard English.

A priority of Magabala and IAD Press, as in Indigenous publishing houses in New Zealand and Canada, has been the production of picture books, and it remains the case in all three literatures that there are relatively few Indigenous novels for young adults. Australian Indigenous novels for older readers and young adults include Melissa Lucashenko's *Killing Darcy* (1998) and Anita Heiss's *Who Am I? The Diary of Mary Talence* (2001). Meme McDonald and Boori Pryor have collaborated on several notable novels: *My Girragundji* (1998), *The Binna Binna Man* (1999) and *Njunjul the Sun* (2002). These texts proceed from the assumptions and worldviews of Indigenous protagonists and take for granted the role of spirit figures in the lives of contemporary Indigenous people. They are double-voiced, in that they imply two audiences: young people of the cultures in which they are produced; and non-Indigenous readers for whom they are both comprehensible and emblematic of alterity.

The past, again

Historical fiction, as Maurice Saxby observes, has 'been slow to emerge'[43] in Australian children's literature, unlike its pervasiveness in British and American writing for children. Over the last decade, however, fiction for children and young people has engaged with changes in the discipline of history and with Australian debates over what counts as history. Catherine Jinks' five Pagan novels, featuring the progress of a 12th-century boy from squire to archdeacon, conduct a self-conscious and parodic account of the 12th-century setting, interpolating modern preoccupations and values into the mediaeval world in a way that exposes epistemological and ideological differences between the mediaeval setting and the time of the novels' writing. In doing so, the Pagan novels undermine the idea that historical fiction can deliver the past, untrammelled by the values and views of the time of its production.

In David Metzenthen's *Boys of Blood and Bone* (2003) and Ursula Dubosarsky's *The Red Shoe* (2006), narratives of individual progress intersect with mythologies of nationhood. In *Boys of Blood and Bone*, a double-stranded narrative tells the stories of two young men, in alternating sections: a contemporary character, Henry Lyon, who is temporarily

43 Maurice Saxby, *The Proof of the Puddin': Australian Children's Literature, 1970–1990*, Ashton Scholastic, 1993, p. 473.

marooned in the rural town of Strattford when his car breaks down; and Andy Lansell, a young soldier from the same area, who fights and dies in the trenches in France. The novel's treatment of the personal trajectories of the two young men interrogates those Australian mythologies which fix upon the Great War as the birth of nationhood. Its descriptions of military action resist the hero narratives that inform hegemonic versions of masculinity, focusing instead on the psychological, emotional and bodily experiences of young men caught up in processes that they do not understand.

Through the novel's interweaving of lives and stories in the two time-schemes, it lays claim to continuities of individual and cultural identity across time. When Andy, enduring trench warfare, thinks of home, his memories linger on the materiality of his life on the land: the smell of hay, the sounds of the farm, the sensations of physical work. The novel's treatment of the contemporary setting of Strattford folds its culture and values into those of the earlier setting. The warmth and directness of its inhabitants mirror the same qualities in Andy's army companions from Strattford, just as the pleasure Henry takes in the details of country life echoes Andy's recollections of his home. These parallels enforce the sense that the country is the true Australia and its inhabitants proper Australians – as one character says of her impression of Andy from an old photograph, 'I thought he looked so *Australian*. With those clear eyes that could look forever.'[44] The romanticism and nostalgia of this version of Australia disguises the extent to which it is based on relations of inclusion and exclusion that centre on myths of nationhood.

Dubosarsky's *The Red Shoe* is set in 1954 in Sydney, as the Petrov affair reaches its climax. It examines the experiences of six-year-old Matilda, who lives with her family in a house full of secrets: her father, a merchant seaman, is deeply affected by his wartime experience; his brother, Uncle Paul, is in love with her mother; her elder sister Elizabeth has had a nervous breakdown; and the house next door is occupied by a mad old man who fascinates and terrifies Matilda. Interspersed through the narrative are excerpts from the *Sydney Morning Herald* for April 1954, including accounts of suicide, reports on incidences of polio and how to protect oneself from the H-bomb.

These intimations of danger are kept at bay by strategies of repression, which include Elizabeth's refusal to speak and Matilda's inability to recall an incident that takes place during a family picnic at The Basin, when her father attempts suicide. The family's fragile hold on stability is represented as homologous with the state of the nation, where intimations of disorder, illness and Cold War anxieties erupt through newspaper reports and overheard conversations, even as the appearance of normality is maintained: the Royal Show goes ahead; Matilda and her sisters see *Roman Holiday*; and Queen Elizabeth visits Australia. In line with most children's literature, *The Red Shoe* follows a humanistic direction in its preoccupation with the growth and development of an individual (Matilda) and her identity-formation. At the same time, its evocation of the

44 David Metzenthen, *Boys of Blood and Bone*, Penguin, 2003, p. 102.

1950s is powerfully informed by 21st-century concerns about globalisation and state intervention.

Tan's *The Arrival*, part picture book and part graphic novel, tracks the journey of a refugee who experiences the bureaucratic rituals of immigration procedures and the confusion of one seeking to make sense of unfamiliar language and practices. Tan's sepia drawings refer, among other intertexts, to early 20th-century photographs of immigrants processed at Ellis Island in New York. The refugee is befriended by other (former) refugees, and their stories of displacement and arrival are framed within the primary narrative. Like *A Mother's Offering*, *The Arrival* engages with the predicament of migrants whose old-world knowledge and experience are insufficient to understand the new world. In *A Mother's Offering* Mrs Saville mediates the narrative perspective, enabling the author to filter what readers should and should not know. In *The Arrival*, in contrast, readers are aligned with the refugee, through images presented through his eyes and in frames where viewers observe him as he observes. Both books describe strange creatures: in *A Mother's Offering*, animals and plants that have no equivalent in Europe; in *The Arrival*, hybrid creatures that act as pets or familiars. In *A Mother's Offering* the strangeness of Australian birds and fauna is a mark of exoticism, and the creatures themselves are either the objects of an admiring gaze, or potential trophies. In *The Arrival* the interplay between the protagonist and a particular creature (tadpole-shaped, the size of a small dog, with stumpy legs, a long tongue and curled tail) marks his progress from fear of the unknown to a wary engagement and finally the incorporation of the creature into the protagonist's family, when he is reunited with his wife and daughter.

Whereas *A Mother's Offering* represents 'Australia' in relation to a normative Britishness that naturalises a white, middle-class sensibility, *The Arrival* foregrounds diversity: its endpapers comprise rows of passport-style portraits, bearing the signs of handling and (in some cases) damage, and showing people whose features, skin colour and clothing refer to differences of race, culture, age and religion. *A Mother's Offering* positions its readers as citizens of a nation where non-Britishness is equated with inferiority and exclusion; *The Arrival*, in contrast, advocates openness to plurality: its final image shows the young daughter of the refugee (now citizen) giving directions to another arrival, so figuring the beginning of another narrative of arrival and inclusion.

In material terms, the two texts exemplify the growth of Australian children's literature. From Charlotte Barton's minor and local work, published by the Sydney *Gazette*, children's texts have become a crucial element of Australian literary production: in 2003, for instance, they comprised 16 per cent of all published books, generating $126.7 million.[45] An indication of the growth of 'quality' publishing for children is the increase

45 Australian Bureau of Statistics, 'Book Publishers, Australia, 2003–04', <http://www.abs.gov.au/Ausstats/abs@.nsf/7d12b0f6763c78caca257061001cc588/ccaaf744a4f4f8d3ca256b3c0074d7a7!OpenDocument> (accessed 7 April 2008).

in books nominated by publishers for the CBCA awards: 14 in 1959; 42 in 1963; 100 in 1984; and 315 in 2004.[46]

Despite their cultural and commercial significance, books for children in Australia receive relatively little attention in mainstream media. Few reviews appear in newspapers and literary journals and, in general, discussions of children's literature in these publications are limited to debates over censorship and the appropriateness of themes and language (especially in books for young adults). Scholarly work on children's literature has developed far beyond its beginnings in the 1960s, when courses on the pedagogical implications of children's texts were first offered in teacher education institutions. Researchers in this field are located in a variety of disciplinary settings, including education, communication studies, cultural studies and literature. Children's literature tends to occupy the margins of academic work in universities, in a similar way to the former marginalisation of Australian literature and women's writing. Nevertheless, children's literature studies attract large and increasing numbers of students in both undergraduate and postgraduate courses. The foundation of the Australasian Children's Literature Association for Research (ACLAR) in 1997, and the inauguration of the first Australian refereed journal, *Papers: Explorations into Children's Literature*, in 1990, have been formative in the development of a community of scholars working in children's literature. The internationalist orientation of Australian research in children's literature is indicated by the fact that ACLAR is affiliated with the principal international professional body in the field, the International Research Society for Children's Literature (IRSCL), of which three Australians (Rhonda Bunbury, John Stephens and Clare Bradford) have been presidents.

46 Sheahan-Bright, 'To Market, To Market', p. 315.

14

Representations of Asia

ROBIN GERSTER

The Eastern bogeyman

Visions of 'the East' have turned even the most unromantic Australian heads. Henry Lawson's poem 'The Tracks that Lie by India', first published in the *Bulletin* in June 1905, finds the poet planning to return home overland, via the Indian subcontinent, after a projected trip to London. This is an itinerary familiar from the so-called hippie trail of the late 1960s and early 70s, but relatively unheard of in Lawson's day. Not uncommonly for a Western male contemplating exotic Asia, his fancy turns to the women and the pleasures that await him there: ''Tis sweet to court some foreign girl with eyes of lustrous glow,' he writes, 'Who does not know my language and whose tongue I do not know.' The poem ends with a foreign fantasy that recalls Banjo Paterson's famous daydream of escape to the Bush from the 'dusty dirty' city and 'the round eternal of the cash-book and the journal'. By contrast, Lawson's own 'vision splendid' is dreamily Asian:

> The tracks that run by India to China and Japan,
> The tracks where all the rivers go – the tracks that call a Man!
> I'm wearied of the formal lands of parson and of priest,
> Of dollars and of 'fashions,' and I'm drifting towards the East;
> I'm tired of cant and cackle, and of sordid jobbery –
> The misty ways of Asia are calling unto me.[1]

It is almost as if Clancy had not gone to Queensland droving at all, but grown his hair, hopped onto a Qantas Boeing, taken to dope and started hanging out in an ashram. Of course Lawson never took the trip. Asia remained 'misty' to Lawson as it did for generations of Australians until the sea-change in both travel and imaginative patterns in the late 1960s. As Les Murray wrote in a review of C. J. Koch's *The Year of Living Dangerously* (1978), it was 'a band of mysterious darkness' to most travelling Australians, a twilight zone 'lying between their safe colonial world and the cool green spaces of ancestral Europe'. On this colonialist itinerary, 'Asia' was reductively concentrated into

1 Henry Lawson, 'The Tracks That Lie by India', in *Henry Lawson: Collected Verse*, vol. 2: *1901–1909*, A&R, 1968, p. 134. The poem appears in the recent anthology, Noel Rowe and Vivian Smith (eds), *Windchimes: Asia in Australian Poetry*, Pandanus Books, 2006.

a seedy seaport or perhaps a sweltering airport to spend a sticky, usually nocturnal hour or two while the airliner refuelled. The pilgrimage to Britain, passing through the 'Far East', on to the 'Near East' and then 'Home', may have been a cartographical absurdity, but was an antipodean rite of passage. Asia was out of sight if not quite out of mind. In his 1961 novel *Bony and the White Savage*, the prolific crime writer Arthur Upfield has a character define this continent's northern coastline as 'Australia's backside pointing at the Asians'. This is a remark less likely to have been made after the social and political ferment of the Vietnam War and its aftermath. *The Year of Living Dangerously* was one of a batch of novels to appear in the era following the Vietnam War that seemed to signal a momentous generational reorientation of Australian affinities away from traditional affiliations in the northern hemisphere and towards Asian neighbours. Towards, indeed, precisely the kind of rejuvenating pilgrimage anticipated by Lawson – which makes 'The Tracks that Lie by India' a signally prophetic poem.[2]

It is hardly surprising that colonial Australian writers resorted to some of the descriptive habits of Orientalism famously analysed by Edward W. Said, that representational hegemony in which Europeans sought to define 'degenerate' Asian peoples as part of an all-embracing system of political, military, ideological, scientific – and, indeed, imaginative – control. Yet the ability of Said's argument to travel east of Suez to the corner of the world occupied by Australia is problematic, and it would be glib to assert that Australians merely mimicked European Orientalists. As Said himself suggests in *Culture and Imperialism* (1993), Australia belongs to the same camp as 'the Orient', India and Africa, as a periphery 'dominated' by the West: he notes, for example, British views of Australians as an 'inferior race'. In recent years, a period marked by critical concepts of post-colonial identity, the sense of shared colonial heritage and shared, if regionally distinctive, tensions with imperial centres has led some Australian writers to respond to Asia with solidarity rather than superiority. Perhaps this is a by-product of the 'empire writes back' phenomenon analysed by the Australian academics Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin in their important study of post-colonial discourses. Nonetheless, during much of the 19th century, the period of Said's critical focus, it was crucial to White Australia to see itself as an outpost of British conquest, 'outpost' signifying a state of constant anxiety about its vulnerable geographical situation. Colonial Australian writers subscribed to prevailing imperial ideologies in representing Asia as not only essentially and irretrievably 'different', but as backward and barbarous and in dire need of Britain's benign civilising influence. Their interests, however, were more inward and self-directed than outward and altruistic.[3]

2 Les Murray, review of C. J. Koch, *The Year of Living Dangerously*, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 21 Oct. 1978; reprinted in Murray, *Persistence in Folly: Selected Prose Writings*, Sirius, 1984, p. 40; Arthur Upfield, *Bony and the White Savage*, A&R, 1987, p. 49.

3 See Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* [1978], Penguin, London, 1995, esp. pp. 2–3; Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, Chatto & Windus, 1993, p. 127; Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures*, Routledge, 1989; Alison Broinowski, *The Yellow Lady: Australian Impressions of Asia*, OUP, 1992, on Australian regional anxieties.

Nineteenth-century Australian writers had trouble defining their countrymen and women as characters in Asia without explicit reference to their imperial identity. As if automatically, they became brazenly British once they left their native shores. They did so literally and legally as well, for it was not until Australian citizenship was created under the Nationality and Citizenship Act of 1948 that the words 'Australian Passport' replaced 'British Passport' on the document cover. Looking at Asia with imperial eyes often meant nostalgic reflections on the heroism and enterprise of the British peoples in colonising so much of the Oriental world. In essence, to be white in 'the East' was to be English. Such was one of the fundamental cultural and political lessons of Rudyard Kipling's *Kim* (1901), the paradigmatic Asian narrative for generations of Australian writers from colonials such as Guy Boothby to moderns like C. J. Koch. The practice of the English protagonist bearing the burden of encountering Asia was to prevail until well into the 20th century, partly because the novels were often produced by English publishers for English readers. And many of the writers themselves, from Boothby and popular novelists such as Carlton Dawe through to Dale Collins, were expatriates living and writing in Britain. But underlying these practical considerations was the assumption that, as Adrian Vickers has remarked, issues of significance 'were best explored through a common Western identity, an identity centred in England'.[4]

Australian Asian travellers of the 19th century were inveterate practitioners of the colonial sneer. This was directed not only at the local populations but toward the regional administrations of rival colonial powers like the Dutch in the East Indies and the French in Indochina – places regarded by some Australian travellers of the time as hardly worth the trouble. Perhaps the seminal Australian travel book, James Hingston's two-volume *The Australian Abroad* (1879–80), is largely receptive to Asia. 'Going through the East', Hingston writes, 'gives us something Eastern in nature, orientalizing our ideas to a degree of which we are not perhaps fully conscious.' Yet his depiction of the malarial swamps of Cochin China (now Vietnam) and Cambodia is replete with contemptuous references to its 'purgatorial' environment and its 'nasty' people as a putdown of pitiful French imperial pretensions in the region. Even the jewel in the British Empire's crown, India, comes in for some genial mockery, though it lacks the edge of John Lang's *Wanderings in India* (1859), in which aristocratic Indian life is a laughable parody of civilisation, fit only for sniggering satire.[5] The Asian writings of Alfred Deakin, one of the prime-movers of the Federation movement in the 1890s and a future three-time prime minister, further illustrate the resistance of Australian nationalists to the development of an independent sense of regional belonging. Deakin was an advocate of closer Australian ties with Asia decades before it became political etiquette. In *Irrigated India* (1893), for instance, he advocated Australian

4 Adrian Vickers, 'Kipling Goes South', *Australian Cultural History*, 9 (1990), pp. 66–7, 77–8.

5 James Hingston, *The Australian Abroad: Branches from the Main Routes Round the Word*, series 1, Sampson Low, Marston, Searle, & Rivington, 1979, p. 476; John George Lang, *Wanderings in India* (1859): see extract in Robin Gerster (ed.), *Hotel Asia: An Anthology of Australian Literary Travelling to 'the East'*, Penguin, 1995, pp. 54–67.

'communion' with India as 'the nearest great country to us'. But it was an India reconstituted by the providential benefits of British rule that Deakin admired, an India that was Britain's 'superb dominion', won by heroism and 'held in defiance of all adverse fortunes'.[6]

The inability of colonial Australians in Asia to see themselves as anything other than British is distant but direct evidence of what in the 1950s became identified by A. A. Phillips' memorable tag, the 'cultural cringe'. Deakin's contemporary G. E. (George Ernest) Morrison provides perhaps the quintessential example. Traveller, journalist, international wheeler-dealer and sometime medico, Chinese Morrison is one of the most commanding home-grown Australian literary figures of the late Victorian age. The son of the principal of Geelong College, where he was born and schooled, Morrison had travelled extensively around Australia before settling in China in 1893, the country in which he was to forge a distinguished career in journalism and diplomacy and which gave him his enduring nickname. In 1880 he had walked from Melbourne to Adelaide; around that time he had journeyed to north Queensland to investigate the so-called blackbirders for the Melbourne *Age*, denouncing it as 'the Queensland slave trade'. In 1883, a little more than 20 years after the doomed expedition of Burke and Wills, he successfully walked from one end of Australia to the other, backtracking their route from north to south – alone. He knew the region too, having sailed the South Seas and leading an expedition into New Guinea, where (of course) he was speared by natives. Morrison was proudly patriotic and an avowed nationalist. Placed in an Oriental context, however, he turned into a raging imperial jingo. In Peking he made his international name reporting in 1900 on the Boxer Uprising for *The Times* of London, writing, as he says in his famous dispatch describing the bloody siege of the foreign legations, 'as an Englishman'.[7]

Chinese Morrison actually never bothered to learn much of the language during his many years in China, though he occasionally liked to dress up in local clothing and sported a queue on his cross-country travels. Not surprisingly, his dispatches were full of half-truths and racially directed misreadings. Perhaps Morrison is best known for the literary record of his awesomely long walk, all of 3000 miles, from Shanghai to Burma, undertaken in 1894. Its title, *An Australian in China* (1895), is an unequivocal statement of national self-definition. He had gone to China, he says, 'with the strong racial antipathy to the Chinese common to my countrymen'; the journey replaced that with 'lively sympathy and gratitude'. And by and large the book is well disposed to the country, though Morrison dwells with relish on horrifying provincial practices such as infanticide, of dead and sometimes living children thrown out like garbage to be eaten by dogs (about 10 pages later the Chinese are lauded as treating children with 'more kindness and affection' than any other people). But underlying his cocky account of his *modus operandi* travelling as a foreign devil around the backblocks of China is a catalogue

6 Alfred Deakin, *Irrigated India* (1893), extract in Gerster, *Hotel Asia*, pp. 82–3.
7 See 'The Siege of the Peking Legations', *The Times*, 15 Oct. 1900, p. 6.

of colonialist assumptions that reveals much about how an Australian of his era and gender saw himself vis-à-vis Asia:

> On my journey I made it a rule . . . to refuse to occupy any other than the best room in the inn, and, if there was only one room, I required that the best bed in the room, as regards elevation, should be given to me. So, too, at every inn I insisted that the best table should be given me, and, if there were already Chinese seated at it, I gravely bowed to them, and by a wave of my hand signified that it was my pleasure that they should make way for the distinguished stranger. When there was only the one table, I occupied, as by right, its highest seat, refusing to sit in any other. I required, indeed, by politeness and firmness, that the Chinese take me at my own valuation. And they invariably did so. They always gave way to me. They recognised that I must be a traveller of importance, despite the smallness of my retinue and the homeliness of my attire; and they acknowledged my superiority.[8]

The radical nationalism of late-19th-century Australia, described by Humphrey McQueen in *A New Britannia* (1970) as 'the chauvinism of British imperialism, intensified by its geographic proximity to Asia', may well have celebrated an ideal of 'native' egalitarianism in opposition to class-riddled England.[9] But it was an ideal that excluded both the Indigenous peoples and the coloured races from neighbouring countries to the north. Dating back to concerns about the influx of Chinese during the gold rushes, both colonial policy and cultural debate in the final decades of the century were dominated by the spectre of the Yellow Peril, of hordes of Orientals overrunning capacious Australia. Even Morrison was implacably opposed to Chinese migration. With a strange 'sensory nervous system' that made them impervious to pain and suffering, the Chinese were more a different species than a different race. Like some animal version of the prickly pear (Morrison actually calls them 'working animals of low grade but great vitality'), they would take over the landscape and 'starve out' the white population. You cannot compete with them and you certainly cannot marry them.[10] The use of degrading epithets to define the threat of Chinese migrants in the colonial period is exampled by Paterson's famous ballad 'A Bushman's Song' (1892), whose attack on the use of Chinese labour during the shearers' strike in the early 1890s contains a sneering reference to the appearance of 'the leprosy' in Australian shearing sheds. Asia was less to be contemplated as a *destination* than some kind of dystopian national *destiny*. Newspaper cartoonists in the latter years of the 19th century had used images of hideous, pigtailed 'Mongols' invading the space – a comfy armchair, a large room – inhabited by the popular personification of innocent white Australia, the Little Boy from Manly. The main literary conduit of the belligerent Australian chauvinism of the period, the *Bulletin*, tirelessly campaigned against Chinese migration in support of White Australia.

8 George Ernest Morrison, *An Australian in China,* Horace Cox, 1895, pp. 229–30; infanticide, love of children: pp. 101, 113.
9 Humphrey McQueen, *A New Britannia*, rev. edn, Penguin, 1976, p. 21.
10 Morrison, *An Australian in China*, pp. 104, 223.

In 1886 its cartoonist Phil May notoriously created the emblem of an Oriental octopus throttling the life out of Australia to denote the horrors of a Chinese takeover: fully a century later, the image was recycled to provide a scary image of the modern Japanese penetration of Australian tourist resorts and facilities.[11]

At this most vehement period of anti-Chinese scare-mongering, the final two decades of the 19th century, newly opened Japan became the Oriental object of Australian fascination and even admiration. In 1889, the Australian traveller, teacher and distinguished scholar James Murdoch, whose three-volume *A History of Japan* (1903–26) remains one of the great historical surveys of the country, reported that 'Australian popular opinion is wonderfully favourably inclined towards Japan and the Japanese'.[12] A once-sequestered, culturally impenetrable country had started revealing a seductive image of itself to the world, albeit one largely decoratively limited to the vases, screens and fans that had become modish in Australia as in Europe. The Japanese people themselves were popularly regarded as picturesque and harmless, both 'queer and quaint', as the chorus of nobles sing in the opening song of the opera that did so much to stereotype the Japanese in the Western mind, Gilbert and Sullivan's *The Mikado*, which had a successful season in Sydney in 1885. In 'Felix Holt Secundus', the autobiographical central story of Murdoch's *Tales from Australia and Japan* (1892), a young journalist travels steerage from Sydney to Japan via the East Indies and Indochina, enduring a passage crowded with 'niggers' and Chinese who are variously calumniated as 'the Yellows', 'the saffron curse', 'Chinkies', 'Chows' and 'odiferous Celestials'. But the trip was worth it, for the vertiginous mountainscapes of Japan are 'indescribable', a 'dreamland'. In *The Australian Abroad* Hingston makes an even bolder distinction. Habitually he compares the Indian 'Hindoo', the Chinese and the native Malays of Singapore with dogs; but his admiration for a pre-modern Japan as 'a land of the picturesque' populated by 'nature's gentlemen' is boundless. It also provides the promise of the personal renewal anticipated by Lawson's Asian reverie: 'Any one who wishes to get away from himself for a time – to seek "fresh woods and pastures new" – will find the newest and freshest in the land of the Rising Sun.'[13]

But by far the most intriguing literary exploration of the Australian–Japanese encounter, and an epochally significant text by any measure, is Rosa Praed's novel *Madame Izan* (1899). Queensland-born Praed lived most of her adult life in England, visiting Nagasaki and Kyoto on the way back to Britain after a short visit to her homeland in 1895, a trip reflected in the novel. Already we can see in *Madame Izan* (subtitled 'A Tourist Story'), the use of the travel motif as a critical tool to dismantle and ridicule Australian attitudes towards Asia. One of Praed's cohort of four travelling Australians is a travel writer; her brother is an archetypal Queensland squatter, John Windeatt, with

11 See Broinowski, *The Yellow Lady*, p. 9.
12 David Walker, *Anxious Nation: Australia and the Rise of Asia, 1850–1939*, UQP, 1999, p. 66.
13 James Murdoch, *From Australia and Japan*, Walter Scott, 1892, pp. 37–9, 42, 44, 72, 77; Hingston, *The Australian Abroad*, pp. 87, 91.

little patience for Japanese culture. In Kyoto, for example, he complains of suffering 'temple indigestion'. Such is the satirical weight of Praed's picture of Windeatt that the perception that he comes from 'a crude, unpolished nation' brooks no readerly argument. This, even though the assessment comes from a hardly impartial source, the Japanese guide Kencho, with whom he vies for the eponymous heroine's affections. (It also turns out that the Japanese is actually married to Madame Izan, who is blind; the novel's plot is improbable.) Given to introducing himself as 'I'm an Australian', Windeatt is admired as a 'magnificent type' and a 'splendid Australian Apollo'. But he is culturally dwarfed by the diminutive Kencho, 'a man of knowledge and artistic perception, cultivated far beyond the ordinary standard'. Madame Izan's rejection of the Australian in favour of his Japanese rival signals a realignment of cultural affiliations. Windeatt wants to put the 'heathen Jap' Kencho 'in his place'. But the Jap gets the girl.[14]

Mocking a bushman, albeit from the safe distance of Britain, was an iconoclastic thing for an Australian writer to do in the 1890s, at a time when nationalistic sentiment was spruiking the Bush as the heartland of the emerging nation. Having him rejected by an Australian woman for a Japanese was even more mischievous, for Japan was beginning to flex alarming military as well as cultural muscle. The Japanese victory over the Chinese in the first Sino-Japanese war of 1895, fought for control of Korea, had demonstrated a shift in regional dominance from China to Japan. Now there was another, and evidently deadlier, Oriental power to contend with, as if Japanese migration to the Queensland cane-fields and north-western pearling ports (small-scale as it was) was not alarming enough. When the Immigration Restriction Bill was making its tortuous progress through the new Australian Parliament in late 1901, much of the debate was devoted to the Japanese. This is a point made by F. M. Foxall's *Colorphobia* (1903), in which the 'diabolical' White Australia Policy is diagnosed as a toxic mix of industrial and commercial protectionism and immature race phobias, imaginary terrors created by systematic racial misrepresentation. *Colorphobia* is prefaced with a snatch of contemporary popular song: 'Whisht! Whist! Whist! / Here comes the bogey man!'[15]

Fears of Japan intensified after its stunning naval victory over the Tsar's Russian fleet at Tsushima in 1905, the first Asian naval defeat of a European power. The racial politics of the event were irresistible. In his poem 'The Vanguard' (1905), Lawson responded to the historical moment by resorting to the Australian self-image as an 'outpost of the White'. Marking the Russo-Japanese War as 'the first round of the struggle of the East against the West', Lawson barracks loudly for the Russians, as 'the vanguard of the White Man'. 'Hold them, Ivan!' he pleads. But Nippon as well as Britannia now ruled the waves. A year later, in 'To be Amused', Lawson hectors his fellow countrymen and 'white men from all the world', to awake from their complacent lethargy and ready

14 Rosa Campbell Praed, *Madame Izan: A Tourist Story*, Chatto & Windus, 1916 edn, pp. 25–26, 180, 200, 201.
15 E. W. Foxall ('Gizen-No-Teki'), *Colorphobia: An Exposure of the 'White Australia' Fallacy*, R. T. Kelly, 1903, p. 62.

themselves for the forthcoming struggle for possession of 'the outpost of the white man's race', envisaged explicitly as a racial struggle as the 'yellow millions' covetously eye the empty continent to their south. C. E. W. Bean, soon to enshrine the bushman as the exemplary Australian hero in his role as the official historian of the Great War, set down the harsh geopolitical facts. 'There are some three million whites in Australia inhabiting three million square miles', Bean wrote in the London *Spectator*. 'To the north, at its very gates, up to within a day's sail, are eight hundred million Orientals.' Three men to hold Australia against every eight hundred, warned Bean, 'that is the quality of the danger'.[16] The vigorous dystopian literature of imagined invasion that flourished in Australia in the pre-Commonwealth years, such as William Lane's first novel, *White or Yellow? A Story of the Race War of A.D. 1908* (1888), had concentrated on the Chinese bogey. After their brilliant success against the Russians, the newly confident Japanese were considered the Asians most likely to flesh out the terrifying arithmetic of Bean's prognosis. C. H. Kirmess' *The Commonwealth Crisis*, serialised in the popular journal the *Lone Hand* in 1908 and 1909, imagines a Japanese conquest and colonisation of the continent's vulnerable northern spaces, stoutly defended by a volunteer force of Australian bushmen self-styled the White Guard. Numerous such invasion scenarios were imagined.[17]

The Japanese were looking unstoppable. Some nervy Australian writers even had intimations of global apocalypse. In *Girl from Nippon* (1915), the prolific Carlton Dawe unleashed his own evil Japanese genius hell-bent on wiping out the entire Western world. A certain 'yellow toad', Dr Mohri – an Osama bin Laden of his day – develops a chemical concoction which he uses to fatal effect on various English cities, destroying whole populations, with the ultimate aim of ensuring the humiliation of the white man and the victorious global march of Dai Nippon. Apparently the merchants of doom achieved their purpose. Hilda Freeman, a young Australian woman living in Germany at the outbreak of war in 1914, dreaded Japan's entry into the war as it would automatically lead to an attack on her homeland. 'I had a horrifying vision of the Japanese invasion of Australia,' she wrote. 'I saw our lands laid waste and our homes devastated.' Her fears flew in the face of contemporary fact. As it happens Japan turned out to be a useful ally in the Great War. The *Ibuki*, one of the feared battlecruisers of the Japanese Imperial Navy, helped escort the first contingents of the AIF to the Middle East from September 1914, shepherding the convoy across the German-infested waters of the Indian Ocean. As a boy in the late 1920s, Murray Elliott, later to write a fine memoir of the Occupation of Japan, struggled to correlate an intimidating calendar of the slant-eyed humanoid octopus on the kitchen wall with four flags he discovered in a cellar drawer – the British, the French, the Italian and a strange one with a large red

16 Henry Lawson, 'The Vanguard' and 'To Be Amused', in *Collected Verse*, vol. 2, pp. 135–6, 221–2; Bean quoted in Gavin Souter, *Lion and Kangaroo* [1976], Pan Macmillan, 1992, p. 139.

17 For a discussion of invasion literature see Robert Dixon, *Writing the Colonial Adventure*, CUP, 1995, ch. 8; David Walker, *Anxious Nation*, chs 8, 9.

spot in the centre with radiating red spokes spreading to the perimeter. No-one had told him that Japan had been Australia's friend during the recent conflict.[18]

War with Japan did of course come to pass. The Yellow Peril finally assumed a tangible shape; the 'sweet and smiling nation' celebrated by Rosa Praed in *Madame Izan* bared its teeth.[19] Japan's military aggression and manifest wartime brutality seemed to prove that the contumely directed at rampaging Orientals was correct all along. This military contextualisation of Australian anxieties about Asia suggests the way in which war has ruinously acted as a dominant historical agent in defining Australian relationships with Asian peoples. A sequence of military engagements in what might broadly be called Oriental theatres against Oriental adversaries has exacerbated the latent Asiaphobia of an historically insecure country. The list is long, and includes the Chinese Boxers at the turn of the century; the Turk in the Great War; the Japanese in the 1940s; the 'Reds' in Korea in the early 1950s; and later participation in the British action against Malayan-Chinese Communists during the Malayan Emergency, the Vietnamese in the 1960s, the Iraqis in the Persian Gulf in 1991, and contemporary encounters there and in Afghanistan. Notions of the 'East' as 'Enemy' extended beyond the historical parameters of the conflicts themselves; this can be seen in the vilification of the Japanese in the years after World War II, as memories festered even while economic and touristic links strengthened. The most searching enactment of this cultural phenomenon, John Romeril's *The Floating World* (1974), dramatises the crack-up of a former prisoner-of-war of the Japanese during a post-war return to Japan on a '*Women's Weekly* Cherry Blossom Cruise'. During the war itself the view of the Japanese as an outrageously vicious, subhuman antagonist had more than a little to do with his Oriental Otherness. In his novel of air warfare in the South-West Pacific, *Island Victory* (1955), Norman Bartlett, for instance, writes of an enemy who was 'enormously more a stranger than a German or an Italian, fellow products of Western Christendom, could ever be'.[20]

Embracing Asia

Australian fears of Asian invasion were both indistinguishable from and intimately related to associations of the East with unbridled lasciviousness. The yellow hordes did not just want to pillage the country, they wanted to ravish the women too. Even as late as the Vietnam War era, the geopolitical idea of the domino theory, justifying Australian participation in the war, was built on the perceived 'downward thrust' of a rapacious Red China. The sexual threat was even more baldly expressed in Lawson's day. 'See how the yellow-men next to her lust for her', he wrote in his battle-cry to Australia's sons, 'Flag of the Southern Cross' (1887). In T. R. Roydhouse's *The Coloured Conquest*

18 Hilda Freeman, *An Australian Girl in Germany*, Specialty Press, 1916, p. 105; Murray Elliott, *Occupational Hazards*, Griffith University, 1995, p. 2.
19 Praed, *Madame Izan*, p. 178. 20 Norman Bartlett, *Island Victory*, A&R, 1955, p. 88.

(1903), the successful Japanese naval invasion of Australia is largely effected by the ability of sexually calculating, predatory Japanese sailors to seduce flirtatious young Australian women.[21]

Outside the military context in which Asia posed an explicitly masculine threat to passive Australian innocence, however, the common peacetime paradigm was that of the East as an explicitly rendered *female* space, ripe with erotic possibilities either denied or taboo at home. One of the most potent imperialist mythologies propagated by 19th-century European writers was that of the Orient as a female realm begging for the benefit of Western (that is, male) penetration and mastery. Passive but irrational, sensual and supine, Asia needed controlling and organising for its own good. In part, this was the ideological rationalisation of fantasies of conquest that could be indulged at little moral, social or indeed financial cost. The trope of the 'sensual East' was anathema as well as a lure to colonial Australians, who were grappling at home with the cultural nightmare of miscegenation. Writing just before Australia attained nationhood, Dawe's novel *A Bride of Japan* (1898) expressed a characteristic nexus of sexual and racial anxieties. The dread prospect of inter-breeding is treated in the disgraceful marriage of a decoratively drawn Japanese temptress, alternately construed as 'a delicately dainty morsel of orientalism' and 'a piece of tinselled heathenism', with a Britisher who increasingly sees himself as a 'white man who had sold his birthright'. In fathering a 'mongrel' (that great Australian insult), he thinks he has become one himself. The child dies and the woman does too, but not before uttering this Kiplingsque *aperçu* about East being East and West, West: 'Yellow is yellow and white is white, and between the two flows a river of conflicting currents.'[22]

The infiltration of the ethos of British colonialism into the Australian literary imagination in the early decades of the 20th century guaranteed the propagation of European myths of Asia as a place of testing and titillation for the visiting white male. Successive generations of popular novelists, from Dawe through Charles Cooper and F. J. Thwaites, to more recent exponents of the genre such as G. M. Glaskin and Jon Cleary, plundered the region for its exotic and erotic connotations. Asian *femmes fatales* were exquisite and accommodating, if occasionally treacherous; to a man the males were villainous and bloodthirsty, to be sorted out, quick smart. 'Asia' was custom-made for popular genres like the adventure story, the romance and the thriller. Woman writers were less liable to use Asia as the fodder of imperialist ideology than men. Nevertheless, as the gorgeous, empurpled India of Ethel Anderson's quirky *Indian Tales* (1948) and *The Little Ghosts* (1959) suggests, women resorted to traditional and even by the 1950s dated colonialist constructions of Asia as avidly as men. (Anderson had lived in colonial India with her husband, a British officer in the Indian Army.) This is not to overlook the trenchant feminism of (for example) Mary Gaunt, whose literary impressions of her travels around

21 Henry Lawson, 'Flag of the Southern Cross', *Henry Lawson: Collected Verse*, A&R, 1967, pp. 8–9. See David Walker, 'Shooting Mabel: Warrior Masculinity and Asian Invasion', *History Australia*, 2.3 (2005), p. 89.3.

22 Carlton Dawe, *A Bride of Japan*, Hutchinson, 1898, p. 158; see also pp. 9, 62, 64, 122.

northern Asia in 1913 and 1914 are alert to the travails of women in societies that are uncompromisingly patriarchal. 'Nothing', Gaunt twice assures her readers in *A Broken Journey* (1919), 'nothing made me so ardent a believer in the rights of women as my visit to China.'[23]

In the contemporary era, the combined impact of feminism, anti-colonialism, queasiness about the deleterious effects of mass travel and the unpleasant association of traditional notions of the exotic East with forms of transnational criminal exploitation such as sex tourism, have led to a revisionary critique of the male construction of the Orient as a sexual free-for-all. In Robert Drewe's *A Cry in the Jungle Bar* (1979), Dick Cullen is a shy and well-meaning, if paternalistic, Australian agricultural scientist, working in Asia for the United Nations to improve the lot of the people. On the grog, he turns into another beast altogether. Drinking in a nightclub in the Philippines, Cullen covets a naked woman erotically dancing among a throng of debauched Filipinos. 'I am the biggest, strongest man in this room,' he thinks to himself, 'I am white and have money and brains enough', and he is surprised, irritated and finally confused when the dancer seems oblivious to these 'irrefutable' facts. Cullen's distorted fantasy of 'salacious beauty, jungle women, the exotica showered on sultans and caliphs' is ironically transmuted into a mirror of the arrogance of white Australian men who, however well disposed they might be to Asia, cannot dispense with inherited views of the region as a Pleasure Zone – a 'nameless nightclub' as it is defined in Drewe's novel – where anything goes and ethical systems observed at home can be temporarily abandoned.

Ironically, at the time male writers of serious fiction have sought to eschew or at least query the sexualisation of the East, some contemporary Australian women writers have reconstructed Asian men in escapist terms similar to those used by Australian men in fantasising about Oriental women. In novels by Blanche d'Alpuget and Inez Baranay, for example, Asia is less a sexual threat than a sexual promise, the chosen site for the reinvigoration of female lives physically and spiritually frustrated in dreary, male-oriented Australia. The female journalists at the centre of d'Alpuget's novels *Monkeys in the Dark* (1980) and *Turtle Beach* (1981) both have encounters with absurdly eroticised Asian men. On assignment to report on the developing story of the Vietnamese 'boat people' washed up and incarcerated on Malaysia's shores, the Sydney journalist Judith Wilkes first sees her love interest, the Tamil academic Dr Kanan, moving amid 'an almost palpable cloud of violets'. He proves to be a disappointingly obtuse lover, and their liaison is aborted. It is unclear whether it is Kanan as an embodiment of what the narrator calls the 'sexual wisdom' of the Orient who is mocked, or Wilkes' expectations of him. Certainly, her naivety is mocked, in falling for a '1920s Hollywood version of the East'. Both the limitations of the stereotype and the Australian reporter's inability to see beyond it are exposed. Things are more cut-and-dried in *Monkeys in the Dark*. Alexandra Wheatfield, a journalist attached to the Australian embassy in Jakarta during

23 Mary Gaunt, *A Broken Journey*, Werner Laurie, 1919, p. 146.

the turbulent Sukarno era, enjoys a fruity affair with a poet and political activist named Maruli. Her vulva becomes 'as slippery as a slice of papaja' in his mere presence; for his part Maruli likes to dignify his come-ons with home-grown profundity. 'People say that if you make love and eat durians at the same time you do not know which you are doing.' He advises the palpitating Wheatfield, her very name redolent of bland Australian openness: 'Come my cock is beginning to ache.'[24]

The mythology of Asian sexuality remains as powerful for women as men. In high irony an Australian diplomat tells Kanan in *Turtle Beach*: 'Only Indians know how to live. All wisdom arose in Mother India. India can teach the West how to live, including how to fuck.' It is a reasonable piece of satire of Eastern 'mystique', but the joke is on the cynical, materialist, parochial Australian. 'We did write a book about it', Kanan says in reply.[25] In Baranay's *The Edge of Bali* (1992), the Australian ethnographer Marla Cavas – 40ish and fed up – stops over in Bali *en route* to Europe. Mesmerised by life in the artists' colony Ubud, she starts researching 'the effects of tourism in the developing world', a typical post-colonial project of the time, the self-incriminating implications of which she is more or less aware. Marla's research is put to one side as she indulges in an affair with a married Balinese, one of the local gigolos who target travelling Western women. With him she shares nights of delicious pleasure, eating 'hairy' juicy rambutans and 'little fat' sugar bananas while engaging in all manner of sexual congress, a 'single intimate act' of 'kissing talking fucking sucking soaping massaging burning sandalwood finding words in the dictionary passing a kretek . . . '. Implausibly, Marla takes leave from this exhausting activity to ponder how 'calm and karmic' is the nature of pleasure in Asia.[26]

'Karmic' is of course the kind of word a post-1960s Western traveller would use. The myth of the Spiritual East is easily interchangeable with that of the Sensual East. For all their habit of looking upon Asia as a sort of geographical aphrodisiac, Australian writers have not been unreceptive to its metaphysical possibilities. Deakin sailed for India in November 1890 ostensibly to report on methods of irrigation in that country for the Melbourne *Age*, not the most transcendental of journeys. But at the time he was active in the Theosophical Society, an international group interested in the discussion and dissemination of Eastern spiritualism, especially Buddhism. Not surprisingly, his trip became a pilgrimage to significant Hindu, Islamic and Buddhist religious sites, described in two collections of his *Age* articles, *Irrigation in India* and *Temple and Tomb in India* (1893). Marie Byles, conservationist, vegetarian, bushwalker (and the first New South Welshwoman to graduate in law) well before these pursuits became fashionable, went on what was planned as a recreational expedition in 1938 through upper Burma into China. Described in *Journey into Burmese Silence* (1962), this proved to be the genesis, through a process of 'ripening karma', of a life-long commitment to the

24 Blanche d'Alpuget, *Turtle Beach*, Penguin, 1981, p. 135; *Monkeys in the Dark* [1980], Penguin, 1982, pp. 85, 114.

25 D'Alpuget, *Turtle Beach*, p. 210.

26 Inez Baranay, *The Edge of Bali*, A&R, 1992, pp. 195–6.

ideals and practices of Buddhism.[27] In 1966 Byles' contemporary Harold Stewart took up permanent residence in Japan, practising Pure Land Buddhism, teaching English, translating *haiku* and writing poetry strongly permeated by his beliefs, including his epical spiritual verse autobiography, the 12-part *By the Walls of Old Kyoto* (1981).

But Deakin, Byles and Stewart were very much the exceptions. In an article published in the *Argus* in 1940, the Australian Japanologist Peter Russo remarked that 10 years' effort interpreting Japan to Australians had impressed on him their lack of interest in Asian peoples and cultures. A person interested in Asia is 'regarded as a bit of a freak,' he complained.[28] It took the geographically distant but socially intimate war in Vietnam to change that. The political decision to involve Australia in Vietnam's internal affairs from 1962 reflected the culturally entrenched fears about Asia's teeming millions and a geopolitical fixation with Chinese communism. But the reverberating social opposition to the war created the cultural and political circumstances by which new understandings and a new coming to terms could be reached with Asia. As Richard Neville wrote in *Play Power* (1970), Vietnam was the 'One Great Youth Unifier' that knitted together the disparate protest movements and so-called 'counter cultures' of the late 1960s and early 70s.[29] The war provided a focus for an essentially haphazard shift in generational loyalties and orientations, a shift manifested in patterns of travel and imaginative engagement. Proclaiming solidarity with an Asian people's battle with United States imperialism, many disaffected young people (often tertiary students who had either interrupted or completed their studies) turned 'East' – though the war in fact was the historical moment when, as Robert Hughes acerbically observed, Australia 'stopped thinking about Asia as the Far East [and] realised it was the Near North'.[30]

In the words of a Janette Turner Hospital character, Asia was deemed to be 'geographically closer to enlightenment' than anywhere else.[31] The Asian journey in the immediate post-1960s period took on the tone of one of the primary sources of tourism, the religious quest. Having rejected 'the synthetic civilisation of America and its commercial concubines', the young Australian traveller in Peter Loftus' novel *The Earth Drum* (1972) travels to 'the holy soil' of Asia in order to 'find out if it was still possible for men to be kind to each other'. In *India Ink* (1984), her collection of prose poems articulating her long involvement in India, Vicki Viidikas finds the rude 'desire for life' expressed by the Indian masses an enriching antidote to sterile Western modernity. Journeying through the country on a crowded train, she draws her legs 'up away from the west, where innocence is murdered and everything's a movie of violence and strength'. In India it is enough simply to be alive, 'with the tides of people'.[32]

27 Marie Byles, *Journey into Burmese Silence* (1962), extracted in Gerster (ed.), *Hotel Asia*, p. 180.
28 Peter Russo, 'Australia and Japan', *Argus*, 27 July 1940.
29 Richard Neville, *Play Power*, Jonathan Cape, 1970, p. 19.
30 Robert Hughes, 'Refugee from the Paradise of the Average Man', *Australian*, 27 Apr. 1968.
31 Janette Turner Hospital, 'Ashes to Ashes', in *Dislocations*, UQP, 1987, p. 72.
32 Peter Loftus, *The Earth Drum* (1972) in Gerster (ed.), *Hotel Asia*, p. 311; Vicki Viidikas, 'Train Song 2' *India Ink* (1984), in ibid., pp. 333–4.

It is not hard to put down this ecstatic Asian travelling to youthful lotus-eating. (And, perhaps, reading too much Jack Kerouac.) It was Australia, or more specifically the conservative Australia represented by their parents, that was being shunned as much as Asia was being embraced. The self-consciously basic, nomadic lives of young middle-class Westerners travelling through the region represented a vicarious parody of local poverty; when the going got too tough deliverance was just a cablegram home away. The Asian pilgrimage was a trip in other senses than spiritual. The road to Kathmandu, observes Neville, was 'paved with cannabis'. 'Enlightenment' was often effected by the prevalence and affordability of drugs, rationalised as a kind of reward. 'How can you refuse a joint extended by a dazzling blonde tramp at a charcoal fireside in Kabul, having just survived a two-hundred-mile desert journey?', he asks. Neville romanticises the young drifters as 'anti-lemmings', the world's last great travellers before it subsides into 'a deathly sea of uniformity'. Yet the various hippie trails crisscrossing Asia did establish the idea of the journey as a worthwhile act in itself. Compared with the dutiful journey to Britain and Europe with its roster of monuments to be ticked off, Asia became associated with personal fulfilment, a finishing school of a kind. The journey became a consummating individual act. 'No man could be finished until he had crossed countries, and watched', remarks the blissful protagonist (a refugee from suburbia who 'finds herself' in an Indian ashram) in Christine Townend's novel *Travels with Myself* (1976).[33]

Above all, in the Vietnam War era there is a portentous sense of the importance of Asia as the region that could determine national as well as individual destiny. The 1960s was the second great age, after the 1890s, of Australian cultural self-definition. It was the decade of Donald Horne's *The Lucky Country* (1964), Geoffrey Blainey's *The Tyranny of Distance* (1966), Robert Hughes' *The Art of Australia* (1966) and the early volumes of Manning Clark's *History of Australia* (1962, 1968). The emphasis was on the need to redefine what Australia was, is, and should become. Horne's assertion that 'we're all Asians now' – a daring proposition in 1964 – struck a chord. That perception was there earlier, of course. Australia's involvement in the post-war occupation of Japan, leading the British Commonwealth forces, indicated a mature commitment to involve itself in and shape the future of Asia–Pacific affairs. Post-war writers such as George Johnston had sniffed the winds of change. 'I have written of Asia', he observed in 1947, at the beginning of his trans-Asian travelogue set in the final days of the war, *Journey Through Tomorrow*, 'because I feel that this . . . more certainly than any other continent, is the continent of tomorrow.'[34] But unmistakable markers of closer ties with Asia are signposted throughout the 1960s. Under Horne's editorship, the *Bulletin* deleted the infamous slogan 'Australia for the White Man' from its masthead; the White Australia Policy was effectively dismantled; Britain's entry into the European Common Market

33 Neville, *Play Power*, p. 216; Christine Townend, *Travels with Myself*, Wild & Woolley, 1976, p. 113.
34 George Johnston, *Journey Through Tomorrow*, Cheshire, 1947; see Author's Note.

accelerated Australian trade relationships with Asian neighbours; and the formation of the Association of South-East Asian Nations gave a deceptive sense of common purpose to the region.

While protest over the Vietnam involvement percolated and sometimes boiled over, leading politicians, especially (but not exclusively) on the Labor side, articulated the need for Australia to reorientate itself. In *Living with Asia* (1965) the anti-war spokesman Jim Cairns talked of Australia belatedly shedding its inherited image of Asia as impossibly 'foreign'; in *Beyond Vietnam* (1968), Gough Whitlam, an advocate of detente with Communist China who was to make a trail-blazing visit there in 1971, argued that Australians, 'Asians by an irrevocable act of geography', should start thinking regionally. In the wake of the Vietnam debacle, Australian diplomacy began to prioritise the Asian connection. In *Gods and Politicians* (1982), Bruce Grant – Australian high commissioner in New Delhi 1973–6 and author of a novel set in Singapore, *Cherry Bloom* (1980) – writes of his 'cultural affinity' with India, which transcends the material exigencies of trade policy.[35]

Like the theme of 'engagement', which has become a kind of Australian political mantra when relationships with Asia are invoked, the contemporary diaspora of Australians throughout Asia has to be regarded with some reservations. As the privilege of people from affluent countries, tourism itself is what Brian Castro, in his Hong Kong novel *Pomeroy* (1990), calls 'the ironic reversal of colonialism'.[36] The colonial mandarins, administrators and military personnel have moved out (most of them anyway); tourists have taken their place. Recent years have seen a more sceptical appraisal of the Austral–Asian connection and the mystique which some of its more fervent Australian apologists constructed around it. Those deluded anti-tourists who move through Asia sniffing derisively at societies that do not meet their idealised view of what they should (or should not) be like, are themselves the satirical subject of contemporary Australian fiction. In his study of what he calls the 'Australian tourist novel', Graham Huggan alludes to the 'anxiety' or 'shame' that characteristically produces 'strategies of dissimulation' in travellers who rationalise their own complicity in the cultural degradation wrought by mass international tourism. 'We want to be Easternised,' Baranay writes of attitudes to Bali (one of the common loci of Australian literary traveling in Asia) 'but not them to be Westernised. We want to stay in authentic villages with clean sheets and cold beer.'[37]

The literary reaction against tourism is just one item on a menu containing a host of new doubts about Asia, plus the reappearance of a few of the old fears. The bombings in Bali in October 2002 and 2005 made travelling there appear unseemly, as well as

35 Gough Whitlam, *Beyond Vietnam*: *Australia's Regional Responsibility*, Victorian Fabian Society Pamphlet 17, Melbourne, 1968, pp. 48–9; Bruce Grant, *Gods and Politicians* [1982], Penguin, 1984, p. 4.

36 Brian Castro, *Pomeroy*, A&U, 1990, p. 193.

37 Graham Huggan, 'Some Recent Australian Fictions in the Age of Tourism', *Australian Literary Studies*, 16.2 (1993), pp. 170–1; Inez Baranay, *The Saddest Pleasure*, Collins, 1989, p. 28.

dangerous. More insidiously, they reinvigorated Australian associations of Asia with calamity, a region where bad things happen. Pandemics such as AIDS and bird flu renewed old phobias about the Orient being synonymous with disease. Adversarial reactions, expressed either imaginatively in fictional texts or in the public discourses of journalism and politics, sometimes take the form of political protest (as against Indonesian rule in East Timor, or the denial of human rights in countries such as China and Burma); sometimes they are compelled by moral revulsion (child prostitution in Thailand, Cambodia, the Philippines); sometimes the grounds are aesthetic (chaotic, cloacal cities); sometimes they are the product of plain paranoia (suicidally perilous modes of transport, tainted food and water . . . sickness . . . hospital . . . death!). In her travel sketch 'India', contained in the collection *The Saddest Pleasure* (1989), Baranay provides a canny allegory of the contemporary turn against Asia. The story's protagonist is hardly an inexperienced tourist. She has visited Asia many times, is not perturbed by beggars, and smiles with equanimity at 'constant miscomprehension'. Although she has journeyed to India, like waves of Western travellers before her, seeking to change her life, she harbours a sharp contempt for voguish spiritual tourism and what she calls 'the simplified hippie hocus-pocus version of Indianness'. Sitting in the bar at the Imperial Hotel in Delhi she realises that the frustrations of India had turned her 'nasty' and made her 'imperious and intolerant'. The traveller as imperialist interloper: the great lover of Indian food starts ordering tea and toast. With supposedly 'peaceful' India 'battering away' at her senses, she takes a trip to Agra to view the Taj Mahal, stays at the Grand Hotel and then goes on to Fatepuhr Sikri. Exhausted, hot, fearful of her male guide, the woman wishes she were 'staying at a better place', and the next morning checks out early and has breakfast at the 'fabulous' Mogul Sheraton. The realism and cynicism and advancing age have replaced youthful idealism and naivety.[38]

The various discourses of journalism – those of the print and electronic media or book-length narratives by reporters – continue reductively to view Asia as a constellation of 'hot spots', the scene of some natural disaster or act of barbarism. Bad news, of course, is good news for a working journalist, a 'story'. For several years the foreign correspondent for the *Sydney Morning Herald*, Louise Williams addresses the moral and methodological and problems confronting the practising Western journalist in Asia in *On the Wire: An Australian Journalist on the Front Line in Asia* (1992). Williams writes of campaign mayhem in Pakistan, of 'sand, sex and sewage' in Thailand, of 'urban despair' in Bombay, puerile *machismo* in Manila, and unmitigated misery in Bangladesh. The whole region, as the book's subtitle indicates, becomes a war zone of some kind or other. Significantly, Williams begins her narrative with her memories of 'suburban bliss' as a child growing up in Australia. In order to serve that comfortable society ('where people can still cry over pet dogs') she felt she had to write about Asia with 'some real

38 Baranay, 'India', *The Saddest Pleasure*, pp. 44–6, 48–9, 50. For a discussion of the contemporary Australian literary backlash against Asia, see Robin Gerster, 'A Bellyful of Bali: Travel, Writing and Australia/Asia relationships', *Australian Literary Studies*, 17.4 (1996), pp. 353–63.

compassion and at least a little rage'. Wondering how to cover Asia 'fairly' as a Western correspondent, Willliams has no illusions about the priorities of Australian newspapers and their readership. 'How do you fight for a story', she asks, 'when, on a foreign desk back in Sydney, 10,000 Bengali lives lost in a tidal wave still equal one Australian hostage killed in the Philippines?' Nor is she able to shrug off her 'First World guilt' as someone able to fly in and fly out of some scene of Asian horror, like a vulture feeding on human tragedy.[39]

Orientalism is based on nothing else if not representational certainty, of speaking on behalf of the natives: of knowing and saying all. Thus the device in post-Vietnam War narrative of having an Asian guide or mentor for Australian foreign correspondents illustrates a significant development in Australian renderings of the region.[40] In *The Year of Living Dangerously* the Australian pressman Guy Hamilton's move toward a greater regional awareness is directed by the Chinese-Australian cameraman Billy Kwan; in *Turtle Beach* the self-sacrificing Minou 'illuminated the situation' for the otherwise obdurate Sydney reporter Judith Wilkes. In *Vietnam: A Reporter's War* (1985), Hugh Lunn finds himself dependent on Dinh, his colleague at Reuters' Saigon office. Yet, however much Australian journalists learn from contact with Asian individuals and ideologies, the dominant theme in the journalist narratives is not of connection with Asia, but of enclosure and insulation. The predominantly male world of the foreign correspondents seems to revolve around fraternal boozing in hotel bars, in clubs and restaurants, thereby reproducing patterns of behaviour manifested at home. In *The Year of Living Dangerously* the foreign press corps in Jakarta in 1965 to cover the violent final stages of President Sukarno's belligerently anti-Western rule gather in the Wayang Bar located in the Hotel Indonesia, where their behaviour is looked down on with 'pensive contempt' by the *wayang kulit* puppets decorating the walls. With its own power supply, purified water, cool air and imported food, its shops and swimming-pool, the Hotel Indonesia is 'a world apart' – the nation as tourist hotel. Here in this 'refuge' from confronting reality, the journalists 'could be themselves'. Whenever they leave its environs, it is self-mockingly only to seek out the 'filthy and the colourful'. Thus, starkly, the predicament of the Western reporter in Asia is highlighted. At best, the journalist is a tourist with a job to do. At worst he is a voyeur stimulated by misery: Billy Kwan calls Hamilton a Peeping Tom, 'a watcher, a watcher merely'. Koch's critique of Western journalism in Asia reveals the voyeurism of the foreign correspondent, reporting on the region for home consumption.[41] This is a significant connection to make, since the popular media is the major means, aside from physical travel, by which Australians 'go' to other places and visit other worlds.

39 See Louise Williams, *On the Wire: An Australian Journalist on the Front Line*, Simon & Schuster, 1991, p. 4.

40 See Peter Pierce, 'The Australian Literature of the Vietnam War', *Meanjin*, 39.3 (1980).

41 C. J. Koch, *The Year of Living Dangerously*, Nelson, 1978, pp. 8, 15, 89, 289. For a discussion of Australian journalism and Asia, see Robin Gerster, 'Covering Australia: Foreign Correspondents in Asia', in Wenche Ommundsen and Hazel Rowley (eds), *From a Distance: Australian Writers and Cultural Displacement*, Deakin UP, 1996, pp. 117–26.

The shallowness of Australian reportage of the region is not unique to the media industry. It is worth querying also the depth of Australian engagement with Asia in other literary and intellectual discourses. Just as the journalists in the Koch novel engage in merely fleeting, circumscribed forays out of their bar-room comfort zone, it might be suggested that the contemporary surge of scholarly interest in Asian cultures is an exercise in 'pursuing otherness for otherness's sake' which precludes the need for more direct dealings with them. As Huggan has suggested, 'post-coloniality' becomes in this sense a form of 'intellectual tourism'.[42] For all the current rhetoric of mutual dialogue, the Australian imaginative encounter with Asia typically suggests insularity not openness, self-interest not regional solidarity. In the contemporary era, a peculiar combination of suspicious insularity and neo-colonial assertiveness and self-centredness has marked the way Australia sees its region and itself in relation to it. The cliché that Australia has 'discovered' Asia reiterates the old assumption that the Orient had no independent existence before being imaginatively apprehended and hence 'invented' by Europeans.

The celebration of the cultural rapprochement with Asia described by critics such as Helen Tiffin in the early 1980s was perhaps premature. Tiffin's central contention in her groundbreaking article 'Asia and the Contemporary Australian Novel', published in *Australian Literary Studies* in 1984, is that Asia in late-20th-century Australian writing has gone from being an exotic, stereotypically constructed backdrop for adventure to 'a territory of the Australian psyche'; this unwittingly suggests a contradiction inherent in the contemporary Australian preoccupation with regional relationships. Relationships are supposed to be two-way. Suddenly a once-despised region has become the convenient vehicle for a redefinition of national identity. Asia now serves a purpose; it has a function. This is something, of course, that the Victorian-era imperialists knew only too well. When Tiffin talked of Ian Moffitt's journalist novel set in China, *The Retreat of Radiance* (1982), as an investigation into 'the possibilities of Australian being', she was not so much identifying a new shift in the Australian–Asian encounter but redefining the traditional imperialist position, in which the European protagonist tested and 'discovered' himself in the stressful Asian environment. Once again Asia is taken as a space upon which the Western sensibility is imposed.[43] It is significant that the big recent Australian novel about Asia, Gregory Roberts' 940-page blockbuster of the man-on-the-run finding himself in India, *Shantaram* (2003), resuscitates Asia's familiar role as an arena for white male questing and self-fulfilment.

Clearly, some of the benevolent romanticism of the 1970s and 80s has evaporated. With regional economies booming and offering seemingly limitless opportunities, individual Australian interests in Asia are more likely to be professional than recreational or philosophical. In truth, the public discourse that advocates a national merging with Asia is impelled by desires as mercenary as mystical. The cheap Asian holiday, the research or

42 Graham Huggan, 'Transformations of the Tourist Gaze: India in Recent Australian Fiction', *Westerly*, 38.4 (1993), p. 88.

43 See Helen Tiffin, 'Asia and the Contemporary Australian Novel', *Australian Literary Studies*, 11.4 (1984).

travel grant, the 'business opportunity' or the 'joint venture' are inextricably bound up with a degree of economic self-interest. Australians are not alone in this; after all, the merchant Marco Polo's 20-year wanderings around the Mongol Empire were a form of extended business trip. But there is often something cynical underlying this imperative to 'understand' Asia and to 'belong' to the region. It is good for business. The journalist Greg Sheridan begins his edited collection of essays about 'Australia's Asian Destiny', *Living with Dragons* (1995), by tritely talking about the Asianisation of 'the Australian psyche'. But one of his humble contributors, Kevin Rudd (describing himself, in the mid-1990s and before entering federal politics, as a mere 'Chinese language and history graduate') makes more sense in his chapter 'Creating an Asia-literate Australia'. Rudd disparagingly describes the relationship in terms of self-limiting paradigms, of the old xenophobic image of Asia as a threat to Australian security being replaced by a new paradigm of 'economic growth, exports and investment'. That *Living with Dragons* was published by Allen & Unwin 'in association with Mobil Oil Australia' rather proves his point. Along with Nicholas Jose, author of the novel *Avenue of Eternal Peace* (1989), set in China during the build-up to the 1989 Tiananmen Square massacre, one almost wishes for a return to an old Orientalist vision of an untouchable and unknowable Asia that has 'nothing to do with trading ambitions or geopolitics'.[44]

Even during that most rancorous period of their history of imaginative engagement with Asia, the 1890s into the first years of the new century, many Australians sensed that Asia was an economic mountain waiting to be climbed. After all, they had the pragmatic example of British colonialism to follow. Banjo Paterson's visit to China in 1901 in the aftermath of the Boxer Rebellion taught him the advisability, even duty, of the British people to walk into the place and take 'the boss mandarin's seat at the top of the table'. In these more modest times, Australians would merely like a seat at the table. As the nation continues to worry about its place in the world, it can be consoled that it is at least 'part of Asia'. If the eagerness to belong to Asia is symptomatic of a postmodern geocultural anxiety, it also reveals an old-fashioned paranoia. In John Upton's play about antipodean sex tourism in Asia, *The Hordes from the South* (1988), an Australian bar-owner in the Philippines articulates the ambivalence perfectly. 'Asia's where it's at', he enthuses. Australians 'have to get into Asia', he warns, 'before they get into us'.[45]

A new Austral/Asia?

In Australian representations of Asia, travelogue has too often taken the place of a fully realised imaginative world. 'Authenicity' has been of the documentary rather than the

44 Kevin Rudd, 'Creating an Asia-literate Australia', in Greg Sheridan (ed.), *Living with Dragons: Australia Confronts its Asian Destiny*, A&U, 1995, p. 26; Jose quoted in Gerster, 'A Bellyful of Bali', p. 362.

45 Paterson quoted in Gerster, 'A Bellyful of Bali', p. 362; Upton, 'The Hordes from the South', typescript (1988), quoted in Broinowski, *The Yellow Lady*, p. 133.

imaginative kind. A character in Alex Miller's novel of transhistorical Austral/Asian inheritances and destinies, *The Ancestor Game* (1992), makes an observation that has a critical application to Australian renderings of the region: 'Travelling does not interest me . . .. How should I *imagine* China if I were to visit it? It's not visiting I care about. It's not China but the imagining that interests me.'[46] Yet the Sino-Australian ancestral symbiosis imagined in Castro's *Birds of Passage* (1983) and *The Ancestor Game* suggests that one of the most feeble ideas inherited from Europe, the unbridgeable dichotomy of East and West, has been unloaded, to the point where Miller has talked about celebrating 'the Chineseness of being Australian' without sounding too clever.[47]

Hybridity has replaced hoary binaries. The past two decades have seen the coming of a new generation of Asian-Australian diasporic writers who have created new fertile spaces within the barren division of East and West, in which to explore a fluid national identity that refuses to be as circumscribed as some Australians would like. Asian-born Australian writers are not easily accommodated by a survey of 'Australian representations of Asia'. As Tseen Khoo has observed, this very typology has deflected critical energy away from the analysis of the cultural production of the Asian diaspora in both Australia and elsewhere in the West. 'Asian-Australian literature', Khoo writes, 'emphasises the broadening, not contraction, of possibilities for different styles and histories of literature in Australia.'[48] Novelists such as the Bangladeshi Adib Khan, Pakistani-born Azhar Abidi and the Sri Lankan-born Yasmine Gooneratne, Michelle de Kretser and Chandani Lokuge, along with the Chinese poets Ouyang Yu and Stanley Sim Shen, refuse to lend themselves to a facile, self-congratulatory view of multicultural Australia. In a salutary development (within the often acrimonious contemporary context of debates about responses to asylum seekers and national migration policy more generally), the personal narratives of Indochinese refugee families, notably Alice Pung's *Unpolished Gem* (2006) and Kim Huynh's *Where the Sea Takes Us: A Vietnamese-Australian Story* (2007), remind us how regional entanglements have literally changed the face of Australia.[49]

There may come a time when the subject of 'Australians-in-Asia' will be redundant, a matter of historical curiosity.

46 Alex Miller, *The Ancestor Game,* Penguin, 1992, p. 289.

47 Miller: see 'Chinese Connections and Disconnections', *24 Hours* (Dec. 1993), Supplement: 'Highlights of the 1993 Melbourne Writers Festival'.

48 Tseen-Ling Khoo, *Banana Bending: Asian-Australian and Asian-Canadian Literatures*, McGill–Queen's UP, 2003.

49 See also Alice Pung's edited collection of autobiographical narratives by Asian Australians, *Growing Up Asian in Australia,* Black Inc., 2008.

15

Autobiography

DAVID McCOOEY

Spectres of autobiography

Australian autobiography is a spectre. It deals with those spectral categories of identity that shift in and out of discursive focus: subjectivity, Indigeneity, ethnicity, nationhood. And it has a spectral presence for Australian literary history, in which autobiography is simultaneously central and marginal. At its narrowest, the term covers a small body of literature, taking until the 1960s to achieve historical significance, only to then quickly become inadequate to cover the full range of autobiographical practices available to contemporary writers. Broadly defined, however, autobiography is nothing less than the source of Australian literature, the pre-eminent mode of colonial writers, canonical fiction writers (such as Franklin, Furphy, and Richardson), Indigenous writers, minority writers, refugees, and lyric poets. Another way in which we can think of autobiography as spectral is its association with expressions of the uncanny (the unsettling interplay of the familiar and the unfamiliar) and ongoing crisis. These terms – spectres, the uncanny, crisis – will underpin this discussion of Australian autobiography from earliest times to the present.

Autobiography is a word that neither the Indigenous population of Australia nor (probably) those sailing on the First Fleet would have understood in 1788. As Robert Folkenflik notes in *The Culture of Autobiography* (1993), isolated instances of the word appear in the late 18th century in England and Germany, but as a term for self-writing it remained secondary to 'memoir' until the 20th century.[1] To discuss Australian autobiography before the 20th century is to evoke an apparition, since neither 'Australia' nor 'autobiography' properly existed before then. Nevertheless, the autobiographical mode is the foundation of representations of 'Australian' experiences, seen in the First Fleeters' journals, British emigrants' diaries, letters by colonial women, explorers' journals, petitions written by (or for) convicts and Aborigines, and emigrant handbooks of the 19th century. Such writing, in a period before easily reproducible visual representation, offered authoritative accounts for diverse British audiences (scientific, domestic, and bureaucratic) hungry for information about the Australian colonies.

1 Robert Folkenflik (ed.), 'Introduction: The Institution of Autobiography', *The Culture of Autobiography: Constructions of Self-Representation*, Stanford UP, 1993, p. 5.

The first of these accounts, Watkin Tench's *Narrative of the Expedition to Botany Bay*, was published in 1789. Tench followed this with *A Complete Account of the Settlement at Port Jackson in New South Wales* (1793), which like its predecessor rehearsed detailed and objective 'information' recorded in Tench's journals. These works, published in England, remind us that early 'Australian literature' such as Tench's is neither properly literary (in the modern sense of the word) nor properly Australian. In this case it is the descriptive writing (ethnography, natural history, topography) of an English soldier for a British audience. The literary makes itself felt, though, in the laments of the literate convict, Thomas Watling, artist and forger, in *Letters from an Exile at Botany Bay* (1794). Watling's factitious rhetoric can be seen in his presentation of the landscape around Parramatta as not only deceitfully beautiful (a commonplace of colonialist discourse), but also *literary*:

> The Poet may there descry numberless beauties; nor can there be fitter haunts for his imagination. The elysian scenery of a Telemachus; – the secret recesses for a Thomson's musidora; – arcadian shades, or classic bowers, present themselves at every winding to the ravished eye . . . In short, were the benefits in the least equal to the specious external, this country need hardly give place to any other on earth.[2]

Watling's classical and neo-classical allusions illustrate how the exile relied on pre-existing images and modes of representation to construct understandable versions of his or her experience.

Most convicts, however, were illiterate and did not have access to such forms of self-expression. Because of this, the autobiographical writings of convicts were sometimes inscribed by others, such as petition writers. Such writings primarily exist in the form of petitions, letters (which were subject to official scrutiny), and court evidence, all of which were determined by their dialogic context, where dialogue (given the radical asymmetry of power) acted as a constraint. Book-length convict accounts, while important to the early literature, illustrate the ambivalent status of autobiography in colonial times, since most are now considered to be fictional. John and Dorothy Colmer, in *The Penguin Book of Australian Autobiography* (1987), describe convict memoirs as 'almost indistinguishable from picaresque novels'.[3] In fact, *The Memoirs of James Hardy Vaux* (1819), *Quintus Servinton: A Tale Founded Upon Incidents of Real Occurrence* (1831), and *Ralph Rashleigh*, which was first published as a convict memoir in 1929, are all fiction.

Watling's invoking of pre-existing *literary* models as a form of 'free' self-expression (rather than that officially prompted) was more generally the practice of free settlers, who used the pre-existing autobiographical forms of the journal and the letter as modes of self-representation to respond to the psychic effects of displacement. As Andrew Hassam writes, 'in the act of writing, migrants were attempting to stay in touch, not

2 Thomas Watling, *Letters from an Exile at Botany Bay* [1794], Review, 1979, p. 12.
3 John and Dorothy Colmer, *The Penguin Book of Australian Autobiography*, Penguin, 1987, p. 3.

so much with those left behind, but with themselves'.[4] The subjective experience of migration, while figured by the migrants as a form of crisis, did not, though, as Hassam's studies of 19th-century British migrant shipboard diaries show, lead to the kinds of self-reflection that we would today associate with interiority and agency, so much as an attempted reinstatement of pre-colonial forms (such as class) and modes of expression (such as the journal).

British convicts and colonisers, of course, were not the only people in Australia at the time, though tracing the ghostly autobiographical records of the Indigenous and Chinese populations (and even the non-British European population) is a serious challenge. Indigenous autobiographical expression can only be found in fragmentary form: letters, petitions, court testimonies, and other forms solicited by the colonial powers. Although the forms of such statements may resemble those sought from convicts, Aborigines were reporting in a foreign tongue to a foreign power that viewed their status as human subjects ambiguously at best. Autobiographical statements were also important to the large population of 19th-century Chinese-Australians. Shen Yuanfang, in *Dragon Seed in the Antipodes: Chinese-Australian Autobiographies* (2001), states that 'autobiography has been the mode specific to the written records of Chinese experience in Australia'.[5]

As we can see, the discursive and representational challenges facing colonial Australians, in their many guises, were not wholly caused by the psychic pressures of displacement. There were also economic and political pressures at work in the nascent 'autobiographical public sphere' of the time. The exploration of the country, for example, led to the publication of explorers' journals (by Sturt, Leichhardt, Mitchell and others); the form proved popular, and was illustrative, as Robert Dixon has pointed out, of the developing frontier culture of the time.[6] Also popular, especially among English publishers, were emigrants' handbooks, such as Charles Rowcroft's *Tales of the Colonies: Or, the Adventures of an Emigrant* (1843). These began emerging in the 1840s when transportation ceased and there was a need to boost the colonies' attractiveness. Many – including Rowcroft's, with its emphasis on 'masculine' activities such as hunting and bush travel – were also part of the growing frontier culture. The discovery of gold furthered the interest in such handbooks, and works like Ellen Clacy's *A Lady's Visit to the Gold Diggings of Australia in 1852–53* (1853) showed the growth of a market for works by women about the Australian colonies.

The importance accorded to women's writing in this period is, however, relatively recent. This alerts us to the fact that autobiography cannot be understood without an appreciation of the historicity of texts deemed to be autobiographical. The colonial texts we look to as early forms of Australian autobiography (especially those by women)

4 Andrew Hassam, 'Writing Home: Nineteenth-Century British Migrant Journals and Letters', in Wenche Ommundsen and Hazel Rowley (eds), *From a Distance: Australian Writers and Cultural Displacement*, Deakin UP, 1996, p. 4.

5 Shen Yuanfang, *Dragon Seed in the Antipodes: Chinese-Australian Autobiographies*, MUP, 2001, p. xvii.

6 Robert Dixon, 'Public and Private Voices: Non-Fiction Prose', in Laurie Hergenhan (ed.), *The Penguin New Literary History of Australia*, Penguin, 1988, p. 132.

were often either published anonymously or unpublished, and were accorded a cultural capital specific to their time. The modern revival of Australian colonial texts as literature occurs for divergent ideological reasons. These include the reinstatement of voices and perspectives generally hidden in colonial discourse. Women's personal writings (especially the journal and the letter) have been particularly popular among modern scholars. Significant modern editions of colonial women's letters and journals include those of Rachel Henning, Elizabeth Macarthur, and Louisa Clifton. Anthologies of such writing include Fiona Giles' *From the Verandah* (1987) and Lucy Frost's *No Place for a Nervous Lady* (1984). Such works show a new value placed on the private sphere, in contrast to the strongly masculinist and public-sphere-oriented ideology of colonial times. As Joy Hooton puts it in *Stories of Herself When Young: Autobiographies of Childhood by Australian Women* (1990), 'for the contemporary reader periphery and centre have exchanged places; the private world has acquired a new interest, while the public has become as dated as its imperial frame'.[7] The modern revival of 19th-century autobiographical work has not only been part of a feminist project. As Elizabeth Webby points out, Alexander Harris' *Settlers and Convicts: Or, Recollections of Sixteen Years' Labour in the Australian Backwoods* (1847), often considered the most informative autobiographical work of the period, caught the attention of historians in the 1950s wishing to establish a nationalist tradition.[8] Letters have also been attended to for diverse reasons. One autobiographical letter of the 19th century, Ned Kelly's 'Jerilderie Letter' (1879; 1942), stands out as having had numerous historical and literary effects (Peter Carey's novel, *True History of the Kelly Gang*, 2000, being one example).

Towards the end of the 19th century, autobiographical works increasingly looked at recreating early, 'pioneering' Australia. This was in response to a perceived passing-on of the pioneers, and (more generally) as a response to an emergent modernity in Australia, seen in the country's developing urbanisation, education, and industrialisation. Early examples include Annie Baxter Dawbin's anonymously published *Memories of the Past by a Lady in Australia* (1873) and Rolf Boldrewood's *Old Melbourne Memories* (1884). *Memories of the Past* was based on Dawbin's journals, and mostly covers events in the 1840s. On her arrival in Hobart she writes:

> I cannot say that I expected to see all the people 'darkies;' but I was rather astonished on seeing so many elegantly-dressed woman [*sic*] walking about; and still more delighted in the evening when we accepted an invitation from the pleasing wife of the Attorney-general to a fancy-ball.[9]

This illustrates not only contemporary racism, but also a tension in colonialist discourse concerning the status of early Australian society. Australian difference is emphasised ('It

7 Joy Hooton, *Stories of Herself When Young: Autobiographies of Childhood by Australian Women*, OUP, 1990, p. 10.
8 Elizabeth Webby, 'Colonial Writers and Readers', in Webby (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Australian Literature*, CUP , 2000, p. 52.
9 Annie Baxter Dawbin (as 'A Lady in Australia'), *Memories of the Past*, Williams, 1873, p. 6.

seems to be also that there were more oddities in those days', she writes in the work's preface as a justification for its publication).[10] But such difference expresses the uncanny condition of a displaced colonial culture. Of the fancy-ball, for instance, Dawbin notes the surprising presence of a number of Indians (servants to a guest from Madras), and one guest dressed as a New Zealand chief. While suggestive of the novelty of things 'out of place', such figures are also uncanny spectres of the estrangement that colonialism produced in its subjects.

Uncanny pasts: childhood, education, and place

In the first decades of the 20th century, autobiography continued to be concerned with the 'passing' of an early Australia, as seen in works such as Ada Cambridge's *Thirty Years in Australia* (1903); Mary Fullerton's *Bark House Days* XE "Fullerton, Mary:*Bark House Days*" (1921; 1931); Mary Gilmore's *Old Days, Old Ways: A Book of Recollections* (1934) and *More Recollections* (1935); and Rosa Praed's *My Australian Girlhood: Sketches and Impressions of Bush Life* (1902). Such works are overtly elegiac projects, reanimating the ghosts of a peculiarly Australian past. Praed, who had been living in England since 1876, writes that 'my only excuse for these scattered memories and impressions of Australian life is that they belong to an order of things which has passed away'.[11] While the order in question is the colonial order, Praed also refers to 'the sweeping away of the old race from the land', using the racist and sentimental language of inevitability that was the legacy of colonial dispossession. As is common for the time, guilt associated with such dispossession surfaced in images of a haunted landscape. Describing the 'eerie experience' of being alone in a bush house on a winter's night, Praed writes that 'It is as though the elemental forces of primeval Australia were holding high revel – ghosts maybe of dead Lemurians revisiting their pre-Adamic haunts.'[12] Such language shows a double elision of the Indigenous population from historical memory. Not only are they ghostly, they are not even Indigenous. David Crouch's observation (regarding Australian ghost stories) that 'the ghost story itself is a way of silencing an Indigenous presence within a discursive structure that asserts the legitimacy of non-Indigenous occupation'[13] could also apply to non-Indigenous autobiographical writing.

Praed's figuring of the bush as uncanny – that discomforting interplay between the strange and the familiar – raises an important aspect of 'spectral autobiography' in a post-colonial context. Sigmund Freud's theorising of the uncanny, which centres on the terms *heimlich* (homely, familiar) and *unheimlich* (unhomely, unfamiliar), has been central to much post-colonial thinking about place and identity in settler cultures, in which

10 Ibid., p. v.

11 Mrs Campbell (Rosa) Praed, *My Australian Girlhood: Sketches and Impressions of Bush Life*, T. Fisher Unwin, 1902, p. 3.

12 Ibid., pp. 4, 152, 153.

13 David Crouch, 'National Hauntings: The Architecture of Australian Ghost Stories', *Journal of the Association for the Study of Australian Literature, Special Issue: Spectres, Screens, Shadows, Mirrors*, 2007, p. 102.

'home' threatens to turn out to be 'not home', and/or 'home' is always elsewhere. It is also central to Australian autobiography, which features, as we have seen, the sense of colonial culture being the familiar in an unfamiliar setting. The continued presence of the Indigenous population (often figured in ghostly terms) is another. Australian autobiography is haunted, then, because Australia is a haunted place.

The uncanny in Australian autobiography is therefore associated with a settler culture's sense of crisis, especially in terms of belonging and identity. This is not surprising, since the uncanny is in itself a form of crisis. As Nicholas Royle writes in *The Uncanny* (2003), the uncanny is not only 'ghostly', it is

> a crisis of the proper: it entails a critical disturbance of what is proper (from the Latin *proprius*, 'own'), a disturbance of the very idea of personal or private property including the properness of proper names, one's so-called 'own' name, but also the proper names of others, of places, of institutions and events. It is a crisis of the natural, touching upon everything that one might have thought was 'part of nature': one's own nature, human nature, the nature of reality and the world.[14]

Such wide-ranging crises operate in specific, local ways. A crisis of property clearly operates in post-colonial Australia. For instance, the 1996 Wik judgment (in which the High Court of Australia ruled that pastoral leases had not extinguished native title) produced the uncanny effect of Australian pastoralists claiming a 'minority' position, as Ken Gelder and Jane M. Jacobs note in *Uncanny Australia: Sacredness and Identity in a Postcolonial Nation* (1998).[15] A crisis of the proper name can also be seen in Australian autobiography. The 'proper name' is integral to the autobiographical project, since it operates as both a signifier of identity ('this work is *by* me'), and as a mark of autobiographical intent ('this work is *about* me'). The concern with names in Aboriginal autobiography shows that the uncanny is not only associated with non-Indigenous autobiography. Charles Perkins writes in *A Bastard Like Me* (1975), 'I suppose I could be classified as one of the original Bastards from the Bush.'[16] By evoking his putative illegitimacy in this way, Perkins (whose autobiography is largely about his achievements – educational, sporting, and political – as an Indigenous Australian) figures himself as both nameless (a bastard), and therefore marginal, as well as central to Australian mythology (a bastard from the bush). Shirley Smith's *MumShirl* (1981) similarly begins with an illustration of the uncanny doubleness of identity that names can effect. 'My full name is Colleen Shirley Perry. I am the daughter of Isabel Agnes Perry and Henry Joseph Perry of Erambie Mission, West Cowra, New South Wales. But I am better known as "MumShirl".'[17] Ruby Langford Ginibi's *Don't Take Your Love to Town* (1988) also begins with a consideration of names, and the statement that her narrative is concerned

14 Nicholas Royle, *The Uncanny*, Routledge, 2003, p. 1.
15 Ken Gelder and Jane M. Jacobs, *Uncanny Australia: Sacredness and Identity in a Postcolonial Nation*, MUP, 1998, p. xiii.
16 Charles Perkins, *A Bastard Like Me*, Ure Smith, 1975, p. 7.
17 Shirley Smith with Bobbi Sykes, *MumShirl: An Autobiography* [1981], Mammoth, 1992, p. 1.

with 'How I got to be Ruby Langford. Originally from the Bundjalung people'.[18] The uncanny doubleness or fluidity of identity here is not merely existential. It is also an Indigenous strategy, as illustrated in Smith's (or MumShirl's) comment on the practice of adopting non-Aboriginal names: 'So my Grandfather became Perry; he just "took" the name . . . . But even while we took these white names to use "outside", we kept on with our Aboriginal names also.'[19] As such, the uncanny can be seen as a figure of both crisis and continuity in Aboriginal culture.

The uncanny operates (as crises of the proper and of the natural) in modern Australian autobiography in various ways. This is especially the case with regard to a thematic cluster (childhood, education, and place) that dominates mid-century Australian autobiography, a form that by this time had become increasingly 'literary' in status. (This is seen in an incipient way in Catherine Helen Spence's *An Autobiography*, 1910, an account of both her literary and political activities.) Henry Handel Richardson's *Myself When Young* (1948) recognises autobiography as a literary form (albeit a minor one), and focuses on the themes of childhood and education. *Drawn from Life* (1941), by the artist Stella Bowen, is similarly concerned with education. Though Bowen mostly discusses her European experiences, she begins with an account of her Australian childhood in which Australia's uncanny, ghostly condition is expressed through a crisis of identity. For Bowen, growing up in Edwardian Adelaide, 'we were just pale imitations of something which was already moribund in England'.[20] Bowen resolves this crisis by leaving Australia after the death of her parents.

Education in Australian autobiography is generally figured as a crisis involving a parent or parents. This crisis is often due either to parental absence (or adoption) or a need to free oneself of parental pressure. Such a dyadic relationship between parental crisis and education can be seen in Hal Porter's *The Watcher on the Cast-Iron Balcony* (1963), Xavier Herbert's *Disturbing Element* (1963), Clive James' *Unreliable Memoirs* (1980), Germaine Greer's *Daddy, We Hardly Knew You* (1987), Jill Ker Conway's *The Road From Coorain* (1987), and Robert Dessaix's *A Mother's Disgrace* (1994). Narratives of education, including Porter's and Conway's, often present a move towards autarky in the autobiographer. Such an emphasis on individuality, however, does not preclude an engagement with nationalist myths, as seen in A. B. Facey's *A Fortunate Life* (1981) and Patsy Adam-Smith's *Hear the Train Blow* (1964), in which education is related not only to parental crisis, but also the nationalist mythic tropes of war and rural adversity.

The heightened literary status of autobiography was clear by the early 1960s. Indeed, Herbert's and Porter's works were two of four major literary autobiographies published in 1963. (The others were by Miles Franklin and Katharine Susannah Prichard.) Porter's has become the definitive Australian literary autobiography of the period. *The Watcher*

18 Ruby Langford Ginibi, *Don't Take Your Love to Town*, Penguin, 1988, p. 2.
19 Smith, *MumShirl*, p. 5.
20 Stella Bowen, *Drawn From Life* [1941] Virago, 1984, p. 12.

on the Cast-Iron Balcony is a highly stylised account of childhood, reliant on an almost hypnotic listing of detail, a rich rendition of place, a complex use of narrative point of view, and a mythopoeic attitude towards childhood. The latter feature is notable in numerous modern Australian autobiographies of childhood, even those apparently dealing with the harshness of Australian life (such as Conway's *The Road from Coorain* and Chester Eagle's *Mapping the Paddocks*, 1985).

Autobiographies of childhood are narratives of beginnings, and beginnings are important and volatile things for a settler nation, since they are inherently related to issues of identity and legitimacy. Significantly, the emphasis on personal beginnings in modern Australian autobiography usually relates to wider social or historical beginnings, which often raise non-Indigenous anxieties concerning Australian identity. The journalist and novelist Ronald McKie makes such anxiety explicit in the title of his autobiography, *We Have No Dreaming* (1988). Vincent Buckley's *Cutting Green Hay: Friendships, Movements and Cultural Conflicts in Australia's Great Decades* (1983) similarly links personal and cultural beginnings in an anxious way. It begins with a consideration of Buckley's Irish ancestors, and their place in the Irish diaspora:

> If I study the extracts from the ships' manifests, I find an eerie regularity in the way in which the names come up, over and over, Christian and surname together, and how the stark 'descriptions' of them so rob them of individuality and purpose that, in the end, I do not worry about pursuing the question which of them were my forebears, belonged as it were to me. In the ring of the names is the fierce conviction that they all belong to me . . . [21]

Buckley's experience is uncanny in its uncovering of a crisis of the proper name, and through the uncanny figure of repetition. Buckley knows that the names are not those of his ancestors, but nevertheless associates with them to construct a history. Such a strategy highlights, however, not historical continuity, but discontinuity.

In *The Education of Young Donald* (1967), Donald Horne also links his account of childhood, education and place with social history. In constructing a history for his childhood home town of Muswellbrook, he presents a vague, mythic Indigenous past for it: 'Imagine Muswellbrook first as scrub, brush, forest and a river with its tributary creeks, the land of the Aborigines. Then the whites walk into this "wilderness" and begin to clear it for their huge sheep and cattle runs.'[22] Even as Horne tries to assert the fact of Indigenous dispossession in colonial times, he refrains from representing any Indigenes, ironically refiguring the colonial myth of *terra nullius* that he is trying to overcome. Such an aporia is indicative of the spectral and uncanny condition of Indigenous dispossession in mid-century Australian autobiography. But, like Buckley, Conway, and others, Horne shows how Indigenous absence also affects non-Indigenous history: 'We had no sense of

21 Vincent Buckley, *Cutting Green Hay: Friendships, Movements and Cultural Conflicts in Australia's Great Decades*, Allen Lane, 1983, pp. 3–4.

22 Donald Horne, *The Education of Young Donald*, 1967, Penguin, 1988, p. 14.

Muswellbrook's past: no one told us anything about the history of the Hunter Valley.'[23] Historical absence, as noted by McKie, Buckley and Horne, suggests another uncanny condition, one in which the Australian autobiographer is haunted by a *lack* of ghosts.

Anxiety concerning beginnings can be traced to an anxiety about Australian identity. Such anxiety plays out in modern Australian autobiography through the opposing discourses of social history (as mentioned above) and mythopoeia. Childhood is often presented in mythic and elegiac terms. Consider the titles of Gavin Souter's *The Idle Hill of Summer* (1989); James Murray's *The Paradise Tree* (1988); Douglas Stewart's *Springtime in Taranaki* (1983); John Hetherington's *The Morning was Shining* (1971); James McAuley's book of poetry, *Surprises of the Sun* (1969), Nancy Phelan's *A Kingdom by the Sea* (1969); Pixie O'Harris' *Our Small Safe World* (986); Alec H. Chisholm's *The Joy of the Earth* (1969); and Martin Boyd's *Day of My Delight* (1965). They all advert to mythical gardens, springtimes and safe worlds that are no longer. Often the mythical and the historical appear together. Bernard Smith, in *The Boy Adeodatus* (1984), reconstructs his childhood (disfigured by the social stigma of illegitimacy) using letters, official documents, and oral history as well as mythic and intertextual references (such as Augustine's *Confessions*, from which the title comes). One key mythic trope used by Smith, and countless others, is the Edenic myth, in which childhood is figured as a paradise that is lost with the Fall into maturity. Such a structure can be seen operating in almost all the works discussed above.

A general feature of the Edenic myth as expressed in modern Australian autobiography is how early loss and death are sounded in the text, as seen in works such as *The Watcher on the Cast-Iron Balcony*, *The Road from Coorain*, David Malouf's *12 Edmonstone Street* (1985), Joan Colebrook's *A House of Trees* (1987), and Dorothy Hewett's *Wild Card* (1990). Such works typically end with the conventional tropes of the Fall: death, sexuality, and work. Many also end with the protagonist leaving Australia, as if this too could be conceived as a kind of Fall into maturity: among them *A House of Trees*, *The Road from Coorain*, *Unreliable Memoirs*, Graham McInnes' *The Road to Gundagai* (1965), and Kathleen Fitzpatrick's *Solid Bluestone Foundations* (1983).

The relationship between place and anxiety concerning beginnings is also found in the emphasis in modern Australian autobiography on childhood houses. Fitzpatrick's *Solid Bluestone Foundations* and Manning Clark's *The Puzzles of Childhood* (1989) both illustrate an autobiographical discomfort with the parental home, as hardly worthy of consideration. Malouf's *12 Edmonstone Street* argues that there was a general anxiety regarding Queensland houses and the sense of belonging to a place. Malouf writes of his father's shame over the family's weatherboard home: 'He would have preferred a modern one made of brick. Weatherboard was too close to beginnings, to a dependence on what was merely local and near to hand rather than expensively imported.'[24] Once

23 Ibid., p. 27.
24 David Malouf, *12 Edmonstone Street*, 1985; Penguin, 1986, p. 10.

again, the uncanny asserts itself. What is local is out of place; what is Australian is 'improper'.

Given the importance of nation and national identity to these works, it is not surprising that much of the early theorising on Australian autobiography was sponsored by cultural-nationalist terms. According to Richard N. Coe (writing in 1981), Australian autobiographies of childhood have been overwhelmingly concerned with the condition of national culture.[25] John Colmer in the first monograph on the subject, *Australian Autobiography: The Personal Quest* (1989), argues that 'most Australian autobiographers . . . are as concerned with creating and redefining images of national identity as with discovering truths about the self'.[26] And in *The Penguin Book of Australian Autobiography* (1987), John and Dorothy Colmer argue that 'in Australia the impulse to record a hitherto unrecorded world, to chart rapid social changes and to discover the truth about national identity has been as strong as the impulse to discover the self, and, moreover, is inseparable from it'.[27] This claim seems unconsciously to repeat early-colonial, late-colonial, and cultural-nationalist responses to Australia.

Identity/crisis

The most significant developments in autobiography since the Bicentenary in 1988 have been the rise of minority forms of autobiography, and an associated shift from the cultural-nationalist modes of reading and writing it described above. These new forms of autobiography have centred on shifting ideas of identity (national and personal) and ongoing crises of various kinds. In the contemporary period the terms 'identity' and 'crisis' are profoundly related, as we will see.

One of the most significant expressions of such developments has been the rise of Indigenous autobiography. Indigenous writers have brought about a discursive revolution in which they have moved from being the ethnographic objects of colonial discourse to the human subjects of autobiographical discourse. A number of Aboriginal men, such as Charles Perkins, Jack Davis and Noel Tovey, have written important autobiographies, but the form has been especially popular with Indigenous women as a way of constructing intersubjective personal histories that resist the racism and silence of white Australian histories. Early examples include Margaret Tucker's *If Everyone Cared* (1977), and Labumore's (Elsie Roughsey's) *An Aboriginal Woman Tells of the Old and the New* (1984). Both Sally Morgan's *My Place* (1987), the first Indigenous bestseller, and a popular interest in Indigenous culture raised by the Bicentenary, led to a wave of publishing, including Glenyse Ward's *Wandering Girl* (1988, from the first Indigenous publishing house, Magabala Books), Alice Nannup's *When the Pelican Laughed* (1992),

25 Richard N. Coe, 'Portrait of the Artist as a Young Australian: Childhood, Literature and Myth', *Southerly*, 41.2 (1981), pp. 129–30.
26 John Colmer, *Australian Autobiography: The Personal Quest*, OUP, 1989, p. 154.
27 John and Dorothy Colmer, *The Penguin Book of Australian Autobiography*, p. 3.

and Evelyn Crawford's *Over My Tracks* (1993). Such works, as critics have noted, attest to great hardship, and are both resistant and dialogic in approach. They are also usually concerned with a return home and an emphasis on family. As such, Indigenous autobiography tends to avoid common patterns of Western autobiography which emphasise individual development. Ginibi's *Don't Take Your Love to Town* is unapologetic in not seeking the kind of coherence that might be expected from Western literary autobiography. Morgan, somewhat controversially, does evoke non-Indigenous autobiographical traditions in her account of discovering her Indigenous heritage. Her multivocal work – in which Morgan's Aboriginal identity is uncovered in the narrating of family history – uses the quest motif and elements of detective fiction to dramatise the process of discovery.

As the critical controversy surrounding *My Place* attests, Indigenous autobiography has occasioned considerable anxiety on behalf of (usually white) critics over its publication by mainstream non-Indigenous publishing houses, its use of non-Indigenous collaborators and editors, and its employment of non-Indigenous literary forms. Perceived asymmetrical power structures in collaborative autobiographies offered an early area of critique (often for good reasons). Recently, however, Michael Jacklin has adverted to the potential for harm in the *criticism* of collaborative writing, arguing that in defending Indigenous subjects who appear to be vulnerable in the collaborative process, 'critics are again writing over and thus devaluing the Aboriginal contribution to the text'.[28] The use of a reconciliatory discourse has also led to critical anxiety over where such a construction positions the white reader. Anne Brewster, for instance, argues that because we are positioned as friends of the narrator in many of these stories:

> we don't identify with the white perpetrators of terror. In reading these narratives, we develop a sense of the continuity and survival of Aboriginal history but not necessarily of white settler culture . . . We are shielded from an identification with the white settler culture of terror and a recognition of the continuity of our own history of oppression . . . [29]

Literary status, and its effects, is an additional theme of the criticism of Indigenous autobiography. Penny van Toorn argues that the recognition of Indigenous autobiography as 'literature' is not in itself liberating: 'The shift into literature should not be viewed as an unequivocal liberation into a politically autonomous or culturally separate Aboriginal textual space; it is more accurately understood as a shift from one colonial discursive regime to another.'[30]

28 Michael Jacklin, 'Critical Injuries: Collaborative Indigenous Life Writing and the Ethics of Criticism', *Life Writing*, 1.2 (2004), p. 68.

29 Anne Brewster, 'Taking Your Story to Town: Evelyn Crawford's *Over My Tracks* and the Ambivalence of Aboriginal Women's Autobiographical Narratives', in Ommundsen and Rowley (eds), *From a Distance*, p. 101.

30 Penny van Toorn, 'Indigenous Australian Life Writing: Tactics and Transformations', in Bain Attwood and Fiona Magowan (eds), *Telling Stories: Indigenous History and Memory in Australia and New Zealand*, A&U, 2001, p. 16.

As van Toorn dryly observes elsewhere, 'Aboriginal life-writing is thus a highly contested textual territory.'[31] Aboriginal autobiographers themselves are aware of this condition, and have been increasingly engaged in practices that allow them control over their texts' composition, publication, and reception. Another feature of Aboriginal agency in the field of life writing, as seen in *My Place*, is a blurring of the distinctions between familial autobiography and biography. In *Auntie Rita* (1994), the voices of Rita Huggins and her daughter Jackie interweave to produce a hybrid inter-generational work. Other writers (including Morgan, Ginibi and Doris Pilkington in *Follow the Rabbit-Proof Fence*, 1996) have written biographical works of family members, effectively Indigenising auto/biographical discourse.

As with Indigenous autobiography, the rise of ethnic-minority writing has been attended by the opening of a new critical discursive space. In this instance, that space is one that values self-reflexivity, formal innovation, and intersubjectivity (though more traditional works such as Mary Rose Liverani's *The Winter Sparrows: Growing up in Scotland and Australia*, 1975, and Elena Jonaitis's *Elena's Journey*, 1997, have also been well received). By focusing on the provisional and linguistic features of identity, ethnic-minority writers illustrate the (often uncanny) complexities of identity, especially in the wake of displacement and trauma. Works such as Emery Barcs' *Backyard of Mars: Memoirs of the 'Reffo' Period in Australia* (1980), David Martin's *My Strange Friend* (1991), and Andrew Riemer's *Inside Outside: Life Between Two Worlds* (1992) represent the disfiguring effects of 'history' on an individual's life, and the sense of duality that immigration engenders.

An important trope of such works is the narration of a return journey to the home country of the autobiographer's family. For Riemer, his return to Budapest in 1990, narrated in *The Habsburg Café* (1993), shows 'I had nothing in common with this world.'[32] As critics have noted, Riemer is reluctant to make his narrative one of Holocaust survival. For other auto/biographers, especially children of survivors, the 'return' narrative is wholly predicated on the ongoing crisis of the Holocaust. Arnold Zable's *Jewels and Ashes* (1991), Susan Varga's *Heddy and Me* (1994), Mark Raphael Baker's *The Fiftieth Gate: A Journey Through Memory* (1997) and Peter Singer's *Pushing Time Away: My Grandfather and the Tragedy of Jewish Vienna* (2003) share the same procedure of writing intersubjective auto/biography which highlights the process of discovering the histories of families blighted by the Holocaust. As Richard Freadman writes in *This Crazy Thing a Life: Australian Jewish Autobiography* (2007), post-Holocaust memoirs 'look back, but also forward; indeed they often have a particular rhythm of looking back in order to look forward. The writers are motivated by the desire to bear witness to the catastrophe, but also to reconstruct the family tree decimated by the

31 Penny van Toorn, 'Indigenous Texts and Narratives', in Webby (ed.), *Cambridge Companion*, p. 35.
32 Andrew Riemer, *The Habsburg Café*, A&R, 1993, p. 214.

war.'[33] One important form of Holocaust witnessing has been the 'Write Your Story' Project of the Makor Jewish Community Library (situated in the Melbourne suburb of South Caulfield). Inaugurated by Julie Meadows in 1998, this project has led to the publication of over 50 volumes of autobiography. As Freadman's account of the project illustrates, testimonial narration can have real communal and therapeutic effects.

The rise of Indigenous autobiography and ethnic-minority autobiography occurred within the context of a critical project that sought to overturn the masculinist and nationalist readings of Australian autobiography. One of the first works to undertake this project was Hooton's *Stories of Herself When Young* (1990), which was partly a feminist revision of the archive, and partly an early expression of a 'relational turn' in autobiography studies witnessed internationally by the end of the millennium. Hooton's theory that women's autobiography represents a relational self (defined through others and community) through open or discontinuous structures and alternative modes of authorship, prefigures much discussion of contemporary autobiography. Her attention to autobiography's formal diversity (as a way of avoiding masculinist and nationalist models) also anticipated later anti-formalist readings of autobiography. Gillian Whitlock, for instance, in *The Intimate Empire: Reading Women's Autobiography* (2000) and *Soft Weapons: Autobiography in Transit* (2007), engages with autobiography not through its formal characteristics, but through the effects of autobiographical *reading*. As such, autobiographies become shifting sites of authority and expression within the changing historical, social and political contexts where they find themselves. Whitlock's monographs are in turn part of an increased interest in comparative autobiography studies. Work by (or co-written by) Australian critics includes Freadman's *Threads of Life: Autobiography and the Will* (2001); Mary Besemeres' *Translating One's Self: Language and Selfhood in Cross-Cultural Autobiography* (2002); *Selves Crossing Cultures: Autobiography and Globalisation* (2002), edited by Rosamund Dalziell; Kay Shaffer's and Sidonie Smith's *Human Rights and Narrated Lives: The Ethics of Recognition* (2004); and David Parker's *The Self in Moral Space: Life Narrative and the Good* (2007). These – like Whitlock's studies – are variously concerned with identity, intercultural experience, and/or ethics (or morality), in the context of autobiography as a global form of writing.

The move from nationalist models of Australian autobiography, coupled with the rise of identity politics, has meant that autobiography since the early 1990s has been both notably diverse and politically charged (usually – as already implied – within a context of ongoing crisis). Eric Michaels' *Unbecoming: An AIDS Diary* (1990) and Sasha Soldatow's and Christos Tsiolkas's dialogic autobiography *Jump Cuts* (1996) are self-reflexive works that deal explicitly with the relationship between sexual identity and politics. They join a long list of formally divergent works such as Drusilla Modjeska's ficto-autobiographical *Poppy* (1990); Beverley Farmer's *A Body of Water: A Year's Notebook* (1990) and *The Bone*

33 Richard Freadman, *This Crazy Thing a Life: Australian Jewish Autobiography*, UWAP, 2007, p. 82.

House (2005); Murray Bail's *Longhand: A Writer's Notebook* (1989; updated as *Notebooks: 1970–2003*, 2005); John Hughes' auto/biographical essays, *The Idea of Home* (2004); and William Yang's multimedia work, *Sadness* (1996). These works have been part of a shift in thinking away from 'autobiography' to 'life writing'. That such a shift does not simply have formal implications can be seen in Helen Garner's non-fiction works, *The First Stone: Some Questions About Sex and Power* (1995) and *Joe Cinque's Consolation* (2004), in which Garner figures strongly as both actor and reporter in the narratives. Garner's emphasis on justice and social and personal responsibility is indicative of a change in literary culture: autobiographical life writing has become associated with the figure of the public intellectual, ethical value, and the valorisation of non-fiction forms of writing as modes for discussing the self in terms of larger historical and social issues.

Public intellectuals such as Robert Manne, Morag Fraser, Robert Dessaix, Modjeska, Raymond Gaita, Inga Clendinnen, Cassandra Pybus, Garner, Singer and Henry Reynolds have not all written auto/biographical works (though most of them have). Still, it is notable how much these thinkers invest in auto/biographical discourse in their work as writers, broadcasters, editors, anthologists, and so on. Such investment was reflected in changes in book culture in the 1990s. As David Carter notes in 'Public Intellectuals, Book Culture and Civil Society', works such as Modjeska's *The Orchard* were part of a publishing development that saw such titles packaged as 'desirable commodities' by appearing to have both 'high aesthetic value and moral seriousness'.[34]

Such memoirs have not always been associated with the figure of the intellectual, as Li Cunxin's best-selling *Mao's Last Dancer* (2003) illustrates. Cunxin's success at literary festivals also demonstrates that authors who can engage in dialogue with their audiences have been supported by a new autobiographical public sphere, found within the media, multinational publishing, and literary events such as festivals. Cunxin's memoir narrates his escape from extreme poverty by being chosen to become a student at the Beijing Dance Academy, his success as a dancer, and his defection to the United States in 1981. As the popular success of this story shows, value is often placed within the autobiographical public sphere on the testimonial status of autobiographical writing. That the authors of such writing often narrate from the uncanny position of the ethnic-minority 'other' (paradoxically offering an exchange of universal humanist values from within culturally specific contexts) is related to the fact that certain forms of testimonial writing are valued for their 'authenticity'. (Cunxin's life as a financial planner in Melbourne, for instance, is of no interest to his narrative.)

The concept of authenticity, however, is volatile. This can be seen in the case of another best-selling memoir, Norma Khouri's *Forbidden Love* (2003), which purports to be a memoir regarding an 'honour killing' in Jordan. Khouri and her memoir were exposed in 2004 by the journalist Malcolm Knox as fakes. (The controversy is the

34 David Carter, 'Public Intellectuals, Book Culture and Civil Society', *Australian Humanities Review*, 24 (2001–2), <http://www.lib.latrobe.edu.au/AHR/archive/ Issue-December-2001/carter2.html>.

subject of a film by Anna Broinowski, *Forbidden Lie$*, 2007.) As Knox makes clear, the autobiographical public sphere played a part in Khouri's success: 'Khouri . . . spent much of 2003 retelling [her] story, reducing listeners to tears and anger, in interviews, bookshops and at other events.'[35] And as Gillian Whitlock argues, genre also played a role, since her work addressed a willing market (following the terrorist attacks of September 11) through the newly recognisable subgenre (formed by multinational publishers) of 'proto-feminist writing about the Middle East'.[36] Such a misrecognition of autobiography has ramifications:

> From the Khouri hoax we can learn, to our embarrassment and shame, that we may be especially vulnerable to propaganda in the form of testimony, and capable of an unquestioning acceptance of certain categories of information about other cultures we know little about if it takes certain generic forms of address.[37]

Other recent autobiographies have also attracted controversy in the autobiographical public sphere. Cheryl Kernot's *Speaking for Myself Again: Four Years with Labor and Beyond* (2002) was attacked for not revealing certain facts about Kernot's private life deemed relevant by some to her political career. The publication of Roberta Sykes' first volume of autobiography, *Snake Cradle* (1997), led to questions (strikingly similar to those later directed at Mudrooroo) about Sykes' Indigeneity, with members of the Birrigubba Indigenous community accusing her of dishonesty. Sykes, who was born to a white mother who did not tell her the identity of her absent father, narrates her experiences as a person of colour suffering from profound violence and racism throughout her autobiographical trilogy, *Snake Dreaming* (1997–2000). Supporters of Sykes point to the fact that she was treated as an Indigenous Australian during her childhood, that she has strenuously supported Aboriginal rights and interests, and that she has described herself as black. Critics (including Pat O'Shane, a NSW magistrate and member of the Yalanga people) claim that she showed an ignorance of Aboriginal culture and did not correct media reports that she was Indigenous. Sykes has responded to the controversy with silence.

The common factor of controversy does not make the memoirs of Khouri, Kernot and Sykes equivalent, nor should they make us think that contemporary Australian autobiography operates primarily as a source of scandal. Self-narration continues to operate less dramatically through traditionally sanctioned forms, such as autobiographies of childhood, family memoirs, and autobiographies of careers (of writers, politicians, soldiers, sports people, and so on). Anne Summers' *Ducks on the Pond* (1999), Hilary McPhee's *Other People's Words* (2001), and Brian Matthews' *A Fine and Private Place* (2000) are accounts of childhoods and careers that investigate the links between the self

35 Malcolm Knox, 'How a "forbidden" memoir twisted the truth', *Age*, 24 July 2004, <http://www.theage.com.au/articles/2004/07/23/1090464860184.html?oneclick=true>.

36 Gillian Whitlock, 'Tainted Testimony: The Khouri Affair', in *Who's Who? Hoaxes, Imposture and Identity Crises in Australian Literature*, ed. Maggie Nolan and Carrie Dawson, *Australian Literary Studies*, 21.4 (2004), p. 173.

37 Ibid.

and national identity in recognisable, if highly nuanced and sophisticated, ways. Traditional forms, however, increasingly operate within the autobiographical public sphere. This is observable in the rise of the autobiographical essay in the mainstream media; the role of autobiographical writing in education; the rise of new autobiographical forms (such as autopathography) related to testimony; and the ubiquitous relationship between autobiographical expression and the media, the new media, and popular culture. This latter aspect is especially pronounced, seen in celebrity culture, nationalist auto/biographical programs such as *Australian Story*, blogging, and reality television, which all rely on various forms of generic auto/biographical performance.

Ongoing crises

The importance of testimonial literature, trauma and ethical value, and the diffusion of autobiographical discourse into popular and public culture have given autobiography a new urgency, as well as a new association with unresolved crisis (personal, political, and historical). Such an association articulates one of the conditions of contemporary autobiography discussed in Susanna Egan's *Mirror Talk: Genres of Crisis in Contemporary Autobiography* (1999). While crisis and its resolution are central to traditional autobiography, Egan illustrates how unresolved crisis is a defining feature of contemporary autobiography. Works concerned with such crises cannot assume their own autobiographical authority. Rather, they are inherently dialogic and generically heterodox, incorporating fiction, history and visual forms (such as film and comics). Such autobiographies are also notable for their 'foregrounding and emphatic presence of the body'.[38]

Although not all recent Australian autobiographies engage in the kind of formal experimentation that Egan focuses on, there is a general shift towards engagement with ongoing crisis through the strategies she discusses: self-referentiality, generic excess and intersubjective narration. (In part, this has already been noted in the discussion of Indigenous and ethnic-minority writing.) Forms of crisis in recent Australian autobiography can be classified in five groups: crises of the body, narratives of illness and impending mortality; crises of the nation, centred on Indigenous and migrant experiences; crises of identity, relating to childhood and family; crises of history, usually concerning diaspora and non-Australian experiences of genocide; and crises of faith, relating to religious, political and other forms of belief.

One additional form of crisis that has been central to Australia is war. The Great War produced a number of significant works, such as A. B. Paterson's *Happy Dispatches* (1934), Martin Boyd's *A Single Flame* (1939), and Frederic Manning's autobiographical novel, *The Middle Parts of Fortune* (1929). Works such as May Tilton's *The Grey Battalion*

38 Susanna Egan, *Mirror Talk: Genres of Crisis in Contemporary Autobiography*, University of North Carolina Press, 1999, p. 5.

(1933), as well as later accounts of war, including Ray Parkin's trilogy (*Out of the Smoke*, *Into the Smother*, *The Sword and the Blossom*, 1960–8) and Frank Clune's *Korean Diary: A Journey to Japan and Korea in 1950* (1955), illustrate the renewed importance of the journal as a mode of (putative) authoritative autobiographical expression. Irris Makler's *Our Woman in Kabul* (2003) illustrates, too, the continued tradition of reporters writing autobiographically about war. Reporting from Afghanistan shortly after September 11, Makler's account deals with a new kind of war, the so-called war on terror. This war has attracted diverse autobiographical reflection today, including Brian Deegan's memoir of his son who was killed in the 2002 Bali bombing, *Remembering Josh: Bali, A Father's Story* (2004), and Gill Hicks' *One Unknown* (2007), an account of her survival of the London terrorist bombings in 2005.

Individual autobiographies can engage with crisis entirely, as in Deegan's and Hicks' works, or episodically. Two recent works, for instance, begin with crises of the body. *Things I Didn't Know* (2006) opens with an account of Robert Hughes' traumatic car accident in Western Australia; Louis Nowra's *Shooting the Moon* (2004) with a near-death experience. Inga Clendinnen's *Tiger's Eye* (2000), which also begins with serious illness, narrates the author's attempts while ill to understand various forms of crisis through autobiography, fiction, and history (Egan's 'generic excess'). The link between crisis and generic excess is also found in Doris Brett's *Eating the Underworld: A Memoir in Three Voices* (2001), which ranges from realism to fairy tale to represent Brett's illness; and Robert Drewe's *The Shark Net: Memories and Murder* (2000), which links the author's childhood with a series of murders in 1950s Perth using elements, often comically, of the *Bildungsroman*, the detective story, local history, courtroom drama and horror. Using such genres, *The Shark Net* illustrates that, however we narrate them, selves (our own or others') are the sites of forces not easily contained or understood. The extreme expression of this is seen in Jacob G. Rosenberg's *East of Time* (2005), which uses numerous vernacular genres – anecdote, fairy tale, gossip, song, and parable – to recreate the Jewish ghetto in Lodz before Rosenberg and his family were transported to Auschwitz. A 'rendezvous of history and imagination, of realities and dreams, of hopes and disenchantments',[39] *East of Time* is an elegy for Rosenberg's family (all of whom died at Auschwitz), the Lodz ghetto, and, by association, all those who died in the Holocaust. Its successor, *Sunrise West* (2007), which deals with Rosenberg's survival, marriage and move to Australia, is similarly elegiac.

Egan's model of autobiography involves not only crisis and generic excess, but also mirror talk, the (potentially uncanny) convergence of autobiography and biography. In showing the limits of the self, ongoing crises inherently lead to a consideration of otherness. Works that deal with familial loss, such as Gaylene Perry's *Midnight Water: A Memoir* (2004) and Peter Rose's *Rose Boys* (2001), are overtly dialogic, representing the narratives of others as ways of responding to crises of identity. Similarly intersubjective

39 Jacob G. Rosenberg, *East of Time*, Brandl & Schlesinger, 2005, p. 9. Rosenberg died in 2008.

(and generically heterodox) are works concerned with the crisis of nation. An example is Nicholas Jose's *Black Sheep: Journey to Borroloola* (2002), which narrates Jose's search for 'Our mystery relative [who] lived with his Aboriginal wife in an up-side-down water tank in a place called Borroloola'[40] as an occasion to consider the racialised nature of Australian history. In *Balanda: My Year in Arnhem Land* (2005) Mary Ellen Jordan's experiences of working in a coastal community in Arnhem Land lead her to discover a form of radical alterity in which intersubjective narration is a major challenge.

Recent childhood autobiographies have emphasised the mirror talk involved in narrating one's childhood. Works such as Robin Wallace-Crabbe's *A Man's Childhood* (1997), Mandy Sayer's *Dreamtime Alice* (1998), Louis Nowra's *The Twelfth of Never* (2000), John Hughes' *The Idea of Home*, and Craig Sherborne's *Hoi Polloi* (2005) and *Muck* (2007) emphasise the complexity of personal identity in the context of problematic familial relationships, and all offer compelling portraits of parents. They also show, especially Sherborne and Nowra, that satire and comedy are major features of modern autobiography. (This is also seen in the work of Barry Humphries, Clive James, Drewe, and Robin Eakin.)

With their emphasis on the disjunctions occasioned by parents' migration, the works by Hughes and Mark Raphael Baker – as well as Raymond Gaita's elegiac *Romulus, My Father* (1998) – show that childhood is an especially powerful site of mirror talk for ethnic-minority writers. More recently, Asian-Australian voices have also begun to be heard. These, too, are often concerned with the doubleness associated with displacement, and the effects of large-scale crises such as genocide. Vannary Imam's *When Elephants Fight* (2000) is an intergenerational account of a Cambodian family, including the trauma it suffered under the Khmer Rouge. William Yang's *Sadness* is a multimedia work about loss that uses Yang's photographs to investigate his Chinese-Australian identity, his identity as a gay man, and the murder of his uncle in Queensland in 1922. Equally intergenerational in focus is Alice Pung's *Unpolished Gem* (2006). Australian-born, Pung narrates her place within the ongoing crisis of displacement and trauma faced by her Chinese-Cambodian parents and grandmother. With humour she illustrates the psychic and emotional pressures of living within two cultures. The work is reluctant to offer a safe 'assimilationist' account of being first-generation Australian. Instead, it ends unexpectedly on a note of mourning and cultural fidelity, for Pung's grandmother and (implicitly) Pung's childhood self.

As previously argued, crisis in autobiographies of childhood can be marked by the loss of parents. Recent examples of such autobiographies – such as Frank Golding's *An Orphan's Escape* (2005) and Sandy McCutcheon's *The Magician's Son* (2005) – have centred on the search for absent biological parents. Dessaix's *A Mother's Disgrace* is an especially sophisticated and self-conscious work that narrates his discovery of being gay, and his search for his biological mother.

40 Nicholas Jose, *Black Sheep: Journey To Borroloola*, Hardie Grant, 2002, p. 1.

Autobiography in the public sphere

An Orphan's Escape is one of a number of recent memoirs dealing with ongoing crisis that is written out of the discursive space opened by an official report that relied on autobiographical testimony, in this case the Senate Inquiry into Children in Institutional Care, *Forgotten Australians* (2004). This referred to two earlier reports that also relied on autobiographical testimony: *Lost Innocents: Righting the Record* (2001), an inquiry into child migrants; and *Bringing Them Home: Report of the National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from Their Families* (1997), which concluded 'that between one in three and one in ten indigenous children were forcibly removed from their families and communities in the period from approximately 1910 until 1970'.[41]

Bringing Them Home clearly showed, in an unprecedented way, the transformative potential of the autobiographical public sphere. The response was extraordinary in the different expressions that it occasioned. Many readers expressed how powerful and shocking they found the report into the Stolen Generations, while Robert Manne's *In Denial* (2001) details the ideological right's attack, and the Howard Government's infamous refusal to apologise to Indigenous people, thereby underlining the ongoing nature of the crises narrated in the report. Regardless of the Government's response, public interest was so great it became something of a bestseller,[42] and extracts, along with documents regarding responses to the report, were published as *The Stolen Children: Their Stories* (1998), edited by Carmel Bird. As this work showed, the report engendered further autobiographical expression: from politicians, children of those involved, members of the Stolen Generations, and intellectuals such as Reynolds, whose *Why Weren't We Told?* (1999) is an account of the historian's education, politicisation and activism in Indigenous politics.

Bringing Them Home also occasioned further Indigenous testimony, partly because it led to the funding of the Bringing Them Home Oral History Project, interviews from which appeared in *Many Voices: Reflections on Experiences of Indigenous Child Separation* (2002), edited by Doreen Mellor and Anna Haebich. Indigenous memoir has also explicitly situated itself in terms of the report. Rosalie Fraser's *Shadow Child* (1998) is subtitled 'A memoir of the stolen generation'. *Rene Baker File #28 / E.D.P.* (2005), by Rene Powell and Bernadette Kennedy, which places autobiographical testimony alongside archival research, presents itself as part of the report's narrative and effects. Fabienne Bayet-Charlton's *Finding Ullagundahi Island* (2002) and Lynette Russell's *A Little Bird Told Me: Family Secrets, Necessary Lies* (2002) similarly

41 *Bringing Them Home: Report of the National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from Their Families*, Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, 1997, p. 37.

42 According to Bernadette Brennan, the original print run of 2000 sold out within days. Another 7000 copies were quickly sold, as well as 40 000 community guides and 4000 video versions: '*Bringing Them Home*: The Power of Story as Public Discourse', in Alison Bartlett, Robert Dixon and Christopher Lee (eds), *Australian Literature and the Public Sphere*, Association for the Study of Australian Literature, 1998, p. 24.

present the formation (and distortion) of the past as occurring in the bureaucratic archive.

Bringing Them Home powerfully illustrates the political and ethical potential for autobiographical discourse, especially with regard to large-scale, ongoing cultural crises. In *Soft Weapons*, Whitlock considers the place of autobiography in cultural conflict:

> Autobiography circulates as a 'soft weapon'. It can personalize and humanize categories of people whose experiences are frequently unseen and unheard. To attend to a nauseated body at risk in Baghdad, or to hear a militant feminist body beneath a burka, to attach a face and recognize a refugee is to make powerful interventions in debates about social justice, sovereignty, and human rights.[43]

'Recognising a refugee' is one area in which autobiography has operated as a soft weapon in Australia. In the wake of the Howard Government's hostile response to asylum seekers in the 1990s (which included mandatory detention, the introduction of Temporary Protection Visas that did not allow for family reunion, and the attempted proscription of 'humanising images' of asylum seekers in the media), a number of works reliant on autobiographical testimony have sought to give voice to those people. David Corlett's *Following them Home: The Fate of the Returned Asylum Seekers* (2005) details Corlett's discussions with asylum seekers who had been forced to return to their homelands. Autobiographical testimonies give insights into the conditions of detention in Australia and Nauru, and the fate of those who returned to their homes (which included torture, statelessness, and mental illness). *From Nothing to Zero: Letters from Refugees in Australia's Detention Centres* (2003) also uses autobiographical testimony for humanising purposes. One letter from a nine-year-old reads in part: 'I like to watch TV. My favourite show is Simpsons. My favourite food pizza. I came from Iraq . . . I am very sad because long time in jail. I wish to go out side of detention'[44] Emanating from uncanny penal spaces that both do and do not evoke earlier Australian ones, such autobiographical expressions are necessarily highly mediated. The space given to the speakers is brief and fugitive in form, but the ghosts of these people may yet come back to haunt us.

In *The Uncanny* Royle writes:

> It is impossible to think about the uncanny without involving a sense of what is autobiographical, self-centred, based in one's own experience. But it is also impossible to conceive of the uncanny without a sense of ghostliness, a sense of strangeness given to dissolving all assurances about the identity of a self.[45]

As this chapter has shown, one also cannot think about the autobiographical without invoking the uncanny. Autobiographical identity, which is reliant on language, is at

43 Gillian Whitlock, *Soft Weapons: Autobiography in Transit*, University of Chicago Press, 2007, p. 30.
44 *From Nothing to Zero: Letters from Refugees in Australia's Detention Centres*, Lonely Planet, 2003, p. 62.
45 Royle, *The Uncanny*, p. 16.

all points haunted by the ghosts that inhabit the language that has been passed on to us. Haunted, too, by the things that exceed full autobiographical expression – history, experience, embodiment, even the quotidian – autobiography itself is a spectre of those things that it can never quite represent. The apparitional world of autobiography seeks, ultimately, to bring to life the apparitional world that we, as ghostly subjects, inhabit.

16

Riding on the 'uncurl'd clouds'

The intersections of history and fiction

BRIAN MATTHEWS

One of the more famous reviews – or infamous, depending where you would choose to stand in the ensuing debate – in Australian literary history was written by the journalist and popular historian M. H. Ellis about Volume One of Manning Clark's *A History of Australia*.[1] In a scarifying assault, entitled 'History Without Facts', in which Ellis could find not one mitigating virtue in Clark's book, he dismantled the work on the grounds of what he claimed were its many errors, some serious, but most minor. Some examples: 'distorted and inaccurate', 'obsessed with little things of the mind and spirit', 'Was ever such nonsense written?', '[he] ignore[s] vital documents and evidence which, one would imagine, could not escape the notice of even the most superficial historian', and so on.

Though no one – least of all Ellis, who had his own axes to grind – paid much attention at the time, the question of history versus literature was lurking beneath this splenetic attack. Was Clark writing history or a species of fiction? Was narrative history, the term Clark himself used, doomed inevitably to harbour error and distortion because it arose partly from the workings of the imagination? How would historians of Ellis' persuasion proceed differently? Did not everyone writing the past employ narrative?

The reception of Volume Two of Clark's *History*, *New South Wales and Van Diemen's Land, 1822–1838*, raised the matter of the interface between history and literature more explicitly and without the spleen. Writing in the literary journal *Southerly*, G. A. Wilkes, Professor of Australian Literature at the University of Sydney, suggested that

> Australian history and Australian literature have rarely found so felicitous a conjunction [as in Volume Two of the *History*]. This is felt on a broad scale in the awareness of human personality and the sense of human nature that gives Clark's narrative almost the interest of a novel; it is felt on a minor scale in his allusions to Shakespeare . . . to the Book of Common Prayer or even – as in the description of the death of Darcy Wentworth – to the closing sentence of *The Fortunes of Richard Mahony*.

Alastair Davidson writing in *Dissent* noted that 'the book is more or less Clark singing his own saga', and Lloyd Robson said in *Meanjin*, '[Clark's] *History* should be judged as literature.'[2]

1 Ellis, 'History Without Facts', *Bulletin*, 22 Sept. 1962.
2 Wilkes, *Southerly*, 3 (1968); Davidson, *Dissent* (Spring 1968); Robson, *Meanjin Quarterly*, Dec. 1968.

Grenville, *The Secret River*

A little less than half a century after the *History* was being either attacked or valued for having the lineaments of literary fiction, novelist Kate Grenville found it necessary to defend herself against the charge that her fiction was actually history. In an essay entitled 'The History Question: Who Owns the Past?', the writer and historian Inga Clendinnen attacked Grenville's novel *The Secret River* (2005) – which 'vividly creates the reality of [Australian] settler life, its longings, dangers and dilemmas' – as a distortion of the historical record, an appropriation so severe that it made her 'flinch'. The novel, Clendinnen said, was an indication of how novelists 'have been doing their best to bump historians off the track'. For historian and biographer Mark McKenna, *The Secret River* was also exemplary – of novelists 'parading' as authorities on aspects of Australian history. Novelists, as McKenna saw them, assumed that 'their art [of fiction]' was 'superior to that of history'.[3] Grenville's defence appeared in *Quarterly Essay* No. 25:

> I'm a great admirer of Inga Clendinnen's writing and found *The History Question* full of the insights and thoughtfulness that characterise all her work. She spends some time discussing *The Secret River*, and I'm glad of the opportunity to make a few comments about that aspect of her essay.
>
> Clendinnen isn't the only historian to think that I regard *The Secret River* as history, and that I claim for it the authority of history: Mark McKenna (mentioned by Clendinnen in her essay) led the charge a few months ago. Clendinnen paraphrases McKenna's argument when she says, 'Grenville discovered she could write history after all. The novel is a serious attempt to do history . . . Grenville sees her novel as a work of history . . . ' Although Clendinnen gives no source for this claim, it could well have come from McKenna's piece, so in this reply I'll refer to his essay as well as hers.
>
> Both McKenna's essay and Clendinnen's quote me as claiming to have written history – and in fact to have written better history than historians. However, the quotes that they use have been narrowly selected, taken out of context, and truncated. They don't represent what I actually think. But, like Chinese Whispers, those 'quotes' are now being quoted by others – and for this reason I'd like to put the record straight.
>
> Here it is in plain words: I don't think *The Secret River* is history – it's a work of fiction. Like much fiction, it had its beginnings in the world, but those beginnings have been adapted and altered to various degrees for the sake of the fiction.
>
> Nor did I ever *say* that I thought my novel was history. In fact, on countless occasions I was at pains to make it clear that I knew it wasn't . . .
>
> It was important to me that the incidents and characters were solidly based on history, but as a novelist I drew on these historical sources loosely, as a starting-point for the work of the imagination. The final events and characters meld many historical references together – they're fiction, but they're based on fact.

3 Clendinnen, 'The History Question: Who Owns the Past?' *Quarterly Essay*, 23, Black Inc., 2006; McKenna, 'Writing the Past', in Drusilla Modjeska, ed., *The Best Australian Essays 2006*, Black Inc., 2006.

> I'm sorry that my adaptation of historical sources has caused Inga Clendinnen to 'flinch' – but it's what fiction writers do: take the world and modify it. I've always made it clear, though, that I *have* modified it. I've spelled out my awareness that I'm writing fiction, not history.

A long debate

Much of this debate, which continues to wax and wane in journals and seminars, makes the history/fiction question sound as if it is a new phenomenon, but the intersection of history and fiction, of works of record and works of the imagination, has been going on for a long time in the Australian creative culture.

The publication in 1955 of Patrick White's *The Tree of Man* is generally accepted as a watershed in Australian fiction, comparable with the appearance of Henry Lawson's *While the Billy Boils* in 1896 or Joseph Furphy's *Such is Life* in 1903. All three in their different ways can throw some light on the contemporary interest in the relationship and boundaries between history and fiction.

In Lawson and in Furphy a narrative that was distinctly, intimately and unmistakably Australian transcended nationality to place the great human questions and dilemmas credibly in an antipodean landscape and express them in the vernacular their authors knew to be the authentically emerging sound of the people. Neither Lawson nor Furphy was inclined to be theoretical about the literary imagination – although Furphy, the autodidact, was incurably and helplessly discursive – but both knew what needed to be said and what rejected.

On the question of what constituted a proper language for and accurate depiction of the Australian reality, Lawson's pronouncements were rough and ready enough, but they have come to be recognised as important indications of his views on literary realism and what he himself was trying to do. One of these is 'Some Popular Australian Mistakes', a list of 23 errors made by writers about the Australian landscape, and a conclusion.[4] Here are some examples:

> An Australian mirage does not look like water; it looks too dry and dusty. A river is not a broad, shining stream with green banks and tall, dense eucalypti walls; it is more often a string of muddy waterholes – 'a chain of dry waterholes', someone said. Men tramping in search of a 'shed' are not called 'sundowners' or 'swaggies'; they are 'trav'lers'.

And the conclusion reads:

> We wish to heaven that Australian writers would leave off trying to make a paradise out of the Out Back Hell; if only out of consideration for the poor, hopeless, half-starved wretches who carry swags through it and look in vain for work . . . What's the good of

4 Lawson, 'Some Popular Australian Mistakes', *Bulletin*, 1893.

> making a heaven of a hell when, by describing it as it really is, we might do some good for the lost souls there?

Lawson had various culprits in mind – among them A. B. 'Banjo' Paterson – when he used the umbrella term 'Australian writers', but lurking, perhaps almost subconsciously, was an Englishman. Henry Kingsley's thoroughly anglophile colonial romance, *The Recollections of Geoffry Hamlyn* (1859), contained a famous descriptive passage with which Lawson, in common with every other reasonably enthusiastic reader, would have been familiar. It ran like this:

> A new heaven and a new earth!
>
> Tier beyond tier, height above height, the great wooded ranges go rolling away westward, till on the lofty sky-line they are crowned with a gleam of everlasting snow. To the eastward they sink down, breaking into isolated forests, fringed peaks, and rock-crowned eminences, till with rapidly straightening lines they disappear gradually into broad grey plains, beyond which the Southern Ocean is visible by the white reflection cast upon the sky.
>
> All creation is new and strange. The trees, surpassing in size the largest English oaks, are of a species we have never seen before. The graceful shrubs, the bright-coloured flowers, ay, the very grass itself, are of species unknown in Europe; while flaming lories and brilliant parroquets fly whistling, not unmusically, through the gloomy forest, and overhead in the higher fields of air, still lit up by the last rays of the sun, countless cockatoos wheel and scream in noisy joy, as we may see the gulls do about an English headland.
>
> To the northward a great glen, sinking suddenly from the saddle on which we stand, stretches away in long vista, until it joins a broader valley, through which we can dimly see a full-fed river winding along in gleaming reaches, through level meadow land, interspersed with clumps of timber.
>
> We are in Australia . . . .

This avalanche of glens, woods, downs, boskey uplands, not untuneful birds, and other northern hemisphere literary landscape paraphernalia, was exasperating to Lawson because he knew that, like the errors he enumerated in his piece on popular mistakes, this was not a true description, and its language, as much as the author's inexperienced eye and untutored gaze, was an important contributor to the distortion. Lawson, needless to say, saw no heavenly ingredient when he looked at the surrounding bush. And what he saw required a new kind of language – different words; different rhythms; sparser, tougher, more pared-back formulations. In 'The Bush and the Ideal' he comes close to saying as much, castigating bushmen, characterised by the stereotypically named Bill and Jim, for themselves falling victim to the distortions of the self-consciously literary representation of the back country.

> Bill and Jim do not see the bush as it is; and if they write verses about it – as they frequently do in camp – they put shiny rivers and grassy plains, and western hills and dawn and morn and eve and gloaming; and forest boles of gigantic size – everything, in fact, which is not and never was in bush scenery or language; and the more the drought bakes them the more inspired they seem to become. Perhaps they unconsciously see the bush as it should be and their literature is the result of craving for the ideal.[5]

In general, Lawson's prose manifested his own views. Writing 40 years on from Kingsley, he was not in debt to the language of English landscape description and knew he must not be if he was to capture a scene utterly different. Lawson was forging a new utterance and, in relative isolation, tuning a quite other note.

His equally maverick and great contemporary, Furphy, was not convinced by Kingsley either. In *Such is Life* – still perhaps the best work of fiction written in Australia – Furphy refers to the 'slender-witted, virgin-souled, overgrown schoolboys who fill Henry Kingsley's exceedingly trashy and misleading novel with their insufferable twaddle'. Lawson's rejection of turning a hell into a heaven and his insistence on 'describing [something] as it really is' and Furphy's addition of the word 'misleading' to his litany of scorn and castigation are key moments in the reactions of the two writers.

Lawson's short stories

Lawson had set his foot on literary tracks, which, in a moment of spleen, he told his academic critics to 'keep out of' (a phrase that reminds us of Clendinnen's 'historians [being bumped] off the track'). These tracks took him away at great speed from the conventional and popular, in the sense that he was portraying in his prose an Australia that did not suit the nationalism of the time. Lawson's Australia – where drought prevailed in climate and in souls; in which people went mad with isolation, unspeakable things happened to men and women in the wilderness, aspirations died, human feeling was blunted, and humour was at best ironic, at worst black – *that* Australia was not the stuff of necessarily national pride, more a portrait of dogged endurance against the odds.

> The two-roomed house is built of round timber, slabs, and stringy-bark, and floored with split slabs. A big bark kitchen standing at one end is larger than the house itself, veranda included.
>
> Bush all round – bush with no horizon, for the country is flat. No ranges in the distance. The bush consists of stunted, rotten native apple-trees. No undergrowth. Nothing to relieve the eye save the darker green of a few she-oaks which are sighing above the narrow, almost waterless creek. Nineteen miles to the nearest sign of civilisation – a shanty on the main road.

5 Lawson, 'The Bush and the Ideal', *Bulletin*, 1897.

> The drover, an ex-squatter, is away with sheep. His wife and children are left here alone. Four ragged, dried-up-looking children are playing about the house. Suddenly one of them yells: 'Snake! Mother, here's a snake!'
>
> The gaunt, sun-browned bushwoman dashes from the kitchen, snatches her baby from the ground, holds it on her left hip, and reaches for a stick.
>
> She is not a coward, but recent events have shaken her nerves. A little son of her brother-in-law was lately bitten by a snake, and died. Besides, she has not heard from her husband for six months, and is anxious about him . . .
>
> She is used to being left alone. She once lived like this for eighteen months. As a girl she built the usual castles in the air; but all her girlish hopes and aspirations have long been dead. She finds all the excitement and recreation she needs in the *Young Ladies' Journal*, and Heaven help her! takes a pleasure in the fashion-plates . . .
>
> She lifts the mangled reptile on the point of her stick, carries it to the fire, and throws it in; then piles on the wood and watches the snake burn. The boy and dog watch too. She lays her hand on the dog's head, and all the fierce, angry light dies out of his yellow eyes. The younger children are quieted, and presently go to sleep. The dirty-legged boy stands for a moment in his shirt, watching the fire. Presently he looks up at her, sees the tears in her eyes, and, throwing his arms round her neck exclaims:
>
> 'Mother, I won't never go drovin'; blarst me if I do'
>
> And she hugs him to her worn-out breast and kisses him; and they sit thus together while the sickly daylight breaks over the bush.[6]

Or there is the weird twilight world of 'The Bush Undertaker' (in the 1892 story of that name), which Lawson's genius endows with a mysterious depth and plangency. He makes it a musing upon life, death and the tug of the past without losing the documentary edge, the life of the remote shepherd and the isolation that gradually erodes sanity and reality:

> At the foot of the sapling he espied an object which he at first thought was the blackened carcass of a sheep, but on closer examination discovered to be the body of a man; it lay with its forehead resting on its hands, dried to a mummy by the intense heat of the western summer.
>
> 'Me luck's in for the day and no mistake!' said the shepherd, scratching the back of his head, while he took stock of the remains. He picked up a stick and tapped the body on the shoulder; the flesh sounded like leather. He turned it over on its side; it fell flat on its back like a board, and the shrivelled eyes seemed to peer up at him from under the blackened wrists.
>
> He stepped back involuntarily, but, recovering himself, leant on his stick and took in all the ghastly details.
>
> There was nothing in the blackened features to tell aught of name or race, but the dress proclaimed the remains to be those of a European. The old man caught sight of a black

6 Lawson, 'The Drover's Wife', 1892.

bottle in the grass, close beside the corpse. This set him thinking. Presently he knelt down and examined the soles of the dead man's blucher boots, and then, rising with an air of conviction, exclaimed: 'Brummy! by gosh! – busted up at last!'

He carries the body back to his hut, pursued by what he at first thinks is a flock of black goannas, but which turns out to be only one, following the body. Much disturbed by its sinister persistence, he shoots the goanna which dies 'in violent convulsions on the ground'. Then, feeling an obligation that he can only obscurely explain, he sets about burying the body of Brummy.

He shovelled in some more earth and paused again.

The dog rose, with ears erect, and looked anxiously first at his master and then into the grave.

'Theer oughter be somethin' sed,' muttered the old man; ''tain't right to put 'im under like a dog. Theer oughter be some sort o' sarmin.' He sighed heavily in the listening silence that followed this remark and proceeded with his work. He filled the grave to the brim this time, and fashioned the mound carefully with his spade. Once or twice he muttered the words, 'I am the rassaraction.' As he laid the tools quietly aside, and stood at the head of the grave, he was evidently trying to remember the something that ought to be said. He removed his hat, placed it carefully on the grass, held his hands out from his sides and a little to the front, drew a long deep breath, and said with a solemnity that greatly disturbed Five Bob: 'Hashes ter hashes, dus ter dus, Brummy – an' – an' in hopes of a great an' gerlorious rassaraction!'

He sat down on a log near by, rested his elbows on his knees and passed his hand wearily over his forehead – but only as one who was tired and felt the heat; and presently he rose, took up the tools, and walked back to the hut.

And the sun sank again on the grand Australian bush – the nurse and tutor of eccentric minds, the home of the weird.

Lawson's art was to work very close to documentary reality. It is both fascinating and instructive to be reminded of George Orwell in similar mode, to see their gaze fix on similar moments and images: Lawson's glimpse from the train of a 'woman standing at the door throwing out the wash-up water' vividly parallels Orwell's fleeting sight from a different train of 'a young woman . . . kneeling on the stones [at the back of one of the houses], poking a stick up the leaden waste-pipe which ran from the sink inside'.[7] Lawson called his observations 'copy', but he would transform what he saw with fleetingly symbolic, visionary or imaginatively mysterious strokes – the snake burning on the fire in 'The Drover's Wife', the goanna as a symbol of death in 'The Bush Undertaker'. Finding him too gloomy, too *black*, was in a sense as much a judgment of his slant on the real Australian story, its history, as it was of his fiction. Indeed, more so, because few in his own time – not even the most influential critic of the day, A. G.

7 George Orwell, *The Road to Wigan Pier*, in *The Complete Works of George Orwell*, ed. Peter Davison, vol. 5, Secker & Warburg, 1997, p. 15.

Stephens of the *Bulletin*'s Red Page – recognised the purely literary, imaginative power of his deceptively spare, understated, often plotless stories.

In a later age, he would be seen to have a premodernist spareness, that bleakness that would grow and darken in the years between the wars to have an elusive symbolic depth that characteristically accompanied the bleakness. In his own time, however, at the height of his career, between 1896 and 1902, the Australia that emerged from his fictional/documentary world was not the one to which people generally wanted to own or admit. That was not how it was, they objected, just as, in a comparable contemporary debate – the so-called history wars – some commentators want to remove from the story of the Australian past, or at least radically diminish, episodes that are less than complimentary to the pioneers and founding fathers, what they call the 'black armband' view.

Furphy, *Such is Life*

The intersection of history and fiction was even clearer and more intricate in Furphy's *Such is Life*. One of several examples, but perhaps the best and most trenchant, is the discussion the bullockies have about the Burke and Wills expedition of 1860–1 – mismanaged, badly planned, fatally affected by Burke's pretensions and massive ego and, in the end, a failure that combined tragedy, farce and phenomenal bad luck. The Victorian Exploration Committee, drawn from the Philosophical Institute of Victoria (later the Royal Society), which chose and supported Burke and his arrangements, regarded the explorers as intrepid and heroic, but all over the bush, on the 'mulga wire', the expedition was derided. And the laconic point of greatest agreement was that the worst of Burke's many mistakes was bad timing.

The bullockies' discussion is sparked by the egregious remittance man, Willoughby, who tries to urge upon them, as they dine and yarn in the shade on Sunday, 9 September 1883, the 'establishment' version of the Burke and Wills venture:

> 'Now Mosey,' said Willoughby courteously, 'will you permit me to enumerate a few gentlemen – gentlemen remember – who have exhibited in a marked degree the qualities of the pioneer. Let us begin with those men of whom you Victorians are so justly proud – Burke and Wills . . . '

He gets no further with his enumeration. Amid a flurry of Furphean expletives, Mosey gives the 'mulga wire' version of the expedition.

> 'Hold on, hold on,' interrupted Mosey. 'Don't go no furder, for Gossake. Yer knockin yerself bad and you don't know it. Wills was a pore harmless weed, so he kin pass; but look 'ere – there ain't a drover nor yet a bullock driver, nor yet a stock-keeper, from 'ere to 'ell that couldn't 'a' bossed that expegition straight through to the Gulf, an' back agen, an' never turned a hair – with sich a season as Burke had. Don't sicken a man with yer Burke. He burked that expegition, right enough. 'Howlt! *Dis*-MOUNT!' Grand style o' man for sich a contract! I tell you, that (explorer) died for want of his sherry an' biscakes. Why, the ole man here, seen him out beyond Menindie, with his—'

> 'Pardon me, Mosey' [said Willoughby], 'was Mr Price [that is, Mosey's father] connected with the expedition?'
>
> 'No (adj.) fear!' growled Price resentfully. 'Jist happened to be there with the (adj.) teams. Went up with stores and came down with wool.'
>
> Willoughby, who probably wept over the sufferings of Burke's party . . . seemed badly nonplussed . . . and Mosey continued. 'Well, the ole man here seen him camped, with his carpet, an' his bedstead, an' (sheol) knows what paravinalia . . . They give him a lot o' credit for dyin' in the open,' continued the practical little wretch, with masterly handling of expletive, 'but I want to know what else a feller like him could do, when there was no git out? An' you'll see in Melb'n' there, a statue of him made o' cast steel, or concrete, or somethin', standin' bold as brass in the middle o' the street! My word! An' all the thousands o' pore beggars that's died o' thirst an' hardship in the backcountry – all o' them a dashed sight better men nor Burke knowed how to be – where's theyre statues? Don't talk rubbage to me. Why, there was no end to that feller's childishness. Before he leaves Bray [William Brahe] at Cooper's Creek, he drors out – what do you think? – a plan o' forti-(adj.)-fications, like they got in ole wore out countries . . . An' mind you this was among the tamest blackfellers in the world. Why, Burke was dotin'.'

In his own way and through the cantankerous voice of Mosey, Furphy is nailing some popular Australian mistakes: he is inducting history into his fiction to comment on the history and to enliven and deepen the fiction and its characters.

Perhaps it is the mavericks who best enlist history to their fictional cause. While *no-one* emulated the inimitable Furphy, much of the Australian fiction that followed in Lawson's footsteps and was profoundly influenced by his example was worthy – pre-eminently perhaps the work of Miles Franklin – but not adventurous. The narrative of Henry Handel Richardson's great trilogy, *The Fortunes of Richard Mahony* (1917–29, 1930) is skilfully interwoven with the fabric of Australian history, but its concentration on the tragic character of Mahony is the focus and source of its immense power. The developing colony is not mere backdrop, but that story is dwarfed by Mahony's.

Herbert, *Capricornia*

In Xavier Herbert's novel, *Capricornia* (1938), however, history is enlisted in a new and stunning way. At one level, *Capricornia* is transparently set in the Northern Territory and Darwin. Its landscapes, in particular, and Herbert's account of the events that have unfolded over them, especially those involving the management of the Aborigines, are congruent with the Territory's history. *Capricornia* starts as if it might be a history, with a discursive rhythm, a broad sweeping style of observation, and an air of detachment that would influence Clark some 25 years later in the opening sentences of his six-volume *A History of Australia*: 'Civilisation did not begin in Australia until the last quarter of the eighteenth century,' Clark began. 'The reason lies partly in the environment and way of life of the people inhabiting the continent before the coming of the European,

and partly in the internal history of those Hindu, Chinese and Muslim civilisations which colonised and traded in the archipelago of south-east Asia.'[8] Admittedly, to be willingly open to the idea of a historical narrative as distinct from a fictional narrative in Herbert's first paragraph, one would have to ignore the corrosive irony which overtakes the initially guileless opening move, but similarities of tone and rhythm in Clark remain striking:

> Although that northern part of the Continent of Australia which is called Capricornia was pioneered long after the southern parts, its unofficial early history was even more bloody than that of the others. One probable reason for this is that the pioneers had already had experience of subduing Aborigines in the South and hence were impatient of wasting time with people who they knew were determined to take no immigrants. Another reason is that the Aborigines were there more numerous than in the South and more hostile because used to resisting casual invaders from the near East Indies. A third reason is that the pioneers had difficulty in establishing permanent settlements, having several times to abandon ground they had won with slaughter and go slaughtering again to secure more. This abandoning of ground was due not to the hostility of the natives, hostile enough though they were, but to the violence of the climate, which was not to be withstood even by men so well equipped with lethal weapons and belief in the decency of their purpose as Anglo-Saxon builders of Empire.

But, like a photograph just slightly out of focus, another world sits alongside the 'real' one – a world in which the place called Capricornia and its main town Port Zodiac are recognisable, referable to a reality and to geographical names we are familiar with, yet still radically different, a world in which events and characters are larger than life, where jinx and coincidence and luck rule in a way that ordinary existence somehow precludes or rationalises. As in Lawson's fictional world, or Furphy's *Such is Life,* or Marcus Clarke's *For The Term of His Natural Life* (1870–2, 1874), people's lives are spread over huge and sparsely populated distances, yet they keep running across each other, hearing tell of each other's affairs, manipulating things from afar, living and dying in a kind of narrow but fierce publicity that is at odds with the solitudes of their vast environment. In Capricornia, massive changes in the world at large are diminished as if muffled; huge events are reduced to rumour or brought down to size, paradoxically emphasising in the one moment Capricornia's insulation from quotidian reality and its capacity to make everything seem more real than real:

> A few words spoken in a railway car in France, spoken ever so softly, because these history-makers are as jealous of their business as stingy schoolboys of correct results of sums, were overheard by pressmen, gossips of the world, who rushed off shouting, shouting till the world was ringing with the news.
>
> The news was translated into code. The code was translated into impulses of electric force. In that form the news sped southward, through the tangled settlements of Europe,

8 C. M. H. Clark, *A History of Australia*, vol. 1, MUP, 1962.

> across the wastes of Persia, through the steam and stench of India, on and on with lightning speed, down through the roaring jungles of Malay, the paddy-fields of Java, into the Silver Sea among the coral and the pearls, up Capricornia's lonely shore, through Port Zodiac, away and along the singing Transcontinental Telegraph Line, over the Caroline River, into the ever-open ears of Mrs McLash.
>
> The Great War was ended.

Beginning with a recognisable historical moment, leaps of the imagination translate history (and geography!) into fiction; and the 'real' world is at the end of this headlong process assigned a minor role and an inferior status compared to the fictional one.

This was not an unusual phenomenon in Australian fiction of the first half of the 20th century. In the inter-war period historical fiction did much to carry the burden of narrative history in Australia before the professionalisation of the teaching of history in the universities took over this role and task. Think of the work of Eleanor Dark (*The Timeless Land*), M. Barnard Eldershaw (*A House is Built*), Brian Penton (*Landtakers*) among others, not to mention the historical fiction since written in Australia, much of it influenced by postmodernism and other theoretical disputes about history. Two of these concerned Burke and Wills: Alan Atwood's *Burke's Soldier* (2003) and Kevin Rabalais's *The Landscape of Desire* (2008).

White, *The Tree of Man*

And this brings us back to White. As an avowed opponent of what he called 'dun-coloured journalistic realism', White, in *The Tree of Man*, was departing consciously and categorically from the kind of fiction Lawson and especially his inferior acolytes wrote. All the stereotypes of Australian bush fiction can be found in *The Tree of Man* – drought, floods, bushfire, isolation, and pioneering, uncommunicative and seemingly taciturn people – but these exist in the narrative not as quasi-historical emblems, ways of seeing 'what it was like in those days', but as opportunities for the exploration of the 'extraordinary', which White sought to find behind the dun-coloured familiar scenes, faces and standard trials, failures and survivals. This exploration had been prompted by reactions he had experienced in the years following his return to Australia from Europe.

> The first years [after his return] I was content with these activities [growing flowers and vegetables, and breeding Schnauzers and Saanen goats], and to soak myself in landscape. If anybody mentioned Writing, I would reply: 'Oh, one day, perhaps.' But I had no real intention of giving the matter sufficient thought. *The Aunt's Story*, written immediately after the War, before returning to Australia, had succeeded with overseas critics, failed as usual with the local ones, remained half-read, it was obvious, from the state of the pages in the lending libraries. Nothing seemed important, beyond living and eating, with a roof of one's own over one's head.

> Then, suddenly, I began to grow discontented. Perhaps, in spite of Australian critics, writing novels was the only thing I could do with any degree of success; even my half-failures were some justification of an otherwise meaningless life. Returning sentimentally to a country I had left in my youth, what had I really found? Was there anything to prevent me packing my bag and leaving like Alister Kershaw and so many other artists? Bitterly I had to admit, no. In all directions stretched the Great Australian Emptiness, in which the mind is the least of possessions, in which the rich man is the important man, in which the schoolmaster and the journalist rule what intellectual roost there is, in which beautiful youths and girls stare at life through blind blue eyes, in which human teeth fall like autumn leaves, the buttocks of cars grow hourly glassier, food means cake and steak, muscles prevail, and the march of material ugliness does not raise a quiver from the average nerves.
>
> It was the exaltation of the 'average' that made me panic most, and in this frame of mind, in spite of myself, I began to conceive another novel. Because the void I had to fill was so immense, I wanted to try to suggest in this book every possible aspect of life, through the lives of an ordinary man and woman. But at the same time I wanted to discover the extraordinary behind the ordinary, the mystery and the poetry which alone could make bearable the lives of such people, and, incidentally, my own life since my return.[9]

Such was the breadth and power of *The Tree of Man*, however, that it seemed to accomplish what no other Australian fiction before it had done. The force of imagination, intuition and symbolism are combined with a subtle use of natural change – the pace and detail of the action are governed by the changing seasons, beginning with the growth and promise of spring. This suggests not just the life and times of Stan and Amy Parker but gives a sense of Australia's growth from, for better or worse, a kind of remote and unchallenged innocence to the complexities and deceptions of the modern world. The story begins in solitude and isolation:

> A cart drove between two big stringybarks and stopped. These were the dominant trees in that part of the bush, rising above the involved scrub with the simplicity of true grandeur. So the cart stopped, grazing the hairy side of a tree, and the horse, shaggy and solid as the tree, sighed and took root.
>
> The man who sat in the cart got down. He rubbed his hands together because already it was cold, a curdle of cloud in a pale sky, and copper in the west. On the air you could smell the frost. As the man rubbed his hands, the friction of cold skin intensified the coldness of the air and the solitude of that place. Birds looked from twigs and the eyes of animals were drawn to what was happening. The man lifting a bundle from the cart. A dog lifting his leg on an anthill. The lip drooping on the sweaty horse.
>
> Then the man took an axe and struck at the side of a hairy tree, more to hear the sound than for any other reason. And the sound was cold and loud. The man struck at the tree, and struck until several white chips had fallen. He looked at the scar in the side of

9 White, 'The Prodigal Son', 1958.

> the tree. The silence was immense. It was the first time anything like this had happened in that part of the bush.

And it ends with the central character, Stan Parker, achieving a kind of final illumination literally in his own backyard. However, that backyard is no longer the primitive bush of immense silences and hidden curious animal eyes, but closely encroached upon by developing suburbia:

> That afternoon the old man's chair had been put on the grass at the back, which was quite dead-looking from the touch of winter. Out there at the back, the grass, you could hardly call it a lawn, had formed a circle in the shrubs and trees which the old woman had not so much planted as stuck in during her lifetime. There was little of design in the garden originally, though one had formed out of the wilderness. It was perfectly obvious that the man was seated at the heart of it, and from this heart the trees radiated, with grave movements of life, and beyond them the sweep of a vegetable garden, which had gone to weed during the months of [Stan's] illness, presented the austere skeletons of cabbage and the wands of onion seed. All was circumference to the centre, and beyond that the worlds of other circles, whether crescent of purple villas or the bare patches of earth, on which rabbits sat and observed some abstract spectacle for minutes on end, in a paddock not yet built upon. The last circle but one was the cold and golden bowl of winter, enclosing all that was visible and material, and at which the man would blink from time to time, out of his watery eyes, unequal to the effort of realising he was the centre of it. The large, triumphal scheme of which he was becoming mysteriously aware . . .

Many Australians, reading *The Tree of Man*, felt – as they had not done with Dark, Penton, Eldershaw *et al.* – that, while this was undeniably fiction, it put them in touch with a larger conception of the nature of the place, its past and its possible futures: it presented the truth of fiction, different from, yet another and stimulating dimension of, the truth of history. Some historians recognised this, among them Clark.

Clark, *A History of Australia*

In 1955, when *The Tree of Man* appeared, Clark was about to begin researching, in hope and with tremulous ambition, the work that would, to his own surprise as much as anyone else's, take 25 years and more than a million words to complete and involve him in constant controversy. Part of the controversy revolved around Clark's decision to abandon the idea of a standard 'textbook' history in favour of narrative – the mode of fiction, among other things.

As the historian John Hirst (eventually one of Clark's severest critics) has observed:

> I was trained to be suspicious of narrative – mere narrative, as it was called – because it was skating along the surface, mistaking events for causes, which were actually to be discovered in society's deep structures. Historians have now rediscovered and defended narrative; narrative does embody an explanation, and the order in which things happen,

> not to speak of coincidences and chances, can be determining. Obviously there are good narratives which include analysis as well as storytelling, but narratives are a standing temptation to evasion – you can construct a story without facing the questions: What sort of institution or nation or life is this? How is it cast? What is the controlling dynamic? What is the habitual response? Increasingly, I have been attracted to the historical sociologists – particularly Ernest Gellner and his school – who know history is important but who tell only the history that matters for their purpose, that is, what explains the current configurations of society, politics and culture.[10]

But that little word *tell* – 'who tell only the history' – so easily rushed over, is crucial. When you 'tell', you *narrate*. It is not narrative, as such, that is the 'standing temptation to evasion' – it is language. No matter how subject to stringent disciplines, language strays, drifts from specificity, reveals itself as incapable of handling some complexities or mysterious tremors of meaning. This is what White meant by the 'rocks and sticks of words' with which it 'became a struggle to create completely fresh forms'. The argument about the capacity of words, 'ordinary language', to drift or alter in meaning within their linguistic context – within whatever narrative they are part of – lay at the heart of Gellner's objections to Wittgenstein.

Clark's turning away from the textbook approach to considering the possibilities of a wholehearted commitment to narrative was in part influenced by the publication of *The Tree of Man*, because, fiction though it indubitably was, its symbolic, descriptive and narrative force brought to it a penumbra of historical truth. Here is a story, readers felt, that somehow captures the nature and atmosphere, if not the discrete facts, of our history and our country's being – history without facts, you might say. As Clark recalled it:

> It was time to have a go at telling the whole story [of Australia], time to run the risk of discovering whether I had anything to say and could say it. There had been an earlier attempt – the attempt to write a textbook history – which would be very 'yes' and 'no' in the accepted textbook style, and very dull. But that sort of truth was not within me. Now I wanted to write history as a story – history as an art. In *The Tree of Man*, Patrick White had just shown it was possible to discuss the themes that interested me in a novel. That was an inspiration to start – to show that an historian could also do it. So on 1 October in Oxford I wrote the sentence: 'Civilisation did not begin in Australia until the last quarter of the eighteenth century.' The story had begun. Now I had to learn how to tell it. That was hard and bitter agony because, like all those who have tried, I was to find that what went down on paper left much to be desired – there always being a gap between the conception and the creation.[11]

Such was Clark's recollection of his encounter with the intransigent 'rocks and sticks of words'. But significant episodes of his *History* recreate the past by combining the truth

10 Hirst, *The Monthly*, Feb. 2008.

11 C. M. H. Clark, *A Historian's Apprenticeship*, published posthumously and unfinished, McPhee Gribble, 1992.

of history with the narrative methods of fiction. Of many fine examples, his treatment of the Burke and Wills expedition is pre-eminent.

> On 11 November 1860, the party pitched camp on the banks of a water-hole of Cooper's Creek. There – where the yellow-belly fish were an easy catch for the white man's hook and the blackfellow's net, where in a green year the bush was teeming with game, where some of the grasses could be eaten, where the [A]borigines had learned to find the fish in mud-holes in a dry year and to dry pelican flesh for tucker when the birds had migrated in those years when the water-hole dried up – Mr Burke commanded William Brahe to put his assistants to work to build a stockade for protection against the wild blacks.[12]

Clark could almost be following Furphy's fictional lead, his ironic emphasis on the needless stockade being a reference to the fortifications which, as Furphy's Mosey Alf pointed out, belonged to 'ole wore out countries' and were redundant among the 'tamest blackfellers in the world'.

Clark's depiction of Robert O'Hara Burke setting off for Menindie, where Mosey's 'ole man', Price, would derisively glimpse him while delivering stores and loading wool, is equally striking:

> Believing his own honour as well as the honour of Victoria to be in his hands, Mr Burke struck camp promptly on 11 September. As the huge cavalcade rolled over the bridge at Swan Hill and made for Menindie on the Darling River, they were moving away from civilisation into the great silence. As soon as they moved into the saltbush country, some succumbed to the hardships. Becker, as an artist, resented being called on to act as a working man. Landells had differences of opinion with Mr Burke about the handling of the camels. Mr Burke nearly choked with rage. Some six miles from Menindie, the assistants and the shearers on a station pinched the rum reserved for the camels, and carried on for days in a wild debauch. Again Mr Burke erupted into torrents of abuse against Landells, who announced his intention to resign. Beckler sided with Landells; so did Becker. By the time the party reached Menindie, Landells, one of the men who knew about camels, Beckler the doctor, and Becker the artist and the one man who was keeping at least a pictorial record of what they saw, were all on their way back to Melbourne – Landells with stories that cast grave doubts on Burke's sanity.

The ludicrous pomp of the 'huge cavalcade' crossing the bridge and its entry into 'the great silence' is full of portent as, with the preliminaries and the parading over with, the party faces the unknown. The story of their crisis at what should have been the triumphant end of their journey is in Clark's narrative hands similarly dramatic and full of impending doom:

> the wet season had begun and the whole country had been converted from dry land into a sea of mud in which men and beasts floundered. They were tasting the bitter fruit of Mr Burke's act of foolishness. In the dry season of the year, all they would have

12 Clark, *A History of Australia*, MUP, vol. 4, p. 152.

> had between them and the sight of the sea was a walk down the Bynoe River to the gulf . . . In the wet the beasts of burden sank to their knees in the mud, the men were exhausted by the sticky heat and pestered by the insects which swarmed around them by day and night. Finding the ground in such a boggy state from the heavy falls of rain that the camels could scarcely be got along, Mr Burke decided to leave them . . . and proceed with his horse Billy, and Wills on foot, leaving young John King and poor Charley Gray at the camp. The two set out on Sunday 17 February to walk to the gulf, floundering along knee-deep in water, till they reached a channel through which the sea water entered.
>
> There they halted. They could not obtain a view of the open ocean, although they made every endeavour to do so. For their long-awaited moment of glory the rain poured down incessantly . . . They were not far from the sites where those Dutch seamen, those mighty men of renown, had cried out in horror and despair on seeing the land and the people of New Holland . . . Mr Burke and that 'capital fellow' William John Wills could neither see nor hear the sea. Their only satisfaction was to taste the salt water which swept over that boggy ground at high tide . . .

Suffice to say that the intersection of history with fiction and fiction with history has a long, interesting and honourable place in Australia's creative life and in its scholarship. Bushranging (Rolf Boldrewood's *Robbery Under Arms*, 1888), convicts (Price Warung's *Tales of The Convict System*, 1892; Clarke's *For the Term of His Natural Life*), Aboriginal history (*Capricornia* and Alexis Wright's *Carpentaria*, 2006) and, of course, *The Secret River*, exist in and draw momentum from both the imagination and history. There are many more contemporary examples. D. H. Lawrence pointed out that if you attempt to nail down the novel it gets up and runs away with the nail; similarly, the idea that boundaries can and should be drawn between history and fiction – boundaries which the fiction writers in particular are frowned upon for crossing or for aspiring to cross – is unenforceable and certainly unnecessary. In both history and fiction, the imagination – the making of story – will always play its part. Its role in a history will be different from its manifestation in fiction. In the latter, perhaps Hamlet or Prospero; in the former, possibly Dante, struggling with the conflict between the truth of his vision and his inner compulsions; and sometimes, no doubt, Ariel, flitting effortlessly between the two, ready for anything –

> I come
> To answer thy best pleasure; be't to fly
> To swim, to dive into the fire, to ride
> On the curl'd clouds . . .

17

Publishing, patronage and cultural politics

Institutional changes in the field of Australian literature from 1950

DAVID CARTER

The period from the end of World War II has seen at least three major transformations of the Australian literary field. In the 1950s, cultural institutions dedicated to Australian literature or Australian books were still relatively underdeveloped, while publishing and bookselling operated within an established set of relationships with the British publishing industry. In the decade from the late 1950s, local publishing of Australian books expanded, gradually at first, and then rapidly as local branches of British firms developed Australian lists. New and more diverse institutions dedicated to Australian books and authors emerged, as did a generation of writers and readers with new orientations towards both literature and the nation. By the mid-1970s Australian literature was defined through a set of relatively autonomous institutional sites in universities, publishing, criticism, bookselling and professional associations. The presence of contemporary books expanded dramatically, and for the first time something like the literary heritage was available to contemporary readers through numerous reprint series and an increasingly rich critical literature. In the new century, however, some of these achievements seem less secure. Although a mature infrastructure has been established, it exists within a newly globalised international literary system that poses once again some of the recurrent questions for Australian culture: its independence, its national significance, and the role of literature (or books and reading) in those equations.

The literary field

The terms literary 'field' and literary 'system' refer to the network of cultural institutions, industry structures, professional identities, public policies and social practices that determine how books get to readers and how readers get to books or to any other source of literature and literary talk. They include publishing and bookselling; magazines and book reviews; libraries, schools and universities; professional bodies like the Australian Society of Authors; editors and literary agents; informal associations such as writing and reading groups; and the literary festivals and prizes that have become a feature in the national literary landscape since the mid-1990s. These institutions of production and publication, distribution and consumption, appreciation and certification govern the

relations between different kinds of writing and reading and the different kinds of value attached to them, whether in the marketplace or public culture. They are the means by which Australian literature exists as a 'public thing' – a shared idea informed by a sense of tradition or heritage, a subject for interpretation and contestation, an object of policy and the site of professional careers.

These institutions operate in a global framework. Australian cultural industries have existed within constraints: the size of the domestic population and the country's relationship with the two large producers of English-language culture, the United Kingdom and the United States. Tom O'Regan describes Australia as a 'middle-sized, English-language' culture.[1] Australia's book market is similar in size to Canada's: small compared with the United States and the United Kingdom, but large compared with New Zealand, South Africa or Ireland.[2] It has been too small to sustain large-scale, ongoing cultural industries, yet large enough to produce a recurrent pattern of small to medium-sized institutions; these are sometimes remarkably successful but typically short-lived, with some enduring exceptions. (Publisher Angus & Robertson and the *Bulletin* magazine both survived for more than a century but have recently disappeared.) As an English-language culture, Australia has not been large enough to resist cultural imports from the two major producers or to supply the wants of local consumers, but its market has been large enough to be a prime destination for American and British cultural exports. Whatever we think of this as citizens, there is evidence that as consumers (and indeed as cultural producers) Australians value their access to American and British cultures. Australia, in turn, has become a medium-sized cultural exporter.

Despite the growth of the Australian population, despite changes in communication technologies and publishing economies, these constraints continue to determine the nature of cultural institutions and literary or book culture. Yet a mature literary system has emerged in Australia, something that scarcely existed in the immediate post-war decade. To say this is not to reinscribe the colonialist notion that Australia was a cultural desert until this time. Australians have long participated in a busy print culture of local and imported materials. But the institutions of Australian literature were remarkably underdeveloped until the last quarter of the 20th century.

A mature literary system is marked by dense institutions that are relatively stable, and professional participants. It has publishing houses and imprints in high, middle and popular registers; diverse bookselling and book promotion venues; a variety of journals of criticism and review in print and other media; scholarly infrastructure; professional associations; professional careers for writers and cultural intermediaries (literary agents, editors, critics); substantial state and private investment or subsidy; a significant domestic audience; and significant international traffic in books, rights and personnel.

1 Tom O'Regan, *Australian Television Culture*, A&U, 1993, and *Australian National Cinema*, Routledge, 1996.
2 Robert Sessions, 'Thirty Years On', in Craig Munro and Robyn Sheahan-Bright (eds), *Paper Empires: A History of the Book in Australia, 1946–2005*, UQP, 2006, p. 89.

The post-war decade

Few of these features were in place in Australia in the 1950s. The kinds of consecrating institutions that could define Australian literature as something apart from the busy marketplace of books and magazines, as a tradition or a cultural project, were weak or non-existent. The universities did not yet recognise Australian literature as a subject in its own right, few books of literary criticism or history were available, and there were few other venues for extended critical writing. The periodical scene was thinner than it had been in the 1940s, although *Meanjin* and *Southerly* had begun to offer a regular place for criticism, and the ABC and commercial radio offered regular book programs. The Fellowship of Australian Writers (FAW) remained the most important writers' association, with some influence on government, but it had lost the militant nationalist edge it had had in the 1930s. It remained a decentralised body, as much a club for amateur booklovers as a professional lobby group. More positively, the Commonwealth Literary Fund (CLF) offered fellowships for writers; financial support for lectures on Australian literature, more often delivered by freelance writers than university critics; and guarantees against loss to publishers of approved literary works.[3] Angus & Robertson, for example, received a publication subsidy of £100 for its 1000 copies of Judah Waten's *Alien Son* and sought the same amount again on the expectation of loss; in fact the book sold out. Waten received a CLF fellowship in 1952 to write 'a novel of migrant life'.[4]

The publishing of Australian books was no longer dominated by London as it had been before the war, but local literary publishing remained small-scale, intermittent and not particularly innovative. Although new fiction titles by Australian writers appeared in roughly equal numbers from Australian and British publishers, the advantages of British publication and distribution, especially for fiction, still existed. Novelists, new and established, continued to seek British publishers: Kylie Tennant with Macmillan, Frank Hardy with Werner Laurie, Randolph Stow with MacDonald. Indeed, British publication dominated new fiction again for a decade after 1956, including substantial quantities of crime and romance fiction produced by Australian writers.

Angus & Robertson remained the major Australian publisher for mainstream fiction, releasing about six new titles per year on average, with a strong line in humour and historical fiction, alongside reprints of consistent sellers such as Ion L. Idriess or Xavier Herbert's *Capricornia*. (Angus & Robertson also published overseas titles such as the *Anne of Green Gables* series, a solid money-earner for decades.) By the late 1950s the average

3 For the FAW and CLF see Alan Lawson, 'The Recognition of National Literatures: The Canadian and Australian Examples', PhD thesis, University of Queensland, 1987, ch 4; Patrick Buckridge, 'Clearing a Space for Australian Literature, 1940–1965', in *The Oxford Literary History of Australia*, OUP, 1998, pp. 180–4; Stuart Glover, 'Literature and the State', in Munro and Sheahan-Bright (eds), *Paper Empires*, pp. 166–8. On literary associations in post-war Brisbane, see William Hatherell, *The Third Metropolis: Imagining Brisbane Through Art and Literature, 1940–1970*, UQP, 2007.

4 National Archives of Australia, Series A463, Judah Waten–CLF. The subsidy and grant to Waten, a communist, proved controversial (see later). *Alien Son*'s first reissue was a successful paperback released by Sun Books in 1965; it remained in print until the late 1990s, ironically including reprints from A&R.

number of original fiction titles had doubled, with new authors such as Thea Astley, but little else that was new.[5] Much of its output was from writers who combined a freelance career with cheerful amateurism. More significant in establishing the sense of a shared, accumulating literature were the new poetry titles which appeared consistently, under Douglas Stewart's direction, if only in small numbers each year, and the publisher's two anthologies, the annual *Australian Poetry* and biennial *Coast to Coast*.[6] With new editors each time, these volumes drew on a wide range of authors and provided a regular, sometimes controversial, account of how Australian literature appeared to a contemporary.

Apart from educational books, only a few publishers produced more than 10 new titles annually. The constraints on national publishing were largely those arising from its international context, settled arrangements that suited the interests of British publishers and Australian booksellers alike. Characteristic of a relatively underdeveloped infrastructure, the larger Australian publishers like Angus & Robertson were also major booksellers rather than 'purpose-built' publishing houses. The Australian Book Publishers Association had been established in 1948 (24 years after the booksellers' equivalent), but its early years were dominated by bookselling concerns.[7] Australia remained the largest export market for British books, accepting a quarter of all British exports. A Statement of Terms agreed between British publishers and Australian booksellers guaranteed regular supply, healthy discounts and uniform prices for the latter and more or less predictable profits on both sides, but it did nothing for local publishers. This relationship existed within the larger framework of an understanding between British and American publishers, formalised in 1947 as the Traditional Markets Agreement, which divided the English-language book market in two, with Britain controlling all Empire/Commonwealth markets (and sharing Canada).[8] This made it virtually impossible for Australian publishers to acquire separate rights in British- or American-originated books, while British publishers were generally not interested in Australian books unless they could get all Commonwealth rights, including Australian. Despite Australia's affluent, literate population, then, it was difficult for local publishers to achieve sufficient economies of scale to compete with British imports. There were consequences for local writers too, for local publication was more likely in genres such as travel, memoirs, adventure, children's stories or school anthologies than at the higher end of the fiction field. With no international market, small-volume poetry publishing remained local.

These institutional arrangements cannot be interpreted simply in cultural terms as the failure of mature Australian nationhood. Although they clearly reproduced a form

5 Details from *AustLit: The Resource for Australian Literature* <www.austlit.edu.au> and Neil James, 'Spheres of Influence: Angus & Robertson and Australian Literature from the Thirties to the Sixties', PhD thesis, University of Sydney, 2000.

6 1959 was a bumper year with six poetry titles, from William Hart-Smith, Charles Higham, Nan McDonald, Ian Mudie, David Rowbotham and Chris Wallace-Crabbe.

7 Craig Munro and John Curtain, 'After the War', in Munro and Sheahan-Bright (eds), *Paper Empires*, pp. 4–5.

8 Jenny Lee, 'Australia in Colour', *Southern Review*, 40.1 (2007), pp. 43–6.

of imperial domination, they were secured by local industry interests and met *consumer* interests by providing access to the latest books from London. Perhaps the best parallels are with contemporary cinema, where Australian production and 'national cinema' are shaped by the dominance of the United States; and where Australian audiences welcome local productions which earn only a small fraction of the box-office.

Other active publishers of literary/cultural titles in the 1950s included F. W. Cheshire and Georgian House in Melbourne; the Australasian Book Society in Melbourne, then Sydney; Edwards & Shaw and Ure Smith in Sydney. Rigby in Adelaide and Jacaranda in Brisbane became major players only in the 1960s. Australian publishing was concentrated in the two largest capitals but also heavily regionalised with publishers' lists, even in the big centres, biased towards writers from their own cities and states. Publishers' lists also reveal the importance of children's (and school) books, where local publishers came to dominate in the post-war period as local settings worked best for local audiences. Children's books outnumbered general titles on many lists, including Oxford Univeristy Press's Australian list. Authors such as Judith Wright and Kylie Tennant maintained a steady stream of children's titles alongside their other literary work.

Georgian House published Rex Ingamells' *Great South Land* in 1951, and a handful of novels over the next two decades. Edwards & Shaw focused on new poetry titles, including A. D. Hope's *The Wandering Islands* in 1955, and in addition to Roland Robinson's poetry it also published his collections of Aboriginal stories. Cheshire published few fiction titles, but did publish poetry, innovative anthologies such as *Span: An Adventure in Asian and Australian Writing* (1958), and also Alan Marshall's work in various genres (*I Can Jump Puddles* in 1955). Most innovative was its non-fiction and literary criticism, from W. V. Aughterson's *Taking Stock* (1953) to A. A. Phillips' *The Australian Tradition* (1958), books that prefigured the larger 'taking stock' of Australian culture that would occur in the following decade, to which Cheshire also contributed.[9]

The success of the Australasian Book Society illustrates the underdeveloped nature of the industry. It was established in 1952 to meet needs its supporters felt were being overlooked: to publish 'democratic' nationalist or working-class writing (in part for worker readers). Inspired by the successful production of Frank Hardy's *Power Without Glory* outside the established channels, it was a publishing cooperative dependent on mostly trade union members. It published communist writers such as Hardy and Ralph de Boissiere, and books that would have been unlikely to find publication elsewhere; but it could also operate close to the mainstream, co-releasing titles such as Donald Stuart's *Yandy* (Georgian House) and Phillips' *The Australian Tradition*. In 1961 it trailed only Angus & Robertson as a publisher of new fiction.[10] Defined broadly, its own

9 Other books included the anthologies *Australia Writes* (1953) and *Australian Signpost* (1956), and in the 1960s critical studies including J. P. Matthews, *Tradition in Exile* (1962), Louise Rorabacher's anthology *Two Ways Meet* (1963), Clement Semmler and Derek Whitelock, *Literary Australia* (1966) and Brian Elliott, *The Landscape of Australian Poetry* (1967).

10 For the ABS see Jack Beasley, *Red Letter Days: Notes from Inside an Era*, ABS, 1979; John McLaren, *Writing in Hope and Fear: Literature as Politics in Postwar Australia*, CUP, 1996; David Carter, *A Career in Writing: Judah*

nationalism was a widely shared literary disposition, but its emergence as a significant player reveals the gaps and low horizons then characterising Australian publishing.

These comments describe the mainstream hardback book trade; but the most active local publishers of new Australian novels were in fact the mass-market publishers Cleveland and Horwitz. Crime, westerns and war were the main genres, with several hundred titles appearing from both publishers each decade from the 1950s to the 1980s, peaking in the 1960s. Cleveland published Gordon Bleeck, Keith Hetherington, and 'Larry Kent'; Horwitz's mainstays were Carter Brown and J. E. Macdonnell (the adjective 'prolific' is redundant). To a large extent, the pulp industry operated as a discrete market, with different authors, production schedules, readerships and sales venues – newsagents rather than bookstores. In the early 1960s, though, Horwitz launched an Australian Library, reprinting cheap editions of novels by Ruth Park, D'Arcy Niland and Charmian Clift among others, and previously banned books such as Robert Close's *Love Me Sailor* and the first Australian edition of Norman Lindsay's *The Cautious Amorist*.[11]

In more general terms, the sense of cultural crisis generated in the years leading up to World War II and the cultural optimism that emerged towards its end – both of which mobilised writers – appear to have evaporated by the 1950s, at least until the Cold War brought a new mix of crisis and confidence into intellectual life. A raft of new magazines (the best marker of cultural activity in the absence of strong book publishing) had been launched in the years 1939 to 1946: *Australia: National Journal* (1939–47), *Southerly* (1939–), *Angry Penguins* (1940–6), *A Comment* (1940–7), *Meanjin* (1940–), *Pertinent* (1940–7), *Poetry* (1941–7), *Salt* (1941–6), *Australian New Writing* (1943–6), *Barjai* (1943–7), *Australian Woman's Digest* (1944–8), *Fellowship* (1944–8), *The Writer* (1944–8), *Australia's Progress* (1945–6), *Bohemia* (1945–67), *Angry Penguins Broadsheet* (1946), *Australian Books* (1946–8), *Australasian Book News and Library Journal* (1946–8), *Talk* (1946–8), *Focus* (1946–8), *Twentieth Century* (1946–75) and *Vista* (1946–63). Few survived into the 1950s. Those that did – *Meanjin*, *Southerly* and the two Catholic magazines *Twentieth Century* and *Vista* – had institutional backing.[12]

Popular commercial magazines had longer lives. Among those continuing in the post-war decades were monthlies such as the *Australian Journal* (1865–1962), *Walkabout* (1934–74) and *Man* (1936–74); and weeklies such as *Australasian Post* (1946–96), *Pix* (1938–72) and the *Bulletin* (*Smith's Weekly* closed in 1950). All carried 'literary' features and book talk – news and reviews, author profiles, Australiana, travel sketches, fiction – and provided freelance or salaried work for local writers. Although some continued into

Waten and the Cultural Politics of a Literary Career, Association for the Study of Australian Literature, 1997. The 1961 estimate excludes pulp fiction publishers.

11 See Anthony May, 'Horwitz', and Ian Morrison, 'Pulp Fiction', in Munro and Sheahan-Bright (eds), *Paper Empires*; Toni Johnson-Woods, *Pulp: A Collector's Book of Australian Pulp Fiction Covers*, NLA, 2004, and 'The Mysterious Case of Carter Brown', *Australian Literary Studies*, 21.4 (2004), pp. 74–88; Graeme Flanagan, *The Australian Vintage Paperback Guide*, Gryphon Books, 1994.

12 David Carter and Roger Osborne, 'Periodicals', in Munro and Sheahan-Bright (eds), *Paper Empires*, pp. 239–42.

the 1970s and beyond (usually as very different sorts of magazines) most reached their peak in the 1950s or early 60s. As journalism itself became professionalised, the freelance market shrank. A mixed market of amateur, commercial and 'committed' writing, represented for example in the career of Vance Palmer, was gradually replaced by a more differentiated and hierarchical literary field; the popular and literary markets became increasingly divided, while television took over many of the magazines' entertainment and news functions. More sophisticated or at least more contemporary forms of social analysis and Australiana replaced the older forms of essay and sketch. From the late 1950s new kinds of magazine appeared.

The *Bulletin* had lost something of its centrality to literary discussion due to the new permanence of *Meanjin* and *Southerly*, later joined by *Overland* (1954), *Quadrant* (1956) and *Westerly* (1956). But under Douglas Stewart's editorship (1940–60) its Red Page continued to operate as a 'magazine within a magazine' and remained the most widely read books review. It was particularly significant for verse, printing poetry of high seriousness from authors such as Judith Wright and Rosemary Dobson alongside popular ballads.[13] It played a key role in establishing this as a period when poetry rather than fiction appeared to be where the new maturity of Australian literature was being forged (the difficulties of fiction publishing helped this effect). Alongside the *Bulletin* sat the newspaper book review pages. While generous in the number of books reviewed, they were scarcely oriented around Australian literature, although the *Sydney Morning Herald* in 1955 had a special 'Literary Australia' feature. The books reviewed were largely British but with little sense that they were imports; non-fiction received the longer reviews, while fiction was left to the marketplace with brief notices of new novels bundled together. While the Melbourne *Age* boasted a rather staid 'Literary Supplement', generally as in the *Bulletin* there was only a weak sense of an autonomous literary sphere separate from the more diverse world of books and book news. If this allowed a wide range of books to be noted, it left little space for them to become part of conversations about the state of the nation; there is little sense of 'Australian culture' either assumed or worried at.

The Cold War and cultural liberalism

This was the territory *Meanjin* made its own. Housed at the University of Melbourne (since early 1945) in an often strained relationship for editor C. B. Christesen, *Meanjin* had settled into the format of a serious 'quarterly of literature and art' on the model of the American *Partisan Review*. It mixed verse, short fiction and criticism of Australian literature with articles on history, philosophy, architecture and the other arts. But literature remained fundamental. Christesen's ideal for his journal was as an

13 Thomas Shapcott, 'Douglas Stewart and Poetry in the *Bulletin*, 1940–1960', in Bruce Bennett (ed.), *Cross-currents: Magazines and Newspapers in Australian Literature*, Longman Cheshire, 1981; and Susan McKernan (Lever), *A Question of Commitment: Australian Literature in the Twenty Years after the War*, A&U, 1989, pp. 120–40.

independent, democratic forum for ideas in which literature was the central means of creating and sustaining a significant (national) culture. *Meanjin*'s nationalist reputation is not misplaced, but while it had a lasting significance in establishing the intellectual and literary credentials of the *Australian* tradition it was equally concerned with the *modern* tradition in European and American cultures. Crucially, *Meanjin* defined its role through differentiating the 'serious' – the modern, the intellectual, the literary – from the commercial world of book news. The quarterly form itself expressed this distancing from the ephemeral world of journalism. It separated 'Australian literature', too, from the popular successes of Idriess, Frank Clune, or essayist Walter Murdoch. Many of its articles were self-reflexive meditations on the role of author, critic or 'thinker' in the contemporary world. A certain ambivalence marked its sense of the artist and intellectual, reflecting the magazine's own ambivalent institutional status between independent review and academic journal (in Christesen's words, 'a fate, surely, worse than death'). For all its elevation of literary discussion – and its reliance on academic contributors – the idea of a separate, elite artistic or intellectual class was anathema to its liberal-democratic ideals. Art had its own autonomy and the artist's primary responsibility was to his or her art; but the artist also had a responsibility to society or 'humanity'. The magazine's liberal faith, always prone to disappointment, was that the two belonged naturally together.[14]

Meanjin is often paired with its near-contemporary *Southerly*; together, for the first time, they provided regular venues for the formal critical essay dedicated to Australian literature, bringing that literature into focus as an object for criticism. But *Southerly* expressed a more genteel world of bibliophiles and scholars with little of *Meanjin*'s sense of committed writers or a national tradition oriented to the present.[15] As I have argued elsewhere, the newness of this understanding of a national tradition is easily forgotten.[16] Despite the familiar celebration of Lawson, Paterson and the romantic 1890s, earlier nationalist writing is dominated by its sense of a lost or discontinuous tradition, itself a product of the discontinuous nature of the institutions that might have sustained its presence. It was only in the 1950s that a socially embedded tradition, a dense history extending back into the 19th century and forward into contemporary literature, was fully articulated (and soon contested). It received its authoritative statement in a series of major books, Vance Palmer's *The Legend of the Nineties* (1954), Phillips' *The Australian Tradition* and Russel Ward's *The Australian Legend* (both 1958), and in *Overland*, launched in 1954 precisely as a contemporary expression of the democratic tradition. However populist the language, Australian literature – and folklore – was grasped as a question of significance to the national culture and thus a matter for intellectual investment.

14 Carter and Osborne, 'Periodicals', pp. 244–6; Tim Rowse, *Australian Liberalism and National Character*, Kibble, 1978, pp.180–7. Meanjin Press also published a series of books, mostly poetry, between 1941 and 1953.

15 See Susan Sheridan, 'Gentleman's Agreements: *Southerly*'s First Editors', *Southerly*, 67.1–2, pp. 333–47.

16 David Carter, 'Critics, Writers, Intellectuals: Australian Literature and its Criticism', in Elizabeth Webby (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Australian Literature*, CUP, 2000, pp. 268–78.

The literary–intellectual field was restructured in two overlapping phases from the mid-1950s: the cultural effects of Cold War politics; and from the late 1950s, a set of 'post–Cold War' attitudes. Australian literature, and intellectual positions generally, became more politicised *and* more professionalised.

It is difficult to assess the effect of Cold War politics on the Australian literary field. Writers were named in the Lowe Royal Commission ('Inquiring into the Origins, Aims, Objects and Funds of the Communist Party in Victoria'); suspicion was cast widely in the Petrov inquiry; security files were compiled on communist and left-liberal literary figures and organisations; *Meanjin* was scrutinised; and *Overland* was denied CLF assistance. Most spectacularly, in 1952 the Catholic Labor MP Standish Keon and the outspoken Liberal W. C. Wentworth attacked the CLF's supposed political bias in awarding grants to communist and fellow-travelling authors. While Prime Minister Menzies publicly defended the CLF's integrity, he secretly ordered security checks on all future grant recipients in order to avoid a repeat of the 'scandalous and embarrassing' case of the award to Waten.[17] As so often in Cold War politics, however, the damage was sustained at the liberal centre rather than on the communist left. Palmer and Flora Eldershaw resigned from the CLF Advisory Board; the moderately militant nationalism of the CLF was dissolved in a safer board chaired by conservative academic A. Grenfell Price.

Despite these events – and Wentworth's desire for an Un-Australian Activities Committee – nothing of the scale of the US pursuit of communists and fellow travellers eventuated. The larger effect, however, was the politicisation of positions around literature and intellectual commitment, in what poet and academic Vincent Buckley later called the 'peculiarly Australian intellectual cold war'.[18] Although communist writers and cultural groups were at the height of their influence in the mid-1950s (communism *could* provide writers with a 'professional' identity), positions on the left were more commonly articulated in terms of the nationalist, democratic realist tradition. Although both *Meanjin* and *Overland* promoted this tradition, literature in their pages also stood as a realm of freedom, deeply social or human in its significance, but when true to itself never 'merely' political. Cold War attacks on writers were thus seen as attacks on both the national tradition and the liberal humanism taken to be literature's own.

These assumptions were directly contested in *Quadrant*, launched in 1956 under the auspices of the international Congress for Cultural Freedom, a body that sought to protect 'creativity and freedom', principally in the literary–intellectual sphere and principally against communism. Editor James McAuley, also a poet and academic,

17 For Cold War cultural politics see Carter, *A Career in Writing*, chs 4–6; McKernan (Lever), *A Question of Commitment*; McLaren, *Writing in Hope and Fear*; Fiona Capp, *Writers Defiled: Security Surveillance of Australian Authors and Intellectuals, 1920–1960*, McPhee Gribble, 1993; Ann Curthoys and John Merritt (eds), *Better Dead than Red: Australia's First Cold War*, A&U, 1984.

18 Vincent Buckley, 'Unequal Twins: A Discontinuous Analysis', *Meanjin*, 40.1 (1981), p. 9.

attacked the foundations of liberal cultural nationalism by redefining Australianness, modernity, democracy and literature in conservative idealist terms.[19] Yet in the process of asserting art's higher meaning, above political instrumentality or humanist sentimentality, McAuley also spoke for its cultural – indeed, its political – significance. Although its articles were consistently conservative and sometimes anti-communist, *Quadrant* too provided a forum for Australian literary criticism and new poetry. Poetry was preferred to fiction, Susan Lever suggests, because the kind of poetry selected, marked by traditional form and elevated diction, best illustrated the argument that true art rose above the twin evils of nationalism and modernism (communism was a form of both).[20]

Academic literary criticism had also begun to interrogate the national tradition through close reading of individual texts: yes, there was a democratic theme in Australian literature but was this the *best* Australian literature or the best explanation of its literary achievement? The process of critical reassessment, revealed and revaluated alternative traditions: a romantic-idealist tradition in Australian poetry could be traced back through Stewart's *Bulletin* to Christopher Brennan and colonial poetry; a tradition of 'moral seriousness' could be traced from Patrick White through Martin Boyd to Henry Handel Richardson and colonial fiction. In decentring the nationalist tradition, professional academic criticism, with its proclaimed disinterest in politics, could thus be allied to more explicit anti-communist intellectual projects such as McAuley's or Buckley's.[21] Positions became more complicated and fraught as the left itself began to split after the Soviet invasion of Hungary and Khrushchev's denunciation of Stalin in 1956. Again this could have spectacular public manifestations, as at the Peace Congress held in Melbourne in November 1959, which erupted into controversy when Buckley and *Overland* editor, former communist Stephen Murray-Smith, introduced an exiled Hungarian writer and proposed a motion in support of 'freedom of expression'.[22] Except at its extremes, however, the 'intellectual cold war' was less about communism than about the meanings of Australian culture and literature and about cultural authority in a contested sphere of liberal discourse.

The politicisation of the quarterlies resolved into their consolidation as the literary and cultural mainstream (despite their limited circulation). They offered a stable mix of essays, verse, fiction and reviews, mainly written by academics but still notionally addressed to a generalist audience. But if the appearance of clusters of new journals indicates significant shifts in the literary–intellectual field, then another critical moment

19 Best illustrated in his opening editorial, *Quadrant*, 1 (1956–7), p. 3.

20 Susan McKernan (Lever), 'The Question of Literary Independence: *Quadrant* and Australian Writing', in David Carter (ed.), *Outside the Book: Contemporary Essays on Literary Periodicals*, Local Consumption Publications, 1991, pp. 165–76.

21 John Docker, *In a Critical Condition: Reading Australian Literature*, Penguin, 1984; Buckridge, 'Clearing a Space', pp. 186–90.

22 Ralph Summy and Malcolm Saunders, 'The 1959 Melbourne Peace Congress: Culmination of Anti-Communism in Australia in the 1950s', in Curthoys and Merritt (eds), *Better Dead than Red*, pp. 89–90.

can be observed in the period 1958–63. New magazines included the commercial fortnightlies *Nation* (1958–72) and the *Observer* (1958–61), which merged with the *Bulletin* in 1961. It was symptomatic of the cultural renovation then under way that editor Donald Horne immediately removed the latter's long-standing masthead, 'Australia for the White Man'. These were new kinds of magazines for Australia, pitched between the dailies and the quarterlies and organised around commentary on public affairs and cultural trends, with extended reviews of books, theatre, painting and cinema in the mode of the 'higher journalism'. *Nation* especially promoted the renovation of national politics and public life, a new cosmopolitanism, a new Australian culture focused on the contemporary.[23] The new national daily from 1964, the *Australian*, had similar aims. Magazines expressing explicit politico-intellectual positions, increasingly from within the university, included *Outlook* (1957–70), which anticipated, then followed, the New Left; *Prospect* (1958–64), which sought a Catholic intellectual discourse beyond Cold War rhetoric; and *Dissent* (1961–82), attuned to New Left intellectual politics. *Australian Letters* (1957–68) and *Australian Book Review* (1961–73) identified and promoted a new sophistication in Australian art and letters. The appearance of the iconoclastic, pop art, libertarian *Oz* magazine in 1963 announced the arrival of a second wave of critique and renovation.[24]

Although commentary has focused on the years of the Whitlam Government or the Vietnam War as the significant points of social transformation, the importance of this earlier period should not be underestimated, nor the role of new Australian books and magazines in effecting different forms of modernising cultural reassessment. In their different ways, the new magazines expressed a desire to move beyond Cold War oppositions, beyond the complacent conservatism and amateurism of both the old left and the old establishment – the Menzies Government, the media, academia and more. Together they indicate the emergence of what has been called 'the new nationalism' but might be better described as a new liberalism or in Anne Galligan's phrase a process of 'cultural naturalisation'.[25] Paradoxically, the phenomenon of post-war expatriatism among writers and intellectuals belongs to this same cultural trajectory. Clive James, Peter Porter, Barry Humphries, Randolph Stow and Robert Hughes all left Australia in the 1950s or early 1960s, while many others (Elizabeth Harrower, Christopher Koch, David Malouf) did so for briefer periods. By contrast, the generation of writers emerging in the 1970s and 80s, although more internationalist in some respects, found no reason to expatriate to pursue their careers.

23 See K. S. Inglis (ed.), Nation*: The Life of an Independent Journal of Opinion, 1958–1972*, MUP, 1989.

24 Carter and Osborne, 'Periodicals', pp. 253–5. A second generation of independent papers included the *Sunday Observer* (1969–71) and the related titles, *Sunday Review* (1970–1), *Review* (1971–2) and most famously *Nation Review* (1972–81), formed via a merger of the *Review* and *Nation*. See Richard Walsh (ed.), *Ferretabilia: The Life and Times of* Nation Review, UQP, 1993.

25 Anne Galligan, 'The Culture of the Publishing House: Structure and Strategies in the Australian Publishing Industry', in David Carter and Anne Galligan (eds), *Making Books: Contemporary Australian Publishing*, UQP, 2007, p. 37.

Publishing and the reading public

The decade from the late 1950s also saw the beginnings of a major expansion in the publication of Australian books that continued at least until the 1990s. The scale of growth is impressive: from 612 new titles in 1961, to 2790, an increase of 350 per cent, 20 years later, to about 10 000 after another 20 years. The value of Australian publishing doubled from 1961 to 1965; it doubled again by 1970, and yet again by 1979. The incomplete listings in the *Annals of Australian Literature*, useful nonetheless because of their literary bias, suggest that fiction publication increased steadily from the early 1950s (6–12 new titles) to the late 1960s (12–21), while volumes of poetry and criticism roughly tripled from a low base; numbers of 'books of Australian literature' rose from 122 in 1970–9 to more than 400 in 1990–5. The fuller listings in the electronic bibliography *AustLit* suggest a patchier rise in mainstream fiction publishing, but with steady growth in the 1960s and 70s until spectacular expansion during the 1980s and 90s (a fivefold increase, from around 70 new titles in 1980 to more than 350 in 2000).[26] The proportion of Australian-originated titles among total book sales also grew: from around 10 per cent in the early 1970s to just over half in the 1990s and 64 per cent in 2002–3. In 1960 the Australian Book Publishers' Association had 40 members, but only four were general publishers with a national profile; by 1989, there were 149 members.[27] There was similar growth among publishers.

More significant, of course, is the nature of the publishers and publications. The period is marked first by the growth of independent local publishers, then by the establishment of local lists by British firms. Cheshire's list expanded in the 1960s, in poetry, fiction, auto/biography, anthologies and criticism. It first published Bruce Dawe, Barry Oakley, Rodney Hall, Malouf, Joan Lindsay, Robin Boyd's *The Australian Ugliness*, Peter Coleman's *Australian Civilisation* and Brian Elliott's *The Landscape of Australian Poetry*. Jacaranda built on successful educational publishing to expand into literary and non-fiction titles, including Stewart's *Voyager Poems*, Kath Walker and Thomas Shapcott, critical collections on Wright and Slessor, Coleman's *Obscenity, Blasphemy, Sedition*, and a collection from *Overland*. Following the massive success of John O'Grady's *They're a Weird Mob* (1957), Ure Smith blossomed into a major publisher of fiction, humour and Australiana, and paperback reprints of Australian classics.[28] Lloyd O'Neil's Lansdowne,

26 Figures from Buckridge, 'Clearing a Space', p. 184; Glover, 'Literature and the State', p. 169; Bruce Bennett, 'Literary Culture since Vietnam', in *The Oxford Literary History of Australia*, p. 253; Michael Webster, 'Into the Global Era', in Munro and Sheahan-Bright (eds), *Paper Empires*, p. 82; Grahame Johnston, *Annals of Australian Literature* [1970], 2nd edn, ed. Joy Hooton and H. P. Heseltine, OUP, 1992; Jason Ensor, 'Reprints, International Markets and Local Literary Taste: New Empiricism and Australian Literature', *Journal of the Association for the Study of Australian Literature*, Special Issue (2008), pp. 198–218.

27 Book sales figures: Judith Brett, 'Publishing, Censorship and Writers' Incomes, 1965–1988' in Laurie Hergenhan (ed.), *The Penguin New Literary History of Australia*, Penguin, 1988, p. 461; Jenny Lee, 'Exploiting the Imprint' in Carter and Galligan (eds), *Making Books*, p. 27. ABPA figures: Glover, 'Literature and the State', p. 169.

28 See David Carter, '*They're a Weird Mob* and Ure Smith', in Munro and Sheahan-Bright (eds), *Paper Empires*, pp. 24–9.

established in 1960, developed a successful list in Australiana alongside substantial titles on current affairs and social analysis. Lansdowne also released the first Australian editions of Martin Boyd's novels and initiated the series of short critical studies, *Australian Writers and their Work*, unprecedented in Australian literary criticism. From 1969, Lloyd O'Neil Pty Ltd developed an Australian Classics reprint series.

Despite the international success of Penguin paperbacks, the Australian book trade in the 1960s generally published new titles in hardback. Angus & Robertson resisted original paperbacks until the 1970s. New local publishers broke the pattern, first with reprints and then paperback originals. Sun Books was founded in 1965 by Brian Stonier, Max Harris and Geoffrey Dutton, after their dissatisfaction working with Penguin to develop its first Australian list.[29] Sun was launched as a paperback publisher, mainly for reissues (including Richardson's *Maurice Guest* among its first seven books). Its list expanded to over 300 titles, more than half originals, including a Sun Poetry series, Colonial Poets, Wright's short stories, White's *Four Plays*, David Campbell's *Modern Australian Poetry* and Ian Turner's *The Australian Dream*.[30]

The late 1960s to the late 1980s proved to be the great age of Australian reprints. Rigby, which expanded its new titles significantly, launched Seal Books in 1968 for paperback reprints, mostly literary fiction from the colonial period to the mid-20th century, many produced in collaboration with Lloyd O'Neil. Horwitz and Ure Smith have already been mentioned. Angus & Robertson launched the Sirius imprint in 1963, but a larger series with the same name began in 1979 and continued for the next decade. In between there had been Angus & Robertson Classics, Australian Classics and Arkon Books, issued in paperback and drawing titles from other publishers as well as from its own backlist. When Penguin resumed publishing Australian fiction, it relied wholly on titles originated by other publishers until the mid-1980s, mostly near-contemporary works. At the end of the decade, in a second, targeted wave of reprints, it launched the Penguin Australian Women's Library (and a War Classics series). Throughout the 1980s the London-based Virago reissued a series of 'forgotten' Australian Modern Classics by women writers. Although some of this publishing was more opportunistic than idealistic, the reissue of Australian titles made Australian literature visible and accessible to contemporary readers as never before.

Arguably, though, the rise of *non-fiction* publishing had a more immediate role in articulating the new liberalism. A remarkable series of original studies of Australian culture and public affairs appeared in a relatively short period. They included Ward's and Phillips' earlier nationalist studies; Boyd's *Australia's Home* (MUP, 1961) and *The Australian Ugliness*; Manning Clark's multi-volume *History of Australia* (MUP, from 1962); Coleman's *Australian Civilisation* and *Obscenity, Blasphemy, Sedition*; the tertiary text

29 See Geoffrey Dutton, *Snow on the Saltbush: The Australian Literary Experience*, Viking, 1984, and *A Rare Bird: Penguin Books in Australia 1946–96*, Penguin, 1996.

30 John Arnold, 'Sun Books', in Munro and Sheahan-Bright (eds), *Paper Empires*, pp. 43–7.

Australian Society by Davies and Encel (Cheshire, 1965); Dutton's *Australia and the Monarchy* and *Republican Australia* (Sun, 1966); Geoffrey Blainey's *The Tyranny of Distance* (Sun, 1966); and new studies of Aboriginal life and customs. Many of these were not just new books but new kinds of books in the local marketplace: intellectually driven, mostly from authors with a university education – rare enough in earlier Australian publishing – and focused on Australian social and cultural issues for Australian readers. The general reader could now be conceived as the *educated* general reader.

Alongside these books, popular Australian titles – travel, wildlife, 'Aussie English', folklore, and snapshots of the nation – played a critical role in the process of cultural naturalisation.[31] By the early 1960s, Australian non-fiction bestseller lists were full of Australian titles, mostly from independent firms. As Jenny Lee has shown, there was a boom from the mid-1960s to the early 70s in large-format, highly illustrated Australiana. Most famous was Rigby's *The Australians* (1966) with text by George Johnston, whose novel *My Brother Jack* was another key story of national reassessment. These books 'fostered a vernacular discourse about the "new" Australia'; and they addressed an 'increasingly autonomous Australian book-buying public' no longer satisfied by a market consisting almost exclusively of British books.[32] The same effect was registered in the newspaper review pages. If there is still inevitably a majority of overseas books reviewed, the pages are organised around new Australian books and convey a strong sense of a distinct Australian readership. (The *Sydney Morning Herald* in 1975 ran a series of full-page excerpts from unpublished works by Australian authors.)[33]

Allen Lane's 1961 remark, that 'Australia is about to emerge, speaking from a publishing point-of-view, into a creative phase in place of an absorbent one' has entered Australian book lore.[34] If the local independents had found (indeed, created) an expanding market for Australian books, British publishers were not far behind. Penguin, Nelson, Cassell and Macmillan established Australian branch offices in the 1960s to develop local lists to supplement their imports. Cassell published Thomas Keneally, Peter Mathers and Henry Reynolds, for example, while Macmillan published Nicholas Hasluck, David Foster, and Murray Bail in the 1970s. Already established firms such as OUP and Collins expanded into general publishing, OUP continuing Lansdowne's series *Australian Writers and their Work*.

Penguin's Australian originals were largely non-fiction, including Dutton's *The Literature of Australia* (1964), Hughes' *The Art of Australia* (1966), the *Penguin Book of Modern Australian Verse* (1961). Another was the key manifesto for the period, Horne's

31 Following his success as Nino Culotta, John O'Grady wrote *Aussie English* (1965) and *Aussie Etiket* (1971), both published by Ure Smith. In early 1966 *Aussie English* and *Let Stalk Strine* by 'Afferbeck Lauder' also from Ure Smith, were first and second on the Australian bestseller list: David Carter, 'O'Grady, John *see* "Culotta, Nino": Popular Authorship, Duplicity and Celebrity', *Australian Literary Studies*, 21.4 (2004), p. 69.

32 Lee, 'Australia in Colour', pp. 43, 58.

33 For example a full-page excerpt from David Ireland's *The Glass Canoe*, still a work in progress, was published on 7 June 1975.

34 In Brigid Magner, 'Anglo-Australian Relations in the Book Trade', in Munro and Sheahan-Bright (eds), *Paper Empires*, p. 8.

best-selling *The Lucky Country* (1964), the most sustained attack on Australian insularity and complacency to appear until another Penguin, Humphrey McQueen's *The New Britannia* (1970), added racism to the charge.

In the space of a decade or so Australian trade publishing had grown from a few small to medium-sized publishers, mainly Australian-owned, to a diverse structure of large and small, hardback and paperback, local and overseas firms addressing a range of different registers in the marketplace. Educational and children's publishing, essentially local markets, underwrote the expansion for many firms. If the British publishing houses moved into a market created for them by the local firms, they multiplied that market to the power of two or three. But few of the chronically under-capitalised Australian firms survived as independent publishers past the 1970s. As businesses and imprints changed hands, they were acquired by overseas or non-publishing interests. Cheshire was acquired by the Xerox Corporation before being sold to Longman via Paul Hamlyn; Lansdowne, Jacaranda and Ure Smith became part of the Hamlyn empire; Rigby was taken over by James Hardie Ltd, ending in the Reed group; Sun Books found a home with Macmillan.[35] Angus & Robertson looked to have maintained a kind of independence after being taken over by News Ltd in 1980, but eventually disappeared into HarperCollins.

'A literature both distinctive and mature'

Until the mid-1950s few critical works on Australian literature were written by academics. Although A. D. Hope had introduced a full course in the subject at Canberra University College (later the Australian National University) in 1954, it was not until the late 1970s that Australian literature was fully established: with a wide range of courses across different institutions, a professional association, research programs, critical journals, and broad consensus over the shape of the literary past or at least what was worth arguing about. The history of school settings remains to be written, but it appears that adoptions of Australian texts followed (with a time-lag of five to 10 years) the growth in university teaching and publishing, taking off in the mid-1980s and peaking in the first half of the 1990s.[36]

Literary nationalism had developed a strong sense of cultural tradition but only a weak sense of a literary canon. In 1959 Buckley could still use the title '*Towards* an Australian Literature' when addressing the question of its place in the university.[37] The first chair in Australian literature was established at the University of Sydney in 1962, only after public agitation and fund-raising. *Australian Literary Studies* was launched in 1963 for scholarly and critical essays, by which time *Southerly*, too, had become

35 Brett, 'Publishing, Censorship and Writers' Incomes', p. 461; Lee, 'Australia in Colour', p. 57; Arnold, 'Sun Books', p. 45; Michael Page, 'Rigby Limited', in Munro and Sheahan-Bright (eds), *Paper Empires*, p. 43.
36 Based on NSW and Victorian senior school settings, figures provided by Ivor Indyk.
37 Vincent Buckley, 'Towards an Australian Literature', *Meanjin*, 18.1 (1959).

more an academic critical journal than a literary magazine. Paradoxically perhaps, it was confidence in the 'mission of English' more than faith in the national culture that drove this new investment in Australian literary studies. Indeed, defining Australian literature as a proper subject for academic attention distanced it from the amateur or partisan enthusiasm of earlier, largely nationalist critics. As announced in Hope's famous essay 'Standards in Australian Literature' (1956), what was needed was a properly *literary* reassessment of the relative value of Australian authors and their place within a properly literary canon.

'Literary' in this sense was less an aesthetic than a moral or metaphysical attitude; the style of criticism was 'ethico-formalist'. In a series of publications from the early 1950s Australian writers were subject to critical scrutiny and revalued up or down. Reinterpreting the high nationalist moment of the 1890s against 'strictly literary standards', G. A. Wilkes concluded:

> Lawson is memorable not for the part of his work . . . that reflects the temper of his age, but for the part that transcends it, while Furphy's work is important not for its democratic temper or offensively Australian bias, but for its exploration of issues that are not local, but universal in their reference.[38]

Buckley provided a similar revaluation in 'The Image of Man in Australian Poetry', the lead piece in his *Essays in Poetry, Mainly Australian*.[39] Brennan, not Lawson, was the pivotal figure, 'representative of the human condition in a way, and with a depth, which makes Lawson's attempt at representative statement appear no more than striking of an average'. Buckley traces a line from Brennan to Slessor and FitzGerald then Webb, McAuley, Hope, Wright and Stewart. Through them, Australian poetry was reaching 'spiritual maturity'. The poets were individual, not 'in any obvious or insistent way, Australian', but each had 'begun to bring together into a satisfying synthesis the objective and the subjective . . . European culture and Australian fact'. Buckley insisted that his arguments for 'a literature strongly rooted in a local place and atmosphere are not at all the same as the arguments for a nationalist bias and stereotype'.

The other unavoidable fact for criticism was the 'sudden' arrival of White's middle novels with their Australian themes but 'mannerist' style. For some, White was an un-Australian, anti-democratic writer. For a critic like Buckley, by contrast, he was just the kind of writer who might be canonised, another case of 'spiritual maturity', whether or not his works were totally successful literary achievements.[40] White's fiction was at once highly individual, within the modern tradition, and distinctively Australian. H. P. Heseltine reinterpreted the whole history of Australian literature so that White emerged as its fulfilment: *Voss* 'fuses almost all those aspects of Australia's literary heritage which

38 G. A. Wilkes, 'The Eighteen Nineties' (1958), in Grahame Johnston (ed.), *Australian Literary Criticism*, OUP, 1962, p. 40. Wilkes held the first Chair of Australian Literature at Sydney.
39 Vincent Buckley, *Essays in Poetry, Mainly Australian*, MUP, 1957.
40 Vincent Buckley, 'Patrick White and his Epic', in Johnston (ed.), *Australian Literary Criticism*, pp. 187–97.

define both its modernity and its Australianness'. [41] This was a powerful argument that did not reject the nationalist tradition outright but absorbed it, giving it a new 'spiritual' depth and intellectual modernity. In the 1966 edition of *The Australian Tradition*, Phillips felt the need to add a footnote to the effect that White had 'succeeded in reconciling a sensitive interpretation of Australian life with a keen feeling for the spiritual mysteries'.

The redefined Australian literary tradition was confirmed in a series of books. Buckley's *Essays in Poetry* contained individual studies of Slessor, FitzGerald, Hope, Wright and McAuley. Grahame Johnston's collection, *Australian Literary Criticism*, reprinted Wilkes on the 1890s, Hope's 'Standards', and individual essays on Brennan, Neilson, Fitzgerald, Slessor, Wright, Hope, McAuley, Lawson, Furphy, Richardson, Boyd, Herbert, and White. Dutton's *The Literature of Australia* included broader surveys but was again dominated by essays on individual writers in the canon. Essays on these writers also dominated the journals. In *Australian Literature: A Conspectus* Wilkes extended the now orthodox themes to a (short) book-length study. Hope, McAuley and White represent the synthesis of a dialectical pattern running throughout Australian literature, 'the extension of European civilisation, and the assertion of an indigenous culture' coming together 'to produce a literature that is both distinctive and mature'.[42]

The project of Australian literature

Whatever its ideological intent in disarming cultural nationalism, the new criticism did produce a powerfully coherent sense of the Australian literary canon. Its canonical works were rendered complex, morally serious texts worthy of scholarly attention, in ways beyond most earlier criticism (even as critics like the Palmers had pleaded for decades for Australian literature to be taken seriously by the universities). Exactly what this professionalisation of criticism meant for contemporary writers, apart from those few who made it into the canon or whose books were set on courses, is less clear. Certainly the growth of courses and local publishing were interdependent. But despite the gains, a gap was opened up between a relatively homogenous academic world of Australian literature and its criticism, and the much more heterogeneous world of contemporary books and reading. Outside the canon, academic criticism was not notably interested in contemporary writing. Even the elevation of White must have been a mixed blessing for budding authors, creating a space for serious critical reception (where critics tried fitting Keneally and Stow for example) but setting the bar forbiddingly high. Of course, many of the leading new critics were themselves creative writers, especially poets; indeed much of their authority derived from their status as poets rather than academics, and their criticism was made in their own image.

41 H. P. Heseltine, 'The Literary Heritage', *Meanjin*, 21.1 (1962), pp. 35–49. See A. A. Phillips' reply, 'The Literary Heritage Re-Assessed', *Meanjin*, 21.2 (1962), pp. 172–80.
42 G. A. Wilkes, *Australian Literature: A Conspectus*, A&R, 1969, p. 11.

More significant for contemporary authors was the Literature Board of the Australia Council established by the Whitlam Labor Government in 1973 and given statutory authority in 1975. It had a budget four times larger than the CLF which it replaced; no less significantly it incorporated literature into a national program of support for the arts. Instead of the supplementary support the CLF could offer, the Australia Council represented a national project; and although the language was not yet current, it began the recognition of literature as a major cultural industry. It is impossible to untangle the influence of Literature Board funding from other developments – the growth of new publishers, the formation of the Australian Society of Authors, the expansion of university teaching, a generational shift in terms of higher levels of education, or the arrival of cheaper offset printing which allowed new entrants into the publishing game. But that it did make a difference seems clear. By 1985, over 1000 writers had received grants and over 1000 books had been subsidised (34 per cent poetry, 35 per cent fiction); between 1973 and 1986, more than 75 per cent of grant recipients produced or published work; $14 million went to individual writers, $2 million to magazines, and $3 million to publishing subsidies.[43] Innovative new publishing programs such as the Paperback Poets and Paperback Prose series from University of Queensland Press which brought the new writing of the 1970s and 80s to public attention depended upon subsidy. As Di Gribble wryly notes, McPhee Gribble developed a reputation as 'virtually an off-shoot of the Literature Board'.[44] In a period when writers' incomes were still generally below the average male wage,[45] Literature Board funding allowed new writers to be published and careers to be pursued by those already in the field.

Many aspects of the board's programs have proven controversial: its alleged Sydney-and-Melbourne bias; the recurrence of established names among awardees; the granting of subsidies to foreign-owned publishers (unlike its Canadian counterpart); its focus on funding individuals (more than 50 per cent of its budget); its intervention in the market or its selling out (awarding funds to News Corp. for a monthly book paper);[46] its elitism or, alternatively, its 'politically correct' privileging of women or Indigenous, ethnic and other minority groups. But none of the criticisms have stuck, and the board's juggling of merit, diversity and equity claims and artistic, 'national' and 'industry' imperatives, however impure, seems entirely appropriate to an instrument of state cultural policy.

In the academic sphere the Association for the Study of Australian Literature was formed in 1977. It represented both the culmination of the critical enterprise of the previous two decades and the stirring of new developments beyond what could now

43 Brett, 'Publishing, Censorship and Writers' Incomes', p. 457; Thomas Shapcott, *The Literature Board: A Brief History*, UQP, 1988; Irene Stevens, *A Short History of the Literature Board, 1986–2000*, Australia Council, 2004.

44 Diana Gribble, 'McPhee Gribble', in Munro and Sheahan-Bright (eds), *Paper Empires*, p. 109.

45 Brett, 'Publishing, Censorship and Writers' Incomes', p. 458.

46 In 1996, the *Australian* was awarded $176 000 from the Australia Council's Audience Development and Advocacy Division (not the Literature Fund) to publish what became the *Australian's Review of Books*. The review appeared monthly from Sept. 1996 to June 2001.

appear as an established orthodoxy. Ethico-formalist criticism remained the dominant practice alongside historical scholarship for earlier texts, but for the second generation of scholars, Australian literature also became the field for renewed cultural politics. Central to this was a complex 'new nationalism' (the term is appropriate here): critical of the 'old nationalism' for its nostalgia, racism and sexism, but also anti-imperialist (American or British), hence predisposed to new versions of nationalism focused on contemporary Australian culture. If there were nationalist traditions to be rejected there were others to be reclaimed, a process also occurring in theatre, cinema and journalism.

One consequence was that Australian literary criticism came to invest much more in contemporary writing in the 1970s and 80s, and as a *social* fact as much as an artistic movement. Despite radical differences in their politics and poetics, writers such as Peter Carey, Malouf, Murray Bail, David Williamson, Jack Hibberd, Les Murray, Frank Moorhouse, Thomas Keneally, John Tranter and Helen Garner (though the impact of women writers came in the next wave) could all be seen to represent a newly autonomous, original and self-originating culture no longer defined by its colonial inheritance. Challenges to literary conventions could be linked with challenges to conventional social and intellectual values. As Bruce Bennett suggests, conceptions of Australia as a symbolic emptiness gave way to local specificity and regional awareness;[47] to forms of internationalism, too; and to a sense of cultural plenitude or at least cultural potential.

Feminism and the emerging history of Australian race relations would complicate this picture, but even these were part of 'reclaiming' national ground. Again local non-fiction publishing was crucial. Most of the books that transformed literary studies came from *outside* literary studies (and mostly from overseas-owned firms, but with strongly nationalist publishers like Penguin's John Hooker behind their lists). Typical are McQueen's *A New Britannia* (1970) and *Aborigines, Race and Racism* (Penguin, 1974), John Docker's *Australian Cultural Elites* (A&R, 1974), Anne Summers' *Damned Whores and God's Police* (Penguin, 1975), Miriam Dixson's *The Real Matilda* (Penguin, 1976), Tim Rowse's *Australian Liberalism and National Character* (Kibble, 1978), Drusilla Modjeska's *Exiles at Home* (A&R, 1982), Richard White's *Inventing Australia* and Geoffrey Bolton's *Spoils and Spoilers* (both in Allen & Unwin's Australian Experience series, 1981), Richard Broome's *Aboriginal Australians* (also Allen & Unwin's Australian Experience series, 1982) and Reynolds' *The Other Side of the Frontier* (Penguin, 1982).

This is not the place to enter into debates about the major social transformations leading from the 1960s into the 70s and 80s. Perhaps the most important effect for the literary field – alongside the collapse of censorship – was a generational bonding with the new 'national project' among post-war baby boomers, or at least among those able to benefit from the expansion of higher education. The collapse of censorship was itself understood as redefining *national* boundaries. The national project, in this sense,

47 Bruce Bennett, 'Perceptions of Australia, 1965–1988', in Hergenhan (ed.), *Penguin New Literary History*, p. 436.

could be thoroughly internationalist in spirit, and it often was among the new short story writers and poets (and among feminists and other political activists). The sudden dissolve of Britain as a point of cultural reference for artists and writers – even as a point of resistance – was truly remarkable.[48] The sense of Australian cinema, Australian theatre and, not least, Australian literature as autonomous, as cultural projects in which one's identity might be invested, was more widespread than ever before.

Patronage and promotion

Other forms of professionalisation and state patronage emerged. The Book Bounty was established in 1969 to assist Australian printers; the first Society of Editors was formed in Victoria in 1970; and in 1974 the National Book Council was established for book promotion, introducing Australian Book Week and Book Awards.[49] In 1963 the Australian Society of Authors (ASA) was established following a meeting of delegates from the FAW, PEN, the Radio, Television and Screen Writers Guild and other writers' groups. The state FAWs had remained important groups locally but the fellowship had little national presence as a representative lobby group concerned with writers' professional interests. In a period of increasing opportunity but also increasing complexity in the legal, policy and industrial contexts, a more specialised and centralised body was envisaged; in 1976 a national ASA committee was established.[50] The most important early achievement was government recognition of Public Lending Rights (PLR) in 1974. The scheme supplements writers' and publishers' incomes by paying copyright holders for books borrowed from public libraries. The ASA was also the driving force in establishing the Copyright Agency Limited (CAL), also 1974, after a test case in collaboration with Moorhouse and Angus & Robertson; the issue was illegal photocopying by educational institutions without proper remuneration for authors and publishers.[51] CAL, PLR and later ELR (Educational Lending Rights, 1994) took some years to be properly established, but although the latter was dumped and then reintroduced, all are now settled parts of the cultural policy framework managed by dedicated agencies.

The most visible growth has been in writers' festivals and book prizes. Adelaide Writers' Week was not the first literary festival in Australia – Melbourne had a Moomba Festival with a Book Fair throughout the 1950s – but its gradual success in terms of audience numbers and publisher participation, especially from the early 1980s, has made it a key site for launching new books, profiling authors and industry networking;

48 See David Carter, 'Going, Going, Gone? Britishness and Englishness in Contemporary Australian Culture', *Overland*, 169 (2002), pp. 81–6. Only in television, popular music and possibly theatre did Britain remain interesting, and perhaps only in the first was 'Britishness' still at issue.

49 Louise Poland, 'The Business, Craft and Profession of the Book Editor', in Carter and Galligan (eds), *Making Books*, pp. 96–115; Thomas Shapcott, 'National Book Council', in Munro and Sheahan-Bright (eds), *Paper Empires*, pp. 159–62.

50 Brett, 'Publishing, Censorship and Writers' Incomes', p. 459; Lawson, 'The Recognition of National Literatures', ch. 4.

51 See Peter Meredith, *Realising the Vision: A History of Copyright Agency Limited, 1974–2004*, CAL, 2004.

a model for other state and regional festivals; and, more recently, symptomatic of the internationalisation of the literary field. With the parallel rise of state government investment in cultural infrastructure, a festival culture, closely linked with a prize culture, has arisen in Australia as it has across the English-language world. As Stuart Glover has shown, state-level funding has become a significant part of the literary infrastructure.[52] Festivals now exist in Brisbane, Perth–Fremantle, Sydney, Hobart, Byron Bay, Mildura, Canberra and beyond. Audience numbers are high (up to 90 000 in Adelaide). The demographic may be biased towards a daytime audience and middlebrow tastes, as critics have suggested, but organisers try to meet diverse local and minority interests as part of the festival logic.[53]

The effects of the festival boom are increasingly debated. Critics have seen the festival circuit as a key 'technology' for reproducing a culture of literary celebrity or reinforcing romantic notions of the writer as sage and seer, or merely as a strategy for regional promotion. But although there are vested interests and a great deal of ritualised performance at these public events, they are generically too diverse to be reduced to a single ideological effect. If an old romantic sense of literature's higher wisdom is performed in some sessions, the larger effect might be to return literature to the heterogeneous world of books and readers (after all, a food writer or TV journalist is likely to follow the poets).

If Adelaide came into being as a way of supporting Australian writers, the international dimension now dominates festival culture within a careful scaling of local, national and international appeals. The metropolitan festivals are all promoted by featuring the new year's line-up of topical overseas writers. But this is a function of the globalised nature of the English-language book trade rather than cultural cringe, as Australian writers are carefully shuffled into the program alongside the international stars. Regionalism, in this sense, is no longer primarily about distance from the Sydney–Melbourne axis but location within a global network. While the local is celebrated it is usually as a sign of the city's own cosmopolitanism, its own place in an international order (Sydney is 'A City Transformed by Words').[54] What is notable is the still-novel idea that *books* can carry this significance.

The growth of literary prizes has a similar trajectory. The Grace Leven Poetry Prize from 1947 and the Miles Franklin Award for fiction from 1957 were joined by the National Book Council, *Age* Book of the Year and Patrick White awards in 1974 (the latter from White's Nobel Prize, itself a catalyst); the New South Wales Premier's Awards in 1979; and then state prizes in Victoria, Western Australia, South Australia and

52 Queensland government funding for literature increased from under $100 000 in 1989 to over $1 million by 2006: Glover, 'Publishing and the State', Carter and Galligan (eds), *Making Books*, p. 87.

53 See Wenche Ommundsen, 'The Circus is in Town: Literary Festivals and the Mapping of Cultural Heritage', in Fran de Groen and Ken Stewart (eds), *Australian Writing and the City*, ASAL, 2000, pp. 173–9. On Adelaide see Ruth Starke, *Writers, Readers and Rebels: Upfront and Backstage at Australia's Top Literary Festival*, Wakefield Press, 1998.

54 <http://www.swf.org.au/>

Queensland. The *Australian*/Vogel award for younger writers from 1980 and the David Unaipon Award for Indigenous writers from 1989 serve groups under-represented in other awards, and prizes also exist for science fiction, crime and other genres. If any further sign of the literary prize's significance were needed, in December 2007, less than a fortnight after his government was elected, Prime Minister Kevin Rudd announced Australia's richest literary awards, annual Prime Minister's Prizes for fiction and non-fiction worth $100,000 each. Again the effects are double-edged as public recognition and financial reward for Australian writing meets celebrity culture. And if the prizes reproduce nationally what the states have done, their meanings are also cosmopolitan: the point in part seems to be for Australia to have its own award sitting alongside other national awards and the big-ticket international Dublin and Booker prizes.[55]

National/international publishing

The growth in the number of new literary titles from the mid-1970s reflects the emergence of a new generation of independent presses: Currency Press (1971), Outback Press and Wild & Woolley (1973), Greenhouse and McPhee Gribble (1975), Fremantle Arts Centre Press and Sybylla (1976), Hale & Iremonger and Hyland House (1977), Anne O'Donovan (1978) and Sisters (1979). Hyland House published about 120 titles in its first 10 years; its list included Mudrooroo, Lionel Fogarty and Kevin Gilbert, children's and fantasy author Gillian Rubenstein, and Dorothy Porter's best-selling verse novel, *The Monkey's Mask* (1994). McPhee Gribble, famously, published Garner's *Monkey Grip* (1977), and later Beverley Farmer and Tim Winton. Fremantle Press struck gold with A. B. Facey's *A Fortunate Life* (1981) and Sally Morgan's *My Place* (1987). Sybylla and Sisters Spinifex were among a group of new feminist publishers. UQP, which had been protected from earlier takeovers, developed significant new fiction and poetry lists. All were biased towards new writers in what might be seen as an age of the 'new' – the new poetry (*New Poetry* magazine began in 1971), the new theatre, the new journalism, the New Wave in cinema and the New Left. Angus & Robertson began an aggressive contemporary publishing program in paperback and led the formation of an Australian Independent Publishers' Association in 1975.[56]

Both the Statement of Terms and the Traditional Markets Agreement came undone in the 1970s, opening up the markets for both publishing and bookselling.[57] The availability of offset printing and the shift towards paperbacks favoured new entrants into the publishing market. Some were alternatives to the mainstream, some expressly

55 Robyn Sheahan-Bright and Craig Munro, 'Writers', in Munro and Sheahan-Bright (eds), *Paper Empires*, pp. 142–5; Corrie Perkin, 'Rudd to Reward Aussie Writers', *Australian*, 5 Dec. 2007.

56 See essays by Richard Walsh (A&R), Morry Schwartz (Outback), Katharine Brisbane (Currency), Frank Thompson (UQP), Ron Blaber (Fremantle), Diana Gribble (McPhee Gribble) in Munro and Sheahan-Bright (eds), *Paper Empires*; Anne Galligan, 'The Culture of the Publishing House', in Carter and Galligan (eds), *Making Books*, pp. 38–41; Diane Brown, 'Feminist Publishing, 1970–2006', in ibid., pp. 268–304.

57 Jim Hart, 'New Wave Seventies', in Munro and Sheahan-Bright (eds), *Paper Empires*, p. 55.

oppositional. New means of printing and reproduction also enabled the (under)growth of newer sub-cultures, one-off publishers and a forest of short-lived little magazines for stories and poetry, more seriously 'pop' than popular.[58] If the new publishing encouraged new fiction, especially the short story as Judith Brett suggests (better suited than the novel for formal experimentation), poetry was the key form for those interested in a more radical remaking of Australian literature, the movement captured tendentiously in John Tranter's 1979 anthology *The New Australian Poetry*. The anthology itself was published by a small Brisbane poetry publisher, Makar Press, which had grown from a poetry journal of the same name.[59]

Nonetheless, the largest publishers of new Australian titles remained the overseas-owned firms. Penguin, Nelson, Heinemann, Longman, Macmillan (Pan Macmillan from 1988), Collins (HarperCollins from 1989) and Allen & Unwin all became major players. (Allen & Unwin became Australian-owned in 1990.)[60] But despite fears that increasing foreign ownership would lead to a decline in local publishing, the reverse appears to have occurred. As Brett writes, 'local editors were generally appointed to manage the local lists, and their identification with Australian literature and culture was generally as strong as their identification with their parent companies'.[61] The expansion of the Penguin list under Brian Johns and Jackie Yowell was an outstanding example, while Brian Stonier played a similar role at Macmillan. The new opportunities the Australian market presented, its 'huge appetite for Australian literature, both fiction and non-fiction',[62] also influenced editors and managers arriving from overseas. Galligan lists Frank Eyre (OUP), Robert Sessions (Cassell, then Penguin), Trevor Glover (Penguin) and Patrick Gallagher (Allen & Unwin).[63] Another round of takeovers and mergers began in the late 1980s, with Penguin, for example, absorbing Lloyd O'Neil, Greenhouse and McPhee Gribble, but by then the overseas imprints had largely become naturalised within the Australian literary field.

The biggest publishing phenomenon of the period, however, Colleen McCullough's massive international success *The Thorn Birds* (1977), suggested a different pattern, with simultaneous New York and Australian first editions from Harper & Row. American editions would become increasingly important to fiction writers, popular and literary. Australian writers have a long history of successful international publication in popular fiction, from Arthur Upfield, Maysie Greig and Carter Brown to Morris West and Jon Cleary. But the growth of international publishers based in Australia means that for

58 Magazines included *The Ear in the Wheatfield*, *Magic Sam*, *Etymspheres*, *Your Friendly Fascist*, *Surfers Paradise*, *Makar*, *Compass*. See the two volumes of Michael Denholm's *Small Press Publishing in Australia*, Second Back Row Press, 1979, and Footprint, 1991.

59 John Tranter (ed.), *The New Australian Poetry*, Makar Press, 1979; Brett, 'Publishing, Censorship and Writers' Incomes', p. 457; Susan Lever, 'Surviving as a Writer: The Careers of the 1970s Generation', *Southerly*, 67.1–2, p. 396.

60 Louise Poland, 'Allen & Unwin', in Munro and Sheahan-Bright (eds), *Paper Empires*, p. 98.

61 Brett, 'Publishing, Censorship and Writers' Incomes', p. 462.

62 Trevor Glover (Penguin) quoted in Galligan, 'The Culture of the Publishing House', p. 43.

63 Galligan, 'The Culture of the Publishing House', p. 41.

contemporary genre writers – McCullough, Di Morrissey, Mathew Reilly, Garth Nix, 'Lian Hearn', Sara Douglass or Greg Egan – Australia is less an outpost for overseas-based publishers than a site of production and consumption in its own right, integrated into a transnational network. Crime remains more locally inflected; local crime publishers include Text, Wakefield and Allen & Unwin.[64] American editions have become routine for the best-known literary novelists such as Carey and Malouf, and common for many others including Richard Flanagan, Kate Grenville, Winton, Linda Jaivin and Nicholas Jose. The translation market has also grown. The value of book exports doubled in the second half of the 1990s; by value approximately 14 per cent of all books published, including six per cent of fiction, was sold overseas, predominantly to the United States and New Zealand.[65] The sale of international rights has thus become a critical part of the literary infrastructure and of a publisher's business, not least for independents such as Text and Spinifex who have been especially active in this field; so too attendance at international book fairs, which has been assisted by the Australia Council. One reason for the rise of literary agents, from one in the mid-1970s to more than 20, is their role in negotiating separate international rights for authors.[66]

Between postmodernism and the middlebrow

Despite the signs of expansion, however, it would be a mistake to read this history as a simple evolution from colonial dependence to national self-sufficiency. Internationalisation bites both ways. In the latest restructure of the publishing industry – and of literature within the industry – both independent locals and established British firms have been absorbed into multinational conglomerates in which book publishing, typically, is one small part of a vast media enterprise. Not only is publishing dominated by the big few – Penguin, HarperCollins, Random House, Pan Macmillan and Hodder Headline/Hachette Livre – these firms are themselves parts of global operations: Pearson, News Corp, von Holtzbrinck, Bertlesmann and Hachette respectively. Although there has been an explosion in the number of publishers in Australia, most are small to minuscule, while the top 10 account for the bulk of output and sales.[67] For literary fiction between 1990 and 2006, three publishers (Pan Macmillan, Penguin and HarperCollins) produced a quarter of all locally originated titles; the top six (adding Random House, Allen & Unwin and UQP) accounted for 43 per cent. While four of the top 10 publishers of literary fiction over this period were Australian-owned – Allen & Unwin,

64 Acknowledgements to Ken Gelder for information on genre fiction publishing.

65 ABS, *Arts and Culture in Australia: A Statistical Overview*, ABS 4172.0, Canberra, 2007, pp. 79–80.

66 Sessions, 'Thirty Years On', p. 90. The revival of PEN as a significant writers' group in Australia might also be linked to increasing internationalisation. PEN is supporting the publication of two major anthologies of Australian and Aboriginal writing to be published by Allen & Unwin in 2008–9: see the Centre for the Macquarie PEN Anthology of Australian Literature at <http://www.humanities.mq.edu.au/anthology/index.htm>.

67 Lee, 'Exploiting the Imprint', p. 23; Simone Murray, 'Generating Content: Book Publishing as a Component Media Industry', in Carter and Galligan (eds), *Making Books*, pp. 51–67; Webster, 'Into the Global Era', pp. 82–3.

UQP, Fremantle and Text – there is a substantial gap between the top four and the rest.[68]

Although reconfigured, the constraints on local publishing and the imbalance between large overseas and smaller local firms thus remain. As suggested earlier, foreign ownership means neither inevitable decline in the quantity or quality of Australian books nor reduced circumstances for Australian authors (indeed, for some the reverse will be true). The new patterns of ownership, as part of Australia's greater integration into transnational networks, provide greater access for local writers to international markets. Like the British houses before them, the multinationals have developed substantial Australian lists (while increasing their imports); and if the ethos of the small publishing house has been highly valued – especially in literary publishing and in nurturing early-career authors – large houses can make bigger investments in advances, editing, promotion and distribution. At the same time, this might mean investment in 'fewer but "bigger" titles', something also encouraged by the rise of department stores as major booksellers.[69] From a peak in the late 1990s, the number of new fiction titles released in Australia has declined dramatically. The causes have to do with factors beyond publishing; but *sales* of Australian fiction have similarly declined, while sales of imported fiction have increased.[70] Poetry publishing, unsurprisingly, has been even more sensitive to change. By the end of the 1990s, as Bronwyn Lea notes, Angus & Robertson, Heinemann, Penguin, OUP and Picador had largely abandoned poetry, leaving some of Australia's major poets without a publisher, while new titles decreased from around 250 annually in the years 1993–9 to around 100 in 2006.[71]

Commentators have suggested a range of effects stemming from the new publishing regimes across the English-language book world: an increased focus on celebrity authors, popular non-fiction, and frontlist titles rather than the midlist or backlist where slower-selling 'literary' books might build a reputation; a preference for blockbuster or genre fiction; a shorter shelf life for all titles; an expectation that each title will earn a profit rather than allowing cross-subsidisation; and a shift of power from editorial to marketing within the publishing house.[72] This is a difficult area where the divergent institutional cultures of publishers, authors and critics often collide. Publishers defend their commitment to quality and culture (and their market savvy), while critics diagnose 'increasing commercialisation' and 'dumbing down'.

68 David Carter, 'Boom, Bust or Business as Usual? Literary Fiction Publishing', in Carter and Galligan (eds), *Making Books*, p. 240.

69 Webster, 'Into the Global Era', p. 83; Lorien Kaye and Katya Johanson, 'Publishing and Bookselling', in Carter and Galligan (eds), *Making Books*, pp. 68–80.

70 ABS, *Arts and Culture in Australia: A Statistical Overview*, ABS 4172.0, Canberra, 2007; Jeremy Fisher, *Current Publishing Practice: An Australian Report*, ASA, 2005, pp. 17–18. Sales of Australian titles in the non-fiction, children's and educational categories, however, have continued to rise.

71 Bronwyn Lea, 'Poetry Publishing', in Carter and Galligan (eds), *Making Books*, pp. 247–51.

72 Lee, 'Exploiting the Imprint', pp. 24–5; Mark Davis, 'The Decline of the Literary Paradigm in Australian Publishing', in Carter and Galligan (eds), *Making Books*, pp. 119–21; Richard Flanagan, 'Colonies of the Mind, Republics of Dreams: Australian Publishing Past and Future', in ibid., pp. 132–48.

Most contentious in recent times has been Mark Davis' argument that a broader restructure of the public sphere in the interests of neo-liberal markets has produced a 'decline of the literary paradigm' itself. 'By the early 2000s,' Davis writes, 'almost no major Australian publisher was aggressively seeking or promoting new literary fiction at the forefront of their lists, and literary fiction was no longer the cornerstone of the industry's self-perception.'[73] His prediction that literary fiction will be published in two strands – as part of prestige imprints within large houses whose main business lies elsewhere, or through the niche interests of smaller independents – is already a fair description of the Australian situation. A slightly different account might see an 'expanded middle' in Australian fiction publishing. Cultural nationalism in the 1970s and 80s encouraged a strong sense of each new work contributing (or being recruited) to the national literature; but this was still in an economy of relative scarcity. In a period of (relative) expansion and internationalisation from the mid-1990s, this sense of the national literature has been dissolved, its boundaries blurred as those between high and popular forms have been blurred, by growth in 'quality' mid-range and genre fiction – 'good books' and 'good reading' but not books ready-made for canonisation. In positive terms, the growth of the middle range might itself be the sign of a mature literary system.

One response to the perceived decline of the literary paradigm has been the heightening of public debates over Australian literature. These were enmeshed in the culture wars of the last decade, as commentators both at the liberal centre and on the conservative right attacked the new academy for having abandoned literature in favour of politics, theory or pop.[74] The same charge might be made against publishers – in a twisted way it was when, in May 2006, the *Australian* newspaper hoaxed a number of publishers and agents by sending them a chapter of White's *The Eye of the Storm* pseudonymously; unsurprisingly, they ignored or rejected the submission.[75] What that proved is unclear. More importantly, publishing of books in Australian literary studies has collapsed as dramatically as other forms of literary publishing – but not because scholars have abandoned the field – from a peak in the mid-1990s of more than a dozen titles a year to less than half that number. The numbers at any stage are small enough for one or two publishers' enthusiasm to make a significant difference. In the 1990s UQP, OUP and MUP all had critical series; none survived into the new century.

Davis is at pains to distance his analysis of decline from what he sees as a largely nostalgic reassertion of literary values in certain journals, publishing practices and

73 Davis, 'The Decline of the Literary Paradigm', p. 120. Long-time publisher Richard Walsh disagrees: 'The Father of All Media', *Australian Book Review*, Dec. 2007–Jan. 2008, pp. 6–7.

74 For example: Rosemary Neill, 'Lits Out', *Weekend Australian*, 18–19 Mar. 2006, Review, p. 4, and follow-up letters 1–2 Apr.; Steve Lewis, 'PM Canes "Rubbish" Teaching', *Australian*, 21 Apr. 2006, and subsequent articles and editorials; Neill, 'Lost for Words', *Weekend Australian*, 2–3 Dec. 2006, Review, pp. 4–6, and responses the following week; Neill, 'Universities Cold Shoulder our Literature', *Australian*, 4 June 2007. In August 2007, the Australia Council convened a roundtable in Canberra on Australian literature and literary education: Imre Salusinszky, 'Literary Mission', *Australian*, 8 Aug. 2007.

75 Jennifer Sexton, 'White Rejections Speak Volumes on Cultural Arbiters', *Australian*, 17 July 2006.

commentary, especially from the baby-boomer cultural establishment. Significant literary figures – Williamson, Christopher Koch, Robert Dessaix, Andrew Riemer and a bevy of critics, columnists and academics – have attacked post-structuralism and political correctness for killing off literary appreciation.[76] Much of the campaign *for* Australian literature conducted in the pages of the now conservative *Australian* has been a campaign *against* cultural studies and postmodernism. Literature is privileged in such arguments as a space beyond market forces and fashionable ideology; but they offer little more than a comforting sense of tradition or fine sensibility wherein literature 'speaks for itself'.

Publishers meanwhile have identified a new market for good books and literary appreciation outside the academy, as in the flourishing culture of reading groups. HarperCollins's Australian edition of Janette Turner Hospital's *Oyster*, for example, includes 18 pages of supplementary materials clearly designed for such readers. The reading group effect is multiplied in ABC Radio's *Australia Talks Books*, ABC TV's *First Tuesday Book Club*, campaigns such as 'One Book, One Brisbane', the magazine *Good Reading* and, of course, in the literary festivals.[77] There has been a mini-boom also in the publication of 'literary' essays and memoirs, initiated perhaps by the unprecedented success of Drusilla Modjeska's *The Orchard*, first published bravely as a beautifully designed, small-format hardback.[78] While *Oyster* and *The Orchard* could easily be claimed for postmodernism or political correctness, they also circulate as 'good books' in quite another reading culture.

Academic literary studies did of course change profoundly from the late 1970s in ways that are familiar across the English-speaking world, with the rise of theory over criticism, textuality over literature, and textual politics over poetics. The debates over 'literature' versus 'theory/cultural studies' were enacted in the academy itself, not least in the context of Australian literature where the 'foreignness' of theory could provoke nationalist resistance. In the first wave, feminism and Marxist approaches were linked via the central concept of ideology. In the second, structuralism and post-structuralist theories, often arriving together, challenged the boundaries of literary autonomy differently with their emphasis on deep structures, linguistic undecidability, (inter)textuality and discursive regimes. Although psychoanalytical and semiotic theory made an impact, the force of post-structuralism was localised predominantly as a form of 'textual politics' around the categories of gender, race and nation (nationalism became even more problematic). If gender was the key revisionary concept for the first wave, race and ethnicity have now become radically central in work on migrant–settler, Asian–Australian,

76 See also Mark Davis, *Gangland: Cultural Elites and the New Generationalism*, 2nd edn, A&U, 1999, pp. 28–42 *et passim*.

77 *Good Reading* was launched in mid-2001 and appears monthly.

78 Kath McLean, '*The Orchard*', in Munro and Sheahan-Bright (eds), *Paper Empires*, pp. 185–8; David Carter, 'Public Intellectuals, Book Culture and Civil Society', *Australian Humanities Review*, 24 (Dec. 2001–Feb. 2002); Mark Davis, 'Assaying the Essay: Fear and Loathing in the Literary Coteries', *Overland*, 156 (1999), pp. 3–10.

postcolonial and, above all, Indigenous–non-Indigenous relations. In these equations literature can scarcely be contained within 'literary studies'; and literary studies will not be limited to 'literature'.

Certainly, by the 1990s, criticism no longer aimed at building the canon; the new agendas challenged canonisation and revealed its exclusions. But within what was now an established institutional structure, theory opened the field to new texts and new readings, thus broadening and diversifying the body of works that now comprised 'Australian literature': if theory deconstructed, it also *reconstructed* Australian literature. This process involved both historical revision – reclaiming forgotten female and working-class writers for example – and modernising the canon to accommodate new literary developments such as Indigenous writing and life writing.

The changes in the literary academy can also be understood as a new stage of professionalisation, for despite 'textual politics', the uses to which literary texts were put were increasingly specialised and so distanced from those of 'ordinary reading'. It is easy to misread this as symptomatic of general cultural dysfunction; easy, too, to underestimate ordinary or non-professional reading – its variety, its own forms of specialisation, the degree to which it too has become predisposed towards readings of gender, sexual, ethnic, Indigenous, regional (or postmodern) difference. Against the signs of cultural shrinkage one can point to new forms of writing and publishing, new forms of reading and book talk. Within the dynamics of the Australian situation, the concentration of publishing in the hands of a powerful few opens new spaces for local publishers able to sustain smaller (and smaller-selling) lists of fiction, poetry or innovative non-fiction.

Australian independents have produced five of the last 10 Miles Franklin Award winners, including challenging novels on Indigenous themes (*Carpentaria*, *White Earth*, *Benang*).[79] New magazines, web sites and publishers (Giramondo, Brandl & Schlesinger, Five Islands) have opened to poetry, alongside a boom in poetry festivals and prizes. More mainstream has been the new phenomenon of annual *Best* collections – the *Best Australian Essays* (from 1998) and *Best Australian Stories* (1999), both from Black Inc., and two poetry volumes, from Black Inc. and UQP, since 2003. These might be expected in a book culture organised around celebrity authors, prize-winners and short-term marketability. But there are signs, too, of a different kind of cultural remaking, in response to both the negative and positive conditions of possibility: the gaps in the marketplace left by the big players; the opportunities and threats of the culture wars; the sense of a decline (or renaissance) in serious publishing; the hybridisation of genres and media, and of academic and non-academic modes; and the emergence of new reading publics for artful and thoughtful writing. If the *Australian*'s review pages now nestle within a lifestyle supplement, it also publishes the monthly *Australian Literary*

79 At the same time, of course, the major houses *will* take on challenging novels: Random House publishes Christos Tsiolkas; Picador (Pan Macmillan) published Richard Flanagan's *The Unknown Terrorist* (2006).

Review. Black Inc. launched the *Quarterly Essays* in 2001 and *The Monthly* in 2005, and has produced a strong series of titles on public affairs and cultural politics. Scribe and Duffy & Snellgrove have published in similar areas. The local university presses, UQP, University of New South Wales Press and MUP (now Melbourne University Publishing), and institutional publishers such as the National Library and the ABC, have developed classy lists of crossover titles, often written by academics but not exclusively for scholars. Although literary criticism is doing it tough, this is a strong period for publishing in areas such as Indigenous studies, biography, cultural history and media studies. Titles such as *Bad Girls*, *Gangland* and *The History Wars* and successive books by Reynolds, Inga Clendinnen and Robert Manne among others have sold well, although generally this is small-volume publishing for a restricted section of the domestic market, hence left largely to the independent or institutional publishers.[80]

Since 2002 Giramondo has published two or three book-length issues of *Heat* annually and five or six new books, including essay collections by Beverley Farmer and Gerald Murnane, and Brian Castro's prize-winning *Shanghai Dancing* (earlier rejected by the major houses). Text, under former *Scripsi* editor Michael Heyward, has published contemporary essays and made an unlikely success out of reprinting works such as Watkin Tench's diary of the First Fleet, colonial journals of exploration, and Alan Moorhead's war reporting. In fiction it has built a name for stylish literary and popular fiction (Bail's *Eucalyptus*, crime writers Shane Maloney and Peter Temple) and reissued its own Australian classics.[81]

Some of this activity no doubt represents the kind of nostalgic coterie publishing predicted and criticised by Davis. The reflective essay and its close relative the memoir have to some extent become fetishised as sites for higher sensibility and social responsibility, and there has been a parallel rise and fetishisation of the figure of the public intellectual – Manne, Gaita, Clendinnen and others – a writerly persona embodying moral authority and national conscience, as opposed to mere professional expertise.[82] While these new forms of publication have multiplied the kinds of 'public-ness' available in Australian culture, they can also appear to be directing public debate into narrow channels. But again the results are too diverse to be reduced to a single ideological effect. Inevitably a mix of innovative and nostalgic, postmodern and middlebrow cultural aspirations are in play. At best new forms of literariness, media literacy and historical understanding are released into the culture. Australian literature, in the narrower sense of the term, now finds its place in a looser, less pure and perhaps less hierarchical field of books, magazines, and other media forms.

80 Catharine Lumby, *Bad Girls: The Media, Sex and Feminism in the 90s*, A&U, 1997; Davis, *Gangland*; Stuart Macintyre and Anna Clark, *The History Wars*, MUP, 2003; David Carter, 'Public Culture Publishing, 2005–2006', *Westerly*, 51 (2006), pp. 168–85.

81 Anne Galligan, 'Text Publishing', *Paper Empires*, pp. 113–17.

82 See David Carter (ed.), *The Ideas Market: An Alternative Take on Australia's Intellectual Life*, MUP, 2004.

Conclusion

In some ways Australian literature, not Australian cinema after all, has been the unlikely survivor of new media developments. The Australian book, at least, seems to have found newly sophisticated ways of reinventing itself and finding new readerships. In 2007 UNSW Press launched a new series, New South books, with Sherman Young's bright polemical essay *The Book is Dead* (an irony the author shared).[83] The market for good books, literary fiction and quality non-fiction has expanded, or multiplied internally. While the new book cultures are still privileged forms of consumption they do not simply reproduce old cultural capital; instead they suggest just what books and reading might look like after the 'redistribution' of cultural capital produced by expanded tertiary education, globalised culture markets, and the pervasive influence of new media and pop cultures.

Less clear are the kinds of attachment to 'Australian literature' – to the nation and the literary – that remain. The internationalism of the new literary bestsellers is a distinctive feature of contemporary book culture, and Australian fiction now appears within this cosmopolitan array much more forcefully than in any national ordering. That task is left to the academics and a few reviewers. Indeed, in a period when the profession seemed to need defending, a new discourse has arisen around Australian literary studies, less anti-canonical and more concerned to define a critical 'curatorial' relationship (in Robert Dixon's phrase) to the literary heritage.[84]

As a Canadian study has suggested for 'Can Lit', the investment in 'Oz Lit' that was sustained from the 1960s to the 90s might prove to be a short-lived baby-boomer phenomenon. Younger readers, the Canadian study concluded, were not reading any less than their parents but they were reading without any particular investment in the project of Canadian literature.[85] Australian readers, too, might be happy enough with the books and other forms of writing that global markets and new media deliver to them, mostly unconcerned about their national provenance, comfortable with the way certain Australian books, like Australian movies or music, find a place in these transnational cultural networks. Other studies suggest that a diet consisting largely of imported culture is not the opposite of a strong sense of national distinctiveness.[86]

Australia is no longer a dominion or 'client' state within a closed literary and publishing market, but a medium-sized player, both importer and exporter, within a globalised industry and transnational literary market (for fiction at least). A mature literary system and publishing industry have been established: both local and overseas-owned firms investing in new Australian writing for diverse, disaggregated local markets; a

83 Sherman Young, *The Book is Dead: Long Live the Book*, UNSWP, 2007.
84 Robert Dixon, 'Australian Literature – International Contexts', *Southerly*, 67.1–2 (2007), p. 17.
85 Robert Wright, *Hip and Trivial: Youth Culture, Book Publishing and the Greying of Canada*, Canadian Scholars' Press, 2001.
86 Tony Bennett *et al., Accounting for Tastes: Australian Everyday Cultures*, CUP, 1999, pp. 202–25.

relatively dense and stable network of institutions of review, patronage and reward; and an autonomous book-buying and reading public. Almost certainly there are greater opportunities for a greater number of Australian writers than 20 or even 10 years ago, although none of this guarantees careers, secure incomes, publication, reviews or a place in the bookstore. Literary publishing remains structurally small, though within a much stronger public and commercial infrastructure. Poetry and criticism publishing are still marked by discontinuity; life writing, essays and public affairs are vigorous for the moment; children's books are an international success story; fiction remains significant, being one-third of locally released general books and stronger than ever in genre publishing. But while independents and multinationals will continue to release Australian literary titles, it is less certain that the idea of Australian literature will drive any lists except among niche publishers. Whether this is seen as a problem will depend upon the cultural politics of writers, publishers, critics, policy-makers – and consumers.

18

Theatre from 1950

KATHARINE BRISBANE

At the half-way point of the century, theatre in Australia had seen the reversal of patterns of theatre-making and theatregoing brought about by two world wars and was caught up in the post-war idealism that art, culture and self-expression could be ministers in the evangelical movement for world peace.

At that time there were two dominating forces. The commercial theatre of J. C. Williamson Ltd, established in 1876 by an American actor–manager, was owner of enough theatrical real estate to make it the largest touring circuit in the world. The Williamson empire was based on the canny acquisition of rights to the Gilbert and Sullivan operas, and from the 1920s had been run by the five enterprising Tait brothers who presented American musicals, Viennese operetta, pantomime and English comedy. The work was uniformly a reproduction of the overseas original; the stars were almost always imported. Other entrepreneurs did regular business with JCW (or the Firm, as it was known) and Australia was well served by a round of entertainment of a high, if not particularly creative, standard.

Meanwhile, the more serious sector of Australian society, inspired by the Irish and English repertoire movements, had since 1907 sought social and intellectual improvement by establishing an amateur theatre, peopled mostly by the professional and business classes, the Catholic Church and the universities. During the Great Depression many actors, thrown out of work by the mass closure of live theatres in favour of the cinema, established drama, dance and elocution studios, which by degrees converted into small theatres.

For many of these, the pursuit of self-expression led to debate on cultural identity and the need for a national repertoire. In the 1930s and 40s a host of playwrights attached themselves to these theatres, and graduated into radio, which proliferated with drama during the lean years of World War II. They wrote chiefly about social issues – domestic hardship, fire and flood, racism, provincialism – and their models were variously the European realists, the classical poets, expressionism and American political theatre. But, with rare exceptions, this literary theatre was confined to the amateur world. The one exception is Sumner Locke Elliott's *Rusty Bugles* (1948), an elegiac comedy about soldiers trapped at an isolated ordnance depot in Northern Australia during the Pacific War while their family lives crumble. An attempt was made by the state government to

suppress the rough language, but its instant recognition by its ex-service audience led to a long and successful national run. Locke Elliot never saw it. He had taken his biting wit to New York, where he soon surrendered the stage for the novel, and Australia lost a budding master of popular comedy.

From 1947 the Firm revived the grey years of war with the new American musicals, *Oklahoma!*, *Kiss me Kate*, *Annie Get Your Gun*. The serious theatre was captured by the Old Vic tour of 1948–9, a diplomatic mission to embrace the battered empire; it was led by Laurence Olivier and Vivien Leigh, whom Australians treated to street parades and overnight ticket queues. This tour had a lasting impact upon Australia's cultural ambitions and influenced the direction of theatre in the second half of the 20th century. The elegance of the designs by Loudon Sainthill and Cecil Beaton for *The School for Scandal* and the elevated style of Olivier's *Richard III* set a benchmark for future ambitions.

The first outcome was an invitation in 1949 from Prime Minister Chifley to Tyrone Guthrie, an eminent British theatre director, to observe Australian theatre and recommend action by government. His principal recommendation – that talent should be sent to the United Kingdom to train and work, returning home when they were famous – was rejected. The second came in 1953 when a consortium of eminent men persuaded Prime Minister Menzies to back what became the Australian Elizabethan Theatre Trust, Australia's first official funding body for the arts, with the task of attracting tax-deductible donations and providing an infrastructure on which a performing arts sector could be built.

The successes of this venture included the transformation of the failing Borovansky Ballet into the Australian Ballet and the establishment of the Elizabethan Opera, today Opera Australia. Marionette theatre, initiated by Peter Scriven, had a popularity that lasted until the 1980s; and even more lasting has been the play with which the name of the Trust (as it was known) is associated, Ray Lawler's *Summer of the Seventeenth Doll*.

At the time he wrote this play Lawler was an actor and director with the Union Theatre Repertory Company, the first post-war professional company. In 1955 his play was co-winner of a competition held by the Trust, and the UTRC's founder, John Sumner, was assisted to produce it at the Union Hall at the University of Melbourne. Its success was immediate. It toured Australia for two years and was then presented in London by Olivier where it ran for seven months and won the *Evening Standard* award; it later played (though less successfully) on Broadway. Since then it has been widely translated, filmed and studied. It is the first of two plays from this period that every schoolchild knows. Lawler went abroad with the play as a cast member. He settled back in Melbourne in 1975 and wrote two more plays about the *Doll* characters, *Kid Stakes* (1976) and *Other Times* (1978); the three plays came to be known as *The Doll Trilogy*.

Summer of the Seventeenth Doll was the perfect play for the moment. It combined the familiar form of the realist three-act play with the shock of seeing and hearing,

probably for the first time in a major theatre, the colours and the sounds of modern Australian life. The play is set in working-class Melbourne, where live Emma and her daughter, Olive. Olive has surrendered marriage for five months of annual honeymoon with Roo, a gun sugar-cane cutter from North Queensland. He and his mate Barney have had a rendezvous here each Christmas for 16 years; but now middle-age has caught up with them. In hindsight the play is a tribute to that ever-youthful Australia that relied on primary industry and physical prowess, soon to give way to the rising educated class of the baby-boomer generation. It opened the door to other writers who took advantage of the more colourful aspects of working life, with plays like Richard Beynon's *The Shifting Heart* (1957), a domestic drama about Italian immigrants; Barbara Vernon's *The Multi-Coloured Umbrella* (1957) about sexual *mores* and the betting industry; *The Slaughter of St Teresa's Day* (1959), Peter Kenna's comedy melodrama about Sydney's underworld; and finally Alan Seymour's *The One Day of the Year* (1960).

This gush of working-class revelation quickly proved a concern to those funding the Trust, whose taste lay in drawing-room comedy. The vulgar accents, quirky vernacular, moral irregularities and fondness for resolution by violence brought protest from those who thought it not the public face Australia should display. But Australia's mood was in harmony with that of London, where from 1957 writers and actors were descending from the north, like Roo and Barney, to sweep away the polite theatre with bad manners and regional accents. *Summer of the Seventeenth Doll* was welcomed there in 1957 as 'the first play in which working-class characters are treated without condescension'.[1]

The One Day of the Year was the play that took the brunt of the criticism. When the Adelaide Festival of the Arts selected the script for its inaugural 1960 festival, that powerful lobby, the Returned Services League, sought to ban it for bringing into disrepute Australia's sacred national day, Anzac Day, 25 April, which commemorates the landing at Gallipoli in 1915. Alf, a World War II veteran, is an angry big-mouth who now works as a lift driver and looks forward to the one day in which he can restore his self-respect. Meanwhile his student son can see only the drunkenness that follows the parade. This leads to bitter argument, revealing again the widening gap between the pre- and post-war generations. Meanwhile their old mate Wacka, living with his memories of the Great War, refuses to attend the march but quietly weeps at the sound of the Last Post on television.

The RSL row culminated in the withdrawal of the festival's offer, and the play was presented first by an amateur group, then by the Trust and eventually in London. Over the years interpretation has lowered the emphasis on Anzac Day in favour of the more lasting inter-generational theme, but Alf's opening lines remain the best known in Australian drama:

1 Kenneth Tynan's review in the London *Observer*, 5 May 1957.

> ALF: I'm a bloody Australian and I'll always stand up for bloody Australia. That's what I felt like sayin' to him, bloody Pommy, you can't say anything to 'em, they still think they own the bloody earth, well, they don't own the bloody earth. The place is full of 'em. Isn't it? Wacka! Isn't it?[2]

The One Day of the Year is the second of the plays from this period that are still part of a teenager's education. It marked the end of the period that Lawler began.

One by one writers and actors went abroad, many with the financial assistance of the Trust. It was the end of the first wave of post-war theatre, and with it the three-act realist form that had dominated the stage since melodrama had deserted to the cinema. It was a form derivative of American and British plays and movies, translated into an exotic, but largely imagined, setting of the urban under-classes.

The first sign of change came in 1961 in the person of Patrick White, internationally acclaimed novelist. Not content with banning *The One Day of the Year*, the Adelaide Festival governors compounded their problems by rejecting for the second festival the first of Patrick White's plays to be professionally performed in Australia, *The Ham Funeral*. Their selection committee had unanimously recommended the play, but the offer was quickly withdrawn when a scene in which two aged prostitutes find a foetus in a rubbish bin was deemed offensive. The play was produced outside the festival and the result was sufficiently encouraging for White to abandon the novel for a fruitful four-year period in which three more plays were written and performed. Of these the first and most frequently revived has been *The Season at Sarsaparilla* (1962). After dissatisfaction with the production of *Night on Bald Mountain* (1964), he returned to the novel; but he was persuaded by a revival of *Sarsaparilla* in Sydney in 1976, followed by a much-acclaimed performance of *A Cheery Soul* (1963) at the Sydney Opera House in 1978, to write three more plays.

The theatre has an ambivalent attitude to White's plays. His themes, like his novels, juxtapose the small stature of the individual against the large canvas of human existence, and he employed forms that were challenging: part realist, part expressionist, part poetic and presentational. He began, and persisted in, experiment in form, and in this has been more fortunate than most Australian playwrights in establishing collaborations with directors capable of realising his work: John Tasker, who directed his early plays; Jim Sharman from 1976; and Neil Armfield from the 1980s. In 2007 a landmark reinterpretation by Benedict Andrews found a new audience for *The Season at Sarsaparilla* at the Sydney Opera House and proposed a new way of interpreting the Australian repertoire.

Meanwhile, in the 1960s, the Firm continued its steady importations but the amateur theatre was moving forward. In 1959–60 the National Institute of Dramatic Art, Australia's first national drama school, was established by the infant University of New South Wales in tiny premises on campus. In Melbourne the Union Theatre Repertory

2 *The One Day of the Year*, A&R, 1972, p. 8.

Company, until then a half-yearly troupe playing on campus, moved into its tiny Russell Street Theatre in 1960, supported by the university and the Trust. It soon began its metamorphosis into the Melbourne Theatre Company. Before the end of the decade it was the anointed state company and by the 1980s principal incumbent of the glamorous new Arts Centre.

On the other side of the country the long-standing Perth Repertory Society had opened its own theatre, the Playhouse, in 1960, employed a professional director, and was steadily moving towards full professionalism. In this it was aided by Australia's immigration program, which imported '10-pound Poms' from the British theatre. The Playhouse provided Perth audiences with a successful repertory company in the English style, initially under the popular direction of Edgar Metcalfe, until 1985 when state government intervened to restructure the arts sector.

In Adelaide the Trust had attempted to set up a semi-professional South Australian Theatre Company under John Tasker in 1965, but it was not until 1972 that the 'social workshop' of the Dunstan Labor Government commissioned the Festival Theatre Centre and re-established the company. In Brisbane, after three healthy amateur theatres had rejected approaches by the Trust to turn professional, the state government under Joh Bjelke-Petersen established the Queensland Theatre Company by statute.

The New Wave

What wrought these changes was the climate of the 1960s, which saw the post-war generation arrive at maturity. A new energy awakened a public induced into apathy by 20 years of prosperity and paternalistic government, and gathered revolt against Australian involvement in the Vietnam War and United States domination in general. This awakening led to the referendum of 1967, which voted basic rights to Indigenous Australians and created a pattern of public protest. This in turn extended to film and stage censorship, party-political demonstrations and issues of national interest, like the TV-Make-It-Australian campaign and the lobby to re-establish a film industry and create an independent government-funded arts body.

By 1966, as part of this growing restlessness, the first ripples of the theatre's New Wave began to be felt. In 1962, an offshoot of NIDA called the Old Tote Theatre had been set up, with the aid of the Trust, to give NIDA's artists a public stage. The Old Tote (housed in the totalisator building of the old Randwick Racecourse on which the university was built) began presenting the classics and, despite its seating of only 160, became influential. It quickly expanded into touring and then into a larger theatre on campus, the Parade. In 1966, in response to the demands of NIDA graduates, the Tote hired another small hall in which to experiment with local scripts and new directions. This was the Jane Street Theatre.

In Melbourne the enterprising Betty Burstall set up La Mama (1967–), an even tinier experimental theatre in Carlton, in which she gave open house to any writer,

director or performer who wished to use it. Out of this opportunity came the Australian Performing Group, a cooperative who in 1970 opened its own premises nearby and during its 10-year life contributed new forms and a new kind of actor to the history of the Australian theatre. The APG closed in 1980, but La Mama survives as Melbourne's most revered experimental centre.

Similar groups in other states, led by students of theatre who had engaged with the alternative movements of Europe and America, came and went in this period. Out of it emerged a significant group of writers, directors, designers and actors who became leaders in the pursuit of a truly Australian theatre. Among these were the writers Jack Hibberd, David Williamson, Alex Buzo, John Romeril, Dorothy Hewett; directors Jim Sharman, George Ogilvie, Rex Cramphorn, Brian Syron, John Bell, Lindy Davies and Peter Oyston; designers Brian Thomson and Peter Corrigan; and actors Max Gillies, Bruce Spence, Barry Otto and John Gaden.

The first evidence of support was the federal government's move in 1967 to create a national funding body, to be called the Australian Council for the Arts. The decision came in response to the decline of the Australian Elizabethan Theatre Trust. At the time of the Trust's establishment Australia had almost no experienced performing-arts managers and technicians outside the commercial theatre. Skills had to be imported, and the outcome was a style of theatre practice that for the most part failed to recognise the opportunities offered by local talent, local accent or character. In attempting to encourage the theatre-going habit it was also forced to underwrite some of its classical and popular works with unsustainable commercial partnerships.

But as so often happens in revolutions, the same personalities soon re-emerged in a different guise. The announcement in 1967 that the governor of the Reserve Bank, Dr H. C. Coombs, a principal figure in the Trust history, would be charged with establishing the new body, was greeted with loud protest. Coombs took a deal of criticism for his loyalty to the arts. He was refused time and money for consultation, and was under pressure to get funds committed and appointments made before the 1969 election, so he lobbied for seeding funding, divided the arts into genres and selected an executive officer. With the exception of film, which soon established its own funding body, the structure of the Council remained virtually unchanged for the rest of the century.

The influence of this new body has been far-reaching. It enlisted the cooperation of state governments in supplying buildings and supporting companies. It selected the Melbourne Theatre Company, the Old Tote Theatre Company in Sydney, and the National Theatre at the Playhouse in Perth to be the official state theatres, and persuaded Brisbane and Adelaide to create statutory bodies. Tasmania's task of sustaining live theatre proved intransigent and that state has since become Australia's centre for puppetry.

Of more lasting significance were the guidelines for subsidy laid down by the Council. Perhaps because of the Trust's experience, the Council insisted upon a non-profit structure with a board of responsible citizens and award rates for performers. This discounted

the whole stratum of amateur companies with a professional base that depended upon profit. Some companies restructured to comply, but as competition increased most were taken over or died. La Boite in Brisbane is a rare example of a theatre that successfully metamorphosed through changing ecology from amateur status to professionalism. Another, which remained determinedly independent of government intervention, is the Ensemble Theatre in North Sydney, founded in 1958 by the expatriate American actor Hayes Gordon. It is a compact organisation with a waterfront theatre and restaurant that serves a steady constituency with mainstream entertainment.

So, by and large, the voice of community theatre was lost. And yet, it was their values that motivated the establishment of the new theatres – those of education, self-expression, nationalism, subversion, spiritual health. As time passed this was reinforced by the Council's supervision of the repertoire. High points were given to new Australian work and the classics. Notes were sent if the season contained too many 'popular' comedies.

This tension between the demand for high art and the need to sustain the habit of theatregoing has been damaging, particularly to the small capitals that today find it difficult to provide year-round art theatre and who have lost amateur arts that were once their life-blood. The situation was aggravated in 1976 when J. C. Williamson's, aged and under assault from the booming state theatres, unsuccessfully applied to the Industries Assistance Commission for subsidy, and closed its production arm. Other entrepreneurs leapt in to replace the Firm, but the dispersion of the central management that ran the theatre circuit has been trouble to the commercial sector ever since.

The Council's budget at the outset was $1.7 million and with it, amid great controversy, it set about establishing its own chain of 'excellence'. Expansion was rapid – in the case of the Old Tote Theatre, too rapid. By 1973 it had moved to the Drama Theatre of the Opera House, and by 1978 was declared insolvent. The state government quickly replaced it with the Sydney Theatre Company and converted an old loading dock in the Rocks development into a second theatre, the Wharf, which opened in 1984. With the exception of Perth and Hobart, these companies have developed into large institutions housed progressively in architecturally grand arts centres. In 1975 legislation confirmed the Council as a statutory body with the title Australia Council for the Arts, and gathered under its umbrella other federal bodies for literature and visual art.

The rise of Dingo Theatre

The arrival of the Council for the Arts was an opportunity also for a host of new-style theatre groups that mushroomed during the late 1960s in shabby warehouse spaces. They were no longer 'amateur' but rather 'alternative', or cooperatives, dividing the box-office equally among members, and in some cases the outside earnings of participants also.

The uncontrolled nature of these groups soon drew the attention of the police and the state chief secretaries, in charge of decorum. The late 1960s saw several arrests and

some minor convictions for acts of obscenity in a public place. But more often the intervention referred to the health and safety regulation of these temporary premises and by the mid-1970s most had been forced to close. By then their practitioners had moved into the mainstream or moved on.

Melbourne became a fertile ground for writers and performers. The cooperative and improvised style developed by the APG, made possible by their makeshift premises, provided in the first years ideal circumstances for experiment and a forgiving, animated audience. It also created a group of versatile, courageous and self-reliant actors who later became prominent in a diversity of fields.

One leader was Jack Hibberd, then a young doctor in love with words and influenced by Brecht and the European absurdists, who wrote a manifesto for the APG demanding a nationalistic 'dingo theatre' that spurned European convention and exploited popular taste. His early plays were brief encounters with style and social *mores*, railing against Australia's parochialism and prudery. His first full-length success was *White with Wire Wheels* (1967), a comedy that satirises the language of the young male and exposes his hidden adolescent fears. Three flat-mates sustain their camaraderie on boastful talk of cars (which they understand) and women (whom they do not). A more worldly young woman in the flat upstairs exposes their facade, and, in a surreal scene, their fears and private dreams. A stream of other plays followed, many of them monologues and all experiments with form, language and meaning. The most substantial are *The Overcoat* (1976), an adaptation from Gogol; *A Toast to Melba* (1976), a musical biography; and his most widely acclaimed work, *A Stretch of the Imagination* (1972).

This latter play, memorably created by Peter Cummins, later by Bruce Spence, Max Gillies and others, is a solo piece about Monk O'Neill, a philosopher and misanthropist cheerfully awaiting death in his shack on One Tree Hill. The play covers the day of his 80th birthday, and in it he attends to his ailing bodily functions and addresses the audience with ruminations on his past: travels in Europe, sexual adventures, encounters with legendary figures, his arrangements for death. The style is part comic, part romantic, and behind it is the epic sweep of the old Anglo-Celtic Australia, now dying, and its reconciliation to a usurped land:

> You're a tower of strength to me, Mort. Two minutes of silence for Mort, a man who was once the life of the party, who always did the right thing, a digger who has ceased to shovel, an Einstein of the stab pass and the brindle chuck, a knuckler of pansies who always wore the pants, old silver-tongue, a man's man, the first off Gallipoli, one of nature's policemen, Mort.

John Romeril added a political dimension to the stock of the APG. This first play was *I Don't Know Who to Feel Sorry For* (1969), a drama about mother and daughter trapped in poverty and violence; the theme was repeated in *Bastardy* (1972), in which a prostitute refuses to recognise the son who comes looking for her, because he is Aboriginal. Romeril's first significant success was *Chicago, Chicago* (1970), a surreal

vision of the 1968 Democrat Convention in Chicago, and influenced in form by Brecht and American transformation exercises.

The play that sustains Romeril's work as a playwright, however, is *The Floating World* (1974), a sweeping, unruly play about a retired couple on a cruise to Japan, which gathers into itself the ill-defined emotions still felt at the time about Australia's expanding trade relations with its former enemy. Les Harding had been a prisoner-of-war of the Japanese and is a reluctant passenger. While his wife flirts, Les drinks and remembers the mates who died. Egged on by the appalling jokes of the entertainment officer, his words become more racist and his actions more erratic, until upon arrival in port he races down the gangplank and stabs the nearest Japanese. In an extraordinary 20-minute monologue he explodes in a wealth of long-suppressed memory, among which is nostalgia for those times of extremity, when every sense was alive and every feeling was shared. Romeril continues to write prolifically, including community and youth theatre, and in the 1980s began a strong connection with Japanese and Asian theatre which continues to inform his work.

These two writers, more than any others, expressed the high emotion of the group in voicing protest at the social and political backwardness they saw in the world around them.

Two further leaders of this charge were Dorothy Hewett in Perth and Alex Buzo in Sydney. Dorothy Hewett (1923–2002) was a generation older than her fellow New Wave writers and was already a noted poet. Back in her hometown and attracted by the Elizabethan dimensions of the New Fortune stage at the University of Western Australia, she began writing for that theatre: first *This Old Man Comes Rolling Home* (1966), a saga about the exuberant life of the Darcy family in Sydney's Redfern; and *The Chapel Perilous* (1971), an epic celebration of Sally Banner, a female crusader who believes 'in the blood and the flesh as being wiser than the intellect'.[3] *This Old Man* is a baroque tribute to her years as a communist, to the life force of people oppressed by poverty: crime, alcoholism, backyard abortion. Its influences include Tennessee Williams and Patrick White, and White returned the favour in his later plays by adopting Hewett's use of music into his drama.

The Chapel Perilous has more classical reference. It begins with a ritual adapted from Malory's *Morte d'Arthur* in which Sally, as Sir Lancelot, seeks to pass through the fearful challenges of life and gain entrance to the Chapel Perilous. But the black knights do not let her pass. 'Your worldly renown can avail thee nothing in matter of the spirit', intone the Chorus. 'Repent yet for ye do not belong to the blessed, and we foretell your death.' The play's form is Shakespearean and moves fluidly through scenes, songs, soliloquies and processions in the Elizabethan manner.

The play shocked and delighted with its frankness, its lyricism, its baroque form, its intellectual daring and demand for attention to a woman as hero. To this point the

3 *The Chapel Perilous*, Currency Press, 1972, p. 17.

New Wave had been male-dominated – it is hard to recall today just how masculine the theatre culture was. The entry of Sally Banner into these waters led her author into brave new channels with a series of plays examining women's dependency and men's delusions: *Bon-Bons and Roses for Dolly* (1972), *The Tatty Hollow Story* (1974), *The Man from Mukinupin* (1979). Her last play, *Nowhere* (2001), gathered together all her preoccupations: the imperatives of blood, sex, social justice, music, poetry, literature and the intellect. Music is central to her work, as are literary references, particularly in the case of *The Man from Mukinupin*, a mythical portrait of a country town that owes something to the American musical, more to Shakespeare's *As You Like It*, and something again to the mediaeval world of Thomas Malory.

At the opposite extreme in the late 1960s was Alex Buzo (1944–2006). Buzo was a history student at the University of New South Wales when the Old Tote Theatre presented his short play *Norm and Ahmed* (1968) in an experimental season of Australian work. He was immediately claimed as a new voice. As Hewett is extravagant, so Buzo is precise. Satire is the weapon of his early work, and his ear captures and amplifies the cadences and ingenuity of the vernacular spoken by particular sectors: returned servicemen, public servants, young executives; the monied and the immigrant. *Norm and Ahmed* has two characters, an ageing storeman and a Pakistani student, who find themselves at a city bus stop late at night. Ahmed's language is studied, his manners exemplary. He does not welcome Norm's overtures but responds politely. Little by little Norm unravels his own life, boasting of successes, suppressing his disappointments, making elaborate expressions of goodwill towards our Asian neighbours which by degrees reveal envy and prejudice. Both the men, we come to see, are aliens in the same land.

The play is famous for its heady mixture of colourful clichés and public-service vernacular; and has much in common with the satire of Barry Humphries, who had first forensically examined Melbourne suburbia in 1957. And behind their mutual delight in the orchestration of words lies a similar exasperated cruelty and romantic yearning for change.

This became more apparent in Buzo's next works, *The Front Room Boys* (1969) and *Rooted* (1969). The former orchestrates a calendar of work practices in a government office. The play opens at nine o'clock on a Monday morning.

[ROBBO *enters*.]
ROBBO: G'day Thomo
THOMO: G'day Robbo.
[ROBBO hangs up his coat, sits down and reads a report. GIBBO enters.]
GIBBO: G'day Thomo.
THOMO: G'day Gibbo.
[GIBBO hangs up his coat, sits down and reads a report. PRESTO enters.]
PRESTO: G'day Thomo.
THOMO: G'day Presto.

And so on until Hendo changes key.

> [HENDO enters. He crosses the room and goes out through the back door.]
> GIBBO: Hendo's early.[4]

It is classic Australian vaudeville. This style is developed in *Rooted*, a more substantial black comedy in which the life of Bentley, one such public servant, comfortably settled with his wife, his flat and his stereo, is undermined by the machinations of the invisible Simmo, in the name of mateship.

The outsider is central to Buzo's work. In his early plays he satirises both the popular culture and the victim who attempts to oppose it. By degrees the work becomes more character-driven and the outsider learns to assert himself and comes to see most of the game. *Coralie Lansdowne Says No* (1974), his first mature play, examines the changing climate and introduces the second major female figure of the New Wave. Coralie is an unemployed teacher, rootless and turning 30, a product of the libertarian culture who has fallen into living on other people. She sees herself as 'a high-flying bird' and yearns for her life to be perfect. Meanwhile she is caretaking a mansion on Sydney's Palm Beach. Three men offer her a compromise: a wealthy but half-blind lawyer, a married former-lover and a 'poet and public servant' who is a head shorter than she. Coralie says no, but when the lover's neurasthenic wife commits suicide reality begins to invade. In the end she accepts the diminutive Stuart, insisting, 'You must be good to me.' Coralie was greeted in 1974 as another female liberator; but the play contains a warning, unheeded at the time, about the too-rapid changes to traditional society brought about by the contraceptive pill and the overthrow of the conservative coalition government.

Macquarie (1972) was another warning; it compares the early reforming governor with the Labor hero Gough Whitlam and foretells the Dismissal. Increasingly Buzo's characters isolate themselves from the turmoil in order to review the values of the old world being discarded in favour of a role in the new global economy. Style came to be Buzo's defence against an imperfect world. The sophisticates Edward Martello in *Martello Towers* (1976) and Weeks in *Makassar Reef* (1983) hide these fears behind elegant repartee. In his later plays this irony becomes suppressed by increasing subtlety as he struggles to find substance below the shifting sands. His last major work, *Pacific Union*, examines the role of H. V. Evatt in the foundation of the United Nations, and the choice he faced upon the death of Prime Minister Curtin between staying at the vital inaugural meeting in San Francisco or returning to Australia to contest the leadership.

Buzo's role as a prophet was not understood in his lifetime but he remains Australia's finest dramatic stylist to date. This gives his plays claim to more lasting qualities than some of the more popular works of the prolific 1970s.

4 'The Front Room Boys' in *Four Australian Plays*, Penguin, 1973, pp. 19–20.

Another writer whose rigour sat uneasily with the audiences of the 1970s was Alma De Groen, a New Zealander by birth whose work, like that of Buzo, was preoccupied with the outsider's predicament – in her case domestic disorder – but projecting a sense of foreboding that comedy does not relieve. She came to notice in 1970 with a remarkable short play, *The Joss Adams Show*, which, in a series of dream-like sequences, traces the state of mind of a woman suffering post-natal depression. *Going Home* (1976), written in a Canadian winter, is a domestic comedy-drama in which the wife seeks to allay her confinement by compulsive telephone shopping. *Vocations* (1981) is a feminist comedy about the transformations of motherhood. In 1987 she moved into a new phase with *The Rivers of China*, an examination of the last weeks in the life of Katherine Mansfield at Fontainebleau with the self-development guru Gurdjieff, parallel to which is a present-day accident victim who awakes from a coma with the identity of Mansfield. This idea of a pervading consciousness with the power to rescue a dying world continued to inform De Groen's imagination with *The Girl Who Saw Everything* (1991), which ponders the impact of the death of an unknown woman discovered on a deserted road, upon the internal lives of an estranged couple; and *The Woman in the Window* (1998), in which Anna Akhmatova, the imprisoned Russian poet, shares the stage with a futuristic world in which no green land remains and the literary imagination has been locked away as a danger to national security.

Towering above all these writers in the public mind, however, was David Williamson, who from 1973 quickly became the most popular playwright in Australia's history. Williamson emerged from the writers who gathered at La Mama in the 1960s and made his name with three confronting comedies, *The Coming of Stork* (1970), *The Removalists*(1971) and *Don's Party* (1971). Each in turn was hailed for its satirical portrait of Williamson's own milieu, respectively the sexual *mores* of a household of young men (not dissimilar to those in Hibberd's *White with Wire Wheels*); dysfunctional police and their clients; and a group of former Young Labor activists facing the dissipation of their early idealism. First *The Removalists* and then *Don's Party* were taken up by Sydney theatres and toured the nation. *The Removalists* was presented in London and won the 1973 *Evening Standard* award for best new play of the year – the first international success of the New Wave. Williamson gave up his day job, accepted a commission from the Melbourne Theatre Company and settled into a dream run.

While the plays of the late 1960s and early 70s were rough, ribald and iconoclastic, reflecting the turmoil of public opinion that brought down the elderly government, the surprising sweep of the newly elected Whitlam Labor Government gave pause to those by that time accustomed to opposition. And the government itself gave no quarter, throwing out in a few weeks some of the icons of policy: repealing the so-called White Australia Policy, recalling troops from Vietnam, recognising the People's Republic of China.

David Williamson's great virtues have been his elegant craftsmanship and his understanding of his audience and the temper of the times. In his youth he was a loyal member

of the Australian Labor Party and worked fervently towards the election of the Whitlam Government. His plays through the 1970s expressed with singular penetration the sense of a political party as family, ambitious, headstrong, visionary and finally treacherous. These plays see domestic relationships as varieties of confrontation, from the violence of *The Removalists* in which a young cop is 'blooded' into a crude and macho culture, to *Don's Party* in which political and literary ambitions are muddied with sexual obsessions and disappointments. *Jugglers Three* (1972) confronts the two sides of the Vietnam War divide and questions the shake-up in foreign policy as a veteran returns to find his wife living with a protester. (Years later he rewrote the play as *Third World Blues*, 1997, believing that his stand against the returned servicemen had been naive.) It was followed by *What If You Died Tomorrow* (1973) in which the makeshift domestic chaos of a too-rapidly successful writer reflected the climate of breathless change that was the Labor Government's first year. And by *The Department* (1974) the family, in the guise of a university department, demonstrates how even high intelligence can be ground down by petty ambitions and bureaucracy. By 1976 *A Handful of Friends*, which deals with the invasion of privacy and betrayal of friendship inherent in the creation of works of fiction, gathers into itself the pent-up emotions that followed the Dismissal and vows to maintain the rage.

Instead Williamson turned to his other passion, Australian Rules football, then on the cusp of turning professional. Looking back at how brutally the old sports culture was overturned, *The Club* (1977) remains one of his most prescient works. In it we watch a failing club employ first a business manager, and then begin to trade loyalty for muscle. The speed at which these plays were written and produced in the 1970s is one of the phenomena of the new subsidised theatre, and one reason for their immediate identification with their audience. The 'high art' theatre has, like the rest of the world, become steadily more ordered, to the point that it is no longer possible to capture the moment in the way these plays of the 1970s so admirably did.

Williamson's 1979 play, *Travelling North*, was a turning point: this character study of a dying man has been called his *King Lear*. Frank is an old communist who persuades his younger lover Frances to leave her tiger daughters and travel north with him to the sun. There, as his health begins to fail, he rages for a while before gathering his faithful court about him. Over time they teach him, if not wisdom, at least a little humility. Of all Williamson's plays, this is perhaps the one that transcends time.

In the 1980s he moved into the wider social context with issues like the rise of feminism within marriage (*The Perfectionist*, 1982); social justice and the press (*Sons of Cain*, 1985); the temptations of greed (*Emerald City*, 1987); ethics and the legal profession (*Top Silk*, 1989); and the boundaries of middle-class friendship (*Money and Friends*, 1991).

While some of these plays were first presented outside the subsidy system, and all had national, and sometimes international, production, Williamson settled into a steady relationship with the now-established state theatre companies. So successful was he that

his audiences came to depend upon him for a new play each year. Successive plays came to draw on the lives of that audience, selecting real estate, the art world, literary festivals, radio talk-back shows to satirise their morals and *mores*. The exception was *The Jack Manning Trilogy* (1999–2001), three plays inspired by the introduction into the legal system of conferencing between offender and victim as an alternative to a custodial sentence. These plays were written for the three-quarters-in-the-round Ensemble Theatre, and need only bare boards and a semi-circle of chairs on which to uncover the ripples of complicity surrounding single acts of vandalism, rape and victimisation.

The emergence of style

Back in the 1970s, in Sydney the Nimrod Street Theatre opened in 1970, a few days after Melbourne's APG. It grew out of the experiments at Jane Street, to which a group of key figures had gravitated, including the actor–director John Bell, later to head the Bell Shakespeare Company; the director Rex Cramphorn, who led the most profoundly experimental group of the New Wave, the Performance Syndicate; William Yang, later a distinguished photographer and performance artist; and writers Michael Boddy and Bob Ellis. The latter's play *The Legend of King O'Malley* (1970), a vaudeville-style musical about an early political hero, captured an embracing kind of Australianness which rejected absolutely the English style of acting and replaced it with a rambunctious, straight-to-the-audience performance that set its participants on a new road.

The 100-seat Nimrod in Kings Cross was an immediate success, presenting makeshift shows in makeshift conditions. The excitement of apparently instant theatre reflecting the restless mood of the time was seductive to these early audiences, and writers like Ron Blair, Michael Boddy and Alex Buzo had their plays on stage within three months of conception. Soon, however, the founding group began to look for more considered work. It was responsible for setting *The Removalists* on its path to success and for the return to the stage of Peter Kenna, whose major play, *A Hard God* (1974), received its first performance at Nimrod Street with the brilliant Gloria Dawn as Aggie. In 1972, after a lifetime in vaudeville, Dawn had given her first performance in legitimate theatre, as Kenna's comic heroine Oola in *The Slaughter of St Teresa's Day* at Marian Street Theatre.

A Hard God is an autobiographical drama about an Irish Catholic family in Sydney, who huddle together, mixing petty differences with strong family loyalty. Aggie's husband Dan is suffering undiagnosed cancer. His brother Martin dies in a fall and murder by communists is suspected. The feckless younger brother is running from his wild, gambling wife. Comedy and tragedy are mixed with stories of the family's uprootedness, first from Ireland, then from their farming land, latterly from each other. And crossing their lives in his own time-space is 16-year-old Joe, in love with a strapping boy and fearful of retribution. Joe later became the centre of two more plays, *Furtive Love* and *An Eager Hope* that became *The Cassidy Album* (1978). Kenna's writing is distinctively Australian, but the language is injected with inherited Irish cadences; the people, for

the most part, share an acceptance of their small place in the world very different from the argumentative characters familiar in the work of his contemporaries.

> MARTIN: Oh, he's a hard God, Dan. He's a hard God.
> DAN: There's probably a pattern to it somewhere, Martin, if only we could see.
> MARTIN : That *is* his hardness, Dan. He doesn't allow us to. We just have to stumble on blindly with his mercy raining down on us like thunderbolts . . . Oh, God forgive us our sins! . . . Oh well, it will all end some day. The sun will finally set on our endeavours . . . some day.[5]

In 1974 Nimrod moved to larger premises in Surry Hills, designed on the three-quarters-in-the-round open stage, which has come to be associated with contemporary work. The fact that new theatre buildings have tended to reflect the flexible spaces of the improvised theatres of the New Wave is a commentary on how thoroughly these playwrights and their audiences rejected the old illusions. The Nimrod Street Theatre is now the SBW Stables Theatre; its successor in Surry Hills became the Belvoir Street Theatre in 1980.

From 1973 the annual Australian National Playwrights' Conference (1973–2006), first held in Canberra, popularised the development of scripts and the role of the dramaturg or literary adviser. In Melbourne in 1976 the Playbox Theatre became a home for new work; and the Victorian College of the Arts opened, consolidating the principle of self-motivation familiar among artists in Melbourne, but very different from the hierarchical structure of the performing arts endemic to Sydney. VCA graduates were influential through the 1980s in regional community theatres, most of an experimental kind. They also established skills in physical theatre, stand-up comedy, circus and performance art that are distinctive from the rest of the country.

Meanwhile the Australia Council for the Arts gathered in the existing facilities for literature and visual arts. This was one of the last acts of the Whitlam Labor Government, and by 1976 the incoming Fraser Coalition Government had introduced draconian financial measures to staunch the run of inflation. In the arts, as demands for support increased, the policy of both the Australia Council and the Literature Board shifted direction. Public sector sponsorship began to be sought by the newly assertive flagship companies, and in 1983 they responded to the introduction of ceiling funding by demanding and receiving direct funding from Canberra. Among the beneficiaries of this exponential growth were the writers Louis Nowra and Stephen Sewell, who burst out of the current domestic preoccupations into a grander arena filled with historical monsters and global machinations.

Nowra began writing at La Mama in Melbourne but moved to Sydney when Nimrod performed his play *Inner Voices* (1977) in the small Downstairs Theatre. It is a fiction about the son of Catherine the Great of Russia, locked away since childhood, who knows nothing but his own name. A view of the public world as intrinsically callous

5 *A Hard God*, Currency Press, 1974, p. 32.

and greedy became the signature of Nowra's writing, a style that includes music and dance, and draws variously from classical and pop culture. His subject matter ranges from the South American War of the Triple Alliance (*Visions*, 1978) to Chinese civil war (*The Precious Woman*, 1980), colonial pastoralists suffering ergot delirium (*Inside the Island*, 1980) and a lost convict tribe (*The Golden Age*, 1985). All these plays contain the underlying theme of imperialism unsustainably imposed upon barbaric human nature and territory. The mystic possibilities of deprivation of the senses – speechlessness, blindness – and later the nature of Aboriginality, have also been central to his plays. Later his themes became contemporary and comic, including *The Summer of the Aliens* (1992), based partly on his childhood, and *Cosi* (1992), probably his most popular and warm-hearted work, about the attempt to get up a performance of *Cosi Fan Tutte* with the inmates of an asylum. *The Temple* (1993) is a farce about Australian outback politicians and power-brokers. Several of his later plays, from *Capricornia* (1988), an adaptation of the Xavier Herbert novel, grapple with racial discrimination. Nowra was particularly fortunate in the support of Richard Wherrett, who was director of Nimrod 1974–9 and of the STC 1979–91, and Jim Sharman, for whom Nowra was associate director at the Lighthouse Company of South Australia (later the STCSA) during 1982–3. Wherrett's mission to present theatre that was 'grand, vulgar, intelligent, challenging and fun' matched Nowra's style and themes, and together over this period they produced a series of vintage production. For a period Nowra moved to film and television before returning to the stage with *The Boyce Trilogy* (2004–6), a family dynasty saga.

Stephen Sewell, too, benefited from the opportunities open to him at the STC and more particularly at the Nimrod Theatre and with Jim Sharman and his company in Adelaide. He came to attention with his play *Traitors*, first presented at the APG in 1979, quickly followed by *Welcome the Bright World* (1982) and *The Blind Giant is Dancing* (1983). These are sprawling political dramas that pit the warring drives of personal relationships against national or global forces. *Traitors*, Sewell's most-performed play, is a straightforward Orwellian drama about sex, ambition, ideology and betrayal in the early years of the Soviet Union under Stalin. *Welcome the Bright World* is an uncompromising work about fascism in Germany in the 1970s, which focuses also on the familial tensions of a Jewish family of a nuclear physicist and their consequences. *Blind Giant* enters the territory of union politics in which Allen, the principled organiser of the left, joins the struggle with the right and is seduced and destroyed by forces within himself. A fourth work from this period, *Dreams in an Empty City* (1986), caused scandal at first performance in Adelaide by alleging systemic corruption in global banking and giving his altruistic young whistleblower a messianic status.

Sewell's plays are prodigal, polemical and noted for their exclamation marks. Their vision of the world in which ethics, free speech and community are losing the war against corruption and mob rule began distantly in Stalin's Soviet, and moved by degrees to Australian and then US politics. But always the issues of individual identity and need, the conflicting relationship between men and women released from

the bondage of traditional domestic roles, merge and absorb the maelstrom of the public arena in which they find themselves. Sewell's style is high-tensile, relentlessly so, but no other Australian playwright has yet attempted this kind of marital interrogation in which private anger and despair are expressed in the language of public debate.

As audiences became more complacent during the 1990s, Sewell wrote a series of plays about familial conflict, then turned to film; but the assault on the World Trade Centre in 2001 returned him to the stage and extended his apocalyptic vision to post-9/11 America. His *Myth, Propaganda and Disaster in Nazi Germany and Contemporary America* (2003) is a dense thriller that echoes Kafka's *The Trial*. Talbot, an Australian academic teaching politics at an Ivy League University, finds himself cornered, and finally killed, by a mysterious interrogator, for whom Talbot's forthcoming book, a comparative study that provides the title of the play, is proof that he is a terrorist. Principles such as academic freedom are abandoned in favour of greed and personal aggrandisement, and the axis-of-evil manifesto triumphs. It was followed by *It Just Stopped* (2006), a view from the inside of an apartment block after the world outside has been incinerated.

New perspectives of Australian life

The 1980s were a time of consolidation in the theatre. While the flagships became grander, hitherto quiet voices began to assert themselves in the innovative second-level theatres with Indigenous stories, feminist critique, queer theory and perspectives on a variety of minority groups.

The civil rights movement in the 1960s had awakened Aboriginal activists to the need for a public platform, and during the 1970s several explorations were made into the creation of a black theatre. Of the pioneering texts that emerged, Robert Merritt's *The Cakeman* (1976) received most attention. It is a semi-autobiographical story of white prejudice and a family's attempt to escape from a derelict reservation. Its attention began a trickle of dramas detailing the sorry story of family dislocation and individual loss which came to be known as the Stolen Generations and which continue to this day, fuelled by public inquiries and revelations of systemic abuse and deaths in police custody. More widely influential in raising the awareness of an Aboriginal literature at this time was Kevin Gilbert, whose play *The Cherry Pickers* began life in 1971 and went through many changes until published in 1988.

In 1979 the Western Australian poet and activist Jack Davis was invited by the National Theatre Company in Perth to write a play for its theatre-in-education team. This became *Kullark* (*Home*), a historical drama about the Aboriginal warrior Yagan and the early settlers on his land at Pinjarra. Davis' work with the director Andrew Ross soon showed them that the theatre could become an important forum for Aboriginal rights, and Davis wrote a series of plays in quick succession. In *The Dreamers* (1982)

the dying grandfather of an urban family gradually returns in his mind to his ancestral home while the daily squabbles of his household continue around him. *No Sugar* (1985) is a family saga of a time in the 1930s when the Aborigines of Northam were forcibly removed to the Moore River Settlement. *Barungin* (*Smell the Wind*, 1988) is a polemical piece about Aboriginal deaths in custody, then the subject of a Royal Commission; and *In Our Town* (1990) is about a mixed-race marriage and discrimination against an Aboriginal returned serviceman.

Davis opened domestic life to his white audiences, revealing the practical humour, sharp practices and communal care that Aboriginals share; together with both the injustices of bureaucracy and the ingenious ways of confounding it. Davis' characters are engaging, and engaging actors were found, often among his immediate family. The first of the group to make his mark professionally was Ernie Dingo, a teacher of traditional dance who became a national icon first on stage and then on film and television. He was followed by a steady stream of young – and older – actors who learnt their craft by populating Davis' plays and paved the way for new writers. Today a generation of writers, singers and formally trained performers tell their own and others' stories, employing singing, music and dance, bringing a distinctive new energy and dedication to the arts. Among the many are the dancer Stephen Page, musician William Barton, and performers Leah Purcell, Ningali Lawford, Deborah Mailman, Wayne Blair and Richard Frankland.

The proliferation of skilled actors and singers, and the gradual resolution of questions of ownership rights, particularly among the Nyoongar, Koori and Murri peoples of the capitals, enabled the major work to date of the Aboriginal theatre to be conceived and realised. *Bran Nue Dae* (1989), by Jimmy Chi and the Kuckles band, emerged fully grown from the Western Australian pearling port of Broome with the aid of the Black Swan Theatre Company in Perth and private sponsorship. It is an incisive, celebratory musical that encapsulates the multi-racial mix which is Broome. Willie runs away from mission school and meets his raffish Uncle Tadpole. Together they return to Broome, sharing adventures along the way with Aboriginals, hippies and missionaries; and one by one they resolve their differences as they find they are all related. The joyful music reflects the sounds of Broome, from hymns to reggae, and is particularly memorable for the anthem 'There's nothing I would rather be / than to be an Aborigine.' Chi went on to write other musicals, notably *Corrugation Road* (1991), a satirical commentary on mental illness and racial abuse.

More recently the outstanding figure to emerge in Aboriginal performance has been Wesley Enoch, a Murri theatre director and writer who came to national attention in 1995, when he was artistic director of the Kooemba Jdarra Theatre in Brisbane, and collaborated with Deborah Mailman to write her solo performance, *The Seven Stages of Grieving*, a meditation on family relationships. Since then he has directed widely throughout Australia and has been in a great part responsible for bringing Aboriginal playwriting and performance into the mainstream. His own collaborative works have

included *Black Medea* (2000), an adaptation of Euripides' *Medea*; *Riverland* (2004), a presentation of the life of the artist Ian Abdulla; and his family study, *The Story of the Miracles at Cookie's Table* (2007).

Along with the growth of Aboriginal theatre, the 1980s brought a wider social consciousness and the rise of second-generation immigrant writers who began to examine the meaning of 'home'. Of these the most lasting is probably Janis Balodis' epic drama *Too Young for Ghosts* (1985). It follows the fortunes of a group of post-World War II Latvian immigrants dumped in the Queensland cane country, and juxtaposes their actions with flashbacks from their wartime history and that of the German explorer Ludwig Leichhardt a century before. Bit by bit the past is revealed – old scores, old crimes; these need to be expiated before new life can begin. Some succeed, some fail, as the story continues in two further plays, *No Going Back* and *My Father's Father*. Today the three are known as *The Ghosts Trilogy*. These were among the earliest works to bring the post-war migrant experience to the Australian mainstage. Tes Lyssiotis was another at this time who wrote a series of penetrating, gently ironic plays about the constraints of Greek-Australian family life, among them *I'll Go to Australia and Wear a Hat* (1982), *The White Sports Coat* (1988) and *The Forty Lounge Café* (1990).

By 1992, multiculturalism had begun to give way to anxiety as the number of refugees began to multiply. Mandatory detention was introduced and by the turn of the century government was building offshore sites for asylum seekers and treatment became increasingly harsh. The politics of the home country began to meld with the politics of Australia. Asylum stories, especially those behind the razor wire, were adapted in many theatres. Notable among these is the work of the collaborators Michael Futcher and Helen Howard in Brisbane: *A Beautiful Life* (1998) was one of the first to tell a story from the Middle East. Hamid is imprisoned in Iran for a chance connection to the resistance movement; he heroically escapes to Australia, where he settles with his family, and joins in action against the Iranian regime. He is arrested at the Iranian Embassy and is caught up in a mire of bureaucracy and cultural confusion. But beyond this action is the interdependence of Hamid and Kamran, a philosopher who teaches him survival in prison, and their fear of the diplomat Ahmed who they believe to be their former torturer. Beyond that again is their hold on personal integrity and its cost. Such is the complexity of those who come to Australia claiming to be asylum-seekers. In a fluid bare-stage style, multiple characters improvise the story from a variety of perspectives as again and again their lives fall apart.

The authors continue to draw stories from the life of those around them. In 2005 they produced *The Drowning Bride*, in which a young woman, after the death of her beloved grandmother, seeks out her Latvian grandfather, known to have been a Nazi collaborator. His admission exposes a morality of survival that leaves both him and his wife defiled. These semi-biographical plays introduced new complexities of character and gave rise to a variety of collaborative processes aimed at defining a form appropriate to small companies of actors on makeshift stages.

The most extreme artistic mind to emerge from Melbourne in the late 1980s with this new multicultural sensibility was the director Barrie Kosky. He is of Jewish Hungarian background, and his work is highly intelligent, extravagant, sometimes exquisite, often vengeful or repulsive – always full of incongruities and surprise. Though Australian audiences remain uncomfortable with his imaginative flights, his work demonstrates the level of sophistication to which this short history has brought us. From his university group, the Gilgul, which revived traditional Jewish forms, he quickly moved to mainstream theatre and opera where he caused immediate *succès de scandales*. In 1996 he directed the Adelaide Festival of Arts, and since 2002 has lived and worked in Europe. His choice of texts ranges from the classics to adaptations; they reveal only marginal connection with current politics, but all wrestle with preoccupying images drawn from the Holocaust, European history and more intimate examples of man's inhumanity to man. In 2006 he created for the Sydney Theatre Company ensemble *The Lost Echo*, an eight-hour collaboration with the writer Tom Wright employing Ovid's *Metamorphoses* to trace the slow decline of our connection to the gods and to myth – in Roman times a robust sexual one, today a faint echo of the imagination. In drama, music and dance they told stories, in turn bloody, obscene and romantic, of passion and revenge, accompanied on the piano by Kosky and closing in a dying fall with Schubert's *Winterreise*.

Such stories of social breakdown and loss were also to be found in a more domestic environment. The Melbourne Workers' Theatre was founded in 1987 to uncover stories from workers' lives. From this group the principal writers to emerge were Andrew Bovell, Patricia Cornelius, Daniel Keene and Raimondo Cortese. The latter two are distinctive talents in a minimalist style in sharp contrast to their Sydney counterparts. Keene's characters are drawn from the disenfranchised. The plays are lyrical, defined by orchestration rather than narrative. Like Samuel Beckett, Keene's dialogue is rhythmic, not character-driven, but distilling feeling without insight or defence. 'Being alive is the hardest thing in the world', says Angela, the young mother in *All Souls* (1993). 'Why does it hurt so much, why does everything I love and everything I want . . . why does it hurt . . . like it's already gone?' This sense of longing and incomprehensibility is ever-present but always framed by an awareness of natural surroundings – the sound of birds, children, a single instrument – and of his characters' passive acceptance of life's inevitability.

An early success was *Cho Cho San* (1984), a version of the Madam Butterfly story performed in Japanese style and with Butterfly and her child doubled by puppets. It was followed by *The Hour before My Brother Dies* (1985) a duologue on the eve of an execution, and *Silent Partner* (1989) a wry comedy about two incompetent greyhound trainers. Between 1997 and 2002 he collaborated with the director Ariette Taylor (The Keene–Taylor Project) on a series of short pieces that toured to considerable acclaim. Keene is a prolific writer who is still better known overseas than in his own country. *The Nightwatchman* (2005) was first performed in France and had its English-language

premiere in Sydney in 2007. Regarded as his major work to date, it is an elegiac study of an elderly man's last evening in the vacated family home, and the warring memories of his son and daughter. An important influence on his work was the director Lindzee Smith, who helped him establish a name in New York.

Cortese is younger than Keene but his work derives from similar territory. He is a graduate of the VCA and an artist and performer as well as writer. His work emerged from what came to be known as grunge theatre in the 1990s and reflects the small-scale, collaborative style for which the alternative theatre in Melbourne is known. Much of his writing is short duologues of strangers caught in arbitrary situations, which often remain unresolved. His *Roulette*, 12 short pieces first performed variously at La Mama between 1996 and 2005, succinctly capture the nuances of idle chat, of impatience, predation, of small hopes and grief, as each character reveals a chink or two in the mask they assume at the outset. *Features of Blown Youth* (1997), his major full-length play, is an impressionist study of a household in their 20s who share casual sex, drugs and music and create their own disorderly intimacy in a language of *non sequiturs* which reflect their isolation from the preoccupations of mainstream society.

Patricia Cornelius continued to develop the Workers' Theatre style in a variety of revue-style short scenes. Andrew Bovell moved into mainstream theatre and then into film and television, where he won many awards. An early play, *After Dinner* (1989), was first performed as single scenes and developed into a successful farce. This MWT concept of tenuous and contradictory connections continues to inform his work, particularly his film script *Lantana*, which grew out of his play *Speaking in Tongues*, a work in the thriller mode in which circumstantial evidence conspires to create a dark scenario that dissolves in the light of day. *Holy Day*, a darker play set in a lonely half-way house in colonial times, calls on these same conspiracies as a missionary's wife emerges from the isolated bushland, screaming that a native has murdered her child. Judgments about morality in a settlement with no social resources are challenged as the mission collapses, the vulnerable, including Aboriginals, are destroyed and the survival-minded meet their threat. It is a powerful play which both questions the emotional history behind our past and draws parallels with black and white reconciliation today.

With the growth and maturation of the theatre companies came a reassessment of the male dominance of the 1960s and 70s. Of those who made a career in the theatre the best-known are Katherine Thomson, Hannie Rayson and Joanna Murray-Smith.

Thomson began as an actor-researcher in community theatre, where she established an empathy with workers caught in a time of industrial change, and a work-pattern of her own which still continues. The moral strength of working people and the ease with which they are manipulated by economic forces became a recurring theme. Her first play to gain national attention was *Diving for Pearls* (1991), set in Wollongong, where the once-giant steel industry is being sold off to housing and tourism. Den is a welder, hanging on to what he knows. Barbara is a shiftworker dreaming of becoming a hostess at the new resort hotel. Their ill-matched hopes, mutual need and inevitable disillusion

expose the widening gap between commonplace contentment and the blind sweep of material progress.

In her comedy *Barmaids* (1991) two spirited women are united against a takeover syndicate. *Navigating* (1997) is a beautifully structured work, almost a thriller, in which Bea, a middle-aged clerical worker in a coastal town, is caught in a council cover-up of the local developer's malfeasance. One by one the vested interests subject her to isolation, insult and finally violence as the connections, leading back to a 35-year-old tragedy, expose themselves. Thomson's most recent plays are *Wonderlands* (2003), which powerfully debates the rights to land in which Aboriginal land owners and white land owners have equal emotional investment; *Harbour* (2005), which examines a dying unionist's dilemma in the grip of the 1998 maritime workers' strike; and *King Tide* (2007), about managing grief within a family. The plays are political but, like Jack Davis, she brings insight and humour to the private dreams of her people and in the end reminds us that the world in which we live is greater than our small ambitions.

Though different in style, the sense of social justice in Hannie Rayson's work is as deep as Thomson's and as firmly rooted in time. An early graduate of the VCA, she too began creating plays by researching current events. Rayson's first play to gain attention, *Room to Move* (1985), was a timely comic critique of the impact of feminism on domestic life; it set her on a path of portraying the pressures of family conflict within a contemporary social context. Her most widely performed play, *Hotel Sorrento* (1990), is about the reunion of three sisters in the family's beach house, and the emotional turmoil fuelled by the expatriate second sister's recently published novel. As unresolved injuries and painful reminiscences surface in the sibling war, Rayson also debates Australians' preoccupation with global opinion and self-worth; and regrets the passing of a world where summer holidays could be all the year round.

Plays that followed included *Falling from Grace* (1994), in which a group of professional women test issues of competition, ethics and the task of juggling family and career; *Competitive Tenderness* (1996), a farce about local politics; and her major work to date, *Life After George* (2000). George is an academic and revolutionary whose untimely death brings together his three wives. Their memories and their time-scale bring into sharp focus the steady commercialisation of university standards and the corruption of ideas and ideals, by a world in which sex and rebellion are no longer to be celebrated. In a similar way *Inheritance* (2003) deals with the culture of hard living endemic to small-town farm life and the entrenched grievances that brought about the election of Pauline Hanson to federal parliament in 1996.

Rayson is a storyteller. Her characters are, on the whole, not complex but express themselves boldly and liberally confide their hidden stories in flashbacks. While she is skilled at engaging in domestic confrontation, her characters never lose sight of the public issue or the agenda for change. This emerged most fiercely in her play *Two Brothers* (2005), intended to take her exploration of sibling rivalry into the public arena. But it brought down the ire of the federal cabinet by drawing transparently, in the view

of many, upon the careers of two prominent public figures and exploiting a very public refugee boat tragedy.

Rayson's canvas is the broad fabric of Australian society, Joanna Murray-Smith's is narrow, taut and finely woven. Her subject matter is intensely domestic and her theme limited quite rigorously to middle-class marriage and its breakdowns. Nevertheless her plays are remarkable for their intensity, internal complexity and ambiguity. More than any of her contemporaries, she relies on her actors to find their own reality. 'It could be anywhere', wrote Dorothy Hewett in her introduction to *Love Child* (1993), drawing attention to the abstraction of the domestic setting, the shadows at the edges. And any time. Equally, the plays are made up largely of duologues, forensic interrogations between characters who are either partners or strangers. *Love Child* is a confrontation between a divorced woman and the woman she believes to be the baby she gave away 25 years ago. In *Redemption* (1997) the random murder of a famous cellist brings together his estranged wife and the brother whose misplaced love broke up the marriage. In *Nightfall* (1999) the expected visit of a lost daughter uncovers the ugly reason for her disappearance. But her most widely acclaimed play is *Honour* (1995), in which the intervention of a young woman reporter takes a successful couple in late middle-age on a journey from contentment to separation. The young woman seduces the husband with flattery, and silences the wife by persuading her that the sacrifice of her career had been a betrayal of her gifts. In a series of reversals Murray-Smith debates duty versus self-fulfilment until the natural order prevails. But by then Honor herself has moved on.

These inter-generational consequences of the feminist movement are a recurring, sometime secondary, theme in Murray-Smith's plays. In 2006 she succeeded with a rare farce, *The Female of the Species*, in which a teenager, driven to desperation by her mother's feminist indoctrination, takes revenge on feminism's famous advocate by home invasion. Murray-Smith's signature is the dash, the unfinished or interrupted sentence, spoken for the most part by people who know each other's speech patterns too well. It is a style that effectively internalises, implies that the pressure of words piling up inside the speaker's head is log-jammed by their tongue. The result is a level of tension equalled only by Sewell, among her contemporaries.

Today a growing number of women maintain a career in theatre, film and radio, among them Alana Valentine, Debra Oswald and Mary Morris, whose early work has particularly successful with themes for young people.

In the Sydney of the 1980s other writers began to bring fresh observation to family conflict and were influential in elevating the gay sensibility – discreetly introduced in the 1970s by Peter Kenna – to a central position on the mainstage. Michael Gow had his first big success in 1986 with *Away*, about three families on summer holiday. A headmaster and his wife are grieving the death of a son in Vietnam; a menopausal mother's tension is alienating her husband and daughter; and the third couple is living with the knowledge that their son is dying of leukaemia. As the characters meet by

chance on a deserted beach, the barriers of financial status and private anguish dissolve in an unexpected storm and the author draws on *A Midsummer Night's Dream* to reconcile the couples.

Following its premiere at the tiny Stables Theatre in Sydney, *Away* quickly became one of Australia's most popular plays. It captures the characters' emotional confusion and draws them out of their daily squabbles into the higher, imaginative world inhabited by the teenage boy and girl at the centre. *On Top of the World*, presented the same year, is probably a clearer picture of the creative anger that is characteristic of Gow's work. Here a dysfunctional family, the daughter a semiotician and the son a real estate agent, celebrate their dying father's birthday. Stephanie has given up her academic job to look after Clive and his affairs. Marcus, a dependent personality, has evaded the difficult decisions and now reluctantly confronts the pitiless invective of his sister, who bears comparison with Edward Albee's Martha. But this time Marcus has brought with him an elderly neighbour, and the revelation of her life of thankless service shocks them into humility and a tentative reconciliation.

Europe (1987) is a two-hander between a Continental actor and a student with whom she has had a passing affair while on tour in Australia. He has followed her to Europe and now confronts her with his adolescent passion while she, consumed by her current role, barely remembers him. This complex play argues one of Gow's major themes, the place of history in building national character. Europe's 'blood-soaked past' is set against Australia's colonial history, 'the army of the conned'. 'I'm with them', says Douglas. 'I'm of that army. All of them who've gone through hell so your lot can stay on top.'[6] Douglas and Barbara work their way through their relationship until as equals they make their own resolutions.

Europe is also about our perceptions of other people, about imagination and illusion. Barbara believes Douglas fell in love with her stage illusion; for her the theatre is grind and torture, into which real emotion is an unwelcome intrusion. The theme is further explored in Gow's most savage play, *Furious* (1994), in which a successful playwright seeks to make sense of his discovery of a family secret by writing a play about it. The pursuit becomes a search to understand himself and his creative process. 'Help me', he begs a PhD student. 'I can't stop what's spewing out. I'm lost in it, it's dragging me along, pulling me under. I'm cold. I'm afraid.'[7] It affects his health, complicates his sex life and, while his play flourishes, leaves him without resource. This theme of inexplicable anguish is again examined, this time in comic terms, in his verse play *Sweet Phoebe* (1994). Michael Gow is also an actor and director and in 1999 he was appointed director of the Queensland Theatre Company.

In 2007 his autobiographical character in *Furious*, the writer Roland, returned to the stage in *Toy Symphony*. It is a passionate play directed at sharing with the audience the perplexity of a life dependent upon artistic inspiration. Unbridled thought

6 *Europe, On Top of the World*, Currency Press, 1987, p. 30. 7 *Furious*, Currency Press, 1994, p. 26.

and imaginary figures present themselves without warning, disrupting his progress, then leaving him bereft. Gow engages us with theatrical devices that surprise and revelations that move, creating a powerful, often absurd, portrait of the writer's dilemma.

Gow's contemporary, Nick Enright, was also a prolific writer, actor and theatre director and a much-respected acting teacher. He was probably also the best lyricist for stage performance that Australia has produced. Among his many musicals were *The Venetian Twins* (1983) and *Summer Rain* (1980) with Terence Clarke (both of which appeared in various versions over several years), *On the Wallaby* (1994), and the original book of *The Boy from Oz* (1999), with songs by Peter Allen. His song from *The Venetian Twins* (a parody based on Goldoni's comedy), 'I'm going back on the track to Jindyworabak', sung by Drew Forsythe, has attained the status of a classic. As a man of the theatre he was a natural collaborator and was at his best working with a creative team. He was also a linguist and translated several French and German classics for the mainstage; he wrote television series, and his screenplay *Lorenzo's Oil* received an Oscar nomination in 1993.

His work is eclectic in form and theme. His first play, *Daylight Saving* (1990), is a domestic comedy about the international tennis circuit, but he soon began to pour out plays reassessing through fiction aspects of his own background. *St James' Infirmary* (1992) explores the moral conflict between belief and social conformity within a Jesuit college when a student defaces the walls of the drill-hall in a passionate protest against the Vietnam War. *Mongrels* (1994) examines the folklore surrounding the tenuous relationship between two fellow playwrights with similar working-class Catholic backgrounds, the gentle Peter Kenna and the convicted armed robber Jim McNeil. *Good Works* (1994) provides insight over 50 years into the lives of two country-town families ruled by convention and the Catholic Church, and the effect on young men coming to terms with homosexuality.

The case of a young girl raped and murdered by a gang of teenagers in Enright's hometown of Newcastle led to *A Property of the Clan* (1994), a moving account of the tragedy from the young people's perspective. Its success led to *Blackrock*, a retelling from the parents' view; and then to a film version released in 1997. Other theatre-in-education plays for a teenage audience followed.

Probably his most popular work has been *Cloudstreet* (1998), a collaborative work with Justin Monjo, adapted into a five-hour epic from the novel by Tim Winton. The play toured Australia, and to Europe and the United Kingdom and has had repeated seasons. In retelling the picaresque saga of the Lambs and the Pickles, the script stays close to Winton's text and captures his rambling house with its characters and its ghosts and propels them by cumulative force to the heights of classic tragedy.

The last major play before his early death was a complex multi-media work called *A Man with Five Children* (2002), inspired by the British filmmaker Michael Apted's film series *Seven Up*. Gerry, a documentary filmmaker, sets up a project to follow five

children on one day a year until they are 21. His contract is to observe, to record, but never to interfere, and the text calls for film sequences to show the children innocently presenting their thoughts and feelings. But as the five grow in self-awareness Gerry is drawn into their lives, building little conspiracies, increasing co-dependency. The editing process itself begins to dictate the direction of their lives: their early celebrity leads to expectations of brilliance. At 21 they vote to continue the recording, but life conspires to destroy the script and the end is inexorable. Gerry becomes an outcast. Roger, the confused Asian-Australian, dead in some Asian jungle, prompts him to confess what he wanted from them:

> GERRY: One day out of their lives. One day a year . . .
> ROGER: Till . . .
> GERRY: Till they turn . . . Till they die. [On the screen he sees JESSIE's last moment.] One day for the camera to follow them. To a football game, a ballet class, a birthday party, whatever. One day a year for them to speak and be heard. I'd like to be in their lives. Yes, I'd like to be in their lives. No, I'd like them to be in my life. I'd like them to be my life. I'd like them to live for me.

This is the predicament of the creative writer, one who exhausts their own life to transform others' lives into something more profound, more beautiful, more controllable, as Roland does in *Furious* and Gerry in *A Man with Five Children*. It is a common theme for the writers of our drama. As John Romeril wrote in *The Floating World* in 1974, 'It's not that human beings cannot bear too much reality. It's that reality is too much to bear.'[8]

Since the 1980s plays about the AIDS epidemic have been plentiful, and gay relationships have made progress in public acceptance. But it is not the sexual but the creative imperative of the gay personality that has preoccupied Kenna, Gow and Enright. The sheer stature of the gay sensibility in the Australian performing arts is still not publicly acknowledged. But among younger writers of gay themes one Sydney man is pushing the boundaries, and in the process seems not to have recognised their existence. Tommy Murphy has already proved himself outstanding as a writer of popular comedy with a refreshingly confessional insight into the more intimate side of Sydney's gay society. His best-known plays are *Strangers in Between* (2005), a *faux-naif* comedy about Shane, a gormless 16-year-old from Goulburn who has escaped to the city lights eager to find his own sub-culture; and *Holding the Man* (2006), an adaptation of the book by Timothy Conigrave (1995) about the death of his lover from AIDS. Murphy began writing as a teenager and won his first award at 16. While he was at the University of Sydney the director David Berthold recognised his talent and encouraged his grasp of the surprising possibilities of the theatrical form. Berthold has since directed most of his work.

8 *The Floating World*, Currency Methuen, 1975, p. 93.

The first impact of Murphy's work on his audience is astonishment at how dangerous, and apparently artless, the writing appears. Shane's mind is a merry-go-round in which each thought receives the same rapt attention.

SHANE: You know coathangers?
PETER: Yes.
SHANE: Where do you get them from?
PETER: I don't know.
SHANE: Yeah, there isn't a shop for them . . . I reckon if I hung my clothes they wouldn't smell damp.
PETER: I'm always throwing coathangers out. They must just grow. I'll give you some to start a crop.
SHANE: Oh. OK. Thanks, Peter. *Pause.* So, how do you have anal sex? I tried the other night but it didn't work. It just didn't fit. I was able to do it to him but.
PETER: Oh.[9]

Shane appears to have conducted the whole of his life in this vein of indiscriminate curiosity, but the play has a darker side. Brother Ben, whose angry attack had been the cause of Shane's escape, comes in search of him; and in the ensuing encounters it is the younger brother who proves the more mature, the more certain of his own destiny.

Holding the Man follows the 15-year relationship between Tim and John from a Jesuit boys' school to maturity. In the early years of the AIDS epidemic they are both diagnosed with the virus, and the play movingly ends with their debility and John's death. The brutal frankness of the physical and mental deterioration derives from Conigrave, but the absurdity, the swift leaps from scene to scene, the sheer joy provided by six actors playing some 50 characters, is Murphy's own. Domestic love in Australian drama has almost always been expressed through confrontation. With the exception of Kenna's Aggie and Dan, John and Tim in *Holding the Man* may well be the only truly uncomplicated love story we have seen on stage since the 1950s.

Conclusion

While the story of our playwriting has been an unfolding one, always reflecting the changing social climate, the stages available to our writers have had an equal influence upon the outcome. In the post-war world that began this chapter the stage was universally a proscenium arch on which comedy and drama were played with the aid of scenery flats and lighting. The playwrights of the New Wave began their careers in shabby improvised spaces which by degrees imposed their flexibility on both artists and audience and have been reproduced by architects in grander surroundings. With the decline of the proscenium went the theatre of the four walls. In its place has been the art of the atmosphere maker. On the well-equipped stages built since the 1970s the

9 *Strangers in Between, Holding the Man*, Currency Press, 2006, p. 21.

lighting designer and the composer have become active partners in the realisation of the text. Gone are the days of the one- or two-set play with continuous narrative. Form now adopts the culture of the camera, with its quick glimpses, varied perspectives, short attention span and musical interludes.

This form began to make its impact in Williamson's *Travelling North* (1979), divided formally into 20 short scenes. Today few plays sustain a scene for more than a few minutes without a transition supported by mood music adopted from film. One consequence of this is the dominance of the two-hander scene or play. A sustained scene in which more than two people engage is now rare in contemporary Australian drama, and when discovered needs to be celebrated. Peopling the stage as Lawler, White and Hewett did, as Williamson, Sewell, Nowra and Gow have done, extends the author and gives the play an authority which two people and a lighting designer cannot match.

Another contributor to imaginative constraint has been the economy. In the 1970s it was openly said that a play with more than seven actors would not be considered. In the 1980s the main stages expanded and large-cast musical theatre entered the repertoire. By 1996 Richard Wherrett was calling for fewer new Australian plays on stage and a wider, more eclectic taste.[10] But in the first decade of the new century the pendulum has swung back to known international and Australian work. With the exception of Hannie Rayson, who seems successfully to have pleaded special privilege, the seven-character rule continues to prevail.

Lastly has been the unwitting influence of public responsibility for the arts. Guidelines have varied but, in hindsight, preoccupation with work about Australian identity, and suspicion of simple entertainment, have produced an important but rather earnest form of high art. In the 1980s the entry of corporate sponsorship opened the opportunity for larger imaginations, with higher production values, our own style of middle-class entertainment and musical theatre. But in this decade a slowly pervading conservatism is on one side oppressing the theatre with financial interests and self-censorship, and on the other subverting it with increasingly mature minority views: gay theatre, Indigenous documentary theatre, the admonitory visions of Sewell and Keene, and satirical musicals like *Keating!* and *Priscilla, Queen of the Desert*. What has not yet emerged is a genuinely inter-racial theatre that reflects the changing demography of the population and their changing ambitions for society.

Nevertheless, after 50 years of labour, which began in tiny church halls and warehouses, we do have a recognisably Australian form of theatre, an authoritative funding body, iconic government buildings for opera, music and drama, a proliferation of smaller theatres and a lively subculture. We do have a canon, and in hindsight it does trace, with remarkable accuracy, a trajectory of our emotional life.

10 Richard Wherrett, 'For Some Serious R&R' (Philip Parsons Memorial Lecture), 2 Dec. 1996, Belvoir Street Theatre, Sydney; Katharine Brisbane (ed.), *The Parsons Lectures*, Currency House, 2003, pp. 67–81.

19

The short story since 1950

STEPHEN TORRE

The ancient storyteller needed an audience and an occasion to perform a story; similarly, the modern short story must find a textual host and reader. By and large, a short story's textual history begins with publication in a periodical. There are other possibilities – competitions, readings (live or on the radio or television), even internet publication – but overwhelmingly the printed newspaper, magazine or journal is the first option. After that, republication in book form is possible, whether in anthology, miscellany or single-author collection. From the beginning, a short story's textual life is bound up with the practical, financial, ideological and editorial complexities of the publishing world, and this account of the Australian short story in the last half of the 20th century begins there.

Periodicals, anthologies, and short story publication

In Australia, the period immediately after World War II focused on Australian patriotism, economic recovery, immigration, sport, family values and suburban expansion. Literary endeavour was not high on the list. Yet compared to the limited options for publishing short stories overseas, the Australian market was encouraging. Major capital city newspapers accepted them, and the *Bulletin* continued its seminal role in short story advocacy. A range of popular magazines took short stories, not just women's magazines that favoured romance, but those based on professional or trade interests, or with political or social agendas. Principally, though, it was the establishment of the literary periodicals that most influenced the range and quality of work in the short story mode: *Southerly* first appeared in 1939, *Meanjin* in 1940, *Overland* in 1954, *Quadrant* and *Westerly* in 1956, and *Realist Writer* in 1958. In succeeding decades additional literary journals, some influential and widely distributed, others (so-called little magazines) short-lived but often vibrant and daring, were added to the list (see Chapter 17). By the late 1960s the emergence of the so-called New Writing found a ready venue. The short story also flourished in the 1970s and 80s, says Elizabeth Webby, as a result of the development of university education, including study of Australian culture, and government subsidy of the arts. In the last quarter of the century and into the 21st, globalisation, the internet, and crucial changes in the publishing industry have resulted in a proliferation of textual

media which overflow national and geographical borders. Even though in the 1990s changes in the corporate structure of Australian publishing and government subsidy meant that the short story was 'virtually deserted by mainstream publishers',[1] the genre found alternative sites for publication.

A number of periodicals have been particularly important in the history of Australian short story publishing. *Realist Writer* (1952–4, 1958–63) was a voice for the socialist-realist short story and its underlying theory. *Inprint Magazine,* edited by Bill Turner, published quarterly 1977–87, was one of the first devoted exclusively to the literary short story. In 1982 Bruce Pascoe launched what was to become the most successful periodical in Australia devoted to short fiction: 65 editions of *Australian Short Stories* were produced until its cessation in 2000. With average sales of 6000, it was widely available in newsagents and bookshops. Its list included key short story writers of the 1980s and 90s. Pascoe's aim was to publish 'the best contemporary short fiction by Australia's established and new writers, collections which we believe will become the new heritage of the art in this country'.[2] Some issues had a theme: the 11th was devoted to women's writing. Perhaps the most interesting experiment was *Tabloid Story* (1972–80), each issue of which appeared in a different host magazine, thus bringing what was predominantly new and often experimental writing to a varied spectrum of readers. University union and student publications were common hosts, with the 10th issue appearing in three different places at once (*Arena* at Macquarie, *Lot's Wife* at Monash, and *Semper Floreat* at the University of Queensland). Half a dozen issues appeared from 1979 to 1980 in the radical *Nation Review*, but also in the *Melbourne Times*, *Bulletin*, *National Times* and *New Journalist*. The production of *Tabloid Story* was 'alternative', and the radical innovations in editorial practice, payment to contributors, and other areas are dealt with in 'The Tabloid Story Story' by one of its founding editors, Michael Wilding.[3] Notwithstanding the lively domestic scene, Australian short stories were accepted in overseas periodicals after the 1950s, with increasing frequency. Some key hosts were *Atlantic Monthly*, *Blackwoods Magazine*, *Granta*, *Harper's*, *Kenyon Review*, *London Magazine*, *New Yorker Magazine*, *Partisan Review*, and *Transatlantic Review.*

While the periodical publication of short stories is often controlled by a diversity of interests, the generally more costly publication and distribution of short stories in book form – in anthologies or collections – is the province of fewer mainstream publishers. In respect of short story *collections*, the discussion of which forms the substantial part of this chapter, the 'literary aura' of the author is the principal criterion for publication; but different types of *anthologies* have varying readers and *raisons d'être* in mind. Here again, major Australian publishing houses were sympathetic to the short story, primarily

1 Elizabeth Webby, 'Introduction', in Webby (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Australian Literature*, CUP, 2000, p. 16.
2 Bruce Pascoe, 'Editorial', *Australian Short Stories*, 3 (1983), p. iv.
3 Michael Wilding, 'The Tabloid Story Story', in Wilding (ed.), *The Tabloid Story Pocket Book*, Wild & Woolley, 1978, pp. 295–316.

because of its kudos as a defining discourse of national identity and culture, stemming from its supremacy in the 1890s and from the work of Henry Lawson *et al*. Short story anthologies constructed their content in different ways: to represent the 'best' short stories over a period, perhaps a year or the century; to represent contemporary work; to gather stories on certain themes, or places, or in certain modes; to appeal to certain communities of readers such as dog-lovers or cricket enthusiasts; or to explore events of historical importance or cultural and sociological significance.

At the broadest level of specialisation are anthologies that select the best work of the year. Here Australia has had a number of serial anthologies of influence. The most authoritative was *Coast to Coast*, published annually 1941–8, and then biennially 1949–70, with the last issue edited by Frank Moorhouse in 1973. Published by Angus & Robertson, its editors comprised a who's who of short story writers with some distinguished academic scholars: Vance Palmer, Douglas Stewart, M. Barnard Eldershaw, Dal Stivens, Hal Porter and Thea Astley among the former, and C. B. Christensen, Leonie Kramer and A. A. Phillips among the latter. *Coast to Coast* sought the 'best' stories from its yearly intake of submissions. Most had been published previously. In some issues the editors contributed a foreword, and the sequence of these provides a narrative of changing taste. *Summer's Tales*, the Macmillan version of *Coast to Coast*, ran to just three annual editions (1964–6). Favouring socialist-realist fiction were the four issues of *The Tracks We Travel* (1953, 1961, 1965, 1976) published by the Australasian Book Society. In his introduction to the first, Stephen Murray-Smith claimed that the stories were 'a contemporary expression of the mainstream of the Australian tradition'. He saw the writers as linked to those of the 1890s by realistic techniques and themes of oppression, exploitation, the exaltation of the common man, and the assertion of Australian cultural values.[4] After a lull, Black Inc. initiated a new serial anthology with *The Best Australian Stories 1999*, edited by Peter Craven; subsequent issues have been edited by Moorhouse (2004, 2005) and Robert Drewe (2006, 2007). This series sources material 'which has not appeared in book form'[5] – that is, from original contributions and periodicals. As with *Coast to Coast*, Craven's, Moorhouse's and Drewe's introductions provide insights into the changing status of the short story, though these editors problematise issues relating to the production, transmission, evaluation and reception of texts.

Every decade since the 1950s has seen the publication of anthologies that seek to establish a definitive selection of the best or most representative short stories of much longer time-spans than a year, beginning with Oxford University Press's World's Classics series No. 525, *Australian Short Stories: First Series* (1951), edited by Walter Murdoch and H. Drake Brockman. Also influential and much reprinted and reviewed was *Short Stories of Australia: The Moderns* (1967), edited by Beatrice Davis and published by Angus &

4 Stephen Murray-Smith, 'Introduction', in Murray-Smith (ed.), *The Tracks We Travel: Australian Short Stories*, Australasian Book Society, 1953, pp. 9–13.

5 Peter Craven, 'Introduction', in Craven (ed.), *The Best Australian Stories 2002*, Black Inc., 2002, p. vii.

Robertson. Harry Heseltine's *The Penguin Book of Australian Short Stories* (1976) became a standard university text, a status threatened by Laurie Hergenhan's *The Australian Short Story: An Anthology from the 1890s to the 1980s* (1986) published by University of Queensland Press (which promoted much new fiction and poetry in the 1970s). International publishers welcomed the Australian short story to their catalogues: Murray Bail edited the *Faber Book of Contemporary Australian Short Stories* (1988), and Wilding *The Oxford Book of Australian Short Stories* (1994). Published for the new millennium was Carmel Bird's *The Penguin Century of Australian Stories* (2000). Although successive editors struggle to make new selections, these kinds of anthologies (unlike those fed yearly with new work) tend to narrow and standardise the canon, foregrounding the work of certain authors, and often certain texts. This homogenising influence is studied by Steve Holden in 'Australian Short Stories and "the solid Body of Australian Fiction" '.[6]

More specialised anthologies aimed to give a picture of contemporary writing in the 1970s and 80s. Brian Kiernan selected works by Murray Bail, Peter Carey, Morris Lurie, Moorhouse and Wilding in *The Most Beautiful Lies* (1977). The works conveyed an underlying convergence on the fabulist side of fiction, suggested in the epigraph from Mark Twain on Australian history: 'like beautiful lies . . . full of surprises, and adventures, and incongruities, and contradictions, and incredibilities'.[7] *The State of the Art: The Mood of Contemporary Australia in Short Stories* (1983), edited by Moorhouse, coupled Penguin's production skills with astutely chosen stories arranged into themes such as 'Marriage, Parenthood, Ancestors', 'Low Life', 'Travelling About, Bumming Around, In Transit', 'Games, Fantasies, Lyricism' and 'Growing, Ageing'.[8] Don Anderson's *Transgressions: Australian Writing Now* (1986), also from Penguin, built on the earlier volume, concentrating on stories which structurally or thematically imaged 'transgression'.

Anthologies of narrower focus included several of Tasmanian and Western Australian writing (and later from the Northern Territory and Queensland), seeking to redress the convergence of publishing activity in east coast metropolitan areas. These showcased the work of local authors, but also aimed to portray life in the regions. There were anthologies of 'migrant' writing, for instance *Shalom: A Collection of Australian Jewish Stories* (1978). More recently Kerryn Goldsworthy edited *Australian Love Stories* (1996) for Oxford University Press, demonstrating that Australian authors have attained provocative insights. Indeed, so they show in *The Penguin Book of Australian Gay Writing* (2002), a successor to the earlier Oxford *Australian Gay and Lesbian Writing: An Anthology* (1993) edited by Robert Dessaix. As an indicator of the possibilities of specialisation

6 Steve Holden, 'The Australian Short Story and "The Solid Body of Australian Fiction" ', *Australian Literary Studies*, 19.3 (2000), pp. 279–94.

7 Brian Kiernan, *The Most Beautiful Lies,* A&R, 1977, title page.

8 Frank Moorhouse (ed.), *The State of the Art: The Mood of Contemporary Australia in Short Stories*, Penguin, 1983, pp. iii–iv.

one could not surpass *Expressway: Invitation stories by Australian writers from a painting by Jeffrey Smart, hosted by Helen Daniel* (1989), in which each of the 29 stories responds to Smart's famous 'Cahill Expressway'.

Anthologies of science fiction and fantasy constitute an important subset. For many years relegated to marginal status, few writers in Australia could succeed in publishing collections devoted exclusively to SF. After Carey experimented with the mode it gained some acceptance and several collections were published: Rosaleen Love's *The Total Devotion Machine and Other Stories* (1989) and *Evolution Annie and Other Stories* (1993), Greg Egan's *Axiomatic* (1995) and *Luminous* (1998). Love's works were both published in London by Women's Press, Egan's also in London by Millennium Press. Earlier it was only in anthologies that the works of major practitioners appeared. The first to contain exclusively Australian SF short stories were *Australian Science Fiction 1*(1968) and *The Second Pacific Book of Science Fiction* (1971) both edited by John Baxter; *The Zeitgeist Machine* (1977) edited by Damien Broderick; *The View from the Edge: A Workshop of Science Fiction Stories* (1977), edited by George Turner; *Envisaged Worlds* (1978), edited by Paul Collins; and *Transmutations* (1979), edited by Rob Gerrand. Lee Harding was a respected Australian SF writer who edited *The Altered I* (1976), *Beyond Tomorrow* (1976) and *Rooms of Paradise*, all containing works by Australians alongside luminaries like Ursula Le Guin, Brian Aldiss and Poul Anderson. In the last few decades the mode has been taken more seriously and regular compilations have appeared, notably *The Best Australian Science Fiction Writing: A Fifty-Year Collection* (2004), edited by Gerrand for Black Inc.

Transitional modes in the 1950s and 1960s

Although the corpus of the Australian short story assumes a rhizome-like structure, dispersed through periodicals, anthologies, collections and other hosts, in any critical history it is, eventually, the individual author collection that comes into focus. Whether plucked from earlier textual hosts, or printed for the first time, stories in collections allow us to uncover the oeuvre of an author, and trace the diachronic transformations of a genre.

The reciprocities between these are immediately evident in the first authors in this survey. After World II, socialist realism was a continuing influence on fiction, and several writers whose work was shaped by the accompanying ideological debates published in the 1950s. Alan Marshall, who started writing and publishing in the late 1930s, brought out several collections over 50 years, culminating in *The Complete Stories of Alan Marshall* (1977). Marshall has an obvious affection for storytelling, and several of his works are stories about 'story'. Ranging in mood from joy and affirmation to anger and sorrow, Marshall is adept in fable, parable, yarn and tall story, reportage, lyrical sketch and action story. Some autobiographical correspondences occur: in 'How's Andy Going' one

character has a physical disability, and the story dramatises the necessity for acceptance, dignity, and equality in human relationships. Others are more sombre, with illness, violence, cruelty to animals, war, and death as recurring subjects. But Marshall insists that all things struggle against obliteration, and through will and determination the wild state is succeeded by order. In his wide-ranging exploration of the individual's identity-creation in relation to community and nature, Marshall works his socialist-realist style lightly and subtly.

The interest in mothers, children and families evident in the works of socialist realists like Marshall is focused on a single family in Judah Waten's *Alien Son* (1952), a sequence about a Russian Jewish family of migrants adapting to Australia between the wars. Like Marshall's, Waten's stories give the impression of being strongly autobiographical. Waten wrote: 'A recurring crisis in my mind [was] the choice between politics and literature.'[9] Again like Marshall, his Marxist view of literature was never narrowly ideological. He observed: 'On the purely literary side Marxists today agree that there is not one single way of mirroring life . . . a dialectical approach is offered by Marxism, the recognition of two entities, the words and the reality they try to portray.'[10] This softening coincides with the emergence of alternative modes and voices in the short story during the transition from the 1950s to the 60s.

One was the distinction between popular writing, which brought the tale and related forms to a high level of sophistication, and more literary writing which tended towards lyricism. A new consciousness, while recognising change, also sought to reaffirm, reassert and reform. Its unifying focus was the outback, but whether through tall tale or lyrical story, the bush is treated with a keener perceptiveness, sometimes with nostalgia, more often by reasserting the continued importance of the Australian outback, its culture and characters. In many cases a lyrical (rather than a mythical) treatment creates a different emphasis so that the environment is conceptualised as nature rather than the Australian Bush.

G. M. Glaskin and Alexandra Hasluck worked within conventional modes. Glaskin's stories were mostly published in popular magazines and newspapers including the *Australian Women's Weekly*, the *Countryman* and the *Western Mail*. He relied heavily on established formulas of romance, murder, suspense and horror. In *A Small Selection of Short Stories* (1962), 'Boy at Play' tells how adults reject a child's eye-witness account of a murder – until the body is discovered. Glaskin's innovation is in dealing with the boy's gradual appreciation of the distinction between imaginative insight and reality. Unusual or perplexing states of mind and behaviour, and sometimes macabre events, also play a part in stories that deal with adults. Hasluck's approach is also conventional, but unlike Glaskin, her subjects are historical rather than futuristic or fantastic. Most stories in *Of Ladies Dead: Stories Not in the Modern Manner* (1970) are about murder or

9 Quoted in Jack Beasely, *Red Letter Days: Notes from Inside an Era*, Australasian Book Society, 1979, p. 126.
10 Judah Waten, 'Marxism and Literature', *Issue*, May 1971, p. 10.

the macabre in some historical or legendary context. This, combined with Hasluck's preoccupation with women characters, provides an original approach to the otherwise predictable features of the suspense story.

Yarns, tall tales and anecdotes, modes associated with earlier literary emphases, continued to appear after World War II. Bill Scott, Frank Hardy and Dal Stivens published work which remained popular well into the 1970s, and late in the decade new practitioners, like Keith Garvey, continued writing tall tales. Though the stories are frequently formulaic, each practitioner had his signature characters and styles, as in Hardy's *The Yarns of Billy Borker* (1965), Scott's *My Uncle Arch and Other People* (1977), and Garvey's *Tales of My Uncle Harry* (1978). One of the few established writers to have been published in *Tabloid Story* and by Wild and Woolley, Stivens consistently experimented, eventually concentrating on fantasy, while giving us sophisticated stories that hybridise several modes. Influenced early by both naturalism and social realism, Stivens went on to write tall tales in *The Gambling Ghost* (1953) and *Ironbark Bill* (1955). On the other hand, the stories in *The Demon Bowler and Other Cricket Stories* (1979) are generic and stylistic hybrids. The Australian obsession with cricket provides a vehicle for the obsessive characters who recur in Stivens' work. Some cricket stories read like traditional tall tales, but Stivens is adept at subtle turns. In 'Indians Have Special Eyesight', there is a deliberate counterpointing of the myth of Victor Trumper, who 'used a bat like a sword and . . . danced down the wicket like a panther', with the diseased and crippled men whose only enjoyment in life is now to reminisce on his achievements.[11] Some stories, such as 'The Miraculous Cricket Bat', introduce the supernatural by giving the bat itself the power to turn a mediocre batsman into a master. Stivens is unique in the modern period in utilising a national obsession with such variety.

Ingenuity is also the keynote of the fables in *The Unicorn and Other Tales* (1976). These are built around the dual techniques of tampering with reality and altering the expected setting. Stivens writes stimulating restatements of old stories in a manner that suggests 'new writers' such as Wilding and Carey. 'Diablerie', set in contemporary London, is a variation on the Faust story, in which a tattoo of the devil begins to move around on the body of the main character. 'Sanctuary' is the story of Noah's Ark, but set in the future. In 'The Golden Urn' Prometheus and Jonah are discovered inside the belly of a whale discussing what sounds remarkably like a modern marketing approach to fire. Stivens reflects on contemporary social *mores* in an understated way, and without distracting from his virtuosity. In 'Diablerie' the character sells his soul to the devil so that he can maintain his affluent lifestyle and buy expensive jewels for his wife. Several stories wryly comment on contemporary sexual behaviour, including 'The Unicorn' and 'Streamlined Fairy Tale' in which the maiden discovers that virginity is a fate worse than its loss.

11 Dal Stivens, *The Demon Bowler and Other Cricket Stories*, Outback Press, 1979, p. 6.

Rural and provincial life

While the mythologised bush continued to be of interest, rural and provincial life began to feature regularly. Xavier Herbert's stories are mostly set in northern Australia, and his characters come with few intellectual sophistications or bourgeois predilections. His fiction tends towards caricature: the fearsome suitors in 'Miss Tanaka', the policeman and his harridan wife in 'Keeping the Peace' and Michaelos and the priest in 'Michaelos is a Miser'. Plot contrivances focus attention on how characters behave in challenging circumstances, as in 'Rise and Fall of Jeremiah Stacey', an analysis of how new-found wealth threatens friendship and understanding. In the preface to his appropriately titled *Larger Than Life: Twenty Short Stories* (1963) Herbert insists on the necessity of exaggeration: 'There is a marvellousness about life, but it is all too rarely manifest. Life is really larger than it appears to be, and the "made-up story" is made larger than life by means of manipulation.'[12]

Donald Stuart's stories, collected in *Morning Star, Evening Star: Tales of Outback Australia* (1973), share some subjects and settings with Herbert's, but Stuart's approach is more lyrical. Most are linked by a narrator who looks back to his youth for his subjects – prospectors, miners and swagmen; the stoicism of men working in harsh environments; the importance of friendship and mutual respect in sparsely populated areas; and, despite the hardship, an admiration for the outback and the regimen it imposes. The dual consciousness afforded by the coexistence of youthful narrator and older reflective author allows Stuart both to celebrate a way of life and lament its passing. The most affecting stories deal with Aborigines: 'Summertime' is a meditation on an Aboriginal boy's perception of the integration and beauty of his world, which contrasts sharply with 'My Kind of People' on the death of an old Aboriginal woman. This stands for the fate of the tribe, as an Aboriginal elder explains to the 'young feller' narrator the 'hopelessness' engendered in the Indigenous people while trying to deal with the 'white-fellers' ruthless ways, the triumph of the harsh, unfeeling, material, fiercely competing whitefeller'.[13]

Cultural difference is also central in stories about a migrant Indian family living in Australia that appeared in the *Bulletin* in the late 1950s and were eventually collected in *The Time of the Peacock: Stories* (1965). Mena Abdullah and Ray Mathew collaborated to produce a sequence narrated by a girl, Nimmi, who is learning to adapt to Australia. Unlike Waten's narrator in *Alien Son*, Nimmi's struggle is to realise and sustain her cultural heritage. The authors dramatised how the characters gain the respect of others by asserting their cultural and religious practices and beliefs. The tiger's message in 'Grandfather Tiger', where a schoolgirl fantasises a talking tiger who acts as her mentor (and a substitute for her dead grandfather), is to 'Accept . . . And they will accept you', but also to 'Wear your own name and your own clothes and they will understand you

12 Xavier Herbert, Preface, *Larger Than Life: Twenty Short Stories*, A&R, 1963, p. x.
13 Donald Stuart, *Morning Star, Evening Star,* Georgian House, 1973, p. 88.

better.' The chief pleasure of the stories lies in the unfolding of Nimmi's emotional and mystical conceptualisation of the Australian environment in terms of the culture of India. The gods and spirits of India, dragons and tigers, peacocks, snakes and other beasts of mythical significance become as palpable in the Australian bush as they are in Nimmi's mind, and were in India. In 'The Time of the Peacock' Nimmi sees the peacock open its tail at the moment her sister is born, despite her father's insistence that 'A peacock wouldn't open his tail in this country';[14] in 'Because of the Rusilla', Nimmi's brother Lal finds a substitute for his escaped pet, the Rusilla, in a singing kettle. Abdullah's and Mathew's best stories are structured around evanescent moments and revelations. The delicate prose makes migrants' experience, and a special kind of mystical sensibility, rare and original contributions to the Australian short story.

Unlike Herbert's northern Australian stories, Judith Wright's are located in the verdant and fertile areas of southern Queensland. While for Herbert landscape is usually background, Wright's nature mirrors subtle feelings of the characters. Nearly all her stories were published in the *Bulletin* during the 1950s and collected in *The Nature of Love* (1966). In 'The Lame Duck' Wright takes a young unpretentious husband and wife who enjoy a harmonious relationship, and traces its souring through the intervention of a new neighbour who implants discontent in the wife's previously happy acceptance of a simple way of life. In 'The Weeping Fig', death is transmuted into life through the agency of the central metaphor, a weeping fig tree beneath which the main character's ancestors are buried. The tree comes to stand for the character's memory and respect for his ancestors, as well as a vindication of their struggle against extinction. As in *The Time of the Peacock*, children are important in *The Nature of Love*. They experience complex feelings for the first time, and growing inability to articulate and understand. In 'Staying with Mrs Fox' and 'The Colour of Death' young characters encounter the powerful and sometimes frightening passions associated with love, sex and death. Their faint perceptions of these things are made conscious (sometimes acutely so) by Wright's naturalistic style and ability to find correlative metaphors in nature.

Most of the stories in Helen Wilson's *A Show of Colours: A Selection of Prize-Winning Stories* (1970) are reprinted in *The Skedule and Other Australian Short Stories* (1979), and are set in remote coastal or inland areas of Western Australia. In 'Breakaway Country' a Vietnam War veteran finally finds solace in the outback where 'If he could keep his mind on the torture of trees he might gradually forget that of men. He'd made the break and come to the bush for healing.' Wilson's stories often deal with characters who move from the city to the bush and the transformative effect this has upon them. The thaumaturgic powers of the bush are evident in 'The Skedule', which deals with a woman who comes to a remote settlement to be married. At first she has a 'Pale city face', but when she meets her husband a 'loveliness came to life in her face.'[15]

14 Mena Abdullah and Ray Mathew, *The Time of the Peacock: Stories,* A&R, 1965, pp. 97–8, 9.
15 Helen Wilson, *The Skedule and Other Australian Short Stories*, A&R, 1979, pp. 53, 5, 13.

Lyndall Hadow's *Full Cycle and Other Stories* (1969) are set in post-war rural Western Australia. Often they are composed of three or four scenes together suggesting a long period in a character's life. In 'Full Cycle', a migrant woman's joyful anticipation of marriage turns to misery when her husband puts her to work in the fields as well as expecting her to bear children, especially boys, to help on the farm. The 'cycle' is completed when she eventually accepts, even begins to enjoy this role. She is superior to the man in her emotional integration, even as, rough to the last, 'his heavy hand fell on her in the dark' in the business of procreating a boy.[16] In a world less than ideal, Hadow suggests (as in 'Inters' and 'Freedom for Laura') the necessity of compromises.

Don Charlwood and Nancy Cato both reflect tendencies in the fiction of the 1950s and 60s: Charlwood's work is even more regionally restricted than that of Stuart, Wilson and Hadow, and there is a corresponding limitation of subject matter and theme. Charlwood's *An Afternoon of Time* (1966) is a sequence interrelated by the use of a single first-person narrator, a fixed geographical setting, and a restricted number of characters drawn from a particular country community. The stories are autobiographical in tone, and the frame of the collection is the story of the narrator's departure from Melbourne at 19 and his trek through various parts of Victoria where his family and ancestors have lived. The protagonist in all Charlwood's stories is time, and in the better examples there is an urgent desire to defeat time and change. This continues in Charlwood's second collection, *Flight and Time* (1979), where seven of the 11 stories are about aviation. Here again, Charlwood seeks to retard time and change by narrative reconstruction of the past, but is always led to recognise that movement ('flight') and change are fundamental aspects of time.

Unlike Charlwood, Cato uses a variety of settings in *The Sea Ants and Other Stories* (1964), from the Australian beach, city, countryside and bush to the seedier quarters of London and the vineyards of France. There is an element of paradox in Cato's attitude towards nature. In 'Afternoon on the Beach' a nun's temporary dissatisfaction with her vocation is ameliorated when she remembers childhood pleasure at excursions to the seaside; similarly, a feeling of contentment comes to the character in 'The Bee' during one of his trips into the countryside. On the other hand, in 'The Trap', a woman who tries to steal fish from a trap is herself caught and drowned by the rising tide, while in 'The Perishers' city people become lost in the desert. The perils of the Australian outback are conveyed through the bushfire in 'The Jars of Apricot Jam' and isolation in 'Cat'. Urban *mores* exert a negative influence on the young woman journalist in 'Keep it Brief' and 'Age of Innocence', while 'Champagne for Breakfast' deals with the onset of senility in two ageing ladies in a London bed-sitter. There is a variety in the age and roles of Cato's characters: children, youths, adults and the elderly all appear, as do nuns, travelling salesmen, journalists, RAAF officers, mad hermits, vineyard workers and garrulous American tourists.

16 Lyndall Hadow, *Full Cycle and Other Stories*, Collins, 1969, p. 32.

Cato's work suggests an attitude common to writers of the 1950s and 60s: they place the highest value on integration, whether of people's relations to the land or with cultural and social environments, and on continuity. The stories themselves are not unrealistically utopian or idealistic, but even when dealing with suffering and vulnerability the ideal is kept in sight. What is kept out of sight is the city, and even in its rare presentations, it is treated negatively. The writers who took integration, continuity and the value of ordinary life as their themes were not the writers of urban literature.

Town and city disillusionments

Although many writers continued to set their stories in rural or outback areas, some shared a developing urban consciousness. Subsuming it was the often frustrating search for personal values to replace lost or relinquished bush myths. The urban consciousness is not as exclusive as in the New Writing of the late 1970s, and in fact each of these writers has stories set in the country, though their bush has lost its mythic dimensions. Country towns are seen as tired, slow and isolated places from which youthful and energetic characters seek to escape; the cities to which they turn, however, do not offer solutions for their anxieties. The persistent attitude towards the city is alienation, though each writer finds individual images for it. The figure of the youthful narrator growing older and world-weary, if not disillusioned, is common, as is the thinly disguised authorial persona as aspiring writer, artist, bohemian or intellectual.

The narrator's attitude in the 'town' stories of David Rowbotham's *Town and City: Tales and Sketches* (1956) is representative. The opening story, 'Hometown', begins: 'I have no love, but a sober affection, for my hometown . . . At times the town seems almost senile with all its old shops and old houses, with its drab familiar landmarks.' Stories such as 'The Fiver's Inn' and 'Service at the Inn' feature a landmark of provincial life, the pub, but only to trace the decay of these once legendary places. In 'The Man from Callemondah' the man's life is given significance only because he persists with futile struggle against the obdurate land until his death. Most of the 'city' stories deal with socially marginalised people whose attitude to life is summed up in 'A Man and His Shack' as 'a kind of unremonstrative existentialism', also suggested in 'Tricolour and Coffee' where the customers in a cozy literary café discuss Sartre and Dostoievsky. Elsewhere life is bleakly aimless and transitory, as in 'Reginald Sampson', where a man is assisted in his suicide by a doctor, and 'Molly Shay's Favourite', where a woman is stigmatised by gossip.[17]

Mathew's *A Bohemian Affair* (1961) similarly contrasts country and city in the stories of a teenager who leaves a farm to attend university in Sydney. The tone of the first-person narrator suggests Holden Caulfield in Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye* (1951), as he dwells on the futilities of love and the wider disillusionments of life in a country

17 David Rowbotham, *Town and City: Tales and Sketches*, A&R, 1956, pp. 1, 60.

town. When he goes to Sydney to study, he is adopted by a larrikin and bohemian set of aspiring poets, novelists, painters, gigolos, libertarians, and even scientists. He soon finds that an uncomfortable disenchantment lies beneath their affectation of leftish radicalism and liberated sexuality. In 'An Extraordinary Thing' the characters find that art and life are not the same thing, and that compromises are involved. Similarly, 'A Bohemian Affair' reveals the emptiness of the lives of the 'bohemians' and their eventual de-radicalisation.

A wider milieu marks Thelma Forshaw's *An Affair of Clowns: Short Stories and Sketches* (1967). The first section, 'Some Customs of My Clan', consists of stories about a working-class Irish Catholic family narrated by a daughter, an aspiring writer. The manners of this Sydney 'clan' include hard drinking, gambling, ferocious gossiping and scandal-mongering, fighting, and loving (the last two usually linked). In 'The Wowser' the family ethos is described as demonic and hedonistic, despite a love–hate intimacy with Catholicism.[18] The narrator vacillates between resentment and fatalistic acceptance. Forshaw's style rests on an intrusive narrative constantly interrupted by explication of detail and analysis of motivation, as well as jokes, colloquialisms, and *bons mots*, which support a tone of comic irony. A second section, 'In the Melting Pot', explores the cosmopolitan character of 1960s Sydney in stories like 'Better than Australia, No?' and 'The Demo'. Comic overtones are attenuated in the third, 'Outsiders', about people marginalised because of age, sexuality or beliefs, and forced into compliance in the 'affair of clowns' which is life.

An urban mentality contributes to the existentialist nausea of the characters in Alan Davies' *A Sunday Kind of Love and Other Stories* (1961). The scene is middle-class Melbourne and the crises of characters from an educated, if not intellectual background. Most stories dramatise the struggle to resolve a conflict between inner desire and outer intractability, with disillusionment rather than resolution the usual outcome. In the long title story two characters, each married to another, conduct a series of encounters in which desire is fraught with guilt: 'What caused this fear of loving, which lay at present like a knife between them . . . A clinging, cloying, bitter-sweet *folie de toucher* . . . Futility was the word for it.' Davies is best at articulating vague existentialist angst, as in 'Carlton Night': 'A great arc of the city, a sea of broken brick of a desolation that only a hundred thousand houses together can effect, welled out over the plain . . . It was not a sight to be borne, though Roy could not quite say why.'[19]

The anxieties are more intellectually focused in Manning Clark's semi-autobiographical *Disquiet and Other Stories* (1969). 'A Democrat on the Ganges' shows how racism all-too-easily surfaces when two 'democrats' find themselves in India, while 'Still Hope for God' deals with the author's visit to Warsaw and his conversation with a Pole, who, though a victim of Nazi brutality, still holds anti-Semitic views. In the

18 Thelma Forshaw, *An Affair of Clowns: Short Stories and Sketches*, A&R, 1967, p. 77.
19 Alan Davies, *A Sunday Kind of Love and Other Stories,* Cheshire, 1961, pp. 146, 4.

Australian stories, social, political and religious issues are foregrounded in the adventures of Charles Hogan (Clark's alter-ego) in the upper echelons of political and academic life in Melbourne and Canberra. Despite raising challenging ideas, the tone is summed up in the last story: 'there might be hope for God, but no hope for man'.[20]

Developing internationalist perspectives

Clark's concerns with issues beyond the local anticipate a development in the short story away from provincialism towards a more internationalist perspective, an anxiety in Australian writing following World War II. The trend appears not only in a shift towards a philosophically and intellectually widened thematic range and international settings, but also in the emergence of modernist and European literary modes in Australian fiction. Beginning with the Depression-era stories written before 1950, Peter Cowan's core subject is the conflicted nature of human relationships, underpinned by a modernist alienation. In 'The Red-Backed Spiders' from *The Unploughed Land: Stories* (1958), a father's inability to provide security and order for his family leads to an unstable blend of love, frustration and aggression. His son's play includes building castles out of discarded tin cans (an obvious symbol of his wish for a harmonious family home) but the father is worried he will be bitten by the red-backed spiders known to breed among the rubbish. When he sees the tin castle he kicks it to pieces and repeatedly strikes the boy. The terrified son takes his revenge by placing a tin containing a spider under his parents' bed, and the father is fatally bitten. The Oedipal plot and tightly pared-back expressionist narrative are typical of modernist influences in Cowan's work. Whereas a liminal kind of moral immanence in nature and the land is often a reference point, urban environments are meaningless. In *The Empty Street: Stories* (1965), characters interact impersonally in a materialistic world of objects. Their lives are artificially arranged to avoid the excessive emotions they both fear and deeply seek. Rather than dealing with the emptiness of ordinary human interactions, *The Tins and Other Stories* (1973) focuses on the traumas of intense relationships. Several stories deal with artists whose insights into their motivations or the hidden worlds of others result in anxiety which is incommunicable and suppresses their creativity. Many of Cowan's themes are integrated in a complex way in 'The Lake' from *Mobiles and Other Stories* (1979). The style here is Cowan's most experimental – a prose equivalent of *vers libre* – with fluid transitions between dialogue and narration, stream of consciousness and outer description, the psychological and the metaphysical.

Patrick White's short stories began to appear in Australian literary journals in the early 1960s (though some were written and first published long before) and are collected in *The Burnt Ones* (1964) and *The Cockatoos: Shorter Novels and Stories* (1974). The English and European literary influences evident in White's fiction complement his

20 Manning Clark, *Disquiet and Other Stories*, A&R, 1969, p. 146.

themes of the bleakness of materialism, and sufferings and consolations of spiritual questing. Whether set in Greece or the suburban wasteland of Sarsaparilla, White's stories are thematically and structurally complex. In the first study of them, David Myers noted the 'spiritually heightened significance of things' as well as their 'compression', 'sustained intensity and tension', and 'lyric density of imagery'.[21] These effects are widely recognised virtues of the short story, and are evident in 'Down at the Dump', one of the most frequently anthologised Australian short stories, locally and internationally.

'Down at the Dump' concerns a trip made by the Whalleys to scavenge in the Sarsaparilla dump while Shire Councillor Hogben and his wife attend the funeral of Daise Morrow, Mrs Hogben's sister. The proximity of dump and cemetery provides an ironic juxtaposition typical of White, suggesting that just as something of value might be found in the material dump of society, so too, some lasting human virtue might be glimpsed among the dead in the cemetery. In varying degrees of consciousness, the characters focus on Daise Morrow. The more affluent are likely to be afflicted by spiritual sterility (a tenet of Judaeo-Christian theology pervasive in White). Despite the material wretchedness of the lives of most Sarsaparillians, Daise's universal love exists as a redemptive and transforming force that will save them from their desolation. The remarkable climax occurs when Daise 'speaks' her vision of the future (day's morrow) from the grave, concluding: 'Love should be the greatest explosion it is reasonable to expect. Which sends us whirling, spinning, creating millions of other worlds. Never destroying.' Here, as in nearly all his stories, White articulates a vision of love (ranging from the physical to the universal and spiritual) seen as the source of human creativity and self-actualisation. In most stories characters struggle towards this vision through suffering or a more muted Freudian 'ordinary everyday unhappiness'. But 'Down at the Dump' has a sub-plot concerning the tentative movements towards love of the adolescent Lum Whalley and Meg Hogben who intuitively apprehend Daise's message, suggesting that for the open-minded (young at heart) the path to fulfilment need not be painful and apocalyptic. The spiritual resurrection of Daise has its analogue in a vision of the capacity of the natural world for regeneration: as Meg and Lum drive home from their day at the dump, 'The warm core of certainty settled stiller as driving faster the wind payed out the telephone wires, the fences the flattened heads of grey grass always raising themselves again again again.'[22] This resolution (and conclusion) is placed after the climatic epiphany. This is a pervasive structural feature of White's stories.

While many of his contemporaries continued their preoccupation with traditional subjects from the nationalist tradition, such as mateship and the mythopoetic nature of the bush, White synthesised his own mythology which had few overt connections with Australian literary or cultural traditions. Australian short story writers had

21 David Myers, *The Peacocks and the Bourgeoisie: Ironic Vision in Patrick White's Shorter Prose Fiction*, Adelaide University Union Press, 1978, p. 190.

22 Patrick White, *The Burnt Ones,* Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1964, pp. 309–10, 314.

overwhelmingly sided with a realistic, materialistic view of the world, rather than a religious and mythical one. White's use of Australian landscape, characters, language, culture and manners seemed idiosyncratic and confronting. What other writers used for humour and satire, or gauche nationalistic ends, White used to probe the nature of existence. Although many writers used the short story to explore what was peculiarly Australian, White sought what was universal in the Australian ethos.

Hal Porter was a near-contemporary of White, but thematically and stylistically a considerable contrast because of his dense bravura style which juxtaposes gothic excess and acute realism. His prolific output includes five original collections and two editions of selected stories appearing between 1942 and 1980. Porter examines memory and perception, especially in regard to the artist; a nostalgia for the past and a sense of family identity; the consequences of sexual awakening in the young; the loss of childhood innocence and the anxiety of guilt; adult sexuality and betrayal; the alienation, entrapment and despair of men and women in contemporary society. His settings range from the Australian country town of Bairnsdale to European cities, and to Japan in *Mr Butterfry and Other Tales of New Japan* (1970). There is also a considerable variation in mode: from the quasi-documentary in 'Rajano in Ueno – A Biography', to the apparently autobiographical in 'Act One, Scene One' and 'Francis Silver', the comic in 'Say to me Ronald!' and the neo-gothic horror stories 'Gretel' or 'The Daughter of the Late Bishop'. Porter uses stock devices of short fiction – flashback, nested narratives, dramatic revelations, reversals, final twists, a sense of surprise, strong closure. Typically his first-person narrators are travellers compulsively drawn to anatomise the dissatisfactions and sufferings of those they encounter. Their descriptions are lexically hyperbolic and lushly detailed. In Porter's stories, positive values are usually only discovered in the memories of the past or in art, rarely in the life of the present. The mood modulates to nihilism in 'Irasshaimashi', where a Japanese girl escapes from a severe and limiting life in a fishing village only to be murdered by a psychopathic killer in the glittering city of Tokyo. The village is described in terms of Porter's pervasive motifs: vulgarity, squalor, viciousness, indifference, degradation, mediocrity, decay, filth, incongruity and absurdity. Biological determinism is the underlying attitude, and in 'Mr Butterfry' the narrator says: 'Nature has not once indicated that life is for or about anything more than an arcane necessity to breed, before one dies, others to breed and live and die.'[23] This deterministic view intensifies in later stories, often conveyed through unsatisfactory marriages or liaisons, locked and barred houses, images of imprisonment.

Like Porter, Desmond O'Grady and Shirley Hazzard (both expatriates) are not wed to Australian settings. O'Grady's internationalist perspective is evident in the titles of his two collections: *A Long Way from Home: Stories* (1966) and *Valid for All Countries: Stories* (1979). A degree of cynicism is evident in O'Grady's treatment of growing up in Australia, whether the country or the city, and apathy tends to prevail over idealism.

23 Hal Porter, *Mr Butterfry and Other Tales of New Japan,* A&R, 1970, p. 31.

In a sequence in *Valid for All Countries* entitled 'Memoirs of Catholic Boyhoods', religion is presented as antagonistic to reason and passion, although a comic story, 'Life, Debts and Miracles of F. X. Horgan', presents a priest who clears the financial debts of his parish by betting on winning horses suggested by his reading of scripture. In studies of migrants in Australia, O'Grady presents European characters (and just a few sensitive Australians) fighting a losing battle to impose grace on artlessness, meaning on absurdity, and commitment on apathy. In stories set overseas, the focus is not so much on an expatriate alienation, but a universal capacity for insensitivity, cruelty and absurdity, whether in the vanity of international film stars in 'Circe in Capri', or the crassness of an American anthropologist towards New Guineans in 'Sterner's Double Vision'.

In contrast, Hazzard's short fiction, collected in *Cliffs of Fall and Other Stories* (1963) presents characters who are more sensitive to their own feelings. There are American, English or European settings, and she alludes to 'an unprecedented loss of geographical and, to some extent, national and even social, sense of belonging' among contemporary artists. Hazzard's central theme is love; as in White's stories, it comprehends the 'sensations of memory, of suffering, love, animosity, terror, pleasure and affection'.[24] Like many of Porter's and O'Grady's characters, Hazzard's affluent, middle-class travellers are rarely at home; their travels imply a rejection of physical stasis as emotionally restricting, but also an attempt to escape from emotional commitments that may involve powerful but contradictory feelings of suffering and pleasure. Marriage is often seen in this paradoxical way, as in 'A Place in the Country' where the husband is attracted to the security and emotional order of marriage but resentful of its limitations on his sexual desire. The responses engendered are evident in the introspection of his wife, who concludes: 'We suffer because our demands are unreasonable or disorderly. But if reason is inescapable so is humanity. We are human beings, not rational ones.'[25]

There are paradoxical aspects to the freeing of the Australian short story from outback and regional concerns, and from nationalist ones. In both the urban and internationalist story, the dissociation of the characters results in an intense probing of the nature of human subjectivity, and equally of the subject's disaffection and alienation, whether from nature, country, culture, or society. With varying degrees, the emphasis in the Australian short story shifted from the analysis of environment onto the analysis of character. In general the concentration on exploration of the self results in stories that are less palliative and more concerned with the gravity of their subject. Hardly any work thus produced could be regarded as popular or entertaining (as, for example, the adventure story and tall tale were). To paraphrase Hazzard, they are not the kind 'you tell to a child to make it go to sleep' but the type you tell 'to adults to make them wake

24 Shirley Hazzard, 'Problems Facing Contemporary Novelists', *Australian Literary Studies*, 9.2 (1979), p. 179.
25 Shirley Hazzard, *Cliffs of Fall and Other Stories*, Knopf, 1963, p. 48.

up'.[26] Maturity in handling the short story is evident in the free and flexible use of the modes of modernist literature. These writers maintained the notion that text was a medium through which the ideas, vision and worlds of author and characters could be perceived; it was the role of the next wave of writers to destabilise these certainties.

The New Writing

In the last quarter of the 20th century a hitherto unequalled activity in the writing, publishing and reading (popular and critical) of short stories resulted in the emergence of a new kind of fiction. For a period, experimental and innovative fiction dominated the interests of writers and readers alike; but by the end of the century it became apparent that non-experimental fiction, writing that made use of received or established modes, coexisted with fiction that rejected, questioned or manipulated convention. The publishing boom, at first associated only with the New Writing, eventually benefited all kinds, so that the period was characterised by plurality. This was partly a result of the diversification of international influences. While in the 1950s and 60s English and European writing (and occasionally American fiction and drama) were dominant, in the 1970s Australian short story writers were receptive to a variety of literatures including those of the United States and South America. In the special 'New Writing in Australia' issue of *Australian Literary Studies*, Moorhouse mentioned Donald Barthelme, Jorge Luis Borges, Richard Brautigan, B. S. Johnson and J. G. Ballard.[27] Wilding noted the personal influence (as well as a general influence on Australian writers) of a wider range of international authors who used fabulist and 'confessional' modes, or were interested in 'the literature of process': Julio Cortzar, Adolfo Cesares, Italo Calvino, Jack Kerouac, Charles Bukowski, Henry Miller, Jerzy Kosinski and Leonard Cohen.[28] To these can be added Gabriel García Márquez, John Barth and John Cheever, whose work became readily available in Australia during the 1970s.

The decade thus saw a renaissance of the short story: there was a revival of the form (which seemed to be partly the result of the enthusiasm generated by, and for, the New Writing), and an increased awareness of its flexibility and diversity. In general, fewer writers felt the need to model their stories on pre-existing notions. Those who did could be accused of no more than seeing the world in established patterns; but the awareness that the short story could shape the reader's perceptual processes was the chief discovery of the New Writing. Enthusiasm resulted in the appearance of a large number of first collections, many lacking the control that experience brings. On the other hand, an established and skilled writer like Stivens was able to produce work not unlike that of the best new writers: *The Unicorn and Other Tales* (1976) is concerned

26 In a symposium on the short story with Shirley Hazzard participating. Quoted in Elizabeth Janeway, 'Is the Short Story Necessary?', in Charles E. May (ed.), *Short Story Theories*, Ohio UP, 1976, p. 96.
27 Frank Moorhouse, 'What Happened to the Short Story?', *Australian Literary Studies*, 8.2 (1977), p. 181.
28 Michael Wilding, 'A Survey', ibid., p. 123.

with the text as artifact and use of the fabulist mode which were important features of the New Writing.

Frank Moorhouse is Australia's most prolific contemporary short story writer. His first collection, *Futility and Other Animals*, appeared in a limited edition in 1969 and was republished by Angus & Robertson in 1973. In the introduction Moorhouse wrote: 'These are interlinked stories, and although the narrative is discontinuous and there is no single plot, the environment and characters are continuous.'[29] All Moorhouse's subsequent collections shared this structure and most were subtitled 'A Discontinuous Narrative' or some variation of this. The term became part of critical discourse, although few other writers succeeded in developing the structural complexities and potentialities it allows both within collections and across the oeuvre.

Despite 'discontinuities' of structure and subject matter, the stories in *Futility and Other Animals* mostly deal with sexual identity and relationships, and tensions between desire and behaviour. Some characters – like Cindy, who features in several of Moorhouse's works – confront the confusion and 'futility', while others become alienated and trapped in repetitive and obsessive behaviour. Those who acknowledge the exigencies of life do not overcome futility but face it with bravery, as in the stories in the last section 'This is the Part Called Bravery'. Moorhouse's second collection, *The Americans, Baby: A Discontinuous Narrative of Stories and Fragments* (1972), continues analysis of the interplay between personal and social behaviour. 'Dell Goes into Politics' examines her dawning political consciousness, shown in relation to her conservative family background. 'Anti-Bureaucratisation and the Apparatchiki' and 'The Machine Gun' also examine the politicisation of the characters as a result of their subjective motivations rather than hegemonic ideologies. This collection introduces a new character, Becker, an American Coca-Cola sales executive. Unlike other Australian internationalist writers, who are concerned with Australian reactions to cosmopolitan influences in their expatriate characters, Moorhouse is interested in the cultural tensions Australians experience in encounters with Americans in Australia. Becker is not the only one; they also occur in 'The American, Paul Johnson' and 'The American Poet's Visit'. The stories concerning Becker provide the most comprehensive presentation of the encounter between American capitalism and Moorhouse's urban characters' more Marxist inclinations. The author's subtle anti-authoritarian and libertarian politics assert themselves in the case of Becker, through the ironic presentation of his fall from a former way of life and the inadequacy of 'The American Dream' in sustaining him in his interactions with Australians. Becker's fall coincides with his seduction by an Australian woman, and in 'Jesus Said to Watch for 28 Signs' he lists the 28 signs that have marked his alienation from political, social and cultural givens. The story invites the reader to consider that Becker is better off having freed himself from American corporate life, lapsed into Balmain libertarianism, and 'fallen' for Terri.

29 Frank Moorhouse, *Futility and Other Animals*, A&R, 1973, p. vii.

The Electrical Experience: A Discontinuous Narrative (1974), centres on T. George McDowell, Rotarian, admirer of American culture, and father of Becker's friend, Terri. The book presents the ethics, morals and mind of an Australian capitalist, a country-town-based soft-drink manufacturer, and the *mores* of his generation (those who grew up between the wars). *The Electrical Experience* makes innovative use of varying typefaces, headings, lists, letters, documents, notes, diagrams, illustrations, interspersed 'fragments' and anecdotes, cross-references and deploys black type on white, alternating with white on black. These devices (suggestive of pre-World War II magazine, newspaper graphic design and avant-garde collage) draw attention to that 'discontinuity' which is reinforced by non-linear chronology.

Moorhouse next concentrated on restricted worlds, and adopted an exclusively first-person point of view. In *Conference-Ville* (1976) the narrator is exposed to shifting ideas about society, politics, and culture in the context of meetings, seminars and conferences. In *Tales of Mystery and Romance* (1977) Moorhouse deals with the narrator's relationships with his ex-wife and others, as well as his wish for the approval of intellectual colleagues, despite persistent paradoxical distrust of them. The fundamental inquiry is into those aspects of self that long for identity with others while failing to overcome ambivalence. In 'The Alter Ego Interpretation', the narrator's relationship with his homosexual lover is fraught with uncertainty, leading him to ask 'Can I be sure he feels any of these ways or that we operate from the same motive at any given time?' No answers are discovered. 'Milton Rebutted – Intellectual Tricks and Accusations' focuses on the intellectual side of the relationship, particularly Milton's criticism of the narrator's creative methods. The narrator defends his collection of files, as a method of discovering the 'explanatory or predictive', as a 'squirming nest of living facts'.[30]

'Files' are at the heart of *The Everlasting Secret Family and Other Secrets* (1980), in which the central subject is the primacy and intensity of sexual behaviour and fantasy, but because of various taboos, inhibitions and restraints, this one common, 'continuous' aspect of humanity is habitually suppressed. In 'The Illegality of the Imagination' Irving Bow has a sexual fantasy: 'He said to himself that it was an example of the illegality of the imagination.'[31] The fantasy is 'illegal' both because it is socially unacceptable and arises uncontrollably in Bow's mind. Despite its 'secrecy', sexuality links people, joining them in a community or 'secret family'; this idea is conveyed structurally as well as thematically by the voyeuristic compulsion of the narrator in 'The Dutch Letters', the inter-relationships within and between the stories, and the accumulation of apparently trivial details in notes and documentation. In *Forty-Seventeen* (1988) the elusive connections between characters are again sought, though this time from the point of view of the gaps that open in relationships, often as the result of age. Moorhouse traces the connections and their fragilities through self-contained narratives, obscure

30 Frank Moorhouse, *Tales of Mystery and Romance*, A&R, 1977, pp. 7, 147.
31 Frank Moorhouse, *The Everlasting Secret Family and Other Secrets*, A&R, 1980, p. 43.

episodes, diary entries, textual fragments and traces, as well as dreams, fantasies, and desires, finally creating an interlinked narrative which suggests much more than its surface discontinuity.

Pieces of travel writing, journalism, satire, humour and reflection mingle with intertextual references to the collections discussed above in publications like *Room Service: Comic Writing of Frank Moorhouse* (1985), *Lateshows* (1990), *Loose Living* (1995) and *The Inspector-General of Misconception: The Ultimate Compendium to Sorting Things Out* (2002). The most recent of these, *Martini: A Memoir* (2005), is a celebration of the martini and an archive of the lore and legend associated with it. Around the facts, Moorhouse constructs a bricolage of personal experiences, fictional interpolations, and seemingly actual historical references. He interlaces this discontinuous narrative with allusions to characters and episodes from his oeuvre. 'Memoir of a story: Story of a memoir' (the title itself points to the reciprocity and instability of the fact–fiction relation) refers to 'The Story Not Shown' from *Forty-Seventeen*. One pleasure of Moorhouse's writing is the reader's hesitation about whether events are fact or fiction, provoked by an author who often deliberately blurs the boundary. Moorhouse invites collaboration in the construction of a fictional world, which may be an image of the real one. The title of 'The Chain Letter Story' suggests the mutual communication and involvement of reader and writer in fiction-making. The penultimate paragraph of the story says:

> THE MOST IMPORTANT THING TO KNOW IN LIFE.
> (This is to be filled in by the reader.)[32]

An associate of Moorhouse, Wilding was a professor of English at the University of Sydney and a short story writer, novelist and critic. A theme of *Aspects of the Dying Process: Short Stories* (1972) is the subject's interaction with psychic, social, cultural and political environments. In 'The Altar of the Family' a father's rigid views on the distinctions between masculinity and femininity are used to mortify his sensitive and nature-loving son. Violence engenders psychosis in 'As Boys to Wanton Flies', where a woman's solution to a boy's neurotic fear of insects is to push him 'naked into bed' with a menagerie of 'squashing, crushing, splintering' insects. In his terrified flight, the woman calls 'Come back . . . now you will be cured' but 'he ran, impelled on his single ceaseless note of terror, and he would never come back'. Violence marks adult lives too, though in more sublimated and complex ways. A character in 'Somewhere New' has morbid fantasies of animals devouring humans, and the narrator fears heights and falling, giving the encounter between the two a sense of ambivalence and paranoia. Epistemological quandaries are a feature of stories where different realities are revealed as illusions concealing repetitive or fixated personal, social or political forces. Sometimes the characters respond to the material environment doubtfully, as in 'The Sybarites', about people linked by ennui and despair, where one 'had no clear idea of what the sea

32 Moorhouse, *Tales of Mystery and Romance*, p. 162.

reached to, whether anything impeded his view of the polar wastes except the earth's curve, his sight's limitedness'. In the title story, a woman uses a 'complex and time-consuming process of artificial dyeing . . . the dyeing process' to transform her jeans, metonymic for her identity. The pun dyeing–dying suggests that whether personal or social, acquiring or changing identities is often artificial and illusory.[33] *The West Midland Underground: Stories* (1975) continues these epistemological themes, but is more speculative and metafictional. In 'The Man of Slow Feeling' an accident results in a man's sensations being delayed for three hours after the occurrence of a physical stimulus; he lives in two worlds: one in which there are perceptions but no accompanying reactions, and one in which there are reactions but no immediate causes. A similar anachronism occurs in 'See You Later', where image and matter are decoupled by 200 years. 'Hector and Freddie' addresses the nature of fiction. The story is a postmodern allegory in which Hector represents the author and Freddie the character, each coming to appreciate the reciprocity of their interaction. The relationship between author and fiction, fiction and reality, is also given sustained treatment in *Scenic Drive* (1976), a sequence interrelated by recurring characters, linear development and the use of a first-person narrator, and *The Phallic Forest* (1978), a collection previously 'banned, censored, cut and mutilated'.[34]

Carey's stories, like Wilding's, revel in their structural and thematic playfulness, a characteristic which Robert Scholes regards as fundamental to modern fabulation.[35] Those in *The Fat Man in History: Short Stories* (1974) manipulate material reality unexpectedly, in order to dislodge readers from ordinary consciousness and to draw them into the logic of the story. In 'Peeling' the narrator says about a woman who collects white dolls, 'When I finally take her to bed . . . I will get some better idea of her true colour, get under her skin as it were.'[36] When the narrator begins to undress the woman he finds that she is constructed of several layers, which he successively 'peels' away. Precisely this literalism takes the story into the fantastic. Along the way we are tempted with possible psychological explanations: at one level the woman is like a young girl, at another she is a man. She shows considerable curiosity in 'her' penis, leading us to think, perhaps, about Freudian polymorphous perversity. But all interpretations that depend on external models are defeated. The narrator reaches the final level:

> with each touch she is dismembered, slowly, limb by limb. Until, headless, armless, legless, I carelessly lose my grip and she falls to the floor. There is a sharp noise, rather like breaking glass.

33 Michael Wilding, *Aspects of the Dying Process: Short Stories*, UQP, 1972, pp. 80, 81, 23, 90.

34 Michael Wilding, *The Phallic Forest,* Wild & Woolley, 1978, p. i.

35 Robert Scholes, *Fabulation and Metafiction*, University of Illinois Press, 1979, pp. 2–3, 8. Scholes sees 'experimental fabulation' or 'metafiction' as an expression of a philosophical attitude which he calls 'fallibilism': 'Fabulation . . . means not a turning away from reality, but an attempt to find more subtle correspondences between the reality which is fiction and the fiction which is reality. Modern fabulation accepts, even emphasizes, its fallibilism, its inability to reach all the way to the real, but it continues to look towards reality. It aims at telling such truths as fiction may legitimately tell in ways which are appropriately fictional'.

36 Peter Carey, *The Fat Man in History: Short Stories*, UQP, 1974, p. 23.

> Bending down I discover among the fragments a small doll, hairless, eyeless, and white from head to toe.[37]

At the end we are no closer to solving the enigma of the woman and her dolls. We do know, however, that her external world is modelled on the various layers of which she is (physically) composed, and therefore, if there is an interpretation to be made it is that she creates her reality according to her logic, just as the story creates its own.

Particularly in his second collection, *War Crimes: Short Stories* (1979), Carey presents contemporary social and political subjects. The title story deals with corporate and capitalist hegemony, unemployment, and the destructive consequences of power and powerlessness. Elsewhere he treats the intermingling of love with greed, possession, vindictiveness, selfishness. Descriptions of urban and rural environments are evocatively precise (like photo-realism in art). The idiolects of characters are also authentic. Yet the stories contain strange material or physical illogicalities that defy attempts to identify their settings as those of everyday. Possibly for this reason many of Carey's reviewers have assumed that his stories are set in either the immediate or distant future,[38] but they are autochthonous. Insistence on their own logic defies the reader to believe otherwise. Carey intuitively expresses ideas about contemporary consciousness and the role of fiction in its creation. This accords with critics like Scholes, who point out that realities are multifarious, interchangeable and in part created, like a story's characters and events.

Ken Gelder has described a 'preoccupation with the fictionalising impulse and the concept or the mechanics of decreation' in contemporary Australian fiction, a wish to 'emulate reality by . . . disallowing the autonomy and the inadequacy of the single imposed interpretation'.[39] Bruce Clunies Ross has added that contemporary fiction's absorption with the processes of its own creation indicates a 'different conception of the function of art, [which] is not aimed at interpreting how we got where we did, but with showing us some of the ways we are deceived about where we are.'[40] This is evident in Wilding's and Carey's work, and also in Murray Bail's *Contemporary Portraits and Other Stories* (1975). Like Wilding and Carey, Bail tends to undermine ontological stability.[41] In 'The Drover's Wife', the Drysdale painting becomes a landscape into which the narrator projects his anxieties about his separation from his wife. The skill

37 Ibid., p. 32.

38 See, for example, reviews of *War Crimes* by Peter Pierce, *National Times*, 10 Nov. 1979, p. 46; by Karen Hughes, *Weekend Australian Magazine*, 1–2 Dec. 1979, p. 12; and by D. R. Burns, *Australian Book Review*, 19 (Apr. 1980), p. 21.

39 Ken Gelder, 'Character and Environment in Some Recent Australian Fiction: With or Without Reference Points', *Waves*, 7 (1979), p. 103.

40 Bruce A. Clunies Ross, 'Laszlo's Testament or Structuring the Past and Sketching the Present in Contemporary Short Fiction., Mainly Australian', *Kunapipi* (Arhus), 1.2 (1980), p. 122.

41 See Brian McHale, *Postmodernist Fiction,* Routledge, 1989, p. 27: 'An ontology is a description of *a* universe, not of *the* universe; that is, it may describe *any* universe, potentially a *plurality* of universes. In other words to "do" ontology in this perspective is not necessarily to seek some grounding for *our* universe; it might just as appropriately involve describing *other* universes, including "possible" or even "impossible" universes – not least of all the other universe, or heterocosm, of fiction.'

depends on the tension between what the narrator thinks the painting is about, and what the reader knows it is not about. The effect is to question the representational stability of art, or, more generally, external reality. At the end, when the narrator cries out 'Hazel – it is Hazel and the rotten landscape that dominate everything', we know that the landscape has become exclusively that of the narrator's psychic world. A number of Bail's stories begin as objective descriptions of some external thing or concept and gradually develop subjective points of view that undermine the idea of objective reality. 'Zoellner's Definition' begins by quoting the dictionary definition of the word 'definition' but proceeds to define the character, Zoellner, in terms of his parts. Bail works his way through 'Face', 'Countenance', 'Skin', 'Eyes', 'Spectacles', 'Mouth', 'Voice', 'Cigarette', 'Tooth', 'Nose', 'Ear', 'Hair', 'Arm', 'Leg', 'Penis', 'Height', 'Short', 'Clothes' and 'Age'.[42] Under each heading a standard dictionary definition is followed by a subjective description, contrasting objective and subjective, or empirical and imaginative knowledge. For instance, after beginning with the dictionary definition of eyes as 'the organ of sight' he continues:

> Positioned in fluid his eyes move in his head. Juggled by soft wires apparently, they move freely without pain. His are the colour of wet nuts . . .. Lately he has observed scenes of human misery, perhaps believing that the sight of horror and original emotions will reveal some of the foundations of knowledge.[43]

Bail suggests that the kind of mimetic literature that seeks to reflect reality is deceptive. In the end, Zoellner is no more than the body of defining words which is the story. A surrealistic element is evident in one of the sub-stories in 'Heubler', where Schultz attempts to 'outlive art' by cutting off parts of his body and exhibiting them 'suspended in clear formalin'.[44] Bail's pervasive concern in *Contemporary Portraits* is to make the reader question (though not always find answers for) the nature of fiction. Like Zoellner's parts and Schultz's limbs, Bail's words lie suspended on lines and preserved in print as reminders of the attempt.

Whereas Bail shows dexterous wit in dealing with the nature of language, Morris Lurie, predominantly a humorist, relies on a wry sensitivity to underlying emotions. Lurie has had international success with stories published in the *New Yorker* and *Transatlantic Review* as well as Australian journals. His prolific output includes *Happy Times: Short Stories* (1969), *Inside the Wardrobe: 20 Stories* (1975), *Running Nicely* (1979), *Dirty Friends: Stories* (1981), *Welcome to Tangier* (1997), and several selected editions. Many stories with international settings deal with characters whose travels are motivated by the need to escape their past, or to search for meaning to their existence. Both these motives are behind the dilemma in 'French Toothpaste', where Isaac Shur becomes obsessed with the origin and identity of things. Unable to sleep, Shur is racked by his mind's constant repetition of lists of things and their origins when he hears a rooster

42 Murray Bail, *Contemporary Portraits and Other Stories,* UQP, 1975, pp. 61, 66–74.
43 Ibid., pp. 67–8. 44 Ibid., pp. 8, 10.

crowing. The first rooster is joined by others, and eventually all the animals in the village seem to be proclaiming their faiths 'and the sound of their belief was enormous'; but then 'one by one, slowly, the voices fell silent . . . and the last sound of all that Isaac Shur heard that night was the first rooster . . . still crowing alone and afraid, "Is there a God? Is there a God?" '[45] Shur's fantasy allows him to articulate the question behind his obsession with origin and identity. Most stories stay within realistic dimensions, but a few convincingly incorporate bizarre effects. In 'An Immaculate Conception' a couple buy a painting that appears to be a slice of the real world, so that if you 'stand where the painter stood . . . you will see a white rectangle missing from the landscape, where our painting has been taken out of the world'.[46] Lurie's favourite social and cultural environment is the family. Stories about childhood and adolescence in a Jewish family in suburban Melbourne, and adulthood in the world at large, allow him scope to explore relationships between parents and children especially, for they provide, all at once, joy and anxiety, support and manipulation, love and hate.

Writing from the margins

Not all New Writing was experimental. Some authors addressed original or traditional subjects in conventional modes. Alienation and the search for identity predominate in the works of Barry Hill, Nicholas Hasluck, Thea Astley, John Emery and Nicholas Jose. The contexts of this alienation range widely. Hill's *A Rim of Blue* (1978) examines the anxieties of suburban working-class Australians. Hill's characters succeed in ordering their relations with the outside world only if they have the strength to summon emotional power and responsiveness. Their lives are cold and hard, and the author's compassion intensifies rather than ameliorates his characters' sense of this obduracy. Hasluck's middle-class characters in *The Hat on the Letter O and Other Stories* (1978) apprehend the worthlessness of contemporary life by reflecting on their relationships with others. Hasluck often induces readers to share characters' feelings of unease. Fugitives from the situations depicted by Hill and Hasluck are likely to come to rest in the North Queensland setting of Astley's *Hunting the Wild Pineapple and Other Related Stories* (1979). Astley's narrator, who links this collection, discovers cultural, social and personal disenchantment in characters who range from young drop-outs to the elderly and neglected. Emery's settings and characters in *Summer Ends Now: Stories* (1980) are more diverse. His depictions of social and political influences on personal relationships are also more disconcerting, and his characters' responses are often aggressive. Jose's *The Possession of Amber* (1980) presents an international gallery of scenes of dissolution and insincerity to which most of his characters succumb, sometimes with a jaded sense of their own alienation, at other times with surprise at their easy loss of innocence.

45 Morris Lurie, *Happy Times: Short Stories*, Hodder & Stoughton, 1969, pp. 130–1.
46 Morrus Lurie, *Inside the Wardrobe: 20 Stories*, Outback Press, 1975, p. 200.

Feminist agendas to move women's writing from neglected margins to the centre of literary attention resulted in the publication of innovative work. Vicki Viidikas captures the sharp lines of external reality as well as subjective and psychological worlds in *Wrappings* (1974). The collection is integrated by 'unwrapping' layers of defence, convention, illusion and repression to reveal the creativity and sensitivity inherent in characters' oppressed consciousness. In *The Hottest Night of the Century: Short Stories* (1979) Glenda Adams favours the first-person point of view, but her stories are skilfully structured to balance our involvement against the distance required to appreciate how these responses are motivated by social and cultural pressures. Michele Nayman's *Faces You Can't Find Again: Short Stories* (1980) dramatises, through a clipped and dispassionate reportage, the meaninglessness of personal relationships. There is a greater sense of a male-dominated society that exerts negative influences in Jean Bedford's *Country Girl Again: Stories* (1979). Like Nayman, Bedford is mainly concerned with the delineation of frustrations. An undertone of gothic can be detected in Bedford's stories of the traumas of provincial life. The idyllic opening of the title story does not reflect the gradual disintegration of the marriage of Anne and Terry. For two years Terry has worked long hours and loved living in the country; Anne, on the other hand, is bored by country life and feels trapped when she discovers she is pregnant again. She longs for the vibrancy of theatres and meeting people, and the story ends with her going to the city, finding a lover, and terminating her pregnancy. Bedford's characters tend to see urban life as potentiating personal freedom and satisfaction. *Colouring In: A Book of Ideologically Unsound Stories* (1986) by Bedford and Rosemary Cresswell, focuses on Sally, a single mother living with a gay friend, and her journey towards individuation through the support of her friends. This work stresses the difficulty women have in detaching from a mother and becoming independent. Sometimes the dependence is switched to men, but Bedford and Cresswell stress the necessity of seeking a full and independent self despite the many failed relationships entailed in rejecting the role of faithful, dutiful, nurturing woman.

Both Nene Gare and B. Wongar (the Aboriginal pseudonym of Streton Bozic, a Yugoslav migrant) dealt with racism. Gare's *Bend to the Wind* (1978) is a series of stories of characters who come into conflict with whites when they leave an Aboriginal reserve. Gare's ability to render the consciousness of her Aboriginal characters intensifies the reader's perception of whites' lack of sympathy. In Wongar's *The Track to Bralgu* (1978), narrators speak directly to the reader with dignity and compassion about their own predicaments, giving a more urgent feeling of a culture under siege. The counterfeit voice of Wongar is eventually replaced by Indigenous ones with the publication of *Gularabulu* (1983), stories of Paddy Roe transcribed by Stephen Muecke, Archie Weller's *Going Home* (1986) and Herb Wharton's *Where Ya' Been, Mate* (1996).

Literature by and about migrants also contributed to a proliferation of new voices. Pino Bosi's *The Checkmate and Other Short Stories* (1973) consists of conventional plot-oriented stories, some no more than anecdotes. But Bosi gives an inside view as much

concerned with cultural coexistence and integration as racism. Similarly, Vasso Kalamaras' *Other Earth: Four Greek-Australian Stories* (1977) is a bilingual edition concerned with communicating the feelings and experiences of its Greek characters. An evanescent sense of Mediterranean colours, textures and atmospheres informs Anna Couani's *Italy* (1977). Apart from this ethnic aspect the narrator is also concerned with rendering her perceptions of inner and outer worlds, much in the style of Viidikas. Beverley Farmer's *Milk: Stories* (1983) and *Home Time: Stories* (1985) address intimate themes of sexuality, love and loss in the lives of Greek and Australian characters (often in juxtaposed cultural tension). Trevor Shearston's *Something in the Blood: Short Stories* (1979) uses the most original subject matter of this group. His stories are about expatriate Australians in Papua New Guinea and explore Australian colonialism in that land.

At home, reorientation was taking place. Robert Drewe's *The Bodysurfers* (1983) departed from the hegemony of the outback as the locus of explorations of Australian identity. He saw that most Australians lived on the coast, and the seaside and beach were more likely to be the settings for everyday aspirations, achievements and failures. Drewe locates the identity crises of three generations of the Lang family in the Australian littoral – a setting rich with the symbolism of tides and waves, bright surfaces and perilous depths, just waving and drowning. The relations of male and female characters are complicated by the tensions between the mundane sybaritic rhythms of everyday life and the deeper perplexities, uncertainties and timidities of their inner being. (The former is beautifully evoked by the Charles Meere 1940 painting 'Australian Beach Pattern' used on the cover of the first edition of *The Bodysurfers*.) Even among the sunbaking masses, the cultural construction of gender inherited from the bush myth subtly undermines rapprochement between the traditional binary divide of masculine dominance and feminine submissiveness; this point is reinforced in the penultimate story, 'The Last Explorer', where the title character symbolically turns his hospital bed around, away from the sea, to face the desert in his death.

Despite the predominance of New Writing in the last quarter of the century, some authors felt no need to be radical. Justina Williams in *White River and Other Stories* (1979) favoured entertaining plots and regional colour, while Geoffrey Dutton emphasised literary craftsmanship in *The Wedge-Tailed Eagle: Stories* (1980). This is also true of T. A. G. Hungerford in *Wong Chu and the Queen's Letterbox: The First Collection of Stories* (1977), Geoffrey Dean in *Strangers' Country and Other Stories* (1977) and A. E. Sturges in *Flaherty's Fall and Other Stories* (1975). All deal with outback and city in a manner recalling the literature of the 1940s and 50s: they present Australian man defining himself through his struggles with the environment. A comic counterpart can be found in the continued existence of the yarn, in the works of Keith Garvey, and in W. A. Winter-Irving's *Bush Stories* (1977) and Tom Ronan's *The Mighty Men on Horseback: Sketches and Yarns* (1977). The anecdotal style is also the basis of Cliff Green's *The Sun Is Up: Memories of Country Schooldays* (1978) and Lloyd Davies' *Past Master and Other Stories* (1980), dealing with the author's mostly comic experiences as a lawyer.

After the New Writing

The New Writing set off several waves of short story writing; it revived interest in the form (even in traditional modes), so that a new generation emerged which established the short story as an important genre. In his definitive work *Australian Short Fiction: A History* (2002), Bruce Bennett notes that the period 1980–2000 was characterised by several diverse trends: an increasingly globalised awareness of international tensions; a corresponding sensitivity to the issues of post-colonialism at home; and a rise in fiction by and about women.[47]

Elizabeth Jolley's stories dramatise loneliness and alienation, dreams, love, and relationships between parents, children, and siblings. In *Five Acre Virgin and Other Stories* (1976), migrants experience cultural dissonance, sometimes exacerbated by issues of social class, poverty or ethical beliefs. In *The Travelling Entertainer and Other Stories* (1979) and *Woman in a Lampshade* (1983), mundane lives are a backdrop for dreams (sometimes attained, sometimes not) of escape – buying a block of land, meeting the ideal partner, getting a job. A recurring theme is the migrant's experience of England as the Black Country; in 'The Pear Tree Dance' we read: 'Back home in the Black Country where it was all coal mines and brick kilns and iron foundries her family had never had a house or a garden.'[48] Jolley elicits compassion for the cleaning woman, the travelling salesman, the migrant farmer battling on a small holding – those who struggle for survival. Many are emaciated, poor, starved of food and love. In 'The Pear Tree Dance' a domestic cleaner lives a lonely life in a rented room and dreams of owning 'a few acres of land';[49] but land can be both redeeming and imprisoning. The open spaces, sunlight and trees are a healing and redemptive force in 'The Jarrah Thieves': 'The wind in the perpetually swaying tree tops was like an endless lullaby in the rocking cradles of branches and leaves.'[50] But in a darker vision, the land is a prison: characters scrimp and save to buy an acre of land, only to realise that the sun is relentless and the soil barren; thus the land is a metaphor for both exhilaration and desolation.

Olga Masters' stories focus on the boredom, mediocrity, and hardships faced by men and women in provincial towns during the 1930s Depression. In *The Home Girls* (1982), *A Long Time Dying* (1985), and *The Rose Fancier* (1988) Masters analyses their psychology, finely aligning motive and emotion with dialogue and action. Unemployment is a fact of life for the labourers, mill workers or farmhands, while women are confined to roles as mothers and wives, teachers and domestics. Mrs Jessup in 'Scones Every Day' (from *A Long Time Dying*) is typical: she lives in Cobargo (a town of exceeding dreariness), has 10 children, is fiercely houseproud, and dies baking her daily tray of scones. As the family grieves, the eldest daughter prepares to take on her role. In Masters' stories, the

47 Bruce Bennett, *Australian Short Fiction: A History*, UQP, 2002, p. 225.
48 Elizabeth Jolley, *Woman in a Lampshade*, Penguin, 1983, p. 3.
49 Ibid., p. 12.
50 Elizabeth Jolley, *Five Acre Virgin and Other Stories*, Freemantle Arts Centre Press, 1976 , p. 76.

women place a strong emphasis on being the ideal mother and wife, while still yearning for love, happiness or meaning. Some resist the mediocrity of small-town values, as in 'The Rages of Mrs Torrens' (from *The Home Girls*). Here the title character lives with her husband, a mill worker in Tantello, population 200. Mrs Torrens is proud and independent, one of the few women who can drive. Her anger is directed at the small-town mentality and her rages are a source of gossip and amusement. Her difference from the townspeople is depicted through rejection of stereotypical roles – especially expected female subservience. When her husband loses his hand in a sawmill accident his employer sacks him, refusing to acknowledge the mill's lack of safety measures, and Mrs Torrens scandalises the community by deliberately smashing the equipment at the mill. She is forced to leave, given medication to make her less volatile so that her rages subside, becomes subdued and eventually indistinguishable from the women of Tantello. In contrast, in 'The Snake and Bad Tom' the father is a brutal, angry man who intimidates his wife and children. The story dramatises how each of the five children deals with the father's violent outbursts – in particular Tom, the scapegoat who takes on the brunt of the father's anger by refusing to obey him. Often, in Masters' stories, women are more likely to be safe if they live with each other: such is the case of 'The Lang Women', who operate their farm successfully and independently of deceased patriarchs and husbands.

Marion Halligan has published several collections, including *The Hanged Man in the Garden* (1989), stories about Canberra in the 1980s in which a surface silkiness and sensuality are often undercut by deeper turmoil. Halligan contrasts the world of created beauty, order and tranquillity, such as might be represented by a carefully landscaped garden, with less obvious unruly elements, emotions of grief and loss. As the Hanged Man symbol in the Tarot cards suggests, inverted or unusual perspectives can reveal the artifice operating in the space of everyday life, a thin layer of decorum the characters attempt to impose on their experiences of love, betrayal, loss and grief. Women in particular are comfortable with feminist ideals, but also worldly and self-indulgently 'feminine' when they choose. Halligan's settings enhance her themes: gardens, cocktail and dinner parties, art gallery openings present a cultivated atmosphere into which may enter loss, adultery, divorce, or, indeed, personal growth. Halligan's strategy is similar to the *trompe l'oeil* effect created by the artist Frank in 'Belladonna Gardens' and 'Sybil's Kimono': just as he transforms a drab Housing Commission apartment into a decorator's masterpiece, Halligan's sensuous descriptions draw attention to the artifice of the characters' lives.

The scene shifts to Adelaide and its rural and suburban surrounds in Barbara Hanrahan's *Dream People* (1987) and *Iris in Her Garden* (1992). Largely set after World War II, Hanrahan's stories present the reminiscences of people growing up in country towns with limited employment, narrowly delineated gender roles, and a provincial lifestyle centred on the butcher, baker and grocer. The main form of transport is the horse and cart, and entertainment is provided by the movies, the pub and illegal gambling.

The predominantly Anglo-Celtic citizens value attending church and Sunday school, and rivalry between Protestant and Catholic is an undercurrent. (The post-war arrival of migrants and displaced persons adds a further religious tension to the community.) The Protestant work ethic is strong, particularly among stoic women, whose vision of themselves as the guardians of moral values is underpinned by their Temperance movement work reforming fathers and husbands who try to assuage their sorrows in drinking, gambling and adultery. A number of stories confront the nadir of existence, depicting those dying of cancer, or victims of tuberculosis and arthritis.

The women in Kate Grenville's *Bearded Ladies* (1984) reject submissiveness. They challenge feminine stereotypes by being independent, and declining to dress in ways that men expect: thus Sandy in 'The Space Between' who dresses so that passers-by are unsure of her gender. Grenville encompasses the complexities of relationships and the emotional trauma of their termination, rivalry between men and women, the difficulty of challenging expected gender roles. In 'Country Pleasures', instead of a bucolic scene of cottages framed with roses, a Tuscan villa is in decay, infested with mice, and incest and bestiality occur. The decaying house mirrors the dying relationship between the main characters. An Australian woman feels ill at ease in the French countryside in 'Meeting the Folks', a feeling exacerbated by the arrogance of her partner's mother; and things are not much better in 'Refractions', set on a Sydney Harbour in which the water has turned a lurid red colour as a result of a jellyfish infestation. This is a metaphor for the story of a paedophile secretly observing children playing, which itself triggers a memory of childhood sexual abuse in the narrator.

Less confrontingly, Helen Garner crystallises the anxieties and uncertainties of her characters in often short monologues (or polylogues – several voices alternating) and compressed vignettes, of which she is a master. Garner's themes are latent in what she depicts: women reflecting on lost opportunities, tensions in families, the power of (male) lovers to disappoint, and, as suggested in 'Civilization and its Discontents' from *Postcards from Surfers* (1985), the necessary social suppression of desire at the cost of discontent and unhappiness.

Lily Brett's *Things Could Be Worse* (1990) and *What God Wants* (1991) comprise stories about Holocaust survivors in Australia. Even as they and their children struggle to start anew, adapt to Melbourne culture, and manage friendships, the horrors of the past are subtly woven into their fears and nightmares. In 'It Was After the War' the main character feels more alone and culturally isolated in Melbourne than she did in Auschwitz, and the Munch-like scream that enters her dream reminds her of the suppressed voices of the Jews. Despite their efforts to regain a pre-Holocaust innocence, these characters are irrevocably tainted by tragedy. In *What God Wants* a rift opens between the survivors and their children, the latter not knowing how to deal with the powerful feelings about an event they did not experience.

Janette Turner Hospital's literary career has been an international one, and her fiction has a cosmopolitan range of reference. The title of her first collection of stories,

Dislocations (1986), indicates a central theme. Yet much of her work has Australian settings and, in several stories, North Queensland in particular, as in 'You Gave Me Hyacinths', based on the author's experience as a teacher in a rain-forest town during 1965. For Turner Hospital the rainforest is as fantastic and surreal as it is mundane and real. In *Isobars* (1990) she maps the connections between experience and presence as embodied in place, time and memory, and the cumulative effect of these on identity. For the characters, the 'isobars' that chart their lives are complicated by experiences in diverse worlds. They are also frighteningly vulnerable to traumatic and violent disruption – particularly for women – as in the title story and 'The Second Coming of Come-by-Chance', where Aborigines are framed for a girl's rape by policemen. The prevalence of urban violence also informs 'Bondi' and 'Eggshell Expressway'. Stylistically, Turner Hospital's stories reveal a postmodernist ease with inter-textuality and the ontological destabilisation of narration and character; for instance 'For Mr Voss or Occupant', from *Collected Stories, 1970–1995* (1995), features Laura writing about the novel in which she appears, White's *Voss*.

Contemporary voices

The last decade has heard a profusion of new voices, and this study concludes with a discussion of several contemporary authors whose work has reached a critically recognised influence and maturity, and who collectively demonstrate the best that has been achieved in a range of contrasting concerns and styles.

Peter Goldsworthy's *The List of All Answers: Collected Stories* (2004) comprises work published in individual collections from 1982 to 1993. He is a master of the short short story, and wit and surprise are key attributes of his fiction. The domesticated dramas of middle-class suburbia are a recurring concern: in 'Historical Necessity and the Garden Sprinkler' an amateur inventor creates a combined mower-sprinkler that wreaks havoc on a neighbour's back yard. In 'The List of All Answers' a mother creates a list of 10 perfunctory answers to silence the nagging questions of her child. After a time she and her husband decide the list has outlived its usefulness but, to their bewilderment, the child throws a tantrum when the list is removed and demands its continued use. Some stories deal with less frivolous family tensions, particularly between husbands and wives. *Little Deaths* (1999) represented a mordant turn, as he explored the devastating effects of leukaemia and breast cancer. Goldsworthy masters a wide tonal range of insight into ordinary and extraordinary human psychology, motivation and behaviour.

This delight in narrative is shared by Carmel Bird, who adopts a traditional storyteller's strategy; her narrator is a Scheherazade spinning webs of stories out of everyday events that often have an element of the bizarre. In *The Woodpecker Toy Fact and Other Stories* (1987), the author's fascination with truth and fiction is evident in the title story; it begins 'My mother was a magger' and informs the reader in a footnote that the verb 'to mag' comes from magpie, 'the scandalmonger of the woods'. The narrative voice is

warm, confiding, friendly, gossipy, and the conversation between the narrator's mother and Mrs Back-Fence evokes the 1950s when housewives stayed home, husbands went to work, and children learnt about life through stories heard over the backyard fence. A Woodpecker toy fact, as the narrator explains, is a 'terribly silly story' that gains legitimacy when a child uses it to enter into the adult world of storytelling, and for making meaning out of life through narrative.[51] This is a motif that Bird uses again in *The Common Rat* (1993) and *The Automatic Teller* (1996), where the narrative spins out a story taking the reader into a place of truth or knowledge which in the end has no answers: the quest is pleasurable for the journey itself. This traditional storytelling mode is useful for examining both the mundane and the macabre; as the narrator says, 'It was as though I had a golden thread which I wove to make a net in which to catch the toy facts . . . '.[52] The gothic and surreal are never far away in Bird's stories, and the vulnerability of innocence in a world of experience is strongly suggested. In 'A Telephone Call for Genevieve Snow' (from *The Automatic Teller*) the intercom system provides information about a lonely primary school teacher to a serial killer who uses it to set up a meeting that ends in her torture and murder. The story is embedded within another about the predatory habits of the wolf, with the narrator using folklore of the wolf to drive the plot of the stalking and killing of the innocent Genevieve Snow. Similarly in 'Mr Lightning', four girls disappear without trace, and this is linked to their abductor, known to police as 'Mr Lightning' because of 'the white flash between the eye-slits of his black woollen balaclava'. The objective, detached voice adds to the tension, foregrounding the perspective of the killer who is unmoved at the suffering he inflicts. 'Affair at the Ritz' is a Kafkaesque story in which a cockroach tells of being found by a woman in a bathroom, her revulsion, and its imminent death after being sprayed and tossed into the 'little rubbish tin under the vanity unit'.[53]

Tim Winton's stories are exclusively focused on the Western Australian provincial areas he has made it his specialty to anatomise. A comprehensive range of traumas is diagnosed, beginning, in *Scission* (1985) and *Minimum of Two* (1987), with family and marital disintegration, disillusionment, and the frustration of insight and understanding. His male characters struggle with a hegemonic Australian masculine identity. Nothing is more difficult than making the transition from childhood to adolescence and adulthood, the theme of stories beginning with 'My Father's Axe'. The problems encountered in adolescence often resurface violently. Accomplished in their realism, Winton's stories are nevertheless sometimes unusual in structure. 'Scission' is a mini-discontinuous narrative, consisting of 60 brief scenes separated by cinema-like jump-cuts. In his most recent collection, *The Turning* (2004), Winton employs sophisticated techniques to make his stories cohere. They are individually and collectively structured to elucidate human

51 Carmel Bird, *The Woodpecker Toy Fact and Other Stories*, McPhee Gribble, 1987, pp. 3, 6.
52 Ibid., p. 8.
53 Carmel Bird, *The Automatic Teller*, Vintage, 1996, pp. 61, 260.

change or 'turning'. Instead of his novels' linear, teleological progression, the 17 stories are arranged in a discontinuous narrative in which the edges and borders of characters' lives cross each other or bounce off tangentially. Gaps and blanks are coupled with flashback and flash-forward requiring the reader to make retrospective revisions to the reading. The framing structure loops back and forth in time and place, and among clusters of characters, intensifying both the universal experience of 'turning' and its diffusion in human experience. In individual stories, whether using first- or third-person narration, the discourse is almost exclusively and deeply rendered through the characters' points of view. This filtering of thought and action is reinforced by a climactic event or epiphany. In this way, Winton emphasises the centrality of 'turning'.

As in his novels and poetry, David Malouf's encompassing theme in his stories is the complex reciprocities of place, thought and feeling. His work in the short story has enabled Malouf to pursue this in more focused and particularised ways. In his first collection, *Antipodes* (1985), Malouf plumbed the subaltern milieus of Australians, living, as the title suggests, on the opposite side of modern and ancient civilisations and cultures. A young boy sent to the outback gains insight into the crushing and limited lives of its people in 'Sorrows and Secrets'. In contrast, the adolescent youth of 'Southern Skies' is given an epiphanic view of the universe through a professor's telescope, a vision that coincides with his first sexual experience: 'I was at the point where my self ended and the rest of it began that Time, or Space, showed its richness to me.'[54] The young man in 'A Medium' also dimly comprehends the potentially overwhelming power of emotion when he sees a seemingly ordinary and reserved woman go into a trance. Malouf also writes with assurance about Australians in Europe or interacting with Europeans in the ironically juxtaposed worlds of aristocratic German households and the gas chambers of Treblinka. In *Dream Stuff* (2000) the powerful constitutive effect of dreams, memories and psychic life on the self is explored on a broad canvas. The volume constitutes a century-long history of Australia from a personal point of view, though these perspectives range widely. Malouf's most recent collection, *Every Move You Make* (2007), demonstrates his consummate skill in the Joycean epiphany. Australian and European settings lie side by side. In the title story, set in fashionable Sydney beach suburbs, a woman experiences a near-perfectly reciprocal love with a man, but is unable to understand a core of self-destructiveness, a carelessness of his own life. When he has an accident and dies after four days in a coma, she is shocked to learn that he has a mother and brother, the brother a mentally and physically handicapped travesty of her lover. The epiphany is her realisation that the man's self-destructiveness was a self-inflicted atonement for guilt at his brother's misfortune. Around the other side of the world, in 'Towards Midnight', a woman receiving treatment for breast cancer lives in a villa in southern Tuscany. Her thoughts revolve around her past, husband and sons (who are elsewhere pursuing their business), and the rhythms of pastoral life. For a while,

54 David Malouf, *The Complete Stories,* Knopf, 2007, p. 142.

an itinerant worker in the district – a young man – has been slipping into her pool at midnight for a swim, unaware she is observing him. He comes to embody vitality and youth, the very life that will soon forsake her, for she realises that one day he will be gone as suddenly and mysteriously as he arrived. The story concludes: 'Back and forth he hurled himself. Effortlessly, the body its own affair. Weightless, As if there was no limit to the energy that powered it. As if the breath it drew on might have no end.'[55]

The Australian short story seems to express an inexhaustible vitality. Since 1950 we have seen not so much a succession of concerns and modes, one supplanting the other, but waves of writing successively enlarged by a variety of influences and innovations. Few writers work exclusively with the short story; many of the best are also novelists and poets. The variety of writing produced since 1950 suggests that the short story is both diagnostic and constitutive of trends in Australian literary creativity. Its history also shows an expanding awareness of a globalised literary imagination, with many of today's authors producing work for an international audience, continuing into the 21st century.

55 Ibid., p. 108.

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Scribbling on the fringes

Post-1950 Australian poetry

DENNIS HASKELL

In a 1992 special issue on poetry of Australia's oldest literary journal, *Southerly*, the poet, editor and publisher Dane Thwaites writes, 'The great and glorious art of poetry has been in recession, maybe even depression, for a long time, a century or more.' Thwaites is not using the word 'glorious' ironically; he comes to praise Australian poetry, not to bury it. Thwaites goes on to say, 'the fact is sales are so low that poetry books don't usually pay their way . . . the general social irrelevance of poetry is profound'.[1] Sixteen years later the situation had not changed. January 2008 saw the *Weekend Australian* publish articles on the subject by Mickey Pinkerton and Timoshenko Aslanides. Pinkerton argues that 'Australian poetry clearly has an image problem', having 'lost its stature from days gone by when just about everybody could recite a few poems'. Aslanides argues for the creation of the post of Australian poet laureate, partly to 'broaden the appreciation of poetry in Australian daily life'.[2] This lament about poetry having become a minority art in terms of sales, money and public attention has recurred throughout the period since 1950, and it is a central fact about the place of poetry in Australian society today. As Thwaites notes, it is a 'long time' problem, but there is no doubt that it was intensified by the complexities introduced into poetry through the advent of modernism just after the Great War. It is not just a problem in Australia, but one that exists in most of the world. In fact, Thwaites notes that 'If you want to get nationalistic about it then Australia's probably doing very well in poetry'.[3]

Of course, this would not be a problem anywhere if it did not seem so unjust: trivial (in both music and lyrics) pop music flourishes while poetry struggles, even though 'a single brief poem could offer the same deep sense of emotional and intellectual satisfaction as is achieved at the end of a good novel' (Pinkerton) and only poetry can really 'document the evaluation of the national psyche and record the strength of regional feeling . . . articulate grief at times of tragedy and . . . describe our exultation on occasions of national triumph' (Aslanides). The great English Renaissance poet Sir

1 Dane Thwaites, 'Some Thoughts of a Poetry Merchant', *Poetry,* ed. Ivor Indyk & Elizabeth Webby. *Southerly,* 3, (1992) and A&R, pp. 1, 4.
2 Mickey Pinkerton, 'On a better deal for verse', *Weekend Australian,* 12–13 Jan. 2008, Review, p. 2; Timoshenko Aslanides, 'On Why We Need a Poet Laureate to Celebrate Australia Day', ibid., 26–27 Jan., Review, p. 2.
3 Thwaites, 'Some Thoughts of a Poetry Merchant', p. 6.

Philip Sidney described poetry as a 'speaking picture' which 'doth . . . strike, pierce [and] possess the sight of the soul',[4] and the idea that poetry provides the deepest expression of the human spirit is as persistent as its lack of public profile. The very successful film *Dead Poets Society* appealed to this perception, as do, in their watered-down way, greeting cards and notices in newspaper In Memoriam or Valentine's Day columns. The story of Australian poetry from 1950 to 2008 is the story of how we reached this situation, and it is inflected with social, philosophical, and technological changes in the society itself.

Few people in this period actively like poetry, although almost no Australians explicitly disapprove of it. Most ignore it, but those who are interested tend to be passionate. As any magazine editor or prize competition judge can tell you, an enormous number of Australians write poetry – far more than read it or spend money on it. Grant Caldwell, writing in the poetry magazine *Blue Dog*, declares 'There is no doubting the health of interest in the writing of poetry in Australia today', evidenced by 'the abundance of poetry venues, the thousands of submitted works to . . . publishing entities throughout the country, . . . the proliferation of Creative Writing classes'.[5] Combined with changes in Australian society, this has meant a number of things since 1950, but particularly since the 1960s when university education began to be widespread: an enormously increased role for schools and universities in the world of poetry; a need for literary magazines of stature and durability to be attached to universities; increasing use of the internet to publish and discuss poetry; more emphasis on oral performance at readings and writers' festivals, the readings often encouraging a different form of poetry; and an increased emphasis on attention-grabbing events such as literary prizes. Each of these issues demands attention; some, in the wake of the modernist revolution, have provoked questions about just what a poem is. Examining this issue, and the poetry of six decades, requires a brush with a broad sweep rather than fine particulars, and space limitations preclude the exactitude of definitions or detailed attention to any individual poet.

Schools and universities

A rough guide to the growing importance of educational institutions, and especially universities, in the propagation and reception of poetry might be gained by a quick look at major names. Of the poets who were prominent in the period 1950–70 – including Kenneth Slessor, R. D. FitzGerald, A. D. Hope, John Blight, Douglas Stewart, David Campbell, Judith Wright, James McAuley, Kath Walker/Oodgeroo, Rosemary Dobson, Gwen Harwood – only Hope and McAuley were teachers, making the transition from private tutoring or schools to universities. While many poets gaining prominence

4 Sir Philip Sidney, *A Defence of Poetry*, OUP, pp. 25, 32.

5 Grant Caldwell, 'Australian Poetry – Publication, Diversity, Support and Promotion', *Blue Dog*, 3.6 (Nov. 2004), p. 58.

after 1970 were not teachers – for example David Rowbotham, Francis Webb, Bruce Beaver, Peter Porter, Randolph Stow, Les Murray, Robert Gray, John Tranter – the number who are or were for substantial periods is significant – Dorothy Hewett, Vincent Buckley, Bruce Dawe, David Malouf, Chris Wallace-Crabbe, Tom Shapcott, Judith Rodriguez, Fay Zwicky, Vivian Smith, Jennifer Strauss, Andrew Taylor, Geoff Page, Kevin Hart, Peter Steele, Dorothy Porter – this would make a very long list. All of the poets in both lists gained prominence partly through being studied in schools and university English departments. Slessor's is the most galling and symbolic example; a journalist all his working life, he became famous and widely studied in schools and universities more than 20 years after he could not write poetry, and instead wrote bland notes on his poems for students in the Sydney *Daily Telegraph*.

Thwaites declares, 'From the money point of view, the only truly healthy area of Australian poetry is collectively the English departments of the tertiary institutions'. From his standpoint, 'The role of the English departments in preserving the poetic tradition is invaluable' but the 'kind of analysis of poetry that is inevitable in tertiary institutions overemphasises the qualities of poetry which are translatable into prose'. Moreover, 'This is perhaps the whole story of poetry's decline in the twentieth century' and thus 'poetry may be something like an endangered species in a zoo'.[6] In his introduction to the 1972 edition of *The Penguin Book of Australian Verse*, Harry Heseltine observes that in the 1950s 'the universities . . . did come to occupy a place in the polity of Australian literature which they are unlikely to vacate for some time to come'.[7] These are less extreme versions of the claim in 1957 of the English poet Philip Larkin that 'the modern poetic audience, when it is not taking in its own washing, is a *student* audience, pure and simple' and that this is an audience 'whose aim is not pleasure but self-improvement, and who have uncritically accepted the contention that they cannot appreciate poetry without preliminary investment in the intellectual equipment which, by the merest chance, their tutor happens to have about him'.[8] There is thus, in the contemporary Western world, and certainly in Australia, a sharp dichotomy between two different senses of poetry: one that, following modernism, values intellectual sophistication and complexity, and one that values immediate, less intellectualised response. Of course, these are the extremes, and there are a host of positions in between held by both writers and critics. Nevertheless, the extremes are useful as stark guideposts. It should also be noted that not all those who value intellectual and verbal complexity reside within the academy, but they do take their bearings from university English departments. In the eyes of some they bear much of the blame for poetry's limited readership. Pinkerton relates that he had to be converted to poetry, that he had 'loathed poetry as most people do', thanks to an educational experience

6 Thwaites, 'Some Thoughts of a Poetry Merchant', pp. 2, 3.
7 Harry Heseltine (ed.), *The Penguin Book of Australian Verse*, Penguin, 1972, p. 51.
8 'The Pleasure Principle', *Required Writing: Miscellaneous Pieces, 1955–1982*, Faber, 1983, p. 81.

that 'was nothing short of literary intimidation', being 'bullied by Milton, Chaucer and the rest'.

Until the early 1960s: The well-made poem

At the heart of this debate is the question of just what poetry is. The question in the early 21st century has by no means as clear an answer as in 1950. This half-century, and the half-century before, have seen fluctuations between experiment and greater adherence to tradition. Classifying poets who have long careers into decades caricatures, but it does provide a rough guide to the changing *Zeitgeist*. The major poets who first came to significant notice roughly between 1950 (although some first published books in the 1940s) and the early 1960s might be considered to be, in alphabetical order, Blight, Buckley, Campbell, Dawe, Dobson, Geoffrey Dutton, Harwood, Hope, McAuley, Elizabeth Riddell, Roland Robinson, Stow, Webb and Wright. A number of others – notably Beaver, Porter, Rodriguez, Rowbotham, R. A. Simpson, Shapcott, Walker, and Wallace-Crabbe – first published then but came to notice later. Riddell firmly established a reputation only late in life, but Harwood and Hope were also relatively late publishers; the list is approximate rather than definitive, as all such lists must be. In the introduction to *The Penguin Book of Australian Verse* Heseltine found it the most unavoidable fact of all that 'the best of the poetry written in Australia tends to fall after a date somewhere around 1930' (p. 29). The 1930s saw the writing of Slessor and FitzGerald, so it is hard to say that better poetry has been produced since, but the poetry of the 1950s taken as a whole is stronger than that of the previous two decades. Each of the writers mentioned in the first list above continued to produce quality work for many years following the early 1960s. Of them, only Campbell and Wright, and perhaps McAuley, undertook much change in style as they did so, relaxing their verse into a more colloquial tone; however, even this change was not dramatic.

Enough time has passed to enable reasonably reliable assessment of these poets' achievements. It has not been sufficiently recognised how important this period and these poets were; they gave depth and strength to an Australian poetry tradition which was still fragile when they began writing, and against which some younger poets were later able to rebel. Even the wish for rebellion in the late 1960s and the 70s was a sign of their achievement. Apart from their temporal coincidence there is no sense in which these poets can be considered a group. Indeed, for a communally based culture that does not promote rampant individualism, preferring values such as mateship and the scything of tall poppies, Australian poetry has been remarkably free of cohesive groups or movements. There were friendships between poets, but only Hope and McAuley might be considered to have formed something of an alliance, and their own work differs from each other's in many respects. Robinson, an Irish immigrant during his teenage years, began as a Jindyworobak (see Chapter 10) and to that extent maintained the strongest link with the nationalist, bush poetry of Paterson, Lawson and other

members of the *Bulletin* school. It is a tradition that is not dead today, but lives on in the country with bush poetry gatherings that exist totally outside the academy and the world of 'serious' literature. Robinson saw 'The Bush' – spelt with a capital B as Lawson had – as reaching 'back to a time unknown',[9] so that it was strongly linked to Aboriginal culture, in which he immersed himself. Inevitably, some of his depictions now seem dated, but he empathised with Aboriginal culture and provided translations of Aboriginal songs, poems and stories. He was always interested in the 'Bush' as a kind of verbal language – 'chaos that had not word / nor image carved on stone' – an Australian version of the 'eternal language' of Nature that Coleridge depicted in 'Frost at Midnight'. With the new-found respect for Aboriginal culture and the environment in contemporary Australian society, Robinson's beliefs have come into their own a decade or so after his death, and his work is due for reappraisal.

The poet most closely linked to these concerns, and more highly regarded for them, is Wright. Her reputation was established with her first book, *The Moving Image* (1946), and that reputation has hardly dimmed. One of the most forceful and inventive of Australian poets, she drew heavily on her New England childhood for much of her imagery, and that upbringing gave her a sense of guilt for the dispossession of the Aborigines that has continued in the work of Page and John Kinsella. Her work almost always has a philosophical edge, which links her to Slessor and FitzGerald, and she shared their concern with time, especially its 'subtler treacheries',[10] a theme which runs through so much modern Australian poetry. All these elements feature in the other strand for which her work is well known: relations, especially sexual, between women and men. In all of it 'the poles of mind meet lust's equators',[11] her fierce intelligence matched by a strongly, and very Australian, physical sense of the world.

These comments might surprise some readers of Wright but they would surprise no-one if made of Hope. Like Wright, also a major critic of Australian poetry, Hope often wrote of sexuality – explicitly and implicitly, coarsely and subtly, seriously and wittily – throughout his long career. Sexuality is generally celebrated in his work, usually from a male point of view, and prudery is always denounced; his attitudes are best understood in relation to the wowserism of an earlier Australia – he had this in common with Norman Lindsay. Also drawn from that period is their interest in Greek myth as a way of commenting on the life of any period. In Hope's poem 'Pasiphae', the Greek mythological figure, mother of the Minotaur, copulates with Poseidon's bull in 'terror' and 'triumph', driven by a force beyond her to an act which is a 'blow' that fills her 'with monstrous life'.[12] In 'Imperial Adam', sex with Eve generates her 'terrible and triumphant female cry'; sex is a bestial act that leads to 'the first murderer',

9 Roland Robinson, 'Altjeringa', *Deep Well*, Edwards & Shaw, 1962. All Robinson's words are quoted from this poem.
10 Judith Wright, 'The Harp and the King', *Collected Poems*, A&R, 1994, p. 158.
11 Wright, 'Typists in the Phoenix Building', ibid., p. 237.
12 A. D. Hope, 'Pasiphae', *Selected Poems*, ed. David Brooks, A&R, 1992, p. 42.

Cain, lying 'upon the earth'.[13] The 'imperial' power lies beyond Adam; sexuality is a destiny and he is its tool. Pasiphae finds 'Her love unable to embrace its bliss'; a Classical Greek sense of the separation of body and spirit, and of the limitations of earthly life, is maintained. Hope's response to this idea of humans being driven by wild powers beyond them was to enclose his lines in neat, mostly rhyming, metrical stanzas. He long had a reputation as a kind of Australian Alexander Pope. Certainly the similarity in their names provides a neat juxtaposition, and Hope maintained a strong, Augustan belief that the fundamental truths of human life were perennial and not contingent:

> To every season its proper act of joy,
> To every age its natural mode of grace,
> Each vision its hour, each talent we employ
> Its destined time and place.

Not the least of these truths is the fact that we die, and these lines comprise the opening stanza of Hope's 'Ode on the Death of Pius the Twelfth'.[14] This poem shows Hope's quieter, reflective mode, apparent in other poems about death, such as 'Hay Fever'. Hope's poem is just one of a broadly elegiac mode which is amazingly strong in the Australian poetic tradition.

Hope, the son of a Presbyterian minister, was not a Christian, unlike his friend, McAuley, who moved from radical socialist beginnings to Roman Catholicism and political and poetic conservatism. McAuley came to believe that 'No worse age has ever been –/ Murderous, lying, and obscene; / Devils worked while gods connived . . . '.[15] McAuley was a man of strong opinions, and not afraid to put them in the public realm, including in poems. However, it is his gentler poems, written when he could intuit 'a deep sense / Of natural order in the way of things, / In star and seed and in the works of love,'[16] that are more likely to survive. These include the nature poems he wrote after his first serious illness, but foremost among them is the much-anthologised 'Because', written about his childhood relationship with his parents, and by extension about Australian emotional reticence more generally. Never patronising, it is a poem of forgiveness, aware that 'Judgement is simply trying to reject / A part of what we are because it hurts.'[17]

The poet of this period whose reputation has grown is Gwen Harwood, lively, often mischievous, by turns philosophical, warm, and satirical. Her philosophical poems are explicitly so, and concern the philosophy of language, while music, and its capacities and limitations compared with literature, is a recurrent subject. Many poems are dedicated to friends, but she is a more detached, intellectual poet than first appears. In some ways

13 Hope, 'Imperial Adam', ibid., p. 16.
14 Hope, 'Ode on the Death of Pius the Twelfth', ibid., p. 114.
15 James McAuley, 'Explicit', *Collected Poems*, A&R, 1971, p. 332.
16 McAuley, 'Celebration of Divine Love', ibid., p. 91.
17 McAuley, 'Because', ibid., p. 47.

she is the most modern of these poets, since, despite her explicit consideration of ideas and her vivid evocations of people and places, it is hard to pin down her beliefs. Away from playfulness and irony, she is often a marvellous poet of friendship, a relationship evoked even when writing with great pathos about her mother:

> At our last meeting I closed
> the ward door of heavy glass
> between us, and saw your face
> crumple, fine threadbare linen
> worn, still good to the last,
> then, somehow, smooth to a smile
> so I should not see your tears.
> Anguish: remembered hours . . . [18]

Exact detail is offered with authorial poise and careful movement that frames the personal emotion, which seems all the more powerful now that Harwood herself is no longer living.

These are poets whose reputations seem secure. Just who will be highly valued from the period after them will be determined by time, which is a great winnower of reputations. Any well-known contemporary poet and contemporary critic must be haunted at least a little by the ghosts of Abraham Cowley, Edmund Smith, William Hayley and others, poetic heroes of their time now largely forgotten.

The nature of poetry

It would be foolish to pretend that the poets of the Hope–McAuley–Harwood generation have written bestsellers, but they are writers much respected within universities whose work is nevertheless approachable by a general intelligent audience. This is partly the effect of time, but also because they wrote in largely traditional form. Despite the many differences between them, they had a shared sense of what a poem is.

At the end of the Great War, modernism had jerked the English poetic tradition to a halt, then swung it in another direction, through 'certain half-deserted streets' and 'time . . . for a hundred visions and revisions'.[19] Modernism had a celebratory start in Australian poetry with Furnley Maurice (pseudonym of Frank Wilmot) and Slessor. The latter in particular loved everything modern and strongly favoured experiment in poetry. However, this aspect of their work did not receive an immediate following, and the Ern Malley furore of 1944, which made a mockery of Surrealist obscurity but was taken to mock all modernist pretentiousness, set back the acceptance of literary modernism in Australia, especially in poetry (see Chapter 10). Modernism, however, was not just a fashion and it would take more than the Malley hoax to make it go away.

18 Gwen Harwood, 'Mother Who Gave Me Life', *Selected Poems*, A&R, 1990, p. 167.
19 T. S. Eliot, 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock', *Collected Poems, 1909–1962*, Faber, 1963, p. 13.

In retrospect, it can be seen to have built up a pressure, allied to the increasing influence of the United States on Australian life, including Australian literature. It is not quite true that modernism was a river that built up such power that it eventually flooded over the dam wall of Australian formalism, as its proponents have claimed, but the image is not entirely inappropriate. More than a touch of modernism is readily apparent in the early work of poets such as Beaver, Porter and Rodriguez, but it was already there in the work of Stow and Dawe. Stow, a novelist as well as a poet, was influenced by Patrick White (and by Taoism), and offered something similar to White's blend of romanticism and modernism, the modern world confronted with a metaphysically based refusal of social conformity. In Dawe's work Australian colloquialisms and a colloquial stance towards social issues, rather than obviously metaphysical concerns, entered Australian poetry for the first time, apart from uses for comic effect. Metaphysics were always there in Dawe's verse – he converted to Roman Catholicism in 1954 – but they were hidden rather than obvious. In an early poem his thoughts about the absence of a dead friend begin:

> Ah, no, Joe, you never knew
> the whole of it, the whistling
> which is only the wind in the chimney's
> smoking belly, the footsteps on the muddy
> path that are always somebody else's.[20]

The familiar diction and easy movement, the lack of claim to authority over the material, and the unrhymed, irregular line breaks all point to modernism. This is a sharp contrast to the lines in Hope's elegy quoted above, and it is notable that Dawe's subject is an unknown 'Joe', not a famous Pope.

It was against views of poetry such as Hope's that the poets later known as the Generation of '68, an appellation bestowed by Tranter in 1979, rebelled. They might have found a model in Dawe, but did not. The lead poet in Tranter's anthology, *The New Australian Poetry* (1979), was Beaver. To a large extent this is because of region: Dawe was by then living and working in Queensland, and this revolution that made modernism widespread in Australian poetry was fomented in Sydney and Melbourne. Its most significant document is Tranter's anthology, compiled after the event. It was not, however, the first. These poets were able to publish their work in a plethora of small magazines, some just roneoed and given away free; and they presented their poems at poetry readings, which were until then a rare phenomenon. The mode of publication as well as the work itself was experimental; under their banner, *liberté* and experimentalism were roughly synonymous. Although they were less original than claimed, their activities ended the era in which the only poem was the well-made poem.

20 Bruce Dawe, 'Soliloquy for One Dead', *Sometimes Gladness: Collected Poems, 1954–2005*, 8th edn, Pearson Education, 2006, p. 5.

Anthologies

One way to get an understanding of a modern period's poetry is to examine anthologies, particularly general rather than specialist ones (of, say, religious verse). Wright edited anthologies in 1956 and 1957, one of them reissued in a revised edition in Tranter's generational marker of 1968. This included one poem by each of Rodney Hall, Geoff Lehmann and Murray, and two by Shapcott; Beaver had one, and Dawe four. The most experimental in form and content were Dawe's. *The Penguin Book of Australian Verse*, later renamed *The Penguin Book of Modern Australian Verse*, came out in 1958, and Tom Inglis Moore began an attempted comprehensive anthology of *Poetry in Australia* with *Vol 1: From the Ballads to Brennan* in 1964. These were anthologies that did not see a rupture in the Australian tradition, and they would continue to be produced, as evidenced by Heseltine's revision of *The Penguin Book of Australian Verse* (1972; reprinted many times), Mark O'Connor's thematically based *Two Centuries of Australian Poetry* (1986; revised edition 1996),[21] Murray's *The New Oxford Book of Australian Verse* (1986; revised editions 1991, 1996),[22] and other volumes. Nevertheless a change was marked by the publication in 1986 of Hall and Shapcott's *New Impulses in Australian Poetry*, and was consolidated by Shapcott's *Australian Poetry Now* (1970) and to some extent by Hall's *The Collins Book of Australian Poetry* (1981).[23]

Hall and Shapcott were members of an older generation in reasonably prominent positions who were sympathetic to the younger experimentalists. The aim of *New Impulses*, Hall and Shapcott stated, was 'to clarify the accomplishment of Australian poetry in breaking fresh ground during the past decade, particularly since 1960', so the anthology included 'no poems by the accepted hierarchy' (p. 1); while in *Australian Poetry Now* Shapcott declared that 'Australian poetry is witnessing a genuine breakthrough into entirely new territory' (p. xi).

In any art form in any period the entire range of aesthetic beliefs and practices is always a complex beyond the reach of summation. The analyses we undertake are rough approximations, a way of making artistic periods manageable for discussion. That the late 1960s and the 70s were one period of great activity and of experiment in Australian poetry is undoubtedly true. What is less clear is the nature of the experimentation and the quality of the work produced. The causes of this flourish of activity were many, and extended far beyond the perceived conservatism of Australian poetry at the time. It was an era of youthful rebellion against social structures generally. Tranter's introduction to *The New Australian Poetry* argues for poetry as 'an integral part of a wider struggle for freedom', including against 'the critical strictures of university English departments' (xvii). In fact university English departments with their intellectualisation of literature

21 Mark O'Connor (ed.), *Two Centuries of Australian Poetry* [1996], 3rd edn, 1998.

22 Les Murray (ed.), *The New Oxford Book of Australian Verse*, 2nd edn, OUP, 1991.

23 Rodney Hall and Thomas W. Shapcott (eds), *New Impulses in Australian Poetry*, UQP, 1968; Thomas W. Shapcott (ed.), *Australian Poetry Now*, Sun Books, 1970; Rodney Hall (ed.), *The Collins Book of Australian Poetry*, Collins, 1981.

provided a natural home for modernist experiment, and not the least of the causes of experiment was the experience of university education by many of the poets involved. Poetry workshops, creative writing courses outside the universities and a strong push for the study of Australian literature within them began during this period. The Literature Board replaced the Commonwealth Literary Fund in 1973 with an expanded role, and from 1974 funded Writers in Residence programs (now defunct). Tranter denied the 'high seriousness' of traditional poetic language as a 'quasi-religious rhetoric' simply 'inappropriate to most areas of most people's lives' (xxii), and he argued for self-referential poems, language 'as a primary and opaque material' (xviii) with 'a reality more solid and intense than the world of objects and sense-perceptions' (xxiv–xxv). These claims would be seen by some to be more relevant to postmodernism than modernism and to foretell the theories of Baudrillard and sometimes of Derrida. They might seem to contradict any role for poetry in a 'wider struggle for freedom'. They would also have any contemporary Dr Johnson, as he did about Bishop Berkeley, tell Tranter to kick large stones.

These experimentalist claims were bound to produce a reaction, and the first contemporary Dr Johnsons were Gray and Lehmann, whose anthology *The Younger Australian Poets* (1983) was published as a counter to *The New Australian Poetry*. Here was new Australian poetry that did not conform to Tranter's proclaimed aesthetics. Gray and Lehmann found a 'reverse sentimentalism' and 'solipsism' in the alternative poetry. While Tranter praised his poets' productivity, Gray and Lehmann claimed that it had 'alienated the reading public, who have found the newspapers, literary journals and bookshops flooded with poetry that is semi-literate, pretentious, obscure, silly or vicious'. For their anthology, Gray and Lehmann 'looked for, along with literary values, whatever impressed us as human ones'. They saw the Generation of '68 as rejecting 'the validity of all Australian poetry which preceded their own'; they then qualified this by excepting Beaver and Webb, but argued that the 'Australian tradition has been concerned with the experience of a unique place, and such adjustment of awareness as this enforces has often led to a philosophical tough-mindedness'. Gray and Lehmann aligned themselves with Murray, who had been critical of most of the generation of 1968, rather than Beaver, and among predecessors singled out for praise 'Judith Wright, Slessor, Campbell and Fitzgerald [*sic*]'. They saw the 'degree of factionalism among the poets' as 'unprecedented' in Australia.[24]

The factionalism was undeniable, and for a time a good deal was at stake, but outside Sydney and Melbourne it did not much exist. The differences have continued – for example, when Tranter edited *The Penguin Book of Modern Australian Poetry* in 1991 he included work by 17 of the 22 poets in *The New Australian Poetry*, plus all the poems of Ern Malley 'as radical, intriguing challenges to traditional ways of writing and reading'. The intention of Tranter and Philip Mead was to question 'previous

24 Robert Gray and Geoffrey Lehmann (eds), *The Younger Australian Poets*, Hale & Ironmonger, 1983, pp. 15, 11, 12.

canons of modern Australian poetry, sometimes sharply', even while overcoming the 'muted region of past controversy'. Tranter and Mead recognised that 'an anthology is not just a collection of poems; it is always an act of theory and criticism'. Their introduction on the whole seeks to be measured and uncontentious – even if their selection of poems, perhaps inevitably, is not – and largely involves a consideration of the nature of the modern. From their perspective, the 'major theme [of] the modern movement . . . must be the constant questioning of older ways of looking at things'. In fact, this is debatable, especially if emphasis is put on the word 'constant' – it is hard to believe that T. S. Eliot would have agreed. It does point to a continued valuing of experiment over the maintenance of tradition, which means that poets such as Nicholas Hasluck, O'Connor and Andrew Sant are not included in their anthology. All the other anthologies referred to in their introduction are experimental. Nevertheless, their emphasis is on poems which provide 'the enjoyment of a complex and intense aesthetic experience'.[25]

In the same year, 1991, Gray and Lehmann published their updated anthology, *Australian Poetry in the Twentieth Century*, claiming 'three strict criteria: the poem must be emotionally stimulating, written in a unique voice, and above all, be enjoyable'.[26] They wrote only a two-page introduction, but did argue for an aesthetics very different to Tranter and Mead's:

> We expect poetry to appeal to the senses and to affect the emotions. Poetry is not primarily about ideas . . . The resources of poetry are all adapted to emotive expression . . .
>
> We do not believe literary innovation is necessarily more admirable than an individual, revitalised use of tradition. But neither can we accept the complacencies of much formalism. Beneath both the open and formal approaches, the same qualities of feeling and intellect, and the same visceral abilities, finally justify a poem. [p. xi]

Although the books are of approximately the same length, Gray and Lehmann were editing an anthology drawn from the whole 20th century whereas the starting point for Tranter and Mead was Slessor, the seventh poet (on p. 47) in Gray and Lehmann's volume. Nevertheless, the difference in emphasis on modernity and on the sensory is striking. Two very different poetics are at work. Accordingly, the selection of poets is very different: of the poets from Murray onwards, 13 appear in both anthologies (including Gray, Lehmann and Tranter), while seven appear only in Gray and Lehmann's, and 43 only in Tranter and Mead's.

All anthologies are, by their nature, retrospectives, and even *The New Australian Poetry* was consciously prepared after the event. It is interesting to look at what younger

25 John Tranter and Philip Mead (eds), *The Penguin Book of Modern Australian Poetry*, Penguin, 1991, pp. xxx, xxix, xxviii, xxvii.

26 Robert Gray and Geoffrey Lehmann (eds), *Australian Poetry in the Twentieth Century*, Heinemann, 1991, dustjacket.

Australian poets, whose inherited tradition includes this divergence of views about the importance of experiment and about what is a worthwhile poem, have made of it. Far the most prominent of such anthologists is the indefatigable Kinsella. He is the youngest poet included in Tranter and Mead's anthology, but since 1992 he has edited a number of anthologies himself, including the latest edition of *The Penguin Book of Australian Poetry*, in preparation as I write. Kinsella is an especially interesting exemplar of the post-1968 generation of Australian poets. A lover of the romantics, Kinsella is also interested in postmodernism and has fomented ideas of a new Australian pastoral, palimpsest writing, and international regionalism, ideas that are very much related. In some ways Kinsella seems a traditionalist – he writes about rural Australia, in particular about the wheatbelt near York, WA, where he partly grew up and currently lives. Like Wright's and Page's, his poetry shows an acute awareness that these white farms involved dispossession of the Aborigines who originally lived in the area. It also reveals a strong environmentalism and pacifism, which puts him at odds with his younger self and with the values of most rural communities, including his own. Thus his versions of pastoral have nothing to do with Arcadia or with cattle winding slowly o'er the lea; they are anti-pastorals about real environmental degradation. His poetry displays a chronological complexity; while Wordsworth might have looked over the Wye Valley and recalled a visit there five years before, Kinsella is likely to overlay one time with another, partly to show the way the past influences present perceptions and partly to show the vagaries of memory. This creates a kind of modernist or postmodernist temporal palimpsest, and it is made more complex by his palimpsest of place, which can overlay impressions of York with impressions of Cambridge, England and the land near Kenyon College, Ohio, the other places where Kinsella has lived recently.

Thus, his work displays both traditional and experimental dimensions; he certainly does not disparage earlier Australian poetry, and his work could belong in a Gray–Lehmann anthology or a Tranter–Mead anthology. As an anthologist himself, Kinsella is the most ecumenical of editors; in fact he is the most ecumenical of poets, entertaining influences from everywhere. His published work, which is voluminous beyond belief, ranges from traditional rural lyrics to experimental language poetry, and from rhymed stanzas to free verse. While his poetry is studied in universities, some of it has sold well, at least by poetry standards. He is a pointer to the range of poetry written by those who are now the younger Australian poets, including the generation younger than Kinsella. Poets such as Alison Croggan, Lucy Dougan, David McCooey, Bronwyn Lea, Jaya Savige and Judy Johnson seem untroubled by debates over experiment and tradition, and to have modernism and postmodernism as an accepted part of their inheritance, whatever use they make of it.

Looking back on debates of the 1960s and 70s, perhaps little has changed except that the angst seems to have gone out of the issue. There was a great range of poetic styles in evidence then too, and the division between traditional form and experiment was never as clear-cut as the factional divisions would suggest. It is certainly arguable that

the most experimental poet of the period was Murray, and that the debates are present now but more quietly so, driven to some extent by the even greater contemporary marginalisation of poetry. Writing in 2004 the poet, editor and publisher Ron Pretty said, 'There is a tendency at present to praise, to publish, to prize experimentation for its own sake . . . It's innovative . . . and *ipso facto* it must be good.'[27] In 2005 the poet Robyn Rowland approvingly quoted the American critic Wayne Miller to the effect that ' "what strikes me is how often these days I hear terms like 'avant-garde', 'new', 'experimental', and 'outside the mainstream' being used . . . as indicators of what's good or interesting in today's poetry" '. That the tone of this debate has changed is indicated by Rowland's further quoting of Miller – ' "Lyric and the avant-garde are not opposite ends of a spectrum, but striking a balance between experimentation and the need to speak is central to poetic enquiry" ' – and by the temperate nature of Tranter and Mead's introduction.[28]

An attempt at a balanced and yet provocative perspective is offered in poet Alan Gould's comment:

> the poem that achieves finesse in its expressive power is like [*sic*, for 'likely'] to proceed, not solely from experiment, nor solely from satisfying entrenched expectations. It emerges from a crucible in which both experiment and expectation have been entered and worked . . . To bray that someone's poetry is inconsiderable for the reason that it is not wholly innovative, or because it does not sufficiently preserve past values, is to involve oneself in propaganda, not art.[29]

Buried in this debate is the fact that there are many forms of experiment and many motives for it. Rowland argues:

> It is one thing to write poetry that is thrilling in its experimental play with language and that requires effort to open ourselves to its meaning, but another to write it in order to cloak oneself easily as poet in an arbitrary assemblage of words . . . requiring so difficult a deciphering that the reader feels stupid, intimidated, cut off, discarded [p. 77].

We are in fact left in a contemporary situation in which each of the following are the opening lines of recently published poems:

> Waking again (for the nineteenth time) to despair, despair
> yet somehow caught in the old sunlit dream of eighteen.
> That sweet call of sleep as you re-climb the seventeenth stair.
> The nocturnal confusion the Age of Consent likes to bare . . .
>
> Jordie Albiston[30]

27 Ron Pretty, 'Finding the Live Ones: A Poetry Publisher's Take on the Question of Quality', *Blue Dog,* 3.6 (Nov. 2004), p. 69.

28 Robyn Rowland, 'De-lyricising the Lyric? A Response to David McCooey's "New Lyricism" ', ibid., 4.8 (Nov. 2005), p. 74; quoting Wayne Miller, 'History, Lyricism, and "Avant-Gardism" ', *American Book Review*, 24.4 (May–June 2003).

29 Alan Gould, 'The Yes – Wow Molecule', *Blue Dog,* 3.6 (Nov. 2004), pp. 60–1.

30 Jordie Albiston, 'Numbers of Reasons to be Grateful', *The Fall,* White Crane, 2003, p. 50.

alan can't come to school any more won't come we'd say but
he says can't or his mum says there's darkness in
school people there wade in it when they speak to alan there's
lies there's rumours in the words the faces and bells and . . .

John Foulcher[31]

rented/blurbug/ nikes & dcs/marriage/1989/the middle
the doodle bugs hear it whisper
on the farm na here it whispers
it's the rummest & chugs & chimes
& its coming maybe lady
resteds your thigh maybe lover

Michael Farrell[32]

How far this is from John Manifold's 1946 view that 'To earn his keep, a poet has to be / Himself, his age, and his society.'[33] The vast differences between these poems suggest that Australian poetry is currently letting a thousand flowers (or weeds) bloom. They suggest no more agreement about what is a (valuable) poem than the anthologies edited by Tranter, Tranter and Mead, and Gray and Lehmann. These differences can be broadly mapped, and Tranter and Mead are right to find their origins in modernism. Poetic modernism, through Eliot, belatedly established the reputation of the 17th-century metaphysical poets, such as Donne and Marvell, and like the metaphysical poets celebrated not just experiment but intellectual experiment. In the 18th century Dr Johnson famously criticised the metaphysicals for yoking heterogeneous ideas by violence together, and this provides a fair description of the practice of poets from 1968 to Farrell and like-minded contemporaries. This is the kind of poetry that may find an audience in the universities, but not in the general public, even the general poetry-reading public, small as it is. Rowland has similarly argued that there is now 'a division between an "academic" and "general" appreciation of poetry', citing similar comments from poet Mike Ladd, who prepares ABC Radio's program *Poetica*, the English poet and editor Neil Astley, and Ireland's leading woman poet, Eavan Boland. Ladd observes that 'the general audience wants poetry that speaks to them not only intellectually but personally and from the heart', and that 'Firstly, they want to understand the poem.'[34] Astley conducted a survey in the United Kingdom that gave 'A damning picture of how poetry was viewed by the general public: . . . obscure, difficult, dull, boring or pretentious', and argued that 'There's no conflict between "access" and excellence.'[35] Boland, who spends part of each year teaching creative writing at Stanford University, is even more trenchant. Rowland comments:

31 John Foulcher, 'Why Alan Won't Come to School', *Convertible,* Ginninderra Press, 2000, p. 20.
32 Michael Farrell, 'tracks listing', *ode ode,* Salt, 2004, p. 72.
33 John Manifold, 'A Hat in the Ring', *Selected Verse*, UQP, 1978, p. 38.
34 Rowland, 'De-lyricising the Lyric?', pp. 76, 77, quoting Mike Ladd, Letter, *Blue Dog,* 2.3 (June 2003).
35 Neil Astley, *Being Alive,* Bloodaxe, 2004, quoted in Ladd, Letter, *Blue Dog.*

> Criticising the university system in Ireland for imprisoning poetry in 'high modernism' during the '70's, she noted how academic definitions became the mainstream culture of poetry but at the same time 'readers were haemorrhaging away from poetry . . . Poetry was learning a new, infinitely more exclusive speech'.[36]

The strength of academics is intellect, and it is in the nature of university English departments to intellectualise literature – the main reason why writers are wary of them. Academics are also students of literary tradition, and from this standpoint what is interesting will always be what is new. It is also in the universities' nature to value what is complex and needs detection and explanation. For many people this analysis is one of the genuine pleasures of reading. Others will agree with Wordsworth that 'we murder to dissect'[37] and will feel browbeaten and intimidated. The contemporary American poet Michael Donaghy wrote, 'I started a PhD in English at the University of Chicago because I loved poetry – which I now realise is like saying I studied vivisection because I loved dogs.'[38] From the general reader's point of view, it is not the technically new that matters but vividness and emotional resonance. It is a simplification to characterise one type of reader or writer as academic and the other as general, but it is a way to highlight contrasts; most readers have a bit of both in them, and many experimental poets have only sporadic contact with universities. Nevertheless, universities provide a home for intellectually experimental work, and it is hard not to believe that much of it derives from modernism's alienation of readers, so that in the end some poets will disregard the reader entirely. In truth, every experienced poet knows that the difficult poems to write are the simple ones, not the abstruse ones, and that the real risks in writing do not necessarily entail technical experiment but exposing your feelings. After modernism, including in postmodernism, the most difficult thing to write about is happiness and the most courageous experiment is to write without irony. In matters of grave importance sincerity, not form, is the vital thing.

Other anthologies

Since the 1950s the universities passed through the literary approach of New Criticism, which tended to see literary works as a whole unto themselves, into a period of high theory which, speaking broadly, encouraged just the opposite – a view of literary works, even poetry, as the result of larger social discourses rather than the work of self-directing individual voices. One result of this was a politico-sociological

36 Eavan Boland, 'The Wrong Way', in W. N. Herbert & Mathew Hollis (eds), *Strong Words: Modern Poets on Modern Poetry*, Bloodaxe, 2000, quoted by Rowland, 'De-lyricising the Lyric?', p. 77.

37 William Wordsworth, 'The Tables Turned', *Selected Poems and Prefaces*, ed. Jack Stillinger, Houghton Mifflin, 1965, p. 107.

38 Michael Donaghy, in Dennis O'Driscoll (ed.), *The Bloodaxe Book of Poetry Quotations*, Bloodaxe, 2006, p. 39.

view of literature, reflected in the nature of some of the anthologies produced. These include volumes with overt political purposes, such as the feminist anthologies. These include *The Penguin Book of Australian Women Poets*, edited by Susan Hampton and Kate Llewellyn (1986), driven by a sense that 'Women have a marginal status in the literary world' and that 'aesthetic judgement is political'; Barbara Petrie's *Kiwi and Emu: An Anthology of Contemporary Poetry by Australian and New Zealand Women* (1989); and *The Oxford Book of Australian Women's Verse*, edited by Susan Lever in 1995.[39] Hampton and Llewellyn included Aboriginal women poets, and Aboriginal anthologies are the other most notable poetry anthologies with a socio-political motivation. The most important of these has been the first, Kevin Gilbert's *Inside Black Australia* (1988), but other collections – such as Jack Davis' *Paperbark: A Collection of Black Australian Writings* (1990), which includes poetry and prose – are also milestones.[40] The first general anthology to include traditional Aboriginal songs was Hall's *Collins Book of Australian Poetry* (1981), and Murray followed suit in the different editions of his *New Oxford Book of Australian Verse* (1986).[41] Other anthologies had published individual Aboriginal poets, especially Kath Walker (later known as Oodgeroo or Oodgeroo Noonuccal), but these volumes were the first to present traditional Aboriginal writing as part of the Australian tradition. Gilbert included only individual, identified poets, and noted the difficulty in attempting 'rationalisation of hundred of thousands [*sic*] of tradition against the last twenty years of limited access to white education and education in the alien English tongue' (p. xv).

Other anthologies in this category include works such as *Cry Out! An Anthology of Street Poetry*, edited by Ann Davis and Ron Pretty (1996), and perhaps, depending on your point of view, the anthologies of religious verse edited by Murray and Kevin Hart.[42] The latter might be considered generic anthologies, and others of those include *Comic Australian Verse*, edited by Geoffrey Lehmann, and *The Oxford Book of Australian Light Verse*, edited by R. F. Brissenden and Philip Grundy in 1991; *The Oxford Book of Australian Love Poems*, edited by Jennifer Strauss (1993); *The Sting in the Wattle: Australian Satirical Verse*, edited by Philip Neilsen (1993); and Jim Haynes' *An Australian Treasury of Popular Verse* (2001) – a populist collection of bush and comic verse, but with only a small fraction drawn from contemporary poets.[43] Recent anthologies of new poets include Tom Shapcott's *The Moment Made Marvellous* (1998), and *Calyx: 30*

39 Susan Hampton and Kate Llewellyn (eds), *The Penguin Book of Australian Women Poets*, Penguin, 1986, pp. 3, 16; Barbara Petrie (ed.), *Kiwi and Emu: An Anthology of Contemporary Poetry by Australian and New Zealand Women*, Butterfly Books, 1989; Susan Lever (ed.), *The Oxford Book of Australian Women's Verse*, OUP, 1995.

40 Kevin Gilbert (ed.), *Inside Black Australia: An Anthology of Aboriginal Poetry*, Penguin 1988; Jack Davis (ed.), *Paperbark: A Collection of Black Australian Writings,* UQP, 1990.

41 Murray (ed.), *New Oxford Book of Australian Verse*.

42 Les Murray (ed.), *Anthology of Australian Religious Poetry* [1986], rev. edn, Collins Dove, 1989; Kevin Hart (ed.), *The Oxford Book of Australian Religious Verse*, OUP, 1994.

43 Geoffrey Lehmann (ed.), *Comic Australian Verse*, A&R, 1972; R. F. Brissenden and Philip Grundy (eds), *The Oxford Book of Australian Light Verse*, OUP, 1991; Jennifer Strauss (ed.), *The Oxford Book of Australian Love*

Contemporary Australian Poets (2000), edited by Michael Brennan and Peter Minter.[44] All editors have their biases; most of the major anthologies have been edited from Sydney or Melbourne, and reveal limited selections from other parts of Australia. This has prompted the publication of regional anthologies, of which there have been many, especially from Queensland and Western Australia. They include: *Effects of Light: The Poetry of Tasmania*, edited by Vivian Smith and Margaret Scott (1985); *North of Capricorn: An Anthology of Verse*, edited by Elizabeth Perkins and Robert Handicott from Townsville (1988); *Wordhord: Contemporary Western Australian Poetry*, edited by Dennis Haskell and Hilary Fraser (1989); *Tuesday Night Live: Fifteen Years of Friendly Street*, edited by Jerri Kroll and Barry Westburg (1993); the Aboriginal anthology, *Voices from the Heart: Contemporary Aboriginal Poetry from Central Australia*, edited from Alice Springs by Roger Bennett (1995); and *50 Years of Queensland Poetry: 1940s–1990s*, edited by Philip Neilsen and Helen Horton in 1998.[45] Comparative anthologies have been few, but notable are two widely separated in time: *Contemporary American and Australian Poetry*, edited by Shapcott in 1976, and *Over There: Poems from Singapore and Australia*, edited recently by Kinsella and Singapore's Alvin Pang.[46] We might expect more such volumes.

I have provided a list of anthologies at length because they provide a sense of the level and range of activity in a period. There is an enormous variety in their contents and approaches – some, for example, include substantial introductions and copious notes on authors, others little or none; some give a large amount of space to relatively few poets, while others are determinedly wide-ranging collections. That the anthologies have grown in number there is no doubt; they frequently have a different or larger market than volumes by individual poets. A number of the major publishers, such as Oxford University Press and Penguin, now publish poetry only in anthologies, anticipating an educational market that will provide ongoing sales. An impressive flurry of activity was maintained at Oxford while the poet Peter Rose was a commissioning editor there, and perhaps the most successful artistically and commercially of all general anthologies was *The Oxford Book of Modern Australian Verse*, edited by Porter in 1996 and repeated many times.[47] Porter, a senior statesman of Australian poetry with an

Poems, OUP, 1993; Philip Neilsen (ed.), *The Sting in the Wattle: Australian Satirical Verse*, UQP, 1993; Jim Haynes (ed.), *An Australian Treasury of Popular Verse*, ABC, 2001.

44 Thomas Shapcott (ed.), *The Moment Made Marvellous,* UQP, 1998; Michael Brennan and Peter Minter (eds), *Calyx: 30 Contemporary Australian Poets*, Paperbark, 2000.

45 Vivian Smith and Margaret Scott (eds), *Effects of Light: The Poetry of Tasmania,* Twelvetrees, 1985; Elizabeth Perkins and Robert Handicott (eds), *North of Capricorn: An Anthology of Verse,* Foundation for Australian Literary Studies, 1988; Dennis Haskell and Hilary Fraser (eds), *Wordhord: Contemporary Western Australian Poetry,* Fremantle Arts Centre Press, 1989; Jerri Kroll and Barry Westburg (eds), *Tuesday Night Live: Fifteen Years of Friendly Street,* Wakefield Press and Friendly Street Poets, 1993; Roger Bennett (ed.), *Voices from the Heart: Contemporary Aboriginal Poetry from Central Australia,* IAD Press, 1995; Philip Neilsen and Helen Horton (eds), *50 Years of Queensland Poetry: 1940s–1990s,* Central Queensland UP, 1998.

46 Thomas Shapcott (ed.), *Contemporary American and Australian Poetry,* UQP, 1976; John Kinsella and Alvin Pang (eds), *Over There: Poems from Singapore and Australia*, Ethos, 2008.

47 Peter Porter (ed.), *The Oxford Book of Modern Australian Verse*, OUP, 1996.

international reputation, has lived in London for many years; very much an intellectual poet, he showed a catholicity of taste and managed to attain breadth of selection within inevitable constraints of space.

Infrastructure

The most active anthologist of recent years has been Kinsella. Apart from the forthcoming new edition of *The Penguin Book of Australian Poetry* and *Landbridge: Contemporary Australian Poetry* (1999), which includes many younger poets and statements of aesthetics as well as poems, his works include *Western Australian Writing: An On-line Anthology* (2003) which provides both prose and poetry. The internet is gaining increasing prominence for poetry, not surprisingly given the financial risks of print publishing for Australian poetry's small audience. Other important projects include the development by a consortium of universities and the National Library of Australia of AustLit, an electronic bibliography of the whole of Australian literature, not just of poetry, with some full text; the building of APRIL (Australian Poetry Resources Internet Library), an Australian poetry full-text database, by a team based in Sydney, including John Tranter and the former Professor of Australian Literature, Elizabeth Webby; and the on-line poetry magazine, *Jacket*, edited with flair by Tranter.[48]

While digital work can, in theory, be undertaken from anywhere, all this work, and nearly all the anthologies listed above, have been undertaken and produced in cities. Australia's is a predominantly urban population and while the bush, or at best the rural, still figures prominently in Australian poetry, the modern period has shown a shift to the city.[49] Nevertheless, it is still true that Australian poetry includes more poems about landscape than about relationships.

Recent years have proven difficult for literary magazines, reducing the number of major publishing outlets for individual poems; it is through the publication of these that a poet usually builds a collection. In 2008 *Southerly*, *Westerly*, *Meanjin*, *Quadrant*, *Overland*, *Heat* and *Island* are Australia's major journals publishing contemporary poetry, but the futures of *Westerly* and *Meanjin* are uncertain. Numerous small literary magazines have come and gone since 1950, many of them performing important roles for a time and for a region; it would be invidious to name some and not others. *Poetry Australia* and *Poetry Magazine* – which become *New Poetry* in 1970 and published the more experimental work of the late 1960s and 70s – were for many years the major magazines entirely devoted to poetry, but both are now defunct. Extraordinary work was undertaken for a

48 AustLit: <www.austlit.edu.au>; <http://setis.library.usyd.edu.au/ozpoets/index.html>; *Jacket*: <jacketmagazine.com/00/home.shtml>.

49 An interesting debate about this issue was conducted by Australia's two best-known contemporary poets, Les Murray and Peter Porter; see Les A. Murray, 'On Sitting Back and Thinking about Porter's Boeotia', *The Peasant Mandarin: Prose Pieces*, UQP, 1978, pp. 171–84, and Porter, 'Country Poetry and Town Poetry: A Debate with Les A. Murray', *Australian Literary Studies*, 9.1 (May 1979), pp. 39–48.

long period by the poet and editor Ron Pretty in Wollongong and then in Melbourne, which resulted in the creation of the Poetry Australia Foundation and its magazine *Blue Dog*, now published from the newly created Australian Poetry Centre. The magazine is genuinely Australia-wide; it has editors in each state (but not the Northern Territory). The other prominent poetry magazine is *Salt*, edited by Kinsella; its reach is not just Australian but international.

Recently *Salt* has become an on-line magazine, building on the brilliant website maintained by Salt Publishing in Cambridge, England. The World Wide Web hosts a wealth of sites about poetry, both present and past, but it has not been as fully exploited by Australian poets and publishers as by those in the United States and the United Kingdom. The web offers obvious possibilities for, as marketing people would say, a niche product such as poetry, which has a relatively small market but a passionately devoted one. It is likely that the development of the web has helped defuse the tensions about the nature of poetry that existed from the late 1960s into the 80s. The web would seem especially useful in a country such as Australia – one with a small, widely separated population in a large landmass. Technological developments have made printing and publishing easier than ever, but distribution and warehouse costs remain a huge problem.

Digital publishing is bound to see further development, driven by economics and rapidly improving technology. Nevertheless, it is striking that web publishing has to date made no inroads into poetry book publishing. It is likely that this is mainly due to the sentiment expressed by Grant Caldwell: 'there is something about a book or journal that transcends its apparent insentience, that makes it a living, breathing, thing . . . There is something tangible, irrefutable, committed, even timeless about journals and books'[50].

Whether a younger generation will feel the same remains to be seen. The web allows the possibility of videos and recordings, and it is even possible that the future will see a return to a more oral culture such as that experienced by Chaucer. This would change the nature of the poetry which would be valued. Perhaps this is one element in the return of rhyme in much contemporary poetry in English, including in Australia.

The publication of poetry was once maintained by many major publishers as a sign of quality and stature, even when it was not profitable, but the world of company takeovers and more hard-nosed company directors has abandoned this idea. The major publishers of Australian poetry collections now are Five Islands Press, Giramondo, Salt and University of Queensland Press, together with regional publishers such as Fremantle Press in WA, Ginninderra in the ACT, and Walleah Press in Tasmania; Keeaira Press, Jukurrpa Books, Aboriginal Studies Press, and Magabala Books specifically publish Aboriginal writing, including poetry. Notable new publishers are Black Inc., Puncher

50 Grant Caldwell, 'Australian Poetry', p. 57.

and Wattmann, and Soi3 Modern Poets, while Black Pepper and Brandl & Schlesinger continue to publish a modest number of impressive books. Picaro Press, Press Press, Vagabond and Shed under the Mountain all publish poetry booklets. Many other publishers have produced important books during the period under review, but no longer do so – including Gargoyle Poets, Duffy & Snellgrove, Hyland House and Paperbark Press.

There has been a strong public reading culture, which is a form of oral publication, since the late 1960s; the level of activity and the quality of the work fluctuates in different cities at different times, but prominent over the last decade have been the literary festivals – the capital cities and many other cities and towns have one – which often draw large crowds, even to poetry. The Literature Board of the Australia Council and the state government arts bodies offer grants to poets and other writers, but these are very competitive. Residencies are available in Asia, Paris and other destinations, again on a competitive basis, to writers, while one in Rome, near the room where Keats died, is reserved for poets. The recent establishment of the Australian Poetry Centre in Melbourne, thanks to funding from the Copyright Agency Limited, is a potentially important event, but the centre needs to develop a national outreach, which will take time. Each state has premiers' literary prizes including many specifically for poetry; other prizes such as the Grace Leven and Christopher Brennan Prizes are longstanding, and also prominent are the Newcastle Poetry Prize, the ABR Poetry Prize, the Judith Wright Prize, the Gwen Harwood Prize and the Vincent Buckley Prize. There are numerous smaller poetry prizes around the country, usually for individual poems. The number of prizes far outstrips their value for a literary culture, but they draw publicity and so are liked by politicians and officials.

The range and level of activity outlined reveals the level of interest from those who are involved in this minority art. Were there space, extensive analysis could be provided of certain themes, such as the strength of elegy and of ekphrastic poetry (poems about paintings and other images) in the Australian tradition, or of the growth of verse novels, of Australian poetry about Asia, or by migrants. These topics point to the health and strength of Australian poetry since the 1950s, including contemporary Australia, notwithstanding the limited level of general public interest. This suggests, as does the use of poetry of a sort at important family occasions such as weddings and funerals, that a wider audience might yet be recaptured. This would require a poetry that expressed people's feelings for them in ways that they could intuitively understand, without academic analysis. That poetry could be experimental, for there is experiment that seeks to use the language in newly expressive ways, as opposed to experiment that provides a mask for inconsequence. Poetry, Porter has argued, 'does us the signal service of miniaturising our pain while intensifying our feelings'.[51] At base there is in all of us a sense that poetry is the only language that can express our deepest emotions or

51 Peter Porter, 'The Survival of Poetry', *Australian Book Review*, 245 (Oct. 2002), p. 30.

the deepest part of our psyche – what other ages would have called 'the soul' – and the loss of belief in the soul is perhaps the major factor in the diminution of poetry's audience. Dr Johnson said in the 18th century that 'Poetry is the art of uniting pleasure with truth by calling imagination to the help of reason.'[52] Readers who could discern that happening in Australian poems might rush to them, at least at certain times, from a world of consumerism, supermodels, pop singers, the worship of the body and other surface distractions. And even if they will not, we need a poetry written in the belief that they will.

52 Samuel Johnson, 'Milton', in Bertrand H. Branson (ed.), *The Lives of the Poets*, in *Samuel Johnson: Rasselas, Poems and Selected Prose,* 3rd edn, Rinehart, 1971, p. 338.

21

Groups and mavericks

JOHN KINSELLA

Quarantined spaces, groups and a crisis of modernism

Australian poetry after World War II has been strangely isolated from other poetries in English. The usual arguments are that the war, with its massive influx of American troops and the expeditions of Australian soldiers overseas, broke up the intactness of Australian arts in the same way as happened with its economy and society. Similar arguments are made in the context of the Great War, but these are often more enthusiastic than factual. Reaching back further, though Australia is so physically isolated, especially prior to air travel, its post-settlement/invasion poetry has been seen as an extension of primarily European, particularly British–Irish poetries, in essence an ongoing colonial poetry.

I believe, however, that this is untrue. The isolation of Australian poetry and poetics has evolved more from choice than from circumstances, and its quality comes about from very specific relationships between a consciousness of the uniqueness of the Australian landscape, and the enormity of dispossessing Indigenous peoples whose relationship with that land is so specific, varied, and complex. This is not to say such conditions have not existed elsewhere, but Australia has been resistant to (if deeply troubled about) its place in the broader international community.

Even now, in an age of easy air travel and ready communications of diverse kinds, a reiteration of uniqueness and separateness still underlies much Australian writing. It seeks to set itself apart. And even in cases where anthologists try to be inclusive, or connect with other parts of the world, Australia is constantly defined as such a different space that connection must come through the migrant experience, economics, or other material exchange. An example is an anthology I recently co-edited with Alvin Pang, *Over There*, which juxtaposes contemporary Australian and contemporary Singaporean poets while keeping them in their respective country spaces. Pang and I discuss the many connections between the two countries in our introductions, and seek to encourage further interaction, but still wrestle with the geographical and cultural barriers that exist. This is the result not only of the negatives of nationalism, nor a desire for national intactness, but also of the perceptions of Australia as quarantined space. Australia historically and physically has been constructed as separate, and this notion underpins an entire continent's poetics regardless of its sources.

Ouyang Yu constantly challenges the hegemony of this Australia in his poems of 'the Chinese migrant in Australia'. Yu has been exceedingly effective in showing the hypocrisies of the Australian literary establishment (and society at large) in creating a separation between Australians of Anglo-Celtic and European heritages as being historically integrated into the land, and the relationship between, say, Chinese migrants and the Australian land. This connection goes back to before the middle of the 19th century and yet is given a minor place in the canonisation of a defining national literature. This is especially true with poetry. Ouyang Yu is a maverick who speaks out and suffers the consequences of his volubility. His declarations against Australia, his country, are often seen in the light of 'us and them', and he receives such comments as 'If he doesn't like it, why did he come here in the first place?' Why did any of us come here in the first place? Here's an extract from Ouyang Yu's poem, 'Fuck You, Australia', 'a country flowing with gold and fuck-holes' – 'you thought I had wanted to learn your english that called me nimes / that fucked whenever you could anybody especially us'. Having said he is a maverick, it is clear that Ouyang Yu is closely connected with the Chinese community not only in Melbourne where he lives, but in Australia at large. As founding editor of the ground-breaking poetry journal *Otherland*, which publishes poetry in Chinese, primarily written in Australia, and through his extensive translation of English-language Australian literary works into Chinese, Yu delineates a form of group participation that is multi-directional.

Some years ago, I wrote an essay on conflicts between different groups in Australian poetry. This included considerations of publishing biases, and associations with particular anthologies and anthologists, and concluded with the notion that poets are self-serving, defensive and opportunistic. Nothing new in this, and it could apply to any poetry in the world. What is relevant, though, is one of the many responses I received. Deb Comerford, who was writing a thesis on innovative Australian poetry anthologies, decried the fact that I had articulated such friction. She maintained that it was essential for poets to stick together, and that, since they are always in the minority, collaboration, cooperation and community are to be cherished. She said that there were 'lines of gossamer' connecting poets. I agree up to a point. In establishing a poetry discussion list on the internet back in the mid-1990s when these things were not common (poetry etc.), by working collaboratively with many poets around the world, and being a habitual anthologist, I obviously believe in community of poetry. That said, it is easy to ignore the individualist compulsion of the poet, the desire to be a maverick and to break free of groups. Australian poets have a tradition of internal connection, and a suspicion of the international. Its origins are in a crisis of identity, for Australian poetry is actually Indigenous poetry (spoken, sung, written on the body, written in sand, transliterated and written in English or whichever language), and all others writing out of Australia do so with anxiety.

This is the reason that even a basic grand narrative such as 'modernism' skews when applied to Australia. The 20th century has parallel modernisms. In the European

sense, there are two major strands, and no doubt many more. There are the false self-advertising placard-waving versions of Pound and Eliot and their ilk, and then there are the technologists of language. Pound used modernism as a smokescreen to promote his own agendas. He was not a combatant in the Great War; neither was Eliot (which is *not* to suggest that 'combatant experience' was the only source of modernist 'war poetry'). They left the modernity of America, went to the *anciens régimes* and value systems of colonisation, and held their word-placards up, a little like Bob Dylan and Allen Ginsberg in that favourite clip of Dylan's. A promotional exercise to become one with the conservatives of their new homelands, their modernism suggested loss and scepticism while always obsequiously planning to belong. On the other hand, the mapping of the destructive powers of modernity in the poetry of Wilfred Owen horrifically goes hand-in-hand with a new freedom of expressiveness about loss; a technology of linguistics eases open the spaces in the poetries of patriotism – from Rupert Brooke back through to the nature places of Wordsworth and Keats, which still contained the pride of place, no matter their own revolutions in language. The thread of modernism through Owen finds extensions in Russian Futurism on the left, and even Italian Futurism with its militarism and praise of war on the right. A class of modernisms, but parallel to the placard versions of Pound and Eliot – the robber barons come out of the new world hungry for what is left of the old. Mina Loy is modernist in the sense that Eliot is not.

In the Australian condition, Kenneth Slessor is seen as the modernist *agent provocateur*. He was of the Eliot and Pound placard-waving kind, and his modernism is a materialist dupe. When he witnessed war firsthand it stopped poetry in him. His silence was modernist, not his poetry writing.[1] The real Australian 20th-century modernists were all poets directly or indirectly associated with the Great War: Leon Gellert, Zora Cross and Lesbia Harford.

The crisis of Australian modernism in poetry is sometimes said to be the Ern Malley hoax, perpetrated by James McAuley and Douglas Stewart. These two soldiers conspired in 1944 to dupe Max Harris and the modernist journal *Angry Penguins* by making a bricolage and pastiche poet spring like a genius from nowhere. Though both McAuley and Stewart are presented as conservative poets seeking to show the stupidity of modernists, both are arguably more innovative and modernist in the Australian sense at least than many of their more apparently radical contemporaries. It is doubly ironic that these mavericks, who formed a conspiratorial group of two, have spawned so many imitators (including myself). These imitators are often instigators, or at least connected

1 Slessor, one of the greatest Australian poets, is to my mind at his most uniquely 'modernist' in his (often considered) 'lesser' occasional poems published in *Smith's Weekly*. His early 'modernist' poetry is often lushly imitative and driven by its stylistics. Eliot's and Pound's consciousness of a modernist compulsion in literature takes on an aspect of cultural engineering I have always found limiting. Given space, I would explore Eliot, Pound, and Slessor together in the context of Freud's 'A level within the ego' from *Mass Psychology and Analysis of the 'I'*. I accept that these are inflammatory statements and that many critics see Slessor as a father of Australian modernism.

themselves to groups of other poets. I would say that not a crisis in modernism but rather a definitively postmodern moment is located in the Ern Malley hoax.

A poet such as Francis Webb – anxious both about his Catholicism and his deteriorating mental state, and his search for the quiddities of language and their relationship to historical events, music, myth, horror implicit in even calm events, and a crisis of maintaining composure and control – is not directly connected to the Ern Malley poems, but is certainly congruent with them in affect. Webb was always perceived as a loner, and his mental illness both isolated and differentiated him. We might not impose this on a reading of the poems, but they were conditions imposed on his writing of them. An anecdote: I was talking with one of Webb's supervising doctors about his time in West Ryde Hospital, and he told me that Webb had told him that when he had written the beautiful lyrical poem of new-born life, 'Five Days Old', he had held the child and was tormented by the beauty of the moment and a desire to dash the child against a wall. There is none of this tension in the poem. Or is there? It seems an important question to ask.

International regionalism

Webb's poetry was appreciated to a point in Australia, but his real recognition came through the English critic Herbert Read, during his sojourn at an Australian university. Read took the word back to Britain. Webb had been a pilot and had served in Canada during World War II. He also spent time in an asylum in England. His internationalism was of a peculiar kind: out there, but locked in. Read's encomium of Webb did not make him a household name in Britain. Few Australian poets have become well known outside Australia. Their regionalism is not only by default, due to the isolation of Australia but, I would argue, is implicit in the regionality of their poems. Judith Wright once said that she wrote poems to be read in Australia. But Australians have also been internationalists; John Tranter, with his writing of Australia through the lens of European and American modernisms, and the abstractions and interests of the New York School of poets, is a prime example. Tranter is a traveller. But then, so is Les Murray, whose interests are so parochial and local, even if his travelling experiences inform a large part of his poetry.

In struggling with what I see as a crisis between the international and the regional in Australian poetry, I have coined a simple term to assist in the consideration of this. The term is 'international regionalism', and it has a distinctly positive angle: the creation of international communication conduits between regional spaces, but with an emphasis on respecting regional integrity. It is about language and cultural preservation in the face of globalism: creating a universal language of resistance on the one hand, but a language of interaction and cooperation on the other. It is a 'liminal' theory. The term 'international regionalism' has been adapted and used in many discourses. The anthology *Landbridge: contemporary Australian poetry* was the first mainstream publication

to make direct reference to it, though I had discussed it in various essays, letters, and on email lists long before that book was released. I originally devised the theory to discuss land rights issues re settler/invader cultures, appropriation, and Indigenous rights in Australia in relation to the rest of the world.

As would be arguable for most national poetries and poetics, one of the dynamics observable in Australian poetry, at least retrospectively, in considering any given period, seems fundamental. It is the dynamic between poets operating primarily as individuals, and those who see themselves as part of some larger group (or to use Philip Mead's term, 'network', in a decontextualised sense) in which they form a nodal point in a conversation.[2] Of course, often a poet is not really conscious of being part of some larger movement, but is lumped in by critics or others after the fact. However, many poets see themselves as literally interconnected and part of broader conversations which they drop in and out of as they choose, or feel impelled. Is there much difference between this collective *modus operandi*, where participants can operate unseen and at vast distances, and, say, the intimacy of the Melbourne clubs in which literary figures such as Henry Kendall and Marcus Clarke drank and chatted over the literary and other issues of their day? Quantitatively, there is, but in spirit, probably not. The technology, which seems so distancing to a previous generation, does not necessarily seem so to a generation engaging vigorously in its usage. This is stating nothing new, but in order to go where we are going, this premise needs to be established.

Australian writers of whatever ethnicity, or however long they have been in Australia, seem prepared to make reference and intertext with not only what has come before in Australian literature, but whatever literary history they have come out of. When a poet such as Ania Walwicz, a migrant from Poland, writes 'about' Poland, or 'about' Australia from the migrant experience, the two locations are intertwined and in constant conversation. In the *tour de force* entitled *Boat* (1989), Walwicz takes seemingly independent prose poems – some of no more than a few pages each, some running to 266 pages – to create a narrative of belonging and exclusion without a clear storyline. The poet works through accumulation of events, observations, experiences and investigations of language that paratactically, rhythmically, and with a dramatic music, creates an illusion

2 The dynamics of contemporary poetics in Australia necessarily take in broader innovative debates, ranging from 'LANGUAGE' poetry through to the 'Cambridge School', and many other collective 'discussions' appertaining to how and why poems are written. Interestingly, the rise of the world-wide web stifled conversations around the LANGUAGE school, rendering it 'post-' after only a short while. Alienation of text was supplanted with linguistic innovation: a generative challenge to the problems of the lyrical self. I wrote in the *Landbridge* anthology I edited in 1997: 'This is not to say that the demographics of poetries haven't changed with the times, because they have. The internet in particular has not only increased the potential of the "amateur" poet to participate as poet in a "public" space, but also the potential to collaborate and interact. The defusing of the "lyrical I" throughout the '70s, '80s and '90s, particularly in American poetry, has reinforced a tendency to a polymorphous "voice". Poets have become conscious of how central they are, as individuals, to the pulse of the language they use. Some reject the need to move away from the "I", and have dug in against linguistically innovative verse such as that of the American Language poets, asserting that the emotive authority of the self is at the core of what constitutes poetry, and that all attempts to move away from this are misguided.'

of an independent language, a kind of creole neither English nor Polish, but with its own terms of reference and even its own speakers. Though intensely 'personal', these poems *seem* universal, as if the reader is naturally a speaker of their language. This is the result of an intense ability to measure prosodically the response of the reader in a kind of preordained way, playing on reader expectation in sound and expression. Metonym, metaphor, myth and mimesis are bound together, compelling the reader. In the poems we go on a journey of slippage between languages of the migrant in the 'new' linguistic environment that also creates connections akin to Piaget's relationship of the child and object. This is of course deeply ironised, but in such a divergent way that it works on its own terms:

> polish words don't answer they go away goodbye forever then see you again dowidzenia ciao they return little letters typed in my head hidden in drawers put away they return bit by bit ten facet fellow painter jacek malarz pokojouwy house painter is going to paint my house renovate looking for right word page mister right word but he doesn't come yet.

Walwicz can be read as a feminist poet and certainly could be 'collected' under a rubric of feminist activist verse, but she is also a writer of personal identity within community, an innovator looking for alternative ways of expressing cultural transition, displacement and belonging. She is a maverick – there is no one quite like her. Ironically, probably the closest in sheer flexibility and range of formal innovation in language is Lionel Fogarty, the Murri poet – but her concerns place her within a broader group dynamic. This does not necessarily mean that she interacts with like-minded poets – she may or may not – but that her work can be taken as communicating within a wider community.

Another recent 'migrant' poet, John Mateer, who came from South Africa to Western Australia in his youth, does not always create intertexts within poems between the places of his origin and migration, but certainly juxtaposes poems within collections relating to both places, and other places and cultures in the world where he has spent time. He sees this transculturality and internationality as a fact of his poetic condition.

One of the vibrant and deeply intelligent characteristics of Mateer's verse, even in bleaker moments, is the revitalising nature of words themselves. He comfortably switches between English and languages of location, but this should not necessarily be seen as a celebration of the power of language to redeem; in fact, often in the case of Afrikaans the language carries an ominous weight that is almost invasive – as does English itself. Rather, language can ironise its own terms of production and allow us to see the faults in those who use it, including the poet himself.

Mateer's verse has been controversial because of what is seen by some as an appropriation of other cultural registers and identities. In a number of poems, Mateer writes through the voices of Indigenous figures, in an effort to empathise with issues of being dispossessed, and to register the resistance to ongoing 'white' colonisation. My mention of this is not arbitrary, because in many ways this is the core issue of identity and

nation in Australian poetry. The Jindyworobaks, in their annexing and appropriating of Indigenous culture in order to create a shamanistic connection with the 'primal' Australian land, were overtly appropriative, and, depending on the poet, racist. Mateer is clearly not a Jindyworobak, and an opposition to racism in all its forms around the world informs his poetics. So this would make the line drawn between the two, between the movement and the maverick individual, seem inappropriate. But such a line is necessary in order to understand how readerships are formed for either poetries (poetry of the Jindyworobak movement, for example, its anthologies, and of a maverick such as Mateer in his individual poetry volumes).

In *Kayang and Me*, Kim Scott strongly objects to Mateer's poetic use of Nyoongar language at a reading from one of Mateer's poems when they were both performing at an event in Canada. Scott speaks of the distress he felt at hearing a language that is only just being reconstituted and reclaimed by Nyungar people, being spoken by, as he says, a white South African. There are important issues in this. First, Scott as a Nyungar is in a position to criticise what he sees as an inappropriate usage of a language that has been placed under massive pressure by the machinery of colonisation. On the other hand, his isolating Mateer's South African origins does not take into consideration that Mateer is, both poetically and in terms of self-identity, as much a part of 'Western Australia' as of his birth land. In *Loanwords* Mateer utilises borrowings and usages from a number of languages in order to reconstitute their original implications, while also building in the agency of new meaning in the language in which they are being deployed. This transnationality is the main driver of his work. Mateer meant no disrespect, I believe, but the issues are at the core of contemporary poetics. What is and is not available to the poet in creating a poetic language that carries its own intactness and its own implications for reading?

'Attention and scrutiny'

Kevin Gilbert, in his introduction to *Inside Black Australia: An Anthology of Aboriginal Poetry* (1988), begins:

> Over the last two decades the Aboriginal voice has received quite a remarkable amount of attention and scrutiny in the European Australian world of literature. Many, especially those exercising a critical overview and expecting something different, more exotic perhaps, from a people whose traditional expression was an oral tradition, have not come to terms with this often raw, certainly rugged, and definitely truthful subjective material drawn from the creative impulse. There are a number of difficulties in perception and analysis, the most difficult of these is to attempt rationalisation of hundreds of thousands of years of oral tradition against the last twenty years of limited access to white education and education in the English tongue. [p. xv]

It is arguable that Indigenous Australian poetry in English is at least evident in missionary documents of the mid-19th century, but in essence the rise of Indigenous poetry in

English as a poetic force in Australia traces from the 1950s. Poets such as Jack Davis and Oodgeroo (Kath Walker) were criticised early on for using 'traditional' European versification to impart messages specific to Indigenous social, spiritual and political concerns. This use of form actually enhances and strengthens the message of resistance in these poems by juxtaposing the restraint of one tradition against the reiteration of a tradition (or traditions) that have been placed under extreme pressure to sustain continuity. The works of both poets were complex acts of reclaiming and affirmation. Even their more open-form poems, with seemingly linear expression, play with the conventions of English-language syntax.

Davis's poem 'One Hundred and Fifty Years', subheaded 'Written in protest at the non-inclusion of Aborigines in the celebrations of 150 years of European settlement in Western Australia, 1829–1979', ironises the state celebrations that delete acknowledgements of Indigeneity. In the poem, the free-verse niceties of evoking place with references to the presence of a lyrical 'I' that is 'encountering' the surroundings – 'I walked slowly along the river', 'a flock of gulls quarrelled over debris' – while a picture of obvious distress is building ('juggernauts of steel and stone') are countered by the initial usage of a rhyming refrain that seems to parody a British folk chant ('Please to remember the Fifth of November', pertaining to Guy Fawkes) and highlights the overlaying of Indigenous resistance with imagery of British military ritual:

> So now that the banners have fluttered,
> the eulogies ended and the tattoos have rendered
> the rattle of spears,
> look back and remember the end of December
> and one hundred and fifty years.

This refrain, with its metonymic substitution (of tattoo, both marking of the body and military ritual) allows a segue into an unexpected ferocity of language that will lead to confrontation and accusation of murder, presumably coming out of the massacre at Pinjarra (the so-called Battle of Pinjarra in 1834). The poem shatters the conventions of English-language poetry through using those conventions against themselves. This conscious poetic process will later be heightened by Mudrooroo (his rejection as a legitimate voice for Indigenous culture is beside the point here) and Fogarty. The latter takes the de-hybridising of English-language poetry to its most extreme as a form of resistance.

Of the Murri people, and born at the Cherbourg Aboriginal Reserve in Queensland in 1958, Fogarty is a leading spokesman for Indigenous rights in Australia. In resisting the colonising force of English, he has reterritorialised the language of the invaders and made of it a language that speaks for his people. I argue that Fogarty is the greatest living 'Australian' poet, forging a poetics that captures the orality of his people's millennia of song cycles and spirituality, and also engaging with codes and tools of international modernism. Fogarty is at once verbally affronting and celebratory of his identity. A

deeply 'political' poet, he is also a singer whose poetry seeks healing and redemption for the many wrongs done to his people. There is a rage in the work, and the death of his brother Daniel Yock, in the back of a police van in 1993, as well as the plight of his people, compels his poetic spirit.

In a significant interview Philip Mead conducted with him in 1994, Fogarty said: 'Daniel was a Song Man and he used to make songs up from his own dreaming, and he knew a lot of different languages. He was a really special person to my children. A very culturally talented guy, very dedicated to his culture.' And it is that dedication to his culture that Fogarty carries into a poetry that is cyclical and declarative, deeply metaphoric and metonymic at once. The 'timelessness', the dreaming, the conversations between story and land, between the totemic and people, are beyond labelling. A unique poet, he has effectively managed to confront the persistent attacks by imperialist language, and (still) colonial culture/s, on his people's voice, by preserving its identity, and also creating something entirely new (an extension of what existed before), to fight the invader. He is a liberator, an innovator, and a writer with a purpose as crucial as the existence of his people. Fogarty has de-hybridised his own language by hybridising English with his people's language. It is a poetry that demands respect. In the poetry of the 20th and 21st centuries, he is as essential and skilled as any.

The consolidation of Indigenous poetry across Australia gives the impression of a unified movement rather than a series of maverick poets. One should be wary, though, of conflating different language-origins and tribal belongings in the construction of a 'reconciled' voice. The achievement of an apology to the Stolen Generations, earlier aspirations for a treaty, and the occasional success in land rights battles, do not make for one Indigenous nation. The symbolism of the Aboriginal flag and of committees and councils that meet to help resolve Aboriginal issues internally should not be seen as a totalising process; difference must be respected. The Yamaji poet Charmaine Papertalk-Green writes of Aboriginal issues but with specific reference to her own people (in Western Australia, around Geraldton), but obviously also in the context of Aboriginal/black rights in Australia.

I first came across Papertalk-Green's forceful poetry in *The Penguin Book of Australian Women Poets* (edited by Susan Hampton and Kate Llewellyn), and then in other anthologies including Kevin Gilbert's essential *Inside Black Australia*. Interviewing Papertalk-Green a couple of years ago, I asked her about her early writing – which began at high school – and also about other Indigenous poets she had read. She replied: 'Kath Walker, Kevin Gilbert, Alf Taylor, Lionel Fogarty and one of my late old nannas, Ethel Clinch. The late Kevin Gilbert gave me a lot of support as a teenager to keep writing and he included some of my poems in his book *Inside Black Australia*.' The interconnection with Indigenous Australian poets outside her people and community is clear. But what's as important to Papertalk-Green is the mention of the influence of a poem by her nanna, Ethel Clinch. Though Papertalk-Green has travelled widely around Australia, and worked in cities a long way from home, she remains in her life

and poetry closely connected with where she comes from. She writes her land and her community. The first question I asked her in that interview was about her people. She said:

> I belong to the Wajarri-Amangu and Bardimia people of the Murchison area. Wajarri-Amangu on my Mother's side and Bardimia on my Father's side. I was mainly brought up in Mullewa with my mother's people but later in life have gotten to know more of my father's side. The old people used to have very strict laws but most old people have gone now, leaving behind a very different type of culture and environment, which most people need to accept and nurture.[3]

Papertalk-Green is a singer of her place and culture not only in herself, but as an extension of her family and Yamaji country. She also said: 'I mean the proper singing for this country – the Yamaji country. The land must be so sad that it does not hear its people so often now.'

This refers to traditional singing Papertalk-Green says she heard coming from the Mullewa reserve when she was a child. She has never laid claim to be a 'proper singer' in the traditional sense. When poetry is read in full – not just pieces in anthologies – the impression is that this poet is talking about many aspects of life and place, and when the work is taken together, as in her volume *Just Like That* (2007), a singer emerges with the strength of her people and their land. In a different sense, then, she is a 'proper singer'. Papertalk-Green is always willing to take risks – she will criticise herself and her own (if she feels it will help) as well as the colonisers; but in the end, she is trying to sing the community together with a respect for all the other songs out there that are others' to sing.

Papertalk-Green's work with young people tries to rectify the problems she explores in her poetry. She speaks for the living and the lost. She is trying to save the knowledge, and laments the forgetting, the matter-of-factness of death in a materialist world. She laments what has been taken, and also what is being lost through circumstance. In the remarkable title poem, she writes:

> A link had been broken I could not mend
> Knowledge – your knowledge had gone
> Lost to me forever
> You had gone – just like that gone
> Like so many before you.

Knowledge and land and life are inseparable. Together they make the song of family, community, and place; they also make and come out of the song of the poem. The poem is a way of saving the knowledge as well as lamenting its loss. Though we read and know that the loss is forever, the poem also gives hope that a different kind of knowledge can and will remain. It is an affirmation as well as a lament. Papertalk-Green embraces

3 Interview, 2005. See also Charmaine Papertalk-Green, *Just Like That*, Fremantle Press, 2007.

her community and yet writes out of a determined individualism. She is as prepared to critique issues within her own community as in the non-Indigenous communities that interact with or indeed oppress them.

Non-Indigenous anxieties

With the last two decades of her life dedicated to Indigenous rights, it seems appropriate to draw at least a thin line of connection to Judith Wright, in many ways the definitively 'white' poet. Despite being highly individual, she was used specifically to delineate a national poetry. Wright's poetry has been part of school curricula for three generations now. Her objections to the constant reproduction of an early poem like 'Bullocky', and what she sees as its misrepresentation as part of pioneer nation-building white hegemony, largely constructed by the poet Vincent Buckley (who, as Philip Mead has said, 'lamented her change of direction in *Woman to Man*, away from topics of 'settler' and 'historical' significance'),[4] show the tension between the maverick and her subsumed poetics. Wright was never intensely part of literary cliques. She did connect with other Australian poets, but her life was very much a private one until the mid-1960s when she helped found the Wildlife Protection Society of Queensland and became a public activist for conservation causes.

By the 1970s, she had become radically involved in Indigenous rights and land rights causes, including helping found, and sitting, with Nugget Coombs and others, on the committee for a treaty with Aboriginal people. Wright's early support for the poet Oodgeroo (Kath Walker), her deep respect for her friend's poetics, and its interconnection with Oodgeroo's desire for her people to reclaim their land on Stradbroke Island off Queensland, grew into a life commitment to Indigenous causes. Everything Wright wrote was informed by her political commitment, whether it was the Canberra Tent Embassy (1972–), and the interconnection between Kevin Gilbert's role in that long-term protest and his poetry, or reconsidering her writings on her pastoral past, on what she called being members of the pastoral aristocracy. This took place through a reappraisal of her early classic, *The Generations of Men* (1959), now taking into account Indigenous perspectives, as *The Cry for the Dead* (1981).

This is significant because Wright herself claimed that her poetry was totally removed from her politics, or rather, that poetry should have nothing to do with politics. Always suspicious of what she termed 'post-postmodernism' (perceiving John Tranter as the head of that mythical school), Wright was wary of allowing the emotions of a poem to be lost to rhetoric. It is clearly impossible to separate a text from its environment of creation, and also the politics that inform its writing, but Wright resisted this conflation to the end of her life. However, she perceived her last collection, *Phantom Dwelling* (1985), as innovative, and this was as much in the political subtext as in her use of more

4 Philip Mead in private correspondence with the author (August 2008).

open forms and uncharacteristic syntax. Wright is rarely seen as an innovative poet, but I believe she was, as this final book illustrates.

The sequence 'For a Pastoral Family', part II, 'To my generation', could only be described as directly, rhetorically and descriptively political:

> If now there are landslides, if our field of reference
> is much eroded, our hands show little blood.
> We enter a plea: Not Guilty.
> For the good of the Old Country,
> the land was taken; the Empire had loyal service.
> Would any convict us?
> Our plea has been endorsed by every appropriate jury.
> The irony is as brutal as the subject matter it is investigating.

Wright always paid credence to her Australian poet-predecessors; whether championing Charles Harpur, introducing the work of Shaw Neilson, or writing the poem 'Brennan' in *The Phantom Dwelling*, she interrogates her relationship with the poetic past. As she says in this last poem,

> History's burning garbage
> of myths and searches
> sends up its smoke-wreath
> from the city dump.
> It stings in our eyes too.

Wright had reservations about Brennan's poetry, but the tragic aspects of his condition surely attracted her sympathy. We will see later how Tranter has utilised Brennan as a thread of connection in his poetics, and that of Sydney itself.

In her later poetry, Wright tried to render the sources of much non-Indigenous anxiety in Australian poetry. Whether it is of the early 'settler' kind or that of more recent migrants, this is the inevitable and essential anxiety about the displacement of Indigenous peoples and their cultures. Following Hodge and Mishra in *The Dark Side of the Dream* (1990), it could be argued that a characteristic note in Australian discourse has been the 'hebephrenic', which they use to mean the attitude that denies anything is problematic. They suggest the need for an approach to Australian literature that is instead 'paranoid' – believing that the repressed of Australian literature, or its obsessive underlying interest, is not primarily the theme of exile from the 'mother country' of Britain, as Wright once suggested, but the knowledge of what it did to take possession of the land – a subconscious recognition of the oppression of Australia's Indigenous people. If we read a text in a 'paranoid' manner we can detect ways in which it signals this obsession, and so on. I once asked Murray how he felt about 'paranoid readings' of his poems, and he insisted these were irrelevant. However, I have found their idea of paranoid reading, with regard to Australian literature, disturbingly illuminating. A poem such as Murray's 'The Grassfire Stanzas' seems to have absolutely nothing to do

with Indigenous dispossession (though it needs to be said that a consciousness of this has been an obsession of Murray's for his entire working life); nevertheless, one can locate an entire discourse on this issue, for example, in the stanza:

> Eruption of darkness from far down under roots
> is the aspect of these cores, on the undulating farmland;
> dense black is withered into web, inside a low singing;
> it is dried and loosened, on the surface; it is made weak.

We are receiving, on the one hand, a literal, if also figurative, description of burning-off. The action of the fire as it moves across the grassed paddock is observed and described, evoking a series of meditations on not only cause and effect, but the mythic, the subconscious, and relationship between observer and place. Even more than this, the maverick becomes part of a broader community which we see defined in an earlier stanza when the poet writes: 'The man imposing spring here swats with his branch, controlling it: / only small things may come to a head, in this settlement pattern.' It does not take a leap of faith to draw a connection between the darkness and the 'dense black is withered into web' of the later stanza, cited first above, and these two earlier lines with their description of 'settlement' order. The rhizomic allusion – in the Deleuze and Guattarian sense – evoked in the first line, 'Eruption of darkness from far down under roots', drawing together the chthonic and the visceral experience in which we are vicariously participating, creates a schematics that surely allows us to read subtextually. One might also add that the word 'singing' has a particular implication in the context of dispossession. Songlines, singing that comes out of law, and narratives of a poetry that pre-existed migrant presence in Australia by tens of thousands of years, are louder than the crackling of the burning grasses and Murray's skilful evocation of them.

Murray is a particularly interesting figure in the context of the maverick versus group construction. Murray is always identified as maverick, with a populist poetics and politics that seek to relate not only to the individual Australian but especially the impoverished and barely-landed rural 'settler' community. His work is not orientated toward, say, Chinese market gardeners, but primarily comes out of depictions of European encounters with 'the bush'. Murray is seen as conservative in politics, though he aspires toward an Australian cultural sovereignty and what he has called a 'vernacular republic'. A fierce nationalist, his predecessors in Australian literature might well be Henry Lawson, Banjo Paterson, and, strangely, Harpur. Though a highly public figure, Murray has something of Harpur's disconnection from the literary community, despite seeming a literary lion in Australia. Whether editing anthologies, being poetry editor for Angus and Robertson or a spokesman for Australian poetic issues on an international scale, Murray has operated out of his own beliefs and poetics, drawing all to that centre rather than necessarily being inclusive. Perhaps this makes him more of a Lawson than a Paterson.

In his 'debate' with Peter Porter in the early 1970s, over the so-called Boeotian and Athenian, Murray aligned himself with the Boeotian, which he understood as rural and shamanistic, as opposed to the rational, 'scientific' and urban Athenian Porter. This has been extensively explored elsewhere. But it is relevant because, in creating an opposition with Porter, who has lived in London since the 1950s and is often cited as the definitive example of an expatriate Australian writer, Murray is also creating a 'group' or community through apposition. Though it seems that this is a binary difference, Murray is building community through what are tolerable differences of attitude in terms of language and how external material is absorbed into the poem. Murray and Porter have much in common. Porter's use of European art, post-Renaissance ideas, wit, logic, irony, crispness in seeing, and resigned fatalism, offset Murray's lyrical ruralism and its polemical framework. The offsetting makes them complementary.[5]

Pulped factions and new poetries

On the other hand, the much-cited friction between Murray and Tranter, and Tranter's creation of, or connection to, the so-called Generation of '68, is a different case. 'The Generation of '68' was a term coined by Tom Shapcott, attributed to Tranter (who later used it), and accepted by critics to refer to a group of poets who came to prominence during the Vietnam War, and loosely shared a number of political, social and aesthetic viewpoints.

These poets were anthologised by Tranter in his *The New Australian Poetry* in 1979. There is no doubt that there are distinct differences between the poetry of Murray and the poets collected by Tranter on aesthetic, formal and political levels. It is a mistake, though, to consider that it is Murray versus the new poets, because Murray as a potent figure in Australian poetry has had many imitators and supporters who have 'sided' with him in this apparent binary. This does not mean that there is any validity in the conflict or rivalry of the so-called camps, but rather that *en bloc* differences likely existed. Troubled by this, I wrote an article in the mid-1990s for the *Australian Book Review* entitled 'Pulped Factions': 'One could doubtlessly list groupings of poets with common interests, create some kind of map of the Australian poetry-scape that would indicate directions in contemporary poetic thought and response to the Australian condition.'

5 Peter Porter is often described as an Australian expatriate living almost in 'cultural' and 'spiritual' exile. Porter is an immensely sophisticated and complex poet who has published poetry over many decades. Living in London from the 1950s to the present day, Porter has recently been visiting native Australia more often. His concerns with European art and music, with issues of high and low culture, with wit and form, have at times obscured his intense considerations of the relationship between his birth home and his adopted home. In a radio-essay for the BBC on the publication of his two-volume *Collected Poems* by OUP in 1999, I said: 'Primarily seen as an urban poet, Porter has also written significantly of European and Australian landscapes. Always in the context of cultural concerns, and epitomised by his consistent use of the garden (before and after the Fall), as a place of artistic and natural interaction – an enclosed Arcadia, the natural world is more present than many critics have allowed.' The binary between Murray and Porter is false in many ways, but will be consistently articulated out of national and aesthetic convenience.

Yet it is usually those poets who manage to lift themselves out of these groupings, or define groupings through attracting imitators, who become those voices best identified with the generative side of the age. They possess a desire to explore language and notions of meaning outside the acceptable. Poets like John Tranter, John Forbes, Gig Ryan, and Robert Adamson, who in many ways exemplify a whole period of poetry, have established their own voices that have made them enduring poets. The same can be said of J. S. Harry, Jennifer Maiden, and John A. Scott. All are inventive, 'hybridised voices', conscious of the canon, but desiring to reinvent it.

It is not by chance I group these poets together. They are of the era of factionalism (with Ryan being on the cusp) in Aus Poetry. It would be assumed, to counter this, I would place Les Murray, Geoffrey Lehmann, Rosemary Dobson, Robert Gray, and possibly Kevin Hart on the 'other side of the fence' – those poets who apparently represent a more lyrical, meditative ('religious'?), conservative ('traditional'?) poetics. In between the two we would have Gwen Harwood. Peter Porter forms a 'school' of his own (European, Augustan, and 'urban-e'), while Dorothy Hewett exists outside all of these, though obviously associated with the new romantic traditions of Adamson and his 'followers'. The point is, I *do not* think even these contrived groupings are relevant now. One can admire any particular association of poets one desires without having to be an 'adherent'. There seems to be a need, as part of creating a literary identity, to *create* lines of influence in a nation's literature.

My piece was part of a broader debate about whether a new generation of poets – which would go on to produce Peter Minter, Kate Fagan, Michael Brennan, Louis Armand, Margie Cronin and Jaya Savige – was actually imprisoned in earlier conflicts and disagreements or whether they were able to start afresh. The new poetry in Australia is much more about individual voices drawn together in loose affiliations, where the anthology is less of a manifesto than an exercise in pluralism. Awareness of Indigenous poetry, 'migrant' poetries, and of 'sub-cultural' poetries, has gone hand-in-hand with an acceptance of gender equity in publishing. The personal conflicts might be there, but something broader and richer has evolved.

It is recognised that the late 1960s and early 70s saw a revolution in small-press poetry publishing in Australia, working outside long-established publishers such as Angus & Robertson, which mentored an author over a lifetime (although a senior Australian poet recently lamented to me that this was no longer the case in Australian publishing). In fact, small-scale publication has always been part of the Australian publishing scene. Barron Field's *First Fruits of Australian Poetry* (1819) and Michael Massey Robinson's *Odes* (1826) were clearly 'small-press' publications. Though within the focal lines of colonial expression, they were also statements of a form of post-coloniality. We can discern a line from the modernist *Angry Penguins* publications of the 1940s, through to the *Poetry Australia* publications of the 1970s, and even more so the breakaway *New Poetry*, with its strong inclination toward contemporary American innovative poetry largely (but by no means exclusively) arising out of the American Black Mountain

School, New York School, and San Francisco Renaissance. In these internationalism – or rather, perhaps, a bringing-in of poetry from elsewhere in the world – was *de rigueur*.

However, one would be mistaken to see this as a broader internationalism. It was more a consolidation of Australian content through giving it a place within the international poetry spectrum. The split in the Poetry Society that led to the breakaway *New Poetry*, impelled by the lyric poet Robert Adamson, was as much about a consolidation of power within a particular group or community by creating a splinter group or community – subset – as about aesthetics. This is not to say that Adamson and his followers were not innovative in their aesthetics, but that personal relationships and disagreements also played their role. It is impossible to separate personality and ego from any of these collations of poets and poetics we 'posthumously' interpret as movements or groups. Opposition makes the strangest bedfellows. More recently, conflicts in Australian poetry have been largely personality-based. Amalgamations of poets with little in common in terms of their poetics, work in opposition to others because of personal animosity. Groups are retrospectively identified when in fact the association between these poets is not as part of a general aesthetic manifesto – they are extremely different poets.

Adamson has spent much of a lifetime writing out of a specific place, his home and life on the Hawkesbury River. In essence he brought into Australia a working knowledge of Black Mountain School poetics. Adamson is a contradiction, in that he is both maverick and an instigator of group-think. His influences, ranging from Hart Crane to Robert Duncan, are broad, and yet he skilfully locates what might be termed the sub-lyrical gesture in every poem he writes, whatever its subject matter. Birds, the river, family, love, poetics, and a wistful, elegiac tone, go hand-in-hand with a mapping of the self that has created a narrative of place unlike any other in Australian, non-Indigenous poetry.

Adamson, with his prison background, was seen as an *enfant terrible* during the 1960s, from his then-base in Balmain confronting, outraging the imagined poetry establishment with a Rimbaud-like assault on niceties and good order. His first book, *Canticles on the Skin*, began a process in which this publisher–poet carved out his own space within Australian letters. Adamson has written,

> There are two kinds of poetry in my first books, poems that were drawn from memory, basically descriptions of reality, and poems made up from art and the imagination. Since *Canticles on the Skin* (1970), I have been trying to work out what is real and what is imagined. Writing poems that escape intelligence 'almost successfully'.

There is an irony in associating Adamson with Rimbaud. Adamson has always been obsessed by the poetry of the second-wave French Symbolist, Mallarmé. On the other hand, a poet often thought of as inspired in some senses by Mallarmé, John Tranter, is actually more empathetic with, and influenced by Rimbaud.

Tranter's poetry, starting with his second volume *Red Movie* (1973), has displayed the almost tautological combination of surface calm and underlying conceptual torment.

Strongly influenced by John Ashbery and other New York School poets, he has created poems which are sculpted as almost *objets d'art*, which stand up to being looked at, as in a gallery, but undermine cultural, political and artistic givens. Making use of other poets' work, even investigating random word association programs like Babel, before many other poets had even heard of them, sampling the experiments of the Oulipo, while writing into an Australian poetry history, in a metatextual way, Tranter has spawned many would-be imitators but none who have really succeeded in doing so.

To understand fully Tranter's complex intellectual concerns, consider the poem 'Christopher Brennan'. In this sestina, Tranter plays against the restrictions of form by combining both a populist and a serious subject. Brennan is in many ways the Sydney precursor to Tranter. This mixing of high and low cultures was not characteristic of Brennan's verse, other than in maybe a few poems for his mistress, Vi. Brennan's notoriously turbulent private life was counterpointed by the rigour of his scholarly writing as well as by the Symbolist removals of his poetry. Tranter often chooses the commonplace as his subject matter, be it *film noir*, drinking around the pool or elsewhere, flying in a Lufthansa aeroplane, the Creature from the Black Lagoon, high school, literary tropes and figures – but all of these subjects are distanced by an ironic suspicion of what might be constituted as beauty or as 'effable', and thus digestible by the mass culture that his persona is always part of, though standing slightly aside.

'Christopher Brennan' ironises Anglo-Australia's monolingualism while also ironising the affectation of using knowledge for personal gain. In the end, though, this is a poem about the elusive nature of inspiration set against the complexities of relationships and aspiration, yet told with a wry, good-humoured ease that belies its almost tragic implications. This poem, in some ways a drinking song, relies on the knowledge that Brennan essentially died of alcoholism. Characteristically, Tranter creates a literary connection that questions his own authorial position, while satirising Australian scepticism or philistinism toward imagined European effeteness. He is having his cake and eating it too. This is the tautology of a Tranter poem and in part the aesthetics that led him to become group-leader while at the same time inimitable maverick.

To track an evolution of Tranteresque poetics is not difficult. Tranter's path from rural Australia to urban Sydney strangely takes him closer to the trajectory of Murray than, say, a poet like John Forbes, with whom Tranter would later be associated. To unpick the 'rules' of the poetic field that Tranter entered and in many ways helped foster, one need look no further than his own comments. In a special Australian issue of *Poetry* (Chicago), published in 1996, Tranter made the following points about the Generation of '68. Noting that the repressive atmosphere of the 1950s in Australia was 'a milder version of the McCarthy period in the U.S.', he adds: 'No poet in Australia in the late Fifties and early Sixties could get a poem published in any magazine if the editor thought that it might in any way give moral offence to the average person; and there were few outlets of any kind for experimental verse' (p. 89).

Tranter pinpoints the effect of a backlash from the Ern Malley affair as part of this reaction. He particularly notes American culture during the 1960s as having a liberating effect on Australian poetry, while characterising the rebellion against conscription and the Vietnam War as concurrent drives towards counter-cultural activity. Donald Allen's *The New American Poetry* (1960) and Donald Hall's *Contemporary American Poetry* (1962) were influential. Tranter says, 'No other generation of poets in Australia's history had produced such a sheer mass of published writing.' He also observes that older writers such as Hewett, David Campbell and Bruce Beaver went with the new flow and became more experimental. This was the era of the post-World War II baby boomers with an increase in tertiary education. New technologies (for example, the Gestetner) allowed small magazine publications. New venues for readings opened, and drug culture provided its own strange impetus. Vitally, Tranter explains:

> Poetry was not seen as a pastime by the new poets. It was not regarded as a hobby. It was not seen as a pleasant diversion from an academic routine, or a skill to be developed simply for its own sake. It was seen by many poets as an integral part of a wider struggle for freedom and individuality: freedom from conscription (Australia was at war with North Vietnam at the time, and conscription was part of that war), freedom from the censorship of imported books by the federal Customs department, freedom from police harassment, freedom to experiment with drugs, to develop a sexual ethic liberated from authoritarian restraints, and freedom from the handcuffs of rhyme and the critical strictures of the university English departments. [p. 93]

Possible transgressions

The New Australian Poetry was not the only anthology to have a generative effect. *Mother, I'm Rooted*, *The Penguin Book of Australian Women Poets*, and later, the *Oxford Book of Australian Women's Verse*, were landmarks in the affirmation of a collective notion of women's poetry in Australia.[6] Many poets in these volumes operated out of relative isolation, and may not have seen themselves as part of a group, or even the drives of feminism or the Women's Movement of the times. But the editors' intent was certainly to identify threads of concern that tracked back to 19th-century Australian poetry and possibly beyond. It is characteristic of historical overviews to separate and investigate women's poetry as an entirely distinct entity. This may reinforce the notion that the mainstream of Australian poetry has been male, and only belatedly was there a rise in a conscious female collective poetics. This is patently untrue. A large number of poems to be found in newspapers during the 19th century, as well as in individual collections, were by women.

In Western Australia, for example, the most noteworthy poet writing in the middle of the 19th century and publishing in the *Church of England Magazine*, was Elizabeth

6 For a brilliant analysis see Ann Vickery, *Stressing the Modern: Cultural Politics in Australian Women's Poetry* (Salt, 2007)

Deborah Brockman, who wrote of concerns of family, depression, place and spirituality. The connections between such a poet and her counterparts of the 20th and 21st centuries is stronger than is ever made obvious. The Oxford anthology mentioned above is particularly good at drawing subtextual threads between these poets across the eras, but there is still much work to be done.

Dorothy Hewett, whose earliest poetry was written in her home place of Western Australia, was certainly conscious of her isolated position as a woman writer in a predominantly male writing environment. However, this did not stop her creating a mythological and also realistic universe (the relation between these two is at the core of her poetics) which operated both in a maverick or independent sense and also in defiance of the local literary patriarchy. This was achieved by writing 'about' wheatbelt Western Australia, through tracking the stories of her family, often juxtaposed with the half-heard stories of dispossessed Aboriginal people (though it was not until later life that she really articulated her concerns about this), and creating a highly imaginative world of the self, in which all transgressions, gender and sexual, were possible. Hewett was always characterised as a rebel in her personal life, and her poetry reinforces this by allowing a full run of possible transgressions.

Despite this, even long after she had left Western Australia, Hewett saw herself as connected with its writing, and more especially the Western Australian wheatbelt about which she wrote so intensely. She achieved this by being both an imagistic colourist (of birds, seasons, flora and fauna) and a storyteller. Also, her communist politics engendered portrayals of the working class and the 'ordinary', usually set in ballad or other popular stanzaic forms that evoked a deep sympathy across genders and with specific working conditions and places. Examples are 'In Midland Where the Trains Go By' (set in Western Australia) and 'On Moncur Street' (set in Sydney). Hewett's novel *Bobbin Up* (1959), written when she lived in Redfern in Sydney, and felt the tensions (and the joys) of participation in and compliance with the Communist Party ethos, is an empathetic portrayal of working-class women's experiences and conditions. This novel is considered a feminist classic, and much of Hewett's writing for theatre as well as poetry and prose fiction, is concerned about the conditions of women, emotionally and pragmatically.

But still, she wrote on a human canvas, and her concerns were ultimately to do with the individual vis-à-vis this canvas. So she is at once part of a group, in the sense that she writes out of women's and leftist concerns, but is so individuated as to be constantly under scrutiny and attack for being 'self-absorbed' and romantic (in the sense of self-mythologising). Her life in Sydney drew her into the circle of Adamson and the *New Poetry* magazine, and indeed Adamson published Hewett's remarkable *Rapunzel in Suburbia* (1975), but she nonetheless remained at a tangent to all groups. Adamson is frequently identified as the 'Nim' in Hewett's 'Alice' poems, and is said to function as the *enfant terrible* in these poems' transgressions. The personal subtexts of Hewett's poetry draw in a number of literary and other figures, but always operate within the private mythological universe that she spent a lifetime constructing. This

does not distract from the very public concerns of this private poetry. Hewett always attracted followers and imitators, in both the east and the west. When she lived in the Blue Mountains she was a patron and mentor-figure for the Varuna community; she was present at what were almost weekend 'salons', with poets and general audience coming from far and wide when they knew she would attend.

As long-term poetry editor for the Melbourne *Age* newspaper, Gig Ryan has commented on and fostered many poets, whose work ranges across generations and styles. In conversation, she has enthusiastically endorsed younger innovative poets such as Michael Farrell. Ryan has been associated with *The New Australian Poetry*, though really a generation later. Her connections with other Melbourne poets and particularly Forbes who moved from Sydney to Melbourne have curiously led to her being read through the group dynamic (a double irony, because she has in fact led and played in a number of 'rock' bands). Ryan is distinctively a maverick poet. Her urban concerns draw on bars, drinking, driving cars, money, relations between often unidentified people, set against sharp or sardonic political observations, the mundane usually mixing with 'high cultural' references: history, mythology (especially Greek), eating, and a critique of capitalism. Her poems tend to be short, compacted and elliptical. When longer, they work in sequences using similarly compact and elliptical sections.

What is remarkable about her poems' approach to the so-called unified self is that the 'I' is always distanced, but the reader gets the feeling that this may be a safety measure to protect against a disclosure of intensity in personal feeling. This is more than a ploy; it is an aesthetic statement. Ryan may or may not consider herself a feminist, but this action may be interpreted as a political choice. The persona does not discount the possibility of equitable relationships between men and women, but often doubts this, or at best finds it paradoxical. It is almost as if genders cannot be reconciled. In the poem 'Two Winters', Ryan writes, 'Without him I feel empty and alive / the happy eighteenth-century clocks, the desk skulls.' (from *Pure and Applied*, 1998).

Against the grain

Beneath the discourse of 'Australian poetry' as defined by prize culture, readings, internet conversations, university networks and general canonical processes, there are many poets in Australia who operate in their own space against the grain. This does not mean that they are not part of broader conversations, but they often function at a tangent to those conversations that they themselves engender. David Brooks is an interesting case. Extensive critical writing on Australian poetry, teaching Australian poetry at Sydney University, and the co-editorship of one of Australia's flagship literary journals, *Southerly*, would seem to place him at the centre of this canonical process. In terms of his poetry, this is not necessarily the case. The poetry operates outside these other discourses in many ways.

In his most recent volume, *The Balcony* (2008), Brooks conveys a sense of strong or vicarious connection which is affected by those who might be watching the persona, who might see him, and whom he in turn is conscious of. Brooks, like Tranter, draws on lines of literary connection by invoking Lawson as Australian literary predecessor. The central symbol and motif of the book is the balcony, which is a place not only of viewing – to see the world outside – but on which you yourself might be viewed – as in the remarkable poem in which a long kiss is watched by outsiders until its absolute intactness outlives them, and they are gone. Or making love near the archbishop's house, but it is not a problem because no-one is looking. Two important references come to mind throughout the subtexts and intertexts of balconies in this book. The most obvious is Baudelaire's 'Le Balcon', especially:

> *Les soirs illuminés par l'ardeur du charbon,*
> *Et les soirs au balcon, voilés de vapeurs roses.*
> *Que ton sein m'était doux! que ton coeur m'était bon!*
> *Nous avons dit souvent d'impérissables choses*
> *Les soirs illuminés par l'ardeur du charbon.*

The question becomes, how much of one's love does or should become available to the outside world? The balcony is a public and private space in which a two-way mirror is effected, as is the often-public performance of our most intimate relationships. Brooks deals with scrutiny of choice by opening the balcony doors. But do not be fooled. No matter how intimate some of these poems, how strong the sense of the crumpled sheet, you only get as close as the poem and your imagination allow.

A less obvious reference in terms of the balcony subtexts of place is Lawson's poem 'Faces in the Street'. This definitively Sydney poem surely echoes the pain of this public–private exploration. Indeed, Brooks has a poem in this collection that goes by the same title, and though it is socially distant from Lawson's, there is that sense of looking from behind the curtain, and discovering oneself. Lawson writes:

> And cause I have to sorrow, in a land so young and fair,
> To see upon those faces stamped the marks of Want and Care;
> I look in vain for traces of the fresh and fair and sweet
> In sallow, sunken faces that are drifting through the street.

In Brooks we read:

> Often, in the faces of young women
> I pass in the street
> I see the faces of young women
> I once loved
> or made love with
> years ago,
> and I wonder whether they,

now in their forties or fifties,
ever see, in the faces of young people they pass,
those of young men or women they once loved in their turn

Brooks positions the persona as one who recognises a commonality not only with other males but women as well. This is particularly characteristic of the challenges to the masculine 'certainty' that is investigated throughout the book. In Lawson's poem, the persona sees distress and wants this overcome in a revolutionary way. Though it may seem less strident, Brooks's poem, through empathy, demands as much for each generation to understand that those who have come before also contain 'all of the the ages inside them'.[7]

Another poet who has operated in a similar space but with very different poetics is Dennis Haskell, editor of the literary journal *Westerly*, and an academic who teaches Australian literature. His poetry often deals with domestic and interpersonal matters that do not fit the frequent male posturing of isolated, authorial confidence and distancing. In 'At Greenwood, a Meditation', the title, though referring to a Perth suburb, does double duty by suggesting something rural and tranquil. We see the 'natural' constantly reiterated, even down to the apparent contradiction of 'suburban, lupin dressed hills'.

This poem is an urban pastoral, but one in which the two worlds do not fit comfortably together. The poem is about the nature of inspiration. It begins 'In a humdrum household' and yet there is something threatening at work – 'these dark creatures'. The 'occasional cats jackknife over fences' – they do not simply step over them. As the poet contemplates, inspiration does not come in a sweetly sonorous traditionally 'pastoral' way, but 'sharply', broodingly, and startlingly, to extend words used in the poem. This is a poem about a familiar scene suddenly becoming alive with difference – or rather, and this is the true nature of inspiration – the difference that is always there is seen again in a fresh way.

This idea of urban pastoral takes us into the territory of the pastoral in contemporary Australian poetry and its contra-indication in ecological poetry. Coral Hull was genuinely eco-poetical long before the term became part of a trend and a less genuine, largely academic discourse of involvement and apologia for poetic acts that sell themselves as making a difference, but defend their own space of production. Though Hull completed a doctorate in creative writing, she has nothing to do with the academic world. She has consciously set herself outside cultural elites in all their guises, to function as poet-activist. She has been possibly the most maverick non-Indigenous poet to write from Australia. Her concerns for animal rights, vegan ethics, peace and human rights have led her to withdraw her books from print to avoid participation in profit culture and to make them available through her website–journal–foundation, *Thylazine*.

Hull's poetry, with its slippages between vivid imagery and reportage, takes the reader inside the suffering and marginalisation of both animals and humans, caused by those

7 *The Balcony* is set in Slovenia and Australia.

who are indifferent, ignorant or exploitative of their condition. She also witnesses mental and physical trauma, and writes out of a need for survival against aggressive agency. The poetry should not be mistaken, though, as defensive, because it is resistant and activist in the most forceful sense. In the affirmation of the oppressed, great beauty is also possible. This is not poetry purely of loss, but is also impelled by celebration and respect of the oppressed. Hull frequently ironises popular culture's vicarious participation in exploitation, or uses it to juxtapose a participant's complicity through irony. We see this very clearly in 'The Zoo Ark':

> 'Oh my god, they've killed Kenny!'
> A tiger urinated after being shouted at.
> Captives choke, plastic straws lodged in their throats.
> Their blue faces now unbarred. Throw things at them.
> The cage is full of cigarette butts, popcorn packets.

Hull at least peripherally connects with a tradition of Australian pastoral that has operated within its own terms of displacement. Hers is a radical pastoral in which surface is engaged with as much as subtext. Like Wright, she makes direct observations, but deploys figurative language to take them out of rhetoric and into the suggestive. You take a Hull poem with you a long time after having read it, and since she writes so much about the problematical nature of the rural world, you are likely, willingly or unwillingly, to bring into comparison with Hull's observations all Australian rural poetry you encounter.

One could create an endless list of poets who touch on broader group categories, forming subsets, or indeed working as 'sets' entire in themselves. However, an overwhelming impression the reader of Australian poetry as a whole receives is that notions of Australia, positive or negative, link most if not all of these poets. One does not have to write about Australia to be aware of it. And even the most maverick poet still groups within this consciousness. This is not to affirm 'nation', or even 'nationality', but to articulate a connectivity that cuts across lines of community, subculture and personal difference. Fogarty certainly works within his community; the already-noted death of his brother Daniel Yock has driven, emotionally and spiritually, his poetic activism, on a deeply personal level, as well as within the political and spiritual knowledge of his own people. And yet his poetry is like no other's.

Poets I have not had the space to consider, who shine as beacons of contradiction in the model I have suggested, include Harry Hooton, Michael Dransfield, Dorothy Porter, David Campbell, A. D. Hope, Beaver, Vivian Smith, Rodney Hall, Thomas Shapcott, Judith Rodriguez, Philip Salom, J. S. Harry, Fay Zwicky, Andrew Taylor, Pam Brown, Alison Croggon, Π.O., Geoff Page, Jennifer Maiden and Gwen Harwood. Porter found a significant following among lesbian, bi, gay and queer readers, at least after *The Monkey's Mask* (1994), a lesbian detective verse novel whose sparse, thin poems build narrative suspense as they work toward novelistic resolution. Porter wrote other

verse novels, her last being *El Dorado* (2007). She is a significant figure in this argument because her early books, including *Night Parrot* (1984) and *Driving Too Fast* (1989), attracted a feminist audience, a general poetry and popular readership, which would later branch out into near-iconic status among lesbian-bi-gay-queer communities. This is not to say that there is a firm boundary between these readerships, but to acknowledge the flexibility and sophistication of Porter's voice.

Dransfield's *Drug Poems* (1972) was strongly influential and engendered its own iconicity (though arguably a false one). Dransfield's death, related to drug addiction, made him a definitive figure of poetic counter-culture when in fact his poetics were strongly informed by traditional European poetry and culture, set within the psyche of an Australia awakening to a mass-cultural modernity, that drew from him both sharp satire and neo-Romantic indulgence.

Dransfield was a wide-ranging poet who is under-recognised for his innovative use of the line and frameworks in which images circulate, interconnect and resolve as narrative. In the Courland Penders poems a house serves as a function of Dransfield's propensity to mythologise, with stories working almost as folk tales within the structure. In Dransfield's poetry and letters, and through the biographical work of Patricia Dobrez, *Michael Dransfield's Lives* (1999), we see the importance to Dransfield of friendship and interaction and communication with other poets. Drugs, by necessity of 'scoring', bring their own community, but they also engender their own extreme isolation, as in 'Bum's Rush':

> take a last look at the effigy collection
> say farewell to friends you may have made among the graven images
> then walk as a human lemming would
> out across the bay to where the ice is thinnest and let yourself vanish

Dransfield once declared that all his poems were posthumous. How many of these poets wrote or write for posterity, one cannot ultimately tell. But they certainly, in their group-connectivity and maverick individuality, speak outside their own lives and writing. Poets, like all writers, end up in the hands of editors and publishers – maybe if they are lucky enough, or is this an unlucky outcome? Harwood, taking the Héloise and Abelard story as vehicle for writing companion poems that served as a hoax attack on the *Bulletin* (according to the notes included in her *Collected Poems, 1943–1995*, 2003), played on Buckley's religious imagery to implant her own distortions of the letters of the two medieval figures.

These poems, with their acrostics reading 'So long Bulletin' and 'Fuck all editors', are most often mistaken as mere disguises for an attack on modes of publication and reception, when in fact the effect of the poems, regardless of Harwood's intention, is a struggle between the material and spiritual, the problems of setting up love and denial within aesthetic frameworks, particularly emphasised by the constraints of the acrostic and the sonnet form. It must be remembered that Héloise and Abelard, after

their separation, communicated by letters, in which she lamented the loss of their physical love, while he, who had been castrated, urged her to transcend this concern and focus on God. A poet cannot take on this story without some import of passion and relationship being read into it. The original medieval letters are allusive; so, one might argue, are Harwood's texts, and the acrostics are perhaps the distraction rather than the purpose. To me, this is where the maverick of Harwood lies, and not in the hoaxing of Walter Lehmann (her pseudonymous *alter ego* for these poems), which fits within a long tradition of group-think.

My model is one of convenience, but I have tried to demonstrate that relationships between poets in Australia are anything but straightforward, and that they by necessity locate themselves within groups and communities, but also inevitably and paradoxically position themselves against these.[8]

8 This essay has not touched upon the immense paradigm challenges and shifts engendered through maverick engagements between public and private spaces in performance/slam/culture-jamming poetry and poetics. While these are thought of as contemporary phenomena, there is significant work to be done on the history of performance in Australian poetry in relation to traditions of Indigenous song and ritual and storytelling as well as 'colonial' and 'postcolonial' aggregations. My omission of them here does not mean I wish to separate these aspects from a general poetics; it is simply due to selecting certain threads. They are of an equal relevance and entirely interwoven through other aspects of poetic presentation and activity.

22

The challenge of the novel

Australian fiction since 1950

SUSAN LEVER

Modernism in a modern nation

Australia's foundation as a secular democratic state in 1901 made it a nation committed to modernity and the principles of the Enlightenment. Rational principles of state organisation and an accompanying confidence in scientific and technological progress have established Australia as a stable nation-state that provides considerable material benefits to its people. Even in such an isolated place as Australia, however, the experiences of the 20th century – particularly two world wars and intervening economic depression – undermined confidence in the powers of democratic order and the future promised by technology. The novel, the literary genre most associated with the Enlightenment in Europe, has often carried progressive ideas to a popular audience. After World War II it also became a source of challenge to those ideas. Modernism in Australian art emerged relatively late in the 20th century, but its critical attitude to modernity and its distrust of rational thinking is evident in many Australian novels written after the war. The ambivalent attitude of Australian writers to modernity is expressed repeatedly in the novels published after Patrick White's in the 1950s, and White is a pivotal figure in the development of the Australian novel since World War II.

White transformed the possibilities for the Australian novel by demonstrating that it was a place to test ideas against complex spiritual, psychological and emotional experience, not only an avenue for national storytelling. His series of brilliant novels established the form as the dominant literary mode to express the shifting intellectual debates and allegiances of contemporary times. It has remained a source of opposition to dominant assumptions about Australian life, and a means of wayward commentary on the more rational and established ideas about what such life may mean.

White's novels offer a pessimistic European perspective on Australian life and, though fully immersed in literary tradition, he experimented with formal conventions, shifting from revisionist history novels to contemporary satire, and finally to question his own fiction-making. His novels are poetic, extravagant, and critical both of Australian society and the role of the individual artist within it.

The 1950s

The years 1955–7 marked significant changes for Australian literary life. In 1955 Ray Lawler's *Summer of the Seventeenth Doll* was produced professionally by the Elizabethan Theatre Trust and hailed as a 'breakthrough' in representing ordinary Australians on stage, touring to the United Kingdom in 1956 (see Chapter 18); in that year, Barry Humphries appeared as Edna Everage for the first time, transforming him from actor to stage satirist; and White's *The Tree of Man* (1955) and *Voss* (1957) asserted the presence of a major novelist with a critical, subjective vision of Australian history.

In 1956, television transmission was introduced to broadcast the Melbourne Olympics. The medium would provide new avenues for storytelling, argument and information, and its impact on the novel and stage drama has been immense. Television presented writers with a more immediate way to tell their stories than the novel, and many of the roles of the novel have passed to television since the 1960s. Television has proved particularly good at informing people about events as they happen in the world, and its visual images of foreign places, domestic daily life, political conflicts and narrative incidents have an immediate effect that the written word cannot match. Over the past 50 years, television documentary has taken some of the roles of the novel – particularly the task of entertaining audiences with stories about the real world, or arguing about how we should understand that world. Television drama has appropriated the subjects of the crime novel, the romance and the comic novel of family life. Australian novelists still write in these popular genres; but they supplement a stream of television entertainments, admittedly dominated (as the popular novel is) by material from the United States or the United Kingdom.

The year 1956 was also when the Soviet leader, Nikita Krushchev, denounced Stalin at the All Soviet Socialist Congress, thus changing the nature of the Cold War, and making it difficult for any Australian communist writers, not already disillusioned, to maintain any lingering utopian vision of the Soviet Union. The Cold War would continue through the 1960s and 70s (when the Vietnam War polarised opinion), but its ground had shifted. Many writers who had joined the Communist Party of Australia during or immediately after World War II felt betrayed, and their sense of a cultural mission was destroyed. The socialist-realist novels written by Frank Hardy, Judah Waten, Dorothy Hewett and others (though occasionally revived for attention by later revisionist readings) can now be seen as belonging to a time when writers could claim naive ignorance about the nature of Soviet Stalinism.

The novel has been declared dead many times over the past 50 years; certainly, visual media have appropriated some of its roles. Nevertheless, in 2008, the literary novel in Australia maintains a level of prestige. This is not to say that novels are purchased in greater quantities and more widely read than they were 50 years ago (in 1952 Miles Franklin lamented that Angus & Robertson would only print 5000 copies of a novel – about the same print run as a literary novel in Australia in 2007, though many more

novels are published). It is simply that the novel remains the pre-eminent literary form for an aspiring writer; it is a democratic form, available to any literate person provided they find a publisher, and it accommodates many subjects and styles. Unlike drama for stage, film or television, the writer can retain control of the process of publication to a large extent, so that the final book represents an individual artistic achievement. At the same time, the novelist can hope for a reasonably large audience if the novel manages to capture public attention. Since the emergence of television documentary, a parallel literary form of subjective non-fiction writing (for example, Anna Funder's *Stasiland*, 2002, or Helen Garner's *Joe Cinque's Consolation*, 2004) has developed in Australia, but the novel continues to provide a place where the writer is free to explore any aspect of life and to create new possibilities.

One of White's achievements was to establish the pre-eminence of the novel in Australia. Before the publication of *The Tree of Man* and *Voss*, Australian poets – such as Kenneth Slessor, Douglas Stewart, R. D. FitzGerald, A. D. Hope, Judith Wright and James McAuley – held the high ground of Australian literary art. White's novels demonstrated that high art could be achieved in the prose form, as he pushed the novel towards the metaphoric and symbolic languages associated with modernism. In his hands it was no longer the novel of character, nor narrative, let alone of 'social issues'. *The Tree of Man*'s ordinary people had a mythological dimension, *Voss*'s explorers wrestled with the unavoidable limits of embodiment, as the novelist speculated about the relationship between physical and metaphysical worlds. This had been marked as the territory of Australian poets who sought to renew the myths and to test language for its symbolic possibilities. Voss, the explorer, belonged with Francis Webb's Leichhardt (*Leichhardt in Theatre,* 1952), Stewart's Scott of the Antarctic (*Fire on the Snow*, 1944) , and McAuley's *Captain Quiros* (1964), rather than with Eleanor Dark's prosaic Captain Phillip (*The Timeless Land*, 1941). In a 2007 article in the *Times Literary Supplement*, David Malouf wrote that 'Like James Joyce, Gertrude Stein and William Faulkner, Patrick White was a practitioner of High Modernism, a style and an approach almost no one attempts today. This is fashion, and fashions pass.'[1] But White was not only a high modernist, he was also a writer whose work shows sensitivity to shifts in cultural understanding, as it does his own shifting beliefs about art. Unlike Samuel Beckett, White returned from Europe to live among his own people – suburban post-war Australians – and to struggle with the limits of their experience.

White's first post-war novel, *The Aunt's Story* (1948), directly addressed the contrast between the Australian commitment to simplicity and sanity, on one hand, and European chaos, on the other. It begins in a mundane Sydney social world, and its central section explores the dissociated histories of the residents of the Hotel du Midi, refugees from the atrocities of Europe, before ending among the simple folk of the American mid-west. White's experience of Europe and America, before and during

1 David Malouf, 'Castle Hill Lear', *Times Literary Supplement*, 5 Jan. 2007, p. 12.

the war, gave him an understanding that Western civilisation was in crisis. As he travelled back to Australia by ship, finishing *The Aunt's Story*, he may have hoped to find that clarity of vision and simplicity that he imagined at its end. When he settled in Castle Hill, on the fringes of Sydney, he confronted a society that appeared wilfully ignorant of the philosophical underpinnings of the terrible conflicts in Europe. In 1956, he declared that his task was to teach an ignorant people of the meaning of that struggle, as he proceeded to expose the failings of the rationalist materialist philosophy of the West.[2]

At the end of the 1940s, Australian fiction was dominated by a group of left-leaning nationalists. If we set aside the work of expatriate writers like Henry Handel Richardson, Christina Stead and Martin Boyd, the local novel generally offered social-realist depictions of the struggling poor, mainly set during the Great Depression, with historical fiction as an education in the nationalist tradition of liberal humanism. By the 1950s Vance Palmer, Katharine Susannah Prichard and Miles Franklin, novelists associated with an earlier age of nationalist writing, were completing their careers, with vast political-historical trilogies in the case of Palmer (*Golconda* 1948–59) and Prichard (Goldfields trilogy 1946–50) and Miles Franklin's last Brent of Bin Bin novels (*Cockatoos* and *Gentlemen of Gyang Gyang*, 1956). Xavier Herbert, published *Soldiers' Women* in 1961, and began labour on his last great opus, *Poor Fellow My Country* (1975). The strength of *The Aunt's Story* as a *tour de force* of technique adapted to subject matter might be read as a comment on the comparatively straightforward nature of these novels, what White called 'journalistic realism' and Stead, referring to Dymphna Cusack's fiction, saw as full of 'valueless clichés'.[3]

Beneath all the debate about modernism in art lay the fundamental commitment to modernity of Australian society. European Australia was a product of Enlightenment thinking – an experiment in secular democracy. The political forces that contested artistic territory all subscribed in some degree to elements of modernity – whether an interest in social justice and equality, or individual liberal freedoms. These were often expressed in novels that promoted national pride in egalitarian ideals while deploring the failure to provide equality of economic opportunity. The widespread post-war commitment to technology and science reinforced an Australian faith in material progress as the source of human freedom and fulfilment. In the period since the 1950s, literary modernism (and its postmodernist successor) has been positioned as a critique of this faith, though many Australian novelists vacillate between appreciation of the material and individual freedoms of secular democracy and a critique of Australian complacency and conformity. Ambivalence about the Australian achievement marks fiction across a range of interest groups, especially evident in the post-structuralist critique of liberal democracy that, nevertheless, acknowledges its benefits. Australian novelists most often

2 Patrick White, 'The Prodigal Son', *Australian Letters*, 1.3 (1958), pp. 37–40.
3 Hazel Rowley, *Christina Stead: A Biography*, Minerva, 1994, p. 361.

critique the restrictive and limited nature of Australian democracy, rather than demand its overthrow.

This ambivalence is evident in experiments with form in the novel, and the insistent alignment of experimental form with radical politics by various critics of the Australian way. Australian novelists often want both things at once – a liberal humanist world where individuals can make their way to success, and a society that takes responsibility for those who fail. Taking White's lead, Australian novelists have been grappling with the irresolvable elements in Australian life – the good life that allows social mobility to some working people, but manages to deny it to those on the fringe (particularly Aborigines and new migrants); the political equality that acknowledges the rights of women, but leaves some of them poor and excluded from full participation in work and wealth; the cheerful materialism that gives many Australians only superficial contentment.

In the 21st century, Australian materialism appears to be merely a regional variety of global consumer capitalism. In the 1950s, when Europe lay devastated, it represented an outpost of material well-being, a new ally and slightly backward mimicker of the United States. Even so, writers like Gavin Casey could identify a looming suburban malaise (*Amid the Plenty*, 1962), though White represented this in an acerbic satire on Australian complacency, especially of the suburban matriarchs of *Riders in the Chariot* (1961), taking Humphries' more benign and ambivalent suburban matriarch into darker territory.

The modern city

One of the subjects neglected by the nationalist and realist writers before the war was the power struggles in Australian cities – though Australia had been thoroughly urbanised for most of the 20th century. In the early 1950s two novels demonstrated divergent approaches to a similar Australian subject: Frank Hardy's *Power Without Glory* (1950) and Dal Stivens' *Jimmy Brockett* (1951) both followed the careers of gangsters (otherwise known as corrupt businessmen) in Australian cities. Hardy's novel had been printed surreptitiously because regular printers feared legal prosecution, and Hardy himself faced charges of criminal libel from the family of John Wren, the obvious model for the novel's crooked millionaire, John West. Ostensibly, the novel was an expression of Hardy's faith in a communist future, an exercise in 'critical realism' exposing the links between corrupt business and politics in Australia. Written in a melodramatic style and making an obvious didactic argument for a socialist future, the novel presented Australians with a rare account of the hidden political history of one of its great cities, Melbourne. Hardy's knowledge of political events in the early 20th century and the continuing relationships between politicians and shady characters and criminals confronted readers with a recognisable, unromantic view of the operations of power. Though its communist message disappeared, the novel's popularity revived after it was adapted for television, broadcast as a series for the ABC in 1976.

Stivens' *Jimmy Brockett*, on the other hand, offers a first-person account of the life of an Australian crook. Its allegiances are more ambivalent than those of *Power Without Glory*, as it takes amusement from the underworld of Sydney and its links with political power and the social elite. Jimmy Brockett is brutal and insensitive, but also energetic and ready to enjoy his seedy success. Stivens' novel was humorous and morally ambiguous, a novel of Sydney life. Kylie Tennant's *The Joyful Condemned* (1953) addresses the corrupt relations between wartime criminals and politicians in Sydney with Tennant's habitual cheerfulness. All three novels point to the failure of Australian democracy, and the failure of Australian virtue, though Hardy's alone offers a political analysis and solution. They expose the moral, personal and domestic aspects of Australian corruption, raising questions about the underlying nature of Australian power relations. In the 1960s Hardy became a popular yarnspinner, with a brief television career, before writing his exposé of the communist betrayal, *But the Dead are Many* (1975), and a non-fiction account of the Gurindji walkout, *The Unlucky Australians* (1968), an important first step in the Aboriginal land rights movement.

Stivens, like Hardy, was not so prolific a writer as White, but he shared White's interest in modernist styles, and his later *A Horse of Air* (1970) could be called postmodernist in its self-conscious play with fiction-making. Hal Porter's novels also indicate the presence of more experimental writers living in Australia outside the circle of socialist realists or nationalist writers. His novel set in occupied Japan after the war, *A Handful of Pennies* (1958), offered a blackly comic view of Australian experience; and *The Tilted Cross* (1961) turned the Australian historical novel into a self-conscious exploration of the grotesque.

By and large, the novels published in the immediate post-war decades about Australia's experience of World War II are straightforward accounts, even celebratory of the national war effort. Instances on the home front are Jon Cleary's *You Can't See Round Corners* (1948), Tennant's *The Joyful Condemned*, Cusack's and Florence James' *Come in Spinner* (1951) and Cusack's *Southern Steel* (1953); in combat are Lawson Glassop's *We Were the Rats* (1944), Eric Lambert's *The Twenty Thousand Thieves* (1951), T. A. G. Hungerford's *The Ridge and the River* (1952) and *Sowers of the Wind* (1954, about the occupation of Japan) and David Forrest's *The Last Blue Sea* (1959). But the simplicity of Australian versions of the war is evident by comparison to that iconic American novel of World War II, Joseph Heller's *Catch 22* (1961), with its understanding of the new power structures created by the triumph of capitalism, or Evelyn Waugh's *Men at Arms* trilogy (1952–61) that satirises the betrayals of war. Unlike Heller or Waugh, Australian combatant–writers could not satirise such a serious national encounter with the world beyond. Curiously, White – who served with the British troops in the Middle East, and was besieged at Tobruk – never wrote fiction directly based on this experience.

George Johnston's *My Brother Jack* (1964) may represent the defining statement on the place of war in the post-1950s Australian imagination, with its recognition of the cost of the Anzac tradition, and its assertion that the post-war period will belong to men

of education, not their brave and good-hearted brothers. Like *Summer of the Seventeenth Doll*, *My Brother Jack* marks a turning point in the sophistication of Australian literary audiences – a rejection of the nationalist stereotype of the easygoing larrikin in favour of a commitment to a suburban middle-class life. This may be read as a commitment to success in the international capitalist and technologically advanced society Australia had become. It was not so much oppositional as promoting of modernity.

Many novels of the 1950s and 60s have been adapted successfully for television: *Come in Spinner* (1990), *My Brother Jack* (1965; 2001), Nancy Cato's *All the Rivers Run* (1983; second series 1990), Alan Marshall's *I Can Jump Puddles* (1981), Ruth Park's *The Harp in the South* (1987). Some, like Jon Cleary's *You Can't See Round Corners* (1967, with setting changed to the Vietnam War period where draft dodging had more sympathy), were improved by television adaptation. D'Arcy Niland's clichéd celebration of white masculine working-class Australians, *The Shiralee*, has been adapted for both film (1957) and television (1988). Gradually, European migrant experience was being registered, too, with John O'Grady's *They're a Weird Mob* (1957; filmed in 1966); and David Martin's *The Young Wife* (1962), one of the first novels to acknowledge the place of non-English-speaking migrants in the Australian community, became a television series in 1984.

Television and film dramas need strong narratives and stable, even stereotypical, characters. As if turning away from these obvious elements, the literary novel since the 1970s has become progressively more tangential, abstract, obscure, non-linear, poetic and metaphorical than pre-television fictions.

White's influence[4]

The immediate bearers of White's influence were Thomas Keneally and Thea Astley, who openly acknowledged their admiration for his work from the beginning of their careers. Keneally's *Bring Larks and Heroes* (1967) took the history of first settlement as a base to explore the particular crisis of a Catholic marine assigned to the colony at a time when the French Revolution had begun to change attitudes to personal freedom and the state. Keneally was more interested in religious and ideological allegiance than the spiritual, but he, like White, explored the possibilities of a more subjective version of history. Astley, also a Catholic, published her first novel, *Girl with a Monkey*, in 1958, but her choice of a refracted narrative showed signs of the modernist approach White had developed in *The Aunt's Story*. These writers were less cosmopolitan than White – and, at least in the 1960s, maybe more provincial, and certainly imbued with an Irish Catholic experience of Australia, by contrast to White's squattocratic heritage. But

4 The following discussion draws on contributions to vol. 289 of Selina Samuels (ed.), *Dictionary of Literary Biography: Australian Writers, 1950–1975* (Gale, 2004), particularly Elaine Lindsay on 'Barbara Hanrahan', James Packer on 'David Ireland', Delys Bird on 'Elizabeth Jolley', Brigid Rooney on 'David Malouf', Peter Pierce on 'Thomas Keneally', C. A. Cranston on 'C. J. Koch', and Imre Salusinszky on 'Gerald Murnane'.

they could see the possibilities for adapting White's less material interests for their own preoccupations.

Astley enthusiastically read all White's fiction and adopted the structure of *Riders in the Chariot* for *The Slow Natives* (1965); she declared that *The Acolyte* (1972) was her answer to White's portrayal of the 'great artist' in *The Vivisector*. We might now read this as a kind of critique of White, yet Astley's overwhelming and idiosyncratic style in *The Acolyte* suggested that White's intrusion in his novels somehow gave her the freedom to be an intrusive writer, and sometimes more elaborate than the master.

Both Astley and Keneally have been prolific novelists over four decades. Keneally's sense of drama has led him to pursue the complex crises behind Australian, European and American history. His subjects have ranged from the Great War (*Gossip from the Forest*, 1975), Saint Joan of Arc (*Blood Red, Sister Rose*, 1974), the American Civil War (*Confederates*, 1979), to the Holocaust (*Schindler's Ark*, 1982), as well as Australian history (*The Chant of Jimmie Blacksmith*, 1972; *The Playmaker*, 1987) and contemporary life (*A Family Madness*, 1985). He has an instinct for the personal drama behind international crises, particularly war. Peter Pierce notes that *Bring Larks and Heroes* was published between the first two volumes of Manning Clark's *History of Australia*, and that the novelist and historian share a sense of history as a drama, even melodrama, where individuals grapple with their destiny in a context of political and ideological struggle. Pierce also traces a shift from a tragic vision of Australian possibilities to a more optimistic one over Keneally's career, evident in the comparison between the bleak ending of *Bring Larks and Heroes* and the more cheerful prospects of *The Playmaker* written about a similar subject 20 years later.[5] Two of Keneally's novels have been adapted as successful films – *The Chant of Jimmie Blacksmith* (1978) and *Schindler's Ark* (1994) – and his interest in narrative drama provides a firm base for such adaptation. While Keneally seeks the dramatic and crisis-driven narrative, Astley's personality dominates her novels as she demonstrates surprising linguistic skill and wit. *Hunting the Wild Pineapple* (1979), *It's Raining in Mango* (1987) and *Drylands* (1999) satirise the state of contemporary Australia from shifting, but always domestic, perspectives.

In 1961 Vincent Buckley could refer to Randolph Stow and Christopher Koch as writing 'in the shadow' of White. What he meant was that both Stow and Koch, in different ways, had taken up White's lead in pushing fiction to a new dimension – 'the mythopoeic, metaphysical, even religious'.[6] Of course, this could also be interpreted as full of 'darling artifices' and 'pretentious and illiterate verbal sludge' as A. D. Hope put it,[7] or 'Dad and Dave on the psychoanalyst's couch' according to David Martin[8] – both referring to *The Tree of Man*.

5 Peter Pierce, 'Thomas Keneally', *Dictionary of Literary Biography: Australian Writers, 1950–1975,* vol. 289, pp. 183, 188.

6 Vincent Buckley, 'In the Shadow of Patrick White', *Meanjin*, 20.2 (1961), p. 144.

7 A. D. Hope, 'Review of *The Tree of Man*', reprinted in *Native Companions: Essays and Comments on Australian Literature, 1936–1966*, A&R, 1974, pp. 75–9.

8 'The Legend and the Loneliness', *Overland*, 23 (1962), p. 35.

Despite the critics, *Voss* and *The Tree of Man* ensured that the novel would become the art form of choice for literary writers who wanted to explore more than the social, political conditions of life – who wanted to ask big questions about the individual's spiritual state. The novel has remained the prime genre for Australian writers and readers because White not only brought poetic language and psychology (and a degree of pretentiousness) to the novel, he also made it a medium to criticise, satirise, analyse and philosophise about Australian life. White continues to be criticised for his so-called elitism and distance from politics by readers who ignore the oppositional nature of his writing; it consistently opposes the complacencies of modernity, without plumping for an overarching solution. *Riders in the Chariot* went further than White's earlier novels, demanding that ordinary Australians acknowledge the catastrophe in Europe, and their own relationship to it. For all its obvious manipulation and extravagance, the novel gave an insight into the European tragedy of Nazism and linked it to post-war Australian life, with its suburban expansion and European migrants. White's vision of the crucifixion of Himmelfarb on a jacaranda tree may be excessive and even improbable, but the novel's interests are so wide-ranging that they encompass many of the subjects and modes of later novelists.

Astley, Keneally, Stow and Koch, together with Elizabeth Harrower – whose novels share White's despair at the boredom and brutality beneath suburban family life in Australia – all might acknowledge gratefully the influence of White. But only Astley and Keneally maintained continuous writing careers beyond the 1970s. White may have inspired younger writers in one or two novels, but sustaining a career was more difficult.

The 1970s

By the mid-1970s, though, a new generation of writers was evident. In October 1977 *Australian Literary Studies* published a special issue on New Writing in Australia and invited a range of young, mainly men, writers to make statements about their work (novelists included Peter Carey, Frank Moorhouse, David Foster, David Ireland, Peter Mathers, Murray Bail).[9] When asked about the influences on their work, the novelists mentioned Borges, Beckett, Márquez, Barthelme, Boll, Calvino or Coover. Their influences were not British or Australian, but the European, American and South American experimenters. Were they ignorant of the eminence living over in Centennial Park, continuing to write extraordinary novels – *The Eye of the Storm* (1973), *A Fringe of Leaves* (1976) and *The Twyborn Affair* (1979) to come? Only Murray Bail mentioned White: 'Above all this stand the prose works of Patrick White. To my mind he continues to take alarming risks for which we should all be grateful – his emotional, intellectual,

9 *Australian Literary Studies*, 8.2 (1977).

even stylistic risks. Yet I don't suppose he has been invited in this survey.'[10] One might think that White had, as Bail suggested, set the pace for all the experimental activity celebrated in the special issue. Instead an anxiety of influence apparently leads the writers to deny any possibility that an Australian writer could make a difference to them. Surprisingly few Australian writers have made public recognition of White's influence on their work – a book of tributes to White is full of writers sighting him on a bus, or in Centennial Park, or thanking him for personal generosity but studiously avoids any reference to the influential power of his art.[11] (In his memoir *The Land I Came Through*, 2008, his close friend, the poet Robert Gray, admitted that he resisted reading the novels until after White's death.)

On the other hand, the writers had become aware of a more restrained European style of writing, and a European awareness of the failure of systems that had once held out hope for the future. The dominant ideologies of the 20th century had been found wanting, and European writers resisted setting up authoritative narratives of their own – fictional narratives were, after all, just another way of ordering the universe and could not be trusted. Helen Daniel identified eight Australian writers – Mathers, Nicholas Hasluck, Gerald Murnane, Carey, Elizabeth Jolley, Foster, Bail and David Ireland – as particularly responsive to European and South American writers and their 'double' storytelling.[12] Certainly, such influences continue to be apparent in the work of Murnane, Jolley, Bail and Carey, though Foster, Ireland and Mathers appear to have come to similar understandings independently. Foster, for example, found scientific theory disrupted any faith in an orderly universe. Particle physics and the laws of thermodynamics suggested that we relied on paradoxical, random systems to give us a sense of meaning. The novel, by contrast, depended on intuitive understanding: 'Language, I believe, is intransigently non-statistical, cannot easily encode statistical data at all, and retains a tribal memory as a form of communication from a god to an individual.'[13] For Foster, like White, this meant language could be a source of revelation, part of a modernist quest for possibilities, rather than another system for postmodernists to distrust.

Most of these writers belonged to a post-war generation that benefited from the peace and prosperity and the extended educational opportunities after the war. Mathers and Ireland, though, brought some of the autodidactic qualities of those born too early to reap such benefits. Ireland might be seen as his generation's representative of the self-educated, brilliantly eccentric and independent tradition of Australian writers exemplified by Joseph Furphy, and Herbert in previous generations, and maintained by Foster in the next. These writers seem to emerge from the Australian atmosphere, as much a part of the national ethos as any fictional character, yet able to register the

10 Murray Bail, 'Statement', ibid., p. 188.
11 Clayton Joyce, comp., *Patrick White: A Tribute*, A&R and HarperCollins, 1991.
12 Helen Daniel, *Liars: Australian New Novelists*, Penguin, 1988.
13 David Foster, 'On Being Normal', *Studs and Nogs: Essays and Polemics, 1987–98*, Random House, 1999, p. 134.

major intellectual shifts of their times. Mathers' two novels, *Trap* (1966) and *The Wort Papers* (1972), also display these qualities, embedded as they are in Australian attitudes and experience, yet self-consciously satirical and postmodern in tenor. Ireland's novels, especially *The Unknown Industrial Prisoner* (1971), *The Glass Canoe* (1976) and *A Woman of the Future* (1979), appear pieced together from observations and wild imaginings. *The Unknown Industrial Prisoner* leaps away from all the socialist-realist novels about oppression of the worker under capitalism to examine in detail the operations of the workplace (a chemical plant in Kurnell) and the responses of individual workers to it. Ireland's fiction probes the failings of modern urban capitalist Australia from an observational position at its base. But it offers no political solutions, apart from the rebelliousness and resistance that the fiction itself demonstrates. *Bloodfather* (1987), Ireland's account of the emergence of the naturally brilliant creative artist (like himself), emphasises a notion of individualism, curiously close to the 19th-century spirit of individual improvement.

Arguments about Australian distinctiveness in art will always be inconclusive; nevertheless, if there is an identifiably Australian contribution to the international novel, it is this extravagant, energetic, learned but untutored approach to storytelling often marked by an eccentric narrative voice. Usually this voice is unrefined and masculine – though Astley certainly speaks it from time to time. By the 1970s such voices were consciously cultivated by writers, particularly dramatists such as Jack Hibberd whose Monk O'Neill (*A Stretch of the Imagination*, 1972) exemplifies the character. Carey, too, captures some of its spirit in his eccentric, lying narrator of *Illywhacker* (1985). Where the European and British novels of the late 20th century may appear relatively restrained and controlled, these Australian works are digressive and extravagant.

By comparison, American post-war novelists, such as Philip Roth, Don DeLillo, Toni Morrison, Paul Auster and many others, have managed to maintain a commitment to storytelling that is recognisably American through all the shifts and fashions in modernism and postmodernism. Perhaps led by White, recent Australian literary fiction has less concern with narrative, and more interest in the performance of language, often depending for its interest on the establishment of an energetic voice (witness the novels of Astley, Mathers, Ireland, Foster, Carey). The 1980s writing of Moorhouse and Morris Lurie might be seen as keeping to a more American commitment to narrative clarity, and a sophisticated awareness of the changing nature of urban life.

While these writers could be read as experimenters, most were also assertively white Australian men, sensitive to the cultural power of Britain and America. Many of their works explicitly resist British and American influence. Moorhouse's *The Americans Baby* (1972), Foster's *Moonlite* (1981) and Carey's *Bliss* (1981) all tried to come to terms with the insidious dominance of American and British culture within Australia. As a generation, these artists expressed a need to find a national voice – different to the nationalism of an earlier generation, but nationalist nevertheless.

The 1980s

The late 1970s and 80s was an exciting period to be a reader of Australian fiction. By the 1980s the novel had established itself as a major source of intellectual commentary on Australia's changing culture, engaging in the major arguments about feminism, multiculturalism, the white relationship to Aborigines, the meaning of Australia's mixed history and its possible futures. Women writers began to challenge the pre-eminence of men. Helen Garner's *Monkey Grip* (1977) is generally regarded as marking the emergence of a feminist perspective, though Kerryn Higgs' *All That False Instruction* (published in 1975 by Angus & Robertson as a prize based on the manuscript of its first chapter) sometimes is given credit, and Harrower's novels certainly examined the suburban imprisonment of women in an earlier generation. While women writers have been prominent in Australian fiction throughout the 20th century, the 1970s resurgence of an international feminist movement that saw women's fiction as a testament of women's experiences and a resource for ideas gave novel-writing a new political place. Garner's novel examined the difficulties of women's commitment to traditional ideals of romance and domesticity with the new opportunities for equality and freedom. By the 1980s several older women writers – Jessica Anderson, Olga Masters and Elizabeth Jolley – had joined Astley in offering a women's perspective on Australian social life. Many women writers such as Kate Grenville, Beverley Farmer, Amanda Lohrey, Joan London, Drusilla Modjeska, Janine Burke, Sue Woolfe and Marion Campbell also emerged as literary novelists informed by theoretical understanding of current feminism. Still other women turned to popular genres such as crime fiction, overturning prevailing stereotypes and formulas.

In women's fiction, the ambivalent heritage of the Enlightenment was evident. Modernity (not only liberal democracy, including the final recognition of equal pay for equal work, but also the contraceptive pill, and various domestic technologies) had provided women with greater opportunities to participate in society, but it also insisted on a uniform notion of the individual, suppressing difference and denying the irrational (claimed as the feminine) elements of human understanding. Astley's 1960s fictions now appeared to be the work of a woman writing like a man to please a male-dominated literary world, and some critical rescue needed to take place. Astley, like Anderson and Masters, might be read as documenting the inequalities of the past; their work could be incorporated into the feminist testament of struggle. It was less amenable, however, to the post-structuralist feminist awareness of language structures as a form of oppression. This demanded a more modernist and experimental approach to fiction that can be seen in the writing of Campbell, Finola Moorhead, Mary Fallon and others. Garner's career is particularly interesting in this light, as she continues to question the theoretical assumptions and moral relativism of contemporary intellectual culture, moving from fiction to overtly subjective non-fiction writing. Modjeska's work often shifts between fiction and more scholarly informative writing – one of the many challenges

to strict genre boundaries in recent writing. Yet to group these writers together denies their individual and distinct voices; Barbara Hanrahan and Carmel Bird, for example, are but two writers who observe Australian life from ironic perspectives. Hanrahan's idiosyncratic fiction examines ordinary lives in sometimes gothic perspectives. Bird's *The Bluebird Café* (1990) exemplifies the way women's writing can employ postmodernist tactics to expose women's experience. Joan London's *Gilgamesh* (2001) recalls White's earlier novels as it delicately builds a narrative of Australian poverty and desire for knowledge of a wider world.

Jolley, who began publishing in the 1980s after waiting years for a sympathetic literary environment, managed a mix of realism and postmodern invention so that formal experiment sat within clearly traditional allegiances. White's continued experiments were undoubtedly important to Jolley's writing and to her publishers' willingness to accept her work. His *The Twyborn Affair* explores the gendering of characters as a fictional activity but never abandons a historical reference as his central character moves from Europe to Australia and back. A postmodern awareness of the novelist's participation in the fiction-making, and an ironic appreciation of the comedy of false identity, do not diminish the sense of a difficult experience of an actual world in White's novel. Jolley, too, creates sexually ambivalent characters and conveys a European sense of difficult heritage and wayward sensibility in her fictions of outcast men and women. Her novels of the late 1980s and 90s, in particular, have a fine sense of the absurd though they always face serious questions about responsibility and morality. Several (*Miss Peabody's Inheritance*, 1983; *Foxybaby*, 1985; *The Well*, 1986) have narratives that shift from one level of invention (or proposed reality) to another. Her trilogy *My Father's Moon* (1989–93) turns Jolley's own life experiences into a contemplation of the possibilities of love and the treachery in an ordinary life. It is an exercise in the way the imagination can encompass and embroider actual life experiences.

David Malouf, too, has acknowledged the influence of White on his work, though his writing develops White's interest in the poetic and lyrical possibilities of prose. After writing a first novel (*Johnno*, 1975) firmly based in the realist traditions apparent in Johnston's *My Brother Jack*, Malouf began to try a wide range of subjects and styles – Ovid in exile (*An Imaginary Life*, 1978), Australians at war (*Fly Away Peter*, 1982; *The Great World*, 1990), and the life of a wayward Australian painter (*Harland's Half Acre*, 1984), reminiscent of White's *The Vivisector*. Malouf began his career as a poet and his writing develops a series of metaphorical tableaus rather than dramatic narratives. But the possibilities of the subjective historical novel, evident in *Voss* and *A Fringe of Leaves* (1976), have attracted Malouf and others of his generation. Just as White revised the myths of the explorer and settler, Malouf has re-examined several legendary moments in Australian history – beginning with Australian experience in the two world wars, and probing backwards to frontier encounters with Aborigines and the moral crises surrounding settlement.

Many other established poets have turned their hands to verse novels, perhaps attracted by the possibilities of longer narrative forms. Verse forms, of course, challenge definitions of the novel, which is traditionally written in prose. Poets as diverse as Les Murray, Dorothy Porter, Alan Wearne, Geoff Page, Philip Hodgins and John Tranter have called their long narrative poems 'novels', perhaps to signal their concern with contemporary characters and activities rather than the heroic figures associated with the verse epic. Influenced by Vikram Seth's *The Golden Gate* (1986), Matthew Rubinstein's first novel *Solstice* (1994) was a sonnet sequence, following a day in the lives of contemporary characters in Adelaide. Porter's *The Monkey's Mask* (1994) even became the basis for a film – a surprising fate for a verse novel. Murray's *Fredy Neptune* (1998) is as eccentric and digressive as any novel by Ireland; perhaps it is only over the length of a novel that the distinctive Australian voice can be heard.

This interest in the verse novel may indicate the powerful attraction of the novel's diverse possibilities at a time of literary experiment. But there were other possibilities, too. Whether intentionally or not, Foster wrote *The Glade Within the Grove* (1996) and its accompanying poem, *The Ballad of Erinungarah* (1997), in a mixed form associated with the pre-modern period – the anatomy. Northrop Frye argues that the anatomy is the long form of the Menippean satire, a mainly prose form that does not concern itself with character and linear narrative. Of course, such a mix of poem and commentary also recalls Vladimir Nabokov's *Pale Fire* (1962), now more readily associated with the shift to postmodernist self-consciousness in the novel.

Several Australian novelists embraced this shift enthusiastically with deceptions that dazzled readers. In 1988 Mark Henshaw's *Out of the Line of Fire* produced a virtuoso postmodernist performance, setting several fictions in play at once; Brian Castro's *Double Wolf* (1991) imitated Freud's case studies to suggest an Australian connection with his Viennese central character. Both later confessed that they had not even visited the European cities that they conjured up so convincingly. The call of Europe has continued to be strong, with many Australian writers mimicking the abstract, formally restrained and quietly satirical writing of late-century Europe. Even Moorhouse, shifting from his 'discontinuous narrative' stories (see Chapter 19) to full-length novels, chose Europe as a setting and a European style for his examination of the mid-century crisis in *Grand Days* (1993) and *Dark Palace* (2000). Murnane, after his more conventional first novels, has continued to write in a minimalist version of this style, in novels that test the power of language to create alternate worlds. Bail's *Eucalyptus* (1998), though ostensibly about Australians' understanding of native trees, adopts a European fabulist style.

Castro is most often claimed as an Australian-Asian writer, despite the obvious European influences on his work. His *Birds of Passage* (1983) counterpointed the narrative of a Chinese migrating to the Australian goldfields of the 19th century against that of a modern Australian Chinese man. Though several of his novels have Chinese settings or references, he is immersed in European philosophical traditions and enjoys playing these

off against his experiences of China and Australia. Like Kazuo Ishiguro, he appears able to perform in a range of literary styles, informed by a sense of irony at the disjunctive cultures of Asia, Australia and Europe. *Shanghai Dancing* (2003) scrambles aspects of Castro's own family heritage and early life in China, deliberately undermining the reader's confidence in the autobiographical or fictional status of the novel.

The increased immigration to Australia from various Asian cultures has led to the seeking out and promotion of Asian subjects for the novel, at times almost as government policy (through various residencies and grants). While Blanche D'Alpuget, Nick Jose, Alex Miller, Christopher Koch and Robert Drewe have all written novels about China and South-East Asia, they necessarily confront the limited white experience of Asia, as journalists, tourists, diplomats or visiting scholars. The work of Asian immigrants is more obvious in Australian film than in the novel (as it is in the visual arts), though there are signs (Alice Pung's *Unpolished Gem* 2006, for example) that this may change in the future.

One of the features of the oppositional writing of the late 20th century is a mix of conventional storytelling and elaborate explorations of impossibilities, of realism and fantasy, of a modern sense of time and a pre-modern timelessness often labelled 'magic realism' – an accepted part of the repertoire of postmodernism. This term may be applied widely, and disguises the differences between novels that attempt to undermine the assumptions of modernity. Novels as various as Rodney Hall's *Just Relations* (1982), Foster's *Moonlite*, Sam Watson's *The Kadaitcha Sung* (1990), Beth Yahp's *Crocodile Fury* (1992) or Fotini Epanomitis' *The Mule's Foal* (1993) offer versions of such a mix, as if all pre-modern cultures shared a common, more primitive relationship with nature. Yet these formal strategies have an ideological implication: they criticise the modern world by comparison with an apparently more spiritual pre-modern culture, imagined in fiction. In almost every case, though, the writing invokes a pre-modern society that has an element of violence and brutality. The modern society of urban Australia restrains and disapproves such violence, but it has lost, the novels suggest, any contact with authentic emotion and spiritual understanding.

Of recent novels, Christos Tsiolkas' *Dead Europe* (2005) offers a *tour de force* in this mode, ripping apart a complacent modern urban Australia with stories, some fantastic, some plausible, about European peasant culture during the mid-century crisis. Tsiolkas' narrator immerses himself in the degradation of a Europe that created and has never recovered from the horrors of Nazism and totalitarianism. The novel asks uncomfortable questions about Australia's relationship to that moral decline. It may be read as carrying on White's angry and satirical attack on Australian complacency, though we should note that White never moved into the world of fantasy. *The Twyborn Affair* may have proposed that the body, with all its lusts and vices, is the only source of any spiritual understanding, but its London brothel appears refined beside the Prague sex club of *Dead Europe*. In Tsiolkas' novel, a consoling or uplifting spirituality is not even a faint hope.

Australia and post-colonial power

The contrast between the world before the Enlightenment and the modern urban society that followed it may be played out in negotiations between Australia and Europe, or, less often, between Australia and Asia. Nevertheless, awareness has grown that this conflict could be found within the nation, in the history of white settlement and displacement of the Indigenous peoples of the continent. By the time of the Bicentenary of white settlement, a revisionist movement was exposing the stories of massacre and mistreatment of Indigenous people hidden in the official account of Australia as a successful settler democracy. Henry Reynolds' histories of frontier violence stimulated novelists' concerns about the portrayal of history. Of course, novelists already had offered challenges to the benign accounts of white Australia – Prichard's *Coonardoo* (1929), Herbert's *Capricornia* (1938) and Eleanor Dark's *The Timeless Land* had insisted on the damage that the colonisers inflicted on the native people. Yet the end of the 1980s saw a widespread awareness that public history had denied important truths about the ruthless nature of white settlement, and many novelists took on the task of confronting darker probabilities.

This shift in understanding undermined artists' belief in the importance of rebellion against British and American culture. In the light of post-colonialism – particularly the new fiction coming from the former British colonies in Africa, the West Indies and the Indian subcontinent – Australian settlers could now be seen as part of the colonising force, the frontier workers of the British Empire. Australians were not only the progressive bearers of civilised democracy and rebels against imperial culture, but also the displacers and destroyers of another colonised society – the Indigenous people. Australia's much-vaunted egalitarianism and freedom from oppression depended on a conquest. Novelists are still coming to terms with this changed perspective. On the one hand, white Australian writers feel the need to understand their own heritage, mixed though it may be, and invest some dignity in their own right to speak. On the other, they must be aware of the implications of white success not only for people but for the land itself.

Robert Drewe's *The Savage Crows* (1976) was one of the first novels to recognise this mixed heritage; it contrasts the experiences of modern urban Australians with those of George Augustus Robinson, recorded in his diary as he rounded up the remaining Tasmanian Aborigines in the 1830s. Mudrooroo (Colin Johnson until the late 1980s) wrote two of the first novels to give an Aboriginal perspective on contact history – *Long Live Sandawara* (1979) and *Dr Wooreddy's Prescription for Enduring the Ending of the World* (1983), which also followed the expeditions of Robinson, and reminded white readers of their own racial position.

In retrospect, the revision of history through the subjective historical novel looks like a communal project of the 1980s and 90s, with Carey's *Oscar and Lucinda* (1988) and *True History of the Kelly Gang* (2000), Drewe's *Our Sunshine* (1991) and *The Drowner* (1996),

Malouf's *Remembering Babylon* (1993) and *The Conversations at Curlow Creek* (1997), Hall's *Yandilli* trilogy (1988–93), Roger McDonald's *Mr Darwin's Shooter* (1998), Liam Davison's *The White Woman* (1994), Kate Grenville's *Joan Makes History* (1988), Victor Kelleher's *Wintering* (1990), and many others. Though they deplore white brutality, not all of these novels denounce white achievements. *Oscar and Lucinda* retains a sense that the British were responsible for the damage; McDonald can still write optimistically about the ironies behind Australian commercial history in novels such as *The Ballad of Desmond Kale* (2006). Kate Grenville's *The Secret River* (2005) confronts the implication of white settlers in the destruction of Aborigines but cannot avoid admiration of those settlers. Andrew McGahan adopts a more traditional approach in his novel of settler culpability, *The White Earth* (2004).

In the 21st century readers are likely to note a neglect of Aboriginal presence in any novel addressing Australian history; witness the responses to Tim Winton's *Cloudstreet* (1991), or Bail's *Eucalyptus*. And some writers try to reach beyond contact history to seek a pseudo-Indigenous relationship with the land itself. Winton's *Dirt Music* (2001) sends its central characters on an epic journey to northern Western Australia to find spiritual consolation in its isolation among pristine nature. But the novel itself notes that this is a particularly European quest for harmony with nature: the guide says '[Blackfellas] don't have a passion for getting away from other people and *communing* with nature.'[14] Foster's *The Glade within the Grove* depicts Australians as unthinking destroyers of the trees that are the source of spiritual understanding; but civilisation itself is the enemy of the forest (or, as the novel also insists, the eucalypt tree is the enemy of civilisation). All Foster's novels recognise the destructive nature of the human presence on earth; technological progress has accelerated the destruction.

Among the writers concerned about the continuing failure in relations between the white and black communities in Australia, Kim Scott and Alexis Wright have emerged as particularly sensitive to the literary evidence of the past, and the inadequacy of conventional storytelling. Scott's first novel *True Country* (1993) recorded the perspectives of both the city-educated teacher and of the Aboriginal people he lived among in the far north-west of Western Australia. It registered both the exasperation of the city people who came to help, and the dogged independence and confusion of the Aboriginals. Wright's *Plains of Promise* (2000) examines the effects of removing children from their struggling Aboriginal parents. Both writers declare their sense of responsibility to the people whose racial heritage they share. Both, too, have written monumental works influenced by a postmodernist awareness of the partial nature of narrative and by the post-colonial extravagances of satirists such as Salman Rushdie. Scott's *Benang* (1999) bristles with ironic humour, shifting between past and present as it explores the effects of the eugenic racial theories of A. O. Neville on particular families in the south of Western Australia. Wright's *Carpentaria* (2006) parodies the big outback novels of

14 Tim Winton, *Dirt Music,* Pan Macmillan, 2001, p. 411.

Australia, most obviously Herbert's *Capricornia* (but the Phantom family may be a parody of Winton's Fish and Lamb families of *Cloudstreet*), as its characters live out their own narratives with disregard of the powerful white community living alongside. In this novel, the land, rich with minerals, and the sea, turbulent with storms, are more powerful and long-lasting than any human settlement, white or black. Scott's and Wright's novels call on an existing Australian tradition of eccentric, monumental novels imbued with a satiric spirit. While they appear to embrace some of the techniques and fashions of international post-colonial writing, they recall (sometimes consciously) the expansive novels of Herbert, White, Ireland, Winton, Prichard and others.

Just as post-colonial sensitivities have turned Australian writers to self-examination, a powerful global culture now dominates the publishing and reading of novels. This, too, is part of the progress of international capitalism, and it demands that writers address an international audience rather than a merely local one. This may appear to be colonialism in a new form, though it overrides all national cultures and embraces every nation that participates in global trade. Sometimes it appears that international success for Australian writers comes at the price of subduing idiosyncrasy in order to abide by global conventions, so that Australia and its history provide a quota of exotic material for international readers.

The novel may be a democratic form in its accessibility, and even in its popularity in democratic societies. But it is not proportionally representative, in that its writers and readers do not speak for every interest group (by age, sex, class, sexuality, ethnic background and so on) that makes up Australia. Writers born before 1960 still dominate literary discussions, such as this one, and even relatively new writers – Gail Jones, Scott, Wright – are also of the pre-1960 generation. There are encouragements to younger writers in Australia, not least the Vogel Award for a novel by a writer under 35. A number of writers now in their 30s and 40s (Venero Armanno, James Bradley, Delia Falconer, McGahan, Tsiolkas) look set for interesting careers, though others have stopped publishing after a few promising novels (Fiona McGregor).

Only a few Australian novelists have managed to sustain financially viable careers over 30 years or more; usually this represents international success as a result of a major prize, such as the Man–Booker prize (Keneally, Carey), or prolific success in popular genres (Morris West, Bryce Courtenay). Some others publish fitfully or live close to subsistence, and there is a frequent pattern of shifting from the novel to more commercial genres (such as the crime novel or journalism) in order to seek a market – though Louis Nowra has moved from stage drama and film to the novel when frustrated by film and theatre politics. Many more writers make their living from other careers, publishing novels when they can. Henshaw, for example, after publishing an acclaimed first novel, has maintained a career as an art curator, writing two crime novels with John Clanchy under the name J. M. Calder.

The literary novel in contemporary Australia depends on a range of literary prizes at one level, and the growth of creative writing courses in the universities at another. The

critical support for good writing – once evident in newspaper and journal reviewing and in university teaching – has dwindled over the past 50 years, sometimes as a result of a loss of critical confidence in 'evaluation'. The profit-making priorities of newspapers and the changing emphases of academic literary study mean that arguments about the value of contemporary literary fiction are likely to occur in private, rather than in the public domain – except when some scandal such as Helen Darville's presentation of herself as Helen Demidenko, the author of *The Hand That Signed the Paper* (1995) erupts. In the place of critical support, a small group of academics, librarians, reviewers and book trade people meet to decide annual award winners, thus guaranteeing that as many as three or four novels (of the hundreds published) will be read each year by informed readers. Meanwhile, universities increase the number of creative writing courses in order to attract students to diminishing English departments; and some novels are the product of postgraduate programs. The desire to write novels continues among those who want to participate in intellectual and artistic debate.

An overview of this kind necessarily seeks connections between disparate works of art, and can note only general shifts in emphasis and understanding. Important novelists have slipped out of my net, such as Lily Brett and Peter Goldsworthy. The continuing use of the novel as an avenue of opposition, critique, and dissent is only one way to approach this material, but it encompasses many changes in the novel form, and in the interpretation of Australian life. Despite all the difficulties of the marketplace and all the arguments about nationalism, writers and readers turn to the novel as a way to understand Australia. The novel's eclecticism and its flexibility in form and subject matter ensure that it is the genre most likely to say something that Australians need to hear about their society.

23

The novel, the implicated reader and Australian literary cultures, 1950–2008

RICHARD NILE AND JASON ENSOR

Foundations and genre

The origins of the novel and the settlement of Australia may both be located within the historical convergence of European industrialisation, colonisation and the Enlightenment in the 18th and early 19th centuries. It is uncertain what novels might first have been carried on board the tall ships with their human cargoes of convict workers and gaolers or how these were read within an Australian context, but it is clear that the exiles possessed higher average levels of literacy than the general population of Britain at this time.[1] 'And what books do you read?', Freer demands of the 12-year-old Sylvia in Marcus Clarke's convict narrative *His Natural Life*; the young girl responds: 'Oh lots!' including 'Shakespeare's Plays', Milton, and the novels of Daniel Defoe, Henry Fielding and Jacques-Henri Bernardin de Saint-Pierre.[2] Succeeding waves of enforced migrants and free settlers maintained the reading standard, while Education Acts from 1848 onward delivered almost universal literacy to the displaced and their locally born offspring, who went by the peculiar name of currency lads and lasses. An Australian reading public was thereby established early, as the imaginative interaction between texts and contexts made its first tentative gestures towards creative writing and ultimately literature. Literary critic Elizabeth Webby observed that printing presses arrived with the First Fleet but that it was several years before the expertise to run them could be assembled in Australia.[3]

The first 'Australian novel' was published anonymously in 1831, when the transported forger Henry Savery wrote *Quintus Servinton: A Tale Founded upon Incidents of Real Occurrence*. From such modest beginnings, the novel as genre went on to become a powerful literary presence of the contemporary post-industrial moment. The novel might be reasonably seen therefore as an integral component of Australia's European settler histories and cultural experience, and since the 1960s at least, an increasing number of novels by Indigenous Australians have been published. Kim Scott's *Benang:*

1 Stephen Nicholas (ed.), *Convict Workers: Reinterpreting Australia's Past*, CUP, 1988.

2 Cited in Ken Stewart, 'Sylvia's Books: Literature, Civilisation and *His Natural Life*', in Irmtraud Petersson and Martin Duwell (eds), *'And What Books Do You Read?': New Studies in Australian Literature*, UQP, 1996, p. 1.

3 Elizabeth Webby, 'Writers, Printers, Readers: the Production of Australian Literature before 1855', in Laurie Hergenhan (ed.), *Penguin New Literary History of Australia,* Penguin, 1988, pp 113–25.

From the Heart (1999), for instance, was joint winner of the 2000 Miles Franklin Award.

Even before the spread of colonialism into the Indian and Pacific Oceans, literary and artistic conceits actively imagined a Great South Land within the general vicinity of the unexplored island-continent. With the use of modern mapping techniques, for example, it is possible to accurately plot the coordinates of Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* into Australia, while Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* owes a small literary debt to the journals of the buccaneer William Dampier who visited the north-west coast on two voyages in the late 17th century. Australia persisted strongly into the novels of the Victorians through Dickens, Trollope, Kingsley and others, while the colonies produced their own Victorians such as Catherine Helen Spence, Rosa Praed and Jessie Couvreur. Clarke's novel of incarceration and exile, *His Natural Life*, was arguably the most read of Australian colonial fictions. It was subsequently reproduced in many forms and with different endings, from serial publications, and stage, film and television adaptations. *His Natural Life* would almost certainly lend itself to popular opera along the lines of Andrew Lloyd-Webber's adaptation of Victor Hugo's *Les Misérables*.

With the spread of empires came the spread of European languages, but none was as influential or widespread as English, the language of the most extensive empire in history. By the mid-20th century, English had become the world's first truly global language[4] as Australian cultural elites contemplated its presence in and impact on Australian literature. In 1950, for example, A. A. Phillips produced his classic essay 'The Cultural Cringe', which critiqued an Australian reading disposition shaped by the cultural achievements of English literature and which held Australian literature to be inferior. Phillips argued that Australian writers had to constantly negotiate a cringing sensibility within Australian readers. The influence and global reach of the English language continue strongly into the present time and elements of the cringe also survive. It is impossible to appreciate or understand the fuller history of Australia or Australian literature without recourse to the ongoing importance of the English language, its variant form known as Australian English, and its most important literary production, the novel.

The novel took the standard three-volume form in the 19th century. As the history of Clarke's *His Natural Life* reveals, it was also closely associated with serial publications that appeared in the broadsheets of the time. The triple-decker novel was replaced by the single-volume novel in the 1890s. Until this time, single-volume fiction had been associated with cheap literature such as the penny-dreadful in Britain and the dime novel in the United States. In 1946, Miles Franklin published *My Career Goes Bung* partially as a corrective to certain misreadings of her 1901 novel, *My Brilliant Career*. Franklin's preface intimates the grip of popular literatures on precocious imagination:

4 Robert McCrum, William Cran and Robert MacNeil, *The Story of English*, rev. edn, Faber, 1992.

> Precocious effort in art is naturally imitative, but in localities remote from literary activity there is no one for the embryo writer to copy. . . . I must have been nearly 13 when the idea of writing novels flowered into romances which adhered to the design of the trashy novelettes reprinted in the *Supplement to the Goulburn Evening Post*. These stories, secretly devoured, presented a world enchanting to budding adolescence. They were prinked with castles with ivied towers and hooting owls, which were inhabited by the unaccommodating guardians, thrilling seducers and more thrilling rescuers of titled maidens, pure as angels. I used to read my versions to two or three girls, who still gaily recall the entertainment we thus manufactured for ourselves.[5]

In a shift of paradigm onto a new reading matter, just 12 months earlier, in 1945, Franklin entreated a new generation to more actively engage the Australian novel. The occasion was the publication of Colin Roderick's *The Australian Novel*, which presented 19 literary excerpts as part of a planned four-volume anthology, from Henry Kingsley's *Geoffry Hamlyn* (1859) to Eve Langley's *The Pea Pickers* (1942):

> People settling in new lands need novels . . . Poems, ballads and prose extracts from the literature of the British Isles and other parts of Europe, included in the class of readers of my mother's and grandmother's times, were a treasure trove to me before I was twelve. A little later came the discovery of Australian writers like Marcus Clarke, Rolf Boldrewood . . . Many youths and children in the 'nineties learned most of Gordon and Kendall by heart. Fuller enchantment came with Lawson, Paterson and others not so prominent . . . gifted writers have followed . . . The circulation of their books, however, is not adequate to meet the needs of the reading public . . . Mr Roderick has set himself to improve the situation by a series of anthologies . . . Among the nineteen writers, samples of whose prose he is presenting in this volume, are our best known and most satisfying novelists – several of them so far the giants of our literary scene.[6]

Franklin's enthusiasm for Australian literature was widely known and respected in literary circles, and she and others had seen positive signs following the publication with government support of Australian novels produced in print runs of 25 000 copies during the war. In 1945 J. K. Ewers published his critical survey and appraisal *Creative Writing in Australia*, which was distributed widely to libraries and schools as a touchstone for the nation's literature. Both Franklin and Ewers noted the centrality of the novel in the 20th century.

Across the English-language world, the single-volume novel became standard around the beginning of the 20th century. Despite differences in binding, the basic format of the literary novel changed remarkably little into the present digital age of greater design flexibility, leading to the elimination of traditional typesetting requirements and the necessity of designated print runs. Improvements in printing technologies, including

5 Miles Franklin, *My Career Goes Bung,* A&R, 1946; reprinted 1980, p. 5.
6 Miles Franklin, 'Foreword', in Colin Roderick (ed.), *The Australian Novel: a Historical Anthology*, William Brooks, 1945.

print-on-demand, and distribution techniques, including digital download, along with consistently high literacy standards, help explain the circumstances that continued the development of the novel into the contemporary moment, as do patterns of work and recreation, but not necessarily the preferences demonstrated by writers and their readers, over a very long time, for this particular form of literature.

The century belongs to the novelist

Across countless acts of sustained creativity that can, and often do, take years to perform, and via reading habits, patterns of library usage and book-buying, Australians have established an intimate relationship with the novel that has not been reproduced on the same scale or in similar manner by other literary forms. Mapping the relationship between the various elements of any literary culture is complex and often difficult, but patterns of production and consumption have been remarkably consistent since the early 20th century. There seems to be little to dispute the assertion that, despite the often challenging conditions of writing and publication, the novel became Australia's essential literary form from this time. Its centrality to Australian literary culture has persisted through many changes in tastes, technologies and markets into the 21st century.

Between 1900 and 1969 more than 5000 Australian novels were published for the first time in print runs ranging from the hundreds through to the tens and sometimes hundreds of thousands. A few titles sold in the millions. The mid-20th century was notable for the phenomenal sales success of pulp fiction, such as the works of A. G. Yates who wrote as Carter Brown. In a different category of popular, Jon Cleary's *The Sundowners* (1952) sold more than three million copies and, like Nevil Shute's *On the Beach* (1957) and D'Arcy Niland's *The Shiralee* (1955), adapted well to film; Catherine Gaskin's historical romance *Sara Dane* (1957) also sold in large numbers and was later serialised for television; while Dorothy Sanders, writing as Lucy Walker, was accorded the title Queen of the Romance and Jennifer Greig-Smith who published 'almost 200 novels under the pseudonyms Jennifer Ames, Ann Barclay, Maysie Greig, Mary Douglas Warre and Mary Douglas'[7] achieved vast Australian and international readerships for their romance fiction.

There were other successful sub-genres, as Martyn Lyons wryly observed in his introduction to *A History of the Book in Australia* (2001):

> One afternoon in 1951, Clive Bleeck, then in his forties, left his office as usual at the Eveleigh Railway Works in Sydney and went home to his wife and two children in the eastern suburbs. After dinner he made his way to the back room, limping as a result of a childhood injury, put paper and carbon into his typewriter and started work on his latest literary creation, entitled *Invasion of the Insectoids*. This was just one of the

7 Juliet Flesch, 'Under the Coolabah: Australian Romance Publishing Since 1990', in David Carter and Anne Galligan (eds), *Making Books: Contemporary Australian Publishing*, UQP, 2007, p. 281.

> 250 recorded novels and novelettes completed by Bleeck in his lifetime. One hundred and fifty-one of them were westerns which Bleeck produced every month for nine continuous years. Some were crime thrillers, others were romances, and dozens more, like *Invasion of the Insectoids*, were what he called 'space operas'. Most were produced by Calvert or Cleveland Publications, under one of 13 pseudonyms used by Bleeck's publishers . . . *Invasion of the Insectoids* does not appear in the canon of great Australian literature, and it is safe to assume that it never will.[8]

To a considerable extent, mid-century literary cultures were uninterested in the likes of Bleeck, Grieg-Smith, Sanders and Yates – or, for that matter, Gaskin, Niland, Shute or Cleary. They were preoccupied by a concern to establish a canon of Australian writing, though that phrase was not used at the time. To the exclusion of virtually all else, their discussions centred on the foundations of a national literature. This almost invariably involved the search for the elusive Great Australian Novel.

The would-be great novel existed imaginatively within the mind of the literary arbiters[9] alone; it took the shape of radical nationalism in that it was democratically Australian, which meant that it was liberal humanist and left-leaning, socially conscious and in the style of realism. Such a conceit was savaged by Arthur Upfield in his crime mystery novel *An Author Bites the Dust* (1948), which was loosely based on the literary opinions of 'the Palmer acquaintance', of Vance and Nettie Palmer. 'Our sole interest at the moment is Australian literature, and the influence we may exert on it', says Upfield's pompous literary author Mervyn Blake. 'We are interested . . . in literature with a capital L, not commercial fiction that receives the approval of the common herd.'[10] The idea of specifically Australian literary fiction (again a term that was not used until later) became complicated when Patrick White won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1973. White's novels did not readily fit within the nation-building rhetoric of the time, and he infuriated local literary elites with his acrid criticisms of nationalism and realism.

From the 1970s and 80s Australian-produced pulp fiction titles declined markedly because of changed trading arrangements with the United States. Bryce Courtenay, Thomas Keneally and Colleen McCullough, among others, extended the popularity of historical fiction, often followed by film and television adaptations. Romance continued virtually unabated, led by Emma Darcy (a literary collaboration), a favourite at Mills and Boon, with estimated international sales in the region of 60 million copies into the early 21st century.[11] Peter Corris wrote crime fiction for a new generation, and the new category of young adult fiction proliferated. Around the same time the term literary fiction entered the lexicon and commonly appeared in the material form

8 Martyn Lyons, 'Introduction', in Lyons and John Arnold (eds), *A History of the Book in Australia, 1891–1945: A National Culture in a Colonised Market,* UQP, 2001, p. xi.

9 The term 'literary arbiter' was used by Drusilla Modjeska in *Exiles at Home: Australian Women Writers,1925–1945*, A&R, 1981, to describe Nettie Palmer but may be applied more generally to those of the Palmer acquaintance.

10 See Richard Nile, *The Making of the Australian Literary Imagination,* UQP, 2002, pp. 147–56.

11 Flesch, 'Under the Coolabah', p. 283.

of 'quality paperbacks'.[12] The term gradually replaced older usages such as 'serious fiction' or novels with a 'social conscience'.[13] Into the literary category, Gelder and Salzman (1988) noted a 'new diversity' of styles and subjects, often associated with identity groups, including women's writing, gay and lesbian writing, migrant writing, Indigenous writing, and so on.[14] These and other categories – including the emergence of regional writing supported by regional presses, and the decline of censorship – complicated earlier aspirations for a single national literature. Tim Winton identified strongly as a regional writer from Western Australia, while achieving national and international prominence. He was also one of a select few literary novelists to reach a larger 'non-literary' readership.[15] Winton sometimes used the term middlebrow to describe his work.

With the possible exception of work by poets Les Murray, Peter Porter and Judith Wright, and playwrights Alan Seymour, Ray Lawler, David Williamson and Joanna Murray-Smith, other literary forms did not achieve anywhere near the success of the novel, either in terms of published titles, sales or implied readerships. Recognised as one of the finest poets of his generation, David Malouf genre-hopped to become acknowledged as one of Australia's most distinguished literary novelists of the late 20th century. Malouf continued to write fine poetry, which was published in far more modest print runs. Literary critic Patrick Buckridge, writing in 2006, noted that 'contemporary fiction, especially Australian fiction, has made a strong showing in the last two decades, while poetry sunk almost beneath the horizon'.[16] Yet short fiction may have been a greater literary casualty, despite Frank Moorhouse's overly optimistic suggestion that the shorter prose form particularly suited Australian reading habits.[17] Magazine sketches remained reasonably popular for a time, and more recently flash and other forms of short prose writing adapted well to the new media of the 21st century. Although collected volumes and anthologies of short fiction were hard to find, more than 15 000 new novel titles were published during the 20th century and a further 5000 titles appeared by 2008.

In other important respects the novel was undoubtedly Australia's pre-eminent literary form. It continues to be the focus of the overwhelming majority of critical reviews in literary pages and specialist journals, and within discussion and reading groups. It is the subject of the greatest amount of textual and author-based research appearing in peer-assessed academic publications, from articles to monographs, and biographical

12 Hilary McPhee, *Other People's Words,* Pan Macmillan, 2001.

13 For example, the term writing with 'social conscience' is used throughout Craig Munro, *Inky Stephensen: Wild Man of Letters,* UQP, 1984.

14 Ken Gelder and Paul Salzman, *The New Diversity*, McPhee Gribble, 1988.

15 Mark Davis, 'The Decline in the Literary Paradigm in Australian Publishing', in Carter and Galligan (eds), *Making Books*, pp. 116–31.

16 Patrick Buckridge 'Readers and Reading', in Craig Munro and Robyn Sheahan-Bright (eds), *Paper Empires: A History of the Book in Australia, 1946–2005*, UQP, 2006, p. 346.

17 Frank Moorhouse, *The State of the Art: the Mood of Contemporary Australia in Short Stories*, Penguin, 1983, and (ed.), *Fictions 88,* ABC, 1988.

studies. The novel is more visible within public culture than other literary forms and well represented at all levels of Australian education. It is the subject of the most prestigious literary awards nationally and internationally. Despite a paucity of reprints, the novel has established a more enduring presence within wider creative cultures. Screen adaptations have included films based on novels by Cleary, Keneally, Malouf, Elizabeth Jolley, Peter Carey, Tim Winton, Archie Weller, Christos Tsiolkas among others, while small-screen adaptations for television include the work of Shute, Gaskin, McCullough, Courtenay, Alan Marshall, Frank Hardy and Ruth Park. To be fair, the film adaptation of Banjo Paterson's poem 'The Man from Snowy River' and its sequel were among the highest-grossing films in Australian cinema history, with solid video and CD sales and a follow-up television series; however, the closer relation has been with the novel.[18]

It is also possible to extrapolate that the Australian novel has been more durable over a longer period of time and influential culturally than film, music and the visual arts. It has been the flagship of Australia's oldest cultural industry, with novels accounting for around 30 per cent of all published books and 60 per cent of library borrowings in Australia. David Carter observed:

> The book publishing industry has an economic and cultural significance that bears comparison with other cultural, entertainment and leisure industries in Australia. The *Year Book Australia 2007*, from the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), shows that book publishers in Australia produce more income than music and theatre production and performing arts festivals combined, only slightly less than film and video production, but, as might be expected a good deal less than radio and television broadcasting. Book publishers and book retailers together earn significantly more income than all but the last of these cultural sectors; and, taken together again, book publishers and book retailers also employ more Australians than other sectors, with the exception of film and video production. Book publishers and retailers are also involved in significant import and export arrangements. In short, the local book industry is a major sector within Australia's cultural infrastructure.[19]

The implicated reader and the literary nation

Embedded within the concept of Australian literature is a deeply held assumption that the Australian novel is closely associated with the experience of being Australian. Readers have been actively encouraged to accept this; in the process, they willingly suspend disbelief that Australia rendered imaginatively is also Australia rendered authentically. By this process, the making of Australian literature has been undertaken on a broad reader-based assumption: that novelists and novels – even when disregarded, which was a constant complaint – along with other creative artists and arts, contribute to

18 See Graeme Turner, *National Fictions: Literature, Film and the Construction of Australian Narrative*, A&U, 1986.
19 David Carter, 'Introduction', in Carter and Galligan (eds), *Making Books*, p. 1.

deeper understandings and experiences of being Australian. Literature is not intrinsically national, nor is its reading necessarily so, but each has the effect of contributing to the idea that literature can be understood because of its nation of origin. Literature thus conceived simultaneously critiques and evaluates, modifies and changes, the idea nation. The adjective Australian thus appended to literatures gives great force and assumption to the proposition that imagination and nation can and do coexist in literature. The very idea of coexistence, for all its diversity and critical engagements, is powerfully reinscribed by the production of each new novel and each new act of reading. The triangulated relationship between writers, publishers and readers thereby invents and continually renews the concept of coherence in literatures and in nation.

It is clear that Australians shared a strong liking for the novel, in common with much of the English-speaking and European-influenced world. Australians have always written and read novels in large numbers, and to this day they constitute one of the largest *per capita* book-reading publics in the English-speaking world. Despite their reputation as outback adventurers, soldiers and sporting heroes, therefore, Australians constitute a literary nation or, at the very least, a nation of readers. Buckridge notes three commonly used senses of 'reading': as 'reading matter (*what* people read), as an activity (*how* they read), and as a social institution (in effect, *why* they read)'. He goes on to assert:

> We have a great deal of information on the first of these dimensions, the books themselves. The archives can tell us what books were being bought, borrowed, prescribed and reviewed . . . and hence – with a fair degree of probability – what books were being read. The challenge here is to find a historical pattern in the mass of information.[20]

Buckridge also notes an 'expanded and diversified book-readership' in the years after World War II, which 'gave rise to a strongly "reader-centred" approach to books of all kinds, and a strong reaction to this work was certainly one of the factors contributing to the "elite versus popular" polarisation of reading practices in the 1950s'.[21] In *Accounting for Tastes*, Bennett, Emmison and Frow confirmed earlier research by Lyons and Taksa that reading practices are differentiated by readers themselves, noting a 'strong tendency for women readers to devalue their own literary tastes and preferences'. They typically condemn 'themselves as frivolous readers, both for reading idly, as a diversion, rather than, as the terms in which they typically contrasted men's reading with their own, for a particular purpose; and for their preference for romance fiction over more factual and educational kinds of material'.[22] In *The Politics of Reading*, Lynne Pearce invoked the term Implicated Reading to

20 Patrick Buckridge, 'Readers and Reading', in Munro and Sheahan-Bright (eds), *Paper Empires*, pp. 344–8.
21 Ibid., p. 346.
22 Tony Bennett, Michael Emmison and John Frow, *Accounting for Tastes: Australian Everyday Cultures,* CUP, 1999, p. 145, also citing Martyn Lyons and Lucy Taksa, '"If Mother Caught us Reading O!" Impressions of the Australian Woman Reader', *Australian Cultural History*, 11 (1992), pp 39–50.

> indicate the *multiple* ways (contextual as well as textual) in which readers become involved in their texts and readings they give rise to. To this extent, the term is pitted against the self conscious 'professional reading' we undertake as literary/cultural critics, although it is important to recognise that *all reading* is a process in which we are 'positioned' and not wholly in control.[23]

By logical extension, it might be argued that all forms of reading are implicated in that each reader brings to every reading a social and cultural world and their individuality of understanding to the text; or, to put this into the terms of Alberto Manguel, 'All writing depends on the generosity of the reader.'[24] Australian readers of Australian novels were habitually entreated to read generously in terms of the Australian experience rendered in fiction.

The grouping of national literature involves a complex set of relations between creativity, the processes of actualisation through publishing, and the act of conferring meaning through reading. These interdependent relationships are also what ultimately define literature, which cannot truly be said to exist without writing, publishing and reading. In terms suggested by Webby: 'Without the writer, there is nothing to print or read. Without the printer, the writer cannot reach an audience. Without readers, the efforts of both writer and printer are merely ink marks on paper.'[25] Reading is commonly conceived of as an individual pursuit, but in its cumulative form, made up of many individual and imagined acts of reading (for we can never truly know who reads what or how another reads), literature can and does constitute the imaginary of groups and nations.[26] Yet, as Manguel has argued: 'Implicit in the possession of a book is the history of the book's previous readings – that is to say, every new reader is affected by what he or she imagines the book to have been in previous hands.'[27] A novel is a manuscript until it is published, and it cannot be considered as literature until it has been read. The term literature evolved into its modern accepted usage from an etymological root that linked both reading and writing through the condition of 'literacy', of being able to both read and write. Literature is therefore not only what is written, but its relationship to reading. The condition of reading relates to and defines degrees of literariness. The development of near-universal literacy in Australia, and a concomitant development of individualised silent reading as the most widely practised form of reading, has had the effect of intensifying claims to literariness (or otherwise) of creative fictions and related forms of published writing. The development of textual studies as the principal objective of literary criticism was a function of this intensification

23 Lynne Pearce, *The Rhetorics of Feminism,* Routledge, 2004, p. 222, citing Lynne Pearce, *The Politics of Reading,* Arnold, 1997, pp. 1–4, 238–43.

24 Alberto Manguel, *A History of Reading,* Flamingo/HarperCollins, 1996, p. 179.

25 Webby, 'Writers, Printers, Readers', p. 113.

26 Following Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism,* Verso, 1983; rev. edn 1992.

27 Manguel, *History of Reading* p. 16.

from the 1970s in particular, most notably within English studies, as a discrete academic discipline based on close readings.

As an extended form of prose fiction, the novel may invite meditations upon the complexities of life, character and circumstances through the act of reading. The intimacy of reading is established by equally personal but quite different acts of writing. For all their personal aspects, reading and writing are deeply cultural and social phenomena, and we cannot properly understand literature without appreciating the relationship between them. Readers share, though not always in common, the imaginative worlds created by the novelist; and they share with one another what is read, but not always in the same way or with the same emotional or intellectual intensity. Readings of the same works by different readers can and do create profoundly different experiences. Writers and readers may actively imagine one another, but they rarely meet beyond the illusory connection they make on the page. Each exists in relation to the other but in a state of almost perfect intimate strangeness.

Manguel describes writing as an act of gifting stories to readers.[28] That is true to an extent, especially during the stages of creating and preparing manuscripts before they are published. Reading and writing are mediated by the processes of publication, including, importantly, the actualising role performed by editors. For most authors editors are not only the first but the closest and most intimate of all readers. Their job is to work with authors to bring manuscripts into final published form. Once published an author's text does not generally alter, though modern forms of multi-authored online stories and novels may ultimately over-ride the model of the single author and the completed work. Editors stand at the mid-point between the act of writing and more widespread acts of reading by the public, facilitating the journey from manuscript to publication.

Readers are enticed by a range of marketing strategies to purchase and read books which, in their published form, are substantially owned by the publisher. Under the conditions of most standard contracts, publishers generally control 90 per cent or more of the commercial value of each published novel. The publisher shares this percentage with booksellers who receive 'discounts' of between 30 and 40 per cent off the retail price. Ten per cent or less of the commercial value of the novel remains with the author, though this can increase with successive editions. Those who buy books may ultimately experience the gift of the writer, but only after they have shelled out money to complete the sale and commit their leisure time to reading. Alternatively, readers borrow from libraries that are maintained from taxes, or are passed on books or gifted copies on special occasions. As many as 50 per cent of hardback novels are believed to be purchased as gifts. Therefore, although gifting certainly occurs, readers also enter into an implied contract with publishers based on a commercial transaction and their choice to acquire books and allocate time to reading specific authors' works. This substantial commitment is made on a blend of personal and cultural choices.

28 Ibid.

Once published, novels exist in standard shape and form. They are compact and can be easily carried and read across many different locations. E-books were developed in the late 20th century but run a long way behind print-based publications. It remains to be seen what effect 'generation text' will have on printed books. There is widespread concern that libraries are losing out to the web and indications in the early 21st century that the demographic for print-based publications is ageing, while younger readers were accessing text-based material through a range of electronic means. Even so, book sales have remained strong, unlike newspapers, which have struggled to maintain markets.

Each copy of a novel is produced in identical form to all others in the same print run. The same words exist in exactly the same order on each identical page and in all copies. Editions may differ in format but not in content. For all this uniformity, reading experiences can and do vary greatly between individuals, as they can between different readings by the same person. Yet, despite the centrality of the novel to Australian literature and more broadly Australian creative cultures, little work has been done on the genre besides textual and author studies. Reading has been the silent partner in the equation of text- and author-based critical practice, and yet the paradox remains that it is the essential activity that makes literature. Literature is not what is written on the page, or even primarily about who writes, but how writing is read.

Awarding the literature

Miles Franklin died at the age of 75 in 1954. She had been at or near the centre of literary politics for close on three decades following her repatriation to Australia after a 21-year absence between 1906 and 1927. By the 1950s Franklin was one of the last remaining connections with the 1890s; she had known both Henry Lawson and Joseph Furphy at the height of their literary abilities. Franklin was revered among extensive social networks, including important and influential cultural groupings in the nation. It came as little surprise to those who had known her personally or through her reputation and commitment to national literature that she had left provision in her will for the creation of a national literary prize that would carry her name. The Miles Franklin Award, which would ultimately become Australia's most prestigious and sought-after literary prize, was inaugurated in 1957. Until this time, the only award of any national significance was the Australian Literature Society's Gold Medal for Australian Literature. The concept of literary awards gradually caught on, and by the 1980s there were an estimated 50 major ones, including prime minister's awards, premiers' prizes, corporate-sponsored awards and a national award for young writers. Internationally, Patrick White won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1973 and contributed his winnings to the establishment of the Patrick White Award; Peter Carey (1988 and 2001) and Thomas Keneally (1982) won the Booker; and Kate Grenville won the Orange Award in 2001.

Franklin had established her bequest in the belief that Australian literature to that time had been overlooked and marginalised, even at home, and that it needed support and

promotion. She had a point. Australian novels were still largely published overseas and often difficult to obtain locally. Reprints were virtually unheard of. Further, there was no cultural infrastructure of any significance, and in the decades before the establishment of the Literature Board of the Australia Council in 1973, little institutional support that might positively advance the cause of Australian literature. A few morsels fell from the table of the Literature Board's predecessor, the Commonwealth Literary Fund, which had been established in 1908 to support destitute writers with pensions. The CLF was renovated in 1939 but only small improvements were made, including the provision of a few meagre fellowships and annual lectures on Australian literature at universities. While private benefactions have not traditionally been a part of cultural philanthropy in Australia, much to the shame of such an affluent society, Franklin's ambition to raise the profile of Australian writing proved to be prescient. A new reference point for creative excellence would ultimately be established by the Miles Franklin Award. As it became better known and increasingly prestigious, it fed debates about the standards and canons of national writing. From the inaugural winner, Patrick White for *Voss* in 1957, through to Alexis Wright for *Carpentaria* half a century later, the Franklin Award mapped changing literary styles and shifts in literary politics. It was also the source of intense debates over standards and the meanings of literature, spectacularly so during the Demidenko controversy in the mid-1990s (see below). The award was originally designed to honour both novelists and dramatists, but it became overwhelmingly associated with the development of the novel from the 1950s.

The creation of the Miles Franklin Award helped to usher in a new period of critical discourse around Australian literature that now covered a range of reading positions from specialist analysis and assessment through to broader engagement by lay reading publics. Although there is no direct or causal relationship between the creation of the award and the establishment of the first chair of Australian literature at the University of Sydney a few years later, both contributed to a new set of aesthetic and critical practices that aided a higher standard of debate over reading and the relative merits of Australian literature. The Franklin Award and the opening up of Australian universities helped to create new classes of more professional and discerning readers, many of whom had received formal training in critical methods and whose opinions increasingly mattered. Small magazines played their part in the professionalisation of the literary critic, but literary analysis and reviewing were also commonplace in newspapers, radio and television. By the 1970s and 80s, Australian literature was in the process of becoming better established within the cultural mindset of the nation. It was being read at schools and universities and it featured strongly at arts and literary festivals, with spin-offs for book-clubs and literary discussion groups. For more than a decade in the 1980s, along with Australian cinema, music and the visual arts, Australian novels were 'flavour of the month' – a common phrase that applauded international success, especially in the United States.

The creation of the Miles Franklin Award registers a small but significant shift in literary consciousness and reading practices, which was only barely apparent in the middle

of the 20th century but gathered momentum from the 1960s. The great bibliographic efforts of the Sydney University librarian, H. M. Green, were published as *A History of Australian Literature* in two volumes in 1961.[29] Green charted the progress of published writing from first settlement to 1950. His *History* left little doubt that a significant literary record had been established in Australia. The volumes also acknowledged, rather grudgingly, the primacy of the novel in the 20th century. Green categorised novel writing as little more than journalism and went on to argue:

> Writers as well as readers are affected by the national disinclination to look beneath the surface of things. The Australian novelist and short story writer have always, since the [1890s] at least, considered it their business to present a picture of Australia, of Australians and their way of life, and in this they have succeeded: the countryside and the men and women who have grown out of it possess a distinct individuality, and this has been often vividly displayed. But our novelists . . . seem to assume even now that with this their business ends; concentrating upon superficial qualities that distinguish Australians as such from Englishmen, Americans, Europeans, and life in Australia from life overseas, they tend to ignore, except in so far as there are implied within their picture, what is after all of greater fundamental importance: the qualities that Australia and Australians share with man as man and life as life. Vivid descriptions of a man, a scene, an action: Australian fiction abounds in these; but just as the average man or woman, in Australia as elsewhere, lives along the surface, so the average novelist . . . is satisfied to display superficial aspects of character and life . . . Of Australian poetry, at its best again, this is not true.[30]

Closer readings and textual analyses help explain the apparent continuities as well as the contradictions within what was at this time considered to be Australia's novelistic traditions. As the novels of Henry Handel Richardson, Christina Stead and Eleanor Dark complicated the nationalist project of the 1920s and 30s, so later writers like White, Thea Astley and David Ireland, who each won the Miles Franklin Award, complicated claims to an orderly and easily explicable progression based on the accepted literary principles of the earlier time. The presence of White's novels, in particular, disrupted a good deal of what might have at the time been accepted as Australian literature.

Geoffrey Dutton's 1964 edited collection, *The Literature of Australia*, presented professional criticism and, for the first time, published the work of academics and public intellectuals working in fields of literary analysis and cultural history. The book was noteworthy also for its production in paperback: 'For the first time in the history of Australian literature, it offers the general reader and student, in a cheap and compact form, a critical account of the more important writers and their works.'[31] At 15s 6d, *The Literature of Australia* was a bargain. Three propositions underpinned it: like Green, it put beyond dispute that 'Australian literature exists and can be taken seriously in the

29 H. M. Green, *A History of Australian Literature,* A&R, 1961.
30 Ibid., A&R, rev. edn, 1985, vol. II, pp. 934–5.
31 Geoffrey Dutton, *The Literature of Australia*, Penguin, 1964, p. 7.

context of English as a world language'; the Australian academy possessed the necessary expertise for such a volume to be realised; and third, there was a readership including students interested in consulting the text, even though it would take some years for Australian literature to be taught as a stand-alone subject. All but three of the 19 contributors held academic appointments in Australian higher education. *The Literature of Australia* survived for 24 years as an authoritative general survey, succeeded in 1988 by *The Penguin New Literary History of Australia*, edited by Laurie Hergenhan.[32]

There were other indications that Australian fiction traditions were changing. The ascendancy of nationalist authors who had been born towards the end of the 19th century and who had dominated Australian writing and critical reception in the first half of the 20th century was drawing to a close. Among them, Franklin is probably better known today on account of the award that bears her name than the novels she wrote, although *My Brilliant Career* was made into a highly successful, internationally released, film in 1976. Among Franklin Award winners, only Vance Palmer (b.1889) in 1959 belonged to the old-style nationalists that might have included Franklin. Xavier Herbert (b.1901) in 1975 and George Johnston (b.1912) in 1964 were sometimes associated with the nationalist project, but they were much younger than Palmer and his generational cohort. Indicative of new writing and writers, Astley (b.1925) was a multiple Franklin Award winner in 1962, 1965, 1972 and 2000; Ireland (b.1927) won in 1971, 1976 and 1979; while White (b.1912) picked up his second in 1961.

Generational changes usher in new dimensions and are a most powerful force of cultural renewal. How might Green have assessed a novelist like Malouf? According to Buckridge, aesthetic reading among the baby boomers typically included Malouf, White, Keneally, Carey, Jessica Anderson, Helen Garner and Sally Morgan.[33] In 1958, 23-year-old Randolph Stow followed up White's success the year before and won the Franklin Award for *To the Islands*. Stow generated a good deal of excitement about the future possibilities of Australian literature. He had all the hallmarks of Australia's first celebrity author. He was young, good-looking, often awkward in company, university-educated and a specialist teacher of literature at the University of Western Australia. Australia's new reading publics warmed to his writing and by the 1960s Stow's *Merry-go-round in the Sea* was popular among adults and young adult readers alike.

Palmer died in 1959 and was named as that year's winner of the Miles Franklin Award, one suspects out of respect for his service to literature more than his achievement with *The Big Fellow*. The contrast with Stow is stark. Somehow, Palmer did not seem to fit the sequence of winners. He was more than 50 years older than Stow and at the age of 74 remains the oldest winner of the Franklin Award. Stow's achievements as a young novelist had to wait 25 years to be matched by a young Tim Winton. Rodney Hall

32 In a nice act of symmetry between the two volumes, Hergenhan had been a contributor to Dutton's *The Literature of Australia*.

33 Patrick Buckridge, 'Case Study: Baby Boomers at Play', in Munro and Sheahan-Bright (eds), *Paper Empires*, p. 352.

was born in the same year as Stow but won his first Franklin Award for *Just Relations* in 1982, which he followed up with a second in 1994 for *The Grisly Wife*. By this time, Stow had left Australia and had all but given up writing to live obscurely in the south of England. Not quite a baby boomer, Carey won the Franklin Award with *Bliss* in 1981 and again with *Jack Maggs* in 1998. Carey became internationally renowned; like another Franklin Award winner, Keneally, he was part of a small but growing number of Australian novelists who negotiated different publishing contracts in different copyright regions in the world. The first writer born after World War II to win the Franklin Award was Winton – in 1984 for *Shallows*, in 1992 for *Cloudstreet*, and in 2002 for *Dirt Music*, by which the impact of changes since the middle part of the century could be assessed more fully. Another young writer, Helen Demidenko (b.1971), won the award for *The Hand that Signed the Paper* (1995); she was the latest-born winner to 2007 and arguably the most controversial recipient because of her impersonation of a child of Ukrainian parents, persecuted for their role in the war, and for her plagiarism.

The Miles Franklin Award does not constitute a tradition of Australian writing or even a set of canonical texts, but its importance in mapping novel writing and new reading positions from mid-century is instructive. It indicated new forms of readership and new ways of reading Australian literature that would become increasingly apparent and influential. The conferring of the award almost invariably encouraged literary-based discussions. At times these spilled over into broader cultural debates, but overwhelmingly have tended to focus on questions of literary merit and the assessment of works according to the principles of literary and textual criticism. Importantly, the award each year reaffirmed the novel as Australia's most important literary form.

The structure of the cringe

For all the evident literary diversity of the period from the 1970s onward, remarkable continuities connected the past to the present. In 1986, the general manager of the University of Queensland Press – at that time one of the successful publishers of Australian literature – offered a public assessment of the circumstances surrounding the creation of Australian literature. 'What happens to a country, to a culture, when one of its most enduring influences, that of its native literature, is in the hands of another culture?', Laurie Muller asked.[34] To many, such a question may have seemed curious and perhaps out of joint with its time. Australia's literary prospects were in good shape, while the broader cultural mood was buoyant, imbued by the twin successes of international acceptance and, locally, new nationalisms that had grown up around flourishing creative industries such as film, television, theatre, art, dance and music. There were box-office successes at the cinema; seemingly endless runs of television soaps, dramas and children's television; touring theatre companies; the achievements of Indigenous art and dance;

34 See Richard Nile, *The Making of the Australian Literary Imagination,* UQP, 2002, pp. 27–36.

and any number of headline musical acts from Peter Sculthorpe to the stage production of *Priscilla: Queen of the Desert*.

Following a continuous 'cultural renaissance' since the 1970s, Australian literature continued to be considered the flagship of the nation and, arguably, Australia's most important creative enterprise. Yet, Muller went on to assert, what happens when the nation's literature is 'shaped, influenced, and edited in another place? Should we be put in the ignominious position of having to import our own culture?' Muller was fishing for a reaction rather than a definitive response, as the first stage of a broad strategy of mobilisation for a cause. The hard-won successes of local writing, he maintained, had become an issue for local publishers, as multinational companies began raiding Australian lists by luring away novelists with significant financial inducements that could not be met locally and which, in most instances, could not be covered by sales. UQP would be hit hard by such raids. Among Muller's intended audience were writers, literary scholars as new custodians and readers, other publishers and literary agencies that, he hoped, might align into a broad coalition of interests to keep published Australian work within Australia. All sectors of the industry realised that there were larger commercial implications at play, as international companies appeared to be determined to bolster their credentials in the Australian market by using commercial dominance to buy high-profile Australian authors and thereby increase credibility locally – which was a threat to local publishers. Industry talk began to centre on celebrity authors and the stacking of lists against what were argued to be the better interests of Australian literature. At stake commercially was one of the most lucrative English-language book markets in the world, which was undergoing significant adjustments because of changes in the ownership of publishing companies globally. These would prove to be some of the most significant changes to affect English-language publishing since the signing of the Berne agreement in the late 19th century.

During the 20th century, the English-language book trade remained almost obstinately separated into two distinct blocs. United States manufacturers and traders were left to their huge domestic market, which approached 300 million by the early 21st century. The Americans also traded into Mexico and Latin America, but manifest destiny stopped in the north at the 49th parallel until compromises were reached in the 1970s. These compromises opened the Canadian market to US publishers, but Australia remained firmly within the British sphere of interest. The British trade commanded English-language rights throughout much of Europe until the end of World War II, and all colonial and former colonial possessions. The Berne agreement continued to protect British cartel interests in the international trade, while fixed prices in the domestic British market established and enforced prices in the Australian market. Australian publishers could do little to compete apart from looking to fill gaps in the market. New publishers came and went and a few made significant contributions. Sun Books in the 1960s and McPhee Gribble in the 1980s are representative examples of local publishing ingenuity against the overwhelming economic presence of British-based companies.

Muller was an adept cultural politician who for many years had been the president of the Book Publishers' Association, and he knew his constituency well. His plea took on the character of a call to arms for local publishing as an *a priori* condition for a healthy and viable national literature. Arguments in favour of local publishing had been part of the cultural mix in Australia for the better part of a century. That they took this particular shape in the 1980s reflected new insecurities surrounding the nexus between writing and publishing, but the real fight was over Australian readers. Muller was not simply establishing a rationale and agenda for a larger debate concerning the providence of Australian literatures, he was also responding to a shake-up in international publishing and cautioning writers against switching camps. Many supporters of the literature recognised this.

Although poetry, drama and short fiction might have been imputed by the term Australian literature, the publishers' interests were almost exclusively the novel. And it was the literary novel, rather than the novel in general, that was highly prized. Popular forms of literature could generate lucrative returns, but most titles perished after only a short time and needed to be constantly renewed. Standard formulas assisted writers to achieve the quick turnaround required to produce several titles a year. By contrast, literary fiction takes longer to write and establish a longer shelf-life, notwithstanding the Australian propensity not to reprint works. By the early 21st century literary fiction was carrying significant commercial cachet, even if print runs were smaller than more popular forms of writing, precisely because they survive better and for longer periods within readerly consciousness. Importantly, the cultural value – translated as market prestige and name authors – had the effect of adding significance to imprints. High-profile literary authors were good value for a publisher even if their sales were modest. According to Jenny Lee, while 'publishers' imprints' may be 'reassuringly familiar' they are in fact 'merely brands, long divorced from the illustrious gentlemen whose names they bear'.[35]

In making claims for the front lists of the 1980s, Muller was also arguing for the preservation of backlists – Australia's literary fictions which had been significantly defined by new classes of readers from the 1950s onward. To an extent he was adopting the rhetoric of protectionism and old-style cultural nationalism. His language owed something to the mood of 1970s and to the logic behind the much-vaunted cultural optimism of the Whitlam Labor Government (1972–5) that had led to, among other things, the establishment of the Literature Board. Before Whitlam, the conservative Gorton Government (1968–71) supported a nascent Australian film industry and oversaw the ending of censorship restrictions in literature. Following Whitlam, the Fraser Government (1975–83) established the Special Broadcasting Service and multicultural radio, while continuing many of the cultural reforms dating back to Gorton and the effective ending of the Menzies period. Government interventions into and support for

35 Jenny Lee, 'Expoiting the Imprint', in Carter and Galligan (eds), *Making Books*, p. 17.

the arts significantly reshaped the Australia's creative constituencies and their expectations of arts practice from the 1970s. In 1986, Muller was alerting this constituency to its new challenges, which included the deregulation of the Australian economy. The metaphor and the reality of opening the Australian market to international trade and finances would significantly affect all arts areas and challenge established relationships among forms of cultural protection.

At the time, Australia was the single largest importer of books from the United Kingdom. The Americans had long been interested in Australia's voracious appetite for books and in the mid-1970s established a legal justification for competing for market share against British publishers. New readers and cultural elites, as they were becoming increasingly known, were concerned about the negative influences on the local culture of American pulp fiction, in particular. A coalition of novelists, literary scholars, publishers and cultural bureaucrats formed around the arguments in favour of Australian literature. Their battleground was the Australian novel. This coalition argued the case to continue British interests in Australia. Its arguments prevailed and maintained a hold over the Australian book trade after a 1989 inquiry recommended its deregulation. It was back to the barricades in 2008, when the issue of parallel imports was again raised within the context of a free trade agreement with the United States.

In the 1980s, new generations and publishers, including Hilary McPhee and Diana Gribble, established new parameters for a distinctive new Australian novel – the literary paperback. The success of McPhee Gribble over almost two decades came to an end in 1989 when the company was taken over by a multinational publisher. With the sale of the local publisher, one of the most prestigious and important literary lists of the late 20th century passed out of Australian hands. It was a familiar story. According to Muller:

> some of the most culturally influential names are no longer edited and published in this country. It is cultural imperialism. Is our literature being looted, is this the modern face of transnational publishing, or is it good old British Empire style hard-nosed business opportunism . . . our writers, having finally achieved hard won international appreciation, are being enticed to publish out of London for access to the UK/European market.[36]

Specifically, Muller was addressing an ongoing structural weakness in Australian publishing and literary production which, more precisely in the language of the times, was expressed as an argument about cultural makers over cultural takers. The structural prejudice against Australian-published books underpinned the cultural cringe as a state of mind with both readers and writers. Australians were great cultural consumers, they were gifted cultural producers but there had always been – to steal a term from a slightly later time – a perception of a disconnect between the two. It was not only the role

36 Nile, *Making of the Australian Literary Imagination*, pp. 27–36.

of writers, editors and publishers to produce fine literary novels: they had to ensure the novel's place within the patterns of Australian cultural consumption. Their ongoing struggle stirred disquiet about British and American cultural influences in the context of Australia's comparatively small English-language population.

According to Phillips the cultural cringe existed in two main varieties: the cringe direct and the cringe inverted. Australians inhabited a position of the cringe direct when their reading position was mediated by expectations of European, but in particular English, literatures in any approach to Australian literature. Inside the collective insecurity of Australian reading publics resided the voice of what Phillips referred to as a 'minatory Englishman', a voice of cultural disparagement that placed an inferior label on the cultural and creative capacities of Australian writers. By contrast, the cringe inverted was that of the opinionated Australian bore who proclaimed all things Australian to be superior. Sometimes called the cultural strut, it was the attitude of the God's-own-country cultural nationalist.

What might now be thought of as a counter-cultural-cringe movement beginning in the 1980s celebrated the achievements of Australian culture, while cultivating a new reading public and arguing against the constraints placed on creativity because of lack of cultural infrastructure and the largeness of alien, or other English-language, cultures. This new generation of writers and readers had moved on from the achievements of White to make their marks nationally and internationally. Among them were poets and playwrights, but overwhelmingly they were novelists and included Kate Grenville, Malouf, and Winton. Fundamental changes in the structure of the Australian economy through financial deregulation, beginning with the election of the Hawke Government in 1983, also threw up new cultural and creative challenges. Until this time, Australian creative industries had been protected by a series of tariff walls. The arguments in favour of Australian literature were held within a logic that attested to national health through the safeguarding of local creativity against foreign influences. The reduction in protection (which began under Whitlam) transformed into a new mantra about open markets under the Labor governments of Hawke and Keating. Keating was also closely identified with the new readers as cultural elites and support for a stronger commitment to writing, through senior fellowships offered by the Literature Board. The fellowships became known as the Keatings. With the election of the conservative Howard Government in 1996, a strong sentiment was expressed against these so-called cultural elites.

It was also typical of Australia that cultural capital might be measured in monetary terms. For close to a century, British interests in Australia had been protected by internationally binding laws and well-defined international trading practices. Michael Legat, formerly editorial director of Corgi Books and later Cassell and Company, both significant UK publishers, summarised these in a series of successful practical guides for authors writing in English. *An Author's Guide to Publishing* was commended by the British Society of Authors as 'invaluable reading for all authors . . . a balanced, helpful

and informative guide to the profession of authorship'. Among the more helpful tips was Legat's description of 'Territory and Rights':

> Even those whose knowledge of geography is minimal are aware that the world is divided into the continents . . . The author writing in English has needed to learn a different kind of geography, which is concerned with the division of territories by various English-language publishers . . . Until quite recently, there were likely to be two principal publishers only – the British and American houses – and the world was divided into three: the exclusive British market, the exclusive American (i.e. United States) market, and the rest of the world, termed the Open market.[37]

Through a series of trading conventions and laws, Australia continued to operate as an exclusively British territory.

In 1989, an inquiry by the Prices Surveillance Authority determined that prices on books were artificially high in Australia as a consequence of the British dominance of the Australian book industry. The authority recommended a more open market, which would allow other English-language publishers to compete for Australian book buyers and readers. Under this threat, Australian publishers, writers and readers argued for the status quo, which meant the continuation of British cultural domination. Within a few years, cultural nationalists like Muller, Keneally and Carey shifted from their arguments about cultural independence and sovereignty to acknowledging and accepting the territories and rights described by Legat. Those conditions applied to Australian book production into the 21st century but under constant threat of revision.

Literature and the national culture

For all its diversity, what, then, constituted Australian literature? The development of the AustLit database since the 1990s represents a growing structure of authority in the field of creative and critical writing that, over time, has drawn to itself the cultural and institutional power to shape and set definitions for classifying Australian works. The following graphs and interpretation, prepared by Jason Ensor, assess the distribution of approximately 20 500 first-edition Australian novels (plus nearly 18 000 manifestations).[38] Figure 1 charts the distribution of first-edition novels (mainly between Australia and Britain). This graph supports the traditional findings of book history: Britain (represented by the dark grey line) dominated until 1941, when the circumstances of World War II allowed for a more sustainable Australian industry, to the point that Britain never recaptured its once dominant position in Australian literature.

In Figure 2 the light grey line represents all Australian publishers, including Australia's most successful publishers of pulp fiction in the immediate post-war period, Cleveland

37 Michael Legat, *An Author's Guide to Publishing*, Hale, 1991.

38 These figures represent the 'pre-clean' state of the AustLit database at May 2008 in work undertaken by Ensor as part of an ARC grant on 'Colonial Publishing and Literary Democracy in Australia'.

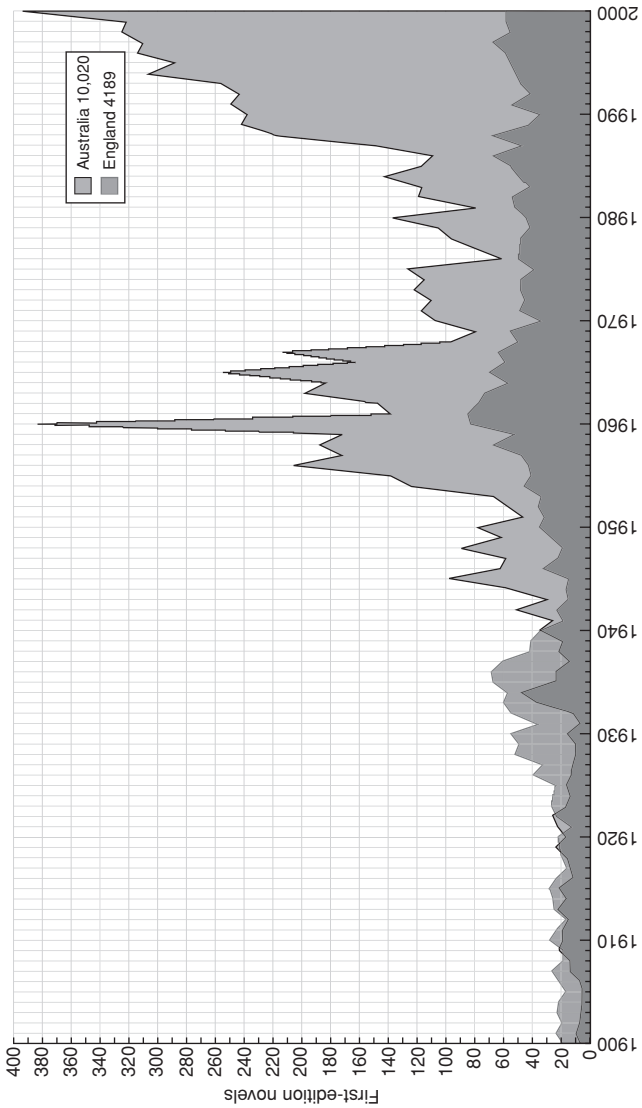

Figure 1: Place of publication of first-edition Australian novels, Australia and England, 1900–2000. Australian total includes pulp fiction publishers Cleveland Publishing Co. and Horwitz.

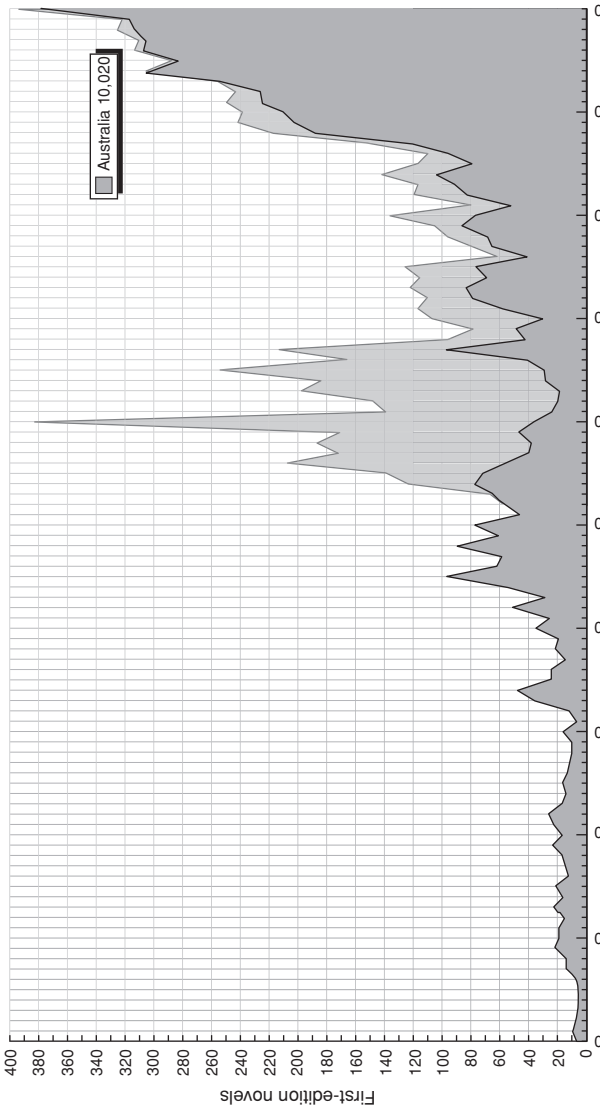

Figure 2: Publication of first-edition Australian novels, mainstream Australian publishers versus pulp fiction publishers, 1953–72 (within 1900–2000 statistics).

and Horwitz. The dark grey line represents all Australian publishers minus Cleveland and Horwitz, which produced the greatest number of titles 1954–71 (respectively 1460 and 815 novels), establishing the companies as the most prolific Australian publishers for the period.

It is also clear that the sharp peaks of pulp fiction production continue in an opposite direction to the rest of the Australian publishing industry for this period, which appears to be in significant decline towards pre-1940s levels from 1956 until at least 1966. After 1966, a new pattern of mainstream publishing emerges to eventually match Cleveland and Horwitz in the early 1970s, and then overtakes the totals in 1972, when the figures for Cleveland and Horwitz drop significantly.

Figure 3 shows only mainstream Australian publishers (excluding Cleveland and Horwitz); British publishers rival Australian novel production between 1956 and 1967 and are not sharply differentiated until the 1980s. In 1984, mainstream Australian publishers outclassed both British publishers and Australia's two largest pulp fiction publishers, creating a surge in novel production in 1987 with a lasting peak matching the record year of Cleveland and Horwitz in 1960. This period aligns with a discernible movement towards quality paperbacks and literary fictions associated with, for example, McPhee Gribble.

Production trends after World War II cast a different light on the usual comparison between British and Australian publishers in the production of first-edition Australian novels. Although modern book histories generally confirm that British publishers dominated the Australian publishing industry until the 1940s, the degree to which British publishers returned to dominance again for over a decade (1956–67) is noteworthy. The failure of the majority of Australian publishers in the face of British influences across most of the 20th century is striking. It has been suspected that pulp fiction publishers took advantage of the Australian government's move to establish 'tariffs on American imports that effectively banned American pulps' 1939–59,[39] but the degree to which pulp publishers were able derive a disproportionate benefit requires further examination. In recognising pulp fiction as a major rival to the literary novel during this period, a more accurate view can be gained of the Australian literary landscape and markets.

Reprints and translations offer an alternative and informative view of the crafting or favouring of literary taste locally and internationally. Reprints are connected to production cycles, the length of time in which profits are secured during the previous or initial print run, and the general feeling publishers have for their markets (Figure 4). The relationship a publisher has to perceived audiences and the 'economic or political interest' in success and profit influences printings of a work or translation from another imprint. Reprints are thus a commercial indicator of demand. A statistical analysis

39 Toni Johnson Woods, '"Pulp" Fiction Industry in Australia, 1949–59', *Antipodes*, 20.1 (2006), p. 64.

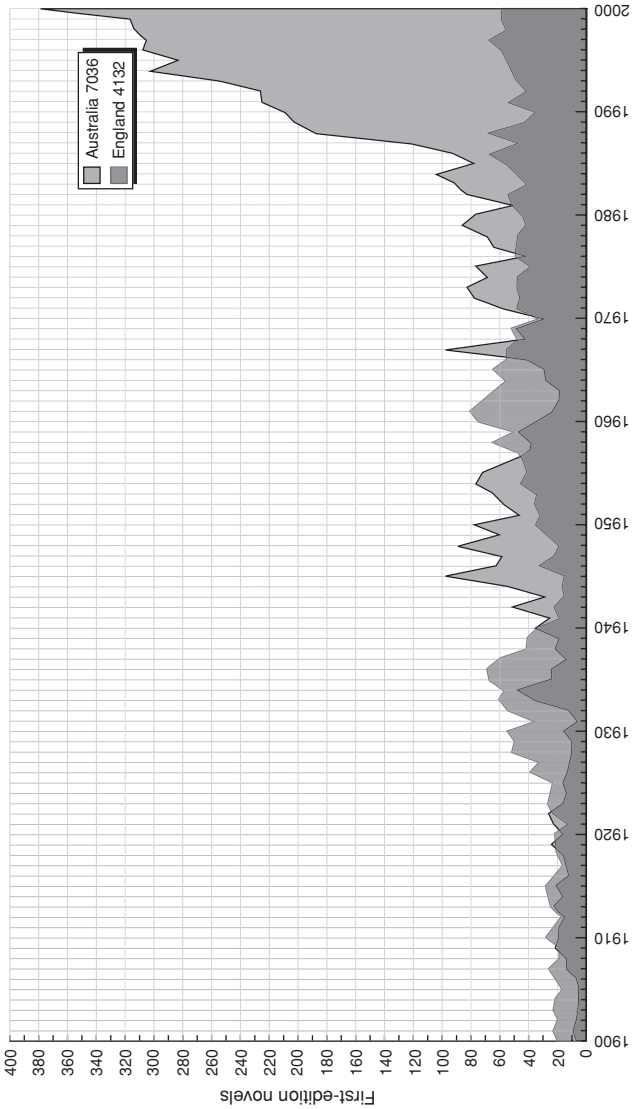

Figure 3: Place of publication of first-edition Australian novels, Australia (excluding pulp fiction publishers Cleveland Publishing Co. and Horwitz) and England, 1900–2000.

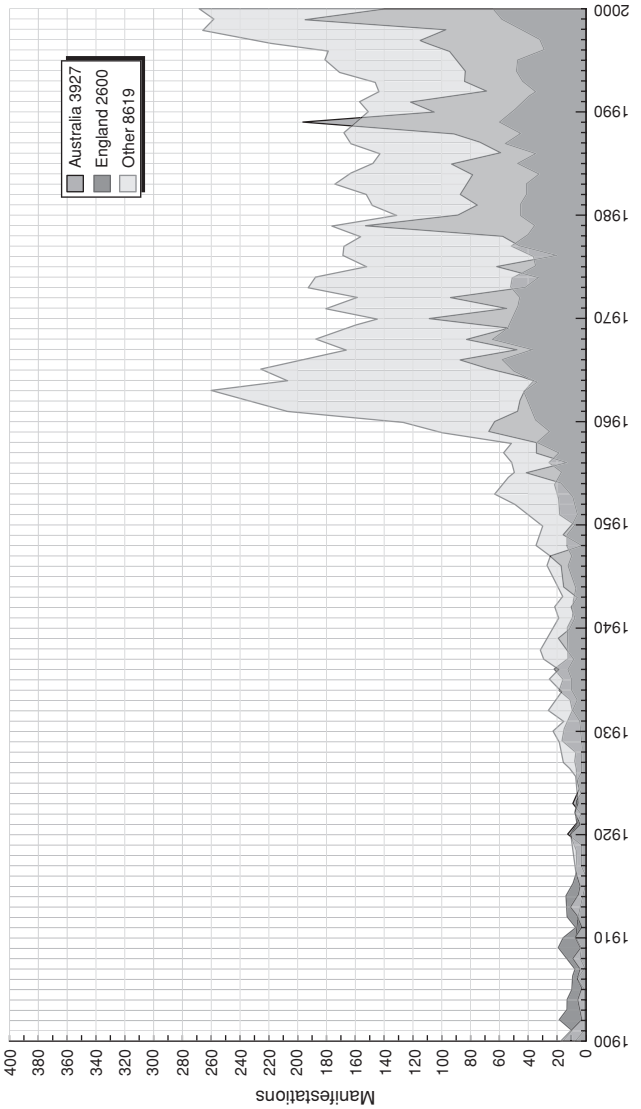

Figure 4: Number of reprints and translations (manifestations) of Australian novels, Australia, England and other international, 1900–2000.

Rank	Author	Year	Period	Work	Reprints
1.	West, Morris	1959	1959–2005	*The Devil's Advocate*	65
2.	Shute, Nevil	1957	1957–2005	*On the Beach*	56
3.	Shute, Nevil	1950	1950–2001	*A Town Like Alice*	55
4.	West, Morris	1963	1963–2003	*The Shoes of the Fisherman*	49
5.	McCullough, Colleen	1977	1977–2005	*The Thorn Birds*	47
6.	West, Morris	1973	1973–1995	*The Salamander*	46
7.	White, Patrick	1957	1957–2000	*Voss*	41
8.	Shute, Nevil	1942	1942–2000	*Pied Piper*	40
9.	Shute, Nevil	1952	1952–2000	*The Far Country*	39
	Keneally, Thomas	1982	1982–1997	*Schindler's Ark*	39
10.	West, Morris	1971	1971–1994	*Summer of the Red Wolf*	37
11.	West, Morris	1968	1968–1999	*The Tower of Babel*	36
12.	West, Morris	1965	1965–1999	*The Ambassador*	34
	West, Morris	1974	1974–2005	*Harlequin : A Novel*	34
	West, Morris	1979	1979–1993	*Proteus*	34
13.	Shute, Nevil	1944	1944–2001	*Pastoral*	33
14.	Shute, Nevil	1947	1947–2000	*The Chequer Board*	31
	Shute, Nevil	1948	1948–2000	*No Highway*	31
	Shute, Nevil	1955	1955–2000	*The Breaking Wave*	31
	Shute, Nevil	1960	1960–2000	*Trustee from the Toolroom*	31
	West, Morris	1981	1981–2003	*The Clowns of God : A Novel*	31
15.	White, Patrick	1955	1955–1998	*The Tree of Man*	30
	West, Morris	1976	1976–1992	*The Navigator*	30

Figure 5: Top reprinted works published outside Australia, 1890–2005, up to rank 15.

of AustLit's metadata of manifestations (reprinted and translated works) for Australian novels builds up an oblique picture of modern literary tastes and demands during the 20th century – which books publishers reprinted or translated the most.

As Figure 5 shows, works by Australian authors Morris West and Nevil Shute dominate as the most reprinted titles internationally to rank 15, and indeed this applies down to rank 20. From rank 21 onwards, however, pulp fiction giant Carter Brown not surprisingly has bestsellers in nearly all subsequent ranks: titles like *The Wanton* sit alongside White's *A Fringe of Leaves*; *The Tigress* ranks ahead of Herbert's *Capricornia* and Boldrewood's *Robbery Under Arms*; and Brown's *The Vixen*, *The Stripper* and *A Corpse for Christmas* share shelf space with translations of Malouf's *An Imaginary Life*. Much further down, Brown's *W.H.O.R.E* eclipses *My Brilliant Career* at no. 36 through the luxury of just one more translation.

Carter Brown is presently the most reprinted author in Australia for 1890–2005, ahead of Herbert, Prichard, and Franklin by 10 times or more reprints in Australia, as Figure 6 shows. The punishing workloads of many pulp fiction writers and the association of pulp novels with the lowest socio-economic markets, explain why he remains unchallenged as the most successful Australian writer to ever produce for the international market by

Author	No. of manifestations
Brown, Carter	313
Macdonnell, J. E.	252
Grover, Marshall	205
Hamilton, Kirk	82
Upfield, Arthur W.	73
Waring, Brett	70
Thwaites, Frederick J.	63
Lee, Miranda	57
McLure, Scott	51
McCall, Clint	40
Timms, E. V.	37
Tennant, Kylie	36
Park, Ruth	35
Herbert, Xavier	32
Collins, Tom	31
Shute, Nevil	30
Parv, Valerie	30
Shelton, Cole	27
Way, Margaret	26
Stead, Christina	26
Keneally, Thomas	25
Kent, Larry	25
Prichard, Katharine Susannah	25
Winton, Tim	24
Garter–Brown, Peter	24
Lord, Gabrielle	23
Marsden, John	23
Chandler, Lee	23
Boldrewood, Rolf	23
Lindsay, Norman	23
Idriess, Ion L.	22
Southall, Ivan	21
Marinelli, Carol	20
Richardson, Henry Handel	20
Murrell, Glenn	19
Slater, John	19
Franklin, Miles	19
Kingsley, Henry	19
Taggart, Ben	18
Lennox, Marion	18
Armstrong, Lindsay	18
Boyd, Martin	18
Beaumont, Walt	17
Cleary, Jon	17
Carey, Peter	17
McAllister, Cord	17
Ireland, David	17
Koch, Christopher	17
Laurens, Stephanie	16
Dodge, Emerson	16

Figure 6: Top reprinted authors, Australia, 1890–2005.

a reprint/translation multiplier of three or more, closely followed by West and Shute (Figure 7).

Quality notwithstanding, the high reprint runs for Carter Brown suggest that international tastes from the 1950s to the 1970s did not match what publishers in Australia considered worthy of being reprinted. Between 1950 and 1979, Brown's *The Corpse*, *The Unorthodox Corpse*, *Sex Trap* and *A Good Year for Dwarfs?* were favoured by some international publishers over *Power Without Glory*, *The Roaring Nineties*, *Capricornia* and *The Four-Legged Lottery*. Certainly, more literary Australian novels like these last four fought for attention within an international market that also supported, rather competitively, titles like *The Ice-Cold Nude*, *No Blonde is an Island* and *Nude – With a View*.

Figure 8 looks at the international reprint list for 1990–2005. A heavy decline in pulp literature can be seen after twin peaks in 1960 and 1965. This suggests a consistent international shift towards the production and consumption of more literary texts and away from works in pulp and popular genres. *Schindler's Ark*, *The Devil's Advocate* and *The Thorn Birds* remain in the line-up, but new entries include *Eucalyptus* (Bail, 1998), *Lazarus* (West, 1990), *The First Man in Rome* (McCullough, 1990), *The Lovers* (West, 1992), *The Grass Crown* (McCullough, 1991), *Eminence* (West, 1998), *Gould's Book of Fish* (Flanagan, 2001), *Remembering Babylon* (Malouf, 1993), *The Riders* (Winton, 1994), *The Conversations at Curlow Creek* (Malouf, 1996), *Dirt Music* (Winton, 2001) and *Oscar and Lucinda* (Carey, 1988). Carter Brown does not appear anywhere in the top 100 works.

Though these statistics can only be a 'superficial and partial identification of . . . empirically verifiable regularities',[40] data like this can constitute a 'novel way in which claims about cultural dominance [and market forces] might be explored' and debated.[41] Such statistics pose questions for how Australia's literary coordinates are organised locally and internationally.

The quality paperback

In the 1950s and 60s, Arthur Upfield, Frank Clune and Jon Cleary became some of the few writers able to make a living writing novels. Cleary sold more than eight million copies of his books from the 1950s to 2008, among them his most popular title, *The Sundowners*. Such writers had to maintain sales of around 20 000 per volume. Most literary writers at the time would have been lucky to sell 3000 copies, a figure which remains the break-even point in a standard print run. Books in the 1950s were divided into two main categories of hard-case editions and paperbacks. Generally speaking, quality of production signified literary value. Hard-cover books were more expensive

40 Pierre Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production: Essays on Art and Literature*, Columbia UP, 1993, p. 12.

41 Tony Bennett, Michael Emmison and John Frow, *Accounting for Tastes: Australian Everyday Cultures*, CUP, 1999, p. 203.

Author	No. of manifestations
Brown, Carter	1824
West, Morris	669
Shute, Nevil	621
Way, Margaret	385
Parv, Valerie	294
Macdonnell, J. E.	290
Upfield, Arthur W.	264
White, Patrick	208
McCullough, Colleen	207
Greig, Maysie	205
Lee, Miranda	168
Keneally, Thomas	144
Walker, Lucy	124
Stevens, Lynsey	115
Boothby, Guy	109
Armstrong, Lindsay	105
Shaw, Patricia	83
Mitchell, Elyne	81
Hannay, Barbara	81
Ames, Jennifer	78
Kenrick, Tony	75
Innes, Michael	73
Park, Ruth	70
Malouf, David	68
Winton, Tim	66
Prichard, Katharine Susannah	64
Cleary, Jon	61
Patchett, Mary Elwyn	60
Marsden, John	60
Douglas, Shane	57
Stead, Christina	57
Hospital, Janette Turner	56
Lindsay, Philip	56
Shelton, Helen	56
Nix, Garth	55
Lambert, Eric	55
Neville, Margot	51
Duke, Elizabeth	49
Praed, Mrs Campbell	49
Jolley, Elizabeth	49
Niland, D'Arcy	48
Locke Elliott, Sumner	48
Gordon, Victoria	47
Lindsay, Jack	45
Long, William Stuart	45
Marshall, William	44
Shore, Edwina	44
Mitchell, Kerry	43
Boldrewood, Rolf	42
Thompson, Estelle	39

Figure 7: Top reprinted authors, international, 1890–2005.

Rank	Author	Year	Period	Work	Reprints
1.	Bail, Murray	1998	1998–2002	*Eucalyptus*	22
2.	West, Morris	1990	1990–2005	*Lazarus*	19
	Keneally, Thomas	1982	1992–1997	*Schindler's Ark*	19
	Nix, Garth	1995	1996–2004	*Sabriel*	19
3.	McCullough, Colleen	1990	1990–2003	*The First Man in Rome*	18
	West, Morris	1992	1992–2002	*The Lovers*	18
4.	McCullough, Colleen	1991	1992–2004	*The Grass Crown*	17
	West, Morris	1998	1998–2003	*Eminence*	17
	Flanagan, Richard	2001	2001–2005	*Gould's Book of Fish: A Novel in Twelve Fish*	17
5.	West, Morris	1959	1990–2005	*The Devil's Advocate*	16
	Malouf, David	1993	1993–2005	*Remembering Babylon*	16
6.	West, Morris	1988	1990–2002	*Masterclass*	15
	McCullough, Colleen	1977	1990–2005	*The Thorn Birds*	15
7.	West, Morris	1996	1996–2000	*Vanishing Point*	14
8.	Marsden, John	1987	1990–1995	*So Much to Tell You*	13
	Winton, Tim	1994	1995–2000	*The Riders*	13
	Malouf, David	1996	1998–2001	*The Conversations at Curlow Creek*	13
	Nix, Garth	2001	2001–2005	*Lirael: daughter of the Clayr*	13
	Winton, Tim	2001	2002–2005	*Dirt Music*	13
	Hannay, Barbara	2003	2005–2005	*A Wedding at Windaroo*	13
9.	Carey, Peter	1988	1990–2003	*Oscar and Lucinda*	12
	Parv, Valerie	1990	1991–1994	*That Midas Man*	12
	Way, Margaret	1997	1997–2001	*Holding on to Alex*	12
	Nix, Garth	1997	1997–1999	*The Calusari: A Novelization*	12
	Pascoe, Judy	2002	2002–2004	*Our Father Who Art in the Tree*	12
10.	Malouf, David	1990	1990–2000	*The Great World*	11
	West, Morris	1988	1990–2003	*The Shoes of the Fisherman*	11
	White, Patrick	1957	1990–2000	*Voss*	11
	McCullough, Colleen	1993	1993–2003	*Fortune's Favourites*	11
	Stevens, Lynsey	1993	1993–1996	*Touched by Desire*	11
	Keneally, Thomas	1992	1994–1996	*Woman of the Inner Sea*	11
	Malouf, David	1978	1994–2002	*An Imaginary Life: A Novel*	11
	McCullough, Colleen	1996	1996–2004	*Caesar's Women*	11
	Parv, Valerie	1996	1997–2004	*A Royal Romance*	11
	Parv, Valerie	1998	1999–2000	*The Princess and the Playboy*	11

Figure 8: Top reprinted works published outside Australia, 1990–2005, up to rank 10.

and directed at discerning rather than popular readers. Popular titles were published as cheap paperbacks; soft binding signified a non-literary title for the mass market.

Such distinctions were challenged in the non-fiction market in the 1930s when Penguin began to produce in paperback scholarly titles that might be expected to appear in hardback. It took some time for literary novels to be published as paperbacks. In the 1960s, Sun Books published a number of paperback titles but it was not until the

phenomenal success of McPhee–Gribble in the 1970s and 80s that quality paperbacks became part of the Australian literary landscape.

A 1975 Working Party into the Australian Book Trade noted the change in book buying trends. By this time between 70 and 80 per cent of all paperbacks were being purchased for personal use, while the majority of hardbacks were produced for collecting and other institutions such as libraries:

> The most visible trend in the demand for book trade products is the steady growth in sales in mass-market paperbacks. The purchase of a paperback appears to most people as a minor and casual expenditure, whereas the purchase of a cased book is often an extravagance or investment calling for some hesitation and careful consideration. The growth in paperbacks has certainly played a very significant part in extending the reading habit, and indeed this extension has been necessary to the growth of the reading habit. Paperback publishers seem more aware of the value of marketing techniques, and certainly use these techniques more widely and effectively.[42]

Hilary McPhee had earned her publisher stripes at Penguin Australia and, in partnership with Di Gribble, she utilised local literary knowledge to attract and publish some of the more important writers of quality paperbacks. Along with local publishers like UQP and Fremantle Arts Centre Press, McPhee Gribble changed the rules of publishing in Australia and successfully established the link between writers of quality and a book-reading public. Its success was noticed by multinational corporations, one of which acquired McPhee Gribble in 1989 and with it a substantial list of Australia's most important authors from this period. While it is too early to make an assessment about print-on-demand, it seems clear that this technology also favours the paperback, which is now the standard form of Australian novel.

In an influential essay, Mark Davis made a case for the 'decline of the literary paradigm in Australian publishing'.[43] Davis makes a fundamental error in suggesting that Australian publishers from the 1990s have become motivated by a desire for marketable books over books of literary value. Publishers have always been motivated by the economics of publishing. Indeed the history of publishing is, by definition, a history of economic necessity in which book sales have been at the forefront of all publishing enterprises. Several cultural critics and more casual readers have extended Davis' notion to writers and readers of Australian literature. Undoubtedly, raw economics expressed in terms of book sales plays its part, but the relationship between the three corners of the industry is more nuanced. Put simply, there is now in Australia a significant readership for literary fiction, supported by substantial cultural infrastructure, within the broader cultural economy of the novel in Australia. Within the broader cultural economy, therefore, literary fiction has an important part to play. Beyond that, it has immeasurable cultural value that will always be contested but ultimately defended because of the centrality of

42 *The Australian Book Trade: The Report of the Australian Book Trade Working Party*, 1975.
43 Carter and Galligan (eds), *Making Books*, pp. 116–31.

literature to the nation. This centrality has been established by the progressive cultivation of the Australian mind through better writing and reading.

More Australian novels are being published now than at any time in history, while data on reprints supports the contention that new reading publics were formed and became increasingly discernible in Australia from the 1950s. These readers gradually helped shape and give value to the meanings ascribed to the Australian literature, supporting the contention that literature emerges out of a compact between writers and readers. That relationship is mediated by publishers. While Australians continued their longstanding liking for popular forms of writing, their reading practices created significant spaces for the creation and evaluation of the literary novel, which came to the fore in the second half of the 20th century. The century manifestly belonged to the novel, and the literary novel shows every indication of remaining the flagship of Australian literature into the 21st century.

24

Nation, literature, location

PHILIP MEAD

Until recently 'Australian literature' has been an imagined entity that belonged predominantly to the discourse of national culture and its institutions. The historiography of this institution, with its constant revisions and contradictions, is complex.[1] But by far and away the strongest influence on its formation was the rage for nation that Europeans in Australia brought with them from the beginning. This will to nation, driven more than anything by an unassuageable hunger for identity in possession of the land, was political, social, psychological and mythic. It was also divided between an anxious sense of being displaced and inferior, and a confidence in being independent and distinctive. It imposed a precise and exclusive alignment of unitary ethnicity, national territory and literary tradition. Federation, as a political contract between regions with vast geographical differences, and with different histories of discovery and settlement, nevertheless imposed a continental sovereignty with determinate effects on the cultural field. The idea of an Australian 'civilisation' was understood as essentially bound to the establishment and legitimisation of a unisonant nation.

Thus the prefiguring of this nation-centred literature was read back into the intricacies of colonial writing. The flickers of its nativeness were discerned here and there for example, in William Charles Wentworth's dream-vision of an Australian civilisation in his long poem of 1822, *Australasia*; in Charles Harpur's topographic romanticism; in Catherine Helen Spence's 'unmistakeably (but not obtrusively) Australian novel' (*Clara Morison*, 1854); and in Marcus Clarke's assertions, in his preface to Adam Lindsay Gordon's *Sea Spray and Smoke Drift* (1867), about the self-interpreting Australian bush and the beginnings of a national school of Australian poetry.[2] Its late-19th-century heroic age was represented as a legendary contribution to nation-founding. It accompanied and inflected the invention of Australian modernity, in an uneasy ascendancy of the metropolis over the bush. Its role, in the middle of the 20th century, was primarily

1 A useful introduction to the earlier version of Australian literary history is provided in G. A. Wilkes, *The Stockyard and the Croquet Lawn: Literary Evidence for Australia's Cultural Development*, Edward Arnold, 1981, and Laurie Hergenhan, ed., *The Penguin New Literary History of Australia*, Penguin, 1988. For more recent accounts of the strains and tensions in Australian literary history, see Bob Hodge and Vijay Mishra, *Dark Side of the Dream: Australian Literature and the Postcolonial Mind*, A&U, 1991, pp. 1–22, and the articles in 'New Directions in Australian Literary Studies?', *Australian Literary Studies*, 19.2 (Oct. 1999), pp. 131–62.

2 Brian Elliott, *The Landscape of Australian Poetry*, F. W. Cheshire, 1967, p. 75; Frederick Sinnett, *The Fiction Fields of Australia* [1856], ed. Cecil Hadgraft, UQP, 1966, p. 36.

the provision of a nationally differentiated universalism. Its (postmodern) fate has been marginalisation, superseded as a canonical index of national identity by cinema and popular culture. No doubt, a discourse of 'nation' will always be with us, as a defining substrate of social and subjective life, and the narrative of Australian literature has had an important role in that discourse and continues to do so in various educational contexts. But it is now apparent just how unsettled it is in itself and how inadequate it is for understanding individual literary texts, the rise of genres and the socio-economic history of literary production, or even the value of literature generally.

The shift in thinking about literature in Australia, in recent decades, away from an overriding and limiting concept of nation has coincided with a broader change in Australian cultural life. The years since the 1970s have seen an extensive, if unresolved and contradictory, sense within Australian society and culture that a revised account of nationhood needed to be drafted. This has not meant tearing up the first draft of Australia that was begun with white settlement, but rather updating and extending the pre-existing historical and political terms of that settlement, re-examining the historical archive out of which it was produced, and recognising that previously marginalised or excluded peoples have contributions to make to the process of redefining the nation. In the instance of Indigenous writers this contribution has been profound. Kim Scott, for example, has argued for a fundamental reconceptualisation of the literary narrative of nation:

> Some might place Australian Indigenous writing within the realm of Australian Literature, but there is a wider context; that of the emergence of Australia, as a nation, at the same time as some of the stories which have grown from our land continued or were adapted, or died forever. Australian literature, in such a context is a sickly stream.[3]

Of course this rewriting of a now problematised Australia has been politically contentious at every level, with cultural impacts and existential anxieties for everyone. This has been most obvious in the backlash at the social movement that led to the High Court's *Mabo* and *Wik Peoples* decisions (1992, 1996); in the political and moral challenges of the *Bringing Them Home* report about the Stolen Generations (1997); in the fate of multiculturalism and the idea of citizenship; in responses to the crisis in Australian environmental history; in the debate about an Australian republic; and in the bitter tussle over national borders and how permeable (or not) they should be in relation to South-East Asia, Australia's global region.

'Nation' remains a fundamental constitution of modern human society and culture. It includes individual histories of 'endeavours, sacrifice, and devotion' as well as problematic inheritances.[4] For any nation, the political and cultural question, in the present, is how to deal with these inheritances. And it is not as though nations are

3 Kim Scott, 'Foreword', in Anita M. Heiss, *Dhuuluu-Yala: To Talk Straight: Publishing Indigenous Literature,* Aboriginal Studies Press, 2003, p. i.

4 Ernest Renan, 'What is a Nation?', in Homi K. Bhabha (ed.), *Nation and Narration*, Routledge, 1990, p. 19.

free to struggle with their memories and with the ideal of consensus in the present in isolation. What a nation means – historically, culturally, symbolically – is everywhere under pressure, from internal contests over narratives of nation, as much as from the socio-economic imperatives of globalisation and evolving forms of state power. How we experience and are able to imagine the national in a postmodern world is undergoing radical reorganisation. The activist slogan 'think global, act local', for example, with its deliberate occlusion of the national, is a current expression of impatience with an order of human society that has often been violently maintained, historically short-sighted, racially exclusive and ecocidal. But if Ernest Renan is right, a nation is also a people's 'soul, a spiritual principle'.[5] This deep dichotomy is one of the reasons for our ambivalence about nationhood and how it is to be remade in the present. Any historical ground or contemporary reference it provides is unresolved and contradictory.

One effect of these shifts is that thinking about literature and nation is no longer in thrall to exclusive, limited templates of genre, geography, identity and temporality. Since the 1990s, as Robert Dixon has pointed out, previously residual comparative, transnational and interdisciplinary impulses in Australian literary studies have surfaced from beneath the 'rhetoric of nationalism and disciplinary specialisation'.[6] We can now hear more clearly questions that were incipient, but muted, in the institutional conversation about literature in Australia. How is literature located? How do we read the history of 'a literature' once it is uncoupled from the drivers of national identity? How do different genres valorise the same locales (the city of detective fiction vis-à-vis the city of the poetic imagination)? What role does the literary imagination play in bioregional definition? Generally speaking, post-national Australian literary studies have been moving in two directions: towards transcultural comparisons and contexts, and towards rereadings of the local. These different spatial turns may appear antithetical – global or transnational versus regional or local – but in critical practice they are complementary. Much work in contemporary literary studies is an attempt to understand and articulate the complexities of the imaginary places, locales, districts and regions of literary texts and their recursive relations to the multi-faceted experience of actual, lived places.

This chapter focuses on the role played by place-consciousness in this constantly changing matrix of literature, nation and place. My argument is that the remarkable florescence of regionally focused literary cultures in recent decades is not an unmotivated or ephemeral phenomenon. And what we might refer to as a critical regionalism is developing as an interactive response to this new regionalism and to the possibilities of contemporary knowledge, particularly in the sphere of language and literature. Critical

5 Ibid.

6 Robert Dixon, 'Boundary Work: Australian Literary Studies in the Field of Knowledge Production', in David Carter and Martin Crotty (eds), *Australian Studies Centre 25th Anniversary Collection*, University of Queensland, 2005, p. 33.

regionalism draws to the centre of critical attention the specific, the singular, the (imagined and historical) places of literary texts and locational perspectives on authors, oeuvres and reception.[7] As such, it is part of a cultural trajectory driven by the desire to understand the singularities of literary texts and their production, including their role in the multi-levelled experience of place and its representations. In this context, knowledge about literary texts looks very different from what it did within the older nationalist paradigm

One aspect of place consciousness – landscape representation – has always been a focus of critical readings of national literature. Indeed, Australia is typical in this regard, even if the fixation on landscape meanings as 'the inscape of national identity' has its individual forms.[8] European-imagined Australia, for example, has a long prehistory in the operations of European vision in the South Pacific.[9] This prehistory includes heterodox elements of what Murray Bail has called European austromancy – thought experiments in social theory that repeatedly imagined utopias and dystopias, like Jonathan Swift's Lilliput and Blefuscu, in what became Australian colonial space.[10] The task of much 20th-century national historiography, as well as literary history, was to assimilate these grand narratives of northern-hemisphere discovery and imperialism – their maritime heroism, iconic representations of man and nature, as well as their eccentric social imaginings – to the less grand one of penal settlement and colonisation. *The Landscape of Australian Poetry* (1967) by the South Australian literary critic and historian Brian Elliott exemplifies this tradition in the literary-critical field. Elliott's study is concerned with how the actual topography of Australia 'appeared at first to impose obstacles to poetic expression in Australia, then to liberate it; and finally, as the colonial period came to its close, to choke and inhibit it'.[11] The theme of the mid-20th-century focus of his history is on the 'emancipation . . . from the shackles of the colonial topographical obsession and a return to the free vision of nature, a natural revaluation of the environmental image'.[12] In this connection, D. H. Lawrence's descriptions in *Kangaroo* (1923) of the writer Richard Somers' experience of the Australian bush – 'the landscape is so unimpressive . . . aboriginal, out of our ken' – have been a repeatedly contentious site of debate about the rhetoric and politics of settler nativism in the history of Australian 'landscape'.[13]

7 I borrow this term from Gayatri Spivak who uses it to describe her activist academic work in a more purely political context of North–South differences but who nevertheless understands there is no 'clear-cut distinction between self-determination and nationalism, [between] regionalism and nationalism': Judith Butler and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *Who Sings the Nation-State?: Language, Politics, Belonging*, Seagull, 2007, p. 108.

8 Homi Bhabha, 'DissemiNation', in Bhabha (ed.), *Nation and Narration*, Routledge, 1990, p. 295.

9 See Bernard Smith, *European Vision in the South Pacific*, OUP, 1960. See also, for example, Ross Gibson's reading of Edgar Allan Poe's story, 'A MS. Found in a Bottle', in *South of the West: Postcolonialism and the Narrative Construction of Australia*, Indiana UP, 1992, ch. 5, pp. 93–110, for a perspicacious analysis of Australia in the northern hemisphere literary imagination.

10 See Murray Bail, 'Imagining Australia.' *Times Literary Supplement*, 4,417 (27 Nov.–3 Dec. 1987), p. 1330.

11 Elliott, *Landscape of Australian Poetry*, p. xi.

12 Ibid., pp. xi–xii.

13 D. H. Lawrence, *Kangaroo*, Penguin, 1986, p. 87.

The obsession with landscape was inflected in numerous literary tropes: one of the best-known is the literary and cultural dichotomy of Sydney or the Bush. It has a complex archaeology in the 'secular failure [and] spiritual triumph' of the literature of land exploration – Thomas Mitchell's and Charles Sturt's journals for example. We can see the conflicting cultural expressions at work in the attempt to define the nature of Australian belonging in the exchange between A. B. 'Banjo' Paterson and Henry Lawson in the *Bulletin* in 1892, '*allegro* and *pensoroso* of the bush ballad school'.[14] Earlier, in 'Clancy of the Overflow,' Paterson's vision had been of a romantically independent Clancy, riding somewhere on the 'sunlit plains extended' of outback Queensland. To Lawson this legend of the bush was a fantasy, city-bred, colonisingly Arcadian, and probably class-bound.[15] For him the bush was in reality a place of isolation, economic hardship and downtrodden drovers' wives. In Barbara Baynton's short story 'The Chosen Vessel' it was even worse. This topos has been revisited by numerous writers, in serious and comic registers. It includes contemporary rewritings like Murray Bail's story 'The Drover's Wife' (*Contemporary Portraits*, 1975); the stories about camping and bush-walking in Frank Moorhouse's *Forty-Seventeen* (1988); the debate between Les Murray and Peter Porter in the 1970s about Athenian (city) and Boeotian (agrarian) traditions in Western and Australian poetry; in John Kinsella's poetics of a radical pastoral. It even extends to instances of grunge fiction like Andrew McGahan's *Praise* (1992), which might otherwise be thought of as exclusively urban in their concerns and location.[16] Even popular genres, like crime fiction, can be inflected by the dichotomy: Arthur Upfield's Napoleon Bonaparte is an outback detective.

Elsewhere in the same archaeology Australians are taught to read the lopsided, doubled outline of their country's 'origins': the map of Cook's mythic voyage of 1770 is overlaid with the settlement of Phillip's drear purgatory of 1788, both of them east-coast events. This faulty registration of history and place is reproduced in later maps of Australia. Matthew Flinders' circumnavigation of Van Diemen's Land in 1798–9 and then of the mainland in 1802 established the geographical entity of the continent and its lasting name. It also completed the more than 150-year insularisation of Tasmania (in 1642 Abel Tasman had no reason to think his newly discovered Van Diemen's Land was an island). The cartography of the nation, on the other hand, has multiple iterations and is not finalised until the first day of 1901. Its mostly cadastral state boundaries – apart from the Queensland–New South Wales border from Mungindi to the coast, along the Macintyre River, and the Murray – produce a geodetic palimpsest of white exploration

14 Gibson, *South of the West*, p. 89; Elliott, *Landscape of Australian Poetry*, p. 157.

15 See Coral Lansbury, *Arcady in Australia: the Evocation of Australia in Nineteenth-Century English Literature*, MUP, 1970, for a reading of the origin of an Arcadian Australia in mid-Victorian English literature.

16 The Porter–Murray debate includes Porter's poem 'On First Looking into Chapman's Hesiod'; Murray's response to it in an essay of 1978, 'On Sitting Back and Thinking about Porter's Boeotia'; and Porter's reply, 'Country Poetry and Town Poetry: A Debate with Les Murray', *Australian Literary Studies*, 9.1 (May 1979), pp. 39–48. For other details of this debate see Bruce Bennett, *Spirit in Exile: Peter Porter and His Poetry*, OUP, 1991, p. 146. For John Kinsella, in a reformulation of the Lawson–Paterson exchange, 'Pastoral is the contrary of sublime': *Disclosed Poetics: Beyond Landscape and Lyricism*, Manchester UP, p. 15.

and settlement.[17] Sovereignty requires maps. Tasmania is the exception again: the only solely geopolitical sub-national region. But overwhelmingly the 'natural' entity of the continent provided a powerful legitimating form for the political and social entity of the Commonwealth of Australia, coordinating the desired convergence of environment, nation and identity.[18] Regionalism, both creative and critical, is a process of resisting and critiquing this convergence.

The drawing and redrawing of the spatial parameters of Australia is analogous to the intervals of its temporal existence. As the historian Graeme Davison has demonstrated, using Eleanor Dark's work of popular fiction *The Timeless Land* (1941) as a reference, European settlers figured Aboriginal Australia as timeless.[19] Time, and therefore history, only arrive with European maritime discovery and white settlement. Likewise, before Flinders, Australia was only partially named and incompletely mapped. In this sense it was also a place-less land to the European mind because it was without *their* geopolitical definition. One of the first responses of Europeans to Australia, a heritage everywhere thematised in the literature of contact and settlement, is of a place-less, time-less, and people-less land. The poem by Australie, or Emily Manning, 'From the Clyde to Braidwood' (1877) is typical of this view of Australia as 'bare, bald, prosaic'. In one of the earliest published poems in Australia, 'The Kangaroo' (1819), Barron Field had used the same word, prosaic, to describe ahistorical, acultural proto-Australian space. As Paul Carter has demonstrated, it is not as though the Europeans arrived without ideas and desires about what they were determined Australia, as a place, was to be. The recent discovery of 'deep time' in Australian human history, Tom Griffiths argues, has linked Australia to world history in new ways. These revise European versions of it as the 'Last sea-thing dredged by sailor Time from Space', the South as other, upside-down, or monstrous, thus indigenising Australian history and 'localising' the Australian story.[20] The evolution of a similarly new Australian spatial consciousness in recent decades, profoundly influenced by Aboriginal being, has allowed Australians to relocalise their understanding of literary production and its representations of place in new ways.

17 This national chart of Australia has not been without residual dreams of secession and new states, including the New England seventh state movement, led by Sir Earle Page in the 1920s and 30s, and more vaguely, the push for a North Queensland separate state. A New State Convention was held in October 1923, in Rockhampton. The most spectacular attempt at secession was a petition from Western Australia that went to a Joint Committee of the British House of Lords and House of Commons in 1935. The boundaries of the Australian Capital Territory, within New South Wales, were not finalised until 1911.

18 See J. M. Powell, *A Continent for a Nation? Environment–Identity Convergences in Australia, 1901–2001* (2000); Libby Robin, *How a Continent Created a Nation* (2007); and Gibson, *South of the West*, for a reading of the 'duplicitous object of the South Land', p. x.

19 Graeme Davison, *The Unforgiving Minute: How Australia Learned to Tell the Time* (1993), pp. 7–8. For an important geographical reading of this history see J. M. Powell, *Australian Space, Australian Time: Geographical Perspectives* (1975).

20 Bernard O'Dowd, 'Australia', in *The Poems of Bernard O'Dowd*, Lothian, 1944, p. 35; Tom Griffiths, 'Travelling in Deep Time: *La Longue Durée* in Australian History', *Australian Humanities Review* (June 2000), p. 4. A. D. Hope's poem 'Australia' (1939) also explores the (European and settler) paradoxes of the geological age of the Australian continent and its youthfulness as a nation, although without any recognition of its Aboriginal history.

This spatial consciousness is expressed across an impressively varied discourse of spatiality, and it now works as one of the most influential developments in Australian intellectual life. This body of work includes *Reading the Country: Introduction to Nomadology* (1985), edited by Stephen Muecke, Krim Benterrak and Paddy Roe; Kay Schaffer's *Women and the Bush: Forces of Desire in the Australian Cultural Tradition*, (1988); the collection of essays, *Island in the Stream: Myths of Place in Australian Culture* (ed. Paul Foss, 1988); Ross Gibson's first literary-contextual study *The Diminishing Paradise: Changing Literary Perceptions of Australia* (1984) and his later *Seven Versions of an Australian Badland* (2002), a brilliant fictocritical and post-colonial study of the Capricorn coast of Central Queensland and its aftermath of story, ecology and history. Paul Carter's *The Road to Botany Bay* (1988) and *Living in a New Country* (1992), although primarily concerned with setting out his original intellectual project of a 'spatial' (or non-imperial) history, have numerous reference points in literary texts, from Mary Fullerton's poetry, to Dante, Defoe and David Malouf and, in their response to non-Western conceptions of space, move towards his poetics of the locational in *The Lie of the Land* (1996).

The work of Meaghan Morris, Val Plumwood, Stephen Muecke, Deborah Bird Rose and Tim Bonyhady across a range of inter-disciplinary sites – cultural studies, ecofeminism, ethnography, art history – has revised the reference system of Australian place-consciousness. Terms like region and state, with their etymologically embedded dyads – metropole and nation – seem increasingly outmoded. The emphasis in the title of Tim Bonyhady and Tom Griffiths' *Words for Country: Landscape and Language in Australia*, for example, is away from landscape, a word 'freighted with cultural meaning which suggests a view that is remote and painterly,' and towards the indigenising term country.[21] Country is a word currently invested with very different cultural and cross-cultural meanings. While it defines specific places of Indigenous habitation and of Indigenous-settler histories, it is also a kinship term, implying familial and personal responsibilities and a differently conceptualised sense of ownership. 'Country is a living entity with a yesterday, today and tomorrow, with a consciousness, and a will toward life.'[22] This kind of conceptual and linguistic shift is analysed in J. M. Arthur's lexical mapping of Australian settlement in her under-recognised study, *The Default Country: A Lexical Cartography of Twentieth-Century Australia* (2003).[23] Crucially, this discourse of country also includes the critiques and contributions of Aboriginal intellectuals and writers such as Kim Scott, Marcia Langton, Jeanie Bell, Anita Heiss, and Fabienne Bayet-Charlton.[24]

21 Tim Bonyhady and Tom Griffiths, 'Landscape and Language', in Bonyhady and Griffiths (eds), *Words for Country: Landscape and Language in Australia*, UNSWP, 2002, p. 1.

22 Deborah Bird Rose, *Nourishing Terrains: Australian Aboriginal Views of Landscape and Wilderness*, Australian Heritage Commission, 1996, p. 7.

23 See also her chapter, 'Natural Beauty, Man-Made' in Bonyhady and Griffiths, eds, *Words for Country*, pp. 190–205.

24 See, for example, Michele Grossman (ed.), *Blacklines: Contemporary Critical Writing by Indigenous Australians*, MUP, 2003.

This heterogeneous and multi-disciplinary discourse of place-consciousness frequently draws on and critiques literary representations of place and region to provide the stimulus for a new regional- and location-focused literary history and critical reading. The groundwork for this reading was bibliographical, anthological and scholarly, but critics interested in the broader significance of Australian literary works have begun to build on this foundational work and to explore methodologically innovative and differently thematic possibilities for critical regionalism, emphasising the singularities and specificities of representations and imaginings of space and place. If the predominance of landscape in the Australian literary and critical tradition was the equivalent of a simple conic projection of space onto the flat page, our understanding of the history of spatial consciousness has evolved. We are now able to read the literary history of vastly differentiated Australian place, region and locale for its representation of how space is produced by acts of performative language, sustained by memory, sung into being, apprehended in the act of being travelled across, returned to, multiply imagined, interconnected to experiences of the global world – as well as being defaced and degraded by loss of language and story.

The west

It is no surprise, perhaps, that Western Australia – given its vast size, geographical and historical difference from Eastern Australia, as well as its Indian Ocean orientation – has been a leader in regional literary definition. 'West coasts tend to be wild coasts, final coasts to be settled, lonelier places for being last.'[25] The distinctive growth of Western Australian literature is reflected in anthologies like *Soundings: a Selection of Western Australian Poetry* (ed. Veronica Brady, 1976); *New Country: a Selection of Western Australian Short Stories* (ed. Bruce Bennett, also in 1976); *Wide Domain: Western Australian Themes and Images* (ed. Bruce Bennett and William Grono, 1979). There is also the online anthology *Western Australian Writing* by John Kinsella and Toby Burrows, as well as bibliographical and critical studies such as that edited by Bennett, John Hay and Susan Ashford, *Western Australian Literature: a Bibliography* (1981; revised 1990, as *Western Australian Writing: a Bibliography*). Bennett's edited volume, *The Literature of Western Australia* (1979), is a collection of detailed critical studies of Western Australian diaries, letters, journals, novels, short fiction, poetry, drama, children's books, newspapers, and literary journalism. Such scholarly and critical work ensures that Western Australia, in any understanding of the 'ways in which the land or local conditions may have shaped, or been shaped by, the literary imagination' is richly represented.[26]

25 Tim Winton, *Land's Edge*, Macmillan, 1993, p. 103.

26 Bruce Bennett, *The Literature of Western Australia*, University of Western Australia, 1979, p. xiii. The stimulus for regional literary history has often been celebratory and therefore ambivalent. Centenaries, sesquicentenaries etc. of first settlement, prompt the desire for stocktakes of substantive cultural achievement, but they are also

This important critical work of Western Australian cultural localisation exists alongside powerful narrative, mythic and poetic expressions of the west's difference. Examples are Randolph Stow's reading of the *Batavia* disaster of 1629 as the story of an Indian Ocean Anti-Christ, the mythic antithesis to the (Pacific) Southland; Kim Scott's *Benang, from the Heart* (1999) with its complex narrative tracks through Nyoongar country and history; the Indian Ocean littoral of Robert Drewe and Tim Winton (*The Bodysurfers*, 1983; *Land's Edge*, 1993); and Kinsella's Avon Valley-centred poetics of spatial lyricism and its localised critique of literary pastoralism and actual land management.[27] Since the 1970s, *Westerly*, the WA-based quarterly literary journal founded in 1956, has contributed not only to the nurturing of Western Australian creative writing but also to that writing's South-East Asian orientations.

Small islands

Despite the historical depth of its literary heritage and the richness of its contemporary writing culture, Tasmania has yet to develop a critical regionalism comparable to that of the west or the north. There are single articles of cultural overview such as Jim Davidson's essay 'Tasmanian Gothic' (1989), Margaret Scott's 'Tasmania's Literary Heritage' (1999), and the environmental historian Peter Hay's collection of occasional pieces, *Vandiemonian Essays* (2002) that explore Tasmanian culture more broadly and personally.[28] Anthologies of Tasmanian writing, like *Effects of Light: the Poetry of Tasmania* (ed. Margaret Scott and Vivian Smith, 1985) and *Along these Lines: from Trowenna to Tasmania: at least two centuries of peripatetic perspectives in poetry and prose* (ed. C. A. Cranston, 2000) have been prompted by the perceived importance and distinctiveness of Tasmania as both geographically distinctive and equally fascinating as a place in the literary imagination. But these offer only the briefest introductory and contextual notes on the literary material they excerpt and anthologise.

As a place of the imagination, Tasmania has a presence in the literature of islands and island identity, a fact recognised in a 2000 collection of critical essays in

reminders of the violence of colonial origins. See for example: Cecil Hadgraft, 'this small commentary on our literature', in *Queensland and its Writers (100 Years – 100 Authors)*, UQP, 1959, preface; the location of Kenneth Slessor's 'Five Visions of Captain Cook' as a North Queensland poem in F. W. Robinson, 'The Earliest Writings of Queensland' in R. S. Byrnes and Val Vallis (eds), *The Queensland Centenary Anthology*, Longman, 1959, pp. 3–6; Bruce Bennett, *The Literature of Western Australia* (1979) was one of the volumes in Western Australia's Sesquicentenary Celebration Series.

27 See Randolph Stow, 'The Southland of Antichrist: the *Batavia* Disaster of 1629' in Anna Rutherford (ed.), *Commonwealth: Papers Delivered at the Conference of Commonwealth Literature, Aarhus University, 26–30 Apr. 1971,* Akademisk Boghandel, 1971, pp. 160–7; and John Kinsella, *Disclosed Poetics: Beyond Landscape and Lyricism*, and *Contrary Rhetoric: Lectures on Landscape and Language*, both ed. Glen Phillips and Andrew Taylor, Fremantle Press, 2007, 2008. See also the suggestion of an 'Indian Ocean' Cultural Studies in Devleena Ghosh and Stephen Muecke (eds), *The UTS Review: Cultural Studies and New Writing*, 6.2 (Nov. 2000), and in Stephen Muecke, 'Cultural Studies' Networking Strategies in the South', *Australian Humanities Review*, 44 (Mar. 2008).

28 See Jim Davidson, 'Tasmanian Gothic', *Meanjin*, 48.2 (1989), pp. 307–24; Margaret Scott, 'Tasmania's Literary Heritage', *40° South*, 12 (Autumn 1999), pp. 19–22; and Peter Hay, *Vandiemonian Essays*, Walleah, 2002.

cross-cultural island writing, *Messages in a Bottle: The Literature of Small Islands*.[29] Although *Island* magazine (originally *The Tasmanian Review*) focuses on Tasmanian writing and themes, further possibilities for critical regionalism in the literature of Tasmania remain to be explored, not least Tasmania's function in the literary imagination as a *mise-en-abŷme* for Australia, the island continent. From the northern hemisphere, for example, Tasmanian literary insularity has recently been read as an allegory of 'tensions between the local and global'.[30] The localised influence of Clarke's *His Natural Life* (1874), a melodrama of penal Van Diemen's Land, usually thought of as a monument of national literature, extends into the present with the debate about the origins of gothic Tasmania: is it natural or cultural? distinctive or demeaning? Chloe Hooper's *A Child's Book of True Crime* and Richard Flanagan's *Gould's Book of Fish: A Novel in Twelve Fish*, both published in 2002 and both reinterpretations of Van Diemen's Land and its convict history, are two contending fictions in this debate.

Tasmanian history seems to be a readily available archive of the colonial past but subject to the contradictory functions of remembering and forgetting. Novelists such as Drewe in *The Savage Crows* (1976) and Mudrooroo in *Doctor Wooreddy's Prescription for Enduring the Ending of the World* (1983) have been fascinated with the workings of the settler unconscious as it surfaces in the journals of George Augustus Robinson, with their first-hand account of frontier conflict in 1830s Van Diemen's Land. Probably because of its insularity, Tasmania also reflects the use that humans have put islands to as social laboratories, in reality and in the imagination. The distinctive utopian/dystopian structures and themes in the literature of Tasmania begin with *Gulliver's Travels* (1726); they include Louis Nowra's play about the descendants of a lost tribe of ex-convicts and gold-seekers, *The Golden Age* (1985); Christopher Koch's east-coast faeryland in *The Doubleman* (1985); Dennis Altman's speculative novel of 1970s secession, *The Comfort of Men* (1993); Brian Castro's radically experimental novel of racial difference and lament for Tasmanian Aboriginal history, *Drift* (1994); Flanagan's magical-realist fiction of hydromodernisation, *The Sound of One Hand Clapping* (1997); and Julia Leigh's biogenetic-gothic *The Hunter* (1999).[31]

A further sign of the complexity of Tasmania's place in the literary imaginary of both an archipelagic Australia and the southern hemisphere as a whole is evident in its encompassing of the island chains of Bass Strait and its relations to the polar continent

29 See Fiona Polack, 'Writing and Rewriting the Island: Tasmania, Politics, and Contemporary Australian Fiction', in Laurie Brinklow, Frank Ledwell and Jane Ledwell (eds), *Message in a Bottle: The Literature of Small Islands: Proceedings from an International Conference, Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island, Canada, 28–30 June 1998*, Institute of Island Studies, 2000, pp. 215–30. See also Tim Jetson, 'Place', in Alison Alexander (ed.), *The Companion to Tasmanian History*, Centre for Tasmanian Historical Studies, University of Tasmania, 2005, pp. 466–71.

30 Nicholas Birns and Rebecca McNeer, 'Introduction', in Birns and McNeer (eds), *A Companion to Australian Literature since 1900*, Cambden House, 2007, p. 5.

31 See Tony Hughes D'Aeth, 'Australian Writing, Deep Ecology and Julia Leigh's *The Hunter*', *Journal of the Association for the Study of Australian Literature*, 1 (2002), pp. 19–31.

of Antarctica, both regions with their own histories of literary representation.[32] In some contemporary Aboriginal spatial representation of Australia, like David Mowaljarlai's 'Bandaiyan: the Body of Australia', where Uluru is the navel of the country, Tasmania has a new antipodean presence as the country's feet.[33]

Central south

In recent decades a number of anthologies of South Australian writing and some bibliographies of South Australian poetry have been published. Patterns of spatial representation in South Australian writing are characterised by the capital Adelaide's location, on the coastal edge of one of the most arid regions of the continent, and extend to the Centre, with its origins in the unique social experiment of the Wakefield Plan for emigration and William Light's city grid plan. Murray Bail's novel *Holden's Performance* (1987), for example, draws on the city's planning and social history in its portrayal of Adelaide. South and central Australia have also been the sites of some of the most important survivals of Aboriginal culture, including Indigenous languages and linguistic art forms. The importance of these rich and ancient cultures of country-located poetic, mythic and historical forms is only beginning to be understood in terms of a post-national Australian culture. This context includes the important figure of David Unaipon and the story of his *Legendary Tales of the Australian Aborigines*, a work he wrote for publication by Angus & Robertson in 1926 and which was appropriated by William Ramsay Smith and published under his name in 1930 (and subsequently reprinted until 1998). Stephen Muecke and Adam Shoemaker, in their edition of his original *Tales* in 2001, have helped to repatriate Unaipon's work, 'weaving the text back home to the community (or communities or family groups) where the stories were told and traded in the first place'. Muecke and Shoemaker view their decolonising practice as editors, as countering the 'imperialism and universalism of writing that is supposed to transcend place, aspire to the universal, and conquer time by becoming of permanent historical significance'.[34]

In the 1940s Adelaide and South Australia were the hub of one of the most assertively nationalist episodes in Australian culture and, again, one with problematic relations to Aboriginal culture. Stimulated by P. R. Stephensen's *The Foundations of Culture in Australia* (1936) and led by South Australian writers Rex Ingamells, Ian Mudie, Max Harris, the Jindyworobak movement was an attempt to Australianise writing and

32 See Stephen Murray-Smith and John Thompson (eds), *Bass Strait Bibliography: A Guide to the Literature on Bass Strait Covering Scientific and Non-scientific Material*, Victorian Institute of Marine Sciences, 1981; Stephen Murray-Smith, 'Three Islands: A Case Study in Survival', in Imelda Palmer (ed.), *Melbourne Studies in Education 1986*, MUP, 1986, pp. 209–24, and the 'Representations of Antarctica' bibliography at <http://www.utas.edu.au/english/Representations_of_Antarctica/>.

33 Bill Arthur and Frances Morphy (eds), *Macquarie Atlas of Indigenous Australia: Culture and Society through Space and Time*, Macquarie Library, 2005, p. 24.

34 Stephen Muecke and Adam Shoemaker, 'Introduction', in David Unaipon, *Legendary Tales of the Australian Aborigines*, MUP, 2001, p. xliii.

cultural traditions (see Chapter 10). Aspects of Aboriginal culture (mediated through anthropological studies) were colonised in the cause of defining a white, decolonised version of Australian culture. As its name, even, betrays – a word from James Devaney's *The Vanished Tribes* (1929) meaning to annex, or join – the neo-colonial and depoliticising provenance of Jindyworobak is apparent. But as Brian Elliott's 1979 anthology of Jindyworobak writing demonstrates, it was also motivated by what has proved to be a continuing desire in the white Australian imaginary, particularly in relation to spatial representations, for a species of cultural–racial syncretism.[35] In the context of anthropological and linguistic research, Norman Tindale's well-known 'Map Showing the Distribution of the Aboriginal Tribes of Australia' of 1940 is analogous to the work of the Jindyworobaks, remapping as it does the spatial and social complexities of the continent-wide distribution of the Aboriginal nations.

Concurrent with these episodes of South Australian literary culture is the Hermannsburg linguist and anthropologist T. G. H. Strehlow's *Songs of Central Australia* (1971), the contentious product of a lifetime's work among the Arrernte (Aranda) peoples. (Strehlow had influenced Ingamells' conception of Jindyworobak by his essay 'Conditional Culture,' 1938.) Strehlow's study, overlapping in complex ways with the Jindyworobaks and with David Unaipon, is a monumental attempt to preserve and translate the great heritage of sacred Aboriginal song and story, including its essential and constitutive relation to, and celebration of, place. Strehlow's final vision of 'the strong web of future Australian verse' is that it will be woven with the 'strands that will be found to be poetic threads spun upon the Stone Age hair-spindles of Central Australia'.[36]

This evolving (white) cultural dream, given different expressions in Strehlow and in the Jindyworobaks, also appears translated into environmentalist terms in later essays of Judith Wright's under the heading of 'About Conservation' (in *Because I Was Invited*, 1975), in Les Murray's essay 'The Human-Hair Thread', and in such poems of his as 'The Bulahdelah–Taree Holiday Song Cycle'. As recently as 1977, over 40 years after Ingamells' first use of the term Jindyworobak, Murray was drawing on the contentiously nationalist material of Jindyworobak for an updated concept of cultural interchange and spirituality-in-place. Murray wrote:

> my abiding interest is in integrations, in convergences. I want my poems to be more than just National Parks of sentimental preservation, useful as the National Parks are as holding operations in the modern age. What I am after is a spiritual change that would make them unnecessary. . . . the Jindyworobak poets were on the right track, in a way; their concept of *environmental value*, of the slow moulding of all people within a continent or region towards the natural human form which that continent or region demands, that is a real process.[37]

35 Brian Elliott (ed.), *The Jindyworobaks*, UQP, 1979.
36 T. G. H. Strehlow, *Songs of Central Australia*, A&R, 1971, p. 729.
37 Les Murray, 'The Human-Hair Thread', *Persistence in Folly*, Sirius, 1984, p. 27.

The north

The historian Regina Carter, in her study of early Asian–Australian contacts and polyethnicity in North Australia, asserts that Australian history 'properly begins' in the north. 'Looking at Australian history from north to south,' as she argues, 'reconfigures much of what we think we know of the Australian past.'[38] This is exactly what Cheryl Taylor, Elizabeth Perkins and David Headon have done in their critical accounts of the writing of the Northern Territory and the tropical north. Headon's *North of the Ten Commandments: A Collection of Northern Territory Literature* (1991) is probably the most eclectic selection of any Australian regional literature yet published. It acknowledges those classics of Australian and Territorian writing, Mrs Aeneas Gunn's *We of the Never-Never* (1908) and Xavier Herbert's *Capricornia* (1938) and *Poor Fellow My Country* (1975). In addition, it includes translations of Aboriginal song cycles and dreaming stories; Aboriginal retellings of white maritime exploration (Cook, Flinders); extracts from journals of overland exploration (Stuart, Leichhardt, Giles, Campbell, Stokes); accounts of violent white invasion like Ernestine Hill's 'The Daly River Murders of 1884 and their Aftermath' and 'The Coniston "Massacres" of August 1928' by Sidney Downer. There are also many yarns, ballads and stories of frontier exploits and 'incredibilities'; and modern Aboriginal writing, including the Yirrkala Bark Petition of 1963 and Vincent Lingiari's speech in August 1975, at Wattie Creek, in Gurindji and English, at the handing back of Aboriginal land. All of these represent the 'paradox and contradiction, idiosyncrasy and absurdity' of the literature of the Northern Territory.[39]

In their analysis of the writing of what David Malouf has referred to as the 'uncontrollable North', Taylor and Perkins make the point that no 'form of [non-Indigenous] writing has contributed more to the representation of North Queensland than long prose narratives', predominantly of the encounter with a tropical environment and the long history of racial interaction and violence, including with the island and surrounding regions to the north of the north (Papua, Papua New Guinea, Indonesia, Timor-Leste).[40] They detail the foundation of northern regional identity in these narratives of explorers, colonisers, castaways, frontier policemen, female pioneers, amateur and spurious ethnographers, white fringe-dwellers and exiles (E. J. Banfield, Jack McLaren), as well as the mid- to late-20th-century critique and rewriting of this identity in the fiction of Jean Devanny, Sarah Campion, Thea Astley, Eric Willmot and Janette Turner Hospital. Chilla Bulbeck and Gillian Whitlock have both analysed the quirky and powerful regionalism of Astley's fiction: the 'strangeness of north Queensland tropical vegetation, time and space produce strange people, the "Queensland oddball" or "humanoids" '.[41]

38 Regina Carter, *Mixed Relations: Asian–Aboriginal Contact in North Australia*, UWAP, 2006, p. 1.

39 David Headon (ed.), *North of the Ten Commandments: A Collection of Northern Territory Literature*, Hodder & Stoughton, 1991, p. xvii.

40 Cheryl Taylor and Elizabeth Perkins, 'Warm Words: North Queensland Writing', in Patrick Buckridge and Belinda McKay (eds), *By the Book: A Literary History of Queensland*, UQP, 2007, p. 214.

41 Chilla Bulbeck, 'Regionalism', in James Walter (ed.), *Australian Studies: A Survey*, OUP, 1989, p. 74.

A brilliant recent rewriting and extension of this tradition, Alexis Wright's novel *Carpentaria* (2006) embodies an Indigenous perspective on this conflicted history of human interaction and habitation. Wright's re-presentation of the gulf region, including its powerful white avatar in Herbert's *Capricornia*, embraces both Aboriginal cosmogony, including ancestor spirits' creation of the topography – 'the serpent's covenant permeates everything' – savage satire of white economic imperialism (bauxite mining), and allegories of the historico-spatial imagination.[42]

Cecil Hadgraft has a significant place in this overview. His *Queensland and its Writers: 100 years, 100 authors* (1959) was published within a year of his *Australian Literature: A Critical Account to 1955* (1960). The virtually simultaneous perspectives of these two studies, one regional, one national, were prescient of future directions in Australian literary studies. Building on half a century's work in regional literary studies, including Hadgraft's, Patrick Buckridge and Belinda McKay published their edited collection of essays, *By the Book: A Literary History of Queensland*, in 2007. So far, this is the most highly developed example of regional literary history in Australia. It includes a history of North Queensland writing by Cheryl Taylor and Elizabeth Perkins; and a version of the preface to the Writers of Tropical Queensland subset of the AustLit database and essays about 'South-East' (city, hinterland and Darling Downs), 'Central,' and 'Western' Queensland writing; as well as 'Statewide Themes' (Indigenous, children's, travel). Surveying the quantity and variety of Queensland literary heritage, Buckridge and McKay begin with the question of whether a 'Queensland difference' is identifiable: the idea of Queensland as not just a geopolitical subdivision of the nation but a 'state of mind'. Their response to this hypothesis is to 'see if we could use the literary history of Queensland not to boost and consolidate Queensland's image of itself as a whole and distinct entity but to scrutinise that image, to look beyond it, to question it, even to ignore it if that seemed the right thing to do'. In this sense, their 'consortium' of critical essays represents a reflective instance of critical regionalism that is informed by an awareness of how a geopolitical region may not be a holistically literary one.[43]

The historical depth of their study rests on earlier work in critical regionalism, including Hadgraft's; J. J. Stable and A. E. M. Kirkwood's *A Book of Queensland Verse* (1924); H. A. Kellow's critical study *Queensland Poets* (1930); and also the powerful presence of Queensland writers and intellectuals in simultaneously regional and national definition. Malouf's fiction – especially *Johnno* (1975) and *Harland's Half Acre* (1984) – his memoir *12 Edmonstone Street* (1985), and many of his short stories are meditations on human relations to the specific places and space of Brisbane (in wartime, in the louche 1950s, in the 1960s makeover), South-East Queensland and the 'North'.[44] Malouf has also contributed to the discourse of spatial consciousness, mentioned earlier, in his

42 Alexis Wright, *Carpentaria*, Giramondo, 2006, p. 11.
43 Buckridge and McKay, 'Introduction', in Buckridge and McKay (eds), *By the Book*, p. 5.
44 See William Hatherell, *The Third Metropolis: Imagining Brisbane Through Art and Literature, 1940–1970*, UQP, 2007, p. 1.

conversation with Paul Carter about writing and historical identity.[45] But, as the readings in *By the Book* demonstrate, there are many other distinctive facets to the representation of place and space by Queensland writers. And the Queensland-inflected intellectual tradition goes back, at least, to the Toowoomba-born A. G. Stephens and his role at the *Bulletin*. It includes important institutions in Australian literary production like the magazines *Meanjin* (originally), *Barjai*, *LiNQ*, the publishers Jacaranda Press, Makar Press and University of Queensland Press, and the contributions to Australian literary studies at the University of Queensland (*Australian Literary Studies*, *Hecate*) and James Cook University. On any map of Australian literary intellectual life, Queensland would have one of the most densely represented histories.

Other regions

Patrick Morgan's work on the literature of Gippsland in Victoria – *The Literature of Gippsland: The Social and Historical Context of Early Writings, with Bibliography* (1986) and *Shadow and Shine: An Anthology of Gippsland Literature* (1988) – provides one of the earliest scholarly and critical discernments of a literary region. Morgan's identification of the rich traditions of Gippsland writing was stimulated by the project of *The Oxford Literary Guide to Australia* (1987; rev. 1993), for which he was an associate editor. This guide to literary landscape features, while national in extent, is organised by state and territory. It provides short literary histories of Australian 'towns, townships, suburbs, rivers, mountains, well-known geographical areas such as the Riverina, the Monaro and the Mallee', in terms of where writers have lived, worked and set their works.[46] The section 'Australian Territories' includes entries on Antarctica, the Australian Capital Territory, Norfolk Island, and the Northern Territory.

Although 'Canberra' is an entry in the first edition of *The Oxford Companion to Australian Literature* (1985) it was dropped from the revised, 1994, edition. This move goes counter to the complex and unique literary culture of this region, which includes the narrative history of pastoral settlement, lyric encounters with the Monaro (David Campbell, Michael Dransfield), the political novel (Sarah Dowse, *West Block*, 1983) and the Seven Writers literary collective (*Canberra Tales*, 1988).

New readings

A tangible response to the development of localised literary cultures is research in the field of Australian literature that can now be conducted with sophisticated bibliographical resources able to differentiate for region and locale. Searchable and mineable spatially based subsets of the globally accessible AustLit database, like the Literature of Tasmania,

45 See Paul Carter and David Malouf, 'Spatial History', *Textual Practice*, 3 (1989), pp. 173–83.
46 Peter Pierce, 'Introduction', in Pierce (ed.), *The Oxford Literary Guide to Australia*, OUP, 1993, p. xi.

Writers of Tropical Queensland, and Australian Literary Responses to Asia, provide data about writers and their works with a special emphasis on regional or spatial terms.[47] The possibilities of this kind of research into Australian literature and literary cultures are only beginning to be explored.

An important influence here is Franco Moretti's remodelling of literary history, including spatial elements, in *Graphs, Maps, Trees: Abstract Models for Literary Theory* (2005). Moretti's insights are often informed by a 'distant reading' of fictional versions of places (cities, villages, suburbs) and statistical analysis of book history and genres (epistolary, gothic). In the European and British history of literary form proposed by Moretti, the national is a contested and conflictual structure; it is subject to movements of political and cultural devolution, as in Britain, and to the resurgence of 'older, smaller homeland' grounds of cultural identity in Europe.[48] Such cultural investments, Moretti demonstrates, are reflected in the provincial, regional or village-life novel, for example, and in poetic movements like the Scottish Renaissance of the 1920s and Hugh MacDiarmid's project of Lallans.[49] What Australian literary culture might reveal, viewed as a topography of forms and subjected to similar kinds of spatialised reading, remains to be seen, but there is every possibility it would quantify, variously, the shift away from a nation-centred literature to a location-centred one. For example, such empirical analysis might compensate for what has been a blind spot in the nationalist paradigm about the significance in Australian writing of representations of the town and the regional city.

A locational literary history would also provide a re-evaluation of iconic instances of literary place-consciousness, sometimes located firmly within the older narrative of national identity. Examples are Clarke's Tasman Peninsula, Lawson's small selections, Mary Grant Bruce's South Gippsland, Kenneth Slessor's Sydney Harbour, David Campbell's Monaro, Malouf's Brisbane, Judith Wright's New England, Frank Hardy's Carringbush, Thea Astley's tropical north, Drewe's beaches, Kinsella's wheatlands, Alex Miller's stone country. A critical regional reading of such places of the imagination would return them to the strata of Indigenous and other localised histories of representation as well as contemporary reorientations of spatial experience and knowledge.

For example, a reading of the Kimberley might move between the universe of ancient and modern Indigenous narratives and songs (Worora, Ngarinyin, Wunambal) with their structure of monsoonal seasonality; Dampier's and Baudin's narratives of coastal contact; Daniel Defoe's *Adventures of Captain Singleton* (1720), Sir George Grey's late-1830s journals of exploration; and contemporary Indigenous mythography (*Joe Nangan's Dreaming*, 1976; Kim Scott, *True Country*, 1993; Daisy Utemorrah *et al.*, *Visions of Mowanjum*, 1980). It could also encompass white imperialist fictions of a vanished Lemurian civilisation (James Francis Hogan's *The Lost Explorer*, 1890; G. Firth Scott's

47 <http://www.austlit.edu.au>.

48 Franco Moretti, *Graphs, Maps, Trees: Abstract Models for a Literary Theory*, Verso, 2005, pp. 51–2.

49 See Morag Shiach, 'Nation, Region, Place: Devolving Cultures', in Laura Marcus and Peter Nicholls (eds), *The Cambridge History of Twentieth-Century English Literature*, CUP, 2004, p. 533ff.

The Lost Lemuria, 1898) and H. P. Lovecraft's 'The Shadow Out of Time' (1936), part Indiana Jones pseudo-anthropological romance, part speculative fiction. Other elements might be another narrative of civilisational cycles, Mary Durack's family memoir of failed pastoral settlement *Kings in Grass Castles* (1959); Randolph Stow's *To the Islands* (1958); Katharine Susannah Prichard's *Coonardoo* (1929); Gail Jones' *Sorry* (2007); as well as contemporary autobiographical and non-fiction accounts of the cattle and mining industries.[50] An indigenised reading of this region would emphasise the ways in which country has grown these rich strata of representations. Such a reading might also reveal the conjunctions of the cultural expressions of lived experience of a region, over thousands of years, and that same region's possibility as a remote locale of meaning and identity for writers who may never have experienced the actual place, like Lovecraft.

The city as region

Although it necessarily works with the surviving archaeology and hierarchies of the region/metropolis dyad – Sydney and/or the Bush – critical regionalism is theoretically predicated on the assumption that all places are equally distinctive and meaningful in the literary imagination. John Docker's influential account of Sydney and Melbourne cultural history in *Australian Cultural Elites* (1974) – Sydney aestheticism versus Melburnian social commitment – predates the spatial turn in critical theory and is therefore almost entirely despatialised.[51] Rereadings of the city, though, as a region of the Australian imaginary are returning literary texts to the specificities of their historical and spatial contexts.

Since the growth of Australian spatial discourse, new readings of the city in the literary imagination have tentatively emerged. Peter Kirkpatrick's *The Sea-Coast of Bohemia: Literary Life in Sydney's Roaring Twenties* (1992; rev. 2007) reads Sydney culture of the 1920s in terms of the paradoxical maps of Bohemia, the originally European country of romance, and virtual city-space of the artistic demi-monde.[52] William Hatherell's *The Third Metropolis: Imagining Brisbane Through Art and Literature, 1940–1970* (2007) is a reading of post-1940 literary Brisbane, 'part chronological, part thematic', that focuses on the paradox of a city that its writers characterised as a cultural desert (Thomas Shapcott) but that at the same time produced a remarkable flourishing of literary and artistic activity.[53]

These studies emphasise the spatial (inner urban) contexts of literary production as well as the interconnectedness of writers to heterogenous creative communities and

50 The most detailed reading of Lemurian fiction is in John Docker, *The Nervous Nineties: Australian Cultural Life in the 1890s*, OUP, 1991.

51 Hatherell, *The Third Metropolis*, p. 14.

52 Kirkpatrick's critical study has a companion volume in Jill Dimond and Peter Kirkpatrick, *Literary Sydney: A Walking Guide*, UQP, 2000.

53 Hatherell, *The Third Metropolis*, p. 3.

those communities' often contradictory relations to Australian social and economic history. Members of a younger of generation of Indigenous writers, including Samuel Wagan Watson, Tony Birch and Lisa Bellear, are also writing about contemporary Indigenous perspectives on the Australian city – *Dreaming in Urban Areas*, as Lisa Bellear's 1996 poetry collection expressed it. *Radical Melbourne* (2001) and *Radical Melbourne 2: The Enemy Within* (2004) by Jeff Sparrow and Jill Sparrow, and *Radical Brisbane* (2004) by Raymond Evans and Carole Ferrier, although broadly cultural and committedly activist, are the work of Australianist literary scholars and represent a street-level rereading of the 'always alienated' and fully human city.[54]

Regional production and institutions

The new regionalism I have been describing has also been supported and enhanced by the rise of regionally focused publishing projects and regional funding agencies for writers and writing, usually governmental. Important national publishing houses like the University of Queensland Press and Fremantle Arts Centre Press, in the 1970s, and Magabala Books, in the 1990s, for example, were also associated with regional cultural movements, playing an active role in regional literary production and definition. The institutional history of these publishers and their part in the growth of regional literary cultures is an important aspect of Australia's book history.[55] Since the Whitlam Government set up the Australia Council in 1973, including the Literature Board, as one of its policy and funding art form boards, with a mission to support writers and writing nationally, the states and territories have each developed their own funding and institutional support for writers and writing. These have evolved in their individual ways, sometimes closely associated with the premier's or chief minister's office, sometimes at a greater administrative remove. The instigation of literary prizes (and associated funding for festivals and events) has been a significant aspect of this regional subsidy of contemporary writing. The more populous states of New South Wales and Victoria have tended to badge their prizes with the names of writers particularly associated with their literary history, while giving them a national scope: the Kenneth Slessor Prize for Poetry (New South Wales Premier's Awards), the Nettie Palmer Prize for Non-fiction (Victorian Premier's Awards). But South Australia does the same; the biennial Adelaide Festival awards are national, but their poetry prize, for example, is named the John Bray Poetry Award.

The other states and territories have often maintained a regional focus for their prizes, like the Western Australian and Northern Territory awards for natives or residents, while the National Word festivals in Canberra in the 1990s capitalised, literally, on Canberra's

54 Guy Rundle, 'Foreword', in Jeff Sparrow and Jill Sparrow, *Radical Melbourne 2: The Enemy Within*, Vulgar, 2004, p. 11.

55 See chapters on UQP, Fremantle and Magabala, for example, in Craig Munro and Robyn Sheahan-Bright (eds), *Paper Empires: A History of the Book in Australia, 1946–2005*, UQP, 2006.

dual presence as a simultaneously regional and national literary centre. Sometimes small states have emphasised international literary perspectives, like Tasmania with its Pacific Region prize of the 1990s. In 2006 a consortium of Melbourne-based benefactors, moving in the opposite direction of localisation, inaugurated an annual Melbourne Prize, thus narrowing its focus to the Victorian capital as a centre for writing. In 2008 the new directions in public patronage of literature were characterised by two major government announcements, one state-based, one federal: the inaugural Western Australian Premier's Asia–Australia Literary Award and the Prime Minister's Literary Awards (fiction and non-fiction). Also in that year, Melbourne was named a UNESCO City of the Book (Edinburgh is the only other so honoured).

Since the 1980s states and territories have also developed writers' centres, subsidised institutions that function as providers of services, resources and funding as well as coordinating events for sub-state writing communities. Typical of such organisations is this mission statement from the Queensland Writers' Centre: 'the QWC works to advance the recognition of Queensland writers and writing, locally and nationally'. While the history of the book in Australia, including its regional aspects, has received serious critical and scholarly attention in recent years, the history of state and regional institutions of literary patronage and cultural policy remains largely unwritten.

Writers themselves have always had slippery and mistrustful relations to entities like nation, with multiple responses in their writing and in their lives to the spectrum of what it might mean. Exile, after all, is one of the most ancient of literary subjectivities. And the literary imagination is no respecter of boundaries and borders, however it might take off from and reimagine the places it represents. All the same, place, environment and locale have frequently been the most profoundly formative influences on their imaginative work. And the evolving nature of the spatialised literary imagination – now decentralised, relocalised, Indigenising, transnational – suggests a number of focuses for the future work of critical regional reading: country, gothic Tasmania, the poetics of 'international regionalism', transnational spatial identities, the Indigenous city, quantitative literary regionalism, Carpentaria, Lemuria, regional book history, virtual Australia, regional cultural policy, alternative literary geographies (the edge, the insular, the trans-Indian Ocean), the town.[56] As the literary imagination in Australia continuously evolves in response to what country can mean, and to its own traditions of spatial representations, literary history and critical reading also need to reorient their theories and understandings of location.

56 See John Kinsella, 'Poets Cornered', *Sydney Morning Herald* (20 Jan. 2001), Spectrum, p. 8.

Select bibliography

This bibliography includes books published in the span of more than 150 years, from Frederick Sinnett's *The Fiction Fields of Australia* in 1856, to 2009. In part, it is a guide both to previous literary histories of Australia and to those presses (university and commercial) that have been at various periods committed to the publication of Australian literature, history and criticism. The bibliography is also a reflection of enduring overseas interest in the literature of Australia: a number of the titles below were written and edited by scholars from other countries (the entries for Patrick White give the best notion of this). The bibliography is arranged under thematic and generic headings; to a degree what is included in each has been a matter for editorial decision. There is an obvious overlap between categories – for instance, literature concerned with Aborigines, with Asia, autobiography, children's literature. There are books of essays elsewhere besides the section titled Essays, although these tend to be more genre-specific. Readers are directed to places where they can find out more than is listed here, both in book and electronic form. Notwithstanding the wry title of Tanya Dalziell's chapter on 19th-century fiction, Australia has hardly been 'no place for a book'.

Abbreviations used here and in the endnotes are:

A&R	Angus & Robertson
A&U	Allen & Unwin
ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
ANU	Australian National University
CUP	Cambridge University Press
MUP	Melbourne University Press
NLA	National Library of Australia
OUP	Oxford University Press
SUP	Sydney University Press
UNSWP	University of New South Wales Press
UP	University Press
UQP	University of Queensland Press
UWAP	University of Western Australia Press

Aborigines and Indigenous literature

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Asia

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Borchardt, D. H., and Kirsop, W., *The Book in Australia: Essays Towards a Cultural and Social History*, Australian Reference Publications, 1988.

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Clarke, Patricia, *Pen Portraits: Women Writers and Journalists in Nineteenth-Century Australia*, A&R, 1988.

Coleman, Deidre, and Otto, Peter (eds), *Imagining Romanticism: Essays on English and Australian Romanticisms*, Locust Hill, 1992.

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McQueen, Humphrey, *A New Britannia: An Argument Concerning the Social Origins of Australian Nationalism and Radicalism* (1970), rev. edn UQP, 2004.

Meredith, Peter, *Reading the Vision: A History of Copyright Agency Limited, 1974–2004*, Copyright Agency Ltd, 2004.

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Palmer, Vance, *The Legend of the Nineties*, MUP, 1954.

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Pierce, Peter, *Absences*, University of New England, 1993.

——, *'Is War Very Big?/As Big as New South Wales?': War and Parochialism in Australia in the 1920s* and 1930s, University College, UNSW, 1996.

——, *The Country of Lost Children: An Australian Anxiety*, CUP, 1999.

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Turner, Graeme, *National Fictions: Literature, Film and the Construction of Australian Narrative*, A&U, 1986.

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The most important journal in the field is *Australian Literary Studies*, established at the University of Tasmania in 1963 and from 1975 based at the University of Queensland.

The most significant overseas journal is *Antipodes: A North American Journal of Australian Literature*, published since 1987 by the American Association for Australian Literary Studies.

The *Australian Book Review* has had two incarnations under that name, being published in Adelaide 1961–74 and then in Melbourne from 1978 to the present.

Two of the oldest continuously published literary journals in the world come from Australia: *Southerly*, established in Sydney in 1939; and *Meanjin*, published in Brisbane as *Meanjin Papers* 1940–7, from Melbourne as *Meanjin* 1947–60 and from 1977 to the present. In the interim of 1961–76 it was called *Meanjin Quarterly*.

Other journals of significance – and not much junior to the other two – are *Overland* (1954–), *Quadrant* (1956–) and *Westerly* (1956–).

Literary biographies and criticism

This section is arranged in alphabetical order of the subjects of each book, beginning with Jessica Anderson and ending with Judith Wright. Where the author's name is not indicated in the title (as with Louisa Lawson), an explanatory note is added thus [ ].

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Noonan, Michael, *A Different Drummer: The Story of E. J. Banfield, the Beachcomber of Dunk Island*, UQP, 1983.
Rorobacher, Louise, *Marjorie Barnard and M. Barnard Eldershaw*, Twayne, 1973.
Hackforth-Jones, Penny, *Barbara Baynton: Between Two Worlds*, Penguin, 1989.
Day, A. Grove, *Louis Becke*, Random House, 1966.
Semmler, Clement, *Barcroft Boake: Poet of the Stockwhip*, Lansdowne Press, 1965.
Brissenden, Alan, *Rolf Boldrewood*, OUP, 1973.
De Serville, Paul, *Rolf Boldrewood: A Life*, MUP, 2000.
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Barnes, Katherine, *The Higher Self in Christopher Brennan's Poems: Esotericism, Romanticism, Symbolism*, Brill, 2006.
Chisholm, A. R., *Christopher Brennan: The Man and His Poetry*, A&R, 1946.
Clark, Axel, *Christopher Brennan: A Critical Biography*, MUP, 1980.
McAuley, James, *Christopher Brennan*, OUP, 1973.
Stephens, A. G., *Chris. Brennan*, Bookfellow, 1933.
Heseltine, Harry, *John le Gay Brereton*, Lansdowne Press, 1965.
Alexander, Alison, *Billabong's Author: The Life of Mary Grant Bruce*, A&R, 1979.
McCallum, John, *Buzo*, Methuen, 1987.

Bradstock, Margaret, and Wakeling, Louise, *Rattling the Orthodoxies: A Life of Ada Cambridge*, Penguin, 1991.
Tate, Audrey, *Ada Cambridge: Her Life and Work, 1844–1926*, MUP, 1991.
Heseltine, Harry, *A Tribute to David Campbell: A Collection of Essays*, UNSWP, 1987.
Gaile, Andreas (ed.), *Fabricating Beauty: Perspectives on the Fiction of Peter Carey*, Rodopi, 2005.
Hassall, Anthony J., *Dancing on Hot Macadam: Peter Carey's Fiction*, UQP, 1998 (3rd edn).
Huggan, Graham, *Peter Carey*, OUP, 1996.
Lamb, Karen, *Peter Carey: The Genesis of Fame*, A&R, 1992.
Woodcock, Bruce, *Peter Carey*, Manchester UP, 1996, rev. edn 2003.
Elliott, Brian, *Marcus Clarke*, OUP, 1958.
Wilding, Michael, *Marcus Clarke*, OUP, 1977.
McCann, Andrew, *Marcus Clarke's Bohemia: Literature and Modernity in Colonial Melbourne*, MUP, 2004.
Molloy, Frank, *Victor J. Daley (A Life)*, Crossing Press, 2004.
Stephens, A. G., *Victor Daley*, Bulletin Newspaper Co., 1905.
Brooks, Barbara, with Clark, Judith, *Eleanor Dark: A Writer's Life*, Pan Macmillan, 1998.
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Dow, Hume, *Frank Dalby Davison*, OUP, 1971.
Haskell, Dennis, *Attuned to Alien Moonlight: The Poetry of Bruce Dawe*, UQP, 2002.
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Pearl, Cyril, *Brilliant Dan Deniehy: A Forgotten Genius*, Nelson, 1972.
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McLaren, I. F., *C. J. Dennis: His Life and Work*, Hall's Bookstore, 1961.
Ferrier, Carole, *Jean Devanny: Romantic Revolutionary*, MUP, 1999.
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Coleman, Verna, *Miles Franklin in America: Her Unknown (Brilliant) Career*, Sirius Books, 1981.
Mathew, Ray, *Miles Franklin*, OUP, 1963.
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Roe, Jill, *Stella Miles Franklin*, HarperCollins, 2008.
Barnes, John, *The Order of Things: A Life of Joseph Furphy*, OUP, 1990.
Croft, Julian, *The Life and Opinions of Tom Collins: A Study of the Works of Joseph Furphy*, UQP, 1991.
Goldsworthy, Kerryn, *Helen Garner*, OUP, 1996.
Wilde, W. H., *Courage a Grace: A Biography of Dame Mary Gilmore*, MUP, 1988.
Riemer, Andrew, *The Ironic Eye: The Poetry and Prose of Peter Goldsworthy*, A&R, 1994.
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Armstrong, Pauline, *Frank Hardy and the Making of Power Without Glory*, MUP, 2000.
Hocking, Jennifer, *Frank Hardy: A Political Biography*, Lothian, 2005.
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Atherton, Cassandra L., *Flashing Eyes and Floating Hair: A Reading of Gwen Harwood's Pseudonymous Poetry*, Australian Scholarly Publishing, 2006.
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De Groen, Frances, *Xavier Herbert: A Biography*, UQP, 1998.
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Monahan, Sean, *A Long and Winding Road: Xavier Herbert's Literary Journey*, UWAP, 2003.
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