

6 POSTMODERNISM IN AUSTRALIAN LITERATURE

Australian literature can be understood as literature of the settler colony representing a complexity of the formation of both Australian cultural identity and its culture. Culture of the original Aboriginal inhabitants was based on oral tradition which was either suppressed or could not compete with Australian literature based on a written tradition. During the colonization of Australia when the country was established as a British penal colony in 1788, Australian literature was influenced by the British literary tradition. Especially in early 19th century Scottish broadside ballads adapted to the convict life and Australian setting as well as Romantic poetry modeled after English Romantic poets (Wordsworth, Keats, Shelley and others) were imitated. The first systematic attempts to form Australian literature that would reflect unique Australian experience were made by the authors who were either contributing to or were the editors of the radical egalitarian and nationalistic journal the *Bulletin* in the 1890s. Australian colloquial speech, vernacularism, yarn, short stories, the bush experience, bushrangers as symbolic representatives of the resistance towards British colonialism and realistic writing method were the common attributes of these authors (**Joseph Furphy**, **Henry Lawson**, **Barbara Baynton** and many others). With a growing independence (Australia became a dominion, less dependent on Britain when the country became a Commonwealth of Australia in 1901), economic progress and modernity, realistic writing method started to be understood as old-fashioned and unable to express new Australian experience in the 20th century. They were especially such authors as **Christina Stead** and **Patrick White** who became the most influential modernist writers attacking traditional and nationalistic concepts of Australian literature based on the bush myth and realistic method of writing associated with it. Some critics see some of Patrick's White works going even further and argue that such novel as *The Twyborn Affair* (1979) and *Memoirs of Many in One* (1986) use postmodern narrative techniques such as self-reflexivity (the former work) and with "openly postmodern structure" (Lever 1998: 312) in the latter work (Lever 1998). In addition to these works, earlier works such as **Peter Mathers'** *Trap* (1965), **David Ireland's** *The Chantic Bird* (1968) and later especially his *The Unknown Industrial Prisoner* (1972) can be understood as novels anticipating a period of postmodern literature in Australia. These novels are influenced by South American magic realists' works (Marquez and Machado de Assis, especially in

Ireland's fiction), used self-reflexivity and metafictional in which reality overlaps with fiction. But Australian postmodern literature started to develop more systematically in the 1970s when Frank Moorhouse edited a short story anthology **Coast to Coast** in 1973, when **the Tabloid Story** journal was established in the early 1970s and when a new generation of authors such as **Peter Carey, Murray Bail, Michael Wilding, Morris Lurie, David Foster, Gerald Murnane, Nicholas Hasluck, Elizabeth Jolley, later partly Rodney Hall** and others started to publish their experimental postmodern fiction many of which were published in the above journals and anthologies. These authors represent a strong generation of postmodern authors whose work was discussed in **Helen Daniel's** influential critical book ***Liars: Australian New Novelists (1988)***. In this book, she called these authors Australian new novelists and this new novel is understood as typical of

[...] play of mind, ludic and absurdist, a fabric of hazard, paradox, contradiction, instability...[within which]objects, things, are surfaces behind which there is an absurd or fantastic reality, sometimes surrealistic, shadows on the surface of the real (Daniel 1988:21).

This quotation indicates typical postmodern poetics the work of the discussed authors is marked by. **Peter Carey, Michael Wilding, Murray Bail**, partly **Frank Moorhouse** represent perhaps the most internationally known Australian authors that is why with the exception of Peter Carey their works will be discussed below.

In addition to his writing career, **Michael Wilding** (1942-) has been working as an editor for several journals and lecturing as Professor of English at the University of Sydney, and has written scholarly books on John Milton, British fiction, and classic Australian fiction. **Frank Moorhouse** (1938-) has been mostly a journalist and editor for several Australian news and journals, and later a full-time writer. And **Murray Bail** (1941-) has been mostly working as an art critic, journalist and a full-time writer. Their academic and intellectual background, their familiarity with the contemporary tendencies in the development of literature and literary criticism as well as with the Australian literary and artistic tradition have enabled these authors to redirect the trajectory of the Australian short story and novel since the 1960's. Michael Wilding is probably the most prolific of these authors, writing especially novels and short stories. Although he was born in Britain where he got a prestigious education and B.A. degree from Oxford University, later he moved to Australia. The titles of his works such as *The Short Story Embassy* (1975), *The Phallic Forest* (1978),

Reading the Signs (1984) imply his interest in contemporary post-structuralist and postmodern theories of literature, in the referential function of language and in the relationship between language and reality. The cultural situation in Britain, Europe, Australia and other countries, the bohemian world of Sydney and Melbourne intellectual elites, the boredom of suburban life and pseudo-intellectualism, mental and ecological crises, the influence of the radical Beats and American (popular) culture, sexuality, sexual deviations, and the nature of linguistic representation have become the main themes of Michael Wilding's fiction. His physical dislocation from England, Australia and partly the United States where he was lecturing has enabled him to acquire the status of a playful, ironic and detached observer of the cultural situation in these countries and continents. As he himself admits,

The new world of Australia was very different from the traditions of provincial England. I loved it, and it provided me with my first materials: the bohemian world of Sydney with its writers and journalists, anarchists and leftists, filmmakers and poets. I moved from English psychological realism to a new world experimentalism—'new writing' as we called it at the time, for want of any other term. Now it is called postmodernism. It was fun to do. Experimental, spontaneous, in love with the fictionality of fiction (Wilding, 2005).

Wilding develops the above themes in his first short story collection *Aspects of the Dying Process* (1972). Autobiographical elements, the life of the Sydney elites, the post-hippie urban world, industrial pollution and confrontation of the European and Australian cultures are some of Wilding's main themes that he introduced in his short story collection *The West Midland Underground* (1975). As in much postmodern fiction, also in this collection the author plays with the meaning of the title which changes and never refers to the same referent. It refers to a geographical area, a film title; it is a grammatical expression or an indefinite underground. This narrative instability points to Wilding's preoccupation with the postmodern construction of meaning and the relationship between language and reality and life and art. The symbolic meaning of underground refers not only to an indefinite geographical underground, but also to the negative effects of industrial pollution and commercialization since the underground is absorbed by an unspecified "overground" which "had bought out the underground, and affixed iron plaques of ownership to stations and arches and tunnels and platforms; and closed it down" (Wilding 1996:60). This

disappointment with contemporary consumerism and industrialism is compensated by nostalgia for the pastoral countryside of the past and vanished romantic atmosphere.

Wilding treats the impact of American literary tradition, especially of Jack Kerouac and popular culture on the Australian bohemian life, more explicitly in the short story from the later collection, *Bye Bye Jack. See You Soon*. The Jack in the title and the allusions to the novels *On the Road* and *The Dharma Bums* apparently refer to Jack Kerouac and his style of spontaneous prose. The narrator from this story seems to be a writer and a university teacher who, in his first person narration, imitates Kerouac's spontaneous way of writing and tries to cope with the hedonism and boredom of life in Sydney influenced by the Vietnam War protests, beatniks and underground culture. At the same time, however, he points out a certain "exhaustion" of the beatnik literature and culture, for example, also by the narrator's argument that "I don't have the beatitude of a Kerouac" (Wilding 1977: 226). Thus this story is not only a story treating the impact of American popular culture and political situation on Australian life, but also a story about writing invoking an attempt to construe a new poetic expression different from both the traditional realistic narrative typical of early Australian literary tradition and the American beatnik writing. The story also turns out to be a parody on the Sydney bohemian and pseudo-intellectual elites and their lifestyle. Writing and the construction of meaning is further treated, although in a neutral setting, in Wilding's story *The Words She Types*, in which the author develops the transition of a typist from an imitating copier of reality to the editor of her boss's texts, i.e. a creator of reality, which becomes a metaphor of the writing process.

As in his first short story collection, also in his first and successful novel *Living Together* (1974), Wilding also playfully and symbolically deals with the construction of meaning through language, with an environment of representation depicting Sydney intellectual elites and hedonistic culture, but especially open sexuality. The nature of linguistic construction of reality is further treated in his following postmodern novel *The Short Story Embassy* (1975) in which, as the title suggests, metafictional elements, the theme of writing, construction of reality but also sexuality, parody and irony dominate in the context of his depiction of the post-beatnik world set in the Australian urban environment. Wilding's concern with sexuality and the body as both a manifestation of contemporary culture and as a metaphor of writing appears in his other novels *Scenic Drive* (1976) and *The Phallic Forest* (1978).

Industrial pollution, life in the Australian city (Sydney), semi-surreal fantasies, sexual desires and a post-hippie world also appear in Wilding's novel *Pacific Highway* (1982). But what dominates in this novel is the author's interest in ecological issues as expressed in his previous works. A similar theme connecting history and contemporary reality appears in Wilding's novel *The Paraguayan Experiment* (1984), in which the author draws on the real historical event of the socialist expedition led by William Lane who wanted to establish a utopian New Australia in Paraguay in 1893. *Reading the Signs* (1984), another of Wilding's short story collections, only confirms the author's interest in the nature of linguistic representation and the construction of reality through language, for a depiction of which he largely uses both linguistic games and metafictional elements involving the reader in the process of the construction of meaning. Although Wilding has continued to use his postmodern narrative techniques to deal with such themes as the contrast between European, American and Australian worlds, ecological crisis, and nostalgia for the pastoral atmosphere as juxtaposed to the post-beatnik Australian world, sexuality and the bohemian world of the Sydney elites as well as the nature of representation, in such short story collections and novels as *The Man of Slow Feeling: Selected Short Stories* (1985), *Under Saturn* (1987), *Great Climate* (1990), *Her Most Bizarre Sexual Experience* (1991), and *Somewhere New: New and Selected Stories* (1996), he has slightly refocused his interest in his later works to other issues he had briefly dealt with in his previous fiction. His novel *Wildest Dreams* of 1998 is a fictional rewriting of his experience as a writer and critic in Australia that includes autobiographical elements. In one of his interviews he said that this novel is about

The rise and fall of a young writer. It's based on my thirty years in Sydney. It is focused on different aspects of the literary life—book reviewing, the alternative world, publishing. It's a memoir (Maver 1997: 9).

Although Wilding used autobiographical experience and claimed this book was a memoir, he again plays with the relationship between fictional and verifiable experience. The novel turns out to be a postmodern metanovel on writing including his comments on the influence of American authors such as Richard Brautigan, John Barth, Donald Barthelme or Louis Borges on his writing method.

The verifiable facts are turned into the fictional narrative in one of Wilding's later works *Raising Spirits. Making Gold, and Swapping Wives: The True Adventures of Dr. John Dee and Sir Edward Kelly* (1999), which takes its subject-matter from life experience of an

English alchemist Dr. Dee and his assistant Edward Kelly from the 16th century who traveled around Europe and finally found both favor and disgrace at the court of Czech Emperor Rudolph II.

Although **Murray Bail (1941)** is not as prolific writer as Wilding or Frank Moorhouse, each of his books is almost a literary event. Bail uses postmodern narrative techniques to challenge the traditional nationalist stereotypes about Australia as an isolated country proud of its realistic bush tradition and the idea of mateship. Like Mark Twain, Bail often uses satire but also postmodern irony to make a critique of the nationalist preoccupations of Australians with their identity, but also to explore the notion of Australian literary tradition in the context of European culture. His characters are not only common people but also often eccentrics, and through their depiction Bail points out the absurdities of contemporary life. Maps and mapping, traveling and mobility have become central metaphors through which Bail explores the above themes, undermines the Australian realistic tradition and reconsiders the nature of Australian identity. His profession as art critic for the Australian National Gallery in Canberra has enabled him to enrich his postmodern narratives with visual imagery and intertextual allusions to painting, through which he builds up his postmodern vision of the world. As the title of his first collection of stories, *Contemporary Portraits and Other Stories* (St. Lucia, 1975) implies, he incorporates visual imagery in his narrative. This visual imagery dominates in one of the most important stories of the collection, *The Drover's Wife*, in which he draws the reader into a complex web of connotations. The narrator comments on the famous picture by Australian modernist painter Russell Drysdale, inspired by Henry Lawson's famous short story of the same title of the 19th century. Lawson's story gives a realistic treatment to the difficult bush life. But Bail's short story narrator imagines the woman in the picture to be his wife who had abandoned him 30 years before, and develops her future life story. Through direct reference to the picture, Bail manipulates the readers, their perception of reality and understanding of what is real and what is invented and fictional. Thus he creates a metafictional frame of reference through which he explores not only the relationship between fact and fiction, but also undermines the credibility of the Australian realistic tradition as represented by Henry Lawson and 19th century realism. The realism of Henry Lawson is thus juxtaposed to the modernism of Russell Drysdale and further to Murray Bail's postmodern vision of the world in this story. At the same time, using postmodern

narrative techniques, Bail points out the vitality of postmodern fiction that relativizes any stereotypical and nationalist preoccupations about national identity and its construction.

Similar themes appear in other short stories from the collection, for example in Zoellner's *Definition* and in *Portrait of Electricity*. The former story is reminiscent of the narrative strategies of Pavić's *Dictionary of the Khazars*. The narrator pretends to give an exact definition of Zoellner through the precise description of the parts of his body, which is further parodied to show the absurdity and impossibility of the exact representation of reality through precise and mimetic language. A similar strategy can be found in Bail's *Portrait of Electricity*, depicting tourists in a museum and museum guides commenting on and describing facts associated with life of an anonymous, but famous person. Through ironic juxtapositions of incompatible objects the guides are unable to explain a connection between, and the use of parody and burlesque, Bail emphasizes the impossibility of explanation of the complexity of human nature (of an unknown famous person in this short story) by means of language and the description of objects related to a person's life. To emphasize the absurdity of the rational approach to reality, the result of which is museumization of reality, Bail also uses burlesque and parody (for example he presents human excrement as an example of the famous person's life force in the museum) to point out the impossibility of believing in the capacity of reason to understand and explain reality (Kušnír, 2004). A similar approach and narrative strategy manifests itself in other stories from the same collection, especially in *Cul-de-Sac*. These motifs of quest, museum, fragmented reality, and measuring space can be found in Bail's first novel *Homesickness* (1980) as well. A group of twelve Australian tourists traveling around Africa, Britain, South America, the United States and the Soviet Union are reminiscent of Mark Twain's *Innocents Abroad*. While Twain's novel enables the author to make satirical and ironic observation of various American characters and their identity confronted with "high culture", Bail's novel does not only make ironic observation of Australian identity, but also points out the falseness and artificiality of the construction of stereotypical "national identity." The main metaphor Bail uses to parody the idea of rational understanding of reality and national identity is the institution of the museum. Tourists' traveling and their visits to museums turn out to be a parody on the rational and positivist approach to the world. The tourists' traveling becomes a bizarre and surreal experience and, in addition to the above meaning, the tourists' status of explorers and observers casts them in the position of allegorical readers (of reality).

Language, geography, identity and its construction also become themes of another of Bail's novels, *Holden's Performance* (1987). The setting is Australia between World War II and the 1960's. The main character, Holden Shadbolt, can symbolically represent Australia in the course of its post-war historical process. As in his previous works, in this novel Bail also uses the imagery of traveling, mapping and motion (Adelaide, Sydney, cars and trams) which enables him to emphasize the idea of observation, and thus also the construction and interpretation of reality. Construction of reality as a theme is dealt with on the allegorical level, and the novel thus becomes an account of the relationship between reality and fiction, language and reality, life and art.

Bail's postmodern narrative techniques, his linguistic and surreal play combined with absurd humor and eroticism, his parody of the naive belief in the ability of traditional writing to "objectively" represent reality and many other issues can be found in his short story collection *Camouflage* (2000), which mostly includes the stories from his first short story collection.

Above all, though, Bail has been confirmed as a valuable and innovative author especially by his most recent novel *Eucalyptus* (1998), for which he was awarded both the 1999 Commonwealth Writers Prize and the Miles Franklin Award. In this novel he incorporates various fairy tales and motifs on which the central plot is based. Like Donald Barthelme in his *Snow White*, Robert Coover in his *Briar Rose* or *Stepmother*, or like Angela Carter, Bail uses a central metaphor, in this case the eucalyptus, a native Australian tree, through which to develop his imaginative, playful and postmodern metafictional story, not only on the relationship between father and daughter but also on the nature of construction of identity and reality, on colonization, on the relationship between the colonizers and the colonized, language and reality. The basic narrative is constructed around a re-configured version of the fairy tale plot: a widowed Australian, Mr. Holland, has become obsessed with eucalyptus trees in the Australian bush and has decided to create a farm consisting of all possible kinds of eucalyptus tree, which he has become an amateur expert in. Like kings in fairy tales, his will is to marry his beautiful daughter to a man who will be able to identify and name all the eucalyptus species. Since most of the suitors fail to fulfill this task, the process of Ellen's marriage is constantly postponed in Bail's novel, like death in the Scheherazade story. This narrative construction evokes several connotations— arranged marriage can represent fulfillment of patriarchal law which is, however, systematically postponed and thus it evokes

Bail's critique of the patriarchal approach to life and authoritarianism. Although Ellen is seduced by the stories told by her suitors, she longs rather for physical and erotic love, which may imply that Bail is pointing out the difference between experiential, physical reality and its linguistic construction through stories (or fiction represented by stories). This idea is supported by Bail's juxtaposition of a meticulous and scientific description of eucalyptus trees and the stories that both Ellen's father and her suitors tell. These stories often concern telling stories themselves, which makes them self-reflexive and metafictional. Identifying and naming trees is a positivist project which evokes a belief in the possibility of knowing reality through language. But since Ellen is seduced mostly by the stories rather than by the mechanical process of her suitors' naming the trees (which mostly fails), it seems that Bail is making a critique of both the ability of language to "objectively" represent reality and of realistic writing based on the mimetic tradition promoting this idea.

Bail's use of postmodern narrative techniques have enabled him to deal with the relationship between Australia, Europe and the USA, to make ironic observation of Australian cultural identity and its construction, and to point out the artificiality and unreliability of the construction of any "objective" picture of reality as provided by the realistic narrative tradition.

Although Frank Moorhouse is an innovative fiction writer of the same generation as Wilding and Bail who also subverts traditional realistic narrative conventions, it is more difficult to qualify him as a typical postmodern author. Referring to his early short stories, Bruce Bennett calls him "renovator of Australian realism" (Bennett 1976: 364). Moorhouse's position as a columnist, journalist, Visiting Professor at the University of Texas at Austin, USA (2002), and writer-in-residence in Great Britain has significantly contributed to the formation of both his cultural experience and his narrative methods. Like Hemingway's inspiration with his journalist style manifesting itself in his use of short sentences, Moorhouse also often uses similar sentences and dialogues including them. His first short collections, *Futility and Other Animals* (1969) and *The Americans, Baby* (1972), depict generational conflict and life in a modern Australian urban setting. The depiction of a naked woman lying on an American flag indicates some of the themes Moorhouse deals with in this collection—sexuality, sexual fantasies, hedonism, commercialization of sex (like in *Playboy* and other erotic and pornographic magazines) as well as the Americanization of Australian culture through popular culture. Controversial depiction of sexuality can also be found in his first

short story collection *Futility and Other Animals*. Although formally using rather traditional narrative devices, these collections also imply the thematic innovation which Moorhouse further used in his following short stories and novels. These first short stories, like some of Wilding's, also depict the life-style of the urban alternative and bohemian communities of the writers, political activists and radicals, students and intellectuals. Moorhouse uses his formal innovation known as "discontinuous" and fragmentary narratives enriched by irony and parody in his short story collection *The Electrical Experience* (1974). His term "discontinuous narrative" appeared as a sub-title to his short story collection *Futility and Other Animals*, and the author characterized it as

...interlinked stories and although the narrative is discontinuous—there is no single plot—the environment and the characters are continuous. In some ways, the people in the stories are a tribe—a modern, urban tribe—which does not fully recognise itself as a tribe[...]The shared environment is both internal—anxieties, pleasures, and confusions—and external—the houses, streets, hotels, and experiences (Moorhouse 1969, introductory note).

This narrative technique points out Moorhouse's experiment involving reduction of plot, and loose connections among the characters that are, however, united through a common urban environment, culture and life style. But this fragmentary narrative uses characters of the same name (such as Becker, Rexroth, Hugo, Angela) who appear in various stories from his *Futility and Other Animals* and are connected rather loosely. Not only characters, but also fragments and motifs from earlier stories appear in his later stories. In the short stories from the *The Electrical Experience* Moorhouse depicts characters protesting against the social situation, conflict, the Vietnam War and cultural situation through the bohemian life style, sexual experiments (prostitution, masturbation, homosexuality - see Bennett, 2002:183) and drugs like the American beatniks, or through active political commitment. In this short story collection, Moorhouse also experiments with different forms of art (literature, film, photography) through the inclusion of photographs, letters, various documents and forms of printing (white print on a black page).

Love and sexual relationships, the moral dilemma between sexual liberty and responsibility, the position of individuals in society and their role in history, political commitment and individualism all put in ironic context become recurrent themes of Moorhouse's writing in the 1970's and 1980's. Despite his discontinuous narratives, Moorhouse could be labeled as innovative realist rather than a truly postmodernist writer.

Bruce Bennett compares his method of writing even to that of the American writer Tom Wolfe and the New Journalists (Bennett 2002:186). Some critics consider the two following short story collections, *Tales of Mystery and Romance* (1977), and *Forty-Seventeen* (1988) to be Moorhouse's best artistic achievement. Through the use of the first-person narrator, the former collection continues to depict Moorhouse's typical themes — love relationships, the conflict of freedom and responsibility, sexual desires, pseudo-intellectualism and the clash between rationality and irrationality, logic and mystery.

Moorhouse's interest in the depiction of experimental sexual practices as a symbolic manifestation of cultural alternatives, freedom, perversity and pseudo-protest, the documentary nature of his short stories, the relationship between individuals and the community, nationality, commitment and gender issues appear in his other short story collection *The Everlasting Secret Family and Other Secrets* (1980), and partly in *Room Service* (1987) and *Lateshow* (1990). Self-reflexive observations, attempted love relationships set in the context of international institutions, politics, nostalgia, traveling and displacement become the main themes of Moorhouse's *Forty-Seventeen*, taking place in Europe, Africa and Australia. In contrast to his innovative realism and moderate experimentalism (discontinuous narrative, dialogue, fragmentation), however, and quite untypical for Moorhouse in its use of narrative techniques, his short story *The Drover's Wife* included in *Room Service* is a typical postmodern story using metafictional, intertextual and parody elements to challenge the Australian literary tradition of realist authors of the Bulletin School of the 1890's. The story is similar to ones by Murray Bail and other authors (Anne Gambling, for example), but from its very beginning, the story directly invades the structure of Henry Lawson's original version by Moorhouse's depiction of Franco Casamaggiore, an Italian student of Commonwealth literature and his lecture on Lawson's story which turns out to be not only its re-interpretation, but also a parody of the academic obsession with interpretation and the idea of production of meaning. Thus this postmodern story turns out to be not only a parodic reconsideration of the Australian bush myth evoking the idea of hostility, isolation and nothingness, but also a parody on the academic obsession with re-interpretation, academic (pseudo) intellectualism, and the formation of a stereotypical image of particular national identities.

Moorhouse turned to writing novels in the 1990's. They became no less successful than his short stories. The relationship between Australia and Europe, political commitment versus individual experience and freedom, sexuality and desire, and the immorality of

political anarchy become the main themes of Moorhouse's League of Nations novels, for the writing of which he did intensive and lengthy research in the archives of the League of Nations in Geneva, the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C., USA and the National Library of Australia. The first of them, *Grand Days* (1993), shows Moorhouse's interest in the confrontation of European and Australian cultures and politics, as well as in the connections between the personal, political and the historical. In addition, the novel revives Moorhouse's journalistic technique of documentary observation and the theme of previously-tabooed sexuality. The novel is set in Geneva in the 1920's, that is in the period of crisis and of the origination of the League of Nations. The personal and bohemian lives of bureaucrats are juxtaposed to international events and politics, which are treated satirically. Despite the historical facts and characters depicted in the book, Moorhouse's novel is neither purely journalistic or factographic nor a historical novel. He plays with the possibilities of the connections between the historical, factographical, verifiable and fictional, the reconstructed and the invented. The novel is not a historical reconstruction of past events, but a playful reconsideration of the role of the League of Nations in the history of politics, the importance of historical personalities and Australian representatives in the League, and the role of women in its formation. It is also a novel about the relationships between and the bizarre personal and sexual lives of the diplomats (especially the main character Edith Campbell Berry's interracial oral sex, masturbation, her transvestite friend), that is both private and public life. The novel consists of "scenes" rather than a chronological plot. The jury for the prestigious Australian Miles Franklin Award refused to consider this novel for this literary award on the grounds that it is set in Europe.

Edith Campbell Berry also appears in Moorhouse's following novel with a similar theme entitled *Dark Palace* (2000), for which he was eventually given the Miles Franklin Award. Set again mostly in Europe but with a considerable representation of the Australian background, the novel depicts the evaporation of the political optimism associated with the idea of co-operation and the League of Nations 5 years after its establishment. Edith can symbolize the League of Nations itself and its transition from an initial optimism to later skepticism and disillusionment. As the narrator states,

The world was not changing in quite the way she had planned...With Japan's invasion of Manchuria, the League's disarmament program has stalled, and Edith's marriage is unraveling [...] As a roving trouble-shooter

and chef du protocole, *Edith is the League*, with all of its flaws and delusions (Moorhouse 2001).

These novels, however, remain some of the most significant Australian novels concerning the interwar period. Moorhouse's literary career was extended by his film script writing, his editing, and finally by his now much more postmodern in fashion, *Martini: A Memoir* (2000), which is not a traditional memoir, but a collection of fragments, comments, jokes, recipes, funny observations on food and drinking, sex and literature, supplemented with self-reflexive and ironic commentaries on various life situations.

All three authors, however, despite their use of postmodern narrative techniques, vary in the degree and scope of their innovation as well as in their depiction of themes. In his postmodern narratives, Michael Wilding uses parody, irony, self-reflexive commentaries and allegory to deal with the post-beatnik urban and bohemian Australian setting. In his fiction, sexual and drug experimentation are sources of both liberty and boredom. Although Frank Moorhouse deals with similar themes, with several exceptions (some of his short stories such as *The Drover's Wife* or his *Memoir*), he is more interested in the subjectivization of experience and the connection between the private and the public and historical. His narrative techniques, his use of discontinuous narratives and his interest in the social and the political qualify him, with many of his works, as a modernist rather than a postmodernist author. In contrast to these authors, the less prolific Murray Bail uses myths and fairy tales which are incorporated into his surreal fantasies and metafictional and parodic observations of reality. This enables him to reconsider the nature of the Australian realistic tradition and the process of reconstruction of reality and the stereotypical image of national identities, as well as presenting an ironic picture of contemporary Australian life.

Like Michael Wilding, also Rodney Hall was born in England (in 1935), but moved and settled in Australia with his widowed mother at the age of thirteen. After his work for the television, radio and travelling in Europe he completed his education at Queensland University in Brisbane. He is not only a poet, playwright, but was also an actor and especially a musician which has enabled him to introduce a poetic quality and lyricism into his works. With his more than 30 novels, poems, plays, travel and social commentaries as well as biography he has become one of the most prolific Australian authors. His poetry is characterized by an experiment with free verse and imagery in which he often employs his familiarity with myths and legends. His novels have been three times nominated for the

Booker Prize, and he was twice awarded a prestigious Miles Franklin Award with his novel *Just Relations* in 1982 and *The Grisly Wife* in 1994. His novel *The Day We Had Hitler Home* was shortlisted for the 2001 Miles Franklin Award, and *Captivity Captive* won the Victorian Premier's Literary Award in 1988. Several other novels' nominations for various literary prizes is the evidence of the quality of Rodney Hall's fiction. His first novels were rather traditional in form. Later, experimenting with narrative voices and introducing lyrical elements in his fiction but also violence, Hall often explores such themes as family, Australian identity, politics, history and inter-cultural relationships in Australia. Although it may be problematic to qualify Hall as a postmodern author, the inclusion of lyrical and poetic elements, overlapping of different time levels, reality and myth makes him experimental rather than traditional author. In one of his most successful novels, *Just Relations*, he depicts a complicated chain of family relationships in the course of family histories through a depiction of which he symbolically treats the resistance to the authority and the idea of liberty. This novel is often understood by critics as a novel creating a white mythology around the Australian country landscape similar to the Aboriginal vision of the world. His emphasis is on the community as represented by rural families and communities. These themes can be found in his *Kisses of the Enemy*, but also in *Captivity Captive* (1988). In this novel a patriarchal figure of Daniel Malone represents authority and perhaps symbolically colonialism. In addition, Hall's depiction of the family, its isolation and violence may symbolically represent key issues associated with Australian cultural identity, i.e. the idea of a distance, isolation, violence and authority associated with the convict system and colonialism. Hall's novel *Kisses of the Enemy* is based on the complex conspiracy plot and a fat figure of Buchanan here represents a symbol of authority and power. In addition, the novel gives a critique of American militarism in Australia and his narrative techniques, including overlapping of reality and fiction as well as fantastic elements, are reminiscent of the magic realist fiction. The resistance, history, and especially the relationship between white Australian and Aboriginal cultures, between the rational and mythical vision of the world are depicted in Hall's *The Yandilli Trilogy* consisting of *The Second Bridegroom* (1991), *The Grisly Wife* (1993), and *The Island in the Mind* (1996).

Hall's novels *Captivity Captive* (1988), *The Second Bridegroom* (1991), and *The Day We Had Hitler Home* (2000), can be understood as fictional and symbolic history of Australia completing his symbolic chronicle of Australia since the colonial times (around 1850's) up to

the present in which he depicts not only violence, but also the mentality of the immigrants. And his last novel, *The Last Love Story* (2004) takes place in the City North and City South which symbolically represent free, democratic (City South) and authoritarian worlds (City North). Through a complicated personal relationships Hall symbolically depicts the political influence of the state on the individual as well as its manipulation with its citizens. It evokes an atmosphere of the contemporary world influenced by political manipulation, terrorism, youth and popular culture. In his novel *Love without Hope* (2007), Hall depicts a rural woman suffering of depression which is a result of a bushfire during which she has lost her beloved horses. Her memories of a missing husband and the past give a vivid picture of her life and past and create an alternative to both the present and the brutality of the institutions, especially the mental hospital, she must face.

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