The Australian Experience
Critical essays on Australian novels
W. S. Ramson editor
In its challenge to look afresh at sixteen novels about the Australian experience of life—novels as different as Harris's *Emigrant Family*, Stow's *Tourmaline*, Keneally's *Jimmie Blacksmith* or White's *Vivisector*—this book adds a new dimension to Australian literary criticism.

The novels range from the nineteenth century to today; their subjects are as diverse as colonial utopianism, the savagery of the convict system, the treatment of primitive peoples, war and nationalism. Yet through them all runs one universal, human theme: the search for self-understanding.

Lucid and informed, on occasion provocative and contradictory, this collection of critical essays is essentially an exercise in discovery or rediscovery by many distinguished writers. Not all readers will accept these highly personal revaluations—many will be exasperated by them—but none will fail to enjoy their challenge.
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The Australian Experience
Critical essays on Australian novels

W. S. Ramson editor

Australian National University 1974
Preface

The Australian novel has a short history and, if some writers, like Joseph Furphy, have appeared acutely aware of it and anxious to mould its course, others, like the expatriates Frederic Manning and Christina Stead, may seem to have arguable claims to a role in this history or a place in a university course in Australian literature. Indeed, if the simple criterion of permanent residence is used, the only novelists represented here who have incontestable claims are Browne (‘Rolf Boldrewood’), Clarke, Furphy, Lindsay, Keneally and perhaps White. This collection, then, as the inclusion of an essay on Lawrence’s Kangaroo should make plain, does not seek to deal with a recognisably separate branch of literature in English, with novels written by Australians about Australia and, in the first instance, for Australians. It finds its validity rather in grouping novels by divers hands which have taken as their subjects aspects of human life as they can be observed in their Australian manifestations — the utopianism of a frontier society; man’s inhumanity to man as represented by the cruelty of the convict system or his treatment of a primitive people; nationalism; the experience of war; the impact of sudden social change on an older, established order of life; the response to the social and political currents of the period between the wars; most pervasively, the individual’s search for self. Its concern is not with novels which say something about the Australian way of life or which contribute to an understanding of national character — though some incidental recognition of this is inevitable — but with novels which say something about the Australian experience of life, which look beyond the immediate and the local and which seek to illuminate through this experience man’s — not just the Australian’s — understanding of himself. This is the reason for the inclusion of Kangaroo, most obviously an ‘outsider’s’ novel; and Kangaroo would,
if their literary quality had so warranted, have drawn support from amongst the small number of French, German, and Italian novels set in Australia.

It follows that the chronological distribution of the novels discussed was determined not by a wish to record the steps through which the Australian novel strode to its present maturity, but by the need to represent the several phases of a rapidly changing society, each of which encouraged a different sort of interpretative vision of life. Few of the novels can really be described as looking back into Australia's historical past, as having the benefit of hindsight. Most deal with the contemporary or near-contemporary world observed by the novelist and reshaped by him to accord with the needs of his particular thesis. So both Harris and Kingsley, though in novels very different in substance, see an Australia Edenic in potential, in the calm before the gold-rush period; and novelists as different as Furphy and Boyd respond in a similarly visionary manner to an Australia more diverse and more complex in its patterns but still in part reducible to that glimpse of a new breed of men in a new and more optimistic situation which Harris noted, which Furphy develops in the service of nationalism and Boyd, in *Lucinda Brayford*, balances, as a source of life, against his vision of an old world succumbing to the forces of the new. For these, indeed for most of the other novelists discussed, the Australian experience was a formative experience.

This collection of essays, then, is not meant even as a skeletal history of the Australian novel and, as it is certainly not intended as a student's companion, biographical and bibliographical data, readily accessible elsewhere, have been included only in those instances where they are essential to the argument. What the collection does offer is a series of fresh, critical and, of course, informed appraisals of the novels chosen. Most areas of literary study get a little dusty from time to time, and critics a little too concerned with refuting critics. Australian literary studies are no exception and I hope that the essays in this collection will provide at least a breath of fresh air — not because their writers have been under any onus to be 'stimulating' or 'provocative', but because they have had an opportunity to make a full, fresh, and direct response to the novels with which they are dealing.

I am very deeply indebted to Professor A. D. Hope, who most generously — and, as he now no doubt realises, unwisely — offered
Preface

to ‘look after things at the Australian end’ while I came on leave. Mine, of course, is the responsibility but his has been, at the crucial stage when typescripts have been coming in, the worry and the hard work. And I am grateful also to the editorial staff of the Australian National University Press for their patience and help. I recall a paragraph from Furnivall’s foreword to his Early English Text Society edition of Hoccleve’s *Regement of Princes*:

Last August I took my bundle of Hoccleve papers down to the pleasant farm in which we spent our holiday month, Axhill House, Ashill, 8½ miles south of Taunton. But, alas, I never untied the string. There was the nice soft lawn to walk on barefooted, or lie on, all the morning; beautiful lanes and cross-country paths to stroll over in the afternoon or evenings; songs and pieces to listen to at nightfall; crops and cattle to look at and chat about; a grand view round three-fourths of the horizon to see from our hill; visits to pay, churches to inspect, neighbours’ stories to hear; — bother Hoccleve! Where could he come in, with the sunshine, flowers, apple-orchards and harvest about?

I have written my piece on Alexander Harris on a terrace overlooking an olive grove in Tuscany, and the Press has had more than the vagaries of the Italian postal service to worry about!

W.S.R.
Castagneto Carducci, July 1973
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1
The Emigrant Family
the delineation of actual life

W. S. Ramson

Unlike Kingsley's Geoffry Hamlyn, with which it is frequently compared, The Emigrant Family has never been a popular novel; and if its author, Alexander Harris, is known at all, it is not as a novelist but as a social commentator, as the 'emigrant mechanic', author of Settlers and Convicts, one of the liveliest and most informative of the many ostensibly autobiographical accounts of the colony written with the potentially large audience of intending emigrants in mind. The critical problem, then, is less one calling for an exercise of the historical imagination, of explaining the novel's continued stature as a 'popular classic', of putting aside later judgments and making a fresh but informed reassessment — in the case of Geoffry Hamlyn, providing an historical perspective to Furphy's rude but forceful condemnation and arguing the nature of the novel's romanticism as Kingsley's contemporaries might have perceived it. It is, rather, the simpler problem, as apparent to Harris's reviewers as to modern readers, of deciding whether or not the world envisaged in the novel has sufficient imaginative strength to contain the novel's didactic material, or whether the balance between the two energies in the novel is so uneven that The Emigrant Family remains essentially a handbook of practical information, wearing only thinly a guise of fiction.

Harris himself is disarmingly modest about the novel's genesis:

The main design in the composition of these volumes, and that to which every other has been carefully subordinated, was the delineation of the actual life of an Emigrant Family, and the scenery about their homestead in the Australian colonies, in the middle of the nineteenth century. Of course, all must not expect to meet with a Martin Beck for an overseer: but with the single exception of the introduction of a character necessary to finish the tale with sufficient of plot to interest
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the lovers of romance, everything exhibited is a simple copy from actual daily life.

The use, moreover, which I have made of the character of Beck will be found a most legitimate and important one: that of exhibiting to the new settler the various great errors which may be fallen into, and must be guarded against. For, in fact, I have merely concentrated in him singly, what the settler may easily enough meet with in a more dissipated form at the hands of several.¹

Such intimations of the novelist’s art as there are in the Preface are humble. ‘Statistical information’, Harris writes, ‘could not, of course, be introduced into a work like the present’;² and the most valuable return our anonymous author, resting on his laurels as ‘author of “Settlers and Convicts”’, can offer his readers for their perusal is ‘as pure and ample a pleasure as’ he found himself ‘in making the acquaintance of the ladies of the tale’. This gracious but ambiguous compliment, ostensibly claiming no more for the novel than the pleasure obtaining from the delineation of actual life, suggests little more than the sweetening of the pill, the judicious integration of entertaining elements in a recognisably didactic context; but, like the immediately preceding paragraph in which Harris comments on the geography of the novel, it is perhaps intentionally deceptive in maintaining the pretence that the novel does no more than describe actual places and actual people.

The people, of course, can no longer be traced, however tempting it is to look for the originals of the Bracton family in the Braidwood-Shoalhaven districts or to find an antecedent to Martin Beck in a Negro mentioned by Harris in Settlers and Convicts; but the geography of the novel can be examined and can be shown to be untrue in important respects. This despite Harris’s claim that ‘the geographical features of the country are given exactly in the present tale, except in the mere instance of the particular spot at which the family is located’, and his most plausible explanation for making that exception, the reasonableness and propriety of which is ‘obvious to every reflecting person’. One cannot doubt, from his descriptions,

² My italics.
that Harris knew well the country into which Canberra has been so suddenly obtruded. Passages like that describing the Bracton station, the valley of the rocks in which Beck and his companions established their base, or the climb to ‘mistful Budthawong’ (p. 390), its ‘gloomy and savage recesses’ (p. 367) now visible from the comfort of the Clyde Mountain road, all testify to the vividness of his recollection and, indeed, to the strength of the nostalgia it stirred in him. But, if individual scenes are conceived with such clarity and accuracy of recall, the geography of eastern Australia has been compressed, not to say distorted, in a manner which, while it meets the requirements of romance, leads one to question Harris’s claim to have been meticulous in all respects save those concerning the actual location of the ‘Bracton’ family. This is most noticeable in Harris’s placing of the Monaro Plains in relation to the Snowy Mountains. The location of the station at Rocky Springs, in relation to Mt Budthawong on the one hand and, on the other, the string of stations labelled with still-existing place names — Toomut, Goodradigbie, Majurygong, Gundaroo, Pialago, Jerrabombarra, Nickleeagle (p. 224) — appears precise enough. But when we are told that Reuben Kable, on his way to graze cattle at Manaroo, came ‘through a pass of the Dividing Range near the Snowy Mountains, thus getting the opportunity of yarding his cattle for the night at the Rocky Springs’ (p. 220), and the Aborigines who attacked Rocky Springs are described as ‘one of the detachments of the savage tribes that occasionally come over the Murray River, or from the Manaroo side of the Snowy Mountains’ (pp. 211–12), we are made aware less of geographical reality than of an impressionist view of south-eastern New South Wales in the 1830s, the line of settlement running down from Sydney into the country about the Yass-Canberra-Braidwood triangle and a ribbon of coastal settlement running down to Bateman’s Bay and Twofold Bay. The importance of the high country of the Monaro Plains is that a justification is found for bringing Reuben Kable back and forth from Broken Bay, the importance of the Snowy Mountains that they define and contain the settled area of southern New South Wales. The

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3 Harris, as The Secrets of Alexander Harris, ed. A. H. Chisholm (Sydney, Angus and Robertson, 1961) finally made clear, was in Australia from 1825 until 1840, some nine years before the novel was published. His Australia, like Kingsley’s is the Australia ‘before the gold’; see G. A. Wilkes, in this volume.
Bracton station is placed in a pioneer situation, the land surveyed, a township not far distant, a rural community developing. The mountain country on to which the station backs is frontier country, known to bushrangers, crooked stockmen, and the myalls, or uncivilised Aborigines. The Bractons are at the edge of civilisation, the emigrant family engaged in making a new life in a new country, Lieutenant Bracton being significantly a retired English naval officer with no experience either of farming or of the Australian way of life, very much a 'new chum', given the opportunity of 'a first-rate farm for a new settler' (p. 24) but confronted with the range of possible vicissitudes peculiar to the Australian colony.

As the details of the immediate locality seem so contrived as to display the variousness and, in particular, the difference of 'Australian scenery'— whence the descriptions of an 'Australian fog', the township, Ghiagong, the Rocky Springs station, the Coolarama Creek station, and the 'Ghibber Gunyah'— so the larger-scale geography of the novel suggests that Sydney, much neglected in the novel when one remembers its treatment in Harris's *Settlers and Convicts*, serves as a node, a through point on the way towards a frontier which may be the inland frontier chosen by the Bracton family or, as a hint of possible diversification, that occupied by Reuben Kable at Broken Bay, where the great Australian coastline is both beautiful and potentially lucrative. The social commentator who is seeking to be comprehensive must, as Harris did most adequately in *Settlers and Convicts*, cover both the urban and the rural side of the community he is describing; the writer who has some vision of a new society selects: Harris sees life in the new colony as offering endless opportunity but hedged in by numerous hazards. The Australian, both in the inland context of Rocky Springs and the coastal context of Broken Bay, two prime examples afforded by the colony, has the nous, the self-reliance, the quickness and strength to cope with all exigencies; the emigrant family, in the persons of Lieutenant Bracton inland and the theoretically skilful but locally untried seafarer, Willoughby, at Broken Bay, in the various roles played by its womenfolk — even, one might add, in the instance of Charles, fallen through that peculiarly English combination of the stupidity which incurs debts and the

*Compare: 'Few things momentarily perplex the association of ideas in the mind of a newly arrived inhabitant of old countries, more than the first sight of an Australian township in its very earliest days' (p. 55).*
The Emigrant Family

honour that stands by them — comes with the essential qualities of the colonial emigrant, an innocent optimism and willingness to ‘give it a go’, courage and the willingness to recognise and accept the knowledge that comes with experience. The heroic possibilities of Reuben Kable’s most urgent journey from Broken Bay to Rocky Springs, roughly thirty miles overnight on foot and two hundred miles in the following two days and single night on horseback, are, to a point, contained by Harris’s down-to-earth portrayal of this able and down-to-earth Australian. Reuben Kable’s ride is contrasted, immediately, with the slower journey of the ageing, English Lieutenant Bracton, a contrast of youth and age, new world and old. There is no suggestion that, in riding from one end of the colony Harris has mapped out to the other, Kable is more than life-size; rather, the admittedly ineptly conveyed terseness of Kable’s remarks on arrival suggests that this was not a feat to be dwelled on, that he had done only what any other Australian would have done. The colony’s comparative vastness is played down as it is made a single stage for the central drama of human endeavour, man against whatever fate, in the form of environmental hazard, or evil, might throw against him.

One might argue that the spread from Broken Bay to Monaro increases the range of Australian life put before the reader and supports Harris’s claim to have subordinated all designs to ‘the delineation of the actual life of an Emigrant Family’. But, if this were so, even the requirements of romance would allow the ladies the visit to Sydney which the necessity to be both full and fair would ensure. Harris repeatedly interrupts his narrative to describe scenes and activities, to give information; but, while some of these instrusive passages give practical advice, on how to hire men or build a hut, some, like the discussion of land regulations, Reuben Kable’s views on the Aborigines, or Hurley’s explanation of the difference between civil and criminal law, are less closely related to the narrative and have a pertinence to a view of human life which finds expression in the novel rather than to any desire to describe in Defoe-like detail actual life in the colony of New South Wales.

The use Harris makes of his Australian experience in Religio Christi suggests that, whatever his reason for going to the colony

5 Compare the instance when he and the English Hurley ride to the rescue, Kable cross-country, Hurley by the road (pp. 232-3).
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and whatever the course of his life while there, he underwent a profound re-examination of his own life and values, if not something so dramatic as a religious conversion. I would argue that the view of life he presents in The Emigrant Family derives from the vivid recollection of this experience; that he builds around his day-to-day picture of the colony a new and controlling dimension which interprets life in the colony in the terms of his own experience there; that he makes an impressionistic reordering of even the geography of the colony to accommodate his vision, reshaping the colony into a single stage on which the drama of his and everyman's life is displayed with a simplicity and clarity obscured by the complexities of civilised urban life, life 'over there'. The drama of life is seen, simply, as the struggle in every man between good and evil. The new environment of the colony, with the horror of a repressive society behind and the hope of a free society ahead, exemplifies both extremes: free man may work, for his own good and that of others; oppression gives encouragement to evil. Man is most on his own in a pioneer society, can achieve prosperity or succumb to the adversities that surround him. For Harris, the 'little cluster of human life that had now betaken themselves to the enterprise of founding a home at the antipodes' (p. 17) had more than ordinary significance in its exemplification of this thesis.

The most important feature of this vision is Harris's depiction of the Australian. Both hero and villain are natives of the colony and both contribute in important ways to this depiction. It is not simply a matter of manners, though Harris notes that Kable lacks the polish of the Englishman, Hurley, and remarks also his comparative inarticulateness and social awkwardness. More positive qualities are noted, and the generalisation from them made, almost before Kable has ridden into view:

The Australians, we must here remark, are growing up a race by themselves; fellowship of country has already begun to distinguish them and bind them together in a very remarkable manner. Whenever they come into contact with each other, even when considerable difference of rank

Religio Christi is the title of Harris's third autobiography, published in serial form in 1858 in The Saturday Evening Post. The text has been edited by A. H. Chisholm, in The Secrets of Alexander Harris, which also contains an introduction by Harris's grandson, Grant Carr-Harris.
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exists, this sympathy operates strongly: there is no attempt either to check or conceal it. (p. 10)

And again:

[Reuben Kable] exhibited a more than ordinarily full and forcible manifestation of the common characteristics of his countrymen, through possessing more than ordinary intellectual endowments. His height was considerably over six feet; his person slim, but remarkably vigorous and active; his face symmetrical, and just saved from being fair by a slight tint of tan; his hair brown; his eye of the peculiar grey which in the hours of common thought is so unsuggestive and pretenceless, but glitters and flashes under strong excitement like the crystals of a mineral in the sunlight. The utter, yet not discourteous, nonchalance of his race, however, would have been regarded by a stranger as his most distinctive characteristic. (p. 11)

The picture is strengthened as the narrative gives occasion for elaboration or exemplification, the observation kept reasonably dispassionate — though there is no doubt where Harris's sympathies lie — and the tendency towards idealisation kept in check. Kable is frequently identified simply as 'the Australian', his conduct set against that of an Englishman. One obvious area of contrast is in the handling of men. The Englishman either commands, as does Hurley, often with the threat of force, or appeals, like Lieutenant Bracton, patronisingly, to the standards of uprightness which he, as an officer and gentleman, has always recognised himself: 'It wouldn't be manly, men: it wouldn't be English' (pp. 200, 202). The Australian reasons, as with equals, the best example being when Kable steps in as overseer at Rocky Springs and 'talks straight' to the men (pp. 272ff.); his appeal is little different in essence from Bracton's 'be manly, men, be English', but it is delivered with the authority of proven competence rather than that of assumed superiority, plainly, and without side. It accords well with an earlier observation Kable makes to Bracton: 'I hear at times from your countryfolks that they consider us a very plain, rough race; but I believe we have a good reputation for uprightness. To say that our knowledge of colonial "(Anglicé, Australian)" matters is tolerably sound, is to say but little in our praise.' (p. 12).
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The Englishman accepts authority, the Australian generalises from his own conduct and requires the actions of authority to be reasonable—as is demonstrated both by Kable's disagreement with Bracton over the land regulations (p. 14) and his comment to the overseer on the infamous episode of the seven stockmen (p. 248). The Englishman acts with due circumspection and form, the Australian practically, directly, and without concern for ceremony: the vignette which illustrates that 'the Australians uniformly take pains to exhibit a contemptuous dislike of the British military' (p. 232), when Kable first meets Hurley and hears Charlie, leaving the redcoats to take the road, ride at 'hurricane-speed' by a bushtrack to rescue the Bracton ladies from their Aboriginal attackers, leads to the sharp exchange of Hurley's 'polished impertinence' and Kable's asking 'if this is the way you Englishmen take care of your ladies?' (p. 238). But the unfairness (to the English) of this picture is balanced by the treatment of later incidents in which Kable's self-reliance and capacity for direct action become an impetuous and unsuccessful taking of the law into his own hands (pp. 243ff., 365ff.). And, one might add, Kable's justification of the white man's treatment of the Aborigine—'every man must be his own constable who goes to the extreme verge of civilization' (p. 259)—though it appears to have Harris's sympathy, is hardly convincing. The Englishman is aware of, and maintains, class differences, which the Australian cuts through (p. 256), his recognition of a man's qualities and abilities and sympathy with those who share his colonial experience being exemplified by Kable's easy conversations with Charlie, a 'native youth of lower rank' (p. 221) but his 'mate', conversations characterised by 'the cheerful manly freedom which marks the intercourse of Australians with one another' (p. 248).

Martin Beck, like Kable, is 'a man whose abilities compelled homage' (p. 69), indeed, in terms of ability, he is the model overseer important, again in contrast with Bracton, as demonstrating the numerous practical skills, from building to branding, acquired as part of colonial experience and behind the self-reliance of the Australian. The skills he demonstrates are those assumed in Reuben Kable, who does not have to 'prove' himself until he takes over as overseer and demonstrates, by yoking a recalcitrant bullock, that he is more than Beck's equal (pp. 272ff.). But the antithesis of good and evil runs through the novel. Lieutenant Bracton, once educated into his new
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position a respected landowner, is balanced by 'the Australian nabob', Dr Mercer, his cruelty and exploitation of the system of assignment exposed by the story of the dying bushranger and by Hurley's proper investigation. Mr Hurley, the just magistrate, has the vindictive Major Jennings as his counterpart. Amongst the hands at Rocky Springs and Coolarama Creek station all shades from innocence through varying degrees of complicity to a callous and unredeemable criminality are represented in a series of thumb-nail sketches which are respectable precursors of those of Furphy and Lawson. A champion of Reuben Kable's stature — the good that has been generated in the colony — demands a more formidable adversary than the scruffy derelicts of the stockmen's huts can provide. Harris is preoccupied throughout the novel with the problem of evil and makes his most blatant authorial intrusion, not to build in information which might be of use to the intending emigrant but to comment on the convict system — and it is worth noting that he dedicated the novel to the prison reformer, Alexander Maconochie. The tyranny of the system he sees as having far-reaching effects:

Whilst the system of transportation to New South Wales was in its fullest force, the Government of that country, more by far than that of any other of our colonies, was imbued with a military element. With the reasons we have nothing to do: we merely relate facts. The consequences immediately affecting the lower orders were, the selection of justices of the peace to a very large extent from amongst military gentlemen who had become settlers, or were even merely employed on garrison duty at the settlements, and thus the interpretation of the law in a military spirit. But as the lower order generally is that one which in common civil society rebels the most recklessly against control, the collision between it and the law thus interpreted became still more harsh, rash, and desperate: — the superior mingling, but too commonly, with his investigations and judgments the caustic and irritating sneer; the inferior passing into furious defiance. And it was by these means that a vast amount of the benefit to the criminal's morale, which should have resulted from his seclusion in a new country, was prevented; or even after it was commenced, neutralized. (p. 187)

It will probably be found in the end that the banishment of culprits to new countries is the most beneficial course, both to themselves and the
empire at large. It will also be found that the stimulation of the better tendencies by hope is as necessary as the repression of the evil ones by fear; and nothing seems more certain than the impossibility of reconstructing character effectually in a profoundly artificial condition. To isolate a criminal may, indeed, temporarily break up his habits of evil doings but it neither nullifies the tendency to evil, nor does it evoke any tendency to good. It is, in effect, teaching the man to depend more than ever on himself, making him less social; and it seems undeniable that the more a moral agent is taught to live within himself, and the less he finds himself dependent for enjoyment on others, the less must come to be his respect for their rights and happiness. (pp. 189-90)

Martin Beck was not a convict, nor is the novel about the convict system. This particular passage is forcefully, if somewhat naively, argued — though Harris’s expression of his views is probably attenuated by his recognition of the necessity to restrict himself to what ‘could with propriety be introduced into’ (p. 187) his novel. The passage is nonetheless important in determining the role of Beck. Harris argues in every man tendencies to both good and evil. In a free society man’s natural inclination towards ‘labour, economy, and manliness’ (p. 69) ensures good, even to the extent, Harris argues, ‘that the banishment of culprits to new countries is the most beneficial course, both to themselves and the empire at large’ (p. 189), the natural good in man being regenerated under these conditions. Reuben Kable, the native Australian, exemplifies the virtues of such living, Martin Beck the perversion of naturally good qualities by the encouragement society has given to his ‘tendency to evil’. Beck’s plight, in his ‘insulated and depressed position as a black’ (p. 69), exemplifies just that ‘furious defiance’ (p. 187) which Harris saw as the product of the tyranny and repression of the convict system:

It will not detract from either the amusement or the knowledge this account is intended to afford, to state that the character of Martin Beck is not a fictitious one; but one which the writer had long and ample opportunities of studying. Beck was a man whose abilities compelled homage: but the contempt of society had repelled him — insulated him; first made him selfish, and then rendered him cunning. And that cunning, isolation, and selfishness, is at this period a complete definition of his character. He was no drunkard, no petty thief, no libertine; on the contrary, he delighted in labour, in economy, and — but for the vice that
was so singularly swallowing up his whole nature — in manliness. But
man was his enemy. Then what faith had he to keep? None, except to
himself. How was he to keep that? He thought, by getting power. What
was power, as he had had the opportunity of discerning? Wealth.
(p. 69)

No-one would claim that Harris handles this sort of passage well or
deny the creakiness of his transitions from narrative to thesis. But,
throughout the novel, Harris’s portrayal of the repressiveness of the
convict system is strong, whether through the example of a particularly
tyrannous master or magistrate, through the depiction of the riff-raff
of the stockmen’s huts drifting into a life of crime because they are
without hope or alternative, or through the record of the struggles
of the innocent and naïvely honest Welshman, John Thomas, to
keep clear of a legal system set to snare the unwary. Martin Beck’s
growing rage, his response of ‘furious defiance’ which carries him
further towards evil than his colleagues, really little more than
drunkards, petty thieves, and libertines, could countenance, is thus
given a theoretical justification and made a peculiarly strong comple­
ment to the portrayal of the native Australian, the representative of
a new race of men, simply because it is a perversion of obviously
abundant natural talent, the very virtue of self-reliance, so positive
when the tendency is towards good, as in the example of Reuben
Kable, a negative and destructive quality in the repressed and
isolated.

Each, hero and villain, has an environment that corresponds to the
character revealed: Reuben Kable the settled and prosperous environ­
ment of Broken Bay where his sister, innocent and gentle beside
Reuben’s heroically masculine stance, though vapid as Harris’s
heroines tend to be, is the centrepiece of an idyll of domestic hap­
piness, the purity of the love between brother and sister, and the fact
that they are orphaned, suggesting, to ‘the lovers of romance’, an
Eden-like simplicity and innocence and reinforcing the impression,
which must have been so strong to a sensitive observer of New South
Wales in the late years of the convict era, of a new and freshly
idealistic world growing out of the repressive regimentation of the
old. Martin Beck, on the other hand, retreats to the ‘Basin of Rocks’.
Here, on a site which is geologically awesome, and of which the
Aborigines are superstitious, ‘the Black’ perpetrates his grossest atro­
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cities, the shooting of the old farm bulldog Caesar and the hanging of ‘Marcus George, the Scholar’, an early cross between con-man and remittance man, ‘one of those pretenders to knowledge who have so unaccountably the gift of imposing themselves as superlatively sagacious on the vulgar and uneducated’ (p. 311). Between these two is placed the frontier situation of ‘the little cluster of human life that had now betaken themselves to the enterprise of founding a home at the antipodes’ (p. 17), its inhabitants dependent on the strength and frequently manifested generosity of the first but easy prey to the casual depredation or downright malice of the latter. Significantly, in the light of Harris’s good-evil thesis, the original inhabitants, the Aborigines, compliantly servile, as is Old Bondi in his relationship with Reuben Kable, in the one environment, are easily led in the other, readily falling in with Martin Beck’s plans. The previous owner of Rocky Springs, a Mr Moody, explains to Willoughby Bracton that the Aborigines are, ‘about the settlements’, ‘a very degraded race’; but ‘in their primitive state’ he has found them ‘far less vicious than the mass of civilized society’, observing ‘very little of what we commonly call vice amongst them’ (p. 39). They are innocents also but, as Reuben Kable explains to Katharine, ‘there never was a clearer case in the world for the white agriculturist and herdsman in seizing the land’ (p. 258).

‘The little cluster of human life’ may be, superficially, an exemplar to would-be emigrants, the contrivance of the character of Martin Beck ‘legitimate and important’ in exhibiting to the new settler the various and great errors into which he might fall, ‘necessary to furnish the tale with sufficient of plot to interest the lovers of romance’ (p. 5). Harris’s real purpose, however ineptly executed, is both deeper and more fundamental, the question he asks being: how, in this microcosmic environment of the Australian frontier, where both good and evil are more naked than in the world known to the audience, can man save his soul? The dilemma is posed early in the novel by Rachael, the daughter of the Jewish storekeeper in the township of Ghiagong — he a symbol of moral rectitude, she an oracular source of an older wisdom:

How we seem to shun the great gate of the temple, ever standing wide open to invite us; ever emitting for our guidance the joy-song of

My italics.
The Emigrant Family

the elder worshippers! We hear the words all plainly; we know them to be TRUST, HOPE, LOVE. We never utter them in speculation or experiment, but we feel the spirit's passion of PEACE filling, and occupying, and blessing us. And yet in by the great wide gate we will not go, but ever wander round through gloomy winding passages and low dark portals, where, bewildered and desolate of heart, we cry for guidance, till it seems to us that the ear of Jehovah is shut upon us for ever. Whereas all the while He is reproving us for our wandering, and awing us back to the true way by the majestic rebuke of His silence. How humbling it is, Katharine, that one should possess the full comprehension of this wisdom, and yet perpetually fail in the practice. (p. 196)

Intimations of mortality come variously, through Hurley's meditation on 'the old tale of the moralist' as he and Marianna fail to find the happiness of lovers, their disagreement representing another aspect of the conflict between human law and natural law. 'Flowers blossom but to glory in the maturity of an hour, and then fall into fragments. The ocean must atone for its fullest flood by its lowest ebb. And our lives are but the last bar of the same song' (p. 206). A rare but perhaps aptly chosen moment of poetry for an earnest and upright redcoat, echoed by Marianna herself, pining over the same unfulfilled love, as she tells to Reuben 'the pensive moral of her flowers' (p. 278). More positively, Harris uses the figures of both the wheel of destiny (p. 268) and the trumpet of destiny (p. 299) to suggest that the events set in train by the Bractons' removal to Australia, and by Martin Beck's manipulation of circumstances on their settling are ultimately subject to influences more powerful and beyond man's control.

Harris's consciousness of the colony as a single stage, and of the action of the plot as a 'fierce drama' (p. 396) is most explicitly realised as the climactic moment approaches. Reuben alone in his pursuit of Martin Beck pauses to meditate upon the situation of the various players in the drama:

As he sat smoking, he could not but reflect on the chequered fortunes that were at that instant progressing with the various individuals more immediately within the circuit of his own observations: his poor, heart-broken Mary; Katharine no less dear, and for the hour even yet more agitated; Marianna, so long so unhappy, now on the point of
obtaining an opportunity (one he had been earnestly imploring her not to throw away), of rectifying an exaggerated sentiment, and becoming once more the happy and cherished friend of the object of her own first affection; Rachael, so beautiful and loving, yet lone: on the other hand, Willoughby perhaps no more a member of the race of earth; Mr. Bracton, struggling; Martin Beck and his gang accumulating over themselves a weight of retributive influence, which within a few hours would probably crush them into irretrievable perdition. At that very instant there came a sound upon the breeze, so fitful and sharp, so like the mocking merriment of fiends, that it made him spring up on to his feet. It seemed like a scornful answer to his last thought. (p. 386)

And again, as the fateful evening wears on:

The weather held up: no rain fell; but the night was gusty and wavering, and the wind sounded moaningly. To all of them, wheresoever they were, it seemed as if they were waiting, expectant of sorrowful tidings. To Mr. Hurley, as he lay at the inn of the settlement where he stopped that night, the short squalls, as they flew ruffling past his window, seemed to presage some dash of unexpected calamity. To Marianna, as she lay still ruminating, they seemed to say, ‘Thoughtless! it will soon be otherwise with thee!’ To Katharine it said, ‘Lady, know this: — love so prankt, so playful, is but a false guide that lures into a vale of tears.’ To Mary, as it bore up from the wide, wild sea, the boom of Barrenjueh, it uttered but one word — one syllable: it murmured again, and again, and again, — ‘Death! death! death!’ Mr. Bracton and Mrs. Bracton too listened; and spoke of their sons that were either on or under the main: and, before he slept, Reuben Kable also listened: but he was out beneath the open sky, upon the cool, sweet earth, and ever and anon could see the bright and everlasting stars betwixt those rolling clouds, and hear sweet murmuring waterfalls amidst the wail of winds. (p. 387)

Much of this, it seems only charitable to believe, is Harris accommodating his ‘lovers of romance’: Harris’s ladies do not afford today’s readers the ‘pure and ample pleasure’ making their acquaintance afforded him and their prominence in the novel probably derives less

8 My italics.
from a wish to substantiate his thesis through their often chorus-like responses, or to depict with a measure of fullness the life of women in the new colony, than from a recognition that women readers would make up a fair proportion of his audience and that their interests needed to be catered for. But the italicised passage in the first paragraph quoted is explicit in declaring the nature and dimension of the approaching climax to the ‘fierce drama’ of the struggle between good and evil. And, in the second paragraph, loose as the symbolism is, there is optimism in the identification of Reuben Kable with the beneficent forces of the universe: though the others are oppressed by the terror of the storm of life, by the ‘rolling clouds’ of doubt and fear, he, ‘upon the cool, sweet earth’, sees ‘the bright and everlasting stars’ and hears ‘sweet murmuring waterfalls’. The memory of Martin Beck, crouched in despair beside his makeshift gibbet, with both the ‘relic of humanity’ and the carrion crows as potent suggestions of his imminent defeat, is strong; and, though Kable waits for Hurley and the trooper to arrive, the focus has narrowed to set the final conflict as one between the avenging champion of good and man sunk irretrievably into evil. The novel concludes with the Black’s death and with the tidy pairing off of the main characters. But the preservation of the innocent Mary, and restoration to fortune of the Bractons provokes Harris’s final, recapitulatory sermon:

From its long-drawn experience, the world has delivered us a peevish apophthegm — ‘That it never rains, but it pours’ with some people. As a truth, it is well enough; the application only is faulty. The dull and stolid require no culture of their fortitude: open to no passionate impulses, they need versing in no great self-control. But others, of more energetic temperament, in various degrees find their whole lives an alternation of vicissitudes; and, as families so much follow a common character, so, properly enough, it falls to them to share a common lot. By this prompting experience only should we learn to labour for, and attain the ‘even mind’, without which passion becomes madness, and power degenerates into violence.

That tendency even, which exists so widely, to blame with unmeasured severity those whose whole lives present but a single catalogue of misfortune, is an erroneous one, — as much erroneous as that other bias

9 Thus Mrs Smart’s visit to Rocky Springs is an instance of social comedy with general rather than peculiarly Australian application.
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of common minds, to almost worship such as have become crowned with great success. Success is as often Heaven’s exhilarant, distributed in compassion to the faint-hearted, as aught else: a stimulus, and an acknowledgment that they have done their best. The great and tireless spirits may have the spur given them, and rouse at its touch into loftier bursts of vigour, whilst the feeble would shrink beneath it, and give up the race. Indeed, all the dispensations of this world, to be looked at truly, must be considered in regard to the ultimate, not the past. We are not to forget that success and honour are the meed of courageous human toil: but far less must we fail to keep in mind how much in all things there is of a divine destiny. And that looks at the future. Whilst men are not left cheerless, hopeless, aimless, by a neglect of the recognition of their toils in the brief past — the grand, the never-lost-sight-of-point is incitement to a heroic eternity. (p. 410)

The Emigrant Family begins on the humble level which Harris advertised in his Preface. It is a novel which, primarily, sets out to delineate ‘the actual life of an Emigrant Family’, using a romantically contrived plot to display a full and fair conspectus of Australian society. With a canny respect for his audience Harris divides his attention equally between ‘the main actors in the fierce drama’ and ‘those to whose lot fell the meeker but more painful task of contemplation and endurance’ (p. 396), and with considerable skill he slips into the narrative interesting and useful information about life in the colony, information on aspects of life as down-to-earth and as various as hiring hands, building the station dwellings, droving and branding, travelling, and so on. This provides the ‘domestic’ side of the novel, which expands from being an informative novel of manners, offering some assessment of the quality of life possible in the colony and its difference from the established English model, into domestic romance, each of the young ladies of whose portrayal Harris was so unreasonably proud finding, in a satisfactorily romantic manner, a suitable partner in the colony, but each adding to the informative content of the novel by eliciting, with reasonable unobtrusiveness, the views of her admirer. Thus it is a ‘conversation’ between Katharine and Reuben Kable — admittedly, a one-way conversation to which she offers little more than the prompting comment, ‘You place the subject before me in a new light ... May I ask in what way you consider the case ought to be treated?’ (p. 258) — that brings forth the Aus-
The Emigrant Family

talian's statement on the Aborigines. And it is the difference between
Marianna, the lady of sentiment, and Mr Hurley, the just magistrate,
which puts before the reader a reasonable view of the role of law in
society.

For the main action of the novel something stronger is needed.
Harris stresses the usefulness of the character of Beck in concentrat­
ing the difficulties which the settler may encounter; but he admits a
desire also 'to furnish the tale with sufficient of plot to interest the
lovers of romance' (p. 5). And it is here that, for most readers, the
novel falls apart, and there seems little to distinguish Harris's use of
the conventional hazards of bush life — bushrangers, bushfires,
marauding Aborigines, the difficulty of the terrain and danger of
getting lost — from that of Rowcroft's Tales of the Colonies or of
other novels of that ilk. One may choose to read the novel as a
companion piece to Settlers and Convicts, seeing it primarily as a
contemporary account of the colony and finding corroboration or
amplification of views expressed in Settlers and Convicts. Or one may
accept the 'pleasure' Harris offers, indulging an appetite for the trivia
of domestic romance or for the excesses of colonial melodrama. In
either case it becomes difficult to ignore the unevenness of the novel, the
fact that Harris, accomplished and versatile writer as he is, does some
things very well and some very badly. It is interesting, from the point
of view of linguistic history, and a reasonably effective contribution
towards the novel's verisimilitude, that Harris seeks to reproduce the
speech idiosyncrasies of his Welshman and Jew, and distinguishes
between the pidgin of the Aborigines, the patois of the stockmen's
huts, and the polite discourse of the landowners. But his representa­
tion of speech, like the manner of most apart from colloquial con­
versations, is wooden. And while his passages of natural description
are often direct, free from cliché, and vivid, his 'mood' pieces can be
disastrously fulsome.

But there is another dimension to Harris's view of Australian
society which, though it tends to be obscured by the novel's obvious
imperfections, provides its main claim to interest. Harris observes
from a position defined by strong convictions. Whatever his 'Australian
experience' — and it is, because of the conflicts between his several
accounts, difficult to be certain of the course of his life in the colony
— he holds with the strength of the freshly converted to a view of
man's life on earth that had been worked out while he was in Aus-
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tralia. Its points of reference are those which, for him, have been most clearly defined by his own Australian experience — the value of freedom, whether from the established repressions of a class society or from the tyrannous extreme of a military government seeking to punish and reform; the virtue of ‘courageous human toil’ (p. 410), the susceptibility of innocence, variously the prey of evil as Mary Kable is to Beck, or the easy drifter into more strongly defined courses, as the Aborigine is to Reuben Kable on the one hand or Beck on the other; the inevitableness of hardship in life, whether as endless vicissitude or as part of the ‘fierce drama’ between good and evil, between the opposing tendencies present in every man; the place of law; above all, the sanctity of life and the right of every man to its opportunities. The Australian colony with, on the one hand, its fearful history of tyranny and repression, its open manifestation both of evil and of the forces that impel men to evil and, on the other, its boundless prospect of reward for fortitude (p. 411), provides both the stage for the drama and its most powerful argument.

Harris had little literary sophistication, his novel being grounded firmly in that most humble of the Australian uses of fiction, the handbook for intending emigrants. If it aspires beyond ‘all the clutter of the Australian “emigrant novel”’,10 it is not in the direction of the colonial romance, with its mythic possibilities, nor, anachronistically, that of the later nineteenth century nationalistic stereotype, which would so readily have assimilated Reuben Kable. The Emigrant Family is individual, owing little to earlier novels and too little known itself to have influenced later. Its peculiar strength derives from the way in which Harris’s ‘Australian experience’ informed his vision of colonial society and gave it a universal application; humble as the novel is in origin, and imperfect in execution, this vision remains of no little interest.

10 G. A. Wilkes, in this volume.
Marcus Clarke

his natural life

Michael Wilding

For those who wrote about her before she was known to exist, Australia was in image a Utopia, a sort of Paradise. The reverse of conditions in Europe, this unknown continent of the Antipodes could be imagined free from corruptions and persecutions. The realities of the settlement shattered this image; but it continued to survive as a bitter parody of what might have been. A potential Eden had become an evil penitentiary. Mr Pounce of the civil list, one of the English establishment running the penal colony in Marcus Clarke’s His Natural Life (1874) gives all unconsciously such a parody of the utopian and providential hopes.

This island seems specially adapted by Providence for a convict settlement; for with an admirable climate, it carries little indigenous vegetation which will support human life... Poor Potherick used often to


2 The novel first appeared as a serial, His Natural Life in The Australian Journal from March 1870 to June 1872. Clarke then revised it considerably, deleting Devine/Dawes’s adventures before transportation and his adventures after escaping from Norfolk Island. This book version, published in 1874, is the version I am discussing. The serial version has been published in full in the Penguin English Library, edited by Stephen Murray-Smith (1970) and a discussion of its differences from the book version can be found in his introduction and in Joan Poole’s ‘Maurice Frere’s Wife: Marcus Clarke’s Revision of His Natural Life’, Australian Literary Studies, IV, 4 (October 1970), pp. 383–94. The longer title of the novel was not used until 1885, in the first posthumous editions of the novel issued in Australia and England; the reason and authority for this change to For The Term of His Natural Life are not known.

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say that it seemed as if some Almighty Hand had planned the Penal Settlements round the coast, the country is so delightfully barren. (p. 311)³

It is by the use of such myths as basic images for his novel, that Clarke is able to offer so much more than an historical account of the convict settlement. His account and indictment of the system is masterly. But Clarke was not simply offering a naturalistic account of a particular situation at a particular historical time and in a particular geographical context. He was also presenting a vision of human life, a vision in part and ironically drawing on the old myth of the Antipodes. As Richard Brome put it in his play *The Antipodes* (1640)

The people through the whole world of Antipodes,
In outward feature, language, and religion,
Resemble those to whom they are supposite:
They under Spain appear like Spaniards,
Under France Frenchmen, under England English,
To the exterior show; but in their manners,
Their carriage, and condition of life,
Extremely contrary.⁴

The Antipodes traditionally represented the other side of the social coin: and that is Clarke’s material. His novel deals literally with the underworld; the world beneath Europe, the other side of the globe, the bottom of the map: and the world of criminals and prisoners (not necessarily synonymous), the underworld of society that England preferred not to know about and to dispose of. In his depiction of the penal colony Clarke offers a complete counter picture of English society in its systems of authority, oppression and brutalisation. The officers, the guards, the clergy, the innocent and the guilty prisoners, and the free settlers, comprise a full social range. But it is a society that is the reverse image of the official picture of early Victorian England: here the convicts are not conveniently shipped away, here the underworld is the dominant concern of the society. Here the

³ Compare Watkin Tench, *A Narrative of the Expedition to Botany Bay* ... (London, J. Debrett, 1789), p. 138. ‘If only a receptacle for convicts be intended, this place [Sydney Cove] stands unequalled from the situation, extent, and nature of the country. When viewed in a commercial light, I fear its insignificance will appear very striking.’

systems of authority of England reveal themselves in explicit brutality. The particular circumstances of this underworld allow man's 'natural life' to emerge without any of the inhibiting restraints of European society. The Antipodes here represent not the ideal state that man, freed from European society, might aspire to, but its reverse, the brutality that, implicit in European society, he will quickly sink to if allowed. Although as the novel's title suggests Clarke is offering from the particular historical details a general account of human nature, it is as a recreation of the system, the transportation of convicts and their treatment in the penal settlements, that *His Natural Life* is initially striking. There is a prologue to the novel set in England presenting the cause of the hero's, Rufus Dawes's, transportation; there is an epilogue in which we see his dead body floating at sea. But the novel proper begins and ends with Dawes as a convict suffering the system. And though some of the other convicts escape and their adventures provide a relief from the settlements, they are always recaptured and return to this prison world.

Clarke was at pains to suggest the authenticity of the appalling, unbelievable brutalities that are the material of his novel. A sensationalist manner might well have invalidated the serious indictment of the convict system. And in his Preface he stresses his seriousness for, although transportation had stopped altogether in 1868 in Australia, the French had just established the system in New Caledonia. (Devil's Island, indeed, was not closed until 1952.) In writing *His Natural Life* Clarke carefully examined documentary sources, visited the scenes of his story, and spoke to prisoners at Port Arthur. A note to the final chapter of the serial version of *His Natural Life* assured readers

Mr. Clarke has prepared an appendix, which will be published when *His Natural Life* is issued in a volume from the press. This appendix will give incontestable authorities for all statements made in this work concerning convict discipline.

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5 William Golding's *Lord of the Flies* offers in its inversion of R. M. Ballantyne's *The Coral Island* a similar anti-utopian rewriting of a perfectibility myth.


7 *Australian Journal* (June 1872), p. 1558. I owe this reference to Mrs Joan Poole.
The appendix duly appeared, and further sources have since been recorded. Certainly to say that Clarke provided this sort of annotation does not necessarily acquit him of the charge of sensationalism. G. A. Wilkes, for instance, remarks that ‘The account of the brutalities of the convict system verges on the sensational’ noting that ‘as most of the episodes can be documented, it is only the aggregation of them that produces a melodramatic effect’. But it is important to note that these aggregated brutalities are not all suffered by Dawes. Clarke is careful not to give his main character an impossible or unreal load. The brutalities Dawes endures are intermingled with other atrocities perpetrated on other convicts, suffered by other victims: Kirkland flogged to death, cannibalism, child suicides. The aggregation of brutalities is not achieved by the impossible focus of them on to one man. This is one of the precautions that Clarke takes against melodramatic excesses. Another is the avoidance of sensationalism in the specific brutalities. In the description of the flogging to death of young Kirkland, Clarke supplies sufficient detail to nauseate:

The white back was instantly striped with six crimson bars. Kirkland stifled a cry. It seemed to him that he had been cut in half . . . The third blow sounded as though it had been struck upon a piece of raw beef, and the crimson turned purple . . .

After the tenth stroke

The lad’s back, swollen into a hump now presented the appearance of a ripe peach which a wilful child had scored with a pin. Dawes, turning away from his bloody handiwork, drew the cats through his fingers twice. They were beginning to get clogged a little. (pp. 364–5)

But Clarke does not enumerate each stroke, nor does he offer any further description until the fifty-sixth. He establishes the beginning and the end of the flogging nauseatingly enough. But after the fifty-sixth stroke he offers no more: ‘His back was like a bloody sponge, while, in the interval between the lashes, the swollen flesh twitched

like that of a new-killed bullock' (p. 366). After this, Clarke spares us further detail and lets Kirkland die unnoticed. He diverts attention to Dawes who has been doing the flogging: the system in the penal camps was to make one convict flog another—a refinement in tortures, a planned demoralisation. Dawes, having refused to flog Kirkland any more, is flogged himself: and the emphasis here is not on the physical but on the mental torture. We can take that much more readily.

I won’t attempt here to enumerate the variety or the extent of the tortures the British penal system imposed. The prison camps are fully established, and to add to the horrors, an addition emphasising the hopelessness yet avoiding the numbing monotony that a mere succession of floggings would produce on the reader, Clarke shows how the alternatives to imprisonment are worse than prison. For the bush provided no sustenance for escapees. The fate of one group who attempt to escape is described with frightful authenticity:

On the seventh day, Bodenham says his feet are so bad he can’t walk, and Greenhill, with a greedy look at the berries, bids him stay behind. Being in a very weak condition he takes his companion at his word, and drops off about noon the next day. Gabbett, discovering this defection, however, goes back, and in an hour or so appears, driving the wretched creature before him with blows, as a sheep is driven to the shambles. Greenhill remonstrates at another mouth being thus forced upon the party, but the giant silences him with a hideous glance. Jemmy Vetch remembers that Greenhill accompanied Gabbett once before, and feels uncomfortable. He gives hint of his suspicions to Sanders, but Sanders only laughs. It is horribly evident that there is an understanding among the three. (p. 459)

The horror is established by the unmentioned, unmentionable forebodings of Jemmy Vetch. By implication we know what to expect. Earlier in the novel the partially dismembered body of someone who escaped with Gabbett has been seen though it provoked no explicit remark. The unspoken exerts its pregnant force. And the urgency, the immediacy, are built up by Clarke’s use of the present tense. We read on, hoping for a past tense that will declare the whole episode finished and distanced. But no past tense is allowed until the decision to kill is reached.
Said Greenhill, in the course of a dismal conversation, 'I am so weak that I could eat a piece of a man.'

On the tenth day Bodenham refuses to stir, and the others, being scarce able to drag along their limbs, sit on the ground about him. Greenhill, eyeing the prostrate man, said, slowly, 'I have seen the same done before, boys, and it tasted like pork.' (p. 460)

And here Greenhill's 'said' and his seemingly hyperbolic, casual statement mark the end of the suspense. Again the effect is gained by the avoidance of explicitness, by avoiding naming the horror contemplated and soon performed. The only explicit mention of eating human flesh seems a casual comment in a description of hunger; like 'I could eat a horse'. When the plan is finally proposed, the action is not named, but skirted round with 'the same' and 'it'. I have used the phrase 'frightful authenticity' deliberately. For Clarke has drawn here, as his notes tell, from the 'Deposition of Alexander Pierce and official statements of trial and execution of Pierce and Cox for murder and cannibalism' (p. 607). Pierce stated in his deposition: 'Bob Greenhill was the first who introduced it, and said he had seen the like done before, and that it eat much like a little pork.' The horror comes from hearing the way men spoke of this, from an explicitly direct transcription of the real language of men, the genuine avoidance of naming the horror. Clarke's only significant alteration is to insert the vocative 'boys', which by suggesting both an innocent youthfulness and by the appeal of 'we're all in this together', an appeal to a brotherhood of men to eat a brother, subtly emphasises the horror of the situation. To select from this chapter is to offer only a part of its power, and to lose the cumulative suspense, the awful, inevitable following through of the cannibalism of the party, one by one:

Sanders, seeing them approach, knew his end was come, and submitted, crying, 'Give me half an hour to pray for myself.' They consent and the bewildered wretch knelt down and folded his hands like a child. His big, stupid face worked with emotion. His great cracked lips moved in desperate agony. He wagged his head from side to side, in pitiful confusion of his brutalized senses. 'I can't think o' the words, Jem!'

'Pah,' snarled the cripple, swinging the axe, 'we can't starve here all night.'

Four days had passed, and the two survivors of this awful journey sat watching each other. (p. 463)
I pointed in the previous quotation to Clarke's addition of the word 'boys' to the authentic statement from the deposition, and suggested this was deliberately suggesting a youthful innocence. Describing brutal, now cannibal, convicts, the comment may have sounded absurd. Yet in this last quotation, Clarke insists on Sanders' being a 'bewildered wretch', praying by folding his hands 'like a child', he emphasises his 'big, stupid face' and in characterising his murderer, chooses to refer to him as 'the cripple'. What Clarke is doing is emphasising the moral innocence of these depraved creatures: he insists, often enough for any Victorian readers, on their being depraved. But he stresses here, in his most hideous chapter, in describing one of the most bestial episodes in his novel, the childishness, the stupidity, the ignorance of his characters. These men, his language suggests, are more victims than anything else, and they are slaughtered like dumb beasts: 'as a sheep is driven to the shambles'. The emphasis is not on their moral culpability, but on their ignorance, on their simplicity, on their suffering — Vetch born a cripple — and on what they have suffered in society. Sanders is 'in pitiful confusion of his brutalised senses': brutalised, not brutal — his depravity is not innate but imposed upon him, by society, by the penal system. The horrors Clarke describes are the horrors of man's natural life — the accidents of birth, the forces of society. These are not the volitional evils of the free-choosing mind.

Passing by such episodes as the two twelve-year-old children in the special children's penitentiary who jump to death over a cliff rather than live, I will move on to mention only one further example of the system. Again, Clarke draws on factual sources, and again he deals with the episode with a restraint that adds an inexorable force to it. It is the final expression of the hell of the convict settlement, the search for the only possible escape. It involves Dawes and two other convicts, Bland, and Blind Mooney 'who had arrived in Sydney fifty-seven years before, in the year 1789, and when he was transported he was fourteen years old'. (Clarke makes no explicit comment on the year's being also the year of the French revolution. He leaves it as one of his unemphasised ironies. Liberty, Equality and Fraternity were a long way from Sydney.)

The scheme of escape hit upon by the convict intellect was simply this. Three men being together, lots were drawn to determine whom
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should be murdered. The drawer of the longest straw was the 'lucky' man. He was killed. The drawer of the next longest straw was the murderer. He was hanged. The unlucky one was the witness. He had, of course, an excellent chance of being hung also, but his doom was not so certain, and he therefore looked upon himself as unfortunate. (p. 539)

Again the restraint, the detached manner of narration, makes the horror more telling. Clarke uses a similar detachment of manner in his scrupulousness about the precise months and years, and about geographical accuracy. This both emphasises the documentary aspect of the book, and underlines the horror. Book I ends on a newspaper cutting purporting to be 'extracted from the Hobart Town Courier of the 12th November 1827'; indeed the whole chapter consists of this one brief paragraph (p. 104). It is entitled, objectively, 'A Newspaper Paragraph', and the opening chapter of the next book is called, with similar, unemotional, dispassionate factual objectivity, 'The Topography of Van Diemen's Land' (p. 105). But the human aspects of punishment and suffering suppressed by these seemingly objective historical and geographical chapter headings, are drawn attention to all the more forcefully by that very suppression. For the contents of those chapters are facts that cannot be divorced from any humane or emotional response. The newspaper paragraph tells how the innocent Dawes has (with three others) been sentenced to death, and then reprieved to a sentence of six years' penal servitude; and the topography of Van Diemen's Land is the topography of the 'natural penitentiary'.

Clarke's recording of the atrocities of a not far distant past, turning court records and royal commissions into imaginative fiction, was a major achievement. But I want to turn now from the socio-historical

9 L. L. Robson in 'The Historical Basis of For the Term of His Natural Life', Australian Literary Studies I, 2 (December 1963), pp 104-21, argues that Dawes's experiences were untypical: 'No more than approximately fifteen per cent of prisoners were ever sent to a penal settlement, and most convicts were not flogged. Usually men secured a ticket of leave within three years and this enabled them to work for themselves provided they reported regularly to the police.' It does not at all follow, of course, as some Australian commentators have implied, that because His Natural Life deals with someone treated as a hardened offender rather than with the typical, that it is a false account of the system. A system that can perpetrate these atrocities on only one man is an evil system, and far more than one man suffered under the system.
to the personal, to the story of Rufus Dawes, the novel's protagonist, and to the wider implications of the title. The novel opens with a sensational tableau. Lady Devine has just revealed that her son is not the child of Sir Richard Devine but the product of her adultery with Lord Bellasis and Wotton. Whereupon Sir Richard turns the young Richard Devine (whom he has been arraigning, anyway, for dissipation) out of the house. That night Richard having encountered Sir Richard striding past him wild-eyed on Hampstead Heath immediately comes upon the body of Lord Bellasis, his real father. He has just identified Lord Bellasis by examining his wallet when he is apprehended and taken to the police. Believing Sir Richard killed Bellasis, Richard says nothing lest his mother's adultery should be made public. He assumes a false name (Rufus Dawes) and is transported for theft: for Lord Bellasis's wallet had been emptied. Sir Richard dies of a stroke almost immediately on arriving home. Lady Devine never suspects that Dawes is in fact her son. She is led to believe Richard set sail for India on a ship that is later destroyed by fire.

The Prologue does not augur well for a naturalistic novel. It does, however, serve to get Dawes (as he is henceforth known) transported, and so is valuable at the level of a donnée. But even here it introduces problems by insisting on Dawes's innocence. This, more than the succession of punishments meted out to him later, mitigates against his possessing any typicality or representativeness. No doubt there were many innocent people convicted and transported: that is not the issue. What creates the problems for the twentieth century reader is Dawes's initial attitude. The hideous and brutal conditions on board the transport ship predispose us to react against the authorities responsible for such conditions. Consequently we encounter some difficulty when Dawes tells the ship's doctor of a mutiny that he has overheard being planned. This seems a falsification of what a convict on a ship like that would do. The novel seems to lose authenticity as a convict novel by having as its protagonist a 'goody' — and this relates to the initial donnée that Dawes is innocent of any crime. Distinguished from the other convicts by his innocence, reporting the planned mutiny to the authorities, Dawes seems the weak product of bourgeois sentimentalism.

But to make such a judgment is to replace a Victorian sentimentalism with its twentieth century equivalent, an over-readiness to assume immediate sympathy with the imprisoned and guilty. It is
important for Clarke’s scheme that he should draw the Victorian reading public gently towards a position of sympathy with the convicts — not plunge them immediately into a sympathy that would be forcibly resisted and rejected. It is also important that Dawes should be innocent and on the side of authority at the beginning; after all, he has been brought up a member of the English ruling class who established the transportation system and who mete out the justice. It is the purpose of Clarke’s narrative to show the breakdown of Dawes’s class loyalties; to show the breakdown in his belief in the worth of honesty, innocence, goodness in the context of the system. He becomes in the end distinguishable from the other convicts only in being more hardened, more unregenerate. The system is calculated not to produce any reformation, not to develop the good or socially useful or any other worthwhile characteristics of its convicts: Dawes’s nature is composed initially of altruism, self-sacrifice — his shielding of his mother’s name stresses this. But by herding together all manner of criminals, all that is produced is an increase in criminality, cruelty, bestiality, hostility to all social values. Dawes begins as innocent, and as a model of certain sorts of honour: he ends up in his attitudes (though not his actions) one of the most hardened of the criminals, someone in whom any traces of his earlier sensitivity, any past support for the authorities, any social instinct has been utterly extinguished. And this is, Clarke emphasises, a result of the system. On board ship ‘the more guilty boasted of their superiority in vice; the petty criminals swore that their guilt was blacker than it appeared’ (p. 17). The innocent and guilty alike are immersed in deeper depravity. Captain Vickers, the officer in charge of the Tasmanian penal settlement (a fine portrait of a man coping with his office by going by the rule book, by simply carrying out orders and so hoping to block out any moral qualms) later remarks ‘“But imagine an innocent man condemned to this place!” “I can’t”, said Frere, with a laugh. “Innocent man, be hanged! They’re all innocent, if you’d believe their own stories.”’ (p. 130). And with an obvious juxtaposition ironies, they go on to discuss Dawes. It is an important exchange, not only in its obvious but in its subtler ironies. Frere’s careless oath ‘Innocent men, be hanged’ is full of bitter, ambiguous significance: for the innocent are hanged; the oath is appropriately from the brutal Frere also an imperative. And when Frere goes on to say ‘They’re all innocent, if you’d believe their own
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stories', he unconsciously voices what Clarke establishes as a truth in the novel. In the context of those dreadful punishments, and of the guilt of their judges and warders, of the society condemning them and of the Freres running the system, the convicts are all innocent.

The mutiny is quelled, and its ringleaders name Dawes as one of them. On arrival in Hobart he is sentenced to six years' penal servitude, and three attempts are made on his life for exposing the mutiny; defending himself leads to his being put in chains for brawling. After unsuccessful attempts at escape he is condemned to solitary imprisonment on an isolated rock in the harbour. In despair he jumps, weighted by his chains, into the sea.

But at this stage his will is not utterly destroyed; with the later suicide pact he reaches his lowest point. Here, the shock of the water provokes an immediate reflex to survive and he swims. On the deserted shore he later comes across Mrs Vickers and her daughter Sylvia, Lieutenant Frere, and two others; the penal settlement has been closed down and on the last ship to leave there has been a successful mutiny. The convicts have put ashore this party. And now, after his attempted suicide, Dawes makes a determined effort to save the group. He swam not by any primary volitional decision but by an instinctive reaction, counter to his will, when he struck the water. But now his will is revived by the child, Sylvia, and he regains some social spirit, he begins to co-operate with and help others.

Rufus Dawes was no longer the brutalized wretch who had plunged into the dark waters of the bay to escape a life he loathed, and had alternately cursed and wept in the solitudes of the forests. He was an active member of society — a society of four — and he began to regain an air of independence and authority. This change has been wrought by the influence of little Sylvia. Recovered from the weakness consequent upon this terrible journey, Rufus Dawes had experienced for the first time in six years the soothing power of kindness. He had now an object to live for beyond himself. He was of use to somebody, and had he died, he would have been regretted. (pp. 196–7)

In Clarke’s notation, such a voluntary social participation is one of the positive values of human life; it is in contrast with the norms of the penal settlements, where there is either enforced participation in an activity, the result of force and brutality; or there is the per-
verted co-operation of the cannibalism episode; or there is the destruction of the human social spirit, the transforming of it into despair, hatred, uselessness, isolation. Dawes now responds to this new situation by building a coracle to escape from the deserted settlement before starvation overcomes them all. The details of the construction make a marvellous section in the *Robinson Crusoe* tradition. But against the naturalistic authenticity that establishes the resourcefulness and resilience of the human spirit, are set the equally naturalistic reminders of the realities of the penal system. ‘Tell me’, Dawes asks little Sylvia, laughingly, the coracle in progress,

‘what will you do for me if I bring you and mamma safe home again?’
‘Give you a free pardon,’ says Sylvia, ‘and papa shall make you his servant.’
Frere burst out laughing at this reply; and Dawes, with a choking sensation in his throat, put the child upon the ground, and walked away. (p. 214)

It is one of the most poignant moments in the novel, the sudden switch from the prospect of escape, from joy and excitement, to this awful, unthinking dashing of the mood. ‘This was in truth all he could hope for.’ Yet despite this, Dawes retains his will to live and his will to save others.

But this regeneration\(^{10}\) of Dawes, so powerfully and so practically established by his building the coracle, serves only to emphasise his further, subsequent destruction. For when after days at sea a passing ship sights the coracle, Frere, jealous of Sylvia’s admiration of Dawes, and contemptuous and envious of the convict, snatches Sylvia from Dawes’s arms, and says that he, Frere, built the coracle and saved them all from Dawes’s murderous designs. Mrs Vickers dies from exposure on that arduous journey, Sylvia loses her memory from the trauma of the voyage. Frere is believed. Dawes is sent as a prisoner for life to the Hobart penal settlement. ‘“Of what use to society,” asked the *Gazette*, quite pathetically, “has this scoundrel been during the last eleven years?” And everybody agreed that he had been of no use whatever.’ (p. 279).

\(^{10}\) See L. T. Hergenhan, ‘The Redemptive Theme in *His Natural Life*, *Australian Literary Studies* 11, 1 (June 1965), pp. 32–49.
Dawes is later transferred from Hobart to Norfolk Island, the worst of all settlements, where he runs a mafia-like organisation called the Ring. Frere marries Sylvia, and becomes commander of Norfolk Island. A new chaplain, North, an alcoholic, arrives at Norfolk Island and falls in love with Sylvia, whom he plans to take away from Frere whom she has come to hate. John Rex, the ringleader of the mutiny, having been recaptured in England, escapes again and returns to England where he assumes the identity of Richard Devine (Dawes) and because of a striking physical resemblance succeeds in taking over Devine's inheritance. But Rex's mistress whom he abandoned after she had planned his escape, discovers that he is in England, finds him and takes him back to Australia with her, under threat of exposing him as an escaped convict. In the course of these various events, certain remarkable coincidences emerge.

Richard Devine (Dawes) we know from the beginning was the illegitimate son of Lord Bellasis. Maurice Frere, the persecutor of Dawes throughout his imprisonment, is Richard Devine's cousin, and Sir Richard, upon the revelation of Richard's illegitimacy, planned to change his will in favour of Frere, but died of a stroke before doing so. North, the chaplain, was the young parson Lord Bellasis was waiting to meet when he was murdered. North later explains to Dawes when he discovers (as Frere never does) that Dawes is Devine: 'I was to meet Lord Bellasis ... to pay the money and receive the bills. When I saw him fall, I galloped up, but instead of pursuing his murderer I rifled his pocket-book of my forgeries.' (p. 589). North, in debt for gambling, had given Bellasis two forged bills of exchange. Lionel Crofton who was with Bellasis just before the murder was John Rex under an assumed name — ringleader of the mutinies and, along with Frere, Dawes's other black angel. And John Rex was none other than another illegitimate son of Lord Bellasis: hence his resemblance to Dawes — they are half-brothers. And Rex/Crofton was the murderer of Bellasis. The crime for which Dawes was transported — robbery (and suspicion of murder) — was the joint work of North and Rex. North goes to the settlement to assuage his guilt for not having spoken up at Dawes's trial, Rex is transported for another offence that need not concern us here.

Viewed realistically, these coincidences are absurd: and many
critics have commented adversely on the novel as a result of them. And since the historical portrayal of the convict system is done with such a careful and insistent documentary realism, the temptation to read the novel as wholly naturalistic is great.

But the coincidences have a role other than of providing sensational revelations and of providing some structural neatness to what might have been a rambling narrative. The familial connections of the characters offer a basis for a reading of the novel at a different level from the historical naturalistic. The blood relationship of Dawes and Rex allows for some important paralleling of their lives. Their similarities are pointed by their both assuming false names for important parts of their lives — though with an important difference. Rex operates pseudonymously (as Skinner, as Crofton) when he is free, but is imprisoned under his own name; whereas Dawes assumes his false name for captivity, surrendering his real name upon arrest. (Though it is not, of course, a name that is really his, since he is not a Devine.)

But the important parallel between Rex and Dawes is their physical resemblance, their being half-brothers, both illegitimate sons of Bellasis. Clarke pairs these half-brothers throughout his novel as alter egos. Rex is the guilty equivalent of Dawes. He is the professional criminal, the half-brother who committed the crime which resulted in Dawes’s imprisonment. Rex, with his mutinies, his escapes, features largely in the novel. His will to escape is the converse of Dawes’s behaviour: while Rex escapes from Norfolk Island, Dawes joins in the suicide pact, the murder lottery. It was Rex’s mutiny plan that Dawes revealed at the beginning of the novel. These are the contrasts — but there are also similarities: Rex’s life in London under Devine’s name is the sort of dissipated life Dawes/Devine had led before, and which had caused the initial confrontation with his ‘father’ that had provoked the revelation of his illegitimacy. Stressing the identity of these two figures, half-brothers, Clarke has built into his novel these two striking alternatives. The objection I raised earlier to having the novel’s protagonist an innocent figure, is met by having the undoubtedly guilty alter ego of Rex balancing Dawes throughout. These

11 See for instance Cecil Hadgraft, *Australian Literature* (London, Heinemann, 1960), p. 47. Lest this reference should seem misleading, I would like here to acknowledge a debt of gratitude to Cecil Hadgraft for first persuading me to read *His Natural Life* which he so rightly assured me was one of the great nineteenth century novels.
are the alternatives of 'his natural life', the two possibilities for the same person.

They are not the only possibilities. The other figure whose career parallels Dawes's throughout, whose life offers an alternative to the same set of events and locations, is Maurice Frere, the brutal lieutenant who finally becomes commander of Norfolk Island. Again there is a familial connection: Dawes and Frere are cousins. It is not — because of Dawes's illegitimacy — a blood relationship, but a social one. But the lack of blood connection is balanced for the novel's metaphorical pattern by that significant name, Frere, brother. And the name also expresses the nature of this alternative — it is pronounced 'freer'. He is the free alternative to the captive Dawes.

Frere is the most brutal of the officers:

the coarse red-faced Frere, who was noted for his fondness for low society, and overbearing, almost brutal demeanour. No one denied, however, that Captain Frere was a valuable officer. It was said that, in consequence of his tastes, he knew more about the tricks of convicts than any man on the island. It was said, even, that he was wont to disguise himself, and mix with the pass-holders and convict servants, in order to learn their signs and mysteries. When in charge at Bridgewater it had been his delight to rate the chain-gangs in their own hideous jargon, and to astound a new comer by his knowledge of his previous history. The convict population hated and cringed to him, for, with his brutality and violence, he mingled a ferocious good humour, that resulted sometimes in tacit permission to go without the letter of the law. Yet, as the convicts themselves said, 'a man was never safe with the Captain;' for, after drinking and joking with them, as the Sir Oracle of some public-house whose hostess he delighted to honour, he would disappear through a side door just as the constables burst in at the back, and show himself as remorseless, in his next morning's sentence of the captured, as if he had never entered a tap-room in all his life. (pp. 255-6)

Frere is presented not simply as a hypocrite, or a liar, or a sadist, or an authoritarian punishing in others those corruptions he loves himself. These are all components of his personality; but the particular strength of his portrayal is in the indication of his closeness to the
Frere slowly drew one hand from his pocket, took the cocked pistol and levelled it at his recent assailant. 'That's the best chance you'll ever get, Jack,' said he.

Kavanagh fell on his knees. 'For God's sake, Captain Frere!'

Frere looked down on the trembling wretch, and then uncocked the pistol with a laugh of ferocious contempt. 'Get up, you dog,' he said. 'It takes a better man than you to best me. Bring him up in the morning, Hawkins, and we'll give him five and twenty.'

As he went out — so great is the admiration for power — the poor devils in the yard cheered him. (p. 406)

Frere and the convicts are attached to each other by this frightful bondage, this cruel brotherhood. Clarke emphasises that this is not a one-sided attachment. Frere is bound by his sadism and authoritarianism to his victims; the convicts are bound to him by their admiration for power, by the servility of their defeated wills. There is a foreshadowing here of the theory that the inmates of the Nazi concentration camps though far outnumbering their guards had a complicity in their own destruction by accepting the guards' fragile authority.

On the societal level Clarke is pointing to a bond and to a similarity between Frere and his ilk, and the convicts. This is significantly imaged in a fight between Frere and Gabbett that ends the first mutiny. It is emphasised that they are equally matched and Frere wins only because a chance lurch of the ship off-balances Gabbett. Their parity of strength, of physical violence is given an additional meaning when Gabbett later practises cannibalism. But Clarke is also suggest-
ing in the Dawes-Frere relationship the two psychological oppositions of man’s natural life — the persecutory and the suffering. Even Dawes, the most hardened of the convicts by the novel’s end, cannot strike Frere. North records an incident in his diary in which Frere entered the goal yard:

I saw a dozen pair of eyes flash hatred, but the bull-dog courage of the man overawed them here, as, I am told, it had done in Sydney. It would have been easy to kill him then and there, and his death, I am told, is sworn among them; but no one raised a finger. The only man who moved was Rufus Dawes, and he checked himself instantly. Frere, with a recklessness of which I did not think him capable, stepped up to this terror of the prison, and ran his hands lightly down his sides, as is the custom with constables when ‘searching’ a man. Dawes — who is of a fierce temper turned crimson at this bravado, and, I thought, would have struck him, but he did not. (pp. 507–8)

Dawes is inevitably set in the role of victim to Frere’s persecutions. Similarly with Dawes and Rex, Clarke contrasts moral innocence with moral culpability, the will to survive with the drift towards suicide. Dawes, Rex and Frere are all in one way or another ‘brothers’ — they amongst them embody three different aspects of man’s natural life.

But all three ways end similarly. None of these three possibilities is a possibility of freedom. At the end of the novel Dawes leaves Norfolk Island on the ship on which North was planning to go away with Sylvia. It is not a positive move towards freedom — his concern is not to escape (his will for that has been broken) but to save Sylvia from North. The ship is destroyed in a cyclone, and both Sylvia and Dawes die. Frere, wifeless, remains bound to his convict charges on Norfolk Island. Rex is brought back to Australia by his mistress and remains her prisoner. North suicides. No one escapes. Each ‘natural life’ leads to the same blankness. It is a novel of the most powerful, most hopeless despair.

The coincidences are not the mere trappings of sensation and convenience. Rather, they offer the mechanism, they allow a familial metaphor, for an exploration of the irresolvable aspects of human society, of the human psyche. A modern novelist might have presented these contradictory elements within the same individual — Devine's
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altruistic sacrifice, Rex's murder, Frere's brutal exercise of authority, Rex's indomitable will, Dawes's despair, Frere's callous possessiveness of Sylvia, Dawes's hopeless love. Freud has offered the mechanics for doing so. Clarke, writing in 1872, used the traditional materials of the nineteenth century novel. He split these human characteristics amongst his cast of characters, gaining in fullness what he lost in complexity. And the complexity is there if we follow through the lives of Rex, Dawes and Frere as interrelated figures. Certainly Dawes is the obvious hero of the novel, the good protagonist. But the novel's title is undefining in its pronoun: His Natural Life. It could apply equally to Frere and to Rex as well as to Dawes, and my argument is that it applies to them all, for all are aspects of one human figure, of one figure representative of man's natural life.

And the relationship of the familial connections to the events of the Prologue offers a meaning beyond that of simple sensationalism. Both Rex and Dawes are involved in this initial incident of the killing of the father. Rex kills Bellasis, his father who is also Dawes's father, and Dawes's assumed father is killed with the shock of Bellasis's death. Dawes, who has every motive to kill his supposed father (his anger, to protect his mother, to preserve his inheritance) does not do so: but his supposed father nonetheless dies — as if the wish were sufficient — and Dawes is punished because he is suspected of robbing and killing his real father. Rex performs the Oedipal act; but his half-brother Dawes (whose protection of his mother is neatly Oedipal), though keeping his hands clean of bloodshed, is punished and treated as if he had in fact killed his father. The separation of motives, attitudes and responsibilities is similar to Dostoyevsky's treatment of the theme in The Brothers Karamazov.

The psychological interest here can also be directed outwards to a social significance. The initial parricide is the cause of Dawes's transportation, of leaving the old country and going to the settlement. And I would suggest that this initial symbolic action can be related to the trauma of the colonial experience. Brian Elliott in a lecture on Clarke\(^{12}\) has seen Dawes's love for Sylvia, the child brought up in the colony, away from England, as the central image of the novel. In Dawes's rejection by and of the old world and his clinging to and protecting this fragile infant despite every hindrance, Elliott sees an

\(^{12}\) Brian Elliott, 'Marcus Clarke', Commonwealth Literary Fund Lecture, 22 September 1952, Canberra, Canberra University College.
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image of the colonial experience. But Sylvia, though a regenerative image and inspiration for Dawes, is an inspiration all for nothing. She can provide no fulfilment for Dawes, any more than Australia did for Clarke. He went to Australia when his father died, leaving him at sixteen without the inheritance he had expected. He died there, bankrupt for the second time, aged thirty-five. Much of his experience of the colony was of frustration, sickness, financial anxiety, misery. The killing of the father at the beginning of His Natural Life is an event bringing on misery for all the main characters of the novel. Once the societal taboos and values of the old world are broken away from, then the ‘natural life’ breaks out unchecked. The brutality of Frere, the homosexual rape and flogging to death of Kirkland, Gabbett’s cannibalism — is this man’s natural life? There seems no fulfilment; the hopeless expiation of North produces only suicide, Dawes’s protection of his mother’s name produces a life time’s imprisonment. Clarke takes a hopeless view of the colonial experience, of the conversion of the antipodean paradise into a natural penitentiary. The settlement is blighted by the guilt of the initial Oedipal killing. The characters are all guilt ridden — North’s remorse and hopeless expiation of his failure to speak at the trial, Frere’s guilt at his lie about the coracle and his fear Sylvia will remember one day. And though Dawes has nothing to be guilty of, his motivation, to protect his mother’s guilt, is related: is it an expiation by proxy of her guilt, an expiation for wanting his father’s or supposed father’s death, a sexual trauma at the realisation of his illegitimacy? Sylvia, of course, is notably innocent and guilt free: but fearful every time she encounters Dawes, fearful of something she cannot remember. Guilt becomes a major theme for the novel’s mood, relatable to the initial Oedipal killing, and appropriate for the story of a colonisation founded on the convict system.
Robbery Under Arms

a continuing success

Alan Brissenden

Of the sixteen novels written by T. A. Browne under the pseudonym 'Rolf Boldrewood', Robbery Under Arms is the only one to have stayed continually in print. It has been popular from its first appearance as a serial in the Sydney Mail between 1 July 1882 and 11 August 1883. In his 'Fragment of Autobiography', Henry Lawson wrote that as a boy he read Dickens, Marryat, and Harte; then he added, 'And oh! of course we read Robbery Under Arms when it first appeared in the Sydney Mail'.¹ The number of people acquainted with it would have been much larger than the actual circulation of the magazine, because it was read aloud to groups of listeners; a squatter from the Queensland border who once met the author while travelling on a train told him, 'The mail comes in of a Saturday, y'know, and the station hands used to gather to hear me read the weekly chapter.'² A further indication of its appeal is given by Bertram Stevens, who connected the story with the exploits of the Kelly gang, which were still fresh in the minds of Australians. In 1913, Stevens wrote in the Lone Hand that Robbery Under Arms 'was as true to life as the authentic account of the Kellys and a thousand times more romantic. Bushmen told one another about the story, or passed the paper on, and its fame soon spread far beyond the immediate circulation of the Mail.'³

Since Browne had begun writing seriously in 1871 he had been published mainly by the Australasian and the Australian Town and Country Journal. Both of these magazines had refused the first chapter

¹ The Stories of Henry Lawson, ed. Cecil Mann (Sydney, Angus and Robertson, 1967), First Series, p. 25.
² Life I, 1 (1904), p. 59.
³ The Lone Hand XIII (1913), p. 113.
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of *Robbery Under Arms*, to his great surprise — everything he had submitted before had been accepted without comment — so he sent it to the *Mail*, which he had not previously tried, where its publication began quietly enough. It attracted attention as it progressed through its weekly parts for the next thirteen months, and it is the only work of nineteenth century Australian fiction published by the *Mail* which is mentioned in the history of the Fairfax empire, *A Century of Journalism*.

The romanticism remarked on by Bertram Stevens is due especially to the Byronic hero, Starlight — a handsome outlaw with a compelling personality and a past which is both mysterious yet fairly clearly aristocratic. The young men he leads are all colonial-born, and the story is narrated by one of them, Dick Marston, written while he is in gaol waiting to be hanged. Dick and his brother Jim join Starlight through their father, Ben, an old lag transported for poaching, and they carry out their bushranging forays from Terrible Hollow, a splendid valley with a hidden entrance. They combine with another gang, led by the unpleasant Moran, for larger exploits, most importantly the robbing of a gold escort, but for a long period the Marston brothers make an honest living on the Turon goldfields, Jim even getting married to Jeanie Morrison. Betrayed by Jeanie’s sister, Kate, who is in love with Dick, they take to bushranging again, and are on their way to escape through Queensland when, in a final battle with the police, Jim and Starlight are shot and Dick is captured. After twelve years in gaol he is reprieved through the intercession of the local squatter, for whom he and Jim had worked, and George Storefield, a neighbouring selector who by hard work and thrift has become a rich landowner. George, whose sister Grace waits for Dick and marries him on his release, is the moral example set against the downward path taken by the Marston boys, who could have made a success of their lives if they had worked their father’s selection, Rocky Flat, and cared for their mother and sister, Aileen.

The moral element is persistent in *Robbery Under Arms*, but it is overwhelmed by the excitement of the action, the vividness of the language, and the author’s enthusiasm for the exploits he is describing. There is little development in the characters, but readers are kept interested by the gusto of the story telling, and by the glamorous figure of Starlight, the gentleman who can organise the overlanding and sale of a thousand head of stolen cattle, rescue a roomful of
terrified women held at pistol point by the ruffianly Moran, and fall in love with the unaffected Aileen Marston, whose name is on his lips as he dies.

A more subtle attraction for the early readers of the serial lay in the recognisably Australian qualities of the majority of the characters and their attitudes, especially their attitudes to authority. In no sense a *Bulletin*-style nationalist, Browne was ardently patriotic; but, basically, he was never able to make up his mind whether Britain or Australia had the final claim on one's loyalty. Superficially, it was quite clear — England was 'home'; but Australia was the only home known to the native-born, and there are times in *Robbery Under Arms* when the battle with the law is battle with the immigrant trooper, and bushranging is an expression of a more democratic kind of life than that represented by the English system based on a landed ruling class. The language in which Dick Marston tells his story is a further expression of Australianism. While previous authors, especially Alexander Harris, had a concern with the vernacular and incorporated it in their books in conversation, none had used it as Browne now did, as the means of narration.

Another important reason for the continuing success of the novel, as distinct from its initial success as a serial, is technical. In its form as published since 1889, the book is some 28,750 words shorter than the fifty-nine parts which appeared in the *Sydney Mail*. One result is a more compact sequence of events; another is a more consistent tone. *Robbery Under Arms* was undoubtedly successful as a serial, but publication in England as a book in 1888 secured its future. As early as 1885 a friend had suggested to Browne that he bring it out himself, but at that time he could not afford to.

The first publishers were Remington and Company, a London firm who produced a variety of books by authors now mostly forgotten. Music, art, travel and fiction were on their list during the 1870s and 1880s, including several novels in two or three volumes. The three-deckers sold for thirty-one and six a set and it was in this format that *Robbery Under Arms* first appeared. Turner and Sutherland commented in their *Development of Australian Literature* (1898) that 'the success of the book in England was both prompt and substantial, and it received strongly appreciative notices from most of the critical
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journals’, a statement not supported by a survey of some thirty literary journals of the time, which showed very few reviews. It was mentioned in the ‘Publications of the Week’ columns of the Spectator and the Literary World; the Saturday Review found that ‘the adventures of “Marston’s gang” are given at too great length, and are too much like one another’, and the book was ‘exceedingly tedious to read’; while The Athenaeum, kinder, commented that it was ‘tough, straightforward, honest and thoroughly natural’ and remarked, interestingly, on its ‘moral obliquity’.

A three-volume novel at thirty-one and six was relatively expensive, and during the 1880s the firm of Macmillan had begun experimenting with cheap editions of fiction and belles lettres. As part of this program, Robbery Under Arms was bought from Remington for fifty pounds and published at six shillings in 1889. It became one of the most popular of the early books of this kind. It was reprinted over thirty times during the fifty years following its first publication, and had great success as a stage play, adapted by Garnet Walch and starring Alfred Dampier; it has been filmed at least three times, and serialised for radio.

One result of this early success was Macmillan’s publication in book form of the eleven novels Browne had so far written. All but one of these had appeared initially as serials, and the exception, The Crooked Stick, originally entitled ‘The Final Choice; or Pollie’s Probation’, had been a Christmas supplement to the Australasian in 1885. ‘The Squatter’s Dream’ of 1875 had been published in 1878 by F. W. Silver & Company as Ups and Downs, but the ending of the story as it originally appeared in the Australian Town and Country Journal had been considerably changed by the publisher. Browne was much aggrieved at the liberties taken, but it was his first book and he was to wait a decade before another novel would appear between hard covers. When Robbery Under Arms did appear, it too was altered from its original, but the author had some say in the matter; exactly how much cannot be stated certainly. In a letter to her friend Mrs Alice Hoare, Browne’s daughter, Mrs Emily Black, said,

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we learnt to use an old Remington typewriter — about the size of a portmanteau; and I did most of the actual typing for Robbery — before it was sent home to the Publishers. First Longman; and afterwards in a one volume edition (they made him cut out some of it; as it was too long) which Macmillan published.7

Mrs Black, writing some time after the event, has mistaken the name of the first publisher, though curiously enough she uses the correct name in connection with the typewriter in the previous sentence. The ‘they’ of the parenthesis would appear to refer to Macmillan, and indeed the one-volume version is shorter than the three-volume Remington edition. However that, in turn, is itself shorter than the serial, and Remington may have asked for deletions as well.

This pruning eliminates some episodes that are repetitive and others that are out of keeping with the characteristic tone of the novel. In a very few places some minor stylistic changes have been made, but these are of small importance. The serial ran to approximately 259,750 words; the Remington edition was shorter by some 2500 words; the Macmillan edition, however, was cut by 28,750 words (the three are referred to hereafter as S, R and M respectively) resulting in a novel of about 231,000. All subsequent editions have taken this as their copy text.

The deletions in the Remington edition, which are also in Macmillan’s, have little effect on the shape of the novel. The first is a paragraph describing Starlight’s cheerful good humour while in gaol awaiting trial. The second is a short paragraph at the end of Volume I. Its omission may have been convenient for spacing, but it also gives a stronger conclusion — Dick has just told Aileen that he and Jim are going to become bushrangers, and she concludes her sad remonstrance with, ‘Why, oh why, didn’t we all die when we were little children?’ The serial continues with some philosophising by Dick, ending with, ‘Men and women are queer things, there’s no mistake; and the more life you know, the less you’re able to understand the rights of it’ — a truism typical of those scattered throughout the book, and a much less dramatic conclusion that Aileen’s anguished, unanswerable question (Sydney Mail, 4 Nov. 1882, p. 784).

7 MS Ab98/5, Mitchell Library, Sydney.

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The third omission explains an apparent lack of sequence between the end of Chapter 22 and the beginning of 23, which in both R and M opens with, ‘“Because it’s too late,” growled Father’ — obviously an answer to an unasked question. The serial shows that Starlight has suggested that Jim and old Ben could give themselves up and, after the light sentence they would receive, they would be able to return to the farm, Rocky Flat, and care for Aileen and Mrs Marston. Ben angrily decries the idea, adding to the roundness of his character and background when he declares to Jim, ‘I swore an oath when I left England that I’d make it hot for the cursed gentlefolk that hunted me down — to my dying day — and that oath I’ll keep. If you’re too soft to back up me and your brother you’d better turn school teacher and leave horses and arms to men.’ Dick defends Jim, and ends by asking, ‘Why shouldn’t one be spared out of the lot?’ supplying the question for Ben’s reply, ‘Because it’s too late’, which begins the chapter, apparently in mid-air (18 Nov. 1882, p. 879).

The most significant cut in R is a passage of 1700 words (25 Nov. 1882, p. 927, 2 Dec. 1882, p. 975) beginning with a description of the return to Terrible Hollow after the first bushranging venture, robbing the Goulburn mail coach at Bargo Brush. During the days that follow the gang read press reports of their exploits, receive news from home and begin to make an important decision. Four elements in the passage relate to the context and the story as a whole: Starlight is identified owing to what one newspaper called ‘a certain Claude Duval mannerism exhibited by him on this occasion’; the press describes how the police are being abused and ridiculed by the public for their failure to catch the gang; Aileen writes to them of George Storefield’s success as a carrier on the goldfields and of his buying more land; and Starlight makes the vitally important proposal that they go to the Turon to have a look at the diggings.

The loss of this section leads to another lapse of sequences in M. As the gang begin their return to the Hollow after the Goulburn mail hold up, Dick comments, as narrator, ‘Time was more than money to us now — it was blood, or next thing to it.’ This is followed in M by, ‘“I’ll go anywhere you like,” says Jim, stretching himself. “It makes no odds to me now where we go. What do you think of it, dad?” ’ (p. 284). There is clearly a break here, and the ‘it’ of Jim’s
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question to his father has no point of reference; this is explained, however, by the immediately foregoing passage in S, in which Starlight suggests going to the Turon. Like the previous cut, this is clumsily made, with no attempt to compose a sensible bridge.

Those are all the deletions made for the Remington edition, and their ineptness is curious when there is evidence elsewhere, however slight, of some stylistic changes which would appear to be by the author. The letter written by Kate to Dick, for instance, in Chapter 22, is altered in R to include mention of Kate’s sister Jeanie, and the comment following it is changed from ‘This wasn’t a pleasant letter, by any manner of means’ (11 Nov. 1882) to ‘Not a pleasant letter, by no manner of means.’ (p. 258). Here is a conscious attempt to roughen the language of the narrator, and there are some others; it seems logical to think that these are authorial, but this kind of stylistic emendation was not carried out consistently and ceases altogether after the first forty pages of R Volume II. Occasionally the rougher word is replaced by a refined form: ‘where the horses was’ (24 March 1883, p. 536), for instance, becomes ‘where the horses were’ (p. 452), but alterations like this seem more likely to have been made by the English publisher than by the author. All the changes introduced into R were carried over into M; the new cuts that were made for M, however, are of greater significance to the shape of the story, and are contrived so that there are none of the awkward breaks like those noticed earlier. It can be safely deduced that the first five deletions, all in R, were made by Remingtons and that the rest were made by Browne at the request of Macmillan.

The largest passage omitted is 9640 words long, and includes the whole of the episode for 16 December 1882 and parts of those for the weeks immediately before and after. To this point the serial sections and the chapters are roughly co-ordinated, but this deletion leads to S Chapter 17 becoming M Chapter 25. The passage concerns a ‘hermit’ who had lived in Terrible Hollow (see pp. 261ff.). After returning from the Turon where Starlight as ‘Bernard Muldoon’ has organised the sale of some horses, the boys investigate the old hut where it was supposed the hermit had lived; they dig up a box full of papers and a trunk containing geological samples, including gold, some woman’s jewellery and a portable writing desk with letters and papers in it. Starlight reads through them and learns the story of
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Dominick Devereux Wharton, the Honourable Mr. Wharton too, a younger son of Lord Wharncombe’s of Wharncombe Abbey. He had married, seemingly, against the wishes of his family, and being very fond of travelling and botany and geology ... he made his mind up to come out to the unknown land of Australia.

His wife, Estelle, had helped him gather specimens, and had died from snakebite. Starlight decides to send everything back to Wharton’s relatives, saying, ‘I know something of the family. They lived in the same — well, near enough for me to know all about them.’ (9 Dec. 1882, p. 1023). Wharton had stumbled on the Hollow by following Donohoe, the bushranger who had shown it to Ben Marston, and had been allowed to stay. He had done some prospecting, and concluded that a rich, deep lead could be found there.

The second incident of this part is Dick’s return to Rocky Flat to see his mother and Aileen, despite old Ben’s warnings. While he is at home, Aileen tells him that Gracey Storefield thinks of him all the time, and begs him to leave off bushranging for her sake; he replies that once started on a criminal life, the only escape was ‘to make a good haul, and clear out of the colony altogether’ (16 Dec. 1882, p. 1070), an idea which constantly reappears throughout the story. On his return journey, he is shot at by two troopers and wounded; but he reaches the Hollow safely and Starlight and Ben set his arm, which has been broken by a bullet. During a month’s convalescence he builds up resentment against a society where, as he says, ‘a couple of young fellows just a year away from the old country must hurt me the moment they set eyes on me, within a mile of the place I was born in, and try to shoot me down with as little mercy as the overseers show to a strange dog on a sheep run.’ (23 Dec. 1882, p. 1123). This accumulation of bitterness largely leads to his taking up the chance offered to rob the bank at Ballabri, which begins Chapter 25 in the final version.

Stylistically, the omission of the story of ‘the hermit’ is of much significance, for it removes a section of narrative strikingly un-characteristic of the novel as a whole. Browne was always drawn to the exotic titles and adventures of the nobility, and his favourite author was the overwhelmingly popular Scott. Howard Effingham of ‘An Australian Squire’ (1877, published as Babes in the Bush,
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1900), Bertram Devereux of ‘The Final Choice; or Pollic’s Probation’, (The Crooked Stick, 1885), and Roland de Massinger of War to the Knife (1899) are a few examples of his delight in using characters with aristocratic names. The Honourable Dominick Devereux Wharton and his wife Estelle belong with these, not with the Marstons, Storefields and Dalys of Robbery Under Arms; the big squatter in the novel has the marginally distinguished name of Falkland (shared with another country squire, Ferdinando Falkland of Godwin’s Caleb Williams), and his daughter is ‘Miss Falkland’ throughout the book, except for when the drunken Moran tries to make her dance, saying ‘Come, Fanny Falkland or whatever they call yer’ (p. 437). Her aristocracy lies more in her behaviour and her wealth than in her name; and, in colonial Australia, this is realistic. The name of the ‘Hon. Dominick Wharton’ rings as falsely on the ears as the words in which he laments the death of his wife —

My wife is dead! dead! my adored, my only love, my true life, my soul! ...

They smiled, how faintly sweet, those softest lips, those dying love-lit eyes, as I knelt by the rude couch and vowed to the Eternal Ruler of the Universe — to the Heaven on the threshold of which she lay — by our immortal love — by that after life which spirits parted, but not divided, in time MUST share.

Her stainless soul winged its flight from earth ere I rose wellnigh from a death-swoon, but pledged to carry out her dying wishes to the letter. (9 Dec. 1882, p. 1023)

This is the kind of highly coloured writing found especially in Boldrewood’s later work, like The Sealskin Cloak (serial 1884, book 1896), War to the Knife (1899) or The Last Chance (1905), for instance, but it is present also in a description like the following, from the earlier story, My Run Home (serial 1874, book 1897).

As the sun faded out in the short light of a winter day, the glories of the earth, sea, and sky were painted in rich and ever-changing colours upon the fleeting cloud battalions which rose as if marshalled and ranked with unheard trumpet-calls in the clear pale light of eve.

The mountains robed in regal purple, flamed for a space in the golden fire of the dying sunset; the lonely cliffs which lined the shore to eastward grew sombre and darksome of hue long before the soft gloom of
twilight quenched the sunset tabard — 'white and golden, crimson blue.'

The inflated ‘literary’ quality of writing like this has nothing in common with the plain-speaking bushman’s voice of Dick Marston, and Browne was perhaps conscious of this fact, for, at the end of the Hon. Dominick’s lament, which has been read aloud by Starlight, there is a row of asterisks. These are followed by, ‘ “Poor old chap,” says Jim, taking his pipe out of his mouth, “that’s enough to show why he took it into his head to turn hatter and live all by himself in the Hollow, which I expect never had an honest man camped upon it before or since.” ’ (9 Dec. 1882, p. 1023).

Also omitted with this section is a brief mention of how Warrigal came to be devoted to Starlight. Ben is telling how he himself came to the Hollow at the invitation of the bushranger Donohoe (the real Johnny Donohoe was shot near Mulgoa in 1830)—

Donohoe was getting old and done himself, and had to get a mate of some sort. He knew I was middlin’ game, and could hold my tongue, even when I was drunk, so he took me. It’s a long story how the captain came among us; but he saved Warrigal’s life when Donohoe had him tied up to a tree and was going to shoot him. That’s why he takes to him more than anyone in the world. He’s true to you, Captain, if he is to any one, I believe. (9 Dec. 1882, p. 1023).

The theme of devotion and gratitude for saving a life occurs twice in the final version of the novel — Dick had saved Gracey Storefield from drowning when she was a child, and Jim saves Miss Falkland from death by snatching her from a bolting horse. Both of these incidents are of major importance to the plot. As a result of the first, George Storefield declares himself another brother to Dick, ‘one that will stick to you, too, fair weather or foul’ (p. 26), and Gracey eventually marries her rescuer. As a result of the second, Dick is finally freed from gaol through the efforts of Miss Falkland’s father, as well as of George — both of whom have become Honourable Members of Parliament in the Upper House. Since in real life the squatters were those who suffered most from the bushrangers and cattle duffers, it could be expected that no squatter would help a convicted bushranger; these incidents allow Boldrewood to let the unexpected happen. Both events are plausible, and they are varied in the telling—
Dick's saving of Gracey a reminiscence of boyhood, Jim's rescuing Miss Falkland a thrilling piece of action involving the horses that Browne loved and understood so well. The second incident is also important in showing the close relationship between the Marston brothers. As Jim is galloping after Miss Falkland, Dick learns they are headed for the edge of a hundred-foot cliff, where a trooper had fallen over and been killed; he is able to 'telegraph', to give a prearranged signal to Jim warning him of imminent danger, so that Jim makes a desperate effort, catches the reins and is able to swing Miss Falkland on to his own horse before hers plunges to its death. To have omitted either of these rescues would have noticeably affected the novel's structure. Leaving out the reference to Warrigal and Starlight, however, has no such effect, and its inclusion, even so brief as it is, could by repetition weaken the importance of the other two.

This is even more the case with another large cut made for Macmillan, a passage of some 5000 words, comprising more than half of the episodes for 3 and 10 March 1883, which reveals how old Ben manages to get the newspapers and letters which he regularly brings into the Hollow. One day after the gold escort robbery Dick rides off with his father to a lonely shepherd's hut, an outstation of Mr Falkland's property, about twenty miles away. The shepherd, an old Scot named Davy Carstairs, acts as a clearing house for messages for 'Poacher Ben' as he calls him. He reads out the letters and takes replies and rewards for the senders —

'Weel, here's ane from John Barker' ('Cross-eyed Jack', says father). 'Says there's a lot of unbranded calves of Mr. Lumsden's running near the gap, ten miles from Broken Creek. If you cop any, send him two pound.'

'He be hanged!' growls father; 'he'd better run 'em himself. He's a cowardly hound or he'd do it. Chuck it in the fire.'

'William Crickmere' ('Flash Bill,' says father). 'Two lines. "Police working near old cattle-track, Nulla; camped Rocky Creek."'

'Well done, old Bill,' he says. 'There's five pounds; send him that.'

'James Doherty: "If you can send thirty good colts and twenty mares and fillies to the old place to work over the boundary, the money is there."'

'Can't do it, now. Tell him he'd better send word to Tandragee.'
But Davy also makes moral comment, with predictable results; taking up another letter, he says.

"That's from the puir sair-hearted woman that ye swore to luve and cherish a' yer days, Ben Marston — in the hand of write of that fine weel-faured lassie that has the ill fortune to ca' ye father. Are ye no 'shamed to walk the airth, that have done waur to yer ain flesh and bluid than the beasts o' the field? Answer me that, ye bauld and hardened sinner."

"Why didn't ye take to the parson racket when yer time was out?" sneers father. 'Blest if ye can't patter better than half on 'em. You're the one man that I let talk to me that way, anyhow. Maybe ye'll convart me some day.'

And then, not too surprisingly we learn how the old shepherd and the old lag have become linked —

"On the day that ye saved this miserable life, and that of anither that was a hunner times dearer to me — Ben Marston — I made a vow to Almighty God to do ye what sairvice I could to my deein day. Have I no kept my oath?"

"Davy Jones, I aint going for to deny it," says father. 'You've done more for me than any man living ever did or will. You don't cotton to my ways and never did. It stuns me, as you could have stuck to me through it all, unless it was about the kid.'

'Poacher, robber, murderer, I had amaist said that ye are!' said the old man. 'Why is it that I, David Carstairs, that never stole the value of a bawbee in this long, wasted life; that was exiled and sent awa' to this wearfu' land for a sma' regimental offence — can ca' ye freend and brither, and do your bidding, evil as your ways are? Why is it but that when I saw the blue eyes and the gowden locks o' my wee darling lassie — the child o' her that followed me from the auld country and died o' grief and shame in this new ane — go down beneath the pitiless wave my eyes darkened and my soul seemed to have quitted its habitation. Did they no' tell me that ye leapit in frae the forecastle of the prison ship, and the gale rising and the dark waves mounting — and when the boat was lowered and they brocht ye in mair deed than alive, did I no gae doon on my knees and vow a vow to the Lord of Life, to the Great Ruler o' the Universe? And I hae keepit the oath, as I shall answer to the Lord at the last day. I hae keepit my vow.'

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The old shepherd, like his language — 'What a queer lingo it is, my word!' — comments Dick is again derived from Browne's beloved Scott, and he makes only this one appearance in the story.

By omitting repetitious material, the excision of this section also strengthens the book. Davy is but a more eccentric version of Falkland's overseer, Mr McIntyre, who says to the squatter, 'Why should ye fash yoursel' about these young deevils like the Marstons? They're as good's ready money in auld Nick's purse. It's bred and born and welded in them.' (p. 85). Dick's comment on McIntyre's language, 'Droll lingo, wasn't it?' (p. 87) is virtually the same as his later remark on Davy Carstairs's. More important for the novel's structure is the omission of Ben's rescuing Davy's daughter. Rufus Dawes's saving a life in a storm at sea comes immediately to mind, but so do the other three rescues which are already part of the fabric of Robbery Under Arms. When all four are included, the essentially credible, realistic narrative of the novel is weakened by the accumulation of events illustrating this theme of gratitude for rescue.

The discovery of how Ben gets his news is also lost by this cut, but this is another advantage, for our not knowing adds to that sense of mystery and deception which is part of the book's flavour. It may at first appear regrettable that an extra brushstroke laid on Ben's portrait has been lost, an innate, if rarely seen goodness, which is well expressed in his comment to Dick as they leave the old shepherd, standing in the afternoon sun like an Old Testament prophet, forewarning doom, and death —

That's a queer old card, aint he? I save his little girl from drowning at sea, and he's paid me over and over agin for doin' a thing I couldn't help. He's about the second rale good man I ever seen. But he's mad about religion, and that — must be. He thinks a man like me can repent. (3 March 1883, p. 392)

It is, however, better that this is left out for it refers to events that happened outside Australia, in the characters' earlier lives. It resembles several other incidents cut from the serial, including Ben's remark about retaliating against the 'cursed gentlefolk' who had him lagged and transported, and Starlight's knowing the Wharton family before he left England. References like these make specific what is
more effectively left mysterious. Starlight's dying reference to Hurlingham and Morringer's startled recognition of him are all the more powerful because they are the most direct revelation of his past in another country—and that revelation is quickly suppressed by the whispered request, 'You won't tell, will you? Say you won't?' (p. 621). The world of Robbery Under Arms is the Australian world; there are references to England, but 'home' is not the 'old country' across the sea, as it is in several of Browne's other novels, My Run Home (serial 1874, book 1897), The Ghost Camp (1902) and The Last Chance (1905), for example. Starlight can never return to England, and home for the Marstons is where they have been born and reared. Falkland is called 'an Englishman that had come young to the colony, and worked his way up by degrees' (p. 81), but that is the only reference to his origins. His daughter becomes engaged to 'an English lord, or baronet, or something of that sort' (p. 630), but there is no indication whether she is going to England, or staying in Australia, and her future husband has no illusions; he classes her among the colonists. When they visit Dick in prison and she speaks and shakes hands with him, 'Sir George, or whatever his name was, didn't seem to fancy it over much, for he said — "You colonists are strange people. Our friend here may think himself highly favoured."' He is, of course, put firmly in his place by Miss Falkland, who rounds off her part on the theme of gratitude for rescue when she speaks of the great debt she owes to both Dick and Jim—'Poor Jim saved my life on one occasion, and on another, but far more dreadful day, he — but words, mere words, can never express my deep thankfulness for his noble conduct...' (p. 631).

This relationship between the upper classes and the workers is here unmistakably shown to be different from the relationship of patronage between the aristocracy and the lower orders usually presented in English novels of the period. Sir George is an outsider to the Australian colonial world, and it is that world which is presented in the final version of the novel, undiluted by specific reference to events outside Australia before the action begins.

It has been pointed out elsewhere that the major incidents of the novel are all different in kind9 and this further contributes to the novel's success as a work of fiction. In its original form, Robbery Under Arms

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not only included the two additional references to the rescue theme already mentioned, it also had two accounts of station holdups. The second of these remains as Chapters 44–6 in the book, describing the siege of Mr Knightley’s home, during which Patsey Daly is shot. Like every major incident of the novel, this is based on reality — the holding up of Mr Keightley’s [sic] home Dunn’s Plains near Bathurst by the bushrangers Burke, O’Meally, Hall, Gilbert and Vane in October 1863, during which Burke was shot. In the fictional account there is an unattached allusion to a Mr Hamilton, who is a ‘dead shot’ (p. 543), and another to a foray by ‘Moran’s mob at Kadombla’ (p. 540). These refer to an incident included in the serial episode for 21 April 1883, an attack by Moran, Burke, Daly and Wall on Kadombla station. The basis here was the actual assault by O’Meally, Hall and Gilbert on David Campbell’s property Goimbla, only a month after the raid on Mr Keightley’s (Browne’s fondness for slight alteration of names is clearly apparent here). The second incident is easily cut from the story, for it does not directly involve Starlight or the Marstons. It has some value in allowing for contrast between the behaviour of ‘Moran’s mob’, who had to flee from Kadombla empty handed, and Starlight’s band at Knightley’s where gentlemanly behaviour and final success are combined. However, this contrast between gallantry and uncouthness has already been powerfully made through the foiling of Moran’s holdup of the women at the Whitfield’s station, Darjallook, in Chapter 36, and the seige of Kadombla merely adds another bushranging exploit which would have been recognised by some readers of the serial. It is similar to, but much weaker than the Knightley affair, which is given in more detail, at greater length, and is far richer altogether in terms of narrative and character.

Other incidents omitted with the passage, which is some 5500 words long, are a brief account of a brush with Morringer and his men, a quarrel between Dick and Ben, some philosophising by Dick along the lines that education is initially more important for children than religion, a number of minor bushranging incidents involving Moran’s gang, and news from Jim, who is posing as an American and has a job in Melbourne. There is talk of getting away through Queensland, but, as Dick comments, ‘We didn’t think the proper time was come.’
This section is a digression from the main narrative flow of the novel, and its cutting helps to focus concentration on the chief characters. Without it, the story can go from the end of M Chapter 40, with Jim's escape by driving an old gentleman in a horse trap to Melbourne, to the opening of the next chapter, 'We hadn't been long at home, just enough to get tired of doing nothing, when we got a letter from Bella Barnes, telling us that she was going to get married the day after the Turon races, and reminding Starlight that he had promised to come to her wedding.' (p. 496). This information gains impetus because Jim's escape on the previous page has been possible only because Maddie, Bella's sister, had persuaded her sweetheart, Joe Moreton, to let Jim impersonate him as the old gentleman's driver. The intervening section in the serial destroys the close connection between the characters and the events they are involved in, and diverts attention to the minor and independent efforts of 'Moran's mob'.

The cutting down of the serial clearly makes the novel's structure more compact and concentrated, its pace faster and its tone more consistent. Here lies part of the reason for Robbery Under Arms being a much finer work than its immediate predecessor, The Miner's Right. This was serialised in the Australian Town and Country Journal in 1880 and in The Colonies and India, S. W. Silver & Company's London weekly, the following year, the only one of Browne's stories so published in England. When The Miner's Right appeared, unrevised, as a book in 1890, the Saturday Review commented that it would have benefited from a thorough pruning, to become a third of its original size.10 Robbery Under Arms lost nothing like that amount, but it lost enough to make a positive difference to its form.

A less immediately obvious reason for its popular appeal for Australian readers lay in the social attitudes which are part of its texture. Browne was a Goldfields Commissioner and Police Magistrate, he had been a squatter, he was a member of the Melbourne Club; in the future he would enjoy the life of Melbourne society, and be thoroughly conservative in politics. Hardly the man to present a nationalist Australian attitude — and yet, despite himself, he does just that.

H. M. Green has pointed out that Dick Marston is probably the

10 Saturday Review (29 November 1890), p. 622.
first really Australian character in fiction. A whole range of characters, however — Dick and Jim, the Barneses, Billy the Boy — are all touched by the same brush, which vitalises and individualises them as unmistakably Australian. Both their vocabulary and the ideas they express are distinctive. After Jim has saved Miss Falkland, one of the shearers says to him:

‘... your fortune’s made. Mr Falkland’ll stand a farm, you may be sure, for this little fakement.’

‘And I say, Jack,’ says old Jim, very quiet like, ‘I’ve told you all the yarn, and if there’s any chaff about it after this the cove will have to see whether he’s best man or me; so don’t make any mistake now.’ (p. 100)

Mr Falkland does make such an offer to reward him, and the relationship between the squatter and the independent colonial native is illuminated when Jim refuses to take a cheque, or a job on the run as an under-overseer. Anyone would have saved Miss Falkland’s life, he says, ‘all that was in it was that his horse was the fastest. “It’s not a bad thing for a poor man to have a fast horse now and then, is it Mr. Falkland?”’ (p. 101). Falkland is the type of the good squatter, fair to his workers and paying them well and promptly. Dick comments that if more gentlemen were like him, ‘I do really believe no one would rob them for very shame’s sake.’ (p. 101). But Jim is quietly pointing out that a worker like himself has as much right to a good horse as a squatter like Falkland — and they can both benefit from such an ownership.

Elsewhere, in the serial version, Dick remarks that the ‘gentlemen’ were the only people apart from the police who showed fight against the bushrangers. ‘The regular station hands, the small farmers, the labourers didn’t trouble their heads about us ... They’d rather help us a bit, and often did.’ (28 July 1883, p. 152). The social group from which the bushrangers came from are, if anything, anti-authoritarian. While Browne is on the side of law and order — how could he not be? — he is just as clearly sympathetic to, if not approving of, the young men who take to cross-work, finding social reasons for their turning to crime. During drought, for instance,

Robbery Under Arms

...the youngsters, havin’ so much idle time on their hands, take to gaffin’ and flash talk; and money must be got to sport and pay up if they lose; and the stock all ramblin’ about mixed up, and there’s a temptation to collar somebody’s calves or foals, like we did that first red heifer. (p. 69)

In another section, omitted from the novel, Dick comments on Moran, and ‘what partly made him the wild beast he was’.

He always swore he’d been lagged innocent for his first offence, and had to do five years for stealing a horse he’d never seen. However, he’d shook many a one he never was had for, so that made it even. But, somehow, I’ve always found that a man thinks nothing much about doing time for what he knows he’s rightly punished for.

But he never forgets being made to suffer — and hard lines it is — for what he hasn’t done. And that injustice’ll rankle in a man’s heart for years and years — perhaps all his life — and make him tenfold a worse criminal that he would have been. So there’s no mistake — magistrates and judges and all that lot ought to be as careful as they can; for, you’d better believe me, it’s far and away better to let two or three bad ‘uns off now and again than to convict the wrong man. (14 April 1833, p. 680)

Later, Dick remarks that Joe Wall ‘wasn’t a bad sort neither, never did an unmanly act that I know of’ (28 July 1883, p. 152). Historically, there was no sympathy for Dan Morgan, Moran’s historical counterpart, who was feared and mistrusted by other bushrangers as well as the public, but there was much goodwill towards Ben Hall, whose wife, it was said, had been seduced by a policeman while her husband was away. The many admirable qualities of the bushrangers, as typified by Jim and Dick Marston — their superb horsemanship, their daring, their natural gallantry and their Robin Hood-like discrimination between rich and poor — are more dominant in the book than the material success resulting from hard, honest work, exemplified by George Storefield, who is similar to several of Browne’s characters, most notably perhaps Ernest Neuchamp of A Colonial Reformer (serial 1876, book 1890). While R. B. Walker’s assertion that to Browne ‘the characteristic Australian practice of bushranging was
basically inappropriate to the promise of this new land,'\textsuperscript{12} accurately describes Browne's conscious beliefs, the independent, relatively radical spirit of the native-born colonials emerges as the strongest, because most vividly realised, force in the book. At the same time, there can be no doubt that Browne believed that he presented the evil results of the diversion of this spirit into bushranging forcefully enough to be a counterbalance.\textsuperscript{13} But it was the subtle and continuous presentation of that spirit, and its expression in everyday speech that helped ensure the novel's success.

The sense of Australianism is evident in a statement as small as, 'Father, although he was an Englishman, he was what you call a born bushman' (p. 9), or as sustained as the descriptions of the bush landscape. It is present in the scornful contempt in which the police volunteers are held, an attitude given credibility by their treatment of the Marston women in Chapter 27, which eventually results in the murder of four of the volunteers. This contempt is contrasted with Dick's statement that 'men that take to the bush like us don't mind the regular paid force much, or bear them any malice. It's their duty to catch us or shoot us if we bolt, and ours to take all sorts of good care that they don't do either if we can help it.' (p. 446). Many incidents in the book are concerned with the 'all sorts of good care' taken, and outwitting the police is at least partly a matter of the natives outwitting the immigrants — Senior Constable Goring, who first captures Dick and is finally shot by Starlight, has 'seen better days at home in England' (p. 180) and is 'a good rider for an Englishman' (p. 185), while the Inspector of Police is Sir Ferdinand Morringer, a real baronet and one-time officer in the Guards. (Goring and Morringer were modelled on Sargeant Thomas Wallings of the Dubbo police and Sir Frederick Pottinger, an assistant superintendent of police in the western district of New South Wales.) Sir Ferdinand's introduction into the story shows him being ridiculed by the Barnes girls. One of Dick's grievances when he is first wounded is that the troopers are newly arrived from England, and are lording it over the native, trying to shoot him down within half a mile of his own home. A later sample of distinctive Australianism concerns Dick's release from prison. His full term was to have been fifteen years; George


\textsuperscript{13} See Life I, 1 (1904), p. 61.
Storefield and Mr Falkland have made representations for this to be reduced to twelve, and the Minister responsible persuades the Governor to agree to the remission. There are strong protests, but the *Turon Star* supports the move, saying that the Marstons and Starlight had worked manly and true at the Turon diggings for over a year. They were respected by all who knew them, and had they not been betrayed by a revengeful woman they might have lived thereafter a life of industry and honourable dealing. He [the editor], for one, upheld the decision of the Chief Secretary. Thousands of the Turon miners, men of worth and intelligence, would do the same. (p. 650)

The *Turon Star* is speaking for an example of mateship, of helping a fellow worker in adversity. And, as Dick says towards the end of his story, ‘in any part of Australia, once a chap’s given up cross doings and means to go straight for the future, the people of the country will always lend him a helping hand...’ (p. 660). The attitude characteristic of Browne in most of his writing is the paternalism of Falkland’s suggestion that the workers ‘might, I think, always rely upon there being enough kindness and wisdom’ in members of the land-owning wealthy class for them to control affairs satisfactorily, especially as the workers often fight against their own good. Falkland goes on to say, ‘Unfortunately, neither side trusts the other enough’ and the conversation is inconclusive (pp. 82–3). The nationalism of the book’s final sentences, however, more accurately represents its dominant tone, which was undoubtedly attractive to Australian readers in the 1890s and early 1900s.

This presentation of the specifically Australian attitude is made more immediately accessible, and made more cogently, through the language of the characters, and most of all, the narrator himself. Sidney Baker has commented that the reader has ‘no feeling that the characters are exiled Englishmen pining for the northern hemisphere’, and the novel has been a continual source for those who write about the Australian idiom.¹⁴ The easy, colloquial diction, with its conver-

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sational rhythms, has from the first a vigour and directness new in Australian fiction to that time. The framework of the vocabulary is established in the opening sentences.

My name's Dick Marston, Sydney-side native, I'm twenty-nine years old, six feet in my stocking soles, and thirteen stone weight. Pretty strong and active with it, so they say. I don't want to blow — not here, any road — but it takes a good man to put me on my back, or stand up to me with the gloves, or the naked mauleys. I can ride anything — anything that ever was lapped in horsehide — swim like a musk-duck, and track like a Myall blackfellow. Most things that a man can do I'm up to, and that's all about it. As I lift myself now I can feel the muscle swell on my arm like a cricket ball, in spite of the — well, in spite of everything. (p. 1)

This can be constructively compared with the opening of Chapter 19 of Walford, another serial running in the Sydney Mail at the same time:

Dr. Abel (who resided upon his farm about two miles from Walford) was a large-framed man, of upwards of three score years and ten; with snow white hair and pallid countenance. He was a bachelor, and since the death of his housekeeper (several years previously) . . . the difference in his mode of living had of late began to tell upon him, and to render it necessary for him to decline many calls from persons at a distance. (8 July 1882, p. 46)

The formal, flabby quality of the writing here is similar to that found in other fiction of the period, including much of Browne's. Since he is using a poorly educated farm labourer as his narrator in Robbery Under Arms, he has to restrain his use of 'literary' language, using relatively simple words and figures of speech that unself-consciously draw their material from the local scene. The result is that even descriptions of the picturesque or the emotional carry conviction (see, for example, the description of Terrible Hollow, pp. 255-6; Jim's wedding, pp. 345-7; or Dick's return home, pp. 654-7). The colloquial style allows for occasional humour, as in the comparison of people with cattle when he is describing country towns, 'Sleepy-looking, steady-going places they all were, with people crawling about them

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like a lot of old working bullocks. Just about as sensible, many of 'em.' (p. 333). And the vocabulary of the dialogue allows for contrast between the native-born characters and Starlight, as when Bella Barnes is talking about a 'young chap' who has recently stayed at the Barnes's inn. She says he was 'Not a bad cut of a young feller. He was awful shook on Mad; but she wouldn't look at him...'. Starlight, replying, calls him an 'ingenuous youth' (p. 289).

The more refined vocabulary of Starlight usefully sets him apart from the characters around him; it is appropriate in terms of his theatrical qualities, which are also supported by the repeated use of theatrical images in the book, and enhances his stature as the romantic hero; as an 'educated man', as Ben calls him, and a man who 'had a good many books, poetry and all kinds of things' (p. 477) stowed away in his cave, he is more clearly a leader among the native-born sons who elect him their Captain. His language and the air of his dialogue are credibly authentic. When Browne tries to do the same for a character like Miss Falkland, however, or at times Aileen Marston, he can succeed only in making them sound wooden and artificial. The homely vulgarity of Bella and Maddie Barnes comes much more convincingly from the page.

It cannot be claimed that the distinctive local idiom is completely maintained throughout the novel; there are a number of passages where the style becomes self-conscious and stilted — part of Chapter 39, describing the Hollow, for example — but these are too few to affect the general impression of contemporary Australian speech given by the novel.

The accessibility of its language, the realistic moulding of the vernacular for literary use, can account in part for the popularity of *Robbery Under Arms* when it appeared as a serial. This is also an essential aspect of the appeal to nationalism which is present in the native-born Australians and their social attitudes, especially their attitudes to authority. Barry Argyle has argued strongly that Browne is concerned with 'maintaining the established order', that he is 'correct in seeing Falkland's kind and class at the head of Australian society', and that he suggests, through George Storefield, that Dick is 'guilty of voicing the “working chap’s” point of view, which in a small farmer is incongruous, not to say treacherous'.

however, in terms of the Australian novel at this time and Browne's work in particular is that the 'working chap's' point of view is being expressed at all, and in the language that it is.

These are two aspects of *Robbery Under Arms* which contributed to its initial success as a serial, and continued to do so after its appearance in hard covers. To these must be added, for the continuing success of the book, the greater consistency of tone, the more compact narrative, and the more complete concentration on the main characters that resulted from the editing down of the serial to its final version.
Of all the Australian novels that have achieved a reputation, Henry Kingsley’s *The Recollections of Geoffry Hamlyn* is among the least demanding. ‘He has his brother’s power of describing’, Alexander Macmillan wrote in 1858, giving his impressions of the manuscript, ‘but he does not write in the same style at all; it is wonderfully quiet and yet powerful — a kind of lazy strength which is very charming; some of the characters too are drawn with a masterly hand.’ This impression of leisureliness is still the dominant one given by the book. Published in 1859, it went into a second edition within a year, and was later described by Marcus Clarke as ‘the best Australian novel that has been, and probably will be written’, and by Rolf Boldrewood as ‘that immortal work, the best Australian novel and for long the only one’. *Geoffry Hamlyn* duly took its place in both World’s Classics and Everyman’s Library, and has remained steadily in print for over a hundred years.

The latter part of this period has seen a divergence between the opinions of readers and critics of the book. With readers it has enjoyed a continuing vogue, but no critic has been found to endorse the judgments of Clarke and Boldrewood. Some responsibility for this lies with Joseph Furphy, whose hostile view of Kingsley became more influential as *Such is Life* advanced in critical esteem. What is more interesting is that critics favourably disposed to *Geoffry Hamlyn* have been at a loss to know what to say about it. It is usual

1 This is a revised version of an article published in *Southerly* XXX, 11 (1972).


to praise Kingsley's minor characters, to remark his fitful skill in narrative and pay tribute to his descriptive powers, and perhaps commend the book as an 'exhilarating and original romance'.

The novel itself persists from edition to edition; while the various critical comments have their validity, they do not really explain why.

We may work towards an answer by first considering the antipathy to Geoffry Hamlyn conveyed in Furphy's Such is Life. Furphy makes clear what the novel is not. Lacking the 'temper, democratic; bias, offensively Australian' that he claimed for his own work, it presented a conception of Australian life that moved him to protest and parody. Furphy prolongs the history of the Buckley family into Such is Life, describing how 'Hungry Buckley of Baroona — a gentleman addicted to high living and extremely plain thinking — had been snuffed-out by apoplexy... some time in the early 'sixties, after seeing Baroona pass, by foreclosure, to the hands of a brainy and nosey financier'.

His son, after being 'something indefinite in a bank', was reduced to blacksmith work; his daughter, after burying three husbands, became 'gentlewoman' housekeeper at a station property — the Maud Beaudesart of Runnymede. Such is Life is full of the contempt for the 'gentleman' of colonial fiction, who from riding at hounds in England is assumed to have an easy mastery of bush horsemanship, and for squatters of the Geoffry Hamlyn class, those 'slender-witted, virgin-souled, overgrown schoolboys who fill Henry Kingsley's exceedingly trashy and misleading novel with their insufferable twaddle'.

Furphy's criticism, in essence, is that Geoffry Hamlyn presents a generally misleading version of Australian life, and one specifically distorted in exhibiting the English gentry — incompetent bushmen — in command of the colonial terrain. Some condescension to genuine


5 Such is Life (Sydney, Angus and Robertson, 1903, repr. 1945), p. 260.

6 Such is Life, pp. 204, 205. Furphy's attitude is similar to that of A. G. Stephens, who had reviewed Geoffry Hamlyn as part of the collected edition of Kingsley's novels in the Bulletin on 28 September 1895. Stephens allowed that Kingsley's 'John Bull prejudices in favour of the “Grand Seigniors” and against the independent Australians... are the natural prejudices of his day and generation, birth and breeding.' The review is reprinted in Vance Palmer, A. G. Stephens: His Life and Work (Melbourne, Robertson and Mullens, 1941), pp. 47–9.
Australians is implicit. This is of course the typical reproach made of writing of the Anglo-Australian period by critics regarding it from the vantage-point of the 1890s or later. The view is still commonly held that novels such as Geoffry Hamlyn were influential in ‘postponing the recognition in literature of the realities of the Australian experience until the generation to which Lawson and Furphy belonged’. Such strictures depend in turn on assumptions about the nature of the ‘real Australia’ — assumptions which are generally silent, so that they may control the discussion without themselves becoming available for scrutiny. To equate the ‘real Australia’ with the experiences of the 1890s is merely to identify the stereotype one prefers: otherwise argument should be offered to show why life in Australia in the feudal conditions before the gold rush was somehow less ‘real’ or less ‘Australian’, for its period, than the conditions that followed.

The singularity of Geoffry Hamlyn begins to emerge once it is set against Kingsley’s other Australian writings. Complaining of Kingsley’s failure to ‘tell the truth’ of his Australian experiences in Geoffry Hamlyn, Dr Coral Lansbury has pointed out that had he done so, ‘he would have been forced to speak of a young man’s hopes of wealth that would rival his brother’s fame, of the grinding toil on the goldfields with hope withering and the aching longing for England to which he had planned to return’. Yet these are exactly the hardships and disappointments which Kingsley did describe in the Omeo disaster in the Hillyars and the Burtons (1865) — Erne Hillyar first blinded with sandy blight, then going mad, and presumed dead after Tom Williams has gone ahead to find water. ‘Dead he was not, though ... He had only succeeded in destroying his constitution’ (iii, p. 250). Gerty Hillyar, in the same novel, would be almost sufficiently Australian in her sympathies to satisfy Furphy himself. She is taken to England by her husband, and lands at Dover:

they stood on the slippery, slimy boards of the pier at Dover, on the dull English winter day; and she looked round at the chalk cliffs, whose

8 Lansbury, Arcady in Australia, p. 119.
crests were shrouded in mist, and at the muddy street, and the dark coloured houses, and she said, 'Oh, dear, dear me. Is this, this England, George? What a nasty, cold, ugly, dirty place it is'. (i, p. 263)

On further acquaintance, Gerty 'couldn't possibly conceive why people in England didn't all go and live in Australia'. It wouldn't do to leave the Queen behind, but then 'she might get to think better of it as soon as she saw how much superior Australia was to England' (ii, p. 22). This anticipates the comment of one of my colleagues visiting England for the first time in the 1960s: 'They made their mistake 150 years ago. They should have left the convicts there, and moved out themselves.'

If these sentiments are not found in Geoffry Hamlyn, it cannot be because Kingsley was incapable of expressing them, or because his view of Australia did not include them. Something more of his experience of Australia is declared in the article 'Travelling in Victoria' published in Macmillan's Magazine in January 1861. It begins with an account of Melbourne as a centre of 'feverish energy', where, Kingsley observes, 'I have seen people landing in 1857 with bowie-knives in their belts, and much astonished, instead of finding bushrangers, at being put into a comfortably padded railway carriage, and whipped up, if it so pleased them, to a first-rate hotel.' The article is a bustling narrative of a trip from Melbourne by steamer to Williams-town, from there by train to Geelong, then by coach ('one continual bump, thump, crash') with a plank road part of the way, to an overnight stay in Ballarat, thence to the diggings at Ararat ('a great dusty main street of canvas stores, hotels, bagatelle-rooms, and bowling alleys'), and finally by horse to a station in the Wimmera.

One ground of contrast with Geoffry Hamlyn is immediately apparent. Too few critics have recognised that the novel is not contemporary with the events it describes; it is set largely in the 1820s and 1830s, while Kingsley did not arrive in Australia until 1853. The starting point for criticism of Geoffry Hamlyn must be that it is an historical novel, an attempt to reconstruct a period a generation earlier, when the hectic scenes described by Kingsley in 'Travelling in Victoria' were all in the future. It is essentially a novel of Australia 'before the gold', to use the phrase that has for Boldrewood so nostalgic a ring.

The social order represented is therefore very different from that in
The Hillyars and the Burtons, Kingsley's novel of the diggings. Major Buckley is a veteran of the Peninsular Wars and of Waterloo, who has disposed of Clere, the impoverished family seat, for £12,000 in order to take his family to Australia. Captain Brentwood, with whose family the fortunes of the Buckleys become entwined, is also a retired military officer; Stockbridge and Hamlyn are 'squires'. In England their associates are rarely below the social level of Mary Thornton, the vicar's daughter; George Hawker, the son of a farmer, is of a slightly lower station, as in the colony is Mrs Mayford, for the vulgarity of her manners. It must be clear that whatever Kingsley's other novels may be, Geoffry Hamlyn is a novel about the gentry, about those who by birth and training constituted a ruling class in Australia 'before the gold'. Besides learning to ride and shoot, young Sam Buckley is taught Euclid and Latin grammar, and is instructed in swordplay by his father and in fencing by Dr Mulhaus. When he rides up to Garoopna or Baroona, there is a groom to take his horse, and if he is a favourite with the servants, they still address him as 'sir'. These activities are close to those recorded by the thirteen-year-old George Gordon McCrae in his diary in the 1840s (learning Latin syntax, listing the plants in the garden, tracking kangaroos and going duck shooting), just as Alice Brentwood's activities may be matched by Annabella Boswell at Port Macquarie at the same time (gathering flowers for the epergne, reading the Waverley novels, painting wildflowers and dancing a Sir Roger de Coverley). Whether G. G. McCrae and Annabella Boswell should therefore be accused of un-Australian activities is an open question. But it is obvious that the focus of Kingsley's novel is a particular social class, and that other orders — like the Hawbucks, or the convict servants — come into it only at those points where their fortunes impinge on those of the Buckleys and Brentwoods.

This focus is preserved by a method to which readers of Such is Life should be alert, even if it were not advertised in the title of the book. This is the entrusting of the narrative to Geoffry Hamlyn himself, one of the gentry, who tells the story from his own point of view. An apologetic and sometimes fumbling narrator, he nevertheless deals

very summarily with such matters as the size of the runs taken up and the number of sheep and cattle grazed upon them, declaring 'I am writing a history of the people themselves, not of their property.'

More subtly, the narrative comes to reflect his values and the outlook of his class. The much-quoted episodes in which the 'currency lad' comes into the drawing room at Baroona with a note to Jim Brentwood, and is fascinated by the pressepapier on the table, could be taken as evidence of condescension on Kingsley's part, except that it is not Kingsley who describes it with such amused tolerance, but Hamlyn. Kingsley's view of 'the rising Australian generation' (p. 317) is given more directly in 'Travelling in Victoria', in his account of the 'two lanky, brown-faced, good-looking youths' on the railway platform at Williamstown, a contrast in their serenity to the busy lawyer fuming up and down, expostulating at the delay. His own view of the squatters, similarly, includes references in *The Hillyars and the Burtons* (iii, p. 265) to 'a miserable and effete Squattocracy (with their wretched aping of the still more miserable and effete aristocracy of the old world)', and his comment in a letter to Macmillan in 1865, at the time of the Eyre controversy, on 'those short-sighted idiots, who have made fortunes on soil drenched with the blood of the natives, and have come home here and turned saint'.

For the moment, however, it is Hamlyn's perspective which must prevail, as the pastoral Australia before the gold discoveries is rendered as it appears to English eyes.

The image given of Australia itself is necessarily very different from that made habitual by writers of the 1890s school. The typical Kingsley landscape is a wooded scene with a gleaming watercourse, sweeping up to mountains with volcanic outcrops, with a snow-fed river glimpsed in the distance. The 1859 edition of *Geoffry Hamlyn* was in three volumes, and after a first volume devoted to the experiences of the Buckleys and Thorntons in England, the second volume had opened with a description of the new land in the south:

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

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11 S. M. Ellis, *Henry Kingsley 1830-1876* (London, Grant Richards, 1931), p. 142. It may also be necessary to allow for a change in Kingsley's opinions over a period of time.
skyline they are crowned with a gleam of everlasting snow. To the eastward they sink down, breaking into isolated forest-fringed peaks, and rock-crowned eminences, till with rapidly straightening lines they fade into the broad grey plains, beyond which the Southern Ocean is visible by the white sea-haze 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 a 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 the 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 broaded valley, through which we can see dimly a full-fed river winding along in gleaming reaches, through level meadowland, interspersed with clumps of timber. (p. 148)

This is represented as a scene visible from a watershed of the Snowy River in Gippsland, 350 miles south of Sydney, and the setting of the narrative takes in features of Gippsland and Monaro, and of the western district of Victoria. The geography is deliberately imprecise, so that Garoopna is located thirty miles from Cape Chatham (Green Cape) on the east coast of New South Wales, and at the same time is within riding distance of Tuckerimbid (Mount Cole) in Victoria. Yet one must be wary of regarding the passages of natural description in Geoffry Hamlyn as unrealistic. Kingsley painted watercolours of Australian landscapes which indicate his attachment to the Australian scene.¹² Like Kendall in his poems of the cedar forests of the coastal fringe, Kingsley is describing an Australia that has for the most part vanished, and the best standards of comparison are contemporary accounts of the same terrain, such as the view Sir Thomas Mitchell encountered on 23 September 1836 when he discovered Mount Cole:

My first view over this eastern country was extensive, and when I at length descended to a projecting rock, I found the prospect extremely promising, the land being variegated with open plains and strips of forest, and studded with smooth green hills, of the most beautiful forms. In the extreme distance, a range, much resembling that on which I stood, declined at its southern extremity, in the same manner that this did, and thus left me a passage precisely in the most direct line of route homewards. The carts had still, however, to cross the range at which we had arrived, and which as I perceived here, not only extended southward, but also broke into bold ravines on the eastern side, being connected with some noble hills, or rather mountains, all grassy to their summits, thinly wooded, and consisting wholly of granite. They resembled very much some hills of the lower Pyrenees, in Spain, only that they were more grassy and less acclivitous, and I named this hill Mount Cole. To the southward, the sea-haze dimmed the horizon.13

The sense of 'a new heaven and a new earth' in Kingsley corresponds to Mitchell's response to the 'pristine beauty' of the view from Mount Greenock, and to his feelings on 'travelling through this Eden' (ii, p. 276). Again, the more precipitous mountain scenery described in Geoffrey Hamlyn was observed by Alfred Howitt in his explorations of the Dividing Range, and recorded in these terms:

imagine yourself ... about twelve hundred feet above the rivers ... down below you is the Wonnangatta coming out of a basin of dark coloured hills ... Down in the valley you see glimpses of a river ... large flats scattered with trees ... beyond the green valley and beyond ... rise rugged mountains and snowy plains ... With the strata of slate looking bare and brown in its precipices, you look between the jutting ends of two tablelands which drop from a level edge in precipices of hundreds of feet — up a wide misty gorge with the dim outline of mountains and plains beyond.14

On a later trip from Bairnsdale to Tubbut, Howitt described the approach to the Snowy:

Geoffry Hamlyn

The scenery is wonderfully wild... six miles down a winding razor backed spur with a grand view for miles up and down the river, the brown hills changing to indigo blue on the horizon... where is the Tinga Ringa Mountain such as is described in Geoffry Hamlyn. (pp. 174-5)

Howitt’s apparent identification of Mount Tingi Ringi from a description in Kingsley indicates how specific are certain features of the topography of the novel, allowing that the setting as a whole is a composite. In Chapter 24 for example, the trip through the Murray Gates, skirting Croker's Range, to the lowest stations on the Macquarie, is readily traceable on a map. The botanical descriptions are so detailed on occasions that the observations Kingsley made over a century ago furnished the substance of an article in The Victorian Naturalist in January 1958. His own revisions, especially those introduced in the 1864 text, show a continuing attention to details of the geology and the flora and fauna of the book.

What version does Geoffry Hamlyn really offer of 'the realities of the Australian experience'? It represents the world of the pastoral gentry with some fidelity, and yet 'distances' it romantically in the process; it describes the flora and the topography with some verisimilitude, and yet does not seem to insist on this, as though seeking an effect beyond it. Geoffry Hamlyn has projected the Australia 'before the gold' more successfully than any other novel of the colonial period, but it also does something more. Its special achievement is to have given the story of the Buckleys and the Brentwoods, with the setting in which it occurs, almost the status of a myth. This more than anything else accounts for the book's survival. The essential feature of the myth is that a band of people (who shall preferably be noble and innocent, though including one or two darker personalities to complicate the story) leaves a settled and civilised existence to encounter adventure and hardship in some more primitive region. This wilderness will be a testing ground — like the American woods in Fenimore Cooper, or the islands of Patusan and Samburan in Conrad — and (provided the novelist wishes to give a ritual assurance of the triumph of good over evil) they will emerge from it with their characters formed and their prosperity assured, to resume life in the society from which they came. The myth is basically a romantic one, so that Leslie Fiedler would no doubt recognise in Mary Hawker and
Alice Brentwood the archetypes of 'the passionate brunette and the sinless blonde', and it is also basically optimistic, although allowing for such dark elements as the parentage of George Hawker and the plotting and counter-plotting of William Lee and 'Captain Touan'.

Critics have rightly pointed to the simplicity of the moral vision of the novel, and to the simplicity of the consciousness of the characters. The concept of 'muscular Christianity' in the novels of Kingsley's brother Charles may have some influence on Geoffry Hamlyn, especially in the portrait of Frank Maberly, whose appearance in the 1869 text was heralded by the chapter heading (later discarded) 'In Which a Very Muscular Christian Indeed, Comes on the Stage'. Even this ideal is a little too complex for Sam Buckley, who is called upon only to be upright and straightforward, skilled in the manly arts, honestly perplexed when he falls in love, and courageous in an emergency. His character is to be confined by the events of the story, showing how the training his father has brought from the battlefields of Europe can be vindicated in the new environment. On the other hand Charles Hawker, the gipsy blood in his veins, finds retribution for his crimes, though not without inflicting some suffering on the innocent. The loss of some of the characters, even worthy ones like Stockbridge and Cecil Mayford, nevertheless contributes to the resolution. Frederick Sinnett's comment of 1856 on The Emigrant Family, although intended as ironic, applies to Geoffry Hamlyn and underlines the pattern of the 'myth':

It is perfectly delightful to find that, in so small a circle, not merely has the adjustment in the number of the sexes been so complete, but that the matrimonial requirements as to age, disposition, &c., of every body are all supplied to a nicety, and nothing over.

The clearest index to the 'mythic' quality of the book is in its treatment of the Australian landscape, on which the debate over 'realism' has often fixed. There is no doubt that the setting of Geoffry Hamlyn is a composite of Australian scenes, some of which may be identified:


Sir Keith Hancock has pointed to the Deddick river at Tubbut as the likely site of the homestead of Baroona. Kingsley left watercolours of Australian scenes, and within the novel described some locations with a painterly eye, longing for the brush of Etty or Cattermole. What has not been discerned is that his descriptions belong to the romantic tradition of 'typical landscape', seen in parallel in Australian painting in the work of John Glover, Louis Buvelot, Nicholas Chevalier and Eugen von Guerard (the last accompanied Alfred Howitt on two of his journeys of exploration). In Chevalier's 'The Buffalo Ranges', for example, the components of the canvas portray not just an individual scene, but a representative one, illustrating the characteristic features of the region and the mode of life carried on there. Kingsley's description of 'a new heaven and a new earth' cited above is likewise a 'typical' landscape. To the west the wooded ranges roll to a line of snow-capped mountains, and to the east they sink into the plains, where a white haze on the horizon indicates the Southern Ocean beyond. The last rays of the sun light the gloomy forest as the brightly coloured parrots wheel and scream. To the north lies the vista, through a glen and a valley, of a gleaming river winding through the level meadow land, with clumps of timber interspersed. Two horsemen are stationary on the ridge, surveying the scene. The elements of such a description belong to a configuration different from that which the critic is apt to seek, and which he is apt to complain of not finding. It is 'mythic' not only in seeking to capture the Edenic sense that Mitchell and others perceived, but also in seeking to abstract the essential quality of what is described, to disclose the pattern to which the particulars contribute.

This is the mode of operation of the novel as a whole. It disentangles Geoffry Hamlyn from all the clutter of the Australian 'emigrant novel', setting it apart from the propagandist efforts of Samuel Sidney and the Dickens of Household Words. Dr Lansbury is mistaken in placing Kingsley in this context; indeed the special character of Geoffry Hamlyn is declared by contrast. Not only is Kingsley unconcerned with the artisan class on which Sidney placed such emphasis, but his novel relies not at all on the kind of 'information' offered by Sidney or, earlier, by such a novel as Rowcroft's Tales of the Colonies — the procedure for obtaining land grants, the

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capital outlay required, the equipment to bring, advice on building a pisé hut. The stock elements on which Kingsley relies would be more accurately described as ‘folk’ elements: the search for a child lost in the bush, a foray against hostile blacks, drafting and branding cattle, a final reckoning with the bushrangers. There is an inset narrative of the legend of Bogong Jack, besides an account of Moody the Cannibal and the shipwrecks on the southern coast of New South Wales: Kingsley is guided by the instincts of the myth-maker, like the frontier novelists of the United States.

It is the total pattern that is significant, prevailing over the sometimes defective materials that have gone into its making. The action traces a movement from an established to a primitive environment, so that the adventurers are tested and renewed in the wilderness. Steadfast and athletic, they are required mainly to exhibit a code of conduct, and they do so against a background that at once satisfies a requirement of verisimilitude, and is so ‘distanced’ as to be representative of a whole epoch that has passed. Kingsley found in Geoffrey Hamlyn a framework that especially suited his talents, and that at the same time was adjusted to his limitations. It allowed him to indulge a naïve attachment to the heroic, keeping it so based in the simple humanity of his characters that it lends a freshness and buoyancy to the book; it gave episodes that read like clichés in other colonial fiction a kind of ‘folk’ significance in the pattern in which they appear; it enabled him to present a picture of Australia which reviewers praised for its authenticity, but in which the realistic details are shaped to a more idealised effect. Kingsley is not a novelist of exceptional powers, but as a myth-maker his instincts are generally sure, overcoming local failures in the execution. A contemporary of Furphy’s, and one of the earliest of the Bulletin balladists, John Farrell, could respond to the mythic and heroic qualities of the novel in his ballad ‘Widderin’, first published in The Antipodean in 1894. Readers of Geoffrey Hamlyn have continued to respond to it; critics have been slow to recognise the exact mode with which they are dealing.

19 See L. T. Hergenhan, ‘Geoffry Hamlyn Through Contemporary Eyes’, Australian Literary Studies II (1965–6), pp. 289–95. A. G. Stephens, in the Bulletin, 28 September 1895, accepted that the book ‘will always have a value as, a picture (from one point of view) of a bygone Australian time’, and praised the Australian scenery as ‘lovingly and well described’. 72
Joseph Furphy’s Novels

naked capers in the Riverina

F. Devlin Glass

Furphy’s first approach in 1897 to the Bulletin office with his immense manuscript version of Such is Life was marked by extreme diffidence. He was frankly amazed when A. G. Stephens accepted it, and, one suspects, under the shock of A.G.S.’s approval, agreed to prune it by one third. He excised Chapter 2 to form a separate publication, The Buln-Buln and the Brolga, and Chapter 5 later became Rigby’s Romance. Since the mid-1940s, a score of critics have seriously and sympathetically addressed themselves to Such is Life, and although it is generally known that the Buln-Buln and Rigby’s Romance were originally integral to Such is Life, these two works have been largely ignored, and, if treated at all by critics, they have been dealt with tangentially.

Whether we ought to be considering three distinctly different novels, or whether the novels ought to be considered as an ur-novel, a prototype Such is Life, is a crucial question at this point. The essential unity of the themes and their recurrence throughout the three novels suggest that it might be useful to consider them as component parts of a Victorian three-decker novel. However, their markedly diverse characters preclude such a comparison. Furthermore and more importantly, the novels cannot usefully be considered as one work since the original manuscript version was (presumably) mutilated in Furphy’s rewriting of the novel into three works, and

1 Sydney and London, Angus and Robertson, 1948.
2 Sydney, Angus and Robertson, 1946 (originally published in serial form in the Barrier Truth, 1905).
3 Sydney, Angus and Robertson, 1962 (first edition, 1903).
4 I consider Buln-Buln to have more in common with the short story form than with the novel. However, for ease of reference in this essay, I refer to it loosely, along with the other works, as a ‘novel’.
since Furphy is known to have rewritten each of the three, probably extensively. So, rather than seek the ur-novel and resort to baseless hypotheses about the relation between the two excised chapters and the whole, the most advantageous way of regarding the three works seems to be as independent novels which cast light upon one another. It is especially significant that both Buln-Buln and Rigby's Romance help to explain some of the difficulties of Such is Life rather than the reverse. Reading Such is Life one is tempted, especially by the provocative final sentence of the novel, to conclude that the novel is, to misquote Furphy's letter to Cathells (10 August 1897), not 'a collection of [hoaxes], but one long involved [hoax] in seven chapters'. However, to adopt this conclusion, especially in the face of Buln-Buln and Rigby's Romance, is to opt out of the contract more easily than Furphy intended his reader to be able to do. Furphy is not simply the king of Australian practical jokers, or the prime dealer in hoaxes; there is much seriousness and quite a deal of complexity behind his genial (and often bellicose) humour.

What I propose to do is to demonstrate that Rigby's Romance and Buln-Buln enlarge upon in a more direct and positive manner themes that are broached in an equivocal fashion in Such is Life. The most economical way to establish this interrelationship of themes is to focus on the author's positioning of Tom and to observe the attitudes Furphy takes to him in each novel. In Such is Life, Tom is at the centre of the narrative: his is the very unreliable consciousness through which Furphy ironically projects the narrative. Not only does Furphy show Tom to be self-deceived about his own life, and about his own thought processes, but Tom consciously mocks himself, and unconsciously demonstrates his own gross human, intellectual and

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5 Furphy to Williams Cathells, 10 August 1897, MS. 2022/5/28, Kate Baker Correspondence, National Library of Australia, Canberra.

6 A. A. Phillips suggested that Furphy ruined the 'patterning' of the various love (or loveless) relationships by splitting up the work into three (The Australian Tradition. Studies in a Colonial Culture, Melbourne, London, Cheshire-Lansdowne, 1966, 2nd rev. ed., pp. 45-6.) It seems to me that this spreading of the love interest over three novels is but one example of what happened when Chapters 2 and 5 were omitted. Certain other modulations on and qualifications of themes central to the novel are to be found in each of the minor works, and, rather than concentrate on the theme of love relationships, I shall turn my attention to a range of other issues relating to the central themes of the three works.

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social weaknesses. In *Rigby's Romance*, on the other hand, Tom is still the central consciousness, but the most sympathetic, coherent and intelligent voice of the novel is not Tom's but Major Rigby's. Clearly Furphy means us to take Rigby at face value, and undercuts the main objection to endorsing him fully by insisting that he is an ideologue, an agitator, rather than an organiser of the Christian Socialist Utopia. Hence, it is Rigby's ideas rather than his person or his actions (or lack of them), which are the prime focus of *Rigby's Romance*, and the ideas have a direct bearing on the truncated *Such is Life* as we now know it. A similar relationship exists between the *Buln-Buln* and *Such is Life*: this relationship is perhaps even more interesting as it casts further light on Tom himself, in so far as the Tom of *Buln-Buln* is an even more starkly naked character than the Tom of *Such is Life*: he is more self-aware, self-critical, and for the first time humiliated by his inability to become involved with people. Further, the theme of the relationship between fiction and real life is explored at a more sophisticated level than in *Such is Life*, and Tom is forced to reject his dogmatic hostility towards the romantic novel.

*Buln-Buln* begs consideration as an independent work, while at the same time it can be seen to cast light on *Such is Life*: it focuses narrowly on, and dramatises two main issues, first, the relationship between life and imagination, fact and fiction and secondly, Tom's lack of candour is relating to other people. Within this smaller ambit it is a superlatively well structured and unified work, with very little (if any) extraneous material. Like *Rigby's Romance*, *Buln-Buln* is less equivocal in the position it takes to the central problems it raises, as Furphy is clearly more committed to the ideas he presents in each of the minor works. Furphy makes Tom a scoffer in *Rigby's Romance*, and an uncomprehending but cock-sure observer in *Such is Life*, but he finally chastens him in *Buln-Buln*, and the reasons for these differences are directly related to the ideas expounded in each work.

Much critical effort has been justifiably expended in showing that *Such is Life* is a unified and integrated novel, that Furphy's 'federation' of anecdotes was artistically conceived and executed. While I agree with most of what has been said in support of the unity of *Such is Life*, I find John Barnes's view of *Buln-Buln* perplexing: he

7 They are 'minor' only in the sense that their scope is more limited than that of *Such is Life*. 75
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believes that this novel has 'even less claim [than Rigby's Romance] to be considered as an independent novel'. There is less to dispute in the assertion that Rigby's Romance is not a novel than there is in the inclusion of Buln-Buln among the ranks of creative prose works that are not novels. Furphy has been at pains to give both of these minor works the form and trappings of novels. Rigby's Romance can be called a Christian Socialist tract only if one ignores the elaborate fictional lead-up to the ideas expounded in Rigby's homilies, not to mention the rich vein of often earthy comedy that infuses the Socratic dialogue. To my mind, it is a polemical, argumentative work of fiction of the kind that the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries produced in quantity: like its predecessors, Rigby's Romance sets out to affirm religious, political, social and Utopian ideas. Charles Kingsley, Mrs Gaskell, Edward Maitland, Marie Corelli and Newman all wrote ideological novels in which action, plot and imagistic material were subordinated to the demands of the ideas. Certainly Rigby's Romance is not consistent with the twentieth century conception of the novel, which demands a more thorough integration of theme, ideas and subject matter, a working out of ideas through images and a dramatic presentation of conflict; this modern conception of the novel is better exemplified by the present version of Such is Life and by Buln-Buln than by Rigby's Romance. Nonetheless within its own terms, and viewed within the tradition of polemical novels, Rigby's Romance, with its discussion of false and true love, and its delineation of the ideal society, does pretend to the status of a novel. By modern standards, however, it is too didactic and not sufficiently artistic. My most substantial quarrel is with Barnes's summary dismissal of Buln-Buln: while I do not dispute that structurally it is a simpler work than Such is Life, and even than Rigby's Romance, it can, I feel, be demonstrated that Buln-Buln examines in a very economical manner one of the main unresolved themes of Such is Life, and goes further towards providing a solution of the problem posed by the narrator, Tom.

It is salutary to observe closely how the focus on Tom shifts from one novel to the next. In Such is Life he is an extremely protean figure, and many critics have felt that the central critical problem of

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8 John Barnes, Joseph Furphy (Melbourne, Oxford University Press, Australian Writers and Their Work Series, 1963), pp. 31–2.
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the novel is that his dramatisation is somewhat blurred by Furphy's intervention as author. Furphy's most discerning critics, Brian Kiernan and John Barnes, are reluctant to admit that Tom Collins of Such is Life is entirely independent of his creator. Barnes, in outlining his position, appears to be somewhat confused:

Without question, Collins is the exponent of the book's values; and, more than that, he is the mouthpiece of some of Furphy's cherished ideas. He is, then, not wholly separable from the author; and, when we consider the evaluation of life proposed by the novel, we have to recognise that Collins is a persona Furphy has consciously adopted. He is a version of Furphy himself, or, to put it another way, he is Furphy playing a role. And I am inclined to think that this role was necessary to Furphy as a writer.⁹

To identify Tom as even part-exponent of Such is Life's 'values' is to venture into quicksand for not only does Tom subvert himself explicitly, but his actions and beliefs continually point up his wrong-headedness, stupidity, sanctimoniousness, unperceptiveness and lack of sensitivity. Tom is not only a bore, and a boor, but he is self-deceived, and spends most of his time deceiving others, especially the reader. Brian Kiernan's objections to the digressions on dogma (Chapter 2) and on music (Chapter 6), on the basis that they are not dramatically integrated into the novel, can be overcome if one considers the first to be an early statement of the theme developed in Buln-Buln that truth is relative, that 'positions' and 'theses' are inherently dangerous and unintelligent. Similarly, the music digression can profitably be interpreted as an analogue for Tom's inability to grasp the 'mystery', a total view of the events of his life; he hears individual sounds, he even hears and enjoys Molly Nosey's playing but he cannot synthesise and interpret it. Nonetheless, the point remains generally true, but for reasons different from those Kiernan proffers. It can, I think, be convincingly argued that, if such long-winded digressions tend to stand out even from the digressive material, they do so, not because Furphy's imagination has failed him, but mainly because Tom as narrator and entertainer is tactless, and also because Tom consciously and unconsciously uses his pseudo-

⁹ Ibid., p. 12.
philosophy as an escape from, and an active avoidance of, real life situations which are potentially disturbing to him.

As has been pointed out by some critics, Tom is dramatically conceived as a comic character, at whom we are intended to laugh, rather than with whom we can laugh. The discrepancy between what he thinks he is and what he is in fact, and between his theorising and common experience, is acute, and Tom invariably emerges on the debit rather than the credit side of the reckoning.

In his self-introduction in Chapter I of *Such is Life*, Tom assures the reader that

Whilst a peculiar defect—which I scarcely like to call an oversight in mental construction—shuts me out from the flowery path-way of the romancer, a co-ordinate requital endows me, I trust, with the more sterling, if less ornamental qualities of the chronicler. This fairly equitable compensation embraces, I have been told, three distinct attributes: an intuition which reads men like sign-boards; a limpid veracity; and a memory which habitually stereotypes all impressions except those relating to personal injuries. (pp. 1–2)

The last attribute unambiguously condemns Tom because of the moral weakness that it implies; its combination of moral condemnation and wry humour invites the reader to expect that the first and second attributes may be similarly questionable. The critical reader is, of course, not disappointed. Ultimately, the novel is a world removed from romance, but when it does touch on romantic incidents—for example, Tom's Petrarchan infatuation with Jim (Miss Quarterman), the cruel death of Mary in the bush, and the romance of the two Alfs—despite Tom's continual asseverations to the contrary, these events are not finally very different in tone or subject matter from the 'Ouida',10 Henry Kingsley or Marcus Clarke versions of the same events. Certainly the tales are narrated differently, but they are ultimately the same well worn tales.

Secondly, Tom's ability to interpret personalities is extremely defective because his own ego interferes, protesting its own ever-imposing needs. In all three novels, Tom adheres to the demonstrably absurd theories of nomenology because to abandon them would mean

the removal of one ego-prop on which he relies heavily, and so he rationalises his way out of the dead ends to which his credo inevitably brings him: ‘Nomenology . . . was a little out, to be sure; but you can no more secure absolute precision in that science than in any other. Things will occasionally happen of themselves’ (Rigby’s Romance, p. 20). A few pages later, completely unabashed, and probably sublimely unaware, he laments that he knows little about ‘that branch of pathognomy which deals with the possible eccentricities of women who haven’t seen their lovers for a quarter of a century’ (p. 23). He has learnt nothing from the former conclusion.

Tom proffers the meaning of his surname according to the ‘laws’ of nomenology, in a false bid to assure his reader that his name (and implicitly his story) is a ‘guarantee of probity’ (Such is Life, p. 116), but the burden of each of the three novels, especially Rigby’s Romance and Such is Life, clearly works against accepting this. Tom only in glimmers reads himself aright, and when he does so, he mocks himself, rather than takes himself seriously. His self-directed laughter inhibits truth-telling; it certainly rarely means that he changes his behaviour or attitudes because of the self-insight. Even as an annalist, a chronicler (as distinct from a romantic novelist), a self-description that he seems to take seriously, Tom mocks himself and his ‘art’. After elaborately explaining how he can achieve ‘veracity’ by telling a week of his diary, and subsequently equally well explaining his change of plans to tell the ninth day of each month (and, comically, the tenth — in order to finish off what was begun on the ninth), and then finally abandoning his original undertaking altogether in Chapter 7 by relating the events of the 28 and 29 March, Tom coolly subverts the whole situation by commenting: ‘. . . if you take it [the change in strategy] not patiently, the more is your mettle’ (Such is Life, p. 329). The wit of the subversion serves as a convenient gloss for Tom’s inherent lack of ‘veracity’.

When embroiled in a line of thought that puzzles him, or for which he is reluctant to take responsibility, or to which he is fearful of committing himself, he makes his meerschaum, his pipe of ‘super-Phidian perfection’, the scapegoat:

And if the censorious reader has detected here and there in these pages a tendency toward the Higher Criticism, or a leaning to State Socialism, or any passage that seemed to indicate a familiarity with cuneiform
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inscriptions, or with the history and habits of Pre-Adamite Man, he may be assured that, at the time of writing such passage, I had been smoking the mighty pipe — or rather, the mighty pipe has been smoking me — and the unlawful erudition had effervesced per motion of my scholastic ally. (Such is Life, p. 340)

That is to say, Tom is not prepared, as in the previous instance, to take responsibility for his own decisions, or even thought processes. Two options suggest themselves: either Furphy is radically unsure of himself, or Furphy is satirising Tom. The latter is the simpler explanation, and is the one which seems more acceptable in the light of the foregoing; however, I shall return to the former possibility as it helps to explain Furphy's narrative method in the three works.

Furphy's is not satire pure and simple: there are layers upon layers of irony and deception practised in the novel. Not only does Furphy burlesque Tom, and Tom deceive his readers, but Tom subverts himself continually throughout Such is Life. He is frequently ironical at his own expense, especially in Chapter 6 in relating his own amours, and in his radically unself-confident pomposity and occasional bursts of irrationality. Not only does he use his philosophical speculations to avoid confronting both his conscience and other people, but he even admits the fact (p. 273). Tom continually burlesques himself, and reports the unflattering comments of people such as Moriarty and the bullockies. Most pertinently, Tom’s actions condemn him: he avoids involvement with Ida, Maud, Jim, the two Alfs, Sollicker, and most significantly, Rigby; he obsessively avoids all psychological and emotional demands on himself, although physical demands on him for money, tuition and effort (for example, his efforts to keep Alf Morris's stock under surveillance far exceed the demands of friendship), he meets easily and generously. The most glaring examples of his reluctance to become involved are of course his unwillingness to listen to Alf Morris and Molly and Ida; this attitude of professional non-involvement is cogently symbolised by the incident described in Chapter 4 when Tom, deep in meditation at Dead Man's Bend, hears Mosey Price's shout for help and deliberately sinks deeper into almost inchoate, increasingly unreal non sequiturs on a range of subjects in an effort to dodge and elude the persistent calls. Only when Mosey

11 See also pp. 105-11.
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has called him nine times does Tom respond, and in the meantime, he desperately flees involvement mentally and verbally. In context, the incident is hilarious and not at all solemn, but it does highlight in a light-hearted manner the neurotic fear that besets Tom whenever he is in a situation of which he is not the controller and master; his philosophising is often an attempt to gain the mastery, or as he puts it to achieve his primary ambition in life, 'equilibrium of temper' (p. 125), either the feeling of being comfortable in situations, or complacency. He can often see and hear, but he prefers to ignore the promptings of his senses and mind. It is significant that he ignores these demands on his emotions actively rather than passively.

Tom's final description of life is, then, intended to be his ultimate comic reduction:

Such is life, my fellow-mummers — just like a poor player, that bluffs and feints his hour upon the stage, and then cheapens down to mere nonentity. But let me not hear any small witticism to the further effect that its story is a tale told by a vulgarian, full of slang and blanky, signifying — nothing.

Tom is thus stripped by means of comic and satiric modes: not only does Furphy satirise him, but his own narrative, his actions and relationships, and his inability to perceive the meaning of the 'life' he is describing contribute to the comic-satiric reduction of him as narrator. What, then, is the reader left with: is there any 'unassailable bit of standing ground' (p. 328) other than Tom's perception that life is chaotic, unchartable and irrational?

Almost thirty years ago, A. D. Hope recommended that Furphy's theory of the relation between literature and life be taken seriously.12 His warning was then timely, and it is indeed true that Furphy was consciously in revolt against the romance tradition. He was effectively writing a modern style of novel where men act realistically if ignobly, and where there are no villains. Further, he substituted speculative digressions for the conventions of the romantic novel, making 'philosophy' function (or attempt to function) as explanations of how

events come about. But, is it possible to take these digressions as seriously as Hope suggests? Certainly they are crucial to an understanding of the novel, but in the face of the comic reduction of the narrator, they demand a particular kind of reading, for the pseudo-philosophy of the discourses undergoes an intellectual reduction as well, usually subsiding into the protestation that 'such is life' when Tom's current, much loved but contentious theory is not borne out by his experience. The conclusion, 'such is life', is frequently an expression of defeat brought about because his mind is fundamentally rigid but at the same time has the capacity for honesty.

Hope's assertion must be tested, and I propose to assess Tom's intellectual calibre by examining what is perhaps the most central digression of them all, and the one that Hope singles out as bearing the intellectual weight of the novel — the theory concerning the one controlling alternative, the railway junction theory. From analysis of this digression, it will become obvious that Tom's discursiveness serves not only as a commentary on the action, and as an ironic counterpoint to it, but a dramatic purpose as well, in that another facet of his self-deluded character emerges.

_Such is Life_ presents a number of theories designed to explain how one may conceptualise the course of events, and some of them, like Thompson's and Cooper's superstitious fears of malevolent retribution for swearing, Sabbath-breaking and not fulfilling obligations, or Tom's shallow toying with predestination and free will notions, are quickly dismissed. Of the theses presented, perhaps the most convincing and rational is the notion of the one controlling alternative. The assuredness of the prose with which he describes his theory initially convinces:

A major-alternative may create and enclose all the secondary alternatives of after life. A minor-alternative may exhaust itself in one minute, or less, leaving its indelible, though imperceptible, scar on the experimenter, and, through him, on the world in which he lives... In any case, each alternative brings into immediate play a flash of Free-will, pure and simple, which instantly gives place — as far as that particular section of life is concerned — to the dominion of what we call Destiny. The two should never be confounded. 'Who can control his fate?' asks the ruined Othello. No one, indeed. But every one controls his option, chooses his alternative. (pp. 85-6)
However, it is in the proffered examples and in Tom’s application of the arguments to his own life that the argument falters. First, Tom describes Hamlet’s moment of choice as being that of engaging the Players to enact the murder of Gonzago; secondly, he sees Othello’s controlling option as his decision to kill Desdemona. Given only these two examples, the theory is too arbitrary and rigid and, in another sense, too loose: it is possible that Hamlet’s real choice was to take heed of the ghost, and that Othello’s was to listen to the voice of deception and temptation represented by Iago. When the theory is applied to Tom’s adventures, the results are even more absurdly arbitrary: Tom’s ‘scruple of punctilio’ whereby he does not speak to George Murdoch lest he be forced to chop wood is interpreted by Tom as the choice which led to the bushman’s dying, and also to Mary’s death (p. 247). Similarly in Chapter 3 Tom blames his decision not to smoke before crossing the river (p. 122) for the subsequent loss of his trousers and the adventures attendant thereupon. Clearly both occasions were hardly free choices: the first amounted to a culpable refusal to become involved, or at least to negligence in failing to tell Rory of Murdoch’s presence; furthermore, Mary’s death may equally have been the result of her mother’s tyranny, Tom’s tactless statements about her schooling, or a combination of any number of factors, including Murdoch’s death. Secondly, Tom’s nakedness may easily be conceived to have resulted from the accident with the inconvenient floating log: deciding not to smoke was surely accidental.

The second implicit objection to the theory is that the choices are non-choices in so far as their ultimate significance is hidden from Tom. Certainly there are occasions when people make moral choices between alternatives of which the results are directly related to the choice, but Tom’s illustrations do not exemplify such foreknowledge. Tom, however, as his intellectualising progresses, does not fail to perceive that the theory has inadequacies, and in an effort to gloss over these he dredges up example after example in order to find solutions. His version of the parable of the Prodigal Son (p. 87) reveals to him the complicated moral possibilities if more than one person is called upon to make choices; however in this example, with less certainty that the theory is watertight, he is still able to return triumphantly (but with qualified triumph) to his original assertion: ‘But the earlier alternative is following him up, for the farm is gone! The old man himself cannot undo the effect of the foregone choice.’
It is the example of the railway line which finally leads him into an absurd, mechanistic argument which savours of predestination. The image in itself — of railway lines and junctions — in its rigidity suggests its own internal contradictions to Tom, and he almost reaches the point of enunciating them, when, in order to divert himself from the logical extension and conclusion of his metaphor, he subverts his thesis by considering men acting in community. At this point the bitterness of his experience of political life intervenes to bring the argument to a typical, hopeless, but in this case inexplicit statement that life is such that whereas the individual can be expected (if he has true pre-vision) to take the line of least resistance, the experience of men acting communally is that they take the ‘line of greatest conceivable resistance’ (p. 88). In brief, then, in the space of a relatively short, but vital meditation, Tom has in fact subverted his own argument. There is no doubt that Furphy deliberately intended this; Tom, constitutionally a self-subverter, may also realise the contradiction inherent in his logic, but if he does, it is not made clear. It is perhaps not too fanciful to read the image of the dead pine tree strangled by the woodbine, which immediately precedes this meditation (p. 84), as symbolic of Tom’s intellectual strangulation by his own theories, or of the fatuousness of the theory itself.

In *Such is Life*, then, Tom is an unreliable philosopher, although a stimulating and comic one; he is dramatically conceived as a clownish figure and continually satirised by Furphy. His weakness as a thinker is his tendency to reach firm conclusions on the scantiest of evidence.13 There is often a modicum of good sense and justice in what Tom proposes, but his use of the material at his command is highly dubious.

In view of the pervasively satiric mode of *Such is Life*, which extends even to the seemingly serious philosophical digressions, can the reader be said to be left with any ‘one unassailable bit of standing ground’? (p. 328). The answer is, I think, ‘by default, yes’. Furphy’s contention seems to be that if life is not to be distorted by the novelist or by the person who seeks a rational explanation of experience, then it must be observed to be varied, unpredictable, unchartable, and all ‘truth’, dogma and morality to be essentially relative in character. This interpretation of the novel confers particular significance on Tom’s

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13 Tom accuses Rory of this sort of thinking (p. 95).
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attack on ideology, and his explanation of 'human ignorance'; he be- lieves, probably perversely, but to some extent realistically, that a man possesses 'restricted capability': 'To remove one small section of inborn ignorance is a life-work for any man.' (p. 40). This statement in context is, of course, highly ironic for, as narrator, Tom claims omniscience to a degree which is incongruous with this particular dogmatic statement. He does not know as much as he professes to know, and Such is Life amply demonstrates this. Not only is Tom intellectually incompetent, but he is morally delinquent and dishonest as well, and this in a world where the only moral imperatives are charity, or as Tom calls it, 'service and self-sacrifice' (p. 40) and as much honesty as is compatible with charity. Human negligence and refusal to confront others are the chief forms of moral debility in the Furphy world. Reducing the novel to these truisms is, of course, to do it a massive injustice, and to pass over many of its verbal and intellectual felicities, its high sense of humour and Furphy's (and Tom's) basic assumption that he is throwing down the gauntlet to his hapless reader.

Despite Tom's fatalism, life is not completely ungovernable; it is not 'not susceptible of any coercion whatever' (p. 268), and the action of the book suggests that men can act generously and humanely to alleviate suffering, both physical and psychological. The novel enacts several concrete moral situations, each demanding a degree of sensitivity, charity and honesty that the players individually lack. The only exception to this is the saintly Stewart, despite Tom's attempt to rob his goodness of moral significance by attributing it to 'shrewdness' (p. 206). This theme is further developed in Rigby's Romance where the Samaritan appears in the improbable guise of Thompson who generously administers to the unworldly Furlong. Even Montgomery the squatter has a little humanity to recommend him. In the main the unhappy events of the novels are due, if not to the cruelty of nature, then to the cruelty of men: Andy Glover suffers needlessly for Tom's nakedness and incendiarism; Mrs Beaudesart's and Tom's rejection of Ida on account of her pitiful ugliness and pathetic history is a culpable

14 Even then, it is suggested that Australia and nature are potentially beneficent, that history invites the impress of man. If further support for an optimistic reading of Such is Life be required, then it is to be found readily in Rigby's Romance, and in Furphy's letter to A. G. Stephens, n.d., MS. 2022/5/76, Kate Baker Correspondence, National Library of Australia, Canberra.
moral lapse, and so the list could be extended. Tom is capable of great but selective generosity: his assistance to Alf Morris and his financial largesse towards Rory are far in excess of the minimal demands of charity. However, the point about Tom’s generosity is that where physical demands are made on him, he emerges magnanimous; on the other hand, he has no inclination to respond to psychological needs: he can engage in elaborate play-acting on Alf’s behalf, but cannot and will not hear him out when Alf tries to confess his wrongdoing towards Molly. Many of the nasty and immoral situations described in *Such is Life* could be reversed by the kind of charity and politics advanced as ideal by Rigby in *Rigby’s Romance*. Although the problems are real and pressing in *Such as Life*, the solutions are merely implied; moral solutions are presented lucidly, abstractly and directly in *Rigby’s Romance*.

If, in *Such is Life*, Furphy seriously questions Tom’s moral and intellectual competence, in *Buln-Buln*, Tom’s personal failings are more profoundly explored, in a way which simultaneously opens up the question of the romantic novel versus the realistic one. These two seemingly disparate issues are adroitly yoked in *Buln-Buln*, with results that harmonise with and extend one’s understanding of *Such is Life*. Tom in *Buln-Buln* is viewed from a subtly different perspective from those employed in *Such is Life* or *Rigby’s Romance*; although still afraid of involvement with others, in particular Lilian Pritchard, and finally seen on the run, Tom is humbled by the self-confident trio of Fred, Barefoot Bob and Lilian into believing that imagination may in some circumstances be more desirable than ‘veracity’ and realism. Tom still presents himself as the ‘man of austere veracity’ (p. 141), but vis-à-vis Fred, ‘a man of imagination’ whom ‘Age cannot limit... nor use exhaust his infinite mendacity’ (p. 142), Tom loses in stature, and his dogmatism about the need to tell the truth appears inappropriate and inadequate to the situation. Tom poses the problem for himself in an interesting manner: he asks how Lilian, whose intelligence he highly admires, can love and respect such a blackguard and a liar as her husband. The conclusion he implicitly reaches is that ‘the vast and ageless volume of human insignificance’ (p. 144) is made tolerable and enjoyable by the power of imagination. At the end of *Buln-Buln*, Tom continues to joke although still trying to puzzle out the meaning of his encounter with the trio; at the same time he sustains a degree of hurt pride by not being able to enter into
the harmless, endlessly amusing mutual deceptions of the Pritchards and Barefoot Bob. Further, the self-aggrandisement that made Tom a hero to Ida, Rory and Moriarty, becomes completely ineffectual in relation to persons who are intellectually his peers. Tom cannot assume superiority, nor can he enter into their fantasy world by lying, and so he is made to feel inadequate to the situation.

Furphy in Buln-Buln makes an intellectual foray into territory that is alien to the spirit of Such is Life by investigating the nature of the romance lie and the imagination. This is best illustrated by Tom's analysis of Fred's development as a liar. Tom perversely but characteristically equates imagination with 'lying':

Lying commends itself to the juvenile mind as being easy, inexpensive, and convenient; and in course of time the habit becomes fixed. In fact, mankind may be broadly divided into two classes — perpetual liars, and intermittent liars.

Lying is, of all the arts, the most popular and cosmopolitan. The psalmist reports himself to have said, in a moment of excitement, that all men were liars; and, on more leisurely review, allowed the statement to stand on record as being at least one truth emanating from himself... And of all the accusations of mendacity which from time immemorial have primed our atmosphere, probably not one has been groundless... Which simply means that truth is relative, not absolute. (pp. 7-8)

The final truism is eloquently demonstrated by the novel. The Pritchards' marriage apparently operates on a solid substratum of lying, or to put it more favourably and from the adversaries' points of view, it works on the assumption that each is acting generously and charitably in believing each other's imaginative restructuring of the world. It is simply a question of the games people play, and of accepting the ground rules, hence the significance of Lilian's warnings to Tom not to destroy the necessary illusion to which they both consent, that Fred is the glamorous hero of his dreams. While Fred's position is seen by Furphy to be ridiculous and culpable, nonetheless the fragile relationship and its preservation are seen to be higher priorities, and completely override Tom's desire to tell the whole truth. In any case, Tom in Such as Life has already been proved to be arrogant in assuming that he can in fact tell the truth.

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Another positive virtue of lying, or use of the imagination to restructure reality, is Fred’s ability to turn unhappiness and misery to ‘commodity’. When Tom writes Fred’s name on the desk, thus contravening the master’s edict, Fred, initially nonplussed by being ‘found out’, finally uses it to enhance his ego among his peers, and ironically condemn them. Asked by Tom, the real culprit, what had possessed him to write his name on the desk, he replies characteristically: ‘Devilment... The idear struck me all of a sudden, to get up a rebellion in the school. I expected you fellers to mob Snarley while he was weltin’ me.’ (pp. 10–11). Similarly, Fred turned the scar he painfully acquired while making bullets at Jones’s forge to good purpose by fabricating the extraordinary incident of his service in the army of the French Emperor. Fred’s early humiliation at the hands of Wes Tregurtha was also economically expunged by his imaginative transformation of Wes into a pirate prince whom Fred vanquished single-handed. Thus, whereas Tom is concerned to reject the romantic novel because of its distortion of reality, Furphy in Buln-Buln enlarged upon the positive value of the romantic lie, and Tom is made to feel the implications of this decision, though he proves incapable of accepting it emotionally.

The romantic/realistic dichotomy reveals itself as increasingly untenable and artificial as Furphy’s examination of lying proceeds. The faculty by which Fred’s gift for lying exceeds that of the tall story of which Bob is the superlative exponent is that of ‘sublimity’. Although Bob’s admiration for this quality in Fred’s discourse is treated satirically by being placed within the framework of a phrenological examination of Fred’s head, Bob’s adulation convincingly explains why he is willing to suspend credulity in listening to Fred:

My word, Boss, you got a rakin’ good head... The moral sentiments is normal; an’ the intellectual faculties balances them to a nicety. The propensities is fairly counterbalanced; an’ the development of the perceptive faculties an’ the reflective faculties is jist in proportion. I don’t see as you got a disturbin’ bias any particular road, without it’s for Ideality, an’ its correlative organ, Sublimity. These gives a man a tendency to etherealize, but, when dominated by the strictly moral group, an’ controlled by those higher propensities which confer vigour an’ force of character, they constitute the Poetry of Life. (p. 128)
The two virtues mentioned, 'vigour' and 'force of character', are particularly reminiscent of the anti-romance values that *Such is Life* expounds. Tom adds to the discussion when he notes that

Fred's power lay largely in the quality of compatibility or congruity. You would never hear him say, like your first-person-singular (romantic) novelist-liar, 'my blood ran cold' — 'I was unnerved with terror' — 'I was never so frightened in my life' — or words to similar purport. He could see the inconsistency. With the instinct of genius, he perceived that the genuine hero, relating his little adventure, never descends to that sort of palaver, simply because attested courage neither knows nor needs any such paltry foil. (Good counsel, marry; learn it, learn it, Marquess.) (*Buln-Buln*, p. 103)

The justice and good sense of these injunctions is manifest, and is especially illuminating if regarded as a postscript and part explanation of Furphy's opposition to the romantic novel, which emerges most aggressively in *Such is Life*. What Tom argues here is that if one must lie it is necessary to do so credibly and realistically. This assertion opens up an enormous range of possibilities, which had been constrained by Tom's stern deprecation of the romantic novel in *Such is Life*. First, Tom's doctrinaire statements are confounded, thus bringing them into line with the liberal (relativistic) view of truth and ideology that *Such is Life* expounds; for this reason, *Buln-Buln* constitutes an illuminating qualification of Tom's dogmatic, absolutist position in *Such is Life*. Secondly, the discussion of imagination has the effect of illustrating that romantic fiction need not be divorced from real life: the fact that Fred is prepared to collect material from Bob for his romances is eloquent testimony to the close relationship Furphy considers can exist between life and fiction. Certainly in his view, the two need not be mutually exclusive. The implication of this is that had 'Ouida' and Kingsley lied credibly and realistically, Furphy might have endorsed their work, but with a qualification which will emerge in discussing *Rigby's Romance*.15

So, in *Buln-Buln*, Tom is criticised for his pragmatic realism, for his lack of imagination. He learns that his besetting sin is to seek after truth in the face of the desirability of the imagination. He learns too

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15 See below.
that humanity is too psychologically frail to be able to confront the truth, if indeed truth can be separated from fiction. Lilian’s continual snubs, and their devastating effect on Tom, attest to this. The moral issues raised by Fred’s romancing are complex: because of Tom’s fundamental involvement with truth, he is rejected by Lilian; Bob, on the other hand, who simple-mindedly professes his warm admiration for Fred and corroborates the latter’s tales, receives Lilian’s esteem. Despite his gross anti-feminism, Tom’s rationalisation that Lilian, like all of her sex, is perverse, has some truth in absolute terms, but in the relative terms of the situation, because Lilian and Fred have based their marriage on the lie that he is a truth teller and a hero, and because social intercourse with such people as Bob is enhanced by assenting to the lie, Tom must either assent to it too, or lose their friendship. He chooses the latter, the course of honesty, and plans to leave, but not until he has been forced to review his rigid dogmas concerning the nature of imagination and its relation to life.

Tom’s ironic disclaimer in the proem of Rigby’s Romance that his realism is ‘presented merely as a spontaneous evidence and guarantee of that fidelity to fact which I acquired early in life, per medium of an old stirrup leather, kept for the purpose’ (Rigby’s Romance, p. xxii) is functional in that, in this work, as distinct from Such is Life and Buln-Buln, it is vital that Tom be a reliable recorder of Rigby’s homilies on Christian socialism. Tom, as narrator, is less visible than in either of the other works, and when he does obtrude, his concerns reveal themselves to be hopelessly and comically off centre. While he remains caught up in his dream of reconciliation between Rigby and Kate, he misses the point of Rigby’s lesson. Sam, however, the messenger who is meant to bring the ex-lovers together, provides a useful and humorous, though serious comment on the action that the novel chiefly embodies, by becoming an ardent convert to the major’s religion. And so, the roles established in the novel for Sam and Tom are ironically reversed; Sam is the real convert to the socialist credo, while Tom chases romantic (and futile) butterflies.

Furphy shows fine tact in withholding his serious views from Tom, and inventing an ideological fanatic as his spokesman. Furphy’s fondness for Rigby’s Romance rests not on a love for a last-born and least attractive offspring, but on the more solid basis that Furphy was deeply committed to the optimistic Christian socialist ideas articulated.
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by Rigby: 'Eighty per cent of masculine readers will long to be like Rigby and that feeling will disarm criticism.' In another letter to Cathells he described it as his 'most purposeful whack at all that Respectability holds sacred'. For this reason the pompous clownish Tom could not be entrusted with the pedagogical and intellectual weight of the novel. However unsympathetic a character Rigby may be, Furphy does not reduce him in the same way that he satirised Tom. While Tom is allowed to scoff in *Rigby's Romance*, it is Rigby and not Tom who is made to look ridiculous. Tom, a self-confessed chameleon, for the purpose of this particular social exercise, and contradicting his socialistic demeanour in *Such is Life*, adopts the pose of a conservative (*Rigby's Romance*, pp. 102, 200), thus becoming a contentious nuisance and polarising the argument; this device enables Furphy to elaborate his ideas. However, Tom's conservatism degenerates into ruffianism, not uninspired by jealousy, and he proposes to the frustrated Dixon that the best solution to the persuasive arguments of Rigby is to upend him into 'the ensanguined river... the most approved, and only valid Conservative argument' (p. 200). Tom, with his history of 'dummyism' (selecting and squatting on land at the behest of, and in cahoots with, a pastoralist-financier, and so securing a parcel of land for the capitalist), is clearly of the same attitude as the individualist, capitalist entrepreneurs at whom Rigby's rhetoric is chiefly directed, and as such he is criticised by the ethos established in the novel.

*Rigby's Romance* is highly stylised in construction. Within the basic framework of a series of yarns, the most pertinent theme of Christian socialism grows out of cynical intercourse about love and women. None of the tales exemplifies anything resembling unselfish, mutual love, although all masquerade as love stories. Such disillusion, paralleled (symbolised?) ironically and humorously by the yammongers' inability to catch the thirty-pounder last seen ten years ago (p. 135), is the inauspicious basis upon which Rigby erects his theories about communal love in the socialist state. It may be that Furphy intends to imply that married love is difficult to achieve. Rigby, a sober cynic in

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16 Furphy to Williams Cathells, n.d., MS. 2022/5/11, Kate Baker Correspondence, National Library of Australia, Canberra.
17 Furphy to Williams Cathells, cited by Miles Franklin (in association with Kate Baker) in *Joseph Furphy, The Legend of a Man and His Book* (Sydney, Angus and Robertson, 1944), p. 128.
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matters of love, comments that romances are ultimately tragic, though they may appear at first to be comic: 'Romance everywhere, hardening into tragedy, as the real supersedes the fanciful; for the real is always tragic' (p. 84). In the three novels only the two Alfs approach a potentially workable unselfish relationship, and even in this case, Furphy does not allow the reader to observe the love in its consummated and achieved form. On the other hand, as love is explored in only a shallow manner, Furphy possibly simply trusted his communal theories more than conventional love, and saw this as more basic to social happiness. The matter is doubly complicated by the fact that, in Furphy, idealism and ideas were in conflict with his realistic assessment of the human condition. Hence Furphy's disclaimer that Rigby is simply an agitator and ideologue is crucial: he is the focal point of this novel of ideas, the man who has an overview, a seat among the gods. He remains fundamentally optimistic, but squarely faces the realistic fact that men are at variance with the ideal, and frequently act ignobly. Against the charitable Thompsons of his world, he has to balance such men as the unscrupulous 'Christian' capitalist and defender of orthodox religion, Lushington, and Dixon, a man of small and mean mind, who voraciously devours knowledge, especially erudite knowledge.18 Rigby is acutely aware of the difficulties of establishing his socialist world: he argues that for several generations there will be mutineers and dissidents, but he makes an act of faith in the fundamental goodness of humanity:

Consider that not one of the million types of adult sinner, nor a compound of them all, can serve as an example of human nature. These are our failures. These are the lame and the blind, that are hated of David's soul. Yet human nature, uncontaminated, is always with us. And though we industriously misdirect its potencies, and jealously crush its latent capacity for a higher life than our own, the supply of fresh material never runs out. Trust the order of things for that. The unsophisticated child is human nature per se. And of such is the kingdom of heaven, namely, the Divine Commonwealth which we aim at establishing. Happily, on all sides we see it demonstrated that crude

18 Although this is potentially an unproductive proclivity, Dixon's enthusiastic reaction to Rigby in Chapter 37 suggests that it may be turned to positive advantage.
human nature may be educated to any form of government, without involving the slightest outrage on inherent moral constitution; and I confess that I don’t see any reason for drawing the line at that merging of private interests in public welfare which Socialism demands. Why should the adaptability of human nature fall short just here, and nowhere else? ... Shall we inquire wherein lies the oppugnancy? ... It lies in one of two moral diseases—the leprosy of Selfishness, or the palsy of Hopelessness. (pp. 206–7)

*Rigby's Romance* provides an illuminating, if not crucial appendix to *Such is Life*, and I contend that it must not be ignored. To ignore it is to make the mistake that Heseltine made when he described *Such is Life* as being fundamentally concerned with ‘the nothingness of the honestly experienced inner life’.19

The purpose of *Rigby's Romance*, unlike *Such is Life* and *Buln-Buln*, is not to show Tom’s intellectual and personal development and character; in fact, this is only an incidental feature of the work. Rather it sets out to expound the political and religious notions raised desultorily and less abstractly in *Such as Life*. Rigby’s imprecations against orthodox Christianity, the Church, and the materialism and inequalitarianism of capitalist democracy are at the very least historically interesting. However, they can probably lay claim to greater significance than simply this if one takes seriously Rigby’s warning that ‘Socialism is relative, not absolute’ (p. 231). This statement and its defence bring *Rigby's Romance* into line with *Such is Life* and *Buln-Buln* and the relativistic ethic enunciated in each of these works. Furphy realised that, however much one would wish to do so, one could not dogmatise about or program religion, politics, imagination or novel writing, and that ‘Principles only are vital; and how often have these been obscured and subverted by insistence on details.’ (p. 231). Nor does Rigby see the matter as remaining at this point; he argues that ‘State Socialism’ must be built on a foundation of religion.

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rightly so called. There is no other foundation possible. Note any moral characteristic, or social usage, of any race or nation, and you’ll find some religious tenet underlying it. And what appears to me the most inspiring sign attendant on our movement is the intensely religious, the fearlessly righteous tone of its current literature. The opposing literature is, of necessity, frankly materialistic, or transparently evasive; and herein lies the most encouraging weakness of the individualistic position. (p. 233)

The very telling last two sentences quoted do more than hint at the more fundamental reasons for Furphy’s serious quarrel with the romance-novel, and his three major works are not behindhand in articulating an unorthodox but deeply religious or spiritual view of experience. This statement also suggests that in Furphy’s own estimation, Rigby’s Romance approached his ideal of the novel, even if subsequent generations of critics have not endorsed his opinion. Whatever one may think of the Furphy world view, his theories and serious moralism, the fact that he considered it first as a religious and only secondarily as a political exercise to a large extent redeems his vision, by making it more universal and accessible.

The comic reduction of Tom in Such is Life, and Furphy’s constant satirising of him, mean that one is forced to read this novel with special care. I do not wish to suggest that all that Tom says in Such is Life is completely disreputable, and must therefore be discounted; certain aspects of his ‘philosophising’, especially when supported by the events and situations described in the novel,20 are more pertinent than others. On the other hand, the issues he pronounces upon most pontifically and portentously demand a heavily qualified reading, and I have concentrated on these aspects of Such is Life quite deliberately because of the fundamental difficulty of discerning whether one is wrestling with an angel or with Lucifer. Because of such equivocation and ambivalence within the novel, but mainly because Furphy’s attitude to Tom more often than not invites the reader to criticise the narrator, it is necessary to tread cautiously when interpreting Tom.

Because some of the themes of Such is Life are explored in greater detail and with some profundity in Buln-Buln and Rigby’s Romance,

20 One example of this Tom’s pro-socialist ideas, and his juxtaposed ironic portrayal of the station class hierarchy (Such is Life, pp. 255–6.)
students and readers of Furphy must therefore turn to these lesser known works if they are to come to grips in a full and satisfying way with *Such is Life*. The reasons for this are based on more solid grounds than the historical dismemberment of the original novel, the ur-*Such is Life*. *Buln-Buln* provides further credence for reading *Such is Life* as a comic, satiric novel because, by presenting Tom confounded, humiliated and discomforted, it gives perspective to the dogmatic attitudes he adopts in *Such is Life*, where he is generally master of the situations which arise. Further, by questioning Tom's dogmatism concerning the romantic novel, *Buln-Buln* completes and rounds out the relativistic anti-ideology stance enunciated in both *Such is Life* and *Rigby's Romance*. In addition, the interpersonal relations in *Buln-Buln* demand of Tom a degree of sensitivity and involvement that not even Maud or the two Alfs or even Rory and Mary Halloran had succeeded in eliciting from him.

*Rigby's Romance* provides yet another insight into Furphy's attitudes to novel writing. He was intensely serious and cerebral about his work, and felt that novels ought to embody both the reality and the ideal. This uncomfortable and difficult novel does just that. The uncertain central comic focus of *Such is Life* is abandoned in favour of a character who does not invite laughter, but rather serious attention. Furphy's (and Tom's) satiric self-portrait in *Such is Life* inhibits seriousness, and while *Rigby's Romance* is not a solemn novel by any means, its humour is deflected from the central religious/sociological focus and is directed at Rigby's audience — at Thompson, Dixon Lushington and Tom. The question that suggests itself in this: in view of the greater seriousness of *Rigby's Romance*, why did Furphy publish the pervasively ironic *Such is Life* first, or even at all? The answer, I think, lies in a suggestion made by Cecil Hadgraft to which critics have from time to time returned, that Furphy was fundamentally uncertain of himself and his audience.\(^\text{21}\) When he first submitted *Such is Life* to A. G. Stephens, he was a raw novice, very nervous and diffident. Publication made a more confident man of him, and the scores of letters from publishers rejecting *Rigby's Romance* indicate that he was sufficiently confident to broadcast it widely. By the time that Furphy rewrote *Rigby's Romance*, he was passionately

committed to the ideas embodied in it; previous to that, he vacil­
lated, and played safe by presenting Such is Life as the first entertain­
ing instalment of a didactic and fundamentally purposeful work.

To my mind seventy years of exposure to several generations of
readers of Furphiana have served to enhance rather than detract from
the importance of his work. Perhaps the greatest single future con­
tribution to Furphy scholarship would be a heavily and carefully
annotated (and critical) edition of each of the works. Although his
references to Australian customs are obtrusive, if they were explained
to the reader, the novels would appeal to readers outside Australia.
Once Tom’s mock erudition and offensively Australian bias are
elucidated, what remains is a picaresque novel with a sophisticated
ironic outlook, which also incorporates not only historical and socio­
logical material, but also ideas and issues of continuing relevance. All
of the three novels are finally novels about the human condition, about
love, death, human relations, fact and fiction, truth and reality. While
Such is Life is not as great a novel at Tristram Shandy or Ulysses, it
contains much that is similar, but it is nonetheless unique. Most im­
portantly, of course, it continues to entertain.
The Fortunes of Richard Mahony

symphony and naturalism

Ken Stewart

... I don't think I have preached any sermons in any of my books. I say what I have to say through the juxtaposition of images and situations and the emotional exchanges of human beings... I enjoy explicitness — the accumulation of down-to-earth detail. All my novels are an accumulation of detail. I'm a bit of a bower-bird... I feel that my novels are quite old fashioned and traditional — almost Nineteenth Century. I've never thought of myself as an innovator.

Q. Where would you find the tradition?
A. In the Nineteenth-Century Russians, certainly; in Stendhal, Flaubert (not the Romantic Flaubert of *Salammbô*) and Balzac. Sometimes in Dickens.

These words, ruthlessly selected for my purpose in a way that their author could not have foreseen, are taken from a recently published interview with Patrick White. They might truthfully have been spoken by Henry Handel Richardson. The interview with White leads me to speculate that if he has received insufficient attention as a realist, Richardson has had too much; and that each writes in the same tradition.

*The Fortunes of Richard Mahony* has won critical respect as tragedy on a universal plane, and it has been described, disparagingly, as a monumental product of naturalism. Considered as absolutes the two estimations are incompatible (to my mind the second is technically speaking inaccurate), but each introduces inescapable issues concerning this technically varied, uneven, profoundly moving, long novel. Though the nature of Richard Mahony's 'tragedy' eludes simple classification (both as the study of a man's self-destruction and as wholly the struggle against forces of material environment and physiological composition), the genre label is worth keeping, since it

implicitly affirms the quality and stature of the book without succumbing to the grandiose praise and comparison that admirers have not always resisted. And it confirms its careful organisation. As we can infer clearly from H. F. Mares’s analysis of recurring patterns, the trilogy’s contextual interplay is intricate and expressive beyond the possibility of ordinary naturalistic method. Richardson views the findings of her scientific investigation, moreover, from a questioning metaphysical perspective that is philosophically and aesthetically incompatible with the accepted aims of the naturalists. It is true that parts of the book are ‘factual’ and flat. But in many contexts the failure to assimilate environmental detail into an imaginative prose is not necessarily the consequence of a particular literary method: Zola’s formulae do not ask of a writer the curiously stilted, crippled syntax and banal, cliché laden diction that are a peculiar insufficiency of this book. My impression is that this inability to master consistently the mechanics and ordinary felicities of language is more damaging than the prominence of documentary material, though the two are related.

To stress that the dramatic and symphonic qualities of Richard Mahony are as important to its whole effect as its ‘documentation’ is not to deny the inadequacy in many passages of Richardson’s scientific realism or, on the other hand, intentionally to divert attention from her respectable achievement as creator of Richard and Mary Mahony and their authentic, fascinating colonial environment. The point is that Richardson organises what she accumulates. Details are organised not only into ‘settings’, but also into categories which cumulatively attain the force of symbols. Imagery and even characters are ordered in interlocking, significant patterns. If one is aware too frequently of a prosy spillage of information, one feels at the same time that what is being spilled is gradually assuming the complex aesthetic shape of its container.

Richardson’s ‘symphonic naturalism’ draws attention to segments and fragments. The episodic chronicle form, the succession of vignettes, the dramatic juxtapositioning and counterpointing of contexts, the connecting device of motif, and the transference of dramatic focus amongst several characters are the machinery of an elaborately pat-

terned work in which the creative impulse is perhaps overdisciplined by the demands of the mode, and is given insufficient opportunity to sustain its own drive in a single direction before being checked and redirected. *Ultima Thule* is an impressive exception, since in this volume Richardson's energies appear to be controlled over larger imaginative units. In the earlier volumes the reader is conscious both that the organisation is highly segmented, and that too often within a single segment the prose is not sustained or is undistinguished. It is to the art and artlessness of Richardson's 'organised accumulations' that this essay is directed.

*The Fortunes of Richard Mahony* is the study of a man whose inability to cope with the demands of life increases as his efforts to escape them intensify. His society becomes preoccupied with the material goals that he is obliged through his own ordinary humanity to pursue. The progress of each is a comment on the excess of the other. Mahony is unwilling to subject himself to the rhythms of human experience and to reconcile his 'wayward, vagrant spirit' with the commonplace fluctuations of comfort and pleasure in ordinary life. He is confronted by difficulties caused both by his own impulsiveness and impracticality and by the pressures of collective prejudice, Philistinism and social expediency, but his overriding response is ultimately to escape difficulty through the pursuit of a dream. His flights are essentially self-destructive, since they aggravate the discomfort and suffering from which they are intended to release him: the 'dream' that he eventually realises is nightmare. His cumulative refusal to accept the determining categories of material existence is met in the second half of the book by an increasing seemingly un­forgiving malignancy in life itself, which prevents him from regaining the control of body and mind that is necessary for his own ordinary survival and dignity as a man.

The novel begins, in the Proem to *Australia Felix*, with the conjoint image of an old man living and a young man dead. The dead digger's burial alive anticipates Mahony's fate, as critics have acknowledged, but it is as important to recognise that the living figure, an older man who becomes Richard's store employee, Long Jim, is depicted by his thoughts and physical appearance as Mahony's antecedent as well. Images of age and youth recur throughout the book to reflect a dichotomy between spirit and matter, and to help define the inter-
action within Richard’s mind and being between the demands of life and his own urge and quest for Life. Richard’s physical decline and emaciation correspond with a process of ‘growing younger’, culminating in a death which he sees as spiritual birth.

Still in his twenties, Richard seems physically old in comparison with the material gold seekers around him of whom Purdy, popular both as the object of a licence hunt and as a successful public orator, is the epitome. These opening episodes are echoed ironically in scenes in *Ultima Thule* which depict Mahony (not Purdy) both as the object of pursuit and as public speaker. Richard dates ‘the loss of his youth’ from the day of his estrangement from Purdy during the Ballarat palmy days. He grows leaner and sparer in his pursuit of the dream as Purdy grows rounder and fatter: the motif of a cold chop is associated with the one, ‘beefsteaks with layers of onion’ with the other. When Purdy revisits the family after a long absence, towards the end of *Ultima Thule*, Richard reminisces about his boyhood in such a way that his ‘gross’ behaviour is (to Mary) more typical of Purdy’s conduct. To Mahony’s mind Purdy virtually represents youth; figuratively speaking, he is invariably perched on one end of a moving see-saw as Richard stares at him from the other.

Their relationship as boys in Dublin begins with an exchange of marbles and is symbolised throughout their adulthood by the exchange of banknotes, another motif. On the diggings Mahony, in his role as ‘responsible’, law-abiding man (this aspect of him is caricatured in the figure of Hempel) pays Purdy’s fine of five one pound notes, but Purdy later becomes a policeman. Purdy’s original intention on their first visit to Geelong is to announce his betrothal, but Mahony is subsequently betrothed: money is exchanged between them in a wager. Purdy is given a banknote to ensure his presence at the wedding: in the second half of the novel Mahony, having retreated from life in *The Way Home*, announces that he would offer him a ten pound note to stay away. At Shortlands Bluff Purdy turns up and leaves a five pound note for Mahony.

The comparisons, ironies, changes of role and parallels between Mahony and other personages indicate that the novel’s characters are created as much to define Richard’s situation and to underline the universality of his position as for their independent interest. Although Mary begins her married life in the role of child-bride, the dismissal of Purdy, which signifies Richard’s loss of physical youth,
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is also the beginning of Mary's more suspicious adulthood, and she comes increasingly more often to see in her husband 'the eyes of a child'. Richard's attitudes and behaviour become more childish as he grows older ('he might have been a boy once more, standing before his mother and shaking in his shoes over the confession of some youthful peccadillo'). By the end of the novel Mary has assumed a maternal role, and the child Cuffy appears to take on himself, or to have had bundled on to him prematurely, the role of male parent and the worries of adulthood concerning money and public image. Richard disintegrates into a world of innocence and fantasy, in which his ego is resplendently at rest and in which he has to be strapped into a chair and fed, is ill tempered, and has to be taken for walks by the children.

The male characters form three main groups: a host of 'restless mortals', a number of middle-aged 'successes' and several 'failures'. Together with the various types of digger listed at the end of the Proem to Australia Felix, they are created independently of Mahony to represent, ironically or directly, aspects of Richard himself. Although such characters as Purdy, Jerry, Ned, Long Jim and young Johnny are credible enough as separate personages, the interest Richardson takes in their individuality is insufficient to overcome the monotony brought about by their similarity. They are primarily 'examples' of kinds of restlessness. With the exception of the fascinating figure of Purdy, who is compellingly imaged as an alter ego in whom ironies are subtly explored, the 'restless mortals' are slight and essentially repetitive creations, functional but dull. They lack the significance and authenticity as recognisable colonial types and personalities by which Henry Ocock and John Turnham, who equally reflect the ironies of Mahony's situation, are made engaging.

A similar criticism frequently applies to the selective accumulation of detail. Since Mahony's relationship to the material world is virtually the subject of the book, and particularly of Australia Felix, the variety of aspirations and material pursuits of the colonists that much of the environmental detail reflects is relevant and potentially of interest. Although the trilogy is, as J. G. Robertson first suggested, 'a book about money' (Mahony's name as well as his 'fortunes' might be interpreted as a pun), the pursuit of material goals in which both Richard and his fellow colonists is caught up is not dramatised exclusively as Mammonism. The trouble is that too many 'examples' of material
goals and diversions are gathered and displayed: the heavy handed loading of the narrative with the obviously related details becomes tedious, the illustrations various but essentially repetitive. In order to demonstrate the prevalence of alcoholism in the colony, the minor characters probably consume (and are shown consuming) more alcohol per page than those in any other Australian novel. A rough count shows that a child dies of alcoholic poisoning; an alcoholic squatter hangs himself; the death of a baby is caused by alcohol; Agnes Ocock’s illness and death are attributed to it; and several clergymen and incompetent doctors are addicted closet drinkers. Drink is the material means of escape of which Mahony, himself an escapist, is most critical, but it is an expensive irony, artistically speaking, that in his decline he is repeatedly mistaken for an alcoholic. Richardson is in this way both too selective and not selective enough.

Another social characteristic depicted more interestingly to illustrate materialistic excess, despite the appropriate Victorian drapery that tends to veil it from the reader, is sexual misdemeanour: prostitution, adultery and promiscuity. It is illustrated unobtrusively, and helps cumulatively to stress the ‘material’ overreaching of the colony, and to insist that sexuality is an essential part of Mahony’s life. The women on the diggings are harlots. Purdy detaches himself from Mahony to spend time with a prostitute immediately after confiding that he is contemplating marriage; he later ‘makes advances’ to Mahony’s wife; one of old Ocock’s sons loses his employment through ‘nosing after women’; Mary disturbs her brother Ned Tumham while he is attempting to tumble the servant girl Ellen; eventually Ned feels obliged to marry a woman whom he has made pregnant.

A mask of ‘psychological’ imagery\(^3\) intimates sexuality and at the same time helps to maintain a tone superficially consistent with Richardson’s intention to ‘speak for the generation of whom the works are written’. To appreciate the sexual significance of much psychological and ‘background’ detail in \textit{Australia Felix} is to acknowledge a range of overtones and meaning that is not usually found in Richardson’s ‘naturalism’, though it would be fatuous to claim that such imagery completely vindicates the prose against charges of flatness and over-elaboration. Thus the mawkishness of the episodes at

\(^3\) Richardson claimed in a letter to Oliver Stoner to have studied Freud ‘before his name was known in England’.
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Beamish’s Family Hotel is partly offset by the sexual significance of the imagery. The two men ride down from Ballarat (via Melbourne, where Purdy visits the prostitute) on horses, familiar male symbols. At Geelong Mary and the Beamish girls are found behind ‘a clump of gooseberry bushes’ in the arbour. Jurdy puns: ‘many’s the time I’ve anchored there’. Mahony eventually walks with Mary (Polly) to the cave. The meal that follows is in context more than a documentary list of colonial appetisers:

There were juicy beefsteaks piled high with rings of onion, and a barracoota, a cold leg of mutton. There were apple-pies and jam tarts, a dish of curds and whey and a jug of custard. Butter and bread were fresh and new; scones and cakes had just left the oven; and the great cups of tea were tempered by pure thick cream.

The food he is offered is contrasted in the next line with his ‘familiar fare of cold chop’ and is implicitly compared with the kind eaten with Purdy as a child in Dublin. In his role now as l'homme moyen sensuel Mahony eats Purdy’s familiar meal of beefsteaks with layers of onion. The sexual significance is underlined by ‘pipes and pouches’ that are produced after the meal. Female sexuality is intimated in a symbolical behavioural pattern invented for Mary which indicates her attraction towards Mahony. After going outside to fill an empty water-ewer she returns past Mahony’s bedroom, where she involuntarily starts: ‘the water splashed over the neck of the jug and fell with a loud plop’. The imagery compares the Mary-Mahony relationship with that of the earthier Purdy and Tilly. Purdy has described a practical joke played by Tilly during his last visit:

They got the barman to come into my room while I was asleep and hang a bucket o’ water to one of the beams over the bed. Then I’m blamed if they didn’t tie a string from it to my big toe! I gives a kick, down comes the bucket and half drowns me.

Mahony returns to Ballarat, where his musings on Polly’s white stocking and black prunella boot introduce another motif. His only contact with Mary is by mail. As he walks to post his letter ‘he carries a candle-end stuck in a bottle’, a phallic motif that is repeated in a later context, intimating Mary’s sexual anxiety, in which the child-bride is frightened on the night of her wedding by ‘bearded men,
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one [of whom] held a candle stuck in a bottle'. Water imagery recurs in the episode of Mahony's proposal of marriage during his return visit to the Beamish Hotel. 'All three girls stood before tubs, their sleeves rolled up, their arms in the lather'; 'the big boiler belched clouds of steam'. Before the proposal Mahony eats another huge meal. He asks Mary, who is 'boiling and bubbling inside' to walk to the cave. Richardson records meaningfully that 'he forgot to modify his pace'. Cuffy's account of the story over seven hundred pages later implies an authorial query concerning Mahony's judgment in choosing to marry Polly:

He liked best the story of how Papa had seen nothing, only Mamma's leg in a white stocking and a funny black boot, when he saw her first, and it was jumping out of a window. He'd jumped out, too, and chased her; but then he let her go and went away; but as soon as he got home he slapped his leg and called himself a donkey, and hired a horse and galloped ever and ever so many miles back again, to ask her if she'd like to marry him. And first she said she was too young, and then she did. He'd heard it a million times; but it was still exciting to listen to... how in a hurry Papa had been.

After the marriage, during the buggy ride to Ballarat, Mary is reminded of 'home' by the noise of bullfrogs 'like hundreds of hissing tea-kettles, just about to boil'. Her fears and sexual anxiety as she enters Mahony's masculine home are signified by 'a huge black tarantula with horrible hairy legs', that crawls out, and by 'the attack of a big, fierce dirty dog, which sprang at her, dragging its paws down her dress'. The wedding night meal is a canned counterpart of the first meal at Beamish's Hotel.

Imagery of this kind arises in some contexts 'naturalistically' out of the study of human behaviour, but it is at the same time carefully selected and imposed in such a way as to provide more than 'surface' meaning, and to establish patterns of significant cross reference. Richardson recorded in her autobiography that in the months before their marriage she and J. G. Robertson spent hours 'poring over Tristan or the Ring, tracking down motives and digging out connexions'.


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Mahony trilogy suggest that her musical training influenced her fictional methods, and that the kind of study she undertook of the Wagner Cycle might be profitably applied to her own work. F. H. Mares is not exaggerating when he makes the point that 'almost any passage will set up reverberations in the reader's mind — like the ripples when a stone is thrown into water — that imply the future and recall the past in the work. The whole trilogy is bound together and gains shape and structure from these interlocking ripples of significance.'

Mahony's environment is a vast assemblage of people and objects, but the categories of detail which make up his world are strictly limited in number. To read the novel is in a sense to turn the barrel of a kaleidoscope: section after section provides differing patterns of relationships amongst a group of essentially constant images — men, women, children, horses, vehicles, corpses, homes, earth, water, food, sun, hats, stars, mountains, flowers are some of the novel's primary categories.

The sense of fluctuating pattern as one reads is undeniable as motifs become established. But it is not adequate for a novelist to demonstrate the essential sameness of the human condition, both from one man to another and from one time to another, simply by reiterating certain archetypes and superficially decorating them with secondary details that show us, for instance, the fluctuating tastes and customs in housing or headgear. Richardson achieves more than that. One feels that the patterns and rhythms shaping *Ultima Thule* are played out many times throughout the first two books and are drawn together and cyclically repeated in this final volume with a surging inevitability that fulfils one's expectation of symphonic patterning. To stress that a symphonic scheme is at work is not to deny that the prose is intrinsically more compelling in the final volume or that the authenticating and varied surface detail of *Australia Felix* and *The Way Home* is necessarily uninteresting or dull. The trouble is that too often in the first two volumes the effect of reiterated imagery is blunted by the gratuitous explication of what is already imaged; and, moreover, that phrases, motifs and images are repeated mechanically and predictably.

Natural landscapes, mountains, hills, the sun in various phases and the night sky are used both to mirror Mahony's feelings and, more

5 Mares, p. 7. My italics.
importantly, as a kind of cosmic background against which he in­
variably makes his monumental decisions. The setting virtually begs
the metaphysical questions about free will and determinism, meaning
and suffering, that he ponders. The universality of his dilemmas is
stressed, the contexts in which he makes decisions are underlined for
ironical comparison; but frequently in the first two volumes the stock
imagery is unimaginative and repetitive, and the light refracted be­
tween contents does not provide sufficient ironical insight or a
dramatically meaningful sense of *déjà vu*.

The recurrent rhythms introduced in the Proem to *Australia Felix*
are, frequently, more profound. That the Proem provides a premoni­
tion of Mahony’s death is understood subconsciously and emotionally
long before the confirming chapters of *Ultima Thule*. Minor details
that are almost inconspicuous prepare us from the beginning. Mahony
loses his pet cats in mineshafts; the Beamishes are ruined when a
bog forms in front of their hotel; Mahony’s nephew plays at ‘being
a digger in a pool’, the dying squatter Glendinning is ‘strapped over
the chest, bound hand and foot to the framework of the bed’. The
‘roar that burst the eardrums’ of the dead digger recurs like a cli­
mactic percussion motif, on Mary’s wedding night, in Mahony’s
earliest attacks of vertigo, in Cuffy’s traumatic observation of the
drowning of a puppy in a canal at Venice (‘finally amid the laughter
of the crowd, the flat side of an oar caught it full on its panting snout
and terrified eyes. With a shriek that was almost human it sank’), in
the cathartic yet ominous screeches of the mill whistle in Baram­
bogie, and culminating in Mahony’s scream as he crosses the Rubicon
into insanity. Continually the reader experiences, through recurring
images and rhythms, a sense of crescendo and diminuendo that is
intensified and resolved in *Ultima Thule*.

Imagery of earth, burial and confinement is conjoined throughout
the trilogy with imagery of water, to portend not only Mahony’s
material death, as critics have recognised, but also his ‘spiritual birth’.
Our sense of inevitability is intensified by the increasingly more em­
phatic water imagery, but the possible dualism that is implied is more
than Hardyesque. The dead digger of the Proem is buried alive in
a deep wet hole. The tent store is situated amongst flooded mine­
shafts, the first Ballarat house is near Youille’s swamp, the second
is near the Great Swamp. In Buddlecombe, ‘the end of September
brought day after day of soft steamy mists, which saturated every-
thing with moisture, and by night fell as fine rain that turned the low-lying parts of the garden to a bog. The eternal sea fogs seemed literally to bury you alive.' There is increasing emphasis on the volume of water in the descriptions of the lagoon at Barambogie, and the swollen river at the Yarra Bend Asylum:

The carriage came to a standstill on a stretch of waste land, a kind of vast, unfenced paddock, where hobbled horses grazed. It could go no further, for between them and the complex of horses, cottages, huts which formed the asylum, flowed the unbridged river. Rain had fallen during the night, and the reddish, muddy stream, which here turned and twisted like a serpent, ran so high that the weeping willows (Richard's favourite *Salix babylonica*) which had lined the bank, dragged their branches deep in the flood.

The 'river of life' symbolism culminates inevitably in the sea, by which Mahony's coffin and grave are placed.

'Hobbled horses' at Yarra Bend grazed by the side of the river in flood. The horse is by this stage of the novel virtually a symbol of material man, energy, the physical life force. The motif is worth tracing both for the sake of digging out connections which are meaningful, and because it recurs in some contexts in which Richardson is at her best. Horses are frequently associated with vitality and sexuality. Mahony muses as he rides to the Beamish Family Hotel that 'there was nothing better than a piece of good horse flesh between his knees', and in retrospect the innuendo is scarcely innocent. As he visits his patients the stamina and energy of his horse is on each occasion an obvious correlative to his own stamina. Archdeacon Long, whom he admires for his 'splendid vitality', is considered reckless with the reins. In England, where Mahony becomes temporarily more energetic and spirited, he is accused of 'being rather a flash with the reins'. Tilly is associated with abundance and fecundity. She writes to the Mahonys in England: 'the mare Zoe is in foal. Give me the sun, and horses and a garden'. Purdy wears 'horsey checks' and utters 'horselaughs'; Mahony describes his antics as 'horseplay'. When he makes a pass at Mary, Mahony threatens to horsewhip him. The separation from Purdy from which Mahony consciously dates his loss of youth is unobtrusively symbolised in the same context by a fall from his horse.
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The mare, all her spirit gone, stood lamb-like and waited. As he did not stir she turned and sniffed him, curiously. Still, he lay prone, and, having stretched her tired jaws, she raised her head and uttered a whinny—an almost human cry of distress.

The down-at-heel chemist Tangye, who pre-figures Mahony's failure and decline, is depicted 'with muscles on his neck standing out like those of a skinny old horse'. And the horses at Yarra Bend are hobbled.

To select and explicate motifs in this way gives an impression of artificiality in the narrative that Richardson herself avoids. The images are immersed within a larger realism in which they elucidate each other and enrich the prose without blatantly drawing attention to 'symbolism'. But the overtones are important. The horse imagery spreads to help define the significance of the minor characters in relation to Mahony, and by emphasising generic human qualities gives force to the trilogy's motto 'Every man is not only himself. Men are lived over again. There was none then but there hath been someone since that parallels him, and is as it were his revived self.' The horse represents material man. Together with the imagery from the Proem this motif focuses attention throughout the book on central, unifying themes, despite 'realist' meanderings into related subjects concerning family history, colonial 'progress', the comparison of English and Australian life, and clinical illness.

Indeed, the horse and buggy trip from Geelong to Ballarat on the Mahonys' wedding day provides such a calculated sequence of echoes and premonitions that it becomes in retrospect a kind of symbolical miniature of the entire course of their married life. The wattle in full bloom is to Richard 'a symbol of golden hope': in Ultima Thule wildflowers and wattle are associated with the idyllic side of Cuffy's childhood but in the Proem to Australia Felix, which is told in an authorial voice (as Richardson herself has pointed out) the wattles 'bloomed their brief delirious yellow passion against the grey green foliage of the gums'. During the wedding journey Richard has difficulty controlling the horse and is 'repeatedly obliged to leave the track and take to the bush where he steered a way as best he could'. Although at first the scenery is 'new and arresting' Mary feels that they are 'driving away from the rest of mankind' and becomes increasingly worried that the buggy will tip over. When they reach
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'home' the sky is 'pitch dark' and the ground wet. To get to the house ('half a tent and half a log hut') they cross 'a ricketty little bridge over a flooded river'. The house is dark and confined. Mary is left alone and experiences 'a hideous, stupefying din, that nearly split one's eardrums'.

The wedding ride in *Australia Felix* is counterpointed by an agonising buggy ride at Barambogie. The difference is that Mahony, through his own recklessness, loses control of himself and the horse, 'taking as good as no pains to avoid the foot-deep cast-iron ruts, the lumpy rocks and stones'. Mary remembers the wedding journey 'beside someone who was little more than a stranger to her, behind a strange horse on an unknown road'. The description of Mahony thrashing his 'old spiritless and stubborn' horse in this context is at once harrowingly realistic, symptomatic of his loss of control at the moment, and obviously symbolic of the urgent self-destructive (yet, from Mahony's point of view, ultimately liberating) conflict between his material body, represented by the worn out horse, and his 'spiritual' self. His own reckless efforts to escape material confinement and responsibility serve to aggravate his physical condition. The expressive quality of the narrative as realism heightens our perception of the general conflict the incident symbolises:

Enraged at his powerlessness he let the horse taste the whip; but the relief the quickened speed afforded him was over almost as soon as begun, and once more they ambled at a funeral pace. Damnation take the brute! Was he, because of it, to sit for ever on this hard, narrow seat, chasing incoherencies round an empty brain? ... to drive for all eternity along these intolerable roads? ... through this accursed bush, where the very trees grimaced at you in distorted attitudes, like stage ranters declaiming an exaggerated passion — or pointed at you with the obscene gestures of the insane... obscene, because so wholly without significance. — And again he snatched up the whip.

But the prolonged inaction was doing its work: a sense of unreality began to invade him, his surroundings to take on the blurred edges of a dream... one of those nightmare-dreams in which the dreamer knows that he is bound to reach a certain place in a given time, yet whose legs are weighed down by invisible weights... or which feel as if they are being dragged through water, tons of impending water... or yet again the legs of elephantiasis... swollen, monstrous, heavy as lead: all
this, while time, the previous time that remains before the event, is flying. Yes somewhere ... far away, out in the world ... life and time were rushing by: he could hear the rhythm of their passing in the beat of his blood. He alone lay stranded — incapable of movement. And, as always at the thought of his lost freedom madness seized him: dead to everything but his own need, he rose in his seat and began to rain down blows on the horse: to beat it mercilessly, hitting out wherever the lash found place — on head, neck, ears, the forelegs, the quivering undersides. In vain the wretched creature struggled to break free, to evade the cut of the thong: it backed, tried to rear, dragged itself from side to side, ducked its defenceless head, the white foam flying. But for it too, strapped down, buckled in, there was no chance of escape. And the blows fell... and fell.

Mahony’s achievement of great material prosperity at a point exactly half-way through the trilogy coincides precisely with his discovery that he will never in ordinary life find the ‘gold’ and ‘home’ he seeks. The coincidence is imaged in a brief episode in which he is sitting in a crowded, horse-drawn omnibus reflecting on his good fortune:

The vehicle ... started with a lunge that sent the two rows of passengers toppling like ninepins one against another. Mahony alone raised his voice in apology: he had lain on the shoulder of the fat woman. The man on her farther side angrily bade her take her danged feathers out of his eye. The greater number recovered their balance by thrusting forth an elbow and lodging it firmly in a neighbour’s rib.

Even in his present holiday mood this promiscuity was too much for Mahony. He regretted not having accepted Devine’s offer of a buggy; and half-way to his destination dismounted: and covered the rest of the distance on foot.

This was better. In the outlying district where he found himself no traffic moved ... He met no one, could think in peace, and over a knotty point he stopped short and dug with his stick in the mud.

The details are drawn together into a pattern symbolic of Mahony’s voluntary withdrawal from society and material responsibility. And it is on this omnibus journey as an actual trip that he decides to retire and live on his dividends. (‘The idea that had flashed through his mind in the omnibus was: “why go back into harness at all”’): the
idiom is part of the sustained metaphor. It is a measure of his declin­
ing fortunes that at Hawthorn and Barambogie he feels he cannot
afford to keep a horse and buggy, and performs his rounds on foot.
He is cogitating on this as he walks hatless in the sun at Barambogie
when a small buggy ‘in which three people... sat squeezed together
on a seat built for two’ drives up. Two gossipy women ridicule the
desperately sun struck Mahony, but the more generous buggy driver
offers the ride that is urgently needed, and once again Richard
voluntarily declines in order to avoid crowding. The episode symbolis­
ing Mahony’s previous voluntary withdrawal is explicitly invoked
several pages later in a symbolic dream in which his former situation
is ironically reversed:

It had to do with a buggy, a giant buggy, full of people; and inverting
the day on which it was modelled, he now longed with all his heart to
be among them. For it seemed to him that if he could succeed in getting
into this buggy he would hear something — some message or tidings —
which it was important for him to know. But though he tried and tried
again, he could not manage to swing himself up, either his foot missed
the step, or the people, who sat laughing and grimacing at him, pushed
him off. Finally he fell and lay in the dust, which, filling eyes, nose,
mouth, blinded and asphyxiated him.

In the nightmare world of Mahony’s mind society is actively
malicious, vindictive and destructive. His view is qualified through
the previous episode, in which he is offered assistance. The real world,
as the author shows it, is unpleasant, crude and ignorant, but it is
capable of generosity and concern: Richard refuses the help he is
offered, but he is becoming incapable of survival without help.

The horse imagery spreads to define a relationship between Mahony
and his son Cuffy. The child plays at being a horse, ‘capering up and
down the verandah, stamping, tossing his head’, and his unfulfilled
ambition is to own a pony. One of his earliest experiences, narrated in
a tone of ironical amusement, is his administering of an uncontrolled
thrashing to his favourite toy, a rocking horse, ‘with such force that
the patient effigy swung violently to and fro’. Mahony perceives that
the child has done greater injury to his own hands and cajoles his son
into self-control and generosity until Cuffy eventually rams a lump of
sugar ‘between the steed’s blood red jaws’. Two hundred pages later
the roles are reversed, in the harrowing episode previously discussed that depicts Mahony’s uncontrolled lashing of his horse. The chapter concludes with Cuffy remembering a sugar biscuit which he had brought as a present for the horse:

Everybody else had forgotten: the horse, too, it was in a great hurry to get back to its stable. He didn’t like to be the only one to remember, to make it look as if he was still sorry. So having feebly fingered the biscuit—the sugary top had melted and stuck to his pocket—he ate it up himself.

Cuffy’s experience frequently provides in this way a startling reminder of the proper order of things, a forgotten happiness or normality, but his responses objectify at the same time the bewilderment Richardson feels at the disintegration which Ultima Thule is demonstrating.

What is achieved in this last volume through the portrait of Cuffy is a poignant, bitter-sweet tension in the reader’s response. The dramatic effect of his idyllic curiosity and more joyous experience, to which images of wildflowers, honey and sugar contribute, is undercut repeatedly by omens of suffering of which he is unaware. The reverberations of the horse-feeding scene, and of another in which he plays among wildflowers and wattles and gazes at a fly-ridden body of a donkey in a well, at the same time losing his hat, are caught up many times, and expanded:

Of course you wouldn’t carry Dobbin to the shop; but my! it did hurt to think of anybody else sitting on the saddle, or using the scales. He took a pencil and wrote ‘My horse’ in big letters under Dobbin’s stomach, and cut a bunch of hairs out of his tail as a keepsake. And then, as God still didn’t do anything, he stole something; took away a little bag of sugar and a tiny wee tin of biscuits out of the shop, and hid them; and when he told Luce, she did too, and took a little sofa from the doll’s drawing room.

6 This connection, together with others I have not discussed, has been pointed out by A. K. Thomson, ‘Henry Handel Richardson’s The Fortunes of Richard Mahony’, Meanjin Quarterly XXVI, 4 (1968), pp. 423–34. See also Elizabeth Loder, ‘The Fortunes of Richard Mahony: Dream and Nightmare’, Southerly XXV (1965), pp. 251–63.
The Fortunes of Richard Mahony

The culmination comes as Cuffy surveys the corpse of his father, with flies walking along it, notices a 'secret’ mole, and offers a clandestine gift of wildflowers. The sentiment in this last scene is controlled, and countered by traces of bizarre realism and by the child’s purely egocentric feeling of relief at Mahony’s death.

It is primarily through Mahony’s change of role with Cuffy, and the associated interplay of imagery, that the contradictory, bitter-sweet quality essential to the meaning of *Ultima Thule* is expressed. After his final collapse (for example) Richard is moved to a private hospital, significantly at Toorak, pinnacle of the Melbourne *beau monde*, ‘standing in its own beautiful grounds [among] shrubberies and summer houses, a croquet lawn, a bowling green, fruit and flower gardens’. Ironically these are the details of an actual setting and, of course, they signify Mahony’s dream, but the ‘shrubberies and summer houses’ and ‘fruit and flower gardens’ introduce a triple significance since they are the images of Cuffy’s world. The passage continues (pp. 792-3), working on these links, conscientiously extracting irony and pathos from the reversal of roles both with Mary and with Cuffy, expressing through the details of Richard’s childish behaviour both the pity and the sweetness of his release from adult responsibility.

Thus the transition earlier in *Ultima Thule* to the child as a centre of consciousness is not really as surprising or unplanned as some readers have found; and it accords with a logic introduced and sustained in the first two volumes in which childhood and age are integrated with the spirit-matter theme. Cuffy’s mind is a means to explore more fully both the nature of madness and the nature of childhood, and to correlate one with the other. The loose and fragmented imagistic quality of the prose that explores his experience implies ominous affinities between his world and the world of childishness and innocence into which Mahony is escaping. His mind is a vehicle for impressions that are essential to the reader’s interpretation of Mahony and which could not be registered through any other character:

Then he thought he saw a monkey in a wood, and was trying to catch it, when somebody shouted like anything; and first it was Maria on the verandah, and then Aunt Zara in the passage, and she called out: ‘It’s


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all right, Mary! They've got him ... he's coming!' And then Mama came running out and cried again, and kept on saying: 'I must be brave ... I must be brave'. And then one's heart almost jumped itself dead, for there was Papa, and he couldn't walk, and the police were holding him up, and he had no hat on, and was wet, the water all running out of him, and so muddy, the mud sticking all over his greatcoat and in his face and hair — just like the picture of Tomfool in the 'King of Lear.'

Cuffy's mind is, as Vincent Buckley has suggested, an objective means to stave off sentimentality, but it is no more 'an elaborate fictional device', as he terms it, than is Mary's or Richard's mind. Nor is Cuffy introduced, as Nettie Palmer believes, simply to relieve what would otherwise appear as an intolerable catalogue of misery. Cuffy's world is largely his apprehension of Mahony's condition, and many of the symptoms of illness are perceived through his uncomprehending mind. He experiences annoyance, boredom and disgust towards his father. The indifference of unknowing people is for the reader a major source of the poignancy. The details of the child's behaviour sometimes suggest a weird parody of his father. He is shown, for example, as 'the doctor, bowing graciously to imaginary patients'. When Mahony loses self-control and involuntarily kicks Mary in the leg, Cuffy in a grotesque imitation thereupon kicks a goat tied to a stake in the backyard: as if to underline (rather than to relieve) the horror of Mahony's condition.

Although Cuffy's sensibility provides a means to avoid a sentimental apprehension of Mahony's symptoms and suffering, and is revealed sufficiently comprehensively (through emphases on the child's ill temper, traumas and guilt feelings) to avoid cherubic Victorian stereotypes, it performs as well a conciliatory and positive function within the tragedy as its most optimistic concession to hope and stability. Richardson wrote to an Australian reviewer in 1931:

... I did not aim at writing a typically Australian work. Richard Mahony's tragedy might have taken place anywhere; for the seeds of his misfortunes were in himself.

But one thing I should like to point out, and that is, that my younger generation, in Cuffy, showed every sign of acclimatisation. He loved the country... 8

In the novel Cuffy is at least geographically acclimatised. He inherits some of the practical and ‘Australian’ qualities of Mary, the idealism and sensitivity of Richard, and an imagination that is individual. Richardson’s sombre and critical study of Australian society virtually requires the reader to feel that the survival of what Cuffy represents is at least as important as the survival of the colony’s values. She is no doubt implying, in the scene in which the visiting Baron von Krause shows approval of the child’s musical aptitude, that Cuffy’s is an ‘artist’s sensibility’. But there is no insistence on any theory of artist’s privilege and only minor emphasis on the possible relationship of experience to the creative process. It is through the quality of the prose which explores Cuffy’s ‘universal’ childhood experience that Richardson implicitly establishes some fairly orthodox values pertinent to the trilogy’s ‘tragic’ scheme. Indeed, he is in many respects a kind of chorus whose various conflicting responses provide no single answer but together objectify a mystery, and a range of possibilities, that neither Mahony nor Mary and the colony can articulate.

The most certain threat to our confidence in Richardson is the notorious unevenness of her writing within a single paragraph. Delicately ironical phrases are thrown amongst banalities; precise, expressive detail is strangled by dogged elaboration; cliché carries penetrating insight. But it is crucial in assessing the maturity of the book to distinguish between her unintentionally damaging novelese and the dramatically functional ‘banality’ that helps to project the characters of Richard and Mary. It is not a question of whether the sentimental or mundane idiom either represents the sensibility of one of the characters or reflects an authorial inadequacy (though I think that is how commentators who have discussed these issues have defined the problem): for particular contexts each argument (or sometimes both) is right.

The lasting impression of Mary as a young woman is of her cloying domesticity and sentimentality and her limited notions of ‘lady-like behaviour’. She is the ‘little woman’, mending ‘little shirts’, weeping over ‘poor poor little Agnes! That such a misfortune should befall her’. Mahony’s attitudes to her are patronising and tolerant, but the reader is given the opportunity to indulge a less charitable response. Her practical virtues are treated as secondary because the prose more emphatically brings out her limitations: ‘There were the
children... Well, Polly’s first plan had been to put them straight to bed. But when she came to peel off their little trousers she changed her mind.’ The undercurrents of banality that permeate her ‘thinking’ necessarily make a stronger rhetorical claim on the reader than the acts and decisions which demonstrate her common sense and generosity. Nor is her sentimental idiom necessarily tedious: tedium is frequently avoided or relieved by a controlling irony. But even when we can justifiably level an imitative fallacy argument against the prose, as in the ridiculous scene of Mahony’s proposal of marriage, we are necessarily acknowledging a dramatic quality which is at least sufficient not to undermine our confidence in the author’s intelligence, though it is inadequate to relieve completely the absurdity of her character’s idioms.

The dramatic method creates problems that Richardson does not consistently resolve. She fluctuates awkwardly from superior irony clearly directed against Mary or Mahony, or controlled ambivalence and contextual irony, into dull ‘neutral’ dramatic exposition and flaccid ambiguity which leaves the reader uncertain whether disapproval might be possible, since there is no directing clue within or surrounding the context. Critics have shown their awareness of this lack of control but it is the presence elsewhere of an ironic and comic intelligence informing the narrative, in the texture of the writing as well as behind its larger construction, that adds a pressure and vitality to the writing.

Our satisfaction is most marked where the ironical comment stated or implied is crisp, precise and certain in its application. When for example a busy and lady-like Mary is flustered by her sister-in-law’s advice that she should be careful of Purdy’s increasing attentions, Richardson writes, in one paragraph: ‘But Mary left the house in a sad flurry; and even forgot for a street length to open her parasol.’ In an otherwise flat section one appreciates this quiet pungency. After a detailed description of the long awaited grand new house at Ballarat, which ‘stood not far from the Great Swamp’, Richardson comically though with a straight face summarises the aspirations of her characters with the epigram ‘Mahony dreamed of a garden, Polly of keeping hens’. And when to Mahony’s relief Zara Turnham leaves for England, Mary’s response is concisely stated: ‘Polly cried at the parting, which might be final; then blew her nose and dried her eyes, for she had a busy day before her.’
The Fortunes of Richard Mahony

Quietly interspersed narrative remarks help to place the absurdity of much of the dialogue. The comic element is reasonably well controlled for example in the episode in which Mahony hears of Purdy’s ‘improper attentions’ to Mary. The episode contains a mixture of irony and sombre realism, marking the end of Richard’s intimate friendship with Purdy and the beginning of his quarrels with Mary, but the melodramatic quality of the scene is humorously (if rather too heavily) stressed to point up Mahony’s ludicrous and pompous self-concern and hypocritical egotism:

Richard was stamping about the room, aimlessly moving things from their places. ‘God Almighty! he shall answer to me for this. I’ll go back and take a horsewhip with me.’

‘For my sake, don’t have a scene with him. It would only make matters worse’, she pleaded.

But Richard strode up and down, treading needlessly on the flouncings of her dress. ‘What? — and let him believe such behaviour can go unpunished? That whenever it pleases him, he can insult my wife — insult my wife? Make her the talk of the place? Brand her before the whole town as a light woman?’

‘Oh, not the whole town, Richard. I shall have to explain to Amelia ... and Tilly ... and Agnes — that’s all,’ sobbed Mary in parenthesis.

‘Yes, and I ask if its a dignified or decent thing for you to have to do? — to go running round assuring your friends of your virtue!’ cried Richard furiously. ‘Let me tell you this, my dear: at whatever door you knock, you’ll be met by disbelief. Fate played you a shabby trick when it allowed just that low cad to put his head in’.

The incongruous observations (‘treading needlessly on the flouncings of her dress’, ‘sobbed in parenthesis’ and Mary’s ‘Oh, not the whole town’) are of course selected by the narrator as ironist, and help to control our response.

Several vignettes of Victorian society (the following passage describes Mary’s Ballarat party) are enlivened by a light comic irony which places surface details and the manners of the period in an acceptably detached critical perspective, without depriving the narrative of flair and energy, and compassionate delight:

And now knock succeeded knock with the briefest of intervals the noise carrying far into the quiet street. Mysteriously bunched-up figures, their
heads veiled in the fleeciest of clouds, were piloted along the passage; and:

'I hope we are not the first!' was murmured by each newcomer in turn. The gentlemen went to change their boots on the back verandah; the ladies to lay off their wraps in Mary's bedroom. And soon this room was filled to overflowing with the large soft abundance of crinoline; hoops swaying from side to side as the guests gave place to one another before the looking-glass, where bands of hair were smoothed and the catches of bracelets snapped. Music cases lay strewn over the counterpane, the husbands who lined up in the passage, to wait for their wives, also bearing rolls of music. Mary... was caught, as she passed Mrs. Henry Ocock, a modishly late arrival, by that lady's plump white hand, and a whispered request to be allowed to retain her mantle. 'Henry was really against my coming dearest. So anxious... so absurdly anxious'.

It is clear, in Australia Felix and The Way Home, that within the decorum of a rather starchily mannered style Richardson is continually drawing, more and less successfully from section to section, on a variety of resources and styles of fiction, including Flaubertian realism, flat naturalism, comic irony, 'heroic' narrative and symphonic orchestration. Our varying responses to the minor characters are a measure of the changing quality of the writing. Figures such as John Turnham, Glendinning, Tangye, Mrs Marriner and the Bishop in Ultima Thule are memorable creations because they are absorbed within the narration of significant, imaginative episodes. But when Mahony at Brighton says 'Take, for example, the case of Louisa Urquhart', the reader may be excused for wanting to decline: she becomes another gratuitous addendum to the long list of house guests whose visits have to be 'demonstrated'. The restless males are of the same order. Richardson's failure to find a structure and language that harness her creative energy draws attention to these figures as individuals, and hence to their insufficiency as characters.

The change in the quality and tone of the writing in Ultima Thule is not immediately felt, but there is little doubt after the first ten chapters that the narrative impulse is quickened by the subject of Mahony's decline. We are introduced in Chapter 8 to heavily charged at times almost surrealistic prose which continues with some lapses to the novel's end. (The unevenness and verbiage is found pre-
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dominantly though not solely in sections in which the focus shifts from Mahony.) The weirdly evocative penetrative narration of meaningful incident in this volume relies particularly on an expressive use of sound, and of noise imagery. In Chapter 8, 'the pestilential screech of the millwhistle', 'birdlike sounds', 'Cuffy's shrill sweet trebles', Mary's 'magisterial tones', 'small feet scampering', Maria 'thudding up and down clattering her brooms', 'the children's jabber', and 'Miss Prestwick's mincing airs' are recorded in fairly quick succession, and take their part in the rhythm and pattern of Richard's experience. Such sounds and images begin to strike on the reader, as it were, with a strange sensuousness and with increasing intensity as the beginnings of vibrations of madness: 'footsteps... heard a long way off, crunching the gravel by the path of the lagoon' and 'Cuffy's voice proclaiming loudly and unnaturally: 'Je suis urn petty garcong, de bun figoor' continue the pulsation. The ticking of clocks and the blast of the millwhistle are an expressionistic measure of the passage of time, and the millwhistle is a terrifying symbol of release. Probably this kind of appeal to the auditory imagination came rather naturally to Richardson, who was a pianist, and had previously dabbled in musical composition.

Though it would be wrong to suggest that she extricates herself entirely from novelese, it is difficult to agree with critics who find that the novel drags in this last section. The action of the novel is internal, the narrative of mental decline; but in fact the pace accelerates. There is now in each chapter an intensification both of Mahony's symptoms and of the atmosphere of strangeness and terror; and a reading of successive chapters indicates Richardson's skill in measuring out the gradations of deterioration. She is able to place an accurate weight and pressure within each episode, so that the decline is both rapid and prolonged.

The alternations of point of view among Richard, Cuffy and Mary make obvious, on the return to Mahony, the stages of the process, and the extent of deterioration. It is the actual pace of the narrative which harrows the reader and makes the tension intolerable: for Richardson seems to draw on new stores of talent, finds further issues to explore, aspects of suffering to demonstrate in new forms, just when one feels that a climax is inevitable. The sense of inevitability to which readers attest is brought about not so much by insight into character as fate, or into clinical determinism, as by a literary skill in

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continually frustrating the reader of the expected — ominously antici­pated — climax to Richard’s suffering. It is a responsible use of suspense.

We have to conclude that the Mahony trilogy achieves its imaginative and distinctive quality through a complex of pressures working together. It is patterned realism, in which both tone and quality fluctuate; if it falls short of the greatness of the Continental masterpieces, we should not infer therefore that the achievement is slight or moderate, or unfit to be classified in their tradition. Though Richardson’s reputation has withstood critical challenge in Australia, her works have received appraisals that tend to exaggerate the significance (or damage) of one particular attribute. Internationally, The Fortunes of Richard Mahony flared for a short while like fuel without a wick but is now virtually unknown, except to visiting professors who read up on the local product. Richardson was aware of the consequences of exaggerated praise, ‘those puffs, those rather unfortunate generalizations, that are only too apt to recoil on the author’s innocent head’.9 Outside Australia, they have.

Her Privates We

an aesthete goes to war

J. M. Douglas Pringle

Because so few Australians today have heard of Frederic Manning or have read his novel *Her Privates We*, there is some danger of exaggerating its obscurity. In fact it was immediately recognised by English critics on its first, shy, anonymous appearance in 1929 under the title of *The Middle Parts of Fortune by Private 19022*, as one of the best books about World War I, to be compared only with such masterpieces as Robert Graves’s *Goodbye to All That*, Siegfried Sassoon’s *Memoirs of a Fox-hunting Man* and Edmund Blunden’s *Undertones of War*, all of which had already been published. In January 1930 a new edition appeared as *Her Privates We*, still by Private 19022, and was reprinted several times before it was republished under Frederic Manning’s name by Peter Davies in 1943. By then Frederic Manning was dead but his authorship of the book had long been recognised. It was particularly admired by such different writers as Arnold Bennett, E. M. Forster and T. E. Lawrence.

It is true that *Her Privates We* was largely ignored at the time in Australia even though its author was an Australian. It is not difficult to guess why. Frederic Manning had become an expatriate. Australians, who are always so quick to claim any writer or artist as

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1 Previously published in the author’s *On Second Thoughts: Australian essays* (Sydney, Angus and Robertson, 1971).

2 Both these titles, *The Middle Parts of Fortune*, and *Her Privates We*, are taken from the same passage of *Hamlet*:

Guildenstern: On fortune’s cap we are not the very button...

Hamlet: Then you live about her waist, or in the middle of her favours?

Guildenstern: Faith, her privates, we.

In my own opinion neither title is altogether happy. Both smack of literary cleverness and the pun in *Her Privates We* is wasted on all but Shakespearean scholars.

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Australian even if he (or she) was born in another country, are equally quick to disown any Australian-born writer who has the temerity to leave Australia. Frederic Manning, who had left the country in 1896 at the age of fifteen in order to be educated in England, was struck off the list of Australian writers even though he never disowned his national origins. His family remained in Australia where his brother, Sir Henry Manning, became Attorney-General of New South Wales, but Frederic's name is dismissed in one line in H. M. Green's *A History of Australian Literature*, even though that useful work contains some writers of staggering insignificance. Perhaps it might have been different if Frederic Manning had enlisted in an Australian regiment when war broke out and had written his novel about the Australians at Gallipoli or in Palestine. As it was, he enlisted as a private in the King's Shropshire Light Infantry, and *Her Privates We* is very largely a portrait of the ordinary Englishman at war. But, as I shall try to show later, there is still a good deal that is recognisably Australian in this novel, and it is surely scandalous that it should have been neglected so long in Frederic Manning's native land.

There is, however, a more formidable difficulty in bringing this fine novel to the attention of the present generation of Australians. The young today have come to assume that a great book about war must necessarily be a book against war. Their model is that splendid satire *Catch-22* (about which I shall have more to say later) or Norman Mailer's *The Naked and the Dead*. They can hardly conceive that right up to 1914 sensitive and intelligent men like Péguy were still praising war as the noblest human experience. That attitude could not long survive the grim reality of trench warfare, though there are still traces of it in Montherlant's youthful novel *The Dream*. Most of the best books about World War I were fiercely and rightly critical of the appalling waste of human lives and the obstinate stupidity of the political and military leaders on both sides. One thinks, in particular, of Remarque's *All Quiet on the Western Front* and Zweig's *The Case of Sergeant Grischka*. *Her Privates We* is not one of these. It is neither a justification — though E. M. Forster thought it was — nor a condemnation of war. It is an acceptance of war as an inevitable part of human experience, an extreme and heightened form of the reality which surrounds us. Manning is not interested in war as a political act but as a crucible in which men are tested. To many people this attitude will now appear inadequate — though it has yet to be proved
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that Manning is wrong—but it should not be allowed to affect one’s judgment of his novel as a work of art. As Manning wrote in the Preface to the novel:

War is waged by men; not by beasts, or by gods. It is a peculiarly human activity. To call it a crime against mankind is to miss at least half its significance; it is also the punishment of a crime. That raises a moral question, the kind of problem with which the present age is disinclined to deal. Perhaps some future attempt to provide a solution for it may prove to be even more astonishing that the last.

Since Her Privates We is plainly an autobiographical novel, it may be as well to begin with a few words about the author. Frederic Manning was born in Sydney in 1882, the fourth son of Sir William Patrick Manning. Throughout his life Frederic suffered from ill health—caused chiefly by asthma—and except for six months at Sydney Grammar he was unable to go to school. At the age of fourteen he went to London with Arthur Galton, formerly private secretary to Sir Robert Duff, Governor of New South Wales, and lived with him for some years. It was Galton, a scholarly if slightly eccentric man with a wide knowledge of literature, who introduced him to books and writing.

When he grew up Manning determined to become a writer himself and soon won a modest reputation as a critic, essayist and poet. His first book of poetry, The Vigil of Brunhild, was published in 1907. In the same year he began reviewing books for the Spectator and from 1909 to 1914 he was that paper’s principal reviewer. In 1909 he also published his first prose work, Scenes and Portraits, which consists of imaginary stories and conversations between historical characters. This book was highly praised by Bonamy Dobrée, Max Beerbohm and E. M. Forster, and won him the passionate admiration and, later, the friendship of T. E. Lawrence. For all its elegance and wit, it now seems precious and artificial, and the prose, consciously based on Pater, somewhat cloying. For our purpose, however, it is important as showing Manning’s early preoccupation with the personal, social and political efforts of man to reconcile himself to suffering and death, which is the main theme of Her Privates We. In these essays he also reveals his religious attitude which he defined in the Preface as follows:
There are in reality only two religions on this little planet and they perhaps begin and end with man. They are: the religion of the humble folk, whose life is a daily communion with the natural forces and a bending to them; and the religion of men like Protagoras, Lucretius and Montaigne, a religion of doubt, of tolerance and agnosticism. Between these two poles is nothing but a dreary waste of formalism.

Manning had a deep respect for the vital religion of 'humble folk' but despised formal Christianity. Many years later, in a letter to Sir William Rothenstein, he said that if he had been an orthodox Christian, the war would have shattered his belief, but for him Christianity 'is a merely formal symbol'.

During those pre-war years Manning seems to have been a rather precious young man, highly intelligent and sensitive, but barred by his delicate health and a certain over-fastidious refinement from any share of common humanity. Peter Davies, his friend and publisher, who later persuaded him to write *Her Privates We*, remembered him as 'An intellectual of intellectuals — poet, classical scholar, and author of the exquisite "Scenes and Portraits" — delicate in health and fastidious almost to the point of foppishness'. The outbreak of war in 1914 changed his life utterly as it changed the lives of millions of others. In spite of his ill health he felt it his duty to enlist as a private in the ranks of an English County Regiment, the King's Shropshire Light Infantry, refusing a commission on the ground that he had little knowledge of men. He joined his regiment in 1915 and served on the Somme and Ancre fronts in the dreadful year of 1916.

Manning survived the war and, immediately after, returned to his chosen life as a writer and scholar. He enjoyed the friendship of distinguished men like Laurence Binyon, T. S. Eliot, Richard Aldington and T. E. Lawrence, but seems to have lived a rather lonely, secretive life. He never married. He was often too ill to work. However the great experience of war was still fermenting in his mind and eventually Peter Davies persuaded him to write it down. The result was *Her Privates We*, a complete break with everything he had done before. He did not long survive its publication but died of pneumonia in 1935. T. E. Lawrence (then Aircraftsman Shaw in the Royal Air Force) was on his way to see him when he heard the news. T. S. Eliot was the only writer present at his funeral.

*Her Privates We* is plainly autobiographical. It describes the ex-
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periences of Private Bourne, a soldier in the ‘Westshires’ on the Somme and Ancre fronts, with an interval behind the lines, during the latter half of 1916. Private Bourne, if not Manning himself, is at least a projection of Manning, and, though he insisted that the other characters are fictitious, he added: ‘It is true that in recording the conversations of the men I seemed at times to hear the voices of ghosts.’ It is perhaps worth noting that once a pardonable slip reveals the autobiographical nature of the novel: on page 66 he wrote that the mare who pulled the mess cart and (without official permission) the Lewis gun cart for which Bourne was responsible, ‘bore no malice, the old lady, as though she knew we had a pretty thin time’.

One of the reasons why Her Privates We is so successful is that by making Bourne a man like himself Manning was able, quite naturally, to make his philosophic comments on war and the nature of man without interrupting the drive of the narrative. The construction of the novel is both simple and admirable. When the book begins Bourne’s battalion is just being withdrawn from the front line after an attack which has shattered it. The survivors go back behind the lines to rest and reform — and to prepare for the next offensive which each man fears will mean his death. Each finds in drink or women or routine tasks the antidote he needs for his overstrung nerves. Yet hardly have they achieved some normality when they must again go through the slow, deliberate process of screwing their courage to the sticking point. For Bourne the next offensive is the last and the book ends with Sergeant Tozer musing beside his hideous corpse in the trench:

It was finished. He was sorry about Bourne, he thought, more sorry than he could say. He was a queer chap, he said to himself, as he fled for the dug-out steps. There was a bit of mystery about him; but then, when you came to think of it, there’s a bit of mystery about all of us. He pushed aside the blanket screening the entrance, and in the murky light he saw all the men lift their faces, and look at him with patient, almost animal eyes. (p. 274)

From the beginning the style is direct and vigorous, and the fourth sentence contains a slang phrase, ‘beaten to the wide’, which must

3 Her Privates We (London, Peter Davies, 1964). All page references are to this edition.
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have come as a shock to those who knew only the elegant, affected prose of Manning's pre-war books. Throughout the narrative and descriptions of action the sentences are kept short, terse and colloquial. It is only when Bourne reflects on what is happening around him that Manning permits himself that more elaborate style which T. E. Lawrence — and apparently only Lawrence — immediately recognised as marking the author of Scenes and Portraits.

Some of the descriptions of the front are as good as anything ever written about war. Take, for example, this account of men waiting in the trenches for the barrage to lift before an attack:

The drumming of the guns continued, with bursts of great intensity. It was as though a gale streamed overhead, piling up great waves of sound, and hurrying them onward to crash in surf on the enemy entrenchments. The windless air about them, by its very stillness, made that unearthly music more terrible to hear. They cowered under it, as men seeking shelter from a storm. Something rushed downward on them with a scream of exultation, increasing to a roar before it blasted the air asunder and sent splinters of steel shrieking over their heads, an eruption of mud spattering down on the trench, and splashing in brimming shell-holes. The pressure among the men increased. Someone shouldering a way through caused them to surge together, cursing, as they were thrown off their balance to stumble against their neighbours.

'For Christ's sake walk on your own bloody feet an' not on mine!' came from some angry man, and a ripple of idiot mirth spread outwards from the centre of the disturbance. Bourne got a drink of tea, and though it was no more than warm, it did him good; at least, it washed away the gummy dryness of his mouth. He was shivering, and told himself it was the cold. Through the darkness the dripping mist moved slowly, touching them with spectral fingers as it passed. Everything was clammy with it. It condensed on their tin hats, clung to their rough serge, their eye-lashes, the down on their cheek-bones. Even though it blinded everything beyond the distance of a couple of yards, it seemed to be faintly luminous itself. Its damp coldness enhanced the sense of smell. There was a reek of mouldering rottenness in the air, and through it came the sour, stale odour from the foul clothes of the men. Shells streamed overhead, sighing, whining, and whimpering for blood; the upper air fluttered with them; but Fritz was not going to take it all quietly, and with its increasing roar another shell leaped toward them,
and they cowered under the wrath. There was the enormous grunt of its eruption, the sweeping of harp-strings, and part of the trench wall collapsed inwards, burying some men in the landslide. It was difficult to get them out in the crowded conditions of the trench.

Bourne's fit of shakiness increased, until he set his teeth to prevent them chattering in his head; and after a deep, gasping breath, almost like a sob, he seemed to recover to some extent. Fear poisoned the very blood; but, when one recognised the symptoms, it became objective, and one seemed to escape partly from it that way. He heard men breathing irregularly beside him, as he breathed himself; he heard them licking their lips, trying to moisten their mouths; he heard them swallow, as though overcoming a difficulty in swallowing; and the sense that others suffered equally or more than himself, quietened him. Some men moaned, or even sobbed a little, but unconsciously, and as though they struggled to throw off an intolerable burden of oppression. His eyes met Shem's and they both turned away at once from the dread and question which confronted them... (pp. 234-5)

This was the setting in which hundreds of thousands, even millions of men, lived and struggled and died during those years. This was the reality they all confronted. Yet Manning's interest was not so much in the reality but in how men — ordinary men without his advantages of education and knowledge — faced this reality. *Her Privates We* is above all a study of ordinary men in extraordinary conditions. The whole book is seen from the point of view of the private soldier. The officers are sketched in only briefly and then as if from a distance. Bourne, like Manning himself, at first refuses a commission, and is only reluctantly persuaded to put in for one at the end of the book. Even then he is haunted by feelings of guilt as though he were betraying his comrades.

Yet Manning is never sentimental about these men. He looks at them coolly as if they were another race whom he envies and admires but does not quite understand.

The simplicity of their outlook on life gave them a certain dignity, because it was free from irrelevances. Certainly they had all the appetites of men, and, in the aggregate, probably embodied most of the vices to which flesh is prone; but they were not preoccupied with their vices and appetites, they could master them with rather a splendid
indifference; and even sensuality has its aspect of tenderness. These apparently rude and brutal natures comforted, encouraged, and reconciled each other to fate, with a tenderness and tact which was more moving than anything in life. They had nothing; not even their own bodies, which had become mere implements of warfare. They turned from the wreckage and misery of life to an empty heaven, and from an empty heaven to the silence of their own hearts. They had been brought to the last extremity of hope, and yet they put their hands on each other’s shoulders and said with passionate conviction that it would be all right, though they had faith in nothing, but in themselves and in each other. (p. 228)

In *Her Privates We* Manning — or Bourne, for no distinction is possible — continually tries to discover how such men can face extremes of suffering and the constant threat of death without breaking. One of the few officers in the book says to Bourne while sitting together in a dug-out:

...you and I are two of the lucky ones, Bourne; we've come through without a scratch; and if our luck holds we'll keep moving out of one bloody misery into another, until we break, see, until we break. (p. 4)

But they don’t break.

If a man could not be certain of himself, he could be certain of nothing. The problem which confronted them all equally, though some were unable or unwilling to define it, did not concern death so much as the affirmation of their own will in the face of death; and once the nature of the problem was clearly stated, they realized that its solution was continuous, and could never be final. Death set a limit to the continuance of one factor in the problem, and peace to that of another; but neither of them really affected the nature of the problem itself. (p. 203)

Of course some men did break. One of the most moving incidents in the book is the appearance of the deserter, Miller, who runs away before an offensive. He is arrested in Rouen and brought back to the battalion. Manning’s treatment of this man and how he is regarded by his comrades seems to me both just and psychologically accurate:
They were bitter and summary in their judgment on him. The fact that he had deserted his commanding-officer, which would be the phrase used to describe his offence on the charge sheet, was as nothing compared to the fact that he had deserted them. They were to go through it while he saved his skin. It was about as bad as could be, and if one were to ask any man who had been through that spell of fighting what ought to be done in the case of Miller, there could only have been one answer. Shoot the beggar. But if that same man were detailed as one of the firing-party, his feelings would be modified considerably. (p. 89)

Later Miller is paraded before the regiment and his sentence read out.

He was white and haggard, but his mouth was half-open in an idiotic grin, and the small, furtive eyes wandered restlessly along the line of men drawn up in front of him. Bourne felt a strange emotion rising in him which was not pity but a revulsion from this degradation of a man, who was now only an abject outcast. (p. 185)

I would not wish to suggest that *Her Privates We* is faultless. Manning's strength lay in description and philosophical analysis. He was not naturally endowed with a gift for creating character or for dialogue. I confess that I find much of the dialogue false and unconvincing. Here, of course, some caution is necessary. It is extremely difficult, writing in 1971, to be sure exactly how either officers or men spoke in 1916. Manning makes most of the men talk in a kind of simple dialect which, I suppose, is meant to represent the speech of the men in the King's Shropshire Light Infantry. I was at school at Shrewsbury and, while I do not pretend to be an expert, I do not recognise their speech as particularly characteristic. (Again one must be careful. In the first as well as the second world wars territorial recruiting soon broke down. Manning makes it clear that the West-shirts included miners from the Midlands as well as countrymen from Shropshire. In the second world war my own battalion of the King's Own Scottish Borderers, had many miners from Durham — and very good soldiers they were.) He is equally open to criticism when he ventures to put speech into the mouths of Scots soldiers from the Gordon's. Would a Highlander then — or now — have said:
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‘Gude day t’ ye, an’ gude luck, chums’? (p. 190). But even Bourne himself, who should have been easier for Manning, often sounds false. Would he really have spoken to his fellow soldiers like the following passages?

‘Don’t let us go back to kip yet, sergeant,’ said Bourne when the other returned. ‘Let us go a little way behind the huts, and sit down, and smoke and talk. It is such a ripping night. Look at that slag-heap over there, cutting the sky-line like the Rock of Gibraltar. There’s another towards Sains. The wine has enlivened without exciting me.’ (p. 92)

‘The question of right in this connection is of merely academic interest,’ said Bourne, delighted by the position of affairs; ‘but you would admit that we have a prior claim, and therefore are in a stronger position than you are. I am not going to conceal from you, Humphreys, the fact that your presence is unwelcome to us.’ (p. 148)

And if he had done, would he have been accepted by the men as Bourne was accepted? I cannot think so.

I think it must also be admitted that, apart from Bourne himself, most of the other characters are shadowy. They are perfectly distinct, recognisable, human beings but they lack both depth and vividness. Bourne’s own particular friends, the boy Martlow, Shem, Sergeant Tozer, never quite come to life. There is one exception to this. Towards the end of the book he introduces another character, Weeper Smart, who is wholly and fiercely alive. Weeper Smart is not an attractive character and is not meant to be. He is tall and strong but cadaverous and ugly, and his soul is consumed with raging bitterness against the war, the army, the officers and life itself. Manning uses him cleverly to express the men’s resentment against the miseries of life in the trenches, the futility of parades and the stupidity of orders from above. He is one of the very few characters in the book who openly express scepticism about the purpose of the war (p. 165).

‘We’re fightin’ for all we’ve bloody got, said Madely bluntly.

‘An’ that’s sweet F.A.,’ said Weeper Smart. ‘A tell thee, that all a want to do is to save me own bloody skin. An’ the first thing a do, when a go into t’ line, is to find out where t’ bloody dressing-stations are; an’ if a can get a nice blighty, chaps, when once me face is turned
towards home, I'm laughing. You won't see me bloody arse for dust. A'm not proud. A tell thee straight. Them as thinks different can 'ave all the bloody war they want, and me own share of it, too.'

There, in different accents, speaks the voice of Yossarian in *Catch-22*. But there is a difference. Joseph Heller is entirely on the side of Yossarian. He is Yossarian as Manning is Bourne. But Manning-Bourne is not on the side of Weeper Smart. He recognises his strength, his intelligence, his individuality, but he is not on his side. He is on the side of the men who endure without complaining. Yet something slowly draws Bourne and Weeper Smart together in a curious friendship.

No one could have had a greater horror and dread of war than Weeper had. It was a continuous misery to him, and yet he endured it. Living with him, one felt instinctively he would not let one down, that he had in him, curiously, an heroic strain: Martlow, who had been brought up to read people's characters, said of him that he would be just as bloody miserable in peacetime; and perhaps he was right. Bourne, contrasting the two men, decided that Weeper's defect lay in being too imaginative, when it flashed on his mind that while his imagination tortured him with apprehension, it was actually his strength. (pp. 214–15)

It is Weeper Smart who volunteers to go with Bourne on that last fatal patrol between the lines, even though he despises volunteering, just because he thinks Bourne has been treated unjustly. And it is Weeper Smart who goes back to him when Bourne is hit.

Weeper turned his head over his shoulder, listened, stopped, and went back. He found Bourne trying to lift himself; and Bourne spoke, gasping, suffocating.

'Go on I'm scuppered.'

'A'll not leave thee,' said Weeper.

He felt Bourne stretch himself in a convulsive shudder, and relax, becoming suddenly heavier in his arms. He struggled on, stumbling over the shell-ploughed ground through that fantastic mist, which moved like an army of wraiths, hurrying away from him. Then he stopped, and taking the body by the waist with his left arm, flung it over his
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shoulder, steadying it with his right. He could see their wire now, and presently he was challenged, and replied. He found the way through the wire, and staggered into the trench with his burden. Then he turned down the short stretch of Delaunay to Monk Trench, and came on the rest of the party outside A Company's dug-out.

'A've brought 'im back,' he cried desperately, and collapsed with the body on the duck-boards. Picking himself up again, he told his story incoherently, mixed with raving curses.

'What are gibbering about?' said Sergeant Morgan 'aven't you ever seen a dead man before?' (pp. 273–4)

Why didn't Manning side with Weeper Smart? This brings us squarely to the central question of Manning's attitude to war. I do not think that this question would have worried many readers in 1930 when, in spite of the revulsion against World War I, most people still accepted that wars were inevitable and that it was a man's duty to fight and die for his country. Today a new generation is growing up which questions both these things. Their view is expressed most brilliantly in Heller's *Catch-22*, undoubtedly the greatest book to come out of World War II and one of the greatest satires in English and American literature. For that reason I have found it instructive to compare *Catch-22* with *Her Privates We*. Though there are, of course, many obvious differences between these two great books - *Catch-22* is a brilliantly funny satire, *Her Privates We* a deeply serious book, with only brief passages of comedy; *Catch-22* is about the American Air Force, *Her Privates We* about the British Army; enlisted men are almost as rare and shadowy characters in *Catch-22* as officers in *Her Privates We* - essentially they are about the same things. Both books are concerned with suffering and death.

Heller-Yossarian, as is well known, thinks the war is insane, a monstrous conspiracy against life in general and his own in particular. At times he sounds selfish — and remarkably like Weeper Smart:

Clevinger knew everything about the war except why Yossarian had to die while Corporal Snark was allowed to live, or why Corporal Snark had to die while Yossarian was allowed to live. It was a vile and muddy war, and Yossarian could have lived without it... lived forever, perhaps. Only a fraction of his countrymen would give up their lives to win it, and it was not his ambition to be among them. To die or
not to die, that was the question, and Clevinger grew limp trying to answer it. History did not demand Yossarian's premature demise, justice could be satisfied without it, progress would not hinge upon it, victory did not depend on it. That men would die was a matter of necessity; which men would die, though, was a matter of circumstance, and Yossarian was willing to be the victim of anything but circumstance. But that was war. (p. 78)

Manning-Bourne, on the other hand, accepts from the first that death is inevitable and that to die in war is not necessarily the worst thing that can happen.

He expresses this first, in phrases consciously echoing Shakespeare, through the mouth of Sergeant Tozer:

You know, to my way o' thinkin' some of us'ns 'av a dam' sight more religion than some o' the parsons who preach at us. We're willin' to take a chance, we are. 'uman nature's 'uman nature, an' you may be right or you may be wrong, but if you bloody well think you're right, you may as well get on with it. What does it matter if y'are killed? You've got to die some day. You've got to chance your arm in this life, an a dam' sight more than your arm too sometimes. Some folk talk a lot about war bein' such a bloody waste; but I'm not so sure it's such a bloody waste after all... Do they think we came out for seven bloody bob a week? I'm not troublin' about my bloody conscience. I've got some self respect, I'ave.

Bourne appreciated Sergeant Tozer's point of view, because he understood the implications his words were intended to convey, even when he seemed to wander from the point. Life was a hazard enveloped in mystery (did Churchill remember that phrase?) and war quickened the sense of both in men: the soldier also, as well as the saint, might write his tractate de contemptu mundi, and differ from him only in the angle and spirit from which he surveyed the same bleak reality (p. 83).

Later Manning-Bourne admits that

Whether it were justified or not, however, the sense of being at the disposal of some inscrutable power, using them for its own ends, and utterly indifferent to them as individuals, was perhaps the most tragic
element in the men's present situation. It was not much use telling them that war was only the ultimate problem of all human life stated barely, and pressing for an immediate solution. When each individual conscience cried out for its freedom, that implacable thing said: 'peace, peace; your freedom is only in me!' Men recognised the truth intuitively, even with their reason checking at a fault. There was no man of them unaware of the mystery which encompassed him, for he was a part of it; he could neither separate himself entirely from it, nor identify himself with it completely. A man might rave against war; but war, from among its myriad faces, could always turn him one, which was his own. All this resentment against officers, against authority, meant very little, even to the men themselves. It fell away from them in words. (p. 201)

It would be unfair to regard the first quotation from *Catch-22* as expressing Heller-Yossarian's total view. Yossarian proves by both his words and actions that he is deeply compassionate. He also comes to see that war, with its urgent and immediate threat of death, is only an intensification of the myriad threats which always surround life. In this respect he is very like Manning-Bourne. But whereas Heller-Yossarian thinks that 'the point is to keep them from dying for as long as you can', Manning-Bourne thinks that the point is to die as well as you can. The contrast is all the more striking because of the difference between the two wars. Most of us still feel that World War II was justified by the need to stop Hitler's brutal aggression. Certainly most of those who fought in it thought so. (It is noticeable that even Yossarian never goes quite so far as to say that the Americans were wrong to fight Germany.) On the other hand modern historians still find it difficult to tell us clearly what World War I was about. One might have expected Manning-Bourne at least to question the purpose of the war but he does not: for him it is an Act of God or, more likely perhaps, a grim jest by Hardy's 'purblind doomster', to be accepted, to be endured and, if possible, to be won. And while he nowhere discusses the morality of the war or the difference between the Western Allies and the Central Powers, he certainly assumed — as I do — that if the war had to be fought and one side had to win, then it was better for humanity that 'our side' should be the victor.

Both Manning and Heller put their thoughts into a discussion between their characters about what seems to them a particularly
callous order from the higher command. In *Her Privates We* the men are discussing an order forbidding soldiers advancing into action from stopping to help the wounded:

‘There’s nought sure for us’ns, anyway,’ said Weeper, relapsing. ‘Dids’t ’ear what Cap’n Thompson read out this mornin’, about stoppin’ to ’elp any poor beggar what was wounded? The bloody brass’-at what wrote that letter ‘as never been in any big show ’isself, that a dare swear. ’e’s one o’ them muckers as is never nearer to the real thing than G.H.Q.’

‘You don’t want to talk like that,’ said Corporal Hamley. ‘You’ve ’ad your orders.’

‘A don’t mind tellin’ thee, corporal,’ said Weeper, again lifting a large, flat hand, as though by that gesture he stopped the mouths of all the world. ‘A don’t mind tellin’ thee, that if A see a chum o’ mine down, an’ a can do aught to ’elp ’im, all the brass’-ats in the British Army, an’ ther’s a bloody sight too many o’ ’em, aren’t goin’ to stop me. A’ll do what’s right, an’ if a know aught about thee, thal’t do as A do…

‘They don’t know what we’ve to go through, that’s the truth of it,’ said Weeper. ‘They measure the distance, an’ they count the men, an’ the guns, an’ think a battle’s no but a sum you can do wi’ a pencil an’ a bit o’ paper…’

‘Give them a chance’ said Bourne, reasonably; he hadn’t spoken before, he usually sat back and listened quietly to these debates.

‘Let ’em take my bloody chance!’ shouted Weeper, vindictively.

‘There’s a good deal in what you say,’ said Bourne, who was a little embarrassed by the way they all looked at him suddenly. ‘I think there’s a good deal of truth in it; but after all, what is a brass-hat’s job? He’s not thinking of you or of me or of any individual man, or of any particular battalion or division. Men, to him, are only part of the material he has got to work with; and if he felt as you or I feel, he couldn’t carry on with his job. It’s not fair to think he’s inhuman… Once we go over the top it’s the colonel’s and the company commander’s job. Once we meet a Hun it’s our job…’

‘Yes, an’ our job’s a bloody sight worse’n theirs,’ said Weeper. (pp. 169–71)

In *Catch-22* the officers are discussing an order to go and bomb Bologna — a particularly dreaded target:
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Clevinger agreed with ex-P.F.C. Wintergreen that it was Yossarian's job to get killed over Bologna and was livid with condemnation when Yossarian confessed that it was he who had moved the bomb-line and caused the mission to be cancelled.

'Why the hell not?' Yossarian snarled, arguing all the more vehemently because he suspected he was wrong. 'Am I supposed to get my ass shot off just because the colonel wants to be a general?'

'What about the men on the mainland?' Clevinger demanded with just as much emotion. 'Are they supposed to get their asses shot off just because you don't want to go? Those men are entitled to air support!'

'But not necessarily by me. Look, they don't care who knocks out those ammunition dumps. The only reason we're going is because that bastard Cathcart volunteered us.'

'Oh I know all that,' Clevinger assured him... 'But it's not for us to determine what targets must be destroyed or who's to destroy them or...'

'Or who gets killed doing it? And why?'

'Yes, even that. We have no right to question...'

'You're insane!'

'... no right to question...'

'Do you really mean that it's not my business how or why I get killed and that it is Colonel Cathcart's? Do you really mean that?'

'Yes, I do,' Clevinger insisted, seeming unsure. 'There are men entrusted with winning the war who are in a much better position than we are to decide what targets have to be bombed.'

'We are talking about two different things,' Yossarian answered with exaggerated weariness. 'You are talking about the relationship of the Air Corps to the infantry, and I am talking about the relationship of me to Colonel Cathcart. You are talking about winning the war, and I am talking about winning the war and keeping alive.'

'Exactly,' Clevinger snapped smugly. 'And which do you think is more important?'

'To whom?' Yossarian shot back. 'Open your eyes, Clevinger. It doesn't make a damned bit of difference who wins the war to someone who's dead.' (pp. 135–6)

But perhaps the greatest difference between the two authors is in their attitude to the phenomenon of war. Heller-Yossarian regards
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it as a lunatic interruption to life which can benefit only cruel, selfish and corrupt men. A wise man (like Yossarian) will try to get out of the fighting; a wise country (like Italy) will try to be defeated. Manning-Bourne, on the other hand, deeply influenced by history and literature of the past, regards war as an inevitable part of human destiny.

'C'est la guerre', they would say, with resignation that was almost apathy: for all sensible people know that war is one of the blind forces of nature, which can neither be foreseen nor controlled. Their attitude, in all its simplicity, was sane. There is nothing in war which is not in human nature; but the violence and passions of men become, in the aggregate, an impersonal and incalculable force, a blind and irrational movement of the collective will, which one cannot control, which one cannot understand, which one can only endure as these peasants, in their bitterness and resignation, endure it. C'est la guerre. (p. 120)

Starting from this point of view Manning could see in war nobility and even ecstasy, 'transfiguring all the circumstances of life so that these could only be expressed in the terms of heroic tragedy, of some superhuman or even divine conflict with the powers of evil' (p. 42). Starting from his point of view Heller could see only cruelty, corruption and death. There will be many people today who will think that, in this nuclear age, Heller is right and Manning wrong, but this does not detract from the nobility and dignity of Manning's vision. He is, after all, closer to Shakespeare and to Homer than is Heller.

Finally, I wish to deal with the complaint, sometimes raised, that Her Privates We has nothing to do with Australia and can therefore be ignored by Australians. I do not think it is a serious charge, for Manning was dealing with universal themes which should be of as much interest to Australians as to anyone else. However it is not even true. There are many signs of Manning's Australian origins and outlook in this book. Let us take the more trivial ones first. On page 9, Manning describes how Bourne dodges the Prussian machine-gunners:

They were singularly brave men, these Prussian machine-gunners, but the extreme of heroism, alike in foe or friend, is indistinguishable from despair. Bourne found himself playing again a game of his childhood,
though not now among rocks from which reverberated heat quivered in wavy films, but in made fissures too chalky and unweathered for adequate concealment.

He is certainly not talking of England! On page 58, he describes his isolation from the men in his battalion:

He was not of their county, he was not even of their country, or their religion, and he was only partially of their race. When they spoke of their remote villages and hamlets, or sleepy market-towns in which nothing happened except the church clock chiming the hour, he felt an alien among them; and in the vague kind of homesickness which troubled him he did not seek company, but solitude.

On page 181, Bourne's friend Martlow pokes fun at him for using bad language.

'Oh, you all swear like so many Eton boys,' replied Bourne, indifferently. 'Have you ever heard an Aussie swear?' 'No, 'n I don't want,' said Martlow. 'Them beggars 'ave too much spare cash to know what soldierin' means.'

On the march to Louvencourt

they passed an Australian driving a horse-drawn lorry, with a heavy load whereon he sprawled, smoking a cigarette with an indolence which Bourne envied. The Colonel wheeled his grey, and pursued him with a fire of invective practically the whole length of the column, to the man's obvious amazement, as he had never before been told off at such length, and with such fluent vigour, in language to which no lady could take exception. He sat up, and got rid of his cigarette, looking both innocent and perplexed. (p. 208)

Later one of the men mentions this incident. '“You want a few thousand Australians in the British Army,” said Bourne angrily. “They would put the wind up some of these bloody details who think they own the earth.”'

All these extracts seem to prove conclusively that not only did Manning feel that he was an Australian when he was writing the
book but that he wished Bourne to be recognised as an Australian. However that is not the end of the matter. It seems to me undeniable that there is something very Australian in Bourne's attitude to discipline and rank as described by Manning. It would be absurd to pretend that there were no democrats in the British Army in World War I — though they were probably rarer than in the second — but Bourne is democratic in a peculiarly Australian way. Very early he comes to the conclusion that 'there was too much bloody discipline in the British Army' (p. 15). He is infuriated by pointless distinctions between ranks, especially behind the lines, and one of the few really bitter passages is that in which he finds that champagne and other delicacies in the Expeditionary Force Canteen are reserved for officers.

'If I were a colonel,' said Bourne; 'mind you, only a colonel; and a man like that bloody lance-jack, who has never even smelt a dead horse in South Africa, turned one of my men out of a canteen started for the benefit of the troops by public subscription, I would get the battalion together, and I would sack the whole bloody institution from basement to garret, even if I were to be broke for it.' (p. 210)

One likes to think that there were, and still are, Australian colonels who would have done just that.

Bourne's reluctance to accept a commission and his feeling that, if he does, he will be betraying his mates, is also typically Australian. I have met Australians who took precisely this attitude in World War II.

Finally, there is a passage which I do think has been noticed before. In it Bourne is describing his relationship with the men to the chaplain, who asked him if he has any friends among them.

Bourne paused for quite an appreciable time.

'No,' he said finally. 'I don't suppose I have anyone, whom I can call a friend. I like the men, on the whole, and I think they like me. They're a very decent generous lot, and they have helped me a great deal. I have one or two particular chums, of course; and in some ways, you know, good comradeship takes the place of friendship. It is different: it has its own loyalties and affections; and I am not sure that it does not rise on occasion to an intensity of feeling which friendship never touches. It may be less in itself, I don't know, but it's opportunity is
greater. Friendship implies rather more stable conditions, don’t you think? You have time to choose. Here you can’t choose, or only to a very limited extent. I didn’t think heroism was such a common thing. I have seen a man risking himself for another more than once: I don’t say they would all do it. It seems to me to be a spontaneous and irreflective action, like the kind of start forward you make instinctively when you see a child playing in a street turn and run suddenly almost under a car. At one moment a particular man may be nothing at all to you, and the next minute you will go through hell for him. No, it is not friendship. The man doesn’t matter so much, it’s a kind of impersonal emotion, a kind of enthusiasm, in the old sense of the word. Of course one is keyed-up, a bit overwrought. We help each other. What is one man’s fate today, may be another’s tomorrow. We are all in it up to the neck together, and we know it.’ (pp. 87-8)

Is not this the best description of ‘mateship’ ever written? Today ‘mateship’ is unfashionable and some writers even deny that such a thing ever existed in Australia. That is nonsense. It existed for precisely the same reason that it existed among Bourne’s comrades—because in the harsh conditions of early settlement men couldn’t choose their friends; they were all in it up to the neck together. In these circumstances comradeship or mateship does take the place of friendship and I think that Manning knew this instinctively where an Englishman—or at least a middle-class, educated Englishman—might not. And it is this recognition and understanding which makes Her Privates We one of the most sympathetic accounts of soldiers at war that has ever been written.
Norman Lindsay's Novels

an aspect of their ethics

Kerin M. Day

Norman Lindsay has figured more prominently as a black and white artist, painter and etcher than as a novelist, although he published several novels as well as short stories and numerous articles and essays on literary matters. The extent of Lindsay's writings is not readily apparent because many of his novels have been out of print for years and because there exist no collections of his periodical and occasional writings. It will be helpful to place Lindsay's writings in relation to his work in the graphic arts.

Lindsay was born in Creswick, Victoria, in 1879, and in 1901 joined the staff of the *Bulletin* as a black and white artist. His association with the *Bulletin*, in the double capacity of artist and writer, was maintained until only two years before his death in 1969. By 1910 his pen and ink work was widely known, not only to readers of the *Bulletin* but to a wider public, whose attention to Lindsay's work had been drawn by the widespread controversy aroused by the sentiments of drawing such as 'Pollice Verso' (1904), a work of decidedly anti-Christian theme which Lindsay had done for his own satisfaction in such time as he could spare from his *Bulletin* obligations. In 1910 a writer in the *Lone Hand* confidently predicted that Lindsay was likely to 'leave as big a name in the history of black and white as Rembrandt, Daniel Vierge, or that master artist, Charles Keene'.

A. G. Stephens however gave as his opinion in 1912 that Lindsay's work was showing signs of decline and that he was dissipating his talents in too many directions. Stephens was principally referring to Lindsay's graphic art, which was exploring media other than pen and

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ink — Lindsay had, for instance, made one hundred wash illustrations to the *Memoirs of Casanova* between 1906 and 1909, and it was a desire to find a publisher for these illustrations which had prompted a trip to London in 1910 — but by 1912 he had also published several articles and short stories, and the first number of *Norman Lindsay's Book*, a collection of his pictorial and short prose works. His first novel, *A Curate in Bohemia*, which had been written in 1904, was to appear the following year (1913).

Lindsay's first published prose work had appeared in the *Lone Hand* in December 1907, when he was twenty-eight. This was a very brief account of the story of Helen of Troy, and was more in the nature of an accompaniment to the several illustrations with which Lindsay supplied the text than a serious attempt at the art of prose fiction. His first important work of original fiction was a short story called 'Saturdee', published in July 1908. This was the first in a series of short stories about small boys which appeared between 1908 and 1919, and which were later to be published in revised form as *Saturdee* (1933).

Many of Lindsay's early writings, the verbal sketches and verses which appeared in the *Bulletin* and *Lone Hand*, as well as such of his early unpublished work as has survived, are juvenilia which may be passed over lightly. They do however show not only that impulse to write which Lindsay declared to have been with him from his earliest youth, but also that he had early formulated certain of the attitudes he was to urge throughout his life in several of his novels and other writings. Of Lindsay's miscellaneous early prose works, the short stories about small boys, the series of travel articles which stemmed from his trip to England in 1910, and his satirical sketches of parsons and other human 'types', indicate his antipathy to those who would impose an ethical creed on others and to human pretension and humbug. They also show his conviction that life is essentially a comic spectacle to be explored without illusion and to the end of developing the self.

3 *My Mask* (Sydney, Angus and Robertson, 1970), p. 229. See also Godfrey Blunden, 'The Artist: His Life and Work' in *Norman Lindsay, Norman Lindsay Water Colour Book* (Sydney, Angus and Robertson, 1939), p. 49.
4 'Great Stories: Helen, Grande Amoureuse', *Lone Hand* II, 8 (1907), pp. 126-32.
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One of the authors whose works Lindsay first read in his teens and whom he was to admire throughout his life was Rabelais; another was Nietzsche. Lindsay has recalled attempting in 1901 to explain to J. F. Archibald 'a concept of life and art based on Rabelais and Nietzsche'. The Rabelaisian perspective on life as essentially a spectacle to be enjoyed particularly appealed to Lindsay, while from Nietzsche's writings he principally derived both encouragement and confirmation about matters relating to human ethics, especially the conviction that on the individual alone devolves full responsibility for all his efforts and actions. Like Nietzsche, Lindsay held that there was no higher authority or God on whom to rely. The purpose of life was conceived as a development of the self, as a process of continual effort toward self-expression and self-development, and of continual resistance to the restrictions which others would impose on such development. Lindsay particularly urged such resistance in relation to the achievement of full sexual self-expression, which he believed to be fundamental to individual development. These convictions are apparent in all his novels, from the earliest stories (1908) in the series which later became Saturdee, to his last novel, Rooms and Houses (1968).

Except in so far as an author's point of view will make itself generally felt in his work, Lindsay's earlier writings on a variety of matters were not directed by any particular sense of purpose until after about 1910. On his return from England in 1912 he had suffered a severe attack of pleurisy, resulting in a prolonged period of hospitalisation which afforded leisure for extensive reading. Lindsay has recorded that it was due to his reading of so much fiction during this period that his interest in the métier of the novel was aroused. He had read voraciously in his youth, but by 1913 (aged thirty-four), he was familiar with, apart from contemporary writers, only Petronius, Cervantes, Fielding, Scott, Balzac and Dickens. Although he had himself published A Curate in Bohemia in 1913, he seems to have regarded this simply as an exercise in the recording for his own pleasure of certain aspects of the hand to mouth existence he had led during the years following 1895 when he was a free lance.

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7 My Mask, p. 227.
8 Ibid.
artist and student in Melbourne, before his appointment to the *Bulletin* in 1901. Lindsay’s own serious attempts at the art of prose fiction date from 1913. The first of his numerous articles on the craft of the novel, an appreciation of Louis Stone’s *Jonah*, appeared in the *Lone Hand* in December 1915.9

Lindsay’s concern with cultural issues and with the relationship of art and especially literature to life was first particularly aroused by the work of the post-impressionists, then intensified by the 1914 war. During his stay in London (1910-12) he had visited Paris several times and viewed the paintings of the post-impressionists, which he reviled because he saw them as the expression of a hate for life. Lindsay considered them formless and chaotic, and as manifesting both a moral degeneration and a breakdown of the traditional values of art, which he believed to be based on a disciplined study of the nude and to involve a celebration, not a rejection, of life. Lindsay’s conviction of general moral corruption as signified in the post-impressionists’ depictions of the bestial and ugly aspects of life, was strengthened by the 1914 war, which seemed to him to demonstrate the truth of Nietzsche’s conviction that man was an essentially bestial creature who exulted not in the arts of life but in the arts of death. Lindsay was driven to reconsider the tenability of his former optimistic assumptions about the basically good and happy nature of man, and endeavoured to find both a justification for the worth of work and, in a more general manner, a basis for values in both life and art. *Creative Effort* (1920) was the immediate theoretical result of this endeavour. The convictions and arguments expressed by Lindsay in *Creative Effort* were to reappear, variously expressed, in most of his written works in the decades which followed. In *Creative Effort* Lindsay confronted what he saw as the base nature of mankind, but asserted human effort to be worthwhile principally in terms of the self-development afforded the individual who makes the effort. Development of the individual potential was seen as man’s chief task. In his novels Lindsay particularly and repeatedly urged the importance of self-development, not only by means of the self-expressive media of art but by means of that on which successful art and work was held to depend, that is, on an awareness and experience of the opposite sex. In *Creative Effort*

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may often be found the theoretical arguments in support not only of this conviction but of other of the rather didactically arranged discussions which tend to appear in novels such as Pan in the Parlour.

Shortly after his release from hospital Lindsay had written the first draft of The Cautious Amorist (published 1932),\(^\text{10}\) and during the war had written both The Magic Pudding (1918) and Redheap (written 1918, published 1930),\(^\text{11}\) which he considered to be his first serious effort as novelist.\(^\text{12}\) In the years following the publication of Creative Effort, which had aroused scarcely any public response, Lindsay consistently attempted to gain a larger hearing for its views by publishing articles promoting its ideas in the journals Vision and Art in Australia. A London edition of Creative Effort was brought out in 1924, and five years later Lindsay published Madam Life's Lovers, a volume which was subtitled 'A Human Narrative Embodying a Philosophy of the Artist in Dialogue Form', and which was an attempt to convey in more effective form certain of the salient ideas in Creative Effort. Besides maintaining his extensive art work for the Bulletin during these years, Lindsay completed most of his justly acclaimed etchings between 1918 and 1926, and from 1920 onwards also concentrated on watercolours. Collections of his pen drawings were published in 1918, 1924 and 1931.

Redheap was printed a year after Madam Life's Lovers in 1930 and was promptly banned by Australian customs officials, not for any alleged sexual ethic but because it was considered to calumniate certain of the inhabitants of the Victorian country town, Creswick ('Redheap') of Lindsay's youth. Because of the ban and the consequent struggle with officialdom over not only this novel but over the December 1930 issue of Art in Australia, which had been given over to his work, Lindsay felt the need to leave Australia for a while and visited the United States where Redheap, under the title Every Mother's Son, had been enthusiastically received. The Americans regarded Lindsay principally as a writer who 'did a bit of painting on the side',\(^\text{13}\) and during his stay he was approached over the publi-

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\(^{10}\) My Mask, p. 229.

\(^{11}\) Letter from Norman Lindsay to Harry F. Chaplin, 18 May 1950, Item 36(b), Chaplin Collection, Fisher Library, University of Sydney.

\(^{12}\) Ibid.

\(^{13}\) In the words of Rose Lindsay, in conversation with the writer, February 1970. See also My Mask, p. 229.
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cation of other of his novels. The encouragement Lindsay found in America contrasted strongly with the restrictions and attacks on his work in Australia, and probably had much to do with his publication during the 1930s of a further five novels (Mr Gresham and Olympus, New York, 1932; The Cautious Amorist, New York, 1932; Saturdee, Sydney, 1933; Pan in the Parlour, New York, 1933 and Age of Consent, New York, 1938), although two of these (The Cautious Amorist and Saturdee) had, as mentioned, in part at least been written some years previously. In an interview given in 1934 Lindsay asserted his view of the importance of the novel to the cultural development of a country:

The novel is the most suitable means for reaching the minds of the people... The novel penetrates everywhere; it is the cheapest and easiest method of distributing ideas. We cannot emphasise too much its importance in making Australia part of the great movement in the world's advance in culture.14

The distinguishing feature of Lindsay's journal writing during the 1930s was its concentration on the art of the novel. His view of the novel as propaganda, as a means for the dissemination of ideas, must be balanced by his insistence that the novelist's chief task is the revelation of character. In 1943 he wrote: 'If the writer's intention is not psychological revelation, but political propaganda, then his story is outside serious consideration as a work of art.'15

Lindsay published two novels in the 1940s, The Cousin from Fiji (1945) and Halfway to Anywhere (1947). In 1936, aged fifty-seven and with several published volumes of his pictorial work to his credit, he had turned with renewed interest in the graphic arts to what was for him the relatively new medium of oil painting. He still worked for the Bulletin, and in his spare time continued to carve his ship models and to cast the statues which stand in the garden of his home at Springwood. Although he was to publish only two more novels Dust or Polish? (1950) and Rooms and Houses (1968, but largely written by 1953),16 between 1941 and 1961 he wrote for the Bulletin the bulk

14 'Art and Commerce: Interests are Interwoven', B.P. Magazine VII, 1 (1934), p. 20.
15 'Yes or No from Coast to Coast', Bulletin (16 June 1943), p. 2.
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of his numerous essays on literary matters. These two decades in which Lindsay made his greatest prose contribution to the *Bulletin* coincide with Douglas Stewart's editorship of the Red Page. On his resignation from this position in 1961, Mr Stewart was succeeded by Vincent Buckley, who has shown less sympathy towards Lindsay's views than has Mr Stewart. Lindsay published very few articles between 1961 and his death in 1969, but between 1965 and 1969 brought out no less than seven volumes. Four of these were collections of his work in the media of ship modelling, pen drawing, pencil drawing and watercolour; one was a novel (*Rooms and Houses*), one an exceedingly poor collection of essays (*The Scribblings of an Idle Mind*); and there was a book of reminiscences about persons associated with the *Bulletin* (*Bohemians of the Bulletin*). His autobiography, *My Mask*, written in 1956, was published posthumously in 1970, and shows that for Lindsay 'gay and lovely ladies, lyricism, and the whole spectacle of life visualised from a viewpoint of its drama and humour was his concept of the True, the Beautiful and the Good', as he put it in *Rooms and Houses*.18

There have been few critical discussions of Lindsay's novels, the chief being those by John Hetherington and Douglas Stewart.19 Mr Hetherington's general account of Lindsay's writings lacks both accuracy and critical insight. Douglas Stewart's discussion concentrates on fewer of the novels, but groups them into categories whereby the 'semi-autobiographical studies of small-town life in Victoria' (*Saturdee, Redheap* and *Halfway to Anywhere*) are distinguished from the novels dealing with 'ideas and “problems”' (*Dust or Polish?, Pan in the Parlour* and *Miracles by Arrangement*). Such a distinction may tend to obscure the fact that in the semi-autobiographical series are to be found much the same 'ideas and “problems”' as in the other novels, the principal difference between the two groups being one of presentation of material rather than any radical difference in the material itself. In *Pan in the Parlour* and *Miracles by Arrangement*, but especially in the former, the characters themselves engage in theoretical discussions relating to art and life, and there is also a more

18 Sydney, Ure Smith, 1968, p. 103.

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strictly simplified presentation of personality and actions. The effect is that the thematic or ideological scheme of the novel is the more readily apparent. It is probably the evident schematisation of these novels that prompts the conviction that they possess ‘neither the richness nor the authenticity of the autobiographical series’.20

_Miracles by Arrangement_ and _Pan in the Parlour_ are as authentic, in the sense of realistic or true to life, as for instance _Saturdee_, but their realism is of a slightly different nature. Whereas the characters in _Saturdee_ are presented largely in the round, so that we see several of the daily activities in the life of the average small boy in an Australian country town of the 1890s, the characters in _Pan in the Parlour_ are presented more in the abstract; certain highly selected activities of the human adult are stressed time and again. Lindsay is particularly concerned in _Pan in the Parlour_ with certain of what he sees as the fundamental motivations of adults, and he rigorously excludes material not relevant to his theme. In his presentation of material in this as in other of his novels, Lindsay deliberately adopts the same blocking-out process he used in order to gain a perspective for his pictorial art. This process he has most clearly described in _Age of Consent_ where the artist Bradly Mudgett at first experiences repeated failure in his attempts to render the landscape with some sort of perspective, to achieve, in Lindsay’s words, ‘a transference, and not a copy’.21 Lindsay consistently stressed in his writings that the artist was not so much concerned with a transcription of reality as with imaginative effort and the conveying of an individual point of view, or vision; that what mattered in art was not so much the material portrayed as the artist’s perspective on that material. It is just such perspective that eludes Bradly. He fails to grasp in paint the landscape’s ‘brilliant sparkle, its illusion of a mass suspended in atmospheric space’, and it is not until the figure of a young girl appears on the scene that the matter suddenly resolves itself. When the young Cora comes wading slowly down the lagoon which is the subject of Bradly’s canvas, Bradly’s vision of her suddenly gives him the means of organisation that had previously escaped him. The natural world falls into its proper place as both setting and foil for the feminine image:

20 Stewart, ‘Norman Lindsay’s Novels’, pp. 2–3.
21 Sydney, Ure Smith, 1968, p. 44. Subsequent page references are to this edition.
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What he had got in that brief flash of vision was merely a lifting of tonal values in his trees by a sudden concentration of vision on the vivid figure of the girl. The golden nimbus round her tawny hair and the violet edge of light to her warmly tinted arms and legs forced a translucence on all other values. Now he was feverishly daubing in a rough colour pattern of the girl and pushing a lighter key of blue-purple into his dead tree masses. (p. 45)

Bradly's means of organising his material by concentrating on the image of a woman is that which Norman Lindsay himself used in both his pictorial art and in his fiction. His works are authentic, or realistic, largely according to the degree of success with which he manages to convey his belief that the most important means of man's full self-realisation depends on his intellectual and emotional reactions to the opposite sex. This is the fundamental theme of Redheap, Saturdee and Halfway to Anywhere, as also of Pan in the Parlour.

There is a faithful recording of the details of daily life in these novels, but by a process of repeatedly emphasising particular human impulses and certain aspects of behaviour, Lindsay also creates a level which is not so much realistic as allegorical or ideological. This is partly achieved by a technique of alienation which discourages the reader from identifying with the characters. An interest only in the psychological characterisation of the novel is inappropriate to a full grasp of its meaning; the reader is urged to see life as a spectacle. This applies particularly to Pan in the Parlour and The Cautious Amorist. In his depiction of Sadie, the central female figure of The Cautious Amorist, Lindsay is not always aiming so much at psychological verisimilitude as with presenting certain salient features of Woman. Sadie is conveyed not only as a particular woman but as the embodiment of women in general; she is partly a Madam Life figure. Lindsay's method of using particular characters to point to abstractions and tendencies ought not to be glossed over simply because he is often unsuccessful in realising it. As a novelist he needs a convincing basis, in terms of psychological authenticity, from which to make abstractions, but he often fails to achieve this and there remains an unsuccessful mixing of styles, the effect of which is to confuse the various levels on which the novel is operating.

Even in novels such as Saturdee Lindsay uses characters to point to abstractions and tendencies, and to suggest the necessity of woman
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to man's development and the development of his creative faculty. It is only when Peter Gimble, the central figure of Saturdee, starts to 'go with girls' that his creative faculty is inspired (he writes a sonnet to his girl), and his life given a centre of interest which is meaningful in terms of his own self-development. Peter's increasing awareness of the feminine leads him to an increasing realisation of his own potential and of life's possibilities. Peter also finds that the obstacles erected by others to the fulfilment of one's aspirations develop in proportion to the scope of the aspiration. His mother's customary efforts to restrict his activities by detaining him indoors in evenings and at the weekend redouble when she discovers the nature of his new interest. Life's biggest rewards are, however, seen to be for those who have sufficient vision and courage to resist the restrictions which others attempt to impose. 'Take Destiny by the throat and the jade will give you anything', Peter comes to realise, or, as Lindsay puts it in Pan in the Parlour, '[she] was astonished at another instance of the grand copybook maxim that the rewards of life are for those who do that which it pleases them to do'. In Lindsay's novels these rewards are chiefly rewards of self-realisation. In Saturdee, the small boy's determined pursuit of the small girl increases his consciousness of self; it boosts his ego, stimulates his imagination and challenges his enterprise.

Whereas Saturdee and Halfway to Anywhere concentrate on the importance of woman to man, Redheap stresses man's importance to the full development of woman. In Redheap this is principally shown in the affairs of Ethel Piper who is well aware of 'a clamorous demand that she should cease to be herself in order that weaker egoisms might flourish', and conscious that 'she was surrounded by people who demanded that she should live by the prescription of their desires and not her own' (p. 283). Her final rejection of her lover Jerry Arnold is based not on a consideration of either Arnold's wife or of the disapproval of the townspeople, but on the realisation that 'it was self identity that found itself threatened by a lover who demanded the right to dispossess all other lovers' (p. 251). The novel urges support

23 London, T. W. Laurie, 1934, p. 344. Subsequent page references are to this edition.
24 Sydney, Ure Smith, 1959, p. 284. Subsequent page references are to this edition.
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for Ethel in her determination to live according to her own lights and not according to the dictates of others. In The Cautious Amorist, Sadie acts on a similar principle. Stranded after shipwreck on an island with three men, she has affairs with all three in order to prevent any one of them claiming a right over her because of the child she is carrying.

In Lindsay’s novels, self-realisation is necessarily opposed to conduct which operates on a ‘safety first’ principle in relation to sexual matters. Throughout Lindsay’s novels there is a series of women who restrain or deny their sexual instincts, and who are treated with scant sympathy. In Redheap, Ethel Piper’s sister Hetty, who hopes to marry the doctor at the local hospital, finally loses him to Ethel. It is not that Hetty is any more or less selfish than Ethel, but simply that she is selfish in a way that Lindsay sees as damaging rather than promoting self. In the interests of securing a husband and social sanction, Hetty lacks sexual courage, or suppresses sexual vitality, and Lindsay regards this as contemptible. The very qualified sympathy which Lindsay accords Hetty when she comes to a painful realisation of the cost to her happiness of her safety first conduct is not as apparent in other of his novels which present similarly self-suppressing women. Freda Hipslop of Pan in the Parlour has long ‘protected’ herself, or allowed her family to ‘protect’ her, from the ‘disaster’ of a lover, and the author’s complete lack of sympathy for her is especially evident at the novel’s conclusion when Freda’s younger sister becomes mistress of the very house which Freda had herself hoped to possess. In Age of Consent Freda’s position is taken to extremes and ridiculed in the person of Miss Marley, the aged spinster who subsists slenderly on a diet of romantic reverie.

Sexual self-expression is a sine qua non in Lindsay’s novels, and Pan in the Parlour is his major attempt to dramatise the theoretical basis of this conviction. On the individual’s sexual fulfilment is held to depend his ability to work creatively and to realise his full intellectual as well as emotional potential. Senses and intellect are regarded not as separately functioning entities but as inextricably interdependent.

The central protagonist of Pan in the Parlour is a middle-aged physicist called Tarran who has thrown up a promising career to return to the country home of his youth and raise poultry. Tarran blames the Great War for his present inertia, and his physicist col-
league Quaritch also believes Tarran’s abandonment of physics to be explicable in terms of the disillusionment which the war effected in him. This he regards however as no excuse for Tarran’s overthrow of work:

He [Tarran] had a lectureship in physics at twenty-four, and a mind fizzling with new ideas... Then that damned war — All the same, putting moral slackness onto the war is a poor trick! Why go to war if you intend to grab it as an excuse to chuck up work? Tarran’s got that virus — self-spite. He got that bit of shrapnel in the leg and he’s limping through life ever since. Makes a joke of himself for having been potted at by high explosives like a dangerous rabbit. Pretty degrading, but all the same... (pp. 10-11)

But the war is only partly if at all responsible for Tarran’s inertia. The novel proposes that he is temporarily a moral corpse because his emotional faculties are in abeyance. The book’s action is mainly designed to suggest that man can achieve intensity over work only when he has achieved emotional intensity with a woman. Tarran is himself not aware of the cause of his malaise. His insistence that the reason for his present leisurely mode of existence is because he no longer has any interest in research work draws from Quaritch the retort, ‘No interest! that’s the cheapest sort of trick to escape bad conscience’, but Tarran’s bad conscience is not so much over work as over women. He has reached a crisis over his work because of an emotional crisis, a failure to respond with any intensity to women. He has drifted into an engagement with Freda Hipslop, a twenty-eight year old virgin for whom he feels nothing more than a rather tepid and easy-going friendship. Freda remains passive and unresponsive to the advances which Tarran sometimes attempts, and she fails to provide either the emotional or intellectual stimulus he needs. The novel’s conclusion presents Tarran packing his bags in preparation for a return to work, but his renewed conviction in the worth of work has only come to him after an ardent affair with Irene Treadwater, a married neighbour. A passionate reaction to the female form issues in emotional resolution which stimulates the will to work. Like Richard Weir of Madam Life’s Lovers, Tarran learns that love ‘calls intention back to life’.

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The dependence of man’s work on his reaction to the feminine form and on a state of emotional intensity or involvement is more straightforwardly dramatised in *Age of Consent* where Bradly Mudgett gains enormously in confidence and success after he has become involved with the young girl who acts as his model. His studies of the female form resolve his difficulties about tonal composition in his paintings, as mentioned above; he also becomes filled with a new resolution about work which he had previously fumbled, not only because of his lack of a centralising image but because of a lack of confidence in his own powers. ‘For the first time in his life’, writes Lindsay, ‘he surrendered to an emotional debauch over work.’ (p. 154). Bradly gains in confidence to the extent of pricing his work at double his usual modest fee. Although Cora also arouses Bradly’s awareness of himself as a male, Lindsay only lightly sketches this in relation to Bradly’s response to the image of the woman, and the role this image plays in his art. Bradly gains self-fulfilment as much through his creative effort, his art, the success of which depends on his appreciation of Cora’s image, as he does through his emotional involvement with Cora herself. The former intellectual effort is, however, seen as dependent on the latter more sensual experience; the mental image and its stimulus to man’s work are first dependent on a sensual response to physical form.

Lindsay sees the energy for work as depending on a state of emotional disturbance or intensity, and at one point in *Pan in the Parlour* has Tarran postulate a full life as ‘a life full of emotional disturbances’ (p. 66). A life of emotional disturbance is itself involved with the ability to react to form. In its theoretical expression this idea is best put by Gilbert Treadwater, Tarran’s wealthy neighbour who feverishly attempts to justify a considerable unearned inheritance by the writing of novels. Gilbert often depends on Tarran as an audience for his ideas, and exclaims to him:

‘Look here, Tarran, you can’t deny a reaction to form without denying an objective in life, and if you haven’t got an objective you’re either an idiot or you’re impotent... I say that either you are human rubbish or you react to form.’

‘Well, what about it?’

‘Admit that, and you admit that there’s a fixed point where your universe begins.’ (p. 177)
Gilbert here unwittingly expresses his own predicament, for it is due to the fact that he himself does not respond to form, to the female form of his wife Irene, that he cannot make satisfactory progress with his novels. Only when aroused by jealousy to a realisation of his wife as a sexual creature can he summon the resolution to conquer his ineptitude (he throws his current novel in the fire) and start life anew on a basis of increased physical and intellectual perception. Gilbert's increased emotional and sensual awareness will, the novel suggests, also resolve his problems as novelist. Tarran had earlier observed to Irene, 'What right has he [Gilbert] to pretend to the adventure of art unless he makes an emotional fool of himself?' (p. 83), and Gilbert comes to ponder the same question:

Negation of action by dodging intensity of emotion. Modernism. But I tell you it doesn't work out in art. You must have a dramatic apex or you are reduced to flat half-tones. (p. 297)

A dramatic apex in work can be rendered only by the artist who has himself reached such an apex in his emotional life. It was Gilbert's inability to reach this apex that robbed of any consequence his creative efforts as a novelist.

Lindsay emphasises his ideas in *Pan in the Parlour* by the device of parallel situations. The marital situation of the Treadwaters is somewhat similar to that of Olga and Andrew Cornet. The middle-aged Andrew is hampered by feelings of sexual inadequacy that make him appear frigid in the face of the challenge that his young wife poses to him as a lover. Andrew attempts to compensate for this unsatisfactory situation by devoting enormous energy to his career. His jealousy is finally aroused to a high pitch by the way the Pan of the novel's title, Andrew's nephew Laurence, encourages Olga to enjoy herself at a town ball. Andrew, who does not dance and has as usual refused to attend the function, is nonetheless propelled there by a tormented desire to have his wife's infidelity confirmed; he finds instead that his fears are groundless, and he himself becomes the defaulting marriage partner by returning for a brief interlude the ardour of the local barmaid who has long doted on him. The consequent emotional crisis between Olga and Andrew reunites them in a bond stronger, because of its satisfactory physical basis, and hence closer intellectual contact than that which existed formerly.
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Near the novel's conclusion Lindsay has Irene muse that 'Thought is form, as Gilbert had said' (p. 327). The novel demonstrates the pertinence of this for its three central male protagonists. Their reactions to the female form stimulate their work, and thus is postulated an interdependence between senses and intellect. Andrew's sexual fulfilment provides him with an intellectual satisfaction that his work alone could not provide; the full life is argued time and again as a life full of emotional disturbance. Tarran's challenge to Andrew, 'Tell me, do you find the responsibility of your job a full life, or is it a good solution for dodging a full life?' (p. 66), is recalled in his later observation that Gilbert 'uses a mental disturbance over work only to escape it in life' (p. 83). Satisfactory intellectual activity cannot exist without physical or sensual fulfilment, nor can the latter be achieved without the former. Tarran's work had foundered because of his emotional foundering, and at the beginning of the novel, after an encounter by Tarran with the young and vital Olga, there is an authorial reflection on his predicament:

There was presented to him a discovery that by displacing a mental objective in life, he had displaced certain other vitalities. In short, he had interludes of forgetting that women existed for a special function.

All very well taking life as a tolerably good joke in youth, whose mechanics compensate for mental impotence. But even cogwheels wear thin; there is such a phrase as 'the inertia of steel'. Psychology's complacent assurance that potency is purely a mental phenomenon is not so reassuring as it should be. Behind the approach to middle age there lurks a Terrible Doubt... (pp. 43-4)

The Terrible Doubt is felled with Irene's assistance, yielding Tarran the double boon of emotional and intellectual resolution. The experiences of Tarran, Gilbert and Andrew are designed to confirm Gilbert's exclamation, 'Action! What significance can action have without its mental image?' (p. 181). An image of form, a mental conception of woman's desirability, is necessary as investing with meaning a performance that is otherwise purely physical, and beyond this, as providing a general stimulus for all other efforts. Acts of the intellect or of the will are not possible without emotional stimulus, as Irene points out when she declares to Gilbert, 'You can't intellectualize an act of will; you can only get at it by an emotional conflict of some sort'
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(p. 307). In *Creative Effort* Lindsay put the matter in theoretical form when, in denying any clear cut distinction between mind and matter, senses and intellect, he wrote of ‘the eternal paradox of that effort to conquer the problem of intellect by the senses which obstruct the effort but without which the effort cannot be made’.

This discussion has concentrated on the importance of both physical and mental fulfilment to the full self-realisation of the individual because this is the most recurrent theme, however variously expressed, in Lindsay’s novels. Lindsay’s attitude to matters sexual and his notions relating to adult behaviour and the scope of relationships possible between men and women seem to have been formed largely during his adolescence and to have changed little in the succeeding years. While sexual matters as rendered in his novels today seem dated and even childish, it is only fair to remember that they are presented in a morally serious context. Lindsay saw sexual repression as leading to mental and emotional disturbance, hence to inhibited development and poor creative effort. While appreciating both the sincerity of and the reasons for Lindsay’s insistence on the importance of sexual fulfilment, this insistence as conveyed in his novels reflects a rather limited concept of adult relationships (allowing for the fact that he is deliberately stressing, time and again, a particular kind of impulse and a particular idea), and suggests a peculiar immaturity in the author. The title of an American review of *Redheap*, ‘Norman Lindsay’s Right to Adolescence’, seems to me to indicate the unease or disappointment sometimes felt when the depth as opposed to the bulk of Lindsay’s fiction is considered. The marks of his isolation, which was intellectual as well as geographical, and which is most evident in *Creative Effort*, are also apparent in his novels.

Even admirers of D. H. Lawrence have not had much to say in favour of *Kangaroo*. His most slavish devotee, F. R. Leavis, favours it with ambiguous approval as a novel which shows a penetrating insight into the nature of the Australian national life and the character of Australian democracy — two subjects on which it may be doubted whether Dr Leavis has any real qualifications for an opinion other than hearsay. Most comments on the novel mention its messy and careless structure. But because it is a book by a writer of international fame and because its setting is Australia, it has enjoyed a reputation in this country which, perhaps, it hardly deserves.

As a hostile witness who thinks Lawrence an extremely overrated writer, and as an Australian naturally sceptical of a tourist’s ability to form more than a superficial impression of the country in a few weeks’ visit, I know there are certain cautions to observe in trying to reappraise the novel after a lapse of fifty years. In the first place it is easy for the Australian reader today to dismiss it out of hand because so much of it is hopelessly out of date. Australia has changed so much in that half century that Lawrence himself might have difficulty in recognising it if he visited it today. It is so much more organised, conscious, industrialised, above all it is so much more civilised, that the picture presented by Lawrence is in danger of appearing a comic caricature even of aspects of Australian life which he has presented accurately and vividly. It is liable to have the comic unreality of photographs of a generation ago: ‘Surely we couldn’t have looked like that!’ say those who remember how it felt to be alive then. ‘Surely they couldn’t have been real people like us!’ say the young who were not. The ideas, the manners, the conventions and decorations of life are presented with a superficial accuracy which
now gives an impression merely of parody. This impression is reinforced by a kind of hindsight that it would be unfair to have expected Lawrence and his readers to have had at the time. A large part of the book is taken up with the hero's flirtation — it can hardly be called more than that — with the forces and the theories of communism and fascism. Neither Somers nor his author appears to have much real knowledge of either movement, but the sort of argument in favour of each with which the readers are presented is a kind of muddled thinking that was only too common at the time. To a generation which has seen what this sort of thinking led to, which has lived through the eras of Mussolini, of Franco, of Hitler and Stalin, it must seem incredible that any intelligent human could ever have taken this sort of talk seriously. Lawrence's novel is apt to seem ridiculously naive even when he is reporting accurately. There is a third problem for the Australian reader who has been habituated to expect a naturalistic treatment of Australian life in the fiction produced by local writers. Kangaroo may look like a naturalistic treatment because the author documents an unfamiliar scene with a good deal of sharply observed detail. But apart from these camera-eye pieces of background, the novel is no more naturalistic in its method than one by Kafka or Patrick White. It is a fantasy in what, at the time, could be taken for modern dress. If the reader gets impatient with it, he may be justified, but he may give wrong or irrelevant reasons for his impatience. Kangaroo has no more pretension to give a realistic picture of Australian life than, let us say, The Rainbow pretends to be a realistic picture of English life in the midlands over the period it covers. The theme of neither book arises out of its setting in the way that Sons and Lovers can be said to. They simply use certain local references to peg the themes down to some recognisable time and place.

For all that, questions of verisimilitude and competence to pronounce are bound to arise in a book in which the hero makes so many confident assertions about the Australian character and Australian life. These assertions are presented without irony and without reservations and we know from his letters that Lawrence himself held the same views and may presume that he thought he was holding the mirror up to nature. Dr Leavis, at any rate, believes that he did. It is interesting at least to see how far the claim could be justified.

It is not necessary to argue against the idea that a novelist of
Kangaroo

genius may observe in a short time and reimagine aspects and patterns of life unfamiliar to him which the ordinary man might take years to imbibe at the source. The question is: what did Lawrence have the chance to observe at all and how well did he take in even what he was able to see?

Lawrence and his wife Frieda left Italy in the RMS Osterly at the end of February, 1922. Lawrence had been wandering in Europe for the previous few months becoming more and more dissatisfied with life there and he left to stay with American friends who were studying Buddhism in Ceylon. As far as one can tell he had no thought of visiting Australia at that time. It seems to have been contact with Australians on the ship that set him thinking of the country as a possible escape from the complexities and the intellectual decadence of Europe:

The people on board are mostly simple Australians. I believe Australia is a good country, full of life and energy... It is my opinion that once beyond the Red Sea one does not feel any more that tension and pressure one suffers from in England — in Europe altogether — even in America, I believe — perhaps worse there.¹

He wrote this on the ship ten days after sailing and it is characteristic of Lawrence that on the basis of a brief acquaintance with a few passengers he was prepared to invent not only a national character but Australia itself — inventions that he was to repeat in reverse and to reverse again a number of times in the next few months. His impressions of a country and a people were in fact often based on a few random points of observation which he then interpreted in the light of his personal dissatisfactions and aspirations. Three weeks later he has abandoned the theory that the world east of Suez is free from tensions. Ceylon is full of them and he is already sick of it and Australia is now the promised land. But within a day or two he has decided that he wants to return to England after all. Australia is just a place on the way home. He writes on the 30th April from RMS Orsova: 'We are going to Australia — Heaven knows why: because it will be cooler and the sea is wide... Don't know what we'll do in

Australia—don’t care.\textsuperscript{2} The abrupt changes of mood are worth noting because Somers in \textit{Kangaroo} is subject to them too and one suspects that his irritable attacks on Australian society and the sudden enthusiasm for life in the country, which are faithful reflections of Lawrence’s reactions in his letters, have in fact nothing much to do with any real insight but merely reflect Lawrence’s moody preoccupations with his own problems or his occasional bursts of euphoria and enthusiasm.

However that may be, the Lawrences arrived in Fremantle at the beginning of May. They stayed for a while with some Australian acquaintances called Jenkins in Perth and Lawrence must have seen some of the bush for he writes of his impression of the queer, primeval, empty landscape, adding ‘And the people are not’. He does not expand on this nor is there much evidence as to what contacts he had with the population apart from the Jenkins, their friends and Miss Skinner whose novel in manuscript Lawrence took over and rewrote as \textit{The Boy in the Bush}. A fortnight—more or less—in Western Australia was enough for Lawrence. He and Frieda arrived by ship in Sydney in the last week of May and went almost at once to a rented seaside cottage rejoiceing in the name of Wyework at Thirroul on the south coast. There they stayed for most of the next two months and there he wrote a large part of \textit{Kangaroo}. Presumably he paid a number of visits to Sydney in that time. Lawrence’s first impressions of the country and the people were unfavourable and he expressed ‘a bitter burning nostalgia for Europe, for Sicily, for old civilisation...’ Though he wavered back and forth, this seems to have been his more usual state of mind throughout his stay and on 8 August of that year he set sail for America where he finished \textit{Kangaroo} at Taos, New Mexico. On the 19th September he writes to Martin Secker that the novel is finished. In spite of his promise to revise it in typescript, he seems to have made few changes of any importance. The novel was written rapidly, at a draught and under the influence of a single prevailing mood. The book shows the effects of this rapid and rather careless composition.

\textit{Kangaroo} is full of forthright opinions on Australia and Australians. Most of them are made by the visiting writer Richard Lovat Somers whose experience of the country is made to match that of Lawrence

\textsuperscript{2} \textit{The Letters of D. H. Lawrence}, p. 547.
himself in range and length of stay just as they echo the opinions voiced by Lawrence in his letters from Australia. Lawrence, for example, writes from Thirroul on 22nd June:

If you want to know what it is to feel the 'correct' social world fizzle to nothing, you should come to Australia. It is a weird place. In the established sense, it is socially nil. Happy-go-lucky, don't-you-bother, we're-in-Australia. But also there seems to be no inside life of any sort: just a long lapse and drift. A rather fascinating indifference, a physical indifference to what we call soul or spirit. It's really a weird show.3

This note runs all through the novel. On a Sunday shortly after their arrival in Sydney Somers and Harriet go to Manly for the day and Somers reflects sourly on the Australian habit of rushing from where they were to somewhere else on holidays:

And tomorrow they'd all be working away with just as little meaning, waking without any meaning, playing without any meaning; and yet quite strenuously at it all. It was just dazing. Even the rush for money had no real pip in it. They really cared very little for the power that money can give... When all is said and done, even money it not much good where there is no genuine culture. Money is a means of rising to a higher, subtler, fuller state of consciousness, or nothing. And when you flatly don't want a fuller consciousness, what good is your money to you? Just to chuck about and gamble with.

It is all very well for Lawrence to cover himself against this remarkable insight of the newly arrived traveller by adding: 'Poor Richard Lovat wearied himself to death struggling with the problem of himself, and calling it Australia.' That is indeed what Lovat does throughout the book, and very boring it becomes. But it is also the point of view of the book and the picture presented by the author. Lawrence, who breaks into the novel in his own person at intervals, never gives us any other view. In fact he builds up the view that Australian society is crass, uncultured and mindless and that the people as a whole are null and void.

3 The Letters of D. H. Lawrence, p. 549.
'Look at these Australians —' says Somers on the occasion of his first interview with Kangaroo,

they're awfully nice, but they've got no inside to them. They're hollow. How are you going to build on such hollow stalks. They may well call themselves cornstalks. They're marvellous and manly and independent and all that, outside. But inside, they are not. When they're quite alone they don't exist... The Colonies make for outwardness. Everything is outward — like hollow stalks of corn. The life makes this inevitable: all that struggle with bush and water and what-not, all the mad struggle with the material necessities and conveniences — the inside soul just withers and goes into the outside.

At a later point in the novel Somers who is full of pseudo-science, like Lawrence himself, seriously propounds two theories to account for this state of mind of homo australiensis. One is that the primitive continent itself has dominated and reduced the population, drawn it back into the fern-age. Australians are really sub-human. The other theory which does not exclude the first is that in a warmer climate the blood becomes thin and the soul drains out of people. Curious theories like this tend to take over and relieve the novelist and his hero alike from observing and thinking about what they observe. At one point for example Jack Calcott, a very ordinary Australian, is watching a football match with absorbed interest, just as an equivalent Englishman might. But Somers, watching him, invents an incredible and comic theory to account for his absorption:

Jack was a queer sight to Somers, when he was in this brightly vacant mood not a man at all, but a chance thing, gazing spell-bound on the evolutions of chance. And in this state, this very Australian state, you could hardly get a word out of him. Or, when he broke into a little volley of speech, you listened with wonder to the noise of it, as if a weird animal had suddenly given voice... What does today matter, or this country? Time is so huge, and in Australia the next step back is to the fern age.

It never apparently occurs to Somers or his author that Jack might just be interested in football and find pleasure in watching it. One can imagine Jack's comments on Somers's view of the game:
On the field the blues and the reds darted madly about, like strange bird-creatures rather than men. They were mostly blond with hefty legs, and with prominent round buttocks that worked madly inside the little white cotton shorts.

(or any Australian football enthusiast for the matter of that): 'Mad Pommy bastard, what's he talking about? I'm watching this game, North Bulli against Thirroul, see, and up he comes yacking about bird-men and buttocks!' To an Australian, then as now, it is Somers's mindless incomprehension that is striking.

Perhaps the most absurd of Somers's applications of home-made theory is his description of Australian women in the streets of Sydney:

Almost every one of the younger women walked as if she thought she was sexually trailing every man in the street after her. And that was absurd, too, because the men more often than not hurry away and leave a blank space between them and these women. But it made no matter: like mad-women the females, in their quasi-elegance, pranced with that prance of crazy triumph in their own sexual powers which left little Richard flabbergasted.

It leaves little me, I admit, flabbergasted at the state of mind of little Richard.

Lawrence's parody of Australian life could be illustrated in more detail. Some of it is deliberate and is to be explained by the state of mind in which he wrote the novel. An author is, after all, entitled to write in a spirit of travesty or of satire if he wishes. But one suspects that in fact the real reason for much of this irritating nonsense was simple ignorance.

Other writers, visitors like James Anthony Froude and Frances Adams in the last century, have made comments similar to those of Lawrence on the quality of Australian life. Australians themselves, myself included, have noted that in the period in which Lawrence wrote the level of civilisation in Australia was indeed below that in Europe. But they knew what they were talking about because they had moved or lived in Australian society. Lawrence did not. He saw only the very narrowest range of Australian life and the merest superficies of that. What is more, although he set out to write a book
with Australia and its people as its setting he took not the slightest trouble to find out about them. He seems to have been actuated by a kind of vanity into believing that he could reconstruct them from a few casual observations.

It is true that he met a few Australians on the three ships that took him from Naples to Sydney. The Lawrences travelled second class so that it is likely that the range of such acquaintanceships was restricted. Lawrence himself describes them as simple people. In Perth he seems to have met very few people apart from the Jenkins and their friends and Mollie Skinner who kept the boarding house in Darlington where the Lawrences stayed. He met a few people at a bookshop in Perth and missed Katharine Susannah Prichard, who tried unsuccessfully to get in touch with him. If there was any literary or intellectual society in Perth at the time, Lawrence made no contact with it. It was the same in Sydney. Lawrence did not use any of his letters of introduction. Sydney at the time was a city buzzing with artists, writers and composers; it led a lively intellectual life and would have welcomed Lawrence, whose novels were read and discussed at the time. But Lawrence made no contact with this world. He speaks of visiting art galleries in Adelaide and Melbourne and he probably saw the Sydney gallery too. But he does not mention one Australian painter or sculptor. He visited libraries and bookshops including the small library in Thirroul where he was surprised and gratified to find some of his own books. But he took apparently not the slightest trouble to find out if Australia had any writers or not. Katharine Susannah Prichard sent him one of her own novels, Black Opal, the poems of Furnley Maurice, the plays and poems of Louis Esson, a work called Songs of Reverie set to music by Henry Tate. Lawrence’s comment was: ‘I have read the plays and nearly all the poems. The plays seem to me like life, and the poems are real. But they all make me feel desperately miserable.’

Lawrence’s only excursion into Australian writing on his own account seems to have been the racing novels of Nat Gould. Harriet in the book is depicted as ‘reading a Nat Gould novel, to get the real tang of Australia... when she had finished her paper-backed book she said: “It’s just like them — just like they think they are.”’ So much for Lawrence’s exploration of the culture of Australia!

Nor did he take any more trouble to find out what was going on in the social and political life of the country on which he comments so glibly and confidently both in his letters and in the novel. According to Frieda he read no newspapers. He did read the Sydney Bulletin avidly but it was for 'the stories of wild animals and people's living experiences', in other words for the 'pars'—that popular section of the old Bulletin devoted to short paragraphs, of comment, reminiscence or humorous anecdote sent in from all over the country by readers of the 'Bushman's Bible'. Lawrence quotes from them extensively and with relish in the novel. For Somers they represent 'the real tang of Australia' as Nat Gould does for Harriet.

Lawrence's actual contact with Australian society in the east appears to have been the people he met and talked with near Thirroul and on a couple of excursions to Wollongong. (Mullimbimby and Walloona, in the novel). As he spent practically all his time writing or going for solitary walks, these contacts were limited to the local tradesmen and shopkeepers of the little township which he describes vividly, if a little maliciously:

When you had crossed the iron foot-bridge over the railway, you came to a big wooden building with a corrugated iron roof, standing forlorn at an unmade corner, like the fag-end of the village. But the village was an agglomeration of fag-ends. This building might have been a temporary chapel, as you come at it from the back. But in front it was labelled 'Pictoria', so it was the cinema. But there was also a blackboard with gilt letters, like a chapel notice-board, which said 'School of Arts Library'. And the Pictoria had a sort of little wing, all wood, like a little school-room. And in one section of this wing was the School of Arts Library, which the Somers had joined. Four rows of novels: the top row a hundred or more thin books, all Nat Gould or Zane Grey. The young women came for Zane Grey. 'Oh, The Maid of Mudgee is a lovely thing, lovely'—a young woman was pronouncing from the top of the broken chair which served as stool to give access to this top row. 'Y'aven' got a new Zaine Greye, have yer?'...then came a young railway man who had heard there was a new Nat Gould.

This was Lawrence's Australia: the only one he knew at first hand. The crassness of Lawrence's procedure can be illustrated not unfairly by supposing an Australian novelist who happened by some curious
accident to have been brought up in total ignorance of England, visiting the country for a couple of months, spending two days in London during which he took a day trip to Brighton on a bank holiday and then retiring to a village on the Sussex coast, where his only contacts were odd fishermen, village shopkeepers and the local lending library. He refuses to read any newspapers or to acquaint himself with any evidence of English culture above the level of popular magazine fiction and spends his time writing a novel with ‘an English setting’, in which the civilisation, the social life and the politics of the country are explained to the rest of the world with all the assurance of profound experience and of prophetic insight.

The trouble with Lawrence, of course, is that his devotees have credited him with prophetic insight for so long that even shrewd scrutineers like Dr Leavis have taken his picture of Australia in the 1920s at its face value. It should be clear that Lawrence had little chance even to know what he was talking about. But the shoddiness of his ‘Australian setting’, reveals itself on almost every page. He makes a brave attempt at reproducing Australian speech and idiom but nearly always gets it just wrong. When Jack Calcott who is supposed to represent a dyed-in-the-wool Aussie uses a broad north of England ‘Nay’ or the girls in the Manly restaurant or a country town library talk with cockney accents; when the shower in the weekend cottage is referred to as ‘the inevitable Australian douche’, or various characters are said to ‘get the wind up’ meaning they flew into a rage; and a hundred little false notes of a like kind betray the foreigner, the reproach is not that Lawrence missed a few tricks, but that he appears to have taken very little trouble to make his setting even approximately authentic. The same slapdash attitude occurs in details of fact which he could easily have checked on: when we find Australians on the east coast in easy reach of the bush lighting their fires expensively with ‘chunks of jarrah’ or when the village war memorial is surmounted by the effigy of a ‘Tommy standing at ease’—though Lawrence knew the term ‘Digger’ and used it in the book—the carelessness is of the same order that makes Somers say he will sound his muezzin, or tell a story about white ants eating a litter of puppies, or take the blue-bottles on the New South Wales beach for some kind of octopus. These are more than mistakes excusable in a tourist; they are symptomatic of a sloppy attitude to his craft—because Lawrence was not indifferent to detail and prided himself on
sharp and vivid description. One might reply that the book was not written for Australians; but an author who sets a novel in a country unfamiliar to his readers has a responsibility to them which goes further than simply building up an atmosphere of the foreign or the exotic.

A good deal of the novel is not based on observation of Australia at all. If Lawrence never met the Australians—a few days before he left he wrote ‘We haven’t known a single soul here—which is really a relief’—if he took no trouble to learn about them, it is not surprising that his account of politics in this country is almost entirely factitious. He has been praised for his observation of an incipient Fascist movement in Australia in the early 1920s and it is true that there are some remarkable similarities between Kangaroo’s Diggers Clubs, their aims, methods and aspirations and the New Guard which appeared a few years later. But there is a simple explanation for this. Lawrence was projecting on Australian society the image of the still unformed and largely incoherent Fascist movement which he had learned something of in Italy. The New Guard when it appeared modelled itself on Mussolini’s developed State Fascism of a decade later. Lawrence’s account, one of the liveliest in the book, of the breaking up of a meeting of socialists by the Diggers Clubs, has no definite touches of local colour and would seem to be an imaginary transfer of similar action by the squadristi in Italy in 1921. But as Katharine Susannah Prichard, who did know what she was talking about, says, Lawrence really knew very little about either the fascist or the communist theories and policies of the 1920s. Neither the socialism of Willy Struthers as preached at Canberra Hall nor the fascism of Kangaroo as preached in his legal chambers, have anything to do with the policies and theory of any actual party that existed anywhere, let alone in Sydney. For example he appears to be completely unaware of the program adopted by the then famous Trade Union Congress of the year before (1921), which largely defined the aims of organised labour for the next ten years. Lawrence shows great contempt for the Trade Union movement, but even greater ignorance. At one point in the novel he even has the Cornishman William James, who is the owner of a wood and coal business on the north side of Sydney Harbour, explain to Somers, who asks how he comes to be at the Trades Hall (Canberra Hall in the novel): ‘I’m secretary for the coal-and-timber-merchants union.’ The mistake would have been as
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crass in England as in Australia and argues Lawrence's complete innocence of the whole subject. Somers is wooed by both the Fascist and Communist leaders to write for them and set up as a sort of party theorist. He is supposed to have caught their attention by a book he has published on the subject of democracy. Hardly any details are given but from Somers's recorded opinions on social movements and on politics it must have been remarkable only for its naïveté. Katharine Susannah Prichard scolds Lawrence for a vague and wild conception of what democracy amounted to in Australia at the time. Lawrence was unaware, she says, that he was living in a class society with repressive legislation against the working class and economic conditions which justified the working class unrest of the time. She is right of course. How could Lawrence know of these things when he read nothing and met nobody. But she is wrong in another sense. When Somers and his creator explain in almost the same terms that:

This is the most democratic place I have ever been in. And the more I see of democracy the more I dislike it. It just brings everything down to the mere vulgar level of wages and prices, electric lights and water closets, and nothing else... They have good wages, they wear smart boots, and the girls all have silk stockings; they fly around on ponies and in buggies... and in motor cars. They are always vaguely and meaninglessly on the go. And it all seems so empty, so nothing, it almost makes you sick.5

neither of them is talking about democracy in the political sense or even in the sense of a certain sort of social order — they are talking about the shocking habit of Australians, of whatever social class, of being more or less easy and unconscious about it; the way they have no special way of making a gentleman feel that he is a gentleman; a sort of easy familiarity that Lawrence, the miner's son with his inverted snobbery, found disgusting. The picture he gives of democracy in the political and social sense is simply a fantasy invented to support his imaginary political theme.

The fact that this socio-political fantasy is superimposed on Lawrence's picture of Australia, and indeed occupies a large part of

the book, tends to weaken what is an already suspect and shoddy background for the Australian reader. There is only one side of the book in which Lawrence's observation is brilliant and impressive, and that is his description of landscape of sea and shore, mountain and bushland and the raw and untidy townships. But he is best in his evocation of the strange, brooding and secret bushland. Again and again in the novel and his letters he evokes its forms, its vegetation and its birds and animals. It was an aspect of Australia that he loved, which fascinated and intimidated him. It was the side of his strange nature that called forth nearly all his best writing. In the evocation of scenery, of the spirit of place, of the personalities of beasts and flowers, language rarely let him down as it so often did in dealing with human affairs. The description of the kookaburra is justly famous. You feel you have never seen a kookaburra before even if you have lived in the country all your life. But this is just the secret of Lawrence's success. He makes you feel the strangeness of familiar things. You see and feel them more vividly, but you do not know any more about them; in fact as information the passage may be totally misleading. Nobody has got the ancient, aboriginal feeling of the bush better than Lawrence. But the bush he saw was most likely not ancient at all — fairly recent secondary growth, in fact. The description of the blue-bottles on the beach is nearly all wrong as information but it is magical as a vivid impression:

The sea had thrown up, all along the surf-line, queer glittery creatures that looked like thin blown glass. They were bright transparent bladders of the most delicate ink-blue, with a long crest of deeper blue, and blind ends of translucent purple. And they had bunches of blue, blue strings and one long blue string that trailed almost a yard across the sand... They must have been some sort of little octopus, with the bright glass bladder, big as smallish narrow pears, with a blue frill along the top to float them, and the strings to feel with — and perhaps the long string to anchor by. Who knows?

Who knows, indeed? He could have asked the next fisherman he met, but he didn't care to know about the country he was describing. The result is that Kangaroo as a novel set in a particular country and society is very much of a travesty.
But of course it is very much more than a novel of travel and description articulated by a thread of fiction. In a sense it is hardly fiction at all for the two main characters are Frieda and Lawrence, everything that happens to them are things that happened to Frieda and Lawrence either in fact or in Lawrence’s imagination, and the theme of the book is the ideas with which Lawrence himself was wrestling at the time. He describes himself inside and out quite candidly in the person of Somers with an embarrassing complacency even for his most unpleasant characteristics, his petulance, irritable vanity and deliberate malice. Lawrence’s letters show that he dramatises in Somers his own fantasy life and he dignifies it with the term ‘a thought adventure’. This ‘thought adventure’ is concerned with the working out of three personal problems which were also Lawrence’s own preoccupations at the time. One is the solution to the problem of finding a relation of himself to modern society or alternatively of finding a society in which he could live without constant friction and conflict; the second is the problem of how to live with his wife; and the third is the problem of how to be a messiah, for Lawrence seriously believed himself to have a prophetic mission as the bearer of a New Word for mankind. He dramatises all these three in the person of Richard Somers and it is for this reason that Somers is in a sense the most detached of all the many self-portraits in Lawrence’s fiction. In fact Lawrence treats him with a good deal of almost hostile satire. It is as though for once he tried to record himself and his problems quite objectively so that he could play it back and see what it looked like from outside. This is why in one of his author’s intrusions he refers to the book as ‘This gramaphone of a novel’. Perhaps this is why the book is so carelessly written, why it descends to such depths of colloquial sloppiness and pseudo-philosophical delirium. Lawrence did not wish for any literary manipulation, though he knew he could do better than this, to come between the recording and his later judgment. This of course is a perfectly reasonable thing to do, but it makes a mess of the book as a novel for readers who read it for entertainment or enlightenment.

The first of Lawrence’s problems fails to reach any solution. Two reasons for this have already been suggested: Somers in the book is represented as a political illiterate laying down the law about politics and society. Moreover his creator instead of giving him an actual political situation to work on presents him with such an ignorant
travesty that the result on either count is to make Somers look ridiculous. But Somers is only temporarily engaged in Australian politics, he is never actually involved in the social solutions offered by communism and fascism. Their importance in the novel is concerned with Somers’s messianic role. Much more important is Australia itself as a possible community in which Somers/Lawrence might be able to live. The purpose of The Nightmare, the chapter which records almost verbatim Lawrence’s experiences in England during World War I, and incidentally the most impressive piece of writing in the novel, is to make clear why Somers cannot live in his own country; Australia fascinates him by its lack of social pressures, its ‘indifference’ as he calls it, but at the same time he finds its ‘democracy’ and its lack of civilisation offensive. Somers like Lawrence himself was always partly attracted to Australia as the solution to the problem of finding a place where he could live in solitude, but it failed to produce the sorts of people he needed round him in his solitude. As we have seen, he did not take much trouble to find out.

Lawrence like Somers was continually at loggerheads with his wife over something which may seem ridiculous to most people though to both it was of tragic importance — both men believed that the true basis of marriage was that the woman should submit to the man — hence the long and rather absurd allegory on the marriage ship which occupies a whole chapter of Kangaroo. Harriet in the novel, like Frieda in real life, loves her husband but thinks this mystic domination by the male a lot of nonsense. The curious thing is that Lawrence takes no pains to make Somers a really dominating or impressive figure, he is small, irritable, over excited, often quite childish in behaviour and language. Harriet makes fun of him and he is a figure of fun. It supports the idea that Lawrence’s primary aim was not to prove the theory of the dominating male which we know him to have seriously believed as essential to the proper, natural relations of the sexes, but to set down a ‘recording’ of his relations with Frieda in order to see why his theory hadn’t worked. The novel ends with a kind of truce between the spouses but neither can be said to have won and nothing has been solved.

The third problem can be said to have been solved in a manner of speaking. Here Lawrence has arranged a fantasy as a means of working out an imaginary solution. He makes Somers a man not only personally out of tune with the contemporary world and its values,
but convinced that he has a key to what is wrong with contemporary social forms and beliefs and a new world view which will be the answer: the religion of the Dark God. The rejection of Christianity, the rejection of the social patterns of Europe are already implicit in Somers's search when he comes to Australia and only dealt with by the way as he faces the real crisis of the book. The new religions and the new social orders offered by fascism and communism—or a sort of mystical surrogate of them—are offered to Somers successively as temptations rather like those the Devil offers to Christ in the wilderness—Somers at first is attracted to the power solution offered by Kangaroo's Fascism of Love. But he rejects both Kangaroo and Struthers for the curious reason that each is based, like rejected Christianity, on the brotherhood of man and the love of man for man. Somers rejects both for a religion of the uncommitted individual soul. In some mysterious way the dark, phallic, instinctive God will save mankind by providing a way in which social solipsists like Somers can in fact form a workable relation with society.

This is why I call the book a fantasy, because ultimately it seems to me to be a dream in which Lawrence dramatises his personal problems on a world screen and preaches a solution which he never tries to put even into imaginary action.

I have suggested that Lawrence may have had a good reason for not trying to make Somers a hero adequate to his theme. He is always cut down to size, rather comic, often humiliated, nearly always in a rather absurd rage with everything around him, and lacking altogether the personal charm that Lawrence himself seems to have possessed. But his chief defect as the hero of a novel of ideas, or a ‘thought adventure’ as Lawrence calls it, is that the author never succeeds in making him credible as an intellectual figure. Early in the book Lawrence makes the elementary mistake of stressing his brilliance as a man, a writer and a thinker. This is drawing a blank cheque on the readers’ credulity—and the cheque is never honoured. Somers’s conversation is anything but brilliant, his attempts at practical success fall flat on their face, he fails to bring his wife to heel and he goes about it so crassly and stupidly that we do not wonder at the fact; he argues with such floundering incoherence in the realm of ideas and theories that we soon fail to take him seriously as an intelligent man. Somers is a very real and human figure, almost a work of genius in depiction.
Kangaroo

of a certain kind of man who is always at loggerheads with the world because he is always at loggerheads with himself. He is like Thersites in Shakespeare’s play ‘lost in the Labyrinth of his fury’. Because he is lost he cannot be effective for what Lawrence seems to want him to demonstrate.

Yet when all is said, even through the perverse and incoherent babble that Lawrence attributes to Somers, there comes some gleam of a vision: a new world freed by imagination such as William Blake had presented to the world a century earlier. And Lawrence’s enemies are ultimately Blake’s enemies. It is easy enough to laugh at them. Both were vulnerable human beings. Both adopted artistic methods that defeated their aims, but both saw more deeply into the nature of things than their more rational contemporaries. Only there the comparison ends. Lawrence, at the best, was only a very minor Blake.
The Man Who Loved Children

storm in a tea-cup

_Dorothy Green_

Man... the dominant mammal whose whole behaviour tends to be dominated by his own desire for dominance.

MacFarlane Burnet

Christina Stead's long novel _The Man Who Loved Children_, set in Washington and Baltimore, seems on the face of it to be no part of a picture of Australian experience. There is something to be said for those historians of Australian Literature, who, faced with the task of attempting to define what it is that distinguishes Australian writing from other writing in English, have set it aside and concentrated their attention on _Seven Poor Men of Sydney_ and _For Love Alone_. But the novelist is an Australian and the battle described took place on Australian soil; only the terrain has become American, not the battle itself, its origins, the combatants, the strategy, nor the tactics.¹ These indeed belong to no particular place: the battle is universal. The only setting necessary for its conduct was first a stately old home in large grounds, falling into decay, on the outskirts of a great city; second, a rambling derelict house on a waterfront, with a large garden and access to a beach. This was the setting available to Christina Stead as a child and a young woman, when the artist inside her was struggling to be born; first, the rambling old house at Bexley, a suburb of Sydney; second, the two-storey wooden house at Watson’s Bay, both still standing today. But given similar habitats and the particular natures of those who lived in them, the story could have been located in any English-speaking country (though a few odd words betray the speech as Australian). For one of the first things that strikes the reader about

¹ See P. White’s usage, p. 345, of _Voss_, ‘not the deserts of mysticism, nor the transfiguration of Christ’.

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the fictional habitat is its self-containedness; its relationships with the society outside it are tenuous, and he is observing characters in a closed system.

The novel has its roots in actual fact: Christina Stead’s mother did die when she was very young, her father, David Stead, a naturalist and a fisheries expert did marry again, a young society woman totally incompatible with him, who produced a brood of step-brothers and sisters whom his eldest daughter helped to look after. The gardens were full of wild creatures of various kinds, including snakes, and the children wandered at will through paddocks and over beaches and rocks. David Stead was in fact a powerful personality, a spell-binder, who made it difficult for other personalities to withstand him. After his second wife died, he married a third time.

Out of this material Christina Stead has created what is extremely rare in modern literature: three archetypal characters who have a life of their own, independent of their author; characters like Dickens’s Uriah Heep or Mr Micawber, who can be known to those who have never read the books in which they figure. This is particularly true of Sam Pollit, ‘the man who loved children’. The ironical title defines him as the phrase ‘humble as Uriah Heep’ defines Heep. Figures who take on mythic proportions in a literature, who become part of its language, nearly always have a touch of caricature about them: they are always larger than life. Quite often they are not drawn in any depth at all — like the caricature, they acquire immortality with a few telling strokes. Sam Pollit however is drawn in great detail and in great depth, so that he becomes more, not less plausible as the book progresses. At first, it is almost impossible to believe in such a character at all; then it becomes clear that it is the seeming exaggerations which make the portrait convincing: the reader, like the children, becomes part of the illusionary world Sam constructs for his illusionary self. There are hints of such a father in the short story ‘Overcote’ in The Salzburg Tales, a momentary glimpse in Seven Poor Men of Sydney, with Michael’s supposed father. But in this novel the dominant male is seen from every possible point of view: his own, his wife’s, his eldest daughter’s, his young children’s, his sisters’, his father’s, occasionally his colleagues’, those of the foreigners he visits in Malaya, and the narrator’s. There is no doubting his existence.

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As novelist and as naturalist, Christina Stead and her father were both far ahead of their time, especially in their own country. It was thirty years before any of Stead’s novels were published in Australia, although one or two critics had spoken of her genius from the beginning. The rich prose of *The Salzburg Tales* and *Seven Poor Men of Sydney* looks like some riotous exotic plant in the vegetable garden of the social-realist novel in the Australia of the 1930s. Now the fashion is for exotics and the humble vegetable is despised. In the same way, David Stead’s pioneering work in conservation, his interest in the interactions of species with their particular environment, aroused little enthusiasm in the 1920s and 1930s. Now the word ‘conservation’ is, for the moment, on everybody’s lips. The following sentence from *The Man Who Loved Children* is today easily construed as a description of what the writer is up to; when it was written, it must have washed over the heads of nine out of ten readers. If David Stead ever made the suggestion contained in it, he should be given credit for inspiring one of the most elaborate and most original novels in modern English:

‘You know, Looloo, I think we should begin to keep a salinity record of our poor little crick! Why shouldn’t you turn out the Spa House journal, or Natural History of Spa House, like Selborne, and you can put in the human beasts, too, what inhabit the area or human ecology.’ (p. 349)²

This must be one of the rare uses of the word ‘ecology’ in the literature of thirty years ago; but in spite of the current modishness of the word, it makes sense to describe this work as an ‘ecological novel’. It presents the observer with the spectacle of a struggle for survival in a habitat which is too small and too impoverished for the ‘fighting fish’ it contains. The dominant male survives in it, his mate succumbs, but his daughter, partly because of, partly in spite of her genetic inheritance from her father and her own mother, partly because of characteristics acquired from her step-mother, manages to fight her way out of this closed ecosystem and goes for a walk ‘round the world’ to find a new one in which she can flourish more easily. Horrifying as the book often is, there is no tone of grudging resent-

² All quotations are taken from the 1966 edition of the novel published by Secker and Warburg, London.
ment in the narrative; behind it is the clear awareness that only this particular combination of circumstances, this extraordinary mixture of tragedy and buffoonery, could have led to the evolution of this particular species of artist. Louisa's temporary hatred for her father is the healthy hatred of an animal whose existence is threatened; it passes when the threat is removed and is an ingredient in the book, not the ground of it.

What saves Louisa's sanity, as the battle between Henrietta and Sam runs its course, is her contempt for those she is associated with, learned from Henny, and a belief in her own genius, an inheritance from Sam. We do not watch the battle, however, through Louisa's consciousness, nor indeed through the consciousness of any particular figure in the novel. Neither is it correct to speak of an omniscient narrator. It is as if we were standing beside an expert observer, watching with her the behaviour of these strange beings and listening to authoritative descriptions of what they are doing. The observer is perhaps the finished artist Nature intended Louisa to become, looking back at her early experience and confirming her tentative interpretations of what she was living through. It is not true to say, as Ron Geering has said, that comment is rare in the novel. There is a great deal of it, especially in the second half, after Sam's return from the Smithsonian Expedition to Malaya. The reader, like Louisa herself, learns gradually to contemplate and classify the Pollits from a distance, while participating in their lives at close quarters. The attitude is indicated directly in the scene in which Sam is about to open the presents he has brought from Singapore:

A movement began again, breathless and happy among all the Pollits; they had been straying, and now they began circulating slowly, but regularly in groups, like creatures swimming round an aquarium. (p. 271)

The commentary that accompanies the action from the early stages is not the usual kind of 'interior' psychological analysis the twentieth century novelist specialises in. What the author does is to marshal an overwhelming abundance of evidence in speech, action and indirect description of physical and mental behaviour, which will lead the reader inevitably to the correct classification of Sam. A psychologist might have deduced the existence of an 'oral-erotic' type merely from
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watching Sam as he is presented, but the novelist does not start, as so many do nowadays, with a psychological abstraction and then proceed to clothe it in flesh. She begins, as all genuine artists do, from the flesh.

Nevertheless, the 'observer-commentary' is the chief source of the flaws that Randall Jarrell admits mar the book, though they do not destroy its claims to greatness. Jarrell's Introduction to the 1966 edition is by far the best general account of the novel, as full of gusto and poetry as the book itself, but it concentrates, quite rightly, on the obvious highlights in order to entice new readers to it after its long neglect. More serious than the narrative excess he complains of is the insertion of material in the wrong place: we are not given the actual details about Sam's niggardliness with housekeeping money until late in the book, so that Henny's inability to make ends meet is as much a mystery to the reader as it is to her children and her 'lover'. The account of Fisherman Sam, the only Sam for whom one can feel any respect, on page 389, also comes too late, even though it is needed at this point to prepare for the final episode with the marlin. Yet some earlier description of this side of Sam would have made it more credible that he should achieve any sort of eminence, even with his father-in-law's help; his competence as an ichthyologist is not stressed soon enough to dispel the suspicion that no sane adult could have put up with him for more than five minutes. Disconcerting gobbets of information are interpolated into the narrative at various points, interrupting the dramatic line; there are awkward character descriptions like that of Sam on page 272, part of which is repeated on page 303. A more glaring example of repetitiveness in the form of a banal comment occurs on page 332, when we are told by the narrator what we have already had amply demonstrated from the first pages of the novel:

Louie was as happy and as solitary as she could be — she had a real genius for solitude and could manage to have the solace of loneliness even in this community.

This must be the most undistinguished sentence in a book remarkable for the beauty and clarity of its prose, but it surprises us mainly because the writer has mastered the technique of prose better than any other writer of Australian fiction. Yet — when a table is so richly
spread, it is ungracious to complain because a fork or two are mis-
placed. A novel of this kind is a world, and perfection in a world
would be incredible.

One of the difficulties about Jarrell's Introduction is that it reveals
too much of what happens, depriving the reader of the kind of
pleasure the unpredictability of the real world affords him. How sur-
prising it is, for instance, yet how absolutely right, that when Sam's
birthday occurs during the climactic battle between husband and wife,
Henny should give him a pair of hand-knitted socks! It is absolutely
essential to read the novel before reading any criticism about it: the
reader of this article who has come so far without having done so
continues at the risk of missing its 'first fine careless rapture'.

The object of the essay is not to discount what Jarrell has said,
but to supplement it, from a fresh point of view. At the moment, the
family as an institution in Anglo-Saxon society is under heavy
attack and younger readers coming to the book for the first time
will greet it joyfully as one of the first shots in a campaign now well
under way. But it is doubtful whether this novel, about one of the
unhappiest of unhappy families, is really an attack on 'the family'.
Strange and fruitful use can be made of unhappiness, as all Stead's
novels show. Jarrell's claim that the book shows, as few books have
ever done, 'what a family is', is the sort of literary generalisation
which, if it could be translated into chemical terms, would blow
up the chemist and his laboratory. What the novel does is to show
what one particular family was like and what its peculiar combination
of characteristics achieved that was of value to the race; and it does
that supremely well. There are infinite varieties of families and it
would be difficult to imagine a scientifically trained mind like
Christina Stead's confusing a species with a phylum. The inexplicable
union of Henrietta Collyer and Sam Pollit resulted in a family of a
very unusual kind: the only bond between them is their carnality and
this and their other characteristics are distributed among their child-
ren in surprising ways. Moreover, there is nothing particularly repre-
sentative about Henrietta's antecedents, nor those of Louisa on her
own mother's side. Sam's own father and Henny's mother and father
are oddities. Some of Sam's brothers and sisters are of a startling
mediocrity, but he himself is apparently a mutation. A fool in the
ways of the world, an incredible mixture of sensuality and puritanism,
Sam can be taken seriously only in one sphere, ichthyology:

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Then he [Saul Pilgrim] and Sam would sit down over some tea or coffee and biscuits, and it would be nothing but flannel bait, white-line peelers, green bait, beach-casting, mine-bilge pollution, Conwingo Dam shad, rainbow trout and Tetrapturus albitus. In the days just gone Saul Pilgrim had got information for his columns from Sam, and Sam could still put him right on the technical and formal side, for Pilgrim had but a messy, literary mind and scattered experience. (p. 388)

The figures of Sam and Henny are so powerfully drawn, that of Louisa, the eldest child, their 'punching ball', so memorable and moving, that it is not surprising the book should be read simply as a horrifying account of marital incompatibility. But if it is justifiable to see each example of a family as a miniature eco-system, then the principal product of this one is a unique species of artist and the novel is an account of the extraordinarily complex interactions needed to produce it. The book is also the record of the growth towards awareness of the members of the system: all the main characters, according to their age and capacity, move from incomprehension towards some sort of painful insight, except perhaps the little girl Evie, who remains perpetually dependent and bewildered. Henny answers her own early question 'Oh what is the world all about?' when, towards the end of her life, she looks back on twelve years of motherhood, savouring the familiar fresh dirtiness of her baby's room, after returning from a visit to her sister. Reflecting that none of her children have inherited a taste for any of the things she had learned to do, she sums up the futility of attempting to mould human beings:

A mother! What are we worth really? They all grow up whether you look after them or not. That poor miserable brat of his is growing up, and I certainly licked the hide off her; and she's seen marriage at its worst, and now she's dreaming about 'supermen' and 'great men'. What is the good of doing anything for them? Anyhow, He always wins! (p. 457)

Henny, of course, is looking for visible evidence of her influence; she does not see what the children have learned from her, because it is working below the surface. Nevertheless, she is more clear-sighted about the educational process than Sam, who never doubts that what he wishes to communicate can be communicated. Even Sam, however,
The Man Who Loved Children

the most static and self-absorbed of the principal characters, has a brief, uncomfortable twinge of self-perception, when he returns home from Malaya after moving among adults in the outside world for ten months. He sees how little his precepts are followed, when his ‘wand is removed’. His doubts are quickly repressed, however, when he resumes his role as Triton among the minnows, by filling the defaulters with a sense of guilt.

The ten chapters of the book fall into three main sections which correspond roughly to three different stages in Louisa’s growth to awareness. She is equated from the beginning with the ‘night-rider’, the horseman she seems to hear galloping through the dark, awake like herself when the rest of the world is asleep — an image of the artist she aspires obscurely to become. She has no notion where her talents lie, and like so many gifted children who are ugly ducklings has vague dreams of becoming a famous actress, like Duse. Just past eleven, moving towards early puberty, she is beginning to sense that there may be two sides to the matrimonial debate which rages continually over her head; the rift has reached the stage when Henny refuses to speak to her husband and communicates with him through a child or by note. The younger children do not trouble their heads about the inexplicable vagaries of grown-ups: they take no more note of them than of changes in the weather. The end of this first section is marked by a physical reconciliation between Henny and Sam. It is never made quite clear what Henny’s motives are and she scarcely knows herself: the comfort of sensuality, a means of getting money out of Sam, a fear which she never hints at that she may already be pregnant by her stolid ‘lover’, Bert Anderson?

Henny, defenceless, in one of those absences of hatred, aimless lulls that all long wars must have, turned towards him, looking at him strangely with her great, brown eyes. (p. 149)

Sam, sensing her weariness, seduces her from her resolution, indeed from her promise to her eldest son, Ernie, to have no more children. Ten-year-old Ernie, the financial genius of the family, has already had Malthusian misgivings about the pressure of population on resources, the connection between their mother’s perennial shortage of money and the number of children. This reunion between Sam and Henny turns out to be the cause of their final estrangement. Henny’s resent-
ment at her pregnancy is transformed into maniacal hatred towards the end of the book, when Sam voices his suspicion that the child she has borne is not his own.

The end of the second section is marked by the birth of this child, 'the seventh child of a seventh child', as Sam proudly announces. During its gestation, Sam has been in Malaya with an anthropological expedition; the confinement coincides with his return.

The third movement culminates in Henny's loss of her worthless 'lover', a man as egocentric as Sam himself, without even the guts to marry; with the suicide of Henny, the flight of Louisa and Sam's project to re-establish the disturbed habitat of Spa House. Henny's suicide is one of the most carefully prepared for events in fiction, yet it come as a complete surprise. The novelist makes the most skilful use of that old wives' tale that those who talk about killing themselves never do it.

The main concern of the first section is to depict the Pollits in their home environment, a habitat which is really designed as a permanent playground for Sam. He rationalises his own requirements in terms of what is desirable for the children's growth, their growth as he plans it. His first playground, of which he is inordinately proud, is Tohoga House, the property of Henny's father, reputedly a millionaire, with a large family of spoilt children. It is to him that Sam owes his position in the Conservation Bureau.

The novel introduces with great speed and vividness all the main characters, evoking their physical and psychological features, their movements, the sound of their voices, so that they are forever sharply distinguished from one another in the reader's mind. It is the father's return home the children are waiting for in this superb opening chapter:

All the June Saturday afternoon... as they skated round the dirt sidewalks and seamed old asphalt... that bounded the deep-grassed acres of Tohoga House, their home. (p. 3)

But it is the mother who comes home first, and seldom has the situation of a mother stampeded by children and their demands been more accurately and sensuously depicted than in the first thirteen pages of this book. A woman who has never had a family could feel what it is like to have one by reading them. The same feeling of vertigo is
produced by Tolstoy, even in translation, when he describes Dolokhov drinking a bottle of rum on a high window ledge, in Chapter 9 of *War and Peace*. The children produce giddiness in Henny by their perpetual swirling, frothing motion, not only of their bodies but their minds. Adverbs and verbs of motion are used unobtrusively in the first paragraph, but gather force in the second, while inside the house the effect of motion is continued in the clatter of voices:

The sun dropped between reefs of cloud into the Virginia woods: a rain-fog rattled and the air grew damp. Mother coming home from the Wisconsin Avenue car, with parcels, was seen from various corners by the perspiring young ones, who rushed to meet her, chirring on their skates, and who convoyed her home, weaving and glowing about her, or holding on to her skirt, and merry, in spite of her decorous irritations. 'I come home and find you tearing about the streets like mad things!' They poured into the house, bringing in dirt, suppositions, questions, legends of other children, and plans for the next day, while Louie, suddenly remembering potatoes and string beans neglected, slunk in through the back door. (pp. 3-4)

The energy of the paragraph, the precision and order of observation, the subtle seeds of characterisation in this dynamic picture, in which Louisa is already isolated from the rest, show a remarkable ease in the use of language, particularly in the control of tone and rhythm.

From the swirling mass, each child is picked out in turn: the twins, Saul and Sam, full of automatic and aimless curiosity; Ernest, the eldest boy, 'the only Collyer', his mother's favourite, who is possessed of a highly purposive curiosity and an interest in money that provides a curious emotional tie between him and his mother throughout the book:

'Mother has two dollars and eighty-two cents: Mother, when you went out you had five dollars and sixteen cents and a stamp. What did you buy, Mother?'

The self-effacing Evie, with her one question is, characteristically, brushed aside; the unrecognised bond between the stepchild and the
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Mother is established at once, symbolised by the cup of tea which Louisa brings unbidden. Money and tea are associated in this first scene, as they are in the last scenes of Henny's life:

‘You have money on your tea, Moth!’ said Saul cheerfully.
‘Yes, that's good,’ and she carefully lifted the circle of froth to her mouth in her teaspoon, but it broke, and at this she gave an irritated cry, ‘Oh, there, now I won't get any!’

As she sits drinking her tea, surrounded by pestering children, the details of her life are filled in, her meaning for the children, her identification of the house with her marriage. The children see her as belonging to her chair:

When Henny sat there, on the contrary, everything was in order and it was as if no-one was in the house; it was like the presence of a somber friendly old picture that has hung on the wall for generations. (p. 5)

For the children, in spite of her violence, Henny, when detached from Sam, spells peace and non-interference. She sees herself, as they see her, as part of the house:

She had the calm of frequentation; she belonged to this house and it to her. Though she was a prisoner in it, she possessed it. She and it were her marriage. She was indwelling in every board and stone of it...
(p. 7)

The lines that follow are a rich and sinister incantation of the 'proliferating miseries, the running scabs, for which (and not for its heavenly joys) the flesh of marriage is so heavily veiled and conventionally interned'.

Then follows the clear statement of that domestic image on which the life of Henny rests. Sam is to use it later when he is baffled and exasperated by Louisa's adolescent miseries, and there is no doubt that the image has a general as well as a particular relevance:

As Henny sat before her tea-cup and the steam rose from it and the treacherous foam gathered, uncollectible round its edge, the thousand storms of her confined life would rise up before her, thinner illusions
on the steam. She did not laugh at the words 'a storm in a tea-cup.' Some raucous, cruel words about five cents misspent were as serious in a woman’s life as a debate on war appropriations in Congress: all the civil war of ten years roared into their smoky words when they shrieked, maddened, at each other; all the snakes of hate hissed. (pp. 7-8)

Solitaire, the third of the images which define Henny, now appears, like the other two, in a sinister context:

When Sam was out, if Henny felt restless, she would take her double pack and shuffle them with a sound like a distant machine-gun, and worry and re-shuffle and begin to lay them out eagerly, by fours. (p. 8)

Financial stress, treachery, war, weapons of death, Chance, storms: all these features of the domestic scene are paralleled by those of the political world outside it. The children leave the conduct of affairs to those whose business it seems to them to be, as most men leave it to their politicians, and go about their own immediate concerns:

And then when the father came home, the children who had been battling and shuttling round her would all rush off like water down a sink, leaving her sitting there, with blackened eyes, a yellow skin, and straining wrinkles: and she would think of the sink, and mutter, as she did at this moment, 'A dirty cracked plate: that's just what I am!'

'What did you say, Mummy?' asked little Sam. She looked at him, the image of his father, and repeated, 'I'm a greasy old soup-plate,' making them all laugh, laughing herself.

'Mother, you're so silly,' Evie said. (p. 13)

The physical proximity, the psychic distance of children from the grownup world, could hardly have been better conveyed than in this scene.

Sam's homecoming characterises him with equal sharpness and swiftness; his fundamental dishonesty, or self-delusion, where his children are concerned, sounds the key note:

Sam could have been home just after sun-set when his harum-scarum brood were still looking for him, and he had meant to be there, for he never broke his word to them. (p. 16)
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He is not there, of course, because he is delayed at the office celebrating his new appointment to the Anthropological Mission to the Pacific; since his children are parts of himself, there is no question of his breaking his word to them, and he has not, and is never to have, any capacity for distinguishing his intentions from his acts. At this stage none of the younger children look for any relationship between word and deed; for them the adult world is as irrational as the world of Olympus for the ancients. While the parents' battles rage over their heads, they manage to lead an absorbing life, as men do under the shadow of a volcano:

Sam tried to impart everything he knew to the children and grumbled that the mother taught nothing at all: yet their influence on the boys and girls was equal. The children grabbed tricks and ideas according to the needs of the day, without thinking at all of where they got them, without gratitude; and Henny saw this and so did not bother her head about her children. (p. 8)

Henny in fact is an unconscious Darwinian, for whom life is organised as a 'series of piracies'. What she actually does for her young is to educate their senses and their imagination without knowing it, an education invaluable to Louisa, since it teaches her to observe people in figurative terms:

What a dreary stodgy world of adults the children saw when they went out! And what a moral, high-minded world their father saw! But for Henny, there was a wonderful particular world, and when they went with her they saw it: they saw the fish eyes, the crocodile grins, the hair like a birch broom, the mean men crawling with maggots, and the children restless as an eel, that she saw. (p. 9)

Not only is Henny's vision of the world a source of tangible wonders, but her bedroom, with its 'treasure drawers', is an Aladdin's cave, a chaos of delights, while Sam's room is like a museum. Henny is mystery and romance, Sam hard facts. Each parent fights for the possession of the children, but, we are told:

The children were not taking it in at all. Their real feelings were made up of the sensations received in the respective sing-songs and treasure hunts. (p. 33)
The father's eternal talk of saving the world through the pooling of the wisdom of great minds, including his own; his schemes for a planned economy, while he lives off his father-in-law; his belief in eugenic selection; his saccharine gospel of universal love and brotherhood, for men only; his naïve confidence in human perfectibility: all this blows over the children's heads during the first third of the book. What really interests them and what is useful to them are his blow-torch, his paint and tools, the small particular jobs of Sunday-Funday, his songs, and, it must be said in fairness, his knowledge of the natural world. It is interesting to note that The Man Who Loved Children provides a particularly vivid fictional illustration of the thesis recently argued so brilliantly in John Passmore's The Perfectibility of Man: that perfectibilism, doctrines of universal love and utopian bliss lend themselves only too easily to the establishment of totalitarian political systems. Sam's words to his children on the eve of his departure for Malaya have a horribly familiar ring in modern ears: 'You're free to elect your own boss as long as it's Ernie.' Ernie, significantly enough, once Sam has departed, declines the role.

The whole of the first movement, then, establishes Sam as the chief child in a band of children — his own and any he can conscript from the neighbourhood; he is scarcely ever seen in more than a brief contact with his 'peers'. Of children he cannot have enough: he grows by assimilating them, swallowing the younger lives around him as a python swallows its prey, or as the largest fish in an overcrowded aquarium devours the smaller ones. His chief weapons are blackmail and self-pity. The 'tyranny of tears' he is always warning his daughters not to use serves him well. He plays on the mothering instincts of little girls, dominates the boys by shaming their manhood and is in fact, like a new-born infant, utterly oblivious to the existence of any life outside his own:

For Sam was naturally light hearted, pleasant, all generous effusion and responsive emotion. He was incapable of nursing an injustice which would cost him good living to repay, an evil thought which it would undo him to give back, or even sorrow in his bosom; and tragedy itself could not worm its way by any means into his heart. Such a thing would have made him ill or mad, and he was all for health, sanity, success and human love. (p. 47)
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The novel opens then just when Louisa is becoming conscious of the problem of loving such a father, beginning to veer in her loyalties, a veering to which Sam remains stubbornly blind from beginning to end of the book. Louisa is troubled at first by ambivalent feelings; she cannot understand why she prefers the enmity of her stepmother to the love of her father. The fact that she is repulsive to Henny, who senses Sam's repressed incestuous interest in the girl, ensures that she will be left alone. But Henny also feels some womanly kinship with the child who is approaching womanhood and the 'rotten' lot of women; she grasps instinctively her need for solitude and: 'most markedly neglected her, refused to instruct her and refused to interpret her to visitors' (p. 34). 'I beat her,' says Henny, 'but I don't lie to her.' An unconscious coalition develops between them against Sam's primeval maleness, a maleness which has hardly developed beyond a Neanderthal level. This is affirmed by the sordid, pathetic scene which Sam witnesses through the dining-room window, when Henny, in exasperation, makes as if to strangle Louisa:

Louisa looked up into her step-mother's face, squirming, but not trying to get away, questioning her silently, needing to understand, in an affinity of misfortune. (p. 20)

Much of the preparation for the dénouement of the novel is laid down in the opening scenes. Louisa's familiarity with her mother's medicine-chest, with its aspirin, phenacetin and pyramidon, is carefully described; and she is shown as the perennial dispenser of early morning cups of tea. In addition, the father talks continually about weeding out the unfit, justifiable murder and murder as self-sacrifice. All these confused ideas are in the child's mind in the revolting scene in which she is manipulated by an eccentric neighbour into killing a troublesome cat for her. It is 'practice-murder', which establishes credibility for her later attempt to murder her parents 'on principle'. The final comment on the killing of the cat links the scene with its analogue:

Louie was sorry she had only been invited over for the cat, but she believed that the little woman loved her and that there was peace in her foul cottage. (p. 81)
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Louisa is also worked on unconsciously by witnessing the end of one of her parents' more violent quarrels, when Henny torments Sam by taking pyramidon:

'How do you know what's in this?' She looked at him through the water as she drank it and slowly closed her eyes. 'Now get out,' she said through the water. Sam, turning away, saw Louie, a figure of condemnation, in the doorway. The look of concern she turned on her mother changed to rebuke when she looked at him. Sam put out his hand and said quietly, 'Looloo,' but she ducked ably by him and went to Henrietta, 'Mother, can I get you anything?' (p. 128)

In the following powerful scene, Sam almost succeeds in winning back her waning allegiance. He takes her for a walk and tells her about his sorrows. 'I have sorrows, too,' she pipes up, but Sam sweeps on, filling her with stories of 'countenanced murder', because it interests and amuses her. How far his unconscious motive is identical with the conscious motive of the cat-owner is left to the reader to decide. His talk bemuses Louie so much that she is under the impression that Sam for once has been listening to her:

When they got home, Louie was full of excitement. She had never come so near to talking about her own ambitions, and Sam was in a comradely mood. (p. 135)

He destroys her elation by equating her with himself, ridiculing her ideas, and criticising her appearance, about which she is exceptionally sensitive. She promises vengeance as she goes up to bed and dreams of a scythe suspended in a space which is God. She wakes to the sound of screams from Henny that Sam is beating her.

The main bone of contention between the parents is money. Sam professes to be indifferent to it and piously describes it as the root of all evil; in reality he and his sister Jo, as Ernie sardonically observes, think about it all the time, and Sam has already deprived Louie of some property for his own purposes before the story opens. He projects his own secret passion for it on to Henny, accusing her of a reckless extravagance inherited from her father. It is true that Henny entered upon marriage with little notion of the value of money, but her extravagance is never really demonstrated: we see her more often

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darning, patching and making do. After Sam’s suspension from his job and it is revealed that he has kept most of his pay for his own amusements, contributing only a meagre amount to the housekeeping, the situation becomes more comprehensible. Henny’s sense of guilt about her debts no doubt prejudices her view of Sam, but it is given ample support by Louisa’s view, by Ernie’s and gradually by those of the twins.

His most marked characteristic is a lust for power, and money is a means of achieving it, but this lust has no connection with reality except in the world of children. At bottom it is a confession of weakness and insecurity, as his first jubilant soliloquy reveals (p. 17); it is a protest against his poverty-stricken origins, and to that extent comprehensible and faintly admirable. But even in his relations with women and children, he can exercise only limited power; he is compelled to find an outlet for its fulfilment in fantasy, as his lectures to the children on the ideal society demonstrate so comically:

‘My system . . . which I invented myself, might be called Monoman, or Manunity!’

Evie laughed, not knowing whether it was right or not. Louisa said: ‘You mean Monomania.’ Evie giggled and then lost all her colour, became a stainless olive, appalled at her mistake.

Sam said coolly, ‘You look like a gutter-rat, Looloo, with that expression. Monoman would only be the condition of the world after we had weeded out the misfits and degenerates.’

There was a threat in the way he said it. ‘This would be done by means of the lethal chamber and people might even ask for the painless death, or euthanasia, of their own accord.’

Louisa couldn’t help laughing at the idea and declared, ‘They wouldn’t.’

‘People would be taught and would be anxious to produce the new man and with him the new state of man’s social perfection.’

This pernicious nonsense is punctured by Ernie:

‘Oh, murder me, please, I’m no good,’ squeaked Ernie, suddenly. Of course, he had instant success, and Sam chuckled. But nothing more happened nor was any more heard at the moment of Sam’s ideal state, Manunity, or Monoman. (p. 50)
The passage is revealing for several reasons: it exposes Sam's hatred for those who cross him, disguised as the wish for the perfect state; 'the misfits and degenerates' are only too obviously his wife and daughter. His political infantilism hardly needs to be pointed out, but it is given poignancy from its setting in time: the date is 1937 and already fantasies of the kind he indulges in were being put into practice in Hitler's Germany. What saves Sam from condemnation as a complete monster is his capacity for laughter, which makes him unexpectedly human. Such a passage also makes credible Louisa's later passion for Nietzsche, in whom she finds her father's aseptic, eugenic concept of the perfect man translated into poetic, Romantic terms. (To say this is not to father Nazism upon Nietzsche.)

Ernie and Louisa are not the only rebels. During Sam's Sunday-Funday painting orgies, he keeps his unpaid gang of workers amused by chanting idiotic rhymes about their neighbours, friends and acquaintances, so loudly that their amusement gives way to embarrassment, and Little-Sam caps his rhyme in a half-joke:

'John Coverdale Jewell is drunk as a roo-ell,' sang Sam.
'Shut up, you fool,' suddenly shouted Little-Sam to his father, with dancing eyes and an impudent lip.
'Oh, Daddy, he called you a fool!' Evie was very shocked.
'I'm tired of you, you make me sick,' shouted Little-Sam, in a frenzy, 'you make me sick!'
Sam giggled and winked at the children around him. 'Say nothing,' he murmured, 'say nothing.'
'You're an old gasbag,' cried Little-Sam, a dervish. (pp. 66-7)

The boy is jesting to cover the truth; his father makes his teasing more spiteful, his usual method of teaching his children self-control, and then turns his attention to the twin brother Saul. Saul climbs down off the roof and goes away without comment until the foolish singing is finished. His silence is even more effective a comment than Little-Sam's outburst. Sam, having done everything possible to sow discord under a veneer of banal humour, then proceeds to give a further lecture on the Federal States of Europe, when men will be 'no longer hidden under a cloud of misunderstanding, hate-engendered from his brother man.' (p. 69)!
By the end of the first book, Sam is forever immortalised as the ultimate solipsist. He is as bemused by his own eloquence as are the young children, especially little girls, who are his preferred companions, or the young women, who work for him outside his home, who 'just love to hear him talk'. His one male friend and fishing mate, Saul Pilgrim, loves to hear him talk, too — for entertainment:

'Sam,' said Saul fervently, 'when you talk, you know you create a world. I live in a wonderful illusion... I can hardly believe in the workaday world!' (p. 313)

But the rest of the conversation leaves no doubt about Saul's private opinion, though he appears too rarely to function as a real opponent. Men, older boys, and above all Sam's wife, are too prone to introduce an element of the reality principle into Sam's fantasy world. His joking elevation of little Evie to the status of wife, during one of her mother's absences, is less an expression of forbidden sexual feeling than a wish to substitute affirmation for denial. Evie is the only one of the older children who never questions his behaviour or his ideas. The Wishing-Tree which Sam sets up in each of his homes is the fitting emblem of him as he really is, or aspires to be: the eternal infant, whose wants are always immediately supplied by a doting mother. The scene at the end of Chapter 3 is the nursery version of age-old, ever-new political trickery:

'Good-by children!' called Henny from the hall.

There was a rush for the house. Sam lay back and closed his eyes. At that moment, a little voice no bigger than two twigs creaking together on a tree, said from the side-steps 'Mr Pollit! Mr Pollit!'

He opened his eyes on the hazy blue world said gently, 'Yiss?'

Mareta Jewell, a little dark girl, came precipitately up the steps, and approached him with the little dancing hesitation of the shy,

'Can I go round the Wishing Tree?'

'Yes, love,' he smiled.

'Will I get my wish, Mr Pollit?'

'Maybe, if you wish hard, and are a good girl and it's a good wish, you will get it, I expect.'

She gurgled joyously, and ran round the little spruce. (p. 69–70)
The rush of Sam's own children from the father's sermon about Eugea and Pangea (further versions of Utopia) towards Henny, is the movement of the healthy-minded from vague nonsense to reality. Sam, however, refuses to come out of his dream; when he opens his eyes, it is on to the 'hazy blue world' of fantasy, and then only in response to the piping voice of a little girl who is not a member of his household and can therefore see no specks on his 'image'. He greets her first in the Uncle Remus jargon he uses for domestic communication, 'Yiss?' Then, when her request to go round the Wishing Tree confirms her as a fellow dreamer, he accords her equality and affection 'Yes, love'. His answer to her question whether she will get her wish is a piece of ingenious equivocation in which all responsibility for wish-fulfilment is diverted by the magician on the suppliant: 'Maybe...' which means: 'I have made no direct promise'. What he is really saying is: 'If you don't get your wish it is your own fault'; the child however thinks he is saying 'Yes'. The technique is only too familiar: election promises, then if the economy doesn't work well, it is the people's fault, not the government's. In this simple scene, the hollowness of utopianism, of instant wish-gratification policies and the hypocrisies of their propagators are subtly exposed. Sam Pollit, in fact, is not only the full-dress portrait of a would-be authoritarian-patriarchal type of male (who is really an enlarged infant) but the embodiment of a political philosophy, and there is no doubt we are meant to see a connection between the two, which is made increasingly clear as the book develops.

The second 'movement', which accelerates Louisa's progress towards freedom of opinion, begins about Chapter 5. It exposes the fragility of Sam's authority; he has not even imposed himself strongly enough on his family to ensure that his instructions are carried out during his absence and the children write to him with great reluctance. His enforced association with adults, especially those who belong to a different race, an older civilisation, makes it clear that his ideas have no meaning outside his own closed world. His Indian clerk, Naden, takes over the role of reality-principle represented by Henny at home. He has however the advantage of being male and the virtue of silence. In the economy of the book he provides in a quieter key the necessary contrast with Sam: the reader's nerves need a rest before the domestic battle is rejoined. Naden manages Sam by flattery, as Henny scorns to do. This enables him to puncture Sam's ideas about
racial equality and universal goodness, and to ridicule his philopro-
genitiveness, without offence. The novelist puts Henny's point of view and that of all women in the following exchange:

'If I had the money, do you know what I should do, Naden? You remember that orphan asylum I addressed the other day? I should adopt them all — well, not all. I should have a little Chinese baby, an Indian one, out of the asylum and take them home with me.'

'And your wife, too, she likes that too, tuan?'

'The women have to wash the diapers: they are not quite so generous as ourselves; it is not mankind, but little Sam and little Naden,' said Sam. 'But if one could have many wives, wives too would get the idea of community, perhaps. That would be splendid — godlike, eh, Naden?'

Naden laughed, 'You are joking, I know, tuan.' (pp. 216-17)

As Passmore has shown so convincingly, the ambition to be 'godlike' is usually part of the utopian temperament.

Naden is equally sceptical about Sam's ideas of race; to him, white men are 'young in the world' and Sam a particularly young example of the young, who knows 'nothing about how his own country is run'. When Sam pays Naden what he thinks is the compliment of claiming they are both Aryans under the skin, Naden pretends not to hear.

In Malaya, Sam finds fresh food for his fantasy life and his nightly forays into the native quarters to play at universal brotherhood alarm Naden and the Chinese secretary, Wan Hoe. His political naivety is summed up with delicious wit in the passage in which he lists his intellectual heroes, Wells, Roosevelt, himself and others, believing that (in the 'observer's' words):

If such a concourse of great souls could have been got together five hundred years back... the world would have been saved from its sorrows, wars, hate, misunderstanding, class wars, Hitler, and money-lenders; and the Golden Age, permeated by simple jokes and ginger-ale horseplay, tuneful evenings, open-air theatres and innumerable daisy chains of naturalists threading the earth and looking, looking, would have already produced a good-hearted, mild human race. (p. 226)
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Naden's view that non-Asiatics are young in the world is shared by Wan Hoe, after observing Sam's sentimentalities about his children, his behaviour towards his superior, Colonel Willets, and hearing him exclaim 'May I never be an old man!' Wan Hoe replies:

Our old age is perhaps life's decision about us... but I hope there is no living god we may blame for the invention. Everyone remembers himself as a child and cannot recognise himself in the tatters and wrinkled, dirty flesh, in the stench and hairy moles he is forced to inhabit... The Chinese are a knowing people; and I daresay that is why they once made a religious odor about old age; to prevent their sons seeing their own future. (p. 228)

Not only do the two natives see through Sam; so does Willets, who rightly accuses him: 'You're always the same, taking glory to yourself'. So does the English woman Lady Modore, who amuses herself talking to him for want of something better to do. When he begins to lecture her about the need for leaving hair under the arms, she goes straight to the point: 'You have too many children, Mr Pollit.' One of the most brilliant sections of the book now follows: the letters from home and Sam's replies, all of which are completely in character, suggesting the reluctant sounds of the writers' voices. Evie's slip of the pen 'Dead Dad' is translated by Sam into terms which suit him better; his reply to Louisa's cheerful and considerate letter is a characteristic compound of puritanism, sexuality and sadism. He describes in great detail the horrifying Buddhist temple paintings he has seen, revenging himself on women by gloating over their torments. Even more cruel is his final piece of advice 'to work at your school-work. I expect great things of you later on, even if you do seem a little dopey now' (p. 242).

After this display of vengeance, he sleeps soundly and in the morning answers the letter of Gillian Roebuck, his admiring young disciple, who has sent him a letter all about her discoveries of the wonders of nature under his inspiration. His reply is a masterpiece of concealed eroticism. It is a vivid evocation of Singapore's heat, followed by a denunciation of the habit of wearing clothes. Its key sentence is: 'You have just one paramount thought, again conscious and unconscious, "Let's strip Jack naked!"' Having achieved its object of relieving his own thwarted sexual feelings and arousing the
young woman's, the letter ends as it begins with a pious salute to naturalists (p. 244–5).

Sam's visit to Malaya is part of a comprehensive picture of the relations of his family with the world outside Tohoga House. Louisa's annual visit to her mother's family, the Bakens, at Harper's Ferry\(^3\) represents a lifeline of escape from Pollitry. At Harper's Ferry (a name which appears also in \textit{For Love Alone}, as the home of the heroine's country relatives) Louisa lives 'unquestioned in the house of Jacob, no more called forsaken'. If she is faintly amused by the piety of her mother's people, she is also touched and soothed by their kindness, their honesty, their simplicity. She is also impressed by their tolerance: they make no attempt to convert her to their beliefs, being free of Sam's eternal missionary zeal. The only member of the family who refuses to accept her is old Grandfather Israel Baken, who has never forgiven his daughter for her marriage. But as the old man and the child confront one another we see their likeness in their opposition: the same immovable determination is present in both. Old Israel was 'a hearty despiser' — so is Louie, 'A hater, a cynic' — traces of these have been developed in the child by the misery of her life. 'A surly battling, cynical creature' — surly and battling, his granddaughter certainly is.

To Louisa, Harper's Ferry is 'a resort of revelation' and it is to this resort that she first turns her steps when she runs away, a place where:

the placid high-minded heavens of Pollitry were rolled up and there was a landscape to the far ends of the sky — an antique, fertile yeoman's country, where in the shelter of other customs and tribal gods, people believing themselves to be the children of God, stuck to their occupations, gave praise and accompanied their humblest deeds with the thunder of mystic song. (p. 160)

If the young Louisa developed into the kind of artist Christina Stead has shown herself to be, much of this paragraph can be applied to the novelist herself. Her dedication is to the gods of love and art, praise of life quickens her language even when its subject matter is

\(^3\) The associations of the name 'Harper's Ferry' with John Brown's anti-slavery campaign should not be ignored.
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sombre and she can invest the humblest object or incident with lyric mystery.

Henny's visit to her old home at Monocacy is equally revealing. Her confusion of mind: 'Oh what is the world all about?' is related to its origins, first the great, rambling house itself, with its tortuous stairs and passages, its profusions of rooms and objects; then to its inmates, totally lacking in the gentle certainties of the Baken men and women, full of greeds, passions and the love of sensuous ease. The conversation which Louie overhears between her grandmother Old Ellen and Henny is like the conversation of two witches; it is all about violence, murder, suicide and methods of suicide and above all about the desperate frustrations of marriage. As Henny drinks tea, swallows aspirin, eats her customary fiery food in her mother's company, it becomes clear that her response to marriage is a learned reaction and that marriage with Sam has been a disastrous accident which reinforced it. Yet in this trio of females, in spite of their strong individuality, there is something representative. Old Ellen's cynical acceptance of men and their ways is tradition dying; Henny's fiery honesty and her physical and mental impotence are signs of a new tradition struggling to be born; Louisa, listening and observing, will be neither cynical slave, nor helpless rebel, but a free-living organism, who will bring her will to bear on the operations of fortune. It is Henny, oddly enough, who reveals herself as an uncompromising Darwinian fundamentalist, when she finally arraigns, not only men, but the whole scheme of things, seeing it as an affair of blind chance:

And see now! Isn't it rotten luck? Isn't every rotten thing in life rotten luck? When I see what happens to girls, I'd like to throttle my two, or send them out on the streets and get it over with. (p. 168)

Her view makes an odd contrast with that of Sam, the professional Darwinian, who believes that paradise on earth can come through the operations of a select committee.

The sediment that sinks to the bottom of Louie's mind and makes her what she is, is compounded as much of Henny's intuitions as of Sam's moral talk, while from Old Ellen, she learns that the traditional woman's life, reduced to its essence, is simply one long struggle to keep dirt at bay.
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The visit to Monocacy ends with a curiously Dickensian episode (there is a strong Dickensian streak in Stead's work) in which Ellen's little servant-girl Nellie is sacked for calling Louie a bastard during their conversation in the kitchen. Louie's report of Nellie's remark is quite without malice, intended as a device for diverting the grown-ups' attention from her presence, but it has unexpectedly harrowing consequences. The conversation between the adolescent girls is handled with great mastery, like all the conversations in the book, but it is not easy to justify the lengthy treatment of the incident, interesting as it is in itself. Perhaps its purpose is to illustrate the ruthlessness of the Collyers towards 'sinners', a ruthlessness tempered by Henny's streak of compassion: 'I'd steal if I had only her threadbare rags and rich rotters swanked their things under my nose' (p. 185). Her remark prepares us for her own theft of her son's money later on. The incident also redresses the balance of sympathy towards the Pollit side, though it parallels Jo Pollit's righteous indignation when she discovers her sister Bonnie has had an illegitimate child. It is then that Sam reveals a trace of compassion similar to Henny's. The laying down of clues to action and character in this book is as complex and elaborate as the occurrence of links in a food-chain; they are buried in the same kind of circumstantial details that makes them so hard to discern in real life. Christina Stead's narrative method is trying to the patience of readers whose taste is conditioned to the laconic, or to the carefully refined and unified structures of a James or a Conrad; but it is the only possible method open to a novelist setting out to write a Natural History of the house of Pollit.

The gathering of the Pollit clan to welcome Sam home from Malaya enables us to see what heredity has contributed to his makeup. The tremendous rumbustiousness of this episode gains from the contrast with the opening section of Chapter 6, in which we get a glimpse of the children and Henny at home without Sam. Under Henny's rule — a combination of toughness, rough justice and gruff tenderness — there is peace of a kind unknown when the father is home. It is in this brief interlude of freedom from Pollitry that Louie learns to distinguish between fact and fantasy. The night-rider of her childhood imagination she now knows to be the blood beating in her temples, but she integrates the fact into the dream and remains the artist-watcher, the aware one, in a community of semi-sleepers.
The peace of the household is shattered by Sam's return and the entry of Jo, Sam's sister, is typical of the Pollit clan:

With a rhinoceros bound, she burst out of the circle, looking for Sam, shouting for Sam. She bounded all over the place. She was a Golden Horde all by herself. When she found Sam by the snakes' cage she fell on his neck. (p. 250)

Jo uses the same kind of Uncle Remus jargon as Sam, though with less exuberance; she exhibits similar characteristics of egoism, sentimental theorising, self-congratulation, and less carefully concealed spitefulness and greed. The exhibitionism which is the hallmark of Pollitry is particularly infuriating to Louisa when she is forced to listen to the doggerel verse Joe has had published in a newspaper, while the relatives gape in admiration. She takes refuge in Henny's room, saying 'I think it's rot'.

Whenever her irritation got too deep, she mooched in to see her mother. Here, she had learned without knowing she had learned it, was a brackish well of hate to drink from, and a great passion of gall... something that put iron in her soul and made her strong to resist the depraved healthiness and idle jollity of the Pollit clan.

It was a strange affection... it came from their physical differences, because their paths could never meet, and from the natural outlawry of womenkind. (p. 258)

The arch-exhibitionist is Grandfather Charlie, Sam's father, whose likeness to his son is as marked as that of Old Ellen to Henny. The noisy violence of the party reaches a climax when the whole clan, aunts, uncles, Sam and the children line up behind the Grandfather for a 'snake-dance' through the house, a bizarre symbol of the quintessential Sam, which Louisa seizes upon later when she writes the play about her father. The proximity of this scene to that in which Henny's child is born, the general association of Sam with snakes throughout the book, make it all the more ironical that the birth should take the children of a practising naturalist by surprise. Brought up on Darwin and Cuvier, they know nothing at all, as the novelist comments later, about 'sexual commerce': their mother
simply grows big and grows thin again; screams and is silent. Louisa is as surprised by the baby’s arrival as the younger children.

Before the birth of the baby, the party ends in a high-pitched quarrel between husband and wife in front of the entire tribe; Henny retires, Bonnie organises the children into singing the ‘Hallelujah Chorus’ to make them forget and the section ends with the news, by telegram, of David Collyer’s death. This news has no effect on Sam’s intention to be the East as well as the West to his family. He hands out presents according to a system carefully calculated to leave the best of them in his own household, and the breaking of the news of Collyer’s death is further delayed by the onset of Henny’s labour. While the birth takes its slow and painful course, Sam’s megalomania reaches its height. The snake imagery is employed once more as he lines his children up for a visit to the ‘hannimiles’ and the association of fertility and magic is further exploited when he claims to be able to make it rain. He is contradicted outright by Ernie and by Louisa, who refutes him with his own logic. ‘How could you have the rainfall chart behind the door if you could make it rain at any time?’ (p. 301). Sam flips a blow-fly at her, then tries to calm her rising fury with a pious platitude. There ensues a memorable exchange between them:

‘One day you will get to know the world better,’ said Sam, unable to forgive the sceptic of his blood.

‘I know something,’ said Louie, ‘I know there are people not like us, not muddle-headed like us, better than us.’

‘What do you mean?’

‘But I know something else: if it is chaos, it will not be chaos forever: “Out of chaos ye shall give birth to a dancing star!” Nietzsche said that.’

Sam blushed, and he said gently: ‘You mean, out of confusion we will bring order.’

‘No,’ cried Louie, ‘no, no; you understand nothing. People like us understand nothing. I know people at school better than us, better in their minds than —’ she stopped in deep embarrassment. The children

4 Australians who find it incredible that Sam should think himself above the laws of nature might reflect on ex-Prime Minister McMahon’s attitude to Dr Paul Ehrlich or the New South Wales Minister for Agriculture’s dismissal of scientific objections to lindane spraying.
were following her intently, trying to understand what she had found out, something they were dimly groping for.

‘All right, Looloo,’ said Sam gently, ‘all right, all right’. Five minutes later he was singing them some more of his saga, as he fixed a red silk Chinese pajama suit on Evie and wound a sarong over her head and shoulders. (p. 302)

Not Louisa’s adolescent agony, nor the death of Collyer, nor his wife’s pain have any power to penetrate Sam’s consciousness: he turns all into play, even dispersing the children’s natural instinct to mourn by getting them to sing their grandfather’s favourite song *Always Merry and Bright*!

Thus old David Collyer’s painful, and, for them, disastrous, death, passed over in a minute, like the death of a gnat or bee... (p. 297)

The orange-flower wreath he had intended for a child-bed present to Henny, he gives to his younger daughter in revenge for disappointment over Collyer’s will, saying: ‘It was for a little bride of fourteen, but I got the man to give it to me.’ (p. 306).

The book now enters its final stage. The disappointment of Sam’s hopes of being Collyer’s heir, through Henny, the need to find a new house, scandal and trouble at the office and his suspension from the Department: the collapse of the outer world hastens the decay of his family relationships. The change is marked by the move from Tohoga House to the ramshackle home on the waterfront, Spa House, a habitat to which Henny is unable to adapt herself:

It was half-water; the surface was dull, and the sky was windy. At that particular moment, Henny awoke from a sort of sullen absence and knew what was happening; her heart was breaking. That moment it broke for good and all. (p. 323)

Sam ensures his survival by carefully choosing a new habitat in which he can go on playing until his troubles in the Department resolve themselves. It is during the period of his suspension, when he is contributing nothing at all to the household that he indulges in his most grandiose schemes of an all-embracing state socialism run by an intricately engineered bureaucracy which would somehow coalesce into an International Conservation League of Nations, ‘which, by
regulating supplies and conserving instead of wasting would prevent wars and feed all people.' (p. 316)

The quarrels conducted by child-telegraph grow more frequent and Louisa more involved in them. Her involvement stores up in her a 'wealth of vengeful feeling,' in other words a great quickening energy which is to enable her to break free. Again we see the domestic situation through the eyes of an artist-observer, watching an ecosystem in a state of disturbance:

But, to her great surprise, the rest of the family who were, after all, own sons and own daughter of Henny, seemed not to take the slightest interest in the obscene drama played daily in their eyes and ears, but, like little fish scuttling before the disturbing oar, would disappear mentally and physically into the open air, or into odd corners of the house. When a quarrel started (Henny and Sam did speak at the height of their more violent quarrels) and elementary truths were spoken, a quiet, a lull would fall over the house. One would hear, while Henny was gasping for indignant breath and while Sam was biting his lip in stern scorn, the sparrows chipping, or the startling rattle of the kingfisher, or even an oar sedately dipping past the beach, or even the ferry's hoot. Exquisite were these moments. Then the tornado would break loose again. What a strange life it was for them, those quiet children, in this shaded house, in a bower of trees, with the sunny orchard shining, the calm sky and the silky creek, with sunshine outside and shrieks of madness inside. (p. 326)

Henny's decline and Sam's increase are likewise seen in biological terms:

Back she went, step by step; and it seemed that Sam, as poverty closed round them, gained stride by stride. Poverty was a beautiful thing to him, something he was born to and could handle: to her it was something worse than death, degradation, and suicide. (pp. 326-7)

The various vegetable cooking oils with which Sam now experiments in the cause of household economy are images of the oily hypocrisies, which more than ever poison the relationships with his wife and children, leading up to the final debâcle over the marlin oil. Sam is particularly obsessed with the phenomenon of Louisa's adolescence, anxious to protect her from the passions of puberty:
This was what her years of sullenness had concealed, not a quiet and patient nature like her mother’s, but a stern, selfish, vain nature like her grandfather’s wicked Israel’s angry seed.

Sam tried all the recipes. He gave her her mother’s photograph to hang above her bed.

‘What is a photograph to me?’ asked Louisa insolently. ‘Mother is my mother.’ (meaning Henny) (p. 329)

With mental lip-licking he followed her in her most secret moments. (p. 330)

He descends to reading her private notebooks, to investigating her linen. He spies upon the other children and ‘it became a kind of game with him to come upon his children in their silences’ (p. 351). The result of all this is Louisa’s sudden realisation that ‘her life and their lives were wasted in this contest and that the quarrel between Henny and Sam was ruining their moral natures’ (p. 333). The inner tie with Sam is finally severed, though outwardly their relationship appears unchanged.

It is Louisa’s going to High School that makes the first real breach in the enclosed system of Sam’s playground. She is at last able to measure the family’s intellect against others. Her adulation of her English teacher, Miss Aiden, accelerates and concentrates her random creativity and the Poet rises to meet the Scientist in a fruitful symbiosis. As well as an idol, she acquires a friend, Clare, and her father characteristically attempts to annex both. His attempt to invade Clare’s mind, as well as her own, leads to Louisa’s open rebellion. In the midst of another great homily about the regeneration of mankind by love, it dawns on Sam that she is not really listening and he reads over her shoulder what she has been writing in silence:

Shut up, shut up, shut up, shut up, I can’t stand your gassing, oh what a windbag, what will shut you up shut up shut up. And so ad infinitum. (p. 363)

He revenges himself, as always, by taunting her with her ugliness, and when she asks permission to live with her mother’s people, blackmails her into staying by threatening to blame Henny if she leaves home. Unwittingly, Sam soon after provides Louisa with a model for
her determination to shake him off. He lends her Shelley’s *Poems* (to help her poetry), Frazer’s *Golden Bough* (for the anthropological side of the question) and James Bryce’s book on Belgian atrocities, a trio which is supposed to counteract her unscientific views of procreation:

But the more she read of these works, the more she felt guilty of power of her own and she began suddenly to despise and loathe Sam with an adult passion. (p. 379)

A further step forward is taken when Sam waxes indignant over a newspaper story accusing a father of incest with his daughter: he mourns over fatherhood maligned. Then Louisa reads *The Cenci* and there follows the magnificent scene, when, goaded by Sam, she recites to him Cenci’s violent speech about his daughter, against a background of ‘blood-gold sun-rimmed grass, leaves and Louie’s new-washed hair’ (pp. 382–3). Sam, momentarily startled, is reassured by the reflection that she is reading from the book he has given her, which must therefore be innocuous.

The narrative now gathers momentum as all the elements which combine to produce the catastrophe are assembled in turn, the most bizarre of which is the performance of Louie’s play *Herpes Rom* (The Snake-man), which she has written for Sam’s birthday in a special language accompanied by a translation. What is so interesting about this language is its ingenious logic. It is built on a principle of echo-analogy with the sounds of Latin, Greek, French and German:

Anteios [the father]: Ia deven fecen sigur de ib. A men ocs ib esse crimed de innomen tach.

[I must make sure of you. In my eyes you are guilty of a nameless smirch.]

Megara [the daughter]: Men grantach es solentum . . . Men juc aun.

(Ben es bizar den ibid asoc solno ia pathen crimined . . .)

[My sin is solitude. My joy also. But it is queer in your company only I feel guilty.]

The reply to this, shouted joyfully by Ernie, who is playing the father, reveals the source of this faculty for language-making: the long,
unconscious training by Sam in his Artemus Ward-Uncle Remus monstrosities has been turned to genuine artistic use:

Corso! Ib timer ibid rom.

[Of course! You fear your father.] (p. 401)

The play clearly demonstrates in miniature the whole course of Louisa’s emotional relationship with Sam, as well as the novelist’s technical brilliance in communicating artistic genius.

Both Louisa and Ernie break down after this performance; Sam, exasperated, restores equilibrium by leading the rest of the children into a chant in praise of the Free State. The rhythm of the children’s lives is an alternation of vituperation and song.

By this time the reader has become so much a part of the Pollit household that it is with a sense of shock that he sees it suddenly from the outside through the eyes of a ‘normal’ member of society, when Miss Aiden comes to dinner. This event leads to the unmasking of Henny in Ernie’s eyes — the equivalent of Louisa’s dramatic exposure of her father. While he is helping Louie to set the table, it dawns on Ernie that none of their former household treasures are left. Searching for them, he finds his hidden money-box has been rifled by his mother and useless coins substituted: ‘He shook and shook, in a frenzy, but with all the rattling, only the dream-money came out...’ (p. 414). He is aware that something crucial has happened to him, but cannot put a name to it.

That the final dramatic scenes of the novel should be enacted against the background of the boiling down of the marlin is a fitting conclusion to the symbolic design. Sam the Fisherman: ‘intended to oil the universe with the game, and make the luxurious sportsman-like spearfish work for mankind’ (p. 408). This sentence, together with the one that describes the dead marlin itself, identifies it with Henny and her social class, gathering up both Sam’s political ideas and his concept of the relationships and functions of men and women in a few lines:

The boys staggered down to the beach with the weighty spikefish. Its great eyes were sunken: it looked exhausted from its battle for life; there was a gaping wound in its deepest part. (p. 464)
Both Louisa and Henny in the interval between these two remarks have suffered gaping wounds. Sam has stolen Louisa’s poems to Miss Aiden and read them aloud as a joke. He has roused Henny to uncontrollable fury by questioning the legitimacy of his youngest son in response to a poison-pen letter. In a pitiful scene the tormented woman beats Ernie, her favourite son, who responds much as Louie had done, when Henny attempted to strangle her, trying to understand what she has done to him and is doing to herself. The storms in the house are paralleled by the thunderstorms outside, as the marlin boils in the copper throughout the night. Henny, wide awake, plays her last game of solitaire and though she cheats to prevent its solution, the game comes out for the first time. There is nothing more for her to do, except to drink the final cup of tea spiced with cyanide from Sam’s darkroom which Louie offers her. It is fitting that it should be Sam who profits by Louie’s failure of nerve; her intention to kill both her parents for the sake of the children is frustrated by Sam’s sudden whim to have morning tea out of different kinds of cups. Sam is evolution personified, the life impulse at its most elemental, the born beneficiary of accident. He possesses in fact three indispensable qualifications for survival: a highly developed faculty for parasitism, a genius for finding a habitat which suits him, and a resourcefulness in exploiting it. All three derive from his unassailable, amoeba-like egocentrism, without which no form of life on earth could ever have survived; an egocentrism which makes it certain that business will go on as usual in the Spa House aquarium, even though two of its inmates have removed themselves. It is proof even against the truth that Louisa tries to tell him about Henny’s death: her story merely stimulates him to try again to supervise ‘every thought you have’. When she aligns herself with her own mother’s family and quotes Rachel’s letter about his total inability to understand women and children, he seizes on the element in this speech that flatters him and ignores the real point:

Yes, I was a very good young man. I never allowed a breath of scandal or of foolish small talk to be spoken in my presence; and your mother understood me. She was ready to sacrifice everything for me. Perhaps she loved me even better than I loved her... It is a pity you never had a mother.
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‘Well, I’m my own mother’ Louie said, without emotion. ‘And I can look after myself. I want you to let me go away.’ (p. 524)

Not only does Sam stand for a dangerous political and philosophical theory, but he exhibits a psychological split common in the Western male. He fails to perceive that the world is inhabited by two sexes roughly equal in numbers, whose separate needs are not necessarily met by satisfying the sex which possesses military weapons. His political infantilism is made the more explicable by his concept of women as mothers or nurses, whose function is to minister to his needs and wishes; he has no notion that they are persons. His attitude to women is very old, but the political ideas he favours had a new lease of life between the two world wars, resulting in endless proposals for the solution of human ills, which can be loosely described as utopian: communism, socialism, anarcho-syndicalism, state socialism, fascism, nazism, world-government, republicanism and so on. The fallacy underlying most of these is that a system can accomplish a miraculous transformation from misery to bliss without regard to the kind of individuals running it. Twentieth century history has provided the world with two appalling examples of the risks involved in enforcing political panaceas: the paternal-totalitarian, the paternal-bureaucratic. Political systems that concentrate on removing manifest abuses are likely to do less damage than those designed to achieve an imagined ideal. It is easier to be clear about what one does not want, than about what one wants. Louisa was very clear about what she did not want: she did not want to be like Sam or Henny, or to have her self invaded before she could define her wants more precisely. This is why she is able to make more use of Henny’s neglect than of Sam’s educational programming. Henny rightly regards Sam’s eternal busyness as play: ‘What a world of things Sam had to have to keep him amused!’ she comments. It is a comment on Western man in general: the never-ending competition of male-dominated governments over nuclear weapons and supersonic aircraft is Sam’s Sunday-Funday on a horrendous scale. However unsatisfactory Henny’s grasp of economics might seem, it is closer to reality than Sam’s, since it puts the feeding and clothing of children before the provision of useless toys. And it needs to be said in Henny’s defence and in defence of her species that she has been conditioned to be dependent. The Hennys of the world have been largely created by the Sams who in
turn have been created by the Hennys. Louisa insisted on breaking out of this vicious circle, on her right and her ability to create her own 'self': 'I am my own mother', she says proudly. Hindsight, of course, reveals the young Louisa's boast as an illusion: what the book demonstrates is how that self is made by her heredity, her books, the natural environment, her brothers and sister, her immediate associates, her teachers and acquaintances as well as by her own responses and resistances to all of these influences. From both Henny and Sam she derives sensuousness, her delight in carnality, in the world; from Sam her will to survive ("You would keep yourself alive", says Ernie to Sam during one of his eugenic tirades). Both give her training in observation: Henny in imaginativeness, Sam in precision; Henny gives her mystery, Sam gives her music; Henny gives her passion and wit, Sam gives her a clownish humour. Their gifts indeed are rich and inextricably intertwined. For the kind of artist Louisa was to become, there could hardly have been a better training ground, severe as it was. This is why there is no bitterness in this great novel: only the loving detachment of the poet and the detached concern of the biologist. It was far ahead of its time when it was written; we have not overtaken it yet.
Neither Martin Boyd’s reading nor his knowledge of music or painting is obstrusive in the novels; yet one is constantly being surprised by glimpses of a cultivation which is both broad and unusually integrated, of an almost masterful control of resources which has employed sometimes remote and often unlikely material in the service of the total vision behind a given novel. Examples which come readily to mind are Boyd’s allusions to the painters Memlinc, Poussin, and Sisley in *A Difficult Young Man*. None of these is, of course, a particularly abstruse reference, but each has been chosen with deliberation and is exactly right in the context, the painting techniques of Poussin (*A Difficult Young Man*, pp. 39–40)¹ and Sisley (p. 20) being used to establish for the reader Boyd’s own conception of his narrative method and the ‘Memlinc in the cellar’ (p. 161) being a powerfully appropriate symbol of the ‘poetic dream of medievalism’ (p. 114) which defines Guy Langton’s approach to his family history. A similar, but more absorbed instance, is the substantiation of Paul’s role as ‘a living expression of antiquity’, in *Lucinda Brayford* (p. 440), through the allusion to the ‘dry bones’ in Ezekiel 37, 1–14.

The epigraphs of the four books of *Lucinda Brayford* can, similarly, serve as a key to the larger movement of the novel. Again, these exhibit a harmony of eclecticism and creative strength which is in part masked by Boyd’s assumed artlessness and apparently unambitious acceptance of the unaspiring family saga mode. And there is point in conceding these epigraphs more than their immediate appositeness, in taking some cognisance of their former contexts and allow-

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ing them in the novel a value which is symbolically referential rather than decorative.

The brilliant but unreal Lucinda of the first book is elusive, a creature of rare beauty and rich promise who flowers above the colonial society from which she is bred and who is later progressively effaced as she 'takes on the colour' (p. 150) of the new society in which she is placed through her marriage to Hugo Brayford. A key to this transference is provided by the prefixed quotation from Madame Bovary and the suggested parallel with Emma's not dissimilar move from provincial to Parisian society. But the quotation is defused by Boyd's omission of the two preceding sentences: "Tout ce qui l'entourait immédiatement, campagne ennuyeuse, petits bourgeois imbéciles, médiocrité de l'existence, lui semblait une exception dans le mode, un hasard particulier où elle se trouvait prise, tandis qu'au delà s'étendait à perte de vue l'immense pays de félicités et des passions. Elle confondait, dans son désir, les sensualités du luxe avec les joies du cœur, l élégance des habitudes et les délicatesses du sentiment."

Lucinda's movement in the novel is, on the face of it, a quest for love, for firm, enduring, and sustaining human relations; a tentative happiness comes when she realises the measure of fulfilment offered by her discrete relations with husband, lover, and son. The progress in the novel is from the romantic dream of love, which informs the first book and is evoked in the Flaubert quotation, to a qualified view of happiness which is hedged by limitations and accepts contingencies. At a deeper level, she becomes less the subject of the novel than a mirror which reflects its several social patterns, and it is clear that, as the novel progresses, Boyd has been less concerned with the treatment of individuals as individuals than with the use of individuals as representative of human types and conditions; and the novel develops, through this concern and through the cumulative effects of its imagery, the hard-edged brilliances of an allegorical vision of society. The quotation from Flaubert thus offers an ironical gloss on the projected movement of the novel: Emma's situation parallels Lucinda's (and perhaps finds a reflection in Julie's), but the contrast between her total absorption in a stupid dream of reality and Lucinda's education, through independence and accumulating experience, towards an un-

understanding of life which retains a poetic vision but accommodates within it both human shortcomings and human expediency, makes a wry authorial exposure of the meaninglessness of outward appearances and worldly values even as Lucinda’s family, Emma-like, are being won by them. Hugo’s wooing of Lucinda has neither the intensity nor the rarification that the dream requires but is coolly formal, a matter of externals, symbolised by the effacing uniform of an aide de camp, by the shoulder-knots of livery. It is not until the last moments of the novel that Lucinda’s dreams stop retreating before her.

The second quotation, of the last two lines of Lermontov’s poem, ‘The Sail’, confirms the role of Lucinda as mirror as it denies the immediately personal element. The significance of the two lines becomes emblematic as the whole poem, and the context of the social ferment within which it was generated, is taken into account:

A lonely sail shows white
In the blue haze of the sea.
What does it seek in a far-off land?
What has it abandoned in its native country?

The waves are playing — the wind whistles,
The mast bends and creaks...
Alas, it is not in search of happiness
And it is not from happiness it flees.

Beneath it streams the gleaming azure
Above it the sunshine’s golden ray
But it, rebellious, prays for tempest
As though in the tempest were peace.3

Lucinda, like Lermontov himself, is the ‘white sail’; unlike Emma she does not associate happiness with either the past or the future environment but moves through life in search of a deeper happiness which will come only through the ‘tempest’, the ordeal of experience thrust upon her, the testing of the social fabric which finally exposes its weaknesses as it affirms the principles of life which it conceals. And, as this ‘poetic’ image succeeds the preceding ‘novelistic’ image drawn

3 I am indebted to Emeritus Professor A. D. Hope for this literal translation from the Russian.
from Flaubert, so Boyd's concern with a poetic level of meaning which lies beneath his chronicler's prose becomes more insistent.

The quotation from the Methodist hymn which begins the third book is unchallenging, and so well known as to suggest immediately the recognition of mortality made in the following line, a recognition substantiated in the third book by the heavy use of the figures of the fallen tree and falling leaves:

To all life thou givest — to both great and small;
In all life thou livest, the true life of all;
We blossom and flourish as leaves on the tree,
And wither and perish — but nought changeth thee.

The explicitly Christian message of the full stanza has no place in a novel which is in no way doctrinaire, which accepts as a frame for the narrative a paganly simple view of man's mortality, with the recurring cycle of birth, death, and rebirth in the individual man, his ideals, and his civilisation. What is asserted through the evocation of this cyclic process is, again quite simply, faith in the continuity of life on earth, a belief in what is good in the human spirit, in the continuing triumph of good in the face of evil and adversity. In each cycle, as in Lucinda's, doubt and fear shade the prevailing faith and optimism, dash the bright hopes, tread down the crocus — *in ipso adolescentis flore perīl inimicorum insidiis circumventus* — but from each new life is born.

Boyd's treatment of the quotation, then, suggests several keys to the reading of the novel. Here, and in the richly developed image of the King's College Chapel choristers, he borrows from his allusions to church music something of that context of the ritual confirmation and celebration of received truth. Indeed, the singing at King's becomes for Stephen 'a mystic's dream' (p. 538), an image of spiritual harmony which he can only explain to Paul in the manner of a visionary, evoking the notion of the music of the spheres and asserting that 'endless bliss is a state of endless singing' (p. 537).

But the transcendentalism expressed in Stephen's poem (pp. 391, 538–9), which is a gloss on the image of the choristers, like that of Hope's poem, 'Vivaldi, Bird, and Angel', is focused on man alone rather than man as God's creature. There is a strong sense, reinforced by qualities in the poem which give the image the clarity, discreteness,
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and perfection of a manuscript illumination, that Boyd is using the mystic's vision as illustrative of man's aspirations rather than, in any sense, a summation of them. And this is the effect also of the use of the image in the last sentence of the novel, where the specific, repeated instance of the choristers' singing of the Resurrection hymn (pp. 375, 546) is subsumed in the larger concept of universal harmony, especially as this is manifested in the music of the spheres. The most perfected of man's imitations of the 'eternal music' (p. 537), the most compelling instance of his faith, is made part of an argument which accommodates, but does not channel thought into, the Christian vision. Stephen's death and suffering parallel those of Christ, Lucinda's ecstatic communion that which celebrates the Resurrection with the purpose not of defining but of illustrating man's 'creative passion and need for truth' (p. 545) with its most beautiful and most refined example. Boyd's purpose is to explore 'the law of being' (p. 513) which he finds declared in the workings of Nature, and his explication of this is enriched by his use of the Christian experience just as it is by his use of the phoenix myth and his suggestion of equally ancient fertility rites.

Boyd's fourth epigraph, *in ipso adolescentis flore periiit inimicorum insidiis circumventus*, is different only in that it must be referred to a context of events rather than to a written context. James, second Lord Boyd, son of Thomas, Earl of Arran, and Mary, sister of James III of Scotland, was killed in 1484 by Hugh Montgomery of Eglinhoun in a feud between the Boyds and the Montgomeries which lasted for another seventy-odd years. His grandfather, Robert, first Lord Boyd, had brought the family dramatically to power at the Scottish court, becoming Regent to the young king, James III, in 1460 and, from 1466 to 1469, sole Governor of the Realm. His brother Alexander was made the king's instructor. But the family's fall was equally dramatic: Robert died in Northumberland, having been charged with high treason and fled the country; Alexander was executed; Arran, abroad at the time, never returned, dying in Antwerp; his wife, the Princess Mary, was recalled by the king and remarried to a Hamilton. The Boyd lands were annexed to the

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Principality of Scotland. James, second Lord Boyd, was restored to the title and the property in 1482, but killed two years later, when he was certainly under sixteen.5

Little is known of the circumstances of his death but there is the possibility that he, like Stephen, was the innocent victim of 'the violence to nature of modern "civilization", chiefly in the senseless holocausts of its wars'.6 Boyd may not have known the observation of Don Pedro de Ayala, Spanish ambassador to the court of James IV of Scotland, that 'the Scots... spend all their time in wars, and when there is no war they fight with one another',7 but even an acquaintance with that turbulent period of Scottish history could have suggested to him the fitness of the parallel with his own view of contemporary Western society, and made the citation of the epigraph pertinent not because of the simple tragedy of death in ipso adolescentis flore but because of its implied condemnation of the society which caused it. Boyd's use of the word 'murder', in his ascription, seems stronger than the available knowledge of the circumstances warrants and indicative of the sense of outrage informing the final book in which innocence and life, as represented by Stephen, are destroyed by the corrupt and the commercial, the business interests on which Boyd blamed the war. The antithesis between the image of the flower, as it has been developed in the novel, and the connotations of insidia, especially as they are brought out in this context of sixteenth century Scottish usage, is the primary antithesis of the novel, the imagery of growth, of youth and new life, being set against that of decay and corruption, of social stagnancy, expediency and, as the final gradation, evil.8

There is of course no sense in which this, or any earlier epigraph is determinative. Each is an emblem of that part of the novel which

8 The epigraph, in ipso adolescentis flore perit inimicorum insidiis circumventus, is quoted in the entry for James, second Lord Boyd, in The Scots Peerage, and by James Paterson in his History of the County of Ayr (Edinburgh, J. Stillie, 1852), Vol. II, p. 173. Boyd could have encountered it in either of these, and could readily have established the
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it heads: the quotation from Madame Bovary marks the move away from Emma’s bourgeois romanticism to Lucinda’s chameleon progress towards an individually adequate ‘life-style’; that from Lermontov’s poem confirms the shifting emphasis from the novelistic to the poetic, from Lucinda as the heroine of a novel of social realism to Lucinda as an intellectual voyager, a means of interpreting the life styles through which she moves; the line from Chalmers Smith’s hymn proclaims a humanist view of life, recording, as in the first two chapters of the third book, the sudden, busy upthrusting of colonial society and the assertion, against the vision of the imprisoned Hugo (p. 268) and the ‘hungry generations’ represented by Baa (p. 271), that man should ‘live in his own right’ and ‘live for the future’ (p. 275). This is not to argue that each of the four books of Lucinda Brayford has anything like the independence of the separate books of the incomplete Langton series. But it does suggest a different sort of conceptual logic, a poetic vision which is behind the novel and which is realised poetically within it, a vision which transmutes the overt social realism of the novel into a different, fuller, and more intense sort of experience, which allows it the ostensible motivation and feasibility of the social chronicle but which in fact exerts a control which is tight, at times even inimical to the novel’s overt logic.

Small-scale, discrete examples of this dichotomy of vision are found in A Difficult Young Man, where the diffusion of social realism is contrived through the novel’s focus being that of Guy Langton and there being in fact play between the three levels of observable reality, Guy’s ‘poetic dream of medievalism’, and the level of ‘past time, past observations’ as seen from the point of view of present time, present wisdom or maturity. When Blackbirds Sing provides a further, more

few facts he gives. It is unlikely that he would have discovered the quotation at its source, ‘De Familia Bodiorum’, a brief, undated family history in manuscript in The National Library of Scotland, compiled by the scholar and distinguished Latinist, Robert Boyd of Trochrig (1578–1627).

* Or as Langton says (pp. 39–40): ‘I see the unaltered impression made on my childish mind, but as I write of them, my adult experience tells me that the people, except perhaps the other children, were not really as I saw them, and so I may give them in places a glaze of adult knowledge over the sharpness of a boy’s observation, in the same way that Poussin put a glaze over the bright colours of his pastorals, which the restorers now seem to be cleaning off, along with the dirty varnish.’
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compelling instance. Dominic's experience in the field and his experiences in London or with the Tunstalls are related simply and directly; the narrative line is strong. But the extraordinary power and beauty of the novel come from two sources. Firstly, they come from the scenes and episodes which are invested with an emblematic significance operating over and above the narrative line and the ever-present social comedy — as, in the final scene of the novel, Dominic's throwing his war medals in the dam is isolated and given its full significance by Helena's uncomprehending 'You're not serious?' (p. 188). And secondly they come from the creative licence which allows the narrative to strain credulity in its reduction to a single crucial incident — the wounding of Hollis which is played over as Dominic kills his first and only enemy, and played over again in the Cornish convalescent home — and in what appears to be its dependence on coincidence but is of course a most deliberate and strong manipulation of events to gain the maximum impact, not at the level of social reality but at the heightened level of vision at which the whole novel is a poetic sermon on the text 'Thou shalt not kill'.

Evidence of this equally firmly developed 'higher' level in Lucinda Brayford takes several forms: the use of thematic imagery; the holding to the past as it informs the present, palimpsest-like, as a colouring or echo which enhances the significance of a given place or occasion; the use of a large measure of apparent coincidence; and, perhaps most importantly, this same licence in the treatment of characters which, without the clear dichotomy of vision established — in A Difficult Young Man through the use of an internal narrator, in When Blackbirds Sing through the location of Dominic as somehow outside the level of social reality — relies substantially on chronological development as making feasible and the emotional strength behind the passage as making plausible the shifts involved. The two most obvious examples of the latter are the treatment of Straker and, more importantly, of Paul. At Straker's first appearance in the novel, as a waiter showing filthy postcards to Hugo, he is not identified (p. 139); in later, passing references, the reader is reminded of the man selling postcards (pp. 202–3) and an (again unidentified) Australian 'strong man' (p. 192) is introduced in the context of talk about the war. After Straker has bought Fitzcauncell Castle the two are linked through Lucinda's vague recollection of the man's face (pp. 221–2, 313–14), but it is not until Paul's attack on Straker, now Lord Fitzcauncell,
when Fitzauncell calls at Crittenden, that the connection is made explicit. The passage is worth quoting in full:

people were beginning to talk of Crittenden House as a place where it was hardly suitable to take their daughters. An incident with Lord Fitzauncell aggravated this talk. He called at Crittenden and came into the hall just as Paul was crossing from the saloon to the library. When Harry announced him, Paul said:

‘Lord Fitzauncell died in 1872’.

What Paul said was so improbable that Lord Fitzauncell did not take it in. He came forward genially with outstretched hand. Paul ignored his hand.

‘Sir,’ he said, ‘your newspapers have for two decades been engaged in the degradation of the proper feelings of our people. What is vile they offer to gloating eyes, what is vindictive they applaud. You have done more harm to this country than any of its external enemies. In addition to this, one of your friends has seduced my niece, my elder brother died of disgust after entertaining you at dinner, and you tried to sell filthy postcards to my younger brother when he was on his honey-moon. In my opinion, and I am given to under-statement, you are the scum of the earth, so much of which has recently risen to the surface. I beg you will leave before my butler throws you down the steps.’

Harry looked a little disconcerted. Lord Fitzauncell had worn a contemptuous smile until Paul mentioned the postcards. Then he became livid. (p. 496)

The passage follows closely on that recounting Arthur’s death and the immediately consequent portrayal of Paul as ill equipped to assume Arthur’s role as custodian of Crittenden: Paul makes a speech in the House of Lords ‘in which his reference was to such a high standard of political morality that no one took it seriously’ (p. 494); he had removed from the public rooms of Crittenden ‘all the furniture later than 1793, the year of the execution of Marie-Antoinette, the latest date at which aristocratic influence remained pure and uncorrupted’ (p. 495). ‘To come into the house on an afternoon when it was flooded with pale sunlight was a startling experience. It gave one the

10 The identification is made by Lucinda when she meets Lord Fitzauncell on a train and the context recalls her first sight of him (p. 458).
sensation of having passed the grave into a dead, yet deathless, world. There was nothing within sight that was made by living men." (p. 495).

In such a context the passage is, on the level of social realism, not simply a gratuitous insult foisted upon Fitzauncell by Paul; it is an 'unreal' authorial sense of the plausible which allows Fitzauncell such an action as the postcard incident as antecedent, poetically determinate perhaps but, on this level, cheap in its contrivance. The situation is complicated further by the movement in Paul's characterisation: from being, in the second book of the novel, an amiable but wise eccentric, Paul has become, in the third book, particularly in the second of the two brilliantly summative St Saturnin passages (pp. 300–8, 333–9), where the further transition is first signalled, a source of wisdom, an example of philosophical acceptance in harmony with the St Saturnin environment, a key to the 'true' values in life, but, finally, himself a fallen leaf, when drawn back into the war-torn Crittenden, a petulant misfit. The shifts are complex: Lucinda is throughout a mirror of what is happening about her, of the movement in Paul. But in a society which has invoked the storm, which has challenged the aristocratic values finding expression in Arthur's way of life, Paul becomes as extreme a figure as Fitzauncell. Both are out of place in the final book, 'In Adolescentis Flore', both become caricatures — the one a no longer genial anachronism, the other preposterously evil, a cardboard devil of the day, the cartoonist's press baron. Both these figures have, however, an extraordinarily powerful effect, simply because the life of the novel exists on the poetic rather than the socially realistic plane.

The two St Saturnin passages are crucial, not just to this shift in Paul's characterisation, but to the movement of imagery in the novel as a whole. There is music in St Saturnin, and light; there is sunshine; there are doves and flowers; there is a sense 'that the kind of life still existed where all things were in proportion' (p. 336). Paul, in the first scene, is no longer 'a leaf on an oak, fallen in an English park, but a leaf on the eternal olive, the sacred tree of Athena, the ever-green

11 Compare Lucinda's description of Paul's way of life through her quotation of the last line of Voltaire's Candide (p. 444). How deeply this figure is woven into the fabric of the novel can be seen from its presence behind Paul's justification of life at St Saturnin, 'We cultivate our minds' (p. 326), a rebuke to Marian's earnest and joyless gardening.
Lucinda Brayford

tree of humanity and civilisation'. Here 'he only used the past to reflect a deeper light on the present, which was the focus of his attention' (p. 302). In the second scene the shift has been made, Paul has become 'like an antique masque come to life' (p. 336); while there is an aesthetic satisfaction in his being 'able to express in his own person the spirit of that past which had so obsessed him' (p. 336), in his being 'a living expression of antiquity, as if in him dry bones really had been made alive',12 there is a clear indication that a return to Crittenden will emphasise Paul's obsolescence and not his antique wisdom.

Around him, in St Saturnin, plays the light, Stephen's vivid first impression of the south of France (p. 300), Lucinda's memory of the Tarpeian Rock,13 light which recalls the moment of Stephen's conception on the Christmas Hills (p. 140), which links Australia to St Saturnin as a life source and therefore as being in opposition to the museum-like Crittenden, preserved by the combination of Arthur's limited paternalism and Marian's 'earnestness without an objective' (p. 442). The still centre of the novel is thus linked with its beginning, an identification made between the phoenix-like Australian Lucinda14 and the Mediterranean oasis in which Paul establishes a tentative and short-lived balance.

The two St Saturnin passages also declare, and a third (pp. 437–8) confirms, the importance to the movement of the whole novel of the imagery of natural growth, especially that of the seasonal cycle so exploited by Paul, the analogy between human comfort and established growth,15 and the precarious presaging of Stephen's death in Lucinda's observation 'that all young life is like a crocus, that springs up so fragile and trusting, and then is trodden on or nipped off by a sparrow' (p. 438). The music, it is true, is café music, but it is the 'plaintive' music of mortality, 'both sad and amusing' (p. 336); it is as right in its context as the music of Palestrina is in the chapel of King's College. There is a similar innocence in Roland's 'comme ils sont

13 Page 303 explicitly, but see also pp. 56–7 and 233–4.
14 See especially the account of Lucinda's conception (p. 28); also Paul's view that it is 'only from disintegration that new life springs' (p. 327).
15 Compare Watteau's 'tendrils of affection' (p. 19) and Lucinda's exploratory 'tendril of thought' (p. 358).
gentils, ces petits pigeons' (p. 336), an observation on a film sequence of doves flying down from a church tower into a cobbled square, recalled during Lucinda’s later visit to St Saturnin in a passage in which Boyd overtly uses the figure of a palimpsest to revive the significance of both the Tarpeian Rock and the carefree early days at St Saturnin (pp. 445–6) as spaces of light ‘in a long stretch of shadow, like one of those pools of light which they traversed as they walked between the trees’, spaces ‘where their spirits moved freely in the light’ (p. 208). ‘Perhaps’, as Lucinda has earlier perceived, ‘as one penetrated the different layers of experience, the pattern of one’s life was repeated in richer colours’ (p. 304). Certainly the second use of Roland’s comment on the doves both recalls the first and marks a new stage in Lucinda’s growing self-awareness, and the third, coming immediately after Lucinda, Paul and Roland have committed Stephen’s ashes to the river from the Clare bridge and making an explicit contrast with the passing bombers, ‘those filthy machines [which] destroy the sky’ (pp. 542–3), precedes Lucinda’s last and most powerful meditation, her recognition and endorsement of the goodness and beauty in life, the human optimism which has run through the novel in imagery of light, growth, peace and music brought together in the novel’s final sentences:

She watched the boy opposite. He was taut, like a singing bird. His clear young voice floated up to the lofty branches of the roof, which are themselves a form of music: *Eya, Resurrexit.* (p. 546)

We recall, and are meant to recall, Wordsworth’s ‘Ode on Intimations of Immortality’.16

16 See the explicit reference to the Ode, p. 208.

I am emphasising this poetic level of the novel, at the expense of the level of social realism, because its importance is central: in medieval terms it is here that the *fruity* is to be found and, if *chaf* carries too strong a condemnation of the remainder, it is nonetheless true that the level of social realism is of secondary importance. That the levels are separable is urged by features of the one which are, on the surface, inimical to the other, notably the distortion in the characterisations of Straker and of Paul, and the dependence on coincidence which ensures the enmeshing of Vanes with Brayfords and of Brayfords with Maitlands. That the separation of the two levels does not
become a difficulty is a result of the socially realistic being ‘contained’ within the poetic and employing, if not the same, at least a similar sort of patterning. The Clare bridge, from which Aubrey Chapman is thrown in the first chapter and Stephen’s ashes tipped in the last; ‘the hot expanse of the Tarpeian Rock’ (pp. 56–7), a first symbol of the earth ‘apparelled in celestial light’, but Australian as opposed to county English; the Cape Furze house, setting (but not endorsing) an Australian ‘old-family’ conservatism against the new-rich splendour of Tourella; the portrait of Lord Wendale; St Saturnin, important in the poetic plan — and, on the level of social realism, counter to Crittenden — between the two a memory of the evocation of creativity and social freedom in something like Norman Douglas’s South Wind; Lucinda’s claustrophobic London flat; the ‘glass house’; the chapel of King’s College: these and other places, paintings and persons acquire an emblematic significance which holds throughout the novel.

The Anglo-Australian equation is, similarly, used not to set one society off against the other but to establish two phases in the rise and fall of Edwardian civilisation. As Fred Vane’s reliance on buying his way is matched by the blatant bride hunting of Hugo and Baa — it is not of course till she discovers Mrs Fabian Parker that Lucinda realises that her chief value to Hugo is as ‘banker and bedfellow’ (p. 212) — so the social pretentiousness of Julie is different only in kind from that of Susannah. While there is nothing so deliberate as a parallel and complementary grouping of characters in the two worlds there is the sense, in a more random way, that, as Tony prefigures Paul so the Toorak society prefigures that of London and the home counties. Each is, of course, limited in range but each has its own scale, from stability to excess, its own manneredness. One is young, full of energy and vitality but ‘raw’, in being without its own cultural resources, and the other is dying, partly through inanition and partly through its capitulation to the crudely direct interest of the Strakers (it might just as well have been the Vanes) of this world.¹⁸ The poverty of the one is symbolised by Tony, ‘poodle-fakir’ as Fred, in an unusually imaginative moment, brands him, whose interior decorating suggests that his cultural aspirations can and do achieve fulfilment within and on the terms offered by his society, the decadent

¹⁸ And it must be noted that Straker’s purchase of Fitzauncell Castle is paralleled by Muriel’s purchase of Furze House.
ineffectuality of the other by Paul's choosing either exile in St Saturnin or retreat (as symbolised by his interior decorating) in the past. The vitality of the Australian society is perhaps emphasised by its proliferation of children, the barrenness of the English by Marian's sterility, Paul's homosexuality, and Hugo's relationship with Mrs Fabian Parker. It is thus doubly pertinent that Straker's crude, undisciplined energies should chop so disruptively into the settled ways of the English establishment.

There is, then, throughout the novel, a strong degree of patterning. This is not so much for narrative convenience (though first impressions may suggest rather too easy contrivance) as for the effective portrayal of Boyd's view of upper-class Edwardian society. This may be a narrow view to take (though no more so than Jane Austen's) and the sort of patterning he sees would be harder to sustain if the view were more comprehensive; but it is valid as a portrayal of the strongly familial English and colonial aristocracies. The mode of the family saga, towards which Boyd seems to have been inclined anyway, effectively brings out both the stability (albeit it at times precarious) of such a society, the security it draws from the past, and the strength it draws from its feeling of 'family', the satisfying pattern of relationships within which each individual has his place. The saga mode can thus, in recreating this society, use a high degree of 'inter-lacing'; the defined perimeter of the society, the firmness of relationships within it, the predictability of roles and ready approximations of individuals to types all encourage a narrative method which can take a panoramic view and, confident of its frame and general structure, deal assertively with details. Boyd's deceptively easy, 'chronicle' prose confirms this: it does not argue and it seldom ponders, being the prose of statement.

A useful analogy can be drawn with Patrick White's handling of social realism in Voss. In Voss the central process is one of questioning, of movement beyond surfaces, 'from the civilised fringe of the continent into the mysterious centre', from 'the thin layer of the conscious... to the centre of his [Voss's] being'. In Lucinda Brayford the central process is one of affirmation. The comedy is less sharp but no less certain; the surfaces are read more closely and, in place of one man's, one mind's journey, the intellectually sustained quest

19 Dorothy Green, 'Voss: stubborn music', in this volume.
into the mysterious centre, there is the ‘faith’ (p. 444) that observation of the constantly reiterated patterns of life will reveal aspects of truth. White’s vision leads him beyond the surfaces to a highly wrought dramatisation of the multi-faceted agony of man’s quest for self-understanding; Boyd prefers not to probe the ‘dark corners’ of the mind (p. 443), not to separate man from society but, against its firmly patterned backcloth, to explore his ‘rosy mists’ of illusion (pp. 412-13) with the sorrow of a poet viewing man’s mortality but with final optimism in the human spirit. White needs the sharp comedy of his beginning and ending as points of departure and return; Boyd’s deeper reading of the social fabric is the stuff of the novel. But both need the hard-edged quality that they give their visions of society, White to substantiate the great drama of moving beyond the shallow fringe, Boyd because he needs to develop the sense of reiterated patterns, of laws governing both man in society and man in nature. Both need to establish also the sense of their visions being contained, White’s because it is dealing only in surfaces and because the business of the novel lies beyond these, Boyd’s because coming to an understanding of man in society is a necessary preliminary to his deeper understanding of man’s place in nature. Though Voss’s journey of exploration is to be beyond society and Lucinda’s through society, both need a firm starting point, the tightly controlled, brilliantly clear picture which is the necessary basis for both Voss’s fully fledged allegory and Lucinda Brayford’s rather more delicate absorption of the allegorical into the total vision.

The portrayal of Lucinda is, of course, of crucial importance in establishing the reading of the novel. If the shifts in the characterisation of Straker and Paul unsettle an attempt to hold the novel to the level of social realism, the circumstances of Lucinda’s conception and her early years in Australia make it virtually impossible. Lucinda, Lermontov’s voyaging sail, is conceived at the moment of the first life-giving rain to break the drought at Noorilla; she rises, phoenix-like, from a time of desolation to a youth of radiant innocence and vitality:

From her childhood Lucinda had shown a composure and sensitive charm which had marked her as a natural aristocrat. It became a kind of superstition in the family that Lucinda was so exceptional that her future would be distinguished. Her physical texture, her hair and skin, were delicate and flower-like. (p. 41)
Lucinda's future is in fact far from 'distinguished', in terms of any sort of achievement or of the social success so important to the Vanes. Her behaviour after arriving in England is several times described as 'provincial' (p. 192); much later there is suggestion of vulgarity in her dress (p. 287); her very ordinariness for the greater part of the novel sets up a contrast with and becomes a continuing process of coming to terms with the brightness of her birth: 'So quick bright things come to confusion'; the 'tempest' is in Lysander's mind as later in Lermontov's. Lucinda's appearance is 'flower-like', the life of the individual youth as 'fragile and trusting' (p. 438) as a crocus; she, like Stephen in *adolescentis flore*, evokes the 'superstition', developed through the thematic imagery, of the cycle of natural growth which finds its final expression of human faith in 'the lofty branches of the [chapel] roof, which are themselves a form of music' (p. 546). Stephen's conception is, similarly, described in a manner which reaches beyond the incident itself, as it affects the individuals Lucinda and Hugo, and the brilliant evocation of summer heat in the bush:

After luncheon they climbed the hill above the road. From its summit they had a view for many miles to the Black Spur and the mountains of Healesville, which were blue and gold and splashed with deep purple shadows. The hill was covered with gum saplings. The sun drew out the fragrance from their aromatic leaves. The earth was baked hard from the long summer. Strips of fallen bark and red sugar-ants seemed to add to the hot dry smell of the place. In the clear space where they rested on the hill-top were some small prickly shrubs. Here the land seemed terribly ancient, wistful and yet harsh, and nowhere as far as they could see was any sign of human life, except a thin line of smoke which rose from the vine-covered cottage concealed below the hill.

They sat down to rest after the climb. Lucinda lay back and closed her eyes against the sun, white and blinding in the mid-heaven. Hugo began to make love to her. At first she tried to restrain him, because of the time and place. But then the time and place, the high and piercing

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20 *Shakespeare, A Midsummer Night's Dream*, I, i, 145.
21 Used precisely; not 'unreasoning awe or fear of something unknown, mysterious, or imaginary', but 'an irrational religious belief' (*O.E.D.*).
sun, the stark earth, seemed to fuse in her body in a wild desire. A kind of ferocity seized them, a joy passed beyond endurance to pain. She felt that she was consumed by the sun itself, by some first principle of life that immolated her body in an act of new creation.

They never referred to this day again, nor mentioned this hill-top as long as they lived. They were both too conventional to care to think that they might be the passive instrument of forces outside themselves. (p. 141)

Much later in the novel Paul is to offend Marian and puzzle Lydia by declaring that ‘It’s only from disintegration that new life springs’ and ‘the further one goes with the process of decay the nearer one is to the new life’ (p. 327). The novel’s sudden first chapter is a dramatic realisation of social disintegration, the Brayford present being a caricature of aristocratic decadence, William Vane both a fool and a cheat, Aubrey Chapman weak and malicious. The drought which precedes Lucinda’s conception symbolises this disintegration and decay, the rain the dynamism of the eternal cycle of birth, life, growth, and death; Fred and Julie, like Hugo and Lucinda, are ‘passive instruments of forces outside themselves’, part of the process through which ‘tomorrow, the creative passion and the need for truth would supplant the destructive lie, to which men had today abandoned themselves’ (p. 545). Lucinda’s conception is an assertion of this life principle; Stephen’s is seen more explicitly and more powerfully: against an environment ‘terribly ancient, wistful and yet harsh’ Lucinda feels herself ‘consumed by the sun itself, by some first principle of life that immolated her body in an act of new creation’.

No precise significance can be attached to this passage though the suggestions of ceremony and sacrifice are strong and the ambience is that of ancient fertility rites. The name Lucinda is close to that of Lucina, goddess of childbirth, and the subsequent development of Lucinda as a character suggests that, in this moment, she has made her one positive contribution towards life. When she next recalls the occasion in the Christmas Hills it is at a performance of ‘Scheherazade’ as the ballet ‘reached its high point of passion and its climax of death’ (p. 150). Paradoxically, Australia is both the young

22 No other Englishman’s speech is parodied, as the ‘huntin’, shootin’, fishin’’ Brayford’s is here (pp. 9–10).
country, the country of new life and fertility, and the oldest of lands, ‘terribly ancient’, as the rites that are being hinted at, suggesting the eternal and unchanging existence of the cycle of life, of the forces of which men are ‘passive instruments’.

This act of fulfilment made, Lucinda’s role changes. As, in Hugo’s case, the brave appearance and glittering uniform, the shoulder-knots of livery, are cut away to expose a literally, and horribly, faceless recluse, so in Lucinda’s, the brilliance of nature fades as she is absorbed into a larger social fabric and begins the long struggle of the solitary individual towards self-knowledge. Though she is of primary importance as ‘white sail’, she is also one of the ‘remaining green leaves’ on a fallen tree ‘about to crack up’ (pp. 483–4), and her progress is seen in social terms, her goal at first a simple happiness and finally happiness informed by faith. Julie, Paul notes early, ‘has the necessary foundation of culture’ in that ‘she lives for pleasure’ (p. 180). Much of what Paul gives Lucinda is education towards a point where ‘as far as material things were concerned, she probably lived the most civilised kind of life that had yet been evolved’, enjoying, ‘more fully than ever owing to the increased cultivation of her taste, all the good things which came to her so easily’ (pp. 295–6).

But, as Stephen later in the novel needs to ‘find a focus’ (p. 389) for his love, so Lucinda needs to come to terms with a ‘life-style’ which gives her a series of discrete happinesses but which leaves her, essentially, the fate of sitting apart, of ‘watching men who were less interested in her than in themselves and their own preoccupations’ (p. 446); alone with more than a widow’s loneliness, recognising ‘the first faint twinge of the disease from which [she] will die’ (p. 206), civilised and priding herself on her clarity of vision but unable yet to be completely honest with herself, to find a mean between the rosy mists of Stephen’s vision and the hard, unreal lines of Paul’s. Such intimations of immortality as come to her come fleetingly, on the occasion in the Christmas Hills; when, listening to Paul playing Palestrina, she feels herself ‘subject to some power beyond herself and beyond the temporary advantages of men’ (p. 171); in the final hymn to life.

Two comments on her life assume a crucial importance: the first her own observation ‘that only when one’s life was linked to the

23 With, as Lydia says, ‘plenty of sunshine and parties and no cranky degenerates’ (p. 328).
Lucinda Brayford

beauties and tragedies of the past... did it have any richness of texture, that only when one had accepted a background of pessimism did one's pleasures become civilised' (p. 172), the second Paul's grating picture of God as 'a kind of super gourmet, a horrible connoisseur sniffing the fragrance of souls', his harsh likening of men to 'Strasbourg geese whose livers are diseased to make a delicacy' (pp. 361-2). Marian's criterion of usefulness is discarded, action without knowledge of direction being pointless. Lucinda and Stephen are both passive and only partially comprehending, Lucinda in resignation, Stephen in martyrdom. The futility of human action is suggested by Lucinda's feeble attempt to make happiness for herself with Pat, by the capriciousness with which Bill's hopes are thwarted, and Stephen's attempt to focus happiness on Heather dashed, by the ogreish evil of the businessmen who run the war and the world. To cultivate one's garden, one's 'little oasis of bogus civilisation' (p. 528) — the anger here is Lucinda's, not Paul's — is all that is possible.

Lucinda wonders if this is a counsel of cynicism or faith (p. 444) and, though the analogy may appear at first sight fanciful, the dimension of the question is similar to that of the question posed by Chaucer's apparent shift from the celebration of humanity to its admonition at the conclusion of Troilus and Criseyde. For in neither poem nor novel, though there is ambivalence in the treatment of character and, more largely, of humanity, is the issue really in doubt. In Troilus, as in Lucinda Brayford, the narrative, the surface of human realism, is strong: Criseyde and Pandarus, to a lesser extent Troilus, being vividly human, demand sympathy and involvement. But the deeper level of meaning in Troilus, which may sometimes, and particularly in the final admonition to 'yonge fresshe folkes', appear to be in conflict with the surface level, is asserted from the first lines of the poem through Chaucer's frequent asides and ironies and through the firm allegorical basis of the characters. Christian admonition is the inevitable end of a great poem which celebrates human joys even as it exposes their limitations. The underlying movement of Lucinda Brayford is as powerful in its assertion of the faith which triumphs over the evils and adversities of this world. And it is not straining the analogy to suggest that Lucinda's role is not unlike that of Troilus: both begin with bright promise and come to confusion; both are brought to the peace beyond the tempest, Troilus in the heaven of the eighth sphere and Lucinda in the moment of ecstatic

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communion with which the novel ends. Lucinda's question is posed mid-novel, at that still point from which the imagery reaches both back and forward, with the groping ignorance of one who is being made aware of 'being subject to some power beyond herself and beyond the temporary advantages of men' (p. 171). It is the central concern of the novel to bring her to an answer, to the recognition of those truths which the poetic level of the novel continually asserts, to a belief in the 'urgency' of good and a faith that 'the creative passion and the need for truth would supplant the destructive lie, to which men had today abandoned themselves' (p. 545).
Martin Boyd’s Langton Novels

praising superior people

Pamela Nase

The Langton series — The Cardboard Crown, A Difficult Young Man, Outbreak of Love and When Blackbirds Sing — has come to be regarded as Martin Boyd’s final attempt to write a family saga based on the life of the Boyd and ÆBeckett families as they moved in leisurely fashion between Europe and Australia during the second half of the nineteenth century. Although well received when it first appeared in 1952, The Cardboard Crown was regarded as a piece of family history — as one reviewer put it, ‘almost... a family album’.1 Subsequent criticism of the series has for the most part taken its cue from the reviews and has spoken in terms of Boyd’s last attempt to accommodate more comfortably the material he had already used in The Montforts and Lucinda Brayford, the form of the series enabling him to reconcile amplitude with intensiveness of treatment.2

Although the four novels are quite clearly based on material provided by Boyd’s family, their structure suggests that the family saga may not be the most useful starting point for discussion. A man may work with cane and yet not construct a basket. As Professor Kramer has suggested,3 had Boyd wanted to write a family saga he could have done so in a much simpler form, rambling from one generation to the next, delighting in the material for its own sake and continuing indefinitely, as long as generations kept appearing. But he did not do that. He took his family as his basic material and used it to present a

definite and serious view of life. It is this view, as revealed by the presentation of character and the structure of the series, that this article is concerned with.

Boyd’s is not, as some readers have thought, a pessimistic vision. The treatment of all the major characters indicates a view that acknowledges and reveres absolutes and perfection: God’s heaven is within mankind and if all is not well with the world it is because man refuses to acknowledge the God within him. This view is most clearly and concisely indicated in a passage from *A Difficult Young Man*:

a collector will value more a stained and mildewed Memlinc found in the cellar, than a two-acre canvas by a Victorian Royal Academician. That is really what I am seeking throughout the book, the Memlinc in the cellar, the beautiful portrait of the human face, lost in the dissolution of our family and our religion. (p. 230)

These are, of course, the words of the narrator, Guy Langton, and we, as modern readers, are rightly sceptical of any narrator, let alone one who constantly tells us how difficult it is for him to record a true picture. But here Guy Langton is telling the truth — the structure of the series and the method of revealing character do reflect Guy’s search for what he calls the Memlinc in the cellar.

The Memlinc in the cellar is the metaphoric expression of what Boyd calls elsewhere ‘the essential self’. It is the essential self that can recognise good and evil and that will guide men long after Christianity and other known religions have ceased to lay down meaningful guidelines. In his autobiography, *Day of My Delight*, Boyd represents himself as saying that the only important thing is to be adjusted to one’s environment, and his wiser companion as replying:

‘Indeed it isn’t. The only important thing is to be adjusted to one’s self’. This showed that even though an agnostic, she recognised the existence of her Holy Ghost, and had realised a truth towards which I

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was only groping, that when we feel mentally ill-at-ease, it means that we are sinning against our essential selves. This is all we know and all we need to know. The Kingdom of Heaven is within us. (p. 147)\(^6\)

The above quotation, like Guy’s image of the Memlinc, emphasises all those things so essential to Boyd’s view of life, people and the world: discrimination, the natural ability to recognise right and wrong, and a firm belief in the existence of the superior — whether it be superior people, paintings, houses, books or animals — and the need to keep it in focus and intact as both comfort and inspiration. His choice of the fifteenth century Flemish paintings of Memlinc is itself revealing. The portraits reflect that serenity, simplicity and spirituality typical of fifteenth century European painting. But they have as well a curiously truthful quality: the angels are not only angelic, they are human, looking surprised and sometimes awkward, and the faces of the portraits can be both stern and serene. Boyd’s is a view of people that accepts the existence of something beyond the sum total of a person’s actions and relationships, acknowledges the existence of good and evil, and reveres man’s capacity to distinguish between them.

It is in these terms that the major characters, Alice Langton, her daughter Diana, and grandson Dominic, are developed. Boyd’s method is gradually to build up the essential elements of character by recording reactions to given social situations and giving occasional suggested interpretations by Guy. All the central characters of the series strive for harmony between the internal and external worlds and are shown moving towards a point of conflict between the dictates of their inner self and the norms of a misguided society. The conflict is made most explicit in the treatment of Dominic who from the beginning is further removed from social acceptance than anyone else in the novels. His progress through *A Difficult Young Man* and *When Blackbirds Sing* gradually defines and places value upon his individuality and at the same time implies criticism of the society with which he is in conflict. To see the way in which Boyd builds up the picture of Dominic’s inner self, it is necessary to look at the nature of Dominic’s involvement in a series of events. His essential self is quite clearly

\(^6\) *Day of My Delight* (Melbourne, Lansdowne, 1965), p. 147. All page references are to this edition.
established by the unity of motivation that underlies and makes consistent his apparently unpredictable response to a variety of characters and social situations.

We may take the series of incidents from *A Difficult Young Man* beginning, appropriately, with Alice's gift to Dominic of the horse he calls Tamburlaine. Alice is prompted to make the gift by Dominic's spontaneous gesture of generosity when he welcomes the family home from a trip he has himself been unable to make. Shortly afterwards he upsets his own birthday party and throws three generations of Langtons into temporary confusion. At the children's table, Dominic's brother Brian, possessed of some lyrical power, praises Tamburlaine until 'the idea of Tamburlaine possessed them all. The quality of their lives had become heightened because of the existence of this wonderful horse' (p. 29). The children drink a toast to the noble creature — all except Owen Dell who chooses to jeer at the beast, prompting Dominic to fling a glass of lemonade in his face. As a result of this episode, Dominic refuses to ride Tamburlaine in the children's horse race, highlight of the afternoon, and it is Owen who rides the horse to victory. Dominic, arriving on the scene as the race ends, rushes at Owen, pulls him from the horse, punches him with fury, and then refuses to apologise for his action. A crisis results, Dominic at its centre:

Dominic like some dark oracle which would not speak and relieve the anxiety of a threatened city, or a miraculous image which would not bleed at the appointed time, sat sullenly in the library where various people went to plead and expostulate with him, and all the time the parlourmaids were laying the magnificent tea which might never be eaten. (p. 38)

The next of Dominic's anti-social actions occurs during one of the regular family holidays in Tasmania when Helena — Dominic's cousin, childhood soul-mate, and eventually his wife — is thrown from a drag that is being somewhat recklessly driven by their Uncle George. Dominic immediately 'went after' Helena — 'whatever his impulse, he crashed heroically and uselessly into the thicket below' (p. 58). Guy explains Dominic's action in these terms: 'Helena, his playmate and idol, was injured and perhaps dead. His spirit leapt with her, and unfortunately took his body with it' (p. 60).
Two years later he is expelled from school and, as a result, sent to stay with his uncle and aunt, George and Baba, to learn farming. He is not there for long before he is again in trouble. He walks naked through the bush in the still of night and, it is thought, seduces Baba's maids. As a result, he is sent to Agricultural College, where he is ill treated and to which he refuses to return. So he is again sent to his parents' house, Westhill, where, provoked and grossly offended by Wolfie von Flugel's misguided lecture on the seduction of young ladies, he rides his beloved Tamburlaine to death. There is no doubt that the title of the book is appropriate.

But two things emerge on looking more closely at this series of incidents: despite Dominic's difficult, sometimes impossible, behaviour, the reader is able to sympathise with him and to appreciate both the value and the absolute consistency of his responses. The chain of events begins with Alice's gift of the horse. From *The Cardboard Crown* the reader remembers Alice's stature and dignity and places an appropriate significance on the gift; the recognition of some people is worth more than that of others. Dominic's liking for effective 'welcome homes', which prompts Alice's gift, arises from his own capacity for spontaneous generosity, as well as from his feeling of isolation from his fellow men. Yet the same qualities, combined with his instinctive loyalty and acceptance of traditional values, when transferred to a different situation, lead to his expulsion from school and to his subsequent feeling of even greater isolation.

His expulsion from school, while further isolating Dominic, provides both a clear indication of the value of his response and an unmistakeable criticism of the world in which he finds himself. Mr Porson, the headmaster of the school Dominic and his brothers attend, is one of the uncivilised people who are invading a world which has until now been inhabited by people like the Langtons. He values money and position in an arbitrary and superficial way, and turns on their heads the values Dominic instinctively upholds and responds to. As Guy says, although Mr Porson talked so much about gentlemen he was himself apparently not quite in the category (p. 46). His attack on Brian, Dominic's brother, for wearing a uniform a size too large for him is, to say the least, in extremely bad taste. Dominic's hostile response to it is not only in perfect accord with all that we already know of him, it is justified.

The consistency of Dominic's response becomes clear when the
expulsion incident and the birthday party incident are placed side by side. The basis of Dominic’s response to Mr Porson is similar to that which provokes his attack on Owen Dell, when first his pride is affronted and then his fury aroused by the child’s inappropriate and offensive comments. Guy suggests that the Langton children may have instinctively recognised the Dells as outsiders because of their origin (p. 40). Like so many of his comments, this does not need to be literally true to be suggestive of a validity. There is an important similarity in the responses of the Dells and Mr Porson. In Mr Porson one finds blatant snobbery and quite obviously distorted values, but both Mr Porson and the Dells reveal fear or discomfort when confronted with imagination, or simply with evidence of what appears to be almost another level of existence. So when Brian gives an enthusiastic performance demonstrating the virtues of Tamburlaine, Owen Dell is not able to enter into the spirit of the performance: ‘He was embarrassed by any flight of the imagination...’ (p. 30). Mr Porson, in the scene where Dominic, in response to his impertinent command ‘Kiss your mother, Langton’, snubs him by kissing his mother’s hand (p. 47), likewise recognises that Dominic, and probably the Langtons in general, have access to a set of values or a way of life beyond his reach. By their own attitudes and actions, people in the novels divide themselves into kinds; and the division between the Porsons and Dells and the Langtons is perhaps the most fundamental. The Langtons are alive with the freedom to accept their imagination. Mr Porson has smothered his true life by accepting a superficial and artificial one.

In this way Dominic’s essential self gradually becomes apparent. Beneath the unpredictable level of social action and reaction his responses are consistent and eventually, to some extent, predictable. One of the ways that value is placed on these responses is by contrasting Dominic with those characters who do not acknowledge the existence of their inner self and so flout the basic laws of morality. Baba is a perfect example; her attitude to Dominic has the effect of

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7 The Dells are the sons of Austin and Hetty.
8 His reactions to the Dells and Mr Porson reveal something else about Dominic: his instinctive response is so strong and so uncompromising that he reacts in a similar way to a child who is teasing and a headmaster who is revealing the worst forms of bad taste and snobbery.
giving value to Dominic’s actions while detracting from her own. Almost as much as anything else, the contact she has with Dominic labels Baba and helps to define the kind of society that is gradually overtaking that of the Langtons. When Dominic returns from his midnight walk through the bush, he explains it by saying ‘It was quiet’:

Baba was incredulous at the inadequacy of...[his] explanation. She was certain that he was either vicious or mad or both. She recalled his attack on Owen Dell at the sports, his senseless leap from the drag, his threatening Mr Porson with a sword. ‘We might be murdered in our beds’, she exclaimed, and did not make clear whether this was her chief fear, or that one of the neighbours might have seen Dominic naked, and she declared if so: ‘We could never hold up our heads again’. (p. 72)

The reader is in a position to know that Baba’s fear that they might be murdered in their beds is over-dramatic and quite inconsistent with the essential elements of Dominic’s character. It is most unlikely that Dominic would murder anyone — though it is perhaps fair to add that if he did, Baba might justifiably be nervous of her own safety. It is, ironically, Baba herself who tries to murder Dominic — at least that is Guy’s interpretation of the event that occurs during one of the family excursions to Europe (p. 215). During a bull-fight in Spain, Dominic, supposedly to get the rosette for Helena, climbed the fence into the ring. While he was scrambling hurriedly back to escape the bull, he grasped at the top of the fence in front of George and Baba and she, Guy seems certain, deliberately tried to push his hand away so that he would fall back into the path of the bull. Baba’s comment about Dominic’s murderous tendencies, when seen in relation to her own subsequent action, reinforces the idea that, although Dominic’s actions may not be acceptable to society, they have a genuine basis as her own do not.

If it is not in Dominic’s nature to murder anyone, he is, in the course of the novels, forced, largely as a result of the values being imposed by the society into which Baba comfortably fits, to be responsible for the loss of at least two lives: his horse Tamburlaine’s and that of the young German soldier he kills in battle. In the young German soldier he sees beneath all surface distractions, with that
brief flicker of human recognition valued by the novels and shown to be all too rare. He is made aware of the wonder, the mystery, and the value of a living person and of genuine human contact, and realises that it is this that he has affronted and that he had no right to kill:

In that act [killing the soldier] he had violated the two things to which his whole being responded in worship; the beauty of a living human body, all the miracle of its movement and thought; and the relation of two souls in brotherhood. (p. 137) \(^9\)

Unlike Baba, Dominic does not remain unaware of the significance of his actions. The transference into physical violence of Baba's fears and resentments at the bull-fight may for the moment terrify her, but she is not seriously or permanently disturbed. It is one of the most important things about Dominic that he does not suppress or submerge his inner self and that, in the fourth novel of the series, he comes to see clearly the implications of accepting it.

In that novel, *When Blackbirds Sing*, attention is focused on Dominic's experience of World War I, an event that forces him to become aware of the disparity between personal and social morality. His personal values are emphasised by the companionship of the soldiers, and in particular the spiritual harmony he enjoys with the nineteen-year-old subaltern, Hollis, son of a country lawyer and 'excited at being on his way to war' (p. 66). Dominic's rejection of the values upheld by society arises from his realisation that the war he has been fighting stands in direct opposition to all the values he upholds. Although the novel shows the deterioration of those values upheld by Boyd, it is written in such a way that the reader, through Dominic, is in fact able to see beyond the futility and brutality of the war and what it stands for and concentrate on the ideal of divine humanity; the beautiful portrait of the human face. But the ideal exists only in terms of the actual; as Dominic himself finally realises, it becomes distorted if one turns one's back on the truth of the real world.

At the end of the novel Dominic says goodbye to Hollis who is now in a home for shell-shocked officers with half his face mutilated beyond recognition:

He had a dreadful feeling of inadequacy. He should have said something, done something that Hollis expected. Should he like St Francis have bent and kissed that hideous cheek? Then he thought what a beastly thing that would have been—when the boy offered him his whole face, to kiss only the side that was distorted and horrible, ignoring what he still had of life and health, the smooth fresh skin of his youth. (pp. 169-70)

Dominic's recognition that he must still acknowledge and accept the beautiful side of Hollis's face, is a clarification of all that he has so far experienced. He has been trying to unify his existence, trying to reconcile authority with personal morality. One of the main contrasts made between Dominic and Sylvia Tunstall, to whom he was once engaged and with whom he has, in this novel, been sexually involved, is that she divides life into compartments, thereby making inconsistencies tolerable. This Dominic cannot do. He cannot isolate his shooting of the German boy. It is connected to human experience at a deeper level and cannot be set aside under arbitrary labels such as 'soldierly action', 'war', even 'self-defence'. It certainly is not, for Dominic, something that 'had to be done'. When he first sees Hollis's face full on, Dominic offers him his hand, accepting him in spite of what has happened and ignoring his injury. He comes to realise that this is less than honest and a distortion of experience. He must accept all of Hollis, but continue to see and be able to concentrate on that which retains life, health and beauty. Dominic's realisation involves an adjustment of vision, and it is this new vision that governs the structure of the series.

The novel has, with one notable exception, been regarded unfavourably by reviewers and critics. It has been described as a 'dull book, flat and heavy and with no real power even in the descriptions of the horrors of war..." Although the style is markedly different from that of the first three novels, it is appropriate to the structure of the series as a whole. If the brutality of war were to dominate, the whole plan of the sequence would be destroyed. By deliberately under-


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stating the horrors of war, Boyd is able to let the emphasis fall where he wants it: on the positive aspects of Dominic’s experience.

The war, which has such a profound effect on Boyd himself, is deliberately described in When Blackbirds Sing in an unsensational way:

Towards the end of this calm, cold period Burns, strolling along the reserve trench on a sunny April morning, was blown to pieces by a stray shell... (p. 73)

Suddenly in the stillness of the dawn, the serene empty heavens rained down hell. The men climbed out of the trenches and stumbled across under the protection of the barrage. It was as on the evening of the raid. A section would be blotted out by a shell. A man would fall over like a doll. (p. 119)

What is striking about these passages is not so much the understated, toned down quality, as the air of unreality in which Boyd shrouds most of the pictures of the war. The description of Burns’s death captures precisely the unreal nature of wartime experience. Natural processes continue, the seasons pass as usual from winter to spring. Burns, on a sunny April morning, goes for a stroll — a quite usual English occupation on a fresh, sunny, Spring morning — but this time a ‘stray shell’, something quite arbitrary and meaningless, appears and kills him. There is a similarly unreal, almost dreamlike, quality about the second passage: the heavens rain as usual, but they rain hell instead of water, and the men fall down like toys.

This unreal quality of the war is reproduced so that the reader can more fully understand Dominic’s experiences. The war is to him something quite incomprehensible. If the writing is allowed to have its full effect, the final scenes of the novel are not only powerful but perfectly understandable. The change in language in this novel allows the reader to discover, as Dominic discovered, the beautiful portrait that lies beneath the deterioration of the Langton family and the society of which it has been a part.

Guy’s search for the beautiful portrait is most immediately obvious in his portrayal of Dominic who was obviously central to the inspiration of the series. But the presence of other major characters, such as Alice and Diana, is just as important in the total scheme of the
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series. The first novel, *The Cardboard Crown*, is concerned primarily with Alice and the third novel, *Outbreak of Love*, with Diana, while the second and fourth, as already discussed, centre on Dominic.

Alice and Diana represent what Guy calls the external destiny of the family, the destiny that was fixed by the marriage of Alice and Austin, the changing, developing and in the end vulnerable tradition of the Langtons, as opposed to the de Teba strain, the blood of Spanish ancestors, that appears in Dominic undiluted after several generations. But within the flux and change, the deterioration of a vulnerable tradition, we are shown something that is valuable and, though affected, is not lost. The process can be seen by the comparison that is deliberately made between Diana in *Outbreak of Love* and Alice in *The Cardboard Crown*, and by the method of dealing with their individual lives.

The first mention of Alice occurs in the description of a childhood scene in *The Cardboard Crown* where Hetty, a cousin of the Langton children, screams for possession of the cardboard crown so that she can play Queen Elizabeth to Austin’s Sir Walter Raleigh. This is an important scene and one which is, significantly, referred to later in the novel when Alice is attempting to understand and to justify Austin’s sexual involvement with Hetty which had begun just after Alice and Austin were married:

She was ill. She knew Austin’s strong appetites, what it would mean to him, after the first rapturous months of marriage, to find himself deprived of his young wife. And there at hand was Hetty, who had always wanted him, ever since she was a child in the school-room, and had snatched the cardboard crown. (p. 69)

It is significant that Boyd chooses to suggest that Alice achieves the real crown and Hetty only the cardboard crown, while Alice is suffering what seems to her a personal betrayal, temporarily upsetting some of the most important assumptions on which she has based her past life. It is partly from her capacity for suffering that Alice’s stature derives. It is true that Hetty too suffers and to some extent gains our sympathy, but the basis of her suffering is different, and she is not really able to get beyond it as Alice does. Hetty appears in the novel

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as a person blindly seeking her own satisfaction, regardless of her surroundings and situation. What she gets at the end of this self-centred pursuit is only the cardboard crown. The real crown belongs to Alice, and she achieves it both in spite of and because of all that is put in her way. One of the central things revealed by her life, in fact, is the disparity between the real and the ideal, and the recognition that circumstances dictate to certain areas of life and must be taken into account if one wants to attain the only kind of 'crown' worth having.

Alice learns that justice is one ideal rarely attained on the level of action. But the novel makes it clear that there is an area in which justice does operate, and it is in this area that Alice achieves the real crown. There is a kind of justice operating in the fact that Alice’s dignity, her stature and her self-awareness, are the reward for the blows she has not only taken but has accepted. So that although she does live, to a far greater extent than Dominic, in terms of, and in accord with, the society of her time, one of the things made clear by the way Guy reveals Alice’s character is the disparity between true worth and its recognition in the world. It is, in a sense, inevitable that Alice should not receive justice on the level of action, since the nature of her own actions elevates her from the level of most of the people surrounding her.

The isolation of the central characters is not due only to the passing of time and the changing social structure that accompanies it; Boyd implies that people of stature are necessarily isolated, since their stature is dependent upon their being to some extent exceptional, and superior to most people around them. His is a view of life that can claim certain people as superior without embarrassment — it allows for this kind of judgment while still seeing what is valuable in people who cannot develop themselves in their own terms. It is worth looking a little more closely at the method by which Guy establishes Alice’s superiority. Our impression of her when the novel ends is well defined despite the fact that, as the novel proceeds, we may feel we are being told little enough about her.

Alice’s return to Rome after twenty years, when she again spends time with Aubrey Tunstall, is one of the most important events of her life. Yet it is described simply by a comparatively short extract from her diary. She tells of her activities in Rome and of her own feelings:
12 Octobre. Jeudi. S. Donatien. The situation is the same as it was twenty years ago. My reason tells me it is impossible, but my heart denies my reason. What can I do? Nothing of course. Imagine what all the family would say, with their strong sense of the ridiculous, if I were to elope again, thirty-three years later. I have no intention of doing so, yet I cannot deny that if A asked me to, it would not be easy to refuse...(p. 152)

There is little extraneous detail, and little interpretation. It is simply the account of these few days Alice chose to record in her diary, followed by Guy’s interpretation in the next chapter. This interpretation is placed beside the diary entries in a way that seems perhaps closer to the method of a historian than a novelist. Guy brings out certain implications contained in the diary entries and produces an interpretation that would not have occurred to Alice. He does not suggest that he knows the whole truth about her, and yet there is a sense of completeness about Alice’s character.

This sense is the result of Guy’s indirect method — it is not necessary to know the whole truth about the actual situations in which she found herself to know the essential truth about Alice. It is not that any of her actions, taken singly, would make a striking impression, so much as that we see her continually in action, we become aware of the strikingly constant way in which she places herself squarely in front of situations, and the integrity with which she deals with them. In this way Guy seems to allow Alice’s dignity and stature to establish themselves. At the end of The Cardboard Crown, Alice’s life is being seen largely from a negative standpoint — fate destroys all her hopes, hopes not only for herself, but for her children as well. Yet we are not allowed to see her as weak, or as an object of pity. She evokes sadness rather than pity, and is remembered and admired for having faced with dignity and integrity everything life had to offer her.

A similar emphasis is placed on Diana, Alice’s daughter, in the third novel of the series, Outbreak of Love. Yet it is interesting to see how the difference in situation and in character produces a quite different picture. All that we learn of Diana in The Cardboard Crown suggests that she is slightly eccentric, willful in her insistence on marrying Wolfie von Flügel, the pompous German composer of uncertain talent, and selfish in her disregard of her mother’s wishes when she is taken to Europe. She and Wolfie rarely invite Alice to
concerts or to join them on trips and excursions — despite Alice's obvious liking for travelling *en famille* — and they do not make her feel welcome in their house in London. In *Outbreak of Love*, Guy allows Diana's better qualities to be revealed, and gives us a quite different picture from that of the wilful and selfish Diana of *The Cardboard Crown*. Life presents its challenges to Diana as it does to all the major characters, and Boyd ensures both that we see her meeting the challenge, and that we notice not only her shortcomings, but also her strengths. That she remains a less impressive figure than Alice, her mother, is partly the result of the passage of time and the changes it has brought.

Diana's surroundings are obviously less impressive than Alice's. Alice's relationship with Aubrey, for example, is carried out against the backdrop of Europe. Diana cannot seek her other self in Europe; the closest she comes to it is through Russell who is a reflection of Europe. One feels that Aubrey — though himself slightly decadent — belongs in Rome. His conversation is not as theoretical as Russell's; he does not have the same need to be explicit about the 'civilised' since he so obviously lives and belongs in the civilised world. But despite her more humble life in Brighton, Diana is shown to have individual worth. Although we may not feel that she is a character of Alice's stature, we are shown the nature of her own achievement, which results in her ability to write to Russell:

I wrote two letters before this, trying to give excuses for what I am doing. In one I said that it was because Wolfie was a German and that it would be unfair to leave him now. That may be true but it is not the reason. The real reason is that I am married to him, whatever he does... It is curious to think that we imagined that our meetings were only a foretaste of pleasures to come, when they were the whole substance of those pleasures. But I always expected too much of life. (p. 252)¹³

Diana has, in her own way, arrived at this conclusion and the last scene of the novel shows its validity. Because anti-German feelings were so strong in Melbourne, she and Wolfie have moved to the

¹³ *Outbreak of Love* (London, John Murray, 1957). All page references are to this edition.
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country near Westhill, where half the neighbours are German, having settled there because the countryside reminds them of the hills and valleys of the Rhineland. In the final scene of the novel Diana sits with Wolfie at lunch on the verandah of their house, while the winter sunlight gleams on the hock bottle on the table, and tinges with pale gold the far purple forests of Gippsland (p. 254). Contained in the imagery of these lines are suggestions of the two things that have contributed to Diana's acceptance of herself and her love for Wolfie: her relationship with Russell, and Wolfie's escapade with Mrs Montaubyn. By evoking earlier scenes of the novel, Boyd is able to suggest the complexities that underlie Diana's decision and that are present in this final scene.

The hock bottle on the lunch table she shares with Wolfie recalls one of the central scenes of Diana's and Russell's relationship, at the height of their mutual attraction before decisions and demands made their entry: a simple and private luncheon in the big old house in Brighton, a bowl of fruit on a low table in front of the open fire and finally 'the empty hock bottle, somehow so much more suggestive of wanton gaiety than a mere claret or burgundy bottle, lifting its elegant neck between them' (p. 104). The 'pale gold' and 'purple forests' recall in a similar way Wolfie's somewhat bizarre mistress, Mrs Montaubyn; in particular the love-making scene where she becomes for Wolfie, 'the vineyards of the Rhine and the apple orchards of Bavaria' (p. 21), and the concert at which Wolfie plays the prelude that her love-making had inspired. The music is described in terms of Wolfie's mounting joy in the whole natural world '... that kind of voluptuousness in which autumnal richness awakens physical desire' (p. 59). Mrs Montaubyn is also described in these terms at her drunken and disastrous entry into Government House society: 'There was about her a suggestion of high summer ... orchards and vineyards ... in the richness of her curls and her ruby velvet dress, in the many gold bracelets on her plump arms and the necklace of gold vine leaves ... ' (p. 120). All that exists between Wolfie and Diana is brought into the final lines of the novel. Diana's decision to stay with Wolfie has been based on the awareness that one cannot escape the past.

The method of presenting the major characters, Dominic, Alice and Diana, shows what Guy meant when he said that in writing the novels he was searching for the beautiful portrait of the human face that underlies the dissolution of his family. What is common to all these
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characters is that they achieve that kind of integrity which enables them to face squarely and accept whatever life offers, denying neither the past, nor themselves. They go through a process of discovering themselves, and living in terms of their discovery. Even the minor characters contribute to the search, if only, as in the case of Baba, to add contrast and help emphasise the values being upheld in the notion of the beautiful human face.

Another aspect of the novels that underlines the search for the beautiful portrait is the movement of the Langton family from Australia to Europe. The shifting geographical setting has been seen as Boyd’s ‘Jamesian theme... the relation between Australia and the parent culture of England and Europe’. Although Boyd was interested in the predicament of having one’s physical home in one hemisphere and one’s cultural traditions in another, by the time he came to write this series he was interested in the philosophical rather than the social implication of his family’s attempting to live in two countries. The geographical movement, as the setting of the novels shifts between Europe and Australia, allows the idea of change to be emphasised, thus providing a perfect background for the presentation of characters moving towards that stage where their essential self is able to find expression in spite of all the changing circumstances of their lives. The significance the novels place on the Langtons’ attempt to live in two countries and two civilisations is clearly stated in The Cardboard Crown:

Waterpark was the magnet which drew my family back at intervals across the world, whisking them away just as they might have been thrusting their roots fruitfully into Australian soil. This distraction went on for four generations... the family themselves [were] whisked backwards and forwards — to Westhill when they felt the cold, to Waterpark when they felt the heat... (p. 44)

A home in two countries, as expressed in this quotation, offers a means of escaping from the hardships which are a natural part of life; the family goes to Westhill when its members feel the cold, to Waterpark when they feel the heat. The situation is used to sort out those

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characters who allow themselves to fall prey to the temptation of escape from themselves, from those who do not.

Lady Langton, Austin's mother, a character not really strong enough for survival, has been looking forward to returning 'home' to England. The trip however, seems ill fated from the start and while they are in England, her husband's health deteriorates and he is forced to Italy for the winter where he dies. This is how Lady Langton sees the situation:

When she left Melbourne she achieved the ambition of more than half her life. Her long exile was over. Now she saw her departure as only a terrible mistake, her advent in Europe as an immense defeat. She could talk of nothing but an immediate return... she said she must go home. 'Home' had switched again to the antipodes. (p. 51)

She is using the possibility of life in two countries as a means of escape from the periods of misfortune which beset her. Her reaction may be compared with Alice's when she too, during a crisis, is tempted towards what appears to her an ideal existence in Rome. The situation there is complicated by the fact that the reader may see what Alice herself could not see: the impossibility of a complete life with Aubrey. Yet it is one of Alice's greatest strengths that she overcomes the temptation to escape from herself and her past life.

There are indications outside the novels that, by the time he began the Langton series, Boyd was viewing in a different light the family material he had used previously. He began writing The Cardboard Crown when he returned to Australia in 1948. At the Grange, Westhill of the novels, he found the impetus and the material for the Langton series. In 1951 he returned to England. There he continued writing The Cardboard Crown, making a trip to Rome with the uncompleted manuscript. In 1954 he again went on a holiday to Rome, from which he returned 'with Italy in [his] blood'. He went again to Rome in 1955, but returned to England for eighteen months before finally going to live in Italy. During these eighteen months he wrote Outbreak of Love and Much Else in Italy, his Italian travel book.

His renewed contact with Italy began, then, at the time he was writing the first novel of the Langton series. His feelings about Italy were

15 Day of My Delight, p. 257.

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strong, and it is reasonable to suppose that the effect his life there had upon him would be reflected in the novels. One of the most persuasive reasons for feeling that this is so is suggested by the striking similarity between the central concerns of Much Else in Italy and those of the Langton novels. It is as though in the Langton novels Boyd is again taking up the Australian and English material used in the earlier novels, but this time with a focus which, if not entirely new to him, is sharpened by his renewed contact with Italy and with European tradition.

In Much Else in Italy the narrator, accompanied by a 'kind of white Boy in search of God' (p. 6), takes us on a tour of the temples of Italy. They embark upon a search for what is called throughout the book 'the Perfect Drawing'; it is the equivalent of the Memlinc in the novels:

On our last day at Amalfi we went again to the cathedral, to see the tomb of S. Andrew, whose body was brought here from Constantinople in A.D. 1208. On the wall of the stair-case is a fourteenth-century crucifix, of which the face is neither suffering nor sentimental, and for this reason attracted the notice of the Irish boy, who had unconsiously begun to look for the face which might be that of the Perfect Drawing. (p. 27)

The significance of the search becomes clearer to the Irish boy as he reflects on the relics of the martyrs in SS. Quattro Coronati:

There is no must, the Irish boy declared. No one has got to do anything that revolts his nature. You can always die. You can be and you must be — this is the only must — like M. Anouilh's ermine which will rather be destroyed by dogs than spoil its beautiful white fur, its raison d'être, by crossing the muddy stream...

As for the spirit of our age, every age is doomed. Here in Rome nothing is more evident. What we have to reflect is the Perfect Drawing of ourselves, conceived in the heart of the Supreme Nóos. What distorts that reflection we ignore, even if the dogs get our bodies. (p. 101)

16 Much Else in Italy (London, Macmillan, 1958), p. 6. All page references are to this edition.

17 Boyd explains the meaning of this term: "The Supreme Noumenon is that object of intuitive apprehension (not to us "intellectual") which is generally called God. As the word noumenon is in derivation related
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In the Langton novels, through the presentation of his family, Boyd also strives to reveal the presence of this Perfect Drawing.

With the above passage in mind, one can see more clearly certain things about Dominic. Dominic refuses to allow his nature to be distorted by the demands of society, even although his refusal may result in his own destruction. M. Anouilh's ermine provides an illustration of the kind of thing Dominic stands for, and makes specific the reason it is not important that he is not more intelligent or more consciously self-aware. The central fact about Dominic is that he refuses to allow his nature to be distorted, just as the ermine will let itself be killed by dogs rather than compromise its true nature. But if the process of isolation which Dominic goes through emphasises his value in human terms, it also implicitly criticises what achievement is possible to him. By his isolation and estrangement it becomes impossible for those around him to see the 'portrait' he represents. Guy, an artist, has to recreate him and represent him before his value can be asserted. Although the connoisseur may prefer the mildewed Memlinc in the cellar to the two-acre Royal Academy painting, he would also presumably prefer the Memlinc not to be mildewed and to take its rightful place in the house. It seems that the series, in its incomplete form, ends in this gap between the possible and the ideal.

In the final pages of *Much Else in Italy* the narrator and the Irish boy look out on to the harbour where men in boats are lighting candles on the water. Among these boats is one which puts out the candles. It belongs to a millionaire communist who:

hopes after the revolution to become a super-commissar owing to his great managerial efficiency, and so make little alteration in his way of life. He is at the moment engaged in smashing any small businesses and farms that remain... a project equally dear to the heart of the man with the New Statesman. As neither of them have any conception of the Perfect Drawing of the divine humanity which should inform our society, they are like a pair of architects with the most up-to-date equipment, a complete knowledge of strains and stresses, but with not the

to the word Nöos, "the Active Principle of the Universe", we shall, making the distinction, as it were, between God and the angels, describe this supreme power as the Nöos." (p. 3).
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faintest idea of what a house should look like, or what kind of people should live in it. (pp. 183–4)

In a general way the passage relates to the novels in that those characters who are particularly valued in the novels are those who exhibit an awareness of the ‘divine humanity which should inform our society’. The chief characteristics of the society overtaking that of the Langtons, and in the face of which Dominic is rendered helpless, are those of the architect with the most up-to-date equipment, but ‘with not the faintest idea of what a house should look like, or of what kind of people should live in it’.
Julian Randolph Stow was born in 1935. He was a precocious writer. An able poet and a remarkable and original novelist, by the age of twenty-three he had published three novels of which the last, To the Islands, had established his reputation both in Australia and abroad. His next novel Tourmaline (1963) was thus assured of attention and was reviewed widely and with an enthusiasm tempered here and there with uncertainty as to the sort of book it was meant to be. It was said to be set in the future but the township in question seemed to be slumped in a decaying nineteenth century past. It was on the one hand an uncompromisingly realistic picture of character and life in a moribund gold-mining town in Western Australia and on the other a kind of apocalyptic allegory, parable, fable, mythus or what-have-you hardly anchored in time and space at all.

Shortly after the book appeared it was the subject of an able and rather acrid review in the Bulletin of 6 July 1963, by Leonie Kramer, now Professor of Australian Literature in the University of Sydney. Professor Kramer attacked the novel on the grounds that it tried to combine two incompatible techniques, poetic symbolism and realistic description; that in concentrating on the ideological significance of his characters Stow had stripped away practically all individuality from them: ‘We are invited to look not . . . at people but at their symbolic value.’ Finally she found the quasi-religious ideas of the novel less than satisfying. ‘The form [the novelist] has chosen’, she said, ‘lets him down: what he wants to do is not comfortably accommodated by the novel . . . In Tourmaline it seems to me, he has tried to match the prosaic demands of the novel and his own poetic inclinations.’ These inclinations, she said, to judge from Mr Stow’s own published verse, were towards ‘amassing images which are heavily significant but not always meaningful’. The result is that: ‘To the question, “shall
these bones live?” I must answer “No” in terms of Tourmaline. No skeletons, clothed though they may be in the rags of thought and temporarily animated by their creator’s will can compensate for the “want of human interest.” The review was entitled ‘Heritage of Dust: Randolph Stow’s Wasteland’ and it hinted strongly that the author was trying to keep up with fashionable trends like Christian allegory in current fiction and that he was making capital out of similarly fashionable expressions of fairly utter despair about the human condition:

The significance of his references to sin and expiation, to piety and prayer, to imprisonment in the self and the brotherhood of man, to the sterility of godless humanity, is more apparent than real; it is insisted upon but not demonstrated. It is difficult to avoid the feeling that one has visited Mr Stow’s spiritual country before, in the company of T. S. Eliot, Saul Bellow, Patrick White and others. It is one of the more popular tourist resorts for the modern writer; even Salinger has pic­nicked in one corner of it.

A few months later Professor Kramer returned to the attack in the second number of Southerly, 1964. This time, in an article of fourteen pages or so, she gave herself scope to consider all Stow’s novels up to that date and to develop the critical argument which she had outlined in the short review in The Bulletin. It is a coherent, closely reasoned analysis and condemnation of Stow’s method of writing novels. While his gifts as a writer of fiction are for the solid depiction of scene and character, he has been seduced by the movement of the last forty years away from the naturalistic novel and his theories about fiction have stultified his natural gift for it. His talents are essentially realistic ones:

It is important to recognise that Stow espouses the cause of the anti-realistic novel, not because he has tried realism and found it unwork­able, but because it provides him with the scope he imagines himself to need. In choosing to write an anti-realistic novel, he is of course in one sense immediately relieved of the burden of imposing some order and consistency upon human behaviour. Character becomes a function of plot, and more particularly of symbolism; it need not, indeed cannot, be explored per se.
Professor Kramer illustrated her thesis with an examination of Stow's first three novels, where she pays just tribute to his abilities as a writer, his gift for exact and telling observation and selection of detail, his lucid and self-effacing prose, his sensitive discrimination in choosing the right incident or object to bring the scene vividly to life. But the characters live only in these outward delineations of feature and foible. Within they are spectres of Stow’s imagination. They are not based on observation at all. She takes as an example Andrew Maguire in *A Haunted Land*:

Andrew Maguire, the central figure in the family with which the novel is concerned, comes to life temporarily in scenes of violence and cruelty; the very positiveness of his actions lends an air of false reality to him as a person. But in fact only his actions are real. Between his behaviour and its possible causes there is no connection. Maguire’s surface is real enough, but it contains a vacuum.

This she believes is due to what must inevitably happen when a novelist adopts an anti-realistic position in relation to his characters: ‘Stow does not start with people but with ideas about people. He does not examine relationships; he invents them.’ She follows this fault through the next three novels and shows how, in spite of Stow’s maturing powers, it manages to vitiate each one. In the case of *Tourmaline*, she argues that, in addition, the ambiguous figure of the narrator and the long passages of theological and mystical sociology which the narrator puts between himself and the actual people and events of the novel, have the effect of rendering human problems insignificant:

This is more to be regretted since there are some convincing scenes in the novel. The relationship between Mary and Tom the store-keeper takes on, at times, perfectly human dimensions. Byrne the poet flares into life. Deborah, torn between obligations to Kestrel and the demands of Michael the diviner, is also at times a wholly human person. Yet the growth of each is stunted by the necessity for all to conform to the ‘myth’... in *Tourmaline* the narrative impulse is deadened; character is not only in fact, but in appearance, a function of theme, and the theme itself is obscure, wavering, self-contradictory.

Mr Stow appears to have been injured and outraged by these attacks not only on his novels but on his whole practice and belief as a
writer. This was not at all surprising. The criticism came at the height of his success and it was a direct and formidable challenge to his literary reputation. Professor Kramer herself was as much a leading critic as Mr Stow was a leading writer and her article in *Southerly* remains a model of trenchant and lucid critical analysis. If it was avowedly partisan in its defence of the realistic novel, the reasons for taking one side were weighty and strongly defended. Indeed the article was not so much an attack on Mr Stow and his books, as a manifesto against the whole anti-realist school in fiction with Mr Stow serving as a very convenient demonstration model.

His resentment did not lead him to attempt to answer the criticism itself — at least as far as I know — but to counter-attack by deriding the attitude of mind that he imagined must have led to it. And it took a rather surprising form: an onslaught not so much on Professor Kramer as on myself. On the heels of the *Southerly* article, the editor of *Meanjin Quarterly* received a lampoon against me with a letter from Mr Stow asking whether *Meanjin* could use it. Mr Christesen, as was the practice of the magazine in matters of literary controversy, sent it to me to see if I would care to reply in any way. It was a mildly offensive but quite amusing parody of an Augustan epistle in heroic couplets purporting to be from myself to Professor Kramer, guying what Mr Stow called my literary pretensions and by implication those of Professor Kramer. I wrote back to the editor saying I had no objections on my own behalf to his printing the lampoon and saying that I had no wish to reply in any way. What happened after that I do not know. *Meanjin* did not publish the parody.

At the same time I was naturally puzzled and curious to know why I had been singled out for an attack which was followed up by another in the magazine *Nation* on 19 September of the same year. In this Mr Stow attacked a form of academic and intellectual pretentiousness which he called Babbit-eating — Babbits or B.B.B. — and again the chief victims were myself and Professor Kramer as heads and fronts of what he implied was an organised literary *claque*. I was puzzled because, not only had I not said or published a word against Mr Stow, I had, in fact, not even read any of his novels. The effect of the events I have just described was that I thereupon read, and, I may say, greatly enjoyed, *To the Islands* and *Tourmaline* and I seriously thought of writing to Mr Stow to tell him so and to suggest that he was evidently under some kind of misapprehension. As far as I can
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remember I did not do so and I am sorry for it, since he may still, for all I know, harbour unjustified resentment against me.

It was plain at any rate that he associated me in some way with Professor Kramer's article and suspected me of being an accomplice or an instigator. His satire gave evidence that he had read some extracts from a mock heroic poem of mine which was published in the same issue of Southerly as Professor Kramer's article. In it there was a jocular reference to the 'wombat novelists' of New Holland. There was also evidence that Mr Stow had at some time read a poem of mine, 'A Letter from Rome', addressed to Professor Kramer and published in Quadrant the year before, which contained a similar jocular reference to the saddle and sliprail obsessions of Australian poets and their lack of intellectual interest. But it was hard to think that a sensible man like Mr Stow would think these remarks directed against him, or take them as evidence that I was in league with Professor Kramer and a faceless gang of literary Babbits devoted to attacking him.

There was probably an answer, but the matter seemed unimportant and I have never thought it worth while to follow it further.

Such were the main facts of what I have called the Tourmaline Affair. It remains to add that two years later, in Poetry Australia, Number 12, Mr Stow published a series of twelve short poems apparently extracts from a longer work. The title was: From The Testament of Tourmaline, Variations on Themes of the Tao Teh Ching. This, as I mean to argue later, is an important piece of evidence in the interpretation of the theme of the novel in question.

It would be hypocritical of me, of course, to dissociate myself from Professor Kramer's review and article and not to add that up to a point Mr Stow's suspicions were justified. I had nothing to do with the inception or the writing of either but thoroughly shared Professor Kramer's views on the faults of the so-called anti-realistic novels of the period. I had made much the same objections to the introduction of the methods and language of poetry into the novel in reviewing Patrick White's The Tree of Man a few years earlier and with much of her strictures on Randolph Stow's first four novels, when I read them later, I found myself and I still do, thoroughly in agreement. But if I attempt to resurrect the Tourmaline Affair after ten years, it is not in order to exculpate or justify myself, but because I think there
is more to be said on the subject, in fairness to Mr Stow and in the interest of understanding just what he was about when he wrote the novels and what he succeeded in doing over and above possible failures in other directions. I cannot forget that I enjoyed both *Tourmaline* and *To the Islands*, and though I thought both *The Haunted Land* and *The Bystander* prentice work, they are formidable attempts and have the vitality of genius. If the vitality, as Professor Kramer argues, does not arise from the source of it in the great novels of the past, that is in the study of human beings accurately observed and imaginatively depicted in relation to actual society, then it must lie elsewhere and should have its due in a critical appraisal. I find myself a little in the position I am in when I read Dr Johnson’s magisterial demolition of young Mr Milton’s ‘Lycidas’: I think to myself: Yes, nearly all that Johnson alleges against ‘Lycidas’ is true, but what a glorious poem it is in spite of that.

The first consideration, perhaps, is the terms in which the argument was proposed. It is an argument between two forms of the novel: the naturalistic, in which everything, persons, actions, setting and events are based on observation of the way these things are in the world around and can be authenticated at need by further observation — and the anti-naturalistic, in which the writer invents a world or a scenario in which he incorporates elements from the actual world but does not feel bound to any principle of authentication. Or he may introduce theories of social relations or psychological laws not ordinarily recognised in our daily living; or again, he may use the persons, events and relations of daily life not in themselves but as signifying or symbolising things or ideas other than themselves. Or, finally, he may simply construct fantasies out of the material of experience for their own sake.

Contrasting these two methods Professor Kramer observes as an unarguable condition of all fiction that the form the writer chooses imposes certain limitations on what he can do with it:

Stow’s last two novels, and in particular *Tourmaline*, demonstrate the dangers of abandoning oneself to a world of symbolic shapes. It does not seem to me possible to divorce the novel, as Stow has tried to do, from the demands of real life; nor does it seem to me possible to make significant statements about human problems unless the characters who exemplify these problems exist, not only in the imagination, but also in
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the observation of the author. The form of fiction imposes some restraints and obligations upon a writer; he ignores them at his peril.

This seems to me unexceptionable and to be obviously true. Given these conditions, if Randolph Stow is trying to do what the realistic novel does, or if he is trying to arrive at the same ends by different means, Professor Kramer's criticism of the novels is both just and sound. And while the argument is conducted in terms of the realist and the anti-realist novel there seems no way round her conclusions.

But suppose we question this dichotomy of realist and anti-realist novel which is tacitly assumed to include the whole field of prose fiction; and suppose we question the notion which also seems to be tacitly assumed, that if a work of prose fiction fails to conform to the requirements of the realistic novel, it must still be judged by the standards that apply to the realistic novel; suppose we ask whether it may not have quite other ends and be judged by other standards according to which it will be seen to be by no means inferior as a work of literature. May it not be that there are several kinds of prose fiction, each sui generis, though sharing some things in common, each with its own limitations and each with its peculiar sort of power and beauty? May it not be in fact that the so called anti-realist novel is a contradictory idea and that its exponents were really aiming at another literary form, but were confused in their ideas because of the way the realistic novel has tended to dominate our ideas about other species of prose fiction. When I look at the whole range of Randolph Stow's books I am inclined to think that this may have been the case with him. With all the gifts of a novelist which he so clearly displays, he has actually been groping towards another form of prose fiction and in successive books has come closer and closer to mastering its possibilities. Or alternatively one might hold that, after failing in an attempt to combine the realistic and the anti-realistic novel, for reasons which Professor Kramer has succinctly pointed out, he has ended by at last finding one brilliant solution in which the two exist in harmony. I am referring to the fifth novel, The Merry-go-round in the Sea, which of course had not appeared when Professor Kramer wrote.

These are all suppositions and I must now try to show why I think they are substantial.

It is an obvious fact that realistic or naturalistic prose fiction, which more or less annexed the old Italian term novel to itself, has been the
dominant form, first in England and then in Europe, from the early eighteenth century until the present day. Known also as the novel of manners it was the dominant form of literature in general throughout most of the nineteenth century. It was based on accurate observation of people in society, usually contemporary society, and its object was to produce fictions pleasing in themselves, but devoted to illuminating the life of man by showing the truth about it. To do this the characters had to be credible and at least as complex as those we experience in ourselves and others around us; the action must flow from character and be explicable in terms of it and of the moral and other conventions of the society in which these characters were set. To move outside these conditions was to vitiate the form by introducing random or incalculable elements so that one could no longer apply the criterion of probability. But this criterion was in terms of the observed facts of human psychology and social organisation. It largely excluded the supernatural, it could not admit the allegorical or the symbolic, or all those ways of considering human life and human values under the aspect of eternity with which poetry habitually deals. It was 'naturalistic' fiction in the sense that it dealt with human action in humanistic terms. It was an enormous success and it was responsible for some of the great works of European literature. But till the end of the nineteenth century it did not have much of a rationale and its boundaries with romance were not sharply drawn. It is in the last hundred years or so that the 'theory of the novel' has been elaborated and schools of fiction devoted to following various recipes have arisen. At the end of the last century, indeed, there was a strong movement to purge the novel, as a form, of romantic elements of character and plot and to make it more 'scientific' in its study of character and society. Zola's prescription for preparation of a novel reads like instructions for the preparation of a Ph.D. thesis. It was against the limitations and what they regarded as the increasing sterility of the naturalistic novel that writers began to rebel in this century. But they were confused. They thought they could do what the naturalistic novel does, while breaking the rules on which its success depended. They were still under the dominance of the idea of a 'novel of manners'. They only had to find the right device and they would produce a novel of 'super-reality'. A good example of this is the idea that by setting up the writer's studio inside the head of one or more of the characters and recording the flow of thoughts and feel-
ings, their 'stream of consciousness', you would produce a narrative that was more real than real, more realistic than ordinary descriptive narrative. In fact, of course, it was less so, since we do not habitually observe our stream of consciousness, we observe with it. To have it presented to us is as unnatural as being made aware of all the internal processes of digestion while trying to concentrate on a good meal. The same is true of attempts in our time to write novels based on psychoanalytic theory of one kind and another where the subconscious elements of the mind are obtruded into the plane of consciousness; or of attempts to symbolise political theories by making the characters of a novel act not in terms of what they are as individuals but in terms of what they represent in the theory of social realism. The result in our century has been to discredit the words 'real' and 'realism' and to make it almost impossible to conduct a discussion of literature in any such terms.

But while the novel, in the sense of the naturalistic novel of manners, replaced several other forms of prose fiction in its day, it never entirely displaced them. Romance, allegory, fairy tale and fantasy, and many forms of fiction based on the imagination of other possible worlds persisted, and where they persisted in forms different from realistic fiction, they stood in their own right and could not be judged by its standards. They not only form another tradition but it is a tradition that includes many of the great works of genius in Western literature just as the naturalistic novel does. One does not go, as Professor Kramer observes, to such works as Rasselas or Gulliver's Travels, Candide, Frankenstein, Moby Dick, Gargantua and Pantagruel, Hyperion, Heinrick von Ofterdingen or The Book of Job, to inform oneself about insight into the motives of human beings or to understand their loves and hates and enjoy the beauty of the working of these things shown in action. For that we go to naturalistic fiction and drama. But we do not think the worse of them for that and perhaps we go to them the more readily for feeling that there is more to the explanation of man than we can learn from the most accurate and imaginative psychological and social depiction. We do not go to Pilgrim's Progress for the same insights and satisfaction that we go to Thackeray's Vanity Fair, but Thackeray's title gives the novel an added dimension which comes from our reading of Bunyan's allegory.

No-one would be likely to confuse these great works with the novel of manners. The problems arise when they put themselves 'in
modern dress', so to speak, adopting the outward form of naturalistic fiction. We are vaguely uneasy about a work like *Wuthering Heights* with its two worlds and two psychologies, two metaphysical types of human being sharply and almost theoretically contrasted, its clash of two moralities and its justification of one against the other in supernatural terms. We accept Gogol's *Dead Souls* as a naturalistic novel (satirical variety) but would we do so if the whole work of which it was to form part had survived? Kafka's *The Trial* begins as a naturalistic novel but soon reveals itself as a systematic nightmare. *Great Expectations* looks like a novel set in the England of its day, but the plot soon undeceives us. It shows itself for what it is, a fairy tale in modern dress. There is no cause to scold the authors of these famous works for this innocent deception and I believe that Randolph Stow may well have followed in their footsteps. If he was indeed trying to write 'a novel' in the ordinary sense of the word he deserves Professor Kramer's scolding, but if he knew what he was doing, as I believe, then we must judge his success or failure in different terms. A short review of the novels may show what these terms are.

Set side by side the five novels have a certain similarity of pattern which almost suggests that, like Dostoyevsky in his later novels, the author kept varying his approach to a single general theme or searching for another solution to one problem.

In each of the five novels for example the story is built round a single character who is distinguished by an exceptional personality that contrasts sharply with all the others in the book. This character has a magnetism which draws or binds the other main characters to him — it is always a male — and at the same time is obsessed with an unsatisfied need for love, a craving for self-completion that in the end proves destructive to himself and damaging to those he dominates by his attraction and energy. It is this situation which generates the plot or chain of events. The force and drive of this central character in most cases breaks down the ordinary patterns of family or community life and compels the 'ordinary' people to face moral or metaphysical problems from which they would otherwise be shielded by habit and custom or by mere inertia. The pressures put on them are those of an unusual personality which they have no resources to cope with and the pressure of a destructive and demanding sort of love. A small, tight group, an isolated family, a remote mis-
sion station, a derelict township cut off from the rest of the world provides a crucible from which there is no escape and in which the pressures can be inexorably built up. The breaking point is usually provided by the intrusion of a stranger who in one way or another destroys the precarious balance in the group and provides the occasion for an explosion of human forces.

In each novel, therefore, we have what Jean Giraudoux described as the ideal situation for tragedy and this is what each story seems to be leading to. But the curious thing is that tragedy, in the real sense, is always evaded by some device — accidental death or a diversion — which seems deliberate on the part of the author. The world tends to end not with a bang, but a whimper, an ambiguous triumph or an equally ambiguous fiasco.

The final common ingredient of all the novels is that alongside the ordinary causal principles of action in terms of situation and character there is always another and more obscure causality at work, springing from sources remote from the circumstances of the story itself and usually adumbrated in a dream or delusion or obsession of the main character. It is this that leads to the breakdown of realistic depiction of men in action noted by Professor Kramer, because it introduces an arbitrary and untestable element into motive and action. So in Greek tragedy the curse on the House of Atreus cuts across the motivation and the moral choice of the members of that wretched family. So again Pasternak, in Doctor Zhivago, confessed that he had not fully 'characterised' the persons in the novel because he wanted to get away from the sort of causality shown in the novels of Balzac, Tolstoy or Flaubert. These are respectable enough sponsors to suggest that Stow is in good company in the literary tradition.

There is thus an implicit conflict in every one of Stow's novels between the intent to embody his fable in a scene authentic enough to win credence and the more important aim to reveal hitherto unrecognised causal principles which have nothing to do with individual character and local situation.

In the first two novels he does not succeed in resolving this conflict. Both at first sight look like 'realistic' or naturalistic novels. All that Professor Kramer has said about them on this score is justified: the depiction and the setting are brilliantly convincing. She is perhaps less than just to the depiction of the characters, because she has omitted to notice one of Stow's greatest gifts, his power of real, and
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beautifully individualised dialogue. The people are immediately recognised from the way they talk and this does a good deal to counter the way in which the author has reduced them to symbolic figures by other means. Andrew Maguire's passionate selfishness and possessiveness, his magnetic and forceful personality and his complete ruthlessness in action are countered by the embittered but tense acquiescence of his two elder sons. The strangers coming into the story at this point to disrupt the uneasy balance are the three younger children home from school in Melbourne. They too fall under their father's spell but their resistance is leading to the ultimate tragic clash between Patrick and his father. At the last moment Patrick is killed by an accident when his father shoots him instead of Tommy Cross. The real tragedy is averted and everything collapses. But the curse remains. Everything, presumably, will trail on to final decay as the prologue suggests. This sort of family conflict is familiar to us in psychological and social terms, and the actual end seems strangely inconclusive in those terms. What is it all about?

But a closer look shows that there is another kind of causation at work. Maguire is not half-mad; he is 'possessed' by the spirit of his long dead wife and she, in terms of an animal symbolism that runs all through the book, concentrates in herself the destructive principle brought by the first settlers. She is identified with the foxes that destroyed so much of the local fauna — she hates and destroys the kangaroo. This is symbolism, if you like, but it is meant to symbolise real causal forces at work in human society which are neither social nor psychological though they work in these ways. The trouble is that the indications of these forces are crude, the animal symbolism, the excessive use of the so-called naturalistic-fallacy, the etiolation of the main characters and the use of crude machinery such as the idiot-boy Tommy Cross. The naturalistic element is too strong for the other causality which looks merely like superimposed melodrama. In all Stow's novels there is one character who stands apart from the action and observes without always quite understanding the inner significance, but whose comments often give the clue. In this case it is the elder daughter, Adelaide, whose final cry to her father: 'It's not your fault!' is meant to illuminate the meaning of the action. What Maguire has done is no more his fault than what Ædipus found he had done. But in fact the effect is the opposite. The remark suggests that Adelaide, the only really independent member of the family, has at last succumbed

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to her father's magnetic force and not to those that haunt the land itself.

As we shall see later, this is also true. Adelaide has committed the original sin of committing her individual soul to another. But the reader is bound to be confused as to what the conclusion is meant to be. And he can hardly be blamed if he fails to pick up the faint hints of the original crime which causes the land and the family to be 'haunted'. The almost entirely unrelated incident of Patrick's murder of the young Aboriginal, Charley, for fornicating with his sister Anne (more or less at her invitation), is puzzling until we recognise that it is the inexorable repetition of the rape of the land and its massacres and ruthless retributions, a repetition which each generation must repeat. The puzzling incident of Anne's stealing and nursing the fox cub is more than the crude symbolism that Professor Kramer describes: it is an actual re-enactment of her mother's life forced on her by this retributive causality. It is hard for the reader to realise this because the original situation and the unfamiliar causal system are never made clear and the 'naturalistic' treatment is so successful that he fails to take them seriously.

In the second novel, The Bystander, Randolph Stow fails to assimilate or reconcile the two causalities for almost the opposite reason: that the book can be read as a perfectly naturalistic novel in terms of character and social setting: a group of homesteads, one of which is run by a middle-aged bachelor cripple, another by an old maid who is in love with him, the third by a couple with a son who is a simpleton with the mind of a boy of twelve in a mature body. All these people are lonely and dissatisfied except Keithy the simpleton. The plot develops from the introduction of an attractive young Latvian girl as housekeeper for the Farnhams while they take a trip to Europe. Patrick Leighton and Keithy both fall in love with her and the plot seems to be building up in ordinary psychological terms to a tragic encounter when it is rather oddly diverted by Keithy's death in a bushfire.

There is none of the melodrama or the awesome portents of the previous novel, no obvious symbolism, nothing that cannot be explained in terms of ordinary human causality. The reader is apparently expected to know the earlier book because this is the second generation of the same family: Patrick is the illegitimate son of Patrick Maguire and inherits the curse; and the country, as we are reminded
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on page 38, is the same ‘haunted land’. The other causality is still operative. The trouble is that, apart from a few hints, there is nothing in the course of the novel to justify it. The author has underplayed his hand as badly as he overplayed it in the first book.

In To The Islands I believe he found the balance he had been aiming for. This balance is achieved by letting the reader inside the dream world of the main character who is the bearer of the sense of the ‘other causality’. As Professor Kramer points out we know nothing of the inner world of Andrew Maguire — it is a blank. As for Keithy, his mind is impenetrable — it is ‘hid with God’, as Wordsworth, quoting scripture, said of his Idiot Boy. Heriot in To the Islands is in many ways a mysterious figure, as Lear is a mysterious figure, a mystery beyond the psychological, moral or naturalistic explanations that apply to his case. But, as with Lear, we live inside Heriot’s world, we see with his eyes. The naturalistic world of the mission station is brilliantly real and explicable in ordinary terms and so indeed are Heriot’s sense of guilt and his conflicts with those around him. Rex the disrupter causes these tensions to explode when he throws a stone at Heriot during the cyclone and Heriot throws it back and is convinced that he has killed Rex, thereby repeating the crime of the original massacre at Onamalmeri so many years before which he thinks of himself as expiating. At the same time another dimension has been building up in Heriot; he has already begun to move into this world in which he says: ‘I believe in nothing . . . I can pull down the world.’ From here on, from the moment he leaves the mission station behind, Heriot moves out into an apocalyptic vision. The other causality does not conflict with the naturalistic one because it has simply left the ordinary world behind. Once Christian has left the City of Destruction we do not question his journey in terms of everyday verisimilitude. Stow, indeed, takes the trouble to warn his readers: ‘This is not by intention a naturalistic novel.’

We may leave the next novel, Tourmaline, for the moment, pausing only to notice that Stow has tried a new approach here, which is very much closer to Pilgrim’s Progress, than any of his other novels: the book is set in the future, apparently after some disaster to the civilisation we know, and it has left the little moribund mining town of Tourmaline isolated from the rest of the world. The book is set in the future but the inhabitants of Tourmaline are living in an indefinite past. The two causalities have changed places in a way that I shall
comment on later. It is enough to say that the elements of character and social setting now take second place to what we may call a ‘long-term causality’ where the ‘naturalistic’ relations of the townsfolk determine nothing of importance.

*The Merry-go-round in the Sea* gives a new solution to the old problem and it is able to do so because the theme of the Haunted Land, while it is still present, is no longer the operative causal principle. Like *The Bystander* this is, on the surface, a novel of character and social setting where everything happens precisely in those terms. It is a thoroughly delightful picture of a group of interrelated families and of the stages of boyhood delicately and exactly observed. Considered only in terms of the naturalistic tradition it is one of the most brilliant of modern novels. The other causality is there but it has been successfully assimilated to the demands of naturalism. In each of the previous novels its medium had been an apocalyptic or obsessional dream possessing the main, the exceptional character, and this dream seemed at variance with everyday reality; the causality it revealed was connected with a distant crime or disaster and operated independently of character or setting. In *The Merry-go-round in the Sea*, the older boy Rick is the focus of intense hero-worship by the younger boy Rob and the dream is the dream world of boyhood. But Rick has had something in him ruined by the war and his experiences as a prisoner of the Japanese in Changi camp. As he expresses it himself, he has become a citizen of another nation and lost his own:

You never lose your citizenship. In that country everything dies and nothing breeds, but somehow it never ceases to exist, because while it is flourishing its language and its songs become part of the experience of children, growing into a heroic nostalgia, so that every twenty years or so that nation is refounded and begins enthusiastically to die.

This is the other causality, replacing the crime of the ancestors in their rape of the land, as a cause of sterility and recurrent fate. Rick sees that he has passed it on to Rob, a poison at the heart of the love Rob feels for him. Rob himself comes in the end to the disillusionment of growing up and seeing that his dream of the world has been a delusion: ‘The world the boy had believed in did not, after all, exist. The world and the clan and Australia had been a myth of his mind,
and he had been, all the time, an individual. If one could find a parallel in the tradition of non-naturalistic fiction for this book, it might rather surprisingly turn out to be something between *Rasselas* and *Candide*.

*The Merry-go-round in the Sea*, like *The Bystander*, is almost the opposite in its method to the novel that preceded it. Except for some surface aspects of life, some recognisable types of character and a setting recognisable as a derelict mining town on the edge of the desert in Western Australia, *Tourmaline's* is not a real world at all and makes no pretence of it. It is a science-fiction sort of situation. Tourmaline has lost connection with the outside world. Kestrel says 'There's a lot of nowhere round Tourmaline.' It is hinted that after some great catastrophe, in the world outside, everything has collapsed into savagery. The policeman sends his daily radio report but he never gets a reply. There is a pretence of real society in Tourmaline but it is itself a sort of fiction. It has no roots. The community consists of some thirty people. Some of them do a little fossicking which brings them in enough for drinks at the pub, but in general the economy is notional. A truck at intervals brings supplies from the unknown world of the coast, the Aborigines presumably live off the land but the rest of the community have no visible means of support, yet they have continued to dress, drink and eat for years on end. It is plain that we are not expected to believe in Tourmaline as a real place or a real community; it belongs at best to the world of myth and allegory and its 'realistic' surface is no more than that.

Into this world of pointless and aimless survival comes the disruptive force of the Diviner, who starts a sort of cargo cult. He is going to find water, he organises everybody and gathers them into his wild religious dream. He drives out the 'evil' character, the hotel-keeper Kestrel, but things go wrong; he finds gold but does not find water and finally leaves town and Kestrel returns — only then do the townspeople realise that he is in fact very like Kestrel, almost his double.

In the whole book there is a nightmare effect of a world we seem to recognise (the naturalistic surface) but which is really controlled by sinister and unknown forces and a causality other than the one we assume to be at work in the world of our own experience. It reminds one of the technique employed by Kafka in a book like *The Trial*. It is not a rational world gone wrong at all but one in which
there is no rationale at all. It is an inherently insane world. Professor Kramer in her Bulletin review took the basic ideas of the novel to be quasi-religious and she quoted from remarks of the narrator and the Diviner to support this view that it is a kind of crazy Christian allegory. It is possible to take this view and if one does the book is as incoherent as she claims. But there is perhaps another interpretation and one that applies to all Stow's novels.

We have so far said nothing about the moral system on which the novels are based and it is evident that there is a single moral view on which the values of character and action in all of them depend. It is not Christian, though it is not inconsistent with a Christian or a humanist morality and it is perhaps a home-made system. As we have seen in this system love is nearly always a destructive force, though not all kinds of love. Cruelty and possessiveness, murder and war generate sterility and long chains of degeneration and suffering against which individual goodwill is often powerless. But the root of evil in the system is usually obscure.

It is Tourmaline which supplies the key. We may start from the young boy Rob's illumination in The Merry-go-round in the Sea: 'The world and the clan and Australia had been a myth of his mind, and he had been, all the time, an individual.' Now the one person in Tourmaline who is never influenced by the Diviner's enthusiasm and Messianic religious revival is Tom Spring, the town store-keeper. This is true of Dave Speed the prospector too, but he does not live in Tourmaline. Tom on one occasion is described as sitting behind his counter 'like a small ivory statue of a sage'. Tom opposes the Diviner as he opposes Kestrel because, he says, they hate themselves and this breeds hate and sterility, in all they come in contact with. But their crime is worse, their self-hate leads them to try and dominate and possess others in the name of religion or organisation or order or whatever the plea may be. The individual taken over by these forces becomes a 'hunchback'. Tom's message to Kestrel who has come back to reorganise Tourmaline is: "Honour the single soul". "I think in thousands", Kestrel said "and tens of thousands". A moral system based on honouring the single soul, the individual man and woman, lies behind this and the other novels. "There is no sin but cruelty. Only one. And that original sin, that began when a man first cried to another, in his matted hair; take charge of my life, I am close to breaking." These are almost the last lines of the book. The religious
views of the Diviner and the Law, when he was under the influence of
the Diviner are not the ideas behind the book. They are meant to be
wrong and incoherent, because they encourage the citizens of Tour­
maline to commit the original crime of abdicating the single soul and
putting it in another's charge.

The central ideas of the book are contained in the philosophy that
Tom Spring reveals to the Law just after he has condemned the
Diviner and said that he and Kestrel are two sides of the same coin:

He unveiled his God to me, and his God had names like the nameless,
the sum of all, the ground of being. He spoke of the unity of opposites,
and of the overwhelming power of inaction. He talked of becoming a
stream, to carve out canyons without ceasing always to yield; of being
a tree to grow without thinking; of being a rock to be shaped by winds
and tides. He said I must become empty in order to be filled, must
unlearn everything, must accept the role of fool. And with a curious,
fumbling passion he told me of a gate leading into darkness, which was
both a valley and a woman, the source and sap of life, the temple of
revelation. At moments I thought I glimpsed, through the inept words,
something of his vision of fullness and peace; the power and the dark­
ness.

The Law cannot make much of this and his mind is soon recaptured
by the magnetic personality and seductive message of the Diviner. The
ordinary reader of Tourmaline is apt to respond in the same way. But
it is the core of the book and the reference to Tom looking like the
ivory figure of a Chinese sage is the clue, because the passage just
quoted is the central doctrine of Taoism. Tourmaline is a religious
allegory (it is senseless to try to treat it as a naturalistic novel) but it
has nothing to do with Christianity or any religion which requires
submission or abdication of the individual soul even to the most bene­
ficent of gods. Tao, its principle, is the storehouse of all things; it is
one, everlasting and unchangeable, but it is invisible, inaudible and
vague and elusive, has no name, and indeed is non-being. Its principle
is 'no action' (Wu-Wei), which seems to mean taking no action that
is not natural and spontaneous. Tao supports all things in their
natural state and the good and proper condition of the world is that
things transform spontaneously, neither by willed action or by action
from without. Man, when he follows Tao, behaves in the same way:
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in dealing with things 'he will produce them but not take possession of them'. Society organised in accordance with Tao is a state of *laissez-faire* — 'the best rulers are those whose existence is merely known by the people... people say that they simply follow Nature.' Tao is opposed to all artificial regulations, organisation and ceremony, all war, taxation, punishment, superficial knowledge and conventional morality.

It will be clear that Tom Spring's confession to the Law comes straight from the *Lao-tsu*, also called the *Tao-te ching*, the source-book of Taoist philosophy. One could go on to show that all its images of the tree that grows without knowing how it does it, the river that carves the rock without ever ceasing to yield and so on, are taken from the same work. Even Tom's 'clumsiness of exposition' is a Taoist procedure.

In October 1966, Randolph Stow published in the magazine *Poetry Australia*, No. 12, a series of poems entitled *From The Testament of Tourmaline, Variations on Themes of the Tao Teh Ching*. This in fact is just what they are and they appear to be a selection of twelve poems from a larger work which should contain at least 81 individual poems. We are left in doubt whether this is a separate work subsequent to the novel — the extracts as published are dated: 'Perth, W. Australia, 1966.' — or, like the poems of Yuri Zhivago, appended to Pasternak's novel, an integral part of the work in the form of an appended document. The narrator of *Tourmaline* calls his work a 'Testament', but he cannot be supposed the author of these poems since he is not represented as a poet and not only knows nothing of the *Tao-te ching* but does not really understand what Tom Spring is talking about, except in a dim and confused way. The relation of the poems to the novel is not clear, but they are at least evidence that the latter is based on Taoist philosophy and this may be assumed for other novels by Stow, if not all indeed. It would be not unfair to compare him with Dostoyevsky writing a series of works of fiction, naturalistic on one side but infused with another causal principle which directly intervenes in human affairs: God and the Devil in Dostoyevsky's case, Tao in Stow's. If Stow has so far written nothing as great as *The Brothers Karamazov* or *The Devils*, one must remember that

1 This was obviously too late for Professor Kramer to profit by its hint.
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des come late in Dostoyevsky's career. Stow's is already a formidable
talent and no-one can predict what it may bring forth yet.

Dostoyevsky had the advantage that he could assume that his
readers would be acquainted with the elements of Christian morality
and metaphysics. Stow cannot make this assumption in the case of
Taoism, which in spite of being one of the great world religions and
philosophical systems is almost unknown to most Westerners. This
means that the novels are bound to puzzle, especially as they are set in
Western Australia. Yet the rules of the game, as well as the art of
fiction, forbid him to explain or preach. Tao works always by hint
and the spirit of right action, never by argument, propaganda or any
kind of forceful persuasion. This may in part explain Stow's frequent
changes of method in what appear to be successive attempts to find a
means of helping his readers to understand what they must come to
of their own accord by at least the beginning of a change of heart.
Tourmaline is perhaps the furthest he has felt himself justified in
going on the path of actual propaganda — it could be called the
Taoist Pilgrim's Progress. It is perhaps for this reason not the most
successful of his books — but to my mind it is one of the most in-
teresting and the most engaging.
Since critics of *The Tree of Man* agree that the novel is about Stan Parker’s metaphysical quest and dying illumination, it might seem unnecessary to retrace the steps of his journey towards enlightenment. But, while agreeing that Stan Parker is engaged in a search for the grounds of his belief, I dissent from the general judgment as to the nature of his discovery. Further, though critics have attended to the form of the novel,¹ and to the implications of White’s symbolism,² I think there is need for an exploration of the connection between Parker’s spiritual quest, and the form in which White expresses it. All White’s novels are characterised by a very rigorous formal structure. In each, one is made aware of his strict supervision of the progress of the narrative, the disposition of the characters, and the stylised sequences of their dialogue. The apparently spontaneous overflow of life that is so characteristic of Dickens and Dostoyevsky, for example, is notably absent from White, as indeed it is from most modern novelists. There is a deliberation which suggests that each step is carefully planned, and that the whole action is moving towards a predetermined end. Curiously, that end, when it comes, might not seem so inevitable as one would expect, nor as appropriate as that of the more conventionally plotted, yet also more casually narrated novel.

In the structuring of *The Tree of Man* White has sought no simple correspondence between meaning and form. The chronological


sequence of events, covering three generations, and leading from the opening up of a tract of land to the drift to the cities and the encroachment of suburbia, defines the literal level of the novel. A linear structure of this kind permits surprises and minor ironies, but does not reinforce them by deliberate reference or comment. Had White been content with a simple chronological organisation of his novel, he would have produced a work much nearer the social realism of a chronicle of pioneering such as Miles Franklin’s *All That Swagger*. When A. D. Hope, in his review of *The Tree of Man*, 3 complained that White had introduced all the old Australian clichés — flood, fire and drought — he evidently failed to observe that White uses these episodes to take the novel away from purely literal considerations. Flood, fire and drought are great Australian commonplace, but in *The Tree of Man* they become structural principles, and have a quasi-symbolic relationship to the literal events. Objects and characters are also given a non-literal role. The silver nutmeg grater, the white rosebush, Madeleine, the struggling ants, recur as signals of thematic emphases in the novel. In addition, certain areas of literary reference, especially those to the Bible, *Laocoön* and *Hamlet* point to a meaning which cannot be derived from the contemplation of the literal facts.

The author’s guiding hand is also clearly steering the reader’s responses. Often his presence is much more definite than in later novels. In *Voss*, *Riders in the Chariot*, *The Solid Mandala* and more particularly *The Vivisector*, White shifts, often subtly and almost imperceptibly, from presenting the consciousness of his character, to directing the reader’s attention firmly to a particular attitude. The result is confusion or ambiguity, and it is not always easy to decide whether to protest at the one, or applaud the other. Perhaps the best example of White’s appearance in *The Tree of Man* is the sentence ‘One, and no other figure, is the answer to all sums’ (p. 497). 4 I would argue that White’s assertion at this point shows up a weakness in the handling of Stan’s dying revelation. The only way in which White can make the point about wholeness and oneness is by stating it himself; he cannot, though, validate it in terms of Stan’s actual experi-

3 *Sydney Morning Herald* (16 June 1956).
4 All page references are to *The Tree of Man* (London, Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1956).
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ence. (Why the point needs to be made at all is a question of some interest.)

There are, however, other instances in the novel of White's firm direction of the meaning, often in relation to character. Some of these authorial comments are necessary because in Stan Parker White has chosen an uncommunicative protagonist. So he must inform us that Stan 'would long to express himself by some formal act of recognition, give a shape to his knowledge, or express the great simplicities in simple, luminous words for people to see' (p. 225). Or again, 'She had grown fond of this boy, which he had allowed, for sentimental attachments are easier to maintain than relationships which demand love' (p. 244). Adumbration of future possibilities (also a habit of White's) is expressed in 'He accepted the sharp and melancholy pain as something that his flesh must in the end suffer' (p. 248). Sometimes White extends his investigation of character by such comments as 'And as she watched this erect and honourable man she realized with blinding clarity that she had never been worthy of him. This illumination of her soul left her weary, but indifferent... In time the knowledge that some mystery was withheld from her ceased to make her angry, or miserable for her own void' (p. 326). Sometimes, more tentatively, White reaches out to general experience, as in 'The moons of milk were in themselves complete. Everyone sensed this, perhaps, and bowed the head' (p. 229). By central structural episodes, recurrent motifs, and direct invasion of the narrative, White underpins the chronological sequence in such a way as to focus attention upon the stages of Stan Parker's metaphysical quest.

This quest has its own form. Over the course of his life within the novel, Stan accepts various explanations of his world. His persistent attempts to make sense of it lead him to entertain possibilities such as pantheism and Christianity. But one by one these possibilities are discarded. White presents Stan's journey towards understanding in the form of an essay in scepticism, which proceeds by examining and then rejecting certain positions. Some of the most significant events of Stan's life provide him with experiences likely to deny rather than affirm a belief in any God, let alone in a benevolent one. His final revelation is the result of an emptying out. It is a fulfilment, then, in a somewhat ironic sense. The novel adopts the standard sceptical procedure of moving towards a positive assertion through a series of proposals which are overthrown. Yet curiously Stan, unlike Amy, seems
from the outset to be self-sufficient. Amy 'waited for the warmth, the completeness, the safety of religion' (p. 28). But Stan 'did not feel the necessity to translate his own life into brave words. His life as lived was enough' (p. 29). He 'had not yet needed God' (p. 30). In so far as he has been able to think, it is to conclude that 'he was a prisoner in his human mind, as in the mystery of the natural world’ (p. 46).

The first explicit reference to Stan's adult contemplation of religion is brief. In the local church he is confused and awkward; only the sounds and sights of the world outside make an impression upon him. These he thinks, 'could perhaps have been the grace of God' (p. 64). At the end of the flood, a broken piece of stained glass, which casts a temporary glow of crimson and 'disintegrating gold' over ordinary objects, is a relic of 'dead prayers in the drowning church' (p. 95). It is obvious, comments the author, that the lives of Stan and Amy, 'each closed in himself... had never shattered into coloured fragments’ (p. 95). By the end of Part I of the novel White has established Stan's contentment with his daily life, his inability to communicate his insights, and 'the goodness of their common life’ (p. 97). This section ends with a scene of silent, but deep communion between the Parkers and their world. 'For that moment they were limitless’ (p. 97).

It is not until Part II that Stan becomes preoccupied with the problem of certainty. He begins to need a guarantee of the truth of his own observations. He seeks for signs of reality, certainty and permanence, of which he once had no doubt (p. 17). In this section he is seen, for the first time, at the centre of his man-made world. 'All was ranged round him, radiating out from him in the burning afternoon’ (p. 109). Stan’s pleasure in his creation, though, is qualified by the further insight that he and Amy are ‘the centre, but precariously, and he wanted to be certain’ (p. 111). A ‘warm belief in some presence’ (p. 111) is the best he can manage. During the christening of his first child Stan is soon ‘wandering quite frankly beyond the confines of the crude church, unashamed by a sudden nakedness that had fallen upon him’ (p. 124). At the same time the words of the service and ‘the flesh of relationships, were becoming secondary to a light of knowledge’ (p. 124). At this point Stan’s quest begins to take on apocalyptic tones. 'Events of immense importance would take place if only the moment of lightning could occur’ (p. 150). When the
storm comes it turns into ‘an ecstasy of fulfilment’ (p. 151). Stan Parker seems to be sitting ‘right at the centre of it’ (p. 151), as earlier he had sat at the centre of his created world. But as the storm goes on ‘his flesh had doubts and he began to experience humility’ (p. 152). In this state ‘weakness and acceptance had become virtues’ (p. 152). In his confusion he prays to God ‘for the sake of company’, and at the end of the storm he is ‘in love with rightness of the world’ (p. 152).

It is clear that at this point White is plotting an important stage of Stan’s progress towards spiritual enlightenment. Yet, in spite of his eloquent assertion of Stan’s discovery of humility and the rightness of the world, the evidence upon which the discovery rests is slender. White tries to make words do duty for experience, and the result is that while he certainly communicates Stan’s experience intellectually, its emotional impact is small. The problem is partly that of trying to bring together the literal and non-literal levels of the novel at this point. The storm is to do duty as an image of the state of Stan’s soul, without adequate preparation in terms of Stan’s own character. In particular, Stan’s need for certainty is in some respects at odds with the attitude to experience that he has demonstrated up to this moment.

The next stage of his progress is beset by even greater difficulties. After the storm comes the fire at Glastonbury, and an immediate problem is how far to press the legendary associations that the name Glastonbury evokes. Stan’s experience in the fire is prefaced by an authorial comment to the effect that the approach of fire makes men aware of details of the natural world, and that they discover ‘an austere beauty that they now loved with a sad love, that comes when it is already too late’ (p. 166). The fire is required to do double duty as punitive destroyer of the Armstrongs’ selfish world of materialism, and as purifying refiner of Stan Parker. But at the heart of this episode White leaves a mystery. Its challenge to Madeleine’s way of life is clear enough, and her confrontation with Stan at the height of the fire is a recognition of their common humanity. For Madeleine the fire means the acknowledgment of weakness and dependence; for Stan the illusion that Glastonbury contains ‘all that he had never done, all that he had never seen’ (p. 178) is shattered. But White’s language in this scene is both elevated and curiously evasive. ‘Is it, possibly, better to burn?’ (p. 178) is asked before Stan enters the burning house. Once inside, he remembers Hamlet. ‘All things in the house were eternal on that night, if you could forget the fire’ (p. 179). Stan
mounts the stairs on a mission 'of some mystery' (p. 180), 'Approaching some climax, the birth of the saviour or sacrifice, it was not clear which, came quicker' (p. 180). Later, after their mutual recognition, Stan and Madeleine enter 'a phase of pain and contained consciousness' (p. 183). Finally, Stan's burns are described as 'the superficial wounds of the flesh. If he was trembling, it was because he had come out of the fire weak as a little child...' (p. 185).

After the fire, as before it, revelation is possible. Those people who return to their farms feel full of new resolve. 'Because they had looked into the fire, and seen what you do see, they could rearrange their lives' (p. 186). But what do you see, and what, in particular, does Stan see? Stan, in contrast to Amy, has 'experienced exaltation by fire' (p. 187). But there is no evident aftermath of the fire in Stan's development. He has 'moments of true knowledge...telling him of the presence of God' (p. 190). In these moments too he will see the relationship between all things — leaf, sun and his own burned hand. But there is nothing to connect these moments with the fire. Neither can his sense of his own impermanence as against the permanence of the natural world (p. 191) be traced back to the earlier experience. His search for certainty finds him, at this point, regarding his wife as 'about all the certainty he had'. So, having survived flood and fire, with only occasional insights to comfort him, Stan enters the war.

So far, Stan has given no definite shape to his notion of 'the presence of God'. Part III is preoccupied with the nature of Sam's belief, and the consequences of his rejection of it. In the mud of the war he thinks 'with increased longing of a God that reached down, supposedly, and lifted up' (p. 204). But he cannot pray. After he returns from the war he does not reveal to Amy that 'he no longer believed anything can be effected by human intervention' (p. 214). He is also, however, described as making his observations of the world around him 'from the dream state of the sleeper' (p. 216), and it is suggested that he is slowly waking from his dream. He is still reluctant to accept anything as permanent, and must prove permanence for himself. Doll Quigley seems to be able to ignore 'the stronger, muddier currents of time' (p. 218), and Stan speculates about the purposes of God being made clear to 'some old women and nuns, and idiots' (p. 218). His uneasy relationship with his son makes him feel that acts of terror (such as floods) 'did begin to illuminate the opposite goodness and serenity of the many faces of God' (p. 253). After
Ray's disappearance, Stan's belief in God is for the first time positively affirmed.

Although he had acquired the habit of saying simple prayers, and did sincerely believe in God, he was not yet sufficiently confident in himself to believe in the efficacy of the one or the extent of the other. His simplicity had not yet received that final clarity and strength which can acknowledge the immensity of belief. (p. 282)

But, later, it is revealed that Stan believes because 'he had been told for so long that he believed' (p. 302). He has periods of doubt. He prays, and tries to fit 'those stern and rather wooden prayers to his own troubled and elusive soul' (p. 303). The season of drought gives emphasis to the dryness and separateness of his relationship with Amy. It is at this point that Amy's adultery occurs, and that, on her husband's behalf, she acknowledges to her casual lover the belief in God that Stan has not acknowledged himself.

White links this episode with Stan's spiritual quest by a phrase. Amy feels that, in committing adultery, she has spat 'into the mystery of her husband's God' (p. 310). The phrase reappears when Stan, suspecting his wife's infidelity, drives crazily into the city, gets drunk, and sees a 'Godless' sky. 'He spat at [my italics] the absent God then...' (p. 333) and his 'soothing saviour' is not God, but the anonymous stranger who helps him up from the gutter. He returns home to 'a fresh phase of life' (p. 342), but more significantly, to freedom from 'the opposition of God... Once he had been bowed down by belief' (p. 351). This section of the novel ends with Stan's establishment of freedom from belief, though it is a qualified resignation to his new state. He is 'more or less resigned to that state of godlessness he had chosen when he vomited God out of his system and choked off any regurgitative craving for forgiveness...' (p. 356). (It is interesting that in this sentence White has added to and thus changed the sense of the original scene of Stan's drunkenness.) By this point in the novel, Stan has passed through several distinct phases — his initial conviction of the worth of life as he lives it leads to a search for proof of permanence, which, in retrospect, does not seem to have been provided by experience of flood, fire, or drought. The experience of war and its aftermath consolidates the habit of belief. This, however, is destroyed by his discovery of his wife's in-
fidelity. His relationship with God is, then, analogous to his relationship with Amy. Both habits collapse together. By the end of Part III of the novel Stan has found a way of returning to his domestic life; he has not yet found a conviction to replace what, as a young man, he took for granted. He has not yet learnt to do without God.

It is left to Amy and her grandson to glimpse the truth, and it is significant that at this point, White again takes clear control of the narrative, by insisting that ‘there is a mysticism of objects, of which some people are initiates, as this old woman and boy’ (p. 398). Through the same piece of broken stained glass which before had coloured the ordinary world crimson and gold, the Parkers’ grandson sees his mandala — the wholeness of cumquats (p. 399). In his senile sickness, Stan still expresses his pain by calling on God, and in his convalescence, while appearing aimless, he in fact is in a state of spiritual activity, in which the landscape moves in on him ‘with increased passion and intensity’ making him aware of ‘the ruthlessness of divine logic’ (pp. 411-12). This experience, together with a visit to Hamlet, brings to his understanding the imminence of death and his ignorance of his own destiny. Again White intervenes at this crucial point, to remark that ‘it is not natural that emptiness shall prevail’ (p. 422). Stan goes to a communion service, and hopes for God, though he later confesses that he does not know much about him, but hopes in the end to. ‘What else is there that would be any use to learn?’ (p. 457). Stan does not find the answer to his question until the day of his death. He is crippled by a stroke ‘with the connivance of God’ (p. 492), but it is the intrusion of an evangelist offering him salvation by faith which leads Stan to his final revelation. The ‘large, triumphal scheme’ finds him once more at the centre of his created world, but his illumination comes only with his spitting out the ‘heaviness of phlegm’ which he calls God. Only then does he discover the faith founded on fact — on the incredible objects of the earth’ (p. 497), the cracks in the path, and the struggling ants. The vacuum left by belief in God has been filled by belief in his own perceptions. Man, not God, is the measure of all things.

Much attention has been paid to the meaning of this penultimate chapter of The Tree of Man. The consensus of critical opinion is that by placing Stan Parker at the centre of his garden, on the day of his death, White has created a mandalic symbol, and that Parker’s perception that his jewel-like gob of spittle is God, represents his recog-
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nition that divinity is immanent.\(^5\) Whether it is also transcendent seems, for some critics, to be debatable.\(^6\) That Stan, the instant before his death, is granted a spiritual illumination, is unquestioned, and I think it would generally be agreed by critics that, in G. A. Wilkes's words, 'fulfilment for Stan lies not within life as normally lived, but beyond it'.\(^7\) My analysis of the chapter, and the events which precede it, though accepting the notion of revelation, departs substantially from the general view of the meaning of the novel.

It is certainly true that Stan defines his own notion of the truth by reacting against the unwelcome doctrine of the visiting evangelist, who offers him salvation through 'the steam roller of faith' (p. 495). Stan discovers, however, neither the immanence nor the transcendence of God, but God’s irrelevance. Only after spitting out God is he able to see that 'One, and no other figure, is the answer to all sums', though his leap to this conclusion is, it seems to me, imposed upon him by the author’s voice, and does not convincingly follow the logic of his struggle for enlightenment. His expulsion of God on the last day of his life is unlike his earlier experience in the city. His loss of belief then was brought about by an emotional crisis; his expulsion of God at the end is a rational act, backed by his full realisation of his human powers. It may also be noted that Stan’s progress through life has at last brought him back to his starting point. It has taken him a lifetime to be able to believe what he knew all along — that the natural world is 'true'. The Stan of the end of the novel is different from the man at the beginning in that knowledge and belief have joined forces. He no longer needs a supernatural support.

Stan’s illumination leaves many questions unanswered. While the general outline of his progression to understanding is clear — from unthinking acceptance, through desire for permanence, to belief in God, loss of faith, hope for renewal of faith and final rejection of God


\(^6\) Riemer, 'Visions of the Mandala in The Tree of Man'.

and acceptance of a world without God — the steps in this spiritual journey are by no means always validated by the experience the novel offers. The major weakness of the book is White's failure to make credible connections between Stan's actual life as a small farmer, and his role as discoverer of a doctrine of the unity of human life and material objects. The stages of Stan's daily experience run parallel to assertions about what life means. The chief symptom of White's failure is his persistent recourse to verbal expansion of the meaning beyond what the events themselves permit.

The world of *The Tree of Man* is a world of dwindling belief in God and a divinely established order. Berkeley's guarantee of the existence of the material world is no longer credible. The moment before his death Stan Parker takes up a position not unlike Johnson's famous refutation of Berkeley. If man is to believe, the argument runs, he can believe only in the evidence of his own experience. Stan's instinct tells him that the stones and ants he knows so well are real; to ask for a divine guarantor of their reality is to see them as contingent. Once he rids himself of God, the obstacle to his faith in the primary reality of objects, he is able to see the world truly, and to believe in it. To have reached this point, however, is not to have solved either the problem of permanence or the problem of meaning. It leaves open the possibilities that the world will end, and that it is, in any case, no more than a random collection of single objects, fragmented and incoherent.8

It is clear quite early in the novel that Stan Parker sees himself at the centre of a pattern — all paths radiate out from the place he has established. The mandalic image of Stan's garden in which 'all was circumference to the centre' (p. 493) insists, however, upon the absence of premeditated patterning. 'There was little of design in the garden originally, though one had formed out of the wilderness' (p. 493). In the human dimension the creation of design is casual and accidental. The God of Genesis created his world according to an ordered, purposeful plan, and saw that it was good. The improvised garden of the Parkers grows into a form of its own. In his first refer-

8 White may seem to be extending Ivan Karamazov's argument about a world without God, where everything is permitted. Unlike Dostoyevsky, however, White does not consider the consequences of atheism for human morality. His concern here, as in *Riders in the Chariot*, is with aesthetics, not morals.
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ence to himself as the centre of his cleared earth and enlarged house, Stan appears to recognise his centrality, so that, like the God of Genesis, he can take pleasure in his creation. On his final afternoon in the garden, however, it is the author, not Stan, who sees him at the heart of the circles which radiate out even to the penultimate one ‘enclosing all that was visible and material’ (p. 494). No doubt White intends Stan’s realisation that the answer to all sums is one to be a recognition both of the wholeness of the world (imaged forth in the mandalic garden scene) and of man’s power to understand its wholeness. But Stan’s convincing *experience* is, even at the end, of the individual objects of the natural world, not of its wholeness. The Nietzschean image of ants struggling joyfully upwards has a concrete actuality lacking in his abstract philosophical sum.

Even the somewhat perfunctory move from what Stan observes to what he apprehends does not alter the fact that in *The Tree of Man* what man perceives as design is in fact the aggregation of accidents. Pattern emerges from the unforeseen. It is not imposed from without (as by a divine architect), but grows casually from within, not by human plan but by improvisation and accident. When Stan goes to the city in search of Ray, he has no plan. As a young man, White reminds the reader at this point, ‘he had hewn at trees with no exact plan in his head’ (p. 275). But White also remarks that ‘In the end he had hewn a shape and order out of the chaos that he had found. He was also an improvisor of honest objects in wood and iron, which, if crude in design, had survived to that day’ (p. 275). Improvisation creates the Parkers’ garden. ‘It was a haphazard sort of garden’ (p. 371), yet it takes on the shape and significance of a mandala. The shrubs that Amy Parker has ‘stuck in’, and her passionate planting followed by forgetfulness of what she has planted, produce the micro-cosmic model at the centre of which Stan spends his last hours. Improvisation, then, not planning, produces human order; and the pattern created in this way will disclose itself to a clear-sighted human consciousness. God the creator-planner is not merely unnecessary as an aid to the discovery of human design; he actually inhibits that discovery.

In establishing his version of a creation myth White offers no simple relationship between human perception of design, and the form in which the novel expresses this perception. Both language and structure need to be considered at this point. H. P. Heseltine’s very
interesting analysis of some aspects of White's style opens up several important critical issues, but no critic has yet fully tackled the relationship of White’s style to his meaning. A. D. Hope’s original criticism of White’s prose in *The Tree of Man* was extravagantly expressed and inadequately documented. But his strictures pointed to a very real problem. The cows and the cabbages, for example, are described in a prose which seems excessive to the needs of descriptive background, as well as self-indulgent:

The young cabbages that were soon a prospect of veined leaves, melted in the mornings of thawing frost. Their blue and purple flesh ran together with the silver of water, the jewels of light, in the smell of the warming earth. But always tensing. Already in the hard, later light the young cabbages were resistant balls of muscle, until in time they were the big, placid cabbages, all heart and limp panniers, and in the middle of the day there was the glandulous stench of cabbages. (p. 27)

If White is trying to display an order and unity in nature by moving between the human, animal and vegetable worlds and showing their common vitality, then this description makes sense. But more important, perhaps, is his need to establish the independent existence of the natural world, since this is to become the grounds of Stan’s final belief in the here-and-now. A belief in the validity of objects is a necessary part of his recognition that God is dispensable. Therefore, the solid presence of the natural world, and its independence of any supernatural support, needs to be demonstrated. White attempts, I believe, to create that sense of solid, independent completeness, by constant insistence on the strength and ‘truth’ of sense-perceptions — the touch of skin, the smells of the earth in all its moods, the taste of experience, the sounds of the natural forces of thunder, wind, fire and water. His words, it might be said, do not so much render the material world, as create Stan’s experience of it. The landscape has the general features of an actual world, but it lacks fine detail. White constructs a landscape of sensations, and of large allegorical significances. The stringy barks stand above the bush ‘with the simplicity of true grandeur’, ‘Birds looked from twigs, and the eyes of animals were drawn to what was happening’ (p. 3). It is a formal landscape, an artist’s

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abstraction from the real. White uses it to register the immediacy of the Parkers' sensual experience, to assert the consonance between the recurrent natural cycle of the seasons and human experience, and to link the four elements, and their periodic appearance as dominant natural forces, with crises in human emotion. Throughout the novel White provides, through language, metaphor and structure, the evidence that Stan Parker's world is real, and that he is at one with it, and understands its most delicate changes of mood and meaning. (It is still reasonable to argue, however, that on this point the novel needs less evidence than the author actually adduces.) Stan is all along, like Mary Hare in Riders in the Chariot, in possession of the truth and the certainties he believes are yet to be disclosed. His revelation shows him the validity of his own experiences. He is illuminated because he discovers that he is able to believe in what he has always known.

The structural principles upon which the novel rests — the cycle of seasons, and their correspondence with youth, maturity, and old age, and the continuity of experience, represented by recurrent verbal patterns, are in distinct opposition to the thesis of the novel. Here is no 'fallacy of imitative form'. The nature of the design is clear to the reader long before it is revealed to Stan. That his senses bring him individual experiences which are true and related — he is the guarantor of their reality in much the way that Berkeley's God is the guarantor of the material world — is made plain from the beginning. The reader knows that Stan's God is dispensable long before the evangelist cures him of religion by offering him salvation. The novel demonstrates that human design is the aggregation of accidents, but it does so by strict adherence to an order of events, and by a highly formal patterning of its subject matter. There is, then, a sharp contrast between the kind of statement the novel makes, and the way in which the statement is presented.

I do not regard this observation as a criticism of the novel, but rather as a very interesting pointer to a position which is more fully developed in Riders in the Chariot and The Vivisector. It is that the artist transforms ordinary human experience and enables it to be seen as significant, by imposing a strict formal structure upon it. Stan Parker has the insights of an artist but lacks his skills. Much can be made of his inarticulateness, but his is not the inarticulateness of a man who is sceptical of the value of words. On the contrary, his silent gestures are a substitute for 'the poem that was locked inside him
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and that would never otherwise be released' (p. 25). His 'desire that had never been fulfilled' is 'to express himself in substance or words' (p. 110). There are in him veins of 'wisdom and poetry' (p. 24). But he is not the artist, and because he cannot give shape and expression to his wisdom, he must have an exponent.

The poem that Stan Parker cannot write will, it is clear, be written by his grandson, whom it is tempting to see as White's version of himself. The small boy has become owner of the fragment of broken stained glass (once the property of the child of the flood), and through it he sees 'the crimson mystery of the world' (p. 498). His poem is to be about 'life, all life' (p. 499), and its ingredients, as listed by the child, are immediate and vivid sense impressions. As yet they are unshaped, no more than 'little bits of coloured thought'. This last chapter of the novel discloses that all that has preceded it is in fact the poem about Stan Parker's life. The last words of the novel 'so that, in the end, there was no end' refer not to the succession of generations but to the fact that Stan Parker's death is the point of departure of the artistic recreation of his life.

If, then, one is able to accept Stan’s vision of the world as One, it is because the artist has recreated it as One. If the God of Genesis can no longer be seen as the architect of design, the artist can take his place by discerning and communicating the shape of human experience. The guarantor of Parker's permanence and meaning is not God, but the artist. The fact that Stan Parker has his revelation only minutes before his death might, in itself, seem to suggest a pessimistic view of the ability of the ordinary man to make sense of his life. But it also confers a special importance upon the artist, by making him the creator of a form which gives expression to the random, unspoken and incomplete insights of his protagonist.

One is left with the paradox that a novel which dwells on the reality of sense impressions is nevertheless abstract and generalising. Stan Parker is not permitted to be merely an ordinary man, prohibited by his natural taciturnity from telling his own story. He is also required to be a large, representative figure, who might, in an earlier age, have been labelled Everyman. The mode of the novel is allegorical, and so far from exploring character and experience, it makes assertions about them to which, by the force of his intervention as narrator, White seeks the reader's assent. The difficulty is that the evidence upon which agreement might be reached is not always sup-
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plied. Nothing that has been said about Stan Parker, either directly or indirectly, can lead one to assent to his discovery that ‘One... is the answer to all sums’. At such a point (as in the Glastonbury section), it becomes clear that White wants to carry the novel beyond its own terms of reference. But the additional meaning comes from without, not from within the events and characters. It is a creation of the controlling intelligence of the artist, and it is a revelation of the artist’s search for form.

It might be heretical to suggest that The Tree of Man is less impressive as a novel about a metaphysical quest, than as a commentary upon an important aspect of Australian experience. It mythologises the struggle to create order out of a hostile country, and to learn the language of an austere and often grudging environment. It also dramatises aspects of the class structure and intellectual attitudes. It is true that, as White intended it should, it represents an attack upon that ‘dun-coloured off-spring of journalistic realism’ that he thought at the time (not entirely correctly) to be a representative Australian novel. Nevertheless it stands in the centre of the preoccupations of writers of Australian fiction from the nineteenth century onwards, not least in its sceptical attitude towards metaphysical speculation, its attention to the common objects of the natural world, and its endorsement of secular humanism.
'Mr Topp,' the German was saying, 'if I had mastered the art of music, I would set myself the task of creating a composition by which the various instruments would represent the moral characteristics of human beings in conflict with one another.'

'I would rather suggest the sublimity of perfection,' said the innocent music-master, 'in great sweeps of pure sound.'

'But in order to understand it, you must first find perfection, and that you will never do. Besides, it would be monotonous, not to say monstrous, if you did.'

The distinguishing mark of a masterpiece is that it reveals with each new reading and to each new reader some fresh aspect of itself. This is one of the reasons why it is impossible to write a comprehensive appreciation of a masterpiece—especially when it takes the form of a novel. The only way to criticise a novel is to read it aloud with a sympathetic companion and point out the merits and defects as you go, for the process of selection which an article demands inevitably distorts a work of any length and complexity.

Patrick White's *Voss* is a long and complex novel which is a masterpiece: a meditation on the meaning of the desert, conceived while the author was wandering in a desert in the Middle East, during World War II.

During his wandering it may be that White was turning over in his mind the two fundamental ideas which form such a persistent theme in Australian writing, perhaps because in its natural state, in the absence of Europeans, Australia is a country suited to the nomad, to man stripped of all but the essentials. According to A. N. Whitehead: 'Every scheme for the analysis of nature has to face these two facts, *change* and *endurance*. There is yet a third fact to be placed by it, *eternity*, I will call it.'

White's deepest preoccupations are with these essential facts, and they are given priority in *The Tree of Man* (1955) and in *Voss* (1957). Both books are in Whitehead's sense an analysis of nature, of man's place in it. The young Stan Parker,² torn between 'the nostalgia for permanence' and the 'fiend of motion', takes root physically, but remains on the move searching for permanence in his spirit. In the remarkable discussion with Lola, the prostitute, he exposes, to himself and the woman, man's illusions of freedom and independence and learns that slavery to an object outside the self is freedom indeed compared with slavery to the self — the worst form of imprisonment.³ This is the lesson that Voss, bound by his spiritual pride, has to learn, but he cannot learn it, like Parker, by sitting still. He has to journey through a physical desert, a landscape 'stripped of all inessentials', and to turn himself into a desert, to learn to accept the limitations of the human body and spirit. The reversal of emphasis in the presentation of the quest for understanding is indicated by the vocations of the two men: Stan is a farmer, a settler, Voss is an explorer, a nomad.⁴ Stan is also Farmer, as Voss is Explorer. For it is true, as Marcel Aurousseau has pointed out in his indispensable note on the historical content of *Voss*,⁵ that

Mr White has endowed the Australian imagination with a symbolic figure of heroic proportions applying its whole strength to the task of learning to know Australia.

What he does not say is that White has also endowed Australian imagination with a symbolic figure of heroic proportions applying its whole strength to the task of learning to know itself. It is the fusion of these two aims that make the book such a remarkable work of art and its symbolic design is hinted at early in the story when Voss tells Le Mesurier 'To make yourself it is also necessary to destroy yourself' (p. 34) and when he remarks to Mr Pringle 'I am fascinated by the prospect before me. Even if the future of great areas of sand is purely a metaphysical one.' (p. 62).⁶ Throughout this book the fact

³ *The Tree of Man*, pp. 440–2.
⁴ 'It is not for me to build a solid house', p. 131, *Voss* (Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1962). All page references are to this edition.
⁶ See also the conversation between Sanderson and his wife on p. 139.
that sand is disintegrated stone has constantly to be kept in mind. Voss during his life is associated always with stone, with crags, with rocks; mineral images indeed, as we shall see, provide the figurative structure of the novel. In terms of these, Voss moves from stone, to sand, and after his death, to bronze. Endurance, change, eternality. The peculiar geographical fact about Australia, to which most urban Australians pay attention only on an economic level, is that it is a country with a thin fertile rim surrounding a great desert. The desert is to Australia what the sea once was to Britain or Greece: it represents the unknown, the mysterious. But because one can walk into the desert with comparative ease, it is, for adventurous men, a far more palpable presence, a greater temptation to explore than the sea. It represents less of a barrier between the fact and the mystery, between the ‘world of semblance’ and the ‘world of dream’. For White, this geographical feature takes on great psychological, metaphysical, erotic and political significance.

The outline of Voss is simplicity itself. Voss is a German medical student turned botanist turned explorer, who is financed by a Sydney merchant in 1845 to lead an expedition across Australia from east to west; he assembles a party, somewhat haphazardly from a practical point of view, but in a manner essential to his spiritual purpose, sails from Sydney, pauses near Newcastle, sets off for the Darling Downs and thence into the interior; the whole party is lost, though one man claims — dubiously — to be a survivor. Parallel with this story and inseparable from its inner meaning is the love story of Voss and Laura Trevelyan, the niece of Voss’s financial backer. Laura has to discover herself, sitting still in Sydney; testing the truth of her relationship with Voss is her journey of exploration into the desert. Since Laura is necessarily immobilised in the domestic setting of the book, White is able to make the greatest possible use of the contrast between those who ‘huddle’, where all is safe and known and those who venture beyond, in an effort to test and know themselves. He has created a whole range of characters who are at different stages in the progress towards self-knowledge.

It is Rose Portion, Laura’s maid, a creature of instinct and intuition, who brings Voss into Laura’s presence. Through her, later on, the

‘A pity that you huddle’, said the German. ‘Your country is of great subtlety.’ (p. 11).
lovers are to find vicariously the only measure of physical fruition granted to them. Voss and Laura meet at the moment when their sense of self-sufficiency and independence is at its height. Laura has lost her faith in God and no longer trusts in what she cannot see or handle. Philosophically, she represents British empiricism at its most uncompromising. Voss has a contempt for atheism because his faith in himself is boundless: to deny God is to deny the possibility of making himself God. They drink wine together and he sees and she knows that she is beautiful, 'but fleetingly, in certain lights' (p. 14).

The main object of this first encounter is to give the reader a glimpse into their past history which will make clear the task that each has to perform. The childhood of each has been a complete contrast. The insecurity of the young Laura and her consequent hunger for permanence, for solidity, is set against the safety, the domestic cosiness of the young Voss's background, from which he longs to free himself even at the cost of treading 'with his boot upon the trusting face of the old man, his father'. It is clear from the passages dealing with their childhood (pp. 12, 13 and 14) that what Laura has to learn once more is to trust, to have faith in the unseen, and that what Voss has to learn once more is love and the humility of dependence. At their first meeting they are attracted by their faults, which they see as virtues, drawn together by their separateness and self-sufficiency. It is only later after Voss has awakened Laura to the challenge of the unknown, when she realises what he is really about to do, that she warns him: 'It is for our pride that each of us is probably damned.' (p. 89). Their first conversation is interrupted by the return of Laura's family from church and we are introduced to those comfortable familiar figures of the known world, who are to make possible Voss's journey into the unknown. In no other of White's books are such characters described with so much justice and sympathetic understanding. There is no simple opposition, for example, between the practical and the idealistic in Bonner and Voss. Both are in fact greedy men. Voss, as well as Bonner, is motivated by a lust of possession, though the objects of that lust are different. Voss, like Faust, is greedy for a God-like knowledge. Having arrogantly refused such fleshly contacts as dining with the Bonners, for instance,

8 'She did believe, however, most palpably, in wood with the reflections in it, and in clear daylight, and in water' (p. 9).

9 'Atheismus is self-murder. Do you not understand?' (p. 89).
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or accepting bread from an old man in the park, Voss, filled with spiritual pride, sits under a tree and considers his own power:

But it was a discipline for the great trials and achievements in store for him in this country of which he had become possessed by implicit right. Unseeing people walked the sandy earth, eating bread, or sat at meat in their houses of frail stone foundations, while the lean man, beneath his twisted tree, became familiar with each blade of withered grass at which he stared, even the joints in the body of the ant. Knowing so much, I shall know everything, he assured himself, and lay down in time, and was asleep, slowly breathing the sultry air of the new country that was being revealed to him. (p. 27)

The statement, at the time, is ironical, but becomes in the end simple truth, in relation to both the land itself and the country of the mind.

The next significant meetings are those with the members of the expedition whom Voss himself has chosen: Harry Robarts, Frank Le Mesurier, Turner, and Palfreyman, the ornithologist. Robarts is the most genuinely selfless of the party, not because he has risen above self, but because he has never become conscious of self. He is the innocent, the fool in the medieval sense, who appears so constantly in White’s novels:

Poor Harry Robarts was an easy shadow to wear. His wide eyes reflected the primary thoughts. Voss could sit with him as he would with still water, allowing his own thoughts to widen on it... He was nothing except when near to Mr Voss... (pp. 32, 37)

His primal unself-consciousness is most troubled, as we might expect, by Le Mesurier, White’s perennial artist-figure, laid under the curse of creativeness without direction. Like Robarts, he attaches himself to Voss, the man of action, in order to find out who he is, to discover his own particular genius. The German aligns himself now with one of these men, now with the other, sometimes out of sheer perversity, as when Voss, his landlord Topp (whose significance in the book’s structure is not sufficiently appreciated), Le Mesurier and Robarts discuss the country they have come to:

‘I came here through idealism,’ said Topp, feverish with his own situation, ‘and a mistaken belief that I could bring nicety to barbarian minds. 288
Here, even the gentry, or what passes for it, has eaten itself into a stupor of mutton.'

'I see nothing wrong with this country,' dared Harry Robarts, 'nor with having your belly full. Mine has been full since the day I landed, and I'm glad...'

'So all is well with Harry,' said Le Mesurier, 'who sees with his belly's eyes.'

'It will do me,' said the sullen boy...

'And me, Harry,' said Voss. 'I will venture to call it my country, although I am a foreigner,' he added for the company, since human beings have a habit of rising up in defence of what they repudiate. 'And although so little of my country is known to me as yet.' Much as he despised humility, other people expected it.

'You are welcome,' sighed Topp, although already the wine had made him happy.

'So you see, Harry,' said Le Mesurier, 'you have a fellow-countryman who will share your patriotism in embracing the last iguana.'

'Do not torment him, Frank,' said Voss, not because it was cruel to bait dumb animals, but because he wished to enjoy the private spectacle of himself. (pp. 40-1)

Palfreyman presents so far the greatest threat to Voss's conviction of his superiority. He is shaken by Palfreyman's apparent submission to the will of God and associates it in his mind with the reproof the Moravian brother had administered to him earlier at the monastery in Moreton Bay:

For some reason the latter [Voss] knew, he would have liked to dispose of Palfreyman, who answered: 'It is not a question of my will, Mr Voss. It is rather the will of God that I should carry out certain chosen undertakings.' (p. 47)

Palfreyman's humility continues to be an irritation to Voss until he discovers in the desert, the real reason for it. Although he aspires to

10 Compare this conversation with the shipboard talk in the Proem of Henry Handel Richardson's The Way Home.
11 "Mr Voss," he said with no suggestion of criticism, "you have a contempt for God, because he is not in your own image." (p. 50).
be Christlike, Palfreyman has not been Christlike enough to take his hunchback sister’s sense of guilt upon himself and so release her from self-torment:

‘And you rescued, or condemned, your sister,’ Voss accused, ‘by denying her the Gothic splendours of death. Her intention was glorious, but you rushed and tied a tourniquet, when all you had to offer was your own delusion.’ (p. 264)

The fourth of Voss’s chosen, Turner, is a derelict man, without any will at all. (‘A man’s nature will get the better of him.’) There is a strong suspicion that Voss has included him in the expedition because he provides the greatest possible contrast to himself, and thus has his own peculiar place in the explorer’s design.\textsuperscript{12} Voss’s real wish, of course, is to go into the desert by himself (p. 69) to test his naked will, his ‘royal instrument’. That is why he does not wish Laura to pray for him; he wants no external aid, neither natural nor supernatural.

It is a fact of great significance, therefore, that Voss does not himself choose his great antagonist, or rather, his great counterpart, Judd, and that he has to probe further into the unknown country to meet him face to face.

The novel moves in gradually contracting circles from the civilised fringe of the continent into the mysterious centre, in order to discover the relationship between them. (Its design might be compared with that of E. L. Grant Watson’s \textit{Daimon}, of which the alternative title is \textit{The Contracting Circle}. Voss is, of course, much more complicated.) In psychological terms, the fringe represents the thin layer of the conscious; the desert, the depths of the unconscious, so that Voss’s journey becomes a progress of penetration to the centre of his being. In metaphysical terms, the fertile rim is the physical world at its most richly and seductively concrete, the desert its most rarefied and abstract analogue. In erotic terms, the rim is the area where all the testimonies of love are visible and tangible, the desert where they must be taken without evidence, on trust, in solitude.

But the aim of the book is not to affirm the truth of the desert, the superiority of abstraction. For White there are \textit{two} basic marvels of

\textsuperscript{12} See p. 44.
life, two basic mysteries: the mystery of the physical world, and the mystery of the spirit, the concrete and the abstract. The book is an exploration of the nature and the capacities of these two rock-like realities and their interrelationship; an exploration of the appropriate areas of their operation and of the possibility of a fusion between them, or of determining their boundaries. It is, as we shall see, on the political level, that any imbalance between them is regarded as peculiarly disastrous.

The characters are arranged in accordance with this concentric pattern; on the outermost fringe are those who 'huddle' on the level of the conscious and are as blind to the subtlety of the Australian desert as they are to their own inner lives. These are people like the minor domestic characters: Mrs Pringle, Una Pringle — who hates her friend Laura — the Palethorpes, and above all Tom Radclyffe, who is the most culpable because he is intelligent enough to suspect the existence of what he is denying. White depicts this particular section of mid-nineteenth century Sydney society with deadly accuracy, sharp, economical wit, and at times sheer, superb comedy. The scene at the Bonners’ dinner table, when the family discuss Voss after he has left them, the conversations at the picnic, at Mrs Bonner’s farewell party for Voss, at the Pringles’ ball in honour of Belle Bonner, the Palethorpes’ discussion of Laura at tea, the visit of Dr Badgery to Mrs Bonner; all these are masterly, at times savage, but free from the unmitigated contempt that later so often disfigures White’s vision of this stratum of society.13 There is no total condemnation of bourgeois life simply because it is bourgeois, but a compassionate understanding of the necessity for such a society in its time and place. Indeed, such a view is demanded by the theme, for one of the temptations which Voss is called upon to resist is the charm of ‘normal’ family and social life: what Jacobsen in Niels Lyhne called ‘the magnetic attraction of honest Philistinism’. To present it as wholly repulsive would have been to deprive Voss of one of his renunciations. Moreover, White is careful to draw attention to odd figures in such a society who are possessed of insights their circumstances forbid them to pursue: figures like Willy Pringle, Topp, the music master, Dr Badgery, the surgeon. Willy is described with great sympathy as ‘an epileptic of the spirit struggling to break out’ (p. 64). He is the

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domestic counterpart of Harry Robarts, attached intuitively to Laura as Robarts is to Voss. So Laura dances with Willy with great pleasure at Belle Bonner’s ball, for the dance is a symbol of harmony of spirit. It is Willy who, at the end of the book, penetrates far into the meaning of Voss’s achievement. Dr Badgery represents for Laura the supreme temptation to ‘normal’ marriage, especially because he reminds her of Voss. The reason she cannot marry him, or anyone else, is not, as one critic has suggested, that she is sexually frigid, but that she regards herself at that point as married already, and that later she refuses to marry merely for the sake of being married. Such people do exist, whether critics have met them or not.

One step removed from the first unawakened group of which Tom Radclyffe is the type is that to which Mr Bonner belongs. Bonner is ‘the kind of man for whom history primers and newspapers are written’, but within his framework of stock attitudes, he is capable of generosity and a dumb kind of love. He may himself be content to huddle, but at least he will give his money, which he loves, to one who is not content. He has a dim sense that he is making a valuable purchase in backing Voss, though he is incapable of discerning what that value is and is prepared to take it on trust. His wife, with whom he is shown to be in harmony, is drawn as more intuitively perceptive in virtue of being a woman. She is capable of making unpredictable remarks, as she does about Voss at that first Sunday dinner, and of performing unpredictable actions. For example, she provides, so to speak, ‘the ram in the thicket’ by refusing to obey Laura’s instruction to part with her adopted child, Mercy, as a sacrifice to demonstrate her faith in Voss’s love (pp. 372, 396). Belle Bonner is cast in the same mould as her mother and there is an intuitive bond of love and understanding between her and Laura.

The next circle, some distance away from the safety of the outer rim, lies in the Hunter Valley, at Rhine Towers, where Sanderson and his wife pronounce a kind of benediction on Voss’s quest. Mrs Bonner has seen Voss as lost; Mrs Sanderson sees him as asking to be saved, a further degree of insight (p. 151).

Sanderson has had the courage to move out from the known, but his progress towards the unknown is only partial and he and his wife expiate what they confess is weakness by constant industry and unremitting service to others. Sanderson is in a way a more highly developed Bonner, with a better mind, more refinement of spirit and a
totally lovable personality, which arouses love in all who come in contact with it: even Voss takes on Sanderson’s nature while he is at Rhine Towers. Like Bonner, Sanderson operates best within a framework of attitudes, but his attitudes have wider horizons. He represents that peculiarly Australian specimen of the innately Christian aristocrat that life on the land in this country sometimes produces.

Further out still, on the edge of the known at Jildra (in real life Jimbour, on the Darling Downs) we meet Boyle, who is well aware of the metaphysical elements in Voss’s ambition, but whose cynicism prevents him from admitting it. He is in a sense a grotesque parody of Voss. The situation which Boyle has created around himself is a caricature of the condition to which Voss is moving. Like Voss, he wishes to unite himself with, or reduce himself to, a desert, but his motive is little more than perverse curiosity:

‘I have done nicely... as nicely as most people and will do better; yet it is the apparent poverty of one’s surroundings that proves in the end to be the attraction. This is something many refuse to understand. Nor will they accept that, to explore the depths of one’s own repulsive nature is more than irresistible — it is necessary... To peel down to the last layer,’ he yawned. ‘There is always another, and yet another, of more exquisite subtlety. Of course, every man has his own obsession. Yours would be, it seems, to overcome distance, but in much the same way, of deeper layers, of irresistible disaster. I can guarantee... that you will be given every opportunity of indulging yourself to the west of here. In stones and thorns. Why, anyone who is disposed can celebrate a high old Mass, I do promise, with the skull of a blackfeller and his own blood, in Central Australia.’ (pp. 167-8)

Boyle is the sensual man, that part of himself which Voss had wished to deny from the time when he gave up his intention to be a surgeon because he was revolted by the bodies of men. Boyle is also the man who sets out to explore, but who, enervated by disgust with men, has not the courage and will to penetrate to the centre. He does not stay in civilisation like Bonner, nor take it with him, like Sanderson, but finds another kind of ‘huddle’ offered by the desert itself and merges into it. He likes living with the blacks because they are the opposites of the Pringles and the Palethorpes, not because he understands or welcomes the positive values they have to offer, and he
is hostile to Voss for making him conscious of the choice he has made. Boyle has many counterparts in modern society, in the dropouts who flee from a suffocating authority or a dominating parent, only to find substitutes for them in some pad where unlimited freedom provides a new form of imprisonment, the form recognised by Stan Parker.

Bonner, Sanderson and Boyle, then, are necessary stages in the symbolic as well as the literal journey, representing a progressive casting off of habit, material, intellectual and sensual.

It is fitting that it is at Sanderson's where all is beauty and wholesome moderation that Voss finds his obverse, Judd, and that at Boyle's he acquires his destroyer, Jackie, and presents him with the knife with which Jackie is finally to decapitate him.

Rhine Towers, which White celebrates in prose of surpassing beauty, with all 'its mineral splendours', offers the temptations of paradise to Voss (pp. 127-8), so that he reaches out to Laura, sending her his proposal of marriage. His first step away from society is thus his first step back towards it, and towards his own redemption. It is at Sanderson's also that Frank Le Mesurier sees clearly for the first time what he must do: the atmosphere of love and the innocence of children release him and he begins to write:

All that this man had not lived began to be written down. His failures took shape, but in flowers, and mountains, and in words of love which he had never before expressed, and which, for that reason, had the truth of innocence. (p. 142)

There is something in the 'healing air' of Rhine Towers, it seems, which enables men to communicate with one another, though Le Mesurier confines his act of communication solely to writing poetry. But Harry Robarts, Turner, and above all Judd, all respond, by confession, to Voss's mood of fatherly kindliness (p. 141).

The relationship between Judd and Voss is the philosophical centre of the book just as that between Laura and Voss is the psychological and erotic centre. Judd is the rock of concrete fact against which all abstraction has to measure itself:

'I think if we ring for Mr Judd,' Mrs Sanderson finally decided.

The bell echoed through Voss. Remembering the convict to whom Mr Bonner had referred, the German realized it was this that he dreaded most of all. (p. 132)
Judd reminds Voss of ‘limestone, broken by nature into forms that were almost human and filled with a similar, slow brooding innocence’ (pp. 135–6).

Like Voss himself, Judd is always associated with stone, but stone with a difference:

‘I shall take pleasure in knowing you better in the course of time,’ said the German.

The emancipist made a wry mouth, and sound of regret or doubt, of which Voss, preoccupied with his own deficiencies, remained unaware. Indeed, the pleasure he promised himself in learning to understand Judd did seem illusory, for rock cannot know rock, stone come together with stone, except in conflict. And Voss, it would appear, was in the nature of a second monolith, of more friable stone, of nervous splinters, and dark mineral deposits, the purposes of which were not easily assessed. (p. 136)

Contemplating Judd later in the wilderness, when he is killing a sheep for food, Voss realises that he is the centre of the perfection of the physical: ‘Perfection is always circular’ (p. 198). Immediately follows the mental association with himself and Laura, who at the picnic by the sea ‘had made a circle of their own’. That is, as a union of the male and female principles, they make up together the perfection of the spiritual, just as, on the physical level, their perfection is paralleled by the understanding between Judd and his wife. Compare, for instance, the butter-making scene (pp. 144–7) with the sheep-killing scene. The problem is to bring these two perfections, these two ultimate facts, into relationship with one another. Voss and Judd, will-as-spirit and will-as-matter, confront one another in their likeness and difference at Rhine Towers beside a stream of water, where: ‘Circles expanding on the precious water made it seem possible that this was the centre of the earth.’ (p. 149). The water is described as being as seductive as the lesser jewels and it is in this ambience of jewels, rock and water that Judd unconsciously echoes Voss’s words to Le Mesurier. Voss asks him: ‘Then you wish to leave all this that you have found and all you have made for the possibility of nothing?’ To which Judd replies:

It is not mine…any more than that gold chain, which somebody shook in the street. And when they would take the cat to me, I would know
that these bones were not mine neither. Oh, sir, I have nothing to lose and everything to find. (p. 149)

Voss and Judd together (each completed by his feminine principle) form the total circle of existence: spirit striving towards actualisation, matter striving towards abstraction. Judd may be ‘the master of objects’, but he does not allow objects to possess him; before he joins Voss he has, as a convict, tested his flesh almost to the ultimate limits it will bear; he goes with him to put it to its final test. Voss is attracted to Judd and repelled by him out of fear — fear that Judd may be right in regarding matter as the sole reality. He has long known himself to be clumsy in the world of objects, but though he can tolerate the superiority of Robarts, the innocent, in this area, he is wary when he comes up against its master. Yet though their worlds are different, as different as their language, beside the musical water the two rock-like men find themselves in harmony. As they part, Voss says:

‘We shall assemble at Rhine Towers the day over tomorrow.’
‘The day after tomorrow,’ laughed Judd, with strong teeth.
They were liking each other now. (p. 150)

It is Palfreyman, the professional Christian, who troubles this precarious understanding between spirit and matter (p. 151), but the last day in the beautiful valley and the return to the sound of water purling over stones in the river, associated with the memory of Laura and music, restore Voss’s feeling of well-being, and his spirit of forgiveness. In this mood he returns to the house and writes to Laura asking her to ratify the union that they have known to exist between them since their walk in Mr Bonner’s garden:

I am aware that a companion must stumble almost daily over the savage rocks of circumstance, but that a companion of strength and judgement, such as I have already perceived to exist, would be forearmed against destruction.

Materially, I have nothing to offer. I am convinced, however, that my mission will be accomplished; this I would pledge against any quantity of gold or bonds. Dear Miss Trevelyan, do not pray for me, but I would ask you to join me in thought, and exercise of will, daily, hourly, until I may return to you, the victor. (pp. 153–4)
This proposal Laura accepts and Voss does not journey into the desert alone. The proposal of marriage couched in the world's terms which follows in the next paragraph is supererogatory. For the 'Tom Radclyffes' of criticism whose experience of life is so limited that they cannot conceive of a relationship between a man and a woman continuing in existence without regular copulation, what follows must remain incomprehensible. But for the 'Willy Pringles' of the craft, who are willing to listen, the love story and its outcome will seem entirely logical, and the erotic terms in which White describes the departure from Rhine Towers entirely appropriate:

These were sparkling, jingling days.... Men shouted to their mates, their voices whipping the blue air... At this stage they were still in love with one another. It could not have been otherwise in that radiance of light. The very stirrup-irons were singing of personal hopes ... [The foreigner] would stare imperiously over the heads of men, possessing the whole country with his eyes. In those eyes the hills and valleys lay still, but expectant, or responded in ripples of leaf and grass, dutifully, to their bridegroom the sun, till all vision overflowed with the liquid gold of complete union.

The demands Voss made on his freshly-formed relationship were frequent and consuming, but, although exhausted by an excess of sensuousness, it was a period of great happiness to him, and, in consequence, of unexplained happiness to everyone else. (p. 154)

This feeling of well-being, spilling out on to others, is experienced at the same time, or soon after, by Laura and described in similar terms. It is a feeling which is the natural concomitant of acceptance in love, as Shakespeare knew when he wrote: 'Now thou art sociable, now thou art Romeo.' It has rarely been pointed out what great tenderness predominates in White's account of the love between Voss and Laura. Tenderness is not a word usually associated with this novelist, and those who are suspicious of it will be quick to object that he reserves tenderness for lovers who are separated. The objection is beside the point and is best met by reference to the whole of Voss's second letter to Laura, even though she does not receive it: 'We have wrestled with the gristle and the bones, before daring to assume the flesh.' The whole tenor of their story leaves little doubt

14 See, for instance, one of Voss's last dreams of Laura, p. 383.
that they would have assumed the flesh with ease, as one further natural expression of their love. It is at Boyle’s, where all is chaos and division in contrast to the harmony at Rhine Towers, that Voss, while waiting for Laura’s reply to his proposal, finally comes to know what has been working in him since Laura first troubled his self-sufficiency: that things are as they are in virtue of their association with other things, that the independence he and Boyle pride themselves on is an illusion—

‘Oh, it is natural to regret the waste of time,’ Voss shrugged and fenced. ‘And to wish to make amends for it.’

So he explained, but did not tell, absorbed as he was in his discovery: that each visible object has been created for purposes of love, that the stones, even, are smoother for the dust. (p. 179)

While he is waiting for his reply, he is disturbed and ill natured, and discharges his resentment on Judd, seeking to discredit him by implicating him in the loss of the prismatic compass. The struggle for the compass, which continues in the desert, is part of the symbolic pattern of the philosophic argument: which can show the way to the central meaning, the flesh or the spirit?

With the arrival of Laura’s letter, Voss is whole again and sets off, full of strength and gaiety on a day that opened like a square-cut blazing jewel on the expedition, holding it almost stationary in the prison of that blue brilliance. (p. 188)

And so indeed White has fixed the expedition in our minds forever, in spite of the black mystery, represented by the natives of the desert, which eventually becomes its setting: exploration, an adventure of body and spirit, is a jewel in the darkness of history, whether it is the history of the race, or the history of a man.

From this point onwards, after the discussion with Palfreyman about lilies and their testes-like seeds, and Voss’s dream of marriage (p. 187), ‘the two visionaries’ journey together towards salvation, that is, towards faith and humility, and the experience of one has its counterpart, sometimes caricature-like, in the life of the other. The narrative seems to gain a momentum of its own from this point, an impetus which carries the writer and reader with it until the catastrophe returns us to the world of ‘history-primers and newspapers’.
Though it does not lose touch with the physical landscape, the account of the expedition becomes the account of how Voss gradually divests himself of everything but his will, until he sees that he must resign it to the will of what is outside himself, the will of God, or the cosmic will, or whatever name men give to what is beyond their control. 'Your future is what you will make it', Voss had told Laura during their conversation at the picnic. 'Future is will.' The statement remains true, even though what is willed becomes, for each of them, totally different from their original intention.

The successive stages of Voss's denudation — a term deliberately geological — is marked by the disappearance of his companions. The first to go is Palfreyman, the professional Christ who has aroused so much of Voss's contempt (p. 247). Palfreyman, the dedicated scientist, has wavered all his life between fact and faith and has insisted on leading the life of the intellect out of a fear of the flesh. For him faith has been a substitute for, an evasion of, life and so he is incapable of standing firm when confronted with the unknown (p. 177), or with naked self-interest, as when Voss steals the mustard and cress he has planted for the sick Le Mesurier (p. 288). After the baptismal ordeal of crossing the flooded river, and facing the loss of axe, bridle and compass, Palfreyman, like the rest of the party, confronts the truth about himself, sheltering in the cave from the rain. He acknowledges his failure in human love and the need to expiate it. That part of his faith which is genuine is not sufficient to convince the blacks of the white men's good intentions, but enough to enable him to feel a generalised kind of love and 'to lay down the last of his weakness'. It is Palfreyman's death, incidentally, a compelling and powerful scene, which Judd reports as Voss's when he returns to civilisation, a circumstance which casts some doubt on his claim to be Judd (p. 444), or at least on his claim to be truthful.

Palfreyman's sacrifice, as happens so often with sacrifices, inspires not confidence, but a loss of it: 'Nor was there a single survivor who did not feel that part of him had died.' (p. 343). The death brings home to Judd the limitations of his own nature:

Since his own fat paddocks, not the deserts of mysticism, nor the transfiguration of Christ are the fate of the common man, he was yearning for the big breasts of his wife, that would smell of fresh-baked bread even after she had taken off her shift. (p. 345)
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Judd decides to turn back, not because he is a coward, but because he is confused in the realm of the spirit; in the territory of the body he needs no compass. His departure is not a betrayal, but simply a recognition of boundaries. It is the nature of matter to behave as matter, and it is no reflection on Judd himself that his adherents are merely fragments: Ralph Angus, the 'rich young ruler' possessed by his possessions, Turner, the human flotsam. For Dugald, the old black, it is all white man's nonsense, hugely irrelevant. To him their distinctions between matter and spirit would be meaningless.

Voss responds to Judd's departure as a release; the physical world relaxes its chief hold upon him and he is free to test the power of spirit. For unless he does see how far spirit can take him, in chemical isolation, so to speak, he cannot raise the human to the divine, or rather, he cannot objectify his idea of himself.

The second man to die is Le Mesurier, the observer and transmuter of experience, the transformer, in Rilke's language, of the visible into the invisible. Like the other main figures of the expedition, the poet had attached himself to Voss to find what he was meant to be and do. Of all the party, Le Mesurier is most like Voss in his determination to give shape to his life, though his pride is intellectual rather than spiritual:

For he [Voss] had already sensed, early in their association, that the young man was possessed of a gristly will, or daemon, not unlike his own. Now, smiling his approval, the German's lips were tinged with the green of lightning. (p. 248)

He sends him off in a storm to take a message to Angus and Turner about the sheep. They invite him to shelter, but Le Mesurier 'who had been admitted to infinity at times, did not wish to enter their circle'.

During the return journey, he and Voss come together at last, linked in a vision by their aspiration towards godhead:

And now Voss began to go with him, never far distant, taunting him for his failures, for his inability to split open rock, and discover the final secret. Frank, I will tell you, said his mentor, you are filled with the hallucinations of intellectual power: I could assist you perhaps, who enjoy the knowledge that comes with sovereignty over every province of illusion,
that is to say, spiritual power; indeed, as you may have suspected, I am I am I am... their two souls were united in the face of inferior realities. So like clings to like, and will be saved, or is damned. (p. 250)

The whole passage prepares the way for Le Mesurier’s final enlightenment, which is the prelude to Voss’s own. It is during his sickness, when Voss nurses him, that ‘the two were united at last’ as men, as well as visionaries. Le Mesurier’s perception that they are both failures ‘could have been a declaration of love’ (p. 272). He puts into words the whole struggle of the artist, but expresses in doing so the life of the man of action as well:

In the beginning I used to imagine that if I were to succeed in describing with any accuracy some thing, this little cone of light with the blurry edges, for instance, or this common pannikin, then I would be expressing all truth. But I could not. My whole life had been a failure, lived at a most humiliating level, always purposeless, frequently degrading. Until I became aware of my power. The mystery of life is not solved by success, which is an end in itself, but in failure, in perpetual struggle, in becoming. (p. 271)

One of the deepest concerns of the book, which raises an important historiographic issue, is the problem of how to give an exact and true account of experience, the problem which for the artist is an agony. It is for this reason that the last part of the book, where Voss’s deed settles into history, is so essential, for in the two final chapters the notions of permanence, change and eternality fall into place and our faith in conventional historiography is shaken. We are shown that, outside experience itself, there is no way of communicating it, neither through art, not through history, but only at fleeting moments through the meeting of equal souls in dreams. It is Voss and Laura who most effectively share experience, though all the accepted means of communication are denied them.

For Voss, the poems Le Mesurier writes, poems which, for Turner, seemed likely to blow up the world, are prophecies and prayers, especially those entitled Conclusion. The poet, in his delirium, wrestles with the Great Snake, his King, the principle of creation and destruction, which turns out to be merely a comet, as Voss, whom he had imagined god-like, turns out to be wholly a man. When Voss submits,
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Le Mesurier is finished. Committed to the role of observer, instead of initiator of action, the poet can no longer function when the will-in-action is removed. But in losing himself, as Voss prophesied, he finds himself. ‘Now that I am nothing I am and love is the simplest of all tongues’, he had written, without knowing fully what he was saying (p. 296). Now, after Voss’s abdication, he tears up his book and against the skeleton of a tree his suicide is his last attempt at poetry. The journey of Le Mesurier into the desert is White’s answer to Rilke’s early doctrine that God is forever emerging in art, that the artist in a sense creates God. But the artist and God turn out to be similar only in a limited sense. For the artist to identify himself with God is a kind of megalomania; it is only in the world of words that his vision is true, and words, as Judd had sensed, can operate only on matter (p. 203).

Religion, the flesh, the shaping intellect have now gone, and what remains to Voss is innocence, instinct. Harry Robarts fulfils his promise that he will stick closer than anyone in the end. Just as he had accepted life as simply as bread, so he accepts the prospect of death, and his dying is hardly more than a falling asleep, with the unquestioning love of the faithful dog to whom Voss had once likened him (p. 382).

Voss and Laura, the two visionaries, the man and woman ‘of equal stature’, remain. Laura’s task has been to break down the masculine striving towards the infinite, to turn the man again towards the truth of what is human, to compel him to acknowledge that he cannot become God by willing it. Voss’s task has been to direct the feminine stress on the particular towards the universal, to compel Laura to trust that for which there is no evidence: his absence, like the absence of God, is a continual agonising testing of her faith. The image which connects them in their love is the image of the Mass with its central symbol of bread or flesh, which is not the less bread because it is God, and not less God because it is bread. To demonstrate this Laura prepares to give up her adopted child: ‘I am willing to give up so much to prove that human truths are also divine.’ (p. 371). In Blake’s language, which is part of the inspiration of this book: ‘Each minute particular is holy.’

Voss’s last dream before Jackie decapitates him is a phantasy compounded of the stages of his journey: the jewelled beauty of Rhine Towers associated with the ‘Rhenish turrets’ of his homeland,
the transparent stream, the lilies of his dream of marriage and the final acknowledgment and acceptance of his love:

But of greater importance were his own words of love that he was able at last to put into her mouth. So great was her faith, she received these white wafers without surprise. (p. 393)

His murder, parodied by the cutting off of Laura’s hair, fulfils Laura’s pronouncement that man is God decapitated:

Laura’s head — for all that remained of her seemed to have become concentrated in the head — was struggling with the simplicity of a great idea ... ‘How important it is to understand the three sages. Of God into Man. Man. And Man returning into God.’ (p. 386)

Each of them in fact achieves the transformation of the other: Voss is restored to humility, to the human, through love, and Laura is restored to faith, to the divine, through love. The expedition, on the face of it a failure, is a metaphysical success, as Voss had foretold (p. 62). Each of them meets a supreme temptation in this redemptive journey. Judd represents the rock of fact against which spirit almost founders; Tom Radclyffe is the greatest threat to Laura’s trust in the unseen. At the ball, he accuses her of deluding herself, ‘of living off her imagination’, the most deadly accusation a rational mind can suffer. He disturbs her to such an extent that she writes a letter to Voss asking:

‘Are you too a myth, as has been suggested?’ but finds the strength to tear it up, and cries in torment, as so many have cried to God: ‘I do have faith, if it is not all the time.’ In the end, her faith is sufficient to survive the fact that it was founded on the briefest of encounters, and strong enough to bear contact with ‘facts’, represented by the supposed Judd and by Colonel Hebden, who had been to search for Voss and his party. It is her persistence in her faith in Voss’s love and her will not to fail him that brings her to the perception of truth: that what man has in common with Christ is his capacity to suffer and that this is all he has to enable him to look God in the face. Voss’s will to become God did in fact destroy him, but the destruction enabled him ‘to ascend’. If he began as a Faustian man in danger of
damnation through pride, he ends as Faust redeemed, uttering the words Faust would not say:

He himself, he realized, had always been most abominably frightened, even at the height of his divine power, a frail god upon a rickety throne, afraid of opening letters, of making decisions, afraid of the instinctive knowledge in the eyes of mules, of the innocent eyes of good men, of the elastic nature of the passions, even of the devotion he had received from some men, and one woman, and dogs.

Now, at least, reduced to the bones of manhood, he could admit to all this and listen to his teeth rattling in the darkness.

'O Jesus,' he cried, 'rette mich nur! Du lieber!' Of this too, mortally frightened, of the arms, or sticks, reaching down from the eternal tree, and tears of blood, and candlewax. Of the great legend becoming truth.

Something should be said about the philosophical background of Voss's notion of will, as benefits a novel so strongly set in the German tradition of nineteenth century idealism, founded on theosophical polarities. It is an anachronism to talk, as critics have done, about 'Voss's' anticipating Nietzsche. Voss is a character in a book, not a real life philosopher. The real link, if one accepts the proposition that Voss represents at least the spirit of Leichhardt, is with Hegel, for whom self-consciousness was the highest form of knowledge and synonymous with the Absolute, and with Schopenhauer, whose doctrine of the will Voss sets out to invert, but which he merely restates in Christian terms. His physical end and his metaphysical conclusions would have been abhorrent to Nietzsche. Speculations about the will are a commonplace of early nineteenth century German philosophy. Schopenhauer's *The World as Will and Idea* was first published in 1818. A second edition came out in 1844, a year before Voss's expedition is supposed to have set out, three years before Leichhardt's last journey. Voss adapts Schopenhauer's notion of the duality of actions and ideas. 'As phenomena they are ideas; as meaningful, they are manifestations of a will.'15 Merged with this conviction, is the Hegelian notion of evolving man creating God, though this idea is suppressed at first beneath a Schopenhauerian pessimism and con-

tempt for Christianity. Voss begins by attempting to make his will become manifest by denying his humanity, by a Schopenhaurian negation of desire (p. 41). It is Laura’s British commonsense working upon this German idealism which defines the true relations between the subjective and the objective. As we have seen, Laura’s position at the beginning of the novel is that of classic British empiricism: ‘It is wrong everywhere and for anyone to believe anything upon insufficient evidence.’ Voss on the other hand is a representative of the Germanic ‘voluntarism’ whose starting point was Kant’s ‘I must abolish knowledge to make room for belief.’ Laura’s reliance on things visible and Voss’s reliance on things invisible have to be turned upside down and brought into unity. The novel’s metaphysic is eastern rather than western, though it affirms the Christlikeness of each man who strives to be fully human. But it is emphatically not an allegory of the gospel story and attempts to see particular characters as gospel figures are grasping at straws.

There is a risk perhaps that in the end White arrives at conclusions which are commonplaces of eastern and western religions and goes to a great deal of trouble to do it. Most great metaphysical ideas are commonplaces, however, and are none the worse for that. But there is in fact more to the book than the metaphysical ideas on which critics have tended to concentrate, and which White, after all, deals with explicitly enough, if not always consistently.

What is left implicit is the political significance of the novel, which is also conveyed in the images of the mineral world. The theme concerns Absolutism in the political as well as the philosophical sense. The book was conceived during the second war with Germany, that war whose central figure was an arch-megalomaniac. Hitler was a man who was fanatical about an abstract idea and prepared to destroy the world in pursuit of it. ‘The German mysticism and German precision’ spoken of by Tom Radclyffe (p. 104) combined in the Nazis into the most appallingly deadly force the world had known up to that time.

Voss is seen at the beginning of the book as exemplifying these two characteristics. He is always associated, as we have seen, with the mineral world, bent on turning himself into a ‘mineral abstraction’. At the end of the book (p. 446) Laura makes us understand fully why it was that Voss and Judd came to understand one another by a bubbling spring:
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Some will learn to interpret the ideas embodied in the less communicative forms of matter, such as rock, wood, metal and water. I must include water, because, of all matter it is the most musical.

Voss is above all an intensely Germanic and therefore an intensely musical novel. According to Thomas Mann, Faust should have been a musician, music being the most ‘abstract’ that is the most ‘non-human’ of the arts. There are strong affinities between Voss and Mann’s Dr Faustus at certain points, as the quotation which forms the epigraph to this article suggests. Implicit in both books is the Schopenhauerian notion that music is the only art directly expressing the cosmic will, but the notion is not accepted uncritically.

Topp’s dream of an ideal state in which music is the only language, a language which Voss accepts as a kind of homage, is at first part of the pattern of abstraction. But music needs ears to hear it and it is beside water that Voss hears the voice of humanity in Judd. At the beginning he is identified harshly with stone: ‘Deadly rocks inspired him with fresh life’ (p. 18). But his real fate, to be a bronze statue, that is, to be transformed from a fact to a work of imagination, living in history, is foreshadowed on page 109. On page 67 occurs the crucial conversation between Voss and Laura about stone and sand, the components of a desert. ‘You would prefer sand?’ he asks her, when she says she would not want to marry a man of stone. A little later she likens Voss to a desert with rocks and tells him that he fascinates her for that reason, concluding: ‘You are my desert.’

In the end he becomes what she has imagined him to be: his body becomes part of the real desert. The man gripped by an abstract idea fails to make it manifest and is himself absorbed into matter. But in the process of suffering, the dross in the idea is burnt out. After his death, what was noble in it, its spirit, remains as an inspiration to those capable of being touched by his story. Sand is stone with the hardness broken down; bronze is the metal of art with its origins in

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16 This is why it is so extraordinary that Barry Argyle, in his Patrick White (Edinburgh, Oliver and Boyd, 1967), should declare that the only art mentioned in Voss is aboriginal cave painting. (Mr Alan Lawson, of the Australian National University, drew my attention to this inaccuracy.) It is a particularly glaring mistake in view of the fact that one of the chief characters in the book is a poet and that his poems are printed in the novel! Voss, incidentally, inspired a series of paintings by Eric Smith, which are commentaries on the book.
the world of stone. What White is stating through these images is the necessity to hold a balance between the abstract and the concrete, between the generalised notion of man and the particular reality of individual human beings. Too great a stress on the particular leads to the world of the Radclyffes and a stupor of mutton. Too great a stress on the abstract leads in the end to a Hitler nightmare. Voss sacrifices himself, seven men, his favourite dog, a large number of innocent animals, and appropriates the life of a young and beautiful girl in pursuit of an abstract idea. If he had had political as well as personal power, or if Laura had been of lesser stature than he, the destruction might have been even more catastrophic. The little world of a Voss can easily become the larger world where men are statistics, and portraits and statues degenerate into diagrams; or where political theories can end in genocide.

Finally, the book which seems to be so Germanic in conception is fundamentally a most moving celebration of Australia. Though the emphasis may be on ‘death by torture in the country of the mind’, we do not, as is sometimes claimed, lose sight of the country itself. The evocation of an Australian exploratory expedition may be generalised in the sense that it does not refer to one particular known expedition, following a recognisable route, but the descriptive passages are vivid, factual and immediate. White manipulates his historical facts as Richardson manipulates hers, in pursuit of an artistic idea; but at the same time both convey a truth of feeling, of atmosphere, that many a historian might envy. White conjures up for us what it felt like to explore Australia with the most primitive equipment; all the nightmare journeys of Collins, Grey, Eyre, Leichhardt, Sturt and the rest are condensed into one and the book takes on the quality of epic. Moreover, it demonstrates Voss’s main point: that will, imagination, dog-like devotion, spirit, in fact, have a survival value that transcends the physical virtues, however great these are. Voss, Le Mesurier and Harry Robarts do in fact get further than the rest of the party, and the idea of Voss endures.¹⁷

But the novel is much more than the celebration of heroic deeds. Australia is the embodiment of a mystery and White, like Grant Wat-

¹⁷ “Voss did not die,” Miss Trevelyan replied, “He is there still, it is said, in the country, and always will be. His legend will be written down, eventually, by those who have been troubled by it.”
son long before him, and like A. D. Hope, his contemporary, is preoccupied with the abiding significance of deserts. 'In this country,' says Voss, 'it is possible to discard the inessential and attempt the infinite.' (p. 35). Both Hope and White see the desert as the place from which the prophets come. Both see the bourgeois mind as a desert, but as a necessary desert, without which the prophet could not restore his soul. Willy Pringle answers Topp’s charge of mediocrity thus:

'The grey of mediocrity, the blue of frustration’, he suggested, less to inform an audience than to commit it to his memory...‘Topp has dared to raise a subject that has occupied my mind: our inherent mediocrity as a people. I am confident that the mediocrity of which he speaks is not a final and irrevocable state; rather is it a creative source of endless variety and subtlety. The blowfly on its bed of offal is but a variation of the rainbow. Common forms are continually breaking into brilliant shapes. If we will explore them.' (p. 447)18

The author speaking, no doubt, and since then his vision of his country has darkened. It is for that reason that it is important to read this most finely wrought and most moving of his works from time to time with great care. A book into which a writer selflessly pours most of his love for his country and his people is more than likely to be his truest. A marriage of German mysticism and British empiricism in a continent which allows one to discard the inessential and attempt the infinite seems less possible in Australia today than it did in the nineteenth century, but it is now more than ever desirable to re-examine the idea.

I have spoken of the epic quality of the book, considered as a historical novel, and the existence of so many honorific epithets: ‘the flawless girl’, ‘the important leader’, ‘the agreeable young man’, ‘the good Mrs Bonner’, ‘the innocent music-master’ reinforce such an impression stylistically. But the dominant mode is lyrical rather than

18 Compare Le Mesurier’s alchemical image:

‘Dying is creation. The body creates fresh forms, the soul inspires by its manner of leaving the body, and passes into other souls.’

‘Even the souls of the damned?’ asked Voss.

‘In the process of burning it is the black that gives up the gold.’ (p. 361).
eic and it has to be said that the organisation of a long novel in the
manner of a lyric poem makes a continuous demand on the reader’s
attention which can be exhausting. There is certainly the direct con-
nection between style and theme which poetry demands: ‘Each word
was a round pebble of mystical perfection’ (p. 20) is a statement
which not only describes White’s own style, but draws our attention
to the theme of matter and spirit, thing and idea and the symbolism
which conveys it.

But the ambition to make a long novel as perfect as a lyric poem
carries its own dangers and at times the very denseness of the texture,
in which every word and phrase stand in correct relation to every
other, threatens to inhibit the reader’s responsiveness: he feels he must
be constantly searching for clues. The technique poses the aesthetic
problem: does a novel gain by the attempt to load every rift with ore,
or does a relaxation of grip allow essentials to be more easily grasped?
White could legitimately claim that an artist should be indifferent to
the fact that some readers are incapable of holding everything in the
mind at once; all he should be concerned about is the total perfection
of the work. The fabric of language in the book is not perfect: it is
flawed occasionally by some preciousness, some pretentiousness, man-
nerisms, even a handful of clichés. Too often what sounds profound
turns out to be an effect of sonorous tone rather than intellectual sub-
stance. But the total structure, the working out of a great conception,
is very near perfect, and there is something forbidding about perfe-
tion, as the story of Voss and Laura suggests, which is felt mainly in
the characterisation. There, White leaves very little for the reader to
do. For example, he is not left to infer that Bonner is a materialist
from observing his relish of mutton and apple pie — he is told that he
is so. In all his work, indeed, White’s gift for analysis is constantly
at war with his dramatic gift: he seems unable to trust the reader
sufficiently, and so subordinate the first to the second. His method
is in fact relentlessly Germanic. The effect on the reader is rather
like that produced by travelling in the train with a scenery enthusiast
who insists on pointing out every detail of the passing landscape. Yet
for a certain kind of journey, fatigue is a small price to pay and only
the reader who has to write a report on it is required to pay it. Those
who are free to surrender slowly to the spell of the narrative, as it
unfolds, will get as close to experiencing the subtlety, the true in-
wardness of this country as words can bring them. They may also
feel a mounting anger as they read that in 1845 Australians seemed still 'locked forever in their own bodies' and that 'the stubborn music' was still 'waiting for release'.

'Oh, yes, a country with a future', we are still being told by our politicians. What puzzles us, as it puzzles Laura’s visitor, Mr Ludlow, is 'But when does the future become present?' (p. 448).

Laura’s answer no longer suffices, and, at the moment, Willy Pringle’s hope seems less likely to be realised than Topp’s fear:

Then, too, there is the possibility that our hates and our carnivorous habits will unite in a logical conclusion: we may destroy one another. (p. 447)

That is why it is necessary to make renewed efforts to understand what is meant by a symbolic union of Voss and Laura in Australia after a journey into the desert.
The Vivisector

art and science

R. F. Brissenden

... what he saw
Discovered what he was, and the hand — unswayed
By the dictation of a single sense —
Bodied the accurate and total knowledge
In a calligraphy of present pleasure.

Art
Is complete when it is human...
... The artist lies
For the improvement of truth. Believe him.

Charles Tomlinson: A Meditation on

John Constable

I took living animals... and after laying bare that part I wanted to examine, I waited till the animal ceased to struggle or complain; after which... I examined attentively, whether upon touching, cutting, burning or lacerating the part, the animal seemed disquieted, made a noise, struggled, or pulled back the wounded limb... or if nothing of all this happened. The repeated events of those experiments I marked down faithfully, whatever I found them to be. For what is it to me... on which side nature decides the question?

Albrecht von Haller: De Partibus
Corporis Humani Sensibilibus et Irritabilibus

One of the implications of Patrick White’s recent novel, The Vivisector, is that the artist and the scientist are ultimately concerned with the same thing — namely the discovery and presentation of truth. It is also suggested that the genuine artist pursues his task with the same dedicated thoroughness as the scientist pursues his. His role is compared especially with that of the vivisector: like the vivisector the artist has to carry out his work on living subjects — in his case on the body of humanity, in particular on the body of his own immediate

1 This paper was originally delivered to a post-graduate seminar on The Sociology of Literature conducted by Dr Terry Irving of the Department of Government in the University of Sydney.
community. Since he is a member of this community it means that he has to include himself in the vivisection: inevitably this must involve everyone, the artist and his fellows, in pain, discomfort and suffering. The hero of The Vivisector is called Hurtle Duffield. His given name, abbreviated by his family to ‘Hurt’, implies that it will be his destiny to ‘hurt’ others and to be ‘hurt’ himself. Such suffering, however, is presented as something which is essential to the accomplishment of his purpose and vocation as an artist. It is also suggested that the suffering of the world as a whole is in a similar way an essential part of the working out of the divine purpose — and God, like the artist, is necessarily involved in the suffering himself. This, at least, is one way of reading the gnomic graffito that Hurtle Duffield meditatively inscribes on the wall of his sunlit dunny:

God the Vivisector
God the Artist
God

In comparing the artist’s role with that of God, Patrick White goes further than most social scientists — at least consciously — would wish to when considering their own vocation. And the notion that both the creation and the experiencing of art are in some sense sacred activities is an essential element in the view of the world presented in White’s work. But there is a humbler level at which the purposes and to some extent the procedures of the sociologist and the artist — in particular the novelist — may be seen to coincide. They are both, after all, concerned with man and his relations with his fellows; and it is interesting to note that the social sciences and the realistic novel both came into being at about the same time — in the eighteenth century, that period in which it was asserted with a uniquely new force and confidence that ‘the proper study of mankind is man’. The ways in which the novelist and the social scientist pursue this study are necessarily very different: ‘the artist lies/For the improvement of truth’ while the scientist at least attempts not to. Nonetheless the two may share an interest in the same social problems, may even envisage them in similar conceptual terms, and may also arrive at basically similar conclusions. The findings of the one indeed can often illuminate and reinforce those of the other to a surprising degree.

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In his fiction Patrick White has been concerned with two questions which I should assume to be of particular interest to sociologists. One of these is the relationship of the individual to his society, in particular the relationship of the unusually gifted, sensitive and perceptive individual to a society so culturally arid and materialistic as our own. The other is the nature and quality of Australian society especially when it is contrasted and compared with the older and more highly civilised parent society of Europe from which Australia was originally colonised. These questions have naturally attracted the attention of a great many creative writers, and an awareness of them is often evident in the work of people who do not make them their primary concern. A number of things, however, give Patrick White's treatment of them a particularly distinctive quality. The first is the nature of the alienated individuals who appear as the central characters in so much of his work. A second is the ambiguous love-hate relationship which exists between himself and Australian society — a relationship so tense and disturbing that it has proved to be the source of some of his least effective (because least controlled) writing as well as some of his best (because it is so deeply felt). A third — and it is of special importance in *The Vivisector* — is the connection he sees as existing between sexuality and art, and, at a more general level, between the drive to sexual expression and fulfilment and the broadly human need to communicate.

The 'special' people in the world as White sees it are distinguished by two things: firstly, they have an innate honesty and clarity of vision, an honesty and clarity so all-encompassing and perceptive as to enable some of them to attain a mystical sense of the unity and totality of things, to realise, as old Stan Parker in *The Tree of Man* does just before he dies, 'that One, and no other figure, is the answer to all sums'; and secondly they tend to suffer, to be hurt, because of their gift — they are all to a greater or lesser degree 'burnt ones' (the title White gave to his collection of short stories) — people scorched in the fires of God's lightning stroke which may destroy as well as illuminate. The fortunate are those who survive and are able to express themselves — either through art or heroic action or simply through achieving an inner serenity, a wholeness of spirit, which enables them to live in a simple, direct, fruitful and loving way with the people immediately associated with them. The four *illuminati* in *Riders in the Chariot* are particularly clear examples of White's
'special' people, although to the uncomprehending eye they seem to be utterly different — Mary Hare, the crazy old spinster living in Xanadu, the decaying overgrown family mansion; Himmelfarb, the European Jewish intellectual; Alf Dubbo, the almost illiterate Aboriginal artist; and Mrs Godbold; the laundress: they are all gifted with the capacity to see the world 'as it really is', they recognise in each other this extraordinary quality which they share, and three of them are alienated from and finally destroyed by society. Hurtle Duffield, since he is an artist of genius, is naturally also a member of this spiritual élite — and it is significant that he is a painter: he sees the world and is able to express his vision directly, without having to use the more subtle, complex and deceptive medium of language.

All White's alienated and solitary characters have difficulty in expressing themselves adequately in words; and White himself, even though his metier is language, is always straining against its limitations, suggesting that other forms of communication are perhaps more satisfying and effective. He is a remarkably visual writer; and even in novels that are not directly concerned with painting he often uses colours, objects, forms and spatial relationships as recurring symbols of complex constellations of meaning and emotion which it would be difficult if not impossible for him to spell out in words. The question of symbolism, especially colour symbolism, in White's work is large and fascinating, too large for me to do anything but merely gesture towards it here, even though it is clearly of special importance in The Vivisector. Let me, for the moment, however, merely point, without attempting any detailed explication, to two examples from this novel: the colour white and the image of the burnt-out or unlit household fire.

White is associated with the fowls, their droppings, moonlight, Mumma, eggs, Boo Hollingrake, the room in Sunningdale which the young Duffield wrecks with his painting of the suicide, the dunny wall on which he scrabbles his great thoughts, the primed board of the God-paintings on which he is working when he dies and, I have no doubt, several other things — perhaps even the novelist's own name. It is clearly of profound significance in the painter's inner emotional life; and it plays a special role in several climactic moments in his career — notably in his creation of the strange and disturbing painting, 'Lantana Lovers under Moonfire', which dominates the middle section of the novel.
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When Hero Pavloussi, who is to become Duffield's lover, sees this painting she remarks that the houses along the ridge depicted in it 'remind [her] of the houses of Athens — at a time of evening — just after the sun has gone down . . . they are like gas fires from which the heat has been turned off: so grey, and — burnt out.' Duffield is shocked by the observation (and so is the reader) since this in fact had been the private vision of the houses by which he was suddenly possessed at the moment when the painting had been conceived. And the shock has reverberations which echo throughout the novel: one remembers, for instance, the unlit gas fire in the house to which his mother returns after having arranged to sell him to the Courtneys; and, even more strikingly, the vision Duffield has of the naked Nance Lightfoot as she kneels down to relight the dead fire in the grate: 'fascinated by the burnt-out cleft of her formal arse' the young painter finds that the fires of his own genius have been rekindled, and his career as an artist really begins.

Duffield, because he is an artist and a successful one, is never so cut off from the community in which he lives that he cannot come to terms with it. But many of the characters in White's novels are ultimately destroyed, either by society or through their own inability to reconcile their private vision with the image of the world as it is supposed to be by the vast majority of 'ordinary' people. Like Clay (in the short story of the same title) or Theodora Goodman (in The Aunt's Story) they go mad. Yet often it is the outwardly ordinary people who survive—Stan Parker, in The Tree of Man, for instance, or Mrs Godbold in Riders in the Chariot. Mrs Godbold is the only one of the four illuminati in this novel who can be said to survive if not succeed in worldly terms — and it is significant, in the context of White's work as a whole, that she should be a fairly simple, unsophisticated working-class woman — very like, in many ways, Mumma, Hurtle Duffield's real mother. White has a deep conviction, which for the most part he manages to express without lapsing into the conventional sentimentalities, that unaffected goodness is more likely to be found among the members of the working or lower middle class than among the wealthy, the established, the sophisticated or the intellectual. He admires the vitality and directness of lower-class life, but he hates the vulgarity and mindless emptiness of 'mass' culture, just as he despises middle-class snobbery and nouveau riche pretentiousness. He has no illusions about the values of European civilisa-

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tion, of what may be called 'high culture', and he has a first hand experience of them denied to most Australians of his generation: his parents were wealthy, and he was educated for the most part in England and on the Continent, and although he had spent part of his childhood in Australia he did not really begin to live permanently here until his mid-thirties. The decision was deliberate: he realised that he was not a European and that he had to come to terms with his own society. Like A. D. Hope he is one of those who eventually turned 'gladly home...to find/The Arabian desert of the human mind' — and in doing so brought alive within himself a European experience and education which might otherwise have remained sterile and second hand.

Patrick White is well aware both of the complexities of this inter-cultural position in which he finds himself and of their value to him as a writer. And one can only assume that he had them very much in mind when he began planning The Vivisector, a novel in which he presents the life story of a great Australian painter. There are ten sections in the novel; and the first three of these and part of the fourth are clearly designed to expose Hurtle Duffield to as many class and cultural shocks as possible. In this portion of the novel White, with the freedom of the imaginative writer, does what every social scientist would love to do and never really can — he sets up a controlled social experiment. The aim of the experiment is to produce in Hurtle Duffield that condition of fruitful alienation which in a man of genius may lead to the creation of great art. This first part of The Vivisector is in fact an extremely self-conscious piece of writing, planned with the attention to detail that one expects from the author of detective stories; and it is saved from artificiality only by the coherence and credibility of the central character and by the human warmth, liveliness and sympathy with which White portrays the other actors in his highly contrived set of events.

Hurtle the child is introduced in the first few pages as someone who is at once representatively Australian and yet distinctively individual. His father is a poor Sydney bottle-oh, the son of an English remittance man who had borne the name Hertel Vivian Warboys Duffield. 'Hertel' had been the family name of a German woman who had married into the family; but when the remittance man's grandson is christened, 'Hertel' is transformed to 'Hurtle' because the parson
gets the spelling wrong, and the aristocratic 'Vivian Warboys' dis­
appears because, as Hurtle's Pa tells him, 'One name's enough for a
boy to carry round in Australia.' Grandpa Duffield had 'died of a
seizure on the Parramatta road', when he fell off the mule he had
borrowed and on which he had hoped to ride to the centre of Aus­
tralia — 'It was 'is dream', Pa tells young Hurtle; and the catastrophe
had also set the seal on their poverty: after the mule disappeared
poor Pa had 'never stopped payin' it off to the owner for a long time
after'. In three short pages the 'rich and educated', in Lawson's happy
phrase, 'have been educated down', and one of the most powerful and
enduring of Australian myths has been enacted. All that remain to
Hurtle are his transformed and distorted German Christian name, his
Grandpa's seal ring with its English family crest, and his incipient
genius. It is very neatly done; and White maintains control partly
through the touches of comedy — the mistake at the christening, with
its echoes of Tristram Shandy and fairy tales; and the farcical death of
Grandpa Duffield, which, with its ironic evocation of White's own novel
Voss, invites the reader to recognise and accept the artifice of the
writer. At the same time a prophetic warning is symbolically sounded
— again in a slightly comic fashion which allows us to forgive its
obviousness. As Pa stacks the bottles Hurtle watches the fowls,
especially one crook-necked pullet which is being bullied by the rest.
'Why're the others pecking at it, Pa?' he asks. 'Because they don't
like the look of it,' is the reply. 'Because it's different.'

Hurtle it is soon clear is also different — although not so different
as some of White's other 'special' characters. He loves his family; and
he is tough enough to hold his own physically with the other boys in
the slum street where he grows up. But he is sensitive and precocious;
and he also has a sense of his own genius, and of his potential destiny.
White's account of the early years of this exceptionally talented boy
growing up in an emotionally stable and sustaining, but intellectually
and aesthetically frustrating, environment is brief, assured and con­
vincing; the writing is lean, pared down and all the more effective for
being so. When Hurtle is taken by his mother to visit the big house
where she is working we are prepared to accept the boy's response as
perfectly natural: he is not only fascinated by the glimpse he is given
into this new world of beauty, order, colour, and sensuous richness,
but also he recognises it immediately, if subconsciously, as a world to
which he belongs. And when the Courtneys, who have a crippled

daughter but no son, eventually buy him from his family, his acquiescence in the transaction does not seem improbable.

This episode is of absolutely fundamental importance to the novel as a whole; and because of its inherent improbability it poses very great difficulties to the writer. White surmounts them brilliantly — and he does so for two main reasons: first, although the situation may be implausible — or, at least, unlikely — the characters involved in it all behave in a completely natural and credible manner (and one may even question the inherent improbability of the situation — the Evonne Goolagong case, and many other similar ones which receive far less publicity, suggest that the motivations on both sides which can lead to this sort of cross-class adoption are not uncommon); second, he exploits the potentialities of the situation which he has engineered with such imaginative fertility and tact that we become only too willing to let him get away with it.

The first, or at least most obvious, advantage of the situation is that it allows him to expose his hero, already blessed with high intelligence, artistic ability and lower-class toughness and vitality, to an environment in which the wealth of European civilisation can be made available to him — made available for the most part at second hand it is true, but made available nonetheless. As Mumma says, ‘It’s the edgercation that counts’, and in a magical fashion Hurtle Duffield is suddenly ‘educated up’. It is important that the new family into which he is adopted should be emotionally fairly stable — and what instabilities do exist are again exploited by White in a masterly fashion. Duffield, for instance, is able to act out the Oedipal fantasy with his surrogate mother in a way rarely possible in real life; and his surrogate sibling, his ‘sister’ Rhoda, hump-backed and crook-necked like the pullet and therefore born different, acts as a symbol, satisfying both to Duffield personally and to the structure of the novel, of the spiritual family of alienated illuminati to which the painter belongs. Not only is the family emotionally relatively stable, but also, at the right moment it is magically, but tactfully and convincingly, removed: while Duffield is away at the war the father suddenly dies (without providing for him in the will — and of a stroke as the real grandfather died and Duffield himself will die); Maman, true to her Jocasta role, marries a man much younger than herself and disappears; and Rhoda also vanishes, only to come back into the artist’s life towards its end to live with him as the representative of his true family. The artist is thus
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able to experience a complex but relatively painless series of alienation processes. He is physically removed from his first family — but by a decision which, though uncomfortable, they all agree in; a decision, too, which has a symbolic significance directly relevant (as I shall show shortly) to the thematic structure of the novel. He then lives with and is educated by his adopted family — from whom he is inevitably cut off at one level — and, as he attains maturity, he is again removed, partly by his own decision and partly by force of circumstances, from the familial environment and thrust out into the world.

The climactic moments of each of these rites of passage are worth looking at. The first, as I suggested a moment ago, is a communally agreed on decision: the boy, Hurtle, realises that he owes it to his genius; his family know that they owe it both to the child and to the rest of the family. It is done for 'love and money'; it involves his death and rebirth (a condition of the agreement being that he never see his first family again — when he does see his sister Lena, by accident, and breaks the taboo, he suffers his first stroke); and it is celebrated by tears and an act of sexual consummation on the part of the real parents. It is seen in various ways by all those involved as painful but necessary; and it sets out in fairly simple and straightforward terms a proposition the ironies and mysteries of which are to be explored and investigated in a wonderfully rich and illuminating way throughout the rest of the novel. Stated in its most general form it is that the loss of innocence is the price of experience. The special variants of this with which White is concerned are, first, the way in which complete commitment by an artist to his vocation necessarily involves the use, often quite ruthless, of other people — so ruthless, indeed, that it can lead to their suffering and death; second, the way in which the values of civilisation, of a high culture, are somehow necessarily involved with power and money and the leisure which these things can provide. Love is not enough for the development of Hurtle Duffield — he also needs money, or at least he needs the conditions, the surroundings, the experiences and the opportunities which money can provide. Art is a costly business — costly in both material and simply human terms.

This is also implied in some of the most ritually significant episodes which occur during his period with the Courtneys, especially towards the end. His first real painting is inspired by death, by the suicide of his Latin teacher; it involves the defacement of the walls of his
room (the artistic affirmation is also an act of desecration — a Promethean theme to which White returns again and again); the breaking of a sacred feminine object (the ‘rare and valuable’ silver lustre jug, left in his room by Maman so that he will learn ‘to like beautiful things’); and punishment by the father. At the conclusion of his tour of Europe, intended to round off his education, he and his new family are suddenly shocked into a sense of reality, a sense of the cost of things, which has temporarily been forgotten, by the sight of the model of the dissected dog in the anti-vivisectionist display window. It is a crudely obvious symbol, perhaps, but because the context in which it is set is so rich, it effectively works. Finally there is the Oedipal confrontation with Maman — well prepared for, completely convincing at the dramatic level, and briefly and sparely told. Duffield is already maturing sexually — saved in this as in so many other ways by his angel of sweetness and light, Boo Hollingrake, heiress to a sugar fortune, catalytic, helpful and immaculate: dressed in white she brings him to orgasm in her embrace — an orgasm achieved, significantly, without his having physically to violate the sacred presence. Later she acts as the mysterious and inexhaustibly wealthy patron who collects his early paintings; and in her final appearance in the novel, at the Duffield retrospective, she is still functioning as the bridge between heaven and earth, the spiritual and the temporal worlds; she has ‘a certain priestly air’ and her final words are:

‘There’s the Prime Minister. I must go and have a few words with Sam. I have a message for him from a cardinal. You know I’m living in Rome? For purely aesthetic reasons... It’s never too late to be converted to other forms of beauty.

Hurtle, at any rate, is well prepared to cope with Maman’s advances, even though he knows what it will cost them both:

... at least if he was going to destroy her, it wouldn’t be in the way she expected.

‘All right,’ he said, ‘all right,’ like the mug he was, ‘I won’t say anything. I won’t be here.’

‘You — won’t — be?’

‘I joined up.’
'Joined what?'
'Enlisted.'

It was a lie he would have to live up to.
'I'm leaving for camp. Perhaps this week. I'll know tomorrow.'
'I can't believe it! ... After all we've done for you! All the thought! The love!'

The expense, too, went hurtling through his mind...
'You're doing it to kill me.'
'If you're not killed one way, you are in another.'

Well, he had broken the caul: it lay all sticky gelatinous around him; he was panting from the effort.

There are other rites of passage, too, in the novel, the most significant of which involves the death of the prostitute, Nance Lightfoot. In contrast to Boo Hollingrake, Nance is for the most part dressed in black; and it is Duffield's sexual consummation with her, corrupted goddess of earth and fire and the hearth, that finally releases him into the world of creative art. The pairing of artist and prostitute smacks so much of schmaltzy romantic fin-de-siècle bohemianism that White obviously runs an extraordinary risk in using it. But despite a certain uneasiness in his portrayal of Nance herself — she is always a slightly made-up character — the risk pays off; and it pays off because the total pattern of the novel confirms and substantiates the meanings which the situation seems clearly intended to carry. That Nance is a prostitute merely spells out in its most blatant form the love-money relationship by which the artist is connected to the society which sustains him. Duffield uses everybody, just as the client or the ponce uses the prostitute; but at the same time he needs love — and he also needs to love, although he does not himself realise this until Nance is dead.

The scene leading up to the death of Nance is one of the most powerful and complex in the novel. Duffield, living like a hermit in his private hell of heat and rock at Ironstone (the overtones of ordeal by fire are always present in this section), supported partly by Nance's earnings, produces paintings for the first exhibition in which he appears. They are knocked by the critics. Nance comes to visit him, and during an evening of alcoholic despair and self-disgust, she reveals how she was initiated into sex by her father. Getting drunker and more depressed as he listens Duffield finally smears his self-
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portrait with his own excrement. As an ultimate gesture of renunciation he then takes the Duffield family ring off his finger and hurls it into the scrub. When he comes to next morning he finds Nance's body broken by rocks at the foot of the gorge into which she has fallen while suddenly fumbling about for the ring in the darkness ("Throwun away a valuable ring yer grandad solid gold!"). The message is plain — but as is the case with so many important messages you can learn to read it only through the most painful of ordeals: you cannot deny the reality of love, you cannot deny yourself.

Hurtle’s love for Nance Lightfoot presents in its most obvious form the notion that there is a dynamic connection between sex and art. As I suggested earlier, White is preoccupied with this throughout the novel; and at the simplest level it is clear that the various periods in Duffield’s development as an artist grow directly out of his relationships with various women and to some extent, with men. But White is concerned with something much more complex than the simple one-to-one equation of love with artistic inspiration. Art, as it is presented and explored in this novel, is seen to be the expression of a creative urge which while necessarily intimately involved with the sexual drive is greater than it, and, like the urge to sexual fulfilment, one that can express itself in many ways. Thus Duffield is presented — and indeed sees himself — in many roles: as auto-erotic masturbator, as the producer of aesthetic excrement (the artist as anal-erotic), as the impotent divinity who with a mixture of love and hatred shits on the innocent world from a great height (as the fowls let their droppings fall from the pepper tree in the moonlit backyard of his slum home, as at Sunningdale he spits on the larrikins from the branches of the tree overhanging the street, and as the moon, like a giant seagull, defecates on the lovers and the masturbating grocer in his painting 'Lantana Lovers under Moonfire'), and most happily, perhaps, as the man inspired and refreshed by love who creatively transfigures the world in his paintings. But this is only one aspect of the question. The aesthetic/sexual urge is also shown as working itself out in the lives of other people. The Courtneys, for instance, frustrated in their desire to have a son, adopt Hurtle and make something of him: he is, in a very real sense, their work of art, product not merely of their urge to parenthood but also of their drive to create something beautiful and valuable for its own sake. Cutbush, the crypto-queer grocer, makes the same point when he claims to Duffield that the painting which
their chance meeting had inspired is in fact the consummation and fruition of his homosexual passion for the artist.

It must be admitted that there is something unpleasant, disturbing and even perhaps slightly obsessive about the excremental preoccupation exhibited by Duffield and presumably by White in *The Vivisector*. But it is clear that offensive though it may be it is part of a total view of art and society which is complex, intelligent and substantial. Great art can only be produced by individuals and by societies that are willing to acknowledge human nature in its totality — man’s capacity for the highest intellectual and aesthetic endeavour together with his capacity for cruelty and self-destructiveness as well as his capacity for compassion and self-sacrifice. The man who wishes to recreate an image of humanity in art must therefore be prepared, as Yeats said, to lie down in ‘the foul rag-and-bone shop of the heart’; and he must also be prepared if necessary, to cut himself off from normal family and societal relationships. (One of the most interesting features of *The Vivisector* is that all Duffield’s most important relationships are adoptive paradigms of real family connections — his ‘marriage’ is his affair with Nance; he has, of course, two sets of parents; he is both father and lover to Kathy Volkov; his most enduring bond is with his adopted sister Rhoda; and he is continually ‘dying’ and being reborn.) It is also implied that the society which can produce great art must be prepared to explore itself, to acknowledge the full range of human possibilities, to exercise imaginative and creative courage, honesty and adventurousness.

Such largeness of spirit and such capacity for self-examination have not characterised in any notable way our own society. Its philistinism, cultural shallowness, unthinking sentimentality and cheerfully arrogant anti-intellectualism have brought about a climate in which the creative artist — especially the writer — must feel himself to be forever struggling against crippling restrictions. And this struggle can distort and diminish his own productions. Hurtle Duffield is in some ways a limited and not altogether satisfying figure: not all artists, one imagines, find their position quite so isolated, painful and difficult as he does, but his limitations can legitimately be seen as the product in part of the social conditions under which he has to live and work.

*The Vivisector* is an attempt to present a portrait of a great contemporary Australian artist — and each of these four words needs to be given its due and proper weight. If Duffield’s greatness is flawed, if
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his genius is in some ways grotesquely distorted, the reasons are to be found partly in the fact that he is an Australian and that he is living in the second half of the twentieth century. The Vivisector can also be regarded as the report of an investigation into the state of Australian society. If the report is disturbing it is not wholly the reporter's fault. Patrick White is merely stating, as accurately and honestly as he can, the facts of the matter as he finds them. In the words of Albrecht von Haller, that other vivisector (who also happened to be a poet): 'nature decides the question'. In the end this is true not only for the scientist but also for the artist.
The Chant of Jimmie Blacksmith
taking cognisance of Keneally

W. S. Ramson

A thread of seasonal imagery runs through The Chant of Jimmie Blacksmith, asserting the alienness of Australia, the fact that it is the 'southern' land (p. 49)\(^1\) the land of 'inverted seasons' (p. 61), suggesting the powerlessness of the Church, of European man, to encroach upon it. And, though the immediate and explicit concern of the novel is with 'the rape of primitives', Keneally's deeper and continuing preoccupation is with the emerging 'fact' of Australia (p. 177), hence with the handling of the Aborigines less as an instance of man's inhumanity to man than as an aspect of 'the Australian experience', a chapter in the Australian's progress towards national identity. There are obvious similarities, both of technique and stance, with the earlier, and more ambitious, Bring Larks and Heroes; but whereas in that novel Keneally sought to use fable to expose universal moral issues, in this he has, to the novel's advantage, accepted a more limited focus: though the novel has a smaller significance, it has, as narrative, more integrity, and more concentrated strength than the uncertainly volatile pretensions of Bring Larks and Heroes allowed.

The Chant of Jimmie Blacksmith has, of course, an inherently stronger narrative structure than the earlier novel. Both begin in medias res, with the extended flashbacks recounting earlier happenings and establishing the context of the main action which follows; but whereas Halloran, once the description of his secret marriage has revealed him as a man of independent conscience, is, through no volition of his own, involved as witness or, at best, as an unwilling and

negative participant, in a series of incidents which reveal to him the brutality and corruption of the convict system, Jimmie Blacksmith, likewise a victim of circumstance, does take a positive step of declaring war (p. 86) and is thenceforward actively engaged first in the pursuit of his personal vendetta and then in flight. It is not simply that Jimmie Blacksmith, as hero, commands an involvement which Halloran, even at his theatrically conceived end, could not achieve: his quest, in its three phases of search and failure, outraged attack, and flight, provides a forward impetus and ensures a unity of action which, in Bring Larks and Heroes, the reader has intellectually to impose for himself. The plot lacks grandeur, not least because Jimmie Blacksmith is in no way 'expanded' as hero, carries, for instance, no connotations of noble savagery, but it has the simplicity and momentum of epic narrative. And that simplicity, while it gives the narrative strength, confirms its dimension: here, as in Bring Larks and Heroes, Keneally is tempted by the possibilities of fable but the actuality of the narrative of Jimmie Blacksmith is so strong as to no more than tolerate, and even then uneasily, the incidental symbolic posture, and not to allow it development into allegory.

It was, of course, this attempt to expand the significance of Bring Larks and Heroes, to turn Halloran into Everyman and story into fable, that gave that novel much of its interest. But the difficulties were formidable. Keneally does seem, in Bring Larks and Heroes particularly, to have been heavily influenced by White — most noticeably in his movement towards allegory and in his search for an appropriate idiom — and there is a sense in which, if Halloran was not conceived after Voss, he does appear a shadowy, much diluted, Irish Catholic derivative of White's shambling giant. But whereas Voss strides with unquestioned confidence from the social comedy of Sydney into his allegorical journey Halloran, from the moment of his introduction into the novel, is enmeshed in uncertainties. Like Voss, Bring Larks and Heroes — and, of course, The Chant of Jimmie Blacksmith — throws down the anchor of being, at least superficially, an historical novel. Like Voss, it asserts the 'reality' of a social fabric as a firm level of meaning from which one progresses to a higher, interpretative level. Like Voss, though far less deliberately, it uses the 'geography' of the novel as a further support, Keneally's insistence on the alien character of Australia, 'the world's worse end', a 'desert'
The Chant of Jimmie Blacksmith

and 'wilderness' (pp. i, 11, 36),\(^2\) being analogous to White’s more sustained and more imaginative figuring of the journey of the mind as a journey inland from the civilised outer surface or fringe. But Keneally’s problems, as well as his pretensions, are plain in the first paragraph of Bring Larks and Heroes:

At the world’s worse end, it is Sunday afternoon in February. Through the edge of the forest a soldier moves without any idea that he’s caught in a mesh of sunlight and shade. Corporal Halloran’s this fellow’s name. He’s a lean boy taking long strides through the Sabbath heat. Visibly, he has the illusion of knowing where he’s going. Let us say, without conceit, that if any of his ideas on the subject were not illusion, there would be no story. (p. 1)

Keneally, in a brief foreword, has located the novel ‘in a penal colony in the South Pacific’. And there is enough in the moments of intimacy between Halloran and Ann Rush, even in the household of Mrs Blythe, to give the novel a reasonably firm social setting; it does not matter if this is not so strongly established as that in Voss or if it cannot be substantiated as Sydney. But Halloran is never as credibly human as Voss, does not in fact seem to have any satisfactorily independent existence apart from that as a fable figure, a vehicle for possible allegorical meanings, for different aspects of the various intellectual oppositions — like that between a rigid, social morality and the individual conscience or that between an oath extracted under duress and a promise freely and sympathetically given — with which the novel is concerned. Indeed the very discreteness of Halloran’s several roles, as dreamer and poet, husband, unsuccessful rationalist, emphasised as it is by Keneally’s response to situations as dramatic situations and to dialogue as situational dialogue — Halloran on the cliff edge above the sea being different from Halloran confronting Mrs Blythe in her sitting room or Hearn in the forest — prevents the development of an internal consistency strong enough to hold the reader’s consciousness of Halloran as an individual secure against Keneally’s often almost whimsically managed manipulation of his non-hero. Overplayed in response to an immediate situation, as in the scene on the cliff edge where Halloran and Ann Rush sit together,

\(^2\) Bring Larks and Heroes (Sydney, Cassell, 1967). Page references are to this edition.
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'placating their destinics' (p. 29), or in the comic discussion of oaths with Mrs Blythe, Halloran is underdeveloped in terms of the stability which would make this sort of authorial indulgence feasible or allow more than the surface level of meaning. Yet the novel's first paragraph, with its transposition of 'penal colony' into the loose but loaded 'world's worse end', its suggested opposition of the hellishness of the 'world's worse end' with the light of the Sabbath, its poising of Halloran on 'the edge of the forest', 'in a mesh of sunlight and shade', its declaration of authorial omniscience and distancing in the pairing of 'boy' and the oddly colloquial 'fellow', its explicit statement that Halloran's conception of the meaning of his life is illusory and that it is the business of the novel to record his progress towards a fuller understanding — all this leads the reader away from the actual and towards the symbolic, urging him to see Halloran as a hero of potential allegorical significance far more insistently than, for instance, either White in Voss or Stow in Tourmaline.

It is no answer to say that Bring Larks and Heroes is neither Voss nor Tourmaline, that its intentions are different. Time and again Keneally leads the reader into the expectation of allegory — in his first paragraph; in the moment when Halloran and Ann Rush sit on the cliff edge 'four hundred yards from the town, on untouched earth ... [seeming] ... as much fated, each to each, as two people in a fable' (p. 19); in the characterisations of Ewers ('the Arts in that town', 'the artist'), Rowley ('ornamental in the wilderness') (pp. 30, 44, 36), Ann the would-be homemaker, Mrs Daker seen as lust, and the Governor as benevolent but powerless majesty; in his handling of situations, Mrs Blythe in her sitting room, 'blessed with a putrid leg as other women are with children' (p. 127), Mrs Daker's attempted seduction of the eunuch, Ewers, the moment when Halloran and Byrne, by the campfire, sit 'lost in the dark on the scruff of the world' (p. 127). Both Voss and Tourmaline have bases of social realism which allow them to retain credibility, and thematic and structural unities which sustain their movement on to the allegorical plane. Bring Larks and Heroes embarks on a course which runs uneasily between the two planes; it claims to deal with universal moral values and plays down the human individuality of its central character in the interests of representing different facets of an intellectual argument, flirting with the possibilities of an allegorical scheme which tentatively emerges but which is never consistently held and certainly
In *The Chant of Jimmie Blacksmith* this tendency to universalise, to move into allegory, without being as laboured is nonetheless present, almost as a habit of thought. Its effect is not to invite the reader on to a higher level of meaning consistently developed through the novel but to challenge him to add, almost at random, another and variable dimension: Mrs Healy becomes a ‘symbol’, ‘it could almost be said... an archetype’ (p. 21); Mr McCreadie is described for a particular moment with a one-word designation of role — like that of Halloran as poet or husband — as ‘the comforter’ (p. 154); Dowie Stead is labelled as looking ‘like a national product’ (p. 89); more importantly, an opposition is established between ‘the fact of tidy white ownership’ (p. 9), as promulgated by the Nevilles and illustrated by the Healys and Newbys, and the Aboriginal settlement at Verona, an image which ‘an eye — God’s eye — had ceased to see... squarely’, which ‘ran like an ulcer at the edges’ (p. 24). But another sort of patterning contains this incipient allegorising. The primary opposition in the novel is that of black and white and, though this is sometimes set out in ‘such abominably neat terms’ (p. 88) that, in contrast with the open-ended symbolism of *Bring Larks and Heroes*, it appears almost too wilfully, too tightly contrived — sometimes more for the sake of the pattern than the argument — it does give a context to its contributory types and figures. The opposition is established from the first sentence: ‘Jimmie Blacksmith’s maternal uncle Tabidgi’ is qualified by the parenthesis, ‘Jackie Smolders to the white world’. And it is then stretched by the conflict between the two religions, notably as the one opposes and the other has encouraged Jimmie’s marriage to a white girl, by the categorical insistence on the polarisation of the two sets of beliefs, the unbridgable nature of the

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3 The expression is Keneally’s — *Bring Larks and Heroes*, p. 2; *The Chant of Jimmie Blacksmith*, p. 2.

4 Both in this tongue-in-check comment on a particularly ‘neat’ sentence — ‘Mort must either be incriminated for fear of losing him or lost for fear of incriminating him’ (p. 88) — and in a degree of caution about the typing — ‘Dowie Stead looked like a national product’ (p. 89), Mrs Healy became to *jimmie* a symbol (p. 21) — Keneally seems to indicate awareness of the dangers of his over-use of such a dimension in *Bring Larks and Heroes* (my italics).
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no man’s land in which Mr Jimmie Blacksmith, half-breed, ‘hybrid’ (p. 27), is placed. It is a slimly argued but rigorously enforced polarisation, persuasive in the simplicity and strength of its distortion. Missionary Christianity is forced into one uncomprehending and ineffectual corner: the Rev. Mr Neville, gratuitously seated before his fly-blown butter, knows no anthropology (p. 4). Easter, when Jimmie Blacksmith should have been singing hymns, is made the season of his initiation (p. 5); much later, as the summer becomes hotter and drier, ‘the sun took on an Advent ferocity as if to dry out the fervour of Christians in that hemisphere’ (p. 3). This blunt dismissal of a missionary Christianity itself made alien in the hemisphere of ‘inverted seasons’ (p. 61) and only partially redeemed by the evangelist Neville’s belated acceptance of a measure of responsibility (pp. 175–6), is made the more potent by the glibly asserted equation of ‘the management of a mission station’ with the encouragement of the ambition ‘to work and complete work, the ambition of owning property, the ambition of marrying a white woman’ (p. 175). Evangelism so defined is set against the equally unexplored nonentity of an overridden Aboriginal culture, ‘horseshit’ as Jimmie Blacksmith is, more than half the time, able to label it (p. 75). As Easter is relied upon to establish its own connotations, so Jimmie Blacksmith’s initiation ceremony, visualised as it is as a dramatic situation and without any more concern to explicate Aboriginal culture and belief than there is in the curt summary of ‘the tribal pattern’ as understood by Tabidgi (p. 1), is required to establish the alternative pole. It is, of course, no part of Keneally’s concern to establish the dignity of the Aboriginal tribal system — rather to depict its despoliation; but it is not unreasonable to ask that his points of reference be more precisely, and more fairly, defined.

The white, Christian point of view, it is true, is represented also through its exemplars, notably Petra Graf, just as Jimmie’s Aboriginal background, suggested through Tabidgi’s concern as an elder, is depicted further through the behaviour and attitudes of his half-brother, Mort. But, as Mort is little more than a superstitious simpleton, so Petra Graf is so inflexibly a cardboard Christian that neither character is in any real sense amplificatory. The novel’s first chapter exposes the primary antithesis: Jimmie Blacksmith undergoing his initiation into tribal manhood, the Rev. Mr Neville, ‘not incommoded with any part of the truth’ (p. 2), preparing for the Easter hymns. The second chapter expands this to demonstrate that the two truths run parallel
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(p. 6) and that the territory between the two poles of ineffectuality is seductive for both: for the Aborigines 'the gulping of cheap wine in pub yards' is 'a tortured questing after a new world picture for Mun-gindi man' (p. 7), for the Rev. Mr Neville and his wife, the Methodist church in Muswellbrook, 'a green town on river flats', a 'landscape of promise' (p. 8). The facts of 'tidy white ownership' and of 'decency' (p. 9) draw both Mr Neville, who knows no temptation from 'corseted bounteous wombs', from the world of complacent rectitude in which he has an accepted place, and half-caste Jimmie Blacksmith, who has been guided by Mrs Neville towards the security of the symbols of 'home, hearth, wife, land' (p. 15), and who gives up his 'black core' (p. 12) as he falls in love (European style) (p. 27) with the surface image of the holy state of possession (p. 15), the picture of a family shopping, its 'homesomeness', its 'air of family security' (p. 11). The role advocated by Mrs Neville is that exemplified by Petra Graf; the innocence of white values, which Tabidgi is trying to preserve and Wongee Tom has lost, is that represented by Mort. The two are juxtaposed as the rock and the sand, the strong willed and the weak, those who 'grub and build' (p. 27) and the dispossessed, those who have a strong sense of 'commercial purpose' (p. 19) and those who dissipate their earnings in acknowledgment of communal ties; and, in a further shift, encouraged by the dramatic requirements of the narrative, the two characteristics exemplified by Petra Graf, possession leading to productivity and prosperity and a 'Christian' rectitude which seems to the outsider inviolability, are made the distinguishing factors between black women and white. Again, the division made, the exemplars are pushed to the furthest extremes — the 'scrawny gin called Florence' (p. 20) is set against Mrs Healy, 'the ideal landowner's wife', 'a symbol, a state of blessedness, far more than a woman' (p. 21). And, as the one retains the spurious link with Christianity — Jimmie Blacksmith's first positive move towards white values and away from the tribal being a 'baptism' (p. 13) and the state of ownership the state of blessedness, so the more powerfully used sexual imagery is exploited through the other. Though Keneally denies the 'directly sexual' in the act of fantasy which makes Jimmie Blacksmith choose Mrs Healy, as archetype rather than woman (p. 21), it is continually suggested in the delineation of his yearnings towards the state of blessedness of which he has elected white woman the symbol: his watching the white girl dispensing barley-sugar provokes
Wongee Tom’s ‘yer wouldn’t mind that fat girl! Yer stalky bastard!’ (p. 12); later, arguing with the Newbys, and catching sight of Petra Graf, ‘he thought of how he had never had a girl like that, a plump, ripe girl’, as contrasted with the black girls of the camps (p. 76); when he reaches the Healy farm, Mrs Healy is described as ‘lush Mrs Healy ... waiting to be split apart, as Petra Graf had waited’ (p. 99).

On the reverse side, that of the whites’ treatment of the Aborigines, this symbolism is used more powerfully. Mr Neville ‘had often felt the distinctive pull of some slant-grinned black face’ (p. 3), ‘the white phallus, powerful demolisher of tribes’ (p. 20), visits Verona nightly; Farrell, the representative of law and order, rapes his prisoner, Harry Edwards (p. 44); Mr Newby, like Healy and Lewis, his soul staked on Jimmie’s failure (p. 52), boastfully exposes ‘his patriarchal blunt genitals’ (p. 69) to Gilda, the wife who multiplies Jimmie Blacksmith’s rejections and debasement; Dowie Stead, spokesman for ‘British authority’ (p. 108), remembers ‘rolling lubras in Gulargambone’ (p. 90); the ‘rape of primitives’ (p. 177), one of the twin violences of Australian history, shines the teacher McCreadie as he sees the desecration of the womb-shaped initiation site: ‘here the history of mean death and lust for booze and acquiescence to the white phallus, gun, and sequestration and all the malaise of black squalor ... was, legible in the fracture lines of soft stones’ (p. 150).

Both sexual and religious symbolism are strongly present, and both make the situation of Jimmie Blacksmith the more potently realised. But both are present by a dubious logic and neither is altogether honest in its effects. Neither so much grows out of the argument as is imposed upon it, a rhetoric of persuasion rather than of illumination. And, while there is a legitimacy in the basic figure which sees the European treatment of Aborigines as rape, and a dramatic necessity to set even so deliberately the white man’s brutality and lust against the white woman’s veneer of rectitude and decency, there are instances when, as in Bring Larks and Heroes, Keneally seems more concerned with immediate, even incidental, effect than with any enrichment of the novel’s thematic unity: thus Wongee Tom’s comment on Jimmie Blacksmith’s ogling produces an irrelevant snigger, the description of the dressing of the body of Harry Edwards the same gratuitously

Again, there is a denial of the ‘directly sexual’ in Keneally’s qualifying ‘inappropriately to the debate’.
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sadistic shock as the authorial description of the murderer’s axe ‘flecked with the strange grey mucus of the brain’ (p. 80), or of Byrne’s bayoneting of a felon in Bring Larks and Heroes. Just as the depiction of human degradation was valid in that novel but did not warrant the excess of the cumulative horrors of the scene Halloran encountered in Surgeon Daker’s hospital, any more than the conception of a rotten society warranted dwelling on the putridity of Mrs Blythe’s leg, so in The Chant of Jimmie Blacksmith excess is repeatedly a characteristic of a rhetoric which responds to the possibilities of immediate situations rather than to overall thematic demands. Sometimes this suggests an authorial determination to shock, sometimes caprice: why describe the ‘whitey’ killed in Verona as ‘the lovely dead white boy with his well-sewn harelip’ (p. 25) or risk jeopardising the tightness of the symmetry which keeps Jimmie Blacksmith poised between the black world and the white⁶ by toying with it in the scene where ‘he slept with a full-blood in the same room where Mort had her half-breed sister’ (p. 29)? Even though this is a more contained novel than Bring Larks and Heroes, in that it accepts a national rather than a universal dimension and seeks to pattern itself, in an Australian context, on the single issue of black versus white, Aborigine versus settler, even though it is so much tighter as narrative, The Chant of Jimmie Blacksmith, patently a fable in its method of selecting from the available story material, is similarly weakened by the inadequacies of the control exercised over its basic patterns and symbolism. It may seem paradoxical that the directions are different, that the open-ended symbolism of Bring Larks and Heroes suggests pretension and the wilful manipulation of referents in The Chant of Jimmie Blacksmith undue contrivance; but in each case the strength of the novelist’s vision is sapped by the inadequate harnessing of technique.

There is a second respect in which a comparison between Keneally’s prose and White’s suggests itself. In Bring Larks and Heroes, particularly, Keneally followed White in using unidiomatic syntax and vocabulary. And again, as in the handling of symbolism, what in the one instance was a deliberate and controlled use of stylistic effects, integrally a part of the novel’s technique, became, for Keneally, an area of miscalculation. White’s prose, taken in isolation, is mannered

⁶ It was presumably a concern for this symmetry which led to the choice of the name ‘Blacksmith’.
and irritates the reader because of its constant rebuttal of his expecta-
tions. It does not eschew the incidental effects of diction, imagery, or
rhythm but constantly directs them to the one end, incorporating
them in a style which is appropriate to the grandeur of Voss's theme
and exploiting them in the process of arresting and redirecting the
reader along the proper course. If Boyd, in his own figure, is like a
pointillist, White is expressionist in his handling of texture and colour,
in his distortion of a natural appearance to jar his audience into a new
and more intense perception of the aspect of the subject he is seeking
to communicate. Keneally similarly employs a style which is calcu-
lated to control the reader tightly, to move him forward at the pace
he wants and to ensure that every word and phrase is savoured to the
full. Keneally's syntax is not as disjunctive as White's: in Bring Larks
and Heroes the effect of disjunction is gained rather by breaks between
sentence units, by the apparent density of sentence units, and by
constant switch from narrative to comment, Keneally always being
present, with varying degrees of intrusiveness, as commentator. The
first sentence of the novel, quoted earlier, serves as an example. This
is not so much an arresting device, as disjunctive structures are in
White, though, like the high proportion of dialogue or reported
dialogue, and the heavy use of the present tense, it increases the sense
of immediacy and directness. Its main purpose seems to be to estab-
lish a basic, plain style which is hard, raw, and unsentimental — a
'manly' prose which, on the one hand, gives the appearance of pulling
no punches and, on the other, is able to provide a secure basis for the
'tropical sprouting of metaphor', 'the ripe, many-tendrilled prose
which ... offers the kaleidoscope of the suffering sensibility'.

The prose of The Chant of Jimmie Blacksmith is a more refined
instrument, less kaleidoscopic in its effects and more serviceable. But
it still has its random purple patches, sometimes glaringly tangential
in what ought to be so tight a narrative:

Swaddled and hooded, McCreadie lay where Mort waited, for it was his
turn to carry. The fervor of cicadas drilled in the ear. The red-hot lust
of the brute earth to flesh itself out with voice and bug-eyes and dry
twiggy locomotion had brought them up out of the pores in soil. After

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a dark glutinous incubation, they now had a short season to rant, to
burr and shriek notches in the night's smoothest edge. (p. 156)

More critically, the effects of key passages are, like those of similar
passages in Bring Larks and Heroes, dissipated through either this
same tangential quality or through sheer looseness. There is nothing
quite as extravagant as one of Halloran's last evenings of which he
would not have been aware 'as dusk except for the tear in the roof';
which 'had a porcelain fragment of sky in view', 'cut off raw from
heaven's haunch' which, 'at first deep blue... bled itself away' (p.
216), but there are many moments when the rhetoric runs beyond the
generally spare quality the novel claims for itself, moments not pro-
tected by the ironic stance which Keneally took so obstrusively in
Bring Larks and Heroes and which remains an ingredient — as the
basis of a shifting authorial focus — in The Chant of Jimmie Black-
smith. Mrs Newby's dying may have been, as the awed doctor, sombre
police, and women weeping at her clearheadedness suggest, 'grand'
(p. 88). But is it 'royal' or 'saintly', and is either set of connotations
pursued? Newby himself may have been conscious of the alienness of
the land, 'numbed by its air of withdrawal', but the suggestion of
'vast dispassionate and random devilries beneath its crust', the sudden
alliance in his mind between 'the earth and Jimmie Blacksmith' (p. 88),
is itself random and far from dispassionate, claiming for a moment
but never developing a further dimension behind the depiction of
'tidy white ownership' (p. 9) encroaching on an alien and unreceptive
land. And it is uncomfortably at odds with an earlier 'throw-away'
line, given an extra significance by being made a separate paragraph:
'The strangler vines were flowering in their hold on the lean trunks
of mountain ash' (p. 9). Taken on their own, in the context in which
they occur, such sentences appear to add strength; but it is not a
strength which stands scrutiny, a 'many-tendrilled' evocativeness in
fact working against the mode of fable which Keneally has accepted,
and making suspect, by exposing the undoubted cleverness of, even
those passages where the rhetoric is properly in the service of the
novelist's vision.

I have argued that, because Jimmie Blacksmith is more approach-
able as a hero than Halloran, because the events in his life have their
own progression and logic, the novel is stronger as narrative than
Bring Larks and Heroes. But that, in its symbolic patterning and
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rhetoric, it shows the same inadequacy of control as so betrayed the earlier novel. In *Bring Larks and Heroes* the uncertainty of both rhetoric and allegorising was compounded by the insubstantial nature of the main character and the indefiniteness of the structure. Halloran’s journey of exploration is little more positive than the imposition on a vaguely defined, ‘suffering sensibility’ of a series of exemplifications of the brutality and heartlessness of the convict system; in more general terms, the exposure of the individual conscience to its surrounding world of contingencies. In the sense that the novel is a journey of exploration, that there is a forward movement, the structure of the argument must take the form of a recording and assimilating of experiences until the time when Halloran is forced to react, to reassess his position, as an individual, within the system, the stand he has taken and self-justification he has accepted. This allows a structure which is, loosely, picaresque, a movement from exposure to exposure until it becomes impossible for Halloran to evade the issue of questioning his own moral stance any longer. If Halloran stands, simply, for the individual conscience as opposed to the rigidity of the social system — in, for example, the instance of his uneasily contracted ‘marriage’ with Ann as opposed to the strictures of Mrs Blythe — he has the appearance of having acknowledged a higher law, and found justification for his actions in this. But what appears initially as strength, the ability to retain a privacy of belief, is so only in his dreamer’s world and is exposed to the successive hammerblows of the series of incidents which reveal to him the corruption of the ‘system’. His relationship with Ann becomes increasingly a form of escape from the realities which are forced upon him through the incidents involving Mealey, Ewers, and Quinn, and through the treatment of the mutineers at the Crescent. His only positive actions in these situations are ineffectual, his last positive action, that in which he reluctantly agrees to help Hearn, is made in accord with his sympathies as an individual and against the oath to society which he still holds, and can therefore be seen in terms of the individual conscience acting against the authority of the social system. But it is also an action instigated by Hearn, that indeterminately allegorical figure; made under pressure, in that his relationship with Ann, his private world, is threatened; and made in support of one individual seeking to escape — he is not, in other words, opposing the system, not reassessing his own position, but helping Hearn to slide out, to take in a sense the
same course as he has in his private marriage with Ann. The series of brutal situations, most vividly described, has a cumulative effect on the reader, but not a progressive effect on Halloran. What gives every appearance of being the climax of the novel, the moment of choice in the terms that the novel has established, becomes a moment which is at once inescapable and evasive. The novel declines into the protracted theatricalities of Halloran’s hanging with its central issue unresolved.

In *The Chant of Jimmie Blacksmith* this danger is avoided. Jimmie Blacksmith is not only more fully realised as a character, but his course of action is, from the first, positive. He does not, as it were, indulge himself with an intellectual stance but meets the world somewhat more than halfway, and the sequence of events is less one of reluctant discovery than ofanguishing rebuttal. In all three respects, then, the novel is surer. The rhetoric is tighter, if sometimes too consciously so, the symbolic pattern, however dubious its rationale, firmer, the greater narrative structure more positive. Yet, brilliantly written as it frequently is, less ambitious as it so wisely is, *The Chant of Jimmie Blacksmith* falls short of promise for just the same reason that the narrative never quite successfully binds dramatic incident and thematic pretension.

Nowhere is this better demonstrated than in Keneally’s handling of two key passages, that depicting the settlement of Verona and that recording the reactions of McCreadie and Jimmie Blacksmith to the despoliation of an Aboriginal initiation site. Keneally’s vision of Verona is, quite explicitly, the amplification of a single, self-contained ‘image’:

It seemed that an eye — God’s eye — had ceased to see Verona squarely. The image ran like an ulcer at the edges.

At night the candle-light was fragmented, and shattered the silhouettes of boys from town and lubras dancing out their death. (p. 24)

Jimmie, the hybrid, is poised between ‘the fact of tidy white ownership’ (p. 9) and the ‘diverse squalor’ (p. 24) of Verona, between the ‘full hips’ of Mrs Healy and the scrawliness of ‘skinny Florence’ (p. 21); Verona, named ‘in whimsical hope of justice as fine as Shakespeare’s’ (p. 26), is the stalking ground of the ‘white phallus, powerful demolisher of tribes’ (p. 20), ‘a chaos of black-white meanness, ... off God’s globe, if God had a globe’ (p. 26). Though there are later re-
minders of the popularity of rolling gins as a pastime (pp. 90–1) and of the presence of such settlements as Verona on the fringe of many a tidy white town (p. 36), these are curiously unrelated to the portentous image established early in the novel: Dowie Stead’s obsession for Tessie, ‘a lazy, gristy dying girl’ (p. 91) — reminiscent of but not linked with Florence — is a further demonstration of white weakness for the ‘pull in the easy, slack-mouthed lubras’ (p. 57), a pull felt even by the Rev. Mr Neville (p. 3), and made the basis of Dowie Stead’s shock confrontation with his father. Ostensibly a means of exposing the hollowness of the righteous facade of ‘a population that sprouted blunt precept’ (p. 58), like the peculiarly protracted correspondence between Clarice and the would-be federal politician (pp. 165–9), each of these incidents is nonetheless played independently and for its immediate dramatic effects; and there is something incipiently voyeuristic about a presentation which is so explicit in its dwelling on lust as motivation — in the slick use of colloquialisms like ‘roll’ and in the exploitation of the connotations of ‘black velvet’ (p. 36) — and so visual in its easy capturing of physical detail — like that of the ‘easy, slack-mouthed lubras’ or, more vividly, the confrontation of Dowie Stead and his father, ‘both unbuttoned and grotesquely ready for the same black arse, face to face’ (p. 92). Similarly the heavy portentousness of the description of Verona is essentially discrete. It is true that, in the primary opposition established between black and white, the diverse squalor of Verona is posed against the variously represented fact of tidy white ownership — as it is represented by Petra Graf, by Irish settlers and Scots — and that, once the initial flashback sequence is completed, these poles stand firm in the background of Jimmie Blacksmith’s plight. And that the ‘atrocious death’ (p. 42) of Harry Edwards in Verona’s ‘chaos of black-white meanness’ (p. 26) foreshadows Jimmie Blacksmith’s own. But the portentousness of the description is greater than its thematic utility warrants: the statement that the image of Verona is distorted in ‘God’s eye’, the suggestion of ‘the bad portent of blood’ (p. 26), the contrived figure which makes the dead white man ‘the animal of their true totem’ (pp. 26–7), these all heighten the occasion but with rhetoric which does not extend

*Keneally not infrequently uses words from the colloquial register, usually words with strong connotations, to achieve particular effects; cf. ‘abo’, p. 35.*
beyond the occasion. One recalls, in *Bring Larks and Heroes*, the
glimpse of Halloran and Ann on the cliff edge, 'as much fated, each
to each, as two people in a fable' (p. 19), and its undeveloped al-
legorical pretension; or the suggestive return to the notion of the
alienness of Australia made by the last phrase in the comment on
Gilda's marriage in *The Chant of Jimmie Blacksmith*:

The cruel thing was, as the farmer might have told her, that girls in
romances don't allow themselves to be rolled by half-castes on a river
bank in the world's south [my italics]. (p. 57)

The description of Verona, like each of these examples, gives an
illusion of depth of meaning; it makes the moment momentarily
stronger, but it is difficult for the reader to find much beyond this
'fervid illusion' (p. 81).

The scene in which McCreadie, the white teacher, Jimmie Black-
smith, and his half-brother Mort walk into and attempt to rebuild
a ritual site destroyed by white picnickers is in some ways more
crucial, being emblematic of 'the rape of primitives' which is the novel's
ostensible theme. Yet its discreteness in the narrative is indicated by
the fact that it is only a spur-of-the-moment decision of McCreadie
that leads the trio there; it is no developed climactic moment but a
carefully sprung surprise, neatly and dramatically effective in that it
provides a means of separating Mort from Jimmie which is related
simply and directly to Mort's retaining 'his nearly intact black soul'
(p. 148) while Jimmie Blacksmith has given up 'his black core' (p. 12),
his soul having 'too much Christian' (p. 151) in it. But, at a deeper
level of meaning, as a statement of white despoliation of Aboriginal
culture, while it gains a legitimate strength from depicting this in
terms of the desecration of a holy place, it succumbs, in its depiction
of the overriding white society, to a dubious rhetoric of extremes,
adding in the gratuitous image of 'rugger-bugger' vandalism. Again,
it would seem, Keneally is seeing the scene more as a single, strongly
visualised, dramatic moment than as one growing out of the thematic
pattern so far established; the depiction of the Aborigines, the 'yield-
ing loose-grained men' in terms of their soft coastal *tjuringa* stones
(p. 150) is a powerful summation of earlier statements about the men
of Verona, but the 'rugger-bugger' image adds a dimension which is
quite extraneous to the picture of the white Australian so far de-
veloped and, if it is shocking, it is so because of connotations which are similarly extraneous and which come, as it were, ready-made with the image.

One might argue, generally, that Keneally's habit of creating scenes powerful in their immediate impact effectively prosecutes the narrative; that characterising Jimmie Blacksmith, newly made police tracker as 'a comic abo in some other black's clothes' (p. 35), Jimmie Blacksmith and Mort, successfully evading capture, as 'the two gay fugitives' of a Bulletin cartoon (pp. 136-7), and Dowie Stead, with the other 'elected' pursuers (p. 90), as 'a fast striking force, like the new striking forces that were being formed in South Africa to hunt the slithery Boer' (p. 106), or as 'knights' (p. 108), gives a strength and clarity, frequently a visual clarity, to the narrative. And this is certainly an intention of Keneally's larger patterning: it is noticeable that the simple black-white opposition with which the novel begins, its usefulness outlived once the murders have been committed and the primary narrative thread becomes that of flight and pursuit, is replaced by a more complex but no less rigid pattern. The cast is divided into fugitives, mourners, 'elected' pursuers, the impassive administrator of justice and his ghoulish grotesque, the mediating 'comforter', McCreadie, more positive than the Rev. Mr Neville because less aligned; and some scenes, like the gathering for the Newby funeral (pp. 88-9), are readily visualised in the terms established by such type-casting. But there is a shifting of focus involved which either distracts from the narrative or dissipates its energy; or which, more insidiously, makes its own tangential, if not altogether extraneous, impact and adds an essentially spurious depth or significance. The Newby funeral gathering is a case in point, and short enough to quote in full:

Shattered Mrs Newby lived for three days and said that it was the old one who had done her most damage.

Attending doctors were awed by the magnificence of her will towards life. The police paid sombre compliments to the explicit quality of her evidence. Women wept at her clear-headed mourning of her daughters and the esteemed Miss Graf.

Her dying was grand; it was royal and saintly, outscaling her weekly cheese-paring in Gilgandra, her bullying of Gilda, to an extent that Jimmie Blacksmith would have considered unjust.
Mr Newby was tranced. Farmers who had come to offer services to the police kept drugging him from flasks of rum and whisky.

Through the fug of sympathetic liquors, he remembered and wondered how he had ever forgotten that when he had first come to the west as an eighteen-year-old from Dorset he had seen and been numbed by its air of withdrawal, as if it had vast dispassionate and random devilries beneath its crust. Yet it had become his home, nearer to him than his heart’s blood. He did not know how he had ever settled to it. He knew he would sell up now and perhaps go into business in Sydney. To his mind, the earth and Jimmie Blacksmith had become suddenly allied.

The elder of the two grown sons had been the first to go into the kitchen. He rode off to Gilgandra where there were three doctors. What he needed were people to say yes, they are horrifically dead; and country policemen to tell him yes, this is the worst outrage.

All day Saturday and Sunday women — the women whose men brought flasks — brought cakes, made continual tea for policemen, doctors, mourners, condolers, and served it in Mrs Newby’s china.

The Newby boys were still talkative. Still they wanted to speak of what it had been like before blankets and scouring brushes had been brought into play. They were insatiable for words like monstrous, unspeakable, black butchers.

‘After all Dad did for them bastards,’ the younger son said, and the sentiment was passed from mourner to mourner. (pp. 88–9)

The dramatic situation is richly conceived and economically realised. The prose gives an impression of strength, the compactness one of assured control. But there is a sense in which the narrative, for a moment, stands still as the realisation of the scene embroiders rather than informs the fable. It is not simply that, in the description of Mrs Newby’s ‘royal and saintly’ dying, and of Mr Newby’s pondering the west’s ‘air of withdrawal’, the ‘vast dispassionate and random devilries beneath its crust’, the rhetoric claims responses which have no validity argued elsewhere in the novel. There is, more importantly, the awkward mixing of two quite disparate modes, the shift from straight narrative prose, prose of statement, to that of ironically observed social comedy, on the one hand, and the symbolically loaded prose of fable on the other. The basis of this is the rugged prose of Bring Larks and Heroes, a terse, disjunctive prose with the virtues of
the plain style but a ready tolerance of rhetorical extravagance, the plain as it were anchoring the rhetorical. Thus the two mundanely pragmatic sentences — ‘He did not know how he had ever settled to it. He knew he would sell up now and perhaps go into business in Sydney’ — somehow, aided by the modifying ‘To his mind’, encourage the reader to give credence to the statement that ‘the earth and Jimmie Blacksmith had become suddenly allied’. And here, as in *Bring Larks and Heroes*, such a prose does not eschew a random flowering, as in ‘nearer to him than his heart’s blood’, or the emotive tactic of giving a syntactic emphasis to a gratuitous statement of detail like ‘the women whose men brought flasks’, or ‘and served it in Mrs Newby’s china’.

But, when the narrative is strong, and when some measure of depth of meaning is established, it is fair to ask why Keneally tacks into the relatively meaningless presentation of a still-life. The one-word description of Mrs Newby as ‘shattered’ keeps alive the unspeakable fact of violence; her attributing the major share of the damage to Jackie Smolders confirms Jimmie Blacksmith, who had tried to shield his uncle, in the role of victim; the funeral occasion, like a stock scene from a Western, suggests both the comfort of such a gathering and the preparation for revenge. But the serried ranks of doctors, police and attendant women, and their formalised reactions to the lady’s dying, are so presented as to take the description out of the context of the narrative and on to another plane. It is as if Keneally, here as in his later, explicatory use of quotations and cartoons from the *Bulletin*, is thinking in terms of an actual or envisaged contemporary account: the wooden stereotypes of nineteenth century journalese present a stagey, static scene; they have the same sort of validity and the same irrelevance that a photograph accompanying one of the *Bulletin’s* reports might have had. To the extent that they justify the elevation of ‘cheese-paring’ Mrs Newby’s dying to the grand scale, or capture the shock of Mr Newby (why the poetic ‘tranced’?) and his sons, it is as part of such a discrete and posed picture: the white world, in uncomprehending outrage, contemplates the assault made upon it and comforts itself with funereal ritual and talk. Keneally’s response to the scene has an ironic, almost comic, detachment, not altogether out of keeping with his concern to expose the hypocrisies of white society or with a characterisation which is, throughout, more of types than individuals. But, succumbing to its potential as an independent
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dramatic situation, he develops the scene beyond what is consonant with its place in the narrative. The disjunctive prose works because it is firmly anchored by the basic, plain style prose; but the disjunction of modes is less effective because the anchor is less sure. As the immediately following portrait of the avenging Dowie Stead, 'the national product', his secret romanticism and his practical toughness exemplified in his choice of companions (p. 89), is masterful in its contrivance, but leaves the reader wondering just why such a focus has been chosen so, in this instance, the reader lacks an authoritative authorial stance against which he can position such a suddenly shifting focus. And Keneally is so assured a stylist, so demanding in his visualisation of scenes and situations, that this anchor is necessary if the reader is to retain confidence in his masterful author's lead, and not be brought finally to question the seriousness of the novel's thematic pretensions.

Significantly, in this as in Bring Larks and Heroes, it is the conclusion, and the manner of the conclusion, which most tellingly expose the novel's weakness. As Bring Larks and Heroes succumbs to the theatricality of Halloran's hanging and fails to resolve its central issue, so The Chant of Jimmie Blacksmith is rounded off with an unconscionable neatness that, intellectually, takes yet another side step. The basic pattern is reasserted, but subject to further distortion and the introduction of a new polarisation. Jimmie Blacksmith is finally cornered not by the avenging Imperialist but by an invincible white omnipresence, not in the romantic manner of a Western which his sometimes gay, sometimes heroic flight sometimes encouraged, but in a symbolically recapitulatory scene which emphasises the insignificance and inevitableness of an Aborigine's death, in the ineffectual shelter of a church which houses the derelict Dulcie and which still havers with a responsibility towards the Aborigine, voiced by the Rev. Mr Neville, but vindictively denied by the representative of an Australia no longer colonial, Tom Dancer, Secretary of the Union of Wharf Labourers (p. 175). The historical context, little more than suggested by the loosely spun thread of allusion to Federation and emergent nationhood, is suddenly, in quite different terms, reasserted. The 'rape of primitives' becomes a thing of the past in Australia's new 'state of grace', just as the subject matter of Bring Larks and Heroes, the viciousness and brutality of the convict era, is forgotten, 'a rusted fable in the brazen Arcady' (p. 177). A new rhetoric, 'the
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candy floss’ of ‘sunny April’, in ‘the spring of the southern world’ (p. 178), is asserted, the ‘Fresh New Page of Democracy’ is turned, the fable slickly given its place in the Australian’s progress towards national identity, the assumption that this has been a novel about ‘the Australian experience’ resumed as glibly as the resemblance between this ‘Fresh New Page’ and the esteemed Miss Graf is explicitly claimed (p. 177). Even the novel’s thematic pretension has become a stage prop, and its seriousness is left very much in question.
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