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THEMES AND PREOCCUPATIONS IN THE
NOVELS OF
AUSTRALIAN EXPATRIATES

by

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Except where acknowledgement is made,
this thesis is my own work.

Diana Brydon

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this thesis is to fill a gap in Australian literary criticism by examining certain recurrent themes and preoccupations in the novels of representative Australian expatriate writers from Mrs Campbell Praed, who published her first novel in 1880, to George Johnston, whose last unfinished novel was published in 1971. Whereas the achievement of those writers who stayed at home and expressed recognizably Australian social values in their work has received a great deal of critical attention, the work of the expatriates has more often been ignored or rejected as "un-Australian". It is the contention of this thesis that only when the expatriate heritage has been explored as fully as the nativist tradition can a balanced overview of Australian literature, and indeed of Australian cultural history, be attained.

The theme of expatriation — both the reality and the dream of escape from a provincial society to one of the metropolitan centres of the world — and its thematic offshoots — the experiences of exile and of alienation, the voyage as escape and quest, and the difficulties of communicating in an increasingly fragmented world — are examined in a few of the novels of Mrs Campbell Praed; Henry Handel Richardson, Christina Stead, Martin Boyd, Patrick White, Helen Simpson, and George Johnston. Discussion also centres around their recurring preoccupations with the relationship between the Old World and the New, with the conflict between a need for roots and a need for motion, and an interest in the landscape and in the emotions of nostalgia and of *dépaysement* which it arouses.

Particular attention is paid in the first section of the thesis to the use and development of the international novel and, within it,

of the Australian heroine. *An Australian Heroine, Policy and Passion, Maurice Guest, For Love Alone,* and *Lucinda Brayford* are each seen to centre about the journey (or the desired journey) of a young provincial person to a centre of metropolitan culture, and to concentrate on his or her quests for love and freedom. Because the journey is a basic element in the expatriate experience, the second section concentrates on the theme of the quest for knowledge and for freedom in novels of a symbolic orientation. *The Fortunes of Richard Mahony, The Aunt's Story* and *Voss* describe three quests — of an emigrant, of a traveller and of an explorer — each of which ends in the alienation of madness. The third section examines the memoirs of three character-narrators, who attempt to comprehend and conquer their sense of the essentially solitary fate of the individual within a world he cannot understand and in which he is torn by dualities he can neither reconcile nor accept, by exploring and ordering their experiences in an imaginative work of art. *Boomerang*, the four Langton novels of Martin Boyd and George Johnston's Meredith trilogy are discussed in this final section. Whereas the protagonists discussed in Section One embark on literal voyages, which never lose their close connection to reality however many further dimensions they assume, the protagonists of Section Two undertake symbolic quests, in which the distinctions between dream and reality tend to blur. The character-narrators examined in Section Three are introspective voyagers, who bring dream and reality together in their art.

The investigation concludes with the observation that most of Australia's expatriate novelists are more deeply concerned with the symbolic than with the literal implications of expatriation. They use the concepts of exile to question the validity of the norms of behaviour and belief which man has fashioned himself in order to cope with his own divided nature and the demands of his world. Their novels illustrate

the fact that the expatriate perspective may involve an increased awareness of the value of a felt relationship with the land of birth, in addition to the kind of critical distance which a knowledge of alienation may bring. Australian literature appears more diversified, more sophisticated and more critical of the Australian ethos when the novels of expatriate writers are included in the literary tradition.

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this thesis is to fill a gap in Australian literary criticism by examining certain recurrent themes and preoccupations in the novels of representative Australian expatriate writers, from Mrs Campbell Praed, who published her first novel in 1880, to George Johnston, whose last unfinished novel was published in 1971. The thesis is concerned with two central tasks, one arising from the other. First, the theme of expatriation — both the reality and the dream of escape from a provincial society to one of the metropolitan centres of the world — and then its thematic offshoots — the experiences of exile and of alienation, the voyage as escape and as quest, and the difficulties of communicating in an increasingly fragmented world — are traced in novels by selected expatriate writers. Particular attention is paid in the first section to the use and development of the international novel and, within it, of the Australian heroine. A questioning of social conventions, particularly with regard to the characteristics of, and relationships between, the sexes, and an urge toward the realization of a more fulfilling life within society characterize the novels in this section. Because the journey is one of the most basic elements of the expatriate experience, the second section concentrates on the theme of the quest for knowledge and for freedom in novels of a symbolic orientation. In these novels, literal journeys are only important as images of spiritual quests. Yet the more abstract the concept of exile becomes, the more anguished is the experience. The third section examines the theme of the return to the homeland as exemplified in the memoirs of introspective character-narrators, who are seeking to come to terms with their past and with themselves by writing of their experiences. Finally, the fictional treatment of expatriation invites

a consideration of the extent to which the national background and the actual experience of expatriation appear to have been important factors in the work of the expatriate novelists. Too often theories of an expatriate dilemma or of a complex fate have been used to explain novels to which they bear little or no relevance. Conversely, the continuity of certain preoccupations and concerns among the work of Australia's expatriate novelists has not yet received the notice its presence warrants.

The fact that so many of the twentieth century's greatest writers were expatriates suggests that study of the issue will be of continuing usefulness as a way of approaching the central difficulties of twentieth-century culture and society. The study of Australian expatriate novelists is helpful initially as an approach to understanding the special problem of the relationship between a colonial and a post-colonial society and its writers, and it is valuable ultimately in providing one framework in which to place the larger issues of the writer's relation to his work, his society and his universe.

Expatriation has been used as a focus for several American studies concerned with the changing myths of the Old World in relation to the New,¹ and with "the significance of nationality, the artist's relation to it,

¹*The American Writer and the European Experience*, ed. Margaret Denny and William H. Gilman (1950; rpt. New York: Hashell House, 1968); Marius Bewley, *The Complex Fate* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1952); R.P. Blackmur, "The American Literary Expatriate", *The Lion and the Honeycomb* (London: Methuen, 1956); Christof Wegelin, *The Image of Europe in Henry James* (1958; rpt. Dallas: Southern Methodist University Press, 1967); Marius Bewley, *The Eccentric Design* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1959); Cushing Strout, *The American Image of the Old World* (New York: Harper & Row, 1963); Nathalia Wright, *American Novelists in Italy* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1965); Alan Holder, *Three Voyagers in Search of Europe* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1966); Ernest Earnest, *Expatriates and Patriots* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1968); Harold T. McCarthy, *The Expatriate Perspective* (Cranbury, New Jersey: Associated University Presses, 1974). This is by no means a complete list, but it indicates those books which I found most helpful.

and *its* relation to civilization".¹ To some extent, these may be seen as models for the present study. It was the Americans who first introduced the idea of the impossibility of working creatively in a new land which was necessarily obsessed with the physical demands of survival and growth, and who introduced also the doubtful solution of the literary expatriate. Australian and Canadian critics looked to the American example rather than to each other for both a justification and a vindication of their own predicament, despite the fact that America's position as an independent nation freed it somewhat from many of the problems of psychological dependency suffered by "daughter nations" within the Commonwealth.

Washington Irving's complaint in a letter to his niece in 1841, "Good Lord . . . deliver me from the all pervading commonplace which is the curse of our country",² is startling in its resemblance to Patrick White's horror over a hundred years later in the face of the "Great Australian Emptiness" and the "exaltation of the 'average'".³ However, Henry James's well-known formulation of the dilemma has had the most impact on Australian intellectuals. In his essay on Hawthorne he asserts:

This moral is that the flower of art blooms only where the soil is deep, that it takes a great deal of history to produce a little literature, that it needs a complex social machinery to set a writer in motion.⁴

¹Alan Holder, *Three Voyagers*, p.84.

²Quoted in Stanley Williams, "Cosmopolitanism in American Literature before 1880", in *The American Writer and the European Experience*, ed. Denny and Gilman, p.45.

³Patrick White, "The Prodigal Son", *Australian Letters*, 1, No.3 (1958), 38-39.

⁴Henry James, *Hawthorne*, in *The Shock of Recognition*, ed. Edmund Wilson (1943; New York: Farrar, Strass & Cudahy, 1955), p.428.

John Barnes takes this quotation as the epigraph to his collection, *The Writer in Australia*, in which he offers a selection of documents relevant to the making of a study of the "progress of Australian writing in relation to the central struggle to achieve an independent literary tradition".¹ James goes on to enumerate "the items of high civilization . . . which are absent from the texture of American life":

No State, in the European sense of the word, and indeed barely a specific national name. No sovereign, no court, no personal loyalty, no aristocracy, no church, no clergy, no army, no diplomatic service, no country gentlemen, no palaces, no castles, nor manors, nor old country houses, nor parsonages, nor thatched cottages, nor ivied ruins; no cathedrals, nor abbeys, nor little Norman churches; no great universities nor public schools — no Oxford, nor Eton, nor Harrow; no literature, no novels, no museum, no pictures, no political society, no sporting class — no Epsom nor Ascot!²

The South African expatriate writer, Dan Jacobsen, points out that not only is James's description of the "denudation" of the social scene an accurate depiction of the South African and of the Commonwealth experience, but that it further emphasizes "the absence of a specific intellectual tradition comparable with that of the United States at the time James wrote, and of which James's *Hawthorne* is in itself most impressive evidence".³ The American parallel must therefore be invoked with care: the differences may prove as illuminating as the similarities.

James's list of American deficiencies is continually cited by those who are concerned with early colonial cultures, but sometimes they

¹"Introduction: *Art and Nationality*", *The Writer in Australia* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1969), p.xvi.

²*Hawthorne*, p.460.

³"The Writer in the Commonwealth", *Time of Arrival and Other Essays* (London: Weidenfield & Nicholson, 1962), pp.161-162.

neglect James's own conclusion to the catalogue. He continues:

The natural remark . . . would be that if these things are left out, everything is left out. The American knows that a good deal remains — that is his secret, his joke, as one may say.¹

In his own work and in his criticism, James was far more concerned with what remained than with what was lacking. In a letter to Charles Eliot Norton in 1872, he summarizes his position as follows: "It's a complex fate, being an American, and one of the responsibilities it entails is fighting against a superstitious valuation of Europe".² Unfortunately, a writer's popular image is often a simplification and hence a distortion of his true stance. James's situation is no exception. He is usually regarded as an artist who epitomizes the "complex fate", not of being an American, but of being an American obsessed by the glamour of Europe.

James himself tired early of this superficial image and wrote rejecting it in terms remarkably similar to those to be employed by Martin Boyd years later.³ James complained that he was

deadly weary of the whole 'international' state of mind — so that I *ache*, at times, with fatigue at the way it is constantly forced upon me as a sort of virtue or obligation. I can't look at the English-American world, or feel about them, any more, save as a big Anglo-Saxon total, destined to such an amount of melting together that an insistence on their differences becomes more and more idle and pedantic⁴

¹ *Hawthorne*, p.460.

² Quoted in Peter Buitenhuis, *The Grasping Imagination* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1970), p.67.

³ For Boyd's complaint, see Chapter 5, pp.135-136.

⁴ Letter to William James, October 1888, quoted in Buitenhuis, *The Grasping Imagination*, p.165.

This is an attitude few Australian critics would be prepared to accept with regard to their own literature, although it is an accepted commonplace to several of Australia's expatriate writers.

In a review of Mathews' *Tradition in Exile* A.D. Hope argues that the usual conception of colonial literatures passing through three stages from provincial dependence to provincial self-assertion to achieve at last a secure national identity might just as reasonably be viewed from a quite different perspective. The various colonial literatures may be regarded as supplying the frontier tradition of the metropolitan culture which was once centred in England.¹ He concludes:

But with the emergence in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries of prosperous and politically independent populations with a level of culture, education and civilized institutions comparable to those of the homeland, with vastly improved communications between and within the different parts of the English-speaking world, there is perhaps a tendency towards the re-integration of the culture and the literary tradition of the whole area as a common literature in their common language.²

From this perspective the expatriate may be viewed as forward-looking rather than backward-looking in his disregard for the narrower claims of nationalism and in his appreciation of a global rather than a merely local heritage.

American expatriation may be divided into three main stages of development. Irving, Cooper and Hawthorne belong to the first period of provincial uncertainty combined with national pride and the beginnings

¹For an elaboration of this theory, see Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1973). He suggests that "one of the last models of 'city and country' is the system we now know as imperialism", p.279.

²*Native Companions* (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1974), p.89.

of a native intellectual tradition. James, Eliot and Pound belong to the second stage, where the relationship between Europe and America is perceived in a far more complex and troubled fashion, but in terms of an exchange of equals. The generation of which Hemingway and Fitzgerald are the representatives took part in an international movement whereby "Paris was the center for the artistically adventurous of every country",¹ but in the nineteen-twenties expatriation was also a particularly American cult. The Americans who came to Paris and the Riviera brought their American-ness with them. Most of them had returned to the United States by the nineteen-thirties. After the Second World War, the migration of European and English writers to the United States reversed the previous pattern of expatriation and the United States became a new centre of metropolitan culture. Therefore the American experience provides only a partial standard of reference by which the growth of other post-colonial cultures may be measured. Countries like Australia or Canada will never attain the prominence, either politically or culturally, of the United States. They must either look elsewhere for their models or create new images for themselves.

A recognition of this growing tendency toward the re-integration of the literary tradition into a common literature in English with the United States as its centre does not imply a denigration of the importance of place either in individual works of art or to the writer's own capacity for creative endeavour. Art must always be rooted in the particular, but at the same time only if it succeeds in transcending its local situation will it be of universal and lasting significance. In an article entitled "The Lost Australian Nightingale", A.D. Hope presents a point of view which is the natural complement of his

¹Strout, *The American Image of the Old World*, p.185.

recognition of a global culture. Internationalism in itself is a neutral value. The re-integrated literary tradition of a common literature in a common language is a heritage the writer ignores at his peril, but he must not allow its accumulated authority to dim or destroy his own personal vision. He concludes:

If Henry James, James Joyce, Henry Handel Richardson and Katherine Mansfield represent, as I believe, the advantages of a writer of genius escaping early in life from a parochial atmosphere, W.J. Turner I think represents its dangers.¹

The writer must strike a balance between his personal vision and the inherited forms and structures in which personal visions have been communicated in the past. The one great danger of a re-integrated literary tradition and of a single metropolitan culture is their tendency to enforce a uniformity which may be deadly to the art of the fringes. For example, Wyndham Lewis remarks of the Canadian writer Morley Callaghan, that although he is "a very fine short story writer, [he] has had unfortunately to create a vacuum for his characters, lest his American public detect that all this is going on in Ontario, rather than Missouri".²

Similarly, the literary critic must strike a balance between his personal interest in the literature of his own country, because "it gives him an understanding of that country which nothing else can give him",³ and his purely aesthetic judgements about the quality of the art.

¹*Native Companions*, p.173.

²"Nature's Place in Canadian Culture", in *Wyndham Lewis in Canada*, ed. George Woodcock (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1971), p.59.

³Northrop Frye, "Preface to an Uncollected Anthology", *The Bush Garden* (Toronto: Anansi, 1971), p.163.

The situation is further complicated by the fact that

literature, particularly fiction, is not the pure medium we sometimes assume it to be. Response to it is affected by things other than its own intrinsic quality; by a curiosity or lack of it about the people it deals with, their outlook, their way of life. . . . English lack of curiosity about people of their own race who have cut adrift can be thick enough to be felt as a positive force¹

Nonetheless, the critic must try to distinguish between what makes a work of art an achievement of simply national importance and what extends its achievement into one of absolute importance. Wellek and Warren point out in their *Theory of Literature* that

Problems of 'nationality' become especially complicated if we have to decide that literatures in the same language are distinct national literatures, as American and modern Irish assuredly are. . . . Universal and national literatures implicate each other. . . . To be able to describe the exact share of the one and the other would amount to knowing much that is worth knowing in the whole of literary history.²

The study of a nation's expatriate novelists is essentially an examination of how universal and national literatures implicate each other in work produced by writers whose physical situation is in itself a sign of a vacillation between the two.

In the case of an expatriate writer like Joyce, it is plain that his preoccupation with Ireland was a major factor in enabling him to create work of both national and universal importance. The situation

¹Vance Palmer, "Fragment of Autobiography", in *Intimate Portraits and Other Pieces*, selected by H.P. Heseltine (Melbourne: Cheshire, 1969), pp.56-57.

²René Wellek and Austin Warren, *Theory of Literature* (Penguin University Books; Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973), pp.52-53.

of Australia's expatriate novelists is less clearly defined. Writing of his life in London as a young man, Vance Palmer points out that his loyalty to Australia did not prevent him from adopting a "protective colouration"¹ to disguise his nationality in English literary circles. Mrs Campbell Praed, W.J. Turner, Martin Boyd and Helen Simpson also became absorbed into English society. Henry Handel Richardson lived in complete, chosen isolation. Christina Stead associated with business people instead of writers. Each of these writers tended to underplay both his nationality and his expatriation. None of them engaged in a Byronic blurring of the distinctions between his life and art. In fact, each is careful to dissociate himself from the popular notion of the artist as an alienated intellectual or of the expatriate as a tortured and homeless wanderer. In his unfinished David Meredith trilogy, George Johnston dramatizes the predicament of an artist who does fall victim to the romantic notion of the artist as outsider, but in his own life Johnston was careful not to confuse his personal with his professional life in this way. Unlike Ireland's James Joyce, England's D.H. Lawrence, America's Henry Miller, Canada's Mordecai Richler, or the West Indies' V.S. Naipaul, all of these Australian expatriate novelists tend to minimize rather than to expand upon the deficiencies of their homeland, and they prefer not to discuss the possible effects of their expatriation upon their work. Patrick White's "The Prodigal Son" may at first seem an exception to this rule, but the point of the article is to stress the purely personal aspects of a writer's decision about where to live over the attempts of journalists like Alister Kershaw, author of the deliberately controversial article, "The Last Expatriate", to make an issue of public and national significance of it. Each of these writers stresses the personal rather than the social or

¹Palmer, "Fragment of Autobiography", p.55.

literary aspects of his expatriation and each chooses to see it as an isolated accident rather than as part of a meaningful phenomenon.

The refusal of these writers to attach either a national or an artistic significance to their expatriate status may be partially a reaction against the tendency of the nationalist critics to seize on this one aspect of their experience as a key to interpreting, or more often to dismissing, their books. In the nineteen-fifties, several Australian critics, in their search for a definitive Australian literary tradition, felt obliged to eliminate the writing of the expatriates from their canon on the grounds that the works and their writers were "un-Australian".¹ In his extremely influential study, *The Australian Tradition*, A.A. Phillips argues that expatriation benefited no one. He comments:

The loss worked both ways. On the one hand, none of these writers [Henry Handel Richardson, Miles Franklin, Christina Stead, W.J. Turner, Jack and Philip Lindsay] quite attained equilibrium once he or she had lost the feel of native soil beneath the feet — as some of them have since admitted. On the other hand, Australian writing was robbed of a leaven of venturesome minds. Our literature of the last forty years might look very different if there were added to it the books these writers might have produced in Australia, and the influence upon others of their talk, their enthusiasms, and their rebellions.²

These arguments no longer appear as self-evident as Phillips and his successors once found them. It is not always easy to see why their

¹See Miles Franklin, *Laughter, Not for a Cage* (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1956); A.A. Phillips, *The Australian Tradition* (1958, 2nd rev. edn, Melbourne: Cheshire-Lansdowne, 1966); Cecil Hadgraft, *Australian Literature* (London: Heinemann, 1960); H.M. Green, *A History of Australian Literature* (2 vols, 1961; rev. rpt, Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1971); T. Inglis Moore, *Social Patterns in Australian Literature* (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1971).

²Phillips, "The Family Relationship", *The Australian Tradition*, p.105.

place of residence should exclude the expatriates' novels from inclusion in the category of Australian literature, and it is tempting to imagine how different the image of Australian writing would appear to be as a result of their inclusion. No one has ever studied the novels in sufficient detail to determine if a loss of equilibrium really does characterize the books written by Australians overseas, and if such an imbalance were discovered to exist, whether it could either wholly or partially be attributed to the writer's expatriation. A.D. Hope's article on W.J. Turner confirms Phillips' analysis in the case of Turner, but simultaneously denies its relevance to the achievement of Henry Handel Richardson. Finally, all the available evidence seems to suggest that there was fairly substantial communication between Australians writing abroad and those writing at home. For example, Vance and Nettie Palmer spent extensive periods abroad, and kept in close touch with Henry Handel Richardson, Christina Stead and Katharine Susannah Prichard. Brian Penton worked on ~~The~~ *Landtakers* while visiting the Lindsays in London.

Nonetheless, an "Australian literary tradition" was postulated which included only those writers whose works were believed to amount "to a definite contribution to literature that is incontrovertibly Australian", or that could at least be proved to have grown "out of Australian experience", or to represent, in the case of expatriates, "a harking back to their own country".¹ Such an approach made it necessary to view any writer whose work did not fit this Procrustean bed as aberrant, unimportant, or a victim of the "cultural cringe", A.A. Phillips' brilliant term for the colonial inferiority complex which manifests itself most often in a "tendency to make needless

¹Green, *A History of Australian Literature*, Vol.1, p.xiii.

comparisons".¹ The "uncontrovertibly Australian" was declared to be expressed most clearly in the works of the *Bulletin* school, especially those produced by Lawson and Furphy, and in the works of writers in the twentieth century like Miles Franklin, K.S. Prichard, Frank Dalby Davison, Vance Palmer, Cecil Mann, Barnard Eldershaw, Eleanor Dark, and Kylie Tennant, who continued in the *Bulletin* tradition. These writers were seen to have certain social values in common: a belief in radical democracy and mateship which is evidenced in a preference for proletarian subject-matter, and an "earth-vigour" which stresses the bush at the expense of the city. For example, Tom Inglis Moore perceives the following social patterns in Australian literature: the spell of the bush, clash of cultures, realism, sombreness, irony, mateship, radical democracy, the great Australian dream, earth-vigour and humanism.² Where exceptions to this pattern are perceived they are declared irrelevant:

Henry Handel Richardson, believing in the aristocracy of artistic genius, stands outside the proletarian tradition, as do Martin Boyd and Patrick White. These three writers, however, are exceptional as expatriates with European attitudes.³

A literary tradition which is forced to exclude three of the country's major writers in this way does not seem to have a very strong claim to be the major Australian literary tradition.

The newcomer to the study of Australian literature is immediately struck by the fact that most of Australia's greatest writers —

¹Phillips, "The Cultural Cringe", *The Australian Tradition*, p.113.

²Moore, *Social Patterns in Australian Literature*, pp.19-21.

³*Ibid.*, p.258.

Richardson, Boyd, Stead, and White — are at least technically outside this tradition, and that they are (or were in the case of White and now of Stead) expatriates. Marius Bewley wrote his study, *The Complex Fate*, in response to a similar situation in American literary criticism. He claims:

That school of literary appreciation which acclaims American literature simple [sic] because it is American has been represented by a strong body of critical opinion in the United States, and it has led to an insidious magnification of the frontier colloquial tradition in American literature. This tradition is one of great importance, but it is not the tradition embodied in America's four major novelists¹

In his *Images of Society and Nature*, Brian Kiernan models his approach to the Australian novel on Bewley's example. He questions the conventional Australian tradition outlined by Phillips and H.M. Green and accepted for the most part by Franklin, Barnard Eldershaw and Hadgraft in their surveys of Australian literature, concluding that: "If Mr Phillips' tradition is 'the Australian tradition' in our fiction then it has nothing to do with the most important of our novelists".² Kiernan points out, as Phillips himself was the first to admit, that Phillips' "Australian tradition" refers to a social tradition which he believes is expressed in much Australian writing. Kiernan's own position is that

If we are to talk of a tradition or traditions in respect of Australian novels we should mean more than the social contexts or attitudes that the writers share. . . . If we are going to seek an Australian tradition of the novel . . . we will seek it amongst our finest novelists

¹Bewley, *The Complex Fate*, p.2.

²Brian Kiernan, *Images of Society and Nature* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1971), p.163.

first of all and ask if they have anything in common beyond their being related by their birth or their art to Australia.¹

Therefore, Kiernan offers a series of essays on what he considers to be "the most original and imaginative of Australian novels",² chosen with regard to the "images of life they create" rather than to their peculiarly Australian qualities or their writer's place of residence, and he examines them "with reference to discussions of English and American traditions".

His book is an important contribution to the redefinition of the Australian literary tradition or traditions, but he leaves many aspects of his canon unexplored. He is interested in the images of Australian society and nature which each novel presents, but he does not seek to relate individual visions to individual experience, nor is he concerned to carry his insights about individual writers to their logical conclusions as part of a more general approach to Australian literary studies or toward the redefinition of the concepts of colonialism, nationalism and internationalism on which an understanding of the contexts of a work of art depend. In taking an approach to the study of the novel which ignores social contexts and influences to concentrate instead on the artistic excellence of each individual achievement, Kiernan is attempting to redress a balance in Australian literary studies. The nature of his attempt causes him to abandon much that is useful in the old nationalistic approach. For example, H.P. Heseltine points out that

Australian (or any other) culture offers
defining contexts of possibility which have

¹*Ibid.*, p.171.

²*Ibid.*, p.viii.

a great deal to do with the concrete universals that its major writers seize upon as their themes and the forms and language through which they turn them into literature.¹

To concentrate on the text at the expense of its context may prove as distorting as to concentrate on social values at the expense of literary ones.

Irving Deer defines the contemporary critical approach as one which recognizes that

The conception of the elements within a work of art as organic, so heavily stressed by the New Critics, has now been extended outside the work, to identify the work itself as one organic element among many, including those elements that make up the historical, social, and philosophical context of the work. Without that larger organic sense of the significance of a literary work, without a sense, that is, of its interdependent relationships with other elements that make up the whole of reality, the study of any literary work, from any angle, seems irrelevant today.²

These are the critical assumptions upon which this thesis is based.

The social perceptions of the nationalist critics must be brought to bear on the aesthetic perceptions of critics like Kiernan.

The Australian "legend of the nineties" was formulated to meet a real need. Writers in the mid-twentieth century discovered in the eighteen-nineties a sense of national coherence and identity which those who lived in the period expected to see develop in the future. But although the legend was historically inaccurate, it was imaginatively necessary to the stage when a colony is trying to become

¹"Criticism and the Individual Talent", *Meanjin*, 31 (1972), 15.

²"Science, Literature, and the New Consciousness", in *Prospects for the 70's*, ed. Harry Finestone and Michael Shugrue (New York: The Modern Language Association of America, 1973), p.126.

a nation and looking for a self-image in which it may recognize itself. In a recent article, A.A. Phillips modifies the cultural nationalism of his original approach in *The Australian Tradition*, to admit that

No doubt our view of the 'nineties was largely illusory. . . . If I were now handling themes I discussed in the 'forties and early 'fifties, my emphases would be different Yet I still believe that our assault on automatic depreciation, the kind of stimulation of a felt sense of Australian membership which we attempted, were necessary at that stage of our development.¹

Phillips' position is based on a sound understanding of the needs of a developing society. He would agree with the Canadian critic E.K. Brown, who argues that

A great art is fostered by artists and audience possessing in common a passionate and peculiar interest in the kind of life that exists in the country where they live. . . . it will be obvious that in a colonial or semi-colonial community neither artist nor audience will have the passionate and peculiar interest in their immediate surroundings that is required.²

Expatriation may be a sign of the artist's lack of interest in his immediate surroundings or it may be the most extreme of the responses open to the artist in the face of this lack of interest on the part of his local audience.

In a sense, the nationalist critics were correct in distrusting the expatriates' contribution to Australian literature, because expatriation does imply the seeking of a different or at least a larger audience, and with the change of audience comes a change in the orientation if not the quality of the art itself. It is possible that

¹"Through A Glass, Absurdly", *Meanjin*, 34 (1975), 209-210.

²"Canadian Poetry" (1943), reprinted in *Contexts of Canadian Criticism*, ed. Eli Mandel (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971), p.40.

the expatriate may lose touch with his roots and continue to write from experience which becomes more and more remote or that he will become so completely a citizen of another country that his work is no longer of special interest to the country of his birth. But it is equally possible that his international experience may help him in defining the unique characteristics of his homeland. In any case, the collective experience of Australian expatriate novelists, and its relevance to the national literary tradition, can only be understood through an examination of the individual experiences which compose the whole.

Michael Wilding is one of the first critics to stress that "the expatriates are a major component of the Australian literary heritage [and that] . . . they constitute a major strand, a choice, in the possibilities and experience of the Australian writer".¹ Despite this prominence, their work has seldom been considered part of the genuine Australian literary heritage and it has never been examined collectively and comparatively in an extended study. The study of expatriation is a necessary first step toward understanding Australian literature in its totality. Only when the parallel expatriate heritage has been explored as fully as the nativist heritage can a balanced overview of Australian literature be attained. Harry Levin makes a similar point about the study of American literature, arguing persuasively that,

If anything can redeem us, it is this hesitation between our optimists and our pessimists, our frontiersmen and our expatriates. Once we rush to the one extreme or the other, we are lost. On the one hand we have a unique background, which would be quite barren if it remained unique. On the other hand we are strengthened by a hybrid strain, the cross-fertilization of many different cultures. What is commonly regarded as peculiarly American is blatant and

¹"Write Australian", *Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, 6, No.1 (1971), 22.

standardized: Ford, Luce, Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer.
 What is most original is most traditional:
 Melville.¹

The publication of Patrick White's *The Tree of Man* in 1956 provided an excellent illustration of the imaginative capital to be made out of the fusion of Australia's unique background with a cross-fertilization from older cultures. It proved once more that what is most original is also most traditional. The international acclaim which White's work received, and which reached a culmination in the awarding of the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1973, instigated a reappraisal of many of the preconceptions which helped Australian critics to define a specifically Australian literary tradition, and this reappraisal in its turn has led to a new appreciation of the contribution of expatriate writers.

The three main stages of literary development (from dependence to self-assertion to a secure sense of national identity) have been expanded recently to take into greater account what is seen to be the parallel development of the expatriate literary achievement. Critics of all persuasions agree that the works of Mrs Campbell Praed belong to the first period, in which England is still thought of as home. However, to A.A. Phillips, Richardson and Boyd were also victims of the "cultural cringe", and as such suffered in comparison to Lawson and Furphy,² whereas to Russel Ward there is a growth in maturity in Australian writing from Furphy's violent reaction to the Anglophilia of early writers like Praed to Richardson's frank recognition of the problem of dual loyalties. Boyd's light-hearted and ironical treatment of the same

¹"Some European Views of Contemporary American Literature", in *The American Writer and the European Tradition*, ed. Denny and Gilman, pp.182-183.

²Phillips, "The Family Relationship", *The Australian Tradition*, p.103.

issue is taken as evidence of a further advancement, and the entire tradition finds its culmination in the achievement of Patrick White, whose work is at once unselfconsciously local and universal.¹ On the other hand, Anne Summers applies a feminist framework to the achievement of Australian women writers. She traces a development from the conformity of Praed and Cambridge to externally imposed male values, through the intermediary^{te} stage of Henry Handel Richardson, whose works are also conformist but more ambivalent, to a culmination in the achievement of Stead, who not only attempts to articulate the dilemmas of her sex in a male determined universe but who, more importantly, "displays the kind of androgynous mind which Virginia Woolf considered to be the mark of a great writer".² A parallel may be drawn between a country's growth from a colony to a nation, in which it throws off the imperialist domination of the mother (or more appropriately, father) country, to a woman's growth from an unconscious acceptance of male values to self-awareness and self-determination.

However, such schematic patterns of progressive development are only initially valuable as hypothetical frameworks. They are of little use in the evaluation of individual achievements. White and Stead are undeniably Australia's two greatest novelists, but literary excellence does not depend on chronology. The willingness of Ward and Summers to recognize expatriate novelists as part of the mainstream of the Australian tradition is an advance on the previous critical habit of excluding them altogether, but all simplistic patterns of progressive development require a careful scrutiny. The themes of cultural and sexual conflict in the works of these writers must be subjected to a detailed critical

¹Ward, "Colonialism and Culture", *Overland*, No.31 (1965), 15-17.

²Summers, "The Self Denied", *Refractory Girl*, No.2 (1973), 10.

examination before any conclusions may be reached as to their larger significance.

This thesis is constructed on the premise that "the natural and sensible starting-point for work in literary scholarship is the interpretation and analysis of the works of literature themselves".¹ Thus each novel is considered firstly as a work of art in its own right, with its own particular determining structure and mode of being, and only secondly in connection with the other novels to be examined. Common thematic concerns and preoccupations do emerge, and from these it is possible to form some generalizations, but in generalizing one must never lose sight of the uniqueness of each novel's vision.

To direct attention toward themes and preoccupations in a group of novels is not to undervalue the importance of other approaches to the study of the novel, but it does imply a belief in Martin Price's contention that

The unity of a novel is expressed most succinctly in thematic terms. This presupposes that a narrative is shaped so as to disclose a meaningful form, and to apprehend the form is to find some way of stating the meaning towards which it moves. Such a theme is rarely stated overtly in the work; to extricate it from the work is not to hold it up for contemplation in its own right but rather to see it as the general statement that is given intensity, precision, suggestiveness, and fullness of implication by the work itself. The theme is the starting point of our *study* of the work, for it is the most general principle of structure in the work; by turning it back upon the work, we can see a radiance in details and a resonance in parts.²

¹Wellek and Warren, *Theory of Literature*, p.139.

²"The Other Self: Thoughts about Character in the Novel", in *Sociology of Literature and Drama*, ed. Elizabeth and Tom Burns (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973), p.267.

This approach assumes that the novel utilizes language in a way very different from poetry, and that it therefore requires different critical principles to understand its achievement. Christopher Caudwell points out that

The poem and the story both use sounds, which awake images of outer reality and affective reverberations; but in poetry the affective associations are organized by the structure of the language, while in the novel they are organized by the structure of the outer reality portrayed. . . . Hence the hero of the novel is not like the 'hero' of poetry, a universal common 'I,' but a real concrete individual.¹

Although it is important to distinguish between literature and life, there is a close relationship between the two. It is the task of criticism to elucidate this relationship.

Denis Donoghue believes that the "fundamental crisis of the modern imagination . . . [is] the status of the given world and our available ways of apprehending it".² Most of the Australian expatriate novelists, Boyd, Stead and White in particular, affirm their faith in the natural world as a corollary to their rejection of modern man's alienation from it. Their work, insofar as it stresses man in relation to the natural world and the existence of facts, independent of man's consciousness of them, precedes the critical reaction (of which Donoghue is a representative) against that stream of modern art which elevates man's consciousness above all else. Donoghue's reservations about the modern faith in the supremacy of the autonomous imagination do not apply to them. Despite their familiarity with modern experiments in the novel,

¹Quoted in Philip Rahv, "Fiction and the Criticism of Fiction", in *Critical Approaches to Fiction*, ed. Shiv K. Kumar and Keith McKean (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1968), p.300.

²*The Ordinary Universe* (London: Faber, 1968), p.42.

the expatriate novelists, like most other Australian writers, tend to write novels in the late nineteenth-century European tradition.

Richardson, Stead and White make remarkably similar statements about the central importance of character in their fiction, and Boyd stresses the importance of valuing a sensitivity to the living reality of each individual character above an arid concern with technique.¹ The fiction of Praed and Johnston is clearly composed out of a similar belief in the independent existence of a stubborn reality beyond the subjective perceptions of the individual consciousness.

Although they are agreed that the given world does have an independent reality, they have varying ideas both about the nature of that reality and about man's available means of apprehending it through the novel form. Praed believes that an eternal and ideal order underlies the imperfect phenomenon of Donoghue's "ordinary universe", and she relies on the conventional format of the nineteenth-century novel and romance to structure her beliefs. Although Richardson is often accused of being a slave to facts, her novels are the products of a transforming imagination which is capable of perceiving the symbolic potential of the ordinary. She too relies on conventional forms. Boyd and White both stress the superiority of an anti-intellectual way of knowing truth, and both believe that a spiritual reality underlies the physical and informs it with meaning. Boyd asserts that "With the Italians the heart comes first and the intellect second, which we believe is the right order",² and that the "noumena" — "an idea or spirit that expresses

¹For Boyd's attitude, see Martin Boyd, "Dubious Cartography", *Meanjin*, 23 (1964), 6. For Richardson's, see Nettie Palmer, *Henry Handel Richardson* (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1950), p.194. For Stead's, see Jonah Raskin, "Christina Stead in Washington Square", *London Magazine*, n.s., 9, No.11 (1970), 75. For White's, see *In the Making*, ed. Craig McGregor (Melbourne: Thomas Nelson, 1969), p.219.

²*Much Else in Italy* (London: Macmillan, 1958), p.29.

itself in matter"¹ — is best expressed in shapes rather than in words".²

White insists that: "Practically anything I have done of any worth, I feel I have done through my intuition, not my mind — which the intellectuals disapprove of".³ He says:

I have the same idea with all my books: an attempt to come close to the core of reality, the structure of reality, as opposed to the merely superficial. The realistic novel is remote from art. Art should heighten life, should give one an illuminating experience; it shouldn't set out what you know already.⁴

This statement implies that reality is composed of many layers beyond what men normally term the real, and that the artist is the interpreter, rather than simply the transcriber, of reality. The emphasis which Boyd and Stead place on writing what they see⁵ is simply another way of stating a similar belief. They too conceive of the artist's function as one of interpretation rather than of creation. They write from life in order to illuminate it. The forms in which they represent it endow it with a new significance, and provide a criticism of the ways in which men normally come to terms with it.

However, Stead's vision of life is far more pragmatic and materialist in its orientation than that of either Praed, Richardson, Boyd or White. She and Johnston alone are entirely satisfied with the

¹*Ibid.*, p.3.

²*Ibid.*, p.40.

³*In the Making*, ed. McGregor, p.220. See also "A Conversation with Patrick White", *Southerly*, 33 (1973), 138-139.

⁴*In the Making*, ed. McGregor, p.219.

⁵See Martin Boyd, "Preoccupations and Intentions", *Southerly*, 28 (1968), 84, and Raskin, "Christina Stead in Washington Square", 73.

phenomenal world (but not with what men have made of it) and do not seek to see a mystic significance inherent in its forms. Perhaps as a result of his training as a journalist, Johnston is a careful observer of social and political details, but he is not always able to resist a tendency to over-dramatize or to sentimentalize reality. He clearly wishes to be regarded as a serious novelist. His difficulty is in maintaining a tone which will not allow his readers the immediate satisfaction of an easy response to a complex situation. This is a fault he shares with Praed. The great strength of Richardson, Stead, Boyd, and White lies in their common refusal to simplify what they perceive as complex and in their attempts to illuminate without resolving the irreconcilable conflicts of life.

The response of each writer to his world is an individual one, but the differences outlined above are basically differences of emphasis and of quality, not of kind. All of these writers are concerned with the relationships of men and women to their fellows; their works have a reference beyond themselves, to the lives which ordinary people live. This interest is most pronounced and most readily accessible in the novels examined in the first and third sections.

The first section is concerned with the international novel when it is composed in relation to the continuing tradition of nineteenth-century realism or naturalism. Almost all of the novels in each of the sections may be termed international in that they have settings in more than one country or involve characters who are citizens of different countries. However, in the novels excluded from this section the international format seems less central than other concerns, and the themes are presented either in terms of archetypes or symbols, or within the framework of the personal memoir. Similarly, Australian heroines are also prominent in *The Aunt's Story*, *The Cardboard Crown* and *Outbreak*

of *Love*, but the central focus of these novels is directed elsewhere.

Each writer's vision of reality may colour the nature and degree of his realism, but the basic approach common to all the novels in the first section remains that of the realist. In Christina Stead's *For Love Alone*, the realistic method may be modified to take into account the highly individualized poetic perceptions of the central character's point of view, but this perspective is "placed" by the implied author's intervention into a structure of recognizable reality. Martin Boyd's *Lucinda Brayford* may be partially a twentieth-century parable which tends toward an allegorical format, but schematic interpretations of the meaning behind the novel's world are never allowed to overcome the identifiable reality of that world.

Except for *Maurice Guest*, in which the Australian heroine is not the protagonist, each of the novels discussed in the first section takes as its central character an Australian woman rather than a man. It is enlightening to discover the number of strong and interesting heroines in the novels of expatriate writers when the critics seem agreed that the usual pattern of Australian fiction is one in which "the man must go off on the track with the boys to the rough man's world where the delicate little woman would never stand the pace",¹ or where the central preoccupation of the Australian novel is seen to be "its concern with a man's work",² and in which Australia is described as "a man's country".³

¹Geoffrey Dutton, "The Bashful Bloke", *Australian Letters*, 1, No.4 (1958), 16.

²D.R. Burns, *The Directions of Australian Fiction: 1920-1974* (Melbourne: Cassell, 1975), p.1.

³*Ibid.*, p.2.

The novels of these expatriate writers restore balance to the depiction of Australian life through their presentation of the inner lives and aspirations of both men and women and through their interest in every aspect of their character's lives. Instead of mateship, these novels explore many other aspects of human love. *Policy and Passion*, *Maurice Guest* and *For Love Alone* examine self-destructive passion. *Maurice Guest*, *For Love Alone* and *Lucinda Brayford* question the conventions of romantic love and the stereotyping of the sexes. *For Love Alone* describes the sexual fantasies of an adolescent girl, and fulfilling and guiltless adultery. *The Fortunes of Richard Mahony*, *The Cardboard Crown*, *Outbreak of Love* and *Clean Straw for Nothing* present detailed anatomies of the workings of four different marriages. *Lucinda Brayford* considers selfless, generalized love.

It is interesting to trace how often the Australian heroine is used to question established norms of behaviour and the social codes which govern the actions of the sexes. The nativist Australian novel is considered to be "traditionally" (using the word in A.A. Phillips' somewhat specialized sense) opposed to authority, but it seldom extends its radicalism into the field of sexual politics.¹ It is possible to see in the sexual radicalism of many of the expatriates' novels a parallel to the political radicalism of much nativist Australian writing. This is not to deny the essentially conservative vision of both nativist and expatriate writers. Their criticisms of contemporary social conditions spring more from a nostalgia for what they imagine to have been a golden age of the past than from a desire for a complete departure from anything known previously in the experience of man.

¹Miles Franklin's *My Brilliant Career* is the exception to this rule, but after writing this novel Franklin herself went abroad to live for almost twenty-eight years.

The Australian heroine is presented most definitively within the context of the international novel. The international story affords a convenient format for the examination of national and cultural differences and for the balancing of the Old World against the New. The American international story enabled the writer to define the American character by isolating it from its normal environment and by contrasting it with the European. In his *Portrait of a Lady*, James extends these cultural comparisons into the framework for a spiritual drama of universal proportions. The contrast between New World innocence and Old World experience becomes, in the words of Marius Bewley,

not merely a spectacle of divergent national manners and attitudes played off against each other in carefully selected areas, but a serious attempt to resolve these conflicts, to escape from the restrictive categories of the provincial, local, and native, into a more spacious, humane, and comprehensive reality.¹

The same attempt is apparent in the international novels of Australia's expatriate writers at their best.

Praed is sometimes able to fuse the provincial's longing for the metropolis and the woman's longing for the challenge of the man's world with a larger theme: her heroine's sense of constriction and isolation becomes a symbol of man's spiritual alienation in a world which is not his true home. Richardson's *Maurice Guest* transforms Maurice's profound sense of isolation in a foreign city into a metaphor for the predicament of twentieth-century man, feeling himself insignificant and homeless in an indifferent universe and searching for something he cannot define, a form of freedom he is incapable of imagining. In Christina Stead's

¹Bewley, *The Eccentric Design*, p.220.

For Love Alone, the interplay between her heroine's Australian roots and her European participations leads her to see her physical travels in terms of her personal quest for both sexual and intellectual fulfilment. Teresa's quest is seen as at once part of the universal ritual of a young adult growing up and as an image of the struggle of sensitive human beings everywhere and in every time to break free from social and political restrictions to find a new form of freedom. In Martin Boyd's *Lucinda Brayford*, once more the interplay of the Old World and of the New is used to stress the universality of the human situation and to dramatize man's conflicting impulses toward a homesickness for the golden age of his past and an eagerness for the creation of a new heaven in his future.

In the international novels of Henry James the provincial's yearning for experience beyond the confines of the provincial world often comes to represent a larger thirst for life itself. Strether's outburst to Little Bilham in *The Ambassadors* summarizes his message:

'Live all you can; it's a mistake not to. It doesn't so much matter what you do in particular, so long as you have your life. If you haven't had that what *have* you had?'¹

This desperate thirst to experience life, whatever the cost, is the chief characteristic of Honoria in Praed's *Policy and Passion*, of Louise in Richardson's *Maurice Guest*, and of Teresa in Stead's *For Love Alone*. Boyd's *Lucinda* fails to fulfil her early promise partially because she prefers to observe rather than to participate in life. Clotilde's fate in Simpson's *Boomerang* and David Meredith's in Johnston's *Meredith* trilogy are similar.

¹Henry James, *The Ambassadors*, ed. S.P. Rosenbaum (New York: W.W. Norton, 1964), p.132.

Marius Bewley concludes that in the fiction of Henry James, "those characters discover life who look for it in themselves",¹ but that the version of life which Isabel and Strether discover is an unsatisfactory one, because of the limitations of the American tradition. For Bewley, James's great theme became "that of deprivation — deprivation of life. And in James the theme *is* a great one because he knew what life was, and what his characters were being deprived of".² Deprivation is a theme common to most provincial artists. It is Praed's central theme in all her Australian work and one of Stead's in *Seven Poor Men of Sydney*, *For Love Alone* and *Cotters' England*. It plays a large part in the fiction of Richardson, White and Johnston as well. The first section examines several variations on this theme in order to distinguish more precisely the factors necessary to raise it above the level of a mere commonplace of provincial art to a theme of universal importance.

A hierarchy of values is implied in these analyses in which the adjective provincial is used to describe art of the least achievement. In this kind of art, local experience, instead of being transformed into the basis of a communication of wider appeal, remains narrow and limited. In contrast, regional art is valuable in that it interprets "a given environment to the people in it and to its observers. A region or a way of life does not begin to exist until it has been interpreted by one artist after another".³ This illumination of "whole tracts of life" may be the sole achievement of regional art or it may fulfil the further requirements of universal art as well: it may illuminate "life

¹Bewley, *The Eccentric Design*, p.239.

²*Ibid.*, p.240.

³Nettie Palmer, "The Need for Australian Literature", quoted in Vivian Smith, "Vance and Nettie Palmer: The Literary Journalism", *Australian Literary Studies*, 6 (1973), 125.

as a whole".¹ A somewhat similar hierarchy of values may be observed in fictional treatments of the related concepts of exile (or expatriation) and home. Provincial art is concerned with nothing but their literal aspects. Regional art is concerned with the social, political and historical connotations of these concepts, and it may also be concerned with the philosophical, metaphysical or universal. Each of these levels may be present in a great work of art, but provincial art will work in only one dimension.

Harry Levin points out that a symbolic significance always underlies the concept of exile:

Somewhere in the dark backward behind them all [civilization's endless sequence of migrations] looms the archetype of a Paradise Lost, a glimpse of a primeval garden or ideal realm from which mankind has been exiled for its sins. The Judeo-Christian tradition has constantly looked back toward that original idyll and ahead toward a Paradise Regained.²

This dual perspective is clearly discernible behind the work of Praed, Richardson, Boyd, and White, and it may be detected in the work of Stead and Johnston. In their novels, expatriation works as a symbol for spiritual exile; the expatriate's journey becomes a metaphor for the search for identity or for a spiritual home. Dorothy Green discovers Levin's archetype in Patrick White's phrase, "the nostalgia of permanence and the fiend of motion", and she sees it recurring in the work of Lawson, Brennan, Praed, Richardson, Stead, and White.³

¹*Ibid.*

²"Literature and Exile", *Refractions* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1966), pp.67-68.

³*Ulysses Bound* (Canberra: Australian National University Press, 1973), p.18.

In Praed's *Policy and Passion*, Honoria's need to look backwards and her desire for permanence attract her to Maddox, while her desire to move forward to new experiences propels her toward Barrington. In Richardson's *Maurice Guest* the desire for stability is uppermost, while Louise is dominated by her urge for change. The conflict of these opposites, both within himself and in his relationship with Louise, proves too much for Maurice to bear and occasions his suicide. *For Love Alone*'s Teresa looks backward toward the golden age of Greece for the inspiration to move forward toward an apocalyptic revalueing of values and continual self-development. Wordsworth's "Ode on Intimations of Immortality" determines the double perspective of *Lucinda Brayford*, in which Lucinda looks simultaneously backwards to the innocence of childhood and forward to the promise of mankind's redemption for the values which will render her present life bearable.

This theme is continued in the novels of the second section, where it receives a slightly different emphasis. The "country of the mind"¹ becomes more important than any actual country. *The Fortunes of Richard Mahony* enacts in its structure the transition between the two sections. Despite the portentous symbolism of the Proem to Book One, it begins as a conventional realistic novel and becomes more and more truly symbolic as Mahony's tragedy unfolds. The other characters, except for Mary, begin to exist less as people in their own right than as foils and analogues to Mahony's dilemma and as representations of various aspects of his personality. White employs a similar technique in *Voss*, and in *The Aunt's Story* everything is seen through the subjective vision of Theodora Goodman. Nothing exists beyond her consciousness of it and some things exist for her that the reader doubts exist outside her

¹Patrick White, *Voss* (1957; Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1960), p.446.

consciousness. In this novel, White comes closest to advancing the claims of the autonomous imagination over those of the "ordinary universe". When Holstius tells Theodora that "there is sometimes little to choose between the reality of illusion and the illusion of reality",¹ he seems to be defining the message of the book. However, the conclusion remains ambiguous. Theodora's madness seems to be preferred above the sanity of the other inhabitants of her world; yet the reader's only reference is Theodora's point of view. Her final state is madness, and her effort to unite the contradictory impulses toward both permanence and motion in a single vision, in which "true permanence is a state of multiplication and division",² fails to convince many critics of its authentic realization.

The Aunt's Story and *Voss* describe two very different single-minded quests for permanence through the medium of motion. Theodora and Voss seek omniscience and omnipotence respectively. Their urge to know is an urge to fix reality in an unchangeable pattern in order to control it. This is also the artist's urge. Like the artist, they are doomed to failure, yet the value of the attempt lies in the effort itself and not in its result. Each of the novels in this second section relies on the archetypal theme of the quest as its basic unifying symbol. Like the international theme, the quest occurs in all the novels discussed in the thesis, but in *The Fortunes of Richard Mahony*, *The Aunt's Story* and *Voss*, the stress is on the existential value of the quest itself as much as on its object. Like Theodora and Voss, Mahony must come to terms with his own spiritual pride and with the psychic divisions expressed through the conflict of permanence and motion, acceptance and

¹Patrick White, *The Aunt's Story* (1948; Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1963), p.289.

²*Ibid.*, p.295.

flight. *The Fortunes of Richard Mahony* also comes to an end with an ambiguous and open-ended conclusion. The issues are too complex for resolution, and neither Richardson nor White is prepared to falsify reality in order to achieve a more conventionally satisfying effect.

The novels discussed in the third section are characterized by the device of a character-narrator who is involved in discovering the meaning of his own life through an exploration of his family past. In the Langton tetralogy and the Meredith trilogy, both unfinished works, the narrator seeks to understand himself through describing his brother. In *Boomerang*, as in the Langton novels, the search for self is expanded into an exploration of the entire family history. The relationship between fiction and reality, and the transforming power of the human imagination and of memory are all explored directly in this highly self-conscious form. The section title, "Introspective Voyagers", stresses the thematic connection which links this section to the two preceding it. The image of the voyage is central to most of the novels examined in this thesis, but the ways in which it is handled technically affect its significance in each case.

The Ulysses myth provides a classical structure for the basic conflict between roots and motion in one novel from each section. In his study of the adaptability of the Ulysses theme throughout history, W.B. Stanford explains that the direction of Homer's Ulysses was centripetal, essentially inwards and homewards toward normality, but that most twentieth-century writers follow Dante and Tennyson in interpreting his voyaging as the expression of a centrifugal urge, outwards toward new experience.¹ *For Love Alone*, *The Aunt's Story* and *Clean Straw for Nothing* each exploits the ambivalence inherent in the

¹*The Ulysses Theme* (1954; 2nd rev. edn, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1963), p.50.

myth itself, but to different ends. *For Love Alone* celebrates the voyage as the expression of an urge toward continual self-improvement and the advance of mankind away from the oppressions of the past toward the creation of a new heaven on earth. Theodora discovers through her travels in *The Aunt's Story* that place is ultimately irrelevant to spiritual need, and through her quest for "pureness of being",¹ that the quest itself will be her only fulfilment. She must find her happiness in sorrow and in seeking. *Clean Straw for Nothing* abandons its search for absolutes in favour of an acceptance of compromise, and *A Cartload of Clay* affirms the quest itself as the sole value left to mankind.

In a colonial or semi-colonial context, the concepts of roots and motion are especially ambiguous. The writer must come to terms not only with the spirit of the land to which he or his ancestors have emigrated, but also with the inheritance which comes to him from the mother country. A search for roots may involve him in both expatriation and staying where he was born. A conversation between two Canadian expatriate novelists, Robert Kroetsch and Margaret Laurence, stresses the psychological importance to the writer of a physical as well as a mental distancing from his subject-matter:

- K: . . . I see it so much in your novels —
 — that sense of roots and yet at the same time
 that sense of motion. . . .
- L: People always want to get out, and yet
 profoundly want to return. It almost seems
 that people have to go away and go through the
 process of learning about the rest of the
 world, and then they have to return. But
 whether or not they return in the flesh is not
 important. It is a return in a spiritual way.²

¹White, *The Aunt's Story*, p.280.

²*Creation*, ed. Robert Kroetsch (Toronto: New Press, 1970), p.54.

Praed, Richardson, Boyd, Stead, White, Simpson, and Johnston completed the cycle of departure and return in their work if not in each of their lives. In the novels of the third section the completion of this cycle is made the explicit theme. In both their physical and spiritual voyagings the narrators seek to make their peace with their ancestral, native and personal gods. It is therefore appropriate that this section should conclude the study, for in these novels the experience of expatriation is explored, comprehended, and then subsumed into the experience of life as a whole.

The central themes of the experience of exile, of the voyage in quest of meaning or in flight from responsibility or nothingness, and of the conflict between the need for roots and the need for motion, are complemented by preoccupations with the landscape, and with the relationship between the Old World and the New, and between the individual and society. A preoccupation with the landscape and with the experiences of childhood is often closely associated with the idea of exile. Harry Levin discusses how

Dépaysement, a sense of having gone to the wrong place, or — more positively — the yearning for one's homeland, was closely associated with the general growth of interest in the landscape¹

This sense of *dépaysement* is similar to the feeling of nostalgia which the Romantics and post-Romantics often express for the lost innocence of childhood. Clearly, Australian expatriate novelists are part of a much larger, indeed a universal phenomenon, which may be traced back to ancient times, although the Romantic Movement in Europe brought it into a new prominence and into its modern perspective.

¹"Literature and Exile", *Refractions*, p.70.

It is helpful to observe both the connections and the disparities between the Australian development of this tradition and the European mainstream. H.P. Heseltine suggests that

Due to certain circumstances of history and geography, [Australian literature] came much *earlier* than European literature to deal with a number of key themes of late Romantic awareness.¹

Heseltine is most concerned with the notion of the artist as outsider, and with his formulation of the "fundamental concern of the Australian literary imagination" as a concern to "acknowledge the terror at the basis of being, to explore its uses, and to build defences against its dangers".² These concepts are especially relevant to the novels discussed in Section Two, where the confrontation between the protagonists and the fundamental horror at the basis of being leads to three very different kinds of madness in response.

Heseltine's essay links the work of nativist and expatriate writers by placing Australian literature in an international perspective, and his analysis of the nihilist strain in Australian writing is convincing. However, the notion of the artist as outsider requires some clarification. The novelists examined in this thesis do not write as alienated intellectuals or as outsiders obsessed with the demonic. They do attempt to maintain a necessary distance from their material, and except for Stead, they write from a felt experience of exile which runs far deeper than merely geographical or political influences. Most of the characters in their novels feel themselves to be outsiders, but few are artists. Only the novels of the third section look closely at the

¹"The Australian Image: The Literary Heritage", *Meanjin*, 21 (1962), 38.

²*Ibid.*, 49.

artist as outsider, and the direction of each of these novels is toward re-uniting the artist with the world around him.

Australian literary criticism has always placed a great deal of emphasis on the presentation of landscape in Australian literature. European settlers were confronted with a new and strange environment and it took them some time to learn how to present it effectively in their art, and to advance from purely topographical concerns to an interest in the spiritual, intellectual and political values or ambiguities which might be illuminated through the use of landscape imagery. It was necessary for them to develop from a period of self-conscious interest in the landscape as an exotic phenomenon to an acceptance of its place and an awareness of its possibilities as the natural background to meaningful action. For example, Praed struggled honestly with the conflict between her Australian belief in the validity of the Australian environment as a natural setting for human endeavour and her English belief in its purely exotic qualities; yet on the whole, her approach to landscape was uneasy, and its literary role remained problematic.

Judith Wright suggests that

in Australian writing the landscape seems to have its own life, hostile to its human foreground. Sometimes it takes up an immense amount of room; sometimes it is so firmly pushed away that its very absence haunts us as uncomfortably as its presence could. It is the real though unspoken theme behind the Richard Mahony novels, it is the unassimilated guilt that haunts the novels of Martin Boyd, and ruins the lives of his protagonists; it is deliberately transmuted into archetypal hostility, in the novels of Patrick White¹

¹"The Upside-down Hut", in *The Writer in Australia*, ed. Barnes, p.332.

Landscape does play an important role in the novels of these writers and in the work of other expatriates also, but Wright has over-simplified what are really a great diversity of approaches to the use of landscape in Australian writing.

Richardson's Australian landscape is hostile to the aggressive greed of those who seek to exploit her, and to Mahony she seems unpleasant because he is unwilling and unable to appreciate her for herself, but to those who are more open to her influence she is a good land. It is not only irony which leads Richardson to refer at the trilogy's conclusion to the "rich and kindly earth of his adopted country".¹ It is rich and kindly, but it is also earth, and Mahony's soul resents being earthbound. The sea, with its unbounded horizons, is Mahony's true element, and it is as much a part of the Australian landscape as the land itself. Richardson uses the landscape of earth and sea as an image of the conflict in Mahony's soul between his desire for stasis and his equally strong desire for motion. This conflict of irreconcilable opposites, which Richardson perceives to be both the basis and the destruction of life, is the true theme of the Richard Mahony novels.

In the novels of Martin Boyd, far from being hostile to the human foreground, the landscape is usually seen as the ideal setting for a fully civilized, Mediterranean life. Occasionally, it leads people to throw off the conventional proprieties in order to discover their true selves, and in *Lucinda Brayford* certain Australian landscapes are used as touchstones for the ideal harmony of man with his environment. Unassimilated guilt has more affinity with the European heritage. The

¹Henry Handel Richardson, *The Fortunes of Richard Mahony* (1930; Melbourne: Heinemann, 1954), p.831.

lives of Boyd's protagonists are ruined by their inability to reconcile what appear to them to be the irreconcilable conflicts inherent in human existence: between good and evil, intention and result, expectation and fulfilment.

White uses the Australian landscape as a symbol of the mystery and the poetry which may be discovered in apparent emptiness; not as a symbol of archetypal hostility, but as a sign of the challenge life offers to man's capacity for spiritual and imaginative self-discovery. Again, it is less a theme in its own right than a means toward the unfolding of a larger concern: of how "to be human in a universe increasingly inhumane".¹

For David Meredith, in Johnston's trilogy, the Australian landscape comes to represent the nothingness underlying existence and the threat of the unknown. But when he returns to Australia he realizes that, instead of the outback which had haunted his imagination abroad, it is the soulless suburban reality with which he must come to terms. Like Teresa in *For Love Alone*, as a young man he had turned to the sea in quest of the freedom, the adventure and the promise of infinite beauty he could not find in the city. His story follows him farther than Tereas's: eventually he feels compelled to return and face the reality of the city and the cramped and conventional values for which it stands. Like Patrick White, Johnston's protagonist discovers that it is the "Great Australian Emptiness"² of Australian civilization, and not the outback, which is truly terrifying, and which must be confronted if Australians are to survive as a people worthy of their own literature.

¹Veronica Brady, "In My End is My Beginning: Laura as Heroine of *Voss*", *Southerly*, 35 (1975), 31.

²White, "The Prodigal Son", 38.

In his zeal to defend and to extol Patrick White's achievement, John Rorke makes the point that

It is not the uniformity and pragmatism of Australian life which make it, of itself, without artistic possibilities, but the restrictive uniformity of *belief* about that life and man, shared by the novelists, articulated by them and passed on through the tradition, which has made fully sustained imaginative writing about Australia and Australians almost an impossibility.¹

He continues his argument by advancing the hypothesis that it may have been "easier for the expatriates to leave rather than take up the artistic burden of seriously questioning that belief, of rediscovering that life and man, of reproducing here the conditions and achievements of art".² The argument of this thesis is that the expatriates did take up the burden of questioning, not only the chief tenets of the Australian "legend of the nineties", but the conventional assumptions of men and women everywhere. If the true purpose of the novel is to provide a criticism as well as a reflection of life, these novels fulfil that function. If the novel is also involved in providing a mirror in which the people of a nation may recognize themselves, these writers attempted honestly to depict Australian life as they saw it. Their novels portray a people torn by inner conflicts, ambitions and inadequacies, whose lives are influenced by manners, by reading, and by the thinking of forbidden thoughts. They contradict and qualify the myth of a simple bush people, hewing a life out of a hostile land, with little time for the social niceties or the intellectual endeavours of a more complex civilization. While Australians continued to conceive of themselves in terms of the legend, the literature of the expatriates

¹"Patrick White and the Critics", *Southerly*, 20 (1959), 69.

²*Ibid.*

remained unnoticed and unpopular. Now that such myths are obviously no longer viable, there is a renewed interest in the expatriate experience and perspective, and in the image of life, especially Australian life, created in the novels of the expatriates.

A discussion of the patterns which the themes and preoccupations of exile assume in the novels of Australian expatriate writers leads inevitably to an appreciation of the unexpected richness and depth of allusion and meaning which characterize Australian literature as a whole. Perhaps Patrick White was correct in suggesting that "Possibly all art flowers more readily in silence".¹ Certainly, White is not alone in seeking "to discover the extraordinary behind the ordinary, the mystery and the poetry which alone could make bearable the lives of such people", nor in learning that even the ugliness of Australian life may acquire a meaning.² There were several before him who in many small ways anticipated his achievement, and made the depth and range of his vision possible.

¹White, "The Prodigal Son", 39.

²*Ibid.*

Section One

THE INTERNATIONAL NOVEL AND THE AUSTRALIAN HEROINE

Chapter 1

MRS CAMPBELL PRAED AND THE ANGLO-AUSTRALIAN ROMANCE

Rosa Caroline Murray-Prior (Mrs Campbell Praed), born at Bromelton or Bungroopin, Queensland, in 1851, has been described as "potentially, though not in fact, a major Australian novelist".¹ Because her failure to fulfil her early promise is often blamed on her expatriation and on the habit of mind which reveres the Old Country above the native land, it seems useful to consider her work in some detail. Her conversion of the Anglo-Australian romance from a form which served to reinforce British complacency and self-congratulation into a form which showed British values in conflict with the developing values of the new nation of Australia is a contribution to Australian literature which has gone unrecognised.

She came from a station-owning family of some literary interests.² After her father's appointment as Postmaster-General in 1862, the family alternated between living in Brisbane and on their station at Marroon on the upper Logan, which they had purchased in 1864. In 1872 she married Campbell Praed, a visiting Englishman, and after spending a few years on his station on Port Curtis Island, she accompanied him to England and they settled there. In the following years she wrote almost forty novels, about twenty of them Anglo-Australian romances.

¹ John Barnes, "Australian Fiction to 1920", in *The Literature of Australia*, ed. Geoffrey Dutton (1964; rpt. Ringwood, Victoria: Penguin, 1972), p.155.

² She had access to a variety of classics and for a few years, from 1866 to 1868, she produced, with her mother and her brother Tom, a monthly literary magazine modelled on that of the Brontë family for their private amusement. For further biographical information see Colin Roderick, *In Mortal Bondage* (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1948).

In 1895 she made a quick "Rip Van Winkle return"¹ to the land of her birth. It was her only home-coming. As her health failed, she spent her winters on the Riviera and her summers in England. She died there in 1935.

Praed was a moderately popular novelist. Most of her books went into second one volume editions within a year of publication after initially appearing in the traditional three volume format and the demand for her work was sufficient to support the production of at least one and sometimes up to three novels a year. Naturally, such productivity was a strain on her creative talent and most of her later novels suffer from a flagging of her imaginative gifts. Her writing is always strongly autobiographical. She returns again and again to her personal preoccupations with duty, free will, and the occult, and in her Australian books draws heavily on her childhood and youthful memories and on letters from her family. Perhaps she wrote at such high speed and drew on such a limited body of raw material for her situations because she was prevented from saying what she really wanted to say by her publisher's caution and her public's Victorian preconceptions. There is a strong case for this argument in the correspondence preserved regarding the publication of *Policy and Passion* in 1881.² Whatever the reason, her characters rapidly became stereotyped and her treatment of set problems became less an exploration than a familiar exercise over old ground.

¹Mrs Campbell Praed, *My Australian Girlhood* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1902), p.208.

²"The Campbell-Praed Papers", Oxley Library OM64-1, Boxes 1 and 2. I wish here to express my thanks to the authorities of the John Oxley Library, Brisbane, for permission to consult these papers.

Despite her own strong interest in her material,¹ Praed does not seek to challenge her readers in any way. Her theory of literature is that of the gilded pill: instruction disguised as entertainment. Although occasionally there seems to be a dangerous tendency toward an unhealthy self-indulgence in her accounts of the woes and daydreams of her heroines and sometimes a healthier indignation at society's treatment of women in general, she seldom invites her readers to identify themselves with her characters. Indeed, her attempts at maintaining distance are usually so successful as to lead Miles Franklin to complain that "there appears to be no contribution from or presentation of the personality of Mrs. Campbell Praed".² In fact, Praed's own experience did exert a strong influence on the patterns of her novels and on her delineation of character. Yet because her identification with her heroines (whose stories are largely her own) conflicts on the one hand with her social training, which condemns women who do not know and keep their place, and on the other hand with her literary training, which demands a masculine "objectivity", the potential personal force of her narrative is often lost.

In her Australian novels, Praed's concern is with the provincial heroine who longs for the release and stimulation of the wider life offered by the centres of cosmopolitan culture. Her treatment of this theme seems a direct growth from the discussions of the relative merit of city and country in traditional literature and from the regional concerns of such writers in English as Maria Edgeworth and Sir Walter Scott. In other words, she was writing as an English novelist in the

¹It would not be an exaggeration to say that her writing appears to have served as a necessary therapeutic tool with which she was able to work out many of her own problems.

²Miles Franklin, *Laughter, Not for a Cage*, p.75.

regional tradition. The theme of the frustrated provincial genius or sensitive soul born into an uncongenial and unsympathetic environment is a commonplace of provincial fiction. If this theme becomes part of a work of a larger and universal significance, as it often does in the novels and stories of Henry James, then it may justly be termed regional rather than provincial art. This chapter and the following one attempt to determine whether any of Praed's novels ever achieve this stature.

The introductory note to *Policy and Passion* is an important statement of Praed's literary objectives. After deploring the "onesidedness of the intellectual intercourse which at present connects Great Britain with the Antipodes",¹ she goes on to predict a brilliant future for Australian society and culture but notes as well that "the time for this is hardly yet ripe".² In the meantime, the Australian experience must not pass undocumented and the British public must be brought gently to the realization that Australia might have something to say to them. She defines her role as follows:

It has been my wish to depict in these pages certain phases of Australian life, in which the main interests and dominant passions of the personages concerned are identical with those which might readily present themselves upon an European stage, but which, directly and indirectly, are influenced by striking natural surroundings, and by the conditions of being, inseparable from the youth of a vigorous and impulsive nation.

The scenery described here is drawn directly from nature; and the name of Leichardt's Land — a tribute to the memory of a daring but ill-fated explorer — is but a transparent mask covering

¹(London: Richard Bentley & Son, 1881), Vol.1, p.iii.

²*Ibid.*, Vol.1, p.v. This statement is comparable to Henry James's anticipation that Americans could look forward to "something of our own — something distinctive and homogenous" in the future, but that nothing great would emerge in his own lifetime, in a letter to Thomas Sergeant Perry in 1867, in *The Selected Letters of Henry James*, ed. Leon Edel (New York: Farrar, Strauss & Cudahy, 1955), pp.22-23. e/

features that will be familiar to many of my Australian readers.

But it is to the British public that I, an Australian, address myself, with the hope that I may in some slight degree aid in bridging over the gulf which divides the Old World from the Young.¹

It has been argued that her perspective on Australia is limited from the outset by her decision to portray it through British eyes, from the outside rather than from within.² This decision led her to concentrate on the superficial international differences when she might have utilized her special knowledge of the life and spirit of both countries to produce a far more subtle analysis of their interaction. Her decision to address herself to the British public is blamed on the habit of mind which A.A. Phillips has termed the "cultural cringe". Praed and most of her fellow Australians even until well into the twentieth century still thought of England as "home". Such an attitude tended to disguise the potential conflict between an English and an Australian point of view, encouraging instead the unconscious assumption of English values. At the same time, Praed obviously feels a natural pride in the country of her birth which she feels she must justify and explain to the British in their own terms.

Praed was writing throughout the eighteen-eighties and the 'nineties and was familiar with Henry Lawson's work; she was sympathetic to the spirit of Australian nationalism; but she wrote from a sensibility far removed from what has been called the Australian "legend of the nineties". She was living in England; she was acquainted with Oscar Wilde and his circle: the contrast between the *fin de siècle* spirit of the British "yellow nineties" and the optimism and defiant

¹*Policy and Passion*, Vol.1, p.vi.

²Barnes, "Australian Fiction to 1920", p.157.

nationalism of the same decade in Australia must have seemed particularly acute. In some respects, the opposition between the world-weary aestheticism of Barrington and the chauvinistic nationalism of Longleat in *Policy and Passion* is an expression of just this conflict between the British and the Australian spirits of the 'nineties. It is interesting to note that her sympathies ultimately rest with Longleat. Praed was Australian and she was proud of her nationality. However, she could never subscribe to the anti-intellectualism and radical democratic sentiments expressed in so much of Lawson's verse.¹ As Desmond Byrne pointed out in 1896, she was a representative of the Australian landed gentry, the squattocracy, and as such was particularly well-qualified to be "the first to attempt to give an extended and impartial view of the social and political life of the upper classes in Australia".² It was a view not likely to commend itself either to the proletarian bias of the *Bulletin* or to the majority of its readers, and it is a view which cannot be accommodated to fit narrow theories based on the democratic bias of the Australian literary tradition. An aristocratic point of view has often automatically been identified as an un-Australian point of view. Even Byrne, an essentially sympathetic reviewer, feels obliged to add that the "average Australian girl of real life"³ is very different from Praed's typical heroines.

However, the real question is not whether Praed's writing is truly Australian, but whether it is genuine. Does she falsify her own beliefs

¹For example, see "Middleton's Rouseabout" (pp.31-32) and "To My Cultured Critics" (pp.149-150) in *Poetical Works of Henry Lawson* with preface and introduction by David McKee Wright (1918; rpt. Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1951).

²Desmond Byrne, *Australian Writers* (London: Richard Bentley & Son, 1896), p.229.

³*Ibid.*, p.245.

and observations in order to cater to the demands of an English and a Victorian public or does she remain true to her own personal vision, whatever that may be?

Few critics have dealt with Praed's fiction at any length, but most of those who have studied her believe her early Australian work to be her best. Certainly, she has no claim to be remembered as even a minor British novelist for her English and continental stories.¹ The suggestion is that these early Australian novels were written when she was still most closely in touch with the inspiration afforded her by her native land and before she yielded her own independence of thought to the stuffer English point of view. Praed herself has furnished some support for this theory. In a long letter to the *Brisbane Grammar School Magazine* in 1900 she reviewed her achievement of the past twenty years and found it lacking. She wrote:

. . . had I only been simple and natural, had I only tried to describe what I knew, there was a rich virgin field waiting to be tilled under my very feet. I had the Australian bush with its glamour, its tragedy, its pathos, and its humour; I had the romance of the pioneer unpheavings, and the social makings of a new born colony — had I but known it, the whole stock-in-trade of the novelist. . . . Alas! when I think that in those early days of mine, it never struck me that my worthiest ambition might be to become a genuine Australian story-writer! Then it was rather the fashion to despise native surroundings and the romance of the bush. We all wanted to be English — to seek art beyond the sea. So some of us left the treasure behind and sailed after the shadow.²

¹ Although Colin Roderick contends that in her novels of the psychological and the occult, especially in *Nyria*, she reaches her "highest point of literary achievement", this opinion has been ignored by other critics in the field and does not seem justified by the quality of the books in question. See Colin Roderick, "Mrs Campbell Praed: Her Life and Times", Diss. Sydney, 194?, p.479.

² Mrs Campbell Praed, "My Literary Beginnings", pp.16-17, in "The Campbell Praed Papers", Oxley Library OM64-1, Box 3.

Yet although she recognizes that her work has not been that of a "genuine Australian story-writer" she does not seem to fully understand the true reasons for her failure. The fault lies not so much in her choice of subject matter as in her approach. Surely her task should never have been to "describe" what she knew, but to write "simply and naturally" out of that knowledge.

My Australian Girlhood (1902), published two years after her letter was written, confirms this judgement. In this rambling, confused book (half of which is lifted with only minor changes from the earlier half-memoir, half-novel entitled *Australian Life, Black and White*, published in 1885) her emphasis is placed more strongly than ever on the solely exotic aspects of the Australian flora and fauna. Her attitude toward the land of her birth is still one of unresolved ambivalence. She is proud of it but cannot help qualifying her pride by admitting in advance all the possible British criticisms. Thus she writes:

I often wish that . . . one could live one's childhood over again in dreams. For some of us, what a delightful contrast they would present to the smug English conventionalities! . . . Yet after thirty years of civilised existence, that wild youth 'down under' comes back to me in all its unforgettable charm . . .¹

That it was a wild, uncivilized youth she is eager to admit. She calls it charming, an adjective suggesting the quaint and harmlessly unusual, in the hope of making her nostalgia more comprehensible to her British readers and more acceptable, perhaps, to herself. Again, she writes with obvious delight of her familiarity with bush lore and then downgrades the bush achievement by placing it in ironic juxtaposition with Old World values:

¹*My Australian Girlhood*, p.1.

I learned, too, at the camp to plait dilly-bags, to chop sugar-bags (otherwise hives of native bees) out of trees, to make drinking vessels from gourds, and to play the jew's-harp; but English life is not adapted to the display of these accomplishments.¹

Her humour is undoubtedly entertaining, but the impulse controlling it seems unnecessarily defensive.

She is only too clearly able to appreciate the humorous aspects of the colonial's yearnings toward the Old World. She manages to imply that such impulses have a solid foundation in the deficiencies of the Australian environment and of the Australian character nourished by that environment even as she claims for it a distinctive beauty all its own. For example, she relates an incident in which Zack Bedo, under the spell of "a fair Australian Anglomaniac", laments:

'Oh, Lord . . . if there was only something to look at besides those everlasting gum-trees! Now if I could just take a trip to Europe, and get a squint at some of the pictures and statues and the old castles and the Alps — just think of the snowy mountains and the Rhine — and then look at *that*! Oh! I bet if I could only see some of the sights in the Old Country I'd do something yet.'²

When "our poet" replies that the Australian scenery is "worth coming all the way from Europe to look at", the reaction is shocked amazement and disbelief.

This incident with Zack is a burlesque version of the complaints of several of Praed's Australian heroines and of her own attitude at more serious moments to the Australian predicament. As a colonial herself, Praed is acutely conscious of the problems raised when English

¹*Ibid.*, p.66.

²*Ibid.*, p.183.

civilization is transported to a new and entirely different environment where under changed conditions the old cultural values can provide no solace. Elsewhere in *My Australian Girlhood*, as she does so often in her novels, she links the sensations of physical exile in a foreign environment to those of spiritual alienation:

Some one is singing within, a plaintive English ballad, in which there is an allusion to Charles's Wain and a winter evening. The words suggest the Unknown — the far-away. Ice, snow, the Great Bear, holly and mistletoe, and Christmas waits. What have these to do with this languorous southern night, in which the soul faints and cries for something which it has never known? — something distant, awesome, glorious, yet vaguely melancholy — something — the soul knows not what;¹ it is only conscious that it yearns and cries.

In passages like this she succeeds in endowing the provincial's urge toward a wider experience with a larger significance: it becomes part of mankind's search for the infinite. At the same time it remains rooted in the particular. The colonial situation highlights man's inadequacies in the face of the unknown: nature is no longer familiar and humanized but a force to be reckoned with anew, both within and without. The old formulations no longer supply spiritual needs just as the old attitudes toward nature no longer suffice to explain her adequately.

It is a difficult adjustment to make and naturally engenders some confusion. Like the English romantics, Praed brings to the Australian landscape her own preoccupations. On the one hand, she carries with her the popular nineteenth-century prejudice in favour of a Wordsworthian communion with a sympathetic and motherly nature and on the other she brings her personal interest in the inner life and in the occult. As

¹*Ibid.*, p.151.

a result, her feelings about Australian nature are divided. She finds "in the old Nurse ever [her] best friend"¹ even as she stresses the "grim spell of the bush",² the loneliness of "Mile after mile of primeval forest; interminable vistas of melancholy gum-trees",³ and exclaims: "In truth, all the flimsinesses of life are torn into shreds by the wild forces of nature which reign in the bush."⁴ She sees it as at once both a friendly, familiar environment and a starkly elemental one, capable of swift and terrifying treachery.

H.M. Green states the view commonly taken of Praed's achievement when he writes that she

is never better than in her descriptive passages, not so much of her heroines, though of these she has left some attractive vignettes, as of aspects of the bush or of station life.⁵

She is praised as a talented descriptive writer but the implication is that her descriptive passages are not really integrated into the narrative patterns of the novels in which they appear. It is true that Praed is fond of set-pieces in which she indulges her own fascination for the exotic elements of the landscape and in which she names each detail with loving care. At the opening of *Policy and Passion* her visiting Englishman encounters the following scene:

The time was half-past four in the afternoon of a sultry day in February. A storm brooded in

¹*Ibid.*, p.1.

²*Ibid.*, p.2.

³*Ibid.*, p.9

⁴*Ibid.*, p.104.

⁵H.M. Green, *A History of Australian Literature*, Vol.1, p.243.

the distance, and there was an ominous stillness in the atmosphere. The oleanders and loquat-trees before the opposite houses looked brown and thirsty. The acacias in the inn garden drooped with sickly languor; and the spiky crowns of the golden pine-apples beneath them were thickly coated with dust. Flaming hibiscus flowers stared at the beholder in a hot, aggressive fashion. There was no green shadow anywhere to afford relief to eyes wearied with brightness and colour. Brassy clouds were gathering slowly in the west, and the sun, beating pitilessly upon the zinc roofs of the verandahs, was mercilessly refracted from the glaring limestone hills that formed the eastern border of the township.¹

In this case, the landscape effectively sets the scene for the stormy relationships and emotional turbulence to come. The description is in keeping with Barrington's over-refined sensibility, while suggesting the hot-house atmosphere of the fascination he will come to exert over Honoria. At the same time, it works as an objective correlative for Honoria's characteristic mixture of pride and humility and for her own feverish thirsting after experience. To Barrington, Honoria proves as exotic, as stimulating and ultimately as merciless as the landscape itself.

Praed usually writes well when she is describing the various aspects of the typically Australian scene but she is best at these mood pieces which complement her portrayals of inner tensions and struggle. Occasionally she explicitly employs landscape as an objective correlative to mirror the state of a character's mind. Isabel Gauntlett's night journey to Doondi in *The Head Station* is presented in these terms:

Now, in this soft southern night, laden with aromatic fragrance, and filled with the murmur of hidden life, as she was whirled on through

¹*Policy and Passion*, Vol.1, pp.2-3.

regions unknown, and suggestive of the wild and unexpected, Isabel Gauntlett felt her being revived; and her heart panted with the longing of a girl who sees for the first time opening before her the world of romance and destiny.¹

As in the Waverley novels of Scott, the journey into the unknown and primitive land can be perceived as a liberating experience² but the products of a more civilized land must return to it when their "voyages of discovery"³ are completed. Isabel, who nearly died in the suffocating, conventional atmosphere of England, opens like a flower in the freer air of the colony but by the end of the novel it is understood that she will marry an Englishman and return to England. Praed, like her most convincing hero Thomas Longleat, seems determined to keep Australia for the Australians.

It is likely that Praed's alternation between an almost Augustan approval of the picturesque in landscape and a romantic urge to recreate the spirit of a place as an outer symbol of inner emotions is derived at least partly from her reading of Scott's novels. The suggestion of this thesis is that his influence was far less harmful than has generally been assumed. She found in his achievement both a justification for her own work and a theme. Like most of her class and generation Praed read Scott avidly. It is impossible to know if she consciously modelled her work on his example, but signs of his influence are abundant. Karl Kroeber has described Scott's contribution to English literature as consisting

¹(London: Chapman & Hall, 1885), Vol.1, pp.136-137.

²Compare Mannering's and Bertram-Brown's night journeys in *Guy Mannering*, for example.

³*The Head Station*, p.172.

in his transformation of the exotic into the culturally significant. To him not merely the individual but society itself becomes problematic. If his heroes are moderate, his societies are implacable, for what to Byron, and indeed, most of his contemporaries was the problem of individual survival and fulfilment was to Scott the problem of cultural survival and fulfilment.¹

It is easy to see why Scott held such a strong appeal for the inhabitants of England's colonies long after his influence had waned in England itself. For Americans, Canadians and Australians the problems were similar: how to transform the exotic into the culturally significant and how to ensure the growth and fulfilment of a new culture.

In the Waverley novels, Scott romanticizes what to the English is a barbarous and unknown land; his stories follow the pattern of the unexceptionable young Englishman's journey to that land, his encounter with a maturing conflict and his inevitable return home, "the romance of his life . . . ended".² Praed reverses this pattern. She too romanticizes what to the English is a barbarous and unknown land, but her central characters are her heroines. They already inhabit the strange land and are longing to get out; yet when the young Englishman arrives it is as if a serpent has entered a pastoral paradise: he encourages discontent and brings unhappiness. He is the wicked seducer of popular romance and the embodiment of both the appeal and the threat of the Old world to the New. His exploitation of the heroine's innocence parallels his exploitation of the land.³ The heroine learns

¹Karl Kroeber, *Romantic Narrative Art* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1960), p.19.

²Sir Walter Scott, *Waverley* (The Abbotsford Edition; Edinburgh: Robert Cadell, 1842), Vol.1, p.307.

³Many of these men have come to Australia to escape disgrace and make a fortune. They have no intention of doing anything for the country. They will use it and leave.

from her experience to abandon her dreams and settle for the good but simple Australian suitor and a life in her homeland. This is at once a personal decision to be subject no longer to another's will and a symbolic rejection of imperialism's claim to the right to exploit her country. Despite her longings for what she has read is the superior English way of life, she is not prepared to sacrifice her own sense of values to attain it. Praed makes it clear that to settle for her Australian suitors is in some ways to settle for less, just as Scott suggests that Waverley's choice of Rose over Flora, though prudent and even wise, was a choice of the second-best. Her Englishmen, like Scott's Frenchified Flora, represent an older culture, richer, more varied, but more dangerous, especially to those reared in the simpler and freer atmosphere of the New World.

There seems to be a conflict between Praed's innate conservatism, which would have been encouraged by her reading of Scott and the ideas of her time, and her Australian radicalism, which resents the authority of both the past and the powerful. Just as Scott welcomes civilization but longs for the old heroic ideals so Praed welcomes the sophistication and experience represented by the Old World even as she regrets the loss of the innocence and freedom which she associates with the New when untainted by the Old. But where Scott is identified with the Old threatened by the New, Praed finds herself identified with the New threatened by the Old. Because her reading and her upbringing have conditioned her to reverence the Old, the historical conflicts in her work are less clear-cut than in Scott's and her ambivalence is more noticeable. It is apparent in the tension between her approval of her heroine's rejection of the Englishman on nationalistic grounds (probably based on her own regret that she had "left the treasure behind and sailed after the shadow") and her knowledge that her audience (and a

part of herself) could only accept the rejection on moral grounds. Praed's Anglo-Australian romances are sometimes subtle studies of the colonial and imperialist mentalities as observed through the relationships of the sexes. The implication of the narrative structures of these novels is that England seduces and cheats Australia just as Praed's individual Englishmen seduce and cheat her Australian heroines; but Praed herself shies away from such a drastic generalisation and this implication remains hidden, disguised by the moral platitudes so popular in the Victorian age.

Praed's inclusion of all the stock occurrences of colonial romance has often been criticized as an outright capitulation to the demands of sensation-seeking English readers. Certainly it is impossible to ignore her compulsion to explain her country, but a far more interesting reason again suggests itself in the example of Scott. In Scott's *Guy Mannering*, the community spirit and vigorous traditional life of Charlies-hope is conveyed through his account of the fox-hunt, otter-hunt, badger-baiting and salmon-hunt. Praed seems to be using the devices open to her — the kangaroo hunt, the bush picnic, the country horse race, the visit to the aboriginal camp or the diggings — to attain a similar end: to suggest the spirit of the community into which the alien Englishman intrudes a very different set of values. In *Policy and Passion* and *The Head Station*, Praed successfully creates the impression of a coherent community life as a background to the action. Even the melodramatic episode in which Barrington is bitten by a snake (a typical Australian mishap) and Honoria sucks the poison from his wound is highly effective in its evocation of the overpowering attraction he holds for her: the sexual undercurrent of their relationship is more strongly hinted here than anywhere else in the book. Their relationship has already been associated with the fascination and deadliness of snakes. Sometimes it seems as if Honoria

is a type of Lamia whose destiny it is to destroy her lovers; sometimes it seems as if Barrington is to be associated with the Biblical serpent seducing the New World Eve. The snake-bite scene further develops the snake imagery to suggest that their relationship is mutually destructive. Praed is undeniably an uneven writer but at her best these incidents of "local colour" are skilfully utilized to advance and modify the pattern of her narrative.

The Head Station appears to provide a puzzling example of her inconsistency in such matters. She seems to see herself as writing in the tradition of Kingsley's *The Recollections of Geoffrey Hamlyn*, while modifying his vision of Australia; but in fact her account of Australian life serves to uphold rather than to correct the veracity of her model. When Isabel, the visiting Englishwoman, confesses that her knowledge of Australia is confined to her reading of *The Recollections of Geoffrey Hamlyn*, she is assured that this novel is not at all realistic. Mollie tells her:

'Oh, we are not all convicts . . . and we are not all great people in disguise And station life isn't a picnic, nor need you be afraid of bushrangers in these parts'¹

It is tempting to view this critique as the spirited forerunner of Tom Collins' famous remarks on Kingsley in Furphy's *Such is Life*. However, just as Collins' story ironically undercuts his preference for a "slice of life" over an artful arrangement of life into the form of romance; he is incapable of seeing the novelettish story revealed to his readers through his diary entries; so Praed's story disproves Mollie's remarks. Braddick, Isabel's lover, is a great English gentleman in disguise. Hester's estranged husband is an ex-convict

¹*The Head Station*, Vol.1, p.291.

turned bushranger who camps out in the neighbourhood and goes by the name of Captain Rainbow. An uninformed reader could be excused from assuming on the evidence of Praed's account that station life was little more than a leisurely affair of hammocks, novels, evening musical parties and bush picnics, although she does show Gretta working in the dairy.

It is difficult to know what to make of these reversals. Some critics have decided that while she knows it to be a false, or at best a limited interpretation of Australian life she feels obliged to supply her English readers with what they expect and demand. It seems more likely, however, that the pattern of *The Head Station* is a true representation of Praed's vision. A recurrent theme in all her work, which is expressed repeatedly throughout this novel, is an emphasis on the hidden romance inherent in what appears to the casual or indiscriminating eye as the most mundane of existences. Gretta is unable to perceive the Greek god and natural gentleman in her Australian suitor, James Ferguson, nor can she recognize the tragic potential of her sister Hester's relationship with her brother's tutor, Durnford. Similarly, Mollie is unable to perceive the romance in familiar surroundings. It is the writer's business to heighten our sensitivity to the potentialities of the familiar and it is this task which *The Head Station*, however clumsily, sets out to do for its Australian readers. For its English readers, it attempts to show that Australians may lead intense emotional lives and have sensibilities as cultivated as the most civilized of the English.

Praed is not a major Australian novelist but her work is of interest to the literary and cultural historian and her contribution to Australian literature deserves some recognition. She took Kingsley's pastoral romance and made it into a genuine Australian form by shifting

the centre of attention from the English in exile to focus instead on the Australian at home. Her ambivalence toward her native land and her motherland is the counterpart of the aggressive nationalism of the *Bulletin* school, and only when both are recognized as part of the Australian heritage will our picture of the Australian literary tradition be complete. Her Anglo-Australian romances provide an alternative vision of Australia in the last few decades of the nineteenth century. She shows Australia in an international perspective and Australians trying to come to terms with both their heritage from the European past and their new environment. In her portrayal of the Australian landed gentry she anticipates the work of Boyd and in her concern to humanize the Australian environment by showing it to be the setting of human activity as serious, as tragic, as interesting, as human activity elsewhere, she anticipates White.

Chapter 2

MRS CAMPBELL PRAED AND THE AUSTRALIAN HEROINE

Praed's second (and perhaps her greatest) contribution to Australian literature is her creation of a distinctively Australian heroine who comes to embody both the strengths and the weaknesses of the newly settled continent. In her first published novel, entitled *An Australian Heroine* (1880), she is still struggling to define her vision and her portrayal of Esther Hagart seems to suffer from the influence of Kingsley's insipid Australian heroine in *The Hillyars and the Burtons*, Gerty Hillyar. By the following year this difficulty is solved. In *Policy and Passion*, Esther's dreamy, pathetic nature is reproduced in Angela and her longings toward a better world have become articulate, educated and spirited in Honoria. To the modern reader, the sections dealing with Angela are sentimental and tedious, whereas Honoria is an interesting and original creation. Her type recurs in Gretta of *The Head Station*, Sara of *Miss Jacobsen's Chance*, and Elsie of *Outlaw and Lawmaker*, but never again with the freshness and appeal of the original. Nonetheless, such a succession of strong-minded heroines in popular Australian romances of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries suggests that the myth of the masculine orientation of Australian literature only holds true if one chooses to ignore the achievement of Praed.

An Australian Heroine deals with the life of a young Australian girl, brought up in isolation and poverty on a remote island off the Queensland coast, who through circumstance finds herself transferred after her father's death to England and a new life in genteel county society. There are several similarities between the position of the

author and of her heroine: the island setting is drawn from Praed's experience on Port Curtis Island during her first two years of marriage; the naïve heroine mistakes her lover's polished English breeding for signs of a more sensitive nature just as Praed herself came to feel that she had been mistaken in her own estimate of her husband Campbell's character; the heroine journeys from Australia to England as Praed herself did after her Port Curtis sojourn. Indeed, *An Australian Heroine* may be read almost entirely in biographical terms, but this approach does not carry the reader far toward an understanding of the novel as a work of art.

The differences between the fiction and its factual basis are at least equally striking. Esther is unused to society of any kind, while Praed was the daughter of a widowed Postmaster-General, not only accustomed to mingling in high colonial society but often to presiding at functions in her dead mother's stead. Esther's ignorance, her naïveté and her isolation are repeatedly and deliberately stressed in order to heighten the contrast between her wild and undisciplined Australian life and the conventions and proprieties of English life. For example, at her first meal in England she is "perplexed as to the relative use of the implements placed before her"¹ and tries to eat her jelly with a knife.

Praed's insistence on this contrast might seem excessive if its purpose were less necessary to the development of the story. However, the incident is well prepared for and Esther's confusion provides Bernard Comyn, a well-travelled aesthete who will later woo her, with an opportunity to point out to her aunt the important distinction

¹*An Australian Heroine* (1880; New edition, London: Chapman & Hall, 1883), p.128. Hereafter cited by page.

between nature and nurture. What are considered good manners are purely relative. Esther is "naturally refined" although ignorant of specifically English customs. He concludes: "'you know that I have travelled a great deal, and I have come to the conclusion that you English are, with your insular prejudices, the most thorough barbarians in the world'" (128). In this incident, Praed is taking advantage of the interaction of two societies to comment on the shortcomings of each: she deliberately over-emphasizes both the awkwardness of the Australian and the insensitivity of the Englishwoman. However, her purpose in exaggerating these differences is to illustrate the irrelevance of nationality to the truly vital human concerns. Her international setting stresses the universality of her theme. Bernard's criticism suggests that there is a law higher than those of individual societies, a law to which Esther's innate refinement conforms more truly than do Lady Isherwood's acquired sophistications. What is merely implicit at this stage of the story is more fully developed later in a statement of Lydyiard's which in its context appears to have the author's endorsement. Lydyiard tells Esther that

'this dim trace of a system of order that we see pervading every phase of existence — though everywhere it is incomplete and broken up — suggests its realisation elsewhere and is the strongest argument in favour of a perfect unity outside the standing ground of consciousness.'

(386)

This is the ideal order to which Esther has been aspiring unawares all her life, and it is the course of her spiritual journeying toward this goal with which *An Australian Heroine* is most concerned.

The pattern of the novel is that of the young girl's journey from innocence to experience in which she encounters the inevitable discrepancy between expectation and fulfilment and endures the anguish resulting from the lack of coherence between the inner life and the

outer. Her first meeting with the outside world is with an Old World intruder into her New World island. However, corruption has already entered this world through her parents. The arrival of Lydyard and Brand merely confirms the continuity of the past with the future:

Lydyard has participated in Esther's parents' sin; Brand will provide Esther with the opportunity to relive the crisis of decision when her mother chose wrongly and to right it by herself choosing to cling to the path of duty and renunciation, however painful. Esther's mistaken marriage reenacts her parents' in a form of dreadful parody. Whereas they came together in defiance of previous vows and duties, Esther and Brand are married as a result of a ridiculously strict adherence to previous vows and an exaggerated sense of duty on Esther's part. The entire tragedy seems fated from the moment Lydyard warns her that "'It is the past, which, in spite of all our efforts and longings to escape from its thralldom, rules our lives till they are barely our own'" (60). Thus Esther's island must be seen as a false haven and the promise of the New World as illusory. Brand's arrival is less an accident than a sign of the inevitable intrusions of imperfect life upon dreams of a better world.

Brand clearly does not measure up to the exacting standards of that higher law with which Esther feels a natural affinity; yet there seems to be no symbolic value attached to the fact that the Australian heroine represents most strongly the claims of the spiritual life while the English, men and women both, function as devotees of the physical, although this is clearly a reversal of what are usually thought to be the respective roles of colony and mother country. The conflict in this story is not between Old World values and New, but between the physical and the spiritual demands of life. It is enough that Esther's different nationality sets her apart visibly, as her higher spiritual cravings set her apart invisibly.

The novel opens with the solitary figure of Esther, the disguised princess of traditional fairy tale (25), crouched by the sea reading Hans Andersen's story of the Sea-maid, a particularly appropriate foreshadowing of what is to be Esther's fate. She thinks that England will satisfy her inchoate longings as the mermaid yearned toward the world of men, yet both discover instead of the land of their dreams a life even more dissatisfying and lonely. The narrator writes that,

A nearly uninhabited island, swept by southern hurricanes and unreclaimed by civilization, was all the world she knew; but beyond — to the east — where the horizon-line melted into that of ocean, there was another, a misty, mythic region, peopled by the wandering fancies that had assumed shape in her imagination, and dwelt out there in a charmed life, to which she could at will transport herself. (2)

Her longings for something better become confused, through her lack of experience of anything but the novels of Scott and her own bare life on Mudooolan Island, with her conception of England. The narrator comments: "To her ignorant mind, England was a kind of earthly paradise, extremely difficult of attainment" (56). Thus the way is prepared for her infatuation with Brand, who appears to her as a being from that earthly paradise. At the same time, the way is also prepared for her disappointment in him. The reader can see him for what he is from the beginning and entertains no illusions about the fineness of his character: he is clearly mediocre in every way.

Praed's concern, however, is less with the unsuitability of Brand as a mate for Esther, than with the knowledge that longings such as Esther's cannot be satisfied in this world and that they cannot be satisfied by another human being. Bernard Comyn's role in the story serves to underline this point. His failure to be true to Esther at the crucial moment of decision is both in character and absolutely necessary to Esther's own spiritual development. Esther has always

expressed her inchoate longings in terms of dependence on someone else. Early in the story she confesses to Lydyard, "It is like being outside a beautiful garden. There must be something better and higher if only one could reach it, if only some one cared for me, and would teach me'" (59). Later the narrator comments: "She was yearning after a fuller life in which she might devote herself definitely to another. She was ready to prick herself with thorns, if need be, so that she gained that higher goal" (289).

The description of Esther's mixture of adolescent romanticism and spiritual puritanism at this stage of her development is often reminiscent of Maggie Tulliver's interpretation of Thomas à Kempis in George Eliot's *The Mill on the Floss*. Praed informs the reader that Esther read that novel on the ship on her way over to England and marvelled at Maggie's impatience with her education until she herself underwent a similar experience upon her arrival. Clearly Praed is consciously employing the parallel between the situation of George Eliot's heroine and her own and fighting, like the greater author, a tendency toward a sentimental identification with her heroine, by dispassionate narratorial intrusions. She writes:

Had she been older, had she learned better the philosophy of living she would have seen that egoism was in a great part at the root of her discontent — that self-absorption, which is not vanity, but rather a morbid, introspective groping after truth. In the comparative one-sidedness of her nature lay the source of her dissatisfaction and incapability, not in the greatness of her aspirations, in painful contrast with the meanness of her spiritual circumstances. (356)

Esther's desire to flee her husband is a manifestation of her wish to flee the physical and even the sociable aspects of existence. She would like to live solely on a spiritual level, but her understanding of the spiritual relies on day-dreams and inarticulate yearnings toward

something vaguely "higher". When she discovers that flight to Bernard would be both impossible and unsatisfactory in its turn she is forced to fall back on her own resources and to learn the value of the anti-selfconsciousness theory of Carlyle.

Unlike her creator, Esther is not an artist. She

had found it sweeter to dream waking, and to watch the groups flitting by without making an effort to retain them, than to struggle after a permanent acquisition which must inevitably fall short of the ideal. (11)

Near the end of her story, Esther learns from Lydyard the proper route to her ideal. "'In the crucifixion of your individual temperament'", he informs her,

'you will find the highest joy of renunciation. Your martyrdom will be its own monument You will never touch the key-note of perfect harmony, but you have it before you to strive for, as the true artist makes a religion of ideal excellence.' (386)

In her uncompromising thirst for perfection, Esther has shown her affinity with the true artist, but she has not been willing to acquire the self-discipline and the application which must accompany it. Her friend Frederica, who has the discipline but not the soul of the true artist and who is Bernard Comyn's fitting mate, acts as her foil, placing Esther's shortcomings in perspective: despite her faults, Esther's is the greater nature. As she herself tells George Brand on their first meeting, "'It would be better to have the great mind . . . even if it made one wretched'" (20).

Praed devotes much attention to the wretchedness of Esther's life and connects it again with the motif of exile and with Esther's personal limitations. She writes of Esther's state of mind:

Her married life without love was nothing but a degrading prostitution from which she could not escape It seemed to Esther that she had been stranded helpless on a foreign shore. Marriage was not what she had expected. Its higher meaning had been crushed under the weight of material obligations that were hateful to her. It was all distasteful — lowering. (307)

Then she comments:

Poor Esther had none of that analytical faculty which teaches us to accept the world — apart from our individual evaluation — at its best worth Her marriage had upon her the effect of a slow moral suicide. Balzac has written: 'Les drames de la vie ne sont pas dans les circonstances; ils sont dans les sentiments; ils sont dans le coeur.' The deepest tragedies of life lie beneath its surface (312)

Praed, following Meredith's advice,¹ has read the French masters and profited by the exercise. Her natural inclination appears always to have been toward the portrayal of the inner life and in Balzac and Flaubert she found a justification for her preference.

An Australian Heroine is an honest attempt to deal with the inner life and with the pressures resulting from the conflict between Esther's inner life and its outward appearance. Her treatment of her theme is not sensational: she is careful to discourage an indiscriminate identification with her heroine by balancing the emotional appeal represented by the first quotation with the mature analysis of the second. Yet although Praed's theme and her technique are promising one need only compare her effort with George Eliot's treatments of similar areas of experience in *The Mill on the Floss*, *Middlemarch*, and *Daniel*

¹George Meredith, as reader for Chapman and Hall, read the manuscript of a story later to be made into *Policy and Passion* and advised Praed concerning it.

Deronda to realize the thinness of her achievement.

The traditional Victorian variations on the twin themes of duty and renunciation are dutifully run through, but the execution lacks both imagination and passion. Nor is Praed's watchful self-consciousness always sufficient to prevent drama from slipping into melodrama. The unfortunate effect of Lydyiard's passionate address to his dead wife's grave at midnight, "'Your life had no joy, and you died without honour. Your dream of ideal happiness apart from duty has ended as might have been foreseen'" (34-35), is not relieved by his subsequent admission that "'This is true melodrama'" (35). (In contrast it is only fair to note as well that the potential melodrama of the scene in which Esther surprises Brand wooing his cousin Lina is successfully deflated by Lina's well-timed observation that their situation is "a perfect drawing-room comedy" [357].) Finally, not only is the world outside Esther's consciousness at best hazily sketched in, but the greatest defect of all lies in the characterization of her heroine: Esther's personality is pallid and too weak to arouse more than a mild interest. Unlike George Eliot's heroines, Esther is timid and hesitant; Brand nicknames her "Mousie". She is an advance on Gerty Hillyar because she is neither silly nor vacuous, and she has enough inner strength to preserve her own integrity of spirit. However, it is not until her next novel that Praed develops a strong-willed, forthright Australian heroine: she is Honoria Longleat, the heroine of *Policy and Passion*.

The plot of *Policy and Passion* is divided equally between Honoria and her father, Thomas Longleat, Premier of Leichardt's Land. Their stories are complementary but Honoria's is the more compelling of the two. Brought up to be a lady although the daughter of a self-made man (he was originally a convict but she never learns of this), she is

spoiled and ashamed of her father's crude ways, which she associates with the limited scope of colonial existence. She expresses her dissatisfaction to her English visitor and suitor in a much quoted passage:

'Do not call me a *colonial* When you have lived longer in Australia you will know you could not pay a young lady a worse compliment. . . . To be *colonial* is to talk Australian slang; to be badly dressed, vulgar, everything that is abominable . . . at least that is the general opinion. . . . You will see that it is the fashion out here to be as British as possible.'¹

She is conscious of the falsity of her position in mimicking the fashions of a country thousands of miles away and controlled by different interests than her own but she realises too that the vacuum in Australian life must be filled from somewhere. Just as she believes that novels are "false and unnatural" (2, 7) even as she relies on them to supply the deficiencies of her emotional life, so it is in desperation that she turns to an emulation of English ways to satisfy her own indefinable longings for a wider sphere of experience.

She continues her complaint:

'I am always fancying that we Australians are like children playing at being grown-up. It is in Europe that people live

But, do you not see? — everything with us is borrowed. We cannot be original — we cannot even set up an independent government. We must copy old-world forms, and we have nothing of what makes the charm of the old world. Our range of view is so limited. We are so ignorant of life, and ignorant people cannot put out feelers, either deeply or widely.'²

(2, 10-11)

¹*Policy and Passion*, Vol.2, p.8. Hereafter cited by page.

²Compare Gretta Reay's discontent in *The Head Station*: "'Ah! We Australians are like birds shut up in a large cage; our lives are so little and narrow, for all that our home is so big'", Vol.1, p.47.

The Englishman Barrington makes the mistake of assuming that the malaise Honoria expresses can be satisfied by a simple change in material circumstances. He tells her:

'You were not meant to lead a cramped existence in Australia Your gifts are wasted here — your beauty — your rich capacity for enjoyment. You should live in England. All that society and art can furnish should be placed within your reach. . . . ' (2, 187-188)

She herself is wiser. She understands intuitively that her longings are partly a result of her pampered and immature egoism, partly of her sheltered life as a woman, and partly an expression of a deeper spiritual need which cannot be satisfied by the things of this world. She senses too that despite her impatience with Australia it is her homeland and she could never be truly happy abandoning it. Much later, she is able to answer him, and to assert that she would

'pine after the mountains, the wild forests, the old free life. I have read that wherever one's lot may be cast away from home, the longing for one's motherland intensifies with the years, till it becomes pain. I should be unsatisfied.' (2, 246)

Perhaps Praed's own voice may be heard for a moment behind the prediction of her heroine.

Honoria's discontent is further placed in its proper perspective by her father's unbounded faith in the future of the new country he has adopted as his own. John Barnes complains that,

In Longleat she had an excellent instance of Australian values, but she finally sacrificed him on the altar of respectability in a grating piece of doublethink. She could not ask her readers to share her admiration for such a man.¹

¹"Australian Fiction to 1920", p.157.

The passage to which he is referring runs as follows:

As he stood in the glare of the declining sun, his head thrown back, his big chest expanded, with his broad capable forehead, his keen eyes looking out steadily from under shaggy brows, his under lip slightly protruding and giving to his coarsely-moulded face an expression of suave self-complacency, in spite of the drawbacks of evident low birth and vulgar assertiveness, there were in his bearing and features indications of intellectual power and iron resolution, which would have impressed a higher-class mob than that now waiting eagerly for his words. (1, 17-18)

Certainly the stress on Longleat's vulgarity in this paragraph is unnecessarily heavy-handed, and her partial disownment of him here is undoubtedly in anticipation of her English audience's reaction to him; but his vulgarity is also essential to the development of her story. It is important that there should be sufficient reason for Honoria's unwillingness and for her ultimate inability to communicate with her father. Otherwise, his suicide becomes meaningless¹ and she loses the reader's sympathy.

However, Praed makes it clear that Longleat's vulgarity is preferable to Barrington's sophistication. His affair with Mrs Vallancy is intended to complement his daughter's dangerous flirtation with Barrington. Longleat's basic integrity of character and rough honesty is in marked contrast to Barrington's self-deceit and smooth manners. Furthermore, Praed takes pains to marshal the reader's sympathies entirely on Longleat's behalf before the crucial exposure scene in parliament and the touching final interview with Honoria. Longleat's eloquent defence of his past and statement of his faith in his country's

¹ Longleat kills himself because he cannot bear for Honoria to know his past, not because of the political scandal, which he could probably have weathered.

future in his last conversation with Maddox firmly establishes his essential nobility of character and his claim to greatness. During this long speech, all suggestions of his vulgarity are forgotten. Praed clearly endorses his vision of "a young land where the forest is free to all, and the rich and poor are equal in the sight of God and man" (3, 265) and she intends her readers to feel the full strength of his "dream of founding a new order of things, of being the ancestor of great men — patriots — soldiers — legislators" (3, 265). Although the only personal solution for him is suicide, the reader is told that Honoria's children will fulfil his ambition and that she herself comes to a greater appreciation of the country he loved so well. His vision of Australia, not Honoria's, is the one which is finally vindicated.

After Barrington has betrayed her and her honour has been saved by her faithful Australian suitor, Dyson Maddox, Honoria changes her earlier opinions to agree with her father's. She explains to Maddox:

'I trusted him to be loyal as you — as
Australian men are loyal — it is the English
who are false, who have bad thoughts . . .
I did not think that there was any more harm
in meeting him in the Gardens at night, than
in walking with him by the lake at Kooralbyn.'
(3, 130-131)

Just as Henry James's Winterbottom does not know what to make of the behaviour of the young American, Daisy Miller, so Barrington is puzzled by the behaviour of Honoria.¹ The narrator comments:

¹There is no concrete evidence to suggest that Praed ever read James's story. However, it appeared in an English magazine, the *Cornhill*, in 1878 and proved an international triumph, so that it remains a possibility. Gabrielle Bielenstein suggests that "James and Mrs Praed may have met, but this seems impossible to prove. Very likely, the name and something of the work of each were known to the other", in "Affinities for Henry James?", *Meanjin*, 16 (1957), 196. The comparison seems relevant whether or not any direct influence can be proved.

Her frank *abandon* bewildered Barrington's judgement, while it intoxicated his senses. He could not determine whether the absence of that maidenly reserve which he had been accustomed to associate with young ladies of the higher classes was the result of boldness or ignorance.
(2, 248)

Barrington's error in misjudging Honoria reflects a lack of essential nobility of character and of a sensitivity to the nature of others. He has relied so long on convention and social norms that he is incapable of assessing spontaneity. He fails to recognize that, in the words of an Australian observer, Honoria is "'essentially a New-World product. No European young woman could combine so much boldness with an innocence which one is obliged to take for granted'" (1, 136). She herself has come to recognize the truth of this remark by the story's end. When she meets Barrington years later at a London dinner party she is able to assure him that she has "'never regretted having married an Australian; and [she wishes] for no better fate than to cast in [her] lot with that of Leichardt's Land'" (3, 309). Her father's hopes for her have been justified.

Honoria's quest for a larger experience of life and for something beyond the known nearly ended in disaster. Consequently, she seems content to search no further. Her Australian suitor and eventual husband, Dyson Maddox, also feels the need to enlarge his experience, but he is able to direct his energies far more constructively, toward the exploration of his own land and toward political activity. These outlets were not open to a woman. Praed's emphasis is always placed most strongly on the crippling limitations of a woman's life and only secondarily or sometimes symbolically on the limitations of Australian life. Her popular European heroine Nadine also complains: "'Women are hedged in and tied round. To be true to themselves is to be false to

their sex"¹ This sense of claustrophobia and this awareness of being trapped however they choose to act is in all her heroine's laments. Novels like *The Head Station* and *Miss Jacobsen's Chance* are praised for their sense of humour and perspective. They are entertaining because their heroines are of 'too practical a turn of mind to waste many vain regrets over the unattainable'.² For example, Sara Jacobsen converts her demeaning situation into comfortable comedy by refusing to allow it to upset her.³ In contrast, in the novels in which Praed allows her heroines to perceive their situations in a tragic light, her tone seems unbalanced and hysterical; she appears to identify with her female characters at the expense of her male ones. Henry Handel Richardson overcomes this potential narrowness of vision by extending her sense of a claustrophobic universe to her male characters, thereby shifting the issue from the social plane to the metaphysical. However, Praed's male characters, in marked contrast to her women, do not suffer from unfulfilled longings or a sense of constriction. They are active in politics, on the land, and as explorers, while her women are confined to a merely supportive role,

¹*Nadine* (London: George Routledge & Sons, 1885), pp.182-183.

²*Miss Jacobsen's Chance* (London: Richard Bentley & Son, 1886), Vol.1, p.35.

³The relevant incident runs as follows:

'He wishes you to marry?'

Sara bowed her head slightly. The gesture conveyed assent, and in a vague way humiliation. Then another spirit took possession of her. She lifted her eyes and met his straight, laughing softly.

'If I were married he could live at the Club. It's very natural that he should like that better. Why shouldn't I marry? All girls do it. I only wish it didn't have to come so soon.'

'So soon!' he repeated. 'In six months!'

'I'm up for auction', Sara went on, still looking at him, and still laughing. 'That's how it is.'

Ibid., Vol.1, pp.178-179.

which at best is exalted into a vision of the ideal woman, a saintly being capable of supporting the men through their worst hours. (The incident in which Maddox sees the saving vision of Honoria as he lies dying in the desert appears to be part of a tradition more fully explored in Patrick White's *Voss*.)

Praed's frankness in *Policy and Passion* gave her the reputation of being slightly but acceptably risqué.¹ Her original version of the crucial encounter between Honoria and Barrington in his rooms at midnight was censored by her editor George Bentley. As the proofs are lost, it is impossible to know how serious an attempt this represented at portraying human passions in conflict, but it seems reasonable to assume that this first attempt presented directly what the final version merely hints at. It would be interesting to know whether Praed meant her explanation of the power, at once attractive and repulsive, which Barrington holds over Honoria, to be taken literally as a form of hypnosis or to work as a metaphor for that sexual feeling which Honoria's conscious self would never allow her to admit. As a metaphor the device is heavy-handed and unwieldy, but suggestive; taken literally it is melodramatic and improbable. With all its drawbacks, this incident is the closest Praed allows herself to come to an acknowledgement of potential sexuality in a heroine. In her later novels, public pressure and personal antipathies led her to distort her accounts of male/female relationships into unproductive allegories in which masculine brutality confronts feminine purity. *Mrs Tregaskiss* is a typical example, where the contemplation of pineapples in the moonlight leads her unhappy heroine to wonder: "Was there no escape, even in vegetable life,

¹The Prince of Wales asked to meet her after reading *Nadine* and told Mrs Gladstone to read it but to keep it from her daughters.

from the bewildering sex-problem?"¹ When Clare Tregaskiss decides to escape her alcoholic husband by fleeing with her Platonic lover, she is suitably punished and reunited with her husband by the death of her child.

In conclusion, Praed seems to have been only too willing to allow personal inclination and public pressure to lead her away from an honest examination of disturbing issues toward a popular pretense at coming to terms with respectable "problems" on the one hand and toward the substitution of self-indulgence for critical objectivity on the other. The differences in treatment of the unhappy marriage in *An Australian Heroine* and *Mrs Tregaskiss* are illuminating in this respect. Even so, her vision of life often proved too grim for tastes formed by Victorian optimism. Byrne voices a common criticism of her times when he complains: "We are not given enough to admire."²

Although she writes knowledgeably and sensibly of Australian life and on one level intends her novels to "explain" the Australian point of view to the English reader, her novels are really concerned with the depiction of the anguish of a woman's yearnings after a fuller and spiritually satisfying life and with the contrast between the aridity of her environment and the potential fertility of her inner life. This could be a powerful theme, but Praed fails to raise it to a universally significant level. Except in her first two novels, the misery of her heroines seldom goes beyond the level of a personal discontent to

¹(London: Chatto & Windus, 1896), Vol.1, p.52. In this novel, Praed appears to have been influenced by an article by her great friend Justin McCarthy entitled "The Three Dream Heroines". Praed's own preference is for "Fair Ines": "the dream queen of another world . . . the embodiment of all one ever dreamed and told nobody", Vol.2, p.7. Clare Tregaskiss and her friend Gladys are representatives of this ideal type of womanhood. They make for tedious reading.

²*Australian Writers*, p.255.

assume a universal significance and her men are more often types than individuals. Her sympathies are too closely tied to the sensibilities of her heroines for her to achieve a truly large or humane perspective. These are her serious faults, none of which can be blamed on her physical expatriation from Australia or on the attitude of mind labelled "cultural cringe" which she occasionally held towards it. They are defects of sensitivity and of vision.

Perhaps if her own feelings had been more ambivalent, if she had felt more strongly the tensions of living in a country not really her own, her work might have acquired the urgency and depth which it now lacks. Leonie Kramer has written of *An Australian Heroine* (and the remark is appropriate to all of Praed's Anglo-Australian romances) that, "one does not feel, as one does with Henry Handel Richardson, that Mrs Praed really understood the predicament of a person who has sympathies in two worlds."¹ A self-conscious and intelligent writer, she recognized the Australian dilemma at an intellectual level, but she reserved all her feeling for the depiction of a limited kind of spiritual deprivation. Neither the times nor her talent were suited to the production of a more complex art.

¹ Leonie Kramer, "Introduction" to *Australians Abroad*, ed. Charles Higham and Michael Wilding (Melbourne: F.W. Cheshire, 1967), p.x.

Chapter 3

HENRY HANDEL RICHARDSON'S MAURICE GUEST:THE CRITIQUE OF ROMANTIC LOVE

Henry Handel Richardson, born Ethel Florence Lindesay Richardson in Melbourne on 3 January 1870 to a well-to-do doctor of Irish birth and an English mother, is one of Australia's greatest writers, yet except for a brief return visit to check her impressions of the country for *The Fortunes of Richard Mahony* her entire life from the age of eighteen onwards was lived abroad. Unlike Praed, she had to wait nearly thirty years before she received any general critical acclaim, but she is now recognized as one of Australia's major writers. Indeed, she is a writer of such stature she cannot be ignored. Yet although she is regarded as "an Australian classic", it is always with reservations which seem to spring from a belief that "she is somehow un-Australian", that she "does not see things as an Australian would."¹

Perhaps this point of view is expressed most strongly in A.A. Phillips' essay entitled "The Family Relationship".² Phillips bases his conjecture that she was an early victim of the "cultural cringe" on the well-known remark to her husband which she quotes in her unfinished autobiography *Myself When Young*: "'I don't know I'm sure how I ever came to write *Maurice Guest* — a poor ignorant little colonial like me!'"³ While the statement cannot be ignored, it must be placed

¹Vincent Buckley, *Henry Handel Richardson* (1962; 2nd edn, Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1970), p.3.

²*The Australian Tradition*, pp.101-105.

³Henry Handel Richardson, *Myself When Young* (1948; rpt. London: Heinemann, 1964), p.62.

in context. Dorothy Green points out in her *Ulysses Bound*¹ that Richardson's public comments on her personal life must be regarded with caution. She was a fanatically private person who appears to have adopted many masks in her encounters with the outside world. In this instance, the remark seems to be more an immediate plea for sympathy than an announcement of a personal conviction and it is recalled for the sole purpose of introducing her husband's reply, a statement of crucial significance to an understanding of Richardson's work. He reminds her gently: "'But emotionally very experienced.'"² The incident leads Richardson to the conclusion that "to a writer, experience was the only thing that really mattered."³ The implication of this statement is that nationality in itself is of very little importance to the serious artist. He seizes the materials at hand to order them and form them into a significant whole without bothering himself about their origins.

Richardson did see her Australian experience as the basis of her work. She implied that in portraying Maurice Guest and Richard Mahony she was drawing on certain aspects of her own emotional experience in an effort to understand herself and she has been quoted as saying that "an artist has all his material before he is ten years old."⁴ However, she was concerned with the essence of the experience and not with its peculiarly Australian qualities.

¹(Canberra: Australian National University Press, 1973), p.6.

²*Myself When Young*, p.62.

³*Ibid.*

⁴Green, *Ulysses Bound*, p.7.

Nonetheless, Phillips' charges cannot be disposed of so easily. There is a need to examine more thoroughly Richardson's depiction of the expatriate experience, its role within her work, and the relationship between her fiction and that of her fellow Australian expatriates. These are the concerns of this thesis. ~~Hopefully,~~ By altering the angle of vision in this way some new insights may be obtained into Richardson's achievement.

In her article on Australian women writers, Anne Summers argues that "the fact of being female would seem to be more decisive than the status of expatriate"¹ in determining the reception afforded a writer's work. Her feminist bias leads Summers to complain that, "Nowhere in any of Richardson's novels do we find a woman who departs in any way from the traditional, male-drawn conceptions of women" and that "the framework of values within which she operated was still the one dominated by male assumptions about the universe, and within that universe, about women."² These generalisations underestimate the quality and clarity of Richardson's vision. It is too easy to note the unusual aspects of the way she lived and to place too much significance on her masculine pseudonym and on the fact that her major characters are usually men. (The two exceptions are Laura in *The Getting of Wisdom* and Cosima in *The Young Cosima*.) Naturally one cannot expect to find in Richardson the feminist consciousness of the seventies, but her fictional world is far less stereotyped and limited than the feminist analysis allows. In fact, as Dorothy Green and Brian Kiernan³

¹"The Self Denied", *Refractory Girl*, No.2 (1973), footnote 37, 11.

²*Ibid.*, 8.

³Dorothy Green, *Ulysses Bound* and Brian Kiernan, *Images of Society and Nature*.

are careful to stress, Richardson's greatest strength is her refusal to underestimate the ambiguities or to reconcile the irreconcilable conflicts which she sees as the basis of life. She is not a comfortable novelist: the questions she raises are central ones, and they are left unanswered.

In Praed's work the main theme, indeed the almost obsessive concern, was seen to be the depiction and exploration of the conflict between two radically different responses to life, one oriented toward the material aspects of existence, and the other toward the spiritual. Theoretically, both attitudes are admitted to be of equal validity, but emotionally she is clearly committed to the superiority of the spiritual point of view. In Richardson also two irreconcilable responses to life are shown in conflict. The claims of this world, of immediate reality, meet the claims of the ideal, of a continuing search for something better, in a perpetual deadlock.

However, Richardson is far more committed than Praed ever cared to be to the artistic theory of Flaubert.¹ Her treatment is more balanced; judgment is withheld; she arouses an equal sympathy for the predicament of each of her characters. Louise summarizes Richardson's vision of reality in her remark in *Maurice Guest*, Richardson's first novel, when neither she nor Maurice will renounce his own perspective: "Yes. Perhaps you're right — you *are* right. But I am right, too."³ This acknowledgement contains the essence of their dilemma. Neither can change his nature and neither should be required to, for both are

¹She wrote that "The writer who undoubtedly carried most weight with me was Flaubert . . .", in Henry Handel Richardson, "Autobiographical Note" (1942), reprinted in *Southerly*, 23 (1963), 51.

²Henry Handel Richardson, *Maurice Guest* (1908; Melbourne: Sun Books, 1965), p.346. Hereafter cited by page.

of equal necessity to life, yet together they can have no choice but to hurt and perhaps to destroy one another.

Louise and Maurice are both expatriates, provincial refugees who have fled a cultural backwater to pursue life and art in a great European centre. When placed in the continental perspective, the young Englishman appears far more provincial than the unorthodox and adaptable Australian. Louise fits easily into the bohemian life of the city; whereas Maurice is constantly feeling himself to be an outsider and continually responding to new stimuli in an inappropriate fashion.

Richardson is adept at distinguishing national characteristics. Her accounts of the American colony's salon at the Cayhills', of Dove's relationship with his parents, and of the Fürsts at home reveal an exceptional talent for comedy of manners. However, Richardson is less interested in recreating the drama of international life than in the possibilities such a background affords the writer for exploring what is universal in the human experience. Several years before the publication of Lawrence's *Sons and Lovers*, she was grappling with the psychology of love and with its presentation in literature in a study equally perceptive if less memorably expressed.

Although *Maurice Guest* is "very much more than a study of the nature of love",¹ the presentation of love is central to the novel's meaning. Even the fullest studies of love in *Maurice Guest* stop short of viewing the novel as a critique of established assumptions about human relationships; yet *Maurice Guest*, far from accepting a traditional framework of values, is a novel of almost revolutionary implications.

¹Brian Kiernan, *Images of Society and Nature*, p.23.

The interpretation of Maurice's suicide is central to an understanding of the novel as a whole. A.D. Hope reads the novel in terms of Nietzschean philosophy, concluding that Maurice "remains on the level of servile and conventional passion", that he "belongs to the lower sorts of men", and kills himself because of his "insufficiency".¹ At the other end of the critical spectrum, Dorothy Green argues that Maurice's suicide is a heroic gesture signifying his rejection of a world which fails to fulfil the requirements of his ideal.² Rather than settle for "second best" and compromise his vision of the ideal, as Praed's heroines inevitably do, he defies reality and chooses death. Green sees the early incident in which Maurice listens to the old musician he met in the cathedral as relevant to Maurice's decision. Just as the old man had chosen that his life should be a failure "in the eyes of the world" (28) but a success in his own estimation, for he was never untrue to his ideal, so Maurice chooses to fail in the world's terms yet succeed in his own. This is a tempting argument, for it provides a satisfying conclusion to a perplexing love affair which up until Maurice's suicide has remained as messy and inconclusive as these situations often are in life.

However, the novel does not end with Maurice's suicide and the suicide itself is presented in less positive terms than Green's reading would suggest. A number of doubts remain unsettled. The ironic structuring of the novel and the epigraphs heading each of the three sections suggest the possibility that the ideal itself is being questioned, and thus obliquely the holder of that ideal, Maurice himself.

¹A.D. Hope, "Inspiration and Possession: Henry Handel Richardson's *Maurice Guest*", *Native Companions*, pp.257-258.

²*Ulysses Bound*, p.156.

Without subscribing entirely to Hope's point of view, which reduces the novel to too narrow a scope, it is necessary to question Green's elevation of Maurice to the level of the heroic.

The first chapter introduces Maurice as a provincial young man experiencing his first contact with life in Leipzig. At first, as he emerges from the concert hall into the sunshine, still thrilled with a novice's appreciation for the music he has heard, he feels an expansive sense of elation and wanders out of the city intoxicated with naïve dreams of freedom, luxury and success, but later in the day, when the sun has set and he has returned to town, doubts reassert themselves and he is cast down with an almost paranoid sense of his own position as an outsider, alone in a foreign town. Although the reader sees Maurice's environment largely through his own eyes, he is made aware that the outer world which Maurice perceives is often a reflection of his own state of mind. This knowledge helps to distance the reader from too close an identification with the protagonist.

The mixed feelings of the day reach a culmination (which is also a foretelling of future events) in the nightmare with which the chapter concludes. Maurice dreams that he is "in search of something he could not find he did not know himself what he sought" (24). At the name of Moloch he flees in terror, "watched, it seemed to him, from every window by a cold, malignant eye" (*ibid.*). Maurice, as the name "Guest" implies, is the perpetual seeker, the perpetual outsider. His dream merely dramatizes and accentuates the loneliness and the paranoia he already feels. Moloch, a word appropriately strange to Maurice's ears, suggests to the reader terrible sacrifices, the more terrible because unspecified, and thus provides a tenuous link with the epigraph from Petrarch which stands at the beginning of this first section:

"S'amor non è, che dunque è quel ch'io sento?/Ma s'egli è amor, per

Dio, che cosa è quale?"

A literal translation of it reads: "If it is not love, whence comes what I feel?/But if it is love, by God, what kind of thing is it?"¹ In the context of *Maurice Guest* the fascinated horror of this question determines the tone of the entire novel and suggests the helplessness in the face of natural occurrences, seemingly meaningless, which characterizes Maurice's life and death. Yet it also suggests the morbid fascination with suffering and the intellectual and egotistical pleasure to be had in excessive introspection and self analysis, a tradition which can be traced in all its variations from its playful beginning in Petrarch through to the very different preoccupations of the late nineteenth-century decadents. The tone of the original poem is less intense than the epigraph selected from it suggests. What was to Petrarch a pleasant game of paradox has become for Maurice Guest the determining mode of life and death.

After the impressionistic introduction, the second chapter places Maurice firmly within the perspective of a family, class and national background. In *Maurice Guest*, the narrator comments, "the smouldering unrest of two generations burst into flame" (24). The inertia of his provincial background had successfully stifled his father's desire to taste "the joys and experiences of the *Wanderjahre*, before settling down to the matter-of-factness of life" (25). But Maurice "had a more tenacious hold on life" (*ibid.*); he fought stubbornly to maintain it and to escape from the confines of his suffocating environment. The desperation of his need to escape and its equation with life itself are suggested by Richardson's choice of metaphor: Maurice seized upon his talent as a drowning man would a spar (27).

¹This translation is taken from Dorothy Green, *Ulysses Bound*, p.126.

Nonetheless, his character has been formed by his upbringing and the efforts he makes to escape its influence are in some respects efforts to escape from himself as well. Certainly his capacity for self-abandon appears to be the other side of the coin of the puritan mentality, an extreme reaction to extreme repression, so that even in rebellion he remains caught in the system from which he is trying to extricate himself. He cannot change the basis of his thinking; he can only vacillate between accepting and rejecting it. True freedom eludes him because it was never really his goal. He seeks to escape constriction, not to revalue values or to question commonplaces, but to enjoy his share of the world's pleasures and to win his way to a resting-place of "cool, green shadows" (30). Maurice is blindly fleeing what he knows to be unpleasant and soul-destroying, but the goals he seeks are shallow and equally restricting. He has not thought enough about what he really wants or needs.

His ignorance of the motives directing his actions and his initial distaste for examining and questioning them (Richardson writes that "he never came to quite an honest understanding with himself on this point, for desire and dream were interwoven in his mind; he could not separate the one from the other" [27]) are some of the usual traits of callow youth in literature. At first *Maurice Guest* seems to be following the pattern of the traditional *Bildungsroman* in tracing Maurice's growth from ignorance to a more mature self-awareness as he moves from careless daydreaming to agonized introspection. However, in Maurice's case the process is a more complicated one; it leads to self-destruction and becomes a preparation for death instead of life. His story is the record of a gradual process of alienation, both from his surroundings and more importantly from his own sense of himself. Increasing self-analysis leads to confusion and despair, to the

disintegration rather than the consolidation of his sense of identity. His relationship with Louise strips him of the social masks and myths he depends on to survive, and as Krafft suspects, he lacks the necessary strength to forge a new self-image when the old has been destroyed.

Richardson's preoccupation with the failures and outcasts of life is clearly at work here. She records Maurice's decline with clinical precision; yet her sympathy for his predicament is obvious in the pains she takes to involve the reader in an emotional understanding of Maurice's dilemma even as she distances him intellectually so that he may appreciate the irony of the situation.

Maurice's exile is the physical complement of his mental and spiritual alienation. All the characters of *Maurice Guest* are exiles, seeking in a foreign city the training and experience their homelands cannot afford them. Their responses to the experience of exile are as various as their characters. Some embrace it as freedom, some recoil from it; others continue on as before, ignoring its possibilities. Maurice's reaction is hesitant. He is presented as a young man yearning, like Praed's heroines, for something he cannot define. His inarticulate longings are evoked for the reader in the account of his first evening alone in Leipzig:

He watched until the last late-comer had vanished. Only he was left; he again was the outsider. And now, as he stood there in the deserted square, which, a moment before, had been so animated, he had a sudden sinking of the heart: he was seized by that acute sense of desolation that lies in wait for one, caught by nightfall, alone in a strange city. It stirs up a wild longing, not so much for any particular spot on earth, as for some familiar hand or voice, to take the edge off an intolerable loneliness. (23)

The "acute sense of desolation" and the "intolerable loneliness" are sensations Maurice is never able to escape, although he plunges himself

first into his work, until he finds the reality very different from his idealized preconceptions, then into his "passion" for Louise, until she in her turn thwarts his dreams, and finally into the absolute of death, sought appropriately within the woods, his cool green resting place achieved at last.

Maurice left home because he felt he did not belong there; yet although he makes friends easily in Leipzig his sense of alienation from his environment increases. He aspires beyond the prosaic social life which the English and American communities represent and yet he disapproves of the unorthodox and immoral behaviour of Schilsky's group, "young rebels out against the Philistines" (71). He is unable to feel fully at ease in any of the various lifestyles which Leipzig affords him and so he moves uneasily about from one to the other. It is only as his infatuation with Louise comes more and more to dominate his existence that he grows less and less capable of coping with the varieties of experience offered him and retreats into drunkenness, privacy and suicide.

Each of his friends represents in part one extreme of his own contradictory nature: Madeleine, his practical, bourgeois streak; Dove, his lack of imagination and British stolidity; Ephie, his naïve self-absorption; her sister Johanna, his need to dominate in love through apparent submission; and Krafft, his occasional perversity and his later astonishing prodigality. Louise, the "cruel mistress" of the elaborate romantic fantasy he builds about her, is in many ways his mirror image. When he first sees her he is immediately attracted to her by her strangeness:

there was something romantic, exotic about her which was unlike anything he had ever seen: she made him think of a rare, hothouse flower; some scentless tropical flower, with stiff, waxen petals. (37)

She is the southern counterpart of his northern temperament, careless where he is meticulous, passionate where he is reserved, experienced where he is naïve, living for the moment while he looks to the future. Brian Kiernan observes that "one of the German Romantic conventions that Richardson adapts in depicting her characters . . . is that of the polarity of Northern and Southern temperaments found, for example, in Heine and Thomas Mann."¹ The literary convention helps to define and order, but also tends to limit, the psychological perception which is embodied in the action rather than in the analysis of the text. The North/South polarity is an initial aid to understanding which must later be discarded in favour of a more open approach to character.

Louise's Australian nationality works for the reader as a metaphor of the extent of her alienation from traditional mores. It provides a rationale for her obsessive love of change and her insistence on living for the moment,² and it symbolizes for Maurice the unbridgeable distance which separates her from him. Richardson writes:

If she had said she was a visitant from another world, Maurice would not, at the moment, have felt much surprise; but on hearing the name of this distant land, on which he would probably never set foot, a sense of desolation overcame him. He realized anew, with a pang, what an utter stranger he was to her; of her past life, her home, her country, he knew and could know nothing. (90)

This aura of inaccessibility is her greatest attraction. She becomes

¹*Images of Society and Nature*, p.25.

²See, for example:

"And the quick picture she drew, of how, in her native land, the brief winter passed almost without transition into the scathing summer; her suggestion of unchanging leaves, brown barrenness, and arid dryness; of grass burnt to cinders, of dust, drought, and hot, sandy winds: all of this helped him to understand something of what she was feeling. A remembrance of this parched heat was in her veins, making her eager not to miss any of the young, teeming beauty around her . . ." (306).

for him a symbol of the unattainable. He feels that if he could reach her and make her his, he would no longer be an outsider; he would have attained the peace he has always sought and she would symbolize his escape from the values of the society he is fleeing.

On the evening of the day he first sees her he feels "in need of a repose as absolute as the very essence of silence itself" (42). Significantly, Schwarz has just told him that he knows nothing or worse than nothing about music and that only hard work and time will make something of him. His impatience for success has suffered a severe reversal. Music no longer seems likely to lead him into a "world of beauty still unexplored" (18). As he yields himself to the mood of the evening,

a keen sense of desolation came over him; never, in his life, had he felt so utterly alone. In all this great city that spread, ocean-like, around him, not a heart was the lighter for him being there. Oh, to have some one beside him! — some one who would talk soothingly to him, of shadowy, far-off things, or, still better, be merely a sympathetic presence he wanted a friend, the friend he had often dreamed of, whose thoughts would be his thoughts, with whom there would be no need of speech. (43)

Immediately afterwards, he tries to imagine Louise's face and decides that he has fallen "head over heels in love" (44) with her. The banality of the expression characterizes the superficiality of Maurice's conception of love at this time. Part of him wants an echo, not an equal; yet he also wants a guide into the unknown. He wants to hear of "shadowy, far-off things" without being challenged by them.

In this first stage of his love, his arrogance is as absurd as his simplicity is pitiful. He tells himself he would prove to her "what real love was, what a holy mystic thing" (54). As he thinks of Louise he allows his capacity for self-delusion and his moral arrogance

free play. He refuses to believe anything that might contradict his inherited notions of what a woman should be, telling himself that the suspicion of Louise having an affair with Schilsky "was a blasphemy, a blasphemy against her dignified reserve, against her sweet pale face, her supreme disregard of those about her. Not thus would guilt have shown itself" (63). In all his ravings, he is a typical Victorian "bourgeois gentleman".

The first section expands on illusions of this kind during a period when Maurice and Louise are less than casual acquaintances and it ends with the drunken farewell party for Schilsky where Maurice first makes a fool of himself publicly for Louise. Ken Stewart points out that

Scenes and images of drunkenness are used by Richardson in two opposing ways to explore dramatically Maurice's general dilemma. On the one hand, when he is drunk he loses his moral inhibitions, and amoral self-assertion increases; on the other, his drunken states are dramatized as a kind of parody of his own captivation, bleariness of outlook and self-abasement before Louise.¹

Significantly, Book One ends with Maurice's first experience of drunkenness and his first loss of self-control. His original image of himself is no longer adequate to explain his behaviour.

The epigraph to the second section, "O living death, and delightful pain!", taken from the same poem by Petrarch as was the first, indicates the limbo-like state in which the characters dwell for most of the second section, and embodies as well the paradoxical perception of experience which lies at the heart of the novel. This limbo leads to the brief but false paradise at the end of the section,

¹"Maurice Guest and the Siren Voices", *Australian Literary Studies*, 5 (1972), p.361.

the honeymoon at Rochlitz, and ultimately to the hell of the third section, appropriately headed by a quotation from Dante's *Inferno*. For Maurice, Dante's hell expands into life so that death becomes an end to be desired instead of the entrance to judgement. The medieval sense of order can no longer contain the dynamics of the modern experience. Thus the epigraphs help to place the psychological analysis within the perspective of a literary tradition even as they demonstrate the limitations of that tradition to contain contemporary experience.

It is an aspect of Maurice's growing uncertainty that he moves from role to role, allowing his behaviour to be shaped from without rather than from within. He acknowledges to himself that Louise "did not really care for him" and that "there was something irreconcilable about their two natures" (298); yet he feels he cannot help continuing along the destructive course of pressing her to marry him. Maurice, who within a few days of his arrival in Leipzig "had already, in dress and bearing, taken on a touch of musicianly disorder" (33) is equally quick to assume the pose of the fated, star-crossed lover. His deference to fate absolves him from taking responsibility for his actions while providing him with a ready-made and attractive dramatic role. It is a dangerous drifting that leads finally to suicide.

Meanwhile, his behaviour would seem to prove Krafft's assertion that the "best of things is the wishing for them. Once there, and they are nothing — only another delusion" (86). Early in their honeymoon, Maurice first suspects that Louise's "mouth was not so proudly reticent as he had believed it to be; there was even a want of restraint about it" (327). To a man who has been trained to believe that sexuality inevitably involves guilt and shame, especially for a woman and especially out of wedlock, Louise's spontaneity and naturalness is almost a crime. His paternalism ("he would shield her from the

impulsiveness of her own nature" [327]) is only surpassed by his prudery; he is constantly reminding himself that he must practice "self-control for two" (306). His error is threefold: he is unable to transcend the restrictions of a morality which views his happiness as an evil; contrary to Krafft's dictum, he is trying to find his happiness in stasis rather than in striving; and he is confusing what Louise has come to symbolize for him (both the ideal woman and the solution to all his problems) with what she is in herself (a unique and separate human being).

Thus their idyllic summer escape to the country has an air of unreality about it. As in Dickens' happy endings or the brief respite of Hardy's Tess and Angel, their happiness is only achieved through a retreat from the world into a claustrophobic privacy which cannot last. The effort to force reality to conform to an ideal (instead of recognising its eternal elusiveness without abandoning the search) inevitably involves distortion.

Their honeymoon also underlines the fact that Louise too is in her own way an outsider, far more so than Maurice. But in her case it is partly a chosen and at least partly an accepted state. Even as a child, she, like Richardson herself, noticed in herself a strange detachment from events when others expected her to be most involved. At her father's funeral she could not "remember crying at all, or even feeling sorry; [she] only smelt the earth — it was in the rainy season and there was water in the grave"¹ (369). She tells Maurice: "'It's myself I think of, first and foremost, and as long as I live it will always be myself'" (296). Her egotism and her immorality put her

¹In this incident, she appears to be one of the forerunners of Camus' *l'Étranger*, who was unable to feel the requisite emotions at his mother's funeral.

outside conventional society, but they also link her to Schilsky. She is not afraid to make her own values and to take the consequences. It is this courage and this sense of her own individuality which gives her "a genius for loving" (439), not the masochistic self-abnegation which Krafft would like to see controlling her behaviour. Maurice recognizes as much when he dwells on her independence of spirit and disregard of public opinion. In part, his "love" is the expression of a wish to break down this reserve and to make her dependent on him: to subdue what he sees to be superior and to share in her vitality while limiting it.

Louise's "blind desire to kill self" (320) is a form of masochism which disguises a possessive urge. Louise tries to impose her own values on Schilsky as Maurice tries to impose his on her; but unlike Maurice it is the struggle not its cessation that she craves. Like Lawrence, Richardson sees the relationship between the sexes as a struggle for power. Schilsky and Louise each uses everything at his or her disposal in an effort to dominate the other. As Louise recognizes, Schilsky surpasses her at this game because he is more successful in withholding love, whereas she gives of herself too freely. However, she also knows that this very extravagance is itself a form of dominance. They are evenly matched.

With Maurice, Louise is merely filling in time, gratifying her ego and indulging in a play at passion, for a time convincing even herself by her remarkable talent for playing her role. She wants to believe, against her better judgement, that happiness can be achieved through Maurice's bourgeois ideal of romantic love.

To Krafft, Louise represents the archetypal woman of the decadent romantics' most self-indulgent dreams. She is a devouring yet strangely

passive dark goddess, completely immoral and less than human. Maurice's idea of Louise is so obviously absurd that many critics have fallen into the trap of assuming that Krafft's analysis of her nature must be definitive. Richardson's ambivalence in her portrayal of Louise does not clarify the issue. In a conversation with Nettie Palmer in 1935, Richardson remarked that *Maurice Guest* had first appeared during a period of feminist agitation and that she had wanted the book to be "a test": she used a masculine pseudonym and to her delight no one spotted the novel as "just a woman's work".¹ Perhaps part of the problem with the depiction of Louise is a result of the conflict between Richardson's own feminist sympathies and her desire that her work should be judged by universal standards, as the product of a "masculine" rather than of a "feminine" mind. It is known too that in writing *Maurice Guest* Richardson was drawing on her own adolescent love fantasies which were still too close and too painful to be held entirely in perspective. Whatever the reasons, her characterization of Louise is unnecessarily confused. However, there is sufficient evidence within the novel to suggest that Krafft's conception of Louise is as inadequate as Maurice's. Between them, Maurice and Krafft hold the two dominant Victorian images of woman: she is either the "angel in the house" or the *femme fatale*. Louise refuses to conform to anyone else's idea of what she should be. Not only does she upbraid Maurice for trying to force her into the mold of his Victorian preconceptions ("You have an utterly false and ridiculous idea of me, and of everything belonging to me" [296]) but she also rejects Krafft and what he believes her to be with an equal vehemence. She will sleep with him, despite her dislike, to find out Schilsky's whereabouts but she will not accept the

¹ Nettie Palmer, *Fourteen Years* (Melbourne: The Meanjin Press, 1948), p.176.

deductions he draws about her character from her willingness to do so.

Perhaps part of the attraction of Schilsky is the freedom his indifference allows her to be herself. He does not try to change her. As she tells Maurice, love is "something quite different" from what he feels for her. Love "takes everything just as it is" (376).

A.D. Hope points out that the novel is about Maurice, but dedicated to Louise.¹ One wonders to which Louise: Louise as Maurice or as Krafft see her, or Louise as she really is, a being who refuses classification. This Louise is suggested throughout the novel but she is never fully realized. Despite her strength of character, she is not what modern feminists would call a liberated woman. Her rebellions are misdirected and she chooses to be successful in the world's terms, by attaching herself to a successful man. Like Maurice, she is a victim of sexual stereotyping. It is a final barrier from which she finds it impossible to break free.

Ultimately Maurice is forced to recognize Louise's separate individuality, but because of the hopes he has placed in her he can only see it as a sign of the meaninglessness of life rather than of its richness or challenge. "But what a meaningless thing was life", he tells himself self-pityingly,

when the way a lid drooped, or an eyebrow grew on a forehead, could make such havoc of your nerves! And more especially when, in the brain or soul that lay behind, no spiritual trait answered to the physical. (480)

Maurice is incapable of recognising or of responding to the spiritual traits which do underlie the physical Louise. None of his training has

¹"Inspiration and Possession", p.250.

prepared him to do so.

It would be easy to conclude that Louise began by disturbing his peace of mind and ended by making a havoc of his nerves, but this would be to over-simplify what Richardson has taken great pains to present as a complex and disturbing situation. Krafft's suspicions were well-founded. Maurice did not have it in him to benefit from his infatuation with Louise. But it is not a question of Maurice's artistic mediocrity and it is only partly a result of his shortcomings as a human being. It is true that he cannot meet the challenge of trying to form a real relationship with another human being. He does seem to prefer his own solipsistic daydreams. Yet although it would be possible to label Maurice as the man who sits tying his skates or lacing his boots, oblivious to the human significance of the moment, whether it be a veiled proposal or an outbreak of revulsion against him, the issue is not so simple.

He himself comes to suspect that much of his "bad luck" results from

an innate lack of sympathy in himself, an inability, either of heart or of imagination, to project himself into the lives and feelings of people he did not greatly care for. (385)

What he cannot admit to himself is his lack of sensitivity to those he thinks he does care for. Maurice tries his best to love, and fails. Yet although he proves to be personally inadequate, the importance of his story lies in its representative quality, in the universality rather than the individuality of falling short. In its illumination of the difficulties man experiences in communicating with his fellows *Maurice Guest* anticipates the central theme of *The Aunt's Story* and a major preoccupation in all the work of Patrick White.

The entire range of Maurice's attitudes toward Louise, beginning with the humility, courtesy, adultery (with Schilsky as the "husband" figure) and religion of love derived from the courtly love tradition (love as a literary phenomenon) and moving into a more self-assertive phase of violent possessiveness and experimentation (love as a psychological phenomenon) illustrates his inability to move beyond conventional platitudes at either level. Even in his one outburst of rebellion against the laws of society, when he reasons, "surely, in the case of an all-absorbing passion such as this, the over-stepping of conventional boundaries would not be counted too heavily against them" (342), he only succeeds in revealing his subservience to them.

Maurice is the bourgeois anti-hero, an incompetent dreamer, who kills himself, not clear-headedly for an ideal as Green would contend, nor to escape his insufficiency as Hope would argue, but to play his role as the Tristan figure, the ill-fated lover, to its logical conclusion. Maurice has always had trouble distinguishing dream from reality. By the end of his story he is living entirely in the world of his own imagination. Ironically, it is a second-hand world composed of clichés and maxims. He kills himself mechanically, because that is what true lovers are supposed to do when their mistresses have jilted them. Unfortunately, the maudlin and self-indulgent scene with the prostitute Luise tends to blur the uncompromising starkness of Richardson's vision. As an individual, Maurice must take the responsibility for his own death. It cannot be blamed on an indifferent or malignant fate.

Yet Maurice is very much a product of a particular time and place. The Victorians are notorious for their separation of the roles and the supposed attributes of the sexes. *Maurice Guest* is an accurate portrayal of the disastrous effects of this division and of the romantic love ethic which is its complement. Neither Ephie's silliness nor

Avery's strong will can cope with it. Its code condemns Johanna's intellectualism, Madeleine's self-sufficiency and Louise's "wantonness" with equal severity. In *Maurice Guest*, romantic love leads either to death (for Avery and Maurice) or to disgrace (for Ephie). Louise's relationship with Schilsky is an equally unattractive alternative, as is Dove's with his future wife, its natural counterpart.

Richardson clearly feels attracted to Krafft's morbidity; she shares the fascination which he and Louise feel for death and she sympathizes with their scornful rejection of convention. Yet she balances this attraction with an equal sympathy for the victims such as egotism inevitably leaves behind, for the Ephie's, Avery's and Maurice's they use and discard in their pursuit of freedom. Because no one is spared her scrutiny, her nonconformist rebels are seen to be as self-deluding as her victims. Their superior ruthlessness alone distinguishes them. Her implicit suggestion seems to be that human relationships are too fragile to systematize, whatever the system, and that sexual stereotyping is a destructive process.

The final glimpse of Schilsky and Louise with which the novel concludes is deliberately low-key and matter-of-fact, suggesting a definite fall from the heightened passion, strained prose and heavy-handed irony of the preceding section leading up to Maurice's suicide. While Maurice has chosen the absolute of death, Schilsky and Louise remain entangled in the compromises, disappointments and inconclusiveness of life. Although the essentially bourgeois character of their relationship is revealed most clearly in this scene, the general impression is of the triumphant continuation of life: Louise's vitality can still charge an accidental touch of the hand with electrical significance. In this sense at least it is an affirmative conclusion.

Part of the difficulty with *Maurice Guest* is that it is operating on several levels at once and that the various levels do not seem to be clearly distinguished in the author's mind. Possibly they emerged in the writing and Richardson did not have the necessary courage and energy to revise material still so close to her own emotional experience. It is a novel she admits she never could re-read. Although it remains too long, sentimental, and confused in places, several narrative strands may be isolated. Maurice is at once a confused young man seeking self-knowledge and trying to win his way in the world, a bourgeois young man seeking romantic love with the wrong woman, and an image of modern man, feeling himself insignificant and homeless in an alternately hostile and indifferent universe, burdened with a heritage of misconceptions from the past and searching for something he cannot define, a form of freedom he is incapable of imagining. The strength of the novel lies in its sympathy for the confusion and pain of Maurice's initiation into experience of the human condition and for the struggles of this ordinary man to come to terms with it, but above all in its refusal to resolve what it sees as irreconcilable, the eternal paradoxes of life.

Chapter 4

CHRISTINA STEAD'S *FOR LOVE ALONE*: THE VOYAGE TO CYTHEREA
AS A DARWIN'S VOYAGE OF DISCOVERY

Christina Stead, even more so than Mrs Campbell Praed and Henry Handel Richardson, is an unselfconscious expatriate. In a recent A.B.C. interview, when asked if she felt "a certain alienation, moving from one country to another", she explained: "People talk a lot about alienation. I don't feel it. I've never felt it. I don't quite know what it means, to tell the truth."¹ Whereas to Leonie Kramer Henry Handel Richardson was an expatriate by temperament because she was never really able to feel at home anywhere,² to R.G. Geering Christina Stead is a natural expatriate because "by temperament she is cosmopolitan not national in outlook":³ she is equally at home anywhere in the world. Praed and Richardson shared an outlook on life which was largely influenced by their common interest in spiritualism. Neither felt that this world was the soul's true home and their profound sense of alienation from this world is the strongest impression left by their work. Stead, on the other hand, brought up an atheist by her scientist father, is solidly secular in her outlook on life. She has set her novels in Australia, Europe, England, and the United States with an equal facility for catching the atmosphere of the environment while developing themes which grow naturally out of the local setting to attain a universal

¹"Christina Stead: An Interview", *Australian Literary Studies*, 6 (1974), 231.

²Leonie Kramer, "Henry Handel Richardson", in *The Literature of Australia*, ed. Dutton, p.318.

³R.G. Geering, *Christina Stead* (New York: Twayne, 1969), p.25.

significance.

She is at home anywhere, she can write anywhere,¹ but she still feels herself to be very much an Australian writer. She told her interviewer:

I think it's inevitable that I should feel myself an Australian writer. I didn't leave till I was twenty-five, I was fully formed by then of course . . . I must be an Australian, I can't help it.²

Only two of her novels deal with Australian life directly, *Seven Poor Men of Sydney* (1934), her first novel, and *For Love Alone* (1945), her fifth. Her best novel, *The Man Who Loved Children* (1940), is based on her childhood experience in Sydney but she transferred the location to the United States "to shield the family".³ Yet although few of her novels are about Australia, her development as a writer is an important part of Australian literary history and her novels represent a major contribution to Australian literature. In his "Vision of the Twenties", Jack Lindsay claims that Christina Stead and other writers of his generation (including himself) "developed through a conflict between their Australian basis and their European participations a form of growth which could validly exist only for our generation, the generation of the complex transitional movement".⁴ He does not substantiate the claim; indeed, he does not mention Stead in the article again. This

¹In an interview with Jonah Raskin, "Christina Stead in Washington Square", *London Magazine* n.s., 9, No.11 (1970), 72, she says: "You can write anywhere There is no such thing as a necessary atmosphere."

²"Christina Stead: An Interview", 230.

³*Ibid.*, 242.

⁴Jack Lindsay, "Vision of the Twenties", *Southerly*, 13 (1952), 68.

chapter will attempt to test his contention by examining *For Love Alone* in relation to the pattern of expatriate Australian fiction this thesis has begun to trace from Praed to Richardson.

Christina Ellen Stead was born in Rockdale, New South Wales in 1902. Her mother died in 1904 and her father, an eminent naturalist, remarried in 1907. After completing a two-year course at Sydney Teachers College, she became a Demonstrator in Experimental Psychology at the College. She left this job in 1924 to learn shorthand and typing and to save enough money to travel to England. She left for England in 1928, where she met her husband, William Blake, an economist and writer. In 1929 they moved to Paris to work in a bank for five years. They were in Spain at the beginning of the Civil War. In 1937 they settled in the United States and Stead worked as a senior writer in Hollywood in 1942. After the war, they returned to Europe and travelled about until in 1953 they settled in England. He died in 1968. She returned to Australia for a few months in 1969 at the invitation of The Australian National University in Canberra, and in 1974 she returned to Australia to stay after an absence of forty-five years.

In 1967 Stead was refused the Britannica literature award on the grounds that as she did not live in Australia she was not an Australian. Stead herself took no part in the controversy that followed this decision and seemed unconcerned about the issue when asked about it in the 1973 A.B.C. interview, insisting that she knew nothing about the affair until "long after the dust had settled",¹ and that in any case recognition was unimportant to her; her work alone engrossed her.

¹"Christina Stead: An Interview", 232.

Yet however unimportant critical attention may be to the writer, it is important to the reader and to that specialized reader, the critic. Stead's masterpiece, *The Man Who Loved Children*, was out of print until rediscovered by Randall Jarrell and reissued in 1965. None of Stead's work had been published in Australia until *Seven Poor Men of Sydney* was reissued by Angus and Robertson in 1965, to be followed by the reissuing of *The Salzburg Tales*, *Letty Fox — Her Luck*, and *Cotters' England* in 1974. Summers points out that Stead's *Seven Poor Men of Sydney* anticipated Patrick White's

revolt against the dullness of the prevailing realism in the 1940's . . . by more than ten years. It was briefly discussed and then forgotten. The revolutionary honours should have gone to Christina Stead; as an expatriate and a woman, she appears to have forfeited the right to be recognised as contributing to national literary traditions.¹

While it is possible that some of the neglect is due to Stead's expatriate status, in that critics, unsure about "placing" her in a national perspective, choose to ignore her, and that Australians naturally prefer to read about Australia, some must also be due to the uncomfortable and uncompromising clarity of her vision.

Stead stresses that she writes what she sees,² and what she sees is often either unusual, radical or depressing. While *Seven Poor Men of Sydney* signalled an exciting new direction for Australian fiction, it is a promising first novel rather than a mature one; whereas *The Tree of Man*, White's fourth published novel, is the mature work of an established writer. Naturally it would receive more critical attention. Furthermore, *The Tree of Man* fits into a familiar pattern of narrative

¹"The Self Denied", *Refractory Girl*, No.2 (1973), 10.

²Jonah Raskin, "Christina Stead", 73.

structure, the pioneering saga so popular in Australia, whereas *Seven Poor Men of Sydney* represents a complete break with the traditional Australian methods of describing experience.

Stead claims that in writing *Seven Poor Men of Sydney* she "wasn't imitating anybody". "I was writing about my experiences in Sydney",¹ she says. Her interpretation of her experiences in Sydney was influenced by three factors: her European reading, especially in French, her training in the Australian legend, as created in the work of Steele Rudd, Lawson, Paterson, and Marcus Clarke, and her acquaintance with the Lindsays' magazine *Vision*. It is interesting to observe how her unique depiction of Australian life in *Seven Poor Men of Sydney* and *For Love Alone* grew out of her familiarity with the Australian legend, not in rebellion against it, but as a continuation of it in combination with new influences. In her most recent interview, Stead points out that "the Australian legend is very radical", and that Australia's Labor heritage in politics and her mythical heritage in literature form the background of an Australian's thoughts. She also stresses the importance of the outback:

So there was this spectre, a kind of spectre-ridden waste; at the same time we accepted it, you know, as people accept the desert who are born into the desert.²

This combination of a grim vision of reality with a complete acceptance of it is characteristic of Stead's work; but it is combined with such a fascination for the fantastic and the dark underworld of human emotions and with such an exuberance of expression that it seemed totally alien to its first Australian readers.

¹"Christina Stead: An Interview", 233.

²*Ibid.*, 240.

Stead is a difficult writer for several reasons. Even at her most entertaining, her writing contains the sting of satire; she presents no comfortable vision of life; her novels are seldom constructed about the conventional plot outline; her use of language is often idiosyncratic; she is fond of the unusual, the exotic, the perverse. Yet Stead is far more accepting of life than either Praed or Richardson. Instead of a conflict of irreconcilable opposites, she sees life as many-sided, infinitely rich and diversified; she delights in numbering the streaks of the tulip; she desires no synthesis. Keats's "negative capability" seems an appropriate description for her attitude toward her work. In her interview with Jonah Raskin, she criticizes Freud for being "so rigid, with his Id and Ego, and all his categories. He created a mythology as rigid as any other, as rigid as the Christian mythology".¹ She goes on to describe how she herself works:

Sometimes I start with a situation, sometimes with a personality. I never question or argue. I'm a psychological writer, and my drama is the drama of the person. The start of a story is like a love affair, exactly. It's like a stone hitting you. You can't argue with it. I wait and wait for the drama to develop. I watch the characters and the situation move and don't interfere. I'm patient. I'm lying low. I wait and wait for the drama to display itself. . . . I write a lot of *schemata*, but don't adhere to them. You can't write according to a scheme, but on the other hand you can't let the thing run away with you. The story inevitably goes its own way.²

This openness of approach to her fiction makes it difficult to classify, and impossible to identify the utterances of any one character as

¹Jonah Raskin, "Christina Stead", 75.

²*Ibid.*

representative of Stead's personal opinion. She identifies creatively with each in his turn.

Thus Kol Blount's eloquent diatribe against Australia's fate in *Seven Poor Men of Sydney*¹ is a brilliant evocation of the legend and of the frustrated desire for a new order in their own land, but its pessimism is tempered by Joseph's quiet goodness and endurance. He is ground down by life, but he speaks the novel's last words, and in them he begins to re-create and commemorate their past. The ghost land has not destroyed them, and they themselves are adding to the legend. The idea that the land itself is hostile to men who come only to exploit it, but that it might have seemed gentler if men had come with gentler aims and hearts, an idea which is implied vaguely in some of Praed's novels and more positively in Richardson's *The Fortunes of Richard Mahony*, is suggested, but again left essentially undeveloped, in Blount's final cry: "'Jealous land! Ravishers overbold! Bitter dilemma! And lost legion! Our land should never have been won.'"²

The image of the spectre-ridden centre is balanced in *Seven Poor Men of Sydney* by the sea "with its ambiguous promise of freedom and

¹"'Why are we here? Nothing floats down here, this far in the south, but is worn out with wind, tempest and weather; all is flotsam and jetsam. They leave their rags and tatters here; why do we have to be dressed? The sun is hot enough; why can't we run naked in our own country, on our own land, and work out our own destiny? Eating these regurgitated ideas from the old country makes us sick and die of sickness. . . . This land was last discovered; why? A ghost land, a continent of mystery: the very pole disconcerted the magnetic needle so that ships went astray, ice, fog and storm bound the seas, a horrid destiny in the Abrolhos, in the Philippines, in the Tasman Seas, in the Southern Ocean, all protected the malign and bitter genius of this waste land. Its heart is made of salt: it suddenly oozes from its burning pores, gold which will destroy men in greed, but not water to give them drink. Jealous land! Ravishers overbold! Bitter dilemma! And lost legion! Our land should never have been won.'" (1934: Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1965), p.309.

²*Ibid.*

death".¹ In *For Love Alone*, the sea assumes a more dominant role. The prelude "Sea People" begins the novel with a paragraph which in its stress on the antipodean qualities of Australia might almost have come from Praed:

In the part of the world Teresa came from, winter is in July, spring brides marry in September, and Christmas is consummated with roast beef, suckling pig, and brandy-laced plum pudding at 100 degrees in the shade²

Unlike Praed, Stead makes use of the strangeness of the environment to establish a cosmic context for her Australian heroine Teresa and for her quest. Whereas images of constriction and suffocation dominate Praed's Anglo-Australian romances and Richardson's *Maurice Guest*, *For Love Alone* is characterized by the imagery of infinite expansion.

Stead first places her Australian heroine between the sea and the sky. These images are continually associated with the nature of the love she seeks and the freedom for which she longs. Both her dreams and her energy are unbounded. Stead continues:

There is nothing in the interior; so people look toward the water, and above to the fixed stars and constellations which first guided men there The skies are sub-tropical, crusted with suns and spirals, as if a reflection of the crowded Pacific Ocean, with its reefs, atolls, and archipelagos.

- It is a fruitful island of the sea-world, a great Ithaca, there parched and stony and here trodden by flocks and curly-headed bulls and heavy with thick-set grain. To this race can be put the famous question: 'Oh, Australian, have you just come from the harbour? Is your ship in the roadstead? Men of what nation put you down — for I am sure you did not get here on foot?' (1-2)

¹Brian Kiernan, *Images of Society and Nature*, p.61.

²Christina Stead, *For Love Alone* (1945; Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1966), p.1. Hereafter cited by page.

The question from the Ulysses myth establishes a timeless context for Teresa's quest and implies that she is born with the urge to wander. Later the reader is told, unnecessarily, that Teresa has "the heart of a sailor. How could she be satisfied on the dull shore?" (224). Furthermore, the question from the myth links Australia to the world of the ancient Greeks, preparing the ground for the joining of Teresa's two preoccupations, with love and with freedom. Early in her story, Teresa

began to go over, word by word, with intense preoccupation, the *Lysistrata*. She had never learned it; it had burned itself into her head, the words as if printed on the blue and burning sky of Greece, or else of her own country as hot, as naïve, as open. (102)

Teresa finds a confirmation of her longings in the ancient play. The interplay between her Australian basis and her European participations, her acquaintance with the natural physical world and her acquaintance with literature, leads her to see her personal search for fulfilment in terms reminiscent of the prelude "Sea People". She says: "'I always think of coral atolls, submarine volcanoes, the pearl gulfs of the north, a kind of Darwin's voyage of discovery, as the voyage to Cytherea'" (193-194). She tells Jonathan:

'I was going to wonder if we wouldn't be different from all other races but the Egyptians perhaps, because of the sun, the desert, the sea — but our sea is different — each Australian is a Ulysses — "Where did you come from, O stranger, from what ship in the harbour, for I am sure you did not get here on foot?"' (222)

The sea is an expanding rather than a fixed symbol.¹ Its significance grows and changes, looms large with importance at one

¹This is E.K. Brown's term, in his *Rhythm in the Novel* (1950; Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1967), p.35.

moment and fades for a while to reappear with somewhat different connotations at another moment. Its meaning is never exact. It always suggests something larger than the human understanding, some realm of mystery it is impossible to penetrate completely. In "It Was High Tide at Nine-thirty" (Stead's chapter headings are always suggestive), Teresa's heightened consciousness associates the sea with the mystery of sex and it comes to represent for her the psychological conjunction of love and death:

Up on the cliffs, Teresa could see the ocean flooding the reefs outside, choking the headlands and swimming to the landing platforms From every moon-red shadow came the voices of men and women . . . men and women groaned and gave shuddering cries as if they were being beaten. She passed slowly, timidly, but fascinated by the strange battlefield, the bodies stretched out, contorted, with sounds of the dying under the fierce high moon. She did not know what the sounds were, but she knew children would be conceived this night, and some time later women would marry hurriedly, if they could, . . . and perhaps one or two would jump into the sea. There were often bodies fished up round here. (61)

The imagery arises naturally out of the circumstances. The young girl, obsessed with the expression and frustration of her own awakening sexuality, walks home under the moonlit sky after a relative's wedding. Her own vague feelings of dissatisfaction and longing seem to find their counterpart in the sea beneath her, its tides controlled by the moon above. The themes are linked so subtly and so closely into the pattern of the narrative that it is almost impossible to separate a strand to examine it in isolation. Because Stead is concerned to create an atmosphere rather than an idea, she works by accretion and suggestion rather than by statement or by fixed symbols. The world she depicts is always in flux, like the sea itself.

On the next page, the sea retains its previous associations while changing its aspect to represent the freedom and opportunities of the man's world, from which as a woman Teresa is barred:

If only she could go to the bottom of the dike now, with the men, and spend the night with them, thigh-deep in the sweet water, catching fish, saying nothing, looking out to sea! (62)

Then once more the old associations of love and death, mystery and the acceptance of mystery, assume prominence:

She felt the swarm of lovers thick as locusts behind her when she turned into the beach path. Tied up to the fourth pile of the wharf was a rowing-boat covered with a tarpaulin. Under the tarpaulin was a woman's body; she had been fished out of the sea just outside the cliffs that afternoon; it did not cause much comment. They lived there, among the gardens of the sea, and knew their fruits; fish, storms, corpses, moontides, miracles. (64)

Teresa arrives home and goes for a swim. Floating in the water, she thinks:

she would not be afraid to go down at sea. To burn at sea — yes! But to go down! People had floated for thirty-six hours on a smooth ocean. You just let yourself go — you can even sleep floating, but the ocean she dreamed about under her lids was a wide smooth expanse under the moon, a halcyon sea. (67)

Here the sea is almost an objective correlative of Teresa's ambivalent desires. Conscious of its depths and its potential for violence, she can lose herself in it, knowing it will buoy her up: she will not drown.

Two chapters later she is telling herself that "She ought to run away" (80) and wondering if she dares. The chapter ends with her brother Leo and the men heading out to sea, singing:

'A life on the ocean wave,
 A home on the rolling deep,
 Where the scattered waters rave
 And the winds their revels keep.

So now good-bye to land
 To the dull unchanging shore —'. (90)

The "life on the ocean wave" represents the freedom she is seeking, but has not yet worked up the courage to seize. Still later, when Kitty tells her of her own desire to escape the home and find a job, Teresa can think only of herself:

She heard the roughening wind outside and the water lapping; she was conscious of a stirring within and without; she turned round to her sister, and said: "'There is a tide in the affairs of men which taken at the flood leads on to fortune'". (134)

This tag is Teresa's motto. The validity of the comparison, culled from her reading, is corroborated by her own experience of life on the sea-shore. Through this phrase from Shakespeare, her adolescent and egotistical but necessary sense of destiny is linked to her need for escape and to her sense that the sea can meet that need. When Erskine tempts her to remain, she steels herself by remembering the promise of the sea:

If she loved him, she might stay here — for ever, anchored in the little harbour where she was born, like a rowboat whose owner had died and which had never been taken off the slips.
 (284-285)

Here the sea becomes an image of life itself in opposition to the living death of the harbour.

The atmosphere of the first section, "The Island Continent", is largely determined by the sea. It is always present as a challenge to the dull shore, the conventional life which hems Teresa in and thwarts the realization of her potential for living a free life. In the second

section, "Port of Registry: London", Teresa has sailed the seas and arrived at another, smaller island, where the social habits and customs of Australia originated. She has escaped her immediate circumstances, but not herself. Imagery of the sea disappears from the narrative as Teresa turns inward to wrestle with the obstacles to self realization within herself. However, in the crucial recognition scene in the sawmill, Teresa comes to understand that she no longer loves Jonathan, if she ever really did, while leaning over the black pool of water by the mill wheel. All the old associations of the sea are recalled as she wonders:

'What if I should fall in, that he would find me choking the exit in the morning? "Teresa with drowned hair and cheeks of sod —' no, no'.
(408)

Her desire for self-annihilation, her masochism in love, are firmly repudiated here. Teresa chooses that aspect of the sea which favours life instead of death.

The sea is recalled once more during her affair with Harry Girton. Her decision to continue her search for experience and growth is conveyed in the image: "they were stormy petrels, each looking for adventure not only in physical danger but in moral and heady regions" (489). Finally, in the last chapter of the novel, "I Am Thinking I Am Free", sea imagery foretells for the reader Teresa's future with James Quick. To Teresa's mind, he calls up

docks, wharves, water-sides full of shipping, cities of canal-mouths, and masts, pilots and stevedores, all the Hanseatic world and the Baltic outpourings, that business that James was in, the loading and unloading in harbours, where James and Axelrode went with their lively legs and ready wits — that was her world. (492)

In this final image, the wild individualism of the sea is harnessed in

a social context. It plays its part in human intercourse; it does not stand alone. Teresa's integration with society, on her own terms and not at the expense of her individual self, is thus obliquely suggested. However, this last image does not exhaust the potential of the sea imagery to create echoes in the reader's mind and to suggest unlimited and unknown possibilities for Teresa's future. The novel, like the symbol, is open-ended.

The pattern of *For Love Alone* is superficially similar to that of Praed's *An Australian Heroine*, in which a romantic young woman, bred on literary fantasies in a restrictive provincial society, falls in love with a more sophisticated young man and follows him to the centre of their culture in England. Like Maurice Guest, another young provincial who escapes the confinement of home to journey to a cultural centre, Teresa entertains a hopeless passion for someone incapable of returning her love. Like Maurice, Teresa naïvely holds false ideas about the nature of love and the roles of the sexes, but unlike him she is strong and willing to learn from her experiences. She survives. Although *For Love Alone* describes the search of a young provincial girl for love and freedom, unlike the novels of Praed and Richardson, *For Love Alone* celebrates rather than punishes its heroine's quest. Society's rules and customs are deliberately questioned and subverted and the questioner is shown to triumph. Teresa is neither quelled into submission like Esther in *An Australian Heroine*, nor driven to suicide like Maurice, nor retired into social conformity like Louise in *Maurice Guest*, nor, looking ahead to chapter six, is she defeated by madness like Richard in *The Fortunes of Richard Mahony*.

Whereas Praed and Richardson posit suffering as the basis of existence and show their characters raging futilely against it until ultimately they are compelled to acknowledge both its utility and its

dominance, through Teresa Stead questions its very necessity. Teresa sees the suffering all around her:

All the girls dimly knew that the hole-in-a-corner marriages and frantic petting parties of the suburbs were not love and therefore they had these ashamed looks; they lost their girlish laughter the day they became engaged, but those who did not get a man were worse off. There was a glass pane in the breast of each girl; there every other girl could see the rat gnawing at her, the fear of being on the shelf. Beside the solitary girl, three hooded madmen walk, desire, fear, ridicule. (74)

She promises herself: "I won't suffer They won't put it upon me" (74). Her constant query is: "But how can we all suffer when none of us wants it?" (92). She tells herself bravely, "several daring acts and they would all be free" (92), "Chains do not exist, they are illusions" (137). Yet while she can recognize these truths at an intellectual level, psychologically she remains bound. The same romanticism which leads her to question the materialistic values of bourgeois society, in which marriage is a social institution and not a passionate union of two lovers, blinds her to the true causes of her misery.

The opening scene with her father illustrates the source of her romantic illusions about love and the relationship between the sexes. In rebelling against him, she does not discard all of his notions, for they are deeply engrained in her. She too wants "to be adored" (92). She is humiliated by the prospect of being an old maid. She accepts in practice if not in theory that it is necessary for women to attach themselves to men, to humble themselves before men, to preserve their chastity to please men, and to serve men. Like Louise in *Maurice Guest* she knows the weak can manipulate the strong in these ways.

However, she will not forfeit her right to choose herself how her freedom will be limited and by whom, and to choose her own form of suffering. Rather than compromise her ideals, "she would sail the seas . . . perhaps suffer every misery, but she would know life" (265). Self-fulfilment necessarily involves suffering, but it leads toward the higher pleasures of understanding experience and of self-knowledge. To choose to suffer in order to attain a desired end is quite different from suffering that has been inflicted arbitrarily. Teresa is willing to pay the price of suffering to realize her own individuality and to distinguish herself from the mass of mankind; she is not willing to suffer as they do. She tells Erskine melodramatically:

'Glory and catastrophe are not the fate of the common man. . . . I have to go, it isn't my fault. I am forced to. If I stay here, I will be nobody. I'd just be taking the line of least resistance.' (285)

Her sense of herself as a Nietzschean superwoman is youthful arrogance, and although it does help her to escape to a better fate, it is an attitude she must learn to outgrow.

For Love Alone is the record of Teresa's struggle to define herself by separating herself from what she perceives to be restrictions on her freedom: her family, her job as a teacher, Erskine's affection, her country, Jonathan, and finally her husband. In the final section, she must learn to stop escaping entanglements with others and to start forming meaningful relationships with them. Because the process is an unending one, the novel ends as it began, *in media res*. Teresa's story cannot end in a long "marriage-sleep" (265). It must be a continuing "kind of Darwin's voyage of discovery" and a "voyage to Cytherea" (193) as well.

On her return to Quick from Girton she experiences a revelation:

She suddenly understood that there was something beyond misery, and that at present she had merely fought through that bristling black and sterile plain of misery and that beyond was the real world, red, gold, green, white, in which the youth of the world would be passed; it was from the womb of time she was fighting her way and the first day lay before her. . . . she knew why she continued restless and why the men, having so much in the hollow of their hands, kept on striving.
(494)

This apocalyptic vision is reminiscent of Ursula's vision at the end of D.H. Lawrence's *The Rainbow*. The two women have much in common: they share intense inner lives, sexual fantasies, a desire to win a way through the man's world, and unhappy teaching experiences. However, Stead's novel lacks the framework of Biblical imagery which culminates naturally in spiritual revelation. Instead, Teresa's vision belongs within a socialistic tradition of chiliasm. She envisages the liberation of the world's oppressed wholly within the context of this world. This vision encourages Teresa to feel that her approach to life has been validated by her experience. She always believed that "the things she wanted existed" (75) and that "what went on round her was hoaxing and smooth-faced hypocrisy" (75-76), the opposite of the "real world". Quick shows her where she was right, where wrong. She tells him:

The world has changed for me since I knew you.
I felt miserable, hopeless, and now I'm anxious
to come to work. I see there's a life worth
living. I think of things outside myself. (390)

Teresa is not yet ready to discard her notions of fulfilling herself through her relationship with a man. Even at the end of the novel, she never really thinks of anything outside herself. She has not changed that much. Her attitude toward love has changed from the belief that it is all masochistic self-denial to a delight in the possibilities it affords her for dominance. Jonathan's cruelty

encouraged the former; Quick's worship the latter. They both have their roots in Teresa's will to power. She is her father's daughter. After her affair with Girton, Teresa resolves:

'I only know one commandment, *Thou shalt love.*'
No one would hold her prisoner, Harry did not,
and even James would not, but she would hold
them both prisoners. (493)

For Teresa love is basically a quest for power. However, it is implied that she still may learn something from Quick's selflessness, and from his unconcern about conforming to the sexual stereotypes of how a man should behave. Similarly, he must learn from her that he cannot expect to be "enough for her" (479), and that restlessness is no worse in a woman than in a man. They are both the victims of stereotyped misconceptions; but they are also open to change, willing to experiment, full of a lust for life, so that the novel ends with hope for their future, although it is a qualified hope.

The last words of the novel refer to Teresa's encounter with the degraded figure of Jonathan. She sighs:

'It's dreadful to think that it will go on being
repeated for ever, he — and me! What's there to
stop it?' (502)

The sexual prejudices and misconceptions and the distortion of human relationships to which they lead will continue on from generation to generation, unless people like Quick and Teresa, on recognizing their falsity, act to dispel their power. This final question is a challenge to humanity's capacity for self-renewal. The novel must be open-ended, for education in love is an unending process.

For Love Alone explores the nature of love at all its levels and through all the intricacies of the many states of mind the word love

is meant to signify. Teresa writes to Jonathan that

Language is simply not large enough and though English is said to have the most synonyms and the most words altogether, it still lacks hundreds of thousands of words. The words, joy, love, excitement, are bald and general. That is why love stories I suppose sound so dull, for the heroine or hero cannot feel just love, it must be one of a hundred kinds of love he feels. (253)

For Love Alone is an attempt at a story about love rather than a love story, but the nature of its topic still causes it to run the risk of sounding dull or sentimental. For the most part Stead is able to circumvent the paucity of language by counterpointing scenes and images with great effectiveness, but occasionally her control slips.

Teresa's attachment to Jonathan can only be understood in terms of two factors: her extreme innocence and her driving will to escape from what she knows. To her, he represents all "the mysteries of adult life" and "the wisdom of the university" (122). Like Maurice with Louise, she believes that he will be her passport to a better world. It is not difficult for the reader to perceive how false Teresa's impression of Jonathan is, but her infatuation for him is at least initially conceivable. Furthermore, it is clear that she has chosen to love him as a way of strengthening her will to strike out into the unknown. She tells herself several times: "'Just the same I need Jonathan as an aim so as not to fail, even if he rejects me.'" (265).¹ Like Louise, she began by deciding to love as an act of will power and ended by being caught in the web of her own pretence. Three years of single-minded struggle have narrowed her vision and habituated her to thinking of everything in terms of Jonathan alone. Jonathan himself

¹ Compare: "at times she thought that the affair with Jonathan was only a step to the unknown man; she would use him for that" (228).

has changed for the worse during his years in London; but Teresa has grown so accustomed to thinking in terms of the ideal with no opportunity of checking it against the real that she has lost all sense of perspective. It takes her some time to regain her bearings and to separate her own sense of her destiny from Jonathan. When she does finally summon the strength of mind to leave him, Stead writes that she "released him from her will" (408).

Jonathan's pseudo-scientific jargon of love, a mish-mash of "Krafft-Ebing, Freud, Havelock Ellis" (333) and his own misogynist and racist prejudices, has been locked in a battle of wills with Teresa's mystical conception of love as "like that sky, with the stars in it, dark, but longer than our lives and serene, distant, something that is there, even when we don't see it" (332). Quick's entrance is required to break the deadlock and rescue Teresa from her life-destroying relationship. In the circumstances, the significance of his name seems heavy-handed. From this point onwards, the fine psychological analysis of the novel appears to degenerate into a simplistic morality play. Jonathan changes from a tormented young man from the slums trying to make his way in the world, and disturbed as well as stimulated by his sadistic relationship with Teresa, into a type of Thersites, whose nature may be summed up by his own observation: "To understand everything is to despise everything" (410). Quick's demolition of Jonathan's essay and then of his character seem unnecessarily protracted and harsh. The battle is presented as if the author herself took delight in Jonathan's discomfiture. He is shown to be as black as his namesake the crow, while Quick, who "loved women as equals" (364), is idealized in a way which makes it impossible to believe in his reality. It is difficult to see what purpose such a reduction of what has previously been perceived as complex may serve.

The portrayal of Quick is often deplored as being unrestrainedly melodramatic and lacking in Stead's usual ironic perspective.¹ Despite one's awareness that the following quotation is meant to be a sympathetic rendering of Teresa's point of view, its effect is unfortunate. The narration proceeds:

Each embrace was for her a momentary fainting. During the whole passage, she felt both completely united to the man and yet aware of the awful empire she was giving him over her, and it was always at this moment that she pushed him away brusquely. It flashed upon her, 'But this is the night of the senses!' (447)

The emotions Stead is describing are real, but the language is inadequate to convey them properly; it is dangerously close to the novelese to which Richardson resorts for moments of passion in *Maurice Guest*. It is especially unfortunate that this experience has not been made more concrete and convincing as it seems meant to convey the first ecstasy of a positive and fulfilling love, in contrast to the selfish and self-defeating love which Teresa persuaded herself to feel for Jonathan Crow.

Stead's touch is surer when she is depicting the deflation of passion rather than the passionate moment itself. For example, she writes later that,

for nearly half the journey he held the near-fainting Teresa in his arms while he spoke his passion for her Teresa, miserable and maddened by his frenzies, wandered in her mind. . . . She had never been on such a journey

'It is not light thing, our meeting and our union', said he. 'It must have been anywhere that we met and at any time — why didn't I know you ten years ago?'

'I was thirteen.' (453)

¹Brian Kiernan, *Images of Society and Nature*, p.76; Michael Wilding, "Christina Stead's Australian Novels", *Southerly*, 27 (1967), 20-33.

In this incident, Quick's effusiveness is quietly punctured and the reader is reassured that the writer is capable of viewing her hero in perspective. After the first dazzling impression, Quick's own faults begin to emerge. Teresa sees her own idealistic extravagance reflected in him, and while she loves him, she comes to see where he is irritating and absurd. Consequently, she begins to change herself, modifying her ideas and her behaviour as she reacts against their counterpart in Quick. Her affair with Girton effectively dispels the fairy-tale atmosphere of her marriage to Quick and reduces its air of unreality to the level of simply another episode, if a momentous one, in Teresa's journey through life.

The journey motif is used in Stead's novel, as it is in Praed and Richardson, as a symbol for the spiritual quest; but in *For Love Alone* it is a "buffoon Odyssey" (348), its epigraph significantly taken from Cervantes' *Don Quixote*, the classical critique of chivalrous romance. Teresa's proud claim, "'You offend my honour! I would kill anyone who offends my honour'" (13) clearly springs from an ignorant idealism which the reader expects to see educated into a wiser appreciation of things as they are in the course of the story. Yet it also implies a sensible recognition that a woman must assume an active responsibility for herself. Teresa must be her own knight and defender. By changing the sex of her protagonist, Stead introduces complications to the *Bildungsroman* pattern. Not only are the obstacles in Teresa's path different from those which obstruct the progress of a male, but her continuing self-development demands a continual questioning of the whole structure of society instead of her final integration with it.

Teresa's *non serviam* involves a far more radical critique of existing norms than does that of Joyce's Stephen Dedalus, for example. Stephen tries to fly by the nets of nationality, language and

religion.¹ In contrast, Teresa is never troubled by nationality or religion. Her net is the far wider one of social and political structures and of sexual stereotyping, of whose tyranny language is only a reflection. She believes:

Where we have passions that are uncontrollable as in sex, a difficult social web is consciously spun out of them, with the help of oppressor and oppressed, so that practically no joy may be obtained from them, and I believe that it is intended in society that we should have little joy. Religion, morality, consist of the word No!
(254)

She resolves: "By 'they', I don't know who I mean. But I am trying to get by them — whoever they are" (255).

Whereas *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* is concerned with the relationship of the artist to his work and his society, *For Love Alone* is about the relationships of ordinary people, perhaps especially of women, to their society and to their image of themselves. It explores the relationship of fantasy and appearance to reality, of human sexuality to everyday living, and of social pressures to the development of the individual. Its concern is with life, not art. Therefore it is a mistake to view Teresa as an emerging artist.² Her writing and her drawing are deliberately placed as examples of a merely human, rather than as a particularly artistic, expressiveness. Teresa seeks outlets for a natural creativity which is exuberant and meaningful, but which is not the special creativity of the dedicated artist. It

¹James Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916; Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1971), p.203.

²See Douglas Stewart's argument in "Glory and Catastrophe", *The Flesh and the Spirit* (Sydney & London: Angus & Robertson, 1948), pp.235-238. He writes: "The novelist hints that Teresa will become a writer, but she has not stressed the point sufficiently. A fully convincing Teresa would have to be genius first and woman second; this one is the reverse", p.238.

is an overflowing of life and of love, in the broadest sense of those words.

Teresa's goal is to fly by the social nets which are designed to forbid joy. Madness is a recurring image associated with society's repression of the instincts and its separation of values which are only valuable when they are joined together. Physical and spiritual fulfilment, male and female, alike are divided to keep humanity in chains. Madness is used as a label to punish deviance and to crush rebellion. Teresa's special class of underprivileged children is called the Mad Class (82). She prefers them to the "ordinary children who conformed, and were sly, prosy, or smug" (*ibid.*); but she knows they are doomed to lives of hardship and failure. Madness is associated with every aspect of deprivation and desperation. Aunt Bea's landlady has a husband who went mad because "she did not believe in you-know between married people" (45). When Teresa hears the story of the madman who lives near her Aunt Teresa she exclaims:

'But how can they expect mad people to get better if they have no husbands and wives? . . . Why, we would all go mad, if we were shut up and not allowed to get married.' (161)

Teresa tells herself that "Beside the solitary girl, three hooded madmen walk, desire, fear, ridicule" (74). They are the spectres she must evade. Her own behaviour is termed mad when she deviates from the customary submission to these three and attempts to strike out on an individual path of her own. Her brother comments: "'Terry's going mad The way she's going on, she must be going mad'", and her father replies as if it were a simple matter of fact: "'Women go mad if they don't get married'" (273). However, near the beginning of her story, Teresa has decided that; "'I'm not mad, they are'" (92).

Later still, as she becomes more daring in her thinking, she perceives that love and madness are indeed linked, as the poets say, as threats to society's order. "'I belong to the race which is not allowed to reason'", she thinks,

'Love is blind is the dictum, whereas, with me at least, Love sees everything. Like insanity, it sees everything; like insanity, it must not reveal its thoughts.' (460)

Like madness, love heightens certain perceptions and reveals the truth beneath the pretences of existence. This formulation explains what may originally have seemed unusual in the style of narration Stead has adopted for this novel. In the second chapter, for example, the following passage occurs:

As the burning sun bored into her and the reflections from the water dazzled her, she saw insistently, with the countless flaming eyes of her flesh, the inner life of these unfortunate women and girls, her acquaintance, a miserable mass writhing with desire and shame, grovelling before men, silent about the stew in which they boiled and bubbled, discontented, browbeaten, flouted, ridiculous and getting uglier each year. (18)

Teresa's vision resembles madness in its superficial distortion of appearance to reveal the essential distortion which is reality. Her vision of tormented souls in a bubbling hell, influenced by painting and literature, is closer to the truth than the platitudes of society. Nonetheless, these moments of intense vision must be balanced by more conventional interludes in which the objective voice of the narrator takes over to present conversations and actions as they appear to the ordinary consciousness. The moments of vision must be placed in a recognizable social context or their relevance to that context is destroyed. Stead's genius is most apparent in her careful counterpointing of both approaches to reality so that each complements the other to

enlarge the reader's understanding of the whole.

Comparing her own perception of reality with what she has read in books, Teresa is struck by their congruence, "her world existed and was recognized by men" (76), but she feels thwarted by the disparity between this reality and the reality she encounters in her daily life, "the daily simpering on the boat and the putting away in hope chests" (*ibid.*). She dreams about "the sensual life for which she was fitted" (*ibid.*), and resolves that in order to attain it she must "break the iron circle of the home and work" (85). The life of love and beauty which she craves is to her like a "country from which she, a born citizen, was exiled. She struggled towards it" (*ibid.*). She never makes Praed's Esther's mistake of confusing England with that symbolic country, nor does she equate it with a spiritual world which can be separated from the material one; that is not her ideal. Instead, "in a reasonable way, her trip overseas, the halls of learning, were part of this grand life that she lived without restraint" (*ibid.*). She decides to go to England because as a citizen of the Commonwealth she will be able to get a job there, but it is not her final destination. She wants to see the world. Travel gives a purpose and direction to the "vigorous discontent which was pushing her out into the world faster and faster" (*ibid.*). *For Love Alone* is not an international novel in the sense of comparing and contrasting national differences, although the American James Quick is often amusingly puzzled by the habits of the British, among whom he includes the two Australians of his acquaintance; but it is an international novel in its use of settings in two nations to affirm the irrelevance of nationality to mankind's essential struggles, and to affirm its Australian heroine's place as a citizen of the world.

Like Maurice Guest, Teresa seeks fulfilment through love, but her understanding of love is dynamic and continually growing in accord with her advances in self-knowledge and knowledge of the world. Like Richard Mahony's, Teresa's is a kind of divine discontent which refuses to recognize limitations to the human potential for self-fulfilment and for pleasure. Her odyssey is the comic counterpart of their tragic wanderings. Where they seek peace, she seeks growth. Where they seek a home, she is always seeking new territory and greater freedoms. Where their quests are punished, hers is rewarded. Surrounded by madness on all sides, she wins through to sanity and a new optimism, somewhat darkened by the bitter knowledge of her past and its implications for the future, but nonetheless positive. Her romantic idealism has been tempered by her experiences, but she has become neither a cynic nor a conformist. She retains a core of innocence, of delight in her world, and in the possibilities it continues to afford her.

Chapter 5

MARTIN BOYD'S LUCINDA BRAYFORD: A TWENTIETH-CENTURY PARABLE

The dangerous effects of too complete a reliance on stereotyped conceptions of and conventional approaches to human relationships are well documented through studies of love in *Maurice Guest* and *For Love Alone*. Boyd too is concerned with mankind's need to appreciate and to respect the complexity of each individual human being if he is to adapt himself to the changing requirements of life in the twentieth century, but his emphasis and his approach are quite different. Whereas Richardson and Stead, for all their differences, share a romantic belief in individualism and have been profoundly influenced by Nietzschean philosophy, Boyd's beliefs have more in common with those of Praed. Like Praed he comes from an established land-owning family which had been active in the affairs of the colony, in his case, Victoria. Perhaps because of this traditional background, he sees, as she does, individual actions in terms of their social repercussions, and he looks to the past, to the Greek myths and the Christian religion, for guidance in his judgement of what is valuable in his own society. Whereas *Policy and Passion*, *Maurice Guest* and *For Love Alone* are concerned with sexual love and with questioning the romantic love ethic, Boyd in *Lucinda Brayford* is more interested in exploring the kind of unfocussed, impersonal, almost androgynous love which Stephen feels when he hears the music at Clare or when he senses himself to be in harmony with the natural world. It is this kind of love, Boyd seems to be suggesting, which may redeem the world.

Martin Boyd comes from an old and well-established Melbourne family, which is well-known for its various achievements in the arts.

He was born while his parents were touring overseas, in Lucerne, Switzerland, in 1893, and was taken back to Australia five months later. He reports that in his childhood he felt that he "had missed something, and that on the other side of the world . . . life was brighter and full of pleasure".¹ However, he thought of himself as an Australian and only wished to visit Europe "to see the material evidence of history and the haunts of the poets".² He went to England to enlist on the outbreak of the First World War in order to obtain a commission in the English Army. After the war he returned to Australia, but eighteen months later he moved again to England, feeling that he must make a name there before coming home to live. In 1948 he returned to Australia expecting to live there permanently, but in 1951 while on a visit overseas he decided to remain in Europe. On his own account, by 1968 he had spent "twenty-six years in Australia, thirty-four in England, about four in France, and ten in Italy".³ In 1965 he wrote in the "Apologia" to his second autobiography, *Day of My Delight*, that "Since, in my life-long search for the non-existent abiding city, I have come to live in Rome, all my previous life seems remote, as it is unrelated to my present environment."⁴ This statement suggests that like Richardson before him his expatriation was merely the physical manifestation of a more deep-seated spiritual need. In Rome he found the closest approximation to a spiritual home. In his "subjective travel book", *Much Else in Italy*, he writes:

¹Martin Boyd, "Preoccupations and Intentions", *Southerly*, 28 (1968), 83.

²Martin Boyd, "Why I Am An Expatriate", *The Bulletin* (May 10, 1961), 12.

³"Preoccupations and Intentions", 88.

⁴Martin Boyd, *Day of My Delight* (1965; Melbourne: Lansdowne, 1974), p.x.

Each European has his fatherland, but for every civilized man in the Western world, Italy must be his motherland, as a child most often owes its greatest gifts of life and its finest teaching to its mother.¹

He died in Rome in 1972.

Except for Barnard Eldershaw's sensitive essay on *The Montforts* in 1938,² most of the early critical work on Boyd concentrates discussion on his "complex fate" or "double alienation" as an expatriate writer.³ Fitzpatrick, in agreement with Phillips, argues that his attitude of "cultural cringe" crippled his work from the outset;⁴ Niall, that his "divided inheritance" was a fruitful one;⁵ but for both groups of critics his expatriation was the crucial factor in analyzing his work.

Boyd himself insisted that he was unavoidably heir to European tradition and the values of Western civilization and that the novelist's proper concern in any case was not to have a sense of national mission, but to confine himself to "his proper subject, the interplay of human souls and bodies".⁶ Four years later, he conceded that his life may have been that of a "perennially displaced person, though [he] did not

¹Martin Boyd, *Much Else in Italy* (London: Macmillan, 1958), p.29.

²M. Barnard Eldershaw, *Essays in Australian Fiction* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1930), pp.138-157.

³Miles Franklin, *Laughter, Not For a Cage*, p.184; Cecil Hadgraft, *Australian Literature: A Critical Account to 1955*, p.253; A.A. Phillips, *The Australian Tradition*, pp.103-104.

⁴Kathleen Fitzpatrick, "Martin Boyd and the Complex Fate of the Australian Novelist" (Canberra: Commonwealth Literary Fund Lecture, 1953), p.14.

⁵Brenda Niall, "The Double Alienation of Martin Boyd", *Twentieth Century*, 17 (1963), 204.

⁶Martin Boyd, "Dubious Cartography", *Meanjin*, 23 (1964), 7.

feel this at the time".¹ Boyd's understanding of his essential displacement, however, refers to the dilemma of a man who holds to civilized values in an age which has abandoned itself to violence, hatred and destruction; whereas his critics usually conceive of his displacement in far narrower terms, as the expression of an "Anglo-Australian tension".

Boyd clearly resented attempts either to disparage or to explain his work through reference to his family background and personal experience, and especially to imply that his expatriation and his novels both express a rejection and a criticism of Australia. There seem to have been misunderstandings on both sides of the controversy which followed the publication of Kathleen Fitzpatrick's *Martin Boyd* in 1963.² Fitzpatrick and Niall no doubt over-emphasized Boyd's expatriation as an influence on his work and Boyd in his turn appears to have over-reacted to their claims. Nonetheless, Boyd, like Praed, seems to have attracted adverse criticism because his view of Australia did not coincide with the traditional Australian "legend of the nineties".

In "Dubious Cartography" he complains:

It is hard to see why my limitations should give offence. I have done no harm in showing that in Australia from the beginning there has been a core of civilized people, which is all there has ever been in any country. The natural movement should have been for this centre to expand, ultimately to include the whole population, but it seems that 'patriotism' demands its extinction, and my offence is that I keep it on the record,

¹"Preoccupations and Intentions", 88.

²Kathleen Fitzpatrick, *Martin Boyd* (Melbourne: Lansdowne, 1963). See Boyd, "Dubious Cartography" [his reply], and Fitzpatrick, "A Commentary" [her reply], *Meanjin*, 23 (1964), 14-17. See also Boyd's letter to the correspondence section in response to Niall's article on "The Double Alienation of Martin Boyd", and Niall's letter in reply to Boyd's, in *Twentieth Century*, 18 (1968), 73-75.

even though in all my books the balance is in favour of Australia, which provides my most sympathetic characters.¹

Boyd wrote out of "the impulse to record what [he saw]".² He was privileged to see an aspect of Australian society very different from that recorded by Lawson and the *Bulletin* school. His work provides Australia with a complementary image to that of the legendary 'nineties, but unfortunately it seems to have been perceived as an alternative vision which threatened the cohesiveness of the national myth so that his achievement for a time went unacknowledged.

In the past ten years, Boyd's work has received a revival of critical attention.³ Most of this new criticism chides or ignores the nationalist approach to concentrate instead on the moral structure of Boyd's thought and on the themes he himself identified as important for his work. He writes:

My intentions were the outcome of these three major preoccupations — poetic religion; my hatred of war and all victimization; my family and the rich legacies of beauty and wisdom from the past.⁴

¹Boyd, "Dubious Cartography", 7.

²Boyd, "Preoccupations and Intentions", 84.

³For example, see Dorothy Green, "'The Fragrance of Souls': A Study of *Lucinda Brayford*", *Southerly*, 28 (1968), 110-126, and "From Yarra Glen to Rome: Martin Boyd, 1893-1972", *Meanjin*, 31 (1972), 245-258; Leonie Kramer, "The Seriousness of Martin Boyd", *Southerly*, 28 (1968), 91-109; John McLaren, "Gentlefolk Errant — The Family Writings of Martin Boyd", *Australian Literary Studies*, 5 (1972), 339-351; Pamela Nase, "Martin Boyd's Langton Novels: Praising Superior People", in *The Australian Experience*, ed. W.S. Ramson (Canberra: Australian National University Press, 1974), pp.229-248; W.S. Ramson, "*Lucinda Brayford*: A Form of Music", in *The Australian Experience*, ed. Ramson, pp.209-228.

⁴"Preoccupations and Intentions", 84.

The three are closely linked in all of Boyd's post World War Two novels, the works by which he wished to be judged, and which will be examined in this thesis. This recent emphasis on the universal nature of Boyd's themes frees the critic from the necessity of arguing his case on grounds first set up by the nationalists. It is now possible to dispense with the question of which country Boyd himself preferred and with the notion that his work is merely superficial social comedy in order to concentrate instead on the far more interesting aspects of his use of the international novel and of the Australian heroine in relation to the changing patterns which have been traced through some of the works of Praed, Richardson and Stead.

It has often been observed, sometimes in praise and sometimes in blame, that Boyd uses Australia as the background rather than the subject of his novels. At a purely practical level he accepts it as his homeland while regretting its isolation from the rest of the world. At a spiritual level, however, his attitude is more complicated, for Australia has no mythical presence which can correspond to the significances attached to countries like England and Italy through centuries of mankind's interaction with the landscape. Boyd attempts to explain his attitude through a rejection of Kathleen Fitzpatrick's explanation of his career in terms of Henry James's definition of the "complex fate" of the American (or colonial) artist:

A few years ago a young woman, in the peevish and censorious tones of modern criticism, wrote an article on my double alienation. I am not conscious of this myself as regards England and Australia, which are both Anglo-Saxon countries. My problem as regards them is no more psychological than that of, say an eighteenth-century relative in County Mayo, who would have liked to spend part of the year in London, but was deterred by the expense and discomfort of the journey. My inner division, if I have one, is the age-long one of the European, between the Mediterranean

and the north, the Classic and the Gothic worlds.¹

However, he goes on immediately to say of his Australian home that
he

was perfectly at home at the Grange, and what duality I had was satisfied by the old world interior of the house, and the external Australian landscape, so beautiful in those parts.²

Australia's position in relation to this spiritual division is not as simple as Boyd's disclaimer would seem to suggest. Although it is settled by Anglo-Saxons who have maintained their allegiance to Anglo-Saxon culture and its values, the land itself and the climate are more attuned to the spirit of the Mediterranean than to the north, so that it is possible to argue that to be an Australian is to feel this division acutely, for it is manifested continually in the conflict between Australian society and its environment, the interior and the exterior of the settler's home. Australia has all the prerequisites of a Mediterranean life, except for a Mediterranean attitude toward life on the part of its inhabitants and a Mediterranean heritage from the past. Boyd recalls that,

When I left England I said: 'I am going to Australia to lead a Mediterranean life. It provides everything necessary, wine, sunlight and a warm sea.' But somehow the strong bourgeois ethos of Melbourne inhibits this, and the material conditions were for me powerless to overcome it.³

¹*Day of My Delight*, p.239.

²*Ibid.*

³"Why I Am An Expatriate", 12-13.

In *The Cardboard Crown*, Guy Langton describes the land in terms which call to mind Praed's response in *My Australian Girlhood*.¹ Guy remarks:

There is no country where it is easier to imagine some lost pattern of life, a mythology of vanished gods, than in this, the most ancient of all lands, where the skeletons of trees extend their bleached arms in the sun, and giant lizards cling to their trunks.²

This "most ancient of all lands" is associated in his mind with the bright clear air of morning, both the original morning of mankind, the morning of the golden age, and the new morning of the beginning of civilization in Australia, in contrast to England, "the land where it was always afternoon".³ The contrast between the "poetic dream of medievalism",⁴ with its insistent stress on the past which enthralled Guy as a young man in England, and the simpler vision of antiquity, with its "appearance of belonging to all time",⁵ in which he spent his childhood in Australia is an excellent illustration of the division between the Gothic and the Classic worlds. Guy, like Boyd himself, attempts to reconcile the two sides of his nature by furnishing the

¹She writes: ". . . the bush seems a kind of primeval survival But before Atlantis was, old books say that the world had shaped itself into a great and different land, which was Lemuria. And of Lemuria the largest part that remains to this day is Australia . . . who can see the land in its hoariness, and the convulsions that have torn it, and the curious mammals that are upon it, and upon no other land, and the gum-trees of such wierd conformation unlike all other trees that are — who can see these things and ponder over them, without pondering too and greatly wondering over the story of the lost Atlantis and of Lemuria that was before", pp.10-11.

²Martin Boyd, *The Cardboard Crown* (1952; Melbourne: Lansdowne, 1971), p.22.

³Boyd, *The Cardboard Crown*, p.44.

⁴Martin Boyd, *A Difficult Young Man* (1957; Melbourne: Lansdowne, 1965), p.114.

⁵Boyd, *The Cardboard Crown*, p.56.

interior of his house in the Australian bush with nothing but relics of the European past. However, his narrative quest as recorded in the unfinished Langton tetralogy suggests that this solution is insufficient and that Guy is seeking a more satisfying harmony between the demands of his past and his present.

What is most interesting here is the stress on the timelessness of the Australian landscape and on its affinities with the Classic rather than with the Gothic world, a concept also present, with varying degrees of emphasis, in the works of Praed, Richardson and Stead. Guy writes:

A house in Australia, the first of its kind built only a hundred years ago, may suggest the antique more than a sophisticated palace built centuries earlier. There are in the country outside Melbourne little cottages built of bark and tin, whitewashed, with vines along their walls, and the fowls pecking at the hard earth under the fig tree, where one feels the disguised Ulysses might have asked for shelter and a bowl of goat's milk, while one cannot possibly imagine him calling at Waterpark, with its far greater antiquity. But this may be partly due to that feeling one has in the Australian countryside, that it has known the morning of the world. This cottage, where Austin asked for water, had the appearance of belonging to all time.¹

Praed, Richardson and Stead associate the Australian landscape with the mysterious attraction and repulsion of the unknown. In contrast, Boyd associates the landscape with his conception of the ideal human environment. He believes that the freedom, grace and harmony which characterize his idea of the Classic world are at least potentially possible in the Australian world, and that this potential may be realized when Australia is freed from the pretensions and false snobberies of an imported society. The old social order which the Langton's represent is in harmony with these eternal values of mankind so that, according

¹*Ibid.*

to Boyd, they are as equally at home in their adopted land, Australia, as they are in their land of origin, England,¹ as at home as it is possible to be in this world when one's soul is constantly in search of an "abiding city".

In *Lucinda Brayford*, however, Boyd is portraying the rise of a newer social class of which he thoroughly disapproves, those who are enamoured only of the "shoulder-knots of livery"² and not at all of those eternal values of which the shoulder-knots were once the emblem. In this novel, the Australian landscape is used as a touchstone for what is good and enduring in human relationships, and it is opposed to the pretensions of Melbourne society as epitomized by Tourella, as well as to the dying heritage of the Old World as embodied in Crittenden. Its European counterpart is St Saturnin on the Mediterranean, where "it's all light" (300) and where Paul feels himself to be 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 tree of humanity
and civilisation. (302)

The Australian landscape, especially as it appears at Flinders and Cape Furze, and its Mediterranean counterpart, St Saturnin, represent the best of the Classic world. King's College, Clare, at Cambridge, stands for the best of the Gothic world. The two worlds are complementary as much as they are opposites, for each represents the best of which mankind is capable and the ideal for which he strives.

The cottage where Lucinda and Hugo stop for water anticipates the cottage which Guy describes in *The Cardboard Crown*. Lucinda experiences

¹Martin Boyd, "De Gustibus", *Overland*, 50/51 (1972), 5-6.

²Martin Boyd, *Lucinda Brayford* (1946; Melbourne: Lansdowne, 1969), p.8 [section title of Part One]. Hereafter cited by page.

one of the few moments of intense happiness she is ever to know when she surrenders her self-consciousness to the ancient yet timeless spirit of the land and follows the dictates of her natural rather than her social self:

Here the land seemed terribly ancient, wistful and yet harsh 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 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. (141)

Stephen is conceived as a result of this moment, but this is Lucinda's last creative act. She is too bound by society's conventions to enjoy even the memory of this freedom. After this last communion with "the Australian countryside which had formed the close and natural world of her childhood" (140), she leaves Australia for England and becomes caught up in the declining northern world.

Just as in James's fiction the symbolic intention takes over in imaginative intensity from any contrast of cultures in a literal sense, so in Boyd's novel the international format is not an end in itself. In Boyd, as in Praed, Richardson, and Stead, the international novel is used as a device for exploring what is basic and universal in human experience. Furthermore Boyd, like Praed and Richardson but unlike Stead, perceives reality in terms of a conflict of opposites,¹ and the international story provides a structure within which these fundamental tensions may be examined.

¹In *Day of My Delight*, Boyd writes that what "I believed then and still believe, [is] that there is 'war in heaven' — a constant struggle between the forces of good and evil", p.29.

At first the relationships between the Old World and the New seem to fit the pattern established in Praed. Julie's innocence is exploited by the stranger from the Old World in a way very similar to the repeated seductions and betrayals of the New World by the Old in Praed's Anglo-Australian romances. However, Lucinda's experience expands beyond this pattern. Hugo comes to Australia to retrieve his financial situation, marries Lucinda for her money and uses her, as she comes to see, "as a banker and a bedfellow" (212). Yet she is also compelled to recognize that if he had regarded their marriage as basically a mercenary transaction, she herself was not entirely blameless. In fact, as she begins to identify more completely with English society and its values, she begins to believe that her family had "bought" Hugo for her in an acquisitive spirit more reprehensible even than his.

The real conflicts in *Lucinda Brayford* are between two radically opposed philosophies of life. On the one side are those who possess "the necessary foundation of culture": they live for pleasure (180). They include Paul, Hugo, Julie, Lucinda, and Stephen. Ranked against them are those who deny life, either with the belief that they are serving "some deep if obscure moral purpose" (128), like Marion or Fred, or nakedly to pursue power and money, like Straker, Ablett or Baa. Of course there are many gradations between the two extremes, but a situation of crisis, such as a world war, brings the divisions into a sharper relief. The novel is built around a series of moral antitheses. At the level of abstract morality, good is opposed to evil, and civilization to chaos. At the level of public morality, the code of the landed gentry is opposed to that of the businessman, and tradition is opposed to the new. At the level of personal morality, honesty is opposed to deceit, pleasure to a sense of purpose, the feminine principle to the masculine principle. Symbolically, light is opposed to dark, the past to the present, peace to war.

Lucinda Brayford is the record of one woman's growth toward an understanding of this fundamental conflict and of where she herself stands in relation to it. The germ of Lucinda's story was an incident which Boyd witnessed and found amusing: "a rich woman who had led a pampered life [was] suddenly plunged into war-time austerity".¹ Boyd writes that he "began *Lucinda Brayford* with the simple intention to entertain", but that when he started to write, all his "preoccupations began to stir [and] it became a parable of [his] life and times".²

As a parable, the novel tends to work schematically. Versimilitude is less important than a closeness to the moral and spiritual realities which Boyd sees at the centre of the twentieth-century situation. Entertainment has not been sacrificed, but it has been used to illustrate a moral end. Some characters become stereotypes as the story progresses and their representative function becomes more important than their humanity. However, most of the characters retain their individuality. Even when Straker reminds Lucinda of an ogre in a fairy tale (312) or when Paul seems to her like "a living expression of antiquity" (440), these situations imply the beginning of a perception on her part that an inflexibility of approach toward life and ideas does tend to be dehumanizing, whether the person who assumes that approach is basically good or evil in intention. The allegory is subtle rather than blatant. Like Richardson and Stead, Boyd is well aware of the complexity of life and of the falsity of attempting to reduce it to a formula. His own interpretation of the significance of reality is advanced through the development of Lucinda's story, seen mainly from her own perspective, and through the recurrence of parallel situations and of imagery.

¹Boyd, "Preoccupations and Intentions", 85.

²*Ibid.*, 85-86.

Lucinda's journey operates as a metaphor for the transition from youth to age, from innocence to experience, and from the bright sunshine of a simple and harmonious relationship with the natural world to the dimmed light and shadows of a complex relationship with the social and political worlds of mankind. Her journey to an older society is necessary to her personal growth, but it is a journey taken when that older society is already dying. Her journey from the timeless world of Australia into the world of European history introduces her both to a higher appreciation of pleasure and a deeper understanding of pain; it is somewhat like the fortunate fall. Listening to Palestrina with Paul at Crittenden, it seems to Lucinda

that only when one's life was linked to the beauties and tragedies of the past, as in this music and in this house, did it have any richness of texture, that only when one had accepted a background of pessimism did one's pleasures become civilised. (172)

This attitude can so easily be distorted into Paul's unpleasant conception of God "as a kind of super gourmet, a horrible connoisseur sniffing the fragrance of souls" (361), a conception which distorts the truth by assigning too great a significance to the evil and suffering in life. As Stephen and Lucinda come to realize by the novel's end, one must recognize the evil in mankind while encouraging the good.

When she was young, Lucinda's innocence was charming, but as she grows older she herself comes to suspect that her naïveté is the sign of an "inherent instability of character" (188) rather than a positive virtue. Unlike Stead's Teresa, who "affronts" her destiny with even more determination than does James's Isabel Archer, Lucinda is passive and self-consciously provincial. However, she shares with Teresa that same "non-alcoholic quality" (482) which irritates her later when she observes it in Stephen. It is this core of true innocence (in contrast

to her ignorance) which is her salvation, as it is Teresa's. Yet Lucinda lacks that sure sense of self and commitment to the ideal which spurs on Teresa and which prompts Stephen to refuse to fight and eventually to lose his life.

On her arrival in England, Lucinda experiences at first only "the excitement of finding [herself] in the living stream of culture" (154). Later she perceives the heavy weight of responsibility and the dark heritage, the "oppressiveness of the past" (274), which "acts as a drug on the senses" (275), inhibiting free action and the desire to continue creating for the future. She intuitively understands that the English gentry are no longer "in the living stream of culture", but in a stagnant backwater. According to Paul's metaphor, they are the "leaves on a fallen tree" (277).

Lucinda, however, cannot act on her perceptions. Instead, she continually retreats into the deceptively protective cocoon of the heritage from the past, improving her taste on Paul's instructions, and accepting social conventions without question, always trying to adapt herself to her environment rather than to the needs of her essential self.¹ In her concern to be worthy of the Brayfords, to be the ideal wife and the ideal mistress, she sacrifices her own needs again and again until she loses all sense of her identity as an independent individual and can only see herself in terms of her social role, as a society woman with a cultivated interest in the arts. Her conversation with Elspeth Roberts reveals how conventional and hackneyed

¹In *Day of My Delight*, Boyd records the following conversation: "I said to Jean Campbell: 'The only important thing is to be adjusted to one's environment.' She replied: 'Indeed it isn't. The only important thing is to be adjusted to oneself.' . . . This is all we know and all we need to know. The Kingdom of Heaven is within us", p.147.

are her notions about human relationships, and how impossible it is for her to conceive of an equal relationship with a man who is her lover. Similarly, her conversations with Stephen expose her deep mistrust of the expression of emotion and of honesty with regard to one's ideas and feelings. Eventually she decides that it seemed to be "her fate to sit apart, watching men who were less interested in her than in themselves and their own preoccupations" (446). What she fails to realize is that she has chosen to be an observer rather than a participant in life and that her willing self-effacement and her abdication of responsibility has encouraged the men she loves to develop into unbearable egotists.

Just as Lucinda's personal failures are a result of her own timidity (in retreating from experience) in combination with outside factors (the unfortunate circumstances in which she found herself) so western civilization is simultaneously collapsing from within and being attacked from without. Lucinda's marriage and her journey from Australia to England take her from a familiar and stable world order into a world where all values are in flux. The transition she experiences is as frightening and inexplicable to those representatives of the Old World who love the heritage of their past as it is to the New World heroine. Paradoxically, Australia comes to represent the Old World values of stability and continuity, through Lydia and her family, more convincingly than does England, whose conservative structures are rapidly succumbing to the destructive influence of Straker's philosophy, that might alone is right. However, the disintegration is universal. Muriel's purchase of Cape Furze indicates that Australia is just as vulnerable as England. It is only farther away and slower to show the signs of inner rot.

The college prank which begins the novel already shows a civilization on the decline. The universal disintegration is inseparable

from the significance of individual attitudes and actions. The novel's narrative structure depends for its coherence on a belief in the moral responsibility of individual human beings for their actions. The repercussions of the college prank extend throughout the story until its conclusion four generations later, when Stephen, who unites in himself the blood of the three families initially involved in the prank, requests that his ashes be scattered at Clare. Similarly, Julie's seemingly harmless affair, treated with such sympathy and such scrupulous impartiality, leads inexorably to Julie's own decline, Bill's unhappy marriage, and Heather's destructive marriage with Stephen. Even more seriously, perhaps, it undermines Lucinda's entire understanding of her past and the conception of life she had built upon that understanding. Her knowledge of the deception built into her past existence leaves her rootless, without any philosophy on which to base her decisions or even her attitudes:

She thought of her childhood and youth at The Pines and at Flinders, so decent, so secure, so intensely respectable, and all the time this rotten thing had been built into its foundations, to bring about, years afterwards, this collapse, and to make it impossible to look back tranquilly on that happy past. (233)

The disintegration Lucinda experiences in her private and in her family life is seen to be a reflection of a larger disintegration taking place within civilization itself. Lucinda's Australian girlhood and her summers at Flinders continue to operate for her as touchstones of the good life, but after Julie's revelation they have lost much of their force. With her last anchor to stability destroyed, Lucinda comes to feel "that there was no place where she truly belonged" (363). She continues to be spiritually homeless until Stephen provides her with a new cause for faith in the future of mankind at the novel's end.

Boyd's stress on individual human responsibility is balanced by his belief in the ebb and flow of fortune in a cycle of decline, death, rebirth and renewal. *Lucinda Brayford* records the process of disintegration until the individual integrity of Stephen's life foreshadows renewal. Boyd places great emphasis on the capacity of ordinary individuals like Stephen to reverse the trend toward disintegration. Because Stephen lives his life in harmony with his own true nature and in appreciation of the beauty of the natural world, although he is in opposition to the general decline of those values in his own time, he is in harmony with the true spirit of life. Thus the apparent futility of his life becomes in fact a positive omen of the good "which must return to mankind" (545) in its turn. Lucinda tells herself that

To-morrow the good must return to mankind, for it was as urgent in him as the evil, which at length it must redeem. To-morrow the creative passion and the need for truth would supplant the destructive lie, to which men had today abandoned themselves. (*ibid.*)

Her thought is confirmed by the words of the triumphant chorus which interrupts her meditation and ends the novel: "*Eya, resurrexit!*" (546). *Lucinda Brayford* concludes in an atmosphere of hope. Just as the despair of Good Friday is followed by the rejoicing of Easter Sunday, so the destruction of two world wars will be followed by a renewed reverence for life. Furthermore, this potential for good will be activated by ordinary individuals like Stephen, about whom Lucinda sees nothing extraordinary, "except, perhaps, his power of forgiveness" (545).

Yet even more remarkable than his power of forgiveness is Stephen's complete openness to experience. Unlike everyone else in the novel, he refuses to allow himself to be bound by conventional expectations or to restrict his opportunities for happiness by adapting himself to a

predetermined role. Heather recognizes this quality in Stephen and is at once attracted and repelled by it: "She was contemptuous of anything she thought 'high-brow', but this moment stirred in her a longing wonder" (408). Eventually she rejects Stephen's openness for Ablett's obvious and uncomplicated qualities of masculine dominance and self-assertion. She knows exactly where she stands with him, whereas with Stephen her conventional notions were always being challenged and forced to expand.

The notion of the strict division of the sexes and of the attributes traditionally associated with each sex is introduced early in the novel with Fred's continual insistence on cultivating the "manly" virtues in Bill and in his incessant denigration of "poodle-fakirs" like Tony. Lucinda is attracted to Hugo partly because he seems to unite the "best of both worlds" (140): a "feminine" fastidiousness and good taste with a "masculine" efficiency and skill with horses. She soon discovers that this appearance is illusory and that Hugo is a conventional soldier. His "feminine" traits are merely the outward signs of good breeding. She

grew to think that Paul was a more reliable character than Hugo, which seemed absurd. Hugo, steady-eyed, strongly built, not over-talkative, was the type she had been taught to regard as the acme of reliability, whereas Paul with his sensitive wavering glances, his exotic tastes, his malicious chatter, his small limbs, was what Fred would have judged the very embodiment of irresponsibility if not of downright shiftiness, even more so than Tony. It was odd, she thought, that she should have two close friends of the 'poodle-fakir' type. (173-174)

However, Lucinda's indoctrination in Victorian values has been so strong she is unable to profit from her insight into their falsity. She repeats her mistake with Pat. At first she is attracted to him because he seems more sensitive than Hugo. Finally she discovers that he is exactly the

same type. Her affair with Pat is a perfect symbol of the divisions in her life. It is not a total human relationship: She turns to the "masculine" Pat for sexual satisfaction and to the "feminine" Paul for friendship. She is convinced by her experiences that complete relationships are only a childish dream and not a real human possibility.

The episode between Bill and Anne also seems more meaningful in these terms. At the narrative level, it seems a melodramatic coincidence and morally heavy-handed that they should be half-brother and sister, but symbolically their potential union may be seen, at least tentatively, in terms of the coming together of male and female principles into an androgynous ideal. They are described as if they were the two halves of one soul; they are partly of the same flesh. Together they represent a heightened form of happiness, but when they are forcibly separated by deceit Bill at least denies the "feminine" qualities in his makeup and becomes the stereotype of a conventional male, ruining his life and distorting the lives of others in the process.

It is left to Stephen to bring the polarities of the novel together into a new whole. Like Dominic Langton, he suffers a mysterious jamming of the brain when confronted by life's inconsistencies and the irreconcilability of opposites. Dominic is torn apart by the divisions he experiences, but Stephen's spirit survives the ordeal although his body dies.

Stephen's "feminine" forgiveness of Heather, his job playing the flute, and his lack of interest in the war, cut him off from his fellow-men and he feels unhappy and lost without their companionship. Dunkirk reunites him to his fellows, "not only in physical companionship but, he imagined, in belief and purpose" (505). This experience of male comradeship floods his body and mind with "a rush of life" (*ibid.*).

However, his decision to become a conscientious objector again excludes him "from complete comradeship with the other men", and at times he feels "that he [has] no future and that his identity [is] lost" (516). In the Glasshouse, he moves to the other extreme, abandoning himself completely to the "masculine" impulses toward violence and revenge: "He forgot that he had set out to affirm love against hatred, life against death" (522). His crisis comes in the form of a dream. The Glasshouse, symbol of war and the "masculine" attributes, becomes confused with King's chapel, symbol of peace and the "feminine" characteristics; the brutal sergeant becomes confused with the innocent chorister, Brian:

In his nightmare he tried to divide the two things, the two places, and the two people, the object of his love and the object of his hate. Then it seemed as if they were both in himself, and his body was torn apart by them, as if he were nailed to a cross made of love and hatred, and he had to reconcile the two things in himself. (524)

The answer comes to him in the form of music "like a quivering in the air which was part of the all-pervading light" (525). Having recognized the evil and the good, the "masculine" and the "feminine" within himself, Stephen is at peace with himself.

To others, however, this androgynous state, the recognition and acceptance of both "masculine" and "feminine" impulses, appears as a threat and a mystery. The sergeant

could only put it down to effeminacy, and, in a muddled way which he did not himself understand, he took it either as dumb insolence or a challenge to his own virility. He set out to force his male will on it, to break it or destroy it, as if it were a physical virginity. (*ibid.*)

When Stephen thanks him for showing him the cherry-pie, the sergeant is finally compelled to submit to the power, if he cannot understand

the meaning, of Stephen's spiritual triumph. However, Stephen cannot maintain his spiritual integrity except at the expense of his physical strength. He is too weak and the atmosphere of his times too hostile. His spirit consumes his body (537) and he dies; but his example inspires Lucinda to hope and the novel ends with an anticipation of a better future.

It is not too schematic to argue that Stephen dies because the androgynous ideal cannot survive in the atmosphere of war and violence created and encouraged by Hitler and the business men who are his counterparts throughout the world. Traditional concepts of the male as aggressor are specifically associated with the unprincipled pursuit of political power when Ablett compares his own technique for the seduction of women to Hitler's technique for the subjugation of nations (469). In the world which Boyd depicts, the balance between what are traditionally considered to be the male and female principles has been overturned. The pursuit of pleasure, indeed civilization itself, has come to appear to be merely a "feminine" and therefore an inferior concern. The pursuit of power, on the other hand, has come to appear to be solely a "masculine" and therefore a superior concern. The two world wars are seen to be partly a symptom and partly a result of this change in values. When the values exclusively associated with the male have been exalted at the expense of the values exclusively associated with the female, chaos and unhappiness have ensued. *Lucinda Brayford* is a plea for a return to a more humane and a more rational balancing of mankind's instincts toward the "masculine" and the "feminine" impulses, both within individuals and within civilization as a whole.

Thus Lucinda's personal history is related in a variety of ways to the history of Western civilization in the twentieth century. Without losing its value as story, it assumes the dimensions of parable.

Lucinda's journey from Australia to England, childhood to adulthood, innocence to experience, is characterized by two main feelings: she is nostalgic for the lost harmony of her childhood even as she appreciates the maturity and wisdom which her knowledge of evil has brought her. Similarly, civilization looks backward toward a golden age, its childhood which may never be recovered, and at the same time looks forward to the realization of its own maturity in the future.

This double perspective is suggested by Boyd's deliberate reference to Wordsworth's "Ode on Intimations of Immortality". While Lucinda is alone with her young child, Stephen, she feels

that Wordsworth's ode was true, and that walking
beneath the trees and across the sunlit grass of
the park they were enclosed in some space where
their spirits moved freely together in light.

(208)

This modest vision, neither the anticipation of a socialist apocalypse (as in Stead's *For Love Alone*), nor an experience of complete submergence within the life-flow of the universe (as in Richardson's *The Fortunes of Richard Mahony* or White's *The Aunt's Story*), is the kind of moment which reconciles Lucinda to her personal fate and which gives a sense of meaning and of dignity to her life. The difference between her acceptance and Teresa's rebellion in *For Love Alone* is neatly illustrated by their different responses to Wordsworth's ode.

Teresa writes:

Poets, mystics, addicts of drink and drugs, young turbulent children, seem to have a different world from ours, something like we remember vaguely from our childhood and what Wordsworth stupidly called 'apparelled with celestial light' the vague notion of light before our eyes grow stronger. If we could see light, in all ways, that would be 'terrestrial light'. I attribute much of the inexplicable longing for childhood joys, which of course never existed . . . to a longing for this

general, easy, undifferentiated inward sensation
which gives the greatest pleasure¹

Although she recognizes that a balance must be maintained between these two conflicting directions within the human mind, Teresa prefers the terrestrial to the celestial, and the future to the past. Lucinda, like Boyd himself, is more ambivalent: temperamentally, they are drawn toward the nostalgic appeal of the past and a faith in the superiority of celestial light, but they too are convinced of the necessity for both points of view.

The two ideas, like Bohr's theory of complementarity in physics, must be held simultaneously, because

clarity does not reside in simplification and reduction to a single, directly comprehensible model, but in an exhaustive overlay of different descriptions that incorporate apparently contradictory notions.²

The novel is an ideal medium for conveying the complex wholeness of reality without sacrificing partial truths. For example, in *Lucinda Brayford*, the interaction of "masculine" and "feminine" impulses and its significance are balanced on the one hand by characters realistically portrayed and a narrative realistically enacted, and on the other by patterns of imagery which modify and deepen the reader's perception of the many interactions among apparent opposites. The irreconcilability of opposites which frustrates Praed and depresses Richardson, inspires Boyd. He sees it as a necessary tension from which a higher harmony and a greater beauty may result. Like Paul, he prefers "the devil redeemed" to the "simply kind and good" (361).

¹Stead, *For Love Alone*, p.253.

²Quoted in Irving Deer, "Science, Literature, and the New Consciousness", in *Prospects for the 70's*, ed. Finestone and Shugrue, p.128.

In conclusion, each of the novelists discussed in this first section uses a similar situation — the journey of a young provincial person to a centre of metropolitan culture — to explore his own personal preoccupations. Praed stresses the conflict between the spiritual and the material needs of man and complains of the restricted life allotted to women. Richardson concentrates on the disparity between expectation and fulfilment. Stead writes of the world's oppressed, of the poor and of women. Boyd pleads for a return to the humane values of the past. Yet despite these very real differences in outlook and in emphasis, they share a central core of common concerns and of techniques for dealing with them.

The themes of exile, of the quest in search of meaning, and of the stubborn irreconcilability of opposites, recur in the work of each. The international novel, in the hands of Praed, Richardson, Stead, and Boyd, becomes less a device for contrasting the Old World with the New than a medium through which some of the most fundamental problems which confront mankind may be explored. The theme of man's essential loneliness and of his sense of alienation from his world, so central in the work of Praed and Richardson, remains but gives way in prominence to the theme of a search for meaning and for a new sense of human community in the novels of Stead and Boyd. Through the various uses to which they put the Australian heroine, these writers question the stereotyping of human relationships, and suggest the need for a continuing evaluation of how men and women live together in the world.

Although Praed's novels are valuable in their depiction of the life of a time which is now past and in their efforts to endow Australian events with a significance beyond the merely sensational, they never assume the dimensions of great art. *Maurice Guest* proves that an Australian writer need not confine himself to Australian subject matter,

and that failure and defeat are as possible in the great metropolitan centres of the world as they are in the Australian outback. Success is not merely a matter of escaping the provinces for the city: it depends on a combination of personal qualities and chance. The disillusionment which both Praed and Richardson express with the glamour and promise of an expatriate life at the heart of civilization, instead of on its fringes, may be based on personal disappointments, but more importantly it links their work philosophically to the stoical acceptance and ironical awareness of Lawson and Furphy, with the important qualification that the two women writers lack the saving sense of humour of the men.

With the novels of Stead and Boyd, provincial longings and disillusionments lead beyond the expression of an individual frustration to comment on the contemporary world in its entirety. Without attempting to affirm or even to define specifically Australian values, Stead and Boyd create a fictional Australia in which Australian readers may see themselves and their environment. *For Love Alone* and *Lucinda Brayford* illuminate the Australian experience by revealing how intimately it may be related to the universal experience of mankind. Stead and Boyd combine their knowledge of life in Australia with their European participations to produce works of art which, in reflecting the life of a post-colonial society, reflect the realities of life in the modern world, in which no country may isolate itself from the trends of world history.

Section Two

THE THEME OF THE QUEST

Chapter 6

HENRY HANDEL RICHARDSON'S *THE FORTUNES OF RICHARD MAHONY*:THE NOVEL OF EXILE

Vincent Buckley has remarked of Patrick White's impact on Australian fiction that he opened up its range

in a startling way . . . not only by his experiments with form and language . . . but by conceiving and acting out the dramas of his characters in an imaginative world with one more dimension than our novelists have generally recognised as existing. It is a dimension within the individual, and also within the universe which he inhabits. It is mythopoeic, metaphysical, even religious. Its specific myth is that of search — a search, journey, pilgrimage only dimly apprehended by those who make it.¹

The pilgrimages described in the first section of this thesis draw a certain emotional resonance from their mythopoeic origins, but the relationship is not elaborated upon. In this second section, the theme of a search or journey "only dimly apprehended by those who make it" assumes a position of central importance in the narrative and symbolic patterns of *The Fortunes of Richard Mahony*, *The Aunt's Story* and *Voss*.

As the argument of this thesis makes clear, Patrick White was not the first to describe this extra dimension in his country's fiction. However, he does explore this dimension with the most thoroughly controlled technical skill and imaginative awareness yet achieved in the Australian novel.

¹"In the Shadow of Patrick White", *Meanjin*, 20 (1961), 144.

Perhaps one of the reasons *The Fortunes of Richard Mahony*¹ has been called a great (and sometimes the great) Australian novel is that it is groping toward and finally achieves this mythopoeic dimension. Every critic acknowledges the ambitious scope and intention of Richardson's design. Disagreements arise, however, as to the quality of her final achievement. Even Richardson's most ardent admirers make no attempt to deny her "inability to master consistently the mechanics and ordinary felicities of language"² and the damage this inability does to the impact of her trilogy. But they do insist that "the dramatic and symphonic qualities of Richard Mahony"³ provide adequate compensation for this fault, and that the imaginative vision embodied in the trilogy redeems the work definitively.

Certainly Richardson's treatment of philosophical themes through the dramatic interaction of her characters with each other and with their environment can be immensely moving. One of Richardson's harshest critics confesses that he is "haunted by the death of Richard Mahony",⁴ although he does not find this a sufficient reason to modify his judgement of the work as a whole. Furthermore, Richardson's recognition of the equal validity of conflicting approaches to life and of the final impenetrable mystery of men and of objects in this world enables her work to suggest a complexity of meaning rare in Australian literature

¹*Richard Mahony* consists of three volumes. *Australia Felix* was published in 1917, *The Way Home* in 1925 and *Ultima Thule* in 1929. The omnibus revised edition was published in 1930.

²Ken Stewart, "*The Fortunes of Richard Mahony: Symphony and Naturalism*", in *The Australian Experience*, ed. Ramson, p.98. For spirited defences of her achievement see also Dorothy Green, *Ulysses Bound* and F.H. Mares, "*The Fortunes of Richard Mahony: A Reconsideration*", *Meanjin*, 21 (1962) 7-13.

³Stewart, "*The Fortunes of Richard Mahony*", p.98.

⁴Vincent Buckley, *Henry Handel Richardson*, p.41.

before the advent of works by Christina Stead and Patrick White and before the maturity of Martin Boyd. These solid virtues do raise her story above the occasional awkwardness, dullness and sentimentality of her prose.

They themselves are jeopardized, however, by the lack of a controlling point of view behind many of the scenes in the trilogy. Richardson's decision to maintain the propriety of a Victorian standpoint throughout *Richard Mahony* denies the reader the necessary perspective by which to "place" Mahony, both as a product of his class and times and as a person whose most basic needs are independent of time and place. A Victorian mawkishness in the accounts of several incidents cannot be dismissed by referring these lapses of taste to the deficiencies of Mahony's sensibility when they are not clearly distinguished as such within the text and when they do not even seem to be recognized as lapses. Mahony's bourgeois habits of mind and ambitions, unlike those of Maurice Guest, are presented neither ironically nor in contrast to ideas obviously higher in value. In fact, they seem to receive Richardson's unqualified sympathy.¹ In the absence of any sure sense of distance from the narrative, it is sometimes difficult to detect the direction the trilogy is meant to take or even the meaning it is meant to convey.

Richardson's own comments on the significance of the trilogy do little to dispel this uncertainty. On the one hand, she wrote to an Australian reviewer in 1931 that she "did not aim at writing a typical Australian work. Richard Mahony's tragedy might have taken place

¹See Kiernan, *Images of Society and Nature*, p.49, for an elaboration of this point.

place anywhere; for the seeds of his misfortune were in himself".¹

On the other hand, in "Some Notes on My Books", an article published in 1940, Richardson wrote of her intentions in writing the trilogy in very different terms:

So far, all the novels about Australia that had come my way had been tales of adventure; and successful adventure: monster finds and fortunes made in the gold fields, the hair-raising exploits of bushrangers, and so on. But there was another and very different side to the picture, and one on which, to my knowledge no writer had yet dwelt. What of the failures, to whose lot neither fortunes nor stirring adventures fell? The misfits, who were physically and mentally incapable of adapting themselves to this strange hard new world? I knew of many such; and my plan was to tell the life story of one of them, with the changing face of the country for background, the rise of towns on what had been mudflats; while faithfully observing Laura's injunction to keep a foot planted on reality. — Into the question of how far I drew on the 'real' for this book and its companion volumes, I do not propose to go. The woof of fact and fiction is so intricately spun that, even for their author, the unravelling² would now prove a difficult and lengthy task.

The two statements are not entirely incompatible. In the first, she is stressing the universal implications of her work, and in the second, the particular in which it is grounded. However, this distinction does not appear to have been so clearly formulated in Richardson's mind nor put into practice in her trilogy.

The emphasis in the Proem to *Australia Felix* on an anthropomorphized and vengeful landscape does seem to be misleading in terms of the

¹Letter to I.M. Foster published in *Australian Literary Studies*, 4 (1970), 279-280.

²Reprinted in *Southerly*, 23 (1963), 14.

further developments of the trilogy as a whole.¹ Richardson ends the Proem with the prophecy:

Such were the fates of those who succumbed to the 'unholy hunger'. It was like a form of revenge taken on them, for their loveless schemes of robbing and fleeing; a revenge contrived by the ancient, barbaric country they had so lightly invaded. Now, she held them captive — without chains; ensorcelled — without witchcraft; and, lying stretched like some primeval monster in the sun, her breasts freely bared, she watched, with a malignant eye, the efforts made by these puny mortals to tear their lips away.²

This passage is reminiscent of Maurice's nightmare at the end of the first chapter of *Maurice Guest*, when he dreams he was "watched . . . from every window by a cold, malignant eye . . ."³ In *Maurice Guest*, the paranoia is "placed" as a psychological attribute of the protagonist. In *The Fortunes of Richard Mahony*, it is asserted by the authoritative voice of the author; yet the ensuing narrative does not conform to the prediction made here. Mahony is "physically and mentally incapable of adapting" himself to the conditions of life in general and not just to the "strange hard new world". Instead of directing attention to the general malignancy of physical or earthly life to those who, like Mahony, fail to value it at its proper worth and who indulge an "unholy hunger" for a life beyond what this world can offer,⁴ Richardson deliberately

¹For a statement of this argument from a slightly different perspective, see Jennifer Dallimore, "The Fortunes of Richard Mahony", in *Australian Literary Criticism*, ed. Grahame Johnston (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1962), pp.148-157.

²*The Fortunes of Richard Mahony* (1930; Melbourne: Heinemann, 1954), p.13. Hereafter cited by page.

³Richardson, *Maurice Guest*, p.24.

⁴Dorothy Green notes the parallel between the quest for gold and for psychic wholeness in her *Ulysses Bound*, p.249.

stresses the local at the expense of the universal. The Proem establishes a vague atmosphere of foreboding, but the anticipations it arouses are not met. Mahony cannot blame Australia for his failure.

In a letter to Nettie Palmer in 1927, Richardson wrote that

I needn't say how much I should value an Australian audience. But I am quite aware of the difficulties of the case. My Victorians did not love, or even like, their adopted country¹

However, in writing the Proem to *Australia Felix*, she deliberately deviated from her decision to maintain an anachronistic point of view and to write only from the standpoint of her Victorians. She wrote to Palmer in 1930:

Except in two places in the Trilogy I speak entirely for the generation of whom the works are written. One of these is the Proem to *Australia Felix*; the second the few sentences about the Bush and its colouring that occur in the first chapter of *Ult. Thule*. All the old settlers term the landscape colourless, the Bush silent. And for the time being their standpoint had to be mine.²

In other words, the Proem to *Australia Felix* represents a deliberate attempt on Richardson's part to place Richard Mahony's story within a larger context. The difficulties many critics have experienced in perceiving the relationship between the hostile environment described in the Proem and the personal tragedy which dominates *Ultima Thule* suggests that Richardson has not sufficiently clarified the connections she wished to make.

¹Nettie Palmer, *Henry Handel Richardson*, p.190.

²*Ibid.*, p.194.

H.P. Heseltine has advanced an interpretation which to some extent resolves these difficulties. From his point of view, the Proem "stands as an emblem of Mahony's fate as it is determined by and worked out in relation to the Australian cultural dream".¹ This dream is "organized around, [and] deeply deriving from, a hope of unearned, suddenly acquired wealth".² Richardson writes: "This dream it was, of vast wealth, got without exertion, which had decoyed the strange, motley crowd . . . to exile in this outlandish region" (13). Mahony's personal life and his quest for spiritual well-being are corrupted and distorted by the dream and then by the reality of unearned wealth. When the realized dream fails to bring him happiness, he rids himself unconsciously of the burden of his wealth, only to discover that poverty does not lessen his sense of the oppressiveness of life. His search ends in unearned madness. The relationship between Mahony's quest and the historical development of an Australian dream is generally suggestive rather than exact. It suggests a dynamic interaction between man and his environment with each working changes on the other, and it suggests that Mahony's personal tragedy is not merely congenital; it has implications which extend far beyond himself.

Mahony is the victim of a dream, and the dream itself is partially tainted, but it is also potentially valuable. Mahony only dimly apprehends the goal of his quest. That is why he is searching. Therefore, the concept of the Australian dream as a dream of unearned wealth which motivates and destroys Richard Mahony is only one dimension of the experience which the novel recounts. Richardson's story grows from a social study of man in relation to his community to a

¹"Criticism and the Individual Talent", *Meanjin*, 31 (1972), 19.

²*Ibid.*

psychological study of one individual's confrontation with the basic questions of life and of his subsequent descent into madness. The novel does appear to embody not only Mahony's search for psychic wholeness, but also Richardson's search for an understanding of experience and for a way both to contain and to communicate her personal vision to others.

It is interesting that the expatriate Richardson wrote her most ambitious novel in the same chronicle format as that in which most Australian novels of her time were being written, as if she could not avoid partaking of the Australian time-lag despite her residence in European surroundings and her familiarity, through her husband, with contemporary European fictional experiments. Middle-brow English writers were also still using the chronicle format, but Richardson aspires beyond the middle-brow. A.D. Hope's belief that the compulsion to create a past is common to all colonial literatures¹ seems applicable here. Richardson's domicile abroad clearly did not exempt her from feeling this compulsion when her attention finally turned to the raw material her native country offered her as a writer. She was determined to "set the record straight" by countering the sensational tales of adventure with an account of the psychological difficulties of coping with exile and of adjusting to a new land, both experiences of which she had personal knowledge. The possibilities inherent in her theme led her away from a literal to an archetypal emphasis, but she retained the structure within which her vision began to take shape.

Like Patrick White in *The Tree of Man*, Richardson works within established fictional structures in order to concentrate more fully on a revelation of the hidden mystery inherent in ordinary life. Her

¹"Standards in Australian Literature", in *Australian Literary Criticism*, ed. Johnston, p.7.

desire to "set the record straight" precedes White's statement that in writing *Voss* he was "determined to prove that the Australian novel [was] not the dreary, dun-coloured offspring of journalistic realism".¹ For both novelists, the impulse is similar. It involves both a rejection of past efforts at translating the reality of the Australian experience into fictional modes and a personal desire to discover roots and a sense of identification with their homeland through an imaginative re-creation of its past.

The chronicle format enables Richardson to treat the entire span of Richard Mahony's life and death with an exhaustiveness which provides the scope for observing the many almost imperceptible ironies of human aspirations subject to pressures of time and circumstance. Countless complements to and variations on Mahony's quest are presented in the diverse situations of all those with whom he interacts. Just as in *Maurice Guest*, each of Maurice's acquaintances represent aspects of himself and Avery's suicide foreshadows Maurice's, so in *The Fortunes of Richard Mahony* the characters and destinies of Long Jim, Purdy, Tangye and even Cuffy provide oblique (and often obvious) commentaries on the sources and nature of Mahony's behaviour. Although at its best this method illuminates and distinguishes Mahony's situation without oversimplifying it, in the first two books it sometimes tends to overwhelm and obscure it. These volumes often reflect too closely Mahony's own lack of direction and his inability to rise above the pressures of the immediate.

Historical accuracy provided Richardson with a limited degree of objectivity and with a rudimentary method for ordering her perceptions. However, despite her concern to maintain an anachronistic decorum, she

¹White, "The Prodigal Son", *Australian Letters*, 1, No.3 (1958), 39.

came to see the portrayal of the past as less an end in itself than as the means by which she could establish a convincing background in which to place her characters. She wrote to Nettie Palmer in 1929 that

Interesting as the experiments are that are being made to-day in the novel, I never cease to believe that character-drawing is its main end and object, the conflict of personalities its drama. What makes me sure I am right is that only those books endure whose figures are real and intense enough to step out of their covers and lead their own lives.¹

Like Boyd and Stead, Richardson chooses to place the independent lives of the characters in her novels and their relationships to one another and to their environment above her own private imaginings or structural plans. She and Boyd alike have been accused of a deficiency of imagination: Boyd, because he returns again and again to a limited number of character types and incidents whose counterparts may be traced in the history of his own family and Richardson, because Richard Mahony is at least partially based on the life of her father and on her own fears, desires and questionings, and because she is known to have researched the historical and biographical details for the trilogy with great care.

Such criticism neglects the essentially fictional uses to which these facts are put. *The Fortunes of Richard Mahony* is neither a historical nor a biographical novel. It uses the past as the background for its action without providing a criticism of it (except in the most general terms) and without exhibiting any interest in it for itself. The historian Weston Bate finds *The Fortunes of Richard Mahony* at once historically misleading and fulfilling because it is operating at two distinct levels of historical truth: "one is a level of ordinary life

¹Nettie Palmer, *Henry Handel Richardson*, p.192.

which . . . is extraordinarily satisfying and accurate to her sources and the other [is] a level of events and mood on which she departs quite strikingly from them".¹ Clearly Richardson was prepared to follow historical fact closely when it suited her purpose to do so, but when the direction or the emphasis of her story demanded it she did not hesitate to ignore it or even to falsify it.

The historical details allow Richardson to keep one foot firmly "planted on reality"² in the initial two books when Mahony's character requires this complement to attain to the proportions of a figure "real and intense enough to step out of the covers and live [his own life]". He must be established first of all as a Victorian bourgeois with intellectual pretensions and spiritual longings and as a dissatisfied emigrant before he can grow to take on mythic proportions as an image of man the eternal seeker: he must establish his reality before his universality.

The first two books of the trilogy are cluttered with minor characters and incidents whose functions are not always immediately clear, but who serve, by parallel and by contrast, to point out Mahony's failings and his strengths, and to stress his alienation from their world. The acute sense of loneliness which was at the heart of Maurice Guest's experience is also at the centre of Richard Mahony's. In Mahony's case, this spiritual state is mirrored more fully in his physical circumstances. He is an emigrant actively seeking a new life and a new home, eager for change yet unwilling to part with the old and familiar. Unlike Maurice, he has exchanged one cultural backwater

¹"From Gravel Pits to Green Point", in *Henry Handel Richardson, 1870-1946: Papers Presented at a Centenary Seminar* (Canberra: National Library of Australia, 1972), p.44.

²This is Richardson's own term in "Some Notes on My Books", 14.

(Anglo-Irish Protestant Dublin) for another (Victoria). This may account for his compulsive need to draw attention to his innate superiority over almost everyone he meets.

Mahony's dreams of making a fortune and of returning home in triumph from a voluntary exile have already suffered defeat when the novel opens. He is an older Maurice, who longs for a fuller life and who thinks he has a clear conception of what he desires. He wants a gentlemanly and refined material existence and a fulfilling mental and spiritual life. Like Maurice, he tends to confuse the possession of wealth with happiness and with the attainment of spiritual goals, "good breeding with tact and kindness" (419). Like Praed's Australian heroine Esther, he confuses his ideal of England as a spiritual paradise with the actual country. His experience in England cures him of the latter fantasy and his experience of great wealth and leisure on his return to Australia of the former.

Unlike most of Praed's heroines, Mahony, as a man and as head of the household, is able to enact his fantasies and actually leave the provincial backwater of Australia for the promised land of England. When disappointed, he can move again. His mobility adds another dimension to his story: physical journeying parallels spiritual journeying; the emigrant's division of loyalties parallels a psychic division. Similarly, the conflict between his yearning for stability and his yearning for change is symbolized by his compulsion to build ever more solid houses as a defence against the outside world and by his equally strong compulsion to leave them once they are built, when the fortress has become a trap.

Mahony's illusions result not from the innocence of youth but from a desperate refusal to confront the facts of his own nature and his own

position in the world with complete honesty. He can acknowledge to himself that he has not achieved the dreams of his youth, but he cannot accept responsibility for his failure. Instead, he continually tries to blame his restlessness and discontent on external causes: on Australia, on England, on poverty, on social pressures, or on Mary. Only when these attempts fail does he begin to search, still unwillingly, for a cause within himself. His image of himself depends entirely on external and rigidly limited definitions. The chaotic new society of Australia challenges his valuation of himself as a gentleman just as Mary's sound business sense and competence with money is a potential challenge to his image of himself as the protective and dominating male. Mahony can be petty, weak, immature and even unpleasant; yet Richardson presents him in such a way as to make these merely personal characteristics become irrelevant before the representative humanity of his search for meaning in life and for a personal dignity.

Mahony's wife Mary represents his own conservatism and his desire to cling to the familiar and sociable instead of setting out for the unknown. Mary is associated with the earth and with the values of a physical and material existence directed toward permanence, whereas Richard is linked to the sea, with its promise of change and adventure. The Proem to *Australia Felix* establishes the strength and threat of Mary's position. The Proem to *The Way Home* illustrates the challenge and attraction of Richard's outlook. Their domestic conflicts grow so bitter because Mary does speak for a side of Richard's own nature whose demands he often feels he must ignore for his personal salvation even as he feels that their claim to be recognized is as just as his right to ignore them. The conflict between the real and the ideal, the material world and its spiritual counterpart, is re-enacted in the marriage of Richard and Mary Mahony.

Throughout his life, Richard's quest for spiritual knowledge is in conflict with the struggle to obtain the physical necessities of life. On one level,

He was trying to pierce the secret of existence
— to rede the riddle that has never been solved.
— What am I? Whence have I come? Whither am I
going? What meaning has the pain I suffer, the
evil that men do? Can evil be included in God's
scheme? (163)

On the other, Tangye's bitter summation of life's meaning is always present as the counterpart of Mahony's more expansive hopes. Tangye tells Mahony:

'Life's only got one meanin', doctor; seen plain,
there's only one object in everything we do; and
that's to keep a sound roof over our heads and a
bite in our mouths — and in those of the helpless
creatures who depend on us.' (260)

Mahony's spirit rebels against the tyranny of circumstance but he cannot help feeling trapped in its "nightmare-web" (168). He believes that his internal "voyage of discovery" (162) is plagued continually by the necessity of spending most of his life in the unrewarding toil for enough money to sustain existence on a merely physical level, and that everything is conspiring against him to limit and enclose his inherent capacity for self-fulfilment. Yet he himself holds himself back, reserving his energies "like a buried treasure, jealously kept for the event of his one day catching up with life: not the bare scramble for a living that here went by that name, but Life with a capital L . . ." (315). Like Praed's Esther, Mahony holds himself aloof from participating in life and his withdrawal from experience is basically instinctual and emotional rather than intellectual in origin. His careful observance of the conventional proprieties of behaviour marks him as a conformist rather than a rebel, but like all the

protagonists of the novels included in Section One he lives an intense, rebellious and confused emotional life.

Mahony is never able to "catch up with" life; his "buried treasure" is never uncovered. However, his yearning and stumbling quest for his ideal of life can be taken to represent the "spiritual adventuring" he seeks, if only he himself can recognize it as such. Although from Mary's perspective it would appear ironical that his flight from annihilation speeds him toward his final disintegration and death, from Richard's ideal perspective this irony disappears. The sensible and secure path which would have extended the duration of his physical existence and warded off the onset of his madness would also have denied him his spiritual growth and the opportunity to confront the basic facts of his nature and his place in the universe without subterfuge. To some extent, his suffering is a positive rather than a negative factor.

Richardson seems to be endorsing Mahony's conclusion, when pondering on John's approaching death, he tells himself that pain is

the profoundest of life's truths, the link by
which man is bound up with the Eternal . . .
pain that bites so much deeper than pleasure,
outlasting pleasure's froth and foam as granite
outlasts thistledown. (520)

In an essay entitled "The Fate of Pleasure", Lionel Trilling concludes that

the ideal of pleasure has exhausted itself
In its place, or, at least, beside it, there is
developing — conceivably at the behest of
literature — an ideal of the experience of those
psychic energies which are linked with unpleasure
and which are directed toward self-definition and
self-affirmation.¹

¹*Beyond Culture* (1965; rpt. London: Secker & Warburg, 1966), p.85.

Nietzsche expresses this new attitude in his *Beyond Good and Evil* in terms of a recognition that

Any depth, any thoroughness is already a violation, a desire to hurt the basic will of man's individuality, whose trend is constantly toward illusion, toward the surface. In any desire of the mind to penetrate deeply and with understanding there is already a drop of cruelty.¹

Mahony questions the meaning and purpose of existence and the literal truth of the Bible. He requires "spiritual adventuring" and "intellectual excitement" (315); he is "tired of everything he [knows]" (521). The kind of experience his own life offers him is never the kind he craves because it involves a closing rather than an expanding of possibilities, a settling down instead of a reaching out, acceptance instead of questioning. In this sense Mahony is very much the forerunner of the twentieth-century protagonist.² However blindly, he is seeking something beyond pleasure, the kind of knowledge and personal growth which will continue to rack him with doubts instead of assuaging them.

But this need for motion is confused and subsumed within an equally strong need for permanence. Unlike the Nietzschean "Overman", Mahony is also seeking "a dream one has had and half forgotten, and struggles to recapture" (513). Ultimately Mahony's questioning of the meaning of existence is far closer to that of Job than to that of Zarathustra. Like Boyd's *Lucinda Brayford*, *Richard Mahony* is written within an essentially Christian framework which affirms that there is a design, however unapparent to mortal understanding, behind the seemingly meaningless course of existence.

¹Trans. M. Cowan (Chicago: Gateway, 1955), p.157.

²Although created in the twentieth century, he is presented as a nineteenth-century man.

The novel maintains an uneasy balance among Mahony's individualized version of Victorian Christianity, the author's spiritualist beliefs and the Nietzschean concept of a meaningless universe. The Christian idea of the soul's rebirth after death may seem to bear some relation to Sir Thomas Browne's contention that "men are lived over again", which Richardson has taken as the epigraph to *Richard Mahony*, but it is completely antithetical to Nietzsche's notion of eternal recurrence. The first two beliefs imply a sense of purpose and significance which is absent in the latter. Richardson conveys Nietzsche's sense of the harshness of life without his corresponding joy in the challenge it affords men to perfect themselves. She asserts the Christian view that there is a purpose behind existence but places her stress on the vindictive rather than on the merciful aspects of that purpose.

Whereas in *For Love Alone*_x the quest for individuality is opposed by social convention but approved by nature, in *The Fortunes of Richard Mahony* society and nature conspire together to destroy Mahony and to teach him to relinquish his quest. As nature deprives him of his sanity, society deprives him of his fortune and of his patients, his only means of making a living. Although it is obvious to the reader that his quest for understanding seldom rises beyond the limitations of conventional free thinking and hackneyed expressions of discontent, it is still particularly hard for a man who values the intellect so highly to lose his reason through a physical cause.

His suffering eventually brings him to the realization that his quest has been a misdirected one, because it was based on a narrow and self-limiting pride instead of on humility. Like Maurice, he is forced to acknowledge that

there had been no real love in him: never a
feeler thrown out to his fellow-men. Such
sympathy as he felt, he had been too backward

to show: had given of it only in thought, and from afar. Pride, again! — oh! rightly was pride like his reckoned among the seven capital sins. For what *was* it, but an iron determination to live untouched and untrammelled . . . to preserve one's liberty, of body and of mind, at the expense of all human sentiment. To be sufficient unto oneself, asking neither help nor regard, and spending none. A fierce, Lucifer-like inhibition. (738)

Face to face with what White's Theodora in *The Aunt's Story* calls "the great monster Self",¹ Richard begins to understand the Christian paradox that only by losing oneself will one truly find oneself. He decides to abandon the self-defeating circle of being himself "the hunter and the hunted: the merciless in pursuit and the panting prey" (692) in favour of a reduced affirmation of self which accepts his place in God's plan.

As he breaks out of the circle of the self, he experiences a tremendous release and a revelation:

All sense of injury, of mortification, of futile sacrifice was wiped out. In its place there ran through him the beatific certainty that his pain, his sufferings — and how infinitesimal these were, he now saw for the first time — had their niche in God's Scheme (pain the bond that linked humanity: not in joy, in sorrow alone were we yoke-fellows) — that all creation, down to the frailest protoplasmic thread, was one with God; and he himself, and everything he had been and would ever be, as surely contained in God, as a drop of water in a wave, a note of music in a mighty cadence. More: he now yearned as avidly for this submergedness, this union of all things living, as he had hitherto shrunk from it. The mere thought of separation became intolerable to him: his soul, ascending, sang towards oneness as a lark sings it ways upwards to the outer air. For, while the light lasted, he *understood*: not through any feat of conscious perception, but as a state — a state of being — a white ecstasy, that left mere knowledge far behind. The import of existence, the mysteries hid from mortal eyes,

¹Patrick White, *The Aunt's Story*, p.134.

the key to the Ultimate Plan: all now were his.
And, rapt out of himself, serene beyond imagining,
he touched the hem of peace at last . . . eternal
peace . . . which passeth understanding. (740)

Whereas the efforts of Stead's Teresa to separate herself from the forces of society which seek to constrict and to control her leads her to an apocalyptic vision of a brave new world beyond the suffering of the world's past, Mahony's vision is of the utter insignificance of the human individual within the pattern of infinity.

It is possible to consider this revelation a final delusion rather than a definitive culmination of Mahony's quest, yet despite the conventional and uninspired nature of the vision, it rings true as the culmination of Mahony's years of agonized introspection and genuine suffering. It is definitely an ambiguous revelation, a defeat as well as a victory. On the one hand, this brief epiphany gives Mahony the strength to face the truth of his impending madness and the thought of life with neither self-control nor mental awareness. In his merging of the self into the pool of a collective unconscious, he finds the breadth of purpose he has formerly sought in vain. On the other hand, his return to religious belief represents an abandonment of the quest to define himself as an individual distinct from others. He has failed to create himself in an existential sense, but in the novel's own terms he has discovered something which may be more valuable, his true relation to time and to the universe.

A prefiguring of this message occurs when Mahony revisits Edinburgh. The total failure of all his dreams of worldly success is brought home to him by his separation from this example of "life in all its pristine vigour, life bubbling hot from the source" (385). Richardson comments, seemingly with approval:

Never before had it been made so clear to him of what small worth was the individual: of what little account the human moulds in which this life-energy was cast. Momentous alone was the presence of the great Breath: the eternal motor impulse. (*ibid.*)

This may be the ostensible message of the trilogy; yet the whole thrust of the book is to deny this message and to affirm instead Henry James's discovery in the preface to his *Portrait of a Lady*, of "how absolutely, how inordinately, the Isabel Archers, and even much smaller fry, insist on mattering".¹ Even when he is most bent on escaping the implications of his selfhood, Mahony too insists on mattering and in the strength of his characterization lies the strength of the novel.

Nettie Palmer's decision that "the moral discovery of the trilogy was the social nature of man, his dependence on the community",² is similar to Dorothy Green's later argument that love and a "saving occupation" are two of the means by which man may come to terms with the contradictions within himself between "the nomad and the settler" and between "a desire to forget self and a desire to assert it".³ These theories correspond to H.P. Heseltine's suggestion that "mateship, egalitarian democracy, landscape, nationalism, [and] realistic toughness" recur in Australian writing as defences against "the terror at the basis of being".⁴ These customary defences are rejected by Richard Mahony, Theodora Goodman and Johann Ulrich Voss. Their pride leads them to attempt to face the terror of the abyss unaided. Society terms

¹(Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1966), p.xi.

²Henry Handel Richardson, p.122.

³*Ulysses Bound*, p.253.

⁴"The Australian Image: The Literary Heritage", *Meanjin*, 21 (1962), 49.

them mad for embarking on such a quest and the quest itself does seem to drive them mad, beyond the safety and the limits of sanity.

Richardson and White are both interested in these alternative states of consciousness and in the light they shed on man's ordinary perceptions of reality. However, White seems far more sympathetic to the states themselves. Richardson describes her protagonist's madness from the point of view of what a tragedy such a chaotic state of mind is for a man who believes man's highest good is his capacity for rational inquiry. It is a humiliating, debilitating process to which Mahony is subjected. The implication of her narrative seems to be that life punishes those who try to assert their own individuality against the direction of her flux. To try to stamp one's signature upon a moment of time¹ instead of accepting and deferring to its endless ebb and flow is to involve oneself in unnecessary suffering, and yet to do so is the essence of being human. This is Richardson's contradictory message. Society is designed to protect man from much agony, but only through such agony can he fully realize his humanity. It is not enough to conclude that "the moral discovery of the trilogy was the social nature of man", for the opposite is also true. The trilogy acknowledges both the social and the asocial natures of man. They are equally natural and equally necessary to the species; yet the conflict of the two may be insupportable within the individual.

Richardson uses the imagery of the Australian landscape to draw her massive work to a satisfying conclusion, in which the contrast between land and sea and what they symbolize — body and soul, permanence and motion — achieves a delicate balance rather than a reconciliation through death and the passage of time. Her description of the Australian

¹See p.457 in *The Fortunes of Richard Mahony*.

landscape follows early accounts in terming it an ancient and barbaric land. However, her use of the imagery of sea and land also links her more closely to the practice of Stead and Johnston, both of whom turn their protagonists to the sea for its promise of beauty and freedom and for the connection it offers with other countries and with a wider outlook on life. Just as Stead's prologue "Sea People" places Teresa within a cosmic context in *For Love Alone*, so the Proems to *Australia Felix* and to *The Way Home* establish a somewhat similar context for Richard Mahony. The Proem to the first volume is dominated by the land and the Proem to the second by the sea. The final book has no Proem, but Richard finally loses his sanity in a scene which is dominated by the element of fire. Earth, air and sea are all present in the trilogy's conclusion:

— It would have been after his own heart that his last bed was within sound of what he had perhaps loved best on earth — the open sea. . . . On all sides the eye can range, unhindered, to where the vast earth meets the infinitely vaster sky. . . .

All that was mortal of Richard Mahony has long since crumbled to dust. For a time, fond hands tended his grave, on which in due course a small cross rose, bearing his name, and marking the days and years of his earthly pilgrimage. But, those who had known and loved him passing, scattering, forgetting, rude weeds choked the flowers, the cross toppled over, fell to pieces and was removed, the ivy that entwined it uprooted. And, thereafter, his resting-place was indistinguishable from the common ground. The rich and kindly earth of his adopted country absorbed his perishable body, as the country itself had never contrived to make its own, his wayward, vagrant spirit. (830-831)

The "primeval monster" of the Proem to *Australia Felix*, appeased by the sacrifice of a "perishable body", has been transformed into "rich and kindly earth", and the reader is assured that Mahony's soul lives elsewhere.

In conclusion, *The Fortunes of Richard Mahony* is not without technical faults. It is laborious, long-winded, sometimes sentimental, and often lacking in subtlety. Richardson has never been praised for felicity of style or technical innovation. She did not change the forms she inherited nor did she infuse them with a new life. Her technical flaws and omissions are balanced, however, by a vision of great power, a vision of man's inescapable loneliness and his search for meaning in life which in its presentation transcends all limitations, especially in the final book of the trilogy where excrescences disappear and Mahony's personal drama takes over completely.

Richard Mahony is essentially a novel of exile. Mahony is spiritually divorced from his environment, his friends, his wife, and even himself. His quest alternates between a search for wholeness, for a primeval unity of being, and an attempt to proclaim and flaunt his separateness. Because of his own inner divisions, Mahony is unsure of the direction in which he wishes to travel or of the goal he seeks. The trilogy documents his loneliness and his rootlessness with a relentless precision which is overwhelming in its total effect. The provincial's uncomfortable sense of displacement itself becomes part of the Australian experience. His desperation, artistically realized, becomes part of the Australian heritage. The story of Richard Mahony becomes at once an illustration of the failure of "the Australian dream" and a parable of modern man's failure to integrate the divided impulses of his nature into a new whole.

Chapter 7

PATRICK WHITE'S *THE AUNT'S STORY*: THE NOVEL OF ISOLATION

In *The Fortunes of Richard Mahony*, Richard's journey through life is narrated in terms of his own harried wanderings from place to place in search of the unattainable. Ultimately he learns the truth of the Horatian tag, part of which forms the epigraph to *The Way Home*: "*Coelum non animum mutant qui trans mare currunt*". Richard will forever be an exile because he carries exile in his soul. Richardson had an intimate understanding of the anguish of exile and of the ambivalent love/hate relationship between the expatriate and his adopted country which she was able to order and make significant in her art. In *The Aunt's Story*, written just before White made his decision to return permanently to Australia, and in *Voss*, his second novel after his return, White explores similar areas of experience.

Several critics have seen White's expatriate experience as an image of his literary isolation from the "social realist novel of Australian tradition".¹ Others view his "ambivalence towards his homeland Australia" as the source of his recurring preoccupation with the "confrontation of philistine and outsider".² Some see this ambivalence

¹"Introduction" to *Cunning Exiles*, ed. Don Anderson and Stephen Knight (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1974), p.7. See also Thelma Herring, "Odyssey of a Spinster: A Study of *The Aunt's Story*", in *Ten Essays on Patrick White*, ed. G.A. Wilkes (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1970), pp. 3 and 6, and John Rorke, "Patrick White and the Critics", *Southerly*, 20 (1959), 66.

²Hilary Heltay, "The Novels of Patrick White", translated by John B. Beston, *Southerly*, 33 (1973), 94. See also Brian Kiernan, "Patrick White: The Novelist and the Modern World", in *Cunning Exiles*, ed. Anderson and Knight, 81-103.

as the source of what they regard as weaknesses.¹ A few regard it as

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).²

Like Martin Boyd, Patrick White is genuinely the product of a double heritage. He was born in London in 1912 into a family of wealthy Australian pastoralists and although he was a fourth generation Australian he attended school in England from the age of thirteen onwards. After graduating in Modern Languages from Cambridge in 1935, he remained abroad for approximately fourteen years, travelling in Europe and America and working during the Second World War in Greece and the Middle East. In 1946 he sailed back to Australia, writing part of *The Aunt's Story* on the way. He returned to London, had *The Aunt's Story* accepted for publication, and in 1948 finally decided to return to Australia permanently.

Ten years after White's return to Australia, *Australian Letters* published a contentious defence of expatriation in an article entitled "The Last Expatriate" by the journalist Alister Kershaw and a response by Patrick White, "The Prodigal Son".³ This article is a masterpiece

¹ See David Bradley, "Australia Through the Looking Glass", *Overland*, No.23 (1962), 41, and Peter Shrubbs, "Patrick White: Chaos Accepted", *Quadrant*, 22, No.3 (1968), 7-19.

² R.F. Brissenden, "The Vivisector: Art and Science", in *The Australian Experience*, ed. Ramson, p.313. See also Geoffrey Dutton, *Patrick White* (1961; 4th edn, Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1971), pp.3-6. For an excellent account of the history of White's critical reception in Australia and overseas, see Alan Lawson, "Unmerciful Dingoes? The Critical Reception of Patrick White", *Meanjin*, 32 (1973), 379-392.

³ Alister Kershaw, "The Last Expatriate", *Australian Letters*, 1, No.3 (1958), 35-37 and Patrick White, "The Prodigal Son", 37-41. "The Prodigal Son" is hereafter cited by page.

in its own right and an important statement on the issue of expatriation.

White is careful to stress that

the reasons why anybody is an expatriate, or why another chooses to return home, are such personal ones that the question can only be answered in a personal way. (37)

In this instance, the personal answer proves to be the most universal.

"The Prodigal Son" is not only an invaluable point of departure for discussion of White's literary intentions and the special qualities of his work; it is also a useful document for more generalized research into the implications of expatriation and of the return home.

White's description of the semi-colonial experience of his childhood and youth and of his gradual release from these attitudes as an adult typifies the conflict all colonials and post-colonials know between the way they are taught to view their experience and its meaning to them. He explains his decision to return to work in Australia as the result of a personal liberation from the tyranny of Anglophilia and of conventional habits of mind:

Brought up to believe in the maxim: Only the British can be right, I did accept this during the earlier part of my life. . . . it was not until 1939, after wandering by myself through most of western Europe, and finally most of the United States, that I began to grow up and think my own thoughts. The War did the rest. What had seemed a brilliant, intellectual, highly desirable existence, became distressingly parasitic and pointless. (37-38)

In *The Aunt's Story*, Theodora's wandering follows the same pattern, from Australia to Europe to the United States, to achieve a similar but much more drastic liberation. She abandons convention and personality alike to gain her soul and the terrible lucidity of an intensely clear vision.

The first part of *The Aunt's Story* was written in London immediately after the war, the second in Greece, the third on the ship on the way from Greece to Australia, and the whole was revised in Sydney. Geoffrey Dutton suggests that the divisions of setting in *The Aunt's Story* imply that White was attempting to work out his own future "in the image of the destructive past he had just witnessed".¹ Just as Theodora in *The Aunt's Story* decides to "return to Abyssinia",² to her home — Australia at a literal level of interpretation and a state which combines a child-like openness to experience with an adult's awareness of the abyss at a symbolic level — so White himself decided to return home, "to the stimulus of time remembered" (38), after writing this novel. He writes that

All through the War in the Middle East there persisted a longing to return to the scenes of childhood, which is, after all, the purest well from which the creative artist draws. (*ibid.*)

Harry Levin isolates this form of nostalgia as one of the distinguishing characteristics of a literature of exile:

Modern writers have quickened our awareness that there are no memories so vivid, no impressions so indelible, as our recollections from early childhood; and these are most perfectly preserved when we are far away from the localities we associate with them, where our home-thoughts can be touched off from abroad The irony of the expatriate's lot is that he dearly pays for his *Wanderlust* with his *Heimweh*.³

¹Patrick White, p.5.

²Patrick White, *The Aunt's Story* (1948; Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1963), p.266.

³"Literature and Exile", *Refractions* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1966), p.73.

The Aunt's Story is charged with a nostalgia for the Meroë of Theodora's childhood; her quest is largely in search of a quality of purity she lost in growing up; her final mentor Holstius is an amalgam of several of the guiding figures of her childhood; yet the nostalgia is always balanced by a fine sense of perspective, which refuses to ignore, like Theodora herself, the grub in the heart of the rose. White acknowledges the sentimentality inherent in his decision to return to Australia to live and work, but there is no sentimentality in his literary return to the subject matter of Australia in *The Aunt's Story* after writing of London in *The Living and the Dead*.

Martin Boyd, experiencing a similar disillusionment after the destruction of two world wars, also attempted to return to Australia to live and write. For him, "the strong bourgeois ethos of Melbourne . . . the material conditions",¹ and the isolation, proved too discouraging and he moved to Rome, which he regarded as his spiritual home. White saw in Greece what Boyd saw in Rome, a place "where perfection presents itself on every hand, not only the perfection of antiquity, but that of nature, and the warmth of human relationships expressed in daily living" (38). Yet, despite the affinity he felt with Greece, White realized he would never truly belong there. His description of the fate of the expatriate in Greece anticipates precisely the discovery George Johnston's David Meredith makes, several years later, in *Clean Straw for Nothing*. White foresaw that

even the most genuine resident Hellenophile accepts automatically the vaguely comic role of Levantine beachcomber. He does not belong, the natives seem to say, not without affection; it is sad for him, but he is nothing. (*ibid.*)

¹Boyd, "Why I Am An Expatriate", *The Bulletin* (May 10, 1961), 12-13.

Like Johnston's Meredith, White returned home, to encounter

the Great Australian Emptiness, in which the mind is the least of possessions, in which the rich man is the important man, in which the schoolmaster and the journalist rule what intellectual roost there is, in which beautiful youths and girls stare at life through blind blue eyes, in which human teeth fall like autumn leaves, the buttocks of cars grow hourly glassier, food means cake and steak, muscles prevail, and the march of material ugliness does not raise a quiver from the average nerves. (38-39)

In an attempt to fill this void, White returned to his writing. He abandoned the evocation of "time remembered" and the quest for the pure well of childhood experience for a reconstruction of the present which would

discover the extraordinary behind the ordinary, the mystery and the poetry which alone could make bearable the lives of such people, and incidentally, my own life, since my return. (39)

This quest for the mystery which alone could make bearable his life since his return is the chief motivation behind both *The Tree of Man*, his epic of the settler, and *Voss*, his epic of the explorer.¹

In these novels White is trying to come to terms with the basic elements of the traditional Australian mythology: pioneering the land, drought, fire, the outback versus the city. But he is also recasting them in terms of his own vision, in order to prove "that the Australian novel is not necessarily the dreary, dun-coloured offspring of journalistic realism" (39). It is this latter enterprise which has made him a controversial figure. In a letter to *Overland*, Katharine Susannah Prichard complains that "*Voss* seems to me anaemic and completely out of

¹See Dorothy Green, "Voss: Stubborn Music", in *The Australian Experience*, ed. Ramson, p.285.

tune with an Australian atmosphere and environment".¹ Ian Turner argues that

this, it seems to me, is why Patrick White has not succeeded for Australians — because he is exploring in an Australian environment, a mind, a way of thinking, that is foreign to most Australians.²

On the other hand, Vincent Buckley asserts that "White has opened up in a startling way the range of Australian fiction"³ and John Rorke contends that

The Australian tradition has been confronted with two novels of high seriousness, humour and dramatic order. What sets their author apart from the tradition is that he has thought seriously about his art, and is a serious moralist.⁴

Hilde Spiel writes that "With Patrick White, Australian writing has won its place in world literature".⁵

Yet although White seems to write "as if Furphy and Lawson had never existed",⁶ and

Although he may seem a-typical, Patrick White is inescapably Australian. Indeed it was not until he returned, both in fact and in imagination, to his own country that he began to produce work of any real power and distinction. . . . If he did not in some sense belong to Australia he could not feel such an urgent necessity to come to terms

¹No.13 (1958), 14.

²"The Parable of Voss", *Overland*, No.12 (1958), 37.

³"In the Shadow of Patrick White", *Meanjin*, 20 (1961), 144.

⁴"Patrick White and the Critics", 66.

⁵"Australia's Writers Come of Age", translated by Ellen Mautner, *Southerly*, 19 (1958), 223.

⁶R.F. Brissenden, *Patrick White* (1966; rev. edn, London: Longmans, 1969), p.3.

with it. He brings to the encounter, however, a sensibility at once more complex and more cosmopolitan than that possessed by most Australian writers.¹

When White's novels are examined in relation to the achievement of Henry Handel Richardson, Martin Boyd and Christina Stead, instead of in terms of Lawson and Furphy, they appear far less atypical. An analysis of the themes and preoccupations which recur in his work places him within a definite tradition of Australian writing. In opposition to the practice of nativist Australian writers but in the tradition of Praed, Simpson and Boyd he is often concerned with the experiences of an upper class, in the belief that "the rich man's house is part of the Australian landscape".² More importantly, he delves beneath the surface appearances of life to explore the "core of reality"³ and the intense inner lives of his protagonists. Like Richardson and Boyd he insists that "there is another world, but it is in this one".⁴ As in the work of Stead, the interaction between his Australian experience and his European participations leads to a remarkably original and satisfying achievement which is at once "inescapably Australian" and universal in its scope. White himself is aware of the value of his double heritage, recognizing that intimacy and distance are equally necessary to the production of the greatest art, or as he himself puts it:

I think it's a good thing to be close to one's roots. It's a good thing, too, to spend some

¹ *Ibid.*, p.4.

² Interview with Kylie Tennant, *Sydney Morning Herald* (September 22, 1956), 10.

³ *In the Making*, ed. Craig McGregor (Melbourne: Thomas Nelson, 1969), p.219.

⁴ Epigraph to Patrick White, *The Solid Mandala* (1966; Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1969), p.7.

time away from them; it enriches your work.¹

His preoccupation with the outsiders of life and with a quest for revelation link him most closely to Henry Handel Richardson, while his experiments in combining the realistic novel with poetic language recall Stead.

Out of the disadvantages of living in his homeland, White attempts to make virtues, postulating that

Possibly all art flowers more readily in silence. Certainly the state of simplicity and humility is the only desirable one for artist or for man. While to reach it may be impossible, to attempt to do so is imperative. Stripped of almost everything that I had considered desirable and necessary, I began to try. Writing, which had meant the practice of an art by a polished mind in civilised surroundings, became a struggle to create completely fresh forms out of the rocks and sticks of words. I began to see things for the first time. Even the boredom and frustration presented avenues for endless exploration; even the ugliness, the bags and iron of Australian life, acquired a meaning. (39)

This change of attitude toward his art is already becoming apparent in *The Aunt's Story*, a novel which begins to explore the many levels of meaning behind the concept of "home" in an effort to discover just what is necessary to the good life. *The Aunt's Story* describes the quest for that state of simplicity and humility which is "the only desirable one for artist or for man". It is concerned with what seeing things for the first time might mean for the seer and with the relationship between a visionary and intuitive and a conventional perception of reality. *Voss* expands on this quest — for a simplicity which can incorporate mystery — with a greater self-consciousness and awareness of the difficulties it entails.

¹*In the Making*, ed. McGregor, p.219.

White has been severely criticized for the technique which he has developed in his effort to "create completely fresh forms out of the rocks and sticks of words". Of his attempt to "discover the extraordinary behind the ordinary", John McLaren remarks that "White does not seem to be certain whether he wants to write metaphysically or realistically".¹ David Bradley feels that

in both of White's major novels, the reader is often confused by a sense of strain between his genuine novelist's eye for detail of setting and remembered gesture of personality (the surface of 'real life') and² the poet's desire to be free of all that

Peter Wood questions whether the imponderables presented in White's novels are not more a "matter of literary sleight-of-hand"³ and of simple snobbery than they are fully realized moral complexities. The argument of this thesis accepts Harry Heseltine's contention in his article on "Patrick White's Style", that White's style "is in fact a direct function of his deepest response to life".⁴ Although the primary focus of this study is on themes and preoccupations, these are more dependent in White's work than in that of many others on the words and patterns of words in which they are embodied.⁵

White's quest for an art which will combine simplicity with complexity and honesty with subtlety corresponds to the quests of many

¹"Patrick White's Use of Imagery", *Australian Literary Studies*, 2 (1966), 218.

²"Australia Through the Looking Glass", 42.

³"Moral Complexity in Patrick White's Novels", *Meanjin*, 21 (1962), 25. See also p.27.

⁴*Quadrant*, 7, No.3 (1963), 61.

⁵*Ibid.*, pp.61-62.

of his characters to make sense of their lives. The quest itself is perhaps the central myth behind the expatriate experience. It links distances at both a literal and a metaphorical level and implies a search for a lost harmony which is behind every concept of exile or alienation. Because *The Aunt's Story* and *Voss* are specifically about expatriate quests and because in many ways they complement one another, they are examined in detail here. Theodora leaves Australia; Voss journeys to Australia. She is a traveller; he is an explorer; yet each is engaged in a physical journey which mirrors his quest to know himself. Theodora struggles for release from "the great Monster Self"¹ by going out into the world and attempting to live each (instead of only one) of her "several lives" (74). Voss struggles to assert the supremacy and self-sufficiency of his own personality and will by journeying into the dead heart of the Australian continent. The quest of each ends with a qualified success and madness. Both *The Aunt's Story* and *Voss* describe an outsider's relation to Australian society as a paradigm of man's relation to himself and to his world. Just as the stress of *The Fortunes of Richard Mahony* falls equally on the social and on the a-social natures of man, so *The Aunt's Story* and *Voss* emphasize mankind's need for communication with other lives even as they expose the barriers to communication among men. In comparison with the challenge of this theme, both place and time become finally irrelevant.

Like *Lucinda Brayford*, *The Aunt's Story* and *Voss* spring from a need to understand a world which could produce the unprecedented violence of two world wars. Boyd brings Lucinda to a Christian faith in man's potential for self-renewal. White had no belief in God when he wrote *The Aunt's Story* and less faith in man's inherent capacity for good, so that although Theodora Goodman searches for meaning beyond herself she

¹White, *The Aunt's Story*, p.134. Hereafter cited by page.

cannot find a frame of reference outside her own consciousness. All her efforts to reach out to the world only lead her deeper into herself and she is forced to fall back on self-communion. To this extent, the message of the novel is indeed, as Brian Kiernan complains, largely one of "pessimistic solipsism".¹ Yet White himself has described this novel as a work which celebrates the human spirit,² and in a deeper sense, this description is truer to the experience of the novel. Nietzsche's celebration of the human spirit in a world without God in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* appears to the Christian critic Northrop Frye to be "a glumly cheerful acceptance of a cosmology of identical recurrence".³ Similarly, Theodora's final acceptance of the impossibility of communication beyond the self and of the closed world of her own consciousness as the only world may seem, depending on the perspective from which it is viewed, to be either "pessimistic solipsism" to the critic who has a higher opinion of life's possibilities or tragic heroism to the writer who shares her vision. *The Aunt's Story* does celebrate the resilience and the strength of the human spirit which, in the face of a stark and meaningless reality, can yet create its own purpose by attempting to transcend and to perfect itself.

Yet even as he celebrates Theodora's courage and her honesty, White remains aware of the limitations of her vision and of her final solution. The novel's last scene balances Theodora's ridiculous behaviour against her personal integrity and both of these against the Johnsons' genuine although uncomprehending concern for her well-being. White admits that he is "suspicious of the heroic" and contends that each of

¹"Patrick White: The Novelist and the Modern World", p.87.

²"A Conversation with Patrick White", *Southerly*, 33 (1973), 137.

³*Anatomy of Criticism* (New York: Atheneum, 1968), p.23.

his novels is "certainly ironic — the fact that one is alive at all is an irony".¹ Theodora's solution is a personal compromise rather than an answer.

White has been criticized for the rigidity of his division between the saved and the damned, especially for his treatment of them in a later novel like *Riders in the Chariot*, but also for the less unpleasantly doctrinaire distinctions of *The Aunt's Story*. Brian Kiernan argues that:

The consequence of White's close identification with Theodora, and of his personal aesthetic preferences with her perceptions, is an inability to present the world outside Theodora except dismissively. Yet what is really *wrong* with Fanny, or with the man in the laundered shirt who quotes statistics to Theodora as she travels across America by train, remains 'unargued' dramatically, and as a consequence seems a reflexive dismissal of those who accept the contemporary world.²

This argument rests on an excessively narrow definition of what constitutes "the world outside Theodora". Technically, since the entire story is told as a sympathetic rendition of her point of view, the reader never sees the world outside her perspective except as she sees it and she does go progressively mad. However, there are points of contact with other consciousnesses outside Theodora's. Other outsiders, like her father, "The Man who was Given his Dinner", Miss Spofforth, Lou, the artist Moraïtis, and Zack recognize and appreciate her special capacity for visionary experience, and to some extent share her perception of the nature of the world. Even ordinary, successful people like Frank Parrott (who is shown to have some possibilities although he does not survive³), Huntly Clarkson, and Violet Adams, feel

¹"A Conversation with Patrick White", 137-138.

²"Patrick White: The Novelist and the Modern World", p.87.

³See the narrator's comment on Frank: "He was what they call a practical man, a success, but he had not survived", p.16.

at once attracted and repelled by what her presence and her comments reveal to them about themselves. These ordinary people lack both the strength and the desire to explore the mysteries of their own nature and their withdrawals from possible illumination, while they are not always dramatized, are realized through White's use of imagery.

The most sympathetically portrayed of the characters who accept what Kiernan calls "the contemporary world" are definitely the Johnsons. White explains that "Mrs Johnson would accept the depths, and love the depths fearfully, but she would not understand" (277). The difference between Theodora and the Johnsons is one of degree. Mrs Johnson's acceptance of life is somewhat grudging and by no means complete. Zack sees further and accepts more. But only Theodora adopts a radical acceptance of life. Only she is prepared to accept it in its totality, without making the distinctions and the modifications which are necessary to maintain sanity. Despite their many differences, Theodora and the Johnsons share in an acceptance of life in contrast to those like Fanny and the man in the laundered shirt who try to deny the depths. These latter two take nervous refuge from reality in the superficial rituals of daily life and in meaningless mechanical symbols which are designed to disguise and distort instead of reveal reality. They want to reduce life "into a small, white, placid heap" (266). Their living death emphasizes in contrast Theodora's painful but vibrant life. For White and for Theodora, the contemporary world is composed of many layers of sensation and experience. Far from rejecting it dismissively, Theodora wishes to know it in its totality and to do justice to both its terror and its variety.

The world of objects and of nature which exist outside Theodora are presented affirmatively. The grub within the heart of the rose confirms her own knowledge of the potential discord which may lie beneath

the facade of a loving family or of friendly social relations. By denying the grub, Fanny denies a part of her own nature and on a larger scale her refusal to see is implicitly regarded as one of the major causes of outbreaks of evil in the world. White's message is similar to Johnston's assertion in *My Brother Jack*, that "the real enemy was not the obvious embodiment of evil . . . but was this awful fetish of a respectability that would rather look the other way than cause a fuss",¹ and to Boyd's claim in *Day of My Delight* that there is "only one problem for 'modern man', and that is to recover his conscience".² The contemporary world is criticized rather than rejected: its failure of imagination and its loss of conscience are both described and deplored. Fanny's lack of imagination is dramatized in her every act and conversation so that the reader feels that her dismissal is justified. On the other hand, the social life which is represented by the Johnsons is presented affirmatively.

Theodora's inability to adjust to the Johnsons' sphere is narrated impartially in terms of a confrontation between two equally honest approaches to life which yet are so opposite that they cannot interact: "Their sphere was round and firm, but however often it was offered, in friendliness or even love, she could not hold it in her hand" (281). Theodora's role is partially that of a touchstone; certainly the reader judges people by their response to her; but it is also clear that her withdrawal from all social intercourse is only one approach to "purenness of being" (280), and that her path of negation has its complement in the path of affirmation, which is represented by the Johnsons at their best. Since the novel is Theodora's story, their approach is treated

¹George Johnston, *My Brother Jack* (1964; London: Fontana, 1967), pp.258-259.

²Boyd, *Day of My Delight*, p.242.

far less fully than hers, but its validity is made clear by Theodora's comment: "'You must be happy to live in this house'" (276).

The Aunt's Story may represent a literary dead end in that Theodora's kind of alienation cannot be developed any further than White takes it in this novel, but in itself it is a well-shaped and balanced work which is motivated less by nihilism than by an acute awareness of the dual nature of reality and of the paradoxes which lie at the heart of existence. *The Aunt's Story* is involved both in proving and disproving the truth of the quotation from Olive Schreiner which White has taken as the epigraph to Part One. It runs:

She thought of the narrowness of the limits within which a human soul may speak and be understood by its nearest of mental kin, of how soon it reaches that solitary land of the individual experience, in which no fellow footfall is ever heard. (9)

While Theodora's experience confirms Schreiner's observation, the thrust of the novel itself is to try imaginatively to enter into her experience and thus to enlarge the dimensions within which a human soul may understand and be understood by its fellows.

The Aunt's Story is built around the familiar narrative pattern of the provincial heroine who, a misfit in her own society, grows up and journeys overseas. Theodora Goodman is an unusual heroine: she is sallow, awkward and disturbing instead of soft and pink like her sister Fanny or strikingly attractive like most of the heroines discussed in Section One of this thesis; she is forty-five when she finally decides to depart on her quest. Neither are her adventures and disappointments primarily sexual, although she does reject two suitors. Instead, for Theodora, "Life was divided, rather, into the kinder moments and the cruel, which on the whole are not conditioned by sex" (34).

John and Rose Marie Beston's argument that her crisis is "directly brought on by a feeling of hopeless sexual frustration"¹ seems sadly misdirected. Theodora's status as a spinster naturally both affects and reflects her development, but it is a misconstruction of the evidence to see her choices solely in sexual terms. To contend that "Most of her eruptions express her anger at her inability to take a man of her own"² is to ignore the subtleties of the text and to misrepresent it as well. Theodora could have married either Frank Parrott or Huntley Clarkson if she had wanted them. She rejects them, not because of fear, but because they are inadequate. Theodora is separated from them for ever "by something that their smooth minds would not grope towards, preferring sofas to a hard bench" (125). They are afraid of her. Frank is "like a big balloon [she holds] at the end of a string" (73) and Huntly is "all acceptance, like a big grey emasculated cat" (125). Theodora knows that her destiny lies elsewhere and she has the courage to accept this knowledge. Patricia Morley's interesting hypothesis that Theodora's androgynous qualities suggest a Teresias-like role may be carrying a valid insight a little too far, but she is certainly convincing in pointing out that in *The Aunt's Story* sex "is not of ultimate importance", that "bisexuality suggests a universal or unlimited quality of vision", and that "fertility or creativity is not limited to physical reproduction".³ At a purely literal level of interpretation, some of Theodora's difficulties may be seen in sexual terms, but nothing of any real importance to the meaning of the novel may be explained in this

¹"The Black Volcanic Hills of Meroë: Fire Imagery in Patrick White's 'The Aunt's Story'", *Ariel*, 3, No.4 (1972), 36.

²*Ibid.*, 1.

³*The Mystery of Unity* (Brisbane: University of Queensland Press, 1972), p.77.

way. To reduce the complexity of the novel to a simple exercise in Freudian analysis is an act comparable to that of the man in the laundered shirt, who feels he has done his duty by composing "life into a small, white, placid heap" (266). The novel, on the other hand, like Theodora herself, is characterized by its fluidity and by its stubborn resistance to categorization.

Theodora is in search of something more elusive and more necessary than sexual satisfaction: a kind of freedom and "pureness of being" (280) in which "the great monster Self will be destroyed, and that desirable state achieved, which resembles, one would imagine, nothing more than air or water" (134). As a young child, Theodora lived naturally in such a state, but as she grew older she learned to be self-conscious and to separate herself from her surroundings so that "pureness of being" became something that had to be consciously sought and that could be attained only through suffering. The Bestons' undue emphasis on conventional psychology results from assigning too great an importance to the novel's surface realism, when in fact much of its message depends on reading it as an allegory. The Odysseus imagery which is applied to Theodora's quest reinforces the allegorical dimensions.¹ Like the quest of Odysseus, Theodora's quest is both centrifugal and centripetal: she seeks to recover the lost innocence of childhood and to combine it with the wisdom gained from experience. She must learn to reconcile the warmth of her childhood Meroë with the terror of the legendary Meroë.

For Theodora, harmony with the natural world may only be attained at the price of alienation from the social world. When she is most

¹For a detailed discussion of White's use of the Odysseus motif in *The Aunt's Story*, see Thelma Herring, "Odyssey of a Spinster: A Study of *The Aunt's Story*", in *Ten Essays on Patrick White*, ed. Wilkes, pp.12-18.

receptive to the current of life which flows through all things she is most distant from the rest of humanity, who remain swathed in the envelopes designed to protect the human personality (255). Her life is the fulfilment of Olive Schreiner's prophecy, which stands as the epigraph to Book Three, that "When your life is most real, to me you are mad" (263). Her madness manifests itself in her insistence on experiencing everything with an equal intensity; she does not seek to protect herself from the darker side of life. She suffers things that others have trained themselves never to see. Her life is painfully real, and it serves to remind the less callous among her acquaintances of a reality they would prefer to forget.

Theodora's madness springs from a compulsive need to know combined with a insatiable thirst for freedom. Her understanding of the meaning of knowledge and of freedom expands as she herself grows older and changes. Before she ever thought about her life, she had the capacity to enter completely into the life of the objects around her. When "her hands touched, her hands became the shape of rose, she knew it in its utmost intimacy" (32). As a child, she lived in a state of Lawrentian "blood intimacy". Self-consciousness or mental appraisal had no place in her approach to living. When she noticed the "small pale grub curled in the heart of the rose" she could not condemn it or recoil in disgust like her sister Fanny. For Theodora, it could not be subtracted "from the sum total of the garden" (23). Similarly, when she saw the little hawk tearing the sheep's carcass, "she could not judge his act, because her eye had contracted, it was reddish-gold, and her curved face cut the wind" (35). She enters so completely into the spirit of what she sees, her separate identity is momentarily lost. She is at one with the same flow of life which motivates the hawk. It is a form of sympathetic identification and knowing which can be felt but not communicated.

Theodora's decision to shoot the hawk denies this knowledge. The violence of her personality (270) acts to destroy the abstract violence of the hawk's world and her abstract participation in it. It is an assertion of her individuality in defiance of the undifferentiated flow of life; yet it destroys a part of herself which she has valued:

She took aim, and it was like aiming at her own red eye. She could feel the blood-beat the other side of the membrane. And she fired. And it fell. It was an old broken umbrella tumbling off a shoulder. (74)

The image of the old umbrella confirms a purely external view of the hawk. Theodora herself understands the significance of her action: "I was wrong, she said, but I shall continue to destroy myself, right down to the last of my several lives. . . . In a sense she had succeeded, but at the same time she had failed" (*ibid.*).

She is torn between the ecstasy of her moments of vision when she is one with the universe and her need to be accepted socially, to have other people think well of her. Her mother's guidance and her experiences at school encourage her to deny her several lives in favour of an assertion of a more personal self. Her mother trains her to think of knowledge as power. Her declaration that she would like to know everything is followed by the authorial comment: "To wrap it up and put it in a box. This is the property of Theodora Goodman. But until this time, things floated out of reach" (42). Her desire to assert self through containing and labelling experience is balanced by an intuitive awareness of the utter irrelevance of both the desire and the method to the true nature of reality. Her honesty will not allow her, like Fanny, to "always ask the questions that have answers" (*ibid.*).

Theodora's quest becomes a continuing initiation into the abstraction of knowledge. She must re-learn painfully what she knew

instinctively as a child. As knowing becomes less personal it becomes more intimate and thorough, but "for the pure abstract pleasure of knowing, there was a price paid" (114). Her loneliness increases; "the distances that separate" (137) widen. She moves from wanting to possess knowledge to simply wanting to see. She tells her roommate Una Russell: "'I don't want to marry . . . I want to see'" (54). She answers her mother: "'Why must I take, take? It is not possible to possess things with one's hands'" (127). The Man who was Given his Dinner had recognized this quality in her and predicted: "'You'll see a lot of funny things, Theodora Goodman. You'll see them because you've eyes to see. And they'll break you. But perhaps you'll survive'" (47). Her teacher, Miss Spofforth, is unable to communicate her own perception that

You will see clearly, beyond the bone
 Although you will be torn by all the agonies of
 music, you are not creative. You have not the
 artist's vanity, which is moved finally to express
 itself in objects. But there will be moments of
 passing affection, through which the opaque world
 will become transparent (66)

The "moments of insight" (54) when the opaque world becomes transparent and Theodora sees clearly, "beyond the bone", bring her a sense of freedom as well as loneliness, but it is a freedom she both fears and desires.

The Aunt's Story opens on a note of liberation and relief: "But old Mrs Goodman did die at last" (11). Yet Theodora feels lost and unsure of herself, "as if divorced from her own hands" (11). Although she repeats to herself that she is "free now", her feelings are "knotted tight" (12). Freedom possesses her; not she it. She hopes that Fanny's children will "ratify her freedom" (13), and they help; their bodies deny the "myth of putrefaction" (15) at least; but she remains trapped. When she announces her decision to go away, it is partly to use her

newly found freedom as "a blunt weapon" (18), and partly because she knows she must flee the people and associations which still hinder her emotional growth.

Throughout her life, Theodora has been torn by the opposing needs for permanence and for freedom. As a child they came together for her in Meroë. She felt free there (62) and yet at the same time she felt she could live there until her death (84). When her father dies, Meroë, and Theodora's entire world with it, crumbles and dissolves (89). This experience brings her to an important discovery, which she confides in a letter to Violet:

At first I thought I could not live anywhere but at Meroë, and that Meroë was my bones and breath, but now I begin to suspect that any place is habitable, depending, of course, on the unimportance of one's life. (91)

She is beginning to move beyond personality and the requirements of the personal life, a life epitomized by her mother, for whom everything was "always largely personal" (94). However, she believes that she is still hindered in her quest for freedom by a "core of evil" (126) which she recognizes in herself and seeks to conquer. She could accept the grub within the heart of the rose, but not the core of evil within herself.

She works out her psychic frustrations, inhibitions and hatreds in the brilliant and densely composed second section "Jardin Exotique".¹ Arriving at the Hôtel du Midi at the beginning of this section, she becomes aware once more of the ultimate irrelevance of place and even of human personality to an understanding of the essence of reality:

¹For an excellent analysis of this section, see J.F. Burrows, "'Jardin Exotique': The Central Phase of *The Aunt's Story*", in *Ten Essays on Patrick White*, ed. Wilkes, pp.85-108.

Theodora looked at her labels, at all those places to which apparently she had been. In all those places, she realized, people were behaving still, opening umbrellas, switching off the light, singing Wagner, kissing, looking out of open windows for something they had not yet discovered, buying a ticket for the metro, eating salted almonds and feeling a thirst. But now that she sat in the hall of the Hôtel du Midi and waited, none of those acts was what one would call relevant, if it ever had been. . . . There is perhaps no more complete a reality than a chair and a table. (141)

These actions are all part of what it means to be human, but none of them represents the unchanging essence of man's state. They are part of the differentiated flux of experience and at this moment Theodora longs for a sense of permanence. Tables and chairs are humble objects which seem to represent something of what is enduring in the human experience. Their solidity provides her with an anchor in an otherwise fluid world. She tells General Sokolnikov that she believes "in this table" (159) and that "'Only chairs and tables . . . are sane'" (175). Yet she knows that their solidity is basically illusory and that the essence of life is change, not stasis.

Her experiences in "Jardin Exotique" enable her to appreciate, with less fear, her vision of life as an unending flux, in which the life force flows through various incarnations, always itself yet always manifesting itself in different forms:

Soon the sea would merge with the houses, and the almost empty asphalt promenade, and the dissolving lavender hills behind the town. So that there was no break in the continuity of being. The landscape was a state of interminable being, hope and despair devouring and disgorging endlessly, and the faces, whether Katina Pavlou, or Sokolnikov, or Mrs Rapallo, or Wetherby, only slightly different aspects of the same state. (187)

Theodora accepts the implications of her vision, exclaiming, "'How beautiful it all is'" (187). Like Richard Mahony, she believes that

there is peace and strength to be found in evading "the great monster Self" (134), but unlike Mahony, who retreats into the platitudes of conventional belief, Theodora moves into areas of vision which become increasingly complex. When Sokolnikov accuses her of being drunk, she responds: "'I have never see more clearly But what I see remains involved'" (222). Whereas Mahony's madness isolates him from the rest of humanity and parodies his pride by reducing him to a creature who can do nothing but recite his own name, time and time again, the madness of Theodora Goodman allows her to participate more fully in each of her several lives" (173), and to discover continuity in flux. Each suffers terribly, and each sees suffering as basic to existence, but Theodora alone converts her suffering into a creative medium.

Her European experience frees her from the fetters of her Australian past. Through her relationships, half illusory and half real, with the other people in the hotel she re-enacts and exorcises her past. She is an Antipodean Ulysses in search of a spiritual home and a sense of her own identity. Her father never saw Greece because her mother prevented him. She must come to terms within herself with Europe, America and Abyssinia, with the classical past of her father, the ruthlessly materialistic present of her mother, and with the dark impulses of her own nature. The destructive disintegration of European civilization in the background of the text becomes an inverted image of Theodora's creative dissolution in the foreground. The apparent chaos of her mind is in fact the "great fragmentation" of a growing maturity (139).¹ In coming to terms with herself and with her legacy from both her parents she discovers that both freedom and permanence, good and evil, are complementary aspects of one reality.

¹This phrase is Henry Miller's, from the epigraph to Part Two.

Theodora moves beyond what D.H. Lawrence has labelled the "old stable ego of character"¹ to live "her several lives" (173). Theodora's search for a selfhood beyond the "great monster Self" (134), like Ursula's quest for her own identity in Lawrence's *The Rainbow*, involves a process of stripping away the protective layers which most men use to cocoon themselves against a too painful reality. She voyages beyond the finite, personal self into the uncharted waters of the unknown to explore what is "non-human in humanity".² Yet Theodora's abandonment of a discrete and conventional sense of identity is ultimately very different from Ursula's discovery of her separateness. Lawrence's legacy to White was the achievement of "a new dimension for the novel of education in the twentieth century: the hero has been 'emotionally educated [which] is rare as a pheonix'".³ White has chosen to explore the processes and results of an "emotional education" in his own way. To point out the debts he owes to Lawrence, which he himself does not hesitate to stress,⁴ is not to underestimate his own originality and contribution to the novel.

The final section, called "Holstius", begins with a Lawrentian distinction between "doing and being" (266), which reads almost as a parody of the Lawrentian style. White writes:

Because all this time the corn song destroyed
the frailer human reed. . . . The well-laundered,

¹Letter to Edward Garnett (June 5, 1914), quoted in *Novelists on the Novel*, ed. Miriam Allott (Routledge Pbk; London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1965), p.289.

²*Ibid.*

³Edward Engleberg, "Escape from the Circles of Experience: D.H. Lawrence's *The Rainbow* as a Modern *Bildungsroman*", *PMLA*, 78, No.2 (1963), 112.

⁴*In the Making*, ed. McGregor, p.221.

closely-shaven man scratched his slack white muscles through his beautiful, hygienic shirt, and could not understand. He could not understand why, beside the strong yellow notes of corn, his voice should fall short. He chewed popcorn, chewing for confidence, the white and pappy stuff that is a decadence of corn.

Theodora heard the difference between doing and being. The corn could not help itself. It was. But the man scabbled on the surface of life, working himself into a lather of importance under his laundered shirt.

(265-266)

Theodora cannot simply be, like the corn or like the hawk of her childhood, because she is torn by her knowledge of the depths. But neither can she "scabble on the surface of life" in a desperate attempt to ignore them. She is beyond the destruction of the corn song, and knows that in that song, she is "a discord" (270). In order to find a human way of being, in which the yellow and the black, the surfaces and the depths, may co-exist fruitfully, she knows now that she must discard the "last link with the external Theodora Goodman" (274), her train and steamship tickets and finally her name.

Her encounter with Holstius confirms her new-found freedom and her developing intuition that "true permanence is a state of multiplication and division" (295). The acceptance of this apparent paradox brings all her past into a continuous present:

In the peace that Holstius spread throughout her body and the speckled shade of the surroundings trees, there was no end to the lives of Theodora Goodman. These met and parted, movingly. They entered into each other, so that the impulse for music in Katina Pavlou's hands, and the steamy exasperation of Sokolnikov, and Mrs Rapallo's baroque and narcotized despair were the same and understandable. And in the same way that the created lives of Theodora Goodman were interchangeable, the lives into which she had entered, making them momentarily dependent for love or hate, owing her this portion of their fluctuating personalities, whether George or Julia Goodman, only apparently deceased, or Huntly

Clarkson, or Moraitis, or Lou, or Zack, these
 were the lives of Theodora Goodman, these too.
 (295)

The eloquence and fervour of the language suggest that this is a meaningful vision in which Theodora, by voluntarily renouncing a too personal sense of self, attains instead to a larger and more satisfying state of being. There is room for both the yellow of the "bland corn song" (270) and the black of the depths of her being within the compass of this revelation.

Her apparent withdrawal from everyday reality is in fact an acceptance of total reality, in which the essence of an experience is as important as its individual manifestations, the depths as the surface, and the past as the present. She accepts the stubborn intractability of existence and is now able to see it wholly and steadily for what it is. Holstius is adamant on this point:

'You cannot reconcile joy and sorrow
 Or flesh and marble, or illusion and reality, or
 life and death. For this reason, Theodora Goodman,
 you must accept. And you have already found that
 one constantly deludes the other into taking fresh
 shapes, so that there is sometimes little to choose
 between the reality of illusion and the illusion
 of reality. Each of your several lives is evidence
 of this.' (289)

Holstius' pronouncements are less an answer to the problems of existence than a reminder of its complexity and of its basic intractability to man's desires. The effect of *The Aunt's Story* is to undermine the authority of conventional assumptions about the meaning and purpose of existence and to break down the barriers which restrict man's understanding of his experience. It questions the customary distinctions which are drawn between reality and illusion, sanity and madness, by encouraging its readers to identify with one of society's outsiders.

The author who wishes to present his readers with a new and potentially painful approach to experience must ensure that not only will they be able to understand his message but that they will also be able to accept it. Redundancy enables the reader to understand and helps him to assimilate the unfamiliar gradually.¹ White's poetic use of imagery and repetition of key decisions and incidents in slightly different formats² creates this necessary redundancy and assures the reader's understanding and willingness to follow Theodora beyond the confines of ordinary experience. Similarly, his tendency to set up "straw dog" characters who can easily be rejected and others with whom the reader may establish a relationship of sympathetic identification serves a real need in a novel in which the reader is encouraged to accept and even to approve the conventionally unacceptable.

The conclusion maintains a tentative balance between optimism and pessimism. True to her pact with Holstius, Theodora pays deference "to those who prescribe the reasonable life" (295) without compromising her own vision of reality. However limited the novel's hopes for the possibility of communicating a personal vision or for the scope the world will allow such a vision, it does show Theodora herself finally coming to terms with her capacity for vision and at last able to lead a life of her own. In the terminology of R.D. Laing's psychology, she is one who has survived the journey into the depths of her self and emerged again on the other side, so far ahead of the rest of humanity in knowledge and in maturity that they term her mad. The schizophrenic

¹See Liane Norman, "Risk and Redundancy", *PMLA*, 90, No.2 (1975), 285-291, for an elaboration of this argument.

²To substantiate these observations is not the business of this thesis. Analysis of these issues may be found in Harry Heseltine, "Patrick White's Style", 61-74 and in A.J. Lawson, "Patrick White", Unpublished M.A. thesis, Australian National University, 1972, pp.98-128.

interlude of the "Jardin Exotique" leads to the "lucidity" (297) of the final section.

Richardson's Richard Mahony could cope with neither the surface nor the abyss of life. He was an outsider who was neither strong enough to bear his isolation nor to create his own truths from the pain he knew. He suffered, and he was driven mad by the indifference of life, but he was unable to use his suffering imaginatively. Theodora, on the other hand, although no artist, is able to transmute her suffering into a particularly lucid form of vision, which in its sympathy for all she sees, enables her to participate, if only vicariously, in the lives of others, while it frees her from the tyranny of her own personality. For White's Theodora Goodman, madness is the state of fulfilment she has been seeking; yet her freedom and her knowledge come at a cost few would be willing to pay. *The Aunt's Story* remains a disturbingly beautiful book, in which the poetic language and the earnest striving of the central character alone make bearable the uncompromising grimness of its message.

Chapter 8

PATRICK WHITE'S VOSS: THE NOVEL OF EXPLORATION

In *Voss*, White's quest for the "mystery and the poetry which alone could make bearable" the lives of people in an empty land like Australia and his "struggle to create completely fresh forms out of the rocks and sticks of words"¹ come together to create a unique and successful novel. White's spiritual quest for mystery and poetry is mirrored in the novel itself in the quest of Voss, who is more than willing to admit that his quest is inexplicable in practical terms. He knows that "the future of great areas of sand is a purely metaphysical one".² White's artistic quest, to explore common forms in search of the "endless variety and subtlety" (447) which they disguise, is embodied in Willie Pringle, who seeks to solve the mystery of himself and of his world, and whose need for expression and interpretation struggles "like an epileptic of the spirit to break out" (64). Finally, White's quest for synthesis finds expression in Laura. She seeks to reconcile the quests of Voss and Willie, the explorations of the extraordinary and of the ordinary, of dream and of reality, into a meaningful whole, which will provide that standard of reference and image of harmony which will make life bearable.³

By amalgamating religious allegory — the expression of a search for spiritual roots and transcendent significance — with the historical

¹White, "The Prodigal Son", *Australian Letters*, 1, No.3 (1958), 39.

²Patrick White, *Voss* (1957; Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1960), p.62. Hereafter cited by page.

³For a good discussion of these aspects of the novel, see R.P. Laidlaw, "The Complexity of Voss", *Southern Review* (Australia), 4 (1970), 3-14.

novel — the expression of a search for physical roots and temporal significance — White succeeds in translating "what Delacroix and Blake might have seen [and] what Mahler and Liszt might have heard"¹ into the medium of words, and the "Great Australian Emptiness"² into a fully inhabited world. *Voss* is at once an imaginative exploration of the interaction of man and his environment in a New World context and a consideration of the divisions within the European mind which have led in the twentieth century to a drama of mutual destruction. *Voss* moves beyond the despair of *The Aunt's Story* over man's inability to project himself into disinterested action to consider the problem, given the selfish and limited natures of men and the destruction they are wreaking on the world they have inherited, of how "to be human in a universe increasingly inhumane".³

Whereas *The Aunt's Story* is enacted in the foreground of a scene which has as its background

the gothic shell of Europe, in which there had never such a buying and selling, of semi-precious aspirations, bulls' blood, and stuffed doves, the stone arches cracked, the aching wilderness, in which the ghosts of Homer and St Paul and Tolstoy waited for the crash,⁴

Voss, on the other hand, has as its unspoken but palpably present background the European intellectual heritage which led up to the crash and which was grotesquely but acutely embodied in the phenomenon of

¹White, "The Prodigal Son", 39.

²*Ibid.*, 38.

³Veronica Brady, "In My End is My Beginning: Laura as Heroine of *Voss*", *Southerly*, 35 (1975), 31.

⁴White, *The Aunt's Story*, pp.145-146.

Hitler.¹ It seems useless to speak of White's "English roots" when such a spiritual and political crisis remains the central problem of the entire Western world.² In *Voss*, White describes the collision between European philosophy, terribly divided within itself, and the monolithic emptiness of the Australian landscape, infinitely adaptable to whatever kinds of meaning with which man chooses to endow it. The cthonic simplicity of the aborigines provides an attractive alternative to the tortured complexities of the European invaders, but it is shown to be incapable of withstanding the intrusion: Jackie is driven mad by the only contact achieved between the two cultures.

At the basic level of story, *Voss* comes to Australia from Germany to lead an exploratory expedition into the centre of the continent and never returns. As in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, with which it has much in common, this journey into the heart of an unknown continent is used as a metaphor for man's journey into the depths of his own psyche and for an exploration of the darker and most elemental aspects behind Western civilization. In place of Conrad's narrator, Marlow, the reader's guide in *Voss* is the explorer's spiritual bride, Laura

¹White writes in "The Prodigal Son" that *Voss* was "possibly conceived during the early days of the Blitz, when I sat reading Eyre's *Journal* in a London bed-sitting room. Nourished by months spent trapesing backwards and forwards across the Egyptian and Cyrenaican deserts, influenced by the arch-megalomaniac of the day, the idea finally matured after reading contemporary accounts of Leichhardt's expeditions and A.H. Chisholm's *Strange New World* on returning to Australia", p.39.

²Jack Lindsay, in his article on "The Alienated Australian Intellectual", *Meanjin*, 22 (1963), argues that many of White's "anomalous characteristics, such as the lack of any organic Australian qualities in the midmost of his grappling with Australian essences, derive from the fact that his roots lie in English culture and society", and that "What he has done in the Australian novels is to take external Australian conditions and details, and to infuse into them abstractions born from his English experience", p.58.

Trevelyan.¹ Not only does the novel begin and end with her, but she consistently attempts to interpret Voss's quest and to translate the knowledge she gains from her experience of "death by torture in the country of the mind" (446) into a knowledge which will enrich her way of life and the lives of others with whom she comes in contact. For her and for the reader, as for Palfreyman, Voss "is the ugly rock upon which truth must batter itself to survive" (98).

Like Marlow, Laura perceives the inevitable spiritual chaos which ensues when man attempts to establish himself as the sole standard of value in the universe; and like him she retreats from this revelation to the conventional safeguards of social norms and religion, to the necessary "lies" which protect mankind from "too much reality". Boyd and Johnston also assert that, in his search for scientific and rationally verifiable truth, man has abandoned much that was mythically true and psychologically necessary to his spiritual and mental health. The dilemma is basic to twentieth-century Western thought and it is natural that it should be reflected in Australian as well as in European literature.

Voss attempts to will himself to assume divinity. When his quest inevitably fails, Laura's mercy (personified in Rose Portion's child which Laura adopts and symbolically sacrifices) is on hand to guide him toward redemption, in the belief that,

'When man is truly humbled, when he has learnt
that he is not God, then he is nearest to
becoming so. In the end, he may ascend.' (387)

His quest is consummated, but not as he had anticipated.

¹This thesis is in agreement with Veronica Brady's contention, in her article "In My End is My Beginning: Laura as Heroine of *Voss*", that Laura is the "novel's ultimate centre of value", p.17.

The similarities between Richardson's vision in *The Fortunes of Richard Mahony* and White's in *Voss* are immediately striking. Each attempts to draw the chaotic raw material of an Australian locale into the same European imaginative ordering of experience. Each was well grounded in the European tradition and for each the early Australian years provided the raw material for art. Like Mahony, Voss is engaged in a quest for self-definition which after much suffering he relinquishes, to recognize instead his own insignificance and powerlessness. Judith Wright regards the deaths of Mahony, a doctor, and Voss, a botanist, as a kind of ritual sacrifice of "the European consciousness — dominating, puritanical, analytical"¹ — to the silence and loneliness of the Australian environment. She feels that these failed heroes are the reader's "surrogates",² and that their deaths must be enacted before European man can become a full citizen of his new land, Australia. On their deaths, Mahony and Voss become absorbed into the landscape; their remains are "indistinguishable from the common ground".³ A reconciliation between spirit and matter, Europe and Australia, has been effected; but the emphasis is different in each novel.

The physical universe in Richardson's fictional world is indifferent and even hostile to Mahony's spiritual quest. In the world of *Voss*, on the other hand, it alone may reveal to man his spiritual potential. Instead of either a meaningless post-Nietzschean universe or a Christian universe charged with the infinite love and power of God, White discovers in the natural world the potential for a

¹"The Upside-down Hut" (1961), reprinted in *The Writer in Australia*, ed. John Barnes (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1969), p.335.

²*Ibid.*, p.336.

³Richardson, *The Fortunes of Richard Mahony*, p.831.

realization of the spirit of man through a spiritualization of reality, which is religious and humane without being specifically Christian. Laura, who is "suffocated by the fuzz of faith", believes "most palpably, in wood, with the reflections in it, and in clear daylight, and in water" (9). Mary survives Richard as Laura survives Voss, but Mary's faith in the natural world is not accorded the value which White assigns to Laura's. Mary is presented as stupidly materialistic, whereas Laura's appreciation of the natural world is itself a form of mysticism. Mary thwarts Richard's quest, while Laura transforms the quest of Voss from a journey doomed to self-destruction into an affirmation of man's humanity. In *The Fortunes of Richard Mahony*, the European consciousness is defeated by the physical universe it encounters. But in *Voss*, an interaction occurs which leads to death for Voss's false pride, but to life for Laura's faith in man's potential for creativity and for self-renewal.¹

Peter Beatson remarks of White that

All his works embody the sense of a temperament divided: on the one hand turning away, through fear and fastidiousness, from life; on the other willing himself to turn back, to immerse himself in the stream, to involve itself in the world of passion and compassion.²

This division is present in Voss and Laura: their quest represents a turning away from life at one level of meaning and an attempt to come to terms with this division within themselves — between desiring and

¹It may be seen from this argument that this thesis does not accept Peter Shrubbs's belief, in "Patrick White: Chaos Accepted", *Quadrant*, 22, No.3 (1968), that *Voss*, "in the name of the importance of life, rejects most of life except its burning core, its agony, its ugliness", p.15.

²"The Three Stages: Mysticism in Patrick White's *Voss*", *Southerly*, 30 (1970), 112.

fearing life — at another. In their waking lives they repulse life and involvement with others, while in their dreams they turn to one another and imagine themselves to be in harmony with their environment. Eventually, the worlds of dream and reality merge and they seem to have accepted, at least in theory, the necessity to immerse themselves in the stream of existence. Yet their acceptance is so abstract in comparison with the concrete acceptance of Judd and Rose Portion and their humanity is so cold in comparison to the warmth of Belle Bonner, that the solution at which they arrive through "death by torture in the country of the mind" (446) invites a further questioning of man's relationship with his world and with himself rather than a sense of satisfaction at having achieved a harmonious reconciliation of an age-long conflict.

Laura tells Voss that *he* is *her* desert (88). While he explores the Australian continent in search of the strength of will to create himself as God, she explores the motivation behind his quest in an effort to understand herself and the significance of their two lives. She participates vicariously in his journey and is at once his guiding spirit, his Christian conscience and his interpreter to others. Her triumph is one of vision. Like Praed's heroines, she leads a circumscribed life, but she is able to transform the intense emotional experiences of her inner life into the kind of wisdom which conveys authority in the world of men. By the end of the novel, she is able to defend her understanding of what has happened in a way which is truly convincing:

'I am uncomfortably aware of the very little I have seen and experienced of things in general, and of our country in particular . . . but the little I have seen is less, I like to feel, than what I know. Knowledge was never a matter of geography. Quite the reverse, it overflows all maps that exist. Perhaps true knowledge only

comes of death by torture in the country of the mind.' (446)

Laura is sharing the hard-won wisdom here which Moraitis shares with Theodora in *The Aunt's Story*, that "'It is not necessary to see things If you know.'"¹ The "country of the mind", rather than any geographical entity, is White's true homeland, but it is the relationship between the two, between spiritual and physical realities, which determines the character of the novel *Voss*.

Whereas the final message of *The Aunt's Story* is that "there is sometimes little to choose between the reality of illusion and the illusion of reality",² *Voss* is concerned with "how the world of semblance communicated with the world of dream" (259). The self-conscious paradox of *The Aunt's Story* is expanded in *Voss* through the lovely metaphor of the butterfly wings into a more vividly realized portrayal of the potentialities of the ordinary to suddenly flower into the extraordinary. White's concern is always with that invisible but so much more important other world beyond the tangible and visible, which for so many people is all they care to recognize. *Voss* is an attempt to realize, in words, some of that potential for an understanding of the immanence of the supernatural in the natural, and it is an attempt to provide a justification for Willie Pringle's optimistic declaration, which is also White's own, that he is confident that

'our inherent mediocrity as a people. . . . 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.' (447)

¹White, *The Aunt's Story*, p.113.

²*Ibid.*, p.289.

The "Gothic splendours" (264)¹ of Voss and Laura's quests and the bourgeois homeliness of the Bonner's way of life are equally necessary to establish a spiritual history and context for Australia out of which a present and a future may grow.

In *Voss*, White is re-creating the history of Australia so that the country can begin to exist in men's minds in a humanized and spiritualized form, as a landscape in which men and women have lived and suffered and so made their own. Mr Bonner unconsciously pinpoints what Voss's achievement will be, when he complains:

'Here we are talking about our Colony as if it did not exist until now Or as if it has now begun to exist as something quite different.' (29)

If Voss will not actually make the map, as he boasts (23), he will alter Australians' perceptions of what their country represents and of what it means in their daily life. In Laura's first interview with Voss, he forces her to think seriously about her relationship to her country and to the world outside herself:

'A pity that you huddle,' said the German. 'Your country is of great subtlety.'

With rough persistence he accused her of the superficiality which she herself suspected. At times she could hear her own voice. She was also afraid of the country which, for lack of any other, she supposed was hers. But this fear, like certain dreams, was something to which she would never have admitted. (11)

Later that day, when questioned about Voss, she insists: "'Everyone is still afraid, or most of us, of this country, and will not say it. We are not yet possessed of understanding'" (28). She admits: "'It

¹For an elaboration of this concept see James McAuley, "The Gothic Splendours: Patrick White's *Voss*", in *Ten Essays on Patrick White*, ed. G.A. Wilkes, pp.34-46.

is not my country, although I have lived in it'" (29). Instead, the country belongs to Voss, "by right of vision" (29).

Like the unknown centre with which he is obsessed, the foreigner Voss challenges the accepted realities of homes and public edifices and "the good dinner we have just eaten" (29). Like White himself, he wishes to penetrate to "the core of reality",¹ to "discard the inessential and to attempt the infinite" (35). As in *The Aunt's Story*, this quest involves him in a progressive initiation into abstraction, even as it leads him to concentrate more fully on the infinitesimally concrete. The imagery of *The Aunt's Story* also recurs in *Voss*. Sandy earth and frail stone houses are linked with the blind complacency which disguises a fear of the unknown, while an insatiable desire to know everything rejects these defences to concentrate instead on the lives of ants, in an attempt to come closer to the natural world. White writes:

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.
(27)

The intensity of Voss's obsession to know everything reproaches the unthinking superficiality and lethargy of the coastal inhabitants. However, the pride on which his strengths are based is also his greatest fault. No single character within the novel may be taken to represent the values of the novel. Laura may be at its moral centre, and Voss's quest may provide its central image, but these two major characters are

¹In *the Making*, ed. McGregor, p.219.

placed in ironic perspective just as surely as each of the minor ones. In *Voss*, there are no easy divisions between visionaries and materialists, outsiders and philistines. White's sympathy is always with the seeker after truth, but in *Voss* he recognizes that the quest may assume various forms. Belle's vision of the cabbage tree is in its own way as valid as Voss's apotheosis through Laura's visionary dreams. Belle's fulfilment of self within the social and the natural worlds is the equivalent of Voss and Laura's fulfilment of self through separation from them.¹ Belle's party combines with the attraction of the legend of Voss and with Laura's personal magnetism to draw people together at the end of the novel to discuss their country's future and the meaning of their experience. It is this interaction of disparate values and approaches to life which will ultimately make life worth living. The rigidity of a closed system of belief and a mindless conformity are the habits which lead to "mediocrity as a people" (446) and mutual self-destruction.

In one of her aspects, Laura is the dark heroine of historical romance and Victorian fiction in general. Her darkness is associated with the "desert of mortification and reward" (74), in contrast to Belle, the "golden animal" (309), "drenched with sunlight" (79), who recalls, even to Voss's sombre mind, "cornfields and ripe apples" (80). Belle recalls the security of Voss's German childhood from which he is still fleeing and seeking to free himself, whereas Laura suggests the dark unknown in which he must struggle to find himself. Eventually, he must come to terms with both these aspects of himself.

¹In his *Images of Society and Nature*, Brian Kiernan distorts this point to assume that the presentation of the alternative which Belle represents casts considerable doubt on the totality of White's commitment to Voss and Laura, pp.115-117.

White's treatment of these two women reveals that, just as he is not interested in a facile juxtaposition of the purity of the outback against the superficialities of civilization (that great Australian myth to which Voss falls victim¹), neither is he interested in pitting Laura's active intelligence against Belle's sensuous and intuitive nature in order to arrive at a trivial value judgement in favour of one over the other. In *Voss*, White does establish a contrast between those who prefer the superficiality of an unthinking acceptance of the surface of life and those who are willing to explore the dark depths of life, between those who "huddle" along the coast and those who journey into the "great subtlety" (11) of the desert or dream to walk on the bottom of the sea (62), between "the children of light" and "the dreamers" (16). However, these opposites are presented as two alternative approaches to life: the dark path of introspection and the light path of going out into the world.

Corruptions of both ways are presented and often satirized. Voss's sado-masochism and petty cruelties and Laura's excess during Rose's delivery of Mercy are examples of deviation from the true direction of their chosen path. Similarly, the Pringles and those almost Dickensian Palethorpes represent all the vices of society

¹Russel Ward provides a good description of the growth and development of this myth in *The Australian Legend* (1958; 2nd edn, Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1966). He writes: "Most writers seem to have felt strongly that the 'Australian spirit' is somehow intimately connected with the bush and that it derives rather from the common folk than from the more respectable and cultivated sections of society", p.1. He continues: "Up to about 1900 the prestige of the bushman seems to have been greater than that of the townsman. In life as in folklore the man from 'up the country' was usually regarded as a romantic and admirable figure. The attitude towards him was reminiscent, in some interesting ways, of that towards the 'noble savage' in the eighteenth century", p.5. Voss follows the eighteenth-century explorers in idealizing the aborigines and their way of life and in preferring their society to that of Germany or Sydney. In contrast, he respects and fears, but does not idealize, the typical bushman as represented by Judd.

unredeemed by the basic goodness of the Bonners, the Sandersons and the Asbolds. Certainly, as the title *Voss* suggests, the interest of the novel lies chiefly with Voss and Laura and with their experience of "death by torture in the country of the mind" (446); but White sees too clearly to idealize their struggle.

The satiric society scenes with the Pringles, the Palethorpes, and to a lesser extent, with the Bonners, reinforce the reader's initial tendency to sympathize with Voss and Laura and with the alternative they represent. Voss's fanatical quest promises escape from those dialogues of "almost mystical banality" (61) which smother dreams within society. In the first few chapters, Laura and Voss are united in their opposition to the limitations of their social world, but they themselves are never exempt from their creator's irony and from his awareness of their pretensions and follies.

Laura is self-sufficient, but "might have elected to share her experiences with some similar mind, if such a mind had offered" (9); whereas Voss is proud of his self-sufficiency (15), and feels that communication is unnecessary and possibly even dangerous to the continuing dominance of his will. Laura is characterized as one of the stubborn few willing to "blunder on, painfully, out of the luxuriant world of their pretensions into the desert of mortification and reward" (74), and she is perceptive enough to see that pride is one of her most luxurious pretensions. She tells Voss melodramatically: "'It is for our pride that each of us is probably damned'" (89). Voss's arrogance causes her to suffer for him even as it gives her for the first time in her life a sense of purpose and an interest outside herself:

It was clear. She saw him standing in the glare of his own brilliant desert. Of course, He was Himself indestructible.

And she did then begin to pity him. She no longer pitied herself (90)

In the strength of her new purpose, she tells him that she will learn to pray for him, and it is plain that her new humility is itself "delectable" (*ibid.*), a new luxury and pretension in itself.

Their relationship is continually being qualified by ironies of this nature. Like Richard Mahony, Laura overvalues the intellect, while Voss over-estimates the strength of his own will. Voss wills himself to court suffering. Laura thinks she can choose to resist it, but eventually learns to relish it as a form of self-indulgence much superior to self-pity. These two must learn what Rose Portion and Judd already know; that it is best to accept suffering, in a spirit of simple acceptance, expecting neither exemption nor reward for undergoing what is each man's fate; but at the same time refusing to allow that suffering to undermine one's faith in one's own integrity of spirit and in one's own humanity.

Voss's quest is substantially altered and modified by Laura's vicarious participation. She is the link, structurally, thematically, and symbolically, which unites the two geographical areas of the novel and the facets of experience they represent. Perfectly at home in the social environment although it is alien to her, she seems at times, especially near the end, to be herself the will behind the expedition, and she claims to be its only survivor (370). She alternates between states of romantic hysteria during which, like Le Mesurier, she appears fascinated by the diabolical tendencies of Voss's quest, and ecstasies of Christian compassion, in which she seeks to compel Voss's pride to yield to her mercy. She is fond of melodramatic and oracular utterances, as when she tells Colonel Hebden that "'Voss could have been the Devil . . . if at the same time he had not resembled a most unfortunate human being'" (414). Yet these evidences of her own frail humanity appear insignificant beside Laura's honesty and her unchanging openness to experience.

Although he rejects her prayers, Voss is unable to forget her. The idyllic atmosphere of Rhine Towers, which almost drowns him on his arrival with its intolerable beauty and its stimulation of the memories of childhood (128), and which then arouses in him a counter-desire for self-mortification, eventually softens him so much that in his sleep he is able to dream of Laura and to abandon his armour of self-sufficiency, at least momentarily, to learn that "That which would have been reprehensible, nauseating, frightening in life, was permissible, even desirable in sleep. And could solve, as well as dis-solve" (139). He cannot recall this dream; but Mrs Sanderson, after looking into his eyes, now believes that he is "asking to be saved" (151).

Like the "carved" (48) harvesting scene at the Moravian Mission near Moreton Bay, Rhine Towers represents a timeless world and a paradise into which Voss intrudes like a destroying serpent (129). He seems to represent Satanic pride and an unquenchable thirst for only the most painful knowledge; he rejects the best in human nature. The immediate effect of the approach to Rhine Towers is to discourage identification with Voss so that he may be more clearly understood as a man who is obsessed with dreams of self-glorification and sadistic power. On the other hand, the effect of his dream-like communions with Laura is to stress his vulnerable humanity and his capacity for goodness. Each perspective reveals further aspects of his character and illuminates the contradictions within his quest.

Remembering Laura again on his last day at Rhine Towers, Voss thinks that it is her "stubborn innocence" (152) he finds most impressive. As the countryside's "liquid gold of complete union" continues to affect him, it is a "period of great happiness to him" (155). For Laura, too, in the following chapter, the days swell with "sensuous beauty" and the "two visionaries rode . . . their faces,

anonymous with love". Although "What they were saying had not yet been translated out of the air" (163), this "was a period of great happiness" (164). By showing the growth of this tenuous relationship in psychological detail, by complimenting it through the imagery of landscape and memory, and by weighting it with simultaneous explorations of the meanings of language, suffering, appearance and reality, White creates a unified work, overpowering in its suggestiveness of the multiple nature of life.

If the novel is also sometimes vague in outlining its own approach to the meaning of life, that too is part of the design. The meaning must emerge through the juxtaposition of a variety of alternatives, and through parody, both within the context of the novel's own pattern of character and event, and with reference to literary, religious and philosophical systems from outside the novel's world. Only when Voss's quest may be considered from such a variety of perspectives may it maintain its suggestiveness as a symbol and its closeness to the fluidity of human experience.

As Voss continues on his journey, further implications about the true nature of his quest reveal themselves. He and Laura appear less eager to confront reality than they seem anxious to evade it. Instead of using their dreams to complement and deepen their awareness of reality, they begin to substitute the dream for the reality, the shadow for the substance. Their flight from life is suggested in their attitudes to language. Voss's excessive sensitivity and precarious self-sufficiency are threatened by language, for its use implies communication and a relationship with another outside the self. It is much easier for him to face the trials of exploration in his interior landscape of the mind, or in the actual landscape of the desert, even in forbidding Australia, than to brave the words of his fellow humans.

He thinks:

How much less destructive of the personality
 are thirst, fever, physical exhaustion . . .
 much less destructive than people . . .
 Deadly rocks, through some perversity, inspired
 him with fresh life. He went on with the breath
 of life in his lungs. But words, even of
 benevolence and patronage, even when they fell
 wide, would leave him half-dead. (18)

Laura too reflects that "'Words are only sympathetic when they are detached from their obligations.'" (82).

The conflict in Voss between the instinctive and the intellectual approaches to self-knowledge is revealed through his ambivalence about the value of words and the thoughts they express. His romanticism rejects rationality to enthrone spontaneity; yet his whole quest is based on an abstract intellectual concept. He idealizes the aborigines as a version of the "noble savage", a type he believes lives in closer communication with the truth than does civilized man; and yet at the same time, he patronizes them as a lesser species of being, precisely because they are not civilized. These alternative tendencies within Voss himself are embodied respectively in Voss's two "disciples", Harry Robarts and Frank Le Mesurier. Like Richardson, White balances individual characters and groups of characters against one another, both to reveal and complement aspects of his central characters and to stress their common humanity.

Harry is a simpleton of the type White develops further in Arthur Brown of *The Solid Mandala*, and Frank is the romantic poet, fascinated by thoughts of self-destruction and death. Beside Harry's strong innocence, Voss feels "weak with knowledge" (32). The words of Le Mesurier's diary accuse Voss of his own most personal thoughts (296). Each acts in his own way as Voss's conscience. Although inarticulate, Harry's wide eyes reflect "the primary thoughts" (32), while Frank is

associated with darkness, believing that "'In the process of burning it is the black that gives up the gold'" (361). Voss writes to Laura that Harry's "simplicity is such, he could well arrive at that plane where great mysteries are revealed" (217). His prediction comes true at Palfreyman's funeral service:

In the case of Harry Robarts, however, truth descended upon ignorance in a blinding light. He saw into the meaning of words, and watched the white bird depart out of the hole in Mr Palfreyman's side as they lowered the body into the ground.

(344)

When asked what Voss has taught him, Harry replies shyly: "'I cannot say it. But know. Why, sir, to live, I suppose. . . . I am happy'" (360). On the other hand, Frank, the cynical intellectual, who is "always halfway between wanting and not" (36), answers almost immediately: "'To expect damnation'" (360). Each sees in Voss what his own character demands, and Voss's character itself is ambiguous enough to satisfy even their most disparate needs.

From his sickbed, Frank asserts that "'The mystery of life is not solved by success, which is an end in itself, but in failure, in perpetual struggle, in becoming'" (271). Not strong enough to continue the struggle in his own right, he tries to live vicariously through Voss's striving. When Voss ceases to strive and chooses instead to accept the mystery without question, Frank is incapable of adapting his beliefs to conform to this new understanding of reality: he "had expected too much of hands which were, after all, only bones" (380). In keeping with his philosophy that "'Dying is creation'" (361), Frank slits his throat in a "last attempt at poetry" (381).

If Frank represents the failure of the intellect to render experience not only intelligible but bearable, Harry represents the failure of simplicity or of intuitive vision to re-unite man with the

natural world. The account of his death is equally ambiguous. He is termed "a stinking lily, or suspect saint" (389), an ironical description in terms of Voss's perception that "'We rot by living'" (388) and Harry's earlier statement that Voss had taught him to live. No one is safe from such qualifications, for each is only human and in his humanity stresses again and again the futility of Voss's quest to escape and conquer his humanity.

Yet failure and success, futility and possibility, are paradoxical terms within the context of *Voss*. Voss himself tells Le Mesurier that "'To make yourself, it is also necessary to destroy yourself'" (34). This is a parody of the Christian maxim that only by losing oneself in Christ will one truly find oneself as an eternal being and it is the chief tenet of a post-Nietzschean world in which man's most significant creation can only be himself. Voss continues:

'Every man has a genius, though it is not always discoverable. Least of all when choked by the trivialities of daily existence. But in this disturbing country, so far as I have become acquainted with it already, it is possible more easily to discard the inessential and to attempt the infinite. You will be burnt up most likely, you will have the flesh torn from your bones, you will be tortured probably in many horrible and primitive ways, but you will realize that genius of which you sometimes suspect you are possessed' (35)

If Voss's personal genius assumes a form during the course of the narrative which was hitherto unexpected by him, and which remains evasive of definition to the end, that is part of the ironical and difficult nature of life. The longing for permanence and for certainties in place of doubts is an irresistible human urge, but only the ignorance of a Mrs Bonner or the audacity of a Voss would attempt to freeze "infinity to stone" (84). Voss discovers that to be "reduced almost to infinity" (216) is a less stable state than those mineral forms which

"were an everlasting source of wonder" (41) to him when he first planned his journey.

His prediction to Le Mesurier is in some respects the idealistic equivalent of Boyle's fascination with his own degeneracy. Boyle explains their essential kinship to Voss through the metaphor of peeling an onion:

'To peel down to the last layer
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.'

(167)

Voss regards this process of self-destruction as the fire through which his will must pass in order to be refined to the strength and durability of steel. Through this suffering he plans to win the knowledge and self-control which will make him unassailable. In contrast, Boyle revels in the process itself. Their methods differ, but their ultimate aims are similar: each fears human contact and his own weakness; each seeks to be impregnable because of his fear. By providing a distorted yet partly accurate image of Voss's quest in the crude life and philosophy of Boyle, the interlude at Jildra further tarnishes the explorer's potentially romantic aura and illuminates his human frailty.

At the other end of the scale, the Christian parallels to his quest, which are invoked in his crossing of the river and at Palfreyman's death, work to expose the spiritual emptiness of much of his rhetoric and to foreshadow his eventual crisis and decision to begin "the long journey back in search of human status" (393). Palfreyman's evident failure to summon enough love to ward off his fate becomes nonetheless an illustration of the "paradox of man in Christ, and Christ in man" (342). In a sense, Judd is correct in confusing Palfreyman's death

with that of Voss, for Voss too is humbled in order to ascend (387).

The account of Voss's death is deliberately noncommittal. When Jackie has hacked off his head, and flung it at the feet of the elders, it

lay like any melon. How much was left of the man it no longer represented? His dreams fled into the air, his blood ran out upon the dry earth, which drank it up immediately. Whether dreams breed, or the earth responds to a pint of blood, the instant of death does not tell. (394)

White refuses to simplify the issues to which this death gives rise. He will not pontificate on the meaning of life and death, nor will he attempt to define the value of an individual human life. But he is willing to describe the interaction between dream and reality, legend and history, and the varied ways in which people begin to come to terms with their lives. The remainder of the novel affirms the continuing mystery of life in defiance of all who seek to limit or define it. White's exploratory approach derives from his awareness (which he shares with his heroine Theodora of *The Aunt's Story*) that although one may see clearly, what one sees remains involved.¹ It is an error of emphasis to conclude that "what *Voss* offers is not understanding or the attempt at it, but revelation, the revelation of mystery".² White stresses the difficulty of attaining to a genuine understanding, but he never suggests that the task should not be attempted. The entire novel is an attempt to come to terms, not only with Australia's history and its present mediocrity, but with the history of man and his present unhappy state. What the novel does suggest is that there is no single

¹White, *The Aunt's Story*, p.222.

²Shrubb, "Patrick White: Chaos Accepted", 15.

path to truth, and that rationality must be complemented by revelation, the efforts of the mind by efforts of the spirit, if man is to accommodate himself to reality. Superficial knowledge and ignorance alike are dangerous to the truth and to the pursuit of truth.

Before setting out on his quest, Voss thinks that

If he were to leave [his] name on the land, irrevocably, his material body swallowed by what it had named, it would be rather on some desert place, a perfect abstraction, that would rouse no feeling of tenderness in posterity. (41)

Instead of remaining "a perfect abstraction", Voss is immortalized in a public monument: "The wrinkles of his solid, bronze trousers could afford to ignore the passage of time" (440). As a "work of irreproachable civil art" (*ibid.*), he may no longer disturb those who, like Mr Bonner, believe history should be impersonal (155). For those like Colonel Hebden, however, men for whom "history is not acceptable until it is sifted for the truth" (413), there can only be Laura's ambiguous answer that history is "all lies". "'While there are men'", she insists, "'there will always be lies. I do not know the truth about myself, unless I sometimes dream it'" (*ibid.*). She is only sure that "'Voss did not die'" (448), that his legend lives, and that the air will tell us answers. For Laura, "No victory is final": there will always be "further deserts" (314). She tells Mr Ludlow, in mild rebuke for his facetiousness, that "'For those who anticipate perfection . . . eternity is not too long'" (448). Yet unlike Frank, Laura is able to accept the perpetual struggle of eternal becoming, and even to direct the "wooden raft" of conversation toward "the promised shore" (446). Although she has "never succeeded in learning the language" (438) of polite social intercourse, she inspires the two artists, the musician Topp and the painter Willy Pringle, misfits also, with her "wooden words" (446).

Laura's belief that truth may only be dreamed affirms the value of her perception of the progress of the expedition above even the direct experience of its other participants, especially of such obtuse materialists as Turner and Angus. Certainly the intensity of her visionary experience transforms the Bonner's home into desert and introduces the "fierce heat of unreason" (358) into their prosaic lives, compelling them to doubt, if only for a moment, the accepted beliefs of a lifetime. For the reader, the power of her "dream" is such that it seems only natural for the explorer's party to ride "down the terrible basalt stairs of the Bonners' deserted house, and onward" (*ibid.*). Through Laura, history becomes dramatically personal rather than a matter of newspaper prose, speeches, and the erection of statues.

Yet in the total pattern of *Voss*, dreams themselves are suspect. "Even in dreams", Voss is "deceived by the appearance of things" (139). The hinges dividing the "world of semblance" from the "world of dream" are as fragile as the joints of a butterfly's wings (259), and open and close as often. Voss tells Palfreyman that he could "acquire a wife by simple misuse of a tense" (260). The novel asks whether the difference between what are conventionally considered to be truth and fiction is purely arbitrary. Again and again throughout the novel, this troubling question is raised. Statements like, "To kiss and to kill are similar words to eyes that focus with difficulty" (268), and "He was ready, however, to expiate his innocence" (394), seem designed to jolt the reader out of his ordinary thought patterns into new perspectives on morality, on language, and on the entire array of his conceptions for dealing with his world.

The range of characters and the various responses to life which they represent discourage the forming of generalizations about the definitive meaning of the novel even as they work to clarify where White's

own sympathies lie. Just as Jildra is an inversion of Rhine Towers, and Boyle's quest parodies that of Voss, so the relationship between the aged Mrs de Courcy and that "tentative explorer" (407), Colonel Hebden, parodies the relationship between Laura and Voss. Similarly, the trinity of Judd, Angus and Turner, three types of the common man, parallels that of Voss, Frank and Harry, three types of the visionary. Judd, Voss and Palfreyman are all linked at various times with different aspects of Christ, and each is termed some kind of saint. Laura, Palfreyman and Harry are linked through the imagery of "dog-eyed love" (267). Laura and Frank bleed at the roots for Voss (271, 383). Laura, Frank and Voss each experience the sensation of complete immersion in the flux of the universe. Laura writes to Voss that

as I stood, the material part of myself became quite superfluous, while my understanding seemed to enter into wind, earth, the ocean beyond, even the soul of our poor, dead maid. I was nowhere and everywhere at once. I was destroyed, yet living more intensely than actual sunlight
(239)

"With the release of cold, grey light and solid water", Frank

was immersed in the mystery of it, he was dissolved, he was running into crannies, and sucked into the mouths of the earth, and disputed, and distributed, but again and again, for some purpose, was made one by the strength of a will not his own. (249)

Finally, on his death, Voss too becomes one with his surroundings. Palfreyman goes to his death in a cabbage-tree hat and near the end of the novel, Belle is "convinced that she had been refreshed" (430) by her vision of the cabbage tree. Belle and Laura unite in mutual opposition to that other desert, almost as destructive as the "country of the mind", the desert of social pretension in which shallow interests erode any true sense of values: "Then Laura met Belle, and they were sisters. At once they erected an umbrella in the middle of the desert"

(437). Mr Ludlow, a foreigner, comes to Australia at the end of the novel just as Voss, another foreigner, arrives at the beginning. Ludlow's journeys through Australia, "forming opinions of all and sundry" (448) in a whirlwind tour, provide the final parody of Voss's journey, in which he strove to become familiar "with each blade of withered grass at which he stared, even the joints in the body of the ant" (27).

The effect of these seemingly endless combinations is to affirm the "several lives" which the human spirit may assume, and to suggest the illusory nature of reality and the complementary naturalness of obscurity.¹ At first glance, such a conclusion may seem strange for a novel purportedly "historical"; yet a more thorough consideration would suggest that it is finally the only justification for the "historical novel" as a genre. If history were merely a compendium of facts, or if it could be limited to a single interpretation of the facts, there would be no need for the imaginative reconstruction of the past or for the subtlety of the novel form. However, since even trees are illusory when light prevails, ever fluctuating between distance and shadow (172), the structure of fiction is necessary to an understanding of reality, and the personal dream of the novel approximates most closely to the dream-reality of history — a quality Scott exploited in *Waverley* long before Joyce's Stephen announced that history was a nightmare from which he was trying to awake.

In *Voss*, then, the "bright, primary colours" of "historic adventure" are tinged quite rightly with the shadow of metaphysical exploration (109). Nineteenth-century Sydney may prefer to cast the explorer in bronze "than to investigate his soul" (*ibid.*): it is for

¹See *Voss* p.63, for an elaboration of this concept.

"such souls the history primers and the newspapers will continue to be written" (103). *Voss* is not written for them, but for those who will allow themselves to be troubled by an explorer's legend, and who will join Laura in following an expedition in search of the divine nature of the human soul, *Voss* is an attempt to realize the personal genius of man, and above all White, in an effort to balance man's need for comfort against his passion for truth.

In conclusion, the preoccupation of the novels of the first section of this thesis with the solitary condition of man becomes a major concern in the novels of the second section. Here it is combined more forcibly with the opposition of an outsider to the conformity of the majority, and with an affirmation of the variety and possibilities of existence in the face of mediocrity and the "exaltation of the 'average'".¹ The depiction of the "solitary land of individual experience",² and of the quest to transcend, or at least to confront, the terror of that land, is the central concern of *The Fortunes of Richard Mahony*, *The Aunt's Story* and *Voss*.

Richardson and White, like Lawson and Furphy, understand that "The threat which Australia poses is that of subjection to a completely formless world".³ But Richardson and White carry this perception one step further, to equate the formless menace of the Australian continent with the meaninglessness of a world in which God is dead. This double threat is what causes Mahony his most terrible suffering, and it leaves Theodora with no choice but to retreat into the "great fragmentation of

¹White, "The Prodigal Son", 39.

²White, *The Aunt's Story*, p.9 [epigraph from Olive Schreiner].

³Laidlaw, "The Complexity of *Voss*", 4.

maturity".¹ In *Voss*, it is met by the double response of the visionary who is able to discover significance in suffering and of the artist who can both perceive and translate the extraordinary from within the ordinary, and who can extract "brilliant shapes" from "common forms" (447).

The Fortunes of Richard Mahony is a compelling tale of personal tragedy and defeat; but it lacks the resonance, and the excitement attendant upon the opening up of new dimensions of experience, which characterize *The Aunt's Story* and *Voss*. Whereas Mahony succumbs to the terror of the "Great Australian Emptiness";² Theodora peoples it through her imaginative participation in her "several lives";³ she mythologizes it through her childhood love of a womb-like, mysterious Meroë; and finally, she conquers it through her adult acceptance of the abyss of Abyssinia. Voss and Laura write "their own legend" (367) in the dust of their country, and it becomes theirs "by right of vision" (29).

The traditional theme of the quest assumes new dimensions of significance when it is employed in a twentieth-century setting. The quest to understand, to order and to contain experience, in a universe which is constantly changing and in which there are no fixed values, is an impossible one. Whereas Bunyan's Christian could be assured of a Celestial City at the end of his pilgrimage, Mahony, Theodora and Voss can only be sure of the constancy of suffering, and of the impossibility of reconciling the opposites which determine and dominate their lives.

¹White, *The Aunt's Story*, p.139 [epigraph from Henry Miller].

²White, "The Prodigal Son", 38.

³White, *The Aunt's Story*, p.289.

As the goal of the quest continues to recede from man's reach, the act of questing itself becomes an affirmation of the continuing struggle of the human spirit toward self-realization.

Richardson and White cast their expatriates and their quests in a symbolic mode, a form rare in Australian literature; but their intentions are wholly traditional: to present their own versions of what it means to live in Australia, and in the modern world. Neither felt that the "traditional" Australian ethos, with its stress on the democratic theme and on the primacy of the outback, was an adequate representation of his own experience, and each strove to rectify in his own work the faults he perceived in the works of Australians who had preceded him.

Section Three

INTROSPECTIVE VOYAGERS

Chapter 9

HELEN SIMPSON AND MARTIN BOYD: EXPLORINGTHE FAMILY PAST

The international theme and the theme of the quest are both present in the novels to be discussed in this third section, but they are subordinated to a concern with the mind's journeyings, backward through memory to the past and forward through imagination to a reconstruction of past, present and future in a work of art. Whereas Voss engages in a quest to know himself through an attempt to know Australia, Clotilde, Guy and David search their family pasts and their own experiences in an attempt to understand themselves and their relations to the world. In the process, they reveal much about Australia, but they are informative on a personal, not an epic scale. They are interested in the social and the political levels of experience rather than in the mythopoeic. These novels conform to Lionel Trilling's definition of the novel as

a perpetual quest for reality, the field of its research being always the social world, the material of its analysis being always manners as the indication of the direction of man's soul,¹

in contrast to the kind of novel which Melville (and White) write, in which the reality sought is "only tangential to society".²

Simpson, Boyd and Johnston, like Richardson and White, describe the solitary fate of man within a world he is unable to understand and in which he is torn by dualities he can neither reconcile nor accept.

¹"Manners, Morals, and The Novel", *The Liberal Imagination* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1951), p.212.

²*Ibid.*

But they place their explorations of this dilemma within the context of a human community. Whereas time and place are ultimately irrelevant to the total concentration of Richardson and White on the essence of experience, for Simpson, Boyd and Johnston they are inseparable from that experience. Richardson brings Richard Mahony to an acceptance of the truth of the Horatian tag, that he who journeys across the sea may change his skies but not his soul. Boyd, on the other hand, explicitly states that for Dominic, "it was not true that the skies but not the soul had changed".¹ The Langton novels record the differences in thinking and behaviour in the various members of the family as they move from Australia to England and back again. Their shifting allegiances depend a great deal on their openness to the influences which emanate from the atmosphere of a place, even as they recognize that at a deeper level, "In the Northern or the Southern Hemisphere there was no abiding city".²

Because of the fiction that they are writing the books that tell their stories, the character-narrators of Section Three are as interested in the artist's struggle to convey truth through fiction as they are in the abstract concepts of truth and fiction in themselves. The form of these novels is no more self-conscious than that of Patrick White's *Voss*, but it does reveal different aspects of the expatriate experience and of the expatriate theme in Australian literature. These narrators are fascinated by the idea of perspective: of attaining an ideal balance between intimacy and distance, both in the manner in which they narrate their stories and the way in which they organize them for presentation to an audience. Christopher Caudwell, writing of

¹ Martin Boyd, *When Blackbirds Sing* (1962; Melbourne: Lansdowne, 1971), pp.21-22.

² Martin Boyd, *The Cardboard Crown* (1952; Melbourne: Lansdowne, 1971), p.165.

English novelists in the early part of the twentieth century, suggests that it is "not an accident that these authors, who are to be preoccupied with this epistemological problem of the observer, are each in some way alien to the culture they describe".¹ For Caudwell, only an alien can perceive the fact that the norms of society are "accepted and artificial", not "innate and natural":² that they are relative and not absolute in value.

Unlike Caudwell, these Australian expatriate writers long for the certainty of the past, and regret the decline of what Caudwell would term their "bourgeois" society; yet their own experience of life in the twentieth-century world compels them to express their quests in search of the absolute in relative terms. Boyd shows Guy Langton asserting that "one must talk a great deal of nonsense to arrive at a little truth",³ and adopting the method of the French painter Sisley in the hope that by placing "dots of contradictory colour next to each other",⁴ his characters and his story may come alive. Johnston's David Meredith appears to evade the responsibility of ordering his narrative by employing the haphazard method of shaking a kaleidoscope past. The kaleidoscope mirrors the chaos of values around and within him, but it tends to disguise as well as illuminate the degree of David's personal responsibility for his predicament. For these writers, the alienation of their protagonists from the contemporary world is less interesting in itself than the attempts they are making, through writing their

¹*Romance and Realism*, ed. Samuel Hynes (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1970), p.99.

²*Ibid.*, p.100.

³Boyd, *The Cardboard Crown*, p.14.

⁴Boyd, *A Difficult Young Man* (1957; Melbourne: Lansdowne, 1965), p.20.

stories, to comprehend and conquer that alienation. This attempt is inseparable from the techniques they employ, which recognize and accept the eternal irreconcilability of opposites, even as they are directed toward the effort of synthesizing experience into a meaningful whole.

Helen (de Guerry) Simpson (Mrs Denis Browne) was born in Sydney in 1897. She moved to England at the age of sixteen, studied at Oxford, and visited Australia several times before her death in London in 1940. Only three of her many novels take place in Australia. Of these, her best known and most interesting novel is *Boomerang*. Simpson, like Praed, is undeniably a minor writer, but it is interesting to see how the themes of *Boomerang* correspond to the patterns this thesis is tracing in the works of Australia's major expatriate novelists. In her treatment of the international theme from the perspective of an Australian heroine who is in search of her roots and a sense of her personal and national identity, she links the central themes of the first and the final sections of this thesis. In her use of her own family background to structure *Boomerang*, she anticipates the Langton tetralogy of Martin Boyd. Her style too has been described in terms similar to those usually reserved for Boyd. H.M. Green remarks that

Humour, wit, a sophistication that is not made too obvious, audacity and just a touch of superciliousness that is rarer among Australian than English writers combine to make her work instantly recognizable as quite different from other people's.¹

Simpson's style and subject matter confirm her place in that stream of Australian writing, from Praed and Tasma to Henry Handel Richardson, Patrick White, and Martin Boyd, which deals with the well-to-do and

¹A *History of Australian Literature*, Vol.2, p.1105.

educated class of Australians, in contrast to the preoccupation of the *Bulletin* school and its popularisers with "the common man". A.D. Hope groups Simpson with Henry Handel Richardson and Martin Boyd as one of the "three Australian novelists who have most distinction as artists",¹ and H.M. Green compares the audacity and vitality of her imagination to Christina Stead's.² Yet her novels have received no extended critical attention beyond the initial reviews, brief mention in summaries of Australian literature, and the awarding of the James Tait Black Memorial Prize to *Boomerang*.

Like Stead, Simpson has a taste for the exotic. Like White, Boyd and Johnston, she contrasts the vitality of the Mediterranean ethos with the conformity of the Australian. In *Boomerang*, the narrator remarks of Jack's arrival in South America from Australia that

Jack Boissy had never, in a life of twenty years spent among people who dreaded to differ from their fellows, believed that there could exist such fantasy, such colour as these Miguelans spread out unthinking³

Boomerang is filled with the most unusual and colourful happenings — a tidal wave, bushrangers, a duel, pirates, the impersonation of a well-known writer, white slavery — and with the strangest of coincidences — the pirates take Jack to his grandfather's sunken kingdom of Corazon, the real Martina Fields is Theo's tenant, and Clotilde finds herself unexpectedly at her ancestral home while exploring the front lines during World War One, disguised as a man.

¹"Knowing Where to Stop: Martin Boyd's *Lucinda Brayford*", *Native Companions*, p.204.

²*A History of Australian Literature*, Vol.2, p.1105.

³Helen Simpson, *Boomerang* (London: Heinemann, 1932), p.224. Hereafter cited by page.

Simpson makes all this believable, and even moving, through her judicious use of the character of Clotilde Boissy as narrator. Clotilde does not reveal her name until she is well into her narrative, but she establishes herself immediately as a sensible, witty and reliable guide. She begins by anticipating objections and stating part of her purpose:

Life can afford extravagance, books cannot; for this reason nobody will dream of believing in my two grandfathers. They are too true to be good — good fiction, at any rate; if I try to give some kind of picture of them, it is because they frame between them a vision of a golden age, which could only have existed in brand-new countries, among brand-new circumstances and laws. It was not a golden age for everybody, wives or servants for instance, but for these two it was; they were, to use a word which is almost dead, characters.

(1)

She concludes by confessing her own ignorance: "I must say at once that I never knew either" (2).

The dichotomy she establishes between art and life serves two main ends. It affirms her own sense of the exuberance and unexpectedness of life, defending the excess of her story by presenting it as the result of following at "the pace of truth"¹ instead of at the slower pace of the imagination. And at the same time, this contrast between art and life is central to the design of the novel as a whole. It is not a coincidence that Clotilde becomes enamoured of the false Martina Fields in a way she can never feel for the real one. The genuine seems to her so much less predictable and less dramatic than the fake. While in the trenches, she finds Trollope's fictional world more real than the war going on around her. The suggestion seems to be that man requires fictional constructs to enable him to perceive and accept the nature of reality, even as he also attempts to use them to protect him

¹Foreword to *Boomerang*.

from the truth. There is a fine line separating the fiction that is true to the essence of reality and the fiction that represents an escape from reality, and there is the further possibility that even good fiction may be misused.

In a passage reminiscent of Strether's outburst to Little Bilham in Henry James's *The Ambassadors*, Gloria Jebb, the successful novelist, urges Clotilde to seize her chance and live a full life:

'Yes,' said she, voice a little changed.
'I do stick to my book people. I have to. I
make my own life of shadows; but I want you, I
want all young things, to take their chance, and
live.' . . .

'One thing my way of life has taught me;
that any other way is better.' (363-364)

Clotilde is unable to profit from this advice. Many years later, after an evening with soldiers on leave from the war, she is forced to realize the emptiness of her own life:

I gave a wisp of a laugh, told myself that
I was getting on for forty-one, and looked it,
and couldn't expect anything more in the way of
strong emotion from life. I had never wanted it;
had always fled from it. I would not even put
my mind to the war, but made conversation and
oddly-shaped boots In effect I was only
reflecting the behaviour of half England and all
classes. I do not mean that there were not
bitter particular tragedies of loss, but only
that the whole blistering insanity of the thing
went by us. We walked in nightmare, accepting
nightmare as the reality, and adjusting our lives
to it; displaying, not courage, but incuriousness.
(444-445)

This same lack of curiosity about the differences between illusion and reality, truth and fiction, and about the meaning of experience, leads to Helena's incredulous climax to *When Blackbirds Sing* — "'You're not serious?' she said"¹ — and to Helen's behaviour in *My Brother Jack*.

¹Boyd, *When Blackbirds Sing*, p.188.

In *Boomerang*, Clotilde recognizes that she has never really lived, but that whatever meaning her life does have can only be discovered through an imaginative re-creation of her past. The conclusion of the novel leads back to its beginning, as she commences an exploration of her past to discover where she went wrong.

Although *Boomerang* is a relatively slight novel and the Langton tetralogy is an ambitious, if unfinished work of great power and subtlety, many interesting comparisons may be drawn between the two. Guy Langton begins *The Cardboard Crown* in a spirit very similar to that in which Clotilde begins *Boomerang*. Guy refers to a quotation from Marcel Proust's great novel, *À la Recherche du Temps Perdu*:

'When we have passed a certain age, the soul of the child that we were, and the souls of the dead from whom we spring, come and bestow upon us in handfuls their treasures and their calamities.'¹

For Guy too the time has come to assess his life and to come to terms with his past if he is to have a future. The epigraph to *Boomerang*'s first chapter comes from the *Religio Medici* and runs: "But remembering the early civility they brought upon these countreys, and forgetting long passed mischiefs; we mercifully preserve their bones" (1). Clotilde and Guy both see value in the past and both seek to preserve and to interpret it in their writings.

Not only is each involved in a personal quest to discover the meaning of his or her life through the reconstruction of family history and the exploration of the immediate past, but each brings similar habits of mind and attitudes to the endeavour. Guy also distinguishes between art and life, the credibility of the former and the incredibility

¹Boyd, *The Cardboard Crown*, p.7.

of the latter,¹ to justify the astonishing in what he plans to tell. His flippant wit is well matched by hers. Whether they are observing the British or the Australians they are equally caustic. Guy shows Alice writing that she is "afraid that it is a mistake to bring up children in Australia if later one wants to take them into the world".² He describes Mr Trend, his English housemaster, as being "like a boy who has been kept in cold storage for about forty years, a kind of pickled boy".³ Clotilde describes the Australians as "a cold-blooded race under the tropic's burning-glass, self-conscious, distrustful of beauty, gamblers and the world's most unsatisfactory lovers" (231). Of an Englishman she remarks: "an aide-de-camp, this, quite without money, and almost without intelligence to come in out of the rain, but a social asset of the highest" (*ibid.*). These comments reflect their profound interest in social observation and their common belief that manners may reveal much about morals.

"The significance of manners in the scheme of civilization"⁴ concerns them as much as it does Henry James. Guy contrasts Dominic's innate good breeding and the natural gentleman it implies with Baba's vulgarity and her lack of any internally determined standards of behaviour. He defines his snobbishness, in contrast to hers, as "not concerned with the horizontal divisions of society, but with the vertical".⁵ In other words, it is based on attitudes to life and to

¹*Ibid.*

²*Ibid.*, p.122.

³Boyd, *A Difficult Young Man*, p.99.

⁴Christof Wegelin, *The Image of Europe in Henry James* (Dallas: Southern Methodist University Press, 1958), p.13.

⁵Boyd, *The Cardboard Crown*, p.13.

work, and not on the possession of money or social status. Indeed, the ability to make money is a drawback to Guy. His family values good manners and proper grammar above wealth or power because it believes that manners reflect the inner man as his social position or financial situation may not. Similarly, Clotilde explains her family's snobbishness about the children's voices in a way that indicates that she too perceives that much more is at stake than simply an accent or a concern for what people might think. She writes:

In the middle of wild country, with no railway as yet, and Sydney a five days' journey by coach, these people had made of their houses little oases of civilization. They had certain refinements in their way of living, come by with difficulty and preciously maintained; ways of speech, of eating, small civilities alien to this raw unsettled place. It was not easy to keep up a standard of manners in surroundings which made existence of any kind something of a struggle; and it needed no great prescience to foretell what the result of an incursion of Tooheys would be. Something of the bloom of that refinement, which, rightly or wrongly, these families prized, must rub off in intercourse with people of other standards. . . . The problem, thus lifted about [sic] the petty, becomes material for a full-dress argument; whether, for instance, refinement is worth preserving, or desirable at all in the wilderness; whether its effect upon character is such that it is worth defending at the risk of losing goodwill; finally, whether kind hearts and coronets can ever meet without the latter tumbling. There is something more than snobbery here. (106-107)

For Clotilde as for Guy, refinement is much more than the superficial polish on the natural sterling of character. It is, to a large extent, the essence of character itself.

Clotilde's reference in the opening paragraph of *Boomerang* to the golden age of the colony's beginnings and of her grandfathers' prime corresponds to Guy's evocation of an Australian golden age which provided his childhood with a mythology and in which his grandparents were also his gods in *The Cardboard Crown*. Together, Boyd and Simpson

provide an accurate imaginative re-creation of the lives of the land-owning class in Australia from the late nineteenth century to their decline after the First World War. Simpson describes this semi-aristocratic life in New South Wales, while Boyd chronicles a similar kind of life in Victoria. She writes of Roman Catholics; Boyd, of the Church of England. Yet the pictures they paint are remarkably similar. Contrary to the popular myth that Australia was "chiefly settled by convicts, unemployed agricultural workers and urban slum dwellers" and that therefore "aesthetic values as such are suspect in Australia",¹ Boyd's Langton tetralogy proves that "they were not suspect before 1914".² In *Boomerang*, Clotilde suggests that

(Persons whose habit it has been to think of Australia solely in terms of English convict stock must revise their imaginings. Within a thirty-mile radius of Corazon were, in addition to these Corsicans, stations owned by Germans, Dutch, and Scottish Highlanders.)

(103)

They chronicle the decline of this gracious, leisurely and unashamedly privileged way of life until it is finally destroyed by the First World War. Each writes of family rivalries, varieties of snobbery, cultural values taken for granted and lived with naturally, the central place of Government House and its A.D.C.'s to the colony's social life, and the movement of the children away from European ideas and loyalties to an acceptance of Australia as their home.

Both write with nostalgia for these times, but Clotilde is more willing than Guy to admit the deficiencies of her golden age and its values. As a woman, she knows that her share in the pleasures of that

¹This is Martin Boyd's summary of Kathleen Fitzpatrick's argument, quoted in his "Dubious Cartography", *Meanjin*, 23 (1964), 8.

²Boyd, "Dubious Cartography", 8.

life would have been meagre. It was not a golden age for wives or servants. She writes of the effects of school on her independence:

Five years; and how much of the trousered attitude was left by that time? . . . Hard to go striding carelessly about snapping your fingers at life, impatient of uncertainty, when from day to day you cannot count on your body's fitness; when its dreadful yet rhythmic caprices sway body and mind together, and compel a certain amount of care, a necessary minimum of fuss. Hard to keep your head above the billows of skirts closing in. Hard to justify your own conviction of the trousered attitude being the best, against the voice of your period, your relatives, and your education. (243)

As a woman who aspires beyond the conventional woman's lot, Clotilde is already something of an outsider. She is a difficult young woman in much the same way that Dominic is a difficult young man. She would like life to be unified and complete, and she is frustrated by all the barriers preventing her from realizing her essential self. She resents the tyranny of her body and of society's attitude toward her sex without knowing how to cope with it. Her consequent frustration and confusion is a symptom of a larger dissatisfaction with life itself and with its lack of opportunities for real happiness. Few men are the match of this strong-willed and cool-headed woman, yet she is confined to realizing her potential through her relationships with men. She likes and pities but does not love her husband. She has nowhere to turn for fulfilment but to the past and to her own sense of the essential integrity of her inner self.

The novel ends with her feelings of uselessness intensified by the death of her lover, through whom she had hoped to live vicariously. To her mortification she learns that she is not even strong enough to help carry his dying body through the mud of the Somme to safety. Within the blank weariness and misery of this conclusion, however, there is a sense of hope. The almost miraculous return to her family's source,

although in circumstances very different from those she had imagined, implies a continuity which cannot be broken, even by a catastrophe like the First World War. Her personal toughness and capacity for endurance find their counterpart in the endurance of the French landscape. It is not the jubilant "*Eya, Resurrexit!*" of *Lucinda Brayford*.¹ Simpson's emphasis remains on the pain of the individual within the larger perspective of life as cycle and return so that *Boomerang* concludes with a stoical rather than a visionary acceptance. It ends:

' . . . Here's Chalk Farm, where we started from —'
 I saw that where his blunt finger pointed the
 map read: Mortemart-en-Artois (château).
 'Where we started from,' I echoed, nodding
 stupidly, 'I'll remember.'
 'That's right. Now look —'
 And the blunt finger traced a road, a
 boomerang sweep by Longueval, Montauban, Fricourt,
 that led back to safety — safety'.
 — and all the weariness of beginning again. (506)

Earlier, she had expressed the hope that the return to her ancestral home would provide her with some kind of revelation about herself and about the meaning of her life:

I had a quick vision of that house in Artois which I had never seen, but which had bred the remote great-grandfather, and through him, as Theo said, was in the bones of the rest of us. It did seem a permanent thing, something to come back to when we had all done roaming. I have always had, very strongly, this sense of houses, that they have something to do with the breeding and growth of their occupants, and like humans make friends or repel. Toller was aloof, for all its beauty, and Corazon for all its freedom had something still of exile that hung about it and made it not a happy place. I made, in this minute's withdrawal, a clear picture of Auguste-Anne's manor of Mortemart in Artois, and had a feeling that on its threshold I should know, for the first time in my life perhaps, that I had come home. (441)

¹Boyd, *Lucinda Brayford*, p.546.

What she learns is a harder, if a more valuable lesson, that coming home is not possible in this life. One must always be beginning again and one will not find peace until death. While waiting for her aunt in the convent where she had been schooled, she had wondered: "Was this indeed the only way to happiness, the way the fingers of the Popes were pointing? My mouth was parched, and what spring might slake it was out of my guessing" (433). However, she does not turn to religion for solace. The bare stoicism of the conclusion testifies to her recognition that she can only find what she seeks within herself, if there.

Clotilde's fate, like that of Boyd's Lucinda Brayford and his Langton family, is linked to the course of Western civilization. As Countess Frome, the wife of the Governor-General of Australia, she is the representative of the Old World, but as a native-born Australian, she is also closely identified with the New. Her belief in the importance of houses and their atmosphere for the development of individual character reveals the strong influence which tradition and a sense of place exert on her thinking; yet she also possesses the Australian's iconoclastic irreverence for custom and appearances. As Australians, she and Hugh can perceive the aridity of English civilization in 1915. Hugh explains to her husband that

'When you've got perfection . . . you don't go on trying. That's the way England looks to me. Settled; just right. Finished.' . . . 'I don't say it isn't beautiful . . . I never knew people could live so finely; in such comfort and yet not showy — I mean, not such an awful lot of money spent —' . . . 'This is as civilized as it's possible for people to be. You can't get much beyond this. But things move on; they keep moving. And when a country can give beauty, and ease and safety, what's left for it?'

'High explosive,' Condamine answered him, 'and start again at the beginning.'

'That's about it,' said Hugh. 'Well, Australia hasn't got that far yet, thank God. We're safe.'

Plenty of discomfort left out there, and raw bad taste. No, we're safe yet awhile.' (446)

Although some of these sentiments resemble Paul's belief in *Lucinda Brayford* that "it's only from disintegration that new life springs",¹ the basic tenor of Hugh's argument is very different from Boyd's, and from Simpson's as well. Hugh's reasoning is faulty. The war did not result because England was as civilized as it was possible for a nation to be, but because her civilization was declining from an earlier ideal. She was becoming self-satisfied and her values were becoming distorted. Hugh's rejection of the past is as limited as Theo's unthinking acceptance of it. Clotilde learns that she must search the past both to liberate herself from its oppressiveness and to discover those values which alone can redeem the present.

Because the Langton tetralogy is unfinished, Guy never comes full circle in the way Clotilde does. Instead, *When Blackbirds Sing* ends with the terrifying nullity of Helena's complete incomprehension of everything Dominic, and the western world, has really been through in the First World War. The total lack of communication between human beings in this book, despite many well-intentioned attempts at understanding, renders its depiction of the isolation of the individual human soul more desolate than the same theme in either *The Fortunes of Richard Mahony* or *The Aunt's Story*. Yet if the series had been completed, some of the intractability of *When Blackbirds Sing* might have been modified. A concluding novel might have reestablished the sense of proportion which characterizes Boyd's treatment of similar areas of experience in *Lucinda Brayford*. Boyd had intended his Langton series to be published together in one volume as "The Past Within Us", from

¹Boyd, *Lucinda Brayford*, p.327.

the title of the Italian translation of *The Cardboard Crown*. This title suggests that Boyd intended the Langton series to move on from Dominic's total rejection of the past to a recognition, on the part of Guy at least, that the past is within us, and that it cannot be rejected or ignored without destroying a part of ourselves as well. This is the kind of awareness which comes to Alice in *The Cardboard Crown* and to her daughter Diana in *Outbreak of Love* when they contemplate leaving their unfaithful husbands. They dream of making a complete break with the past and of starting a new life in a new place, but each comes to realize how impossible such a dream must be and settles instead, not for second best as Praed's heroines usually do, but for an enriched understanding of the meaning of their lives and of what makes them valuable as they are.

The central focus of the Langton novels is on Guy's efforts to understand Dominic, and through him, the meaning of "the past within us". The Langton tetralogy is Guy's attempt to exorcise the de Teba spectre, his family's heritage from a murderous Spanish forebear. Guy imagines this family legend to be an incubus both burdening and inspiring, destructive yet potentially creative, a convenient symbol for the darkest aspects of the past which haunt even as they satisfy some of the needs of the present. The ducque's legacy springs from an inner conflict between an aspiration toward the good and the attraction of evil. It involves a heightened awareness to life which is both a curse and a blessing. Although Guy insists that the de Teba story was never more than a fantastic legend to him, useful only in hinting at the inexplicable mystery and challenge of Dominic's character, but otherwise more amusing than shocking, it obviously haunts his imagination. He is prepared to consider it seriously and he is anxious to understand its significance both for his family and for himself. It is not surprising that Guy has inherited the de Teba name, while he believes

Dominic to have inherited an intimate but inarticulate knowledge of the curse itself.

Guy is the passive observer, whereas Dominic is the man of action. He is the compromiser; Dominic, the rebel. Yet by trying to imagine what it must have been like to be Dominic, Guy creates his own kind of action, a form of action which is both dynamic and reflective. Whereas Dominic strives to throw out the past, Guy recognizes that his own task will be to come to terms with it. Sarah's destruction of the ancestral portrait and Dominic's relegation of his family gods to the outhouse are funny yet nonetheless desperate attempts to escape the past at all costs. Their futility, obvious yet heart-rending, partakes of the heroic. Despite his habit of self-deprecation, Guy too has his heroic ambitions. He wants to "pierce truth to the heart, to see what she was made of, or perhaps [himself] to be pierced by the eyes of a god".¹ He decides that the story of his family will be the one creation of his career as an artist. He will make a life-time task of this testament to his own and his family's search for the perfection and peace of the "abiding city", which he sees as the true if unacknowledged goal of his "ever *depaysés* family".² No longer satisfied by the illusion of the quest which is supplied by overseas travel, Guy becomes an introspective voyager and proceeds to write the story of what he knows best,

all the events and influences of the last eighty years which have made us what we are and which culminated in this house in Dominic's final rack of mental anguish.³

¹Boyd, *The Cardboard Crown*, p.17.

²*Ibid.*, p.165.

³*Ibid.*, p.13.

It is only natural that Guy would attribute to those members of his family whose consciences he sets himself to explore his own preoccupations and conflicts. In *A Difficult Young Man*, he explains that his writing is meant to be "an exploration of Dominic's immediate forbears to discover what influences had made him what he was, and above all to discover what in fact he was".¹ However, Guy's motivation would appear to be far more complex than such a statement of purpose concedes. The novels as a whole suggest that Guy is involved primarily in a personal search.²

Guy acknowledges his "fixation" on Dominic, which he defines as an "inability to escape from the thought of the processes to which life subjected him".³ He traces the intensity of his concern back to a boyhood accident in which Dominic was thrown from his bicycle and lay in the road, bleeding, just as their beloved older brother Bobby had been thrown from his pony to his death only a few years earlier. The incident neatly encapsulates Guy's ambivalent attitude toward Dominic. His tenderness is combined with horror. Although Guy feels protective toward him, he is frightened of him too, and perhaps unconsciously half desires his death even as he fears it.

Guy notes that he and Dominic have only one trait in common, a savage pride, but that "He had the appearance, the physique and the self-possession to support his arrogance, whereas my fragile and amiable body merely spluttered with passions I was unable to implement".⁴

¹Boyd, *A Difficult Young Man*, p.9.

²For a helpful discussion of Guy's role as narrator of the Langton novels see Pamela Nase, "Martin Boyd's Langton Novels", unpublished M.A. thesis, Australian National University, 1969.

³*Ibid.*, p.17.

⁴*Ibid.*, p.30.

There is some evidence that Guy derives a vicarious satisfaction from Dominic's flouting of the conventions and especially from his assertion of an innate superiority which Guy himself feels but is unable to impress upon others. As a boy, Guy encourages Dominic not to give in when the others expect him to apologize to Owen Dell, and later, as a young man, he makes possible Dominic's elopement with Helena by delivering him her note.

It is interesting too that in the last novel of the unfinished series, *When Blackbirds Sing*, the novel which deals at most length with Dominic's inner conflicts, the narrator's moderating voice, sorting and commenting on the details of his tale, has disappeared into the voice of an omniscient narrator, a voice which seems to be lacking in the sense of distance necessary for a proper perspective. Since *When Blackbirds Sing* is the fourth novel of a series in which the first three novels are narrated by Guy Langton, it seems fairly safe to assume that the pattern remains unbroken, and that the voice behind *When Blackbirds Sing* may also be taken to be Guy's. Guy went to war himself. The novel's almost ~~semi~~ hysterical rejection of war implies that Guy is identifying and perhaps even confusing his own experiences with those of Dominic. *When Blackbirds Sing* raises the possibility that Guy's own personality may be more conflict-ridden than he was at first willing to reveal. *The Cardboard Crown* contains hints of the testiness which occasionally mars *When Blackbirds Sing*. Guy is proud of his reply in defence of Dominic at the party and contemptuous yet hurt that the "millionaires and their wives"¹ should be shocked as at an obscenity when he refers Dominic's conduct to a religious standard of values. Of course the tone here is very much Boyd's tone in *Day of My Delight*, but in the Langton novels

¹Boyd, *The Cardboard Crown*, p.7.

it naturally becomes an integral part of Guy's personality as a character distinct from his creator.

In *When Blackbirds Sing*, Dominic's turning away from the past is partly a result of his revulsion from war, but both reactions really spring from a much deeper source. After the "brief exchange of human recognition" when he shoots the German boy, Dominic feels that he has "violated every good thing he knew He had affronted both nature and God, which cannot be separated".¹ Furthermore, he realizes that violence, far from being external to his own nature, is one of its integral components. The de Teba imagery, in association with Dominic's dream about the "orgasm of killing", in which he believes that he has met "the evil in himself face to face",² suggests the sullied inheritance, the original sin, which all mankind must recognize and with which men must learn to live, even as it denotes the individual way in which this knowledge affects Dominic.

Guy uses the image of the dying fly in *A Difficult Young Man* to explain Dominic's conflict. He writes that Dominic's emotions on watching the dying fly or standing by Tamburlaine's grave result from a recognition that

the violence of his nature caused suffering and death to others, and that he would rather bear it himself. To this extent only was he suicidal or sacrificial. This alternative which faces all of us in some degree, whether to inflict or to endure, may have appeared to him so dreadful that he thought it would be better to cease upon the midnight, with or without pain.³

¹Boyd, *When Blackbirds Sing*, p.137.

²*Ibid.*, p.107.

³Boyd, *A Difficult Young Man*, p.113.

Dominic's response to this age old and universal conflict is intensely personal. His rejection of his family past and of the English countryside, its historical setting, is an instinctive repudiation of an aspect of existence he does not wish to understand. The intuition that violence might be an integral and even a necessary part of the whole which constitutes human life produces the characteristic stoppage in his brain, yet Guy clearly means the reader to recognize the validity of this perception when he shows Dominic wondering: "Was it possible that the only things that coloured his own life, that made his blood flow, were in themselves deathly?"¹

In Dominic the conflict between good and evil, the past and the present, the real and the ideal, becomes most acute because Dominic is unable to compartmentalize reality. He is even more open to experience than White's Theodora, for he is able to accept people like Colonel Rodgers and Sylvia Tunstall on their own grounds, whereas Theodora could not help judging others. He accepts sex and war with an equal facility, until he is forced to see where they conflict with his personal ideal of what life should be. He is at once more innocent and more complicated a character than Theodora. His ability to perceive the terror and the beauty of life as coexistent leads him to despair instead of acceptance. He wants life to be whole, "related and unified";² yet he can neither reconcile the dualities of life nor can he conceive of them as subsumed within some larger order of existence. Neither he nor Boyd could conceive of a "great fragmentation of maturity".³

¹Boyd, *When Blackbirds Sing*, p.155.

²*Ibid.*, p.61.

³White, *The Aunt's Story*, p.139 [epigraph from Henry Miller].

Dominic is unable to reconcile the beauty of the natural world with its violence. In his recognition that man has separated himself from his proper relationship with his world, he rejects not only man but the world as well, thereby demonstrating the same human perversity against which he is reacting:

Idly he picked up the chestnut bud and examined it, becoming absorbed in its delicate beauty, the mysterious unfolding of the young leaves. As he looked at it, he was reminded of the curling fingers of his son when he held him soon after he was born. He forgot where he was sitting. Something like the feeling he had when he watched the Spanish divers, that there was no division between man and the natural world, returned to him. He had a curious feeling of contentment which was disturbed by the thin whine of a shell sailing high above him toward the German lines. With the blackbirds, death moaned and sang in the spring air. The bursting green of the trees, of the bud he held in his hand, was only a symbol of the resurgence¹ of war. He threw the bud into the grass

Throughout *When Blackbirds Sing*, Dominic's son, as a symbol of his shared love with Helena, who had "brought him into the human fellowship from which he had always felt excluded, and had related him to the natural world which was his home",² and the Spanish divers he sees on his way to England, operate as touchstones of the proper relationship of man to his world. By rejecting the bud, Dominic violates this ideal relationship.

He cannot accept the doubleness of experience, the relationship between procreation and death, the inextricability of good and evil. This is the cross on which Dominic finally crucifies himself. Torn between "his inner desire and his habit of mind",³ he paints his terrible

¹Boyd, *When Blackbirds Sing*, p.77.

²*Ibid.*, p.8.

³Boyd, *The Cardboard Crown*, p.15.

crucifixion figure shortly before his death. In his article entitled "Preoccupations and Intentions", Boyd writes that he has always hated Good Friday and that he sees it as part of a death-cult superimposed by St Paul upon true religion, which teaches that life is to be enjoyed.¹ Even without this information, the perceptive reader of *The Cardboard Crown* will sense a revulsion from Dominic's twisted puritanism in the aesthetic tastes and philosophies of his brother Guy. Whereas Dominic is linked with the symbolism of Good Friday and a crucifixion too distorted and horrible to be shown, Guy is associated with the music of Palestrina, in which the "ancient sorrow of mankind"² has been harmonized into an expression of haunting beauty.

Guy feels guilty about reversing Dominic's rejection of his past by exploring it anew and by memorializing it for all time in his narrative. He recognizes and respects the mythic basis behind Dominic's ritual "carrying out death"³ and he appreciates its expiatory function. But with the benefit of hindsight he knows too that Dominic's way led only to a "final rack of mental anguish".⁴ Guy knows that he must find his own way of living with the past or perish an incomplete man in his turn. Just as Dominic's one burst of creative activity has its roots in an inner conflict, so Guy's one creation, this book, also springs from the need to integrate conflict. Guy's conflict results from the clash between an excessive veneration for the past on the one hand and the demands of the individual for personal expression in the present on the other. He senses that the beauty of his house, furnished with

¹*Southerly*, 28 (1968), 83.

²Boyd, *The Cardboard Crown*, p.19.

³*Ibid.*, p.18.

⁴*Ibid.*, p.13.

nothing dating later than 1780, is "a little deathly".¹ By turning to writing, he transforms himself from a connoisseur to a creator. He begins to move out of an atmosphere of death into a new appreciation of life.

Guy sees his family's peregrinations between Europe and Australia as a symptom rather than a cause of the malaise he is investigating. If Dominic experiences a division between his own impulses and his awareness of what society expects from him, and if Guy himself is unsure of the significance of his own life, their personal conflicts are mirrored in the "geographical schizophrenia"² of their family's situation; but they are seen to result from far deeper causes. Modern man is himself alienated from his essential self and from the natural world which is his true home and which does not recognize national boundaries. The "inhumanity of the modern world"³ is what finally destroys Dominic and puzzles Guy. The restless travels of their family are made in a vain effort, partially to unite their two worlds, and partially to escape the implications of what it means to be doubly rooted in two worlds. But travel does not satisfy the Langton's discontent, because they know in their hearts that "In the Northern or the Southern Hemisphere there was no abiding city".⁴

This philosophical aspect of the theme of exile is by far the most important aspect in the Langton novels. However, the social and historical levels are not ignored. These secondary levels are treated

¹*Ibid.*, p.12.

²Boyd, *A Difficult Young Man*, p.95.

³Boyd, *The Cardboard Crown*, p.165.

⁴*Ibid.*

most fully in *Outbreak of Love*. Several pages are devoted to superficial discussion among the Australian intelligentsia of the possibility of an Australian culture and of its theoretical relationship to the Australian environment and to the European tradition. One interchange is sufficient to establish the attitude of Guy, and of Boyd, to the whole problem of European settlement in a new continent. Whereas in Praed's novels the Australian heroine is reprimanded for her lack of national pride by the visiting Englishman (or Anglicized Australian), in *Outbreak of Love* this situation is reversed. Diana chides Russell (an Anglicized Australian) for speaking of Australians "'not as if we *were* somewhere, but as if we had to *go* somewhere'". Russell tries to explain his attitude by arguing that "'Only our bodies were born in Australia. Our minds were born in Europe. Our bodies are always trying to return to our minds'".¹ This is the "piccadilly bushman's" attitude in Ray Lawlor's play of that name.² Like Russell, he is a misfit everywhere and a failure as a person, for bodies and minds cannot be separated so easily and man must have an intimate and complete relationship with some human environment. Diana's response to Russell is unanswerable. She asks:

'Well then, suppose we go to Europe. Our minds want to return to our bodies in Australia. Besides, it's largely things we got to Europe for. Our people are in Australia. Perhaps you like things more than people.'³

Russell helps Diana to understand that human relationships form the living fabric of culture and that a race will only become truly

¹Boyd, *Outbreak of Love* (1957; Melbourne: Lansdowne, 1971), pp.127-128.

²See Ray Lawlor, "The Piccadilly Bushman" (London: Angus & Robertson, 1961), p.105.

³Boyd, *Outbreak of Love*, p.128.

civilized when it is in harmony with its natural environment.

The painting called "Winter Sunlight" by Walter Withers symbolizes for them both the Australia they love.¹ Diana comes to realize that this Australia has been her true spiritual home all the time. Her whole past, her joys and her sufferings, and the people with whom she is involved, have combined to make it hers. The land, as well as her home, is "a material substance that absorbed life from the lives and feelings of those who lived in it, and which gave out again to console them for vanished time, the life that it had absorbed".² The Langton novels, and to a lesser extent *Boomerang* as well, are in a very real sense an account of the humanization of the Australian landscape and of its transformation from a place of exile to a land which might truly be called home.

In both Simpson and Boyd this affirmative social theme accompanies the theme of a spiritual quest for a lost harmony which cannot be imagined, only missed. This underlying sense of exile cannot be diminished, but it is used to enhance, not to spoil, the positive pleasures that can be taken in life, even during a period as confused and unhappy as the twentieth century. To some extent, it is the form of these novels which makes them more positive works than *Maurice Guest* or *The Aunt's Story*. The acute sense of desolation and of loneliness which tends to dominate these latter novels is moderated in *Boomerang* and in the Langton novels by the positive act of communication undertaken by the character-narrators in writing their stories and in sharing their pasts with their unknown readers. Contrary to all the popular myths about expatriate writers, Simpson and Boyd have not only returned

¹*Ibid.*, p.152.

²*Ibid.*, p.176.

imaginatively to their roots, enriched by their European experiences, but they have produced from their knowledge of exile convincing accounts of the state of a felt relationship with a physical environment.

Chapter 10

GEORGE JOHNSTON'S MEREDITH TRILOGY: EXPATRIATE'S DIARY

George Johnston was born in Melbourne in 1912. He served as a war correspondent during World War Two, and lived in Europe for fifteen years afterwards. He spent four of those years in London before moving, first to the Greek island of Kalynos, and then to the nearby island of Hydra. He began working on *My Brother Jack* while in Greece and returned to Australia in 1965. Both *My Brother Jack* and *Clean Straw for Nothing*, the first two volumes of his trilogy, won Miles Franklin awards. The third volume, *A Cartload of Clay*, was published in its unfinished state a year after his death in 1970. Johnston enjoyed his life in Greece, but felt increasingly that he and his family "were going down the plug-hole",¹ and that the expatriate style of existence was not providing his children with a secure enough future. He saw Australia as a kind of "sanctuary",² even as he recognized that this very stability was as much a danger as an attraction. In an interview for *Walkabout*, he advanced his own cautious version of the "Great Australian Emptiness":³

'One of the great problems is to be able to refresh yourself by turning your back on Australia a little bit. Europe provides this. You can move into a different environment, a different culture. But here, pretty well wherever you go, you're meeting the same man, seeing the same things, same balance of things, and I think, in the final analysis for any creative person, this isn't quite

¹ Clifford Tolchard, "My Husband George: My Wife Charmian: The Johnston-Clift Partnership", *Walkabout*, 35 (January, 1969), 27.

² *Ibid.*

³ White, "The Prodigal Son", 38.

enough stimuli. In Australia we are inclined to drop into clichés; clichés of thought, too.'¹

Like the other writers discussed in this thesis, Johnston felt that his work had benefited from his experiences overseas, but that he himself was essentially an Australian writer.

Unlike most of the other Australian expatriate novelists, Johnston has never suffered neglect or adverse criticism because of his expatriation, yet he alone of all these writers has written explicitly of the expatriate life. Richardson uses it in *Maurice Guest* to suggest the whirl and glitter of a competitive, stimulating but essentially rootless world in which the strong succeed and the weak are lost. White parodies it brilliantly in the second section of *The Aunt's Story*, in which it mirrors the polyglot emptiness of the disintegrating "gothic shell of Europe".² But only Johnston writes of it in careful social and psychological detail, dissecting it as a phenomenon in its own right, while perceiving it as a symbol of the chaos of values in the twentieth century.

To turn from Simpson and Boyd to Johnston is to turn from accounts of the Australian landed gentry and the growth of their intimacy with their land to an account of the urban lower middle classes and their involvement in the capitalist world which has engulfed and destroyed the pastoral world of the Boissys and the Langtons. *My Brother Jack* especially has often been praised for its portrayal of Australian society, or more particularly Melbourne society, between the wars.³

¹Tolchard, "My Husband George: My Wife Charmian", 28.

²White, *The Aunt's Story*, p.145.

³See Patrick Morgan, "Keeping it in the Family", *Quadrant*, 18, No.3 (1974), 10-20, and Geoffrey Thurley, "My Brother Jack: An Australian Masterpiece?", *Ariel*, 5, No.3 (1974), 61-80.

This dimension is an integral part of Johnston's trilogy, but as in Simpson's *Boomerang* and Boyd's Langton novels, the Meredith trilogy is primarily the record of a personal quest.

Like all memoirs, those of David Meredith grapple with the past and with memories of the past in a search for understanding. The intersection of the past as objective fact and the past as it exists interpreted by memory, the history and the fiction of *My Brother Jack's* epigraph from Gide, is for David both a personal and a professional concern, involving him as man and as writer. Somewhere at the point of intersection he hopes to find the truth: understanding for himself and for his readers.

Johnston himself is involved both personally and professionally in his largely autobiographical story and as he approaches current events he sometimes loses the detachment necessary to produce a work of integrity. The tone of *Clean Straw for Nothing* in particular quite often expresses a maudlin self-pity and a self-indulgence which cannot be justified by referring it to David's position as official narrator. On the whole, however, Johnston is able to transform cliché into myth, and if the trilogy is flawed as well as incomplete, it does pose some insoluble problems in an interesting way: its very failures suggest the continuing difficulty of producing a realistic fiction of manners in a post-colonial society.

Although Jack is named in the title of *My Brother Jack*, he is named as "my brother", and it is as "my brother" that he assumes thematic importance, as a foil to the true but as yet unacknowledged hero David. David makes this point himself at the beginning of his second chapter, where he writes: "The thing I am trying to get at is what made Jack

different from me".¹ As his story progresses, it becomes increasingly obvious that what he is really seeking to understand is what made David different from Jack, from his fellow Australians and from his fellow man. Two questions are involved in this quest, each with very different implications. Firstly, David wonders why he is always an outsider and secondly, what it is that makes him unique. He both dislikes and fears being different, and yet at the same time cultivates this difference, because he is even more afraid of anonymity, of being swallowed up by "the opacity of an Australian suburban street".² The trilogy represents an attempt to resolve this tension and to arrive at a satisfactory definition of self through understanding, and in the style of "the ancient mariner", through telling. David is trying to make sense of his life and in the final book, of life in general, but he is also trying to provide a justification of his life, lived as it was. In this latter task, his ambivalence remains unresolved.

My Brother Jack is very much an exploration into a personal past in search of roots; social commentary plays a significant but definitely secondary role. *Clean Straw for Nothing* makes some attempt to understand the relationship between the political and the cultural environments of the times, but again only in relation to David's problems as an individual. Finally, the philosophical speculations of *A Cartload of Clay* centre exclusively about David's tortured psyche. The trilogy moves from a quest into a personal past at the level of the immediate family through the national and the international to the universal, but with an effect the opposite of what one might expect, that of a narrowing rather than an expanding focus.

¹George Johnston, *My Brother Jack* (1964; London: Fontana, 1967), p.21.

²George Johnston, *A Cartload of Clay* (Sydney: Collins, 1971), p.37.

While dealing with the distant past of his childhood, David's manner is controlled and his mood elegiac. He maintains a relatively distanced perspective while recounting the experiences of his youth and early manhood. As his narrative approaches the present his tone assumes a new urgency, while his narrative fragments to accommodate the change. The chronological sequence of *My Brother Jack* gives way to the kaleidoscopic method of *Clean Straw for Nothing*. After the frenzied explorations of this second novel, the pace slows down again in *A Cartload of Clay*, as the telling of a story yields to a meditation on its meaning and to an effort at placing it within a larger frame of reference.

In *My Brother Jack*, David assumes that the past is already fixed in a pattern which need only be discovered, and that it is possible to separate truth from falsehood like gold from quartz. In *Clean Straw for Nothing*, he abandons this approach in favour of the shaking of a kaleidoscope past, where chance determines the patterns in which the memories settle. For this book he chooses the format of a journal in an attempt to avoid personally imposing patterns and an artificial shape on a reality too complex for generalization. By pretending to juxtapose events at random he hopes to escape the falsification which a conscious reorganization of experience would introduce into his account. It is necessary to stress the pretence involved in his use of this device because such a format provides the narrator with an even greater scope for selection and organization than does the method of a straightforward chronological narration. When narrator and protagonist are one, it is important to separate what the book itself says from what the narrator says, and in the case of David Meredith to remember that not only may he be seeking to understand his life, but to provide some justification for it. It is interesting that he switches from the

first person to the third whenever he begins to report an action of which he might justifiably be ashamed, as if to dissociate himself from it in retrospect.¹ These small stratagems maintain the reader's sympathy for David and encourage the illusion that reader and narrator are embarking on a joint quest.

In *A Cartload of Clay*, this quest for understanding becomes an unravelling of the twisted threads of past and memory. Once more, the design behind the narrative is partially disguised, this time by the pretence of a rambling meditation. The central image is that of the linear journey, the voyage through life, the walk down a suburban Australian street, but the book's method is in fact circular. David's thoughts circle about the central fact of Cressida's suicide, approaching it from every angle, then backing off, never daring to face it outright.

As David describes it in *My Brother Jack*, the pattern of his life is one of repeated and failed evasions, of trying "to side-step a world [he] didn't have the courage to face".² His is the story of a man who again and again chooses to dwell in a false world of the imagination instead of facing facts, and who invariably places his own needs above the needs of others. Jack, on the other hand, confronts the world squarely and is capable of selfless action, but he remains unaware of those mysteriously valuable other worlds of the imagination, which David dimly perceives and attempts to reconstruct in his writing.

My Brother Jack is the record of David's ambivalent feelings toward his brother and toward his own achievement. Sometimes he sees himself in Gavin Turley's terms, as an opportunist and an escapist, the opposite

¹For example, see George Johnston, *Clean Straw for Nothing* (1969; London: Fontana, 1971), p.77.

²*My Brother Jack*, p.59.

of his brother Jack, who is both noble and forthright, a true man. At the end of the novel, when he has become Jack's "brother Davy", he muses guiltily about his rise to pre-eminence: "And they were all triers, and I had never really tried . . . I had only grabbed at the opportunity whenever I saw it" ¹ Yet his admiration for Jack is tinged with an almost imperceptible reservation. He writes:

What had changed about him, I began to realise, was both subtle and profound: it was almost as if he had been fined down to the 'essential Jack', as if this was what my brother really *should* look like, as if all his growing and maturing had been working towards the presentation of this man in this exact appearance at this precise time. Even more than this, for I saw that this was not only that he looked as *Jack* should look, but he looked as a proper *man* should look. . . . there was an impalpable feeling about him, almost an emanation, that here was a man totally sure of the rightness of what he was doing. I felt good for him, and yet it disturbed me strangely. . . . ²

It is significant that Jack should finally attain complete selfhood as a soldier, a man ready to kill for fixed ideas of right and wrong and a man who is a misfit in almost any other function. David is attracted to the simplistic Australian myth of manliness epitomized by the "Digger", ³ but for him there can never be this absolute conviction of the rightness of his own actions. Indeed, he suspects that he himself is his own worst enemy. Jack's way cannot be for him. His path toward self-fulfilment will be more torturous because it must be a way of

¹*Ibid.*, p.346.

²*Ibid.*, p.276.

³In *The Australian Legend*, Russel Ward points out that the "Australian tradition being what it is, it is natural that it should be particularly potent in wartime Like the bond or free pastoral workers of the pre-Gold-Rush era, the serviceman lives in a male world Like the bushman the soldier is a wanderer by profession Comradeship and loyalty, resourcefulness and adaptability are as necessary to the one life as to the other", p.231.

continual questioning with no hope of answers; yet it is also potentially more rewarding.

David's discovery of the beauty of the tugs first reveals to him the existence of standards of value other than Jack's. He is drawn from the quotidien into an eternal world where, "for the first time in my life", he writes,

I came to be aware of the existence of true beauty,
of an opalescent world of infinite promise that
had nothing whatever to do with the shabby suburbs
that had engulfed me since my birth. . . .

It filled me with an excitement, almost an
exaltation, that I could tell nobody about. . . .
I moved through this newly-discovered world
breathless and alone, like Adam in a new Eden¹

Like Teresa in Stead's *For Love Alone*, David discovers a "world of infinite promise" in the sea. Traditionally, Australian literature has concentrated its attention on the challenge of the Australian land and on the mystery of its dead centre, but David's first literary successes are his articles on the adventure and challenge of a life at sea.

His fall from this newly-discovered innocence results from his conscious decision to use this experience as a ladder on which he may climb out of the suburban wilderness of his childhood; not when he first begins to write his Stunsail articles, for they were written for themselves and not as a means to an end, but when he begins to compromise his creativity for the sake of material advantages; when under Helen's guidance he becomes merely a hack writer, polishing the brightest apple for a newspaper editor.

¹*My Brother Jack*, p.70.

Although Helen becomes the scapegoat whom David blames for his increasing aridity, it is plain that she is a symptom and indeed a symbol of his own sterility, rather than its cause. She never emerges as a whole woman because she is never seen except through David's eyes and he is determined to justify his treatment of her.

Even in the relaxed nostalgia of *My Brother Jack's* opening paragraphs, so artfully artless, an underlying uneasiness may be detected in his present attitude toward his childhood past. He displays an unconscious awareness of both the fecundity and the sterility inherent in his childhood heritage, when he writes that

Childhood, looking back on it, is like this — a mess of memories and impressions scattered and clotted and pasted together like a mulch of fallen leaves on a damp autumn pavement. . . . and although it is a memory made up of many parts, distinct and indistinct, mundane and fantastic, coherent and incomprehensible, it is fixed now into a final and exact if distant image of a place once lived in and never to be returned to, like the city seen by the wife of Lot in that last yearning moment before she became the pillar of salt.¹

Although there is a definite note of regret in his "image of a place once lived in and never to be returned to", it is not a lost Eden to which his Biblical analogy refers, but the wicked cities of the plain, Sodom and Gomorrah. Part of him, certainly, desires just such an obliteration of his past as was the fate of those cities.

His uprooting of the Dollicus and the re-decoration of Avalon become for him the concrete manifestations of this at first only half-formulated wish. He realizes:

¹*Ibid.*, p.7.

I was trying to hammer out all the past, trying to seal it off forever behind a skin of polished veneer¹

All through the afternoon I worked, silent and intent, hammering on the cedar sheets and the panel strips, battering away at childhood and boyhood and youth, desperately driving nail after nail through the treacherous emotions of a tiny suburban history.²

It is only when he has irrevocably escaped his childhood home, mis-named Avalon, that it begins to take on the significance of a lost Eden, the true Avalon, in contrast to the new trap which he has fashioned for himself. Only then can he allow himself the luxury of mourning: "Once, through fly-wire, there had been the Dollicus"³ Helen, his promising future, herself becomes a new trap and another past to be rejected.

One of the central incidents of *My Brother Jack* is David's apotheosis on his roof in Beverley Grove. His temporary elevation to the visionary position of "Meredith Stylites of the Garden Suburb" is perhaps too tritely expressed to be entirely successful. His revelations sound more like prepared propaganda than a sudden enlightenment, and the very absurdity of his situation tends to undermine the seriousness of his pronouncements. This crucial failure is the more unfortunate since Meredith's message is an enduring concern of Johnston's work and it is central to the meaning of the trilogy as a whole.

It is suddenly revealed to David,

¹ It is interesting to note that Helen is continually described in just these terms.

² *My Brother Jack*, p.165.

³ *Ibid.*, p.251.

that the real enemy was not the obvious embodiment of evil, like Hitler or his persecution of the Jews or the Russian purges or the bombs on Guernica, but was this awful fetish of a respectability that would rather look the other way than cause a fuss, that hated 'scenes', that did not *want* to know because *to know* might somehow force them into a situation which could take the polish off the duco and blight the herbaceous borders and lay scabrous patches across the attended lawns.¹

In *Clean Straw for Nothing* David's continued rejection of this "awful fetish" of respectability is expressed in Cressida's reiterated promise, "'No antirrhinums, darling'".² It is interesting that in *Day of My Delight* Martin Boyd also uses antirrhinums to represent the wilful and destructive blindness of the respectable, which he too sees as the evil largely responsible for the ills of the twentieth-century world.³ Boyd's tone grows even more polemical than that of Johnston's Meredith as he contemplates this idea.

Both Boyd and Johnston see a lack of imagination, and a reliance on cliché as a substitute for thought, as the basis of this antirrhinum mentality, and for both the response is the same: an increased creativity which they hope will restore meaning to language and which in its attempt to understand will bring others to understanding also. Unfortunately, Johnston himself seems unable to free his prose from dependency on cliché and on a use of ellipsis to hint at unnamed profundities which it can only be assumed he is either too lazy or too incompetent to clarify.⁴ Too often he allows himself to sink back from

¹*Ibid.*, pp.258-259.

²*Clean Straw for Nothing*, p.44.

³Boyd, *Day of My Delight*, p.224.

⁴The use of ellipsis is far more pronounced in Johnston's own journalism.

a rigorous wrestling with words into the kind of flaccid and meretricious prose which flows profusely from the pen of any journalist. Although it is possible to attribute these moments of slackness to Meredith's own style of expressing himself, they remain as a flaw in the books themselves.

David's immediate response to this revelation on the roof provides an ironic commentary both on his own character and on the truth of his observation. He takes refuge once more in an evasion of the real issues by blaming Helen for his own respectability and by welcoming the war for the temporary escape it seems to offer. He is as yet unwilling to recognize his own complicity.

This moment on the roof has been prepared for by the scene in which David brings Helen to meet his family. The confrontation between Helen and Jack reveals to David that his only choice is "between inflicting pain or suffering it",¹ and that he is committed to a proving of himself, however wrong-headed. Unlike Boyd's Dominic, who in the Langton tetralogy comes to a similar recognition and chooses to suffer rather than to inflict suffering, David is committed to a policy of avoiding suffering at all costs.² In this scene, he recognizes his alternatives and makes his decision, but as yet he is unaware of the consequences for himself. These are shown him on the roof. By choosing to evade suffering, he has evaded life. He has bartered a garden, however tangled, for a desert. Buying a eucalyptus tree remains an empty gesture, doomed to failure, while David remains unsure of the goal toward which he is striving.

¹*My Brother Jack*, p.218.

²Significantly, both decisions result in disaster. There seems to be no way out for modern man.

My Brother Jack ends with a betrayal, the last of a long series of betrayals, of Sam Burlington, of David's fellow lithographers and of his family. The novel's final, bitterly ironic sentence, David's sentence of guilt, is spoken in good faith by Jack: "'My brother Davy's not the sort of bloke who ever let anyone down, you know. . . .'"¹ David is still choosing to inflict rather than to suffer pain; but his choice of Cressida above Jack is also a choice of the future above the past, and a consequence of his recognition of his divorcement from Jack's world.

In a mirror in Naples, he thinks he sees a sort of calculation in his face which is absent from the faces of his fellow countrymen, and he realizes that he "was not quite one of them, that [he] never had been, and that [he] never would be".² At the end of *My Brother Jack* he has yet to discover where he will belong, what his goal in life will be, and he has yet to understand his own nature and the reasons for his difference.

These problems are his concern in *Clean Straw for Nothing*. Whereas in *My Brother Jack* events were of primary importance, the basic fabric of this second novel is analysis. Its high points are attained in each of a series of crucial conversations. On the narrative level the pattern of evasion and betrayal persists and is intensified. David's indirect betrayal of Jefferson anticipates his deliberate betrayal of Morgan and these two in turn complement his betrayal of Cressida and of himself, and what he sees as Cressida's betrayal of him.³

¹*My Brother Jack*, p.348.

²*Ibid.*, p.319.

³These betrayals are balanced by the unselfish fidelity to friendship displayed by Kiernan, Big Grace, Miriam, and especially by Calverton.

Although David identifies his life's pattern as one of evasion, at its most basic level the pattern of *My Brother Jack* re-enacts the traditional Horatio Alger myth of the poor boy who makes good, but with a typically Australian twist to it: he is ashamed, not proud, of his success.¹ In *Clean Straw for Nothing*, having reached the top of his chosen profession, he abandons the world of ambition for the Byronic role of the artist in exile. This is the form in which he chooses to cast his personal search for freedom. As the title and its complementary epigraph suggest, *Clean Straw for Nothing* is a novel about the costs of existence, about the prices one must pay for one's decisions and more specifically about the price one must pay for freedom. Stephanos' reference to the American example as embodied in Hawthorne, and his warning that by staying on in a foreign place one eventually would have to exchange "reality for emptiness",² become fully justified by David's experience.

Careful to resist "the beguiling siren song of money and self-importance and excitement",³ David falls prey instead to far more harmful temptations: to the lure of his own idealism, with its scorn of compromise, and to its corresponding trap, the private, "primitive milieu"⁴ of an expatriate community. After the unparalleled devastation of the Second World War and faced with the continual threat of the Bomb, David and his friends are disillusioned and dissatisfied with life in

¹In his text for *The Australians* (1966; 2nd edn, Adelaide: Rigby, 1967), Johnston writes: "Struggle, the more hopeless the better, was glorified, but not success. This has always been the great and basic difference between the Australian and the American", p.170.

²*Clean Straw for Nothing*, p.109.

³*Ibid.*, p.159.

⁴*Ibid.*, p.162.

general. Neither the stifling conformity of Australia nor the grey anti-climax of Europe can inspire them with any hope for the future, or provide them with a place to hide. Even on their symbolic island, where the only contact with the outside world is maintained by the mail boat, there is always an airplane overhead or an earthquake beneath their feet to remind them of their participation, however unwilling, in the common fate of mankind. As David mourns again and again, "There was no place to hide. No shield of peace or quietness, no sheltering bell of luminous air. Still nowhere to hide. Nowhere at all".¹

Nonetheless, for a long time the island does seem to be a good place to hide, so good in fact that David entertains the illusion that he is working his way to freedom and not hiding at all. Instead, he persuades himself that he is acting at last on the revelation which first came to him with the beauty of the harbour tugs and later, more clearly, on the roof in Beverley Grove. He is abandoning a life of social hypocrisies for one of simple enjoyments and a dedication to meaningful work. Yet inevitably he and Cressida bring their discontents with them to island life, and as more expatriates join them, they gradually lose sight of their original ideal. The pressure of Americanism in particular, which haunts even those who protest most strongly against it, begins to threaten their own sense of themselves as somehow different.

Calverton and Meredith attempt to pinpoint the disparity between the American experience and the Australian, but with little success. Calverton argues that:

¹*Ibid.*, p.116.

'The Yanks only have to prove it to others now. They proved it to themselves long ago. . . . They could get it all straight and fixed and settled. Get it all worked out on their own terms in their own country. The revolution succeeds, the frontier is subdued, the mountains climbed, rivers forded, plains crossed, the Redman gets licked, the slaves are freed. More or less. So then they can dream up their own mythologies out of what they've done. . . .

Well, out there in Australia, it's different from that. We're always trying to spar around with . . . an amorphous something that won't settle into a shape . . . not even into an idea. . . . An enigma. When you punch at it it just gives and fades away, then there it is again, but behind you now, the same thing, impassive and indifferent. It can't be beaten because you can't ever peg it down to what it is.'¹

This explanation is the colloquial equivalent of Northrop Frye's vision of the incubus haunting Canadian poetry,² and of H.P. Heseltine's explication of Australian literature in terms of the terror of nothingness at the basis of being.³ It is perhaps true that new countries are faced with special difficulties in defining a distinctive national mystique and that harsh climates and big lands, whether of the north or of the south, encourage a particularly strong concern with man's loneliness in the face of an impassive and implacable nature. Yet it is also true that no one nation has a literary monopoly on the nightmare of nothingness. Calverton's theory is finally insufficient for it does not strike deeply enough into the heart of the problem.

In terms of *Clean Straw for Nothing* his most important omission is of the profound influence of Puritanism on the formation of the American mind and its role in determining the American attitude to Europe as both

¹*Ibid.*, pp.172-173.

²"Canada and its Poetry", *The Bush Garden* (Toronto: Anansi, 1971), pp.141-142.

³"The Australian Image: The Literary Heritage", *Meanjin*, 21 (1962), pp.35-49.

the source of enlightenment and the source of evil. David writes of Europe as being both a beautiful dream and a nightmare,¹ but the paradox is merely stated. It must be accepted on faith for it is not presented in concrete terms; it is not Meredith's theme.

Meredith's expatriation is presented less in terms of a conflict between Old World and New, than in terms of a total rejection of contemporary society everywhere. He explicitly refers to himself and his fellow expatriates as protestants. Yet he cannot rid himself of the suspicion that for him expatriation represents a flight from society rather than a stand against it. Consequently, the island in turn becomes a trap, like his childhood and his first marriage before it. After thirteen years it is once more time to continue his physical journeying, and with no place else to go, he finds himself returning home to Australia.

Meredith is particularly careful to stress the correspondence between physical and spiritual journeys. At the risk of redundancy he explains: "There are journeys of the spirit as well as the bodily ones, and I am beginning to think that the former are the more important".² Throughout *Clean Straw for Nothing*, he has referred to certain aspects of the Odysseus myth in order to suggest an analogy with his own predicament and his own times. Odysseus, the archetypal exile, the wanderer forever in search of his home, buffeted by the gods and continually shipwrecked, is an attractive figure to the twentieth-century writer because of his closeness to modern man's own image of himself as the victim of circumstance in an arbitrary universe. Parallels may be drawn between the post-war adventures of Ulysses and the post-war

¹*Clean Straw for Nothing*, pp. 97 and 99.

²*Ibid.*, p.273.

tribulations of modern man; between the purposeful quest of Ulysses deflected by a hostile fate and the blind searchings of his twentieth-century counterpart in a world in which the concept of fate itself has become meaningless.

Johnston alters the original myth in one important way. In the *Odyssey*, Odysseus orders his men to plug their ears with wax and has himself tied to the mast so that he may listen to the sirens' song without yielding to its spell. According to David, Odysseus himself stuffs his ears with wax. The myth is changed from one in which the voyaging hero seeks a widening of his experience and his knowledge through his willingness to listen, if not succumb, to the sirens' song, to one in which instead he deliberately narrows his horizons and clings to his limitations.

The alteration of the myth provides a subtle criticism of David's method and raises some doubt as to the sincerity of his motives in his search for meaning and for freedom. Early in *Clean Straw for Nothing*, he admits that he wants

to stay identified with a dilemma, because . . . it retains [him] in a world which is still out of balance. One must at all costs prevent this from tilting back into the static dullness of the conventional picture.¹

Although his voyaging begins with this desire to escape the boredom of peace-time in suburban Australia, it does develop into a search for those indefinable values which he feels he has lost. He explains:

I feel sometimes that we must have thrown away something we once possessed — an illusion, maybe, or a delusion — something that was able to shield us like an old coat that was familiar

¹*Ibid.*, p.11.

and still handy at times, and not until we had discarded it did we realize that it could still come in handy, so that we have been trapped in a sudden sharp change¹

His urge to travel derives from two contradictory impulses. He is fleeing normality, respectability, and responsibility, even as he is seeking the security of permanent and meaningful values. Yet he is also, like Patrick White and his characters Voss and Laura, fleeing the "exaltation of the 'average'" in quest of "the mystery and the poetry which alone could make bearable"² life in Australia.

W.B. Stanford's definition of the paradox implicit in the twentieth century's understanding of the Ulysses theme is applicable to Johnston's use of the myth.³ David Meredith is comparable to Ulysses in both his classical and romantic aspects. He would like to be both adventurous and safe, different yet accepted; he would like to be rewarded by society for rejecting it. It is a conflict he never resolves. Although he would like to see Greece as his spiritual home, he must eventually confess that he never truly belonged there and that his life on the island was not only unproductive but disastrous. It has proved, like Circe's island, an illusion. Yet although he sometimes feels a "vague womb-yearning"⁴ for Australia, it cannot be called his Ithaca in any conventional sense of the word. As David flies back over the Australian continent he remembers Calverton's analysis of the Australian artist's dilemma and realizes with horror that "now this huge blind

¹*Ibid.*, p.68.

²White, "The Prodigal Son", 39.

³*The Ulysses Theme* (1954; 2nd edn, Oxford: Blackwell, 1963), p.50.

⁴*Clean Straw for Nothing*, p.168.

heedless thing would have to be confronted".¹

While flying over Alexandria, home of the Greek expatriate poet Cavafy, only a few hours earlier, David has been reading Cavafy's poem "Ithaca". It asserts:

Without her you would never have taken the road.
Ithaca has given you the beautiful voyage.
But she has nothing more to give you.²

The symbol of the voyage itself is all that is left for modern man of Ulysses's original quest for his homeland. At the end of the novel, just before landing, David tells himself:

You are an alien everywhere, because alienation is something you carry inside yourself, and all you can do is fashion little enclaves and try to live inside them. You are an alien because there is no one you will ever really know, not even yourself³

Because of the order in which the story is told, the reader knows that David proceeds to build himself just such a little enclave, much like his parents' home as he remembers it.⁴ He seems to have opted for the values of permanence over those of change, but the decision troubles him. He writes:

¹*Ibid.*, p.287.

²*Ibid.*, p.282.

³*Ibid.*, p.288. In Tolchard, "My Husband George: My Wife Charmian", Johnston remarks of his own experience that he finds, "having lived in a lot of places — that wherever you're living you really only live in a little enclave in an alien territory, and you build your own little world round yourself anyway", 27.

⁴On another occasion, he sees his life in terms of a "boomeranging out and back again", in *Clean Straw for Nothing*, pp.156-157.

The trouble is that thoughts are inclined to drift when one is just sitting and watching and not moving any more. We are not told what happened to Odysseus after he got back to his Ithaca and ridded himself of the suitors . . . did he plant trees, I wonder, olive and quince, and pistachio and resinous pine, and retreat into reverie behind them?¹

His doubts in this passage prepare for the renewal of the voyaging motif in *A Cartload of Clay*. In this final, unfinished book David is barely capable of walking down the block, yet his mind has become intensely active, almost feverishly exploring his past and attempting to connect it to his present and to the thought of his children's future. He fears that the alternative to such self-willed voyaging would be to feel himself "moving down a narrowing pipe through a vacuum, if such a journey were imaginable".²

The horror of the trap, which is so prevalent in *Clean Straw for Nothing*, becomes transformed into an even greater terror in *A Cartload of Clay*: that of an overwhelming nothingness. Once more his thoughts revert to the poet Cavafy, who "had known the true nightmare of the cities", and expressed it in his poetry; yet whose final statement was nothing more than "a dot on a piece of paper, signifying hardly anything at all".³ Because David cannot face the implications of such a conclusion, he soon assigns a significance to Cavafy's last gesture, transforming it from a symbol of the absurdity of life into one of universal order:

¹*Clean Straw for Nothing*, p.160. In fact, some versions of the myth do supply a future for Odysseus after his return to Ithaca. It is to these Christina Stead refers in the Prologue to *For Love Alone*.

²*A Cartload of Clay*, p.37.

³*Ibid.*, p.43.

. . . the dot and the circle were related somehow to Empedocles, because hadn't he envisioned God as a dot within a circle? Was it that God was a circle, the centre of which was everywhere and the circumference nowhere?¹

This latter interpretation remains tentative; it is more a question than an answer.

In *Clean Straw for Nothing*, the linear continuity of the voyage motif is balanced by the kaleidoscopic method of presentation. The three times that explicit reference is made to the Odysseus analogue it is always immediately followed and qualified by a further allusion to Kafka, as if in tacit recognition of the irony lurking beneath any application of the Greek myth to modern times. As David admits:

we can no more claim a consistency . . . in the Greek sense than we can really believe we are part of a sustained and forward-flowing chronology. I think I prefer the kaleidoscope image. . . . This is easier than believing in a planned design.²

Although in *A Cartload of Clay* David is unable to share T.S. Eliot's Christian optimism that "the outcome of the journey would be to arrive back where we started, and to know the place for the first time",³ it is precisely this continuity in the Greek sense for which he is searching. The view of life as a kaleidoscope may for a time be an easier one to hold, but it is ultimately a dead end.

Northrop Frye points out that to a Canadian writer, who is broken off from the linear sequence of tradition which an English writer inherits,

¹*Ibid.*, p.46.

²*Clean Straw for Nothing*, p.34.

³*A Cartload of Clay*, p.78.

and who has no tradition as yet of his own, "the traditions of Europe appear as a kaleidoscopic whirl with no definite shape or meaning, but with a profound irony lurking in its varied and conflicting patterns".¹ He could be describing David Meredith, ^{an} expatriate Australian writer who on his return to his homeland after more than ten years of life close to the birthplace of Western culture, has little more than a few random tags to shore against his ruins:

on/ Hemingway's 'The people and the places and how the weather was,' and Horace's 'You can change your skies but not your soul,' and Herder's 'We are carried ever forward; the stream never returns to its source.'²

These phrases drift through his mind and he falls asleep.

He returns to Australia exhausted, empty, ready to confront at last "this huge blind heedless thing".³ For him, Australia has come to represent the nothingness underlying existence, the earthquake's chasm beneath the thin earth-crust of human pretensions, all that is unknowable, but which, nonetheless, he must seek to understand. Instead, he finds the same dull suburban society clinging to the coastline of a great but forbidding land. He journeys inland, but finds no solace there. Only when he returns to Sydney does he realize that he was "trying to assemble from the unchanging face of nature the faded memories of a lost homeland",⁴ and, he implies, trying to see an actual country solely in terms of an out-dated mythology. Like White, Johnston

¹"Canada and its Poetry", *The Bush Garden*, p.136.

²*Clean Straw for Nothing*, p.286.

³*Ibid.*, p.287.

⁴*A Cartload of Clay*, p.78.

contrasts the "Great Australian Emptiness"¹ of the suburbs with that of the outback, and concludes that, while the suburbs are more terrifying, it is more important for the contemporary Australian to come to terms with them than with the old myths of a frontier past. It is the soulless suburban reality which David must confront, and with sympathy, if he wishes to understand and not reject his own roots, his past, and the present reality of the land of his birth. He is given his chance with the Ocker.

When he first speaks to the Ocker he thinks of

one of the faces that Rilke had described, a face that had been put on for so long that it had worn through to the lining and become a no-face, because if you kept the same face for years it naturally wore out in the end like, as Rilke said, gloves one has used on a journey.²

However, he is instantly reminded of "that other face below the no-face", by some lines from Seferis's "Mythical Story", "They were good lads, whole days,/they sweated at the oar with lowered eyes/breathing in rhythm",³ and he decides:

That was it. It was all a mythical story, a mythical journey, that voyage we all had to make on the decks of decayed ships. He. The Julians. The Ockers too. Men, nations, creeds, societies, civilizations.⁴

Although he is able to cling to such "improbable continuities"⁵ in theory,

¹White, "The Prodigal Son", 38.

²*A Cartload of Clay*, p.72.

³*Ibid.*, p.73.

⁴*Ibid.*

⁵*Clean Straw for Nothing*, p.18.

he has not yet gone beyond his initial distaste for the Ocker in feeling. The novel ends as they are establishing a rapport that promises much, but which unfortunately remains undeveloped. Nonetheless, in the final words of the book it is suggested that not only do they share a common humanity but a similar fate as well: the Ocker too has been deserted by his wife.

This incident suggests that David is slowly moving out of his self-imposed isolation into a new sympathy with others. The reader does not witness his response to the Ocker's confession, and in the past he has consistently spurned the pleas of another for help; yet David does appear to have grown into a new maturity in this final book, a maturity which is reflected in its sparer style and in its refusal to slip into the kind of self-indulgent writing which so often mars *Clean Straw for Nothing*.

The apotheosis of "Meredith Stylites of the Garden Suburb" in *My Brother Jack* has been transformed in *A Cartload of Clay* into the concentration of the "omniscient blind sage of Inkerman Street, Northleigh, in the great cosmopolis of Sydney in the huge yearning hollow of Australia".¹ Instead of the grandiose vision of Meredith Stylites, the reader is presented with the carefully noted details of the contents of the Lopez fruit lorry, and, as David says, "why not?":

Who was to say it was more stupid or more wasteful to know what was happening in a suburban street than to be Camus trying to work out what was happening in Algeria or Wen Yi-tuo asking questions of a blind universe? At least Meredith was still capable of *asking* questions, perhaps even capable of working out the answers if it was only to do with the Lopez fruit lorry, and Wen Yi-tuo and Camus were both dead and had both died still wondering. Obviously it was not by withdrawing

¹*A Cartload of Clay*, p.133.

from it, but only by participation that one could hope to know anything about one's environment. . . .¹

David now understands that he has been navigating from the wrong maps all his life. Indeed, he suggests that each person must discover his own maps. Neither the traditions of the west, represented by Camus, nor of the east, represented by Wen Yi-tuo, are ultimately capable of sustaining the individual on his personal quest; he must find his own way. Significantly, his new home is *not* named *Merde Alors!*² He is moving from rejection toward acceptance, and from self-pity to a more mature understanding. His home remains nameless, a home of possibilities rather than certainties.

Perhaps it is inevitable that David may only start to gain wisdom when he is stripped of everything; his health, his youth, his hopes and his wife are all lost to him forever; even his mind is no longer controllable as his body is sometimes forced to ration its oxygen supply. Johnston's protagonist has suffered a punishment for his difference and for the expatriation which expressed this difference of which even the most rabid Australian nationalist would approve. His expatriation is a crime, however, not in a national, but in a human sense. He withdrew from life itself, not simply from his country and his wife, and his "long journey back in search of human status"³ is just beginning as *A Cartload of Clay* comes to a premature end.

The Meredith trilogy is written by a returned expatriate who is trying to make sense of his life and to understand the significance

¹*Ibid.*

²*Ibid.*, p.137.

³White, *Voss*, p.393.

of his expatriation and of his return home. David's recognition of his own complicity in his alienation from any human community is similar to Maurice's recognition in *Maurice Guest* and to Mahony's in *The Fortunes of Richard Mahony*, that they themselves had lacked the human sympathy to communicate adequately with their fellows. It resembles Clotilde's recognition that she had never really participated in life: she herself had chosen the role of an observer. Like Voss, David realizes that the self-sufficiency of which he is so proud is based on a fear of human contacts: he depends on Cressida as does Voss on Laura. There is this sense of a personal inadequacy and of a personal responsibility for their unhappiness in each of these characters. It is characteristic of the provincial habit of mind to believe that real life is only lived elsewhere. Except for Voss, these characters have left their provincial homes in search of real life, and like Praed discovered that they have "left the treasure behind and sailed after the shadow".¹ Reality constantly eludes them, and they blame themselves, not the world, for their failure.

The novels themselves make it clear, however, that while their rebellions and their quests may have been misdirected, they were not unjustified. These characters are right to be dissatisfied with the dullness, the conformity, the mediocrity, which life affords them; they are right to seek a higher good; and it is perhaps inevitable that their search for truth and beauty, for a life which is whole and unified, should be tainted by dreams of wealth and of success. (Here again Voss differs from Maurice, Mahony and David. His search is the ascetic counterpart of their worldly quests: it too is flawed by egotism.)

¹Praed, "My Literary Beginnings", letter to the *Brisbane Grammar School Magazine* (1900), pp.16-17, in "The Campbell Praed Papers", Oxley Library OM64-1, Box 3.

They are wrong only in thinking that true happiness can come from withdrawal instead of immersion in life, and from escape instead of involvement.

Yet neither Australia, nor the contemporary world as a whole, seems to offer anything but substitutes for living. Mahony's search for "Life with a capital L"¹ is doomed to failure. David travels the world reporting on exotic places and events without ever feeling any closer to the sources of life. These novels conclude that satisfaction must be sought within the self; yet that it may only be found in a commitment to something outside the self.

Because David is unable to believe in anything outside himself, neither in the values of the past like Boyd, nor in the value of art like White, he discovers a sense of purpose in the quest itself, in the search for meaning rather than in any particular kind of meaning. The quest for understanding and the acts of ordering and of questioning experience, as embodied in David Meredith's writing, provide their own justification. It is therefore appropriate that the trilogy remains unfinished, for the sole value it is able to affirm is the value of "Only going on".²

¹Richardson, *The Fortunes of Richard Mahony*, p.315.

²*A Cartload of Clay*, p.78.

CONCLUSION

Most of Australia's expatriate novelists are more deeply concerned with the symbolic than with the literal implications of expatriation: they use the concepts of exile — an outsider's alienation from himself, his society and his physical environment, and the difficulty of establishing communication between individuals — to question the validity of the norms of behaviour and of belief which man has fashioned for himself in order to cope with his own divided nature and the demands of his world. Whereas the protagonists discussed in Section One of this thesis embark on literal voyages, which never lose their close connection with reality however many further dimensions they assume, the protagonists of the novels in Section Two undertake symbolic quests, in which the distinctions between dream and reality tend to blur. The character-narrators examined in Section Three are introspective voyagers, who explore and try to order both dream and reality in their art. In the novels of the first section, the voyage is perceived as primarily a means of escape. Although *For Love Alone* and *Lucinda Brayford* balance the theme of flight by placing an equal stress on a search for value, this sense of a balance between fleeing and seeking is most evident in the novels of the second section. In the novels of the third section, the balance has shifted to stress the quest for meaning over the flight from meaninglessness. These novels are the product of a synthesizing vision, which transforms the linear direction of the journey into the circle of experience encompassed, contained and comprehended by a questing and ordering intelligence. Whereas the novels of the first section stress the need for compromise, and the novels of the second section affirm the need for rebellion, the novels of the third section attempt to incorporate both needs into a single vision.

This summary is not meant to imply that the novels discussed in Section Three are better novels simply because they undertake a synthesizing function. Clearly Patrick White's achievement is artistically richer, more accomplished and more suggestive than anything by Simpson, Boyd or Johnston. But these novels do illustrate the fact that the expatriate perspective may involve an increased awareness of the value of a felt relationship with the land of birth, in addition to the kind of critical distance which a knowledge of alienation may bring and an awareness of the unavoidable separateness of each individual human being. Indeed, it is interesting to observe how few of these novels attach value to the experience of alienation in itself. The quest of an outsider like Theodora in *The Aunt's Story* is directed toward the discovery of an integrated sense of self and the establishment of a meaningful relationship with the world outside herself. She is not interested in affirming her difference from others, but in understanding and accepting the nature of her participations in life.

Despite the emphasis which literary critics tend to place on the importance of England as "home" to colonial and post-colonial Australians, England seldom appears in this role in either the lives or the novels of expatriate writers after Praed. Richard Mahony is a victim of this illusion, and it is significant that he is of Anglo-Irish and not English descent: he is doubly a colonial. Richardson herself always felt more affinity with Germany. Boyd discusses the close relationship between England and Australia in his novels, but he presents it as part of a triangle in which Italy, and the south of France in *Lucinda Brayford*, play the more significant roles. For Stead's Teresa in *For Love Alone*, England is merely the convenient starting-point for an exploration of what the entire European world can offer her. France is the true spiritual home of Helen Simpson's heroine, Clotilde: she finds England to be as much a place of exile as Australia.

On her travels around the world, White's Theodora does not even bother to visit England. Each of these writers employs overseas settings, especially in the Old World, to suggest the legacy of the past with which their characters must come to terms or to contrast a way of life in which civilized values are paramount with the spiritual poverty of Australia. Very few are concerned with the imperial/colonial relationship or with its implications for Australian society.

Their avoidance of this issue may be partially in reaction to the aggressive nationalism of much nativist Australian writing. Whereas Canadian writers and critics speak of Canada as an "invisible country",¹ which will only become visible when its creative writers have made images of it and when its critics have discussed and interpreted these images in their work, many Australians felt that they had found a reflection of their unique identity in the phenomenon they termed the "legend of the nineties" and in the work of those writers who continued to perpetrate this legend into the twentieth century. Martin Boyd, George Johnston, Henry Handel Richardson, Christina Stead, and Patrick White were unable to discover the Australia they knew in the literature which grew from this legend. Each in his own way was determined to describe the Australia of his experience and his vision. Their emphasis on spiritual and psychological realities and on the inner lives of their characters may be partially in reaction to the stress which the nationalist writers placed on social realities and on a documentary realism.

A study of themes and preoccupations in a series of novels is primarily a descriptive undertaking. The nature of the task does not

¹See the Introduction to *Contexts of Canadian Criticism*, ed. Eli Mandel (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971), p.3.

allow for a detailed outline of the implications to which its discoveries and its tentative conclusions give rise; yet clearly these implications will prove of some interest to literary and cultural historians and to literary critics alike. Australian literature appears more diversified, more sophisticated and more critical of the Australian ethos when the novels of expatriate writers are included in the literary heritage. When the distinctive themes of these novels are considered in relation to those of the novels included in A.A. Phillips' Australian tradition, the history of Australian literature will be more truly the record of the attempts of Australians, both at home and abroad, to come to terms with their experience and their inheritance.

What is now required is a study which will relate the efforts of Australians, in documenting the expatriate experience and in incorporating the expatriate perspective into their literary image of themselves, to the similar efforts of other post-colonial nations, especially those of Canada and New Zealand, who share with Australia a "common ancestry".¹ Hallvard Dahlie concludes his pioneering article on "The International Theme in Canadian Fiction" with a statement which applies with equal force to the novels of Australian expatriate writers. He asserts that

the trend in the expressing and development of the international theme in Canadian fiction has been progressively away from a consideration of cultural contrasts and social juxtapositions and towards an examination of self, regardless of cultural setting.²

¹See Claude T. Bissell, "A Common Ancestry: Literature in Australia and Canada", *University of Toronto Quarterly*, 25, No.2 (1956), 131-142.

²In *Commonwealth*, ed. Anna Rutherford, Papers Delivered at the Conference of Commonwealth Literature, Aarhus University, Denmark, 1971, p.189.

Generalizations at this level are likely to discover similarities among the expatriate literatures of many countries. Yet when one considers the sophisticated comedy of the Canadian Robertson Davies' account of a Canadian girl in London in *A Mixture of Frailties*, or the savage irony of Mordecai Richler's portrayal of Canadians in London in *A Choice of Enemies*, *Cocksure* and *St Urbain's Horseman*, the accounts of Paris in John Glassco's *Memoirs of Montparnasse* and Morley Callaghan's *That Summer in Paris*, or the African settings of Margaret Laurence's first works, none of which seems to have a counterpart in the novels of Australian expatriates (although Clive Barry has written of an Australian in Africa in *The Spear Grinner*), then substantial differences do appear to exist between the expatriate quests of writers from Australia and from Canada, and between the depiction of exile in their work. An investigation of these differences might lead to further illumination of the complex interaction which takes place between a writer, his work and his society.

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