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The Internationalists: Australian writers and contemporary Greece

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The Internationalists: Australian Writers, Expatriates and the Greek Experience

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Australian writers and the allure of Greece

George Johnston and Charmian Clift, who lived on the Greek island of Hydra from 1955 to 1964, linked Australian literature to Greece in a culturally distinctive manner that is frequently obscured by the romantic myths surrounding their legacy. Like many expatriate Australian writers who have produced works of fiction and non-fiction abroad, these two iconic Australian writers used their international experience to expand the ‘imaginative map of Australia’ (Clunies Ross 90). As Paul Genoni and Tanya Dalziell point out, the sojourn of the two writers on Hydra over a nine-year period is ‘one of the most mythologised episodes in Australian literary history’ (Genoni and Dalziell 1). Their lives, and their experiences on the island, are well documented and have inspired biographies, fiction, photo-essays, a play, and an upcoming feature film.¹ The expatriate community, in which they lived, is also an enduring source of fascination internationally, in part because of the presence of the charismatic Canadian singer and poet, Leonard Cohen, and his connection to the island, which has been much discussed since his death in 2016. Nick Broomfield’s recent documentary, *Marianne and Leonard: Words of Love* (2019), underscores Cohen’s ongoing association with Hydra.

Johnston wrote his novel *My Brother Jack* (1964) while he and Clift lived on Hydra, and with it he said he ‘rediscovered Australia.’ Johnston told Wilfrid Thomas in a radio interview after winning the 1964 Miles Franklin Literary Award that he had rejected Australia, and that it, in turn, had spurned him after he made the decision to leave in 1951, at a time when he believed the nation was devoid of a mature cultural life. As he later recalled, ‘There didn’t seem to be an appreciation for writing, theatre or art even though there were some things happening’ (Johnston ‘Interview’). *My Brother Jack* has remained one of Australia’s most popular novels since its publication.² Its story is as much about the humiliations of the class system in Australia as the burden of war on soldiers and their families. The character Jack Meredith has been described by Brian Matthews in his introduction to a later edition of the book as the ‘stereotypical Aussie’ (xv), and elsewhere as ‘the epitome of the mythical Australian’ (Wilde et al. 505). Johnston’s novel portrays Jack as a failed warrior, and the successful man Davey—a character Johnston based on himself—as a ‘traitor’ to his class.

In 1965, soon after the couple returned to Australia, Clift adapted the novel for ABC television, with a ten-part black and white series that was exceptional in scale and authenticity for the period (Pender). Clift openly opposed both the Vietnam War and conscription, and her adaptation retains the novel’s critical perspective on the effect of World War I on the key characters. As its producer Storry Walton told George Johnston’s biographer, Garry Kinnane, criticisms about the series were raised in Parliament, with allegations that it was, ‘dirty, and the work of a leftist writer who was receiving the favours of a leftist cell in the ABC’ (251).

While Clift and Johnston lived in Greece for a near-decade, they never engaged directly in the politics of their host nation, most likely because they were not citizens and were therefore

dependent on local officials to extend their residency permits on a regular basis. The romantic mythology that surrounds the couple and the multiple tragedies of their lives masks some of the critical facts of their expatriate experiences. As Clift's biographer Nadia Wheatley has demonstrated, the two writers constantly constructed drama around their own lives, and window-dressed the 'failure' of their Greek venture in various ways. Clift and Johnston's impulsive decision to purchase a house on Hydra trapped them on the island, with its 'terrible landscape,' 'mummified by heat,' a desiccated 'naked, hairless country' (Clift in Wheatley 339). With the constant suspicion of them as *xeni*; anti-British sentiment associated with the continued occupation of Cyprus; and their failure to learn the language, Clift and Johnson never achieved the status of locals to which they aspired. They did, however, focus their interests on the ancient history and mythological heritage of the country.

Further, Clift and Johnston's sojourn in Greece occurred at the same time as many Greeks were leaving the impoverished country to begin new lives in Australia. While the couple's stay on Hydra seemingly enabled Johnston to rediscover Australia and then write the book for which he is now best known, contemporary Greek-Australian authors' writing about Greece allows them to rediscover the country their parents left behind through their own Australian sensibility. Among the authors born in the 1950s and 1960s, and who may be said to be currently in the prime of their writing lives (Christos Tsiolkas, Angelo Loukakis and Vrasidas Karalis), are several members of the generation whose parents left Greece to live in Australia after World War II. All of these authors are fluent Greek speakers. Christos Tsiolkas's epic novel *Dead Europe* (2005) presents a savage story of a young Greek-Australian visiting Athens and Greece, and other countries in Europe, and exposes contemporary Greek decadence, decay, social division and racism, within a complex political maelstrom that precedes the latest financial disaster in the oldest democracy. Angelo Loukakis's novel *The Memory of Tides* (2006) portrays the life of an Australian soldier in Crete during World War II; and in a recent memoir, *The Demons of Athens: Reports from the Great Devastation* (2014), Vrasidas Karalis explores the anarchic horrors of contemporary Athens, documenting a return journey to his homeland in 2011, after many years living in Australia. Other Australian writers of this generation, however, write of Greece as Hellenophiles, individuals with no familial link to Greece but who have come to admire the country in much the same way as Johnston and Clift. Meaghan Delahunt and Susan Johnson are two such authors. The work of Delahunt and Johnson links Australian literature and Australian life to Greece. Like Johnston and Clift, both Australian writers have found inspiration, solace, peace and sociality in Greece. Neither author has any family connection to Greece, but both have spent considerable periods of time in the country.

Susan Johnson's *The Broken Book*

For Johnson, the connection to Greece, and to Hydra in particular, derives from her reading of the works of Johnston and Clift, and her intense interest in their lives. Johnson began her career as a journalist, as did Johnston and Clift, and after publishing some seven novels, a memoir, and various essays and short stories, she imaginatively revisited the couple after returning to Australia following many years living in London. Johnston's novel *The Broken Book* (2004) re-imagines the lives of Clift, Johnston and their children during their period on Hydra through a fictional narrative. The novel focuses on the volatile relationship between Katherine Elgin and David Murray, and it is in this evolving drama that the strength of the novel lies, as it dissects failure, disappointment and bitterness that resonates with the historical record of the Johnstons' own marriage while remaining speculative and fictional.

The Broken Book also re-visits the idea of the expatriated self, an idea fully explored in Johnson's earlier novel, the masterly *Hungry Ghosts* (1996). It achieves this through the story of an imaginary expatriate writer, Katherine, who closely resembles Clift. Johnson's reflection on the actual lives of Clift and Johnston is both homage and a sophisticated rewriting of a romantic and tragic story of expatriation, failure and the disintegration of a marriage. The novel shifts from present to past, with extended periods set on the Greek island in the early 1960s, when Katherine and David Murray are both trying to write fiction, with two small daughters and very little money. This dimension of the novel draws on the realities of the lives of Clift and Johnston in Hydra as they struggled constantly to earn enough money to survive at a time when the influx of tourists and celebrities to Hydra was driving the cost of living ever higher. The real and the imaginary writers also faced constant setbacks with their books including the failure to produce sufficient income.

The narrative fabric of Johnson's novel is significant because it couples intensity of emotion with economy of language and directness of expression to cut through the Clift and Johnston myth. The material conditions of the lives of Katherine and David evoke constant worry and weigh heavily on their marriage. The novel shifts back and forwards in time, so that the rift in the couple's relationship is embedded mid-way through the novel before the narrative returns to the earlier days prior to the professional and sexual competitiveness that soured the marriage.

Back in Sydney, in 1969, Katherine meditates on the bitterness between the pair:

Sitting here snivelling in dirty pyjamas, with a glass of whisky and a cigarette, David already slumped off to bed.

We have not slept together as man and wife for the last two years. Something in me is repulsive to him.

I wonder if there was some precise moment when he first began to hate me. Is hatred too strong a word? . . . One of the first rough and buckled moments came when he found himself shackled to a dependent wife and two unexpected children just when he had planned on leaving journalism and devoting himself to writing full-time. My eyes were suddenly wrenched from him to the children; he was bitter that we had barely a year together before I was pregnant. He was bitter, too, when he found out I planned to keep writing, that I was the kind of wife who cared more for the arrangement of a sentence than the arrangement of a nutritious family tea . . . He began to hate those moments when my mind was elsewhere, when all my focus and passion and will was on my work instead of him. (113–14)

Johnson's prose is striking in this passage. The fictional meditation offers a theory about what happened between Clift and Johnston yet transcends the real-life models for the characters, exposing a far more general truth about marriage. Wheatley's biography of Clift portrays Clift as a woman who found herself torn between normative ideals of the homemaking, attentive mother and her compulsion to write and to maintain adult friendships. Wheatley reveals that Clift, after the birth of her youngest son, Jason, on Hydra, gave much of the care of the baby up to a young widow Zoe, who looked after the baby in her own home overnight (348). As a result, Clift was left free to pursue her writing and to enjoy a full social life with the island's growing circle of expatriates. Johnson's character, Katherine, concludes 'Perhaps in his

deepest self he does not believe a woman can be an artist' (114). Clearly, Katherine and Clift disagree. If her husband doubts her claims to be an artist in her own right, however, he does approve of Katherine as a writing collaborator, much as Clift was for Johnston. One of the tasks Katherine undertakes as she sits in her walled garden is to remember expressions used by her father when she was a child, in order to help David authentically recreate for his novel Australian dialogue and life, a time when children were called 'nippers,' unattractive women were 'old boilers,' and brash young men 'two bob lairs':

The Island Greece, 1961

All day I have been sitting in our little walled garden, remembering . . . On the creaky blue table in front of me are my notebook and pen, a scattering of lemon blossoms, an old journal with a broken spine. Above my head the Greek sky, lemon trees, bitter oleander, two plum trees. Sounds reach me: the knock of donkeys' hooves, the voices of the boys leading them up and down the lanes, Soula's nervous chickens, the cries of children from the school on the hill. It is not yet hot enough to force me indoors—within weeks the sun will batter us senseless, but for the moment the air is sparkingly fresh and everything appears newly rinsed. (77)

Above my head, up on the roof, my husband is working in his studio, writing his novel which he hopes will bring us salvation. We are a house of memory here, every door opens on the past, every corner cherishes a lost moment. For months now I have been helping David to remember—after the girls are in bed we sit together on the roof, drinking ouzo, while I talk about Australian food we used to eat when I was growing up or long-forgotten expressions. (79)

It is clear that this story of the couple consciously reconstructing Australian social life is close to the facts of Clift and Johnston's exile in Greece. Johnston wrote *My Brother Jack* amid the turmoil of their actual struggles to sustain their family and marriage. But it also draws on Johnson's own experience of writing as a young mother, the exhilaration of discovering mythology in Greece, the dark truths of an oppressive marriage, and the experience of writing about Australia from the distance of another country (or countries, as she lived in France and the UK for many years).

One of the striking features of *The Broken Book* is the portrayal of lonely mothering in the context of an unravelling marriage. To this end, Katherine is portrayed as a sensual character, submerged and frustrated by the duties of wife and mother, mirroring what is known of Clift. Johnson presents the raw anger and sexual jealousy between Katherine and David in a telling description of the two of them arguing at a *kafenion* by the harbour on Hydra:

I begged David to dance with me but he wouldn't.

'I do *not* want to dance with you, Katherine! I do not want to dance with a drunk woman with smudged lipstick making a fool of herself.'

'I'm not drunk. I'm enjoying myself. Come on, dance with me. Please?'

He leaned across the table and put his head close to mine.

‘You are embarrassing me. Stop acting like a fifteen-year-old slut.’

Anger rushed at my throat. ‘At least I haven’t been sitting there all night like a bloody corpse!’ (233–34)

In its rendering of this public drama, Johnson portrays Katherine’s love for her husband, her loneliness and her sense of sexual agency and freedom. Johnson’s characterisation sustains a view of Clift that resonates clearly with Wheatley’s biography, but Johnson largely bypasses the complexity of Clift’s careful construction of a public persona that Wheatley argues drove Clift while causing her considerable pain. Instead, pictured in a small, white-washed stone house, Katherine looks after her small daughters, longing for some time to write while also dedicating herself to David’s novel. The novel continues to shift between present and past, as Katherine recalls her first encounter with David in 1946—once again Johnson imagines Johnston and Clift’s lives as the basis for her own characters:

I was twenty-two and demobbed for six months, working at the *Herald* for four—we met in the foyer of the Fairfax building in the city. I knew who he was, his fame preceded him, and I recognised him immediately. He was on his way into the building with the editor Vince Atherton and I was on my way out to cover one of the Lady Mayoress’s sticky garden parties for *Women’s News*. When we looked at each other it was a bodily shock: erotic, charged. I felt my lips twist up in that way they used to when I was young and embarrassed, so that people thought I was smirking . . . When David came into the bar I had already been there for half an hour and downed three shandies. ‘Murray! Murray, over here!’ half a dozen people shouted as he came in and he was immediately surrounded. The famous war correspondent himself! The poet of war, of suffering . . . (81–82, 83)

Later, living a penurious existence in the Aegean, Katherine can barely explain their decision to set up home in Greece: ‘How arrogantly optimistic of us (me in particular) to think we could make a living here’ (149). Johnson punctures the myth of the idyll through this character who reflects that she must

face the fact that this experiment has failed. David knows it too, but neither of us dare yet say it out loud. Very bad sales for his last book, his London agent suggesting his publishers might not be interested in his next one, our last remaining money running out. . . . Here is the hard truth: we no longer have enough money to go to Athens and buy new shoes for our children.

We will have to go back to Australia like whipped dogs, our tails hanging. We will have to go back and admit that the nay-sayers were right, you cannot slip out from under the net and survive. It’s true, the world makes you live by the rules or else it makes you pay and pay. It turns you into home owners and mortgage payers and pension savers and insurance holders, it makes you live near good schools for the children. (197–98)

While the novel follows many of the contours of Clift’s and Johnston’s lives, it ingeniously avoids many of the actual events of their last years, opting for an emotional truth that seeks to comprehend Clift, or a version of Clift, in its own story. For example, the novel avoids both Johnston’s illness and much of the family conflict that dogged Charmian in Sydney when she

re-established herself as a popular columnist. It does confront her depression, however, portraying Katherine as frustrated and disappointed at the way her life has circled back towards journalism, away from the kind of writing she longed to create, and her ongoing disenchantment with the arid complacencies of Australian suburbia. And towards the end of *The Broken Book*, Johnson portrays one of Katherine's daughters, Anna, returning with her own husband and children to the island 37 years after leaving it. Anna finds herself sick with nerves, unable to look for her own childhood home until she comes upon it by accident. Johnson's prose here is unadorned yet richly evocative:

I circled the house. Round the walled garden where I saw the tops of lemon trees. Past the plum tree planted by my mother, I went around the back of the house and down the other side. The window to the kitchen was open, protected by a new metal grill. I squatted down and peered in. The cool of it hit me in the face: its deep cave smell, and its dark quiet. I could see straight through to the walled garden at the other side. (300)

In the daughter's gentle memory of Katherine, as she forgives and mourns, she thinks about her mother: 'Here I am, your difficult daughter Anna grown old . . . remembering that I once sailed a frail boat with you into the Saronic Sea' (306).

Johnson's fiction meditates on the experience of real and imagined lives, lived away from family, friends and country. She examines how the experience offers both a protective and disabling mask for those who wear it, exploring the distancing effects of writing and art, and the potential to deepen the imagination and understanding of the self. *The Broken Book* offers a coming to terms with *patria* at the most profound level as well as a nuanced portrayal of how that occurred for Johnston and Clift on Hydra as they recreated Australia through memory and conversations. Johnson's novel also confronts the mythology of the life of Clift in its offering of a lyrical and moving counterpoint to Clift's rich accounts of life on Kalymnos in *Mermaid Singing* (1956), and Hydra in *Peel Me a Lotus* (1959). In this way, Johnson celebrates Clift as a writer and as a woman via her character Katherine, trapped on an island and facing her own insufficiencies, the oppressiveness of marriage and the deprivations of expatriatism.

Meaghan Delahunt and the politicised expatriate

Whereas Johnson's *The Broken Book* telescopes in on the intimate lives and thoughts of its characters, Meaghan Delahunt's fiction actively examines the way history is worked through in the lives of individuals. Its notable feature is the direct way in which it confronts political events, ideological divisions, social conflict, and class war in different settings, and considers how these impact on individual lives.

Delahunt sees herself as a political activist and writer. She is a self-described second generation Irish-Australian, who was born in Melbourne in 1961 to Irish Catholic parents, the oldest of four children. During her student days at Melbourne University, studying for an arts degree, she joined the Socialist Workers Party (SWP), and dedicated the next seven years of her life to the cause of communism, working as a union organiser in the automotive industry and writing for the party newspaper. Her break with the SWP came when she asked for some time off and was refused; and she describes her resignation as a kind of excommunication, with former friends disowning her and referring to her as an 'anti-party element' (Delahunt, Personal Communication).

Today, she is a committed internationalist and a pro-European citizen of Scotland, identifying strongly with the campaign for Scotland to leave the UK in the wake of the 'Brexit' referendum of 2016. In Delahunt's view, to be an internationalist in contemporary Scotland means being a part of a wider political and social agenda:

. . . to be pro-Europe, anti-Trident renewal, anti-fracking, pro-immigration, pro-land reform and the only way we can safeguard any vestige of the welfare state is to get independence. Scotland's 'civic nationalism' is not based on race or ideas of supremacy or Empire . . . It puts education, health, welfare at the heart of what a government should be about. It's about self-determination. (Delahunt, Personal Communication)

In this internationalist spirit, Delahunt has also had a long association with Greece. After leaving Australia in 1992 she has lived and worked in Athens for extended periods, and now spends part of each year on Naxos. She speaks Greek fluently and translates Greek poetry into English. In an essay on 'The Artist and Nationality' (2013) Delahunt suggests that while she likes to think of herself as an internationalist, she also recognises the importance of 'strategic nationalism' in overcoming oppression (21), and in the essay she reflects on the difficulties of applying that idea both personally and politically.

Delahunt's political commitments are never far from the surface of her fiction, and it is this dimension of her work, the rich framing of lives in a political context, that makes Delahunt an important contemporary writer. Her first novel, *In the Blue House* (2001), attracted significant critical acclaim, and announced the ambition that is a hallmark of her following texts. Collectively, Delahunt's writings tackle momentous historical events, ideologies, religious culture and complex political situations. Each novel is carefully researched and renders the settings and particularities of its political and social context with authenticity and depth. Delahunt's fiction is often dark in mood, with frequently disturbing subject matter, but switches to an ironic, playful and satirical mode swiftly and deftly, particularly in her short stories. *In the Blue House* won the 2002 Commonwealth Writers Prize and the Saltire First Book Prize (awarded by the Scottish Arts Council); it was also longlisted for the Orange Prize. Meticulously constructed and plotted, the novel presents an extensive cast of characters to imagine Leon Trotsky's exile and the Russia he fled.

This range and agility are important features of Delahunt's writing. Her second novel, *The Redbook* (2008), charts the meeting of three strangers in Bhopal, India, one of them a Tibetan refugee whose family were killed in the Bhopal gas explosion 20 years earlier. It is an intense and elegantly crafted story about two relationships. Part of the political framing of the story in *The Redbook* is highly relevant to Delahunt herself as a woman living in Scotland, as it deals with a Scottish character and the violent sectarianism he experiences as a child.

Delahunt's third novel, *To the Island* (2011), presents the story of an Australian woman called Lena who travels to the Greek island of Naxos seeking to meet her biological father with whom she has had no contact. Delahunt recalls, 'I felt that I hadn't finished with that idea, of a woman moving from one place to another (Greece) out of a sense of bereavement or grief' (Delahunt, Personal Communication). Lena is single, a former dancer and now a teacher of the art, and she brings with her on this journey her seven-year-old son, who is central to the narrative. The plot trajectory of *To the Island* is simpler than those of Delahunt's earlier novels, and the characterisation is tightly focused on Lena, Alex, and Lena's biological father, Andreas. The evocative details of place are vivid, and the political story turns on what Lena

learns gradually about her father and his captivity and torture during the 1960s. Through the emerging story of her father's experience and its lingering impact on both his and Lena's lives, Delahunt explores the intergenerational effect of violence. The context and precursor to this violence is the coming of 'the Colonels,' when in 1967 after just 15 years of parliamentary democracy, a group of military officers seized power over Greece in a coup. Colonel Georgios Papadopoulos assumed the office of Prime Minister and scores of political activists were imprisoned under a brutal regime. It was not until 1975, after much unrest, that Greece declared itself a parliamentary republic under a new constitution. The novel flashes back to the time when Andreas is in prison so that the reader gradually learns what he endured. The narrative also recalls, in a poignant parallel theme, the famine that wracked Greece in 1941, killing thousands of people, and the lingering aftermath in the behaviour of the older people Lena and Alex encounter on Naxos.

The novel opens in 'the rush of a Piraeus morning,' as Lena and her son prepare to take the ferry to Naxos soon after they arrive in Greece. The prose is direct and taut:

Her small son trailed behind her, fresh from sleep and still rubbing his eyes. With her free hand she dragged their case across the cracked footpaths. They headed away from the station towards the harbour, past the African vendors with their bags and watches, past the stray dogs and one-eyed cats and the men selling *koulourakia* from small carts. She was exhausted now and couldn't get warm. Lena silently practised her Greek and hid behind her sunglasses, her scarf wound tight as a bandage. She found her son's hat in his pocket and insisted he wear it . . . Inside herself a hard wind tugged at abandoned buildings, a black sea cut the horizon; all the people gone. (1)

The emotional fabric of the novel is woven from the painful and difficult negotiations between Lena and Andreas over several months on Naxos during a harsh winter. Andreas confronts Lena with a barrage of questions about her marital status: 'You are alone?' From nowhere it seemed, he came out with the question. 'No husband?' (95). Lena weathers the onslaught, explaining that marriage is not necessary, revealing at this point that she is not alone, and that she has a son. And he regards her as both family and a foreigner, introducing Lena and Alex to his village friends as 'family from Afstralia.' Sitting opposite him as the others withdraw, Lena confronts her father's hesitant introduction:

She swallowed hard. *Family from Afstralia?*

I must get accustomed. A daughter. A grandson. He shrugged. It will take time.

She stirred some sugar into her coffee and didn't look at him. It was true, she conceded. *Family from Afstralia.* He wasn't denying her outright. After all, she'd used the same line in Athens with Lambros and Fotini. (132–33)

Through these difficult interactions, Delahunt conveys the political mindset of her Greek father towards Australians. Although he makes her feel 'small,' she challenges his views of Australians seeking the sun and 'culture' and his view of Australia as new. 'Australia is old. To a colonial mentality it's new,' she shoots back at him (89). He is spiky about the superficiality of tourists: 'You love that we are the poor man of Europe? Pah! . . .' he scoffs. At the same time, Delahunt interweaves the political climate and its revelations into these family tensions:

They sat watching the news from the mainland. . . . Suddenly the news flashed up. More riots in Thessaloniki, in Athens. Police had beaten a protestor and things had got out of hand. The barman turned the volume up. Just as suddenly, Andreas was on his feet, gesturing and yelling at the screen: *Ai sto diaolo!* Lena translated quickly, Go to the devil. The kafe went quiet and the men from the football corner got out of their seats. Some came over to where they were sitting . . . Andreas turned to her. This problem is from the time of the Colonels. Before, even. Who trusts *oi batsoi*? No one. And now this. These bastards—bad training, no education.

He lit a cigarette and pointed to the TV screen. There will be trouble, Lena. Big trouble. In the time of the Diktatoria, there was a special squad of police. Anti-terrorist. No one disbanded this squad. Not the Left or the Right. Under PASOK and old Papandreou it doubled. So much for socialists, he said. *Ax!* Here, the police are used to doing what they like, so they do anything. (133)

Gradually Lena gets to know Andreas and his neighbours who live with this political context and its histories that she does not entirely share. Lena stays longer than anticipated on the island and readies the house for her father's homecoming on the first day of spring, after a spell in hospital. Andreas urges her to stay in Greece, and in that moment, 'with Andreas in hospital and everything uncertain, she realised that she had actually built a life. Something solid, something she was good at and that she could go back to. It came to her, the selfish, unbidden thought: I have a life in Australia' (225).

Like the expatriated writers Johnston and Clift, Lena gains both perspective and resolve on the island regarding the possibilities of life in Australia, but leaving her father becomes difficult. Andreas shows her the scars of his torture and they argue. He chastises her for not cherishing what she has in Australia and she reproaches him for failing to acknowledge her as his daughter. On a June morning Lena and Alex board the ferry for the journey back to Piraeus in order to return to Australia:

The ferry horn sounded long and low and melancholy. Alex had also turned to look. He tugged at her sleeve. *Pappous!*

Andreas was moving quickly towards them. He took his cap off and waved it high in the air. She paused as the ramp levered up and he got close enough that she could hear: *I kori mou*, he called out, first in Greek and then in English, My daughter.

And then more loudly so that everyone could hear, he called again as if nothing else mattered, waving until his hand hurt and the ferry disappeared and he could no longer see them, his voice ragged as the sea. (258)

In so far as they have helped re-internationalise Australian literature, Delahunt and Johnson join a longer tradition of expatriate Australian authors whose voices carry across seas and respond to those that echo across time. It is clear that Greece has been, and continues to be, a place of escape for Australian authors, a place of productive expatriation, a place to develop, explore and re-imagine internationalist ideals, and a parallel understanding of the working class in Australia. At least two different generations of Australian authors have found solace

and inspiration in the Greek Islands. The appealing sociality and freedom that Johnston and Clift found on Hydra is also vivid and real to the current Australian writers who have found inspiration on Hydra and Naxos, yet it is set against the turmoil in Greece over the last ten years. In their fiction Susan Johnson and Meaghan Delahunt have contributed to world literature, ‘worked through’ the effects of history on character and reimagined the ideals of internationalism that animated the lives and work of significant expatriate Australian authors of earlier generations.

NOTES

¹ In addition to the biographies mentioned in this essay, works on Clift and Johnston include Max Brown’s *Charmian and George: The Marriage of George Johnston and Charmian Clift* (2004); the 2008 ABC Radio documentary ‘Persona: The Parallel Lives of Charmian Clift’; *Hydra*, a play by Sue Smith, which dramatises the lives of Clift and Johnston, and premiered with the Queensland Theatre Company in March 2019; and *Theatre of Dreamers*, a forthcoming (2020) novel by Polly Samson also based on the imagined lives of Clift, Johnston, and other key players in the Hydra expatriate colony. A film adaptation of the book by Genoni and Dalziell is also in development.

² Nathanael O’Reilly notes that the novel was voted tenth in the Australian Society of Authors 2003 Top Forty Books List, and that it has never been out of print (130).

⁴ The literary achievements of Greek Australians were first documented by George Kanarakis in *Greek Voices in Australia* (1987), an anthology of prose, poetry and drama dating from 1900.

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