

# Cultural Transmission and Australian Literature: 1788-1998

Although Dr Johnson had died four years before the First Fleet arrived, his loyal Boswell was still alive, as was Edward Gibbon, the author of *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*. So also were many others whose names suggest that, for English literary culture, the later eighteenth century was an age (like all ages) of transition. Among these were James 'Ossian' McPherson, whose liberal 'translations' from the Gaelic in the 1770s had aroused curiosity about a mysteriously remote, heroic past, and Bishop Percy, whose *Reliques of Ancient British Poetry* (1765) had stimulated a revival of traditional popular forms. When Australia was settled, on the eve of the French Revolution, Robert Burns was still enjoying the first success of his Kilmarnock poems. A romantic 'revival' was already well underway, though what the later nineteenth century was to see as a romantic revolution still lay ahead, with William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge's *Lyrical Ballads* (1798), Walter Scott's *Lay of the Last Minstrel* (1805) and *Waverley* (1814), and Lord Byron's *Childe Harold* (first two cantos, 1812)—a revolution that was to have its impact on writers in the infant colonies.

The weight that literature contributed to the 'cultural baggage' accompanying the garrison and their convict charges is not known precisely, though the thousands of religious books the chaplain, Richard Johnson, brought with him suggest it was considerable. It certainly included copies of those key literary texts, the Bible, *The Book of Common Prayer* and hymnals; and most likely copies of Shakespeare

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and *Paradise Lost*, or, if not actual copies, memories of these and other classic texts which helped form the thoughts of the better educated, such as Watkin Tench, on their arrival. The first dramatic production in the new colony was of Farquhar's *The Recruiting Officer*, and in his journal Ralph Clark recorded reading *The Tragedy of Douglas*. Robert Dixon has deduced from other journals that Adam Ferguson's *Essay on the History of Civil Society* and Oliver Goldsmith's *A History of the Earth and Animated Nature* must have been among the books brought by the First Fleet, and we could assume more works of natural history or philosophy.<sup>1</sup> As well as the religious literature (which included Swedenborgian tracts), practical handbooks, accounts of travels and voyages, and George Johnston's volumes of the *Spectator* there could also have been, in an age of rising literacy, almanacs, chapbooks, and other popular forms of information and amusement. Again, if there were not actual copies, there would have been memories, for by this time print was a familiar supplement to oral culture, even for illiterate auditors.

A hand printing press was included in the equipment provided for the settlement, even though no one could use it, and it was not until early in the next century that the first book (*New South Wales General Standing Orders*, 1802) and the first newspaper (the *Sydney Gazette*, 1803) were produced on it—well after accounts of the settlement and the first book written for an Australian audience (chaplain Richard Johnson's address to the inhabitants of the new colonies) had been published in London. But what arrived physically with the First Fleet was less important an influence on the written expression of experience in the new land than the literary culture that had been left behind and which continued to be transmitted. As the influences that Wordsworth, Coleridge, Scott and Byron were to have on writers in the Australian colonies demonstrate, cultural transmission was not (in one of the metaphors of the kind favoured by later literary historians) an initial planting of acorns from the mighty oak of English literature in an alien soil, but a continuing, and changing, process.

The concept of 'English literature' was still relatively recent.

1 Michael Richards, *People, Print and Paper: A Catalogue of a Travelling Exhibition Celebrating the Books of Australia, 1778–1988* (National Library of Australia, Canberra, 1988); Robert Dixon, *The Course of Empire: Neo-Classical Culture in New South Wales* (Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1986), p.3.

Traditionally, and etymologically, literature referred to letters, or writing generically. In the universities it meant primarily the study of classical authors, whether poets and dramatists, or historians and philosophers. Since the Renaissance, it had been argued that writers in English had as much right to be seen as contributing in their language to the tradition of letters and poetry since the ancients as the most admired French and Italian models. Indeed, Sir Philip Sidney had claimed that English had literary advantages over the romance vernaculars. Later, Dryden and Johnson had argued that Shakespeare deserved to be ranked with the bards of other languages, ancient and modern, and Johnson's *Dictionary* was an endeavour consistent with such claims for England's national literature. Although, it went without saying, a gentleman did not need to study authors in his own tongue (unless he were interested in its origins), it was assumed he would appreciate Chaucer and Shakespeare, enjoy Fielding, Smollett and Sterne, and take a lively interest in contemporary authors. A galaxy of editors, including Johnson, had restored Shakespeare's text according to the principles of classical emendation and, out of an initially antiquarian set of interests, a historical sense of the national literary tradition emerged in the later eighteenth century. This was manifested in the three volume *History of English Poetry* by William Warton, poet laureate and Professor of History at Oxford, and in Johnson's *Lives of the English Poets* which postulated a canon and set the terms for much subsequent critical discussion (the publication of both was completed in 1781).

On the eve of the machine printing age—another eve on which Australia was settled—the concept of English literature, in a sense approaching our understanding of literature as aesthetically valued imaginative writing, was established and being propagated by a flourishing periodical press and the production of histories, biographies and collections of reprints for an expanding reading public. Advances in print technology made the national literature popularly available, especially for education. Shakespeare, Milton and Dryden were seen as the pre-eminent figures in a literary tradition that expressed the common culture of a people sharing the same language, environment (climate was held to be particularly important) and historical development. Romantic perceptions of literature as the expression of the 'genius' of the 'race' were to intensify the patriotic appeal of this tradition throughout the nineteenth century. George Nadel's *Australia's Colonial Culture*

(1957) gives numerous examples from the 1820s of how the idea of literature was central to concerns about the colonies' cultural, as distinct from merely material, progress: 'Britain, it was frequently asserted, was great not because of her might but because of Shakespeare and Milton; her glory lay in her poets'.<sup>2</sup>

The excesses of bardolatry in the high Victorian period epitomised the perception of England's national literature at the height of imperial power. This was the perception institutionalised also in the Australian colonies, where cities were graced with statues of the Swan of Avon, public buildings and private mansions displayed scenes from his plays in stained glass and ceramic tile, suburbs had networks of streets named after characters and settings in them, and his works themselves, bound Bible-like, dignified respectable suburban parlours. Even when names for the federal capital were being considered, King O'Malley, who was generally credited with being responsible for its founding, preferred that it be called after Shakespeare, 'the greatest Englishman ever born' or failing that, Burns or even Longfellow.<sup>3</sup> Successful Scots ensured that their national poet, Burns was memorialised as often as the Bard; and expressed their love of Scott by bestowing names like Abbotsford, Ivanhoe and Waverley on suburbs.

Whatever books had arrived with the First Fleet, it was soon apparent that the ideal of the mother country's literature (selectively perceived by English, Scots, and Irish settlers) had been imported to the new country. But so, simultaneously, had the idea of a national literature itself. If the colonies were to advance, if expectations of a future nation were to be fulfilled, then literature would have to take root and flourish in them. Admittedly it would be in the same language and forms as English literature, but it would reflect Antipodean differences in the key cultural determinants of climate, environment and social development.

2 Nadel, p.73.

3 *Commonwealth Parliamentary Debates*, vol. LXV, p. 1809, 7 August 1912; O'Malley's speech at the Dedication ceremony on 12 March 1913, published in *Concerning Canberra: The Christening and Dedication of Australia's National Capital and Its Dire Neglect* (Excell Press, Melbourne, 1936) p.9. It is in this speech that O'Malley refers to Shakespeare as the 'greatest Englishman ever born'; O'Malley was apparently disappointed when his Cabinet colleagues declined his alternative suggestion of Burns and Longfellow. See A. R. Hoyle *King O'Malley: 'The American Bounder'* (Macmillan, South Melbourne, 1981) p.120.

## Neoclassicism and Romanticism

Most of the writing produced during the first half century of settlement in New South Wales and Van Diemen's Land was not literature in the more recent and educationally institutionalised sense, but chronicles, journals of exploration, and handbooks for prospective immigrants, which were published mainly in London. Yet, as some of the more original literary history of recent years has shown, literary pre-conceptions could enter documentary writing. Paul Carter observes of Major Thomas Mitchell, the mid-nineteenth century explorer, that he

... arranged his landscapes to meet certain literary rather than geographical criteria ... for aesthetic, rather than scientific reasons, he treated the mountains and rivers as so many 'topoi' [conventional topics] in an epic poem, as familiar themes about which to cultivate his own reflections.<sup>4</sup>

As a translator of the *Lusiads*, Mitchell was an exceptionally literary explorer—though one who instructed the surveyors under him to retain Aboriginal names for features whenever these could be established<sup>5</sup>—and the Portuguese national epic provided him with a model for his account of his expeditions, and affected his observations. His literariness, though, was only an extreme instance of a more general tendency. Leichhardt's Port Essington log, for example, was thought by King to be too routine and he edited it, adding the requisite classical allusions and expressions of elevated sentiment to make it accord better with readers' expectations.<sup>6</sup>

In *The Course of Empire* (1986), Robert Dixon observes that

From about 1815—the year of Governor Macquarie's spectacular progress through Cox's Pass to Bathurst—it seemed increasingly possible that Australia, too [like the United States], might become

4 Paul Carter, 'River of Dreams', *Age Monthly Review* 2 (September 1982), 5–6.

5 C. W. Salier, 'Thomas Livingston Mitchell', *Journal of the Royal Australian Historical Society* 17 (1931), p.37.

6 Paul Carter, 'Major Mitchell and Triangles of Life', *Scripta* 4 (November 1986), 213–50; *The Road to Botany Bay* (Faber, London, 1987), pp.99–135.

a continental empire. By that time the composition of journals of inland exploration had become a matter of negotiation between the geographical facts of the country traversed and the requirements of an increasingly epic form.<sup>7</sup>

These epic conventions, coming down through poetic tradition from Lucretius and Virgil, were also ideological: they presupposed a world-historical view of the ever-westward course of civilisation as empires rose, flourished, decayed, and the process began all over again. As Adam Smith has it in *The Wealth of Nations*, a nation passed through four stages: the nomadic, pastoral, agricultural and commercial before returning to barbarism. The explorer seeking the site of some future Athens or Rome, reversed these stages as he moved westward from the commercial centre, through agricultural then pastoral districts into the interior where the Aborigines pursued their primitive way of life.

The same topoi, or commonplaces, about 'the history of civil society' were shared by those more manifestly literary figures, the early colonial poets. The closing lines of W. C. Wentworth's non-prize winning poem at Cambridge, *Australasia* (1826) have often been quoted this century, usually with amusement at what seems their precocious bluster.

And, oh Britannia! shouldst thou cease to ride  
Despotic Empress of old Ocean's tide;— ...  
May this, thy last-born infant,—then arise,  
To glad thy heart, and greet thy parent eyes:  
And Australasia float, with flag unfurled,  
A NEW BRITANNIA IN ANOTHER WORLD!

Yet the topos of the inexorable decline and fall of empire, as conventional as Wentworth's heroic couplets, justifies any apparent presumption on the part of the 'currency lad' poet. The consolation he offers for Britain's

7 Dixon, pp.79–80. This section is heavily indebted to Dixon's researches, and those of other members of the 'Sydney school' of literary history, including G. A. Wilkes and G. A. Turnbull's editions of Charles Tompson's *Wild Notes, From the Lyre of a Native Minstrel* (Sydney University Press, Sydney, 1973) and Wilkes's *The Colonial Poets* (Angus and Robertson, Sydney, 1974). See also Richard White's review of Dixon, 'History's Epic', *Age Monthly Review* 6 (September 1986), 7–19.

inevitable decline, the corollary that Australia will assume its imperial role, is an assertion of British-Australian loyalty.

Whereas at first most colonial writing in book form was documentary and published in England (as later most Australian novels were also published in London or Edinburgh), contributors to local newspapers and magazines embraced a very elevated conception of literature.<sup>8</sup> Despite apologies throughout the century for the colonies being at an early stage in their development, and necessarily preoccupied with material considerations, locally published verse was anything but 'primitive' or naive. Michael Massey Robinson, a convict commissioned by Macquarie to deliver patriotic odes on public occasions, was proclaimed by the Sydney Gazette to be 'the laureate bard of the colony'. His 'ODE for the Queen's Birthday, 1816' celebrates in very mannered couplets the crossing of the Blue Mountains, and predicts the prosperity soon to follow.

Where yon Blue Mountains, with tremendous Brow,  
Frown on the humbler Vales that wind below,  
Where scarcely human footsteps ever trac'd  
The craggy Cliffs that guard the ling'ring Waste;  
O'er the wild Surface of the Western Plains,  
Aerst the lorn Range of Isolated Trains:—  
Where from the Birth of Time the slumbering Soil  
Had born no Traces of the Peasant's Toil—  
Behold, where Industry's encourag'd Hand  
Has chang'd the lurid Aspect of the Land;  
With Verdure clothed the solitary Hills,  
And pour'd fresh Currents from the limpid Rills;  
Has shed o'er darken'd Glades a social Light,  
And BOUNDLESS REGIONS OPEN TO OUR SIGHT!

This passage could serve well to illustrate an orthodox view of the colonial artist as lacking the appropriate diction and forms (or the

<sup>8</sup> Elizabeth Webby, 'Writers, Printers, Readers: The Production of Australian Literature to 1855', in Laurie Hergenhan, ed., *The Penguin New Literary History of Australia* (Penguin, Ringwood, 1988), pp.113–25 makes the point that most 'imaginative' literature in the period was published in Australia, the 'non-imaginative' in London.

palette and technique in the case of painters) to render the actual with fidelity. While Robinson names the Blue Mountains, there is nothing in his categorising Augustan diction to locate his setting in the Antipodes. One legacy of romanticism was the assumption that literatures in new societies developed like individuals: after an initial imitative phase, followed by adolescent assertiveness, came eventual maturity and confident individuality. According to this assumption Robinson's clearly imitative ode exemplifies colonial artistic immaturity (though if we are to employ such psychological criteria, it is also paradoxically quite sophisticated). Scholars who, rather than dismissing such poems as imitative, have asked what they were imitative of—for neo-classical poetry was by definition imitative—have revealed some of the complexities of cultural transmission and adaptation as they affected colonial poets.

Since the Renaissance, English poets had aspired to create epics in the vernacular that would provide their literature with its equivalents of Homer and Virgil. American and Australian poets imbued with neo-classical understandings of imitation were aspiring to record their country's part in that universal history epics represented. By the early nineteenth century there had been a number of long patriotic odes celebrating the discovery, settlement and future of America as the culmination of history. These could serve very aptly as models for patriotic Australian versifiers with epic visions and ambitions; and Robinson's ode begins not, as quoted above, with the approach to the Blue Mountains and the revelation from their westward slopes of God's providence, but with Columbus's discovery of the new world.

The first collection of verse from a 'currency lad' was Charles Tompson's *Notes of a Native Minstrel* (1826). As some of his contemporaries were unkind enough to observe, the young Tompson's poems were also highly imitative. His 'Black Town', located where Governor Macquarie had established an institution for Aborigines is, like Goldsmith's *The Deserted Village*, an elegiac contemplation of a once idyllic social setting that has suffered the depredations of time and change. It is filled with formal apostrophe as the poet contemplates the ruins.

Ill-fated hamlet; from each tott'ring shed,  
Thy sable inmates perhaps for ever fled



(Poor restless wand'ers of the woody plain!  
The skies their covert—nature their domain)

And he is lead, with dreadful inevitability, to a closing meditation on that great commonplace, the vanity of human wishes.

Thus, shall Man's proudest, noblest projects fade,  
And, with their founder, in the dust be laid;  
Th'imperial palace and the lowly cot  
Alike must share this universal lot,  
And bow before th'all conquering scythe of Time—  
Such was proud Ilion's fate and such (alas!) is thine!

As with Robinson and Wentworth, the conventions adopted and the allusions invoked are not those of English poetry alone, but also of that longer tradition of 'universal' poetry and history, which had its source in Homer singing of the fall of 'Ilion', and which Australian poets were now joining.

Today the most highly esteemed of later colonial poets is Charles Harpur, rather than Henry Kendall or Adam Lindsay Gordon, who were more highly regarded in their lifetimes and well into this century; yet most of Harpur's considerable output of verse, and some of his miscellaneous prose, have only become available because of the recent attention of scholars—a telling example of how literary history is continually in the process of being constructed, or reconstructed.<sup>9</sup> The son of convict parents, Harpur began writing in the 1830s. He was aware of the English romantics, as well as their illustrious predecessors back to Homer (some of whose passages he 'translated'). His political

<sup>9</sup> Current recognition of Harpur as a major writer of the colonial period is indicated by the following: the chapter on him in Judith Wright, *Preoccupations in Australian Poetry* (Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1965); Adrian Mitchell, ed., *Charles Harpur* (Sun Books, Melbourne, 1973); Leonie Kramer, 'Imitation and Originality in Australian Colonial Poetry: The Case of Charles Harpur', *Yearbook of English Studies* 13 (1983), 116–32; Elizabeth Perkins, ed., *The Poetical Works of Charles Harpur* (Angus and Robertson, Sydney, 1984); Michael Ackland, ed., *Charles Harpur: Selected Poetry and Prose* (Penguin, Ringwood, 1986); Paul Kane, 'Charles Harpur and the Myth of Origins', *Australian Literary Studies* (13 October, 1987), 146–60. Perkins's edition of the complete poems runs to over one thousand pages.

interests as a republican and a democrat led him to publish satires and lampoons, formal public verses and parodies: and in longer, philosophically ambitious poems he donned the prophetic mantle of the native bard. Some of these like 'The Bush Fire' and 'A Kangaroo Hunt' employ 'local colour' subjects common to colonial poets and painters.

The longer poem which has received most attention since it first appeared in the *Sydney Weekly Register* in 1845 (in a shorter version; like most of his work it was constantly revised) was 'The Creek of the Four Graves'. This 'settler's tale of olden times', as the first line announces it to be, is about a party of five who set forth in search of 'new streams and wilder pastures'. Attempting to cross 'barrier mountains', presumably the Blue Mountains, they are attacked by Aborigines in the night and only the leader, Egremont, escapes to tell the tale. From its opening the poem invokes a *mélange* of styles through Egremont's chivalric name, the Chaucerian or Malorian way in which his party is described as 'meetly equipt', the echoing from Milton's 'Lycidas' of 'fresh fields and pastures new'. For his contemporaries, as much as for later readers, such heavily allusive diction could appear awkward and pretentious. But if aesthetic judgement is postponed sufficiently to consider the intentions behind Harpur's self-conscious literariness, these, like those of earlier colonial poets, prove revealing for the uses he was trying to make of the received tradition.

As Egremont's party makes its way westward (so following the 'course of empire'), they discover a creek lying between them and the 'new Appenines'—a naming that suggests the possibility of a coming civilisation. Whereas Robinson's, Wentworth's or Tompson's generic descriptions do not seek to number the streaks of the wattle, Harpur presents the creek with a particularity that is more romantic. It

... ran, shaded up  
With boughs of the wild willow, hanging mixed  
From either bank, or duskily befringed  
With upward tapering, feathery swamp-oaks—  
The sylvan eyelash always of remote  
Australian waters ...

By this creek the party camps for the night, and as the sun set

O what words, what hues  
Might paint the wild magnificence of view  
That opened westward! Out, extending, lo,  
The heights rose crowding, with their summits all  
Dissolving, as it seemed, and partly lost  
In the exceeding radiancy aloft:  
And thus transfigured, for awhile they stood  
Like a great company of Archeons, crowned  
With burning diadems, and tented o'er  
With canopies of purple and of gold!

A Miltonic magnificence apotheosises the local grazier and his hands  
who, in a memorable, Platonising conceit, seem at dusk

To hang like mighty pictures of themselves  
In the still chambers of some vaster world.

Set close to the beginnings of civilisation in Australia, before the pastoral fringe of society had extended beyond the Blue Mountains, the poem implies, by allusion, that it is also set at a phase of development that corresponds to the universal origins of 'civil society'. In the passage quoted above, 'Archeons' conflates the root of 'ancient' with the term for an early form of classical Greek government (it also has Hermetic associations). Elsewhere, Homeric epithets and periphrases abound—Egremont has his 'death-dealing tube' to pit against the Aborigines' 'heavy clubbed nulla-nullas'—and local customs and diction are assimilated to epic convention: the party's heroic feast of broiled rashers is served on 'quadrants from an ample damper cut', and washed down with 'cannikins' of tea. While invoking the English literary tradition from Chaucer on, but drawing (most heavily from Milton) on those elements that related this tradition in turn to 'universal poetry, Harpur is not attempting to see Australian landscape through 'English spectacles'—as later critics assumed colonial poets were—but to embrace that wider conception of poetry that, since Aristotle, has seen the poet as superior to both the historian and the philosopher, and the epic as the ultimate form, the foundation of any national literature.

Harpur engages with his lofty poetic purpose in meditative passages. Egremont, on watch in this sublime landscape, contemplating the

transfiguring effects of moonlight (the romantic elements are accumulating), considers the 'subtle interfusion' of human nature with

... all serene and beautiful and bright  
And lasting things of Nature.

This transcendentalist, and all but explicitly Wordsworthian, apprehension of a correspondence between man's higher nature and permanent natural forms is disturbed by the attack of the Aborigines, after which the poet himself reflects on how

... this lovely world hath been  
Accursed for ever by the bloody deeds  
Of its prime Creature-Man. Erring or wise,  
Savage or civilised, still hath he made  
This glorious residence, the Earth, a Hell ...

A traditionally Christian, and Miltonic, awareness of the problem of evil is here in conflict with romantic 'natural supernaturalism'. Regardless of Harpur's ultimate success, or not, in resolving such opposed metaphysics, his poetic engagement with them provides a fascinating instance of his endeavour to adapt a complicated set of influences to his own familiar landscape. In the poem's historical setting this becomes another lost Eden, the site for re-enacting the primal fratricide of Cain and Abel. Through the encounter between settlers and Aborigines, the creek finds its name, and the Muse a habitation in New South Wales. The site passes into the record of history: 'for many changeful years' travellers would come across the four graves covered with leaves

from the old trees which there  
Moaned the same leafy dirges that had caught  
The heed of dying Ages ...

In its opposing of Wordsworthian to Miltonic elements, 'The Creek of the Four Graves' represents a more general transition from the neo-classical influences on earlier figures, like Robinson and Tompson, to the romantic and Victorian influences on Kendall, Gordon and others in the second half of the century. The poem's explicit concern with the

Adamic process of naming, of assimilating a new world to the language of 'universal' literature and history, also makes it typical of most other colonial poetry; indeed most other colonial writing, including the journals of the explorers. In 1839, Ralph Waldo Emerson had written: 'What shall be the substance of my shrift? Adam in the garden. I am to new name all the beasts in the field and gods in the sky'.<sup>10</sup> Yet in Australia, as in Emerson's United States, new naming had been mainly old naming when it came to identifying settlements and topographical features.

Poetic contemplation of Australia as another possible Eden or Arcady repeated tropes that had already been employed in that other new world. Awareness of the United States as a model for Australia's cultural maturation, its social progress and even its political development was widespread among the colonial intelligentsia and reading public. From the 1820s on, American writers, pre-eminently Washington Irving, Fenimore Cooper ('the American Scott') and William Cullen Bryant, were becoming internationally recognised and their works passed into circulation here. Increasingly, American writers and the idea of an American literature were to provide an alternative set of influences; these may ultimately have derived from Europe (through a European settlement more diverse in its origins than Australia's), but they had already been assimilated and modified to an extent that could be seen by those so disposed as anticipating similar developments in the Antipodes.

Arguments for the necessity of a distinctive national literature had intensified in the United States following Sydney Smith's imperious question in the *Edinburgh Review* (which, like other British quarterlies, was read here) in 1818: 'But why should Americans write books, when a six week passage brings them, in their own tongue, our sense, science and genius?'. In the early nineteenth century, America's lack of romantic 'associations'—the complete dearth of ruined castles was most often instanced—seemed to exclude it as a fitting scene for literature. But following E. T. Channing, who had lectured Emerson, Thoreau and Oliver Wendell Holmes at Harvard, it could be claimed for American

10 Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Journals*, entry for 18 October, 1839, reprinted in Stephen E. Whicher, ed., *Selections from Ralph Waldo Emerson* (Houghton Mifflin, Boston, 1957), p.139.

literature that 'Its charm is its nativeness', and that the lack of the traditional, but also feudal and decadent, properties of romance testified to the republic's social and moral superiority.<sup>11</sup> This classical defence could also accommodate a native romanticism: while it enjoyed the lack of feudal 'associations', the United States had natural literary 'resources' of its own that put Europe's to shame.

W. H. Gardiner wrote in the *North American Review* in 1822

... we are not ambitious that scenes so purely imaginary should be located on this side of the Atlantic ... we have no particular longing after this species of American castle building ... The truth is there never was a nation whose history, studied with that view, affords better or more abundant matter of romantic interest than ours.<sup>12</sup>

Or, as Samuel L. Knapp put the second point more forcefully in his *Lectures on American Literature* in 1829: 'What are the Tibers and the Scamanders measured by the Missouri and the Andes?'<sup>13</sup> These rhetorical stances were commonplaces before they received their most memorable form in Emerson's *The American Scholar* (1837)

I ask not for the great, the remote, the romantic, what is doing in Italy or Arabia; what is Greek art or Provencal minstrelsy; I embrace the common, I sit at the feet of the familiar, the low... We have listened too long to the courtly muses of Europe.<sup>14</sup>

and in *The Poet* in (1844)

America is a poem in our eyes; its ample geography dazzles the imagination, and it will not wait long for metres.<sup>15</sup>

Such assertions, echoed in Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* (1855), itself a

11 Edward Tyrrell Channing, from *The North American Review* (1816), reprinted in Richard Ruland, ed., *The Native Muse: Theories of American Literature: Volume 1* (Dutton, New York, 1976), pp.89–90.

12 W. H. Gardiner, from *The North American Review* (1822), in Ruland, p.189.

13 Samuel A. Knapp, *Lectures on American Literature* (1829), in Ruland, p.171.

14 Emerson, in Whicher, p.79.

15 Emerson, in Whicher, p.238.

potent influence on some Australian poets (especially Bernard O'Dowd later in the century), re-echoed in Australia, where awareness of American writing has been documented from quite early in the century. In 1838, that great admirer of the United States as a political model, John Dunmore Lang, reprinted William Ellery Channing's lecture calling for an American declaration of literary independence, *The Importance and Means of a National Literature* (1830), in his Sydney paper the *Colonist*. Harpur addressed two sonnets to Emerson, and grappled with the ideas of the New England transcendentalists, as well as with those of their romantic European predecessors—a perhaps significant difference between these being that, to European eyes, the Americans' 'Nature', like the Australian bush, was a wilderness. The direct influence of Poe on Kendall and Gordon, and of Hawthorne's historical romances on Marcus Clarke, have been pointed out, and such examples could be multiplied.<sup>16</sup> But more important than American influences on individual writers in Australia was a widely-held (though not uncontested) view that the United States had developed a literature which, while it was still in the same language, was distinctively its own. This could be seen as the prototype of what eventually, but inevitably, would evolve here.

### **Romance and Realism**

The earliest sustained critical assessment of a body of local writing is Frederick Sinnett's 'The Fiction Fields of Australia' which appeared in the *Journal of Australasia* in 1856. Writing after the gold rushes, which had intensified and diversified cultural contacts with the northern hemisphere, Sinnett opens with a playful consideration of the view that Australia's lack of romantic 'associations' prevents writers from finding indigenous subjects appropriate for literature. Like American critics before him, and Henry James after him, Sinnett mockingly laments this lack of 'associations' before proclaiming the romance of Australia itself as a fitting subject for fiction. Australia has ample local colour'; the challenge for writers was to subordinate it to a 'picture of universal life

<sup>16</sup> On poetic influences generally, see Vivian Smith, 'Poetry', in Leonie Kramer, ed., *The Oxford History of Australian Literature* (Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1981), pp.271–426; on American influences, especially Hawthorne's on Clarke, see Michael Wilding, ed., *Marcus Clarke* (University of Queensland Press, St Lucia, 1976), pp.xv–xvi; xxiv

... modified by Australian externals', instead of producing 'books of travel in disguise'. Sinnett's judicious balancing of universal and local criteria in engaging with the troublesome issue of the relationship between a new national literature and the linguistic parent culture was clearly informed by American precedents. But while the declarations of American cultural independence had been made in the predominantly romantic first half of the nineteenth century, the comparable calls in Australia came in a period of reaction against romanticism, or 'romance' as Sinnett lightly disparages it, after the middle of the century. While an admirer of Scott, Sinnett sees the literary imagination's fascination with distant times and exotic places as a phase that has been superseded by the realism of Dickens and Thackeray. Among colonial fictions he prefers Catherine Helen Spence's *Clara Morison*. for its imaginative depiction of human nature in an unobtrusively detailed South Australian setting.<sup>17</sup>

The very year Sinnett's essay appeared, George Eliot, in the *Westminster Review*, extended Ruskin's term 'realism' (in *Modern Painters*, also 1856) to the discussion of literature and Emerson used it of Swift's style. Realism, or a range of 'realisms', predominantly in fiction, characterised the new (and for many disturbing) literary developments in Europe, the United States and, by the last decades of the century when a generation of predominantly native-born writers emerged, Australia. Realism was not a simple, single movement, as the names of some of the major, influential figures identified with it (and often, confusingly, associated simultaneously with naturalism) will suggest: Flaubert and Zola, Turgenev and Dostoevsky, George Eliot and Henry James, Ibsen and Verga... Nor was it a sudden, unprecedented departure from preceding conventions, not at any rate for writing in English. Such 'colonial romancers' as Marcus Clarke, Rolf Boldrewood, Ada Cambridge and Rosa Praed frequently shared settings and styles with writers committed to unillusioned representations of contemporary Australian reality. Romance and realism co-existed, often even in the work of the same writer who, with a change of mood, could vary documentary reportage with melodramatic improbabilities or sentimental

17 Cecil Hadgraft, ed., *The Fiction Fields of Australia* (University of Queensland Press, St Lucia, 1966); reprinted in John Barnes, ed., *The Writer in Australia: A Collection of Literary Documents: 1856 to 1964* (Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1969).



evasions. The realism that reacted against what the *Sydney Bulletin* in 1881 called ‘romantic ideality’ itself provoked reactions against its own presumed amorality and fascination with the sordid. The decades of reaction against romance were also the decades of aestheticism, of French symbolism, the Celtic Twilight, and the popular ‘new romances’ of Ouida, Rider Haggard and Robert Louis Stevenson. These international movements and controversies were reflected locally and entered tendentially into different views of Australian literature as the colonies moved towards Federation.

In 1898, Macmillan of London published the substantial *Dictionary of Austral English* by E. E. Morris, Professor of Modern Languages and Literatures at the University of Melbourne. Conscious that his fellow-Englishmen might imagine that the title could refer only to slang, Morris wrote in his introduction that

The phrase Australian English includes something much wider than slang. Those who, speaking the language of Shakespeare, of Milton, and of Dr Johnson, came to various parts of Australasia, found a Flora and Fauna waiting to be named in English ... Since the days when ‘Adam gave names to all the cattle and to the fowl of the air and to every beast of the field’ ... never were so many names called for ... Much of Australian nomenclature is due to ‘the man in the bush’—more precise address not recorded.<sup>18</sup>

Morris related the Adamic process inherent in much earlier writing (and of which Harpur’s ‘The Creek of the Four Graves’ has already provided an example) to a theory of semantic change. English, as well as receiving additions from Aboriginal and Maori words, took on different meanings in Australasia because of the different referents. As with French in Canada, or Spanish and Portuguese in Latin America, the mother tongue effectively became another language. Because of the totally different environment this semantic shift was even more pronounced with English in Australasia than in North America; as an example, Morris gave the even by then hoary instance of what Christmas connotes in the Antipodes.

The stimulus for Morris’s lexicographical labours had come from

18 Edward A. Morris, *A Dictionary of Austral English* (1898; facsimile edn, Sydney University Press, 1972), p.xii.

James Murray's request for Australasian entries for the *Oxford English Dictionary*. Like Murray's, Morris' work was compiled on historical principles and he drew on literature in its older and wider sense: books of natural history, explorers' journals, and newspapers of the day, as well as belles lettres. Boldrewood, Clarke, Gordon, Kendall—most of the representatives of the national literature as perceived from Melbourne, or London—provided Morris with sources, but he also drew on Henry Lawson, whose first separate collections of verse and prose appeared only two years previously. Sensitivity to his audience's presumed prejudice that 'Austral' English could comprise only slang perhaps led Morris to give disproportionate attention to botanical and zoological terms, at the expense of the colloquialisms that were being exploited by contemporary 'local colour' realists.

Morris, President of Melbourne's Shakespeare Society (which, with nearly five hundred members, boasted of being the largest in the world),<sup>19</sup> was also literary editor of the *Australasian Critic* (1890–91), a general review edited by Professors T. G. Tucker and Baldwin Spencer of the University of Melbourne. An unsigned article on 'The Characteristics of Australian Literature' in the November 1890 issue has been attributed to him. Taking issue with Clarke's claim that the beginnings of a national school of poetry had been made by Gordon, the writer of the article queried whether a 'too conscious attempt to be Australian' is likely to be productive because, all too often, authors 'are not content to let the country and the nation be the setting in which the subject is framed' but want to make them the subject. In the December issue of the *Critic*, another unsigned article attributed to T. G. Tucker, Professor of Classical and Comparative Philology at the University, appeared on 'Australian Short Stories'. The writer found their 'Australianness' obtrusive and feared that English readers would form the impression that

big cities are unknown in Australia; that the population consists of squatters, diggers, stock-riders, shepherds, and bushrangers; that the superior residences are weatherboard homesteads with wide verandahs, while the inferior ones are huts and tents.

19 Ken Stewart, 'The Colonial Literati in Sydney and Melbourne', *New Literature Review* 6 (n.d.), 8–19.

The writer's embarrassment at the impressions English readers of Australian short stories might form of the country are best appreciated if we note that this was written in 'Marvellous Melbourne'.

Whatever the strictures of the Melbourne literati against 'too conscious nationalism', and their misgivings about unrepresentative images of the national life drawn from the bush and the past, they contributed greatly to institutionalising the idea of a national literature. Predominantly Englishmen who had come to the colony in their youth, they were committed to the belief of the morally elevating and socially improving role of literature which is now synonymous with the name of Matthew Arnold. They had replicated the societies, the reviews, even the bohemia of their idealised literary metropolis, London, and had granted local writing a place on their map of English literature. Indeed, they had canonised writers like Clarke and Gordon through their biographical, critical and literary historical studies (including Morris's *Dictionary*) but as Anglo-Australians still drawing on and contributing to the mother culture. Apart from Patchett Martin, they could not muster any enthusiasm for Banjo Paterson (not while, as Professor Tucker wrote, Homer waited on the shelf), Henry Lawson and the new school of Sydney *Bulletin* balladists and sketch writers: nor, for that matter, could James Smith as critic for the *Argus* muster enthusiasm for the '9 x 5' sketches of the Heidelberg school of painters.

The perception of Australian literature from pre-Federation Melbourne was not necessarily shared by the other colonies or by a later and native-born generation. The Sydney *Bulletin*, which has been central to accounts of the literary nationalism of the 1880s and 1890s, provides the chief example of a different set of cultural attitudes in the same period. Associated with the paper was a majority of the better-known, and mostly native-born, writers who have subsequently been seen, and who saw themselves, as establishing a literature that was not Anglo-Australian, like that promoted by Melbourne's literati, but aggressively national and distinct, a new beginning. By now the subject of numerous interpretations and revisions, the *Bulletin* as a weekly intended for, and largely written by, a national audience was necessarily eclectic. Any generalisation about its character is open to exception. It was radical, republican and democratic, but also racist, misogynistic and chauvinistic; it fostered a popular literature, especially in the ballad and short story, yet also published much that was

conventionally literary, and even imported. Such eclecticism makes the *Bulletin* of the period fascinating for its apparently contradictory roles of being the most nationalistic of late colonial papers and also a conduit for contemporary European and American culture. The nature of this transmission though was not a passive reception of overseas influences, but a considered selection of those thought to be most pertinent to local circumstances.

The editor most responsible for determining the policies of the paper and setting its characteristic tone was J. F. Archibald, ardent republican and rabid Anglophobe, who discovered and encouraged Lawson, Paterson, Price Warung and a host of others. Archibald was not only a nationalist appalled by British Philistine 'cant' in the colonies, but also so ardent a Francophile that he changed his given names, John Feltham, to Jean François and concocted a more appropriate lineage for himself. Editorially, he enthused over Zola, Maupassant and other contemporary French writers, while deploring the decadence of metropolitan English culture. Translations of Maupassant stories appeared regularly during the early years of his editorship, as one of the kinds of models it offered aspiring contributors. With another Francophile, A. G. Stephens, who joined the paper in 1894 and became its literary editor, Archibald encouraged readers to take an interest in the most stimulating current thought and writing overseas, not merely in England.<sup>20</sup> In the mid-1890s, the Bulletin Book Exchange, a service to readers, listed titles by Dostoievsky and Tolstoi, George Eliot, Mark Twain and W. D. Howells, Olive Schreiner, Engels, Lombroso and Nordau, and C. H. Pearson's *National Life and Character*. Tolstoi, Twain and Howells were represented by a dozen titles each (though Ouida scored highest with twenty-seven, and Henry Kingsley was respectably represented also).<sup>21</sup> From the late 1890s, Christopher Brennan, under Stephens's encouragement, began contributing articles

20 Douglas Jarvis, 'The Development of an Egalitarian Poetics in the *Bulletin*, 1880-1890', *Australian Literary Studies* 10 (May 1931), 22-34; 'Lawson, the *Bulletin* and the Short Story', *Australian Literary Studies* 11 (May 1983), 58-66.

21 Grace Diana Ailwood-Keel, 'Homespun Exotic: Australian Literature 1880-1910: A Study of Writing in Australia in the 'Nationalist Period', with Particular Emphasis on Overseas Influence', PhD thesis, University of Sydney, 1978.

on classical writers, the French symbolists and German romantics. Although contributions on such topics from the least nationalistic, and most erudite, of Australian poets of the time do not sit easily with the simple stereotype of the *Bulletin* as 'the bushman's Bible', they indicate its editors' commitment to widening that awareness beyond the colonial inheritance of English culture.

Since the mid-century gold rushes on both sides of the Pacific, direct cultural contact with the United States had increased enormously. American books, magazines, newspapers (some in special 'steamer' editions for the Pacific area), entertainers and, as they were seen by some, political agitators had followed the miners from California. In the decades following the rushes, the vernacular 'local colour' realism and dialect humour of American writers, Bret Harte, Mark Twain, and Joaquin Miller especially, were reprinted and imitated in the Australian press. In 1879, the year before the Sydney *Bulletin* was founded, the San Francisco *Evening Bulletin* observed that

It is an interesting study to notice the phases of English literature as they have developed outside Great Britain. The modes and habits of thought are different. Writers of all grades are insensibly influenced by their environment. The American novelist treats his subject from a different standpoint to the English author. He sees men, women and life under other aspects. Let any person also take up a work of fiction from the pen of an Australian and he will be struck with its distinctive features. Still stronger do these appear with journalism, as one of the fields of English literature is considered. The English newspaper appears dry and heavy to the average American. The American treats its topics with too much levity for the genuine John Bull. The Australian journalist is a cross between the two, but his writing is marked by a flavour peculiar to the conditions by which he is surrounded.

The Sydney *Bulletin's* editorial tone, and its policy of fostering vernacular sketches, stories and ballads, had much in common with the 'new journalism' of the United States, especially that of the West Coast. Archibald had originally modelled much of the paper's format on American practice. According to Stephens, he had taken the name from the San Francisco *Evening Bulletin* and ideas from other papers

in that city: the *News-Letter*, the *Argonaut*, and Ambrose Bierce's *Illustrated Wasp*. Archibald also admired Dana's New York *Sun*, and from that city Livingston Hopkins was enticed to become the *Bulletin*'s most celebrated cartoonist, 'Hop'. Features to be inextricably associated in local readers' minds with the Sydney paper, such as the miscellaneous observations of the typical Australian contributed as 'pars', or its blunt, often insulting 'Answers to correspondents', can be found in earlier West Coast papers.

After the turn of the century, on his way to England or shortly after his arrival there, Henry Lawson wrote a sketch entitled 'The Sydney *Bulletin*' which was intended for English readers. In it, he has Archibald advising a potential contributor, the archangel Gabriel: 'Every man has at least one story in him ... Write as simply as you can ... Don't strain after effect ... Write carefully and write only when you have something to tell the people ...'.<sup>22</sup> As a policy for fostering a national literature (as distinct from observing, as Melbourne's literati were, an Anglo-Australian evolutionary step towards it), Archibald's advice joined with manifestos and movements in Europe and the United States that preferred 'fidelity' and 'verisimilitude' in subject and language to what was seen as literary 'artificiality'. But the tensions between realism and romance were found not only in the editorialising of Archibald, Stephens and others, or in such controversies as those that attended the 1884 prosecution of a Sydney bookseller for stocking Zola's *Nana*, or the 1889 Melbourne production of Ibsen's *A Doll's House* (a few months after the London premiere of the English translation).<sup>23</sup> These tensions can be found also in the writing of the period, and within the work of the two writers often later perceived as the single most important contributors to a distinctive national literature, Henry Lawson and Joseph Furphy.<sup>24</sup>

22 Henry Lawson, 'The Sydney "Bulletin"', in *Henry Lawson: Complete Works*, compiled and edited by Leonard Cronin with introductions by Brian Kiernan, 2 vols (Lansdowne, Sydney, 1984), I, pp.872-73.

23 Douglas Jarvis, 'Francis Adams: Australia's Champion of Realism', *New Literature Review* 12 (n.d.), 25-32; Harold Love, ed., *The Australian Stage: A Documentary History*, (University of New South Wales Press, Kensington, 1984), pp.107-08.

24 As tensions between realism and romance in Lawson's work are discussed extensively in the next essay, some paragraphs have been omitted here.

While Lawson was no great reader beyond his adolescence, Furphy, who had received no more formal schooling in the rural area of Victoria where he grew up, acquired an awesome reputation as an autodidact and as the epitome of the literarily encyclopaedic culture of the Mechanics Institutes: he once composed a hundred lines of verse by taking single lines from the poems of English and American writers, many of them now forgotten. When he finished his *magnum opus*, *Such is Life*, he sent it, on Archibald's advice, to A. G. Stephens. After revisions, exclusions, and delays, it was published in book form by the *Bulletin* in 1903.

Because of its self-conscious literary play, *Such is Life* is finally unclassifiable by genre. Is it a 'picaresque novel à la Fielding-Richardson' (one of Furphy's descriptions), a philosophical novel, a precursor of modern metafiction, or an antinovel?—all claims which have been advanced. At first it was not taken to be fiction at all, but at face value, as the reminiscences of a former Riverina bullock-driver, which at least acknowledged one of the kinds of realism it embraces, the documentary and the didactic. One way of perceiving it is as an extended, ironic dramatisation of the tensions between realism and romance, truth and fiction, pragmatism and idealism. Tom Collins, its narrator and Furphy's literary alter ego (the pseudonym was a colloquialism for rumour-monger), begins by offering to present a 'fair picture' of Riverina life by writing up his diary entries for a week in 1883. Having embarked on this plan, Tom then finds that it would oblige him to include the bad language of some sheep drovers, so he changes the basis of the selection to consecutive months. But another unsavoury occurrence he has not anticipated (the 'lambing down' of two fencers by a shanty-keeper; a situation given many permutations in Lawson's stories) forces him to select extracts on yet another principle, one which, unsuspected by Tom, invests his faithful chronicle with a novelettish romantic plot. This despite Tom's vow to forsake 'the flowery bye-ways of the romancer' for the realist's slice of life.

Romance in general, including the 'new romance' of Ouida, Rider Haggard and Robert Louis Stevenson is scoffed at, but a special scorn is reserved for Henry Kingsley's *The Recollections of Geoffry Hamlyn*. This classic Anglo-Australian station romance is replete with the stock properties of colonial fiction that Tom has avowed to eschew: 'The outlawed bushrangers; the lurking black-fellows; the squatter's lovely

daughter, awaiting the well-bred greenhorn ...'.<sup>25</sup> Collins continues the story of Kingsley's dashing Major Buckley beyond the closing pages of *Geoffry Hamlyn* (in which, having made his fortune in the colony, he returns to England and reclaims his ancestral seat) by telling us, with evident satisfaction, how he ended his days as the notorious 'Hungry' Buckley of Barooka station.

*Such is Life* is the most extended example of the 'local colour' realism of the period. It is crammed with examples of dialect humour; it presents the life of a region in a detail that invites comparison with the numerous late nineteenth century European and American novels that present 'scenes of provincial life'; and Tom, with his incessant curiosity and determination, is a parody of the 'scientific' or naturalistic novelist. Always seeking the universal behind the particular to explain 'the ageless enigma of Life', Tom frequently misses the obvious beneath his nose and is a figure of fun to others. Because he is preoccupied with his own pedantry, he even fails to notice that the boundary rider Nosey Alf is a woman. An exchange between them reveals obliquely Furphy's consciousness of the vexed issue, as it seemed, of whether the artist's first obligation was to truth or morality. They are exchanging 'swapping books' of the kind available through the *Bulletin* Book Exchange. Tom's is a Zola novel, Nosey Alf's is *Elsie Venner* (1861), an early 'scientific' novel by Oliver Wendell Holmes.

'I don't think it does a person any good to read Zola', remarked the boundary man gravely.

'Not the slightest, Alf—that is, in the works by which he is represented amongst us. But do you think it does a person any good to read Holmes? Zola has several phases; one of them, I admit, blue as heaven's own tinct; but Holmes has only one phase, namely, pharisaism ... Zola is all honest; he never calls evil, good; whilst Holmes is spurious all through.'<sup>26</sup>

Whether Furphy is presenting a view of life through Tom Collins—whether he is demonstrating a philosophical and moral viewpoint or

25 [Joseph Furphy], *Such is Life: Being Certain Extracts from the Diary of Tom Collins* (Bulletin, Sydney, 1903), p.271.

26 *Such is Life*, p.245.



adopting an unillusioned but comic perspective—has been a keen critical issue, and is likely to remain so, given Furphy's playfulness. Equally engaging is his parodic play with literature from Shakespeare to contemporary romancers. *The Buln-Buln and the Brolga*—originally a chapter excised from a typescript of *Such is Life* but not published until 1948—is an extended play (an appropriate word, as most of it is in dialogue) with the issue of the truth of fiction. Tom Collins is in Echuca, and an old school friend, Freddy Falkland-Pritchard, comes up from Melbourne with his family to visit him. At the same time Barefoot Bob, an acquaintance from 'up country', is passing through. Fred and Bob compete for the attention of Mrs Falkland-Pritchard by swapping stories of their exploits. The attractive Mrs Falkland-Pritchard writes occasionally for the *Bulletin* and the *Australasian* and is interested in philology. Fascinated by the antique associations of Aboriginal names, she approves of the town being called Echuca, for 'the map of this young land is already defaced by ugly and incongruous names transplanted from the other side of the world'. This hints at the nature of the contest that is to take place: the most plausible lie (for Freddy Falkland-Pritchard is an inveterate liar) will be the one most apparently authentic in its diction and manner.

The city-slicker Fred's tales are couched in the clichés of romance: how he rode at breakneck speed through enemy lines at Sedan to deliver a message to Louis Napoleon; how he fended off an attack by pirates single-handedly; how (*à la* Rolf Boldrewood) he hunted the bushrangers he had wounded down to their lair. In contrast to Fred's thrillingly paced, yet so modestly climaxed tales, Bob's yarns meander, gathering apparently extraneous details and observations as he reminisces about the hazards of exploring the unknown interior in search of water, or of 'dispersing' the savage blacks. Bob and his mate Bat arrive at one station just in time to rescue the squatter and his wife, who has been pinned to the wall by a spear through her frock. On another occasion, after 'dispersing' some cannibal blacks, Bob chivalrously decides to return and despatch the blacks' intended feast, a lubra whose back they have broken ('Please yourself' says Bat).

Laconically delivered in the vernacular, with an often painful attention to *les petits faits vrais* ('Curious thing about the Martini-Henry—you can hardly poke a finger through the hole where the bullet goes, but you could shove your fist in the place where she comes

out.'), Bob's yarns have the ring of authenticity.<sup>27</sup> Only a reader, acquainted with the 'local colour' clichés of colonial fiction, of the kind that Tom Collins explicitly eschews in *Such is Life*, or Lawson in 'The Union Buries Its Dead', would recognise they are as much confections, and as conventional in their own anti-literary way, as Fred's more obviously second-hand fantasies. As with the contrasting in *Huckleberry Finn* of those two other great liars, Huck and Tom Sawyer, Furphy (and like Lawson and Steele Rudd he was a great admirer of Twain) is setting in opposition the romantic and the realistic modes, the debased literary and the anti-literary, or illiterate, the written fiction and the dialect yarn, to the confusion of listeners, and readers, as to what is true and what is merely romance. As in much of Lawson, the internationally current opposition of realism to romance finds a local immediacy.

Although he contributed some poems to the *Bulletin*, as well as articles and reviews, Christopher Brennan's reputation stands at the opposite extreme to that of Lawson, Furphy and the ballad-makers most strongly associated with that paper. Nevertheless, it was a reputation for commanding a wide-ranging set of interests in European literature, ancient and modern, that A. G. Stephens wanted to represent in its pages. Born in Sydney, Brennan had distinguished himself at its university which, like Melbourne's, had been established mid-century, more on the Scottish than the Oxford or Cambridge model. In 1892 a scholarship took him to Berlin for a couple of years, after which he returned to his native city and, eventually, to his alma mater as a teacher of German and Comparative Literature. As poet, critic and scholar—and bohemian who scandalised the wowsers—Brennan was admired by those who yearned after the cosmopolitanism embodied in his writings and his formidable presence. He gave the impression of an engagement with culture in its highest and widest senses. It was not for Brennan to celebrate 'our national literature', addressed to 'mythical individuals called Bill and Jim' and telling of 'imported fauna, such as the horse and the jackeroo' (as he wrote in *Hermes*, the University of Sydney magazine, in 1902), nor was it to celebrate the natural beauties of Sydney, as did such minor aesthetes as Arthur Adams and Victor Daley.

27 Joseph Furphy, *The Buln-Buln and the Brolga and Other Stories* (Rigby, Adelaide, 1971), p.71.

His concern was with that ideal Beauty, that paradisaical state that poets down the ages had apprehended in an imperfect world and aspired to express.

Brennan wrote most of the contents of *Poems [1913]* before the turn of the century, and the cycle was effectively the culmination of his quest to rediscover the sources of essential Life (rather than mundane existence), the well-springs of which arose in such moments as the innocent, open perceptiveness of childhood, the experience of love, human or sacred, and in response to myth, to poetry itself. In the 1897 Prelude to the first selection, 'Towards the Source', the poet recalls 'Sweet days of breaking light' when he first read of 'The northern kingdom's dream' and when

by her well Romance  
waiting the fabled chance  
dream'd all the forest-scene  
a shifting green.

The myths of literature present a succession of lost, ideal pasts: pagan Arcady and the Golden Age, the Biblical Eden, the heroic ages of ancient epic and the romances of chivalry, the romantic poet's own lost world of heightened sensibility in remembered innocence. These are evoked throughout the cycle by an allusive and decidedly literary diction and with metrical variety, to be contrasted with modes which recognise the drabness of existence.

If, for example, as in poem 38 of 'The Forest of the Night' section, the poet is exulted

The banners of the king unfold  
to tend me on my evening way:  
my trumpets flood the air with gold:  
my pride uplifts the vanquish'd day

we remember the contrasting mood in the previous section

The grand cortège of glory and youth is gone  
flaunt standards, and the flood of brazen tone:  
I alone linger, a regretful guest,

here where the hostelry has crumbled down,  
emptied of warmth and life, and the little town  
lies cold and ruin'd, all its bravery done,  
wind-blown, wind-blown, where not even dust may  
rest.

The romantic irony, the recognition that absolute states cannot be attained in mere existence, or even states of exultation sustained, emerges through such juxtapositions of mood. The poetic persona assumes contrary attitudes which are as traditional as the diction in which they are cast; and a conflict of styles ensues, one that brings a full-blown romanticism into opposition with a disillusioned modernism, or anticipation of modernism, such as we find in the urban 'nocturnes'.

Deliberately more specific in setting and personal in tone is the concluding poem 'The droning tram swings westward', written in 1913. It is also more discursive, a summary of the themes of the whole cycle presented as the poet travels one evening through Sydney towards the university. He has descended from his 'tower of hermetic thought' and as his tram passes through town he attempts to establish some identification with, or sympathy for, what Lawson called (in a phrase to be echoed throughout Patrick White's second novel) 'the faces in the street'. Brennan's high romantic quest for transcendence, influenced by the French symbolists but also by the poetic tradition he perceived since Homer, ends in philosophical realism.

While Brennan was engaging with tensions between realism and romanticism at a much more rarefied level than Lawson and Furphy were with their rejections of the conventions of Anglo-Australian romance, he was still contributing to the same literary culture, a culture preoccupied by its continuity with, or its departure from, European influences. *Poems [1913]* assumes that the poet in Australia is heir to traditions as old as Homer and the Bible. Brennan was not alone in this belief. Although he wrote in 1927 that 'Australian poetry grew up long ago and claims treatment as an adult',<sup>28</sup> he has the reputation of

28 Christopher Brennan, 'Some Makers of Australia', *Cerise and Blue, St Joseph's College Old Boys Annual*, 1927, reprinted in T. L. Sturm, ed., *Christopher Brennan* (University of Queensland Press, St Lucia, 1984), p.381. In this address Brennan, with ambivalence apparent, outlines the German romantic view of a 'national literature'.

being the least nationalist poet of the period, and Bernard O'Dowd of aspiring to be the most. Yet both contributed to the *Bulletin*, and O'Dowd also had a classical education, was well versed in the French symbolists (though he rejected their influence), and drew on a similarly wide range of allusions in his writing: Biblical, and Cabbalistic, Scandinavian and Celtic, as well as English. His long poem *The Bush* (1912) muses on whether 'Troy tales of Old Australia' might not be gestating in the womb of 'Mother Bush' and Homers be 'waiting in the gum trees now'.

For Troy hath been, and Homer sang  
Its younger story for a lodgings fee,  
While o'er Scamander settlers' axes rang  
Amid the Bush where Illium was to be.

*The Bush* idealises Australia as 'a temple we are to build', 'a prophecy to be fulfilled', and speculatively, playfully, yet optimistically, anticipates an Antipodean renaissance. From 'Melbourne mob and Sydney push' O'Dowd compiles a catalogue of heroic figures who have contributed already: fellow poets from Kendall on, the dramatist Louis Esson, Archibald and 'Rhadamanthine' Stephens, representatives of the fine arts and sciences. All history and literature will contribute to this next phase of universal cultural evolution, for

Who fenced the nymphs in European vales?  
And Pan tabooed from all by Oxford dreams?  
Warned Shakespeare off from foreign Plutarch's tales?  
Or tethered Virgil to Italian themes?  
And when the body sailed from your control  
Think ye we left behind in bond the soul?  
Whate'er was yours is ours in equal measure,  
Altho' 'tis ours to grace the common treasure  
With Lares and Pentes of our own!

Nationalist as he was, O'Dowd still, like Brennan, saw literature in Australia as being in continuity with European traditions.

Another view was that Australian literature was not an extension of English literature, nor a continuance of the European literary tradition since antiquity, but something new and of its own kind. Although

Lawson's sketch of the *Bulletin* for English readers was not published in his lifetime, it summed up a widely shared view that Archibald's paper 'proved to the people of Australia that they had artists and writers and materials for a distinct literature'. The *Bulletin*, he continued, brought about 'the birth of Australian Nationality, Letters and Art', which was followed by Angus and Robertson issuing 'the first purely Australian series of books' (his own and Paterson's being amongst the first in this series). In 1905, Paterson published his collection of *Old Bush Songs*. He opened it with two Aboriginal chants, because he was not concerned with transmitted literary forms but with 'the rough songs and ballads' that had emerged at successive stages of settlement and the social conflict. While the influence of Irish ballads in particular was admitted, Paterson was interested in tracing the origins of an indigenous literature. His introduction begins by quoting Macaulay's definition of ballad poetry as 'a species of composition which scarcely ever fails to spring up and flourish in every society at a certain point in the progress towards refinement', and as Paterson observes: 'So far as materials for ballads go, the first sixty or seventy years of our history are equal to about three hundred years of the life of an old and settled nation'. Rough as they are admitted to be, the old songs are found to have 'quite a character of their own'.<sup>29</sup>

By Federation, longstanding expectations (themselves imported) of the eventual emergence of a national literature seemed to the patriotic to be well in the process of fulfilment. The critical task was to identify what was distinctively Australian in the writings of Lawson, Paterson and the *Bulletin* school generally; the creative task to build on their achievements. Others, such as Melbourne's Professor Tucker in his *Cultivation of Literature in Australia* (1902), saw such claims as premature and 'self-conscious' nationalism as an impediment to progress. The prevalently evolutionist habits of mind could lead equally to the 'cultivation' of literature being seen in gradualist Lamarckian terms (whether the new growth was seen as a transplanted cutting, or as a branch continuing to draw its sap from the parent tree), or in conflictive Darwinian terms. Such romantic, organicist analogies continued to

29 A. B. Paterson, ed., *The Old Bush Songs: Composed and Sung in the Bushranging, Digging and Overlanding Days* (Angus and Robertson, Sydney, 1905), pp.ix-x; p.xiv.

proliferate and become entangled with each other in this century, as different perceptions of the origins, the distinguishing characteristics, and the development of literature in Australia, and different perceptions of relationships to literature elsewhere were advanced.

### **Realism and Modernism**

For most of this century, the 1890s—usually extended from the beginning of the 1880s to the end of World War 1, and perceived as the ‘nationalist period’—have provided historians and critics with a focus for advancing different views of cultural development. Yet, however they have constructed ‘Australian literature’ and perceived its origins, characteristics, and autonomy, and whatever role they have accorded writers of the 1890s, the period itself could not be said to have ushered in a new age in the ‘development’ of a national literature. In *Australia* (1930), a contribution to a series on different countries in the Empire, W. K. Hancock observed of readers and theatre-goers in Melbourne and Sydney that: ‘Nowhere in the world is there so large a mass of people content to live so much of its life at second hand’.<sup>30</sup> Overwhelmingly, books and magazines were imported from the United Kingdom, and local writing remained the pursuit or interest of a minority within a predominantly English literary culture.

Among contemporary writers Hancock mentioned—as novelists ‘who have at last understood the significance of Australian history as a transplanting of stocks and the sending down of roots in a new soil’—were Martin Mills [Boyd], Henry Handel Richardson, Vance Palmer and Katharine Susannah Prichard (p.261). Boyd and Richardson were both expatriates, the themes of their major works Anglo-Australian. As with a generation of American writers between the wars, expatriation would eventually prove an influential form of cultural transmission (at the time Hancock was writing, Christina Stead had left Australia, while Patrick White was jackarooing before returning to England to complete his education at Cambridge). Boyd’s civilised comedies of manners, drawn from the history of his family which over generations had moved between Melbourne and England, provided elegant departures from the sagas of pioneering that were the more usual form of tracing ‘the sending

<sup>30</sup> Hancock, p.262.

down of roots in a new soil'. Richardson had been deeply influenced by later nineteenth century, particularly French and Scandinavian realism, and related Australian themes and settings to this major movement in her trilogy *The Fortunes of Richard Mahony*, published in its entirety in England and the United States in 1930.

Vance Palmer and his wife Nettie worked as freelance writers and reviewed widely in the Australian press. Nettie promoted Richardson's work strongly once she became aware of it (for there was little cultural transmission within Australia itself, a situation the Palmers set out to remedy), and Vance was committed to winning wider recognition for Furphy. Both were interested in American literature, and criticism such as that of Van Wyck Brooks (whose 1918 essay on creating a 'useable past' was so pertinent to their own interests).<sup>31</sup> Nettie's fluency in a number of languages was reflected in the wide range of her reviewing, which included Spanish-American writing, another possible analogue for Australia's hoped-for renaissance. Her monograph *Modern Australian Literature* (1924) discerned a new, post-colonial stage in the country's literary development. As a tireless correspondent, she communicated her views on this to others, including Hancock and the American Hartley Grattan, who published a pamphlet on Australian literature in the United States, with a preface by her, in 1929.<sup>32</sup>

From his 1905 article in *Steele Rudd's Magazine* until after World War II, when his revisionary *Legend of the Nineties* (1954) appeared, Palmer expounded the bush 'legend' or the 'Lawson-Furphy' tradition. As various studies have shown, the Palmers were much more sophisticated and cosmopolitan than many who dismissed their 'literary nationalism'. They travelled overseas frequently and extensively. Vance had worked on Orage's *New Age* in London before World War I, and was acquainted with English intellectual circles remarkably different from the cultural establishment idealised by Anglophiles in Australia. In Russia, Scandinavia, and (closer to 'Home') Ireland, he had observed the quickenings of national culture, most conspicuously in the theatre, that he hoped would be emulated in his own country.

31 Van Wyck Books, 'On Creating a Useable Past', *The Dial* (1918), in Richard Ruland, *A Storied Land: Theories of American Literature: Volume II* (Dutton, New York, 1976), pp.381-87.

32 C. Hartley Grattan, *Australian Literature* (University of Washington Press, Seattle, 1929).



From 1922–26, the Palmers were closely associated with Louis and Hilda Esson and others in Melbourne who were attempting to establish a ‘national theatre’, the Pioneer Players. Esson, who had spent a few months as a youthful dandy on the boulevards of Paris, was well aware of ‘little theatre’ movements overseas. He had met with Yeats and Synge, and been encouraged by them to write about his own country. Some of his pieces, like the Players’ first production *The Battler*, were modelled on Yeats’s or Lady Gregory’s ‘country comedies’. During World War 1, Esson had seen the Washington Square Players, and some of his stark, realist one-acters, like *The Drovers*—with the laconic precision of an early Lawson sketch—invite comparison with the early realist plays of Eugene O’Neill then being produced in American little theatres. The Pioneer Players had been influenced by Lawson (Palmer had adapted ‘Telling Mrs Baker’ for the stage), but at the same time they could be seen as being in line with international movements.<sup>33</sup>

Among others associated with the Players was Katharine Susannah Prichard. In her writing, she was reacting against the drabness of Lawson’s settings and exploiting the variety of ‘local colour’ Australia had to offer. Hancock noted the influence of D. H. Lawrence on her novels, and this was detectable also in her best play, *Brumby Innes*, which, although it won a prize the year after the Players had folded, remained unperformed until the early 1970s because of its controversial subject of race relations in the far north. Prichard was a founding member of the Communist party of Australia and the most prominent figure identified with the ‘social realist’ school. In its ideology, the school was both internationalist, seeing itself in the mainstream of ‘progressive’ writing throughout the world, and also nationalist in its conscious efforts to build on the tradition of the 1890s. The political commitments of other writers who were broadly on the Left in the fight against Fascism (the Palmers, for example, supported the Republican cause in the Spanish Civil War) meant that many who were often regarded as narrow ‘literary nationalists’ often had closer acquaintance with aspects of contemporary European culture than their conservative detractors. The nationalists’ shared conviction that Australian culture, which they saw

33 For the Palmers and their circle see Vivian Smith, *Vance and Nettie Palmer* (Twayne, New York, 1975) and David Walker, *Dream and Disillusion: A Search for Australian Cultural Identity* (Australian National University Press, Canberra, 1976).

as essentially democratic, should be part of culture more widely and not merely a colonial off-shoot of British culture, was best expressed through the quarterly *Meanjin* (Brisbane 1940–44, Melbourne 1945–). This included European and American contributions and its nearest equivalent was the American left-liberal *Partisan Review*.

Though writers and readers were well aware of the waves of formal and stylistic experimentation in Europe and America between the wars, most Australian prose remained predominantly realist, most verse late romantic or Georgian. One could note clear exceptions, such as Chester Cobb's Virginia Woolfish stream-of-consciousness novels or Bertram Higgins's Eliotesque verse, but their marginality only proves the rule. While awareness of modernist experimentation is apparent in the work of conscious contributors to the 'national literature', as that literature was (in Vance Palmer's phrase) for 'the common man', anything smacking of elitism, and likely to estrange an already perilously small audience, was to be avoided. Besides, unlike modernists in Europe, the consciously Australian writers were trying to build on a tradition, not overturn one, and for the doctrinaire social realists among them, modernism represented decadence and a retreat into subjectivity. The majority culture was even more conservative, as academic scorn for T. S. Eliot and 'free verse', and the banning of *Ulysses* and other modernist works for indecency, indicated.

Others again reacted against both the majority, and English-oriented, literary culture and the minority claims for a national literary tradition. An early example was the magazine *Vision* (Sydney, 1923), edited and mainly written by Jack Lindsay and Kenneth Slessor, with Frank C. Johnson. Lindsay's editorial for the first of the magazine's four issues scorned 'verse about shearers and horses'. Like their mentor Norman Lindsay, with his *fin de siècle* Nietzschean aesthetic, the *Vision* poets modelled themselves on the great figures in their idealised European tradition, a tradition they felt had collapsed into modernist chaos in Europe itself (but might find a further renaissance in Australia?). Later in the 1920s, Jack Lindsay and fellow Queenslander P. R. Stephensen established the *London Aphrodite* to retransmit to Europe the ideas that Norman Lindsay had synthesised in the bush at Springwood, and to outrage equally 'the modernist and the reactionary'. Stephensen returned to Australia and in 1935 published the first part of his essay 'The Foundations of Culture in Australia' as the editorial to the first (and

last) issue of his own mythologically titled 'national literary magazine', the *Australian Mercury*. The occasion for the essay was an article in the *Age* earlier in the same year in which the Professor of English at the University of Melbourne had written that 'literary culture is not indigenous, like a gum tree, but is from a European source'. Stephensen's retort was that 'a gum tree is not a branch of an oak', but he also disparaged the *Bulletin's* 'larrikin' influence and urged that 'imported culture' be used to build up the indigenous.<sup>34</sup> By this time, though, any precise and absolute distinction between what had been imported and what was 'indigenous' would have been difficult to establish.

Stephensen's call for Australians to absorb and learn from European culture provoked Rex Ingamells in Adelaide to issue his Jindyworobak manifesto *Conditional Culture* (1938). Ingamells saw transplanted literary forms and diction as preventing local writers from expressing their own responses to their environment: 'Pseudo-Europeanism clogs the mind of most Australians preventing a free appreciation of nature'.<sup>35</sup> Instead of following foreign models, writers seeking to develop more appropriate techniques should study the culture of Aborigines. Such an extreme call, as it seemed then, to cultivate the indigenous conflicted with the cosmopolitan interests of another group emerging in Adelaide, those associated with the magazine *Angry Penguins* (Melbourne, 1940–46). This was destined to become the best remembered avant garde little magazine of the first half of the century when James McAuley and Harold Stewart sprang their 'Ern Malley' hoax to ridicule the 'NeoApocalyptic' surrealism of Max Harris and his associates. The resulting prosecution of the editors for obscenity, and A. D. Hope's mocking reviews of Harris's surrealist novel and the Jindyworobaks' poetics, were indications of the official and academic resistance that 'literary nationalism' and modernism alike encountered.

The two decades following World War II saw the culmination of efforts to win recognition of a national literature with the publication of, especially, Vance Palmer's *Legend of the Nineties* (1954), Russel Ward's *Australian Legend* (1958), A. A. Phillips's *Australian Tradition* (1958) and H. M. Green's *History of Australian Literature* (1961). The

34 Reprinted in Barnes, pp.204–44; Stephensen quotes Cowling, p.210.

35 Barnes, pp.245–65.

appearance of such works coincided with, and helped stimulate, the introduction of courses in Australian history and literature in universities and schools. With the rapid expansion and democratisation of secondary and tertiary education in the post-war decades, the universities which had been the main conduit of European (overwhelmingly English) culture began, however reluctantly in some cases, to take Australian culture into consideration. A. G. Mitchell, for example, in *The Pronunciation of English in Australia* (1946) maintained that Australian English was not a degenerate colonial form of the mother tongue, but a language shared by a national community. The 'discovery' of a local social and literary tradition (or questioning of such findings) in the writings of Palmer and others indicated broad parallels with the post-war expansion of American studies in the United States. But although American models provided some stimulus for local cultural historians, for example, F. J. Turner's frontier thesis for Ward's *Australian Legend* and H. L. Mencken's *The American Language* for Sidney J. Baker's *The Australian Language* (1945), the parallels were less the result of direct American influence than of a response to similar circumstances in both countries which, with consciousness of their democratic institutions heightened by the war, were undergoing social reconstruction.

The claims made for Australia's national literature followed broadly, if unconsciously, those made from the Renaissance onwards for English and other vernacular literatures. Indeed, it was a commonplace assumption of literary history that a renaissance was a necessary stage in the establishment of a national literature: as Stephensen, who reveals the pervasive influence of Taine, wrote in his 'Foundations of Culture', 'Literature and culture blossom at their best during a period of national expansion, as in England during the reign of Queen Elizabeth, and again in England during the reign of Victoria'.<sup>36</sup> Yet, following a late nineteenth-century, and particularly Nietzschean, revival of classicism within Europe,<sup>37</sup> the connotations of 'renaissance' in Australia could be either nationalistic and democratic or, as with Norman Lindsay and his followers, anti-nationalistic and elitist. Poets as different in their attitudes towards nationalism as O'Dowd and Hugh McCrae—or the young Slessor

<sup>36</sup> Barnes, p.229.

<sup>37</sup> Noel Macainsh, 'The Renaissance—Revival in Early Modern Australian Poetry', *Quadrant* 21 (July 1987), 65–73.

—thought that the desired renaissance could be inaugurated by inviting the whole pantheon of Greco-Roman mythology to assume a local habitation. For others, though, indulging in such exotic fancies was worse than irrelevant to the forging of a distinctively national tradition.

If a Shakespeare, a Dante or a Goethe had provided the vernacular literatures of Europe with their equivalents of Homer and Virgil, and ensured their ‘universality’, then similar father figures would be required for Australian literature. The mid-nineteenth-century American ‘renaissance’, so conscious of the Elizabethan model, had Emerson and Whitman among its founding fathers; perhaps Lawson, Furphy and Paterson had assumed such roles for Australian literature during the ‘renaissance’ of the 1890s? In romantic theory, the national literature represented the ‘characteristics’ and values of the people. For Australian, as for American literature, the distinguishing trait was its democratic spirit; perhaps, however, what differentiated Australians from Americans was their ethic of mateship (rather than individualism) and a certain sardonic scepticism towards ideals? In *Introducing Australia* (1942)—a book that was reprinted a number of times both in the United States and Australia, and revised after the war—the American Hartley Grattan, who had been in constant contact with the Palmers and who was responsible for the 1948 American edition of *Such is Life*, ‘the greatest book yet produced in Australia’, discerned ‘the basic Australian literary tradition’ as ‘a compound of sound learning, rebellious, ardent faith in the common man, and an even more ardent faith in the Australian future’, in other words as having more in common with American than with European literatures.<sup>38</sup>

The term ‘tradition’ had acquired from T. S. Eliot and others a prominent, if problematical, place in the lexicon of the ‘new criticism’ that had developed in English and American universities between the wars. This criticism was proving very influential in the rapidly expanding universities here, which were beginning to teach Australian literature. Was it not, though, premature to talk about a local tradition and a canon of literature? If one were to do so, which tradition should be taught, the nationalists’ canon of predominantly realist texts, or an alternative constructed according to the Anglo-American criteria of

38 C. Hartley Grattan, *Introducing Australia* (John Day, New York, 1942), p.168; p.174.

'literary' rather than socio-historical value? (The alternative still might contain many of the same elements though, as the 'true' value of, say, Lawson's and Furphy's texts could be disputed.) Prominent antagonists of those claiming that Australia had a democratic national literary tradition were McAuley and Hope, both Professors of English, leading poets, and influential critics whose aesthetic preferences were for the neo-classicism prevailing at the time Australia was settled. While the concepts and constructs at issue in the often partisan discussions of Australian literature could be seen as local responses to current English and American critical models, they had the effect of moving 'Australian literature' (however this was constructed) closer to the centre of literary cultural interest, whereas previously it had been marginal to the concept of literature institutionalised through teaching, book distribution and literary journalism. The publication of Australian books—histories, anthologies, and social commentaries, as well as novels and collections of poetry—increased markedly from the late 1950s on, in response to the expanding educational market, and the interests of a larger and more affluent population.

Actual cases of cultural transmission proved more complicated than the stereotypes of two opposed lines of influence, local and European, assumed. The best example is the reception of Patrick White following the publication, in England and the United States, of his novels *The Tree of Man* (1955) and *Voss* (1957). White's 'establishment' education at an English public school and Cambridge, his long expatriation before and during World War II, and his preoccupation with themes of spiritual isolation rather than with shared adversity seemed to proponents of social realism to align him with the earlier Anglo-Australian tradition. For opponents of 'literary nationalism' White's metaphysical concerns could be welcomed as universal (and epic), though his techniques could be disturbingly idiosyncratic and uncomfortably modern.

White proved especially significant in transmitting the modernism which had been resisted both by those who saw themselves as continuing the 'Lawson-Furphy' tradition and those who were, selectively, preserving the great tradition of European literature. His first novel, *Happy Valley*, set in the Monaro showed the influences of Joyce, Eliot, Woolf, Lawrence and Hemingway. Published in London in 1939, it had won the Australian Literature Society's Gold Medal, but this fact, like the author's second novel, *The Living and the Dead* (1941), and even

his name, had slipped from most minds after the war. His third and most experimental novel, with its Homeric (and Joycean) motifs, *The Aunt's Story* appeared in 1948, the year White returned to Australia, but attracted little notice. In the mid-1950s, *The Tree of Man* and *Voss* appeared to critical acclaim in the United Kingdom and United States. They were both modernist—or post-modernist, in the literal sense that their author had absorbed the wave of post World War I experimentation—and also traditional, in a local as well as universal way. *The Tree of Man* was a variation on the pioneering saga, *Voss* on the journey of exploration, both staples of the predominantly realist Australian fiction between the wars.

These novels were followed in the 1960s by *Riders in the Chariot* and *The Solid Mandala*, short stories and plays. While White continued to engage with 'universal' themes, he was also satirising contemporary Australian suburbia in highly observant detail and mimicking its speech, so recentring Australian literature in the contemporary city rather than the bush. As well, his long expatriate phase enriched his work with European, especially Greek, settings. White had absorbed much European culture at first hand, as he had much European literature, and could relate both to writing about contemporary Australia. His novels, short stories and plays both contained and transcended the apparent conflicts between imported and idealised high literary culture and a less rarefied indigenous literature for, and about, the common man. They were both modern and traditional, local and 'universal', realist and symbolic, 'European' and Australian. His winning of the Nobel Prize in 1973 finally domesticated Literature, perhaps by many still thought of almost exclusively as something imported, with guarantees and testimonials attached. His success in being simultaneously both an international figure and undeniably Australian in many of his subjects and settings helped to produce a climate in which other, and particularly younger, writers felt encouraged to experiment formally and stylistically.

This is most apparent with the way that White's plays of the early 1960s anticipated the emergence towards the end of that decade of an experimental Australian drama. Following the success of Ray Lawler's *Summer of the Seventeenth Doll* in 1955, it became possible to speak of a 'renaissance' of Australian drama. In the nineteenth century, the popular theatrical forms of melodrama and vaudeville (as well as high

drama, especially Shakespeare) had been exported quite literally to the colonies, and had been adapted readily to Australian subjects and settings (while the poets in their closets wrote five act, blank verse tragedies about bushrangers). But attempts like those of the Pioneer Players to found a national drama had been continually frustrated. Lawler's part celebration, part critique of the bush legend, written in a realist mode reminiscent of Tennessee Williams (the Americans Williams and Arthur Miller were the most prominent dramatists in English at the time) had been followed by other realist studies of local myths and mores. White's plays, influenced by German expressionism were committedly anti-naturalistic and decidedly satiric in presenting local mores. They employed, seemingly, every technique to be found in the work of the 'New Wave' playwrights a few years later, especially a comic and satiric exploitation of the vernacular and, although White was not necessarily a direct influence on their reactions against 'bourgeois naturalism', he again helped to establish a climate more receptive to innovation.

'Bourgeois naturalism' for younger playwrights, most notably Alex Buzo, Jack Hibberd, John Romeril and David Williamson, was encapsulated by *The Doll*. They were reacting against the formal restrictions of its realist conventions and at the same time attacking the stereotype of the 'typical' Australian as the bushman, or at least as retaining rural-communal, egalitarian values. (At a time when this stereotype was being attacked more widely—by historians and social commentators as well as poets, novelists, and dramatists—for being a sentimental evasion of the reality that most of the population lived in the suburbs.) Their early plays, such as Hibberd's *White With Wire Wheels* (1967), Buzo's *Rooted* (1969), and Williamson's *Stork* (1970), satirised the mateship ethos—and the male chauvinism (a term just coming into currency then)—of the junior executive inheritors of the bush legend. It was an intensely indigenous movement, exploiting Australian speech (which had been held by some to be inherently unsuited to drama because of its characteristic laconicism) in a variety of individual ways; yet it was also a movement conscious of being in line with contemporary theatrical developments in Europe and the United States.

The most commonly identified starting point for the 'New Wave' has been 1967, when Betty Burstall opened her La Mama coffee-shop theatre in Melbourne's Carlton. This she named after one of the Off-



off-Broadway theatres she had been attending in New York the year before, and plays the La Mama groups first wanted to emulate, in local terms, were those by Megan Terry, Sam Shepard and other new American writers then being performed in London as well as North America. The influences selected from overseas models operated simultaneously at various levels, on the writing, on the style of directing and acting, and on the organisation of companies. Alex Buzo's *Norm and Ahmed* (1968), which brought the movement to broad public attention after prosecutions for obscenity in two states, bore strong structural similarities to Edward Albee's *Zoo Story*, one of the early American absurdist plays. The ideas of the English director Peter Brook, that assimilated both Shakespeare and Brecht into anti-bourgeois 'rough theatre', influenced the policies and style of the Australian Performing Group, which grew out of the La Mama experiment. In its organisation, also, the APG was responsive to ideas from overseas, and replicated the Portable Theatre set up by David Hare in England to play to factories and schools. Considered as a movement (though it was more an overlapping set of spontaneous responses to circumstances at home and influences from overseas), the 'alternative' theatre of the late 1960s and the earlier 1970s presented some paradoxes. It deplored the cultural cringeing that had filled the bourgeois theatres for generations with hits and stars from the West End and Broadway, yet it was fascinated by Brecht, Beckett and the European absurdist. Sceptical of national legends, it was nostalgic for a lost popular Australian theatre of melodrama and vaudeville; and the first big success of indigenous 'rough theatre' was *The Legend of King O'Malley* (1970), which was quickly followed by other historical burlesques. It claimed, justifiably, to be uniquely, indeed idiosyncratically Australian, yet at each point it was in line with similar developments elsewhere.

What, in retrospect, might seem contradictions between nationalist and internationalist tendencies had been their own consistency for those involved. During the later years of the Vietnam War, the dominant cultural influences on younger generations in Australia, as in Western Europe, became those of the American counter culture. The adversary culture of the United States—the opposition of blacks, radicals, feminists, gays to the establishment—was readily adaptable to local circumstances. Alternatives to the perceived establishment culture in Australia followed models provided by this international, but heavily United States-inspired,

counter culture. The 'New Wave' in the alternative theatre was followed shortly after by a not unrelated development in local filmmaking. There was a new poetry, stimulated by New York, Black Mountain and West Coast experimentation. A 'new' fiction drew on American models, including some that had already responded to Latin American and contemporary European influences. There was a 'new' journalism, again influenced by American practices, which observed a 'new nationalism' in the early 1970s. New developments in print technology facilitated a whole range of alternative publications—weekly papers, magazines and books. There was also a 'new' criticism, or set of adversary criticisms, drawing stimulus from diverse models: New Left political radicalism, feminism, and, from Europe, epistemological scepticism. Whatever the particular influences they responded to, the new critics agreed on the need to interrogate such 'ideological constructs' as literature; and previous conceptualisations of Australian literature were seen to have marginalised women, Aborigines, migrants and the politically committed 'social realists'.<sup>39</sup> As well as suppressing these social differences, perceptions of a national literature were also seen to have denied significant regional differences.<sup>40</sup>

Assumptions about cultural transmission—both transmission from Europe, predominantly, and transmission within Australia itself—have underlain many of the historical differences between critics: between (and an attempt to sort the polemics into chronological sequence follows) 'localists and universalists', 'democratic populists and Anglophile elitists'—or "'Abos" and "Pommies"' as A. A. Phillips once suggested—'nationalists and internationalists', 'post-colonials and Eurocentrics'. Most often, their different assumptions have been couched in the

39 A lively, engaged account of recent critical differences is provided by John Docker, *In a Critical Condition: Reading Australian Literature* (Penguin, Ringwood, 1984). On migrant writing see 'Ethnic Writing Not Australian Yet?', transcripts of a 1986 Warana Writers Week symposium in *Outrider* 3 (December 1986), 60–110. For examples of feminist readings, and re-readings, see Carole Ferrier, ed., *Gender, Politics and Fiction: Twentieth Century Women's Novels* (University of Queensland Press, St Lucia, 1985).

40 Extended considerations of regional differences are found in John Docker, *Australian Cultural Elites: Intellectual Traditions in Sydney and Melbourne* (Angus and Robertson, Sydney, 1974); and Bruce Bennett, *Place, Region and Community* (Foundation for Australian Literary Studies, Townsville, 1985).

evolutionary metaphors of transplantation, adaptation and modification, hybridisation, or the rejection of exotic varieties and the spontaneous emergence of new indigenous growth. Such metaphors seem endemic to discussions of culture, and are themselves part of the conceptualising discourses about literature that have been continually transmitted to Australia—as originally were the very notions of universal poetry and a national literature, with all their potential for conflict. But while such metaphors promise an explanation of the processes of transmission at a quasi-scientific level of generality, they can, at the same time, obscure the immediate and ever-changing influences operating in every period, and ultimately on every writer, who has always had to make an individual, selective, and imaginative response to diverse sets of stimuli, both local and international.