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# **MODERNISM AND THE MODERN AUSTRALIAN NOVEL**

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For my parents  
who have brought me up in a most loving and liberal way

## ABSTRACT

Modernism, as the most influential experimental movement in European and American art and literature around the turn of the century, has made a tremendous impact upon the twentieth century's way of thinking and mode of perceiving. It has been observed in the historical study of Modernism that Modernism is not only distinguished by its tendency towards radical experiments in forms and styles, but more significantly, it has caused fundamental changes to the traditional system of ideas and concepts. The significance of Modernism therefore is not confined to its formal experiments. For these changes are essentially concerned with a new perspective on basic conceptual relationships, such as the past and the present, the subjective and the objective, unity and multiplicity. The pursuit of complexity is the defining feature of Modernism. Such a pursuit has resulted in the disintegration of the conventional perception of reality, and has had a permanent influence upon the critical study of literature.

So far as radical formal experiments are concerned, Modernism hardly affected the development of Australian literature. But it caused a strong reaction, or rather resistance, in Australia during the period from the twenties to the forties. Such a reaction was deeply involved in and greatly influenced by the current attitudes vigorously maintained by various literary groups concerning the development of Australian literature. The involvement of Modernism actually intensified the clashes between these groups. From that point of view, Modernism played an important role in highlighting the major issues recurrent in the progress of Australian literature. It is through examination of the attitude towards Modernism in Australia that an adequate cultural and historical background for the study of the modern Australian novel is established.

If the relationship between Modernism and the modern Australian novel is rather slight with regard to formal experiments and stylistic features, the preoccupation with re-interpreting the past in terms of the consciousness of the present revealed in both Modernism and modern Australian fiction establishes an internal connection between the two. The alternative perspective towards the relationship of the past and the present achieved by Modernism sheds a light upon the thematic analysis of the four modern Australian novels: The Tree of Man, Voss, Tourmaline and Bring Larks and Heroes. The analysis in turn demonstrates the sense of universality in the exploration of the human condition made in these novels.

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## CONTENTS

|                                                                                          |    |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----|
| Abstract                                                                                 | i  |
| Acknowledgments                                                                          | ii |
| Introduction                                                                             | 1  |
| <b>Part I. The Present Past:</b>                                                         |    |
| <b>A Survey of Some Major Issues of Modernism</b>                                        | 4  |
| Chapter 1. The Predicament of the Modern Situation                                       | 6  |
| 1. An Age of Crisis in Its Relation to the Changed Perception of Reality                 | 6  |
| 2. Modernism Is Art's Necessity                                                          | 11 |
| Chapter 2. The Confrontation of the Past with the Present                                | 16 |
| 1. Rejection of the Idea of Chronological Linearity                                      | 17 |
| 2. The Tendency of Spatialization                                                        | 21 |
| Chapter 3. The Challenge of Modernism                                                    | 27 |
| 1. The Paradoxical Vision of Modernism                                                   | 28 |
| 2. Unity and Multiplicity                                                                | 32 |
| <b>Part II. The Historical and Cultural Background Concerning Modernism in Australia</b> |    |
|                                                                                          | 35 |
| Chapter 4. The Legend of the Nineties and Its Revival in the Jindyworobak Movement       | 38 |
| Chapter 5. The <i>Vision</i> School of the 20s and Its Parallel in the 50s               | 46 |
| Chapter 6. The Angry Penguins                                                            | 59 |
| Chapter 7. Modernism in Australian Painting                                              | 64 |
| 1. The Emergence of Modernism and Its Clashes with Conservatism                          | 64 |
| 2. The Rift between Modernist Radicalism and Social Realism                              | 69 |
| 3. Surrealism and Expressionism                                                          | 74 |
| Chapter 8. The Debate about the Development of Australian Fiction                        | 79 |

|                                                                             |            |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------|
| <b>Part III. The Present Past:</b>                                          |            |
| <b>A Critical Examination of the Modern Australian Novel</b>                |            |
| <b>Represented by Works of White, Stow and Keneally</b>                     | <b>92</b>  |
| <b>Chapter 9. The Relevance of Historical Settings to Thematic Concerns</b> | <b>103</b> |
| 1. <u>Bring Larks and Heroes</u>                                            | 104        |
| 2. <u>Tourmaline</u>                                                        | 107        |
| 3. <u>Voss</u>                                                              | 113        |
| 4. <u>The Tree of Man</u>                                                   | 121        |
| <b>Chapter 10. From External Circumstances to Internal Enquiries</b>        | <b>127</b> |
| 1. The Ironic Vision of Absurdity                                           | 129        |
| 2. The Country of the Mind                                                  | 140        |
| 3. Communion with the Natural World                                         | 148        |
| <b>Chapter 11. The Treatment of Time</b>                                    | <b>157</b> |
| 1. Continuity within Simultaneity                                           | 158        |
| 2. The Achievement of Eternity                                              | 164        |
| 3. The Presentness of the Past                                              | 166        |
| 4. The Making of the Legend                                                 | 172        |
| <b>Conclusion</b>                                                           | <b>180</b> |
| <b>Bibliography</b>                                                         | <b>187</b> |

## **Introduction**

The intention of relating the study of the modern Australian novel to the observation of Modernism is not wholly sustained in a mere attempt to trace specific features of Modernism in individual Australian novels. For Modernism never became mainstream in the history of Australian literature; and there is no direct evidence that any of the four modern Australian novels that are to be closely analysed in this thesis is particularly indebted to the influence of Modernism. The aim of introducing Modernism into the scene is to provide the study of the modern Australian novel with a wide context which not just involves the investigation of the historical and cultural background of Australian literature, but more importantly connects the textual analysis of individual works with the universal concerns of literature.

Although Modernism generally failed to create an overwhelming impact in Australia in spite of its sweeping force in Europe and America early in this century, the reaction to Modernism was not only involved in but also intensified major conflicts in the cultural history of Australia. In this sense, observation of the attitude towards Modernism in Australia may well serve as an illumination of the central issues which constitute the historical background for the study of the modern Australian novel.

From the outset, the reception of Modernism ran into serious clashes with and was strongly resisted by two opposite groups. One was radical nationalism, the other European traditionalism. Radical nationalism, which later manifests itself in social realism, represents one of the dominant forces in the history of Australian literature. Its antagonism to Modernism was consistent with its radical idea of national literature, which based the development of indigenous features in literature on the repudiation of all foreign influence. In opposition to this extravagant advocacy for a wholly indigenous literature was the conservative force which maintained that the development of Australian literature depended upon preserving English and European literary traditions. The experiments of Modernism were regarded as degrading and destructive, and the influence of Modernism was therefore persistently kept away.

If the resistance to the influence of Modernism resulted from a bias against the radical experiments of Modernism, the promotion of Modernism in Australian literature, conducted vigorously by the Angry Penguins group, was seriously limited by a partial

understanding of Modernism. It was on the one hand conditioned by its direct reaction against the views concerning the development of Australian literature upheld both by radical nationalism and literary conservatism, while on the other it was bound to fail due to its extreme pursuit of superficial features of Modernism. Ironically, the Angry Penguins' ardent push for Modernism was not distinguished by the production of particular great literary works, but virtually ended by the notorious Ern Malley hoax set up against the superficial imitation of Modernism. While the Ern Malley affair undoubtedly reflected the strong antagonism to Modernism in Australia at the time, it is also undeniable that the promoters of Modernism to a large extent fell victim to their own tendency towards extremes. The experimental movement initiated by the Angry Penguins however made an important contribution to the remarkable achievements in modern Australian painting during the forties.

The radical effort of the Angry Penguins failed to bring the influence of Modernism as an overwhelming force into Australian literature; nationalism and social realism remained the predominant trend in fictional writing. There were a few exceptions though, such as Martin Boyd and Christina Stead, who diverged from that trend. Certain features of Modernism could be traced in their works, especially in Stead's. But the influence of these writers was greatly limited because of lack of sufficient recognition at the time, and their achievements were re-discovered much later.

Although some trace of Modernism can be discerned in the novels by Patrick White and Randolph Stow, Modernism was certainly not a major impetus in the great progress of the modern Australian novel in the fifties and sixties. Nevertheless, there exists a strong resemblance between Modernism and the modern Australian novel in several aspects. First, like Modernism, Australian fictional writings during those two decades, particularly represented by White, Stow and Keneally, showed a conscious departure from the social realist conventions of the past; and their writings were also marked by an experimental tendency, though far less radical than was attempted by Modernism. Second, just as relating the past to the present is the primary concern of Modernism, so the preoccupation with the historical past is a distinguishing feature of the modern Australian novel. Third, in surveying some of the major issues of Modernism, it can be seen that the change that Modernism has made in forms and styles entails fundamental shifts in the modes of thinking and perceiving. One of the most significant shifts is observed in the conceptual relationship of the past and the present. The two are no longer viewed as related merely in a chronological sequence, but interchangeable in a constant process of re-adjustment between the old and the new. In the four novels that

are to be closely examined, how to re-interpret historical events in terms of present consciousness and relate the temporal to the timeless is the key issue. Awareness of the synchronic approach of Modernism to the relationship of the past and the present illuminates the way in which time is treated in these modern Australian novels. At the same time, it is to be observed that the transformation of the stories based on certain historical circumstances into the exploration of universal issues of humanity undoubtedly adds a new dimension to the interpretation of the historical past of Australia and a new aspect to Australian experience.

## **Part I. The Past Present**

### **A Survey of Some Major Issues of Modernism**

#### ***Introduction***

The first major study of Modernism was conducted by Edmund Wilson in his book Axel's Castle, published in 1931. In that book, Wilson made a clear effort to distinguish Modernism as a self-sufficient literary movement with a distinct departure from that of the preceding age. He urged that it was time that the movement represented by "writers such as W.B. Yeats, James Joyce, T.S. Eliot, Gertrude Stein, Marcel Proust and Paul Valery" should be recognized as "an entirely distinct movement, which has arisen from different conditions and must be dealt with in different terms". He proposed that the "distinguishing features" of Modernism should be defined as "a counterpart to" Romanticism.<sup>1</sup> Although whether Modernism has distinguished itself from Romanticism or simply derived its resources from Romanticism proves to be highly arguable throughout the criticism of Modernism, Wilson certainly made an important contribution to prompting a systematic approach to Modernism.

In 1965, Richard Ellmann and Charles Feidelson in their monumental book, The Modern Tradition, significantly advanced the critical views regarding Modernism and its influence upon the present. They asserted that "the age of Yeats, Joyce, Eliot, and Lawrence, of Proust, Valery, and Gide, of Mann, Rilke, and Kafka, has already passed into history", so that it was necessary to look "back upon that age historically" and "see it in historical depth".<sup>2</sup> While putting forward a historical perspective on Modernism, they also stressed that Modernism "is not like the reassuring landscape of the past ... It is at once more immediate and more obscure". They suggested that the study of Modernism should amount "to more than a chronological description".<sup>3</sup> For what Modernism has achieved is "a 'modern tradition', which reaches well back into the romantic era and even beyond";<sup>4</sup> at the same time it has created "a language that gives

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<sup>1</sup> Axel's Castle: A Study in the Imaginative Literature of 1870 - 1930 (London, 1931, 1959), p.9.

<sup>2</sup> The Modern Tradition: Backgrounds of Modern Literature (New York, 1965), p.vii.

<sup>3</sup> op. cit., p.vi.

<sup>4</sup> op. cit., p.vii.

new valences to words long enrolled in the dictionary, including 'modern' itself".<sup>5</sup> In other words, Modernism gives a new meaning to the understanding of the past, paradoxically, by breaking away from past perceptions.

In the 1980s, critics argued that the impact of Modernism remained strong and active in contemporary literature. Malcolm Bradbury claims that even though the beginnings of Modernism "lie a century away from us", it "still shakes us and still manages to disturb us".<sup>6</sup> Alan Wilde compares Modernism to "the Dead Father", a character created by Donald Barthelme, who is described as being "'dead, but still with us, still with us, but dead', or alternately", adds Wilde, "dead only in a sense". He contends that the "burden of the modernist past" lingers as a haunting force.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup>Ellmann and Feildelson (eds.), p.vi.

<sup>6</sup>Malcolm Bradbury, The Modern World (London, 1988), p.5

<sup>7</sup>Horizons of Assent - Modernism, Postmodernism, and the Ironic Imagination (Philadelphia, 1987), p.19

## Chapter 1. The Predicament of the Modern Situation

Modernism starts with an acute reaction to the modern situation and a changed perception of reality. On the one hand, new experiences of the modern world along with new perceptions of reality cause a strong feeling of discontinuity from the preceding age. On the other hand, the pursuit of a more complex form of representation to deal with the increasingly complex sense of human reality reinforces such a feeling of deprivation and disinheritance. Traditional forms and conventions are found both inadequate and incomplete to meet the needs of the writers who are confronted with an utterly different consciousness of reality from the conventional one. As will be seen, the condition in which Modernism has arisen is characterized by an inherent paradox. Modern consciousness of complexity in exploring and presenting human nature severs the connection of the writers with the past age, and it leads inevitably to a disintegration of conventional forms and structures; the disintegration in turn further emphasizes the inadequacy and irrelevance of formal expressions of the past in dealing with the present situation, and thus insists on an anti-conventional tendency.

### 1. An Age of Crisis in Its Relation to the Changed Perception of Reality

The feeling of crisis and the sense of transition are a predominant note in the consciousness of the major writers around the turn of the century. Virginia Woolf describes her age as the time "when we are not fast anchored where we are; things are moving around us; we are moving ourselves".<sup>1</sup> She laments the modern age for being "barren", "exhausted", fragmented and "meagre to the verge of destitution".<sup>2</sup> In correspondence with Woolf's view, T.S. Eliot presents in his The Waste Land the image of the modern world as a vast waste land dominated by the sense of sterility and despair. Also in his review of James Joyce's Ulysses, Eliot pictures the modern world as "the immense panorama of futility and anarchy", and considers it as a necessity for modern writers to find "a way of controlling, of ordering, of giving shape and a

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<sup>1</sup> Granite and Rainbow (London, 1958), p.11.

<sup>2</sup> "How It Strikes a Contemporary", in Andrew McNeillie (ed.), The Common Reader, First Series (London, 1984), p.234.

significance" to the futile and anarchic present.<sup>3</sup> The description of the adventures of Bloom in *Ulysses* under the circumstances of modern society is presented as a parallel to the epic stories of Odysseus. The parallel is made to convey an underlying contrast with an ironic reference to the triviality and futility of modern society.

Distrust of and alienation from the modern world is one of the features distinguishing the writings of Modernism. It manifests the double aspect of Modernism. The effort in creating a comprehensive picture of the modern world is to reveal that distrust of the world, as Stephen Spender elaborates:

... inseparable from this will to be absolutely modern, there was an intense hatred and contempt for modern life. In the works of the most characteristically modern writers contemporary civilization was represented as chaotic, decadent, on the point of collapse, anarchic, absurd, the desert of non-values. ... They had invented their modern idiom and forms to express disgust with the modern world.<sup>4</sup>

The sense of crisis in Modernism is on the one hand, as Spender observes, inherent in its very perception of the modern world; it is on the other hand derived from the strong belief that the modern age is an age of transition. Not only because the period stands between the end of one century and beginning of another, but also because the way to comprehend reality undergoes a fundamental change. In the essay "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown", Virginia Woolf declares that "in or about December, 1910, human character changed".<sup>5</sup> She further explains: "All human relations have shifted - those between masters and servants, husbands and wives, parents and children. And when human relations change there is at the same time a change in religion, conduct, politics, and literature".<sup>6</sup> It is necessary to emphasize that although Woolf's designation of the particular time of change can be arbitrary, and that the change of human character and relations is not as clear-cut as she maintains, her statement is justifiable in a way that it indicates an urgent tendency inherent in Modernism towards change. If the essence of human nature is not necessarily radically changed, the way to perceive it is undoubtedly subjected to a tremendous shift. Stephen Spender observes that what Modernism is essentially concerned with is "the re-invention of reality".<sup>7</sup> Or in Ricardo J. Quinones's words, the prominent need of Modernism is "to establish a new orientation to reality".<sup>8</sup>

<sup>3</sup> "Ulysses, Order and Myth", in Peter Faulkner (ed.), *A Modernist Reader - Modernism in England in 1910 - 1930* (London, 1986), p.103.

<sup>4</sup> *The Struggle of the Modern* (London, 1963), p.208.

<sup>5</sup> *The Captain's Death Bed and Other Essays* (London, 1950), p.91.

<sup>6</sup> op. cit., p.92.

<sup>7</sup> Spender, p.133.

<sup>8</sup> *Mapping Literary Modernism - Time and Development* (New Jersey, 1985), p.123.

A new orientation to reality which marks a crucial departure of Modernism from the preceding age is closely related to the initial determination of Modernism to explore hitherto ignored and unexplored aspects of human reality. James McFarlane in "The Mind of Modernism" observes that the initial emphasis of Modernism is "on fragmentation, on the breaking up and the progressive disintegration of those meticulously constructed 'systems' and 'types' and 'absolutes'".<sup>9</sup> In the modern mind, these "systems", "types" and "absolutes" are no longer taken for granted. Instead, they are regarded as superficial and one-sided in relating the truth. What Modernism pursues is the sense of relativity, multiplicity and complexity underlying human reality. Virginia Woolf defines the modern mind as "the mould of that queer conglomeration of incongruous things".<sup>10</sup> In that mind, feelings "which used to come single and separate do so no longer. Beauty is part of ugliness; amusement part disgust; pleasure part pain. Emotions which used to enter the mind whole are now breaking up on the threshold".<sup>11</sup> In his study of James Joyce, Richard Ellmann also finds that one of the distinct features of Joyce's writing is "his unexpected fusings ... between beauty and its opposites",<sup>12</sup> just as Virginia Woolf remarks that in the modern mind "beauty is accompanied not by its shadows but by its opposites. ... There trips along by the side of our modern beauty some shocking spirit which sneers at beauty for being beautiful".<sup>13</sup>

The certainty and stability of conventional perception of reality are dissolved under this new vision which is characterized by being "elusive, indeterminate, multiple, often implausible, infinitely various and essentially irreducible".<sup>14</sup> However, the changed perception of reality which distinguishes Modernism is in a significant way attributed to the new explorations and new discoveries in other disciplines, such as philosophy, anthropology and psychology around the turn of the century. In fact, studies show that the ties of Modernism with the developments of these disciplines prove to be of indispensable importance in the development of Modernism. Helen Gardner in her study of T.S. Eliot makes an investigation of the crucial impact of modern anthropology and psychology upon Eliot's way of thinking. She states

exploration of the past of the human race and of the depths of the human soul, carried out by the anthropologists and the psychologists, appears not, as in the nineteenth century poets, in the form of reference to and discussion of, particular discoveries, but as a method for the writer to employ for himself:

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<sup>9</sup> Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane (eds.), Modernism 1890-1930 (Penguin Books, 1976), p.80.

<sup>10</sup> Granite and Rainbow, p.20.

<sup>11</sup> *op. cit.*, p.16.

<sup>12</sup> James Joyce (New York, 1959, 1982), p.5.

<sup>13</sup> Granite and Rainbow, p.16.

<sup>14</sup> Bradbury and McFarlane (eds.), p.81.

something that has deeply affected his way of thinking and his manner of expression.<sup>15</sup>

In the field of philosophy, among those philosophers who vigorously challenge long-established concepts of mind and reality, Nietzsche is recognized as the most influential figure and makes a tremendous contribution to the development of modern philosophy. He causes profound changes to central assumptions of traditional philosophy and imposes a vital impact upon Modernism in its formative period. Nietzsche rejects the conviction of a pre-existing reality and places the emphasis upon the creative impetus of the creator. He insists that access to a more fundamental reality should be gained only through the constant destruction of old conceptual conventions and formulation of new ones through the mind of the creator.

Henri Bergson and William James, both of whom were greatly influenced and stimulated by Nietzsche's propositions, anticipate stream of consciousness fiction in Modernism with their theories of intuition and stream of thought. They undertake the task of distinguishing actuality, which exclusively concerns externality of experience, from reality which reveals an inner logic beneath externally unrelated things and explores the hidden structures that condition everyday consciousness. The subsequent assumption is that in the search for truth the observation of temporal relations of external events is far less vital than the investigation of internal processes of the mind.

The study of the human mind with the focus on the exploitation of previously ignored dimensions of consciousness was further carried out by modern psychology, particularly represented by Sigmund Freud and Carl Jung. The publication of Freud's The Interpretation of Dreams, in 1899, is viewed not only as a significant landmark in the history of psychology, but also as an impetus to the development of Modernism. The dream, since Freud, is no longer disregarded as a meaningless and nonsensical phenomenon; instead, it is taken as a leading key to the understanding of subconsciousness which by penetrating surface experience relates temporally unrelated occurrences and establishes a network in terms of spatial associations. James McFarlane in his essay "The Mind of Modernism" remarks that with the achievement of Freud, the "apparent incongruities and incoherence of the dream were nevertheless recognized as the mind's way of communicating the most complex and subtle things".<sup>16</sup> What Freud achieves by his theory of subconsciousness is essential to the development of Modernism. It for the first time reveals the complexity and multiple dimensions of

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<sup>15</sup> The Art of T.S. Eliot (London, 1949), pp.84-85.

<sup>16</sup> Bradbury and McFarlane (eds.), p.85.

the human mind, so that it radically shifts the examination of the human character from concentrating on external events acting upon the mind to exploring the internal process of the mind itself. The examination under this principle can delve into the unconscious area and connects memories, analogies and associations without being restricted by linear logic.

Following Freud, Jung expanded and transformed the theory of subconsciousness based on the analysis of individual dreams by introducing the idea of the "collective conscious". He proposes that the dream and subconsciousness of the individual mind not only are meaningful in the sense of understanding the individual character, but more profoundly, they embody the deep sense of the mythic which underlies the entire history of the human race. Jung's proposition plays an important role in encouraging the tendency in Modernism to establish mythical and archetypal frameworks. It is through the establishment of such frameworks that the past and the present are viewed as interlocked and interwoven. Melvin Friedman distinguishes the respective contributions of Freud and Jung to the movement of Modernism. He states:

[the] subjective processes of the dream work are clearly Freud's contribution to the modern novel, while Jung's further expansion of the myth motive probably accounts for the elaborate parallels and analogies.<sup>17</sup>

In the progress of anthropology, the highly influential book The Golden Bough (1890 - 1915), by Sir James Frazer, stands as an important turning point. In that work he rejects the traditional diachronic or historical approach to the study of cultural patterns and forms of rites, and employs a synchronic approach. The new approach is devised to manifest "the common foundations of all cultures, past and present, Western and non-Western".<sup>18</sup> The central issue that Frazer conveys is that beneath the superficial differences between all cultures, there exists a system of rituals whose universality and timelessness inform all cultural patterns. The recognition of the validity of this synchronic approach not only defies the linear view of evolution, but also tends to re-construct organizing principles on the idea of presenting internal structures which exist simultaneously in cultures of all different ages.

New discoveries in philosophy, anthropology and psychology are meant to call into question the fixity and absoluteness of a conventional approach to reality. The focus is

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<sup>17</sup> Melvin J. Friedman, Stream of Consciousness: A Study in Literary Method (New Haven, 1955), p.111.

<sup>18</sup> Sanford Schwartz, The Matrix of Modernism (New Jersey, 1985), p.5.

shifted onto the exploration of multiple dimensions and of the underlying relations of actuality with subconsciousness. As a result, reality becomes relative, allusive, multi-levelled and more complicated than ever before.

The consciousness of fragmentation and sterility of the modern world, along with the perception of the previously unrecognized complexity and multiplicity of human reality, is inevitably reflected in the formal crisis in the field of creation. The acute awareness of discontinuity in Modernism, as Monroe K. Spears's study shows, contains both an "emancipation: a joyful release from the dead hand of convention, from stale pieties and restrictions" and a "disinheritance, a loss of tradition, belief and meaning".<sup>19</sup> Conventional forms of representation are considered inadequate, even irrelevant, in conveying modern consciousness and modern perceptions of reality. Virginia Woolf describes conventions of the past as "ill-fitting vestments" which not only constrain writers by inhibiting their creative powers but also conceal, even distort, the true vision of life; they actually stand as "an obstacle and impediment".<sup>20</sup> Meanwhile, the inability of predecessors to follow further deepens the predicament of the modern age. It is therefore strongly felt as both necessary and urgent to break away from the stereotypes of the past so as to invent new ways of expression which can convey the subtlety and complexity of the new vision of reality. Malcolm Bradbury's assertion that "Modernism is not art's freedom, but art's necessity"<sup>21</sup> should be understood in such a context.

## 2. Modernism Is Art's Necessity

Along with the strong awareness of the disintegration of conventionalized perception and the confrontation with the fragmented modern world is the feeling of nostalgia for the coherence of the past. Underlying this nostalgic tendency, there prevails the realization that the modern sense of reality can no longer fit in traditional forms and conventions and that fundamental changes in structures of expression are inevitable. Virginia Woolf laments that lyric poetry is unable to serve her generation "as it has served so many generations of our fathers".<sup>22</sup> She explains that the view of the modern world is no longer characterized by those features of harmony and coherence, but

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<sup>19</sup> Dionysus and the City: Modernism in Twentieth-Century Poetry (New York, 1970), p.7.

<sup>20</sup> The Captain's Death Bed and Other Essays, p.108.

<sup>21</sup> Bradbury and McFarlane (eds.), p.27.

<sup>22</sup> Granite and Rainbow, p.11.

dominated by perceptions of fragments, conflicts of incongruous things, juxtapositions of contradictories and the complexity of being. The mind, being full of "monstrous hybrid", is incapable of composing the "fine fabric of a lyric".<sup>23</sup>

With the same view, Stephen Spender makes a distinction between "organic poetry" and "intellectualized poetry". The poetry of the past is classified as "organic poetry" in which "the poetic flows as it were, in an uninterrupted continuum out of living experience",<sup>24</sup> while in contrast to "organic poetry", poetry of the modern age is defined as "intellectualized poetry" which, written in the world of "industrialisation and science, of measurements and reason", is to "confront the modern reality on its own terms, in its own symbols".<sup>25</sup>

The recognition that a new flux of experience of the modern world necessarily distances the present from the past, and that a complex vision of reality insists on an equally complex way of expression, is viewed as a prominent feature in the consciousness of Modernism. Stephen Spender points out that "*realization* is the primary gesture of modernism, the determination to invent a new style in order to express the deeply felt change in the modern world".<sup>26</sup> Such a recognition is also employed as a crucial principle to distinguish contemporaneous writers.

Among the novelists of the early twentieth century, Virginia Woolf draws a line between Edwardians and Georgians. The former are referred to as those who refuse to recognize the changed perception of modern reality, hence see no necessity to turn the course of the novel initiated by such a fundamental change. Woolf describes them as materialists who are tied to conventions of the past and construct stories in a mechanical way with a strict observation of external logic. They simply ignore shades and subtleties accumulating in the mind and consciousness, and decline

to gratify those senses, ... the senses of sight, of sound, of touch - above all, the sense of the human being, his depth and the variety of his perceptions, his complexity, his confusion, his self, in short.<sup>27</sup>

The Georgians, in contrast, are those who are keenly aware of the predicament inflicted by the modern situation. They set out to capture the spirit of life and make a great effort to present the inner reality perceived by the mind, rather than to pursue a plot

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<sup>23</sup> Granite and Rainbow, p.11.

<sup>24</sup> Spender, p.40.

<sup>25</sup> op. cit., p.46.

<sup>26</sup> op. cit., p.83.

<sup>27</sup> McNeillie (ed.), p.238.

determined by a sequence of external events with characterization based on that sequence. She insists that life should be looked at within instead of being approached from the outside. For life is composed of "a halo, a semi-transparent envelope surrounding us from the beginning of consciousness to the end".<sup>28</sup> Well-arranged plots and neatly categorized types miss rather than capture the spirit of life which lies in "a myriad impressions received by the mind".<sup>29</sup> The task that she views as essentially important for the modern novelist is "to convey this varying, this unknown and uncircumscribed spirit, whatever aberration or complexity it may display, with as little mixture of the alien and external as possible".<sup>30</sup>

It is with the application of the same principle that Stephen Spender distinguishes "the moderns" from "the contemporaries". The moderns first of all realize that "the thing observed is changed, and the observer is changed in his manner of perceiving",<sup>31</sup> while the contemporaries deny that modern reality imposes a challenge or creates any problem to the established conventions, hence see no need to make any radical changes in the creation of literature. Spender points out that the contemporaries act upon events rather than have their sensibility acted upon by the changed vision of reality. The moderns distrust the modern world, but are committed to finding ways to present their vision of the world "on its own terms and in its own symbols". They

start off by thinking that human nature has changed. ... This change ... has also changed all the relations within arrangements of words or marks on canvas which make a poem or novel or a painting.<sup>32</sup>

Regarding Virginia Woolf as the representative of the moderns, Spender states that the aim of Woolf's departure from traditional conventions is "to turn her fiction into an instrument which records changed human nature: a shift not just in taste that sensibility reveals, but in the quality of sensibility itself".<sup>33</sup>

Along with the deeply felt inadequacy of traditional forms in conveying modern reality and the necessity for change is the pursuit of complexity prominent in Modernism. Peter Faulkner maintains that the "sense of complexity was to be the modernist writer's fundamental recognition".<sup>34</sup> The sense of complexity concerns not only the complexity

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<sup>28</sup> McNeillie (ed.), p.150.

<sup>29</sup> loc. cit.

<sup>30</sup> loc. cit.

<sup>31</sup> Spender, p.133.

<sup>32</sup> op. cit., p.xiii.

<sup>33</sup> Spender, p.xiii.

<sup>34</sup> Modernism (London, 1977), p.14.

of modern experience, but also the complexity of modern consciousness of human existence, which leads to the recognition of the complexity of literature itself. As Malcolm Bradbury puts it, the sense of complexity in Modernism "is innate, irremovable".<sup>35</sup> The consciousness of complexity demands that such consciousness be reflected in organizing principles and formal structures, since only "a complex and demanding art ... could adequately render a modern consciousness of the world".<sup>36</sup> Ezra Pound, with his well-known proposition, "making it new", urges writers of the modern age to reformulate tensional relations and re-structure conventional reality so as to achieve a synthesis between forms of expression and the fundamentally changed cognition of reality. His composition of ideogram and interpretive metaphor is constructed by juxtaposing and combining traditionally unrelated and antithetical elements to bring out new visions of reality characterized by multiplicity and complexity. Maintaining the same view, T.S. Eliot believes that the aim of modern poetry is "to break up the conventional modes of perception" and "see the world afresh", since what forms "the substratum of our being" are "the deeper, unnamed feelings".<sup>37</sup>

According to Eliot, "poets in our civilization, as it exists at present, must be *difficult*". For our

civilization comprehends great variety and complexity, and this variety and complexity, playing upon a refined sensibility, must produce various and complex results. The poet must become more and more comprehensive, more allusive, more indirect, in order to force, to dislocate if necessary, language into his meaning.<sup>38</sup>

This is precisely what he achieved in his The Waste Land. Joyce's Ulysses, too, is distinguished by its being comprehensive, allusive, and indirect, and its dislocated language. The organizing principles and formal structures of Modernism are featured by complexity and fragmentation, resistance to lucidity and the sense of indeterminacy.

In his The Language of Modernism, Randy Malamud bases his argument on the same view. He finds that a "crucial facet of the language of modernism is its difficulty", since only the language featured by difficulty can express "the sense of external complexity that pervades the modern age",<sup>39</sup> and only the language loaded with

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<sup>35</sup> Bradbury and McFarlane (eds.), p.21.

<sup>36</sup> Peter Faulkner, Modernism, p.21.

<sup>37</sup> The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism (London, 1964), p.155.

<sup>38</sup> Selected Essays (London, 1934, 1950), p.248.

<sup>39</sup> The Language of Modernism (London, 1989), p.8.

fragmentation can reflect "the truth of modern instability" and uncertainty.<sup>40</sup> What Modernism attempts to do is to stretch language "to say more than it had been able to say before", "to reveal more, embody more".<sup>41</sup> The language of Modernism, which is characterized by ambivalence, ambiguity and multiplicity, is invented to organize the chaos and to formalize the formless. The recurrent devices in the writings of Modernism are allusions, references and quotations which are fragmentary in themselves. But it is through shifting unrelated allusions and quotations into new contexts and interweaving them into new wholes that Modernism attempts to encompass fragments of the past and the present and to create a comprehensive and complex picture relating different times and places.

As has been remarked, the primary concern of Modernism is recognized as a search for new forms of representation to accommodate the radically changed vision of reality and human nature, or in Allan Bullock's words, a search for "significant artistic structure in increasing chaos".<sup>42</sup> It is strongly believed that the chaotic and fragmented civilization of the modern age cannot be redeemed but in a completely new form of art. This is the central point underlying T.S. Eliot's high estimation of Ulysses. He regards what Joyce achieves in the book as "a step toward making the modern world possible for art".<sup>43</sup> Malcolm Bradbury is also convinced that Modernism achieves "a worthy art in an age which seems not to grant us one".<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Malamud, p.3.

<sup>41</sup> op. cit., p.4.

<sup>42</sup> "The Double Image", in Modernism 1890 - 1930, p.202.

<sup>43</sup> A Modernist Reader, p.103.

<sup>44</sup> Bradbury and McFarlane (eds.), p.28.

## Chapter 2. The Confrontation of the Past with the Present

Stephen Spender in his influential study of Modernism The Struggle of the Moderns points out that the confrontation of the past with the present is the fundamental aim of Modernism.<sup>1</sup> The statement, which concerns the defining feature of Modernism, can be interpreted in two interrelated ways. First of all, the tension between the past and the present is recognized as the central issue recurring throughout the period of Modernism. Modernism, with an inborn challenge to established culture, "implies a contrast with the past, a break with tradition and convention".<sup>2</sup> While a new flux of experience and the consequent change in the perception of reality disjoin the modern age from the past, the rejection by Modernism of the very idea of historical continuity further enlarges the gulf between the past and the present. Secondly, it is the self-consciousness of discontinuity that leads Modernism to the effort to bridge the gulf between the past and the present on a basis other than historical linearity. Modernism is characterized, paradoxically, both by its conscious departure from the past and its consistent attempt to re-construct the relationship with the past.

The confrontation of the past with the present in Modernism is therefore to be seen not only in its departure from traditional forms and conventions, but also in its re-examination of the relationship between the past and the present from a perspective fundamentally different from the past view. To re-establish the connection between the past and the present is a major preoccupation distinguishing Modernism; and in its challenge to the chronological perception of the past and the present, Modernism causes a change to the very concepts of past and present. Such a change both reflects and is reflected in Modernist forms and techniques of representation, namely epic framework and the stream of consciousness, in which chronology is replaced by the tendency of spatialization and by the employment of multiple points of view and strata of time.

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<sup>1</sup> Spender, p.80.

<sup>2</sup> Monroe K. Spears, p.5.

## 1. Rejection of the Idea of Chronological Linearity

Robert Con Davis claims that "the disinheritance of modern culture is precisely the loss of belief in such traditional schemes as the Great Chain of Being".<sup>3</sup> In Mapping Literary Modernism, Ricardo J. Quinones also asserts that "the first task of Modernism was to disrupt the temporal linearity that formed the basis of many nineteenth-century preoccupations".<sup>4</sup> As has been observed in the preceding chapter, the change in the way of thinking and perceiving in Modernism was greatly influenced by the new developments of other disciplines around the turn of the century. The study of the human mind conducted by Freud and Jung with the focus on the exploitation of subconsciousness, not only re-directs the way in which dreams and subconsciousness could be interpreted and understood, but also challenges the linear view in relating multiple dimensions of the mind. The subconsciousness of the mind relates things through memories, associations, analogies and parallels without necessarily observing the external linearity which connects them in a superficial way. The synchronic approach to cultural patterns of different ages in anthropology further strengthens the loss of the belief of Modernism that mere historical continuity sustains the relationship of the past with the present.

It is important to emphasize that although the rejection by Modernism of the idea of chronological linearity reinforces the sense of discontinuity of the modern age from the past, it does not lead Modernism to isolate itself. On the contrary, the issue of the relationship between the past and the present stands as the fundamental concern of Modernism. Its rejection of historical continuity is initiated by the recognition of the complexity and multiplicity of human reality which historical linearity fails to account for, rather than on a simple dismissal of any relevance of the past to the present. While being keenly aware of the gulf between the past and the present, Modernism is committed to re-establishing the connection of the two. In fact, the preoccupation with the past is a distinguishing feature in the writings of Modernism which at the same time make a conscious departure from traditional procedures. Richard Ellmann comments on this paradoxical aspect of Modernism by saying

modernists have been as much imbued with a feeling for their historical role, their relation to the past, as with a feeling of historical discontinuity. They have a sense of an ancestral line, even if it is often an underground stream.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Robert Con Davis and Ronald Schleifer (eds.), Contemporary Literary Criticism: Literary and Cultural Studies (New York, 1989), p.18.

<sup>4</sup> Quinones, p.88.

<sup>5</sup> Ellmann and Feidelson (eds.), p.vi.

Ricardo J. Quinones, too, observes that Modernist writers not only

were committed to depicting the changing truths of their time and their experience, but they also had a tremendous sense of history, understood in a critical and comprehensive way. They rendered the momentary and fleeting, the here and now, but they also interpreted these events in the light of more permanent forms. The fullness and complexity of their responses yielded a total picture of reality.<sup>6</sup>

The attitude and commitment of Modernism to the past is also used as a crucial principle to distinguish Modernism from other literary movements of the century. Stephen Spender claims that Modernism differs from Futurism in an important way. Modernism is characterized by its effort to re-construct the link of the modern world with the concept of tradition. Futurism, on the contrary, simply rejects any relevance of the past to the present.<sup>7</sup> The distinction that Frank Kermode makes between palaeo-modernism and neo-modernism is also based on the attitude towards the past that each group maintains. Palaeo-modernism, according to Kermode, "was emphatic about its living relation to the past"<sup>8</sup> and "spoke of retrieving rather than of abolishing tradition",<sup>9</sup> while neo-modernism disparages and rejects any values of the past.

The disruption of chronological linearity is most prominent in T.S. Eliot's great effort to re-define the notion of tradition by re-examining the relationship of the past and the present. The traditional view of the relationship is largely confined to the perception of a linear order in which the meaning of the past is seen only in its one-dimensional influence upon the present, while the present passively and mechanically receives such an influence without reacting upon the past. Eliot challenges the view that chronology alone constitutes the substantial connection between the past and the present. In his conception, which is elaborated in the widely influential essay "Tradition and the Individual Talent", the past and the present together contribute to the formation of an organic pattern in which the two are intersected and interpenetrating. The meaning of the past is not absolute and cannot be maintained in itself; it has to constantly seek its existence in the consciousness of the present, while the present actively re-orders its

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<sup>6</sup> Quinones, p.252.

<sup>7</sup> Spender, pp.79-80.

<sup>8</sup> The Sense of an Ending : Studies in the Theory of Fiction (New York, 1967), p.114.

<sup>9</sup> Continuities (London, 1968), p.23.

relation to the past. The difference between the past and the present is neither defined by the chronological order, nor is it as clear-cut as the traditional view claims:

the difference between the present and the past is that the conscious present is an awareness of the past in a way and to an extent which the past's awareness of itself cannot show.<sup>10</sup>

In the re-structured relationship, the present is endowed with a much more active role than ever before. It not only keeps the past alive, but more importantly, it constantly re-shapes the meaning of the past by bringing out of the past what the past cannot realize in itself. At the same time, the implication of the past to the present is ever expanded in the conscious present rather than limited to the past period. To the assertion that "The dead writers are remote from us because we *know* so much more than they did", Eliot answers: "Precisely, and they are that which we know".<sup>11</sup> His affirmation actually contains an underlying transformation of such a saying from inside. For the knowledge of the dead writers is consistently renewed in us, instead of being dead with them. They continue their living with us and in us. We do not come to know more than they do, but we come to know more than they do about themselves.

The central point of Eliot's argument is the emphasis upon the "fusion" incessantly taking place between the past and the present. Just as Sir James Frazer employs the synchronic approach to the study of cultural patterns without being restricted by the chronological difference among one another, Eliot improvises a "simultaneous existence" of the past and the present. He maintains that the two exist in a "simultaneous order" in which "the past should be altered by the present as much as the present is directed by the past".<sup>12</sup> Such a simultaneous relationship is succinctly expressed by the following lines from Four Quartets:

We die with the dying;  
See, they depart, and we go with them.  
We are born with the dead;  
See, they return, and bring us with them.<sup>13</sup>

By re-constructing the relationship between the past and the present, Eliot causes a fundamental change to the traditional concept of tradition. He not only makes an alternative approach to the conventional one to define tradition, but also challenges the

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<sup>10</sup> Selected Essays (London, 1932, 1972), p.16

<sup>11</sup> loc. cit.

<sup>12</sup> op. cit., p.15.

<sup>13</sup> Four Quartets (London, 1968), p.54.

prevailing tendency to emphasize individuality as anti-traditional, or vice versa. As Frank Kermode remarks, Eliot's re-definition of the notion of tradition is "far from abolitionist", yet "not at all conventional".<sup>14</sup>

First of all, Eliot points out that in the evaluation of a poet, the concentration on his "difference from his predecessors, especially his immediate predecessors" so as to set off his individuality, is in effect misleading. For "the most individual parts of his work may be those in which the dead poets, his ancestors, assert their immortality most vigorously".<sup>15</sup> The appreciation of individuality is neither absolute, nor should it be isolated from the context which encompasses both the past and the present. It is not necessarily his difference from his predecessors that establishes a poet's individuality; but more importantly, it is "the appreciation of his relation to the dead poets and artists" that decides the significance of his achievement.

Meanwhile, Eliot transforms the idea of being traditional through his re-definition of the notion of tradition. Based on the proposition of a simultaneous relationship between the past and the present, tradition is no more seen as a constitution composed of invariable canons or conventions which are supposed to be passed on to the next generation in a linear fashion. Tradition, Eliot argues, "in the first place, involves the historical sense, ... and the historical sense involves a perception, not only of the pastness of the past, but of its presence".<sup>16</sup> Accordingly, being traditional is not defined as a passive and timid adherence to the successes of the past, but means an active contribution to the constant "conformity" between the past and the present. Eliot perceives tradition as "an ideal order", which "is modified by the introduction of the new work of art".<sup>17</sup> Evaluating the work of a poet necessarily involves the standards of the past; but the evaluation of the new in its relation to the old proceeds in a reciprocal way and is conducted as "comparison, in which two things are measured by each other".<sup>18</sup> It is this mutual measurement along with the constant conformity between the new and the old that constitutes a living pattern of tradition.

With the emphasis in the perception of tradition shifted upon a living relationship between the past and the present, Eliot further elaborates the idea of fusion in relating the past with the present. He emphasizes the making of new combinations, new wholes, out of images both of the past and the present, seized by and stored up in the mind of

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<sup>14</sup> Selected Prose of T.S. Eliot (London, 1975), p.16.

<sup>15</sup> Selected Essays, p.14.

<sup>16</sup> loc. cit.

<sup>17</sup> op. cit., p.15.

<sup>18</sup> loc. cit.

the poet. While the poet "must develop or procure the consciousness of the past and ... should continue to develop this consciousness throughout his career",<sup>19</sup> he can only realize such a consciousness in his work by achieving a new compound of the past and the present. The soundness of his work is decided not by the greatness of the emotions, but by "the intensity of the artistic process, the pressure, so to speak, under which the fusion takes place".<sup>20</sup>

It is of great importance to note that Eliot's conception of tradition contains no tendency to diminish the values of the past. On the contrary, his re-examination of the relationship between the past and the present deepens as well as widens the cognition of the past and its relation to the present. The rejection of chronological linearity leads to the establishment of a living relationship in which the meaning of the past is destabilized by the constant intrusion of the present, so that the existing order between the two always shifts and needs to be re-adjusted. The essence of such a living relationship lies in a perpetual interpenetration of and subsequent fusion between the past and the present. It is the consciousness of a simultaneous existence of the past and the present that enables a poet to find the balance between a full appreciation of the values of the past and his commitment to the present. For

he is not likely to know what is done unless he lives in what is not merely the present, but the present moment of the past, unless he is conscious not of what is dead, but of what is already living.<sup>21</sup>

## 2. The Tendency of Spatialization

The disruption of the idea of historical linearity in Modernism both accounts for and can be observed in the form of spatialization which dominates the trend of Modernism. In his influential essay, "Spatial Form in Modern Literature", Joseph Frank argues that it is the structure of spatialization that informs the nature of innovative forms of Modernism. He defines spatialization as the form in which

the time-flow of narrative is halted; attention is fixed on the interplay of relationships within immobilized time-areas. These relationships are juxtaposed

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<sup>19</sup> Selected Essays, p.17.

<sup>20</sup> *op. cit.*, p.19.

<sup>21</sup> *op. cit.*, p.22.

independently of the progress of the narrative, and the full significance of the scene is given by the reflexive relations among the units of meaning.<sup>22</sup>

In the tendency towards spatializing, the temporal time-scheme is subordinated to spatial movements. Such a way in which the progress of time is organized in terms of spatialization is a defining feature of the mythical method represented by James Joyce and T.S. Eliot; it is also seen predominant in stream-of-consciousness fiction of Modernism.

Eliot in his review of Ulysses describes the mythical method as a manipulation of "a continuous parallel between contemporaneity and antiquity".<sup>23</sup> He believes that Ulysses not only makes the fragmented civilization of the modern age possible for artistic representation, but also shows an illuminating way to bridge the gulf between the past and the present through the parallel of the perception of the historical past with the representation of modern life. The employment of the mythical method enables Joyce to transform the past and the present into a simultaneous whole and give a shape and significance to the otherwise fragmented and anarchic contemporary life. As Stephen Spender comments: "In Ulysses, an attempted realization of the whole of contemporary life at a particular time and place is brought into cohesion with the Homeric epic interpreted into terms of that present".<sup>24</sup> What Eliot attempts to do in The Waste Land is also appreciated as an effort to juxtapose the past with the present by projecting the knowledge of the literary past upon the perception of modern reality, thus to bring the understanding of antiquity into the context of contemporaneity. Stephen Spender describes the trend of Modernism to encompass the past and the present into a living whole as an attempt "to envisage the past as a whole complexity enclosed within a consciousness conditioned by circumstances that are entirely of today".<sup>25</sup>

The framework that Joyce presents in Ulysses is constructed upon the parallel to Homer's Odyssey with cross-reference to Dante's Divine Comedy and Shakespeare's Hamlet. The chronological time of the story takes only one day with a simple plot of following Leopold Bloom's schedule on 16 June 1904 in the city of Dublin. However, the wide range of allusions and analogies which composes the ever-expanding network beneath the surface narrative reaches back to the Hellenic age crossed with the medieval world, the Elizabethan period as well as the contemporary society of Dublin. As Stanley Sultan points out, the pattern of Ulysses "is one of parallel arrangement rather

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<sup>22</sup> The Widening Gyre: Crisis and Mastery in Modern Literature (New Jersey, 1963), p.15.

<sup>23</sup> A Modernist Reader, p.103.

<sup>24</sup> Spender, p.78.

<sup>25</sup> op. cit., pp.82-83.

than linear development".<sup>26</sup> Meanwhile, the movements of the characters Bloom and Stephen are presented simultaneously until they cross into each other at the midday when "the two streams of consciousness seem to converge".<sup>27</sup> It is observed that the characters "move in space, but they do not develop in time",<sup>28</sup> in the sense that the development of the characters is not revealed in a chronological linearity but unfolded spatially through reminiscences, associations and analogies which are used to relate the moment of the present with the events of the past. Clive Hart distinguishes the characterization in the traditional novel dominated by the sequence of external occurrences from that in Ulysses, which is conducted by cutting "back and forth in time from a character's awareness of the present to his memories of the past".<sup>29</sup> The result is therefore marked by essential differences. The traditional Tom Jones "is always the Tom Jones of the present, Bloom is always seen to be made up of all the Leopold Blooms who have ever existed".<sup>30</sup> The subordination of "the chronology of external events" to "the chronology of the stream-of-consciousness" is regarded as "an important innovation" of Modernism.<sup>31</sup>

Ulysses and The Waste Land are recognized as landmark works of the twentieth century, and the two works have much in common both in terms of the structure of spatialization and of the mythical method to establish such a structure. Just as Eliot defines the method employed by Joyce in Ulysses as the manipulation of a continuous parallel between antiquity and contemporaneity, so Michael H. Levenson in his illuminating study of The Waste Land reviews Eliot's method in the work as the extension of parallels in contrast to the traditional narrative which depends wholly on "convergence of incident, convergence of character".<sup>32</sup> In his analysis, Levenson expands the idea of a continuous parallel. He points out that the purpose and consequence of continuous parallels are to constantly enlarge our notion of cultural contexts by virtue of bringing out "new analogies, new parallels, new possibilities for comparison".<sup>33</sup> It is in the light of this continuous expansion that Eliot's achievement in the poem is evaluated. Levenson suggests that the poem should be viewed as "an inventive act of literary history",<sup>34</sup> for it reshapes our knowledge of the myth of Tiresias, the Grail Legend, of Dante and Shakespeare, and of the theories of J. Frazer

<sup>26</sup> The Argument of Ulysses (Ohio, 1964), p.26.

<sup>27</sup> Harry Levin, James Joyce: A Critical Introduction (London, 1960), p.98.

<sup>28</sup> op. cit., p.116.

<sup>29</sup> James Joyce's Ulysses (Sydney, 1968), pp.19-20.

<sup>30</sup> op. cit., p.18.

<sup>31</sup> Douwe Fokkema and Elrud Ibsch, Modernist Conjectures: A Mainstream in European Literature 1910 - 1940 (London, 1987), p.66.

<sup>32</sup> A Genealogy of Modernism: A Study of English Doctrine 1908 - 1922 (London, 1984), p.200.

<sup>33</sup> op. cit., p.201.

<sup>34</sup> op. cit., p.202.

and J. Weston among other cultural resources. They are placed into new contexts and their relevances to the present are perceived from subsequently new perspectives, so that the relationship among themselves is necessarily shifted. In other words, Eliot's work of the present provides a new understanding of the works of the past, not only in their relation to the present, but also in their relation to one another.

Levenson also points out that Joseph Frank's definition of spatialization, while discrediting the validity of linear sequence, denies development of any sort in the form of spatialization. He argues that although the movement in The Waste Land should be observed in a spatial rather than sequential fashion, the poem is distinguished by a different kind of development, which he describes as "contextual development". By contextual development, he means the development which is made "not by resolving conflicts but by enlarging context, by situating motifs within an increasingly elaborate set of cultural parallels - by widening".<sup>35</sup>

Helen Gardner, though not explicitly elaborating on the spatial structure of The Waste Land, suggests that the progress in the poem be viewed as the progress of "a deeper and deeper exploration of an original scene or theme".<sup>36</sup> Jacob Korg in his argument asserts that by suppressing the laws of time, The Waste Land "reconstitutes space".<sup>37</sup> In other words, by discarding the linear sequence and focusing on the expansion of contextual associations, Eliot creates a simultaneous existence of the past and the present. In doing so, he enlarges the concepts of both time and space.

In their studies of stream-of-consciousness fiction which is fully developed around the turn of the century, both Melvin Friedman and Erich Auerbach regard the disintegration of linear narration as a significant departure from the traditional novel. Friedman states that the emphasis on the exploitation of stream of consciousness turns the focus of the novel. The description of characters from the outside through chronologically sequenced events is replaced by the presentation of the entire area of consciousness which is marked by a breakdown of the external order of narration. He further explains that the tendency in stream of consciousness is to arrange the structure in a vertical line, but with continuous cross references and the interweaving of symbols and images, independent of any time sequence, the whole pattern is evolved spatially.<sup>38</sup> It is in this

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<sup>35</sup> Levenson, p.201.

<sup>36</sup> Gardner, p.96.

<sup>37</sup> "Modern Art Techniques in *The Waste Land*", in Jay Martin (ed.), A Collection of Critical Essays on 'The Waste Land' (New Jersey, 1968), p.90.

<sup>38</sup> Friedman, p.24.

way that Virginia Woolf constructs her novel Mrs. Dalloway. The whole event takes only twelve hours, registered by the mechanical chiming of Big Ben. But by cutting back and forth in mechanical time and crossing present situations with past memories through stream of consciousness, the author presents us with a complete life-story of each character and their relations with one another.

In Mimesis, Erich Auerbach makes a superb analysis of the stream of consciousness technique by closely examining passages taken from Virginia Woolf's To the Lighthouse. He defines the way in which stream of consciousness is rendered as "the modern procedure" which marks the basic difference from the convention of preceding novels. The characteristic feature of the modern procedure is seen in the breakup of the barrier imposed by a single person narration in chronological linearity and in its employment of multipersonal method and multi-strata of time.

In illustrating the innovative way of treating time by Virginia Woolf in her work, Auerbach differentiates two concepts of time: the "exterior" and "interior" time. By exterior time, he means the time occupied by exterior events, while interior time is referred to as "the dreamlike wealth of a process of consciousness which traverses a whole subjective universe".<sup>39</sup> It is an intricate interplay of the two stratum of time that contributes to the manipulation of the narration in a spatially expanding way. Although the exterior time constructs the framing occurrence of the narration, the time in which the narration is conducted is not devoted to the framing occurrence itself, but to the interludes which trace movements of the mind and consciousness inflicted upon by exterior occurrences in a random order. The framing occurrence might be tied to a brief span of time, but the narration revolving in the interior time moves spatially within various shifts of time and scene. Meanwhile, the interludes themselves might not be related to one another; they are released and connected by the common focus revealed in the framing occurrence. But it is the same common focus that serves to "deprive them of the independent 'present'".<sup>40</sup> Auerbach stresses that the movement of the interior time relies on "ideas and chains of ideas" which, though released by external occurrences, are cut loose from the present of these occurrences and integrated by the reflection of the mind and consciousness into a network with an internal order residing in it.

Auerbach's analysis of the distinction between exterior time and interior time shows that the unifying principle of exterior time is superficial, for it only relates external events in

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<sup>39</sup> Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature (New York, 1957), p.475.

<sup>40</sup> op. cit., p.477.

a linear order without concerning the inner relevance among them, while interior time focuses its attention upon the establishing of an internal link among events which are not necessarily related or connected in external terms. The employment of multiple strata of time breaks down the limitation imposed by a particular past or present and makes it possible for the narration to shift among different times and places simultaneously. It is by means of merging temporal differences into a spatial network that the vision of wholeness and the sense of completeness are achieved.

The interior monologue, which is prominent in Joyce's Ulysses, is also seen to be primarily concerned with establishing a simultaneous existence of various thoughts and movements without observing the law of external time. Auerbach observes that by using "the technique of a multiple reflection of consciousness and of multiple time strata", Joyce achieves "a synthesized comic view" in which all "the great motifs of the cultural history of Europe" are contained within a Day filled with randomness.<sup>41</sup> Stephen Spender describes Joyce's interior monologue as "a technique for presenting not just his main characters, but also as a whole society as a state of consciousness".<sup>42</sup>

The tension between the past and the present in Modernism which is highlighted by the disruption of the idea of historical linearity is resolved in the effort to re-construct the relationship of the past and the present. The linear connection between the two is rejected and replaced by a simultaneous one. While the present is shaped by the influences from the past, the past itself is subjected to the constant change caused by the present. In the field of creation, the form of spatialization not only dismantles the barrier between the past and the present imposed by chronological linearity in the traditional novel, but also provides a way to integrate the heritage of the past into the presentation of the contemporary life by encompassing the two in a simultaneous context.

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<sup>41</sup> Auerbach, p.481.

<sup>42</sup> Spender, p.82.

### Chapter 3. The Challenge of Modernism

It is argued that Modernism is not only identified by its radical experimentation in literary forms and structures, but also distinguished by its new way of perceiving and exploring reality, and its re-construction of conceptual relationships. Modernism has undoubtedly made a radical departure from traditional forms and styles, but more importantly it has caused fundamental changes and disruptions to long-established system of ideas and values. The shift which Modernism makes in style is paralleled by changes in ideas and concepts, as Ricardo J. Quinones asserts in his study: "the Modernist shift in style was inseparable from the Modernist shift in values".<sup>1</sup> Malcolm Bradbury likewise claims that Modernism has broken down "traditional frontiers in matters of literary and cultural concern".<sup>2</sup> He further explains, Modernism "has utterly reconstructed our artistic tradition, our sense of form and language, our contemporary values, our culture and our styles". The fundamental changes caused by Modernism to the traditional system of values and ideas have redirected not only "the imagination of its age", but also that "of our succeeding age".<sup>3</sup>

The view that Modernism is basically concerned with changing the prevailing ideology is also supported by the argument of the critics who stand against Modernism, though the purpose of their argument is to negate the achievement of Modernism. Georg Lukacs is one who has made a strong criticism of Modernism. But he shows no intention of dismissing Modernism merely for its radical formal experiments. His approach to Modernism is apparently based on the assumption that the change in style is rooted in a change of ideology. He points out that exclusive concern with stylistic differences between "modern" and "traditional" writing "conceals the opposing principles actually underlying and determining contrasting styles".<sup>4</sup> According to his view, Modernism with its anti-conventional ideology has threatened the basic concept of literature. He accuses Modernism of leading "to the destruction of literature as such"; and concludes that "modernism means not the enrichment, but the negation of art".<sup>5</sup> In his criticism of James Joyce, he disagrees with the argument that Joyce's concentration on the detailed recording of sense-data results in his neglect of ideas and

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<sup>1</sup> Quinones, p.246.

<sup>2</sup> The Modern World: Ten Great Writers (London, 1988), p.14.

<sup>3</sup> op. cit., p.5.

<sup>4</sup> "The Ideology of Modernism", in John Oliver Perry (ed.), Backgrounds to Modern Literature (California, 1968), p.284.

<sup>5</sup> op. cit., p.271.

emotions, regarding the argument as an artistic failure which misses the point. He claims that Joyce's preoccupation with detailed representation is in fact in conformity with his artistic intentions, only these intentions are "aimless and directionless".<sup>6</sup>

Just as Modernism is characterized by its paradoxical vision, so the challenge of Modernism is also to be understood in a paradoxical way. Modernism starts with the recognition of the inadequacy of traditional forms in conveying the changed perception of reality. In making its radical departure from the past, Modernism causes a profound disruption to the traditional way of thinking and perceiving. It re-constructs the relationship between the past and the present, and transforms other conceptual relationships, such as the subjective and the objective, unity and multiplicity. Meanwhile, the pursuit of multiplicity and complexity both in the perception and representation of reality predetermines that it is impossible for Modernism to establish a unifying principle as the final solution to the increasingly complex sense of reality. As Peter Faulkner remarks, "Modernism has thus permanently enriched literature, though leaving its problems unsolved".<sup>7</sup> Yet what Modernism seeks and explores is the sense of indeterminacy and elusiveness in perceiving and presenting human reality. The consciousness of complexity and indeterminacy leads Modernism to challenge fixed ideas of the traditional perception of reality; it also represents the challenge that Modernism leaves to the future.

### **1. The Paradoxical Vision in Modernism**

Paradox as a way of perceiving is predominant in the imagination of Modernism. For Virginia Woolf, the modern mind is "the mould of that queer conglomeration of incongruous things".<sup>8</sup> In breaking up the conventional modes of perception, Modernism seeks to explore inner relationships underlying previously unrelated things by bringing together incongruities, juxtaposing opposites, and reconciling contradictories. It is a distinguishing tendency in Modernism to transform traditional sets of opposite concepts into interchangeable entities, to destabilize the absoluteness of ideas and concepts with the sense of relativity, so as to fully reveal the contingency and complexity of human reality. Malcolm Bradbury gives a clear account of this tendency towards paradox in Modernism:

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<sup>6</sup> Perry (ed.), p.249.

<sup>7</sup> Modernism, p.74.

<sup>8</sup> Granite and Rainbow, p.20.

There is a striving to emphasize the essential character of the accidental, ... the concern to objectify the subjective, to make audible or perceptible the mind's inaudible conversations, to halt the flow, to irrationalize the rational, to defamiliarize and dehumanize the expected, to conventionalize the extraordinary and the eccentric, to define the psychopathology of *everyday* life, to intellectualize the emotional, to secularize the spiritual, to see space as a function of time, mass as a form of energy, and uncertainty as the only certain thing.<sup>9</sup>

The paradoxical vision of Modernism is not only seen in juxtaposing and seeking reconciliation among incongruous and unrelated things; but more importantly, it is revealed in the effort to change conceptual relationships which are crucial to the cognition of reality. Just as the chronologically sequenced relationship of the past and the present is transformed into a paradoxically interrelated one, so the conceptual relation of the subjective and the objective also undergoes a fundamental transformation. The two concepts are no longer viewed as mutually exclusive. Instead, they are seen to be both interrelated and interchangeable. The subjective is objectified, while objectivity is achieved through subjective syntheses and revelations. The changed relationship between the two is most clearly discerned in the tendency of Modernism towards internalizing external experience and externalizing the consciousness of the mind.

Based on the observation of the changed procedure in the novels by Virginia Woolf and James Joyce, Erich Auerbach in Mimesis puts forward the critical term "modern realism". By modern realism, he refers to the procedure which breaches the traditional narration of chronological sequence and focuses on the exploitation of the internal process of the mind and consciousness inflicted by external events. The term conveys the recognition of a paradoxical relationship of the subjective and the objective, which eventually leads to the transformation of "realism" itself.

Firstly, the "modern method" provides detailed descriptions of external events, but it breaks up the linear order of narration by rejecting the idea of plot in the sense of an arrangement of a beginning, a catastrophe as a turning point, and an ending. It also disrupts the belief that the depth of reality and life is captured only in important external events. So, instead of focusing on the presentation of externally significant matters and great turning points, the modern procedure turns to insignificant occurrences plucked randomly from everyday life. Secondly, paying no attention to the external order of events, the modern method searches for an internal logic residing in

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<sup>9</sup> Bradbury and McFarlane (eds.), p.48.

random moments of life by means of establishing a focal point among memories, reflections and associations released by external occurrences. The emphasis is placed upon the synthetic nature of the mind and consciousness rather than on the importance of events. Accordingly, not only is the reference of realism no longer restricted to the description of external events in a chronological sequence, but also the validity of the sense of objectivity derived from such a description is questioned.

Auerbach finds that one of the important features of the modern procedure is "a close approach to objective reality by means of numerous subjective impressions received by various individuals".<sup>10</sup> He contrasts the "multipersonal method" with the "unipersonal method" which admits only one person's view of reality, hence is highly subjective and limited for being tied to a particular incident in a particular situation. He points out that objectivity is not necessarily secured by the narration of external events arranged in a chronological order with the emphasis on important occurrences as turning points of destiny. For the essentiality of reality does not lie in external events themselves, but in the synthesis of the effects that the events release upon the process of the mind and consciousness. Moreover, it is often those simple and externally insignificant incidents which through the mind and consciousness "amount to a synthesis of the intricacies of life" that lead to a "more genuine, a deeper, and indeed a more real reality".<sup>11</sup>

Auerbach observes that Virginia Woolf's procedure marks an essential departure of the modern novel from traditional novels. In her searching for inner reality, she subordinates external events to the presentation of the process of the mind:

In Virginia Woolf's case the exterior events have actually lost their hegemony, they serve to release and interpret inner events, whereas before her time ... inner movements preponderantly function to prepare and motivate significant exterior happenings.<sup>12</sup>

The novel of "modern realism" turns away from presenting the story in the accepted sense of linearity and completeness, showing not only that objective truths are achieved through syntheses of subjective impressions and reflections brought upon by external events, but also that using the external order as the organizing principle is actually misleading in establishing the inner truth of reality. Auerbach describes the change of the course of the novel as "a transfer of confidence":

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<sup>10</sup> Auerbach, p.478.

<sup>11</sup> op. cit., p.475.

<sup>12</sup> loc. cit.

there is confidence that in any random fragment plucked from the course of a life at any time the totality of its fate is contained and can be portrayed. There is greater confidence in syntheses gained through full exploitation of an everyday occurrence than in a chronologically well-ordered total treatment which accompanies the subject from beginning to end, attempts not to omit anything externally important, and emphasizes the great turning points of destiny.<sup>13</sup>

The paradox is that the attempt to reveal the completeness of life by following the sequence of external events ends with an incomplete representation, for it makes arbitrary isolations and fails to "make what is essential stand out".<sup>14</sup> On the contrary, the exploitation of random moments in an individual's life through the "multiple reflection of consciousness" dismantles limitations imposed by particular time and situations. As a result, life is presented "with reasonable completeness".

Auerbach's close examination of the modern procedure as represented by Virginia Woolf demonstrates the tendency of Modernism to reveal the inner truth of external reality through the exploitation of subjective consciousness. Underlying the turn of course in the novel is the changed perception of the subjective and the objective. The conventional definition of the two concepts are greatly modified; and the absoluteness which differentiates one from the other is dissolved in the attempt to view them as interchangeable.

It needs to be stressed that the attempt of Modernism to destabilize traditionally fixed ideas and concepts is initiated by the increasing consciousness of complexity and multiplicity of human existence; the attempt in turn enhances such a consciousness. The paradoxical vision of Modernism plays a crucial role in breaking up conventional modes of perception by revealing the complexity beneath the fixed conceptual structures. But while the paradoxical perception of Modernism widens and deepens the cognition of reality, it also leads Modernism into a dilemma. As Erich Auerbach's study of the modern novel shows, even though Virginia Woolf finds an alternative way to the traditional one in exploring the inner logic underlying external occurrences, she reaches the depth of life only "with reasonable completeness". Her pursuit of multiplicity and elusiveness of human nature in her work predetermines that the sense of indeterminacy be the defining feature of her work. In the same way, the replacement of absoluteness and fixity by relativity and contingency lands Modernism in the situation of complexity which Modernism itself finds it impossible to transcend.

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<sup>13</sup> Auerbach, p.484.

<sup>14</sup> *op. cit.*, p.487.

## 2. Unity and Multiplicity

Taking into consideration the principle of unity and disunity, Ricardo J. Quinones differentiates Modernism from Romanticism. Romanticism is motivated by "the quest for unity", while Modernism is "willing to accept and exploit features of disunity".<sup>15</sup> It is distinguished by its pursuit of the vision which "is multiple and heterogeneous".<sup>16</sup> The preoccupation in Modernism with the exploitation of multiplicity not only leads Modernism itself into a complex situation, but also creates formidable difficulties for critics attempting to formulate a unifying principle in their criticism of Modernism.

Peter Faulkner argues that Modernism, "in its pursuit of a more complex sense of reality", has failed "in coherence".<sup>17</sup> While Modernism, he further explains, "has sharpened and intensified our awareness of the complexity of existence", it also reinforces "our need of, what it suggests we cannot have, a unifying philosophy".<sup>18</sup> Malcolm Bradbury maintains a similar view by stressing that "few ages have been more multiple, more promiscuous in artistic style; to distil from the multiplicity an overall style or mannerism is a difficult, perhaps even an impossible task".<sup>19</sup>

Irving Howe, however, approaches the issue of unity and multiplicity in the evaluation of Modernism from another point of view. He points out:

To condemn modernist literature for a failure to conform to traditional criteria of unity, order, and coherence is, however, quite to miss the point, since to begin with, it either rejects these criteria or proposes radical ways of embodying them.<sup>20</sup>

Stephen Spender proposes that what Modernism has attempted to do is to envisage unity in the context of multiplicity and to relate unity and multiplicity as two integral parts of a whole. He argues:

the modern epoch in art is superficially incoherent, ... there is a unity in its multiplicity. The unity is that of the liberated psyche trying to achieve

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<sup>15</sup> Quinones, pp.120-121.

<sup>16</sup> op. cit., p.224.

<sup>17</sup> *Modernism*, p.17.

<sup>18</sup> op. cit., p.74.

<sup>19</sup> Bradbury and McFarlane (eds), p.23.

<sup>20</sup> *Decline of the New* (London, 1971), p.22.

integration in the creation of objective works of art; the multiplicity is that of many experimental but not inconsistent attempts to achieve such integration.<sup>21</sup>

Having been greatly influenced by Modernism himself, Spender apparently applies the paradoxical view characteristic of Modernism back to his observation of it. Unity and multiplicity, like the past and the present, are not seen as two separate entities, but as interrelated and interpenetrating. Unity is neither an absolute nor a static concept. It has constantly to seek its existence in the process of forming and reforming; it not only is defined by but also exists within multiplicity. In other words, Modernism has provided a paradoxical way of perceiving and constructing the conceptual relation of unity and multiplicity, just as it has transformed the relationships of the past and the present, the subjective and the objective.

The violation of the traditional principle of unity in Modernism is closely related to its recognition of the necessity to find a new way to organize the increasingly strong sense of diversity and multiplicity of human existence; and it is clearly seen in its attempt to unify opposites by juxtaposing "reality and unreality, logic and fantasy, the banal and the sublime" which in itself "form an indissoluble and inexplicable unity".<sup>22</sup> While the conflict of the two opposite elements is intensified by the display of the contrast between them, they are yoked together and unified in their difference. Ezra Pound urges the poets of the modern age to create new unifying principles so as to unite "previously unrelated elements" and establish "identity-in-difference".<sup>23</sup> His own creation of the ideogram is distinguished by his attempt to establish "identity-in-difference". T.S. Eliot also views it as a necessity for the poetry of the modern age to hold together identity and difference, to create "new wholes" and "new combinations" which "maintain a tensional relationship between conceptual unity and sensory multiplicity".<sup>24</sup>

The authors of The Modern Tradition define the distinguishing feature of Modernism as the attempt to articulate "its own formlessness" and encompass "its own extravagant possibilities".<sup>25</sup> The disruption made by Modernism to the traditional idea of unity is relevant to its consciousness of the contingency of the human world and of the multiplicity of experience and existence. Its pursuit of multiplicity essentially reflects its attitude towards the human world which is viewed as inherently problematic and complex. As Irving Howe remarks, "in a modernist culture the problematic as a style of

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<sup>21</sup> Spender, pp.180-181.

<sup>22</sup> Bradbury and McFarlane (eds.), p.86.

<sup>23</sup> Schwartz, p.86.

<sup>24</sup> op. cit., p.96.

<sup>25</sup> Ellmann and Feidelson (eds.), p.vi.

existence and inquiry becomes imperious".<sup>26</sup> Alan Wilde refers the sense of the problematic in Modernism as "the difficult aesthetics of crisis", which is characterized by "the heroism of consciousness making art of its own uncertainty and expressing in its very form, in the express rejection of an easy solution".<sup>27</sup> He argues that Modernism deepens and intensifies the awareness of the contingency of the human world, but finds no solution to it. Its attempt to juxtapose opposites in dealing with the disjunct reality of the modern world does not end in a fusion or a reconciliation of incongruities; but rather, it implies both an acceptance of and an assent to the disjunct and the unreconciled reality.

Whether Modernism is an independent and unified movement, or has created more negative than positive impacts upon the development of literature and art, might be debatable. But it is well acknowledged that Modernism is the most influential trend in literature and art around the turn of the century. Its primary aim is to make a radical departure from the preceding age and at the same time to re-structure the relationship of the past with the present. With its paradoxical way of perceiving and exploring reality, its fundamental challenge to the established scheme of ideas and concepts, and its experiments in literary forms and structures, Modernism has made a tremendous impact upon the mode of thinking and the approach to creative writing.

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<sup>26</sup> Howe, p.9.

<sup>27</sup> Wilde, p.27.

## **Part II**

### **The Historical and Cultural Background Concerning Modernism in Australian Literature**

#### ***Introduction***

A survey of the history of Australian literature shows that when Modernism emerged as a predominant force in the literature of Europe and the United States around the turn of the century, Australia was primarily preoccupied with the establishment of national and cultural identity and with the contention that its literature be characterized by indigenous features as an essential step towards the national literature. In The Oxford History of Australian Literature, Vivian Smith notes that the first sign of Modernism entering Australian poetry might be traced as early as in 1918 when the poet Frank Wilmot was lecturing on Ezra Pound, and some literary magazines began introducing works of American Modernist poets.<sup>1</sup> Yet the overall impact of Modernism upon Australian poetry at that time was rather slight and scattered, far from being strong enough to form a swinging force. Even in the field of painting in which the impact of Modernism proved to be stronger and more crucial than in any other fields in Australia, as both Humphrey McQueen and Richard Haese have observed in their studies of the history of Australian painting, it is not until 1940s that substantial influences of Modernism were clearly indicated, while up to and during that period, social realism dominated Australian fiction.

If Modernism failed to create a fundamental influence upon Australian literature at the turn of the century, the reason for it certainly cannot be superficially attributed to the relative insularity of Australia in terms of geography, for as Vivian Smith discerns, in Australia "there has never been any lack of cultural information at any time; rather the problem has been knowing how to assimilate it and use it in an individual way".<sup>2</sup> In fact, the question of how to assimilate the English heritage and foreign influences into the development of an indigenous literature, is deeply rooted and stands as a prominent

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<sup>1</sup>Leonie Kramer (ed.), The Oxford History of Australian Literature (Melbourne, 1981), p.350.

<sup>2</sup>loc. cit.

issue throughout the history of Australian literature. In Australian Cultural Elites, John Docker claims that "A key dilemma in Australian literature and culture is the relationship between Australia's European inheritance of ideas, ideologies and assumptions, and the new 'Australian' experience and social environment".<sup>3</sup> Although the relationship is not always presented as a dilemma in actual literary works, the statement nevertheless reveals the fact that the development of Australian literature is characterized by its involvement in the clash of cultures and conflict of ideas.

In retrospect, it can be observed that the attitude towards Modernism in the history of Australian literature is both determined, and in an important way, conditioned by the cultural environment of the time, in which the contention between anti-European nationalism and pro-European traditionalism stood as the major conflict. But the experimental tendency of Modernism was resisted and rejected by both radical nationalism and conservative traditionalism. Even for those who were eager to accept Modernism and enthusiastic about experiments, the promotion of Modernism in Australia was conducted as a radical reaction against the narrowness of nationalism which was believed to have severely limited, even harmed the development of Australian literature. This group of people were convinced that to break up the limitation imposed by the perspective of nationalism, it was imperative to bring internationalism into national literature. The radical experimental tendency of Modernism made a strong appeal to them, for being radical and rebellious was their initial as well as consistent intention. Modernism was introduced and understood as a counterforce to nationalism and conservatism prominent in Australian culture during that time, rather than viewed as an inevitable step in the progress of Australian literature. In other words, the reaction to Modernism in Australia was entangled with and complicated by the intense controversy centred on nationalism and internationalism. Such a reaction cannot therefore be reviewed as a single issue, but should be observed by referring to the historical and cultural context. For the reaction to Modernism, whether it was positive or negative, was not only involved in but also conditioned by the arguments on the issues concerning the development of Australian literature.

A review of the literary history of Australia indicates that the central debate in the early part of the century was based on the issue whether Australian literature should be developed as a derivative part of European literatures, or as an indigenous and autonomous one. There were two major groups of people involved in the debate. One

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<sup>3</sup>Australian Cultural Elites: Intellectual Tradition in Sydney and Melbourne (Sydney, 1970), p.ix.

was the group of nationalists, who were engaged in the pursuit of "Australianity" and assiduously advocated cutting off any alien influences so as to be able to focus entirely on creating a national tradition featured by local colour. In reaction to this nationalistic tendency stood European traditionalists, who maintained a firm antagonism against the provincial orientation of nationalism; they were convinced that the development of Australian literature should be attached to European traditions. It is important to point out that both groups opposed strongly the influence of Modernism, regarding Modernism either as an alien influence irrelevant to the development of national features or as a disintegration and degradation of European traditions.

## Chapter 4. The Legend of the Nineties and Its Revival in the Jindyworobak Movement

The late nineteenth century and the early twentieth century is claimed to be a significant period in the history of Australia. It is characterized by the awakening of national awareness and independence, and was a crucial time in establishing the national literature. A great effort was made to turn away from the dominance of English literary traditions and to reflect local subjects and landscape in local terms. As Vance Palmer asserts in his The Legend of the Nineties, "Here was indubitably a fresh voice, not raised to an unnatural pitch to catch the ears of people overseas, but yarning in an intimate way to a familiar audience".<sup>1</sup> In emphasizing the emergence of the new period, Palmer inadequately denounces any validity and value of previous literary works, describing them as "sentimental verse, stiffish essays, and a mass of mediocre novels, written with one eye on an overseas public".<sup>2</sup> In other words, these works have no genuine qualities because they are derivative rather than indigenous products. Palmer believed that with the writings in the eighties and nineties, particularly by Henry Lawson and Joseph Furphy, a tradition characteristic of Australian life and style was established and had never been lost since. He defined the tradition as democratic and indigenous in that its approach to life was not from "the eyrie of a detached observer" but from the point of view of "the working community" and it was characterized by colloquial rhythms, while the English tradition, according to him, with its aims at a literary community was fixed in "a secure middle-class". In his view, the essence of this tradition lay in the presentation of the activities of the character as a social being rather than in the exploitation of his interior life as an individual.<sup>3</sup>

It is not until later that the legend of the nineties which views the period as a new and robust age of the national literature is challenged in critical terms. Leonie Kramer, for example, observes that "only recently have the literary complexities of the period begun to be acknowledged".<sup>4</sup> It has been pointed out by several critics that the pursuit of nationalistic features is not the only trend in literature in the nineties and that the enthusiasm for the national identity is highly coloured by and reflects the political

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<sup>1</sup> The Legend of the Nineties (Melbourne, 1954), p.2.

<sup>2</sup> op. cit., p.108.

<sup>3</sup> op. cit., p.149.

<sup>4</sup> Kramer (ed.), p.9.

sentiment of the time. A.D. Hope claims that the genuine attempt of the nationalists in the late last century to create an indigenous image of the country has proved to be "a dream of an illusory or ideal country",<sup>5</sup> while other critics reveal that the majority of the literary output during that period fails to reach high standards and those exceptionally great works, such as Such Is Life by Joseph Furphy, are not necessarily renowned for their nationalistic characteristics.

First of all, there is no such clear-cut break between the nineties and the preceding period as was assumed by those who strongly supported the legend of the nineties. In his essay "The Eighteen Nineties", G.A. Wilkes, by questioning the validity of the popular view of the eighteen nineties, presents a critical re-examination of the legend. While not decrying the attempt of the nineties characterized by a vigorous exploitation of Australian material, Wilkes makes his point by stressing that the earlier writers had undertaken the same task to assimilate the local scene into inherited formal traditions rather than just awkwardly and technically imitating their English predecessors. Leonie Kramer, in her critical survey of the history of Australian literature in the introduction to The Oxford History of Australian Literature, discerns that one of the weak points of the legend is actually due to its failure to fully understand the genuine effort and the achievement, no matter how limited it might be, of the earlier age. She points out that if the Australian writers before the eighteen nineties failed to produce great literary works, their unsuccessful attempts should be accounted for not so much by the assumption that they are derivative of English traditions, and therefore not "Australian" enough according to the nationalist criterion, as by the fact of their minor talents and limited capacities.

Secondly, as both of the critics mentioned above contend, the nationalist writing represents just one of the streams in the nineties. Leonie Kramer draws attention to the fact that "The melancholy realism of Lawson, and the yearning, frustrated romanticism of Brennan are contemporaneous".<sup>6</sup> If Henry Lawson is claimed to be an Australian writer who makes a vivid literary expression of Australian country life and experience in colloquial terms, then Christopher Brennan is also an Australian writer of the same period who is aware of and influenced by the literary development in Europe and aspires to create "a symbolic representation of a cosmic vision of a lost Eden, located in the heart of man".<sup>7</sup> G.A. Wilkes notes that the Bulletin itself, a magazine founded in 1880 with the aim of promoting an Australian literature independent of foreign traditions and influences, published verses which followed the tradition of Victorian

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<sup>5</sup> "Standards in Australian Literature", in Current Affairs Bulletin, 1956, 41.

<sup>6</sup> Kramer (ed.), pp.9-10.

<sup>7</sup> op. cit., p.9.

poetry along with more "Australian" poems.

In fact, the well-established reputation of the *Bulletin* as the leading voice in the establishment of an Australian national literature is often challenged by later criticism. In the article "Stephens, the *Bulletin*, and the 1890s", Leon Cantrell argues that an adequate re-assessment of the nineties has been deterred by "a seemingly unassailable" concept of the *Bulletin* as the spearhead of "a decade of nationalism, democracy, and literary achievement".<sup>8</sup> He demonstrates that the democratic and literary views promoted by the magazine are actually based on selective, hence restrictive, rather than comprehensive principles. The radical nationalism which is marked by isolationist tendencies not only excludes any interest in and influences from the outside world, but also restricts the view of Australia to "a closed community, white, anglo-saxon, and preferably protestant".<sup>9</sup> As a result, the literary criterion determined by this vision, instead of developing further the notion of Australian literature, is inevitably narrow and limiting in itself. However, by re-examining the critical view of A.G. Stephens, a central figure of the *Bulletin* school, Cantrell believes that "Stephens here achieved an important balance, ... not just for the Red Page, but for Australian literature as a whole".<sup>10</sup> He argues that Stephens's literary comment on the works of the nineties represents "a radical turning away from the principles of literary nationalism"<sup>11</sup> and is characterized by its objective attitude, which is particularly seen in his assessment of the accomplishments and limitations of the *Bulletin* and in his evaluation of Henry Lawson's work. Stephens, while appreciating the interest in Australian materials in the stories and literary sketches collected in *The Bulletin Story Book*, also pointed out that most of them still remained on the level of crude realism and suggested that literary works not only be concerned with local features but also be rich in universal reference. In his judgment of Lawson's work, Stephens spoke of its Australian value, yet he warned that this value should not supersede literary standards; and he described Lawson as being "splendidly parochial". That A.G. Stephens should not be identified as a nationalist critic, as Cantrell has argued, might be debatable, but the primary concern here is with Cantrell's critical stand-point toward the legend of the nineties. He observes the negative effect of the radical nationalism of the *Bulletin* upon creative writing, and attempts to find a balance within the school of nationalism by establishing Stephens as a figure standing outside the *Bulletin* world who maintained a relatively objective view towards national literature.

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<sup>8</sup> Leon Cantrell (ed.), *Bards, Bohemians, and Bookmen* (St. Lucia, 1976), p.104.

<sup>9</sup> op. cit., p.107.

<sup>10</sup> op. cit., p.112.

<sup>11</sup> op. cit., p.109.

Finally, although the eighteen nineties plays an active and influential role in the history of Australian literature, its literary achievement is challenged by remarks such as G.A. Wilkes's, who asserts that "with one of two exceptions, this was an age of minor authors".<sup>12</sup> Here, the value-judgment of these one or two exceptions is shifted from a nationalistic view to a more critical perspective. In reviewing the criticism of Henry Lawson's work, it can be seen that his verse, which particularly reflects the social and political sentiment of that time and which was highly recommended by the Bulletin, is regarded by later critics as the least successful part of his overall work for being dominated by this avowedly nationalistic sentiment and lacking artistic and technical quality. Lawson is best known for his short stories, yet it has been argued that their enduring value does not lie in his patriotic and egalitarian attitude; as Adrian Mitchell remarks, "It is not just Lawson's sympathetic insight, but the mastery of tone and the control of language that impresses".<sup>13</sup>

The other major writer of the nineties is Joseph Furphy whose work Such Is Life was taken as the embodiment of the Australian nationalistic and democratic ideal and celebrated for its reflection of social and political ideas of the time. It should be noted that when the book was published in 1903, except for these surface features, it was by no means fully understood and it was accepted, in G.A. Wilkes's words, as "a rambling and artless chronicle that enabled Furphy to indulge his reflective bent".<sup>14</sup> The complexities of the book were not acknowledged until the 1940s and after; and Furphy is now recognized as one of the important Australian novelists for his attempt at a comprehensive and complicated theme which evidently failed to be recognized in his day.

In the section on Joseph Furphy in The Legend of the Nineties, Vance Palmer's evaluation of Furphy's achievement is particularly concerned with the presentation of patriotism in Such Is Life which, Palmer asserts, viewed Australia as "a robust, self-contained country, socialist in economy, democratic in its way of life, and upstanding in its assertion of its rights".<sup>15</sup> G.A. Wilkes argues that those features concerning social and political issues of the time are just superficial features and virtually inessential to the permanent literary value of the book. Wilkes suggests that the focal point of the critical perspective of the novel should be on "the intricate pattern of cause and effect" which Furphy traces through his not at all loose but refined and systematically woven

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<sup>12</sup> "The Eighteen Nineties", in Grahame Johnston (ed.), Australian Literary Criticism (Melbourne, 1962), p.34.

<sup>13</sup> Kramer (ed.), p.74.

<sup>14</sup> Johnston (ed.), p.39.

<sup>15</sup> Palmer, p.107.

narrative technique".<sup>16</sup>

The legend of the nineties in which was achieved a burgeoning national greatness in literature is no longer accepted as such, as has been shown above. In fact, it has been observed that the preoccupation with the national identity and the pursuit of nationalist doctrines during that period imposed limitations not only on Australian writing, but also on the critical perspective of Australian writing. In contemplating the nature of the legend, Leonie Kramer states:

The legend of the nineties is both a legend and a reality. It is a reality in that the work of Paterson, Lawson, and later Furphy is distinctive in its representation of place and people, and in its cultivation of the idiom of Australian speech. It is legendary in that, while representing a part of the reality, the part in turn has been represented as the whole, or at least as the essence of the whole.<sup>17</sup>

The 1930s sees a revival of nationalism in Australian literature which is fully expressed in the Jindyworobak movement. The movement is initiated as a counteraction to the colonial attitude towards English cultural inheritance and, in relation to it, to any alien influences which, it was believed, inhibited genuine appreciation of the distinctive qualities of Australia as an indigenous country. In his manifesto "Conditional Culture" (1938), the leading figure of the Jindyworobak school, Rex Ingamells, defines Jindyworobaks as "those individuals who are endeavouring to free Australian art from whatever alien influences trammel it".<sup>18</sup> The aim of the movement, accordingly, was for the development of Australian literature away from the confinement of Old World conventions of perception and presentation, for these were believed to be incongruous with the indigenous nature of the land. In order to achieve their aim, this group of people proposed that the emphasis be turned exclusively upon a "clear recognition of environmental values", for they were convinced that such a recognition formed the basis for a distinctive Australian culture.

Ingamells acknowledged his debt to P.R. Stephensen, whose essay "The Foundations of Culture in Australia" is viewed as an inspiration to the emergence of the Jindyworobak movement. In that essay, Stephensen, starting from the assumption that "In general, the Australian-born are Australian-minded, and the English-born are English-minded",

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<sup>16</sup> Johnston (ed.), p.39.

<sup>17</sup> Kramer (ed.), p.12.

<sup>18</sup> John Barnes (ed.), The Writer in Australia (Melbourne, 1969), p.249.

reviews the evolution of Australian literature from the imported English cultural pattern to an indigenous stand-point as the process of increasing national self-consciousness. He identifies the whole process in a summary statement: "From Gordon, the *Englishman* writing about Australia in an *English* way, to Kendall, the *Australian* writing about Australia in an *English* way; thence to Lawson and Paterson, the *Australians* writing about Australia in an *Australian* way".<sup>19</sup> In relation to this assumption is another assumption that Australian literature and culture should be "a literature and culture of national expansion".<sup>20</sup> Based on these two assumptions, Stephensen asserts that it is time for Australia to make a clear break with both English culture which is in decline and English literature which is the expression of its "intrinsic despair". He believed that the tendency which English culture and English literature represent was essentially against "the grain of our potentially-expansionist Australian culture".<sup>21</sup>

Stephensen regarded the literary achievement in Australia before his time mainly as a failure. Earlier writers, such as Marcus Clarke, Boldrewood, and Price Warung, were dismissed not because they failed to achieve high literary qualities but because they were preoccupied with the theme of convictism and flogging which was an Englishman's emphasis and bias against the history of Australia. Although he claims that Lawson and Paterson with their "high national significance" can be seen as "pioneers of indigenous culture in Australia", his attitude towards the *Bulletin* school was more negative than positive. In his view, what the *Bulletin* has encouraged and presented is a "larrikin view of Australian life" and it "did little more for the real development of Australian culture than to substitute larrikinism for convictism as a theme".<sup>22</sup> The only art form, in Stephensen's view, is landscape painting which has broken away from the European pre- and mis-conceived idea of Australia and achieved a distinctive Australian quality by expressing "the Spirit of the Place". He attributes its success to the assumed factor that landscape painting "has been subjected to fewer disturbing and extraneous influences than any other form of aesthetic expression in Australia".<sup>23</sup> Stephensen makes it clear that the basis which he is seeking for indigenous culture in Australia most of all depends on the expulsion of repressive influences from abroad and on the establishment of "standards of its own".

Following in the footsteps of Stephensen, Rex Ingamells expands further the

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<sup>19</sup> Barnes (ed.), p.214.

<sup>20</sup> op. cit., p.229.

<sup>21</sup> op. cit., p.230.

<sup>22</sup> op. cit., p.239.

<sup>23</sup> op. cit., p.241.

nationalistic view of Australian culture. On the one hand, he acknowledges that "Our traditions are twofold. Inextricably woven with the transplanted European culture are our experiences of the Australian environment";<sup>24</sup> on the other hand he denies any positive effect of such inheritance upon Australian literature, claiming that "the very achievements of English poetry have been the fetters of Australian".<sup>25</sup> He also expresses strongly his disagreement with Stephensen when the latter, despite his radical nationalistic point of view throughout his argument, concedes the indispensable role of inherited English traditions in the development of Australian culture and literature. Ingamells, too, starts from the assumption that Australia so far fails to create a literature with its own identifiable qualities, in spite of some genuine efforts made by earlier Australian writers. He discerns such a failure in the lack of affinities revealed in Australian writings between writers and their land. He believes that the major barrier to establishing these affinities is the subservience of Australian writers to the English traditions which prohibits them from observing and presenting the indigenous features of the land from their own point of view. He urges Australian writers of the time to make a fundamental break with "the spirit of English culture", for this is the only way to develop "an Australian culture".

If Stephensen's demand for Australian writers to explore "the Spirit of the Place" is just an abstract idea, Ingamells makes an attempt to specify his own call for the appreciation of environmental values by turning to Aboriginal culture, claiming that the close bond of Aboriginal people to their environment identifies them with the spirit of the land, and suggesting that it is Aboriginal culture that "must spread the roots of our culture".<sup>26</sup> Yet, his argument about Aboriginal culture is rather tentative and vague, sometimes even contradictory; and his own knowledge of Aboriginal traditions hardly sustains his argument. On the one hand, he concedes that those remaining Aboriginal people "are a degenerate, puppet people, mere parodies of what their race once was",<sup>27</sup> and "the best of the culture is dead" and "forever lost to our appreciation".<sup>28</sup> On the other hand, he insists that "something of its spirit has been preserved"<sup>29</sup> and tentatively suggests that by assimilating "much of the spirit" with "many of our own experiences", there will be an "honest development of Australian culture".

The Jindyworobak movement was much criticized and even ridiculed at the time for its

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<sup>24</sup> Barnes (ed.), p.264.

<sup>25</sup> *op. cit.*, p.252.

<sup>26</sup> *op. cit.*, p.264.

<sup>27</sup> *op. cit.*, p.262.

<sup>28</sup> *op. cit.*, p.264.

<sup>29</sup> *loc. cit.*

attempt to limit Australia's literary development to a parochial nationalistic view and for its superficial and irrelevant attachment of the spirit of Australian literature to Aboriginal culture. It is interesting to note that Ingamells observes "the indestructible spirit of the place" more clearly and convincingly in Kangaroo by the English writer D.H. Lawrence than in Aboriginal culture. His interest in turning towards Aboriginal culture is not so much directed to reviewing the culture as a coherent whole as by the intention to use it as a counteraction to international influences, for the reason that Aboriginal culture is "initially far-removed from the engaging and controlling factors of modern European life".<sup>30</sup> His determination to "learn much of our new technique" from "Aboriginal art and song" does not eventually lead him to develop any new kind of poetry; on the contrary and ironically, as Brian Elliott observes, "the Jindyworobaks never aimed at poetry of that tribal and ritual kind; they were lyrical poets, lyricists in the classical, European and even the English tradition".<sup>31</sup>

Vivian Smith's comment on the Jindyworobaks can be seen as a clear and fair summary of the movement. He remarks:

Ingamells overstated his case, and in reacting against the pressures that imported culture were exerting on Australian art, oversimplified the real problems that faced Australian writers at the time. In their emphasis on the mystique of the land, they ignored what had already been done in this area by writers like Vance Palmer in The Passage for instance, and they overlooked the attempts made by other writers to overcome the feeling which many Australians experience of being alien in their landscape. But they were probably the first to emphasize the pre-European Aboriginal qualities of the land itself.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Barnes (ed.), p.264.

<sup>31</sup> Brian Elliot (ed.), The Jindyworobaks (St. Lucia, 1979), p.xxx.

<sup>32</sup> Kramer (ed.), pp.368-369.

## Chapter 5. The *Vision* School of the 20s and Its Parallel in the 50s

The pursuit of national identity through the realisation of national literature represents a strong tendency in the development of Australian literature. It is nevertheless constantly opposed by equally forceful counter movements. If nationalism tends to achieve its ideal of national literature in Australia by establishing indigenous traditions on the basis of clearing away any influences abroad which, as it is claimed, are alien to the local scene and idiom, the opposite direction is, then, to view European literary traditions as fundamental principles for the development of Australian literature and demand that universal literary standards should not be degraded by parochial or nationalistic concerns.

Vision was a literary magazine published in Australia between 1923 and 1924 by Jack Lindsay, Kenneth Slessor and Frank C. Johnson. Although only four issues came out, the influence of the magazine is of great importance not only in that the magazine adopts an approach completely different from the prevailing nationalistic one to the development of literature in Australia, but also because its proclaimed antagonistic attitude against the Modernism of Europe and the United States at the beginning of the century is to a large extent responsible for the general negative view, and more often than not, the misconception of Modernism, both in its own time and in the following decades. The aim of the *Vision* school was to bring about a literary Renaissance in Australia by liberating the creative imagination from the restrictions of nationalism and by denouncing decadence and the disintegration of civilization which was believed to be expressed by Modernism. Youth, vitality, passion and beauty are regarded as fundamental elements of the creative imagination; and the strongly held belief was that while European civilization was in decline, dominated by "the mechanism of culture" and characterized by sterility, Australia which "alone maintains stability and vitality"<sup>1</sup> should undertake the high task of restoring the value of these elements. Therefore, "the Renaissance must begin from here", as is declared in the Foreword of the first issue of Vision.

The central idea of Vision is derived largely from Norman Lindsay, an influential

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<sup>1</sup> Vision, 3 (1923), 4.

literary and artistic figure of the time, whose views are fully expressed in his book Creative Effort. In this book, Norman Lindsay makes no direct attempt to attack nationalism by examining its weaknesses and limitations, but his complete rejection of the nationalistic approach to literature is explicitly reflected in his basic assumption that literature has absolutely nothing to do with social or political environment, for literature is the product of the creative mind and vision which represent the highest effort that mankind can achieve, and the creative mind and vision are distinguished by the very nature of universality. Interestingly, Lindsay's view strikes a strong echo of the proposition of Nietzsche who places the emphasis in creative writing upon the creative impetus of the creator. While the influence of Nietzsche leads Modernism against conventional representational forms and to radical experiments, Lindsay turned to zealously preserve European traditions of the past.

According to Lindsay, literary traditions are seen as universal, and therefore there are no such things as national traditions. He asserts that he can see no reason why the creative effort in Australia may not "have had its origin in Atlantis".<sup>2</sup> As a matter of fact, he regards the search for national identity or nationality as a serious obstacle to high literary achievement, and shows his utter contempt for any national commitment in literature, claiming that "All national expressions of mind are hardly more than aestheticised peasantry".<sup>3</sup> Contrary to P.R. Stephensen's assumption that the progress of literature and culture in Australia depends on national expansion, Lindsay believes that national expansion implies an inevitable spiritual fall into the lowest depths, suggesting that it is when "Germany was nationally of small importance" that "its intellectual activity was at its height", while America, now the most active and prosperous nation, represents the "failure of the Higher Effort" and "produces absolutely nothing".<sup>4</sup>

Following this view, Jack Lindsay in his essay "Australian Poetry and Nationalism" published in the first issue of Vision, attacks Australian poetry for being preoccupied with local features and the search for the national identity rather than aiming at higher, universal themes, describing such poetry as "the kindergarten of art". He urges that Australian poetry should be "liberated from the shackles of local colour and folk-tales, from the peasantry or the drawing-room"<sup>5</sup> and centred on the vitalisation of the deeper aspects of beauty, passion and youth by bringing back "the Goddess to Poetry, Music and Art".<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Creative Effort (Sydney, 1920), p.66.

<sup>3</sup> op. cit., p.194.

<sup>4</sup> op. cit., pp.66-67.

<sup>5</sup> Vision, 1 (1923), 31.

<sup>6</sup> Vision, 1 (1923), 35.

In its pursuit of the genuine Creative Effort, the *Vision* group, along with rejecting the relevance of any national concerns in the creative activity, also renounces the validity of the nineteenth century traditions of Realism and Naturalism. Norman Lindsay criticizes Realism and Naturalism as a devastating intrusion into Art. For both of the forms are only concerned with observing and expressing actuality which by no means can arrive at the revelation of universal passion and humanity. He describes Zola as "a demented photographer who photographed all the wrong things",<sup>7</sup> and comments on the failure of Dickens by saying that in Dicken's "marvellous collection of faces, there is not a single revelation of mind".<sup>8</sup> Jack Lindsay's criticism of Realism is based on the same principle that realistic presentation of actual facts of experience and realistic settings not only has no significance in achieving the true value of literature, but actually reduces the high creative art to the level of triviality. He argues that when Shakespeare comes closest to realism, what he produces becomes "trivial and farcical".<sup>9</sup>

If the reaction of nationalism against Modernism is indirect in the sense that it is determined to expel all alien influences including those of Modernism, the major target of the *Vision* school, apart from every aspect of nationalism, is contemporary Modernism. Like Modernism, *Vision* sees the whole modern world devastated by the War and sterilized by industrialization and modern machinery. Yet, far from observing any necessity for the emergence of Modernism, it views the reflection in Modernism of the sense of crisis and sterility residing in the modern reality by means of experimental forms and techniques as an indication of decadence and disintegration. It claims that Modernism ends in Primitivism which brings no fresh inspiration or constructive contribution to creative art but "Physical tiredness, jaded nerves and a complex superficiality".<sup>10</sup> Norman Lindsay, as an openly declared opponent of Modernism and Primitivism, rejects almost all the major Modernist writers and artists. In the preface to Kenneth Mackenzie's *Our Earth*, Lindsay remarks:

the nuisance of the modernist poet was that, like the painter, he rejected a sensory reaction to form and substituted for it a purely arbitrary and intellectualised use of its imagery. In short, the really evil thing about modernism is its icy "morality", its sterilised intellectuality, its rejection of all emotional contact with life.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Norman Lindsay, p.73.

<sup>8</sup> op. cit., p.192.

<sup>9</sup> "Australian Poetry and Nationalism", in *Vision*, 1 (1923), 32.

<sup>10</sup> "Foreword", in *Vision*, 1 (1923), 2.

<sup>11</sup> Kenneth Mackenzie, *Our Earth* (Sydney, 1937), p.iv.

The experiments of Modernism are seen as a violation of "the touchstone of vitality" and beauty which *Vision* is convinced is the essence of the Creative effort. It is believed that the creative world is doomed in the modern era unless a Renaissance is brought back to re-vitalize it.

By turning away from both the Australian scene and contemporary European literary movements, and against other traditions of the past, the *Vision* school regarded the classical Greek and the Renaissance as the only "two great periods in Creative effort",<sup>12</sup> and Praxiteles, Shakespeare and Beethoven as "the three great creative minds".<sup>13</sup> It is these two periods and these three great creative minds that embody "this aesthetic of vitality, of concrete beauty" which stands as the primary principle repudiating those other poets or artists who "are basically Haters of Life".<sup>14</sup> Norman Lindsay asserts that in achieving the vital sense of life nothing but Creative Effort alone counts. Throughout his book, Lindsay attempts to define the Creative Effort by distinguishing the creative mind from the earthly mind. The former always aspires to transcend life, to achieve a higher perception of life than the reality of life itself, while the perception of the earthly mind is by nature bound to crude facts and objects and can never go beyond them. In fact, transcendence is the key word in the creative criterion of the *Vision* school. The term *Vision* itself is claimed to indicate "the ability to see beyond the actual thing to its imaginative analogy in a higher condition of sense".<sup>15</sup> It is by transcending "the primitive struggle" for daily existence that the Inner Vision both achieves spiritual depth and differs from the Outer Vision. Lindsay's argument about Creative Effort obviously reflects the influence of neo-Platonism. The existence of creative vision is predetermined by the quality of the individual mind rather than determined by the actual experience of life, and therefore it can only be affirmed; but it cannot be obtained by effort. He concludes that because of "the depth and rarity of creative vision" we can "only affirm our sense of the creative power where its consciousness of life arouses in us the highest perception of consciousness of life".<sup>16</sup> It is this affirmation of the creative effort and "its individual expression of thought, passion, or beauty"<sup>17</sup> that represents the essential opposition to both the parochialism of nationalism and the destructiveness of Modernism.

It is interesting to see that both Modernism and the *Vision* school are preoccupied with the past. The recognition of the changed perception of reality and the consciousness of

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<sup>12</sup> Norman Lindsay, pp.70-71.

<sup>13</sup> op. cit., p.28.

<sup>14</sup> "Foreword", in *Vision*, 2 (1923), 4.

<sup>15</sup> "Foreword", in *Vision*, 1 (1923), 3.

<sup>16</sup> Norman Lindsay, pp.200-201.

<sup>17</sup> op. cit., p.206.

historical discontinuity lead Modernism to re-construct the relationship of the past and the present in a way other than chronological linearity. If Modernism is distinguished in part by its effort to re-establish a new link between the past and the present, what the *Vision* school attempts to do is to revive the value of some selected literary traditions and transpose them into the scene of Australian literature. The emphasis of both schools is laid upon the creative effort of the individual mind, but marked by large differences in the cognition of the creative mind in its relation to tradition. Modernism stresses the synthetic power of the creative mind which constantly attempts to integrate its perception of the past into the presentation of the present in a simultaneous order. Contrary to Lindsay's view that the creative mind can only be affirmed rather than obtained by effort, T.S. Eliot believes that the productivity of the creative mind is closely related to its sense of tradition; and tradition "cannot be inherited", but can only be obtained "by great labour".<sup>18</sup>

Norman Lindsay and the *Vision* school might be absolutely right in their attempt to revive the literary traditions of the past in Australia, but it seems that in doing so, they isolated the relevance of the great European traditions from the context of the present. Instead of making an effort to integrate the knowledge of these traditions into the perception of the present situation, they tended to push creative activity into an ivory tower with no concern to sustain its connection with reality. The very attempt of Modernism to discard the conventional modes of perception and representation so as to re-recognize the value of the past in the light of modern consciousness is regarded as a betrayal and destruction of the great traditions of the past.

In retrospect, Jack Lindsay in his essay "*Vision and London Aphrodite*" makes a critical re-examination of the ideas of the *Vision* school. He concedes that in calling for an Australian Renaissance "that would carry on the Grand Tradition which Europe was seen to have betrayed",<sup>19</sup> *Vision* had made an oversimplification of the issues concerning Australian nationalist commitment and European Modernism. The simplification consequently narrowed the perspective and limited the achievement of the *Vision* movement. The intention to oppose complacent provincial nationalism ended in the rejection of "practically everything ... in Australian culture of the past and present".<sup>20</sup> As a result, instead of further developing and broadening the perspective of Australian literature, *Vision* actually turned away from the native Australian soil, and that is partly responsible for the failure of *Vision* to fully achieve its intended aim, as

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<sup>18</sup> *Selected Essays*, p.14.

<sup>19</sup> Bruce Bennett (ed.), *Cross Currents* (Melbourne, 1981), p.95.

<sup>20</sup> Bennett (ed.), p.95.

Jack Lindsay admits:

The extreme antagonism to what we looked on as a narrow outdated nationalist tradition was indeed unfortunate; it made the advocated art of Vision lack all bridges to the Australian situation. Those bridges existed and could have been found, with the result that the whole thing could have been far better balanced and might have had the sort of vitalizing effects we wanted.<sup>21</sup>

If Jack Lindsay in this essay tried to correct the extreme stance of Vision against the nationalist concerns of literature, he only mentions Norman Lindsay's "oversimplified views of Modernism" without going further to present an adequate attitude that Vision should have taken towards Modernism. In re-evaluating the effects of Vision upon Australian writing, he believes that "the movement certainly did clear the ground for Slessor and FitzGerald", though he also suggests that "the effects on Slessor and FitzGerald cannot be gauged by merely looking at Vision and its contents".<sup>22</sup> The fact is that in spite of the proclaimed antagonism of Vision against Modernism, Kenneth Slessor, one of the important participants of the school, is claimed to be the first Australian poet who brought Australian poetry into the modern stream by assimilating modern European influences into his expression of Australian themes as well as by his technical experiments.

Although he was the co-editor of Vision and greatly influenced by Norman Lindsay both man and artist, Kenneth Slessor was never completely involved in the *Vision* movement. In the article "Spectacles for the Fifties" and on some other occasions, Slessor insisted on his detachment from the main ideas of Vision and saw no valid connection between the development of his own poetry and his activities as the co-editor, saying that "If there was any development of 'lyrical faculty' or 'rhythmic tension', it was due to natural causes and not to any mystical 'experience' with Vision".<sup>23</sup>

In effect, Kenneth Slessor diverges from the *Vision* movement in two significant aspects. First of all, if he refused to judge Australian poetry merely by its Australianity, he certainly did not reject it merely for being concerned with local subjects and landscape. He suggests that Australian poetry needs a break not so much from English poetic traditions as from "mediocrity itself in any kind of writing".<sup>24</sup> He further explains that genuine poetry is required to express "independence, vitality and

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<sup>21</sup> Bennett (ed.), p.95.

<sup>22</sup> op. cit., p.96.

<sup>23</sup> *Southerly*, 4 (1952), 218.

<sup>24</sup> "Australian Poetry", in Dennis Haskell (ed.), *Kenneth Slessor* (St. Lucia, 1991), p.99.

*newness*", which implies the rejection of "inherited words and ideas". It is in this context that the demand for "a break from the traditions of English poetry, in which Australian poetry is rooted"<sup>25</sup> is both necessary and justifiable. Slessor regards Charles Harpur's "The Creek of Four Graves" as "the first signal of true poetry"<sup>26</sup> written in Australia and "the first break from the dominance of traditional English ideas",<sup>27</sup> because the poem succeeds in exciting "the movement of imagination and passion" and "a living particle of the Australia in which we exist, not a particle of the Warwickshire in which Shakespeare existed".<sup>28</sup> Such an effect is brought not by Harpur's hesitant use of a couple of Australian words like "nulla nullas" or "wallaroo", but by his original and powerful image of the Australian creek. In the same way, Slessor's dismissal of Henry Kendall and Lindsay Gordon as great Australian poets is based on the observation that both of them have minor poetic talents rather than on the assumption that they are merely imitators of English counterparts and not Australian enough. Slessor argues that "Their fault was not that they flew so habitually to English 'poetic' ideas and devices, but they flew almost without exception to such bad 'poetic' ideas and devices".<sup>29</sup>

Another essential difference of Kenneth Slessor from the *Vision* school is seen in his attitude towards Modernism. Although Slessor is not always positive to all the experiments made by Modernism in the field of poetry, he appreciates Modernism as a powerful reaction against traditional ideas and forms of poetry. In his address on "Modern English Poetry", he expresses his view of the modern movement in poetry in a critical manner which essentially differentiates his attitude towards Modernism from Norman Lindsay's simple rejection of it. He says:

In what I propose to quote from the work of modern writers, no doubt there is much that is unmusical and graceless. For the fruit of some of these experiments, I feel a violent distaste. None the less, I welcome them more readily than the harvests of stagnation; I would prefer my feelings to be outraged by Mr E.E. Cummings, rather than have my intellect candied into stupor by Mr Edward Shanks. I regard the silliest, the vulgarest, the crudest of the moderns as of more value than the literary Shintoists who cumber up anthologies with their trancelike worshipping of ancestors.<sup>30</sup>

Slessor's critical attitude towards Modernism does not prevent him from observing the achievements made by the experiments of Modernism. He was particularly impressed by the new rhythms and cadences that were attempted by Modernism in poetry. He

<sup>25</sup> Haskell (ed.), p.100.

<sup>26</sup> op. cit., p.101.

<sup>27</sup> op. cit., p.102.

<sup>28</sup> loc. cit.

<sup>29</sup> op. cit., p.108.

<sup>30</sup> "Modern English Poetry", in Dennis Haskell (ed.), p.155.

describes the opening lines of T.S. Eliot's masterpiece The Waste Land as "extraordinary and unforgettable", believing that "'The Waste Land,' indeed, is filled with the most splendid and haunting rhythms of anything written in our century", which, he asserts, is even plain to "a prejudiced reader".<sup>31</sup> Yet Slessor also points out that not only do modern free verse rhythms undergo a gradual development rather than a sudden revolution, from Whitman to the French symbolists and then to Modernist poets, but also that free verse rhythm is not the only successful experiment made in modern poetry. He mentions the experiment of A.E. Housman by adding "a fifth line to the conventional quatrain" which had a great influence on "the stream of modern English poetry".<sup>32</sup> Slessor also regards the innovation of the spelling system by the relatively conservative poet, Robert Bridges, as an important contribution to modern literary history, for the new system of spelling was "admirably suited to the proper pronunciation of poetry".<sup>33</sup>

Like those Modernist poets such as T.S. Eliot and Ezra Pound, Kenneth Slessor perceived the necessity for experiments as a crucial element in the creation of modern poetry. In the article "Writing Poetry: The Why and the How", he reveals his two primary concerns in writing poetry. One is for form, the other for experiment. Being firmly convinced that poetry would come to a dead end without constant experiment, he asserts that a breaking of rules is necessary "where the fracture can suggest even a shadow of the effect desired".<sup>34</sup>

In his introduction to Modern Australian Poetry, H.M. Green claims that "The first wave of modernism in verse - the verse represented by T.S. Eliot - did not reach these shores in any unmistakable form until the publication of Slessor's Cuckooz Country, as late as 1932".<sup>35</sup> Max Harris goes further by drawing a parallel between Slessor's "In the Pans of Straw-coned Country" and Eliot's "The Waste Land", claiming that Slessor's poem "quite clearly is an application of T.S. Eliot's temper to a waste land which exists geographically to the west of Dubbo".<sup>36</sup> Herbert C. Jaffa in his study of Kenneth Slessor argues that although Slessor was aware of the influence of Modernism at the time and showed his appreciation of some of Eliot's technical experiments, any Eliotian echoes in Slessor's own poetry are shown not as conspicuously as they were assumed by some critics;<sup>37</sup> while Vivian Smith suggests that Slessor's "transition from conventional

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<sup>31</sup> Haskell (ed.), p.156.

<sup>32</sup> loc. cit.

<sup>33</sup> op. cit., p.159.

<sup>34</sup> op. cit., p.161.

<sup>35</sup> H.M. Green (ed.), Modern Australian Poetry (Melbourne, 1946), p.vii.

<sup>36</sup> Max Harris (ed.), Kenneth Slessor (Melbourne, 1963), p.16.

<sup>37</sup> Kenneth Slessor (New York, 1971), p.71

verse forms to more open forms and a more flexible use of speech rhythms" should be more accurately assigned to the influences of Amy Lowell than to Eliot or Pound.<sup>38</sup>

Even though it is true that Slessor's attitude towards Modernism makes a contrast to the anti-Modernist view of Vision and that he is influenced by Modernism in some respects, Slessor was against many of the radical breaches of traditional ideas and forms that Modernism proposes. He warned that "one must be guarded from the temptation of experimenting for experiment's sake; the only justification for any innovation is the success with which it fills a need. The emotion of a poem must make the experiment, not the experiment the poem".<sup>39</sup> It is also important to note that the influence of Norman Lindsay upon the idea of poetry that Slessor upheld throughout his creation cannot be quickly dismissed.

Max Harris asserts that "In terms of native sensibility and inclination, Slessor, from his very earliest poetry, was of the Eliotian devil's party without knowing it" and that his early poem, "Winter Dawn", "has more in common with Eliot's temper of mind than with Jack Lindsay, McCrae, or Leon Gellert".<sup>40</sup> Slessor may differ greatly from the people mentioned by Harris in terms of temperament or poetic sensibility, but given the fact that Jack Lindsay during the Vision period is seen as the conveyor of Norman Lindsay's ideas, Slessor's break with the Lindsays is not as clear-cut as is indicated by Harris's remark. In his "Modern English Poetry", Slessor proposes that "The whole structure of English poetry ... rests on the use of image, the choice of the concrete where the abstract would be less racking to the creator, and certainly less searching in its revelations of his power or lack of power".<sup>41</sup> Slessor's statement here obviously recalls the idea of Norman Lindsay expressed in his preface to Poetry in Australia, which claims that "all serious values in poetry must reside in the concrete image, which must be defined by a curve in emotional rhythm".<sup>42</sup> Again, just as Norman Lindsay believed, the poetry that Slessor regarded as real poetry is "pure poetry" without any social, moral or political purposes and commitments. He affirmed:

I am concerned with nothing except poetry as pure poetry and not as a vehicle for noble aims or burning hatreds or for righting wrongs or extolling social or philosophic improvements. I do not believe that pure poetry has anything to do with purposes, admirable though some of them may be. The truth is that great poetry is not necessarily moral poetry - and even if in some cases a moral significance can be found, this may be merely an

<sup>38</sup> "The ambivalence of Kenneth Slessor", in Southerly, 4 (1971), 260.

<sup>39</sup> "Modern English Poetry", in Dennis Haskell (ed.), p.159.

<sup>40</sup> Kenneth Slessor, p.12.

<sup>41</sup> Haskell (ed.), p.155.

<sup>42</sup> Poetry in Australia 1923 (Sydney, 1923).

accidental side-effect of no consequence to the intrinsic poetry itself.<sup>43</sup>

For Slessor, poetry is also primarily concerned with the presentation of Beauty, which makes a contrast with "the unmagical and deliberately unmusical sophistications of the present day".<sup>44</sup>

Herbert C. Jaffa remarks that Slessor seems to be able to control those influences of Modernism by selecting what he needs and reshaping it to produce a poetry that is distinctly his own. Vivian Smith makes this view more clearly by concluding that "for all his modernism, Slessor remained in many ways a traditional and conservative poet. He brought a new expressiveness and flexibility into Australian poetry, but like Brennan, who rejected the extremes of Rimbaud, Slessor did not accept the more radical and wayout aspects of modernistic innovations. He rejected the disruption of normal syntax and punctuation".<sup>45</sup>

In the 1950s there was another revival of nationalism in Australian literature, highlighted by the publications of three books: Vance Palmer's The Legend of Nineties (1954), A.A. Phillips' The Australian Tradition (1958), and Russel Ward's The Australian Legend (1958). All three books, in one way or another, look back to the eighteen nineties as the basis of the Australian tradition. Also, the social and political environment during the Second World War and postwar years encouraged the emergence of social realism which followed the traditions of nineteenth century realist fiction while denouncing other literary traditions and concentrated exclusively on the reflection of working people's life and social or political injustice. Both nationalists and social realists resisted strongly the influence of Modernism and regarded Modernism either as a threat to the development of cultural independence or as an expression of despair and capitalist anarchism. In reaction to these two tendencies, another group of writers maintained the view that Australian literature was part of the whole European literary tradition. In upholding traditional forms and ideas of literature, they not only criticized the pursuit of Australianism and social or political commitment as superficial, parochial and irrelevant to the intrinsic value of literature, but also declared their mistrust of Modernist experiments which were viewed as the decay of modernity and disintegration of literary tradition. This so-called anti-nationalist and anti-modernist attitude is particularly seen in the two leading poets of the time, A.D. Hope and James McAuley, both of whom were considered literary conservatives in the period of

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<sup>43</sup> "The Quality of Magic", in Southerly, 4 (1971), 250.

<sup>44</sup> op. cit., p.251.

<sup>45</sup> Kramer (ed.), p.351.

experiment.

A.D. Hope's criticism of the Jindyworobak movement of the previous decade, which he described as "the Boy Scout School of Poetry", is based on the assumption that "We have created a new European country in Australia and we belong to the European nations".<sup>46</sup> A.D. Hope contends that the Jindyworobaks' proposition that in order to adapt ourselves to the land as aliens we have to break away from the English heritage and merge into Aboriginal culture, is even more alien and remote to most Australians than the land itself. He argues that "the poet who tries to write like a second-hand abo is no more likely to produce sincere work than the poet who writes like a second-hand Englishman".<sup>47</sup> In another article, "A Second-Rate Literature?", Hope defines three stages for the development of all colonial literature and believes that Australian literature is still on the second or provincial stage, characterized either by passive imitation of literary traditions of the mother country or by the all too conscious rejection of them. What is preventing Australian literature from reaching the third stage, the stage which indicates independence by "influencing and leading the whole literary tradition", Hope observes, is the arbitrary emphasis upon being consciously Australian. As a result, the expression of the writer's individual vision "has been complicated and distorted by a task which is strictly irrelevant, the task not of being himself, but of being in some way typically Australian".<sup>48</sup> Hope is strongly against the claim for literature to have social, moral or intellectual purposes, saying that "To require all writers to have a particular sort of social purpose has therefore nothing to do with the standards or purposes of literature as such".<sup>49</sup> Here Hope is particularly against the Social Realist school which, by sacrificing the intrinsic standards of literature, is simply servile to the idea or purpose that its party sets for it. But Hope by no means accepts Art for Art's sake aesthetics. He points out that satire, for example, by its very nature is "unashamedly and openly didactic". Great satires have great literary values not just because they happen to have a social purpose but "precisely because they are great *satires*. And to say they are satires is to say they have a social purpose".<sup>50</sup> He argues that satire is first of all "to be judged by its beauty and effectiveness as poetry, ... only secondarily by its effectiveness as social or moral propaganda".<sup>51</sup>

A.D. Hope's rejection of any influence from Modernism is seen both in his critical attitude towards the formal experiments of Modernism and in his determination to rely

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<sup>46</sup> Native Companions (Sydney, 1974), p.45.

<sup>47</sup> loc. cit.

<sup>48</sup> op. cit., pp.74-75.

<sup>49</sup> The Cave and the Spring (Adelaide, 1965), p.31.

<sup>50</sup> The Cave and the Spring, p.31.

<sup>51</sup> op. cit., p.64.

on "strict traditional verse forms, conventional syntax and logical imagery".<sup>52</sup> His disapproval of Modernism is clearly indicated in his belief that the basic assumption of Modernism is more destructive than constructive to the progress of poetry. He says:

Our age is the first to think it could improve on its predecessors by breaking down the principles of verse altogether and looking for substitute forms. It has been an age which, finding itself at the end of one of those periods of loosening of metrical structure, in its ignorance of the actual anatomy and physiology of verse, imagined that there was no real dividing line between prose and verse at all, and that the effects of one were somehow interchangeable with the other.<sup>53</sup>

He describes T.S. Eliot's The Waste Land as "the mumbo-jumbo" which represents just a step "to the incantatory logorrhoea of the Surrealists", and criticizes modern poetry that works on the principle of allusions and verbal associations for being "obscure, secretive, riddling in the process".<sup>54</sup> He expresses explicitly his antagonism to the abandoning of traditional verse forms in Modernism for free verse which, he asserts, is "a very common cheap and popular substitute for poetry".<sup>55</sup> T.S. Eliot's and Ezra Pound's efforts to experiment with free verse and with the adaptation of the French symbolist technique are viewed as "a destructive epidemic", and the development of free verse from Whitman to these Modernists is described as a process in which the "corruption of the garrison from within succeeded where the barbarian assault from without had failed".<sup>56</sup> Yet, despite his anti-experimental attitude and his traditionalism, it is interesting to note, as Leonie Kramer points out, that "defining himself as an inheritor and transmitter of tradition, he was thought of as the most controversial and daring of Australian poets".<sup>57</sup>

James McAuley is often grouped with A.D. Hope for their general agreement of attitude towards nationalism, Modernism and their commitment to traditional verse forms. In the essay "Literature and Arts" published in Australian Civilization, McAuley makes a critical examination of "the Australian Tradition" proclaimed by the nationalists. He observes that the national image created by the initial search for the essence of Australianity is primarily concerned with the mythic vision of the primitive land which later is "carried forward and transposed into the ideological idiom of radicalism and

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<sup>52</sup> Kramer (ed.), p.371.

<sup>53</sup> The Cave and the spring, p.46.

<sup>54</sup> op. cit., p.15.

<sup>55</sup> op. cit., p.38.

<sup>56</sup> op. cit., pp.39-40.

<sup>57</sup> "Judith Wright, Hope, McAuley", in C.D. Narasimhaiah (ed.), An Introduction to Australian Literature (Brisbane, 1980), p.85.

progressivism, until rhetoric and reality became confused and flyblown".<sup>58</sup> The national tradition prescribed by A.A. Phillips and Russel Ward as well as P.R. Stephensen, so far as literature is concerned, is restrictive and arbitrary rather than democratic and indigenous as it is claimed to be, in the sense that the so-called tradition creates a stereotype of the national character and imposes certain demands and approvals upon creative writings and critical judgments. He points out that "All the main impulses observable in Australian culture clearly derive from Europe", including the nationalistic idea about "indigenous" and "derivative".<sup>59</sup>

Although it is true that McAuley shows no hesitation in expressing his rejection of Modernism and other related experiments both in his critical and poetic writings, there are two important points to be noted in observing his antagonism against Modernism. Firstly, just as Frank Kermode in his criticism of Modernism makes a clear distinction between early modernism and later modernism, James McAuley, in his attack upon radical experimental trends in modern literature, differentiates the old modernism from the later extreme tendencies in his statement as follows:

In art the modernist movement, however active, had left its heroic period behind it: its centre moved from Paris to New York and to my view seemed to be producing its own refutation by the endless flicker of heartless, sterile and wilful new styles or movements. The modernist movement in literature seemed to have broken down, leaving only a small crowd of 'beat' declaimers in verse and prose on the West Coast of the USA, who had nothing to do with the old modernism or with serious literature of any kind.<sup>60</sup>

Secondly, if James McAuley's literary conservatism is attributed to his refusal to follow the trend of Modernism and his commitment to traditional forms, it is particularly by his openly declared antipathy towards what he believes the irrational experiments of the Angry Penguins in the form of the Ern Malley hoax that he is considered as an arch anti-experimentalist. The hoax, as he and his co-author Harold Stewart later revealed, was motivated by a serious concern for "the gradual decay of meaning and craftsmanship in poetry", and it was intended to expose the insensibility of absurdity and lack of critical discrimination represented by the *Angry Penguins* group.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Peter Coleman (ed.), Australian Civilization (Melbourne, 1961), p.123.

<sup>59</sup> op. cit., p.127.

<sup>60</sup> "Culture and Counter-Culture", in Peter Coleman (ed.), Quadrant Twenty-Five Years (St. Lucia, 1982), p.175.

<sup>61</sup> John Tregenza, Australian Little Magazines 1923 - 1954 (Adelaide, 1964), p.66.

## Chapter 6. The Angry Penguins

Angry Penguins was a literary magazine which came into being during the early nineteen forties with the aim of promoting a modernist movement in Australia. As its founding editor Max Harris claimed: "Angry Penguins in the 1940s expressed a noisy and aggressive revolutionary modernism".<sup>1</sup> The aggressive revolution that the *Angry Penguins* school intended to bring about was carried on two fronts. On the one hand, it revolted against the nationalistic tendency in literature represented by the Jindyworobak movement as well as against social realism; on the other hand, greatly influenced by the anarchist theories of Herbert Read who stressed the creative individual talent and the necessity for revolt against institutionalized forms and structures, the *Angry Penguins* maintained that there were "no limitations on the technical forms"<sup>2</sup> and was convinced that "poetry had to be liberated from all poetic diction and conventional association".<sup>3</sup> Angry Penguins therefore viewed the "insistence on standards of craftsmanship, on the skilled handling of traditional verse forms" as "a counter to the technical anarchy of the *Angry Penguins*".<sup>4</sup> It is with the determination to dissolve these two trends in Australian literature and art, nationalism which leads to social realism and formal traditionalism, that Angry Penguins attempted to achieve what it believed "the new language and the new painting of Australia".<sup>5</sup>

The attack that Max Harris launched upon the Jindyworobak movement is not only directed to its inadequate theory of *environmental values* which ends up in narrowness and isolationism, but also to what Harris asserts its failure to "adapt authentic Australian landscape description to the purposes of poetry, to assist in the communication of some resolved experience".<sup>6</sup> By the purposes of poetry, Harris means the revelation of the individual myth and the communication of subjective consciousness or unconsciousness which is resolved from actual experience and objective observation by going beyond the recognition of them. Harris's proposition, as he acknowledges, is largely derived from Freud's theories, and he regards Freud as "a creative symbol and a stimulating force".<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> "Angry Penguins and After", in Quadrant, 1 (1963), 6.

<sup>2</sup> Max Harris, "Conflicts in Australian Intellectual life", in Clement Semmler and Derek Whitelock (eds.), Literary Australia (Melbourne, 1966), p.26.

<sup>3</sup> op. cit., p.23.

<sup>4</sup> op. cit., p.27.

<sup>5</sup> Quadrant, 1 (1963), 6.

<sup>6</sup> Semmler and Whitelock (eds.), p.23.

<sup>7</sup> "And the Sexton Told the Bell", in Angry Penguins, December (1944), 55.

In his view, Freud's unprecedented contribution to the creative activity lies not so much in his scientific breakthrough of psychology as in the exploration of myth beyond scientific truth which is taken as "the activating principle in the individual".<sup>8</sup> Harris is convinced that Freud makes it possible for the creative activity to undergo a revolutionary shift from the search for objective truth to the exploration of subjective consciousness, leading to the revelation of an ultimate mysticism in the human mind. By applying Freudian theories to the creation of literature, Harris comes to the conclusion that "the free flow of individual associations produced a profoundly meaningful verbal statement".<sup>9</sup> It is on this assumption that Harris makes his attack upon social realism with its characteristic feature of reportage.

Harris rejects the social realist proposition that literature should first of all reflect social reality and be evaluated in terms of its social significance. He asserts that "the revelation of the individual as his own mythical cosmos" is the sole purpose of literature as such.<sup>10</sup> He proposes that the primary concern of the modern novel be centred on subjective preoccupations - "the individual and his autonomous world", while "all objectivity exists in the novel merely as a fluid interpretive medium for an individual as entire complex".<sup>11</sup> Harris disagrees with the interpretation of Sidney Nolan's Ned Kelly sequence as a powerful reflection of the Australian character and an original expression of a myth of Australian nationhood. In his view, the sequence presents merely a revelation of "Nolan's alter ego, a virility symbol", and claims that "the series exists as a catharsis of Nolan's basic insecurities".<sup>12</sup> Harris believes that it is through a free and unrestricted conveyance of individual consciousness that literature and art are able to transcend the narrowness of nationality and reach the expression of the universal human condition. But the fact is that both views in interpreting Nolan's Ned Kelly sequence could be true; and they are not necessarily mutually exclusive. Harris's exclusive emphasis upon one view by denying the validity of the other actually reveals a consistent tendency in his writing and editing marked by combative one-sidedness.

The emphasis upon the representation of highly subjective individual experience in literature and art not only contrasts the approach of social realism with the stand-point of the *Angry Penguins* group, but also to a certain extent lends an explanation to the group's radical experimentalism "directed destructively at inbred traditions and firmly entrenched establishments".<sup>13</sup> Harris's proclaimed challenge to the trend of

<sup>8</sup> *Angry Penguins*, December (1944), 55.

<sup>9</sup> Semmler and Whitelock (eds.), p.23.

<sup>10</sup> *Angry Penguins*, December (1944), 53.

<sup>11</sup> *op. cit.*, 55.

<sup>12</sup> Semmler and Whitelock(eds.), p.22.

<sup>13</sup> *Quadrant*, 1 (1963), 8.

intellectualism and formal traditionalism in Australian literature upheld by what he calls "reactionaries" during the 40s and 50s largely depends on his view of language and his antagonism to traditional forms. He places an exclusive emphasis upon the intrinsic nature of language, viewing language itself as an animate and communicating drive that conveys that creative enthusiasm which is claimed to be "the nexus of poetry". The argument or the content of poetry, in this view, "is no longer of major significance", and the meaning in poetry comes from "a complex of words and fervour of words in a fervent relationship".<sup>14</sup> He argues that "it is possible for the argument of a poem to live inherently in the shapeliness, the singing quality, the mood and the temper of the language itself and for the poem still to be profound and capable of communicating complex meanings exactly".<sup>15</sup> In other words, the meaning of a poem may not necessarily come from what the poem expresses by words but underlies the complex structure itself; the ostensible obscurity of poetry, in this sense, is not only intended, but also regarded as the intrinsic quality of poetry. It is exactly in this respect that Angry Penguins was accused of destroying the structures of meaning.

In the autumn of 1944 Angry Penguins published a special issue to "commemorate the Australian poet Ern Malley" and Max Harris wrote an introduction to Malley's poems. In his introduction, Harris highly praised the poet, regarding him as "one of the most outstanding poets that we have produced here" and was convinced by the "tremendous power" of the poet who worked "through a disciplined and restrained kind of statement into the deepest wells of human experience".<sup>16</sup> The poems were revealed later as a hoax, a "consciously and deliberately concocted nonsense" made in one afternoon by James McAuley and Harold Stewart. In the following issue, Angry Penguins published an "Ern Malley Section" with a collection of critical reviews of the Ern Malley affair and with the preface stating that "we remain convinced of the substantial correctness of our judgment".<sup>17</sup> In this collection most of the reviewers argue that Malley's poems are genuine poetry or some of the poems have poetic values in spite of the original intention of the authors. But H.M. Green in his review points out that it is a "rather thin contention that the hoaxers composed great poetry unconsciously and in spite of themselves".<sup>18</sup> Vivian Smith in his comment upon the Ern Malley's poems in The Oxford History of Australian Literature makes it clear that "for anyone to think now that the poems add up to achieved artistic wholes is to lose all sense of standards and perspective". But he also stresses the point that this case did draw attention to the

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<sup>14</sup> Angry Penguins, December (1944), 55.

<sup>15</sup> Semmler and Whitelock (eds.), p.26.

<sup>16</sup> Angry Penguins, Autumn (1944), 2.

<sup>17</sup> Angry Penguins, December (1944), 4.

<sup>18</sup> op. cit., 6.

"conflicts between the conservatives and radicals, the ancients and the moderns, the traditionalists and the experimentalists".<sup>19</sup> To ridicule the radical experimentalism of the Angry Penguins was, in fact, the original intention in making the hoax.

The Ern Malley hoax was sometimes accused of preventing a further development of modernism in Australia with the proclaimed intention of debunking a modern literary movement beginning with "the *Dadaist* movement in France during the last war which gave birth to the *Surrealist* movement, ... followed in England by the *New Apocalypse* school, whose Australian counter-parts are the Angry Penguins".<sup>20</sup> As a radical challenge to the prevailing nationalism and conservative traditionalism, Angry Penguins believed that it was time, "indeed overdue, for an aggressive outburst of internationalism, to break through the Deep South isolationism of our culture, and to familiarize ourselves with" contemporary European writers.<sup>21</sup>

Although Angry Penguins did succeed in bringing a fresh inspiration to Australian literature by introducing international literary influences and publishing contemporary European and American literary works, yet, lacking systematic thought and principle, its enthusiastic experimentation aimed at demolishing established traditions and forms failed to produce equally substantial work and is, to a large extent, denounced by its own excesses and superficiality. The irony underlying the Ern Malley hoax is that the hoax was produced as "a serious literary experiment" upon the propositions of Angry Penguins. The irony is further shown in "the contrast between the process of the real authorship and the editorial assertion that 'Malley approached poetry with a tremendous sense of the import of what he was doing'", as Frederick Macartney remarks in his essay "Beyond A Joke: The Sad Case of Ern Malley".<sup>22</sup> Max Harris himself describes the hoax as "a cultural counter-attack" and concedes that it "called on us to defend and analyse the inherent excesses and absurdities in our creative work itself".<sup>23</sup>

Lynne Strahan in the book Just City and the Mirrors challenges the actual being of the modernist movement that Angry Penguins claimed to have launched. She points out that "Negative publicity had given Australian modernism an identity; but there were still doubts about its existence".<sup>24</sup> In its determination to bring European Modernism

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<sup>19</sup> Kramer (ed.), p.371.

<sup>20</sup> Tregenza, p.67.

<sup>21</sup> Quadrant, 1 (1963), 6.

<sup>22</sup> Australian Literary Essays (Sydney, 1957), p.103.

<sup>23</sup> Quadrant, 1 (1963), 7-8.

<sup>24</sup> Just City and the Mirrors: Meanjin Quarterly and the Intellectual Front 1940 - 1965 (Melbourne, 1984), p.67.

into the Australian literary and artistic scene, Angry Penguins turned not so much to Modernism represented by T.S. Eliot, Ezra Pound and James Joyce as to the contemporary innovations and radical experiments undertaken by Surrealism, Expressionism, and the poetry of Dylan Thomas and the New Apocalypse poets. It should be pointed out that the understanding of Modernism shown in Angry Penguins is far from deep and comprehensive. It placed an exclusive emphasis upon the radical experimentation of Modernism without realizing the significance of the distinguishing effort of Modernism to re-construct the relationship of the past with the present.

Preoccupied with introducing internationalism and contemporary experimentalism into Australia, Angry Penguins, like the *Vision* school whose views and stances it strongly opposed, ignored what has already been achieved in Australian literature and made no attempt to locate itself in relation to it. Barrett Reid in his essay "Making It New in Australia" regards this ignorance of previous literary achievements in Australia as a major failure of Angry Penguins, remarking that Harris's "lack of recognition that modern poetry had begun in Australia elsewhere and earlier, particularly in the work of Kenneth Slessor" has caused "a serious dislocation".<sup>25</sup> Max Harris himself, in re-considering the "intolerable posturings" of Angry Penguins, came to the realization that "the *avant-garde* ranks were too tight and too exclusive", which prevented it from appreciating "magnificent talents as those of R.D. FitzGerald, Kenneth Slessor, or the early Patrick White"; and he also acknowledged the "excesses" and "absurdities" of Angry Penguins as an experimental movement.<sup>26</sup>

However, if the Angry Penguins failed to bring about a robust movement in Australian literature, both because of their excesses and superficiality in copying Modernist experiments in literary forms and structures, and of their limited capabilities to produce great and influential literary works, Angry Penguins did make a significant contribution to the flourishing period of Australian painting in the 40s, especially through its association with prominent artists such as Sidney Nolan and Albert Tucker.

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<sup>25</sup> Angry Penguins and Realist Painting in Melbourne in the 1940s (South Bank Centre, 1988), p.40.

<sup>26</sup> Quadrant, 1 (1963), 7.

## **Chapter 7. Modernism in Australian Painting**

The reaction to Modernism in Australia has been reviewed in the preceding survey of literary movements in the history of Australian literature. These movements occurred mainly in the field of Australian poetry. If Modernism as an experimental movement around the turn of the century generally failed to create an overwhelming impact upon Australian poetry, it did greatly influence the progress of Australian painting during the 30s and 40s, which was particularly shown in the experimental and innovative paintings by Sidney Nolan and his rebellious contemporaries. However, it is important to observe that the occurrence of a significant break with the traditions of the past in Australian painting during the period of the two decades did not entail the existence of a united front of Modernism with its radical experiments. Along with experiments in surrealism, expressionism and primitive art, there existed an equally influential trend of social realism. Furthermore, the variant of Australian modernism in painting, as Richard Haese suggests, was on the one hand directly related to the discovery of modern European artistic traditions and experiments which led to a revolt against Australian parochialism; on the other hand, Australian artists employed European Modernism to "their own unique ends" by integrating it into the re-discovery of Australian experience and re-examination of the proposition of "an authentic Australian cultural tradition". Haese emphasizes that while the artists of the 1940s were more inclined to the influence of European Modernist experiments than their predecessors, Australian painting of that period at its best "proclaimed the need for a more fundamental realization of the Australian experience, both past and present".<sup>1</sup> The contention is that each group of artists, including social realists and experimentalists, claimed its aim to be the development of "an authentic Australian cultural tradition", though for each group, the reference to and the way to achieve authenticity are marked by essential differences.

### **1. The Emergence of Modernism and Its Clash with Conservatism**

According to Humphrey McQueen, "Throughout the 1920s, Modernism had been no

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<sup>1</sup>Rebels and Precursors: The Revolutionary Years of Australian Art (Ringwood, 1981, 1988), pp.6-7.

more than outcrops in a vast ocean of opposition. By the mid-1930s, these outcrops exploded to form an island chain. Between 1937 and 1944, this chain formed a new continent".<sup>2</sup> McQueen makes it clear that until the late 30s and 40s the influences of European Modernism upon Australian painting were confined to imitations of superficial features of the movement. Early tentative attempts at Modernist experiments can be seen in works by Grace Cossington Smith, Roland Wakelin, Roy de Maistre and Margaret Preston; and they primarily followed the models of post-impressionism. Both Robert Hughes and Bernard Smith assert the impact of Matisse upon Grace Cossington Smith in her "The Sock Knitter" (1915). Hughes remarks that in the picture there is an "ornamental white arras with green motifs" which "recalls Matisse".<sup>3</sup> Smith in his study describes the picture as "stippled brushwork" applied to "flattish decorative forms" that are "reminiscent of Matisse".<sup>4</sup> But McQueen contends that Grace Cossington Smith's "The Sock Knitter" should be regarded as "the earliest instance of that imitating of surface characteristics" of Modernist experimentalists, even though it "still is accepted as genuine Modernism in Australia".<sup>5</sup> He attributes the misreading of the superficial aspects of the picture as the "allegedly Matisse-like", actually related to "an unresolved attempt at Cezanne", to "the confusion regarding Modernism" during that time in Australia.<sup>6</sup> However, Bernard Smith agrees that the experiments attempted by Grace Cossington Smith, Roland Wakelin and Roy de Maistre "never strayed far from the world of appearances" so as "to make a complete break with naturalistic painting".<sup>7</sup> Smith concludes that during the 1920s and early 30s post-impressionism made only "a slight impact, and cubism and futurism no impact" upon Australian painting.<sup>8</sup>

It was not until the late 30s and early 40s that the influence of European Modernism was able to form a swinging force in Australian art; and it is generally claimed that the 1939 *Herald* Exhibition represents a significant landmark in the establishment of a direct and substantial contact with the overseas Modernist movement. The Exhibition contained the paintings by most of the Modernist masters ranging from Cezanne, Van Gogh, Gauguin to Chagall, Chirico, Dali, Leger, Matisse and Picasso. But, as Richard Haese noted, "by being restricted to the Anglo-French tradition", the Exhibition

contained no examples of German or northern European expressionism, or works by the German new-objectivity movement of the 1920s. There was no

<sup>2</sup>The Black Swan of Trespass (Sydney, 1979), p.26.

<sup>3</sup>The Art of Australia (Ringwood, 1966), p.116.

<sup>4</sup>Australian Painting 1788 - 1970 (Melbourne, 1971), p.173.

<sup>5</sup>McQueen, p.4.

<sup>6</sup>loc. cit.

<sup>7</sup>Smith, p.201.

<sup>8</sup>loc. cit.

Russian painting and no Italian futurism. Nor were there examples of vorticism, dadaism, the more radical canvases and collages of Picasso's cubist work, or the abstracted fauvism of Matisse. There was some surrealism; but the movement was thinly represented, with one work each by Chagall, Ernst, Dali and de Chirico.<sup>9</sup>

In spite of its exclusion of more radical experimental forms of Modernism, the reaction to and influence of the Exhibition were overwhelming. It brought enthusiasm, new vitality as well as heated debates to the Australian art world. Robert Hughes gives a clear description of the significance of the Exhibition to the Australian artists of the time. For them

the show was an event of unparalleled importance; it was their first glimpse of major French post-impressionist paintings, and it brought them face to face with the European values they so urgently wanted to comprehend, giving their own work both a context and a standard of comparison.<sup>10</sup>

Bernard Smith suggests that the show be seen as a signal of an ending to the dominance of "the academic establishment in art in Australia."<sup>11</sup>

The emergence of Modernism in Australian painting from the 1920s to the 1940s was constantly met with strong opposition from a conservative force. The clash between the conservative establishment and the newly emerging movement was pushed to the public front by the successive formations of the Australian Academy of Art in 1937 and the Contemporary Art Society in the following year. In general terms, the former stood for preserving academic values and standards of art, particularly viewed in the pastoral traditions of landscape painting established by Tom Roberts, Arthur Street and Hans Heysen, and strongly against any intrusion of *avant-garde* styles of experiment, while the latter represented the voice revolting against academic institutions of art in Australia and calling for a merging into the mainstream of contemporary European experimentation by means of experimenting with new forms of artistic expression. Yet, as several art critics later observe, despite the overall division between these two opposing camps, there also existed some important differences within each of the organizations.

Richard Haese notes that within the Australian Academy of Art there were two different key positions and that the differences between the two positions actually

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<sup>9</sup>Haese, p.61.

<sup>10</sup>Hughes, p.142.

<sup>11</sup>Smith, p.207.

represented broad and fundamental differences in Australian culture and politics; differences in values and in a sense of Australian nationality deeply rooted in the colonial experience of Australians in the late nineteenth century.<sup>12</sup>

Robert Menzies' aim was to bring about unified and unifying institutions of art over diversity by maintaining "an Anglo-Australian establishment" composed of "the pastoral framework of values" and traditions and by excluding those "modernists" who "talk a different language", while Ure Smith who exemplified "a more liberal position" proposed that the Academy "equally be a force for diversity" in order to encourage rather than inhibit "openness or an enriching difference in art", the difference that "would embrace Australian responses to modernism".<sup>13</sup>

The underlying purpose of the formation of the Academy felt by many artists was to strengthen the establishment, to stifle originality and progress in art and to discriminate against contemporary forms of expression. Such a feeling aroused doubts, suspicions and strong criticism from outside the Academy. Severe attacks were launched by George Bell who was a formidable force in contemporary art circles. The principle that Menzies set for the Academy not only imposed a very restrictive rule on the acceptance of Modernist experimental paintings on its walls, but, as Bernard Smith points out, the Academy failed "to become a truly representative body even of the older and more conservative artists", such as Julian Ashton, Arthur Streeton and Norman Lindsay.<sup>14</sup> Robert Hughes finds that the provincialism proposed by the Academy "was amazing" and reviews it as one of the major factors that led to its ultimate collapse in 1943.<sup>15</sup>

As an immediate response and challenge to the position of the Academy, the opponents of the Academy, led by George Bell, organized the Contemporary Art Society, the C.A.S., in July 1938. Although the new Society was initiated by the determination to break away from restrictions imposed by the old establishment and open up a channel for the development of more vigorous contemporary forms of expression in art, it was not an organization that represented a united front for radical Modernist experiments. Robert Hughes observes that soon after its inception, the Society developed into "a triple schism, between George Bell and the classical post-impressionists, John Reed and the figurative expressionists, and the social realists led by Noel Counihan and Josl Bergner".<sup>16</sup> Following Hughes' view, Bernard Smith sees that the Society "was a

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<sup>12</sup>Haese, p.40.

<sup>13</sup>op. cit., pp.40-41.

<sup>14</sup>Smith, p.126.

<sup>15</sup>Hughes, p.132.

<sup>16</sup>Hughes, p.132.

heterogeneous body from the beginning" and was divided into three groups.<sup>17</sup> The first group with George Bell as its leading man stood for post-impressionism but was strongly against any more radical forms of experiments; the second group was composed of the *avant-garde* circle with prominent artists such as Albert Tucker, Sidney Nolan, Arthur Boyd and John Perceval. They were the enthusiastic experimentalists of surrealism, naive painting, cubism, abstract art and German expressionism. The third group was the so-called group of social realist painters, including Noel Counihan, V.G. O'Connor, Josl Bergner and others. They were characterized by their interest in "the depiction of contemporary life from a left-wing point of view" and believed that "art and politics cannot and should not be separated".<sup>18</sup>

Robert Hughes views the idea "that art affected society" as a significant statement that informs not only the determination of the young radical artists to break away from the sense of art in the past but also their commitment to bringing the Australian art world out of the complacency of insularity into the mainstream of international movements. Yet it was also the different attitudes towards and interpretations of this idea that both predetermined the essential division among these three groups and led to a final break-up. George Bell and his post-impressionist group held no belief in any political and social involvement and concentrated only on the search for "the internal poetics of painting". The chief artists within the Society actively participating in the revolt against the existing social as well as artistic establishment were Albert Tucker, Sidney Nolan, Danila Vassilieff, John Perceval, Arthur Boyd and Josl Bergner. For these artists there existed an intrinsic connexion "between insularity in society and conservatism in art"; for them, to break free from one was determined by dismantling the other.<sup>19</sup>

The first years of the C.A.S. constitution were focused on the conflict between George Bell and the more radical group led by John Reed and Albert Tucker. The conceptions of the Society held by each group, Richard Haese maintains, were irreconcilable.<sup>20</sup> George Bell and his moderate associates insisted that the organization be "an Artists' Society" with a clear set of formal principles and rules, and his proposition is described by Haese as "guild elitism".<sup>21</sup> The John Reed circle was committed to the idea that the Society should remain open and receptive to all new forms and conceptions of visual arts. While the George Bell group simply shunned politics in art and radical experiments of expression, the other two groups were actively engaged in exploring

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<sup>17</sup>Smith, p.218.

<sup>18</sup>op. cit., p.233.

<sup>19</sup>Hughes, p.137.

<sup>20</sup>Haese, p.47.

<sup>21</sup>Haese, p.130.

psychological, social and political aspects of art with an unique combination of surrealism, expressionism and social realism in Australian painting during the 1940s. With the focus on the conflict with the George Bell group as well as the united front policy against Fascism, the essential difference between the *avant-garde* artists and social realists was subdued for a short period before it became a central issue. The initial alliance between the moderates and the radicals within the Society soon disintegrated. The departure of George Bell and his associates from the organization was followed by an increasingly radical tendency of the Society both in the political and artistic sense, and pushed the conflict between the other two groups to the front.

## 2. The Rift between Modernist Radicalism and Social Realism

The radical Modernist experimental movement was not only opposed by the conservative party, but it was also resisted and attacked by the other form of radicalism seen in social realism, though the two parties of opponents made their charges from essentially different points of view. George Bell's guild elitism attracted criticism not only from the group who insisted on an institution encouraging all forms of innovative experiments based on individual perceptions, but also from the group who endorsed a realistic approach to art and life and was concerned with the development of a people's art, with the emphasis upon addressing social issues in the form of art. In the absence of George Bell along with his circle, the discrepancy developed between the other two groups was increasingly deepened and became unbridgeable. After the first split with George Bell within the C.A.S., the virtually disparate conceptions of art and the role of artist in society held by each of the other two groups led to a second split before the end of the war.

In spite of the apparent unity shown in the annual exhibition of C.A.S. in 1942 and the Anti-Fascist exhibition at the end of the same year, the differences between individual artists lay deep. Artists such as Albert Tucker and Sidney Nolan developed highly individual styles and their "respective senses of humanism and the radicalism that flowed from it differed in fundamental ways from that of the extreme left". Nolan "very early found an aesthetic and intellectual sympathy with the highly personal and involuted world of symbolist poetry", whereas Tucker's association ranged widely "from nineteenth century post-impressionism to surrealism".<sup>22</sup> Haese views the

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<sup>22</sup>Haese, p.86.

differences underlying paintings by Nolan, Tucker and Counihan as "the differences between symbolism and surrealism, on the one hand, and socialism and social realism on the other; between a sense of art as a personal testament and art as a political weapon".<sup>23</sup>

Richard Haese notes that by the end of 1943, the C.A.S. "had ceased to operate as a united front body" and was divided into two distinctive camps with violent clashes of values. The one was composed of the so-called Angry Penguins named after the title of the magazine, with its chief artists like Nolan, Tucker, Boyd and Perceval; in opposition to it was the triad of Counihan, O'Connor and Bergner.<sup>24</sup> The guide-line for the *avant-garde* artists by its very nature was anarchist and individualist, which was exactly what the social realist group set against. While these artists developed their art through surrealism and expressionism into the realm of psychological realities, social realists simply rejected any association in the development of art with unrealistic and subjective concerns. Social realism in art was deeply involved in the communist movement in Australia during the war years, and the influence and control of the communist party upon the social realist artists were strongly felt in their concern for important social events and the injustices inherent in the social system, and in their way of dealing with these issues. In politics, these artists were usually of the left-wing; and in art, they proposed a progressive and communal art and adapted a realistic approach. The charges that they laid against the *avant-garde* artists were that the latter indulged in presenting morbid individual psychology in an obscure and mystic fashion, and followed a tradition led by T.S. Eliot, James Joyce, George Orwell and others who were accommodated with a defeatist and pessimistic view of social relations and civilization itself. The art based on these perceptions could by no means be progressive but regressive.

Described by Humphrey McQueen as "the most articulate and best informed proponent for social realist art in Australia during the 1940s",<sup>25</sup> Bernard Smith, in his review of the artistic movements in Australian painting during the 40s, is obviously critical of the preoccupation with more personal and subjective perceptions than social concerns in the paintings of Nolan and Tucker. In Place, Taste and Tradition, he describes the art of social realism as "essentially social art"; while the avant-garde artist "refers his painting to a personal equation; the realist refers to a social equation".<sup>26</sup> Being firmly convinced of the great achievement of social realism in Australian painting namely by Bergner,

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<sup>23</sup>op. cit., p.92.

<sup>24</sup>op. cit., pp.125-136.

<sup>25</sup>McQueen, p.73.

<sup>26</sup>Place, Taste and Tradition (Melbourne, 1945, 1979), p.241.

Counihan, O'Connor and Herbert McClintock, who had "reacted vigorously to the social and political upheavals of their own time",<sup>27</sup> he virtually ignores the paintings of the *avant-garde* artists except by dismissing them on the basis that they gave way to defeatism and pessimism. Surrealism is criticized for indulging in "clandestine interest in the macabre and morbid";<sup>28</sup> and Tucker is viewed negatively for his pessimism which, Smith claims, "is linked spiritually with the world-weariness of the Eliot school".<sup>29</sup> He also regards Perceval's turning away from social realism to the exploration of the child world as "clear enough evidence that regression to a purely individualistic art has not resulted in the heightening of his artistic powers".<sup>30</sup> In his Australian Painting 1788-1970, Tucker's social realism is censured for being "more individualistic and anarchic than the social realism of Counihan, Bergner and O'Connor",<sup>31</sup> and Nolan's Ned Kelly series, Smith asserts, "are not ... outstanding achievements by any standard and have been praised, perhaps, beyond their true worth".<sup>32</sup>

Haese points out that Smith's principle for distinguishing the progressive artist from the reactionary artist was largely based on the "criteria of political intention and the degree of realism".<sup>33</sup> Later in the essay "Realist Art in Wartime Australia", Smith takes on a strong defensive stance for social realist painting during the 1940s, claiming that the achievement of the social realist artists of the time was diminished by the selective principles of the C.A.S. constitution and undervalued generally. He acknowledges vital differences between the *avant-garde* modernists and social realists by maintaining that the latter went directly to life experience and were committed to reflecting contemporary life and society in realistic terms in their paintings, and in so doing they shared their feelings with others; whereas the radical modernists "turned for inspiration to French literature, child and primitive art, psychoanalysis, sacred geometry and the archetypes of Jung".<sup>34</sup> He attributes the reason for the realist artists' drawing heavily on naturalistic traditions to their disillusion with "the de-skilling propensities of modernism".<sup>35</sup> He laments the failure of social realist painting to survive after the war, and associates the failure on the one hand with the fact that these social realists were often too much involved in politics at the expense of their painting, and burned themselves out. On the other hand he is convinced that much more importantly they

<sup>27</sup>Place, Taste and Tradition, p.255.

<sup>28</sup>op. cit., p.214.

<sup>29</sup>op. cit., p.227.

<sup>30</sup>op. cit., p.229.

<sup>31</sup>Australian Painting 1788 - 1970, p.279.

<sup>32</sup>op. cit., p.282.

<sup>33</sup>Haese, p.153.

<sup>34</sup>Angry Penguins and Realist Painting in Melbourne in the 1940 (South Bank Centre, 1988), p.58.

<sup>35</sup>loc. cit.

were marginalized by the art world of the time that turned strongly against a realist approach and was dominated by radical modernists.

But according to the study of Robert Hughes, the rift between "Counihan, O'Connor, Bergner and McClintock, aided by Bernard Smith" and "the Nolan-Tucker-Reed-Harris group" was primarily concerned with the perception of Modernism. For the social realists, "modernism in Australia was potentially Fascist: it confused and distracted the public".<sup>36</sup> Bernard Smith in the first edition of his book Place, Taste and Tradition wrote: "there is a Nazi flag flying from the top of the ivory tower ... Today the most vigorous supporters of aestheticism are either openly Fascist or near Fascist in their political opinions",<sup>37</sup> though he modified the statement in the 1979 edition as only: "Today there is a Nazi flag flying from the top of the ivory tower".<sup>38</sup> It was on these grounds that Smith set up his argument for the social realist group against *avant-garde* art.

Richard Haese observes that for the radicals the C.A.S. was regarded "as a fighting organization for the defence of democratic and progressive values in opposition to all that was conservative, reactionary, potentially fascist, and morally iniquitous".<sup>39</sup> The principles set for the significant annual exhibition of 1941 conveyed a clear message that it would exclude "all who, however sympathetic otherwise, were not prepared to be as experimental as modernists".<sup>40</sup> But with the in-fighting between the modernist radicals and social realists becoming increasingly bitter and irreconcilable, the initial role of the C.A.S. was seriously challenged. The issue now "was whether it was to be a front organization for communist politics in art or whether it was to continue to be a forum for advanced ideas and a focus for avant-garde art".<sup>41</sup> And Haese believes that "radical modernism was now as much under threat from the potential populism implied by the communist position as it had been earlier from the guild elitism of George Bell".<sup>42</sup> On the one hand, to the liberal radicals, the fight with the social realist group was seen as the fight of individualism and anarchism against collectivism and authoritarianism; on the other hand, as Haese notes, if before 1941, while the united front policy held, the works of Nolan and Tucker were tolerated by the social realist circle, then by 1942 their works were criticized for identifying "individual dissent with

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<sup>36</sup>Hughes, p.146.

<sup>37</sup>Place, Taste and Tradition (Sydney, 1945), p.268.

<sup>38</sup>Place, Taste and Tradition (Melbourne, 1979), p.278.

<sup>39</sup>Haese, p.66.

<sup>40</sup>op. cit., p.70.

<sup>41</sup>op. cit., p.137.

<sup>42</sup>Haese, p.130.

communal action".<sup>43</sup> It was now seen very clearly by both groups that the development of radical modernism was utterly at variance with that of social realism.

A complete break occurred after the controversy triggered by the notorious September issue of Angry Penguins in 1943. The 1944 annual exhibition was the last of the all-encompassing C.A.S. exhibitions. In 1945 the artists in Sydney who were deeply discontented with the C.A.S. established the Studio of Realist Art. After 1945 the social realists withdrew from the C.A.S. and were absent from its last exhibition in 1946. Haese makes it clear that by 1946, "the social realist group hardly existed, in spite of the ironically successful group exhibition ... in July 1946 by Bergner, Counihan and O'Connor."<sup>44</sup>

To various degrees, Tucker, Boyd and Perceval in their early stages of creativity were involved in social realism, though the basic idea of social realism for these artists was different from that of Bergner, Counihan and O'Connor. Robert Hughes makes it clear that Tucker's social realism in the 1940s fundamentally "differed from Bergner's or Counihan's in that it was not 'political'" and "had no programmatic content" but was preoccupied "with *moral* evil".<sup>45</sup> But the influence of these so-called social realists in the development of Australian painting and upon individual artists has been fairly acknowledged in both Hughes' and Haese's accounts. Hughes believes that among the chief artists of the 40s, Danila Vassilieff is the most neglected artist. He not only influenced Nolan's later Dimboola landscapes,<sup>46</sup> but also his "fascination with untrained, direct, conceptual images" was actually "one of the preoccupations of the Angry Decade as a whole", that is from 1937 to 1947.<sup>47</sup> Haese also gives a full account of the important influences of Josl Bergner and Danila Vassilieff upon artists such as Arthur Boyd, Albert Tucker, Noel Counihan and Vic O'Connor, both in terms of experimental tendency and choice of subjects. Vassilieff's rejection of academicism and emphasis upon a spontaneous correspondence between techniques and the imaginative vision of the individual artist gave a new direction of exploration for these young artists. Bergner is seen as the first who in his paintings "confronted the poverty and despair that were the legacy for so many of the Great Depression".<sup>48</sup> Although Bernard Smith in his book stresses the deep influence of the social realist painters, especially

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<sup>43</sup>Haese, p.128.

<sup>44</sup>op. cit., p.165.

<sup>45</sup>Hughes, pp.150-151.

<sup>46</sup>op. cit., p.149.

<sup>47</sup>op. cit., p.150.

<sup>48</sup>Haese, p.82.

Josl Bergner, upon Arthur Boyd and John Perceval at the time,<sup>49</sup> Haese indicates clearly that while O'Connor and Counihan felt a strong affinity with Bergner's social outlook and sense of art, the influence of Bergner upon Boyd was more in the aspect of style than in social comment. He points out that Boyd's primary interest lay in the exploration of psychological states rather than in social issues.<sup>50</sup>

Haese in his account of the social realist artists of the 1940s challenges the view that these artists represented "an homogeneous bloc", though in fact they together "embraced a different kind of radicalism". The upholding of such a view, he observes, was due to the intention to suppress individual differences for political reasons.<sup>51</sup> The differences might be seen in the continuing different development of Bergner in fundamental ways from his fellow artists Counihan and O'Connor. Bergner's preoccupation with the theme of the persecution of the Jews and Jewish traditions attracted criticism from the left for his tendency towards radical humanism and "ironically ... helped to alienate him from his friends and associates".<sup>52</sup> The differences among the social realists were also revealed between Melbourne and Sydney artists. Before the C.A.S. was virtually dissolved in 1944 when the split between the social realists and experimentalists became inevitable, the centre of Australian painting with the heated debate among various forces was staged in Melbourne. After the split occurred, the artists in Sydney established The Studio of Realist Art established under the leadership of James Cant as an expression of disillusionment with the constitution of C.A.S. This group of social realists were less radically involved in politics than their Melbourne counterparts. Moreover Cant, who as a participant in the surrealist movement in his early creativity maintained "a concern for aesthetic radicalism", was "reluctant to dispense with psychological realities in favour of social ones".<sup>53</sup>

### 3. Surrealism and Expressionism

Richard Haese observes that Australian artists' discovery of "a more radical modernism" began with surrealism and expressionism in the later 30s<sup>54</sup> and the "attraction of surrealism was so pervasive in the early 1940s that few modernists could resist it", even

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<sup>49</sup> *Australian Painting 1788 - 1970*, pp.283-284.

<sup>50</sup> Haese, p.83.

<sup>51</sup> *op. cit.*, p.174.

<sup>52</sup> *op. cit.*, p.169.

<sup>53</sup> *op. cit.*, pp.162-164.

<sup>54</sup> Haese, p.63.

though "fewer could grasp the substance behind the shadow".<sup>55</sup> It is important to note that although the influence of surrealism loomed large in the experimental phase of Australian painting during the 30s and 40s, surrealism appealed to Australian artists more as an irrational and unrestrained force which posed an overall challenge to the established conventions of art and perceptions of life than as a coherently constructed movement. While surrealism played an important role in the formation of the styles of the major artists of the time, such as Albert Tucker, Sidney Nolan, Arthur Boyd, Russel Drysdale and Peter Purves Smith, surrealism was far from being predominant in their works. It was rather the employment of surrealist techniques by these artists in combination with other devices to achieve their own respective effects that accounted for the indispensable role of surrealism in the development of modern Australian painting.

As early as 1932, the artist Eric Thake revealed some superficial features of surrealism in his painting. But it was not until the controversial presence of Salvador Dali's *L'Homme Fleur* in the *Herald* exhibition of 1939 that for the first time surrealism was brought fully to public notice in Australia. Robert Hughes notes that "*L'Homme Fleur* helped consolidate a growing interest in surrealism. But it did not bring that movement to Australia".<sup>56</sup> Among the artists who were inclined to the influence of surrealism, only James Gleeson "worked closest to the accepted idea of surrealism"<sup>57</sup> and emulated the surrealist master Dali; none of the others, in Haese's view, "should be thought of as a programmatic surrealist".<sup>58</sup> But Haese contends that even though Gleeson developed his style closely on surrealist lines and his work helped surrealism to be better understood, to Gleeson, as "an aesthetic conservative", "surrealism's appeal lay more in its capacity to extend the range and scope of the subject-matter of art than in the challenge to the conception of picture-making and the role of the artist that Andre Breton envisaged".<sup>59</sup>

German expressionism reached the Australian art world in the late 1930s through the work of Albert Tucker. Expressionism had its roots in the nineteenth century tradition of Daumier and Van Gogh, and was developed further in the twentieth century by Picasso and German artists George Grosz and Kathe Kollwitz. Like surrealism, expressionism, when it was first discovered in Australia, held a strong appeal to the

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<sup>55</sup>Haese, p.88.

<sup>56</sup>Hughes, p.142.

<sup>57</sup>loc. cit.

<sup>58</sup>Haese, p.89.

<sup>59</sup>op. cit., p.88.

artists who were eager to take up radical European experimental trends. Its impact upon Australian artists of the time ranged widely from Tucker, Nolan, Boyd to Vassilieff, Bergner and Drysdale. But, as an artistic mode, expressionism yielded few successful and original paintings in Australia, as Robert Hughes comments: "Most of Melbourne's expressionism in the forties was unskilled painting, ... and by no means very inventive".<sup>60</sup> The effect of expressionism on Australian painting was, on the one hand, based on the fact that the efforts to experiment in expressionism, no matter how imitative they often were, helped "to jolt Australian painting from its warm pastoral complacency".<sup>61</sup> On the other hand, it is seen in its assimilation and combination into other devices achieved by innovative artists through their original perceptions and individual styles.

Along with the influence of surrealism and expressionism, there was the appeal of anarchism endorsed particularly by Herbert Read,

whose association with the surrealist movement, together with his writings on the role of the subconscious in art, affected the painting of the 'Angry Decade' more profoundly than any art theory has influenced a movement in Australian art since.<sup>62</sup>

The introduction of Freud's psychological revelations enhanced the interest in exploring and establishing inner psychological realities beneath the surface by means of distortion and transformation. While it was undoubtedly true that Australian artists of the time were greatly influenced by surrealist and expressionist art and the writings of Herbert Read, there were other important influences as well. The key influential figure in Nolan's creativity, for example, was Arthur Rimbaud whose powerful vision of transformation and harmony struck an immediate responsive chord in him; he also found inspirations in the *naïf* art of Henri Rousseau and primitivism of D.H. Lawrence. In the case of Tucker, his preoccupation with the theme of modern evil showed strong affinities with T.S. Eliot's sense of futility and destructiveness of the modernised world overwhelmingly expressed in his poetry.

Just as Vivian Smith remarks that the problem that always faces Australian poets is more the difficulty of assimilating the European influences than being informed about these influences, so the difficulty facing Australian artists during the 30s and 40s was also in assimilating international experimental trends such as surrealism and

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<sup>60</sup>Hughes, p.138.

<sup>61</sup>loc. cit.

<sup>62</sup>op. cit., p.137.

expressionism. Richard Haese observes that "the Australian artist was unable simply to accept European traditions. That would result, as it did all too often, in artificiality and eclecticism. The Australian artist had to forge his own tradition in the 1940s, in the context of Australia and Europe, out of both native and more universal values".<sup>63</sup>

If the influences of European Modernism helped Australian experimentalists, particularly Nolan, Tucker, Boyd and Perceval, to break away from traditionally accepted modes of representation, it was their efforts to absorb these influences into the discovery of an innovative and distinctive expression of Australian experience that distinguished their great achievements and which charted a new course for Australian art. Inspired by new possibilities of formal experiments viewed through the works of European Modernists, these artists, each in his highly individual way, reached out for new dimensions and new visions of Australian experience. The war years did not isolate Australia from the outside world, but the traumatic experience of the war helped enhance the awareness of Australian realities in these artists.

Tucker, in his preoccupation with the theme of moral degradation, focused on decaying urban life which he considered "an inescapable condition of humanity".<sup>64</sup> By using expressionistic and surrealistic devices, Tucker transformed the everyday inner urban street scene into fantastic and highly symbolically charged images of evil lurking menacingly behind the facade of the familiar. Boyd, like Tucker, "was able to draw on a repertoire of images in creating a bizarre world of surrealistic associations".<sup>65</sup> With the use of metamorphosis and of images corresponding to psychological states, Boyd created the frenzied and enigmatic world of St Kilda fallen from grace. Perceval's transformed images of sinister and manic life-force viewed either in the parade of Luna Park or nocturnal Melbourne also conveyed the sense of destructiveness of modern society deeply felt by these artists.

If this "search for the threatened disorder behind apparent order and the menace behind the ordinary" inherent in modern society through "a symbolism capable of expressing non-visual realities"<sup>66</sup> represented an important phase in the achievement of Australian experimental artists during the 1940s, there were other significant breakthroughs that brought about new dimensions in Australian art. Together with Nolan's rediscovery of Australian landscape in his Wimmera series, Drysdale's alternative approach to pastoral landscape "pulled Australian landscape from the limbo of fleece and gum-tree in which

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<sup>63</sup>Haese, p.122.

<sup>64</sup>op. cit., p.187.

<sup>65</sup>op. cit., p.192.

<sup>66</sup>Haese, p.192.

it had lain stiffening for thirty years".<sup>67</sup> The alternative vision of the relentless, harsh and sometimes grotesque landscape that Nolan and Drysdale achieved to the pastoral tradition did not actually turn back against the past, but was a continuation of and re-connection with the perception of earliest pioneering realities. This inclination of re-discovering Australian experience is also the primary concern in Nolan's Ned Kelly series in which the artist by re-interpreting the national myth with his distinctive originality added a new dimension to the historical understanding of this rebellious folk-hero figure in his relation to the bush. It is interesting to note that this tendency of going back to the historical and mythic past in modern Australian painting replicates the tendency in the modern Australian novel, as will be discussed.

Robert Hughes claims that Tucker's "Images of Modern Evil", Nolan's first Kelly series and Drysdale's outback paintings of 1941-5 should be considered as "the most important achievements in the formative years of modern Australian art".<sup>68</sup> These groups of paintings, it might be said, represented three dimensions of development during this significant decade of Australian painting.

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<sup>67</sup>Hughes, p.191.

<sup>68</sup>op. cit., pp.151-152.

## Chapter 8. The Debate about the Development of Australian Fiction

As has been seen above, Australian painting during the 30s and 40s was distinguished by its experimental tendency, strongly influenced by European Modernism. If realism and social realism represent only one of the influential trends in Australian painting during that period, Australian fiction, from the outset and continuously, was dominated by the mode of realism in which documentation, the accumulation of detail, and the chronological sequence are the prominent features. The history of Australian fiction, compared with that of Australian painting or of Australian poetry, is neither identified with any radical experimental movements, nor marked by violent clashes among organized camps upholding different ideas and principles. If there was any fervently asserted movement in the development of Australian fiction, it was the movement of nationalism, in which it was insisted that the national literature be established in the discovery of indigenous traditions mainly represented by the works of Joseph Furphy and Henry Lawson, though the nationalistic interpretations of the Furphy-Lawson tradition and the legend of the nineties are significantly challenged by later critics. And there was a minor competing strand, mainly viewed in the Jindyworobak movement, which claimed that Australian literature as an indigenous literature should be derived from Aboriginal culture rather than from European literary traditions. Up to the late fifties, with only a few exceptions, the Australian novel was hardly inclined to any trend of radical formal experiment diverging from the conventions of realism. Nevertheless, in spite of the dominance of realism and its related nationalistic assertions, the influence of European Modernism came in as early as the 1920s, prominently seen in the distinctive works of Christina Stead - even though it is true that her distinctiveness was not generally appreciated until the 1960s.

Henry Lawson and Joseph Furphy have been claimed as the founders of the realistic tradition in Australian fiction. They rejected the dominance of the fashion of romance in the novels of the preceding age and were determined to describe in realistic terms the life of settlement, of bushmen and their egalitarian attitude and mateship. At the beginning of the century, Henry Lawson's achievement in his short stories and, to a less degree, Joseph Furphy's masterpiece, Such Is Life, were regarded as the major components of the legend of the 1890s; and the indigenous features expressed in their works were seen as the exclusive expression of the national ethos and national identity.

Such a view was reinforced by the revival of nationalism in the 40s and 50s. Lawson and Furphy were reviewed as sole representatives of the Australian tradition with their explicit and authentic expression of Australianness.

A.A. Phillips in his influential study The Australian Tradition claimed that "the Australian writers of the nineties achieved a revolution in nineteenth century Anglo-Saxon letters, setting fiction free from the cage of a middle-class attitude and a middle-class audience."<sup>1</sup> He maintained that "Before the nineties there was no such thing as Australian writing..."<sup>2</sup> It was through the achievement of Lawson and Furphy that Australian literature was brought into being. Their fresh and vigorous presentation of the bushmen's way of living for the first time triumphed over imitative submission to the contrived English conventions of perception and expression, as in the way in which Furphy attacked Henry Kingsley. His statement obviously anticipates Vance Palmer's version of the legend of the nineties. Palmer asserts that Lawson and Furphy have established a "tradition of democratic writing" by developing a special quality of democracy in their works and showing their interest in men's significance more "as representatives of their class" than "as human beings". He further contends that the novel bearing upon this tradition

is never, or very rarely, written from the eyrie of a detached observer, well above the crowd, but from some point in the working community. The idiom, too, is often that of the man on the job, with his slang and his colloquial rhythms. All this distinguishes it from most English writing where the style aimed at is a literary one and the point of view is fixed in a secure middle-class.<sup>3</sup>

Such a view is actually based on the assumption of social realism in which individuality or subjective perception is believed to be not only irrelevant to creative writing but also liable to deviate from realistic and objective observation. Just as Richard Haese argues that Bernard Smith's value-judgment is mainly based on the degree of realism and the criteria of political intention, so it can also be argued that Phillips' and Palmer's interpretations of national literature are limited and confined to nationalistic concerns and politically biased against those groups which do not share the ideals of the working community.

Brian Kiernan has argued that the Lawson-Furphy tradition postulated by A.A. Phillips as "the Australian tradition" actually "has nothing to do with the most important of our

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<sup>1</sup> The Australian Tradition (Melbourne, 1958, 1980), p.1.

<sup>2</sup> op. cit., p.53.

<sup>3</sup> The Legend of the Nineties, p.170.

novelists", since it is more related to social concern than to literary value.<sup>4</sup> In fact, Phillips himself acknowledges in his Preface to The Australian Tradition that by the Australian tradition he is referring "to the social tradition of the community".<sup>5</sup> It is the interpretation of Lawson and Furphy mainly in terms of social and political significance that gives currency to the mode of social realism predominant in Australian fiction during the thirties, forties and fifties. Vance Palmer expresses clearly the central aim of social realism in his statement that "In our novels there is not much emphasis on the interior life of the individual; there is more on his activities as a social being, or on his experiences at work".<sup>6</sup>

Although social realists regard Furphy and Lawson as their ancestors, their understanding of these two writers is confined to those aspects related to their own concerns, and their aim at absolute objectivity is often superseded by political and social intentions. T. Inglis Moore in his discussion of realism in Australian fiction in Social Patterns in Australian Literature distinguishes the realism exemplified by Lawson, Furphy and Richardson from the social realism seen in Vance Palmer, Katharine Susannah Prichard, Xavier Herbert, Kylie Tennant and later, Frank Hardy and his Realist Writers group. He describes the former as "objective realism" and the latter as "purposive realism in the sense that their realistic descriptions are informed with an ethical commitment".<sup>7</sup> In spite of its earnestness to indict injustice in the social system and its endeavour to establish a national ideal through literature, Moore points out, social realism "is often ... flawed by a propagandist narrowness".<sup>8</sup> That the social and political commitment of social realism significantly limits its literary achievements has been generally recognized. Leonie Kramer observes that Such Is Life in one sense "is related to the many documentary accounts of life in the colony; in another it is an ancestor of the many novels of social realism which succeed it" with an important difference that none of the latter "displays its literary sophistication".<sup>9</sup> Kramer further makes it clear that social realists who aim at greater objectivity by submitting to stereotypes and prescribed ways of expression at the expense of artistry arrive at "the quality of life and experience, if at all, indirectly".<sup>10</sup>

Closely related to the nationalistic point of view is the tendency of isolationism and

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<sup>4</sup> Images of Society and Nature (Melbourne, 1971), p.163.

<sup>5</sup> Phillips, p.xxv.

<sup>6</sup> Palmer, p.170.

<sup>7</sup> Moore, p.134.

<sup>8</sup> op. cit., p.136.

<sup>9</sup> The Oxford History of Australian Literature, p.10.

<sup>10</sup> op. cit., pp.18-19.

parochialism which regard any intrusion of outside influence as a threat to the development of an indigenous literature. While it is often pointed out by other critics that Furphy's comparative literary isolation imposes certain limitations upon his creative activity, A.A. Phillips believes that it is exactly because of his immunity to "the influence of any school" and his rejection of the romanticist approach represented by Henry Kingsley that Furphy was able to achieve his distinctive style which "sprang rather from the Australian tradition of Dinkum-ness".<sup>11</sup> Yet, in another place, he contradicts himself by criticizing Furphy for being "too much influenced by early nineteenth century models unsuited to his purpose", such as Macaulay, Lamb and Dickens;<sup>12</sup> and he attributes Furphy's worst defect to his over-elaboration and intellectualism which, he indicates, are the inevitable result of the acceptance of "the contemporary assumption that fiction should be overtly intellectual".<sup>13</sup> By the same principle, he discerns the failure of Henry Handel Richardson to realize her potential achievement and become a representative Australian writer in her firmly holding "to a continental conception of the novelist's duty of objectivity" which prevented her from observing and absorbing essential qualities of Australian life and experience. He views Richardson as "an early victim of a twentieth century disease - the cultural cringe of the Australian intellectual".<sup>14</sup> The point for argument is that if submissive imitation of European traditions is liable to what Phillips calls "the cultural cringe", then Phillips' own exclusive rejection of all influence just represents an inverted version of the same cultural disease.

The nationalistic interpretation of the achievement of Lawson and Furphy and its related view of the Australian tradition are, to a large extent, arbitrary in the sense that they are grounded in the needs of nationalism, and do not just end in narrowness but are even misleading. The perspectives of national literature proposed by Palmer and Phillips are constantly challenged by other critics. Despite Furphy's own explicitly expressed negative attitude towards the mode of romance and Phillips's strong emphasis upon it as a ground to argue for Furphy's breaking away from colonial imitativeness to authentic Australianness, Such Is Life, as Leonie Kramer points out, "depends (albeit surreptitiously) upon the tricks and convolutions of a romantic plot."<sup>15</sup> The democratic theme which Phillips and Palmer assert to be the very centre of Australian creative writing, and the optimism of Australian nationhood that they discern in the work of

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<sup>11</sup> Phillips, p.37.

<sup>12</sup> op. cit., p.47.

<sup>13</sup> op. cit., p.1.

<sup>14</sup> op. cit., p.102.

<sup>15</sup> Kramer (ed.), p.10.

Lawson and Furphy, are also questioned. H.P. Heseltine in his essay "The Literary Heritage" proposes that beneath a vigorous description of bushlife and mateship in Lawson's work lies "an even more compelling awareness of horror, of panic and emptiness" and that Furphy's Such Is Life is, in effect, concerned ... with the futility of human endeavour".<sup>16</sup> He argues that it is the exposition of the nihilism of experience rather than the democratic theme that represents the major preoccupation of Australian writing starting from Lawson and Furphy. Brian Kiernan suggests that if there is any relevance to the present of the ideal social heritage that has been observed in Furphy, it should be "the reverse of democratic optimism", since "a large part of what Furphy explores there is the discrepancy between conventional egalitarian attitudes and social behaviour".<sup>17</sup> Leonie Kramer points to the fallacy of the nationalist claim of the Australian tradition based exclusively on the representative Australianness of Furphy by indicating that Such Is Life

is one of the many works in Australian literature curiously ambiguous in its approach to being representatively Australian. It is as though the assertion of nationalism itself raises doubts about the possibility of making such a claim.<sup>18</sup>

With nationalism prevailing in the nineties, Henry Handel Richardson was seen to stand apart from the Bulletin and its school with her rather detached attitude to the nationalistic pursuit of an indigenous literature. Unlike most of her contemporaries, she was more inclined to the influence of European literary traditions than engaged in the development of indigenous characteristics. Her concept of the novel was derived from nineteenth century European naturalism and realism rather than from her Australian predecessors. In her own time and during the revival of nationalism in the thirties, forties and fifties, she was often excluded from the camp of Australian writers because of her lack of apparent representative Australianness; and her literary achievement was either undervalued or regarded negatively by nationalists. Even though she was committed to the historical description of Australian society and the people who lived in it, and her work presented a strong realistic tendency, Richardson was not seen to belong to the Lawson-Furphy tradition. A.A. Phillips criticises her style for being "flat, characterless, and even crude", claiming that as a result of her "sense of colonial inferiority" she lacked a "freshness, originality and vigour" which marked the styles of Lawson and Furphy who "rode on the crest of Australian assertiveness".<sup>19</sup> In H.M. Green's A History of Australian Literature, Richardson is described as an isolated

<sup>16</sup> Meanjin, 1 (1962), 41.

<sup>17</sup> Kiernan, pp.163-164.

<sup>18</sup> Kramer (ed.), p.10.

<sup>19</sup> Phillips, p.103.

figure whose work "has no Australian literary relationships".<sup>20</sup> Green maintains that although most of Richardson's works are set in Australia, none of them is "Australian in tone".<sup>21</sup> Her Australia in The Fortunes of Richard Mahony is presented as

a young, crude, vigorous, undeveloped country such as Australia was at that time, but except for the life and conditions of the diggings, ... there is little about it that can be considered positively and specifically Australian.<sup>22</sup>

It is certainly true that Richardson was more concerned with character-drawing by delving into the mind of characters than with the expression of Australian attitudes. In contrast to the nationalist emphasis upon characters as social beings and upon the social concerns of the working community, Richardson was preoccupied with the exploration of the interior life of the character as an individual and turned away from the theme of bushlife and mateship to the creation of characters who often aspired to gentility. Adrian Mitchell states that Richardson "gave Australian fiction its first sustained analysis of character";<sup>23</sup> and John Barnes asserts that "she is unrivalled in her psychological penetration".<sup>24</sup> G.A. Wilkes maintains that "the frontiers of the Australian novel were being extended by Henry Handel Richardson"<sup>25</sup> with her introduction of the naturalistic movement of the nineties in Europe and her way of "telling the story in terms of the central characters' feelings and motives" which led her "into a psychological range still uncharted at the time in English fiction itself".<sup>26</sup> Wilkes points out that if Lawson represents "a local school of naturalism, Henry Handel Richardson represents the European one" and suggests that "Any monistic approach to the writing of the time must continually break down in the face of the facts".<sup>27</sup>

It should be noted that in spite of her preoccupation with the psychological analysis of the character's interior life, Richardson, together with Lawson and Furphy, maintains the trend of realism in Australian fiction. Her psychological analysis was conducted by way of the chronologically sequenced plot, and she did not show much sign of being influenced by the stream of consciousness of Modernism in its beginning years in England and America. Nor did she make any attempt at formal experiments diverging

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<sup>20</sup> A History of Australian Literature (Sydney, 1961), p.587.

<sup>21</sup> loc. cit.

<sup>22</sup> op. cit., p.591.

<sup>23</sup> Kramer (ed.), p.211.

<sup>24</sup> "Australian Fiction to 1920", in Geoffrey Dutton (ed.), The Literature of Australia (Ringwood, 1964), p.173.

<sup>25</sup> Australian Literature: A Conspectus (Sydney, 1969), p.59.

<sup>26</sup> op. cit., p.60.

<sup>27</sup> op. cit., p.64.

from the traditional device of realism and naturalism.

The dominance of realism in Australian fiction exemplified by the writings of Lawson, Furphy and Richardson and later superseded by social realism should, nevertheless, be observed in the context of the emergence of an essentially different trend during the twenties and thirties. This different trend was marked by the fiction of Chester Cobb, Christina Stead and Martin Boyd. The early novels of Eleanor Dark can also be taken into account as evidence of this trend. Chester Cobb's two novels, Mr. Moffat (1925) and Days of Disillusion (1926), are mainly remembered for being the first Australian novels to use the stream of consciousness technique. Martin Boyd's The Montforts (1928), by its cultivated cosmopolitan theme, is distinguished from most Australian novels before and of the time which were primarily concerned with the life of countryside. Christina Stead's Seven Poor Men of Sydney (1934) also diverges from the mainstream of Australian fiction by being engaged in a psychological examination and a highly visionary rather than realistic presentation of the individual's subjective experience. The distinguishing features of this alternative trend to the realistic and social realistic novel were seen in its emphasis upon the perception of an individual self and upon the description of the internal development of the character without necessarily observing the sequence of external details. It is also evident that this group of writers, standing aside from a preoccupation with indigenous features, were strongly inclined to the influence of contemporary European traditions and their styles were marked by an experimental tendency diverging from realistic conventions.

H.M. Green in his A History of Australian Literature notes the shift of the subject from the country to the city in the novels of the twenties, and along with this shift, he remarks,

an important qualification comes in: ... story is not so much the aim as analysis and development of character; or rather, though story remains extremely important, its action is coming to take place to a much greater extent in the minds of characters than in the outside world.<sup>28</sup>

He suggests that Chester Cobb's use of "the modernistic method" of stream of consciousness to "deal fundamentally with the life of the mind" alone should earn him a place in the history of Australian fiction.<sup>29</sup> But it is Christina Stead who is seen to

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<sup>28</sup> Green, p.1068.

<sup>29</sup> op. cit., p.1069.

belong to a new phase in Australian fiction by being "entirely modern". By claiming that Stead is entirely modern, Green implies that "her characters, attitude, method and manner generally are those of modernity and of the cities",<sup>30</sup> regarding her Seven Poor Men of Sydney as the first novel "to convey an impression of Sydney as a world city, one of the foci of world life".<sup>31</sup> In spite of his strong emphasis upon Stead's "extraordinarily imaginative vision, and a corresponding style", Green criticizes Stead's work for being flawed by lack of unity, and "lack of ordinary elements" which leads to "the direction of a nervous tension that has about it something of the abnormal".<sup>32</sup>

In Green's survey of Australian fiction of the twenties and thirties, another novelist whose early novels are considered to be "different essentially from those of the 'Australian school', and neither Lawson nor Furphy is among her literary ancestors",<sup>33</sup> is Eleanor Dark. Her departure is mainly seen in "her creation of characters" which is conducted more through the presentation of the emotional and mental development of the character than through the description of action. It is interesting to note that Green uses the same word "abnormal" in commenting on the style of both Stead and Dark, except in the latter's case he grants that her work, "in spite of its preoccupations at times with the abnormal", is "essentially sane".<sup>34</sup> Obviously Green's criticism of this kind is directed more at moral judgment than at critical perception. Furthermore, even though he acknowledges that Dark's novels have filled "a place in Australian fiction that needed to be filled", Green finds them lacking "the strong and vigorous life" represented by Kylie Tennant and other contemporary realistic writers. It is by the same principle that he dismisses Martin Boyd's novel The Montforts, for the sarcasms displayed in the novel are actually directed against life itself. The novel, he claims, is "based on the assumption that there is little beneath the surface of things, and that nothing about life need be taken very seriously".<sup>35</sup> In other words, it is of nihilism and pessimism about life and the world that he accuses Boyd. Instead of seeing the writings of Stead, Dark and Boyd as an alternative mode to the realism represented by Lawson, Furphy and other realistic writers, Green, even though he acknowledges their differences, actually judges those three writers according to realistic principles derived mainly from an appreciation of Lawson and Furphy.

Unlike Green who views Stead, Dark and Boyd as individual, rather isolated writers in

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<sup>30</sup> Green, p.1077.

<sup>31</sup> op. cit., p.1073.

<sup>32</sup> op. cit., p.1070.

<sup>33</sup> op. cit., p.1082.

<sup>34</sup> loc. cit.

<sup>35</sup> op. cit., p.1116.

the mainstream of realism at the time, G.A. Wilkes in his study of the history of Australian fiction detects in the set of novels produced during "the decade or so after the war" by Chester Cobb, Leslie Meller, Christina Stead, Eleanor Dark and Martin Boyd a common force which by turning away from "the 'documentary' strain of the 1890s" suggested "a possibility that the Australian novel might take another course".<sup>36</sup> Looking back on these novels as a whole, Wilkes states that they represent at least "a marked variation in the established pattern", even if they failed to realize the possibility "of a renaissance in Australian fiction at that time" for the practical reason that Cobb and Meller stopped writing more novels, Stead and Boyd left the country and Dark turned to writing historical novels.<sup>37</sup>

So, too, Adrian Mitchell perceives a relationship among these writers and regards them as a group with a common tendency to break away from realistic conventions and focus on the description of psychological states of mind. Chester Cobb with his employment of the stream of consciousness technique anticipated Christina Stead in her adaptation of the technique to explore and present the highly subjective world of her characters. An emphasis is placed upon Stead's resistance to the conventional strategies of the novel in her attempt to diffuse the action through the interpenetrating presentation of the interior life of each character. The construction of her novels depends not so much upon the sequence of plot as upon the interweaving activity of her characters' consciousness and various perspectives. Stead's characterization through the composition of interior monologue, the creation of image and the demonstration of the intricacies of relationships between individual characters is seen as a contrast to the depiction of characters as representatives of the working community in social realist novels, which often results in a failure "to come to terms with the particular and the individual".<sup>38</sup>

If Christina Stead turned away from the nationalistic strain of the nineties by exploring and accumulating the internal details of the consciousness of her characters as individuals, Martin Boyd's departure is seen both in his subject matter which is focused on the way of life of a privileged social group and in his narrative method to deal with the subject. As Adrian Mitchell points out, it was primarily his deviation from the nationalistic criterion that caused a prejudice against and delay of sensitive reading of his novels.

Boyd is viewed as a "much finer writer" than Stead for the reason that he "not only

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<sup>36</sup> Wilkes, p.70.

<sup>37</sup> loc. cit.

<sup>38</sup> Kramer (ed.), pp.131-132.

affirmed the uniqueness of the individual, but watched also for the more profound significance of individual actions, for evidence of the spiritual nature of man".<sup>39</sup> In other words, Boyd was able to transcend the individual to the universal; and while Stead was mainly concerned with the psychological exploration of the individual, Boyd was engaged in a spiritual as well as psychological pursuit of human nature. Mitchell remarks that "Boyd's real interests are the abiding and universal concerns lodged in the individual".<sup>40</sup>

In Mitchell's view, it is their determination to concentrate on the depiction of the inner reality of human character and on the search for the truth of the human world rather than merely reflect social activities in realistic terms that marks the contribution of both Christina Stead and Martin Boyd to "the change which was gradually taking place in Australian fiction".<sup>41</sup> In this sense they anticipated Patrick White in his fundamental breakthrough of what White described as the dreary, dun-coloured journalistic realism that dominated the Australian novel during the forties and fifties.

Interestingly, A.A. Phillips also notices the change of direction in Australian fiction of the twenties, but he regards it as a swing back to colonialism. Martin Boyd's The Montforts is viewed as "a typical novel of the period". According to Phillips, the submissive attitude and lack of a firm grasp of Australian life and experience revealed in the novel suggests that Boyd "was an extreme sufferer from the Cringe".<sup>42</sup> Moreover, the thirsting for European culture expressed by Boyd's urban characters runs contrary to the assertiveness of the nineties which "had been based on the conviction that Australian life had a freedom and an expansiveness in which the spirit of man was liberated".<sup>43</sup> That the bias incited by his exclusivism undoubtedly harms his critical perception is evident. But Phillips is certainly right when he observes that with the rise of the Jindyworobak movement in the thirties the pendulum swung back again "towards the extreme of national assertiveness".<sup>44</sup>

However, it is important to point out that although both of them have made a significant contribution to the enrichment of Australian fiction by creating new dimensions ignored or resisted in realism and social realism, neither Christina Stead nor Martin Boyd was truly appreciated at the time when their novels were published and hardly exerted any

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<sup>39</sup> Kramer (ed.), p.139.

<sup>40</sup> op. cit., p.140.

<sup>41</sup> op. cit., p.146.

<sup>42</sup> Phillips, p.103.

<sup>43</sup> op. cit., p.104.

<sup>44</sup> Phillips, p.105.

influence upon other contemporary writers. Christina Stead's first work appeared in the early 1930s, but it was not until 1965 that one of her novels was published in Australia. Before that time, her work received little substantial critical attention and not much readership in this country. It was merely recognized to be unusual or original, "quite unlike anything else in Australian literature";<sup>45</sup> and it was obviously not favoured by nationalistic criticism. Miles Franklin described Seven Poor Men of Sydney as "Seven Poor Men of Bloomsbury", indicating that the city of Sydney in the novel is presented "in terms of the Bloomsbury coteries"<sup>46</sup> rather than in positive national Australian terms. She criticized Stead for indulging in a depiction of the city as only full of "old-world sins, ... the slumminess of lice and rats and mice and other filth, of disease and perversions".<sup>47</sup> She also found fault with Stead's creation of characters who are characters of the city, living "in bug-ridden slums reeking of garbage tins, kerosene and drains".<sup>48</sup> As for Stead's psychological exploration of individual minds, she attributes it to "some belated latest cries in regurgitations of psychoanalysis and James Joyce".<sup>49</sup> Franklin's strong emphasis on externals is obviously consistent with her own aim in fictional practice.

Contrary to the nationalist claim that Christina Stead failed to reach a realistic reflection of Australian life and society, other critics argue that the achievement of Stead's Seven Poor Men of Sydney lies exactly in her effective combination of the details of a realistic setting into the presentation of the internal world of her characters. G.A. Wilkes describes Christina Stead's method as "a supra-realistic" one, commenting that the effect of Seven Poor Men of Sydney "relies heavily on the physical description of Watson's Bay and the harbour foreshores, Chamberlain's printery in the squalor of Woolloomooloo, of George Street West and the University". But he makes it clear that Stead's physical details are selective and purposeful in accordance with her presentation of the interiors and her creation of motifs.<sup>50</sup> Dorothy Green in her essay "Chaos, Or A Dancing Star?" also observes that the inner life as the main concern of the book is "deployed against a background as solidly real as Dostoyevsky's St Petersburg"; and suggests that the corresponding relationship between the characters and the external world they live in should be regarded as "a very important one indeed".<sup>51</sup> R.G. Geering contends that Christina Stead is concerned with character both as an individual and a social being, only she differs from social realists in refusing to "subordinate the

<sup>45</sup> Colin Roderick, "Christina Stead", in Southerly, 2 (1946), 87.

<sup>46</sup> Laughter, Not for a Cage (Sydney, 1956), p.172.

<sup>47</sup> op. cit., p.173.

<sup>48</sup> op. cit., p.179.

<sup>49</sup> loc. cit.

<sup>50</sup> Wilkes, p.100.

<sup>51</sup> Meanjin, 2 (1968), 152.

individual to society in any simple, determinist way".<sup>52</sup>

Whether Seven Poor Men of Sydney is "one of our first modern novels" and should be "regarded as a landmark in Australian literature",<sup>53</sup> as R.G. Geering proposes, might be debatable, but it is certainly true that Christina Stead, along with other contemporary novelists who adopted an essentially different approach to fiction from the nationalist and social realist assumptions of literature, made a significant contribution to expanding the idea of fiction in Australia, and that was taken and developed further by later writers such as Patrick White, Randolph Stow, and Thomas Keneally. Even though Christina Stead and Martin Boyd were not influential during their own time, their contribution should be understood in a reciprocal way. On the one hand, they anticipated the later development of Australian fiction in their emphasis upon the exploration of new dimensions other than nationalist and social realist concerns; on the other hand, the publications of later writers not only helped to bring about a re-discovery of their work in the 60s but also reinforces their establishment by shedding new light upon the understanding of their work, as it is suggested both by Dorothy Green and G.A. Wilkes.

In her discussion of the new excitement about the work of Christina Stead in the 60s, Dorothy Green attributes its occurrence to the influence of recent novels, remarking that

the kind of attention that novels like Patrick White's Voss has received, the less rigid conception of what the form of the novel 'ought' to be, all these things have created a frame of mind more receptive to a book that must have seemed strange and demanding to the average novel-reader thirty-six years ago.<sup>54</sup>

G.A. Wilkes suggests that unless the attitude towards literature is liberated from nationalist restrictions, a true understanding of Martin Boyd's achievement would be impossible. His argument is that

Boyd writes about Australia much as an English novelist writes about England, without any sense of having a national mission to perform beyond the task of giving full expression to his theme. Until such attitudes to the novelist's material, and such lucidity and accomplishment in the treatment of it, become more commonplace in Australian fiction, this must be part of the singularity of Martin Boyd.<sup>55</sup>

In another place, he relates the new interest in Christina Stead to the recent

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<sup>52</sup> Christina Stead: A Critical Study (Sydney, 1969), p.184.

<sup>53</sup> op. cit., p.185.

<sup>54</sup> Meanjin, 2 (1968), 151.

<sup>55</sup> "The Achievement of Martin Boyd", in Australian Literary Criticism, p.167.

development of Australian fiction, observing that "The movement away from naturalism in White, Stow and Porter is reflected also in the rediscovery in the 1960s of the work of Christina Stead".<sup>55</sup>

As has been seen, with realism and later social realism as a predominant mode throughout its development for at least the first half of the century, Australian fiction shows little influence of Modernism. Based on the principle that literature should most of all be concerned with an objective description and reflection of the social system and lives of the working community, nationalism and social realism with a strong political tendency held an antagonism against any radical formal experiments which turned away from realistic conventions. In the history of Australian fiction, there is no proclaimed Modernist experimental movement such as the radical Angry Penguins movement both in Australian painting and, though less systematically and successfully, in Australian poetry. Although Christina Stead and Martin Boyd and a few other contemporary writers represent a marked variation in the established pattern with their inclination to European traditions rather than to national concerns, and their works are more related to the later development of Patrick White, Randolph Stow and Thomas Keneally than social realist works are, they nevertheless did not closely follow the trend of Modernism by making attempts at radical formal experiments as Sidney Nolan and his group had done in painting. Yet, they certainly did break up the stronghold of realism and social realism in Australian fiction, and in a significant way anticipated the tremendous achievements of the writers in the fifties and sixties.

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<sup>55</sup> Wilkes, p.99.

### **Part III. The Present Past**

#### **A Critical Examination of the Modern Australian Novel Represented by Works of White, Stow and Keneally**

##### ***Introduction***

From the preceding account of Modernism and its historical relationship with Australian culture, it is observed that Modernism, which had created fundamental changes in early twentieth-century European and American art and literature not only through radical experiments in forms and structures, but also through posing significant challenges to the conventional modes of thinking and perceiving, failed to bring about any correspondingly remarkable response in Australia. Indeed, the influence of Modernism was strongly resisted by various groups upholding different principles. As a result, except in Australian painting in the 1940s, the actual impact of Modernism upon Australian culture was far from dominant, but rather scattered, and was mainly seen in relatively isolated literary figures and their works.

On the other hand, as has been argued in the discussion of the far-reaching challenge of Modernism, the changes which Modernism made in style entailed an essential disruption to the traditional system of ideas and concepts concerning creative writing and literary criticism, and in so doing, Modernism caused important conceptual transformations. By this view, the observation of the influence of Modernism upon Australian literature should go further than merely describe those formal and structural features of Modernism discerned in individual works. Modernism has not only marked a new era of literature in terms of radical formal experimentation in creative writings, but has also significantly influenced critical approaches and perspectives by transforming essential relationships between critical concepts. On this assumption, a closer look at the relationship between Modernism and the modern Australian novel is warranted. In other words, the modern Australian novel needs to be examined in the light of the changes that Modernism has made to critical perceptions.

The 50s and 60s are acknowledged as a flourishing period in the history of Australian fiction. The predominance of social realism as a major mode in fictional writing was

seriously challenged by the emergence of a different trend which opened new dimensions in the exploration and representation of Australian life and experience. The primary concern of the novel changed from a strong emphasis upon realistic descriptions of social events to a metaphysical and spiritual speculation of the relationship between social environment and human life. The leading representative of this trend was Patrick White, a world-class writer and one of the most distinguished and influential figures in twentieth-century Australian literature.

The significance of White's contribution to modern Australian fiction was made quite clear by Leonie Kramer in an early article:

No Australian novelist has made such an impact inside and outside Australia as Patrick White, especially with his last four works, The Tree of Man, Voss, Riders in the Chariot and The Solid Mandala. Critics may argue about the exact nature of his achievement, but their consistent opinion is that he has shifted the Australian novel onto a plane that hitherto it has not even aspired to; and that he has done this by looking below the surface features of Australian life.<sup>1</sup>

White claimed that his initial motive was to "prove that the Australian novel is not necessarily the dreary, dun-coloured offspring of journalistic realism",<sup>2</sup> believing that there was an immense void to fill in this area. His distinctive departure from the mainstream of social realism marked a new phase of modern Australian fiction, and attracted strong attacks from the Realist Writer group at the time. What can be observed clearly from the criticism of Patrick White by the group are the literary standards and values of social realism and its antagonism to any formal experiment diverging from it.

David Bradley in his article "Australia through the Looking-Glass", published in Overland, ostensibly based his critical view of White's latest novels upon the restrictive criterion of realism, which actually misleads his judgment. He started with the observation that "White's metier is not realism" and that "his art by-passes realism", claiming that White was not "concerned with holding the mirror up to nature (i.e. with interpreting life through fiction) but, rather, with passing **through** the mirror of fiction to a looking-glass mode of perception".<sup>3</sup> What Bradley found offensive about such a mode of perception is that "Once through the mirror the shapes of the mundane world

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<sup>1</sup>"The Present Past", in C.D. Narsimhaiah and S. Nagarajan (eds.), Studies in Australian and Indian Literatures (New Delhi, 1971), p.129.

<sup>2</sup>"The Prodigal Son", in Patrick White Speaks (Sydney, 1989), p.16.

<sup>3</sup>Overland, 23 (1962), 41.

appear ludicrous and incompetent".<sup>4</sup> Interestingly, he obviously hit upon the point, though not necessarily consciously, when he pointed out that what White was attempting was "to express a purely mystical awareness of the spiritual form of human souls far above - or beyond - the level of events, or things, or the involvements of day-to-day life".<sup>5</sup> But according to Bradley, it was precisely this attempt to transcend everyday life into the exploration of the spiritual state of human mind that led White astray from a realistic perception and subsequent presentation of the real world. Likewise, though he made it clear that "the stuff of fact in 'Voss' is treated only as a springboard for poetic vision", instead of trying to work out the poetic vision endorsed in the presentation of the historical expedition, he found the spiritual journey taken by Voss as "an expedition to nowhere, undertaken by an incoherent mystic with severe disqualifications for the job".<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, he criticized the satirical comedy that White intends upon those pragmatic and materialistic merchants, for it "devitalises and blurs them and their landscape into insignificance beside the splendors of the mysterious mode of perception available to Voss and Laura".<sup>7</sup> He regarded these people as more realistic representatives of society than the obscure Voss or Laura, therefore to protrude rather than to trivialize their roles was vital to the success of the novel. It is for this reason that he described Voss as a "novel without a surface",<sup>8</sup> that is, without a surface of the realism that he defined so narrowly.

Ian Turner, in his "The Parable of Voss", also grounded his interpretation, or rather mis-interpretation, of White's novel in the strictly limited view of social realism. He regarded the metaphysical exploration attempted in the novel as a major failure in conveying "authentic" Australian experience; and the reason for the failure, as he alleged, came from the fact that White simply lost contact with Australian reality. For he asserted that in Australia

Courage, fellowship and understanding counted for more than the exercise of will. Against mountains and deserts and the bitter earth, the assertion of dominance was worth little; it was the ability to use one's strength effectively, and the guts to keep going, that were needed. Pride and humility had little meaning as alternative ways of meeting the Australian situation; confidence in one's own ability, founded on a recognition of the real possibilities, held the greater truth.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>Overland, 23 (1962), p.41.

<sup>5</sup>loc. cit.

<sup>6</sup>loc. cit.

<sup>7</sup>op. cit., p.42.

<sup>8</sup>loc. cit.

<sup>9</sup>Stephen Murry-Smith (ed.), An Overland Muster - Selections from Overland 1954 - 1964 (Brisbane, 1965), p.74.

His simplistic approach to the novel is shown even more clearly in another assertion that "Good and evil have a meaning in a social context rather than a metaphysical context".<sup>10</sup> Like Bradley before him, Turner, too, believed that White made a great mistake by portraying Voss and Laura as more significant characters than others, such as "explorers, squatters, merchants, officers, the ladies of Sydney's early society" who were described as "toy pieces in the struggle that is between Voss and Laura, and within Voss himself".<sup>11</sup> According to him, "real" Australians "have been too busy battling with a tough country to battle with ourselves" and "too tired to wonder whether God exists in us, or we exist in God".<sup>12</sup> Consequently, White "has not succeeded for Australians", for he "is exploring, in an Australian environment, a mind, a way of thinking, that is foreign territory to most Australians".<sup>13</sup>

In the article "The Great Hatred: Patrick White as Novelist" by Jack Beasley, published in Realist Writer magazine, the author maintained that "realism is a fundamental question",<sup>14</sup> and that "the democratic-realist tradition ... is the mainstream of Australian literature".<sup>15</sup> White was seen as standing against that mainstream with his "universal themes of decaying capitalism", as well as his "patrician contempt for ordinary people", his "non-realistic content" and his "misanthropic viewpoint". In fact, the attack against White's prose style and language in this article recalls Miles Franklin's criticism of Christina Stead. They were both criticized for being obscure, complicated and pretentious, and described as "a late blooming of the James Joyce-Gertrude Stein use of language which exhausted itself years ago in European literature".<sup>16</sup>

The fact is that although Patrick White, like Christina Stead and Martin Boyd, diverges radically from the nationalist and social realist approach to literature, and although he tends to be more receptive to international literary influences, he is not explicitly influenced by and significantly indebted to contemporary European literary movements. In his work, plot in the conventional sense still dominates; the syntax has not yet disintegrated as often it does in European and American Modernist works. His use of stream of consciousness is mainly seen in his early novel The Aunt's Story; in his later works, it diminishes as a prominent feature. His self-claimed aim, contrary to social realist allegations, was to examine "the lives of an ordinary man and woman", only to "discover the extraordinary behind the ordinary, the mystery and the poetry which alone

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<sup>10</sup>Murry-Smith (ed.), p.74.

<sup>11</sup>op. cit., p.73.

<sup>12</sup>op. cit., p.75.

<sup>13</sup>loc. cit.

<sup>14</sup>Realist Writer, 9 (1962), 12.

<sup>15</sup>op. cit., p.14.

<sup>16</sup>op. cit., p.13.

could make bearable the lives of such people".<sup>17</sup> As a matter of fact, it is his effective exploration of the mystery and the poetry beneath the surface of life rather than any attempt at radical formal experimentation that marks him as so distinguished a novelist in modern Australian fiction.

Apart from the social realist attack upon Patrick White's novels, there were mainly two groups of critics at the time distinguished by their different approaches to White's achievement as a great Australian novelist. One was more sympathetic than critical, the other more critical but less sympathetic. But as Alan Lawson in his essay "Unmerciful Dingoes? - The Critical Reception of Patrick White" pointed out, underlying this differentiation, there was

the dangerous assumption that extravagant, reckless praise is a good or kind response, that the reviewer who asserts that White is like Tolstoy is somehow better than his colleague who argues, for instance, that there are flaws in White's blending of characterization and theme.<sup>18</sup>

On the contrary, he found that the comments made by those sympathetic critics, such as Vance Palmer, Geoffrey Dutton and Max Harris, were often superficial and tended to compromise the defects observed in White's writings by the emphasis upon the admiration for the great achievements that he made; whereas it was those less sympathetic yet more critical analyses that illuminated understanding of the true values of Patrick White. Lawson observed that despite Max Harris's insistence on his being associated with fighting against the negative reception of Patrick White, his review of The Tree of Man was actually far less illuminating than A.D. Hope's notorious one. Lawson pointed out that "Hope's final description of White's prose style as 'pretentious and illiterate verbal sludge' has been quoted and misquoted frequently while the rest of his relatively long review has been ignored".<sup>19</sup>

There is no denial that Hope was strongly against White's prose style; but his critical observation nevertheless enlightens the way in which the novel should be appreciated, which both Dutton and Harris failed to do. He gave a clear account of where White's achievement lay as a great Australian novelist in the statement as follows:

There is in fact no story, no plot in the ordinary sense. It is simply the portrait of two lives, the random pattern of life itself observed and imagined with passionate and tender concern and touched with a sense of the mystery of all living. It is this which redeems and explains Mr. White's massive depiction of

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<sup>17</sup>"The Prodigal Son", p.15.

<sup>18</sup>*Meanjin*, 32. 4 (1973), 379.

<sup>19</sup>op. cit., p.383.

the commonplace. In spite of some serious defects of manner, he really has ... one essential of the great novelist: the ability to create real people and a real world for them to live in. He has what the Australian novel largely lacks, the power to present people who are important to us in themselves, chief characters who impress us by something out of the common order - in this case, integrity. Integrity is as rare and exciting a quality as genius or beauty and Mr. White can both depict it and show its secret cause with that touch of the tragic which must always attend the depiction of what is rare and great in human life. The book is hardly a novel, for it has no action in the Aristotelian sense. It is none the worse for that, for it shows something more fundamental than mere plot is capable of revealing.<sup>20</sup>

Just as Alan Lawson discovered, Hope's recognition of the achievement of The Tree of Man as the exploration of "the extraordinary behind the ordinary" actually came two years earlier than White's own statement made in his "The Prodigal Son".

Greatly influenced by Patrick White and having a close affinity to him is Randolph Stow. He too was a novelist in the 50s and 60s taken up with the pursuit of mythical and poetic themes underlying Australian life and the history of the land. By 1963, he had published his first four novels: A Haunted Land (1956), The Bystander (1957), To the Islands (1958), and Tourmaline (1963). In his work, Stow made conscious breaches of realistic conventions in the attempt to subordinate realistic descriptions to the transmission of symbolic and allegorical import. His explicit departure from the mode of realism caused a strong response from the critics. Whether the apparent violation of realistic traditions and the attempted combination of the realistic and the symbolic in his work were justifiable in view of what he intended to achieve, or whether they actually undermined his potential achievements, became central issues in the critical discussion of Stow.

Leonie Kramer in her critical articles on Stow detects his major failure as a novelist in his unsuccessful attempt to "fuse the realistic and symbolic levels of his writing", particularly in relation to the creation of his characters.<sup>21</sup> The settings described in precise and carefully modulated details are often both convincingly real and symbolically evocative. Yet the characters living in such an environment are created solely to carry symbolic weight; the character, in this way, "becomes a function of plot. and more particularly of symbolism; it need not, indeed cannot, be explored per se".<sup>22</sup> Moreover, there is lacking an inevitable connection between landscape and character.

<sup>20</sup>"The Bunyip Stages a Comeback - [*The Tree of Man*]", in Peter Wolfe (ed.), Critical Essays on Patrick White (Boston, 1990), p.48.

<sup>21</sup>"The Novels of Randolph Stow", in Southerly, 24. 2 (1964), 83.

<sup>22</sup>op. cit., p.79.

The landscape effects, as a result, "are in the end no more than decorative".<sup>23</sup> Relying heavily upon the symbolism that each of his characters is supposed to carry eventually leads Stow to reduce the credibility and individuality of his characters by generalizing and formalizing them. Kramer suggests that David Martin comes closer to the truth when he asserts that in both Patrick White's Voss and Randolph Stow's To the Islands "the symbolism does not flow from character and action but character and action are vessels to hold a symbol; and exist to have 'motives'".<sup>24</sup>

It is also important to note that in her discussion of Stow, Kramer points out the influence of European Modernist writers upon Stow, though it is seen to play a more negative than positive role in his writing. She argues that what Stow espouses in his novels is "the cause of the anti-realistic novel", especially as represented by Virginia Woolf;<sup>25</sup> and suggests that Stow goes even farther than the latter in his attempt "to extend the novel beyond its conventional limits".<sup>26</sup> In her article "Heritage of Dust: Randolph Stow's Wasteland", Kramer remarks that in reading Stow's novels it is "difficult to avoid the feeling that one has visited Mr Stow's spiritual country before, in the company of T.S. Eliot, Saul Bellow, Patrick White and others".<sup>27</sup>

Less systematic but more sympathetic than Leonie Kramer's criticism is Geoffrey Dutton's assessment of Stow's work, written more as a counter argument to both Kramer's and David Martin's criticism than as a critical analysis of Stow's novels. Dutton argues that Stow's vision of and search for permanence and beauty in life determines his departure from realistic descriptions of ordinary, day-to-day experience, for such a vision and search "can only be achieved by going on a journey away from transitory, inadequate life".<sup>28</sup> Yet he fails to explain how Stow has actually achieved his vision and search. In discussing the novel Tourmaline, which he claims to be "an extraordinarily original book", Dutton admits that "It is difficult as yet to judge this book critically, there is so much in it, such poetry of the imagination, such depth of meaning".<sup>29</sup> In the same vague fashion, he proposes that all Stow's writing "is poetic" without defining the connotation of the poetic and its relation to the realistic. However, although he does not present a clear examination of Stow's achievements, Dutton rightly recognizes the significant contribution of Stow to modern Australian literature

<sup>23</sup>Southerly, 24. 2 (1964), 88.

<sup>24</sup>David Martin, "Among the Bones", in Meanjin, 18. 1 (1959), 54.

<sup>25</sup>Southerly, 24. 2 (1964), 79.

<sup>26</sup>op. cit., p.90.

<sup>27</sup>"Heritage of Dust", in Bulletin, 6 (1963), 41.

<sup>28</sup>"The Search for Permanence: The Novels of Randolph Stow", in The Journal of Commonwealth Literature, 1 (1965), 137.

<sup>29</sup>op. cit., p.146.

by remarking that Stow has been one of several modern writers who have given new depth and strength to Australian writing in the wider context of world literature.

A.D. Hope in his essay "Randolph Stow and the Tourmaline Affair" suggests that there should be an alternative approach to Stow's work to the one based on the dichotomy of the realistic and anti-realistic novel. He points out that to judge Stow by bringing him to terms of realism or anti-realism will inevitably lead to the conclusion that Stow fails in his creation of "human beings accurately observed and imaginatively depicted in relation to actual society",<sup>30</sup> since "he has actually been groping towards another form of prose fiction".<sup>31</sup> Therefore, Hope contends, Stow's success or failure as a novelist should be judged "in different terms" than realistic or anti-realistic ones.<sup>32</sup> Hope believes that what Stow has attempted to do in his novels is intentionally to turn away from the conventional descriptive narrative of events and characters explicable in terms of realistic psychology and social environment, so as to explore the allegorical and symbolic implications of human experience. Yet despite the proposition of a different approach from that of Leonie Kramer, Hope comes to the same point when he observes that there is

an implicit conflict in every one of Stow's novels between the intent to embody his fable in a scene authentic enough to win credence and the more important aim to reveal hitherto recognized causal principles which have nothing to do with individual character and local situation.<sup>33</sup>

The difference from Kramer's view is that Hope finds such a conflict both necessary and inevitable in the sense that in Stow's novels there is always an obscure causality working beneath the "ordinary causal principles of action" and beyond naturalistically observed circumstances, and it is exactly the attempt to demonstrate this superimposed reality that "leads to the breakdown of realistic depiction of men in action".<sup>34</sup> The way in which the conflict gets solved or unsolved in each of Stow's novels is a major issue in the critical estimation of Stow's work. In Hope's view, Stow fails to solve the conflict in his earlier novels, but is successful in his later ones, particularly in The Merry-Go-Round in the Sea.

In spite of the controversy concerning his achievement, Randolph Stow is regarded as one of the more important figures in modern Australian literature, who made a

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<sup>30</sup>W.S. Ramson (ed.), The Australian Experience - Critical Essays on Australian Novels (Canberra, 1974), p.254.

<sup>31</sup>op. cit., p.255.

<sup>32</sup>op. cit., p.258.

<sup>33</sup>op. cit., p.259.

<sup>34</sup>loc. cit.

significant contribution to the prosperity of Australian fiction in the 50s and 60s. His preoccupation with the metaphysical and symbolic exploration of Australian themes undoubtedly helped to open up new dimensions in Australian fiction, though his symbolism sometimes is too highly condensed and liable to weaken the vitality of his work by confining the meanings of his novels to the exposition of certain symbols. If Stow cannot be claimed as a formal experimentalist in any radical sense, he has certainly encouraged new views on fictional form by his attempt to juxtapose realistic descriptions of landscape with metaphysical symbolism, which is effectively done, for example, in To the Islands.

The mission that Stephen Heriot has undertaken in the isolated far North West of Western Australia is at once realistic and metaphysical. He runs a mission station for aboriginals and then driven by his troubled mind decides to undertake an internal mission to achieve self-discovery. The barren landscape through which Heriot and his aboriginal follower Justin move towards the Islands is reflexive of the desolation of his mind; it is also suggestive of the ruthlessness to which he exposes himself, of his own will, in order to achieve the final self-knowledge. For moving through the region of broken hills, "he had nowhere to hide, there was no shelter in the country of rocks, and no movement, nothing to rest or entertain the eye".<sup>35</sup> It is by comprehending and merging himself into the landscape of the natural world that Heriot gradually achieves the sense of reconciliation with the world and himself, just as he no longer finds flying-foxes disturbing, nor dingoes irritating:

that night, lying by the fire, his eyes and ears were strained to overhear and interpret every sound and movement of the earth, so that the brief appearance of flying-foxes in the firelight was as beautiful as the soaring of a flock of parrots at dawn, and the howling of dingoes, that once had tugged at his nerves, was no longer predatory but wistful, and moved pity in him, for he thought they lamented their dingohood as he his humanity.<sup>36</sup>

The immensity and vastness of the natural landscape eventually induces in him not only the sense of his own insignificance, but more importantly, the feeling of humility. He "saw himself now as a minute lizard"<sup>37</sup> rather than an arrogant and wilful man. That Stow leaves the ending of the story unresolved causes both negative and positive argument among critics on the achievement of the novel; but it is generally acknowledged that Stow makes an effective attempt to present the spiritual journey of

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<sup>35</sup>To the Islands (Mitcham, 1958), p.162.

<sup>36</sup>op. cit., p.173.

<sup>37</sup>op. cit., p.193.

Heriot in the harsh land by interpreting the realistic landscape in metaphysical symbolic terms in correspondence to the state of mind of the character.

A little later than Patrick White and Randolph Stow came Thomas Keneally, whose first major novel Bring Larks and Heroes was published in 1967. Unlike the controversial receptions of the works by White and Stow, Keneally's novel struck an immediate response and was widely acclaimed. One of the facts that might account for his success as a novelist, as Adrian Mitchell observes, is that Keneally has successfully "combined the advantages of the popular forms of fiction, especially immediacy of effect, with seriousness of theme and thoroughness of imaginative design".<sup>38</sup> But the immediacy of effect tends to be over-emphasized as a major characteristic of Keneally, which necessarily leads to a one-sided and oversimplifying view of his work. His seemingly easy-going descriptive narrative is actually deceptive in the sense that behind his apparently direct approach to social and individual life persists a deep metaphysical contemplation of complicated themes concerning the fundamental issues of human existence. Keneally's style may be different from that of Stow or White, yet he belongs to the same group of novelists in the 60s who were engaged in the metaphysical exploration of Australian themes. Together with White and Stow, he has greatly influenced the development of modern Australian fiction.

Like the Modernist writers in Europe and America around the turn of the century who were urged by a deeply felt necessity to challenge the established traditions of the past, these three Australian novelists in the 60s also made a conscious departure from realist and social realist conventions dominating Australian fictional writing in the past few decades. Although their departure is not marked by any of the radical formal experimentation which distinguished Modernism, the originality and profundity that they achieved in their exploring of Australian life and experience tremendously influenced the progress of Australian literature and brought Australian fiction onto a new plane.

Furthermore, in the books that are to be analysed, The Tree of Man and Voss by Patrick White, Tourmaline by Randolph Stow, and Bring Larks and Heroes by Thomas Keneally, there is a pronounced tendency to go back to the historical past and to re-interpret historical events from new perspectives and in terms of a consciousness of the present. Associated with the insistent recurrence of the past is the tendency towards

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<sup>38</sup>Kramer (ed.), p.168.

mythologizing which is present in all four novels. And this preoccupation with the reconstruction of the relationship between the past and the present and the attempt to imbue the narrative with mythical dimensions are consistent with the major concerns of Modernism. Even though these two distinguishing features manifested in the four novels may not be directly related to the influence of Modernism, the examination of these two features in the light of their resemblance to the Modernism movement is intended to indicate an internal relationship between the modern Australian novel and Modernism in the sense of universal literary concerns.

## Chapter 9. The Relevance of Historical Settings to Thematic Concerns

These four novels are often categorized as historical novels in that each of them is set in a period of the historical past with the apparent intention of conveying the life and events of that period. It is interesting to note that each of the novels deals with a major phase in the history of Australia; and viewed as a whole, these four novels together provide a comprehensive picture of the country's past in a chronological sequence. Bring Larks and Heroes sets its story in a penal colony at the end of the eighteenth century with the attempt to examine the social and environmental impacts upon individual lives. Yoss is evidently based on the historical journey into the interior of the continent led by Ludwig Leichhardt in 1845, and the author transforms the physical and geographical expedition into a spiritual exploration of the human mind. The Tree of Man takes up the theme of pioneering in the late nineteenth century with the intention of exploring the communion between the land and mankind living in it. Among the four novels, the setting of Tourmaline is intended to be the vaguest, for which the author claims that "The action of this novel is to be imagined as taking place in the future".<sup>1</sup> Yet not only is the story narrated in the past tense, but it is also not difficult to recognize that the story is actually located in a derelict gold-mining town in the first half of this century. However, it is necessary to emphasize that the precise chronological time in this novel is not intended to be as important as in the other three novels.

The engagement with the historical past in these four novels is not only shown in the reinvention of historical settings, but more importantly, it is to be reviewed by looking into how the creation of external settings is integrated into the conception of the thematic concerns in each of the novels. The historical circumstances are not external but essential to the construction of the themes in these novels.

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<sup>1</sup> Note to Tourmaline (London, 1963). All subsequent references to this edition are incorporated in the text.

## 1. Bring Larks and Heroes

On the surface level, Bring Larks and Heroes can be described as a convict novel in the sense that it presents the life of convicts in a penal colony, revealing the injustice and cruelty of the social system. At a deeper level, the novel attempts a far more complex exploration into the human condition than just telling a sad story about innocent people victimized by social injustice and a hostile environment. For neither are Phelim Halloran and the other characters portrayed simply as gratuitous victims of society, nor is the significance of the story limited to social criticism. The remarkable achievement of the novel lies not just in its exposure of the appalling injustice that the penal society inflicts upon individuals, but more significantly in its existentialist perception of absurdity which reveals an insight into the human life conditioned by that particular historical circumstance. It is through the perception of absurdity that the novel makes a revealing observation of the brutal sides of civilization and the contingency of human existence, reinforced by the element of alienation and hostility of the land. Such a perception is effectively conveyed by a seemingly melodramatic yet relentlessly exposed presentation.

The circumstance in which the story takes place is presented as an outpost of both civilization and mankind at the "world's worse" and "wrong end" during the earliest period of the settlement. Exiled to this antipodean world thousands of miles away from the home country, the characters are faced first of all with an alien, weird, grotesque land, with its inverted season. In this hostile world,

a disappointing spring had given way to the malign summer. ... In dutiful vegetable gardens, the leaves of carrots and turnips had tattered and split, shot full of holes by antipodean summer. The grain had already rusted hard beside the little creek called Collett's Brook; and there would be no harvest at Government Farm, where muddled stooks of young corn stood like the camp wreckage of a beaten army.<sup>2</sup>

In this desert land where "nothing but the worm of death seemed to flourish" (p. 21), human life is not only seriously challenged by the hostility of the land, but even more threatened by the cruelty and degradation of mankind itself. The fundamental problem that affronts those who are exiled to the land is not only physical survival in the hostile environment but also a spiritual salvation from the inhuman social system. Yet none of

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<sup>2</sup> Bring Larks and Heroes (Melbourne, 1967), p. 21. All subsequent references to this edition are incorporated in the text.

them seems obtainable in that world. The shortage of food goes hand in hand with the shortage of humanity. For Thomas Ewers, the representative of the Arts in that far station, this is "a land of broken promises to the artist, as it is to the stomach" (p. 37). He is lent out by his master to paint under command, which he believed to be a brutal thing in a civilized society. He articulates rather rhetorically the inhuman and wretched state of the convicts like himself by turning Rousseau's theory of the Noble Savage upside down upon conviction, saying that "Savages are *us*, it appears, unspoilt. It is the mode to be patient with them, as one is patient with the childishness of a saint. It is a pity that no one has a fashion of patience towards convicted men and women" (p. 44).

Confused and "lost in the dark on the scruff of the world" (p. 121), as the frightened Terry Byrne utters in despair, these castaways, no matter how desperately they struggle to survive, are hopeless and helpless. Ann Rush, who is seen to have a clearer view of reality than her secret husband, the main protagonist Phelim Halloran, laments to him with despair that "I don't think there's ever been two such hopeless people. You with your confusion and me with mine" (p. 23). Halloran's secret marriage with Ann is taken by both of them as "an attempt at *warding off oblivion* ... a pledge by each other to each other's survival" (p. 16). Yet even Halloran himself cannot help wondering whether instead of halving their danger, their union may actually double "the chances of being buried by this deadly, passive landscape" (p. 31). When Halloran is ordered to give some spirit to the badly beaten Hearn, the self-claimed prophet, he recalls how Hearn himself has once tried to get liquor into the mouth of Mealy who was "flogged three-quarters to death" just for being heard to have spoken of pikes. Halloran hopes that "he wouldn't catch their condition" (p. 133). But much worse than both of them, he ends with a monstrous hanging, and along with him he brings down his secret bride Ann. The helplessness of these people is forcibly presented in the absurd case of Quinn, whose petition for emancipation at the end of his term of sentence is rejected on the ground that His Excellency has no reason either to disbelieve or to believe him. Instead, Quinn is given a punishment of two hundred and fifty lashes as a potent warning to others. The wretched state of these characters is also effectively conveyed in the image of ants, constantly used in the novel to emphasize the helplessness of human beings. Ironically, Halloran acquires his confidence in himself and in life through having written a verse about ants. While indulging in the joy of his verse, he "had none the less crushed with his canvas shoe a flock of ants feeding in the blind ellipse round a lizard's tail" (p. 92). The event actually foretells the way of his own destruction.

Just as the young subalterns who record in their journal any strange and weird occurrences in this grotesque new land decide that these illogical occurrences are actually "an attempt to subvert their civilized judgments" (p. 25), so in this desert circumstance the dignity and decency of human life are subverted by being twisted, distorted and degraded. The sense of absurdity which is a predominant note throughout the novel is most efficiently conveyed in a farcical and melodramatic way. Love is reduced to a scene "ugly beyond telling" between the surgeon's orderly, "a small well-fed man", and a blind woman with an "odious and unwelcoming body", on the floor of the colonial hospital, which, as the orderly says, "looks after itself" (pp. 50-52). Even killing people becomes a "low comedy" in which Captain Allen chases his weak-minded soldier Terry Byrne who is chasing a felon instead of taking action to kill him, and roars "Kill him!" (p. 141).

If the life of man is debased and degraded wretchedly, human death is also stripped of any sense of dignity. Ewers's hanging is described as "the worst of the hanging, a long stifling, when, in the muscular agony, the ravaged animal spills dirt and water down its legs" (p. 96). The gross absurdity is that Ewers, an eunuch, is hanged for rape. Likewise Halloran, an honest and conscience-bound young man, loyal to his oath to the Colony, is sentenced to death for being a "subverter, rebel, all thing sinister" (p. 197). Halloran is betrayed by his fellow countryman Byrne. The betrayal is cruelly downgraded by the fact that Byrne has inadvertently insulted a prostitute by giving her two ounces of meat instead of four ounces; and it is made even more ridiculous and farcical by Mr Blythe's pompous and amused pronouncement "So there you are, Corporal. This is where he killed you. By two ounces of pickled meat, you're dead. Imagine" (p. 192). The supposed solemnity of Halloran's death sentence is interrupted again by Mr Blythe's preposterous behaviour; and Halloran "was affronted by this poor farce that had degraded their disaster, his and Ann's disaster, as death is degraded by bottflies" (p. 195).

By combining the brutal treatment of human beings with the uncompromising hostility of the environment, the novel draws a powerfully suggestive picture of the life in a penal colony in the late eighteenth century. The essence of such a picture is concerned not so much with the particular happenings of the time as with the distortion and degradation of humanity. The author effectively uses this particular historical circumstance to conduct a reflective investigation into the human issues which are not just confined to but certainly clarified by that specific period of the past.

## 2. Tourmaline

The relevance of the historical setting indicated in Tourmaline is somehow different from that seen in the other three novels. As mentioned before, of the four novels, Tourmaline is intentionally most ambiguous in setting its specific time and in emphasizing its passage. It presents a story which is carefully constructed as highly symbolic. Unlike Bring Larks and Heroes and The Tree of Man, which show an explicit intention to reflect the life and events of a particular period in the past, Tourmaline makes no attempt to explore the actual life of the past, but puts its emphasis upon the construction of symbolic import by drawing reference to a postulated historical situation. Though Voss is also a highly symbolic novel, it is significantly different from Tourmaline in that it integrates the meaning and value of history into its thematic concern. Voss is based on a historical event. It is distinguished by its attempt to transform the physical expedition into the interior of the continent into a symbolic spiritual journey of the mind by means of establishing a parallel between the two, while Tourmaline, set in a derelict old mining town presumably in the first half of this century, is not so interested in presenting historical occurrence as in using the abandoned town as a symbolic site of a spiritual wasteland.

In fact, the significance of time in Tourmaline is at once diminishing and expansive. On the one hand, the precise time in which the story is supposed to take place is never given throughout the novel. While it is claimed to be imagined as taking place in the future, the narrative is mainly conducted in the past tense, intersected with a constant shift back to the present. By inserting the story of the future into the time past which is also interrelated with the time present, the author sets up a visual temporal configuration. The presentation of the story entwined in such an arrangement of time lends the story a sense of timelessness. On the other hand, the attempt to stretch time into timelessness implies that time is insignificant and meaningless, which is actually the essence of the theme of futility.

Tourmaline has more similarities in its thematic concerns with Bring Larks and Heroes than has been recognized, despite radical differences in the formal procedure adopted in each novel. The settings in both novels are presented as the "outpost of civilization" where desolation is the one distinctive feature. In Bring Larks and Heroes, the story takes place in a far station at the world's rim; in Tourmaline, the location is an abandoned mining town, cut off from the outside world, lying in an endless coma. The

desolation of the place reflects and is reflected in the desolation of civilization and human life. The sense of being trapped in the hopelessness is a dominant note in both novels. Just as the ants are an image of helpless people stuck in the world's worst end in Bring Larks and Heroes, the flies, trapped in the bar, constantly bumping at the windows and unable to find a way out, express the sense of futility ruling the inhabitants of Tourmaline. Furthermore, both novels explore aspects of absurdity and self-deception in human life, but from different perspectives and with different procedures. If Bring Larks and Heroes makes an attempt to explore the distortion, the absurdity and the inhumanity of human life through the examination of the social and environmental effects upon mankind, Tourmaline assumes a different metaphysical point of view to reflect on the spiritual state of human beings by making use of a constructed situation of desolation. Although the story in Tourmaline is not intentionally presented in a melodramatic fashion, as it is in Bring Larks and Heroes, the story itself is ultimately an absurd melodrama, a farce, in which the self-deluded community put their "extravagant hopes" of finding water as their sole salvation upon a fake diviner using a crudely assembled rod.

Tourmaline is, on the one hand, presented as a "waterless and dying town" in a "red hard stony desert" where the only lake - Lake Tourmaline - is "like a flat pink desert" (p. 70); on the other hand, it is constructed as an isolated state of mind, "a bitter heritage", from which no one is free, for everyone is an imprisoned tenant in it. It is situated in the middle of nowhere, abandoned by the outside world. The only link with the world beyond is an insubstantial truck driver who comes once a month and vanishes into the wilderness again soon after his momentary appearance. The desolation of the place is offset by the sterility of human life. For years no baby has been born in Tourmaline. People living in this desolate place feel trapped and forlorn, and hunger for a means of revival or resurrection from the dead life, symbolized by the hope of finding water in a desert.

The emphasis underlying such a situation is the note of futility. For no matter what they do and how they do it, no water is to be found in a desert, therefore no hope is to be secured in a desolate place. What makes the situation worse is that these people are seen as incurably self-deceived. They are inclined to be destructive, in spite of their desperate need for hope. Their self-deception predetermines that their effort to find water and salvation is futile, except that it leads them to further destruction. It needs to be pointed out that the story about this derelict mining town and its panic-stricken people suggests a panorama of modern civilization viewed as futile, sterile and desolate. The picture that Stow draws in Tourmaline strikes a strong resemblance to the one

presented in The Waste Land by T.S. Eliot. In fact, as has been mentioned in the discussion of Modernism, the deeply felt distrust of the modern world and the commitment to the exploitation of such a world are seen as the double aspect of Modernism, which can also be applied to the understanding of Stow's Tourmaline.

When a badly wounded young man picked up by the truck driver on his way to Tourmaline is left with the Tourmaline people, the whole town is thrown into frantic turmoil, eagerly receiving him as offering life and salvation for Tourmaline. Even before the man fully comes to consciousness, the desperate people have already determined that he belongs to Tourmaline and is the long-awaited hope for the town. Symbolically, on the same day he arrives, there is a death in Tourmaline. Despite his elusiveness and apparent lies about his identity, the Tourmaline people make themselves believe that he is the desired diviner who is able to bring back their paradise by finding water in this desert place. If they sometimes doubt their belief in the diviner and fear "a terrible danger" coming with him, they are only too eager to deceive themselves, anxiously seeking any rescue in their delusion. The diviner is dragged out of his own despair and confusion, and re-created by the Tourmaline people to undertake the task of saving this place from dying and searching for salvation for them. The diviner soon assumes the role that Tourmaline insists on imposing upon him and becomes ruthlessly obsessed with the devil in himself. He is transfigured and worshipped as a Messiah, while he is actually deeply suffering from self-disgust and self-hatred, crying for his own salvation no less desperately than the Tourmaline people. Tom, one of the few in the whole town who maintain a cool and detached attitude towards the turmoil around the diviner, sees clearly the deception into which the Tourmaline people plunge themselves and the lurking danger behind it. He points out: "He was having a fight with God, ... Just the two of them. Now he's dragged the whole of Tourmaline into it" (p. 185). When the diviner finally and inevitably fails to find water for Tourmaline, its people feel betrayed and deprived. But the truth is that they are not only betrayed by the fake diviner, but more bitterly they are betrayed by their own self-imposed yearnings, as the Law comes to realize that the diviner is "the awakener of all this feeling, but not its source" (p. 174).

If the Utopia that the diviner promises with water and which the Tourmaline people so anxiously yearn for turns out to be a costly poor farce, an alternative solution is only suggested rather than sufficiently presented in the novel. In opposition to the fanaticism that involves the whole town stand the detached Dave Speed and Tom Spring. In her comprehensive essay "Tourmaline and the Tao Te Ching", Helen Tiffin asserts that

Tourmaline is a novel with a philosophical argument based on the opposition between Christianity and Taoism; and she makes a considerable effort to interpret the novel in terms of the Tao Te Ching. Dave and Tom are regarded as representatives of Taoist philosophy, affirming silently "the virtues of acceptance of imperfect conditions, of inaction, dryness, and death, over an active life of progression and aggression, and the promise of Eden, of paradise regained".<sup>3</sup> It is true that there exists a silently mutual understanding between the two characters and that both of them stand firmly against the destructive aggressiveness of the diviner and Kestrel, the hotel owner. In the eyes of Dave and Tom, the diviner and Kestrel are two sides of the same coin. Yet the philosophy that each upholds towards life is somehow different.

Dave believes in the simple native way of life and is seen as "much a native as Jimmy Bogada", his Aboriginal companion, through learning "the same tolerance of deprivation" (p. 83). If Dave is regarded as "the Tao in localized action, in full and perfect harmony with the particular environment",<sup>4</sup> 5 as Tiffin claims, it is Tom who points out the implausibility of what he calls "Dave's Utopia" by teasing Dave with some ironic overtone that "You want us all to go native... That's what you've got against him [the diviner]. Just enough food and water to keep us alive and no distraction" (p. 85). In the novel, Tom is described as "a small ivory statue of a sage" (p.75) who opposes aggression with his forceful silence and non-involvement. His philosophy is wordless. Only on one occasion Tom unveils his God to the Law, and

his God had names like the nameless, the sum of all, the ground of being. He spoke of the unity of opposites, and of the overwhelming power of inaction. He talked of becoming a stream, to carve out canyons without ceasing always to yield; of being a tree to grow without thinking; of being a rock to be shaped by winds and tides. He said I must become empty in order to be filled, must unlearn everything, must accept the role of fool (pp. 186-187).

This no doubt represents a central doctrine of Taoism; but Tom's, or rather the author's, endorsement of the Taoist philosophy is neither comprehensible and graspable to the local people, nor is it completely convincing in the context of the whole novel. If it is the case as A.D. Hope asserts and Helen Tiffin evidently agrees, that the "central ideas of the book are contained in the philosophy that Tom Spring reveals to the Law",<sup>5</sup> as quoted above, then the exposition of these central ideas in the novel is far from sufficient, and sometimes even falls to a confusion. Both Hope and Tiffin attribute this subsequent obscurity of Taoist philosophy endorsed in the novel to the fact that Taoism

<sup>3</sup> K.G. Hamilton (ed.), Studies in the Recent Australian Novel (St. Lucia, 1978), p.93.

<sup>4</sup> op. cit., p.110

<sup>5</sup> "Randolph Stow and the Tourmaline Affair", in Ramson (ed.), p.266.

is relatively unknown in the Western world, and to the difficulty for the author of fully explaining the Taoist principles of hints and silence. But as far as the novel is concerned, this cannot be used as a valid explanation for the imbalance that exists between what the author attempts to endorse and what he actually fails to achieve.

Tiffin's procedure in her study of Tourmaline is first to provide a basic sketch of Taoism and its source book the Tao Te Ching, and then to apply that to an interpretation of the novel and the analysis of its characters. It seems that in doing so, she takes Tourmaline as an allegorical annotation of Taoism in opposition to Christianity. In her attempt to interpret Tourmaline as such, she tends to categorize each occurrence and every character according to this opposition. As a result, her way of interpretation not only becomes rigid, but also suggests the insufficiency of the novel itself in that the endorsement of the Taoist philosophy in the novel is dependent upon an external exegesis of the Tao Te Ching. Tiffin also uses Stow's twelve poems entitled "From the Testament of Tourmaline: Variations on Themes of the Tao Teh Ching", published three years after the publication of Tourmaline, as a vital key to the underlying meaning of the novel. While it is undeniable that these poems as well as the Tao Te Ching might contribute to an understanding of Tourmaline, they certainly should not be used as the determining evidence in the interpretation of the novel, so long as the novel is considered to be a self-sufficient entity.

A.D. Hope in his essay "Randolph Stow and the Tourmaline Affair", explaining that Stow's "novels are bound to puzzle" because of the demanding effort in making assumptions of little known Taoism, particularly mentions that the puzzlement is reinforced by the settings of those novels in Western Australia.<sup>6</sup> In Tourmaline, the setting is presented both as a desert and a desolation of civilization. The situation shown in the novel is more than the imperfect condition that Helen Tiffin observes. The proposition of passive acceptance of this desolation not only fails to convince, but also contains a contradiction in the sense that, except to Dave, such an acceptance which is meant to be a positive one is unacceptable to all the Tourmaline people including Tom.

There is no doubt that Tom Spring is a forceful presence in the novel. Even though his philosophy is not sufficiently exposed, his forcible silence and his firm stance against the aggressive behaviour of Kestrel and later of the diviner establish him as a counter-force to the fanaticism prevailing in Tourmaline. At the beginning of the novel, the opposition between Tom and Kestrel is indicated in the presentation of the locality of

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<sup>6</sup> Ramson (ed.), p.268.

Tourmaline. On opposite sides of the Tourmaline War Memorial stand Tom Spring's store and Kestrel's Tourmaline Hotel. Tom's store is marked by its peaceful colour and unimposing arrangement with "its ancient advertisement for Bushell's tea" (p. 8), while Kestrel's hotel, reddened with dust, gives a rough appearance with a conspicuous display for selling beer. Kestrel's face suggests "experience of every bitterness the world had to offer" (p. 12); Tom is described as a "small strong thin man" who always maintains a quiet and unobtrusive presence. A further indication of the contrast between Tom and Kestrel is seen in the pet that each of them keeps. Tom's "immemorial" cat is identified by its unobtrusive but also inviolable manner, while Kestrel's "black mongrel" is treacherous and aggressive. Just as Tom never bends to the aggressiveness of either Kestrel or the diviner, so Tom's cat is not intimidated by Kestrel's dog. The cat is once seen to slap the face of Kestrel's dog (p. 212)

Tom sees clearly the danger that the diviner brings to Tourmaline. He points out the evil nature shared by Kestrel and the diviner, and regards the latter as a more dangerous manipulator who turns Deborah, a healthy girl, "into a hunchback overnight", while it takes "Kestrel years to do the same thing to Byrnie" (p. 186). The perceptive mind of Tom effectively sets off the confusion and delusion seen in the character of the Law, the narrator. The Law claims that he represents "the memory and the conscience of Tourmaline" (p. 52). But he is no longer respected. His authority as the Law is first defied by Kestrel and then fundamentally challenged by the diviner. His loss of control over Tourmaline suggests the deterioration of social structure, just as the jail, a symbol of social order, is abandoned and becomes empty.

The issue of control is of crucial significance in Tourmaline, for as Tom remarks: "This room's full of wild beasts, too, that might be let loose at any moment. The question is, what controls them?" (p. 46) That the Law himself is seriously flawed is observed not only in his failure to perceive the deceitfulness of the diviner, but also in his active participation in encouraging and helping the diviner to plunge Tourmaline into turmoil. The underlying meaning of the Law's own involvement in staking all the hopes of salvation for Tourmaline on the dubious diviner is far more than personal. As the representative of the social constitution, his involvement both indicates the decay of social system and strengthens the prospect of futility that Tourmaline faces. Eventually the Law gives way to the dictatorship of the diviner and falls under his control. The diviner commands him: "you're to become my follower, and through you I'm to channel the spirit to everyone. You're to become the Law again, more truly than you ever were. But I'm to have the real dominion" (p. 166). His meekness and powerlessness in facing the menace of the diviner is sharply contrasted by Tom's firm refusal to submit to the

diviner. But Tom's clear-headedness and firmness, instead of helping the Tourmaline people see through the fraudulence of the diviner and the ulterior motive behind that fraud, only makes him isolated in Tourmaline. The failure of his attempt to "cure" the Law implies that Tourmaline is on an irrevocable track to doom. Tom says to the diviner: "I won't do anything. The seed you're planting will grow and poison the air for a while; but I'll see it out, maybe" (p. 168). His life stops before he sees it out. Tom dies peacefully and silently soon after Kestrel comes back with more aggressive and more dangerous plans to control Tourmaline. Kestrel resumes the power of manipulation and declares that he is back to carry on "where he [the diviner] left off". Tourmaline falls into a further cycle of despair and destruction.

### 3. Voss

Voss is set in the era of exploration into the inland in the middle years of the nineteenth century, one of the important periods in the history of Australia. It is an historical novel not only in the sense that the framework of the story is ostensibly based on a significant historical event taking place in 1845, the first expedition to attempt to cross the Australian continent, but also in the sense that it fully explores the spiritual state of human beings occasioned by such an extraordinary journey into the desert of the interior. Furthermore, Voss consciously addresses the question of what, in Australia, history is. For seeing Voss as a dead statue or a living legend is essentially concerned with the issue of how to interpret the historical past of Australia.

It is relevant to note that all four novels are, in one way or another, preoccupied with the perception of the land as desert. If Bring Larks and Heroes and Tourmaline designate the desert in the image of the desolation of both humanity and civilization, in Voss the desert represents a naked and virgin land in which every substance is stripped to its primitive essence, posing a stark contrast to the civilized material world. It is in this naked condition of desert that the psychological and spiritual states of the characters are fully exposed to a relentless examination. In establishing such a contrast, the novel gives a panoramic picture of contemporary society and its people.

The contrast between the material pursuit and the spiritual aspiration is first of all viewed in the clash of the two virtually different characters, Mr Bonner and Voss, and their respective perceptions of the unexplored country. Mr Bonner is a wealthy

merchant, a representative of materialism in colonial society. He and his circle dwell in solid stone houses which, on the one hand, distinguish them in terms of their achievement of material wealth; and on the other hand, indicate their attempt to shield themselves from a fearful and incomprehensible external world. Mr Bonner "would never stray far beyond familiar objects. His feet were on the earth".<sup>7</sup> He lives in the physical world and bases his values on the possession of actual objects. The appearance of Voss with his apparent contempt for the affluent material life and his obsession with the challenging interior evidently disturbs Mr Bonner's feeling of complacency and threatens his conviction of possessing the material world. When Laura Trevelyan acutely points out that "Everyone is still afraid, or most of us, of this country, and will not say it. We are not yet possessed of understanding" (p. 28), Mr Bonner's defensive reply shows a typical materialist view of life:

We have only to consider the progress we have made. Look at our home and public edifices. Look at the devotion of our administrators, and the solid achievement of those men who are settling the land. Why, in this very room, look at the remains of the good dinner we have just eaten. I do not see what there is to be afraid of (p. 29)

Voss, with no attempt to limit his life by seeking for himself a comfortable shelter in this foreign country, is seen at the beginning of the novel greatly "distressed by the furniture" in Mr Bonner's extravagantly decorated rooms. Voss is convinced that his egoism makes him reject the material world. Contrary to Mr Bonner who is tied to his world of physical objects, Voss is compared to a bird in the sky who "would frequently be lost to sight". Voss's world, in contrast to Mr Bonner's pragmatic concern, is a world of "desert and dreams". While Mr Bonner and his circle indulge in their material pursuits and stay away from the challenge of the alien country by sheltering themselves in solidly built houses, Voss is obsessed with the subtlety and mysticism of the vast unexplored country. Like everyone else, Voss, too, finds this country disturbing. But essentially different from those who instinctively shun away from it because of fear, Voss is not overcome by any fear of it, but eager to confront the challenge imposed by this mysterious continent to mankind, believing that "in this disturbing country, ... it is possible more easily to discard the inessential and to attempt the infinite" (p. 35).

Voss's undisguised contempt for commercial values and defiance of social conventions lead him to be regarded as "the sting" in the provincial society. Being snobbish and superficial, Mr Bonner and the public are unable to fathom the mind of Voss and his

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<sup>7</sup> Voss (Ringwood, 1957), p.17. All subsequent references to this edition are incorporated in the text.

intention in leading the first expedition across the continent. Public opinion about Voss, the shabby and scraggy German, is either of pity when he is believed to be lost in this miserable country, or of contempt for "his funny appearance of a foreigner". None, except Laura, as Voss realizes, is "conscious of his strength" (p. 61). The attitudes that Voss and the public hold towards the prospect of the expedition are radically different. Asked by Mr Bonner if he is aware of what the expedition could mean, Voss answers disdainfully: "If we would compare meanings, Mr Bonner, ... we would arrive perhaps at different conclusions" (p. 20). To Voss, the expedition, as Laura observes, is a journey of pure will. He is determined to attempt the infinite by putting his will to the ultimate test in this unprecedented exploration into the inland. He is fascinated by the prospect of the journey, even if "the future of great areas of sand is a purely metaphysical one" (p. 62). Mr Bonner and the public are only concerned with the material benefits that the expedition might bring them. Mr Pringle, another rich merchant, claims:

There may, in fact, be a veritable paradise adorning the interior. Nobody can say. But I am inclined to believe, Mr Voss, that you will discover a few black fellers, and a few flies, and something resembling the bottom of the sea (p. 62).

The fact is that Voss's motivation in undertaking this expedition has nothing to do with the expectation of finding a paradise in the interior. Or even if he cherishes the hope for a paradise of the mind, his concept of paradise is definitely different from the one mentioned by Mr Pringle. Voss perceives the desert of the inland as a kind of inferno and purgatory in which he needs to conquer human weaknesses and limitations in order to achieve the infinite. Mr Bonner, though unable to reach the profundity of Voss, finds Voss's arrogance and assumed superiority offensive and disturbing. After saying that "It is a great event, ... and may well prove historical. If they bring back their own bones", he feels "relieved to have made his sacrifice with an almost imperceptible movement of the knife" (p. 61). Even though he predicts that this great event may well prove historical, neither has he in effect a belief in any historical significance of the expedition, except for his commercial interests, nor does he possess any courage to contribute to the making of history in this country. He even has no courage or capability to recognize that Voss is making the history of the country which Mr Bonner can only claim to be his in a most superficial sense, for he is not possessed of any substantial understanding of it.

The public are excited by the advent of this great event. But they have neither patience nor the ability to find out what kind of man Voss is and in what way the event

challenges their value of life. They would rather regard him as "a statue than a man", so that he

would satisfy their longing to perch something on a column, in a square or gardens, as a memorial to their own achievement. They did, moreover, prefer to cast him in bronze than to investigate his soul, because all dark things made them uneasy (p. 109).

Their superficial attitude towards Voss and the fundamental meaning of the expedition not only shows their ignorance, or in Voss's words, the mediocrity of human animals, but also reveals their subconscious fear of the challenge that the power of the desert makes to their weak mind and shallow spirit.

While material society with Mr Bonner as its representative is presented in the novel in a highly satirical tone, the gentle, healing pastoral landscape at the first stage of the expedition in Mr Sanderson's place is conveyed with tremendous lucidity and endowed with a strong idyllic atmosphere. If Voss is seen to be full of scorn and contempt for those mediocre wealthy merchants, and to have no inclination to find himself a place in the material world, he is found greatly tempted by this pastoral landscape, "the peaceful beauty of this country", as he is irresistibly drawn to the inspiringly beautiful valley where

Its mineral splendours were increased in that light [of dusk]. As bronze retreated, veins of silver loomed in the gullies, knobs of amethyst and sapphire glowed on the hills, until the horseman rounded that bastion which fortified from sight of the ultimate stronghold of beauty (p. 128).

Also, he finds his host, Mr Sanderson, a respectable landowner and achiever; and his attitude to Mr Sanderson forms a contrast with that of Mr Bonner, his patron. Mr Sanderson is described as an amiable English gentleman who lives a simple and peaceful life. Though more prosperous than most, he and his modest wife are known for their humility and diligence. With sincerity, Voss expresses his admiration for their "remarkable achievement here in the wilderness" (p. 131). Unlike Mr Bonner who finds Voss's individuality threatening and tries to patronize Voss in order to cover up his own superficiality, Mr Sanderson accepts Voss's "eccentricity". Even though his own mind "could not conceive darkness", Mr Sanderson has no intention to "accuse the German of a nature different from his own" (p. 127). During his meeting with Sanderson, Voss reveals none of the arrogance which dominates his dealing with Mr

Bonner. He is even observed by his team members to borrow his host's character of "amiable courtliness and forbearance". Their short stay in Sanderson's place is remembered as "a period of great happiness" in the expedition.

The episode of the sojourn at Mr Sanderson's should be viewed as a significant part of the whole picture presented in the novel. It not only efficiently demonstrates the pastoral aspect of the landscape with the peaceful life lived in it, but also further discloses the character of Voss and illuminates the nature of the mission that he is determined to accomplish by going through this extraordinary journey.

Although Voss shows a genuine respect for Mr Sanderson and his remarkable achievement, and although the splendid landscape and Mr Sanderson's peaceful life creates a strong yearning in him, Voss has a firm idea that all this is not what he has set out for. He makes it clear to Mr Sanderson by telling him that "It is not for me, unfortunately so, to build a solid house and live in it the kind of life that is lived in such houses" (p. 131). As a matter of fact, Voss rejects the peace of life and sees the indulgence in sensuous delights of any kind as a threat to the accomplishment of his mission. When he realizes that he "had been wrong to surrender to sensuous delights" (p. 129), he decides that he should inflict an equal suffering upon himself and the team as a punishment by insisting on camping outside instead of accepting Mr Sanderson's invitation to sleep in the house. Such drastic actions, whether they enlighten or puzzle, or even enrage his followers, are what Voss sets out to take throughout the journey so as to achieve what he wishes, as he asserts in his letter to Laura: "That which I am intended to fulfil must be fulfilled"; and for his mission he "would pledge against any quantity of gold or bonds" (p. 153).

The next and also the last stop that the team makes before they enter the desert is at Jildra, "the last hospitality civilization could offer them" (p. 1670). The change in the landscape is well observed:

By now the tall grass was almost dry, so that there issued from it a sharper sighing when the wind blew. The wind bent the grass into tawny waves, on the crests of which floated the last survivors of flowers, and shrivelled and were sucked under by the swell (p. 165).

Into this rougher landscape a new character, Brendan Boyle, the station-owner, is introduced. The character of Boyle is strikingly different from that of Mr Sanderson; and each represents a kind of human quality from which Voss is inclined to dissociate

himself. If Sanderson's remarkable achievement in the wilderness arouses admiration and respect in Voss for him, only Voss is determined to reject the temptation of Mr Sanderson's peaceful life; but the Mr Boyle "of loving flesh" simply fortifies Voss's "distaste for men". With Boyle as his companion, Voss "would have repudiated kinship with other men if it had been offered" (p. 169).

Unlike Mr Sanderson who is seen to be a discreet and respectable man of "a certain culture", Boyle is presented as a repulsive man "composed of sensual forms", equipped with a degraded life-style and cynical outlook. He lives in a skeleton shack, using "the boards off Homer to chock the leg of the table, and such other books" as "material for spills" (p. 166). For Boyle, "Jildra, with its squalid pleasures of black flesh and acres of concealed wealth, was reduced to a panful of dust and stinking mud", in which he "had chosen to stick" (p. 175). Being a man of flesh without much sense of spirituality, Boyle is curious at and suspicious of Voss's nature and his intentions in leading the expedition into the interior of desert. He believes that Voss's obsession is "to overcome distance", to head for an "irresistible disaster", in much the same way as he himself is irresistibly drawn to explore the depths of his own repulsive nature. His statement on the one hand reflects his superficiality and shallowness which cannot be expected to understand Voss's profound and immense ambition; on the other hand, Boyle actually hits upon the truth that Voss is destined to an irresistible disaster, even though he is by no means able to guess what Voss intends to achieve by heading towards that disaster. At one moment, Boyle is almost tempted to join the expedition. But lack of courage and aspiration, as always, leads him to resort to "slow rotting" rather than "death in unpredictable circumstances" (p. 175).

Towards Boyle, Voss is full of contempt and indifference. In his dealing with Boyle, he assumes "a protective cloak of benevolence". He feels much closer to the "simplicity of the clay-coloured landscape" than to his human fellow. For Voss, Boyle is just another human animal who only debases himself by indulging in sensual pleasures and is by no means able to know any other ambitions beyond that indulgence. He tells Mr Boyle in a rather arrogant tone: "It is almost always impossible to convince other men of one's own necessities" (p. 172). He himself is certainly not convinced of the necessity of the flesh, in Boyle's sense. Though he acquires an intimation of his divinity through dealing with those such as Boyle, who he refers to as "an ignorant jackass", he also keenly feels that these blank faces, "themselves earth-bound, ... could prevent him soaring towards the apotheosis for which he was reserved" (p. 178).

Interestingly, when he wants so desperately to break away from the human limitations that impede the realization of his will for divinity, he is caught by Palfreyman apparently sleep-walking. He is visibly irritated by this discovery and agitatedly denies it, "as if refusing a crime with which he had been unjustly charged" (p. 177). The point is that Voss's sleep-walking is more a subconscious exposure of his inner self to himself than a display of his human weakness. He is irritated, not only because he never intends to reveal his inner mind to other people, but also because he is well aware that it could be interpreted as a human weakness by these people, just as Boyle exclaims not without meanness: "We welcome you, Voss, through the gate of human weaknesses" (p. 177).

In contrast to the feeling of great happiness during their stay at Rhine Tower, Voss is agitated by his regret for "the waste of time" at Jildra. He makes a hasty decision to leave the place and get on with the expedition into the bush without wasting more time at this last stop of civilization.

As has been seen, the descriptions of the three characters, Mr Bonner, Mr Sanderson and Mr Boyle, reflect different aspects of mid-nineteenth century colonial society. Mr Bonner is a representative of materialistic views and concerns. Beneath his social importance and ostensible wealth are superficiality and ignorance. However, he and his circle represent the mainstream of the society. The life of Mr Sanderson, distinguished by its pastoral and idyllic features, is simple and peaceful. He earns respectability through his industry and modesty, while Boyle lives a loose and licentious life, indulging in rum and black flesh. Just as these three characters exemplify variant components of the society, so the membership of the expedition team also shows a composition of the social structure.

It is necessary to note that in recruiting members for the team, Mr Bonner particularly recommends Ralph Angus, "the owner of a valuable property in the neighbourhood of Rhine Tower" and "a young man of spirit" (p. 22). Obviously Mr Bonner regards Angus as one of his circle whose social position should make him superior in the team. The motivation of Angus in joining the expedition is to pursue his fortune further to the west. Judd, an ex-convict, a survivor of the harsh penal system, is recommended by Sanderson. Mr Bonner agrees to accept him, as it is Mr Sanderson's opinion that Judd is a man "of physical strength and moral integrity". He nevertheless shows some reservation in mentioning Judd to Voss. Having survived the living death of

convictism, Judd believes that he has "nothing to lose, and everything to find" (p. 149) in this journey.

The rest of the team are chosen by Voss himself according to his own principles. The fact that Voss himself suspects that he has "a morbid interest in derelict souls" (p. 42), in a certain way accounts for the kind of people that he chooses for his team. Frank Le Mesurier is an educated young man, secretly writing poems on metaphysical themes. He has a restless mind, sticking to nothing for long. Like Voss, Frank has no belief in material values; but unlike Voss, neither has he strong convictions in himself. Yet he still maintains some hope that the meaning of life might eventually be revealed to him. It is with this hope that he agrees to follow Voss into the desert of the interior. Mr Palfreyman is an ornithologist, the only scientist in the group. He is a person with a strong religious faith. In one sense, Palfreyman's determination to join the expedition is due to his dedication to science. But deep in his heart, Palfreyman is constantly troubled by his wretched failure in his relationship with his hunchbacked sister. Though he claims that "It is rather the will of God that I should carry out certain chosen undertakings" (p. 46), it is also the desperation to escape the frustration of his failures in life that drives him to undertake the expedition, as Voss later during the journey remarks to him with deliberate relentlessness: "you left for the Antipodes, and retreated farther and farther from your failures, until we are sitting beneath this tree, surrounded by hazards, certainly, but of a most impersonal kind" (p. 264). Robarts is a simple English lad, physically strong but intellectually weak. He asks nothing but to be led. Believing that Voss is his saviour, Robarts completely depends upon Voss, virtually with no identity of his own. He takes part in the expedition simply because he needs to follow Voss wherever he goes. Opposite to Angus, the wealthy gentleman, is Turner who is a labourer. Most of the time Turner is drunk, making a mess of his life. He expects the expedition to bring him "bounties and applause" so that he will be able to get himself "rigged out in something real gentlemanly" (p. 290).

For all his caution in recruiting members for the team, Voss is essentially indifferent to other men. He is actually worried that he might be restrained by those human beings in reaching his ultimate goal. He confides to Laura that "It would be better ... that I should go bare-foot, and alone" (p. 69).

On the one hand, the attitude and reaction of each member during the journey necessarily reflect his social background. On the other hand, under the extreme condition of the ghost-like country of desert, any personal feelings are suspended and reduced to a minimum account. The very nature of each person is stripped of

superficial coverings and exposed to relentless scrutiny in that immense landscape. Riding eternally on "the bare crust of the earth", every single member of the team is forced to confront the same ultimate test for both his body and soul.

Eventually, fearing the common doom, Judd along with Angus and Turner decide to drop out from the expedition further to the west. As a practical man, Judd is unable to see any meaning in going further. Turner jumps to join Judd simply because he can no longer bear the hardships of the journey, physically and mentally. Angus resorts to the claim that he has enough land to live a comfortable life and can think of no reason to "continue farther into this wilderness". He never forgets his social position and sees his giving his life into the keeping of the ex-convict as a betrayal of "his class, both then, and for ever" (p. 347). At the last moment of his life, Angus panics at not knowing how to die, "in a manner befitting a gentleman" (p. 425). His social superiority is in effect supposition; it is not natural to him, but something that he always makes an effort to imitate. Turner comes to his death with hollow and loud shrieks. Judd alone survives by practical resourcefulness and mental toughness. It is only too natural that Robarts and Frank Le Mesurier follow Voss to the end. Robarts's unconditioned loyalty to his leader leaves him no alternative. Frank by then is void of any hope for ascending from the despair of life. The fact that he finally ends his own life is consonant with the dark and pessimistic view of life inherent in his nature. Voss is killed by a group of Aboriginal people at a ritual ceremony. He meets "the supreme emergency with strength and resignation" (p. 393). He dies in the country which he claims to be his by right of vision.

#### **4. The Tree of Man**

As in the three novels discussed above, the setting of The Tree of Man is also built upon the perception of the land as a resistant and austere place. But different from both Bring Larks and Heroes and Tourmaline in which the desolation of the setting reflects and is reflected in the desolation of civilization and humanity, The Tree of Man focuses its concern on the sense of solitude evoked by the land and resonant in the life of the man. If the extreme condition of the desert in Voss provides the novel with a metaphysical setting for the investigation of human souls, the virgin land in The Tree of Man is employed as a primitive situation which shapes his life into the life of the land. The Tree of Man is also distinguished from the other three novels in its emphasis on the

prominent role of the natural world in the human life. In the situation where "the earth predominated over the human being",<sup>8</sup> the impact of social events upon the individual life is far less significant than that of natural forces; and the confrontation in this novel is not so much between the individual and society as between human beings and the natural world.

The novel presents a simple life story of an ordinary man named Stan Parker and his wife Amy, who are the first human beings to settle down in an inhabited part of the country in late nineteenth-century Australia. When Stan Parker comes as a pioneer to that part of the land,

That world was still imprisoned, just as the intentions were, coldly, sulkily. Grass that is sometimes flesh beneath the teeth would have splintered now, sharp as glass. Rocks that might have contracted physically had grown in hostility during the night. The air drank at the warm bodies of birds to swallow them in flight (p. 15).

What Stan faces is the tremendous challenge of the hostility of the land to human intrusion. As he starts cutting down trees and clearing the scrubby bush, he makes the first human imprints upon the land. His whole life is engaged in a struggle with natural forces and in the effort to immerse himself into the vast landscape. Eventually his human will prevails over the rocks and trees, and he succeeds in taking root deep down into the land. Afterwards a neighbourhood slowly develops. Gradually a community is established. Still it is the natural events that dominate their lives; all the social activities revolve on these events.

The dominant influence of the earth upon the human being is emphatically visualized in the structural arrangement of the novel. The novel is divided into four parts, in the chronological order of the four seasons. Each part features natural events of the appropriate season. The vigorous structure in the form of the four seasons plays a significant role in the exposition of the central idea of the novel; it effectively indicates the shaping force of the natural world over the human life. The intention of this book, as the author claims, is "to suggest every aspect of life, through the lives of an ordinary man and woman".<sup>9</sup> The novel is primarily concerned with the elaborate description of every aspect of the two main characters' lives rather than with the construction of a tightknit plot. The development of the story, instead of depending on the gradual

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<sup>8</sup> *The Tree of Man* (Ringwood, 1956), p.203. All subsequent references to this edition are incorporated in the text.

<sup>9</sup> "The Prodigal Son", in *Patrick White Speaks*, p.15.

disclosure of the plot, is tightly controlled by the linear structure. It advances along the sequence of natural seasons. By casting the story in the cycle of nature, White's novel both encompasses the major stages in the life of Stan and provides a whole picture of the external circumstances in which Stan struggles to fulfil himself.

The story starts at the beginning of the spring when the land is contained in an immense silence and imposing solitude, and Stan Parker is just about to start his own life by evoking the life of the land. At that stage, just as the scarred bush has yet to accept its face changed by the hand of man, so Stan sets out to dissolve the mystery of the natural world. Sitting alone with his dog in the frosty night, in which the

cold air flowing sluiced the branches of trees, surged through the standing trunks, and lay coldly mounting in the gully. Rocks groaned with cold. In the saucers that pocked the face of stone, water tightened and cracked (p. 13).

Stan is surrounded by loneliness and the hostility of the land, but armed with strength and determination. Stan Parker however is described as a "pretty stubborn" man. Without being intimidated by the tremendous difficulties that he is facing now and in the future, he starts to work from scratch, and manages to build his simple and honest shack amongst the stumps. He then brings a woman called Amy from a far away town to form a family. Amy has yet to learn to accept that life here is of "a distance of stones and sun and wind, sand-coloured and monotonous" (p. 26). The one becomes two and richer in strength to confront the hostile environment. But the natural world by no means becomes less intimidating to human beings.

When the first storm occurs, the "whole earth was in motion" (p. 47). It blows down trees and tosses around pieces of tin and wood, as with a vicious determination to beat down these two insignificant human creatures and wipe out their efforts to build a new life upon the land. But they survive the storm; as Stan says, "We are still here" (p. 48). They quickly repair the damage inflicted by the natural force and soon "there was very little evidence that lightning had struck" (p. 50). Then the flood comes. The continuity of the rain makes the lives of men and animals appear "both transitory and insignificant" (p. 70). The whole world seems dissolved beneath the solidity of the rain; and there is nowhere to escape. Stan, however, accepts the inevitability of the situation. He is a man of slow action; searching for explanations is beyond him. He joins the rescue team organized by the local community. On their way Stan for the first time encounters death, a man drowned in the flood. Submerged in "the great abstractions of death and water" (p. 75), he finds that he is unable to mention either to

the dead man's daughter or to anybody else the body that he has seen stuck upside down in a tree. The flood eventually passes away. Life starts again in the small town. Stan and Amy, having no time to contemplate the losses and damages, turn their backs on the past events, and get on with the things that must be done. In spite of the destructive flood, it "was obvious that these lives had never shattered into coloured fragments" (p. 96).

By the time the summer arrives after some years' interval, the place where Stan started as a pioneer has become a small town named Durilgai, meaning "fruitful". There is a general store and a post office. The shack that Stan knocked together in the first place has been enlarged, improved, and has "finally taken its place with some dignity in the fields" (p. 110). Stan now has two children. But all these hardly make any change to his solitary life. Although the district is more closely settled, Stan's house stands miles apart from the neighbourhood. Being an inarticulate person, he finds it most difficult to communicate with other people in the community. His presence is never intrusive, and often unnoticed. Even his children are alienated from him. Social activities leave little impact upon him. It is still the earth that dominates his life.

Just like spring, summer is another season of activity and hard struggle. It presents an even harsher reality to human beings:

Summer took hold of the country, and it dried up. The leaves of the trees were sandpapery together, and when a wind blew through the yellow grass it rattled in dead stems. There was a scurf of dry seed on the grey earth, and where the cattle gathered at the waterholes and creeks, nosing the green scum, the earth had set in craters. There were many dead things in the landscape - the grey skeletons of trees, an old weak cow that had stuck in the mud and did not rise again, lizards that life had left belly upwards. It seemed at times during that summer that everything would die (p. 157).

The weather gets so dry and sultry that eventually a massive fire breaks out. The fire with "a visible savagery of destruction" pushes its way through the whole area. It involves every single person. People are first fascinated, then frightened and finally humbled by the power of the fire. Facing the overwhelming fire, each one "realized the insignificance of his stature as he prepared to grasp the fire in a final wrestling" (p. 169). With the fire spreading all over the country, any personal life and daily activities are suspended, as if each person were forced out of himself to confront the extraordinary power of the natural force. Stan, like everybody else, is stunned by the

fire, standing in front of it with his feet "rooted in a wonderment". But Stan is the only one who has been consumed by and experienced the intensity of the fire as he rushes into the burning house to rescue the victim stranded within, while the crowd "could ... enjoy the spectacle without a conscience" (p. 176). Just as in the other natural events that he has gone through, Stan, coming out of the fire "weak as a little child", is full of humility in his acceptance of the righteousness of the world. The fire is finally extinguished in the following deluge. People like Stan who are courageous enough to accept humility but not defeat are determined to rearrange their lives; those who have no courage to face the wreckage choose to move to other parts of the country.

In the next phase, when time moves into the autumn, and "All shapes, tree or fence or the merest, tottering skeleton of a shed, were clear cut and final in that fixed landscape of autumn" (p. 229), Stan gets into his middle-age and his life is deeply rooted in the land. He is older now but still in his prime, still full of strength and energy. His short experience in the war only further convinces him that his life is inseparable from the land by which he has been consumed and absorbed all these years. Coming back from the war to the bush where he has lived all his life, he regains his confidence and happiness "in looking at the sky for signs of nature" (p. 199). The two children have grown up and become more estranged from their parents. Having no belief in the simplicity of their parents' lives, they leave home for the city to seek other ways of life. Stan tries but is unable to put his conviction into them. His children are let loose, and he accepts it as natural, while Amy feels deprived and disillusioned. Amy is constantly distressed by her feeling of loss and uncertainty, but Stan firmly maintains his belief in the life of the land and finds himself ever more attracted to the mystery of the natural world.

In the autumn, the drought sets in. The drought is in effect a constant feature of the country. By now people have grown accustomed to it and accept it as a part of their lives. They no longer make attempts to resist it, so that dust, brittle leaves and wisps of grass would come in through open windows and settle wherever they land. Set off by such a dry season, the relationship between Stan and Amy become constrained. They would wake "a bit stiff, and were going stiffly about their jobs, and were talking to each other in thin grey voices" (p. 308). Stan sees it is inevitable as they are getting older; but Amy finds it too hard to accept and becomes bitter and more restless. She is desperate to have something tangible to fill her feeling of void. Her short affair with an unknown traveller adds nothing but weariness and guilt to her life. Stan, however, manages to go through the shock and rage of his discovery by refusing to let it destroy

the goodness of their common life and years of companionship. Stan after all is a simple but by no means a negative person.

Just as winter arrives as the last season of the natural cycle, so Stan reaches the last stage of his life. One winter day, working with young Peabody, Stan finds that his strength finally fails him. Out of confusion and reluctance, he comes to realize that he is now getting too old to do his job, and he admits to Peabody that "I'm not what I was" (p. 363). After he falls ill, the Parkers are persuaded by their daughter to have their property subdivided and most of it sold up. Thelma assumes that her father must be hurt and saddened by the fact that he now has to let his property go. In fact, Stan is both willing and ready to give it up, for he acknowledges that the land is not his to keep, it belongs to the natural world. Having achieved his survival, he is even ready to let his life go together with his land, since his life has long been integrated with the land. As he walks around his property, thinking about all those years of his life spent in this land, the communion

of soul and scene was taking place, the landscape moving in on him with increased passion and intensity, trees surrounding him, clouds flocking above him with tenderness such as he had never experienced (p. 397).

The cold and grey winter days with frost lying on the black earth are associated with death, and it is time for Stan to confront the prospect of death. On one occasion, guided by a vague intention, he nearly kills himself with his gun, but the shot just misses him. Realizing that he has endured hardships all his life, he reflects that he should be able to "stand a bit of knocking about" (p. 407). For the first time in his life he decides to attend the Communion service in the hope of finding an answer to the mystery of life. But unable to pray, he accepts his inadequacy with humility and gratitude. For Stan, knowing that he has lived a hard and busy life and has not been beaten down by harsh nature, is enough. Later when a young evangelist offers him "the glories of salvation", Stan rejects him by replying calmly that "I'm not sure whether I am intended to be saved" (p. 475). Looking back at the past years of his life, he is content and at peace with himself. He finds it hard to believe in God, but he acquires his sufficiency through his firm belief in the natural world. Stan finally passes away naturally and peacefully, into the boundless encircling landscape.

## Chapter 10. From External Circumstances to Internal Enquiries

The fact that these four novels basically deal with historical occurrences need not mean that the issues explored in the novels are exclusively confined to the external circumstances of certain periods of the past. In these novels, the historical circumstances are not only meticulously presented as relevant settings to the thematic concerns, but also explored as specific instances in which the issues scrutinized are concerned with the universal humanity. As Thomas Keneally remarks, the historical novel "is really about the present and uses the past as a sort of working model for the present in which the human issues are the same as those we have now, and have always had to face".<sup>1</sup>

The defining feature in the preoccupation with the historical past demonstrated in these four modern Australian novels, as with Modernism, is to re-interpret the past in terms of the consciousness of the present, so that the meaning of the past is seen living in the perception of the present, while the horizon of the present is necessarily enlarged by a new understanding of the past. To bring the consciousness and perspective of the present into the observation of the past, which also distinguishes Modernism, is the basic guideline in these four novels to correlate external circumstances and internal enquiries.

In Bring Larks and Heroes, the story is concerned with life in a penal colony in late eighteenth-century Australia. Keneally conducts his investigation in a reciprocal way. First of all, he puts the re-examination of that life into a large context which concerns the primary issue of human condition and human existence. Consciousness of the contingency of human existence is a prominent theme in twentieth-century literature, particularly as influenced by existentialist theories; and the theme is revealingly explored in the perception of absurdity found inherent in human existence. By applying such a consciousness to the re-examination of the historical past of Australia, Keneally reveals an insightful picture of the life in a penal colony, in which the distortion and degradation of human life is highlighted by the perception of absurdity.

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<sup>1</sup> Australian Literary Studies, 12. 4 (1986), 453.

On the one hand, modern consciousness of absurdity plays a crucial role in discerning the darkest sides of life in the early settlement; on the other hand, the sense of the contingency of human existence featuring modern consciousness is reinforced by the observation of human life conditioned in that particular time and in the antipodean environment. Through an ironic vision of absurdity and in a melodramatic fashion of presentation, Keneally provides a new dimension in which the historical past of Australia is comprehended. Such a comprehension of the past in turn extends the modern consciousness of absurdity into an historical perspective.

Randolph Stow makes his approach in Tourmaline the other way round. He constructs a historical situation with pre-conceived suppositions and conducts a philosophical speculation from that situation. In other words, the town of Tourmaline is a conceptualized place rendered with convincingly realistic descriptions. The concentration of the novel is not so much on an absorption of life in an old mining town as on a contemplation of the spiritual state of human beings caught in a derelict situation. The underlying issue is concerned with the perception of modern civilization. However, it should be emphasized that it is this plausibly constructed historical circumstance that provides Stow with a relevant instance in which his philosophical contemplation is carried out. The relationship between the external circumstance and the internal enquiries is intrinsic in the sense that the former is a component part of the latter.

In both Patrick White's novels, The Tree of Man and Voss, as with Bring Larks and Heroes, the exposition of the central idea is based on a close observation of historical circumstances at particular periods. But if Keneally enhances his observation of a penal colony by exploring the contingency of human existence, what White does in his two novels is to transform the historical occurrences into stories of mankind which then transcend external circumstances through a universal appeal. In The Tree of Man, the life of a pioneer in the late nineteenth-century Australian bushland becomes archetypal, an everyman's tale of a life struggle in a natural environment. The argument is that it is through vigorous formalization that the story of an ordinary pioneer is endowed with extraordinary magnitude. In Voss, the transformation between the physical expedition and the spiritual journey of the mind is rendered simultaneously. The tremendous physical hardship in crossing the vast desert not only puts the human will to an ultimate test, but is also posed as an essential way to achieve self-knowledge and knowledge of the spirit of the land.

## 1. The Ironic Vision of Absurdity

As briefly summarized in the previous chapter, the sense of absurdity is a prominent note in Bring Larks and Heroes and Tourmaline. Both novels are concerned with illustrating the dilemmas in which the characters are faced with an inability to find an adequate solution. In Bring Larks and Heroes, such a situation is typically reflected in the case of Quinn. For no matter how and what he tries, there is simply no chance and no hope for him to get justice. If Quinn himself might be partly blamed for his naivety and simplicity, the shrewder Ewers only accelerates his downfall with his minor calculations. Compared with these two characters, Halloran seems to be in a safer position. But he is seen from the very beginning to head towards an ominous ending without much knowledge of it. His honesty and integrity makes him an easy target in his particular circumstance. The plight that Halloran and the other characters face is that they have to seek a marginal survival for the life over which they virtually have no control; but on the other hand, there exists a highly limited sense of choice, for after all their downfall is seen to be triggered off by their own faults, even though these faults may not be fatal in other circumstances. It is in this delicate as well as intricate situation that the contingency of human existence is fully explored.

In Tourmaline the primary concern rests not upon the observation of an individual struggle for life but upon speculation about the behaviour of a group of people under a designed condition with an underlying reference to modern civilization, as the whole town is held in a kind of coma and involved in a single striving for recovery from the coma. Obviously, the situation that each novel deals with is different, and more importantly the procedure that each author adopts in his novel is also distinct. If the procedure in Bring Larks and Heroes can be described as objective in the sense that Keneally focuses his investigation of the disturbing quality underlying the human drama on a close observation of life in a penal colony, then the approach in Tourmaline is subjective in that the novel is engaged in a rationalized presentation of the irrationality of human beings caught in a state of desolation. As a result, not only is the sense of absurdity explored in both novels variant, but the manner in which each novel conveys its perception is also marked by a significant difference.

The different approach of the two novels first of all is shown in the difference of characterization. While each character in Bring Larks and Heroes is described as an

individual whose unwinnable struggle for survival both reflects and intensifies the grim destiny of the other characters, the characters in Tourmaline are categorized into groups, each group identified with a certain force or tendency. Accordingly, Kestrel and the diviner, who are described as two sides of the same coin, stand for a distinctly dangerous and destructive force in the town of Tourmaline. They take total control of the lives of other people and manipulate them at will. There appears a superficial difference between the diviner and Kestrel. The process by which the power of the diviner evolves is clearly demonstrated in the novel, while it is only indicated as an established fact that Kestrel is a powerful bullying figure long before the diviner's appearance in the town. But the reality that Tourmaline has acquiesced in Kestrel's control, and obeys him willingly, suggests that he is just another person by whom these people let themselves be ruled and fooled. His power dwindles when the inhabitants of Tourmaline become more desperate for wanting something to believe in, which is symbolized in the search of water, and they turn their anxious hope to the diviner, a complete stranger in the place.

Being essentially the same kind of person, Kestrel is fully aware of the diviner's dark ambition to control people with ruthlessness and oppression. He sees through the fraudulence of the diviner and refuses to take part in the fanatical melodrama unfolding around the diviner, claiming that "I might be the sanest bloke in Tourmaline" (p.127), and referring the diviner as "the witch-doctor". His antagonism against the diviner stems wholly from the feeling that the coming of the diviner threatens his own power. He says bitterly to the diviner that "You've made a lot of converts here" (p. 75). His dog-like follower Byrne and lover Deborah break away from him and become fervent disciples of the diviner. His being replaced by the diviner is actually a continuation of the same role, only the diviner plays the role in a more irrational and vicious way. When the diviner fails to meet the fervently built-up expectations of the Tourmaline people, Kestrel comes back again, with stronger determination and more advanced practical strategies to regain his control over the town. He and the diviner are more than just two sides of a coin. They are identical in the sense that they fulfil the same function as a dangerous and delusive force which maintains a tremendous hold over the people.

However, the creation of the two separate characters with the same identity serves the central idea of the novel in a most essential way. For it is through emphasis upon the sense of continuity demonstrated in the relationship of these two characters that the novel sets up its cyclical motion. In the novel it is implied that the same kind of event has happened before; and the story presented in this novel is just one episode in the

whole cycle. Its ending is followed by the beginning of another episode which is certain to repeat the one before it.

In opposition to Kestrel and the diviner is the dual party of Tom Spring and Dave Speed. Their firm resistance against the delusion of the diviner and the fanaticism around him is presented not so much to reveal their personalities as to carry out the explication of a philosophical proposition. They are posed as the counterpart force to the manipulation of Kestrel and the diviner, and serve as the embodiment of the attitude that the author intends to endorse in the novel. But their insistence on non-action and non-involvement as well as the lack of a sufficient way to express the philosophical idea that they stand for evidently reduces the presumed significance of their role in the whole event.

Between these two is the third group, the rest of the Tourmaline townsfolk, including the narrator, the Law. The people are described more as a community than as individuals. They are not only strongly inclined to collective self-delusion, but are also seen to be potentially dangerous in the sense that they encourage and nourish the dictatorship which takes control of their lives. They are willing victims. It is actually these people who, driven by an irrational pursuit for salvation, co-operate first with Kestrel and then with the diviner to plunge the town of Tourmaline into a constant turmoil. Just as Byrne remarks that "A dog's got to have a master" (p. 183), so these people are seen to be in an incessant need of a master to take charge of them and lead them out of the life of desert. No matter how cruelly and humiliatingly they are treated, they appear ready to take it as part of their salvation. Ironically, their irrational loyalty and devotion often undergo a dramatic change from one subject to another. Kestrel's treatment of Byrne is worse than the way in which he treats his dog. Instead of fighting against the cruelty, Byrne claims that he asks for it. When the diviner becomes a self-claimed God with divinity conceded to him by the Tourmaline people, Byrne shifts his thoughtless devotion from Kestrel to the diviner, following him like a shadow. Deborah changes her love in the same drastic way. Though she is seen to be more independent and rebellious than Byrne, she is just as limited as he is. She breaks away from the grip of Kestrel only to find herself under the even more malicious spell of the diviner. The reality that their delirious fever about the diviner turns out to be shoddy self-deception brings neither Deborah nor Byrne closer to a recognition of the truth. They go back to Kestrel, more despairingly and with no concern for the humiliation that Kestrel inflicts upon them.

That the characters in Tourmaline are more functional and symbolic than realistic is most clearly revealed in the character of the narrator. He is simply referred to as the Law. Undoubtedly he plays the most important role in the novel, endowed with multiple functions. As the Law, he represents the legal institution of Tourmaline; he can also be the Law with an historical reference as the law in the Old Testament. But his power has long gone, together with the flourishing days of Tourmaline. He hangs over Tourmaline like an incompetent shadow, holding only the memory of the past. His impotence is made only too obvious in the light of the overwhelming control of the diviner over the whole town. Furthermore, he is one of the fervent participants in elevating an unknown stranger into their divine saviour. It is the Law himself who initiates the whole event by dragging out of the only partially conscious newcomer the words that he is a diviner. His involvement in the irrational seeking after the revival of the town is, in effect, symbolic of the collapse of the most essential social institution. As the narrator, the Law is the only one in the novel who both takes part in and watches the progress of the event. His recording of the event is intentionally subjective. He shows no hesitation about intruding his own opinion into the record, and acknowledges that he makes guesses and inventions whenever he lacks first-hand knowledge. The traces of invention in his testament correspond to the underlying tone of the novel that "The action of this novel is to be imagined as taking place in the future", as the author claims in his note to the book. As a matter of fact, that the Law serves at once as participant and as historian is crucial in the novel's treatment of time on several levels in a simultaneous way, which will be closely examined in the next chapter.

That the characters in Tourmaline are endowed with symbolic significance can even be observed in the naming of the characters. The name Tom Spring obviously carries the implication of a flowing fountain in contrast to the waterless desert. In the desert, water means life; and finding water is a crucial key to the revival of the dying town of Tourmaline. The intended significance to the character of Tom Spring is made clear in the name that he is given. Except for the external reference of the word "spring" as a flowing fountain, there is also an internal implication that Tom is self-sufficient; he does not need to seek water in the practical sense to support his life, for he himself is a spring in a philosophical sense. But, as has been discussed, lacking a sufficient way to express his philosophical belief, Tom fails to fulfil the role of a spring in the waterless town of Tourmaline; and that reinforces the theme of futility.

Likewise, the implication in referring to the narrator as the Law rather than calling him by a particular name is self-evident. Furthermore, the imposed mysteriousness of the diviner, indicated both in his unaccountable appearance and disappearance, not only

suggests the elusiveness of the character himself, but also effectively extends the connotation of the character by accentuating the symbolic effect through his ambiguous identity. He is posed as a symbolic figure rather than as a particular individual with a distinctive personality, for as the Law says, the diviner "was only a symbol; a symbol for what I believed in, the force and the fire, the creating unwavering spirit of man like a still flame" (p. 195). The underlying irony in the belief articulated by the Law is double-edged. That the symbol himself is nothing but a deception inevitably reduces the soundness of the belief symbolized by the diviner. The fact that the diviner is virtually constructed by the Tourmaline people in order to rescue themselves from despondency exhibits the sense of self-deception also in a dual way. Since the built-up anticipation of a miracle is just an illusion conjured up by the town people out of their own desperate need and then forced upon the diviner, it is inevitable that the anxiously expected climax ends in disillusion. When these people believe that they are deceived by the diviner, they are in effect doubly deceived by themselves.

As has been remarked, the major emphasis in this novel is placed not upon observation of the life of the characters as an individual, but upon the construction of a particular situation in which all the characters are involved in the central conflict. The conflict is mainly between the rational and the irrational. The irrational force evidently gets the upper hand. And it is through a close examination of irrationality under that particular situation that the novel sufficiently exposes the sense of absurdity inherent in the mentality of human beings.

In Bring Larks and Heroes, the primary concern is the scrutiny of characters living in a penal colony. It is shown in the novel that not only is the situation they are trapped in distorted and degrading, but also the characters themselves are twisted and distorted. Neither Halloran nor the other characters are presented as merely innocent victims of the inhuman social system, for as Halloran himself points out, "beef and innocence were both out of the question in that far station on the earth's rim" (p. 76) - though he has no idea that eventually it is the lack of beef and innocence that will lead to his betrayal and destruction.

On the one hand, the characters are described as castaways who are destined to seek marginal survival for their body and soul in that hostile and ruthless environment, and none of them is seen to have fundamental control over his own life. On the other hand, it is made clear that these characters both take part in and are responsible for their own downfall. In other words, while they are caught in an extremely hard situation for

survival, it is after all their own fault, whether self-deception or miscalculation, that costs them their lives. Different from Tourmaline which presents an irrational farce in a serious way to reveal the deformed human mind, Bring Larks and Heroes conveys its perception of absurdity in a melodramatic fashion and achieves an insight into the cruel reality of human contingency through a relentlessly farcical picture of human life.

Ewers is sent to this far station for forgery. Compared with the other characters in the novel, he has rather high intelligence and a strong sense of self-protection. But neither of these factors helps him survive. He is hanged for a crime that he never commits, and is simply unable to commit. He is innocent of the crime, yet he is not innocent of the fraudulent motivation of pleasing and grovelling to Mrs Daker, the viper and his destroyer. Only he is not aware that in doing so he actually makes himself an easy prey for the merciless hawk, "taut with desire", and brings about his own doom. He might be naive in planning for his ransom, but he is also sly, quite capable of dishonesty. Even Halloran, a truly naive person, "could all but smell the unreliability of the man" (p. 48).

Ewers is an eunuch from childhood. This physical deformity makes him mentally vulnerable, particularly in such an inhuman environment. He tells Halloran that "You've no idea what extremes I went to, not to be mocked" (p. 83). But his desperate attempt to cover up his deformity proves to be fatal to his life. Even though Halloran warns him to keep away from Mrs Daker, and he himself finds her canny and despicable, he still tries hard to "put the full weight of his wit" to say and do everything just to win her applause. He naively believes that he has won an "inconvertible" friendship with Mrs Daker and feels flattered by it. The "piquancy of friendship with someone so distinctive, with what you could call a perceptive harlot, excited him" (p. 72). Ewers is not an evil or wicked person, but he has weaknesses which are disproportionately paid off with his life. The twisting thing about Ewers's death is that it is brutal, unjust and absurd, but it is not tragic, since he dies for no sensible reason, let alone a grand reason. That an eunuch is sentenced to death for rape trivializes his death with its absurd and even farcical implication, as if the death of the man were only a nasty joke. Ewers is no doubt a victim of the injustice of the penal society, but he is also a victim of his own distorted nature.

If Ewers is guilty of dishonesty, Halloran is honest by nature, a man of integrity. He has a strong sense of justice, and tries to help those who suffer from injustice without any selfish motivation, though his assistance never turns the course of injustice and in

the end leads him and his beloved secret bride into a death trap. Halloran is not presented as an heroic figure; he is seen to be no less confused than Ewers or any of the other characters around him. His confusion forms an integral part of his self-deception. At the very beginning of the novel, we are informed by the author that "Visibly, he has the illusion of knowing where he's going. Let us say, without conceit, that if any of his ideas on this subject were *not* illusion, there would no story" (p. 7). Just as Ewers's physical deformity makes him vulnerable, Halloran's vulnerability lies in his naivety and his self-deception. Being naive and self-deceived not only distorts his perception of reality, but also leads him to a fatal blunder which costs him his life and the life of Ann.

In his sanguine days, Halloran fancies himself as poet, believing that to be a poet can help him side-step mortality deftly. But just as his poetry, "the debris of minor inspirations" in the eyes of His Excellency, is screwed up in the contemptuous hands of the Governor and callously thrown into the fire, Halloran himself is put to a monstrous death with the same contempt and indifference. His self-deception is most clearly viewed in his illusion about himself and the world when the Marines are summoned to put down the rebels. Standing on the hill in the "generous morning", knowing nothing of the vicious plan that the officers have made, he feels that he is

very much the centre of this world. With his hat off, he found that the tawny drench of light through his eye-lashes was made of gold rods all bearing on him. He was the focus, he was the central screw. Take him out and the hill would fall apart. He contained the world and was not contained by it (p. 137).

But his sanguine feelings do not last long; the sworn affair "dropped its mask and became an execution" (p. 142). His conviction of being the centre of the world is even further mercilessly mocked, and inevitably appears absurd, when he dies gratuitously, and without dignity. His hanging held as a ceremony is loudly cheered by the indecent crowd.

Undoubtedly, Hearn plays a major part in bringing about Halloran's destruction by trapping him into his thinly organized scheme; yet Halloran's own confusion is no less responsible for his death. Even in his first meeting with Hearn, Halloran becomes aware of his ulterior motives and recognizes him as "a far more dangerous style of man" (p. 59). Being honest and conscience bound, as Hearn sees it far more clearly than he himself does, Halloran finds himself unable to put up an effective stand against Hearn's rhetorical argument about the unjust system. He is infuriated but also puzzled by the injustice involving Mealey, Ewers, Quinn and the execution of the rebels. He realizes that his faith in the government and his oath to the Crown are necessarily questioned

and challenged by the darkness of the system that he serves. When Hearn tries to recruit him into his scheme, he knows precisely how to take advantage of Halloran's vulnerable point. As he argues eloquently his misplaced oath to the King and burdening him with the details of the plan, Halloran finds himself unable to reply to Hearn's vehement argument, and only able to reproach himself

for being badly prepared to stand by his [oath]. Since the day he had met Hearn for the first time, he had known that he would one day need to have ideas on the matter, something more than an emotion of perverse loyalty. He had tried so strenuously to be safely and rationally bound by his oath's reality as a man is bound by the reality of the earth on which he stands. As things were, he could do nothing but argue meanly (pp. 157-158).

Halloran is finally dragged into the death trap without being fully aware of it; as he himself admits: "I'm the dimmest judge of men" (p. 115). The last question that Halloran asks himself, "panic-stricken, 'Am I perhaps *God*?' " (p. 230) serves both as a climax and anti-climax of the novel. It is a climax in a melodramatic, even farcical way, conveyed not without ironic overtone and corresponding to the theme of the distortion and absurdity of human life. On the other hand, it is an anti-climax in the same way that Halloran is perceived as an anti-hero. Though Halloran makes himself believe that "he was living in a legend, because he underwent all the fervours set down in legends and in poetry" (p. 22), he never becomes a legendary figure. His life is filled with confusion, distortion and absurdity; his death is even more degrading. He dies disgracefully, but for nothing, as he laments confusedly that "the gallows dealt only in the evil and the tragic", but he and Ann "were neither evil nor tragic" (p. 195). At the last moment of his life, he is seen to be as confused as ever.

In both novels, the exploration of the sense of absurdity in human life deepens the thematic concerns. In Tourmaline, the futility of the place is intensified by the futility of the human mind. The rationality of human beings is found to be reduced most drastically to the absurdly serious deed of depending on extravagant hope for revival from desolation by a dubious stranger with a crudely made rod. The farcical effect of the whole event is forcibly achieved through the contrast between the gravity of the situation that the Tourmaline people face on the one hand and the frivolity of their fanatical efforts to find a solution to such a situation on the other. The sense of absurdity is further observed in an internal contrast between the exaggerated vehemence with which these people pursue their commitment and the only too obvious deceptive nature of their commitment, which is particularized in the coarsely pieced together rod,

as if the solemn pursuit for salvation were conceived in a toy thing. Underlying this perception of futility is a gloomy picture of modern civilization which is trapped in a cycle of self-destruction.

The deceptive note is seen underlying the whole event from the very beginning. For years nobody has come to Tourmaline except the truck driver. The moment an unconscious man is taken from the truck, the Tourmaline people decide that he is the long-awaited saviour coming to revive the town. This underlying note of deception establishes a crucial view of the development of the story. It predetermines that the townspeople's fanaticism is rooted in self-deception. By imposing the image of God out of their own desperate need upon a stranger with a dubious identity, they actually set themselves a trap. Their man-made God turns out to be a destructive moral monster who takes over the charge of their lives. Once they are caught up, there is no way out until the final breaking point comes. As the event progresses, even though they become aware of the confusion and deficiency of the diviner and fearful of a great danger happening to them, since they have lost control both of themselves and their created saviour, they can do nothing but grasp the last straw by letting themselves be led, or rather misled, by the diviner. The anticipation for a climax which ends in an anti-climatic delusion only intensifies the melodramatic and farcical effect. It becomes clear that the whole event is a farce, which is carried out seriously, based on self-deception. They are deluded not by the proclaimed diviner but by their own deception. Their conviction that they are betrayed by the diviner suggests that while the fanaticism about the diviner comes to an end, the real delusion remains with them and will continue to work upon them.

In Tourmaline, the exploration of irrationality which distorts the human mind and behaviour in such a drastic way is most effectively presented in its vigorously organized characterization and formal structure. In Bring Larks and Heroes, the perception of absurdity is integrated into the narrative observation of colonial life and society. It provides a profound insight into the distortion of human life and human nature, and at the same time enhances the sense of the contingency of human existence. If the illustration of human irrationality through the highly symbolic story of Tourmaline impels a rational and philosophical contemplation on the futile state of civilization, the perception of melodramatic and farcical elements in Bring Larks and Heroes provokes a strong feeling of pathos and a deep sense of cruelty concerning the human condition. It is shown that no matter how hard Halloran and the other characters try to survive, there is no way to escape their doom. Their efforts, on the one hand, appear to be only too

trivial to secure their survival; on the other hand, it is these trivial efforts that play a vital role in landing them into a death trap.

To a large extent, the characters in both novels are self-deceived, which leads to disastrous delusion in Tourmaline and gratuitous death in Bring Larks and Heroes. But while the characters in Tourmaline, driven by an irrational aspiration, are actively engaged in the creation of a self-deceiving situation, in Bring Larks and Heroes, whether it is Halloran or Ewers, they can only strive for their lives in a rather limited way. The author's perception is that their lives are full of absurdities and distortions; and the perception of absurdity necessarily diminishes any sense of the significance of human life. A further difference lies in the fact that the course itself to which the Tourmaline people have committed themselves is characterized by irrationality. There is no sense of injustice involved in their being deluded. They bring the disastrous delusion upon themselves, since the delusion is an inevitable consequence of what they embark on in the first place. In Bring Larks and Heroes, it is the apparent imbalance between what the characters do and its overpaid result that makes their death meaningless. Neither Halloran nor Ewers commits a crime for which they deserve a most disgraceful hanging, though both of them are guilty of fatal mistakes. Their undeserved death is undoubtedly lamentable; but the melodramatic presentation takes the story beyond being a merely lamentable event by lending it an ironic dimension, which leads to a contemplation on the contingency of human existence.

Obviously, the ironic overtone is prominent in both novels, but with noticeable differences. Irony in Bring Larks and Heroes is employed as the perspective of the novel, while in Tourmaline the story itself is presented as an irony. The ironic perspective not only provides Keneally with an objective detachment, but also enables him to explore the distorted human nature and ruthless inhumanity underneath the melodramatic description of the colonial life and society. Such a perspective is crucial in setting up the situation in which the characters appear both comic and tragic. The comic element necessarily reduces the grandness of a tragedy; it thus heightens the sense of cruelty and pathos in this tragic story.

Halloran with his earnestness and sometimes pomposity is suggestive of a comic figure, though he is essentially different from the comic character of Mrs Blythe. His fancying himself a poet is seen to be not only unrealistic but also ridiculous in this anything but poetic environment. This fantasy only sets him out of place in the society, and it meanwhile expresses the pathos of his circumstance.

That he acquires his confidence through writing a little verse about ants conveys a hidden irony to his eventual helplessness in rescuing himself and Ann from a degrading death. The very circumstance in which another of his verses is introduced makes his writing poems appear ludicrous because of its incongruity with his own desperate situation, and ironic because of the high-sounding sentiment expressed in his poem. Right after his sentencing, the folded pages of his amateur verses are handed in to the Governor as souvenirs to remind him of "what a varied herd you [he] ruled in this place" (p. 210). The Governor, full of contempt, reads: "'Larks and heroes,' he said, 'smiles of our shy grand-daughters. Not my kind of souvenir'" (p. 211) and throws the pages into the fire without a second thought. With an intended irony, it is from these last lines of Halloran's verse brought in by the contemptuous Governor in that particular situation that the author takes as the title of the book. Keneally uses Halloran's innocent and sincere expression of his wish in this carefully rhymed verse as a reflection of the theme of the novel. Halloran's naivety undoubtedly makes him vulnerable in this harsh environment; but he is also self-deceived, which blinds him to the reality. In this context, his indulgence in writing little poems is not just seen as "idle art", it actually misleads and distorts his mind. He has a visible inclination to justify what he does and sees with his own feeble reasoning, and to exaggerate his confidence that he is able to control his life. Even at the last moment of his life, he still tries to find a meaning for his death by telling himself that he may perhaps be "*God*", in spite of the plain fact that he dies disgracefully for no sensible reason. In the retrospective light of the fact that he is at the end put to a cruel and undignified hanging as a criminal, his poetic expression of hope that

May the smiles of our shy grand-daughters  
Bring larks and heroes to our hedge (p. 211)

becomes an ironic and laughable judgment on his own life. It is more than absurd when the disgraceful death of man who, though a victim of his own illusion to some degree, is by no means wicked, but actually possessing a sincere devotion to writing verses about life, becomes a ridiculous thing.

Different from Bring Larks and Heroes in which the ironic perception is directly related to the melodramatic presentation of the story, Tourmaline identifies its sense of irony with the story itself. If the factor of the third person narrator in Bring Larks and Heroes contributes to the ironic attitude of detachment of the author from the story that he tells, then in Tourmaline the first person narrator fulfils the role of involvement. The story presented in this book is basically about involvement and non-involvement. The

intense involvement of the narrator in the event decides that he can only present the event as a subjective participant without being able to observe its ironic implications as an objective outsider. As a matter of fact, the sense of irony established in the novel is precisely based upon the Law's inability to recognize the irrationality of the activity that he initiates, and in which he becomes an active participant. The reality that he, as the Law, loses his legal control over the town and turns into the leader of a group of fanatical disciples to the dubious diviner contains a highly ironic overtone. A further irony is embedded in the contradictory effect of the event, which is nevertheless predetermined by the initial motivation of the people who start the event. Facing a desolate situation, the Tourmaline people need desperately to revive the town. But, instead of confronting the reality and trying to find a solution by turning to inner resources, they build up a self-delusive hope. Their tremendous effort in nourishing that fanatical hope not only brings about no revival of Tourmaline, but more ironically it leads to the wreck of the town. As the story is centred on the exposition of self-delusion, the intended serious tone in presenting the event of irrationality results in an intensification of the sense of irony.

## 2. The Country of the Mind

Unlike Tourmaline, in which the description of the historical situation is subordinate to the construction of a symbolic message, Voss is distinguished by its establishment of a parallel between the exterior and the interior landscape. As James McAuley in his study of the novel observes, the conquest of the wilderness is the outer aspect of the expedition; its inner meaning is to explore man's selfhood by transforming the desert into "the country of the mind".<sup>2</sup> The story centres on the contrast between the material world represented by Mr Bonner and his circle and the elemental world where material concerns are significantly minimized in the landscape of dust and rocks, and between the harshness of the desert and the aspiration of mankind. Voss is symbolic in a different way from Tourmaline. Its symbolism is inherent in the account of the expedition rather than superimposed upon the structure of the novel, as it is in Tourmaline. The desert in the novel is posed both as a physical hell and as a spiritual purgatory for those who decide to enter it. The hardships that they endure during the journey are both physical and spiritual. For them, taking on the journey into the desert

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<sup>2</sup>"The Gothic Splendours: Patrick White's *Voss*", in G.A. Wilkes (ed), Ten Essays on Patrick White (Sydney, 1970), pp.36-38.

means getting on an irreversible track either to find the inner self or to become lost in the dead heart.

Voss undertakes a metaphysical exploration of human nature by effectively combining the physical journey into the desert with the spiritual journey into the innermost reality of the human mind and soul. Just as the country is described as a devilish, dead, and uncompromisingly inhuman place where the sheer immensity and the absence of all material possession reduces personal feelings, whether hopes or fears, to the inessential, so human nature in this extreme circumstance in which "the men's souls were more vulnerable than flesh" (p. 267) is bared to a relentless scrutiny. In the novel, this unexplored land is seen both as the country of desert and the country of the mind. It is through the expedition into the unvisited interior of the country that Voss, the leader of the expedition, is determined to accomplish his own journey of will, which he refers to as the "other journey", so as to transcend the limitations of his own mortality. Voss, a foreigner and stranger in the local community, is obsessed with the great subtlety and mysticism of the country as much as with his ambition to take human limits to the limitless by going through the infinity of the land. He believes that it is only possible in this inhuman desert to "discard the inessential and to attempt the infinite" (p. 35). For him, to conquer the country by possessing it with his eyes and his mind is to conquer human limitation and weakness; to overcome the distance of the land is to overcome the distance "between aspiration and human nature" (p. 191).

In order to accomplish his will to achieve the goal of eternity, Voss decides to break down every limit imposed by human nature and is determined to endure suffering for such an extreme act. He scorns human frailty, detests humility, and refuses either to give or take human compassion, for "compassion, a feminine virtue, or even grace, of some sensual origin, was undoubtedly human, and did limit will" (p. 213). The character of Voss is most effectually observed in his relationships with his followers, his spiritual lover Laura Trevelyan, and the Aboriginal people. His relationships with these three groups sufficiently reflect different aspects of Voss as the central figure of the novel.

Among the members of the team, Frank Le Mesurier has the closest affinity with his leader. Frank is the only one in the group who is able to read the dark and secret thoughts of Voss's mind. In the early stage of their acquaintance, Voss senses that "the young man was possessed of a gristly will, or daemon, not unlike his own" (p. 284). When he is given the book into which Frank writes down his innermost thoughts, Voss

feels that he is holding "a man's soul in his hand" (p. 271); he trembles in opening the book "as if about to look in a mirror and discover the deformities he most feared" (p. 294). That there exists a strong spiritual communion between the two is explicitly seen in their views about death. Coming to the end of the journey, Frank tells Harry that "Dying is creating. The body creates fresh forms, the soul inspires by its manner of leaving the body, and passes into other souls" (p. 361). His expression apparently echoes Voss's words at the beginning of the novel: "To make yourself, it is also necessary to destroy yourself" (p. 34).

Moreover, it should not be dismissed simply as a coincidence that it is Frank in his sickness who receives Voss's exclusive care. Voss even cleans his filth with his own hands, which is most unusual for one who despises any human compassion and "all sickness". The "common daemon" unites the two men, and their union is exclusive of any other members of the team. When Judd takes great trouble to get "a drop of milk for Mr Le Mesurier", Voss becomes furious and shows no hesitation in humiliating Judd by pouring away the milk "under the convict's nose" (p. 283). The storm scene is crucial in revealing the common nature of Voss and Frank by a sharp contrast to the reaction of the other characters. Like Voss, who "was as exultant as the storm" (p. 248), Frank is eager to identify himself with the storm by immersing and being dissolved "in the mysticism of it". He is asked by Voss to go into the storm to send a message to Angus and Turner; and Voss makes it as "a conspiracy between them" (p. 248). Running into the storm, he feels "relieved of some of the responsibility of human personality", while Angus and Turner who shelter themselves in the rock cave from the raging storm look "repulsively human" (p. 249). To Frank, they are "two human animals in their kennel of rocks" (p. 250). Repelled by their human weaknesses, Frank refuses to join their circle.

Although Frank Le Mesurier is compared to Voss in many ways, and might be viewed as an echo to the character of Voss, he appears less sure and less confident of his destiny than does Voss. He tells Palfreyman that "my whole life has been an investigation of ways" (p. 99). If Voss is strengthened by his determination to accomplish his journey of will even at the cost of his life, Frank is marked by his lack of such a firm and clear belief in himself and in the expedition, as he admits to Voss before the expedition sets out: "I am not intended for such heights as you" (p. 35). At the moment when the ship sails off, he is upset by the fear that "what he was abandoning might be the actuality for which he had always craved" (p. 100). His frustration at his inability to find the final truth about life and about himself is seen in his failure in the storm scene "to burst out and rise to the heights of the storm" (p. 250).

The sense of uncertainty deep down in his nature also predetermines the way in which he ends his life by slitting his throat with his own hands. His committing suicide marks a final but also vital difference between him and Voss.

It is not surprising that when the mutiny occurs, Frank Le Mesurier and Harry Roberts as well as the black boy Jackie choose to remain with Voss. Harry is regarded as a simpleton who asks no more than to be led. He worships Voss as his idol and saviour and follows him like a shadow without much thought of his own, since he is "nothing except when near to Mr Voss" (p. 37). But it seems that it is his simplicity that enables him to be distinguished from the human mediocrity represented by Angus and Turner. Voss perceives mediocrity as one of the major mortal weaknesses. To him, "Mediocre, animal men never do guess at the power of rock or fire, until the last moment before these elements reduce them to - nothing" (p. 61). When the group are attracted to the mysterious rock drawings, both Angus and Turner fail to catch their meaning. It is Harry who gives a visionary interpretation without realizing its implication.

Voss certainly pays little attention to Harry, but he accepts the boy's simplicity, while he is explicitly repelled by Angus and Turner as mediocre human beings. He hates even more the humility of Palfreyman, for humility threatens his superiority and limits his will to divinity. He himself "would not, could not learn, nor accept humility" (p. 199); and finds the humility of Palfreyman humiliating. He says to Palfreyman not without deliberate viciousness that "you are humble. And humility is humiliating in men. I am humiliated for you" (p. 339). It is to be observed that Voss's relentless attack upon human weaknesses in the other characters is an integral part of his resistance against yielding to his own human nature.

Just as Frank Le Mesurier serves as a foil character to Voss, so the character of Judd represents the aspect of humanity that Voss strongly guards against. Judd is physically strong, with a thick build, while Voss is seen as a "thin figure"; Judd believes in earthly life and craves earthly love, while Voss regards all earthly things as an ultimate obstacle to divinity and rejects any appeal of human feeling that might divert him from his determination to achieve unearthly glory. Determined to break away from any possible entanglement into things of human nature, Voss tries to avoid Christmas during the journey by not mentioning it "for self-preservation"; equally determined to maintain his own belief, Judd strongly insists on celebrating Christmas "for self-assertion". Judd makes his protest "with great vehemence" when Voss commands that "men must be driven" in the same way as "the mules must be rounded up" (p. 212). Judd is "only human", but he is importantly distinguished from the other human characters by the fact

that he was once "subjected to the greatest brutality and most rigorous kinds of physical labour" (p. 150) and survived. Judd is the only character by whom Voss feels threatened. Unlike Angus, who holds his grudges against Judd as a convict, Voss suspects him as a man. His firm commonsense view of life and strong sense of independence necessarily challenge Voss's sovereignty, and also make his relationship with Voss irreconcilable, since "rock cannot know rock, stone cannot come together with stone, except in conflict" (p. 136). It becomes inevitable that Judd finally decides to split from Voss and turn back when he senses that Voss is obsessed with his own goal without giving any concern for the common doom of the whole team.

Judd always makes it clear that he is a plain man and understands nothing much "beyond that plainness". To conquer and to possess "the desert of mysticism" is definitely not his obsession. Undoubtedly his physical strength and indestructible common sense help him survive again this time. Judd obtains his physical survival, but it is Voss who leaves his eternal mark on the land that he crosses with his body and soul. Interestingly, it seems that Judd manages to survive only to reveal to the world that Voss "is there in the country, and always will be" (p. 443). Though Judd is said to remain "least changed" of all the company during the journey (p. 176), he certainly undergoes a fundamental change after it. His earthly life is gone with the loss of his family and his property. He becomes a shadow, and so much obsessed with the spirit of Voss that he believes himself to be a witness at the ritual of Voss's death.

The representation of the relationship between Voss and Laura Trevelyan is primarily concerned to reveal the inner life of Voss. That these two characters are closely related to each other is indicated in a structural arrangement at the very beginning of the novel. In their first meeting, Laura Trevelyan and Voss are seen sitting "in almost identical positions, on similar chairs, on either side of the generous window" (p. 12-13). Not only are both of them, in a certain way, strangers and isolated in the world they live in, but also there occurs an immediate recognition between the two minds. Or more precisely, Laura with her intuition captures the inner thoughts of Voss beneath his mask; and Voss a little later becomes aware of it. If Voss is "reserved for a peculiar destiny" (p. 15), then Laura is reserved for the appearance of Voss. While the public is either fascinated or confused by Voss's decision to lead the expedition into the desert of the interior, Laura notes his underlying motivation by remarking to Voss that "this expedition of yours is pure will" (p. 69). Laura's inner knowledge of Voss's mind enables her to establish a spiritual bond between the two. She is not only acquainted with his ambition and strength but also able to discern the dark side in his nature. She

makes it known to Voss that for him, "most flattering ... is the hatred, or even the mere irritation of weaker characters" (p. 88).

Although the relationship between Voss and Laura is described as one of lovers, it is actually concerned more with the exposition of Voss's inner mind through the communication between the two than with the mutual development of the two characters. And it should be noted that their relationship is not so much developed as disclosed in their spiritual transmissions throughout the journey. If Laura develops as a character, her development does not exert any actual influence upon Voss in his development. As far as Voss is concerned, Laura is accepted as an integral part, an inner voice, of his mind rather than a character of her own. She "lived and breathed inside him" (p. 267); her voice continuously appears in his dreams and stream of consciousness, but her form remains indistinct.

Voss's relationship with Laura is vitally different from that with his followers in that it is more spiritual than human. Judd's threat to him is external in the sense that it comes from Judd's indestructible common sense and physical strength, while Laura with her "soft coat of love" and her belief in humility as the ultimate way to divinity represents an internal power that constantly torments and wrestles with him in his mind. His resistance to the appeal of Laura is as much a resistance to his own weakness of which, he believes, is "born the necessity for this woman" (p. 215). When he sends Palfreyman to go amongst the natives both as an attempt to establish a link with the natives and as a "means of revealing the true condition of a soul" (p. 341), he feels the presence of Laura who "did reproach him", but he "drove her off, together with the flies, and spoke very irritably, for flesh, like candles, is designed to melt" (p. 344). His apparent argument with the invisible Laura is actually a reasoning with himself. It seems that Laura is always there to remind him of his being a faulty man. Unless he accepts the humility that Laura makes an incessant effort to inspire in him, he should not be able to ascend from human weakness to divinity. Voss succumbs to humility at the last moment of his life.

Voss's attitude towards his followers as human beings is mainly of contempt, and sometimes of fear of their disloyalty to him, but he is strongly inclined to communicate with the native people; and this inclination distinguishes him further from the other characters. In fact, his effort to establish a spiritual connection with the natives consists of a crucial step towards his ultimate goal and provides a vital clue to comprehending the mission to which Voss commits himself in this hard journey.

While the rest of the team consider the Aboriginal people either as "a filthy race" or as hostile and alien creatures, Voss is firmly convinced that these people possess the spirit and mysticism of the desert with which he is obsessed. For him, to absorb and assimilate the "primitive purity" of this people is essential in achieving infinity. It is important to observe that, in spite of his earnestness to show his good intention to the natives, he constantly fails to win their acceptance. Along with his development as the central character of the novel, his attitude towards the Aboriginal people undergoes a gradual but fundamental change, which leads him to his final illumination.

In contrast to his mistrust of his white fellows, Voss allows no suspicion of the two blacks who join him in the expedition. When Jackie disappears, Voss alone refuses to believe that the black boy betrays his trust by escaping from him. Jackie's return re-confirms his belief in the natives. From the very beginning, Voss is seen to be different in dealing with the Aborigines. While the white people in general regard the blacks as incomprehensible and unreliable, Voss asserts that "it is necessary to communicate without the knowledge of the language" (p. 169), and he is determined to communicate intuitively with these people. Contrary to the attitude of shunning the natives, Voss is convinced that to understand them provides the way to overcome the feeling of alienation from the land. To him, the mere sound of their bare feet upon the earth "at once established their ownership" (p. 169).

However, the initial sensibility that Voss maintains in his treatment of the natives is more condescending and patronizing than genuine. He expects his "suitable kindness" to Dugald and Jackie to win their homage to him in return, but they give no expected response. When the party comes across a group of blacks on the way, Voss attempts to convince them of his good intentions by offering his hand in friendship and giving them a bag of flour. To his disappointment and annoyance, they refuse to take his friendly gesture and carelessly pour the flour on the ground. Voss, "the benefactor", feels abused for his good will. Persisting in considering the natives as the "subjects of his kingdom", Voss clings to the belief that he must establish communication with "these black subjects and finally rule them" (p. 334). But his determination and his effort only help him become "the rejected sovereign". In other words, at this stage Voss is guilty of sentimentalizing his own attitude towards the Aboriginal people; and his pretensions make him appear absurd and ridiculous.

On the surface level, the incident of sending Palfreyman to the natives to investigate the stolen property is the result of the collision between Voss and Judd. At a deeper level,

Palfreyman can be regarded as a human sacrifice that Voss offers to the natives to test and to win their trust. It is a kind of conspiracy between these hostile and dubious people and himself. When Palfreyman agrees to go, even though he evidently sounds weak and confused, Voss is filled with secret joy, watching in great expectancy the frightened Palfreyman walk with "exaggerated strides" to "a given end". Palfreyman fails to overcome his human weakness at the last moment of his life. His death makes every survivor, including Voss, feel that "part of him had died" (p. 343). But that part means different things to Voss and the rest of the team. To Judd, the senseless death of Palfreyman deprives him of the last piece of his belief in the great sufferings of this journey and he decides to turn back. For Voss, Palfreyman's death is a necessary part of the sacrifice that human beings are bound to make in order to achieve the ultimate goal of infinity. Instead of feeling devastated by the death, he is strengthened by it, and determined to press the destructive effect of the death further by strongly opposing a burial service for Palfreyman.

In the final scene in which Voss and his two followers are surrounded by a tribe of native people, it seems that the end comes and death becomes inevitable. But the whole situation as well as the state of mind of Voss indicates that he is not caught in fright or forced resignation but is ready to receive his martyrdom.

The situation is marked by the solemnity of ritual. The blacks paint their bodies with clay and start performing a ritual ceremony. The extraordinariness of the scene is further enhanced by the sudden appearance of a comet in the sky. Confused and frightened, Harry tries to seek help from his Lord, but Voss tells him that he is no longer his Lord. When Frank asks him about his plan, just as he asserts at the beginning of the expedition that he needs no map to guide him, he replies to Frank that "I have no plan" (p. 397). But he makes it clear that this does not mean that he withdraws; he is, as he says, withdrawn into his destiny. For the first time, Voss is seen sitting there "humbly holding a little leaf", and makes his first as well as last confession to Frank that "I am to blame" (p. 397). From the beginning Voss is prepared for the tremendous sufferings that his journey inflicts upon himself and he shows no hesitation to press these sufferings upon the other members of the team. Now, coming to the end of his mission, he realizes that it is time for him to be humbled; and he is ready at last to accept humility.

Voss's human body by now is reduced to a skeleton. His mind is emptied of the past but is filled with great confidence in the future (p. 392). To the black people, he is no longer a human creature, but a symbol "of supernatural origin". For they believe that

this white man comes to them along with the Great Snake. Unlike the death scene of Palfreyman which is marked only by fear and hostility, the situation in which Voss meets his death is greatly signified and mystified by the immense solemnity with which the natives perform their ritual. But it seems that the sacredness that the whole atmosphere builds up in killing Voss is toned down by the sense of vengeance. The blacks finally decide to kill Voss in anger, because they believe that they are deceived "both by the Snake and by the white man" (p. 391). However, when the final moment comes, there only remains an empty body of Voss to get killed. His spirit along with his dreams has already gone into the air before his body is cut into pieces. It forms a contrast to the death of Palfreyman that there is no description of any personal feelings of Voss in his death.

That Voss treats Jackie with "inordinate affection" throughout the expedition and that Jackie kills him with the clasp-knife given by Voss as a gift, may serve as an irony. But because of Voss's determination to make a martyr of himself through the suffering of this both physical and spiritual journey, this arrangement can also be seen as a symbol of fulfilment. Voss gives the knife to Jackie at their first meeting. When he eventually dies by the hand of Jackie, the event is not identified with a betrayal in the sense that there exists no bitter personal feeling between the two. In fact, the killing is so impersonal that Jackie seems to stab into a wooden thing instead of a human body. Furthermore, Jackie is the only survivor to go to the end with Voss and becomes "a legend amongst tribes" (p. 421). It is he who translates the spirit of Voss into dialect so that the soul of Voss always haunts the land of the spirits.

### **3. Communion with the Natural World**

The central proposition in The Tree of Man lies in the establishment of an entwining relationship between the life of man as a pioneer and the development of the untouched land. The land, as it is in Voss, is posed as a formidable challenge to the will and endeavour of human beings. However, The Tree of Man differs from Voss in an important way. If the ambition of Voss is to overcome distance, and Voss is primarily concerned with movement in space, then the determination of Stan Parker in The Tree of Man is set against the progress of time, and the novel is distinguished by its sequential movement. Moreover, Voss's expedition into the desert is undertaken as a journey of pure will and he is determined to suffer for the accomplishment of his will, whereas the life journey of Stan Parker is marked by his uncertainty and inability to

interpret what he experiences. Where Voss is seen to have such a firm conviction of the purpose of his expedition that he allows nothing or nobody to divert him from realizing his goal, Stan Parker is found in a constant struggle to grasp the meaning of his life; he does not aspire to any particular goals and often misses making sense of what he has experienced. If Voss is inspired by a clear vision of the expedition, Stan starts his life "with no exact plan in his head" (p. 269). Voss evidently achieves his aspiration for eternity by living in the legend of the country. Whether Stan succeeds in obtaining self-knowledge at the end of his life is by no means certain. But that is not necessarily a limitation, for, as G.A. Wilkes observes, the "strength of The Tree of Man comes not from Stan's achievement of illumination, so much as from his blundering towards it, his bewilderment and uncertainty, his painful effort to interpret such knowledge as he is given".<sup>3</sup>

In the opening paragraph of the novel, the protagonist is introduced as an anonymous man driving a cart into the solitude of the bush. The whole scene is dominated by trees and immense silence. The man with his dog is seen as the first human being to enter the bush and settle down. He begins by striking a tree, and it "was the first time anything like this had happened in the part of the land" (p. 9). He then builds a fire to get warmth and ward off solitude and loneliness; and the fire makes that particular part of the bush his. He takes root in this "scrubby, anonymous land" which is taking shape under his hand. The young man thus begins his own life as he starts the life of the solitary bush. The life of the man, whose name is later given as Stan Parker, and the life of the land are subsequently entwined together. A communion between Stan Parker and the natural environment is gradually established along with the development of the story. The establishment of such a communion is the keynote of the novel and is to be viewed not only in the comparison between the character of Stan and the other characters, but also in the vigorous formal structure of the novel.

In the novel, Stan Parker is presented as essentially different from his life companion Amy. The initial difference is that Stan chooses to start his life in that uninhabited part of the land, while Amy follows her husband. Although they then share the same kind of life, Stan is strongly attracted by the mystery of the natural world and develops a deep faith in the life lived in that part of the land where he settles as a pioneer. Amy, seeing no connection between her aspiration in life and the natural environment, does not share Stan's conviction in making life purposeful by absorbing the mystery of the land. Their difference is indicated at the beginning when Stan takes her to his newly

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<sup>3</sup>"Patrick White's *The Tree of Man*", in Ten Essays on Patrick White, p.30.

built shack, a long way from the town in which she lives. Stan "recognized and accepted the omnipotence of distance", but Amy "had begun to hate the wind, and the distance, and the road, because her importance tended to dwindle" (p. 27). Throughout her life, Amy drifts around restlessly and aimlessly. Her failure to take root in the land where she lives results in her feeling of insecurity and her greed for possession. Her eyes "had a hungry glitter for something she did not possess" (p. 36). Though Stan is no more certain than Amy of the final form that his life is to take, his strong conviction of natural objects and natural forces, along with his incessant attempt to be absorbed in them, both increases and strengthens his self-sufficiency.

Their different reactions to the appearance of their first stranger guest shows Stan's firm faith in his life in contrast to Amy's lack of faith. Amy is visibly upset by the stranger's talk of the Gold Coast which is beyond her reach, while Stan, "torn between the images of gold and ebony and his own calm life of flesh" (p. 39), finds himself unmoved by any impulse to set off "to see foreign places" as an exchange for his life deeply rooted in this land. His Gold Coast "glittered in a haze of promise as he grabbed the weeds out of his land, as he felled trees and tautened the wire fences he had put round what was his" (p. 420). Amy visualizes her Gold Coast in her only treasure, a little silver nutmeg grater. When the stranger is gone the next day, she is convinced that her silver nutmeg grater has been taken away by the stranger, but that later proves to be untrue. The incident indicates not only that her vision of life is not deeply rooted in reality but visualized in that little object which is presumably gone with the guest, but also that she is inclined to fall victim to her own deception or illusion.

Amy's wish to "perpetuate her dreams and lift the reflections out of mirrors" (p. 41) reflects her inclination to fulfil her life by turning away from the real world. Instead of making an effort to establish her life in the permanence of the land, she depends for her fulfilment on external factors without turning to her inner integrity. Her expectation that "some enlightenment would come from without" (p. 333) leads her from one thing to another. But that expected enlightenment never comes to her in spite of her various attempts. Amy's lack of orientation both contrasts and clarifies Stan's determination to absorb his life into the life of the natural world.

When she first catches sight of Madeleine, a grand woman riding on a grand horse, Amy is swept off her feet by this "god-like and remote" image. She yearns to "unite with the rider and the horse, as if her life craved to be set in the same slow and stately motion, free above the dust" (p. 132). She identifies herself with Madeleine in her romantic fantasy, wondering "whether she could have resisted the advances of a lord, if

he had driven up, and she wearing a mauve dress such as she had never owned" (p. 134). Her tendency to indulge in her fantasy life only increases her "anxiety of not belonging" (p. 109) in real life. To atone for her sense of failure, Amy is desperate to possess someone or something. She is described as both "possessive and possessed". She insists on taking home a lost child picked up in the flood, believing that "her failures were taken away from her by the child that she might now perhaps possess" (p. 91). But her determination to "imprison the child in her house by force of love" (p. 97) fails to detain the child, just as her possessive love for her husband only turns him away from her. Her effort to possess her own children by force of love also ends in failure. In the end, she laments that "I am not sure that I have had anything" (p. 447). Even the dog remains "His dog". Given Amy's desperate need to attach her life to some tangible object, her adultery should be viewed as another attempt to fill her inner void with external effects rather than merely as a betrayal of her husband. Its predictable failure intensifies her feeling that "There was nothing, indeed, over which she had control" (p. 64), least of all her own actions.

Amy's inability to take root in the land is made particularly clear in her exclusion from fully experiencing each natural event that takes place around her. The exclusion is either from her own fear of the power of natural forces, or forced upon her by circumstance. In the scene of the first storm Stan, who is working outside, "laughed ... and felt a kind of pleasure in the mounting storm", while Amy, sitting in the house, gets up quickly and shuts the door "in an attempt to secure for herself an illusion of safety" (p. 46). In the second storm, in which Stan experiences "an ecstasy of fulfilment" (p. 151), Amy's presence is not mentioned, except that her form, to her husband, "faded into insignificance" (p. 150). Her involvement in the episode of the flood is limited to a distant watch on the activities of her husband and the other men. She is also kept away from experiencing the intensity of fire, and left ever to wonder what impact such an experience has created upon the mind of her husband, when Stan rushes into the burning house to rescue Madeleine. This exclusive experience of Stan in the fire further enlarges the gap between him and Amy; and it is shown in their different reactions to the cheque given to Stan by Mr Armstrong as a reward. Stan, having been subjected to the extraordinary power of fire, "could afford to be a bit disgusted at the cheque", but Amy "who had not experienced exaltation by fire", is flattered by this "material pleasure" (p. 184).

Amy's expectation of "some act of miraculous revelation" is never met. Or rather the revelation has gone "unrecognized" (p. 370). Lacking faith and determination, she is weak and frail, so much so that "At any point of her life the wind would have blown her

with fantastic force" to any direction (p. 307). Her attempt to search for fulfilment in external things without turning to inner resources eventually leads to her realization that "It is all above men. I do not understand a thing" (p. 447). This acknowledgment leaves her weary and indifferent. The natural world as well as her husband remains alien and mysterious to her. She keeps away from "those shrubs which had grown and oppressed the house in overbearing clumps and thickets", and turns to her own plants "which she kept around the verandas of the house, the more tender, waxy ones in pots" (p. 418). In the final scene, Stan is seated at the very heart of the landscape from which "the trees radiated, with grave movements of life", and beyond that centre is "the cold and golden bowl of winter, enclosing all that was visible and material" (p. 474), while Amy, excluded from the scene, is seen rounding "the corner of the empty house".

In spite of the convincing description of her as a simple and weak but not wicked woman who is unable to stand firmly on her own, Amy Parker somehow remains a confusing figure in the novel. The confusion comes from several places of unintended contradictions. First, though she is rendered with a simple nature, Amy is also represented as having a "potentiality for evil" (p. 311). While Stan is "in no way vicious" (p. 293), and known for his honesty and tolerance, Amy seems quite liable to viciousness. In one place, she is much fascinated by Madeleine with her grandness and elegance, and longs to be identified with her. Yet in another place, when she sees Madeleine "retching on all fours in the ash and grass" (p. 185) after being rescued from the fire, instead of feeling sad for the destruction of her long-cherished image of beauty and grace, she is alleged to be "secretly", if not viciously, pleased by the scene. Later when she goes to see the deserted place wrecked by the fire, standing against the burnt house, she feels as if she "stood above Madeleine, ... and could have practised some cruelty" (p. 202). Secondly, throughout her life, Amy is pursued by her feeling of insufficiency, always longing to be assured by the touch of her husband. When Stan has gone to war, Amy is said to have finally "achieved self-sufficiency, of farm and children" in Stan's absence (p. 204). Thirdly, although Amy often blames herself for not having loved her husband enough, on some other occasions she shows no hesitation in hurting Stan deliberately or in seeing him hurt with "queer pleasure". Her exaggerated anger towards the rock-cakes given by Doll with no other but good intentions is not merely out of jealousy but suggests the meanness, even viciousness in Amy, which is however suggested by an emphasis upon her thinness when she is first introduced. She makes the scene even nastier by throwing the cakes straight into the rubbish-tin without seeing Stan's hurt, "or she might have been pleased" to see it (p. 214). In the episode in which Stan makes an attempt to achieve a communion with their son, but without success, Amy is described as watching their "return secretly, with

bitter pleasure" which "she derived from sensing some hurt to her husband" (p. 223). All these touches seem to be made to accentuate the unpleasantness of the character of Amy in contrast to the admiration and respect which marks the character of Stan.

Stan's children, Ray and Thelma, grown up with no conviction in the life that their parents live, choose a different way. Their lives both form a contrast with the life of Stan and suggest an alternative track that Stan might take, if he left the land to which he belongs for the alien city. Stan tries but fails to convey to his son his belief in "the essentials of tree and shrub" (p. 221). To Ray, the sandy bushland which takes hold over his father represents the monotony from which he must escape. He condemns his father for his virtue of simplicity, but only finds himself lost in the world of sophistication. When he returns to the land from which he has become alienated, he realizes that he is rejected by the landscape there and frightened by its aloofness. His hard struggle in life is involved in progressive guilt, and leads him to a shameful end.

Compared with Ray, Thelma seems successful in her ascent into society by marrying a wealthy husband. But this superficial success, instead of being a fulfilment, costs her her identity. While the place where her parents live all their lives becomes known as the Parkers, her own name can be changed into any other name among her friends. When she leaves the country, she loses her identity as a Parker, and never succeeds in establishing a new identity of her own. Later, in their visit to her parents, Thelma and her husband are struck by the "smell of life" which "had taken possession" of Stan (p. 341). Their material wealth appears pale and shallow before the rich life of Stan. Thelma cannot but feel astonished that "she had been able to escape from anything so positive" (p. 343). In front of the immense landscape, Thelma's "nonentity was complete" (p. 472).

Essentially different from either Amy, or Thelma and Ray, is the character of Doll Quigley. Just as Frank Le Mesurier is created as a foil, so Doll in this novel can be viewed as a substitute for the character of Stan. Among all the characters, Doll is the only one who is related to Stan in a spiritual way, so closely that Stan himself feels that "Their souls almost mingled" (p. 214). Like Stan who is likened to a hard trunk rooted in the landscape (p. 346), Doll, standing in the paddocks, is "not unlike a tree" (p. 54). She and her simpleton brother Bub are described as "the kind that grow from the landscape with the trees, the thin, dusty, unnoticeable native ones" (p. 461). They are identified more with the natural world than with the human world. They know "the

ways of animals. Their tracks and nest" (p. 441), in the same way in which Stan believes in the leaf, "in the cracks of the path" (p. 477).

But there lies a significant difference between Stan and Doll in their confronting the natural world. Stan is strengthened by his acceptance of "the rightness of the world" when he, battered and humbled by the power of the storm, finds himself "in love with the heaving world, down to the last blade of wet grass" (p. 151). Doll, in spite of her affinity with the natural world, feels "intimidated by the greatness and diversity of the universe, which dwarfed her own limited powers" (p. 463). By the end, unable to protect her brother any longer, she ends his life, and herself is sent to an asylum. However, it should be pointed out that Doll is presented more as a model of "the essence of goodness" than as a fully developed character. Throughout the novel, just as she would remain that same age, Doll Quigley "had not altered much" (p. 461). Her extreme goodness makes people either "ashamed or afraid" (p. 462), and she is kept at a distance. Even Stan, though recognizing her "purity of being", finds it impossible to convert her being "into terms of his own reality" (p. 218).

When Stan first comes to the uninhabited land as a pioneer, that part of the world "was still imprisoned, just as the intentions were, coldly and sulkily" (p. 15). His human efforts are constantly challenged by the harshness and hostility of the land. He fumbles his way through his life by undergoing a series of natural events such as flood, fire, storm and drought. With the experience of each event, his root into the land deepens. Eventually, his "stone of will prevailed over rock", and he had "hewn a shape and order out of the chaos he had found" (p. 269). His life becomes an integral part of the land. That Stan is deeply absorbed into the land is indirectly but most effectively revealed in the incident of the war and in his trip to the city. On these two occasions, Stan is uprooted from his land, and he is seen to become lost, with his strength taken away from him. The event of the war is presented as an insignificant digression, so far as Stan is concerned. His experience in the war creates no actual effect upon his life. It only makes him realize that when things are taken out of his hands, "his functions appeared to have gone from him" (p. 200). In the same way, he feels at a loss during his two-day stay in the city. He goes there to deal with the matter concerning Ray, but finds himself in a completely alien place and unable to do anything. He longs to return to the landscape whose contours he knows "more intimately than he did the faces of men" (p. 276).

However, it should be noted that Stan's development is indicated more effectually in that he survives after many years of hard struggle than in any exposition of the development of his mind. Among the accounts of various events that he goes through in his life, it is only in the scenes of storm that there is a clear indication of a significant change taking place in Stan's perception of the natural world. At the coming of the first storm, Stan becomes excited, believing that he is ready to embrace it with his open arms. Then "a motion of wind and streaming trees" (p. 47) overwhelms him. He begins to be afraid, feeling himself like an insignificant and powerless thing which is "in danger of being carried away" with the storm (p. 47). In the second storm in Part II Stan, instead of standing outside of it as he does on the previous occasion, finds himself "sitting right at the centre of it" (p. 151). He experiences "an ecstasy of fulfilment" together with his "new humility". He is not afraid any more. In his acceptance of "the rightness of the world", he begins to "know every corner of the darkness, as if it were daylight" (p. 151). But in the event of either flood or fire, there is no evidence that Stan undergoes a substantial enlightenment. He can neither capture the implications of these events, nor can he interpret his experience in these events.

If Stan fulfils his life in the sense that he accomplishes what he sets out to do, his desire "to express himself in substance or words" (p. 112) is never fulfilled. He sees the natural world with his eyes and feels it with his bones, but "he did not know how to say such things" (p. 98). He is constantly baffled by the elusiveness of things that he encounters in his life. His inability to communicate also causes difficulties in his relationship with other people. Although he and Amy spend all their lives together, there is no true understanding between them. They accept the existence of each other simply out of habit, and "had not really entered each other" (p. 296). Even in his dream, Stan finds himself desperate but unable to "lift the lid of that box to show her what he had inside" (p. 308). He wishes that "he might suddenly interpret for his son, by some divine dispensation, with such miraculous clarity and wisdom, the love and wonder the horny lizard had roused him" (p. 222). But the "divine dispensation" that he wishes for never occurs, neither does he acquire "miraculous clarity and wisdom" to convey to his son the emotions roused by his love of nature. He and his children remain strangers. To other people, Stan is seen as a slow and inarticulate figure whom they keep at a respectful distance.

Coming to the end of his life, still fumbling his way towards the final form of clarity, Stan wonders "What is intended of me and for me" (p. 407). As is suggested through the reference to Hamlet, for Stan, the meaning of life, like the play, "eluded explanation, then and now. It went on its own way" (p. 400). Stan, after all, is a simple

man who lives a simple life. The mysterious natural world fascinates him and absorbs his whole life, but finding an answer to life is beyond him. At the beginning of the novel, Stan Parker is described as "a prisoner in his own mind" (p. 49); by the end, he is still found to be "a prisoner in his own ribs" (p. 413). G.A. Wilkes observes that "The Tree of Man shows that fulfilment for Stan lies not within life as normally lived, but beyond it".<sup>4</sup> In fact, the introduction of his grandson into the scene at the end of the novel is particularly made to convey the implication that his life will be carried on by his grandson. His unfulfilled dream will be fulfilled in the poems that the grandson, it is promised, will write in time.

Obviously, the rigorous formal pattern of the novel provides a visual display of the progressive communion between the life of Stan Parker and the natural world. The novel is divided into four parts, representing the four seasons of nature. The presentation of these four seasons covers the whole life of Stan, with each season corresponding to a certain stage in the progress of his life. Stan starts his life as a young man in the spring, getting mature in the summer, growing old in the autumn and coming to an end in the winter. The description of his life is thus completely integrated into the progress of the natural world. Reciprocally, the four stages in Stan's life, youth, maturity, old age and death, by being externalized into the natural seasons which consist of the four parts of the novel, are transformed into structural principles of the novel.

This is evidently a thoroughly conventional device. But the employment of such a device is not only efficient in emphasizing through the structural arrangement the communion between the life of Stan and the progress of his natural environment, but more importantly, White re-writes conventionality by extending its application to the examination of the historical past in which the concentration on a detailed description of the development of an ordinary man yields an extraordinary picture both of the time and of the timeless human striving for making life purposeful in a harsh environment. The remarkable achievement of the novel lies precisely in its transformation of the conventional procedure into an illuminating re-interpretation of Australian history. By presenting every aspect of the life of a pioneer in the late nineteenth-century Australian bushland, White takes the dimension to comprehend the history of Australia onto a universal level which concerns the archetypal history of mankind.

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<sup>4</sup>"Patrick White's *The Tree of Man*", in *Ten Essays on Patrick White*, p.31.

## Chapter 11. The Treatment of Time

In surveying the major issues of Modernism, it has been pointed that the tension between the past and the present dominated the history of Modernism; and the tension is reflected in two paradoxically related aspects. While the changed perception of reality destroyed the notion of a continuum, the attempt to re-construct the relationship between the past and the present at once reinforced the departure from the past and re-established the link of the present with the past based on a new perspective. In the re-construction of the relationship of the past and the present conducted by Modernism, the effort was necessarily laid upon re-examining the concept of time, for as Ricardo J. Quinones observes in Mapping Literary Modernism, it is "no accident that time, so related to change and history, should be a primary figure" in Modernism.<sup>1</sup> Time in Modernism undergoes a fundamental transformation; it is no longer viewed merely as the progression in a sequential order and in opposite to space, but more essentially as an expansion in space. As seen both in theory and in practice, the chronological sequence of time was disrupted, and replaced by a simultaneous order of the past and the present. In other words, the diachronic approach to time is seriously challenged by a synchronic approach which was elaborated by T.S. Eliot in his re-definition of the notion of tradition in "Tradition and the Individual Talent".

In the four modern Australian novels analysed here, the treatment of time is also essential to the attempt to re-interpret the historical past of Australia. Although there is no evidence that any of the three novelists has drawn directly from the influence of Modernism, or of T.S. Eliot's theoretical argument, not only does their preoccupation with the past in its relation to the present reflect the concern of Modernism, but also the way in which time is treated in each of the novels supports and contributes to the alternative perception of the relationship between the past and the present proposed by T.S. Eliot. If no direct influence of Modernism can be traced in these four novels, there are nevertheless certainly some important concerns and perspectives that relate them to the views of Modernism.

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<sup>1</sup>Quinones, p.225.

## 1. Continuity within Simultaneity

Time present and time past  
 Are both perhaps present in time future,  
 And time future contained in time past.  
 If all time is eternally present  
 All time is unredeemable.  
 What might have been is an abstraction  
 Remaining a perpetual possibility  
 Only in a world of speculation.  
 What might have been and what has been  
 Point to one end, which is always present.<sup>2</sup>

If the soundness of the philosophical endorsement intended in *Tourmaline* is affected by the lack of a sufficient way of exposition, the novel certainly achieves distinction through its sophisticated treatment of time. In this novel, time is evidently endowed with the most important role. How time is dealt with is essential in conveying and explicating the central issue of the story. First of all, the rigorous organization of time contributes to the establishment of the cyclical movement of the story. The sense of cycle, as has been remarked, lends a significant note to the destructive role played alternately by Kestrel and the diviner; and it is reinforced by the return of the more aggressive Kestrel at the end of the story. But it is primarily due to the way in which time is organized that the story takes on a cyclical movement. The story starts in the future, moves back and forth in the present and the past, and ends as a warning to the future. Secondly, as the sequential order determines the development of the story, it is constantly intersected by a simultaneous existence of different times, which marks a crucial step towards the sense of timelessness featured in this novel. Stow's treatment of time in *Tourmaline* bears a strong resemblance to the synchronic approach distinctively practised in Modernism.

That the story is to be imagined as taking place in future time is not only made clear by the author in his note to the book, but is also emphasized by the way in which the story is started. *Tourmaline* is a town situated in a "strangely immaterial" place, and its existence is unknown to the outside world. The inhabitants of *Tourmaline* are described

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<sup>2</sup>T.S. Eliot, *Four Quartets*, p.11.

as "tenants of shanties rented from the wind, tenants of the sunstruck miles" (p. 7). Even the narrator who calls himself "the Law of Tourmaline" doubts his own reality and wonders "Who gave me this name? And beside the name, what is there?" (p. 10). He is alone in the middle of nowhere, and can only "sense an audience", since here "there is no speech that is not a soliloquy" (p. 10). He writes the testament for himself to read, for Tourmaline will not believe him. And to begin, he "must imagine and invent" (p. 13). Accordingly, all the characters are introduced with an emphasis upon the appeal to the imagination, as he adds "Imagine him/her there" after his description of each character.

Among them, the character of the diviner is intended to be the most ambiguous; his appearance is as mysterious as his disappearance. The ambiguity attached to the reality of this character is devised on the one hand to reflect the dubiousness and underlying fraudulence of the diviner, and to indicate the elusive nature of the destructive force inherent in mankind on the other. For the diviner is portrayed more as an imagined representative of that force than as a particular individual in real life. Half way through the story, the narrator still struggles with his inability to imaginatively grasp the diviner. He can only imagine the diviner there striving to find his own way, but finds it impossible to "pin him down". For him, the diviner "remains obscure, confusing" (p. 94). However, it is more important to notice the underlying intention of the word that the narrator carefully employs in conveying his frustration concerning the diviner. He exclaims "how difficult it is to re-create this young man" (p. 94). Here he uses the word "re-create" rather than say "envisage", which implicitly and necessarily relates the story of imagination and invention to what is assumed to have taken place in the past, as the story is told as the Law's recall of his memory.

In fact, that the story of imagination and invention is related to the past is established at the beginning. In the first paragraph of the novel, the people of Tourmaline are designated as tenants of "a bitter heritage" from which they are unable to free themselves. Their behaviour in the present and future is seen to be consequent upon their inheritance of the past. That Tourmaline has a long history paralleling the history of civilization is indicated in the description of the land in which Tourmaline is situated. The land is claimed to be more ancient than any other stretch of land on earth (p. 7). The point is further backed up by the stress upon the age of the Law, which is said to be "incalculable" and can only be measured in terms of "aeons". Just as the Law is no longer young, so the flourishing days of Tourmaline have become a matter of "many years ago", and exist only in the memory of the Law. Presumably it has been a long time since Tourmaline has been cut off from the outside world, lying in an endless

suspension. For the truck driver, the only link of Tourmaline with the world beyond, "had been coming" once a month for years (p. 16).

Here the memory of the Law is a crucial factor in relating the story to the past. It is through his memory that the story of imagination is transmitted into the scene of the past and becomes the Law's recollection of the event which is supposed to have happened before he starts the story. As the Law is both an active participant in the event and the narrator of it, he is able to move back and forth between past and present. Indeed, with the simultaneous performance of his two roles, he constantly blurs the distinction of the past and the present. During his narration of the past event, he is often seen shifting back to the present to account for the situation in which he was involved as a participant.

In Chapter Two, when the badly wounded diviner is dropped by the truck driver to Tourmaline, its people are anxious to save his life, being convinced that he would in turn save Tourmaline from dying. Eager to make her contribution to the care of their common property, Deborah insists on looking after the diviner through the night. The narrator remarks: "I can see her standing there, tall and slender in her blue dress, and glimmering a little, golden, in the lamplight" (p. 27). The remark is not intended as a statement of fact, for he did not actually see her, but just imagines her standing there glimmering with the hope for a new life, and she takes on an emblematic aspect of the account. As has been observed in the preceding chapter, the Law is by no means an objective narrator. He is as much self-deceived as most of the other characters in the story. Being highly elated himself by the new hope believed to be brought by the diviner, the narrator obviously puts his own feeling of the time into his subsequent description of Deborah's ecstatic state of mind. In another place, when the Law tried to impress the diviner with the glorious history of Tourmaline, the diviner "burst out into a bubbling laugh". The Law was "bitterly disappointed", explaining that "I am not humourless, I hope, but the splendour of Tourmaline is not a laughing matter" (p. 42). His remark is made not only as a statement of fact which justifies the expression in the present tense, but also as a direct response to the diviner's defiant attitude confined to that particular situation during the happening of the event. In making this remark, the Law acts at once as an involved character and as the narrator. And when he steps in and takes part in the progress of the event, while maintaining his role of the narrator, he brings about a simultaneous existence of the past and the present.

A good example of the narrator's intentional insertion of the sense of presentness into his account of the past is found in Chapter Four. As the Law continues his introduction

to the diviner of the prosperous days of Tourmaline, the diviner simply replies, "A funny place, all right". The Law

could not tell from his tone whether he was impressed or covertly amused. But he must have known, behind those blue hills, terrible things. He must have been acquainted, as we are not, with the danger - the terrible danger - that danger of which I know nothing, but which drives me night and morning to prayer, and fills my sleep with images of wind and annihilation (p. 44).

In this passage, the sudden change of tense is rather noticeable. But as the tense is abruptly changed from the past one into the present one, the perspective shown in the statement, instead of leaping from one stage to another, is marked by its continuity. The Law who was engaged in wondering what was on the diviner's mind continues his thinking about the terrible danger that might lurk behind the diviner when he gives his account of the event. Significantly, the thought of danger which is supposed to occur to the Law during the time when the event was taking place is expressed in the present tense. The shift of tense, on the one hand, is made to imply that such a kind of danger - the danger of human destruction - always exists and the fear of it persists over time. On the other hand, the change into the present tense blurs the division between the time when the story happens and the time when it is narrated, thus enhancing the consciousness of the present in the story presumably based on a past event.

It is a consistent feature of the novel to diminish the chronological distance between the event of the past and the Law's narration of it, so that the sequential order of the two is paralleled by a simultaneous existence. In Chapter Four the Law is seen going to his gaol:

In the morning, feeling aimless, I came out of my back door and wandered across a stretch of bare red earth to the gaol; my gaol, to which I am constantly returning, the shrine and the museum of law in Tourmaline. Against the intense blue of the Tourmaline sky, the walls of the exercise yard, like a low square tower, glimmered with all the light and purity the sun could discover in their pale stonework; and I noticed again, with pride, the rough beauty of the round window set high in the front wall, the handsome curve of masonry above the gate. The wooden door that used to cover that gate has fallen from its hinges and lies, cracked and blistered, in the open sun. The gate, lightly filmed with rust, cried out as I put my shoulder to its resistance (p. 50).

Clearly, the Law crossing to his gaol on that morning is an act confined to a particular historical moment, but the following emphasis that he is constantly returning to the gaol relates that particular action of the past to the routine which the Law conducts regularly. The Law's visit to the gaol on that morning is thus integrated into his recurrent

activities. Furthermore, while the Law was indulging himself in the rough beauty of the deserted place, the narrator gives a saddening description of the decayed "shrine and the museum of law in Tourmaline". The two pictures both contrast with and complement each other. The contrast indicates a subtle change of attitude that the Law has gone through. As one of the characters in the story, the Law, obsessed with his reminiscent feeling of the heyday of Tourmaline, was desperate to read any sign of hope into the landscape of ruin. When he narrates the story, he focuses on the sense of futility that the deserted gaol evokes in him. But in spite of different perspectives, the scene that faces the Law in the past and in the present remains the same, as he comments that "The yard has not changed for many years" (p. 50). The continuity of time is contained in the immobility of the scene.

At the end of Chapter Ten, the time scheme established in the earlier parts of the novel is suddenly disrupted when the narrator states that "On that night (when Kestrel left the town) I began to write my testament" (p. 147). In Chapter Twelve, the narrator again says, "In the morning I was sitting in my office, writing my testament that you now read" (p. 163). Beneath these seemingly casual statements, the treatment of time undergoes a fundamental transformation which marks a crucial step towards the composition of timelessness featuring this novel. It is important to note that in making these remarks, the narrator focuses the time on a particular moment during the progress of the event, while the statements are actually concerned with re-organizing the whole time scheme of the novel.

First, there is a vital change concerning the time when the testament is written. At the beginning of the novel, the narrator, standing alone in the middle of an immaterial location, claims that he writes his testament for himself to read, and to begin, he must imagine and invent. Now having proceeded half way through the story, he re-locates the time of his writing the testament by stretching it from the present back to "that night" when the event was taking place. The narrator purposely detaches his writing the testament from his narrating the story, so that he is able to maintain the perspective of his narration, while inserting the writing of the testament into the progress of the story. In doing so, he actually overlaps "writing my testament" upon the creation of the story, as the story is presented as the Law's testament of Tourmaline, and the two are identified with each other throughout the novel. As a result, the process of writing the story and the progress of the story itself are merged; the chronological distance between the story which is told as a recollection of the past event and the creation of it from the present perspective is dismantled and replaced with a simultaneous relationship.

Secondly, by addressing the reader directly and involving him in the process of the writing, the narrator not only relates the reader to the story, but also juxtaposes the reading of the story with the writing of it. Then in Chapter Fourteen, the narrator in his account of the fanatic ritual centred upon the diviner once again says to the reader that

I write this, now, as coldly as I can. But you too will remember those nights of singing, the red fire on the hill, the white fires through the damaged roof, the clang of the bell. And the golden aureole, before the altar, of our delegate, our son, on whom we had settled everything (p. 196).

Through the connection of the reader, the story of the past event is channelled to the time of the future.

The whole story is based on a proposition of a vicious circle, in which

the love of ruin is insidious. In the middle of regret, in the middle of complaint, it is growing on one. There is ease in dereliction. Action becomes irrelevant; there is no further fall. Or if, by any chance, falling is possible, then only action can make it so; and action is therefore suspect, even frightening (p. 204).

In echoing and reinforcing the closed circle in which the people of Tourmaline are caught, the structure of the novel fulfils a cyclical movement. The story imagined as taking place in the future at the end comes back to the point where it starts. It ends with the Law's emphatic words "Beware of my testament!" (p. 221) which serves both as a warning and as a prophecy. The story on the one hand moves in a cycle; on the other hand, its continuity is embedded in a simultaneity of past and present. The cyclical movement of the story creates an open ending. An ending is a beginning; the destructive event presented in the story simply repeats itself again and again. Or the situation can also be viewed as an eternal and inescapable closure which emphasizes the theme of futility. Meanwhile the synchronism of time achieved in the presentation of the story effectively strengthens the idea that this story expands beyond any particular period.

## 2. The Achievement of Eternity

What we call the beginning is often the end  
And to make an end is to make a beginning.  
The end is where we start from.<sup>3</sup>

Just as the cyclical motion in Tourmaline is essential in explicating the central idea of the story, so the framework of The Tree of Man is constructed upon the concept of cycles. But not only is the intention in endorsing the cyclical movement different in each novel, the way in which each author deals with such an endorsement is also marked by large differences.

First of all, the cyclical movement in Tourmaline is devised to reinforce the sense of futility that dominates the life of Tourmaline people, while in The Tree of Man the story which intersects the cycle of human life with the cycle of the natural world is intended to explore the continuity and persistence of life of mankind in relation to nature. Secondly, the theme of futility in Tourmaline determines that the closed circle into which the people of Tourmaline are caught leads them to no progress but further destruction. The story in this sense does not develop in terms of time; it is predestined to return to its starting point. In The Tree of Man the examination of eternity lies exactly in the exploitation of the continuous progress in time viewed through the life of its characters along with the gradual change of their environment. Thirdly, different from the story of Tourmaline which is set in an indeterminate time so as to impose the perception of timelessness upon the application of the story, The Tree of Man clearly identifies its period of occurrence as the late nineteenth century, then the story moves on into the twentieth century, the author makes every attempt to be precise about the progress of time. Finally, if Tourmaline achieves its sense of timelessness through the ambiguous designation of time in which the story takes place and the conjunction of the past with the present into a simultaneous existence, then the vision of eternity attempted in The Tree of Man is to be observed in its highly rigorous formal structure constructed to express the interlocking relationship between the life of man and his natural environment. In other words, Randolph Stow conducts the treatment of time in his novel in a spatial way in the sense that he contains the movement of continuity within the network of different perspectives of time; whereas the author of The Tree of Man

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<sup>3</sup>T.S. Eliot, Four Quartets, p.54.

deals with time in a progressive fashion, and makes a great effort to formalize the progress of time into the structure of the novel.

The framework of the novel, as has been mentioned, rests upon the sequence of the natural seasons, which are arranged to correspond to the four major stages of human life. The process of the natural world is not only indicated in the change of seasons, but also entwined in the progress of human life. Meanwhile, each stage in the life of the protagonist, Stan Parker, is related to and represented by a particular season. The four parts of the novel are carefully designed so as to correlate these two streams of process. Each part is related to a certain season, which is then given a specific meaning by being endowed with a particular reference to the stage that Stan enters in his life. For example, Part I is engaged with the season of spring, in which Stan as a young man starts his pioneering days. Summer arrives with the maturity of Stan; he has made great progress in establishing himself in that harsh environment and has become the father of two children. By the time the novel moves into autumn in Part III, Stan has set his roots deep down into the land and stepped towards his prime. In those cold winter days Stan confronts the prospect of death. Stan comes to the end of his life with peace of mind in his "boundless garden" of nature.

It is important to note that although the four parts are arranged in the sequence of the four seasons, time here progresses in large movements in terms of years rather than moves day by day. For not only is one season followed by the next with an interval of many years between them, but also the season featuring in each part of the novel passes over several years. The overall pattern is continuous, while in each particular part the continuity is intersected with an overlay of the same season. The sequence of natural seasons is thus re-structured with a focus on reflecting the major stages in Stan's development. In this sense, the relevance of the four seasons to the manifestation of Stan's life is symbolic as well as realistic. The establishment of such a relevance is both effective in displaying an interrelation between the life of Stan and the natural environment, and significant in organizing the story along the progressive movement.

It needs to be pointed out that the treatment of time in The Tree of Man is not so distinguished by an experimental tendency as it is in Tourmaline. White makes no attempt to disrupt the traditional perception of time of sequence. The plotline of the story mainly follows the convention of chronological order, which suits the grand pastoral theme of the novel. However, by effectively correlating the cycle of human

life with the cycle of the natural world in virtue of both the theme and the structure, the author succeeds in expanding the narrative of time to timelessness. The story concerning the life of an ordinary man is transformed into an extraordinary story of mankind deeply rooted in his natural environment. Just as the last season ends with the beginning of spring, so when Stan Parker comes to the end of his life, his grandchild is introduced as a prophetic figure into the scene. He will start where Stan ends and live to fulfil the dream which is the extension of Stan's dream. The story ends with a new beginning: "So that, in the end, there was no end" (p. 480).

In spite of the fact that Patrick White in his treatment of time makes no radical departure here from the traditional view of the relationship between the past and the present, he nevertheless comes to the same point which T.S. Eliot made in his contention of the paradoxical relation of an end and a beginning, but with an essential difference. Eliot's identification of the end with the beginning is grounded in the constant fusion between the past and the present, while White demonstrates a continuous process in a linear sequence and emphasizes the continuity of the past into the present. Accordingly, Eliot achieves the convergence of the beginning and the end through the exposition of a simultaneous existence of the past and the present; and White establishes the sense of timelessness in The Tree of Man through setting up a cyclical movement which combines the progress of human life into the cyclical order of the natural world. By encompassing the life of an individual pioneer against the large background of nature, White transforms a pioneering chronicle into an epic.

### 3. The Presentness of the Past

... the difference between the present and the past is that the conscious present is an awareness of the past in a way and to an extent which the past's awareness of itself cannot show.<sup>4</sup>

As Thomas Keneally insists in his note to Bring Larks and Heroes, the novel "is set in a penal colony in the South Pacific. The time is the late eighteenth century". But the story simply starts with the opening sentence: "At the world's worse end, it is Sunday afternoon in February" (p. 7), without exactly notifying in which period the story is

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<sup>4</sup>T.S. Eliot, "Tradition and the Individual Talent", p.17.

taking place. In fact, in the first few paragraphs, the author consistently uses the present tense to create an impression that the story is taking place here and now. The reference to the time of historical occurrence can only be vaguely traced in the description of the setting and the protagonist. Then the tense is changed into the past one to recall a recent event. Presumably what is happening to Corporal Halloran this Sunday afternoon is related to what happened some time previously. Halloran is seen coming to Mr Commissary Blythe's place today "as the result of a summons from Mrs Blythe six weeks ago" (pp. 7-8). The chronological distance between the happening of the story and the narration of it is dramatically shortened by this seemingly casual connection of "six weeks ago". Not until Chapter 2 does the author provide a further explanation regarding the time of occurrence in his description of Halloran's activity:

His elation on what, for the sake of starting the story, we have called *today* and *this afternoon* is buried now beneath a cairn of years. So his *today* is not ours, his *today* is *that day* to us, and we are, after all, the people for whom the story is being told. Keeping sight of him, let us nevertheless say that *that day*, he arrived elated amongst the blighted turnips at the backdoor (p. 17).

Even though the statement is made to re-define *today* as *that day*, the underlying emphasis is placed upon "Keeping sight of him" rather than upon the mere clarification of the period in which the story takes place. To keep Halloran and the story of a long time ago in sight proves to be a fundamental endeavour in the construction of the novel; and Keneally succeeds in doing so by transforming the story of the late eighteenth century into a melodrama endowed with a strong relevance to modern sensibility. Just as the long span of some two hundred years is simply toned down as "a cairn of years", so the presentation of the story concentrates on its impact explicated through the consciousness of the present. The other purpose of the novel, though, is to set up a memorial, a kind of tombstone, to the colonial past.

The story is based on an historical event in the past, but the perception of the present reshapes the story and sheds new light upon the implication of this historical event. The characterization of Phelim Halloran and the rest of the figures in the novel is, on the one hand, conditioned by the circumstances of time; it is on the other hand imbued with the reflection of modern consciousness. Each of these characters struggles hard for his survival in the harsh reality of a penal colony. It is due to the perception imposed by the author that their hard struggle appears ludicrous and absurd, which is explored against the background concerning the contingency of human existence. The essence of the melodramatic and farcical element featured in this novel lies exactly in the characters' unawareness of the sense of absurdity underlying their struggle for survival.

In creating the story, Keneally makes no attempt to conceal the narrator's authority over the progress of the story. As a matter of fact, the narrator's control contributes in a crucial way to establishing the keynote of the story. His function in the novel proves to be much more than just narrating the story. He not only provides important clues to the understanding of the story through description, explanation and commentary, but also intrudes from time to time to monitor the perspective from which the story should be perceived. In giving his account of what had happened, he stands both inside and outside the story. But it is his observation from the perspective of the present that renders the story of the past as a melodrama full of the modern sense of tragic absurdities. Also, the self-consciousness of its own narrative strategies is one of the distinguishing features in Modernist narration.

In the opening paragraph, he informs the reader of Halloran's illusory self-confidence by remarking that "Let us say, without conceit, that if any of his ideas on this subject were *not* illusion, there would be no story" (p. 7). This piece of information obviously points to the central issue of the story, and sets up the basic principle for the way in which the development of the story is to be anticipated. For Halloran is eventually led to a most disgraceful yet gratuitous death by his self-delusion. Here the narrator makes it clear that Halloran is not only unaware of how treacherous the harsh reality could be for him to cope with, but he is also inclined to deceive himself by his own illusions. These two factors inherent in his character predetermine that Halloran heads for a disaster without knowing it, which makes his eventual doom ludicrous as well as deplorable. The sense of absurdity runs deep in the reality facing Halloran in which there is simply no meaningful destiny.

Then in the case involving the hanging of Ewers for the crime which he is by no means able to commit, the narrator again intrudes as an outside observer to pin down the dilemma that such a situation inflicts upon Halloran's conscience, and reveals the hidden absurdity in it with an ironic overtone. He makes the remark that

Whether Ewers would survive handling by Allen was another question. But a corporal is able to move only through given channels; through given straits they were, rather than channels. Conscience can make outright demands on a man. But human affairs were not carried on in an outright manner (p. 84).

First of all, Halloran is the only person who was told the truth about Ewers's innocence. The imbalance between his strictly limited capacity as a corporal and the compulsion

from his honest nature to give his help to save Ewers from hanging for an implausible crime puts him into a corner. The intricacy of the matter is not that the possibility of his help is actually nil, but that he is brutally yet also inevitably caught in that dead corner because of his honesty and vulnerability. The sense of absurdity is most effectively enforced by the narrator's astute exposition of this contradictory reality. Secondly, in the last sentence of his remark, the narrator deliberately parallels conscience and human affairs, and at the same time sets the two against each other. The exhibition of the preposterous incongruity between the two supposedly interrelated things deepens the issue of absurdity which trivializes human tragedy.

In Chapter 10, the narrator gives an account of the impossible situation into which Halloran and his secret bride Ann were caught. Halloran was baffled, since there was no way that they could marry without damning themselves either before God or before the colony. Then the narrator steps outside the story and makes the statement which relates the observation of their personal dilemma to the larger context of the social system:

Every society, however rotten, has members whom it considers the arbiters, the standard-makers of its morality. Halloran and his secret bride were unlucky enough to be the moral paragons of their community. If they fell, they became stumbling-blocks, even to the most errant feet, even to such feet as Byrne's (p. 88).

In this statement, the narrator applies the general principle of a society to the specific case concerning Halloran and his secret bride. By doing so, he not only achieves a contrast between the intention of the principle and the effect of reality, but also pinpoints the farcical implication underlying such a contrast. As the narrator claims, even a rotten society needs to have its arbiters of morality. But in this rotten penal colony, only those who are viewed as "unlucky enough" are assigned these roles. Halloran and Ann have no control over their own lives, yet they are held responsible for the failure of reaching the expectation to which they have been denied the basic right. The contradiction is obviously absurd. On the other hand, the conscience-bound Halloran is also seen as an inevitable victim who naively subjects himself to the fetters of a moral arbiter without knowing that he has been deprived of any means to fulfil the impossible mission. Moreover, when he fails his task, imposed both by his environment and by himself, and he is bound to fail, even Terry Byrne, the one who lacks any sense of morality, could tramp him triumphantly under his "most errant feet". The tone that the narrator uses in describing the foreseeable failure of Halloran is apparently provocative of comic effect. It is carefully intended to reinforce the absurdity of Halloran's senseless death. For in the end Halloran and his Ann are

hanged, while Byrne who betrayed them for the meanest reason walks free of a disgraceful hanging.

As has been remarked, the narrator's perspective is essential in endowing the story of the penal colony with the sense of absurdity which at once is attributed and contributes to the modern consciousness focusing on the contingency of the world and human existence. The transformation of a colonial story into a modern melodrama is most sufficiently demonstrated in the court scene in Chapter 26. Significantly when the narrator gives an account of the court scene, he shifts back to the present tense to evoke the impression that the event is taking place here and now. The account starts with "In court it is sentencing time" (p. 198). If the odd-looking Byrne becomes an evident target to create a roar of laughter and apparently undermines the supposed solemnity of the court concerning the life or death of men by turning it into a low comedy, the undercurrent of the comic scene lies in the cruel absurdity involving Halloran and Ann; and it is revealed in the carefully structured statements of the narrator. The decision of the court is presented thus: "The court declares Halloran and Ann dead twice over, the other three dead once only, although Miles is declared more gravely dead than McHugh and Barrett" (p. 199). The intended comic effect of the narrator's tone on the one hand deliberately reduces the gravity of the loss of human life, as if their loss of life were a mindless and an unimportant thing; on the other hand it enhances the farcical element in the sentencing of their death. Referring to the decision of the court, the narrator again remarks: "Marines have rights of appeal, but Halloran and the others are no longer Marines" (p. 199). On the surface, the sentence is marked by its logical eloquence; but at a deeper level, it is an argument based on an absurd assumption. It is this kind of logically stated fallacy that promotes the sense of absurdity dominating the whole story.

That the movement of the narration is conducted in a dual way is a recurrent feature of the novel. The actual occurrence of the court scene reflects and is reflected by the one happening in Halloran's dream in the previous chapter. In his dream, Halloran attends the court not as the prosecuted but "as a privilege and had liberty to move about the open part of the court and comment on anything Allen [the prosecutor] might say" (p. 182). In the actual scene, Halloran "was chained to a rail on the left on the bench", and could "cut his thumbs off if he pulls harder" (p. 199). But curiously in the dream, not only is he unable to feel happy in the low-pressed and death-smelling courtroom, he is also the one who is most afraid of all and tries to win the defendant's favour. Then suddenly the court is turned into "a court of conscience" and Halloran becomes the defendant. An explanation about the changed situation is made by Allen who gives a seemingly logical but actually preposterous statement on hanging:

It is a ceremony which begins in the cradle and grows from the cradle. Its ministers are the mother and the petting father, the priest, the boys a boy fights, the girls he desires. Cooks advance the ceremony by cooking his meat, tap-boys by pouring his ale. Horses advance it by flying him over stiles, ships by buoying him across the seas. Must you be so cruel to us only because we are its last ministers? (p. 183)

Immediately after Allen's words, Ewers emerges from his death and claims that he is the last minister of Halloran. He gives Halloran a bean-shaped thing which he cracks out of a tiny egg into Halloran's palm. He tells Halloran: "This ... is the seed of your gibbet-tree. As Christ planted his, I planted mine. Now it is your planting time". He then adds that "No one can do worse for it than you can" (p. 184). Before his seed dies, Halloran plants it "in the heart of a conical black pit" just "in time". That Halloran plants the seed of his own gibbet-tree is an obvious reflection of his eventual destiny; and the narrator's emphasis upon "in time" is at once highly ironic and melodramatically farcical. Being single-minded about the fate of the delicate seed in his palm and greatly worried that he might be caught up by time before he completes the assigned task, Halloran is having a race with time, without knowing that he is in a great hurry in burying his own life, and that his winning over time is embedded in his loss of life.

The dreamed court scene is surreal as much as the actual one is farcical. The two reinforce each other in intensifying the sense of absurdity in the story. The combined court scene is not accidentally reminiscent of the atmosphere of Kafka's novel, The Trial, a Modernist classic; and interestingly the theme of the story set in a penal colony of the late eighteenth century is also closely related to the views explored by the Theatre of the Absurd in the mid-twentieth century.

In Kafka's The Trial, the protagonist, the Chief Clerk K., like Halloran, has no control over his life, and in some way is not aware of it. Both of them are forced to engage themselves in a continuous vain striving to discover the meaning of his existence, which is denied by the circumstance that each is set in. One morning K. is summoned to a mysterious Court and charged without being told the nature of the charge. The Court has its offices in the attics of a slum tenement-house, and its officers are venal and corrupt. The atmosphere of the Court is as surreal as the whole event is absurd. Just as Halloran attempts to shun the harsh reality and seclude himself in his imaginative and volatile world of poetry, so K. lives in a shell-like world of his own before he is taken to the Court. But each of them is somehow dragged into the entanglements that accompany human existence. At the end, no verdict whatsoever is pronounced, K. is taken away and executed by two extraordinarily strong men in a most indifferent and

emotionless fashion. If Halloran at the last moment of his life still tries to find a meaning for his hanging by relating his death to the crucifixion of Christ, K. shows no resistance, letting the knife plunged into his heart numbly. But in neither case does death represent the occasion for a meaningful revelation, nor does it identify any definable punishment for K.'s execution, or a substantial crime to justify Halloran's hanging. Death becomes the expression of the nullity and meaninglessness of life itself.<sup>5</sup> However, underlying the different reaction to death in each case, there exists a vital difference in characterization. If K. comes to realize the absurdity of human existence, and accepts his death without resistance, Halloran is distinguished by his unawareness of it throughout the story, which not only explains his last attempt to justify his death, but also illuminates the sense of pathos beneath the absurd melodrama he is involved in.

Set in a late eighteenth-century Australian penal colony in which human life is distorted as much by the social system as by the antipodean world with inverted seasons, Bring Larks and Heroes adds a new dimension to the exploration of absurdity in its relation to the contingency of human existence. Meanwhile by reviewing the historical past from a modern perspective, Thomas Keneally reveals the past in a way that the past's awareness itself cannot show, and thus brings together the past and the present on the basis of a new relationship between the two.

#### 4. The Making of the Legend

The historical sense ... is a sense of the timeless as well as of the temporal and of the timeless and of the temporal together.<sup>6</sup>

As has been observed, Voss is distinguished by its remarkable transformation of the historical expedition across the continent in 1845 into a metaphysical journey of the human soul through the country of the mind. Underlying such a transformation is the achievement of transcendence from the confinement of the historical situation. The

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<sup>5</sup>cf. Herbert Tauber, Franz Kafka: An Interpretation of His Works (London, 1948), pp.77-130. Angel Flores and Homer Swander (eds.), Franz Kafka Today (Madison, 1958), pp.145-160.

<sup>6</sup>T.S. Eliot, "Tradition and the Individual Talent", p.14.

expedition led by Voss is seen to be controversial even in its own time, with regard to the way in which the expedition and its leader should be accepted. The general public are eager to cast Voss into a bronze statue so that at last they need no longer deal with the challenge that he inflicts on their sense of complacency. Laura along with the Aboriginals maintains the belief that Voss never dies, his spirit is forever there in the country. Colonel Hedben insists that he cannot accept such a belief unless he finds the final truth, not to mention difficult views of what a final truth might be. The effort to present and explore different attitudes towards the event of the time demonstrates the way in which the author encompasses the temporal together with the timeless.

At the beginning of the novel, Voss is seen strongly attracted to the mysteriousness of this foreign country. He is convinced that to get to the unexplored and fearful interior is the only alternative to conquering human limitation and reaching the infinite. His obsession and ambition not only strike up a suspicion among the general public but also challenge the foundation of their existence. They fear that Voss's defiant attitude towards their materialism and his daemon-driven determination to enter the unknown of the interior threatens and will eventually destroy their complacent value-system. Even before the expedition sets out, they would "prefer to cast him in bronze than to investigate his soul" (p. 109). Twenty years after the expedition, a memorial to its leader was set up in the Domain:

Johann Ulrich Voss was by now quite safe, it appeared. He was hung with garlands of rarest newspaper prose. They would write about him in the history books. The wrinkles of his solid, bronze trousers could afford to ignore the passage of time. Even Miss Trevelyan confessed : it is agreeable to be safely dead. (p. 440)

The emphatic point of the statement is that Voss, and the idea of Voss, by being cast into a bronze figure, are now safe. But Voss's being safe means different things to the general public and to Laura Trevelyan, and their respective acceptance of the event is marked by essential differences. To the public, Voss, being immobilized into a statue now, no longer stands as a threat to their mediocrity. By laying Voss to rest, it is these people who feel safe, with each of them seen regaining "solid ground". Now they can deal with the subject of the expedition and its leader comfortably by writing about it "in the history books". Yet no one knows the whole truth about the ending of the expedition, as Colonel Hedben concedes: "history is not acceptable until it is sifted for the truth". But he also admits that "Sometimes this can never be reached" (p. 413). He himself certainly fails to reach the truth.

When Voss and his team are believed lost, another expedition led by the Colonel sets out into the bush to search for the lost explorer. The Colonel describes himself as "a tentative explorer", and reveals that his motivation in leading the search party is "not so much to find him [Voss] alive at the end, as to satisfy curiosity" (p. 407). Although like Voss, he is also obsessed with the mysteriousness of the country and driven by "the insatiable desire for perpetual motion through the unpleasant portions of Australia" (p. 416), the significant difference between the two is his lack of Voss's vision and will. Though among all the people concerned he is the most persistent searcher for the truth about Voss, his shortage of aspiring ambitions predetermines his failure in his attempt to find it. At the beginning of his second search, the Colonel is confident and determined enough "to anticipate success". But "as the weeks were consumed and the distance covered, with the usual privation and disheartening natural resistance to all progress, ... the explorer's ugly face grew glummer" (p. 421). He begins longing to be with his wife and children, in contrast to Voss who is resolute to break away from any human entanglements. Soon afterwards, the Colonel decides to admit the defeat and abandon his mission. The team turns back without finding any clues to the lost expedition, though ironically the bodies of Angus and Turner are "lying within a good stone's throw of the beaten Colonel" (p. 422).

Except for some pieces of information and guesses, the truth about the ending of Voss remains unknown. Jackie, the only one who knows the truth, keeps the secret to himself. To those who have seen him after the presumed death of Voss, Jackie is believed to "be in a state of perpetual mental distress, even unhinged" (p. 413) and unable to reveal what he knows. Before Colonel Hebden is able to "apprehend" him, Jackie is drowned in a swamp during a thunderstorm with no attempt to resist. According to Boyle, after the disappearance of the expedition, a tribe of aborigines held a corroboree at Jildra, in which they "enacted a massacre of horses" (p. 414). But the unreliable Boyle is incapable of providing "satisfying details".

At the unveiling of a memorial to Voss, Laura Trevelyan remarks to Colonel Hebden: "Let none of us pass final judgment". The Colonel responds with "Unless the fellow who has returned from the grave is qualified to judge" (p. 440). Yet Judd, though he makes a narrow escape from death through his physical strength and practical resourcefulness, is apparently perplexed. He has no doubt that "Voss left his mark on the country" (p. 443), but he confuses the actual facts with what he believes. He believes that it is he who witnessed the spearing of Voss and "closed his eyes" after his death. Even Judd, the only survivor of the team, proves to be unable to supply the truth, hence is not "qualified" to pass the final judgment as the Colonel expects.

Different from the public whose acceptance of the significant event is both superficial and narrow-minded, Laura Trevelyan, who "has experienced the inferno of love" (p. 440) and has spiritually together with Voss gone through the desert of the mind, is convinced that Voss fulfils his dream by dying in the country which he can assuredly claim to be his with his vision and tenacity. Laura's attitude is also different from that of Colonel Hedben. The latter persists in finding the truth about Voss, even though he proves to be unable to satisfy his curiosity, while Laura repeatedly says that she is content with what she knows about the whole event through her vision, and she accepts the expedition and Voss as "the myth" which needs no final factual details to substantiate its existence.

Laura is characterized by her extraordinary imaginative and sympathetic vision. She perceives the mind of Voss as clearly as Voss knows it himself. Although she is well acquainted with "some very undesirable, even horrible qualities" in Voss (p. 412), her perception of Voss is far deeper than the public opinion concerning the character of Voss. She is presented as the spiritual companion of Voss throughout the journey. When Voss finally comes to meet his death, Laura is suffering from a severe fever. The last moment of Voss's life is echoed in her crying: "It is over. It is over" (p. 395). The coincidence is arranged to emphasize the spiritual communion between the two characters. It is such a communion with Voss that convinces Laura of his eternal mark in the history of the country. To Laura, history is more concerned with spiritual import than with mere factual particulars, since "All truths are particoloured" (p. 444). When Colonel Hedben insists on her seeing Judd to get the final truth, she firmly refuses it. For she feels no need for factual detail to sustain her belief. Yet on the other hand, neither is Judd's conviction that Voss "is there in the country, and always will be" (p. 443) based on fact, as he is no longer able to recall clearly what had actually happened. In this sense, Judd and Laura arrive at the same conclusion through different but also mutually complementary ways. Judd has undergone the toughest physical hardships, while Laura has experienced the spiritual journey of the mind with Voss. It is necessary to note that in answering Mr Ludlow's inquiry about Voss, she quotes Judd's words by saying:

Voss did not die, ... He is there still, it is said, in the country, and always will be. His legend will be written down, eventually, by those who have been troubled by it. (p. 447)

Unsatisfied with the statement, Mr Ludlow persists, "If we are not certain of the facts, how is it possible to give the answers?", to which Miss Trevelyan simply replies that "The air will tell us" (p. 447).

The air that Laura refers to on the one hand can be viewed as a metaphor, while on the other hand it is the defining feature of the legend centred upon Voss. First of all, it is the long-cherished ambition of Voss to be absorbed into the mysterious country with which he is obsessed. When his last moment of life comes, he shows no sign of panic. Instead, he is calm and feels humble for the first time in his life, as if dying in this way were what he has suffered for and what he has always been progressing towards. Along with his last breath, his "dreams fled into the air, his blood ran out upon the dry earth, which drank it up immediately" (p. 304). With his dreams in the air and his blood in the earth, Voss is forever left there in the country.

Secondly, Voss not only regards Aboriginal people as spiritual beings of the country, who hold the ultimate access to its heart, but also makes every attempt to establish an intimate relationship with them. He is convinced that to get the spirit of the country he must get to know and have himself accepted by these native people. When he finally falls into the hands of a tribe of Aboriginals, he neither can nor does he want to resist. What is more important is that these people connect the appearance of Voss with the sudden appearance of the comet. They invest their supernatural supposition into Voss, transforming him into a symbol. When Voss as a person is killed, just as the comet disappears after a brief time, Voss as a symbol and an idea is left. The meaning of Voss for them is ceremonially re-affirmed; he has become integrated with them and their custom only after his death. That dying is creation is what Voss himself always believes, as he claims at the beginning of the novel, "To make yourself, it is also necessary to destroy yourself" (p. 34). For him, life is completed in death.

Moreover, the death scene here is not touched by any indication of menace, in contrast to Palfreyman's death, which is dominated by the feeling of anger and hostility on both sides. The whole situation is surrounded with strong ritual atmosphere and immense solemnity created by Aboriginal people, and Voss himself is calm and ready to succumb to humility. It is noted that Voss comes to the end of his life with great confidence in the future. His future finds its way into the lore which the aboriginals carry with them wherever they go; it is integrated into a ritual corroboree which they pass on from generation to generation. These people move like the air all around the country, and the legend of Voss moves in the air with them.

That Voss's death marks the final step of his mingling with the spirit of the country is also demonstrated in the description of the mind and activity of Jackie after he stabs his leader. Jackie appears to be changed completely by the mission that he is forced upon. He becomes so restless that he has to run from one place to another. His physical well-being no longer concerns him; he is possessed by the souls of the dead. It is impossible for him "to communicate lucidly with men after the communion of souls" (p. 420). By translating the wishes of the dead into dialect and recounting "tales of the spirit life", he "became a legend among the tribes" (p. 421). In other words, the moment that he cuts off the head of Voss with the knife given by Voss, he in effect loses his own life as well as innocence, and is seized by the great spirit of the dead. The spirit that possesses him "more often would writhe inside him, like waning life, or gush and throb, like blood" (p. 421). Taking away the life of Voss, Jackie is transformed into a live spirit of his leader. When he is caught in a swamp and faced with death, like Voss, he makes no resistance. He "lay down, and was persuaded to melt at last into the accommodating earth" (p. 427), taking with him the restless spirit of Voss.

In presenting the formation of the legend of Voss, Patrick White contrasts two attitudes towards it, and underlying the difference in attitudes are different notions of time. One is represented by Colonel Hedben who lays an emphasis upon finding the external truth about Voss. At the end of the novel, he remains "still hungry for the truth, and [did] assert: 'I will not rest'" (p. 447). His persistence and inevitable failure in finding the truth suggest that he denies the existence of the legend in both cases. The fact that he is bound to fail is because he grounds his search in the temporal dimension, whereas Voss has escaped into timelessness. His being limited to the temporal dimension prevents him from realizing that the significance of Voss and his expedition is not factual but spiritual, just as Bonner's mediocrity trivializes the idea of "historical". By confronting with his life the challenge of the extreme condition of the desert upon human nature, Voss has become a symbol of inspiration, the representative spirit of the country.

The other attitude is seen in Laura Trevelyan and aboriginals, particularly Jackie. Laura is essentially distinguished from the rest of the characters by her spiritual vision, which secures her an access to the mind of Voss and the nature of his mission. Her vision transcends the confinement of the temporal dimension, just as it transcends the geographical distance to be with Voss throughout his journey into the country of the mind. She is therefore convinced of no necessity to sustain her belief in the spirit manifested by Voss with insignificant factual details. Her belief is supported in an

indirect way by the native people's ritual worship of Voss. Their way of worshipping bears no relevance to words for facts such as the Colonel seeks. They uphold a perennial ritual of performance celebrating the spirit of Voss. Just as they circulate the spirit of Voss by moving around the country, so Jackie further strengthens its permanence by taking it with him into the earth.

Through contrasting the temporal with the timeless, the factual with the spiritual, White challenges the very idea of history. He carefully demarcates the public's understanding of history from Laura's interpretation of it. It is important to note that the words "history" and "historical" are particularly mentioned on two occasions, and both occasions are related to the revelation of the public reaction and attitude towards Voss and his expedition. One is at the beginning of the novel, just before the team is about to set out. Mr Bonner says: "It is a great event, ... and may well prove historical. If they bring back their own bones" (p. 61). First, his reference to "historical" is based on the condition that they would be able to come back alive. In other words, unless they could do so, the expedition would be meaningless and a failure. Being a shallow and superficial person, Mr Bonner is simply unable to know that the expedition for Voss is more spiritual and metaphysical than physical and geographical. Second, the real purpose of his uttering these words is to overpower the arrogance of Voss which he feels threatening to his own complacency and superficiality. For he cannot conceal his satisfaction at attacking Voss "with an almost imperceptible movement of the knife". Except for material benefits, he has no belief at all in the meaning or significance of the expedition. His understanding of "historical" is not only hollow, but also charged with trivial personal vengeance.

The other occasion on which the word "history" is mentioned is at the end of the novel when a crowd attends the ceremony of unveiling the memorial set up for Voss. By casting him as a bronze statue, they no longer feel threatened by his extraordinary aspiration and ambition. They now "would write about him in the history books" safely (p. 440), and do not need to be bothered by him any more. History for them seems to be the safest tool to guard against anyone or anything that threatens their mediocrity, for they interpret history as anything dead and past. Their sense of safety derived from their interpretation of history forms a contrast to Laura's recognition of restlessness brought about by the spirit of Voss to the generation of the present and the future. She claims that Voss's legend "will be written down, eventually, by those who have been troubled by it" (p. 448). The emphasis upon "troubled" illuminates the very essence of the legend. Those who feel safe with Voss cast as a statue not only fail to understand the significance of the expedition, but also miss the true meaning of history. For

history is not concerned with mere particular details, it is characterized by being spiritual and inspiring. Just as "Knowledge was never a matter of geography. Quite the reverse, it overflows all maps that exists" (p. 446), so history should embody an active and imaginative vision which lives beyond the temporal dimension.

Laura's assertion that the legend of Voss will eventually be written down is fulfilled with the paradoxical conclusion that the substantiality of the legend extends beyond the writing of it, as the immortality of the legend is found lying exactly in its elusiveness of tangible facts. By basing the framework of the novel on the historical expedition, and at the same time emphasizing the unresolved ending, White succeeds in working on the story from the perspective of both the temporal and the timeless. Though a bronze figure of Voss was set up twenty years later to commemorate the expedition, and the metallically cast Voss "could afford to ignore the passage of time", it has been made clear that the statue itself is not so much supposed to serve as the concrete evidence of Voss's spiritual permanence as it is taken as an end of the irritation of the obsessed man to the people of mediocrity. In fact, it is suggested in the novel that the detached Colonel Hedben himself "could have been a statue, in stone or metal" (p. 436). Just as the solid statue is not necessarily relevant to the maintenance of the spirit of Voss, so the essence of the legend transcends any attempt to tie it down to factual details. The story in time is thus transmitted from temporal confinement and expanded into the contemplation of timelessness.

## Conclusion

Even though the progress of the modern Australian novel was not directly indebted to the formal experiments of Modernism, this study has shown that there exists an internal relationship between the two, which is particularly to be seen in the common preoccupation with relating the past to the present from a new perspective. Further reflections of Modernist concerns can be viewed in the speculation upon the sterility and futility of modern civilization in the story of Tourmaline, and the ironic presentation of absurdity observed in the life of a penal colony as an illustration of human contingency. The examination of the four modern Australian novels in the light of Modernism has not only set the comprehension of the Australian themes in the context of the universal exploration of human issues, but also illuminated the contribution of these novels to the enrichment of world literature.

In re-interpreting the historical past of Australia, these four novels, especially the two by Patrick White, demonstrate a distinct tendency towards mythologizing. The Tree of Man is constructed both as a story of a pioneer and as a myth of creation. The book represents pioneering life in the late nineteenth-century Australian bushland, and at the same time the representation is endowed with a strong mythical reference. Stan Parker, as an anonymous young man, came to an uninhabited part of the land to start his life as well as his own. His life is distinguished not by any dramatic turning points, but by constant hard struggle with the natural forces and with his own bewilderment at the mystery of life and the natural world. Eventually his tenacity prevails over rocks and dust; and his life ends with a complete absorption into the land. The whole story is marked by its natural flow, which is at once reflected and aggrandized by the formal structure of the novel. The correspondence of the four stages in Stan's life with the four natural seasons on the one hand indicates the communion developed between Stan Parker and the natural environment; it on the other hand underlines the grand scheme in which mankind forms its bond with the nature. The structural organization of the novel is based on the fundamental element of design offered by nature: the cyclic order of seasonal movements is assimilated into the human cycle of life and death and rebirth. It is this mythical structure that imbues the life story of an ordinary man with an extraordinary quality.

In Voss, White challenges the idea of historical truth by transforming the account of the historical event into a spiritual legend which evades pinpointing factual details. He intentionally reveals the impossibility of finding out the final truth concerning Voss and the expedition so as to emphasize the mythical element in the legend of Voss. Those who believe in the spirit of the expedition find it irrelevant to sustain the legend with any factual details. For Voss, the fundamental significance of the expedition does not lie in any material results as Mr Bonner believes, but in the ultimate test for the human will to search for the meaning of life. The obsession of Voss with the mystery of the unexplored interior, and his aspiration to transcend human limitation to the infinite, are reminiscent of the myth of Faust who sells his soul for the acquisition of ultimate knowledge and power. By transforming the physical expedition into a spiritual journey which takes on an allegorical meaning, White produces a story ostensibly based on an historical event as a mythical reshaping of history.

In fact, literature as a whole in the twentieth century is characterized by a comparable tendency toward returning to mythical forms and mythical themes as part of the general trend of repossession of cultural heritage.<sup>1</sup> The mythologizing tendency, as has been remarked in the historical survey of Modernism, is also one of the defining features of Modernism. In its attempt to establish a new link between the past and the present, Modernism related the consciousness and experience of the modern world in terms of mythical references, allusions and associations. It re-constructed the network of myths by connecting them with new contexts and re-arranging them from new perspectives. The wide range of imagery and rich allusion in W. B. Yeats' poetry of symbolism has a strong visionary element and the poet himself possesses a powerful "myth-making imagination".<sup>2</sup> The imagist poet Ezra Pound resorted to archaic form and ideogramic method to attain a high degree of objectivity. James Joyce's parallel use of The Odyssey in his Ulysses shows an obvious employment of mythical form and theme, and many of his works are hallmarked by the technique of epiphany which captures the critical movement of apocalypse or revelation. In the creation of his poetry and verse drama, T. S. Eliot makes an effective use of mythical parallels and allusions to achieve a living pattern encompassing the past and the present.

Reflecting on the tendency of twentieth century literature toward returning to myth, there emerged one of the most distinctive trends in contemporary literary study, known as myth criticism. Just as the great achievements both in modern psychology

<sup>1</sup>Cf. Ellmann & Feidelson (eds), pp.617-620.

<sup>2</sup>Richard Ellmann & Robert O'Clair (eds.), Norton Anthology of Modern Poetry (New York, 1967), p.110.

represented by Sigmund Freud and C. G. Jung and in modern anthropology with James G. Frazer's The Golden Bough as its landmark greatly influenced the development of the mythologizing tendency in Modernism, so these achievements also made a significant contribution to the foundation of myth criticism. What myth criticism attempts to do is to establish a framework of mythical archetypes which possess an explanatory capacity for all literary works. Its general principles are summarized by John B. Vickery in his introduction to Myth and Literature:

First, the creating of myths, the mythopoeic faculty, is inherent in the thinking process and answers a basic human need. Second, myth forms the matrix out of which literature emerges both historically and psychologically. As a result, literary plots, characters, themes, and images are basically complications and displacements of similar elements in myths and folktales. ... Third, not only can myth stimulate the creative artist, but it also provides concepts and patterns which the critic may use to interpret specific works of literature. ... Fourth and last, the ability of literature to move us profoundly is due to its mythic quality, to its possession of *mana*, the *numinous*, or the mystery in the face of which we feel an awed delight or terror at the world of man.<sup>3</sup>

Northrop Frye, one of the leading exponents of myth criticism, made a tremendous effort in formulating a systematic and explanatory theory of literary criticism, based on his investigation of mythical modes and archetypes. His close attention to the study of myth is related both to his critical reflection upon the mythologizing tendency in Modernism and to the influence of anthropology and psychology. He believed that the ultimate explanation for the structural pattern, and hence for the literary phenomenon as a whole, is to be sought in the structural regularities of mythology. In spite of his direct indebtedness to the works of C. G. Jung and James G. Frazer, Frye insisted that literary criticism has its own conceptual basis and consciously dissociates criticism from other disciplines. He approached the study of myth differently either from those who treat myth as primarily a psychological or anthropological document with limited or indirect relevance to literature, or from those who, though focusing on the relation of myth and literature by levying upon myth to illuminate the theory of symbolic formation, carefully distinguish myth from literature.<sup>4</sup> In his view, myth is an essential component of literature, for myth in essence is motivated by man's desire to "make a systematic attempt to see nature in human shape",<sup>5</sup> and "It is the function of art to illuminate the

<sup>3</sup>John B. Vickery (ed.), Myth and Literature - Contemporary Theory and Practice (Lincoln, 1966), p.ix.

<sup>4</sup>Cf. William K. Wimsatt Jr. & Cleanth Brooks, Literary Criticism: A Short History (London, 1957), p.708.

<sup>5</sup>"Myth, Fiction and Displacement", in J. Handy & Max Westbrook (eds.), Twentieth Century Literary Criticism: The Major Statements (New York, 1974), p.164.

human form of nature".<sup>6</sup> In this sense myth is regarded as containing the undisplaced and abstract literary design which is variously adapted by different contexts of plausibility through displacement. Accordingly, the structural pattern of myth is investigated with a view to informing and illuminating the shaping of literary structural principles. Underlying such an investigation is the assumption of a total coherence of literature represented by the archetypal framework. The implication of the assumption is that all literary works, existing or potential, can be explained in terms of a recurrence of archetypal themes, images, and narrative patterns. It needs to be pointed out that Frye's proposition of an archetypal framework is dynamic rather than static. While he claims that "literature is still doing the same job that mythology did earlier, but filling in its huge cloudy shape with sharper lights and deeper shadows",<sup>7</sup> he also emphasizes the creativity of the writer and his ability to relate the past and the present in a dynamic way. He remarks that the primary task of the poet

is not to interpret but to represent; he transfers an ancient tale from the past to the present, from something inherited to something that confronts the reader immediately; from the particular event in the past, the truth of which is believed, to the universal event, the significance of which is comprehended.<sup>8</sup>

For "the real meaning of a myth is revealed, not by its origin, ... but by its later literary career, as it becomes recreated by the poets".<sup>9</sup>

If Northrop Frye has made a great effort in establishing an internal relationship between myth and literature by basing his classification of literary modes and narrative categories on the pregeneric plot-structures of myth, he makes no sufficient attempt to explore the relationship between myth and history, except implicitly opposing the mythical and the historical. It is Hayden White who further develops Frye's archetypal theory by filling the gap left by Frye between history and literature, hence history and myth.

Moving towards postmodernism, White is greatly influenced by the critical theories of Structuralism and Deconstructionism in his explanation of the tendency of returning to myth prominent in Modernism and twentieth century literature in relation to history. He initiates his argument by challenging the long-established distinction between

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<sup>6</sup>Northrop Frye, Fearful Symmetry: A Study of William Blake (New Jersey, 1947, 1969), p.123.

<sup>7</sup>The Educated Imagination (Bloomington, 1964), p.57.

<sup>8</sup>"Literature and Myth", in James Thorpe (ed.), Relations of Literary Study - Essays on Interdisciplinary Contributions (New York, 1967), p.35.

<sup>9</sup>op. cit., p.38.

history and fiction as an opposition of fact to fancy. While granting the difference between historical events which are concerned with specific time-space locations and fictional events which can be both historically observable and imagined, hypothetical, or invented ones, he argues that history and fiction are not antithetic to each other, but interrelated in several essential ways, and mutually complementary in providing an insight into or illumination of the human experience of the world. In White's own words, his exploration is concerned with "the extent to which the discourse of the historian and that of the imaginative writer overlap, resemble, or correspond to each other".<sup>10</sup>

He claims that "the historical discourse shares more than divides with the novelistic discourse".<sup>11</sup> For the formal strategies employed by both the historian and the novelist to represent either historical events or imaginative events are substantially the same. In the writing of history, the very organization of events out of mere chronicles involves a sense-making process, since no given set of casually recorded historical events is intrinsically systematic or comprehensible. To order historical events in a systematic and comprehensible way, the historian needs to configure them according to the shared notions of forms or plot structures which are part of our cultural and literary heritage. White defines this process of configuration as "emplotment". By emplotment he means "the encodation of facts contained in the chronicle as components of specific *kinds* of plot structures, in precisely the way that Frye has suggested is the case with 'fictions' in general".<sup>12</sup> Frye classifies literary narratives into four pregeneric categories derived from archetypal myth-structures: tragedy, comedy, romance and irony. White points out that historical events, viewed as potential elements of a story, are "value-neutral". It is through the historian's decision of choosing a particular plot structure which he considers appropriate for ordering his materials that these events are rendered comprehensible, either as tragic, comic or ironic. This sense-making process through configuration and emplotment is "essentially a literary, that is to say fiction-making, operation".<sup>13</sup> An historical narrative is concerned as much with the description of past events reported in it as with the employment of story types conventionally used to endow these events with culturally sanctioned meanings. To construct a comprehensible story of the past, the historian needs to achieve a coherence over a given series of historical facts; and the coherence can be achieved only by conforming these facts to the requirements of certain story types. These story types serve as an "implicit shaping device" in the same way that mythical archetypes do in a fictional

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<sup>10</sup>Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism (Baltimore, 1978), p. 121.

<sup>11</sup>op. cit., p. 125.

<sup>12</sup>op. cit., p. 83.

<sup>13</sup>op. cit., p. 85.

narrative. History in this sense, he asserts, can be viewed as "merely another, and more extreme form" of the displacement of mythical archetypes that Frye has explored in his Anatomy of Criticism.

With the emphasis upon the implications of "the fictive nature of historical narrative", White proceeds to question the conventional concepts of "objective" and "factual" which were ascribed to "the so-called historical method" so as to be distinguished from the imaginable and hypothetical element of fiction. He points out that the notion that a historical discourse must be characterized by its factually accurate statements about historical happenings is both illusory and misleading. For firstly the historical narrative, determined by its fictive nature, cannot be objective and factual in the same sense that the physical science or a mathematical exercise is. Secondly, in the unprocessed form, historical facts "exist only as a congeries of contiguously related fragments".<sup>14</sup> The historian needs to encode these fragmentary facts in terms of culturally provided forms, that is, pregeneric plot structures, to make sense of them, in the same way that the novelist constructs his verbal image of reality. The aim of history and fiction is to explain and illuminate the human experience, and the manner in which both the historian and the novelist are engaged to make sense of the world, whether it is "real" or "imagined", is also the same. Thirdly, as the construction of an historical narrative involves as much a combination of facts as the conceptual and generically fictional matrix, there is no single correct original description of historical phenomena. By employing different points of view and choosing different plot structures, the historian can emplot a given set of historical events in a number of ways, providing different interpretations and endowing them with different meanings. White claims that "our understanding of the past increases precisely in the degree to which we succeed in determining how far that past conforms to the strategies of sense-making that are contained in their purest forms in literary art".<sup>15</sup> History, instead of being an antithesis of fiction, shares with fiction "its origins in the literary imagination" and pregeneric plot structures derived from mythical archetypes.

It should not be dismissed as a mere coincidence that the mythologizing tendency demonstrated in the modern Australian novel echoes the preoccupation of Modernism and twentieth century literature in general with myth, and that the way in which the three novelists have dealt with the historical past of Australia implicitly corresponds to Hayden White's manifestation of the interrelation between history and fiction. The

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<sup>14</sup>op. cit., p. 125.

<sup>15</sup>op. cit., p. 92.

parallel should be understood in a dual way. It on the one hand reveals the universality of the pursuit of the modern Australian novel, which reveals its participating in the dynamics of world literature. On the other hand, it demonstrates the necessity that the study of Australian literature should be conducted in a larger than local context. The survey of the development of Australian literature shows that extreme nationalism inevitably led to parochialism which hindered rather than encouraged the progress of a national literature. In the same way, strictly limiting the critical study of Australian literature to its own context can only yield a narrow and partial picture of what has been achieved in it.

If, for example, we take a synchronic approach to the mythologizing tendency in the modern Australian novel in its relation to the pursuit of Modernism, it will not only show the common features that lay down a basis for an internal connection between the two, but also inform the unique contribution of the modern Australian novel to the exploration of the inherent relevance of literature and history to myth. Just as the mythologizing tendency in Modernism was directed towards relating the modern world to the mythical world so as to re-construct the link between the past and the present, what Patrick White, Randolph Stow and Thomas Keneally have attempted to do in their dealing with the historical past of Australia is to expand and deepen the implications of that past to the consciousness of the present. By re-structuring particular historical situations and endowing them with new meanings which are essentially concerned with universal human issues, they have demonstrated how the interpretation of the relatively short history of Australia can gain an explanatory capacity to illuminate the human experience of the world. If the interest of Modernism in returning to myth is related to its attempt to find an effective way to order the modern experience of fragments and discontinuity, the mythologizing tendency in the modern Australian novel is directed towards re-constructing the knowledge of the past from the perspective of the present. Taking the phenomenon of returning to myth as a whole, the two directions can be seen as complementary and contribute in their respective ways to the applicability of the theory of mythical archetypes.

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