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The 1930s

Introduction

Westerly has published special issues from time to time. These have sometimes arisen from conferences, such as that on the Indian Ocean Region (Westerly, no. 4, 1984) or from a mixture of literary events and commissioned articles. The issue on “Literature and Locality” (Westerly, no. 1, 1986) emerged in this way. This issue, which focuses on the 1930s, consists entirely of specially commissioned articles.

The idea for this issue came from Peter Cowan, who has an intimate knowledge of the period, the years of his early adulthood which were formative in his career as short story writer and novelist. His own interest in realism, modernism and sense of place grew partly from the experience of that decade, when he worked at a series of labouring jobs in agricultural areas of Western Australia and commenced reading the American fiction of Hemingway, Dos Passos and others.

A decade is an arbitrary measure. We do not want to suggest that “the 1930s” constitutes an enclosure of time, to be measured and contained. But the decade does represent a dramatic period, beginning in Depression and ending in War, with special manifestations in Australia which have received comparatively little attention in cultural and literary studies. We wanted to offer a broad view of the period, while giving some special attention to Western Australia, not looking back on the period with the superiority of hindsight, but trying to convey the ‘feel’ of those years even while assessing them. Comprehensiveness is beyond the possibilities of a quarterly magazine, but we have aimed to cover different aspects of the period, ranging across film, advertising, journalism and literature.

In From Deserts the Prophets Come (1973) Geoffrey Serle posited the mid-1930s as the beginning of Australia’s cultural “Coming-of-Age” and then added a question mark. Dorothy Green and Sandra Burchill take issue with such a metaphor, and every decade of Australia’s history might be seen as contributing to a sense of cultural identity in some way. But the 1930s firmly set the issue of nationhood in many Australian thinkers’ minds: the Depression showed that Australia was locked into an international community economically, and membership of a weakening British Empire only made national self-respect more essential. The essays which follow examine Australians’ images of themselves projected in various forms and media through these years of startling change.

Bruce Molloy provides useful historical detail about Australian film production in the 1930s, and points out that the first “highwater mark” in our sound film production came during the period in which Hollywood burst on the world. He details the key role of feature films in the 1930s in developing Australian social mythologies, some of which we are still living through.

In the first of three articles on fiction Peter Cowan notes the importance of
the historical novel as a mode and considers literary details of the years in which the Western Australian goldfields petered out and the Great Depression enforced a need to understand the past and present of this country. Robert Darby examines the vexed social issue of "obscenity" and explores the relationship between censorship and literary criticism. His essay demonstrates that the censors' work extended beyond definitions of obscenity to the literary issues of authorial intention and narrators' roles. Censorship assessments involved judgments about meaning and the perennial issue of the nexus between art and life. The censors implicitly accorded great power to literature, and unconsciously reinforced the censored Oscar Wilde's assertion that art determines life. Sharyn Pearce provides a detailed examination of the roles accorded women in fiction during a period of crisis for the family in the Depression. She establishes a claim that women were not ignored in the fiction, and considers the exploration of women's roles beyond the romanticised stoicism of drovers' wives.

Hendrik Kolenberg considers the work of Beatrice Darbyshire, a neglected Western Australian artist, partly trapped in the 1930s by her distance from European artistic models and even from Eastern states artists, but still producing work of merit. By contrast, Dorothy Green and Sandra Burchill provide a wide-ranging study of educational, research and broadcasting institutions' creation of Australians' sense of themselves, fostered through colonial dependency. They examine the fight for the study of Australian subjects (a continuing battle which is not yet won), detail some of the period's major studies in the physical and social sciences and the humanities, and discuss the role of women in these achievements. They demonstrate that "the 1930s . . . was extraordinarily productive in most areas of scholarship", "a rich period".

Carolyn Polizzotto offers a more specific, localised study of advertising and image projection in the world of Western Australian commerce during the late 1920s and early 30s. The essay examines industrial art and the links between religious/moral and commercial principles. In another essay focused on the West, Geoffrey Bolton, himself a child of the 1930s, discusses the ways in which Perth-based newspapers mediated information from the world to readers. His study demonstrates that, compared with the fiction of the period, newspapers lagged behind in detecting the shift from Empire consciousness. He wittily describes the newspapers' juxtapositions of the serious and the lightweight, the international and the local, the reportorial and the anecdotal. This is the period of the shift from a principal concern with news production to the dominance of the profit motive. His presentation of a series of entrepreneurial takeovers, of debate about a gold tax and newspaper implications that politicians are not to be trusted should strike a familiar chord with 1980s readers.

The last two articles deal with the onset of "Modernism". Julian Croft argues for Australian poets' awareness of poetry and poetics elsewhere in the world and shows that poetry revealed a more complex sense of formal possibilities than is displayed in the prose of the period. Croft's incisive analysis presents Australian poets coming to an Eliot-like stance whereby the innovative individual is seen to be integral to the continuance of tradition. In this decade, which also saw the emergence of the Jindyworobaks, Croft examines the work
of a wide range of poets, from the largely unknown Mary Finnin to the known but rarely studied Ronald McCuaig.

Finally, David Bromfield investigates painterly and photographic presentations of Perth's streets: ideas of the modern translated to Perth. He discusses the evident wish of certain Perth designers and builders to be part of the international modern, not of the parochially conservative, and examines the different connotations that the city street may hold: public area, meeting place, site of mere transience between private areas, sometimes possessing a strange vacancy.

The editors wish to thank the contributors to this special issue of *Westerly*, which we hope may contribute to a revival of interest in a critical decade. Thanks are also due to the Literature Board of the Australia Council, which generously provided a subsidy towards the production of this issue.

BRUCE BENNETT and DENNIS HASKELL
James Morrison (Franklyn Bennett) and his wife Jane (Margot Rhys) stand with their firstborn as their cattle herd passes in Heritage.
(Reproduced with the permission of the National Library of Australia.)
Images of Australia: Feature Films of the 1930s

In 1954 Cecil Holmes writing in *Meanjin* posed the question, “What, you may ask, is the special quality of the Australian film?” He then provided his own answer:

Perhaps the characteristic of what is best in Australian productions has been their folk quality, crude and simple perhaps, yet recognisable and authentic.¹

Holmes was referring not just to the silent period of Australian feature filmmaking, which had lasted for the first three decades of this century and had produced such classics as Longford’s version of *The Sentimental Bloke* and *On Our Selection* and the sprawling version of *For the Term of His Natural Life*, directed by American import Norman Dawn. He was also referring to the more than forty sound films produced in Australia during the period 1930 to 1939.

The 1930s, despite their reputation as a period of “forgotten cinema”, were in fact a highwater mark in the tide of production before the long ebb of the period 1940 to 1960. Australian production in the 1930s was of course far overshadowed by the massive output of Hollywood cinema as American technology and commercial infrastructure allowed American film to dominate, as never before, the screens of the world in general and of English-speaking countries in particular.

The late 1920s had seen attempts to protect the Australian film industry. The results of the 1927 Royal Commission had been disappointing at best. It had recommended an insignificant tax on non-British imported film, more censorship and an annual prize for the best Australian film. It had not introduced quota legislation for any substantial financial support or incentive schemes for local production.

To judge from their submissions local filmmakers had recognised the cultural importance of the indigenous feature film as a projection of genuinely Australian images of life, work and society. They were also keenly aware of the problems of competing with imported films with much higher production
values in terms of initial cost and with greater promotional budgets than the local products enjoyed. In addition, the access of local films to Australian screens was, filmmakers believed, rendered more difficult by the substantial investment of British and American film companies in Australian distribution houses and theatre chains.

Despite these disadvantages or perhaps because of them, Australian films of the 1930s presented alternative discourses to Hollywood features, often while exhibiting considerable superficial resemblance to the American product. Taken as a group, these Australian films manifest a discourse of Australianism, consistently concerned with projection of a sense of national identity based upon a unique sense of place and affirming a set of values deriving from images of the bush, family life, and class structure.

These themes of bush, family and class are connected through the concept of pioneering which looms large in so many of the films of the period. Pioneering, usually a family endeavour, consists of the colonisation of the bush for development through primary production. Primary production in its turn usually connotes “breeding”, with its double application to both animals and people. Breeding of cattle and sheep was closely associated with the popular conception of national mission in Australia in the 1930s: producing grist for the Empire mills, with the Australian economy riding on the sheep’s back. No less a national institution was the rural gentry or squattocracy — persons of “breeding” who were the untitled (and even occasionally titled) aristocracy of an avowedly egalitarian Australia.

Yet Australia was, despite the reverence in which pioneering and primary production were held, overwhelmingly an urbanised society. Out of such fundamental social contradictions as this urban-rural dichotomy, and the implicit class structure within a “classless” society, social mythologies develop. Feature films in the 1930s were a powerful disseminator of Australian social mythologies providing images of Australian society and of Australian identity against which audiences could measure their own Australianness. It was in this way that Australian feature films manifested the folk quality to which Holmes alluded in his Meanjin article.

Of course the Australian population of the 1930s was very different from Australian society in the 1980s. A vast majority were of Anglo-Celtic derivation and most identified closely with the aspirations of the British empire. These two characteristics were to shape and influence the narratives of Australian features of the 1930s and the discourses inscribed within them.

The most significant feature films of the 1930s were the products of either tenacious independent filmmakers or of studios which attempted, with various degrees of success, to emulate the continuous production of Hollywood studios. Most notable among the independent producers were two survivors of the silent period, Charles Chauvel and Beaumont Smith.

Charles Chauvel, who had formed a lifelong filmmaking association when he married Elsa Sylvaney, star of his second silent feature Greenhide, produced three films during the 1930s. None of these rank in quality with such later works 40,000 Horsemen (1940), Sons of Matthews (1949) and Jedda (1955). The Chauvels’ first sound feature, In the Wake of the Bounty, was released in Australia in 1933. A rather uneasy combination of dramatised and actual
documentary, it indicated Chauvel's talent for exploiting locations for dramatic effect. It also showed Chauvel's eye for acting talent, with his casting of the then unknown Errol Flynn as Fletcher Christian. (Chauvel was later to repeat this success in giving their first starring roles to Chips Rafferty, Peter Finch and Michael Pate).

*In the Wake of the Bounty* initiates the interest that two later Chauvel films, *Uncivilised* and *Jedda* would take in the interaction of dissimilar cultures. This film indicates Chauvel's ability to convey sensuality through sequences involving nudity. These sequences brought Chauvel into conflict with Victorian Film Censor, Creswell O'Reilly. The resulting publicity ensured the success of the film and no doubt convinced Charles Chauvel that he had discovered an important marketing principle which he used to advantage in almost all his later films.

*Heritage* (1935) was the Chauvels' second sound feature. It is possibly the most selfconsciously mythic of all their features, starting as all mythologies do with the origin of things, "the greatest story of colonisation the world has ever seen: the story of Australia". "Extremely ambitious in conception, *Heritage* traces the development of Australia from first settlement to the 1930s through the vicissitudes of several generations of two connected pioneering families, the Morrisons and the Parrys".

The long-delayed union of these families is finally achieved by the modern generation, after Biddy Parry has received a pep-talk from her father over her reluctance to leave Sydney to join Frank Morrison on his Northern Territory Station:

Parry: Your great grandmother was a pioneer, but you would never stand the hardships women pioneers had to face.

Biddy: If the country and our men really need our sacrifices today, there would still be women pioneers. The most delicious thing in life for a girl is to feel that a man needs her.

Biddy is typical of many Australian screen heroines of the 1930s. While her dress, her behaviour and her earlier dialogue show Biddy to be independent and liberated for the period, she finally opts for the conventional gender role as wife and mother - part of the discourse of pioneering through primary production.

*Heritage* concludes with a sequence set in Canberra, where Frank Morrison, representing the Territory, exhorts the parliament to support the Empire bill, since "every Australian is bound together by the bond of a common race... the bonds which bind us to the empire must be bonds of steel!" Following the applause, there is a sequence in which Frank and Biddy leave parliament house, followed by a dissolve to them on horseback in the outback, followed by a dissolve to vast herds of sheep and cattle. This filmic device underlines the function of mythology in transforming related terms to naturalise social constructs, as postulated by Levi-Strauss and Barthes. *Heritage* very clearly contributes to the mythology of pioneering naturalising such social constructs.
as class through breeding, and reinforces the identification of a pioneering patriarchal social order with parliamentary politics and establishment, imperialist values.

*Uncivilised* (1936) re-examines the dramatic potential of cultural interaction and conflict but this time in an Australian context. The script, a collaboration between Chauvel and E.Y. Timms, is at once convoluted and clichéd and yet highly entertaining, with narrative elements reminiscent of *Rosemarie* and *Tarzan*. The pivotal concern is the development of a sexual relationship between Mara, “wild white man” chief of an Aboriginal tribe, and novelist Beatrice Lynn who has been abducted and brought to Mara’s village. Much attention is directed to Mara’s ambivalent status, at once “white” and “savage”, terms which are seen, in the simpler, non-pluralist and decidedly racist Australia of the 1930s, to be contradictory.

Beaumont Smith was not as active as the Chauvels, producing two sound features in the 1930s. The first of these was *The Hayseeds*, which has some affinities in spirit with filmed works of Steele Rudd. The plot concerns a fairly complex series of interactions between the rural Hayseed family and the urban Townleighs, including a visit by the country folk to the city. This plot allows the opportunity for the expression of many patriotic and nationalistic sentiments:

*Cultural transposition. “Wild white man”, Mara (Dennis Hoey), and novelist Beatrice Lynn (Margot Rhys) discuss the corroboree in Uncivilised. (Reproduced with the permission of the National Library of Australia.)*
Hayseed

Listen, has it ever struck you what’s made us Australians tough?

Townleigh

Well I suppose it’s the fact —

Hayseed

Well I'll tell you: it’s trouble. Trouble has made us determined, self reliant . . . Here, you see that old ironbark tree. In its life it’s weathered droughts, heat, cold, storms, bushfires, but with every setback it’s just grown tougher.

Townleigh

Like the Australian?

Hayseed

Precisely. Yes, adversity’s made him tougher too, and troubles, though they’ve softened his heart, and perhaps given him a better understanding of the troubles of the other cove.

Such rhetoric was extremely common in the films of the 1930’s.

Juxtaposition of different ways of life, of the English rural gentry and the Australian squatter, of rural and urban Australians, is a major element in Smith’s next, and final, film, Splendid Fellows (1934), a celebration of mateship and Empire solidarity. Interwoven with the story of Englishman Monty Ralston and his Australian “cobber” Tommy Thompson, and the Reverend Stanhope, the flying parson and former fighter ace, is an Australian challenge in the Melbourne Centenary Air Race. The Australian entry, the Koala, withdraws from the race with victory within its grasp in order to obey the higher dictate of mateship by searching for the flying parson whose plane has been forced to land in “hungry desert country.” The sacrifice is worthwhile, for the Koala team rescues Stanhope and his companion, earning the accolade of “Splendid Fellows.”

Both of Beaumont Smith’s sound features pivot upon the imperial connection with interaction between aristocratic English characters and the untitled but noble Australian characters leading eventually to mutual respect. In the best traditions of Edwardian stage melodrama, the considerable complexities of the plot structure are resolved mainly by luck and circumstance.

In terms of quality of output and publicity the early 1930’s were dominated by Frank Thring’s Efftee Productions, which established a studio in Melbourne. Efftee’s oeuvre consisted of three films in 1931, and two in each of the following three years. Ina Bertrand has written that:

the films of Efftee, excluding the idiosyncratic George Wallace comedies, can be divided into the stridently Australian and the mock-British.2

One might query the exclusion, for not only do at least two of the Wallace movies have story-lines which derive much of their impact from Australian settings, e.g. A Ticket in Tatts centres around the Melbourne Cup. Indeed, George Wallace’s urban battler, always resilient in the face of adversity, is as much a national archetype as the Pat Hanna persona in Diggers and Diggers and Blighty. While the Efftee films are perhaps overshadowed in quality by
the films which followed them in the 1930s, their importance lies in the very fact of their production and in the lines of thematic development they initiated. The Pat Hanna character was to be developed later by Chauvel and Ealing directors in roles played by Chips Rafferty, while Ken Hall was to make two vaudeville-inspired films, _Let George Do It_ and _Gone to the Dogs_ as vehicles for the antics of George Wallace. The titles and release dates of Efftee’s films are shown in the table below:

**TABLE 1**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Efftee Films</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>F.W. Thring</strong> commenced film production after selling his share of Hoyts Theatres to Fox Film Corporation of America. Between 1931 and his death in 1936, Thring’s studio produced the following films:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1931</td>
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<td>1931</td>
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<td>1931</td>
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The most active of Australian filmmakers of the 1930’s was Cinesound Studios under the management of Ken G. Hall. Of the seventeen features which comprise Cinesound’s output between 1932 and 1940, all were produced by Hall who also directed all but one. The first, and most successful commercially of these, was _On Our Selection_, loosely adapted from Steele Rudd’s classic stories of bush life in late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Hall was unashamedly commercial in his approach and his films invariably recovered their costs, and all but _Strike Me Lucky_ made handsome profits. Cinesound’s position as a subsidiary of the organisation now called the Greater Union Organisation allowed it easy access to the theatres, but, as Hall indicates in his autobiography and elsewhere, its continuation in production depended upon finance from profits of previous productions.

Although Hall’s work is often viewed as highly derivative of Hollywood models and without significant social commentary, as, for example, in Sylvia Lawson’s dismissal of Cinesound’s features,

> there is no way to read Australia’s deeper troubles — which is to say, its myths — through the Cinesound features.4

Hall describes himself as a dedicated nationalist.5 A detailed textual analysis of Cinesound’s features confirms his interest in depiction of Australian identity. Such an analysis calls into question the view that the Cinesound films are merely escapist entertainment, though there can be little doubt that entertainment, particularly “family” entertainment, was their primary, and perhaps only conscious aim. Table 2 sets out the Cinesound films in terms of date and type.

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WESTERLY, No. 4, DECEMBER, 1986
TABLE 2
Cinesound Films

Between 1932 and 1940 Cinesound Films, a development of Australasian Films, and the production branch of the Greater Union Organisation, produced under the guidance of Ken G. Hall, seventeen films. Hall himself directed sixteen of these.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Dad and Dave Films</th>
<th>Action-Adventure Films</th>
<th>Vaudeville Films</th>
<th>Social Comedy-Drama (Cecil Kellaway)</th>
<th>Melodrama</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1932</td>
<td>On Our Selection</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1933</td>
<td>The Squatter's Daughter</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1934</td>
<td>Strike Me Lucky</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1935</td>
<td>Grandad Rudd</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>1936</td>
<td>Thoroughbred, Orphan of the Wilderness</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>1937</td>
<td>Tall Timbers, Lovers and Luggers</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1938</td>
<td>Dad and Dave</td>
<td>Let George</td>
<td></td>
<td>Mr Chedworth</td>
<td>Broken Melody</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Come to Town</td>
<td>Do It</td>
<td></td>
<td>Steps Out</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1939</td>
<td></td>
<td>Gone to the Dogs</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Come up Smiling*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1940</td>
<td>Dad Rudd MP</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Notes: 1* Come up Smiling (alternative title, Ants in His Pants) was directed by William Freshman.
2. In 1946 Ken Hall directed Smithy for Columbia Pictures.

The bush provides setting and background for the majority of Cinesound’s seventeen features. On Our Selection, establishes the basic approach to the use of the bush myth in Cinesound features. The bush setting provides a rhetoric, a coded system, for placing the attitudes and values of characters within a “natural” context. By way of contrast and counterpoint, the bush functions in opposition to the more “civilised” values and attitudes contained in the rhetoric of the city. The bush would allow frequent allusion to the “natural” hardships and catastrophes of Australian life — floods, droughts and fire — and Cinesound would exploit their dramatic and cinematic potential.

On Our Selection indicates the manifestation of basic city/bush opposition in codes of dress, speech and behaviour. While many of these codes were no doubt taken over from Edwardian stage melodrama, film proved more effective in disseminating these oppositional patterns and the mythologies underlying them, both because it was more popular and accessible and because of its capacity for highlighting or foregrounding the telling of significant detail. Confrontation between Dad Rudd, in farmer’s work clothes, and his nemesis Carey, in more citified garb, graphically illustrates the point. Carey threatens to utilise the law, that most cultural of edifices, while Rudd responds in “natural” images and appeals to the landright established by the hardship of pioneering.

WESTERLY, No. 4, DECEMBER, 1986
Carey: Well, I'll have that money out of you now, if its the last thing I do. Can you meet the bill?

Dad: You know I can't.

Carey: Well I'll have to take possession of every head of cattle on the place. I'll break your spirit, Rudd!

[Dad breaks looking off]

Carey: No! Take me few head of cattle and get out.

Dad: For years I've faced the fires, the floods and the droughts of this country. I came here and I cut a hole in the bush when I hadn't enough money to buy a billycan with, or a shirt to put on my back. I worked, hard and honest, living on dry bread, harrowing me bit of wheat in with a bramble. The cattle'd perish and die before me very eyes, and the roof'd go from over me head with the wind, but me spirit was never broken. And do you think you can break it now? By the Lord no! Take me few head of cattle and get out.

[Cut to shot of storm clouds]

Carey: What difference can it make to you now? What can you do?

Dad: Do? What the men of this country with health, strength and determination are always doin', I can start again!

This exchange is worth consideration in some detail. Carey appeals to the institution of “law”, but Rudd’s appeal is to “natural” justice — he has earned the land through labour and endurance. It establishes the basic character of Dad Rudd, his determination and indomitable spirit, and closes with the identification of the spirit of Rudd with “the men of this country”, with “the man on the land”, to use. The intertitle which follows, “A new season — life in the soil — laughter in life,” leads into a montage of livestock and their progeny, completing the identification of Rudd, the farmer, with natural forces: the dialogue about “starting again” reinforced by images of rebirth in nature. Carey, on the other hand, is shown as preoccupied with money rather than produce, and is never seen engaged in any farming activity.

This use of naturalising images to place issues in the bush/city context continued throughout the four films of the Dad and Dave cycle. In Dad and Dave Come To Town (1938), Dad feels incapable of countering the sharp practice of the business he has inherited:

Dad: It’s a good thing to know when you're beat.

Mum: So the city’s found a way to beat Dad Rudd.

Dad: You can’t beat facts.

Mum: Fire was facts; floods was facts; droughts was facts. But you beat them, Dad Rudd. Was that easy?

Dad: When I was Dave's age, I'd stand at the back of a plough at the bottom of a ten acre paddock and watch them furrows running away to the rim of the world, every furrow as straight as a die. But some of them blokes in the city, they can’t plough straight and they can’t run straight.

Mum: And so you're beaten, eh? If you are, you ain't the youngster that came courtin’ me. I thought I knew the man I married.

A second feature of this exchange of dialogue is its illustration of the nature of the Dad-Mum relationship. Although Dad is the archetypal rural patriarch,
Mum is dominant within the family circle, and usually manages to subtly manipulate Dad in the direction she desires.

The final Dad and Dave film, Dad Rudd M.P. (1940) was also the final Cinesound film. In it, Rudd, played superlatively as always by Bert Bailey, has reached full dignity as befitted a character that had become a national institution. Once more the identification between farmer-squatter and politician is complete as Dad takes his place in parliament to deliver an emotional monologue exhorting the parliament to aid the farmers — “who have fought and won and lost and always carried on.” Similarly, he appeals to the young men of Australia “to take their places by the side of their blood-brothers of the Empire . . . to preserve that freedom which is our heritage.” As the parliament erupts into applause, and Dad watches with a mixture of pride and satisfaction, his image is superimposed first over a rural scene then over the Australian flag — another mythic transformation identifying nationality with the bush.

Joan Enderby (Jocelyn Howarth) and Wayne Ridgeway (Dick Fair using the screen name Grant Lyndsay) in a publicity shot for The Squatter’s Daughter. Fair achieved later prominence as compare of the long-running radio show, Australia’s Amateur Hour.
(Reproduced with the permission of the National Library of Australia.)
One recurrent feature of Cinesound’s depiction of family life is the frequent use of the device of concealed or confused identity of the male protagonist. This occurs in *The Squatter’s Daughter*, *Tall Timbers* and *Broken Melody* and even has an equine variation in *Thoroughbred*. Such a device must have been acceptable to Australian audiences since Cinesound management was inevitably careful to analyse the success or otherwise of the narrative lines of its product. Why Australian audiences were receptive to such a device provides grounds for some intriguing speculation. As a nation, Australia might have seen itself as being of dubious or uncertain parentage, and it seems reasonable to assume that consciousness of the convict origins of white Australian society was a strong, if repressed, influence upon “national character” in the years immediately preceding the sesquicentenary celebration in 1938. Can it be coincidental that a number of popular films of the late 1930s feature the son of uncertain parentage making good through independence and hard work to finally win parental approval and his rightful heritage? Or is it more likely that these vehicles of popular culture expressed a repressed or unconscious desire of a young nation for parental approval and legitimation?

Another notable aspect of Cinesound’s depiction of family life is the representation of young women who in general tend to conform to Anne Summers’ dichotomy of “damned whores” and “god’s police.” Certainly the latter group predominates, and Cinesound features progressively articulate the characterisation of the well established Australian type of “squatter’s daughter” or “girl of the bush.” These are independent and young women who combine attractive femininity with the capacity to compete with men, either in bushcraft, as in *The Squatter’s Daughter*, or business, as in *Dad and Dave Come to Town*. Inevitably, as we have already seen in Chauvel’s *Heritage*, they are prepared finally to submit to the male protagonist and accept the conventional roles of wife and mother. Their less virtuous sisters, such as Claire Darley in *Tall Timbers*, Alma Lee in *The Silence of Dean Maitland* and Stella Raff in *Lovers and Luggers* are less fortunate. They are often spurned by the men they love and occasionally punished by pregnancy. Infractions of the rigid moral code of Australian films of the 1930s usually result in at least unhappiness and sometimes catastrophe.

Inevitably the notion of family life leads to the issue of “breeding” and, relatedly, of class. Cinesound features can be shown to contain an internally consistent discourse of class. This discourse postulates an upper class composed of authority figures, identified as “British” (even if they are Australian) by codes of dress and speech. Complementing this group is a working class of obviously Australian characters, lacking the refinement of the other group but generally content with their station. The few references to union activity in Cinesound features are uniformly unfavourable. Very few characters make the transition from lower to upper class, except where some quirk of the plot, usually involving breeding and confused identity, naturalises such movement. Mateship is without exception a working-class phenomenon.

Such a social structure based on social hierarchy is worked out in the English/Australian oppositional patterns of *It Isn’t Done* (a “fish-out-of-water” comedy in some ways foreshadowing, though in different context, the plot devices
of *Crocodile Dundee*), in the treatment of eugenics and elitism in the evocatively-titled *Thoroughbred* and is implicit in the location of Cinesound’s villains.

The major villains are usually upper class, the unscrupulous rich and powerful who have affinities with city rather than bush. Progressively through the 1930s they tend to be not only non-Australian but also non-British: French in *Dad and Dave Come to Town*, Spanish and Asian in *Lovers and Luggers*, Italian in *Thoroughbred* and German in *Tall Timbers* and *Gone to the Dogs*. This designation of villains as foreign no doubt reflects elements of racism and xenophobia as well as reaction to world affairs.

On the one occasion where an Englishman is cast as villain (Lord Denvee in *It Isn’t Done*) the differences between protagonist Blaydon and villain Denvee are finally submerged in a common act of mourning for sons who fell in the same battle on the Somme. Denvee acknowledges that after all they have “something in common . . . that goes much deeper than the ordinary things of life.” This “something”, the blood-brotherhood of Empire, is based on community attained through mutual sacrifice. Blaydon later completes the defusing of an English/Australian oppositional pattern by use of a naturalising metaphor: the cultural differences, like the incompatibility of oak and blue gum, are merely a “matter of soil.”

While superficially Cinesound films may appear to question or deride notions of class and breeding, close analysis of their narratives shows that they tend to confirm or naturalise class groupings and the existence of hierarchial structures, thus presenting a social contradiction to which the myth of classlessness serves as a spurious reconciliation.

The Cinesound features stand as the most substantial body of work produced by one director and one studio in the history of Australian feature film. Other attempts to achieve continuous production were less successful. The output of Efftee Studios has been discussed already. The other notable producer of features films in the 1930s was National Studios.

In 1936, National Studios, having purchased the equipment of Efftee Studios which closed after the death of Frank Thring, produced *The Flying Doctors* in association with General Film Distributors and Gaumont British Films. This was probably the first genuine “co-production” of the sound phase of the Australian film industry. The director, Miles Mander, and the scriptwriter, J.O.C. Orton, were brought from England for the film. The leading player, Charles Farrell was a veteran of numerous Hollywood films. Considerable effort was given to ensuring that the film had a genuine Australian “feel” despite the non-Australian component, as can be seen by the voluminous correspondence the film generated. Comments were solicited from a number of prominent Australians who were interested, one way or another, in the project. As a consequence of this canvassing of opinion, numerous alterations were made to the script. One such change was the alteration of the hero’s name from Orton’s choice of “Gyppo” to “Sandy” as a result of a question from Sam Walder: “Do you not think there is the possibility of people associating ‘Gyppo’ with an Italian?” Such an ethnic background for a hero was unthinkable in the distinctly non-pluralist Australia of the 1930s.
Another memorandum urges the producers to make the doctor, one of the major characters, more a sportsman and, indeed, to "use Bradman" as a "new angle." A scene featuring the doyen of Australian cricketers facing the spin on the now cricketing doctor was introduced. But quite the most interesting comment comes from the Reverend John Flynn, legendary founder of the Flying Doctor Service, who attacks the moral climate of the script and then concludes:

If your firm aspires to produce a film to rank as a picture of interest to nation builders, it would seem to me imperative that the story should end in an atmosphere of victory. The idea is surely to indicate that Australian pioneers arrive somewhere, instead of snuffing out halfway.

Such comments are indicative of the seriousness given to the projecting of a desirable Australian image in the films of the 1930s.

The other co-production emanating from National's Pagewood studio was Range River. Made in association with Columbia Pictures, the film was directed by American Clarence Badger. Based on an original story by Zane Grey, the script is reputed to have been extensively re-written by Charles and Elsa Chauvel, although the credits do not substantiate this. While it is in many ways a transposed Hollywood B-class western, complete with imported star Victor Jory, Range River reflects characteristic concerns of the Australian feature film set in the bush. This is particularly so in characterisation, where transformations of the oppositional pattern of nature/culture tend to locate themselves on a spectrum of worth.

Neither the script of Range River nor that of The Flying Doctor makes any concession to the American nationality of their respective principal players. The speech style and idiom adopted is mid-Pacific, verging on Australian idiomatic, and the viewers are left to draw their own conclusions, though the implication is that both Jory and Farrell are Australian.

The outbreak of war in Europe in late 1939 led to a phasing down of feature production in Australia. Cinesound completed its current film and turned its resources to propaganda and training films. An era of Australian filmmaking had come to an unheralded end, and a slow ebb in feature production had commenced which would last for another thirty-five years. When the tide finally turned and the resurgence of Australian feature production commenced in the 1970s, few Australians would be aware of the vitality of the film industry of the 1930s, or of the existence of a body of films offering significant insight into the construction of national identity in that period.
NOTES

3. *Come Up Smiling* (later retitled *Ants in his Pants*) was the Cinesound feature not directed by Hall. Its director was English import William Freshman.
5. In an unpublished interview with the writer, June 1977.

*Dad Rudd* (Bert Bailey) on the hustings in *Dad Rudd M.P.*, flanked by Mactavish (Joe Valli) at left and Mum (Connie Martyn) at right.
(Reproduced with the permission of the National Library of Australia.)
When D.H. Lawrence arrived in Western Australia in 1922 he could have been excused for seeing his stay in Perth as a literary exile, and a preparation for Taos. He would have found a town whose preoccupations were not noticeably bookish, and he would have found few writers — Katharine Susannah Prichard, herself an import and the author of three novels,¹ Mollie Skinner with one book,² but he would have searched in vain for others. There were reading groups, which he attended, there were contributors to local magazines and the press, some local versifiers,³ there were dramatic societies whose predictable choice of plays were duly noted in the newspaper. The West Australian offered reviews of books, mainly, from lack of choice, English and American. There were a number of capable and traditional water color painters. He may have wondered why it had taken this community moving towards the centenary of its foundation so long to produce any indigenous writers. But then, with Taos in prospect, he may not. And in fairness, when he reached Sydney he could hardly have been struck by any literary abundance there.

If Lawrence had returned a decade later he would have found not a great deal of change. At the beginning of the nineteen thirties Perth could point to more writers and a somewhat more active literary scene. Two writers had published novels which appeared to have some influence, Prichard with Working Bullocks, 1926,⁴ and James Pollard with three novels, The Bushland Man, 1926, Rose Of The Bushlands, 1927, and Bushland Vagabonds, 1928.⁵ These novels, apart from consideration of literary merit, had suggested to writers, as to readers, the possibilities of the local scene, something detected long ago by writers who visited Western Australia, sometimes only briefly, but which had been oddly ignored for the best part of a hundred years by those who did live, and thought to write, in that place. Pollard’s novels were simple in theme and characterisation, but his use of the south west of the State as a setting was welcomed by readers and showed local writers that publishers, in Pollard’s case overseas publishers, were not necessarily prejudiced by a local background.

Prichard’s Working Bullocks appeared to have more impact, though it may
not at the time have had any more readers in Western Australia than Pollard's novels. More widely, and on prospective writers, its impression was stronger. Henrietta Drake-Brockman in writing later on Prichard quotes a comment by Miles Franklin that *Working Bullocks* 'marked the breaking of the drought in which (Australian) novels had merely taken a recess underground for a time like the inland rivers'.

Drake-Brockman added 'none but those who grew up during that indigenous literary drought can fully appreciate the stimulus this novel provided'. That may be accepted. But she stated more strongly 'the publication of *Working Bullocks* in 1926 sparked a renaissance of Australian fiction, stimulating and probably affecting a generation of younger writers'. It is possible to wonder how far that was so. There were at least a number of younger would-be writers in Western Australia in those years who had never read the book and knew little of Prichard. And if the comment was applied more widely, what value did the influence have? It is hardly evident in writers like Penton, Leonard Mann, or Eleanor Dark, during the period. It may of course have had something to do with the pastorals of Miles Franklin herself. But for local writers, the novel could indicate that local concerns and local background might be a basis for worthwhile fiction. *Coonardoo*, 1928, and a curious novel by Thomas Groser, *The Dream Flower*, 1928, both concerned with the treatment of Aborigines in the state, suggested another theme for writers, but though *Coonardoo* became highly regarded, and Groser hardly read at all, the theme was discreetly ignored by local writers.

Mollie Skinner had also published two novels, one which became famous, and another soon forgotten. Her collaboration with Lawrence resulting from Lawrence's rather unlikely stay in Perth, *The Boy In The Bush*, 1924, provided a literary event, though neither the book nor the collaboration was entirely approved in Perth. There were suspicions the book was Lawrence's anyway, and that he had probably spoiled it. There is a lack of much evidence that it inspired local writers. But no local writers approached — or perhaps even shared — the insights and depths of response to the landscape in which Lawrence found himself, and which he revealed in his two novels of Australia. Skinner's *Black Swans*, 1925, might have been expected to offer more promise, but the book was a lonely forerunner of a genre that was to develop strongly in the next decade.

The nineteen thirties for Western Australia did not begin with any suggestion of literary promise. Perth shared the increasing interest in the development of the novel in Australia, and shared the continuing debate of the whole of the thirties on Australian fiction, its direction, its possibilities, its very 'Australianness'. For Western Australia the twenties had shown that local backgrounds and concerns could be productive, and the general trend of the next decade in Australia was for the novel to turn in to those concerns and backgrounds. In Western Australia it was less a matter of willingness to turn in to them than of discovering such concerns, and discovering that background.

There seemed two obvious directions for this discovery. Australian history was poorly recorded and documented, poorly understood, and only beginning to be taught in schools — and it could be said, in universities. Writers might turn to the past to discover the country and themselves, spurred partly by the
need for understanding enforced by the depression, or turn directly to the present, to the actual life about them. There were of course some who decided to ignore both.

While the development of the historical novel proceeded most strongly from Sydney and Melbourne, and proved in many ways the dominant mode of the thirties, for Perth writers the State offered at least some prospect in its history. The general attitude to the history of the State, among its public generally, was accepted as one of pride, at times boastfulness, but one in which there was a certain defensiveness. It was probably this latter quality, this sense that after all nothing very exciting had happened here, and it had taken a great deal of time to happen at all, that made the local writers wary of the historical novel. Mollie Skinner had attempted a consideration of the State's past, and by the thirties the novel was not much remembered. Numbers of earlier writers, visitors of often brief duration, had captured slices of more colorful samples and used them. But in the thirties, in contrast with the rest of Australia, Perth was not enthusiastic about displaying its past in fiction - though it had documented most effectively that past in diaries and letters.

Henrietta Drake-Brockman alone of the Western Australian writers at the time saw the possibilities of, and was attracted to, the historical novel. Her first novel, *Blue North*, 1934, turned to the north of the State, in the eighteen seventies. It offered the colorful and romantic and adventurous aspects of a place discussed by earlier, non indigenous, writers, who had used it for some of the same qualities. *Blue North* also reflected in its publisher something of the revival of Australian publishing in the early thirties, the book forming one of the oddly assorted group of publications to the credit of the Endeavour Press. The Prior Prize and the book publishing of *The Bulletin* were also incentives for novelists, though perhaps indirectly for West Australian writers. Drake-Brockman's next novel, *Sheba Lane*, 1936, was issued by Angus and Robertson who were emerging from the nineteen twenties to become the main publishers of Australian fiction for a good many years. *Sheba Lane* was one of the great number of novels by Australian and overseas writers to use Broome as a setting. It came a little closer to realistic depiction, and perhaps to real life, than *Blue North*, though it never attempted the realism which the setting asked for, perhaps demanded. In the following year *Younger Sons* gave a view of the history of the State and the kind of society which existed up to its centenary in 1929. It was a serious consideration of the society and its roots, avoiding the more obvious colorful and sensational aspects, and indicated clearly the writer's interest in history, something she was to demonstrate later in other work. But during the thirties Henrietta Drake-Brockman was virtually alone in this aspect of the novel which was so strong a concern of the writers of Sydney and Melbourne.

For those writers who were more inclined to turn directly to the present, to the everyday life of their State and their city, the prospect was probably difficult. Perth, small, quiet, self-contained, conservative, was fairly easily known and defined. As a city it repaid intimate knowledge, and in this respect could well have produced the kind of small town detail, analysis, and care in description, which was a feature of much English writing of the period. It was not without material for the novelist, but it required considerable dedication, insight, and
sense of an adequate style to achieve. In the matter of style, Perth writing during the thirties reflected almost no awareness of any of the overseas experimentation that was transforming prose and poetry. It was not that there was any lack of information, the overseas papers gave space to discussion of Joyce and Eliot, to name only two who might have brushed a Western Australian consciousness, Lawrence had actually visited the place, and there was occasional, if less frequent discussion of American writing. The local press contributed articles on trends in overseas writing, in 1936 offering a review of Dadaism and Surrealism, and of writers such as Joyce, Wyndham Lewis, Gertrude Stein, with some sympathy. However, these movements and these writers were often scorned by correspondents to the same press, and for the Western Australian novelists they seemed dangerous examples, even of anarchy and degeneracy. The Workers Art Guild produced contemporary plays with social impact, often very close to the time they were written, *Bury The Dead* in 1936, *Waiting For Lefty* in 1937, for instance, but it is difficult to see that there was much effect even on would-be local dramatic writers. The Western Australian branch of the Fellowship of Australian Writers offered a meeting place for some writers, but could hardly have been said to favor, or perhaps be much open to, overseas influences. Valuable and necessary as the emphasis on Australianness was, the Australian novel in general tended to feed off itself. The exceptions, few enough, only proved the rule. And as far as subject and its treatment was concerned, the whole of Australia become held by a censorship of material and expression so strong that the books of many contemporary English and American writers were unavailable, or hard to procure. If Western Australian writers tended to avoid the explicit in terms of plot or description of behaviour, they were hardly to be blamed, and were not alone. Their rejection of, in fact their odd denial of stylistic experiment beyond the banks of the Swan is far less excusable, but might be seen at least in some degree as a part of an education system that equally showed no interest.

Western Australia in the thirties was a community fairly evenly divided between rural and urban life. There was no real gap between the two, as came later. A magazine such as *The Western Mail*, widely read, reached out to country readers. Its annual publication, the illustrated Christmas number, was more or less evenly divided in pictorial representation of the country and the city. The writer who felt that the country, the outer areas, the still little known landscape, offered better prospects for fiction may not have been simply avoiding the realities of city life, nor being swept along by the bush legend of the nineties. While these were obvious factors, there was a good deal beyond the city worth exploration.

Perhaps oddly, given the flood of outback novels that beset Australian fiction during the thirties, and which set up their own stereotype, notable for sentimentality, evasion, and a legend-ridden view, numbers of Perth writers opted for the city. The Perth they came up with was hardly definitive or conclusive. The local scene presented some constraints, but also some challenges. The depression years may have confirmed some of the fears of West Australians that prosperity, indeed security, was for them an illusory goal. It was easy enough to remember the long and difficult period before the discovery of gold, and the fading of the goldfields, as nineteen twenty
nine enforced economic realities that were not after all unfamiliar. Only one novelist found in the resulting strains imposed on the economic system a source for fiction. Perhaps the centenary year was too close, its rhetoric and its hope too loud, the irony of the collapse too savage for West Australians to want to probe those years too deeply. It is possible to feel the general public seemed to avoid admitting the reality of economic loss, widespread unemployment, poverty, sustenance camps, union unrest, and the Communist Party. That public was in the main very well behaved, patient, tolerant of incompetence and corruption. And perhaps preferred evasion to confrontation.

In 1933 John K. Ewers published a first novel, a novel of Perth, taking its name from one of the city streets, Money Street. A fair description of the book was offered by Ralph Straus '... not only pleasantly written, but introduces you to a little group of the quaintest and most likeable folk who become mixed up in the quaintest and most unexpected of affairs ... It is a jolly book, with the right kind of ending ...'.

If this was a novel of Perth's streets, they were seen very differently by another novelist. J.M. Harcourt had spent some time in Broome, and his novel The Pearlers, 1933, was set there, giving a more vivid, more realistic, and in fact satirical view of life in that markedly individual port than the later Sheba Lane. Harcourt was closer to the realism of American writing of the thirties, the only writer working in Western Australia at the time to show signs of this kind of influence, and of its effect in a more realistic, direct style such as employed by a few eastern states novelists, notably perhaps Brian Penton. Harcourt also was clearly less disposed to bow to local niceties of convention of subject and speech. His The Pearlers seemed frank, revealing, so much so that he later remarked the residents of Broome had wished to hold a book burning, consigning his novel to flames on the beach. The book was evidently subject to official scrutiny as possible material for that other great pile the Censorship Board would have liked to burn.

Harcourt's second novel, Upsurge, published a year later, did not escape. In this book Harcourt produced the only novel that looked squarely at some aspects of the time and place — at the poverty, unemployment, exploitation of men and women during the depression years, and at official acquiescence and corruption in these things. The novel was propagandist, it simplified and it overstated, it forced its human interest to the service of its thesis, yet it stated the problems of the period, and stated them in a way no other author in the State was prepared to do, and indeed the book stood alone in Australian writing of the nineteen thirties.

Harcourt could not escape his challenge to convention. The book was banned, and he left Western Australia. He may have been fortunate to avoid legal action. The book was provocative, and it offered Perth readers the interest of identifying the originals of his characters, something they enjoyed and had little difficulty in doing, even after they were told they must not read the book. Given the larger scale of the depression in Sydney and Melbourne, it is surprising this kind of novel was not taken up by writers there. But perhaps publishers, officialdom, and censorship were too strong an opposition. The city novel was finding the thirties much more difficult than the historical-pastoral depiction.

Philip Masel set the only novel he was to write in Perth, a novel in a sense
between that of Ewers and Harcourt. Masel found no place for quaintness, his theme was that of guilt, the effect in a small community on the family of a man convicted of murder. He did not use the harshness and realism of Harcourt. But he was interested in seeing his characters in relation to the city as a place of living, an entity. He had an awareness of class division, but it was not the vision of a class struggle as was Harcourt's. Masel was concerned with the problems of writing not so much for an English reading public, as gaining recognition from such a public. This seemed more difficult than finding the interest of an English publisher. He saw overseas readers as being primarily interested in accepted or stereotype visions of Australia, which emphasised one of the problems for the novelists of the thirties who wanted to write of the Australian city.

Western Australia produced one example of a type of fiction surprisingly rare in Australia, the war novel. The Australian preoccupation with the 1914-18 war was lasting, though perhaps in the thirties slightly dimmed by the depression. In Western Australia during the decade the war still held a strong interest. *The Western Mail* in those years ran a feature page, on the inside red cover, *A Digger's Diary*, at times spilling to the back cover, composed of short pieces from ex-soldiers, many of them engaged in a struggle on the new farms of the southwest and the wheatbelt, that could have been only a little less extreme than the years of war. In these columns incidents of the war were recorded and re-lived endlessly, and outweighed any consideration of the depression. The page was highly popular, and formed the basis of a kind of club, with dinners and gettogethers of men who had no intention of forgetting those years. There was a surplus of scribes. But out of all this emerged one novelist, Edgar Morrow, with a novel, *Iron In The Fire*, 1934. The novel was like those other war novels by Australians, strongly descriptive of actual event, personal in feeling and remembrance. It was more deliberately autobiographical than novels such as *Flesh In Armour, Crucible, or Reflected Glory*, and did not attempt their interplay of character. Morrow was a contributor to *A Digger's Diary*, the novel was accorded a full page review in *The Western Mail*, a review concluding with the comment that the book 'should be in the library of every house in the land'. Somehow, the message to writers was not taken up. Perhaps because on the page opposite was Chapter 10 of a serialisation of Sax Rohmer's *The Trail Of Fu Manchu*.

Three novels, towards the end of the decade, suggested a greater awareness of overseas writing and influence, greater psychological insight, and willingness to explore personal and sexual relationships. They were at least begun, perhaps largely written, earlier, so hardly accurate pointers to suggest this kind of influence was growing. Seaforth Mackenzie's *The Young Desire It*, 1937, was set clearly in Western Australia, the near rural country and a Perth boarding school for boys. Mackenzie may have struggled with the influence of Lawrence and not altogether won the battle, but it was a worthwhile struggle offering insights and experiment with prose he would not have gained from any local model. His second novel, *Chosen People*, 1938, gave an affectionate view of the city itself, unlike any of the other portrayals, autobiographical in its response to place, with a rather wild, at times turgid, plot of complicated encounters. Like Harcourt, MacKenzie drew clearly from his own experience
and from actual people. Like Harcourt, he left the State, but it would seem because he felt there was no possibility of the literary life he wanted within it. His two West Australian novels were outstanding in their attempt at modernity, at psychological insight rather than action and cliche situations, and for their descriptive beauty.

Mackenzie's two novels were written earlier than their time of publication, something they shared with the third of these end of decade books. In *Intimate Strangers*, 1937, Prichard also looked at the city and like Mackenzie was interested in the more intimate relationships of her characters. For the period, her portrayal of sexual relationships was open, much less obvious and blunt than Harcourt's, as it was also more intimate, and showed more insight. Her novel lacked the propagandist urgency of Harcourt's *Upsurge*, though it was not without political intent, and covered some of the same ground of the depression years. There was some irony in the fact that these books, indicating a developing maturity in the novel, were the work in one instance of a novelist who left the State before his books were published, and in the other of a writer probably always more oriented to the literary world outside.

Oddly, the two writers who in this decade offered a great deal were almost unknown in the State, indeed one of them seems to have been almost entirely unremarked. Clotilde Inez Mary Graves, an English woman, under the name of Richard Dehan wrote two unusual novels set in Broome, *The Sower Of The Wind*, 1927, and *Dead Pearls*, 1932, the latter dedicated ironically to the W.A. Government. Rich and complex in style and structure they offered an awareness of the adaptation of style to subject perhaps only Mackenzie suggested. Often quite openly melodramatic, they dealt with a town noted, at least in popular imagination, as itself melodramatic and vastly different from the rest of Australia. But behind the melodrama there were the concerns of race distinction, the life of the Aborigines, and the attempts of the missionaries to bring a new culture to a most unlikely land, concerns deeper than those of most of the local writers, and most other Australian writers of the time. And there was an awareness of style.

In 1981 Suzi Gablik, an American artist, visited Australia. She was to say:

> It was only when I touched the country, which hangs back so aloof and unapproachable just beyond the cities and encountered a landscape so fierce and primevally strange that it frightened D.H. Lawrence, that I felt myself in the presence of something uniquely Australian. What I experienced, I am now persuaded, was comparable to what Lawrence experienced, not so much during the time he was in Australia but when he first encountered the remnants of American Indian culture in the deserts of New Mexico . . . That naked contact with the elemental life of the cosmos . . . I felt in the Aboriginal presence of the Australian bush. Like Lawrence, I think it was the greatest experience I have ever had. It certainly changed me forever.

Almost sixty years in time and a shift in place marked her observations and those of Lawrence. Yet the essential vision and sensitivity to landscape was the same. Lawrence drew heavily on his experience of Western Australian landscape, yet it is curious that no local writer then or in the decade that followed appeared to share this sensitivity and this vision. But it was shared, indeed its perception haunted another visitor long before Lawrence, in 1910.
E.L. Grant Watson whose novels seemed unread by West Australians and little known to Australian readers in general. His novels of Western Australia, from 1914 to 1935, in particular *The Desert Horizon*, 1923, and *Daimon*, 1925, have not been approached at any time by other writers in their exploration of the relationship of men and women to this strange and elemental landscape. Like Lawrence, he had perhaps the advantage of perspective from a different part of the world, as he certainly had the advantage of a quite different literary community. Yet it remains odd that for Western Australian writers only the more obvious aspects of this strange and powerful landscape were considered in those years.

For the novel in Western Australia the drought may have broken in the thirties, but there was no indication of a flood.

NOTES

   *Black Opal* Heinemann, London, 1921


3. For instance, William Siebenhaar, helped by Lawrence in the publication of *Max Havelsaar*, but whose long poem *Dorothea* Lawrence threw into the sea after leaving Perth.


5. Published by Hodder & Stoughton, London.


7. ibid., p51.


15. Angus & Robertson, Sydney, 1937.


18. Quoted from the *Sunday Times* on the jacket of Ewers’ next novel, *Fire On The Wind*.


22. Angus & Robertson, Sydney, 1934.


30. See “E.L. Grant Watson and Western Australia” in *Westerly* 1, 1980

For other reference see: *The Literature of Western Australia*, Bruce Bennett, ed., University of Western Australia Press, 1979.

The Censor as Literary Critic

All great literature contains the element that is called obscene. Great literature is true to life, therefore the greatest works are most obscene. The so-called obscene is an essential part of normal and wholesome life, so that art that ignores the obscene is to an extent defective.

— Brian Lloyd and George Gilbert

*The censorship and public morality: An Australian conspectus*
(Sydney 1930) pp. 31-2.

Fine writing by prominent authors will not save them if their work is tinged with obscenity. My idea is that authors like Aldington and Huxley should not escape the provisions of the law any more than an obscure nonentity who seeks to become a best-seller by indulging in pornography.


"Sex enters into a lot of things, doesn't it?"
"I don't know anythin' it doesn't enter into,
Mrs Dexter — and that's the God's truth of it."

— Frank Dalby Davison

*The White Thorntree*

On 9 May 1933 Federal Cabinet approved the creation of an “honorary Board to assist the Minister for Trade and Customs in the censorship of imported books”. Its members were Robert Garran (1867-1957), recently retired from his long career as Solicitor General (Chairman); L.H. Allen (1879-1964), Professor of English at the Royal Military College, Duntroon, from 1918 to 1931, and lecturer in English and Classics at Canberra University College since 1931; and J.F.M. Haydon (b 1882), formerly Professor of Modern Languages at Duntroon, and lecturer in Modern Languages at Canberra University College since 1930. Their role was to advise the Minister (Thomas W. White for most of the 1930s) on whether books referred to them contravened Section 52(c) of the Customs Act, that is, whether they were blasphemous, indecent or obscene.

The Cabinet agendum on the establishment of the Board, possibly with the cases of *Brave New World, Ulysses* and Norman Lindsay’s *Redheap* in mind, commented that the present system of censorship had
been subjected to much criticism and it appears that every time a book is banned that is the production of an author of any repute or notoriety an immediate outcry takes place and an attack is made upon the censorship.

When a book was "blantantly obscene", the submission continued, no difficulty arose as it could be "condemned out of hand". But there were borderline cases "where an author endeavours to get just as close to obscenity . . . as public opinion and the law will allow." Moreover, it was not possible to lay down any definite standard or measure of indecency. Every book must be dealt with individually, both as to its language and its purpose, and whatever authority has to pronounce upon a book, there will be many cases where grave doubts will arise.

To take the political heat off the Minister and to help him cope with the increasing number of books which required attention, a semi-independent committee was needed, preferably staffed with people with the time for a "thankless" and unpaid job, and who would "possess the confidence of the general public as to their qualifications".

With Garran as chairman, the Minister for Trade and Customs (Colonel White) could be confident that the board would uphold Empire and family values. During the Great War Garran had drafted the War Precautions Act in such a way that the powers of the Attorney-General "were almost unlimited . . . Magna Carta was suspended, and he and I had full and unquestionable powers over the liberties of every subject." The regulations under the Act were mostly expressed widely to make sure that nothing necessary was omitted, and the result soon was that John Citizen was hardly able to lift a finger without coming under the penumbra of some technical offence.

At the time of his appointment, Garran said that the board would work "in a liberal and not a 'semi-wowser spirit'". Prohibiting indecent works did not mean "the suppression of lawful political opinion, but merely the protection of innocence against blatantly corrupt work, and the prevention of exploitation by those who sought to make money by trafficking in filth". The reference to political opinion indicates an initial uncertainty as to whether the Board would deal with political books. There is no mention of such responsibility in the Cabinet agenda, but the Sydney Morning Herald article (presumably based on a statement by White) does include this aspect. Politically dubious books were not supposed to be referred to the Board, but to the Attorney-General's Department for an opinion as to whether they were seditious, though from 1933 to 1935 White (feaful of A-G's lenicency) made the decisions on his own. Whether the law left any room for "lawful political opinion" is another matter. The Customs (Prohibited Imports) Regulations, the Seditious Literature Proclamation and the Crimes Act so restricted the scope of discussion that, as the Council for Civil Liberties commented, "the stifling of very mild political criticism was perfectly possible". Garran claimed publicly that the Book Censorship Board had "nothing to do" with the law which banned works that had a seditious intention, but it did ban at least two books solely on political grounds: S.S. Utah by Mike Pell in April 1934 and Short Stories From China in September 1935.
There were few disagreements between White and the Board. Of the first 66 books referred, it recommended the release of 34 and the prohibition of 32; of the former, the Minister rejected the Board's advice in only five cases, with a final result that 29 were released and 37 banned. The Board seems rarely to have met. The chairman was supplied with a copy of the book under review; he would read it, note down his comments, then pass it on to the other members. They would write their judgements and pass them back to the chairman, who would then consider the views expressed and communicate a decision to the Comptroller General (Permanent Head) of the Department of Trade and Customs. The Board was reorganised in 1937. Renamed the Literature Censorship Board and backed up by an appeals censor, the new committee existed in this form until 1957. Peter Coleman has written that the new board had a "formal procedure and increased powers and prestige", but there is no evidence that its informal procedure was any different up to 1939. He is right to say that its policy was more liberal than before, but this change was more likely due to a general liberalisation of government policy after 1937 and to changes in personnel. Garran was removed to the post of appeals censor; the more liberal Allen replaced him as chairman; the vacant spot on the board was filled by Kenneth Binns, the Parliamentary Librarian; and in November 1938 the fanatical White left the Customs portfolio.* The files of the Book/Literature Censorship Board are a rich source for the study of literary, political and moral attitudes, and they offer insight into the perceptions of current, particularly overseas, literature and into prevailing standards of literary taste. The judgments of Garran are principally moral and political, but those of Allen, Binns and (to a lesser extent) Haydon are reflective works of literary criticism, often longer and more detailed than newspaper book reviews of the period.

Realism was the dominant literary mode of the 1930s, and fidelity to life was the principal criterion by which the quality of fiction was judged. Charles Bean defined the chief essential of literature as telling the truth: great writers were those who could see

the genuine reactions of men and women to their surroundings — minutely analysing them or cutting down like a surgeon to the core of the impulse or disturbance which this or that circumstance creates — and then displaying to us the discovered truth. . . . The first requirement of a great literature is that it must show us ruthlessly to ourselves, our greatness and our meanness, regardless of praise or blame, flattery or threats.11

NOTE: * There were many differences between Garran and Allen. The former was older, lacking a specifically literary education and evidently steeped in the Victorian view of literature as a morally improving tonic. Allen had done a PhD in English — on the personality of Shelley. The difference between them is suggested by their contrasting attitudes to George Orwell's novel, *Keep The Aspidistra Flying*. Garran found the book without literary merit and indecent, while Allen considered that it had "considerable merit" and was in favour of passing it. Such was Garran's power as chairman that, although Haydon supported Allen to the extent of feeling that the novel lacked sufficient interest to be harmful (i.e. attract a wider readership), *Keep The Aspidistra Flying* was still added to the list of prohibited publications.10
As Bean went on to point out (in the context of asserting the impossibility of significant creative writing in totalitarian countries like Germany, Italy or Russia), such a project was incompatible with the existence of literary censorship. M. Barnard Eldershaw wrote that culture (including literature) was “the image in which man and his environment are brought together. It is the mirror held to life”.\textsuperscript{12} Still further left along the political spectrum, Frank Dalby Davison drew on this comment when arguing that literature was primarily communication:

\begin{quote}
Literature gives back to life an image of itself; and life looks to that image for confirmation and for criticism. . . . When a person says, ‘That is a good book . . . ’ he is saying in effect that the author has given out an image of life in which he finds some degree of enlightenment, confirmation or other helpfulness in living.\textsuperscript{13}
\end{quote}

Even Garran professed to think that “any writer with a real message making a sincere study of life must be given the utmost ‘freedom of expression’”.\textsuperscript{14}

But the concept of realism raised more problems than it solved. What aspects of life should be treated in literature? and in what detail? What was typical and what abnormal, and was literary attention to the latter really true to life? To dwell on the “negative” side of life might be as unrealistic (because partial) as to emphasise the “positive”. How could the concept accommodate conflicting social and political values — differing views of life, in fact? What was a “real message”? These questions were at the heart of the Book Censorship Board’s assessments of the works referred to it, and Garran was evidently still exercised by them when he wrote his autobiography in the 1950s.\textsuperscript{15} There he defended himself against the charge of having been a suppressor of literature by observing that under the Customs Act the importation of indecent books was illegal. The Board’s role had simply been to advise the Minister, and only on borderline cases at that: obvious obscenity could be recognised by uneducated customs officers, but it took a trained mind to notice when an author was trying to sail close to the wind. Garran did not pretend that obscenity could be defined objectively, but he saved himself from the accusation of mere subjectivity by an appeal to “community standards” and the supposed reactions of “the typical reader”. Standards of indecency changed over time, he conceded, and it had been the aim of the Board to apply “the test of the general feeling of the community here and now”: a book could not be classed as decent just because “a few ultra-moderns think it so”. Decency depended upon the reader as well as the writer: “the test is to be found”, wrote Garran, “in the reaction of the typical reader to the book.” He and his brothers did no reader response research: in practice they relied on the imagined reaction of particular groups of potential, but probably neither actual nor typical, readers, for example, young people and the excitable — sexually in relation to morally dangerous books, politically in relation to subversive ones. Community standards, the enforcement of which was Garran’s chief justification for censorship, were evidently different from community practice: he assumed, along with White and the rest of the Board, that pornographic writing was a sure road to best-seller status, that the public was irresistibly attracted to filth and had to be protected from itself.

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Garran’s assumptions were that sex is a very small part of life, and that a published book holds the same status as a public act and should therefore not contain anything not properly seen in public. “We judge by intention and effect”, he wrote:

There are two kinds of indecency: wilful obscenity, intended to appeal to the prurient, which is comparatively easy to recognise; and the indecency which... comes from over-emphasis of certain aspects of life. These are certain things that are not done in public.

Garran could probably conceive that what might be seen in the leafy streets of Canberra’s plush Red Hill might be different from scenes in the lanes of Fitzroy or Woolloomooloo; in the shanty towns of unemployed at Dudley’s Flat or La Perouse; or in the red light districts of any city. But, in his view, what went on there, like what happened in people’s bedrooms and bathrooms, in locker-rooms, parks at night and doctors’ surgeries, was not fit subject matter for fiction. Despite his concession that “wide freedom must be allowed to the writer as an honest study of any aspect of life”, Garran’s own moral and political views were what counted; their application set quite narrow limits to what people could read and write about in the 1930s. Realism was subordinate to morality, art to the conventional, respectable social values which Garran felt it his duty to uphold, even at the cost of freedom of expression. “It is sometimes said that art is not concerned with morals”, he wrote in 1930, “but when an artist exhibits his work to the public, he is not exempt from the law, which does concern itself with morals”.

The ground on which customs officers and the Book Censorship Board might object to literary works were very wide. Explicit descriptions of (heterosexual) sex, coarse language, nudity, promiscuity (especially in women), homosexuality, divorce, abortion, violence, “deviant” sexual practices and free love were all out. The objection was stronger if such mentions were presented in a favourable light or seen to be advocated, diminished if the novel seemed to frown on its characters’ activities: one customs officer, examining Wanton Ways, took exception to the absence of any note of shame or regret over the characters’ promiscuity. Books could be banned for subject matter or treatment, and they did not have to include detailed accounts of sex acts or to use obscene language: to tolerate sex outside marriage was often quite sufficient to earn the censor’s displeasure.

Such policies had an impoverishing effect on Australian fiction in the 1930s. The prohibition of major proletarian realist novels like John Dos Passos’s 1919 or Myra Page’s The Gathering Storm, for instance, deprived writers of examples which might have encouraged more of them to experiment with new fictional forms or to write daring works of political exposure and social protest. The most successful Australian attempt to tackle contemporary radical political themes, John Harcourt’s Upsurge, was itself banned, with terminal consequences for the author’s literary career and probably to the long-term loss of Australian literature. Modern critics complain about the stilted, improbably polite dialogue of characters — particularly working class characters — in 1930s novels, but one which reproduced authentic, everyday speech would not have got past the censor. When Garran, as Solicitor-General,
gave his opinion as to whether Norman Lindsay’s *Redheap* was indecent, he replied:

Much of the dialogue in this book is in my opinion indecent and obscene. It may be said that it occurs naturally in the book as things which the characters portrayed might actually say — as things which are ‘in character’. But that test would justify an imaginable degree of obscenity. I think that the indecency of this book — which goes far beyond what is necessary to the presentation of the subject — is of character which brings it within the terms of Section 52c.18

Garran’s illiberalism is well illustrated in this episode. The customs officer who had referred *Redheap* to the Comptroller suggested that it should not be prohibited because its offensive matter was no worse than what could be found in books already circulating, such as *Jew Suss* or *All Quiet On the Western Front*. Garran’s quick retort to this appeal for liberal consistency was to demand uniformity in the opposite direction: if *Redheap* were banned, these books should be banned as well.

The demands of decency thus limited not only the depth and verisimilitude with which authors could approach acceptable topics, but also the range of subject matter they could tackle in the first place.

Genuine scientific texts on sexual abnormality might be allowed in serious libraries for research use by approved scholars, but popular works were a different matter. Garran read *Strange Loves*, by La Forest Potter MD, as professing to be “a serious study of homosexuality”, but he found its general style suggesting that it was, rather, “a book to excite curiosity”. American authors, he remarked, “show no squeamishness in an open discussion of this subject; but I think its discussion in this way offends against present standards of decency in Australia.” Allen agreed:

This book is not desirable for public bookshelves, and I should not regard it as in any way a serious contribution to medical science. It is a popularisation of information regarding sexual abnormality . . . It is not well written: and in places is incorrect. For instance, it repeats mere garbled gossip about Socrates; and I do not believe that the author has read a word of the *Symposium*.20

Apart from the reference to bookshelves, this comment is in the style of scholarly book reviewing: “Dr X has done little fresh research in this area and has thus produced a mere popularisation. He has neglected important sources of evidence and grossly misunderstood one of the few he did bother to consult.” Confronted with an unworthy addition to the literature, the most that reviewers can usually do is regret that the book should have found a publisher, but what if reviewers had the power to ban books which they felt sub-standard? The Cabinet agendum on the establishment of the Board had raised the difficulty of finding people who would perform a thankless task without even a fee. No doubt all members served from a sense of social duty, but it seems possible that Allen and Haydon enjoyed their work because of the way it slotted into the conventions of scholarly/literary discourse and thus fed academic vanity.

Literary merit and apparent condemnation of homosexuality were the factors which saved Seaforth McKenzie’s *The Young Desire It*. A New South Wales
customs officer drew the book to the attention of the State Collector of Customs in February 1939, informing him that it had been queried when first imported, but released after receipt of intelligence that it had won the Australian Literature Society Gold Medal. The Collector was shocked by the novel. He despatched it to Canberra with the comment that it contained “much that is undesirable and suggestive in dealing with a boy's life at school and the attentions paid to him by a sex pervert”. One wonders what Garran would have made of the book, but the Board’s new chairman had no doubts about its merit.

First, wrote Allen, *The Young Desire It* portrayed the triumph of natural instinct over perversion:

Proceeding on Freudian principles the author attempts to show how the sexual suppressions of a lonely man emerge in unnatural desires. The theme is worked out in the atmosphere of school-life, and the relations between a frustrated master and an inexperienced boy are portrayed. The general theme is that nature conquers by developing in the boy’s mind love for a girl. . . . The unfortunate master in the story is portrayed as a character rather to be pitied than spurned; but it cannot be said that, for that reason, homosexuality is condoned. The attempt, rather, is to understand the episode as a psychological fact. As against this, the love passages between the boy and the girl are of extreme beauty, and leave no doubt as to the supremacy of the natural instincts.

Secondly, the novel’s treatment of its themes fell within the acceptable limits of realism: “It handles a subject in itself unpleasant, but one which is not without the range of life”, wrote Allen, who continued:

That such things . . . may happen is well within probability; and the author asserts that the story, in the main, is true. His statement is corroborated by the evident sincerity of his novel.

Thirdly, the work possessed considerable literary value: “The style is distinguished, and some of the descriptions of Australian scenery are of rare quality. The psychological delineation is subtle, and the atmosphere is that of an idealist poet.”

Writers of the 1930s condemned attempts to restrict their range. They believed that fiction should grapple fearlessly with all the realities of life, the nice and the nasty, creating a record not only of what went on in the main streets and public spaces, but also of what happened in the back lanes, the boardrooms and the backblocks. Frank Dalby Davison attacked the censorship in the name of Art, arguing that a book which

attempts a serious discussion of life and takes life all standing [i.e. in all its truth and diversity] is very liable to find its way onto the banned list. To judge a work by anything other than the canons of art is ultimately to do a disservice to humanity.

No nation can become adult whose citizens have not the freedom of the library.

Despite his reference to the judging of art strictly by its own canons, Davidson was not putting forward an art for art’s sake position. He was demanding a critical literature which could tackle whatever issues and aspects of life the writer’s conscience demanded, especially those which Garran felt unseemly. The book which Davison himself always wanted to write had to wait until the “permissive” 1960s: what chance would *The White Thorntree* have had at the hands of the Book Censorship Board?
Ultimately, the debate was not between art and morality, but between different political values. Barnard Eldershaw attacked censorship for two reasons, one cultural and one political. First, it inhibited the development of that national literature which was necessary if Australia were to conceive itself as, and thus have the chance to become, a nation. Secondly, although censorship was designed "ostensibly to protect the morals of the community", it was "also used as a political filter". Davison asserted the right of an author to treat life as he saw it and to take up political positions. The writer was "entitled to his viewpoint" and could be "a propagandist without suffering in his art" so long as he did not permit "the advocate to come before the artist" and continued to entertain.

John Harcourt's novel Upsurge was one of the few Australian novels banned during the 1930s. A muckraking story of sexual adventure, industrial militancy and establishment corruption in depression-torn Perth, the novel exhibited all those elements of realism which Garran and the Board deplored. "A crude book, on the subject of 'revolutionary upsurge'", commented Garran, "it is disfigured by some very gross passages", especially the visit to the brothel. To describe what went on in brothels — even to mention that people patronised such facilities — was to take realism into forbidden territory. A similar point was made by the Daily News book reviewer, whose comments on Upsurge are remarkably similar to Garran's. The novel, he wrote, brought forward "the question of the relationship of pornography to art." The author had made a mistake in giving his book "an overpowering taint of the sexual", for although Upsurge might "provide excitement for some of his readers — those who carry prohibited Parisian picture cards in their pocket wallets", there were "still limits to sexual emphasis to which a writer may go, and ... Harcourt has here exceeded them." If the censor could play the role of book reviewer, the reverse could also occur: picking up the censor's pencil, the reviewer wrote that he "almost suspected" that Harcourt had written Upsurge in the hope that it would be banned.

Defending his novel, Harcourt invoked the authority of the literary principle of mimesis: the story was founded on fact. "The theme of the novel is the modern crisis with its accompanying decay in the manners and morals of society", he told the West Australian. "It is handled in a realistic manner, but I do not think that anyone, other than those who run away from all forms of unpleasantness, could regard it as indecent." The Australian Woman's Mirror complained that Harcourt took "a naughty-boyish delight in using words and describing events that most keep from the notice of women", revealing that the realism it wanted was the reticent, circumscribed realism of Garran, and not the thoroughgoing realism of Bean or Davison. Again, Harcourt replied to such attacks with the argument that his book was true:

Most of the main incidents and many of the minor ones actually occurred, and neither the conditions the unemployed put up with in the relief camps, nor the treatment meted out to the demonstrators, have been in any way exaggerated.

Many years later Harcourt reiterated his defense of Upsurge as "an honest fictitonal account of the Western Australian State of Denmark at the time", WESTERLY, No. 4, DECEMBER, 1986
the intertextuality implicit in which comment deserves notice. Harcourt’s appeal
to the authority of the facts reminds us of the power of naturalism as a
literary genre, and of its parent, scientific positivism, as an everyday mode
of interpretation. The terms of the debate on whether realism was obscene
had hardly altered since the 1880s controversy over Zola’s daring novels.

And the reference to *Hamlet* reminds us that it was the Prince of Denmark
who, in his charge to the players, gave us one of the classic statements of
realism as mimesis.

“Truth to life” was the most common term of criticism employed by members
of the Board when composing judgments on books submitted to them, but
a novel’s failure to represent life as the censors conceived it could be a ground
for prohibition even when it was not obscene. Garran disliked *The Interne*
because it represented a hospital “as a place for intrigues between internes
and nurses. Actual passages of indecency are few — main themes being
mismanagement by its political bosses and callousness of doctors, but the
tone is not edifying.”

Garran was not going to have his colleagues in the medical profession held
up to contempt, and Allen supported him, arguing that presentation of only
one side of life (the negative) was not true realism.

In the period with which this survey is concerned (1933-1939) very few
Australian novels came to the Book Censorship Board’s attention. The most
significant was John Harcourt’s *Upsurge*, and the other instances were mainly
books by authors who had already fallen foul of the censorship. *Redheap*
was banned in 1930, so Norman Lindsay’s later novels — *Pan In The Parlour*
and *Age Of Consent* — were also sent to the Board, which passed them
with a mixture of boredom and distaste. Jean Devanny’s *The Butcher Shop*
was also banned in 1930, with the consequence that *The Virtuous Courtesan*
attracted attention in 1935. “I don’t know whether the authoress is an Australian
trying to be American or an American trying to be Australian”, commented
Garran, “but it is pernicious tripe” which was duly suppressed. Martin Boyd’s
*Night Of The Party* and Leonard Mann’s *A Murder In Sydney* were also
examined, and both released.

The scarcity of Australian books in the Board’s files cannot simply be due
to the Commonwealth’s having power only over imported literature, since
much Australian work was published overseas (mostly in England) at this
time. Some locally published novels — like F.S. Hibble’s *Karangi*, for its
sexual explicitness and endorsement of liberated moral attitudes, or Dymphna
Cusack’s *Jungfrau*, for its treatment of abortion — might have come under
notice had they been imported and thus had to run the gauntlet of filth-
hunting custom officials. The severity of the censorship may not only have
deprived writers of fruitful foreign inspiration, but also compelled them to
be cautious, to anticipate the censor by avoiding forbidden subjects or leaving
out the detail. Publishers were another level of censorship in themselves: as
respectable members of the middle class they would have held moral views
similar to those of the Board, though their business interests impelled them
in the direction of greater liberalism. It is impossible to say how many
manuscripts were refused publication on moral grounds, but at least two were
rejected for political reasons: Lesbia Harford’s *The Invaluable Mystery* in the 1920s, and Leonard Mann’s *The Red; or The Will and the Flesh* in the 1940s. Many 1930s novels take up gender and sexual politics, but relatively few Australian writers of the period seem to have been concerned with the erotic side of human life. Discouraged by the censor, they may also have been preoccupied by the need to defend liberal values at a time of encroaching fascism and thus more concerned with democratic traditions than sexual liberation. The intellectuals who might have penned the banned books of Australia were perhaps too staid. Harcourt was first president of the Book Censorship Abolition League, but he was quickly replaced by the respectable Professor McMahon Ball — not because of his supposed communist sympathies, but because the straight-laced liberals who set the tone for the anti-censorship movement did not want to defend a dirty book like *Upsurge*. At a time when the Labour Party was as zealous for moral censorship as the United Australian Party, and the Communists equally puritanical, there was perhaps little to be hoped for from a crusade on that issue.

### NOTE ON SOURCES

This survey of the relation between censorship and literary criticism relies on the files of the Book Censorship Board (1937-57), which are held in the Australian Archives, Canberra: CRS A 3-23, Correspondence files, 1933-57 [Decisions for comments on literature forwarded by the Customs Department to Commonwealth Book Censorship Board].

The Department of Trade and Customs also raised a file on each title (or group of titles if a number were considered together) considered for prohibition: CRS A425, Correspondence files, annual single number series, C.1915-

The Attorney-General’s Department raised files on books, pamphlets and magazines prohibited as seditious; before the creation of the Book Censorship Board it was sometimes asked for an opinion on whether a work was indecent: CRS A432, Correspondence files, annual single number series, 1929-

It is extraordinary that nothing substantial as been published on literary censorship since Peter Coleman’s superficial and inaccurate survey, *Obscenity, Blasphemy and Sedition* (Sydney 1961, revised 1974), though there is Ina Bertrand’s study of films, *Film censorship in Australia* (St Lucia 1978). The gap is to some extent filled by important unpublished work in thesis form.

Stephen Alomes, “‘Reasonable men’: Middle class reformism in Australia, 1928-1939”, PhD, Australian National University, 1979, especially Chapter 4, “Defending liberal democracy: Intellectuals, censorship and civil liberties”.


Parkinson’s is a detailed account of the operations of the censorship apparatus; Payne’s is a series of case studies on the banning of *Redheap*, *Ulysses* and *Brave New World*; Sagazio’s thesis is a general account, well researched, but weakened by an apologetic attitude to Lyons and Thomas White, Minister for Customs.

I am grateful to Dennis Haskell, Humphrey McQueen and Richard Nile for comments on an earlier draft of this paper.
NOTES

1. Lyons-Page Ministries, Folders of minutes and submissions, Australian Archives, CRS A2694/XM, Volume 8.
2. Information on Garran and Allen from Australian Dictionary of Biography; on Haydon from Who’s who in Australia, 1944.
16. Garran, opinion (as Solicitor-General) on Redheap, in response to request from Department of Trade and Customs for advice as to whether it was indecent within the meaning of Section 52 (c) of the Customs Act, Australian Archives, CRS A432, 30/812, 5 May 1930.
17. Parkison, p.52-53.
19. Garran, opinion on Redheap.
22. CRS A3023, 1939, March 1939.
27. Australian Women’s Mirror, Sydney, 4 September 1934.
28. Harcourt in 1935, quoted in Richard Nile’s introduction to the reissue of Upsurge (Nedlands, University of Western Australia Press, 1986). Nile’s valuable introduction includes a useful summary of the debate on the banning of this novel.
31. CRS A3023, 1933-34, October 1934; ibid 1938, November 1938.
32. CRS A3023, 1935-36, October 1935. For the file on Devanny’s books, see CRS A425, 43/4415.
Changing Places: Working-Class Women in the Fiction of the Depression

In Damned Whores and God’s Police Anne Summers laments the lack of information about women’s lives during the Depression.

...the images which have been handed down convey almost exclusively the male experience of the Depression; we have been told little about what it was like for women during the 1930s.¹

A survey of the sociological and historical literature certainly supports this argument. There is no Australian equivalent of Working Class Wives, Margery Spring Rice’s exposure of the living conditions of English working-class women in the Depression.² While Beverley Kingston’s My Wife, My Daughter and Poor Mary Ann looks at the part “ordinary” women played in constructing Australian society, it covers the Pre-Depression period (1860 until 1929),³ rather than the Depression; and Miriam Dixson’s The Real Matilda, which claims to deal with problems associated with the identity of women in Australia from 1788 until 1975, deals principally with the formative influences of a nation of convicts and pioneers.⁴ Summers’ own work, which examines the “cultural apartheid and critical neglect of women in Australia” devotes only seventeen pages to an analysis of the effects of the Depression upon Australian women.⁵ Only one chapter in Judy Mackinolty’s collection of essays on The Wasted Years? is devoted to women.⁶ Men also supply the bulk of the recollections of what it was like to live in Australia during the Depression in Wendy Lowenstein’s oral history, Weevils in the Flour.⁷ L.J. Louis and Ian Turner’s The Depression of the 1930s claims to emphasize the “economic, political and social consequences of the Depression”, but these consequences are of a male-oriented kind,⁸ and Geoffrey Bolton’s social history of the Depression in Western Australia, A Fine Country to Starve In, does not attempt to analyze the effects of the Depression upon West Australian women.⁹ While the image of the pioneer woman in particular has received some critical attention,¹⁰ the image of women in the Depression years has been little studied.¹¹
Yet during the 1930s the position of women in Australian society changed significantly, and working-class women were particularly affected by the changes brought about by the Depression. Those women who went out to work in the Depression years had to confront the hostility of a male-dominated trade union movement which feared that the unrestricted entry of lesser-paid females into the work force would permanently endanger men's jobs; they also had to face the guilt and bitterness nourished by many unemployed male workers (their husbands included), who felt ashamed and threatened by the overturning of their traditional social roles. While some women found a new independence in the difficult circumstances of the workplace, a majority found that their domestic circumstances had altered during the Depression, and that a new resourcefulness was needed to handle the increased responsibility of keeping a family together in desperate economic conditions. As household economist the wife was now a more important figure than the traditional male breadwinner (even if he were fortunate enough still to hold a job), and her domestic expediencies included making clothes out of sacks and spare materials, meals out of the cheapest ingredients, and managing to put aside small sums of money for her husband's personal use. This newly acquired importance was further increased in the war years when many women were encouraged to work in factories as part of the war effort. Although these changes are only infrequently mentioned in the histories of the period, they are clearly represented in Depression fiction. Despite widespread belief that women were neglected, in accordance with a continuing pattern of literary androcentrism, writers of the Depression not only include many working-class women, but portray them very differently from those portrayed in fiction before 1929.

Ian Reid disagrees with the notion that only the male experiences of the Depression have been handed down to later generations. According to Reid "novels about women and their problems of self-definition in a male-oriented society" actually originated in the Depression years, as the writers of the time examined the situation of women, especially young women, caught between their impulse towards independent development and pressures towards conformity, towards acceptance of a subordinate role in social and personal affairs.

Reid cites Christina Stead's *Seven Poor Men of Sydney* (1934) and *For Love Alone* (1945), Dymphna Cusack's *Jungfrau* (1936), and Kylie Tennant's *Ride on Stranger* (1943) to confirm his argument that during the Depression some (mostly women) writers began to question sex roles and the oppressed state of women in Australian society. A serious re-evaluation of women's roles does occur in the 1930s, and Christina Stead, in particular, is responsible for the era's most thorough and innovative investigations of female identity, but, Kylie Tennant excepted, the novelists that Reid mentions examine the personal and social dilemmas of middle-class women rather than working-class women.

Clearly working-class women appear less regularly than their bourgeois counterparts, but a gender difference occurs within the area of working-class
fiction as a whole, and working-class women appear less frequently than working-class men. For some (mostly male) novelists, women are of peripheral interest; although Vance Palmer, for instance, stresses the working-class backgrounds of his pallid male protagonists, he rarely introduces working-class women into his novels. When they are present, they are decidedly sketchy; in *The Passage* Lew Callaway’s sisters hardly exist, and while his mother Anna is fully drawn, she is clearly a middle-class woman who has married beneath her. Despite her working-class children she still perceives herself as noticeably superior to the other inhabitants of the Passage.16 During the Depression years Katharine Susannah Prichard’s creative spirit seems to have languished, and there are no female workers of any consequence in *Intimate Strangers* (1937), her major novel of that period. Apart from the brief appearance of Tony Maretti’s mother (rather coyly and unimaginatively stereotyped as a shy Italian peasant in a New Country), “Dirk” Hartog promotes Prichard’s message of the proletarianisation of society by descending the social ladder to live with Maretti. Other writers like Gavin Casey and Leonard Mann who deal principally with working-class characters tend to reflect Depression life through masculine protagonists, although women are significant in the ways in which they help or hinder the men’s efforts to adjust to Depression conditions.

The stereotype of the Australian working-class woman (best typified by Lawson’s stoical, careworn and self-sacrificing bushwomen) is not altered as dramatically or as profoundly as that of the working-class man in Depression times. Because the worker’s image is so well-established and so widely recognized, the novelists of the thirties frequently use working-class men in an attempt to reveal the tragic disparity between past hopes and present disillusionment, and to personify the despair of a generation simultaneously deprived of work and facing a bleak, war-looming future. In Marjorie Barnard Eldershaw’s *Tomorrow and Tomorrow* (1946), for example, Harry Munster superficially resembles Lawson’s workers, yet his life is so pitiful and shoddy, so devoid of mateship, that even he realises that Lawson’s dreams have come to nothing:

Faces in the street. Pa Blan used to quote that, Pa Blan talking of the nineties, the great days of militant labour, era of progress. Isn’t today born of yesterday? What was wrong with the great days that today is no better, but worse? ... Old man’s talk, old Pa Blan’s talk, sick to death with a cancer in his stomach and he didn’t know, talking of how fine things used to be when he was a young man, and the world being made. What world? No recognition in any face. Night now. The two ends of darkness resting on nothing.17

Working-class women, who are less linked in the popular imagination to symbols of egalitarian promise and national fulfilment, may instead be seen to reflect the changing social and economic conditions of women, as perceived by the novelists of the time.
II

Even the most uncompromisingly masculine writers make some concessions to the changing times. Of all the writers of the 1930s, an era in which it is commonly considered that Lawson was “canonized”, 18 Gavin Casey is generally considered to be the most faithful follower of the 1890s realistic tradition. 19 His male characters closely approximate Lawson’s literary model, while his female characters similarly reflect the supportive, domestic and subordinate role of working-class women in the literature of that earlier time. In Downhill is Easier (1945), for instance, Jim’s fondness for his wife Sadie closely resembles Joe Wilson’s affectionate proprietorship of his wife Mary, and Jim’s simple expression of emotion upon seeing Sadie again after a long absence echoes Lawson’s familiar sense of the beauty and fragility of early relationships:

Sadie looked just as tall and fresh and friendly and sweet as I remembered her. Her frock and shoes were cheap and worn, but she always made the best of whatever clothes she had. I thought how wonderful she’d look if only I had the money to spend on her and then I forgot the frock and the shoes and all that. I just saw Sadie, and if you don’t know how it was I can’t tell you. 20

Soon their relationship takes on the equally Lawsonian air of past happiness and present regrets, while Sadie’s prettiness begins to fade, and she assumes the look of a woman defeated jointly by the outback life and the inconsiderateness of her weak husband. Jim’s Veblenesque desires to show off his wife nevertheless reveal something of the more pervasive consumerism of a later age; for as Jim sees it, an attractive wife like Sadie means that he is a better man than his otherwise successful mate Reg.

Sadie is of relatively little consequence in a novel which stresses masculine behaviour, and which offers support for Dorothy Casey Congdon’s succinct, if bitter summary of Casey’s attitude towards women:

His opinion of women was low . . . He depended on women but seemed to think that they were insensitive and had little intelligence. They provided a home, home comforts, sex, and a respectable background — nothing more. 21

Yet, because she is young and childless, Sadie gets the second chance that is denied to most working-class women in pre-1929 fiction. At the end of the novel, when Jim is imprisoned as an accessory to murder, Sadie and Reg go off together to another state. Although the defacto arrangement is mentioned delicately (Reg shows signs of embarassment when he confesses their plans to Jim — Casey does not detail Sadie’s feelings), it is clearly a viable alternative to the pariah-like status of a criminal’s wife. Sadie has been the source of antagonism between Jim and Reg; by consenting to go with Reg she demonstrates that in Depression times a stable relationship between a man and a woman has become more important than the traditonal bond of mateship.
Leonard Mann's *The Go-Getter* (1942) goes further than *Downhill is Easier* by not only reaffirming that male-female relationships are more important than those between the men themselves, but by suggesting that working-class women are no longer solitary stoics like the drover's wife. As Mann sees it, women are essential for men's emotional well-being, and Phyllis Lee's concern for Chris Gibbons' welfare restores a self-esteem that has been badly knocked about by the Depression. Gibbons is amoral and patronising in his first estimation of Phyllis's character:

... she was a bit of luck. She liked him and would like him more, and with her experience she would know how to look after herself, and he would have no worry on that account. And it did not trouble her he had no money. At least he would no more be troubled about the perpetual need of his body. She was not a bad sort of girl, he concluded. Though she was battered, she kept her head up.22

Although he never quite loses his air of indulgent patronage, Gibbons' complacency disappears and she becomes indispensible to him. Phyllis is a lively, assertive woman who easily manages to ward off Gibbons' early advances. She then obtains a job for him with her uncle's trucking firm. Gibbons cannot marry her, since his wife is still alive (living with another man), and divorce is financially impossible. After some deliberation Phyllis decides to live with him, to look after his two children and to help support the family. She sees their future together as a "bonzer" one (p.298); and she is undoubtedly Gibbons' salvation from the problems of the Depression as well as from his own loneliness and alienation. *The Go-Getter* is a typical example of those Depression novels which ignore mateship and instead stress the importance of women as a solace in times of social and economic dislocation.23

Mann and Casey both use male protagonists and present women in secondary roles. On the other hand, Kylie Tennant is undoubtedly the most comprehensive analyst of working-class women in Australian Depression society. She has claimed that her novels perform an entertaining and thought-provoking function by converting real-life events into a digestible fictional form because "in the depression you couldn't get the truth published unless you pretended it was a lie."24 In *The Battlers* she introduces the Stray, who is at first a comical, unlovely sight, an Eliza Doolittle-ish creation who declares to Snow her loathing of mankind:

"I 'ates men — 'ates the old bloomin' lot of 'em. Wot do they ever do but sit back and watch women work? I ain't ever seen a man yet what was any good. The whole schemin', lyin', crawlin' lot of 'em. I 'ates 'em. And women, too," she added liberally.25

The Stray looks like a "trapped, fierce, little animal" (p.12) which has been ravaged by its introduction to life in the outback; nevertheless, despite her unprepossessing appearance, she signals her intention of partnering Snow in his search for work. From then on Snow treats her like the badly trained puppy that her nickname implies, and she shows a complementary eagerness to follow her chosen master.

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The Stray is not merely a comic trifle, or a pleasant passing interest for the male protagonist. She is developed as a more complex character as the novel progresses. Her early outburst against mankind is shown to be uncharacteristic, as she is not normally self-pitying or complaining. Instead she endures the hardships of the track with a stoical resignation which matches that of Snow himself; and on the infrequent occasions when she can obtain employment, she proves to be both enterprising and hard-working. Although she is a gregarious soul who disrupts the solitariness of Snow's camp by her habit of befriending fellow bagmen, she accurately sees herself as a "bloody toiler" (p.115), and she frequently realizes the futility of the battlers' lives and the inconsequentiality of their efforts. At these times Sharkey Wilkes' drunken opinions about women on the track seem clearly comparable with her own experience:

"A woman's there to put up with things, ain't she? Otherwise she wouldn't a been born that way. A woman's meant for the worst jobs. It'sa woman's lot to bear, ain't it? Well, let her put up with it. It gives her something to grouch about. Why, if a woman didn't have something to moan for, she'd fall sick or something. Not that I stand any moaning from my mob. I'd take the hide off 'em with a belt if they started to whine to me. That's the way to treat 'em" (p.81).

Like Sharkey, the Stray knows implicitly the subordinate role of women in the Australian bush, and when the busker announces his intention of marrying little Betty Wilkes, she eyes Betty kindly but ruefully:

"Annuver mug", she grumbled. "Annuver mug that's found a man to work for all her life" (p.274).

The Stray is an obliging, generous, good-natured woman who contradicts Geoffrey Dutton’s statement that “Woman has always been the sour grapes in the plonk of Australian mateship,”26 and she even raises suggestions that she is a female copy of a recognizably masculine type. Tennant may be accused of creating what Miriam Dixson calls “monsters of mateyness,”27 and of failing to create a new image of Australian women:

Tennant has . . . accepted the mateship tradition associated with men of the Australian bush, instead of creating an alternative behaviour pattern for women characters.28

Yet while characters like the Stray struggle for recognition in a man’s world they are never surrogate males. Despite Tennant’s casual usage of the word “mate”, the egalitarian premise of mateship is almost entirely absent. The relationship between Snow and the Stray is more affectionate than has generally been allowed, for Snow is undemonstrative by nature, and Tennant is a puritanical writer by today’s standards. Yet the romantic overtones are clearly, if often comically, indicated:

"The Stray turned a shining, happy face to him; and Snow noticed that she looked almost handsome. He supposed it must be the teeth" (p.317).
The Stray is not a repository of idealized male traits. She does not fit the laconic image, nor does she attempt to imitate male heroics: much comedy is created from her frank fear of bush horrors (pp. 60-61), and her innocent admiration for a field of Paterson's Curse (p. 205-7). The Stray is instead an indication both of the tradional ravages of outback life and of the newer hazards of life in the Depression. Like her working-class predecessors, she shows dogged bravery, self-sacrifice and family devotion, and although, like them, she is primarily an endurer, she can be assertive when the need arises. She decides to pursue Snow and snares him through determination and perseverance; she takes jobs independently of Snow in order to help their finances, and although Tennant euphemistically calls it being "mates", she eagerly accepts a defacto relationship with him.29

The Stray is always emotionally dependent on Snow, and constantly craves his blessing and patronage. She might complain, like the other women, of the iniquities of woman's lot, as well as the careless behaviour of her man, but she treats this discontent as mere posturing and revels in her traditionally subservient role:

"It's always the same", Dancy agreed, "you'd think to hear them talk, they was the lords of creation. But it's the women and kids does the getting of wood and water and goes out selling, while the men sit in the shade." Dancy was getting a lot of satisfaction in the role of the care-worn family woman (p.216).

Tennant has created a woman who shows, like Dulcie Lee in Jean Devanny's Sugar Heaven (1936), increased resourcefulness and a greater understanding of her social and economic predicament, while at the same time enjoying a thoroughly traditional subordination to her husband:

She realized with dismay the incredible truth that in this matter she had no will of her own. She could fight him, hurt him, plague him — ah, no! Standing there with his maltreated face and bruised arms he was her world. 30

In Tennant's later novels women's roles are more radically scrutinised and while male-female relationships are still important, in keeping with a pattern in Depression fiction, women are less likely to take a subordinate role to men. In Ride on Stranger (1942), for example, Tennant creates a woman who expresses something of the greater independence and freedom of thought of her troubled generation, as well as the misgivings and doubts of a natural non-conformist. Apart from Stead's For Love Alone, Ride on Stranger is more focussed on female experience than any other novel written in or about the Depression years. Upon learning of her fourth pregnancy, the result of which is to be Shannon herself, Ada Hicks feels keenly the burden of being a woman:

"I must have done something pretty terrible to be born a woman. Look at what a good life men have. It doesn't matter whether they're married or single, they never have to worry, and a woman's life is just one long worry. If she isn't stricken down every month, she's worrying because she's not. She worries about having children and she worries about not having any. She's just one big worry to herself that she can't get away from. We're a set of criminals."

"That's what we are. And we get paid out just by being born women. Now this will be the fourth in six years and how I'm going to stand it I don't know,"31

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Yet Mrs Hicks continues in her life of incessant household drudgery and child-bearing. Her daughter Shannon, whose very name is ridiculed by the conventional people about her (a fact which serves to increase her innate rebelliousness) is nevertheless determined not to follow her mother's example. When her pedantic headmaster Mr Tracey asks the boys of her class about their future careers, the ebullient Shannon offers the unsolicited answer that she wishes to be a lawyer. Mr Tracey attempts to puncture her enthusiasm with cold logic:

"I was talking to the boys", he purred. "I wouldn't address a question like that to a girl, would I now? Why there is only one thing for girls to do, and that is to grow up to be good wives and mothers" (p.9).

Shannon refuses to accept this advice, however, and runs furiously from the room. Her life thereafter is defiant and unconventional, consisting largely of an insistent questioning of established ideas and masculine prerogatives.

Other people try to influence Shannon to behave according to their own ideals of feminine behaviour. Aunt Edith, for instance, wants to train Shannon to become "a really womanly woman" (p.41), while her friend Beryl attempts to persuade her of the glamour of her own version of femininity:

Her own idea of excitement was a medley of loud music, intoxicating noise, crowds of gay people, and a stalwart young man to cuddle her. Her worst fears were realized when Shannon said she did not like the taste of beer; she found nothing but boredom in the mauling ways of young men, and she had no ear for the music of the ukelele.

"You never really try," Beryl complained, "to be a good sport" (p.34).

Try as she might, Shannon cannot accept compromise. She tires of her job as a radio-announcer, growing bored with the ego-obsessed people about her; she cannot tolerate the hypocrisy of Southwell Vaughan-Quilter's Order of Human Brotherhood, and although she involves herself in the doings of the Proletarian Club, she remains unconvinced and "more than half-cynical" (p. 181) about their beliefs:

In the world in which she found herself she did not believe that half a dozen changes of the social system would cleanse the sewers of human ignorance and stupidity (p.206).

Her brief, idyllic marriage with John Terrill ends when he enlists in the army, and her home finally becomes a haven for outcasts like herself, the old, the distressed, and the no longer wanted. She is last seen resignedly coaxing a pregnant cat on to her hearth, ruefully aware that her quest for identity has now ended.

In her position of protagonist, or the "stranger" of the title, Shannon commands a greater position of prominence, and she is more articulate than any working-class woman in Australian fiction prior to 1929. She is also more self-assertive and inquiring. She is not bogged down by the responsibilities of family and children (for most of the novel she is quite contemptuous of domesticity) and she is able to pursue several independent, if not eccentric careers, moving with bewildering rapidity from one unorthodox experience
to another. She is both a complex woman who is temperamentally alien to her fictional predecessors, and a convincing portrait of a new kind of working-class woman spawned by the Depression. According to Tennant, she is representative of:

the generation between two wars, a generation which was being wiped out, whose voice had been drowned between the voices of older people and the rising of a new world's birth screams, a generation which had confusion for its god-mother and sucked the milk of unwholesome knowledge (p.320).

Although Shannon's life is presented in a warm and sympathetic fashion, there is no real sense in which Tennant recognizes that Shannon is discontented because society offers few outlets for an unconventional woman. Shannon's feelings of restlessness and alienation appear to issue not from a deeply-held view of female oppression on the part of the author (Modjeska calls Tennant "a female humanist,"32 and this seems highly apposite) but from what Christina Stead has defined as Tennant's own "impersonal and austere and unvicious misanthropy".33 Thus, while Shannon is in part a revolutionary portrait, she is not entirely so. Tennant seems to intend her picaresque adventures and search for fulfilment to be temporary, although lengthy, and the reader is strongly persuaded that Shannon's search for meaning is in reality little more than the search for the right man. After this liaison is over, as it surely must be with Tennant's characteristically pessimistic view of the world ("it was good while it lasted" (p. 305)), she is to return to her questioning with renewed irony but mellow resignation.

Although even Tennant's "stranger" ultimately bows to the forces of convention, in Time Enough Later (1945) Bessie Drew, another unorthodox heroine, refuses matrimony and female dependence as natural outcomes in a working-class woman's life. In deciding upon a life of independent yeomanry rather than marital bliss, Bessie shows a natural progression in Tennant's perception of the need for female independence:

It might be selfish, but it was very pleasant to have a bed all to yourself and not be sharing it with a sister or a man, very pleasant to have solitude and time to think out what you wanted to do with your life. Very pleasant not to share your life and live on the left-over edge of it.34

The Stray, Shannon and Bessie present a fascinating picture of working-class women during the 1930s, and one which is being constantly revised in accordance with Tennant's constantly shifting vision of contemporary Australia. The most noteworthy change involves the growing independence of women who are, by virtue of the changing social and economic circumstances, now cultivating a more questioning attitude towards previously accepted social roles. It is significant that the last of Tennant's Depression-era protagonists gets to choose her own destiny.

It is evident that Summers' assertions that only male experiences of the Depression have been recorded, and that "we have been told little about what it was like for women in the 1930s" are exaggerated. While the fiction of the Depression period tends to focus on the problems of the male worker,
working-class women have not been ignored by novelists like Casey and Mann, and they have been given prominence in Tennant's novels, where they experience the hardships and bitterness of Depression life as comprehensively as any of their male counterparts. Summers has also claimed that "none of the folklore tells us whether women's experience of the Depression differed from men's, and if so, how." Yet while Australian working-class men in Depression fiction usually evoke images of anonymity and hopelessness, pessimism and alienation, their female counterparts are seen to have experienced a broadening of their horizons created by the overturning of the established sex roles. Although none of the aforementioned novelists displays feminist sympathies, they reveal the widening world of the working-class woman in the thirties by increasing the importance of male-female relationships, and by illustrating the growth of female independence. The drover's wife was becoming a person in her own right.
The winning housewife allowed her husband five shillings out of a total wage of two pounds and fifteen shillings (his portion included money for transport to and from work as well as pocket money). She had no time for her own amusements, however, kept no pocket money for herself, and had not gone to the cinema for over 3 years. Palmer’s ineptitude with female characters and his excessive preoccupation with masculine will is, according to Vivian Smith, “a limiting factor in his work. He has great difficulty in presenting fully mature and convincing female characters: his women tend to be either witless femmes fatales, vehicles of mindless and later-regretted sexual passion, or else discontented partners in the male-dominated work-force.

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Bolton mentions a competition conducted in 1932 by the West Australian newspaper to find the most economical housekeeper. The winning housewife allowed her husband five shillings out of a total wage of two pounds and fifteen shillings (his portion included money for transport to and from work as well as pocket money). She had no time for her own amusements, however, kept no pocket money for herself, and had not gone to the cinema for over 3 years (A Fine Country to Starve In, p. 204).

Ian Reid, Fiction and the Great Depression (Edward Arnold, 1979), p. 100. Like Reid, I am including in my category of “Depression” novels anything published from 1930 to 1950. Historians agree that the Depression was at its height in the early 1930s, but many businesses and industries continued to languish until the onset of war in 1939.

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An exception to this is Janey Stone’s “Braven Hussies and God’s Police: Feminist Historiography and the Depression”, Hecate, VII, 1, 1982, 6-25. Stone contends that working-class women of the thirties were more militant and aggressive than they are usually given credit for, and that feminist historians like Summers have ignored women’s participation in the unemployed movement in order to fulfill a prescribed role of women as an oppressed and passive gender.

(Self portrait) c1938 carbon pencil 27.8 x 25.3 cm private collection.
Beatrice Darbyshire and the 1930s

In considering the art of the 1930s in Western Australia (i.e. the decade prior to the upheaval of the second world war) Beatrice Darbyshire deserves particular attention. Sadly however, her work remains little known, even in her native state, due as much to her own reticent nature and practice as an artist, as to the effect of the war. As an etcher she had exacting standards and produced few etching plates in small or uncompleted editions. She sold and exhibited rarely, and appears to have kept work back. Her etchings and drawings are therefore hard to come by.

Her work matured during the 1930s, and to all intents and purposes she stopped working around 1939. She seems to have been trapped by her own nature and the times in which she lived, in spite of the quality of her best work which nevertheless transcends it. We may now feel some genuine regret for her predicament, or those who, like her, found themselves out of sympathy with art practice generally after the war.

Had she but had (and accepted) the support of Sydney Ure Smith, the owner-editor of *Art in Australia*, things might have been more encouraging for her. But distance and her natural reserve and humility prevented that. Henri van Raalte from whom she received so much encouragement and prodding, took his own life in Adelaide in 1929. He had moved there in 1922 to take up the Curatorship of the National Gallery of South Australia.

It might have helped had she been Gruner's correspondent. To Heysen he had written in 1917:

> While these men are grovelling around in the dark miserable world, not for a time but all their lives, be sure if it's not the war it would be something else. While for you? The sun, the morning mists, the thousand and one other wondrous things that nature has for her own. Clear your mind of it old chap, and just paint and all will be right, that is the magic of the whole business . . .

Beatrice Darbyshire would have appreciated the attitude and the sentiment. Balingup in the south-west of Western Australia was as much a haven for Beatrice Darbyshire as Hahndorf was to Heysen, or the Emu Plains near the Blue Mountains for Gruner.
When Beatrice Darbyshire left Perth by train for Sydney in 1940 to enrol as a student of the Women's League of Health, the course her life had taken till then was irretrievably altered. She, like the world in which she found herself, changed dramatically. Thereafter the care of other people came before her art.

The artists she admired — Henri van Raalte, Lionel Lindsay, Sydney Ure Smith, Sydney Long, Hans Heysen, Elioth Gruner and Lloyd Rees in Australia, or Malcolm Osborne, William Strang, Alphonse Legros, Seymour Haden and Charles Tunnillie and the traditional values they espoused, were replaced almost overnight. The revolutionary art of Europe from which Australian artists (and certainly the public) had remained relatively sheltered throughout the 1920s and 1930s — cubism, dada-ism, expressionism and surrealism became the strongest influence during and after the war. It became unfashionable to eschew a sober connection with the art of Corot and the artists of Barbizon (Millet, Rousseau and Daubigny), and the break once made to join the League of Health meant that there could be no serious turning back to her art, in spite of regrets. The death or ageing of major Australian artists who were her heroes — Gruner died in 1939, James W R Linton in Perth in 1947, and Sydney Ure Smith in 1949 — would not have inspired her with renewed confidence to take up where she left off after the war years.

The isolation artists in Perth would have felt from other Australian artists was merely a lesser version of Australia's isolation from Western Europe which delayed the inevitable — distance was a barrier. It was a major undertaking
and expensive to take the long journey to Adelaide, Melbourne or Sydney. Few exhibitions were held — an exception, but hardly revolutionary, was the loan exhibition of British art from London’s National Gallery and the Tate in 1936 — Augustus John, Lucien Pissarro and Jacob Epstein featured. Earlier, in 1929, an exhibition of reproductions selected by Professor Walter Murdoch was shown at the University — the first sight many would have had of paintings by Vincent van Gogh and Cezanne!

In 1932 John Brackenreg (who later moved to Sydney and established himself as a successful publisher and dealer) organized an exhibition of some ‘modern’ Australian artists — Margaret Preston, Thea Proctor and Rah Fizelle amongst them. The 1939 ‘Herald’ exhibition shown in Melbourne, Sydney and Hobart did not reach Perth.

Beatrice Darbyshire was probably better informed than most of her Perth contemporaries. She had studied in London at the Slade and Royal College of Art. Ravilious and McNab were amongst her fellow students. But her admiration was for Legros, Strang and the nineteenth century landscape tradition, too strong an influence for her to change direction or to encourage others to do so. For many Australian artists the second world war, like the first world war in Europe, released them from a stifling attitude of humility before nature, banishing it to the amateur, but for some, like Beatrice Darbyshire it was the end of an era and a vision. Our post-war sensibilities have been better conditioned to seek out the derivatives of Picasso, Duchamp, Kirchner and Dali, than Corot and Samuel Palmer, to readily notice Beatrice Darbyshire. In spite of the conservation movement, the direct worship of nature in art is foreign to most of us.

Beatrice Darbyshire was born to middle class parents in Perth in 1901. Her father, a solicitor, encouraged her talent in art. As a girl she attended Henri van Raalte’s art classes, initially at the home of Madeleine Trethowan, a painter of flowers, and later at his house in Outram Street, and then his art school in Hay Street, Perth. She was friendly with the daughters of other respectable families, the Drake-Brockmans and Duracks, and formed a close friendship with Molly Lukis who became the Archivist in charge of the Battye Library. Edith Trethowan was another friend, and a contemporary art student at van Raalte’s school.

Prompted by van Raalte, and encouraged by her parents, Beatrice Darbyshire enrolled at the Slade under Henry Tonks and travelled to London in 1924. She stayed a term and moved to the Royal College of Art, South Kensington as a Diploma Student in the School of Engraving under Malcolm Osborne and Job Nixon. There she met Eric Ravilious, Charles Tunnicliffe and Iain McNab as fellow students. Her drypoint *The Cowshed Balingup*, c1920, was fortuitously included in the British Empire Exhibition at Wembley (London) 1924-25. She returned to Perth after getting her Diploma in 1927, and an intense period of drawing and etching followed.

She enjoyed the patronage of distinguished people — Katharine Susannah Prichard and Professor Walter Murdoch sat for their portraits, and art critics, Leslie Rees, George Benson and Charles Hamilton reviewed her work enthusiastically. She held an individual exhibition at Newspaper House, Perth in 1933, and showed jointly with Jamie Linton and Edith Trethowan in 1931,
and with James W R Linton in 1937. She exhibited with the University Art Club and the Perth Society of Artists between 1929 and 1939 and received mention in William Moore's *The Story of Australian Art*, 1934.

Apart from Henri van Raalte she particularly admired the etchings of Sydney Long, Sydney Ure Smith and John Shirlow. Other printmakers with whom her work has affinity are John Goodchild, Allan Glover, J C Goodhart, Victor Cobb, Harold Herbert, Charles Robinson and Lucien Dechaineux.

She joined the Women's League of Health in 1940 and moved to Sydney for three years. Upon her return to Perth she continued with the League for twelve more years, and also cared for her ageing parents. There is little evidence that she worked at her art again.

In 1979 I organized an exhibition of the work of three, till then unknown, Western Australian printmakers of the 1920s and 1930s. It comprised A B Webb (1887-1944), Edith Trethowan (1901-39), and Beatrice Darbyshire.

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*The Road to Balingup c1939 etching 29.5 x 26 cm private collection.*
The exhibition was requested by the S H Ervin Gallery, Sydney, a gallery which has established an enviable programme of exhibitions surveying aspects of Australian art and artists without any regional chauvinism or paternalism. The exhibition created some interest, and after being shown at the University of Western Australia's Undercroft Gallery in Perth, it was taken on a tour of eight public galleries at the request of the Australian Gallery Directors' Council. The then revived interest in colour wood block prints assured a ready public for the work of A B Webb and even Edith Trethowan. Trethowan's small output was shown in its entirety, all of A B Webb's known prints (but not his equally fine watercolours), and a selection of Beatrice Darbyshire's etchings.

Neither Webb nor Trethowan were living. Their work had ended with their death. Beatrice Darbyshire, though born at the turn of the present century is still living. Her work however ended as theirs, with the war, and has not to date been fully gathered together for exhibition. Her recent illness however presented me with the opportunity to study more than she permitted previously, and at a distance.

What emerges is that Beatrice Darbyshire was more (and potentially I believe far more) than a fine and sensitive etcher. She was also a remarkable draughtsman. Her drawings reveal an intellectual (though no less conservative) artist than the '1979 Printmakers Exhibition' I organized, nor I suspect any earlier exhibition, suggested. They also reveal the care and trouble that she took in composing or re-arranging the various elements which make up the subjects of her etchings.

Amongst her folders I found other versions of etchings such as for The Cowshed, Balingup (a larger plate), and drawings for all or part of The Cattle Track c1930 (one of her best works) and The Road to Balingup c1939. There were also a number of drawings and etchings of gently curving roads edged with monumental gums. These last mentioned works are indeed monumental in conception too, and like The Road to Balingup must have been amongst her last made works, that is around 1939. They reveal a potentially powerful and confident artist.

There are still reminders of Henri van Raalte, but without his heavy romanticism. She greatly admired van Raalte's compositions, the way in which one or a small group of trees could be used to great effect in a composition, and used to draw attention to just such an etching by him which she owned, whenever I visited her. Two of these last named works, untitled and never exhibited, and of which there are drawings and etchings sound a note of personal discovery. It is tempting to speculate upon what she might have achieved if she had not abandoned her art at just this time.

In two of these compositions the trunk of a single tree is repeated, and has such strength and presence in the foreground to a distant landscape, and at the bend of a road on the other, that it takes on metaphorical connotations. The simplification of gnarled knots in the bark, or the shaping of foliage and road commands attention far more than all her previous works.

In recent years we have witnessed some notable instances of artists whose work and reputations have been rescued from oblivion. The first etching I saw by Beatrice Darbyshire in 1976 had been so inscribed by a former Art
Gallery of Western Australia staff member on its backing board, as to suggest that the artist was not just unknown and insignificant, but had undoubtedly died decades ago. Notwithstanding the fact that her life as an artist ended at the conclusion of the 1930’s, her contribution to the perception of Western Australian landscape, and to the art of that state must not again be dismissed so cursorily.

NOTES

4. Two editions of the exhibition catalogue were published — the first by the SH Ervin Gallery, Sydney 1979, the second by the Australian Gallery Directors’ Council 1980.
5. Refer also to my article “Printmaking in Western Australia”, Weslerly, March 1982 no. 1, for Darbyshire’s place in the history of Western Australian printmaking.

(Road, Balingup) c1939 drypoint 40.8 x 50.2 cm artist’s proof private collection.
Australian studies with a small “s” have been going on “without fuss” since the arrival of the First Fleet. For much of that time, they have been conducted by private individuals, in their spare time, or as part of their job, by school and university teachers and librarians in their leisure hours, by a few people with private means, by amateur naturalists, ornithologists, historians, or others who shared their knowledge in learned societies of one kind and another. Government support has been minimal until recent years; and even now often intermittent, often unreliable.

The first Observatory was set up at Dawes Point on Sydney Harbour soon after the fleet arrived, and in 1821 Governor Brisbane erected another at Parramatta at his own expense, because the British government refused the money, even though navigational aids were of first importance to the colony. Brisbane also founded the first Philosophical Society in the same year, and similar societies sprang up throughout Australia for the promotion of natural history, geology, mineralogy, and astronomy, etc. Some of these included the advancement of literature in their aims. After a preliminary foray, in 1866, the Australasian Association for the Advancement of Science was formed in 1886; the first world war spurred the formation of the Australian National Research Council; then came in 1926 the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research, which in 1949 became the flourishing CSIRO we know today. By that time, every major discipline, including literature, had its own professional body, with its own journal and often with a long list of published books to its credit.

What has become clear in our survey, only a small part of which can be presented in this essay, is that nothing useful can be said about Australian studies without serious attention to Australia’s dependent status as a colony, first of Britain, and then of America. Our culture has been shaped by our readiness to accept these two powers’ perceptions of our role, perceptions which are still being fostered today by British and American financial “experts”. Our past and present “manufacturing difficulties” (and that includes all our “products”, physical and intellectual) have a long history; and any attempts to step out of our prescribed role as “quarry” or “market” have been covertly, sometimes overtly, frustrated. We ourselves have for too long acquiesced in
this process, or, more accurately, our too compliant politicians and greedy business men have done so, while our scholars have too often worked against the grain.

School inspectors in 1874 complained to a Royal Commission inquiring into education in the colony of Queensland that the text-books from which pupils were taught natural science, history and geography were hopelessly irrelevant to the children of the colony and made them feel Australia was not their country.

Submissions presented in 1986 to the Committee to Review Australian studies in tertiary education time and again complain of the lack of “Australian-grounded” text-books, not only for universities, but for secondary schools. Professor P.J. Fensham, of the Faculty of Education, Monash University, writes:

Victoria’s eucalyptus stills had an honoured place fifty years ago in The History of Chemistry by Scotland’s John Read. Their continued operation, readily replicable in a school laboratory, has been kept from generations of school children.

The analogies with literary history are only too obvious. Samuel Butler and May Sinclair are innovators, Ada Cambridge is not.

Though, possibly as a result of Queensland’s Royal Commission, matters began to improve in primary schools before 1900, in history and geography, and intermittently in literature, there was heavy emphasis on the British Empire in school readers and papers well into the 20th century; and even as late as 1940, these were still referring to “the home country” and “the Motherland”.

On August 7th, 1940, The Times Literary Supplement carried an article on “Dominion Fiction” with the sub-heading “Literature of Empire”, giving the palm to Australia. (Troops were wanted again?) More revealing are the two articles sub-joined: “Australian Trade: A Nation of Wide Readers” and “Text-books for the Dominions”. The exporters were less enthusiastic about the fact that Australian books could hold up their heads in any company. Local conditions might demand local books, but economic nationalism could go too far and “impede the free flow of ideas”. Or was it the annual free flow of book exports from Britain worth at that time 5-million pounds sterling? Forty-six years later, Australia is a dumping-ground for overseas remainders. As with books, so with other products. Professor Fensham remarks that “Some people have said that Australia’s dependence on imported contraceptives puts us in a colonial type of bondage that needs to be broken”. This in spite of the fact that two well-known Australian chemists have made internationally recognised contributions to the field.

The persistence of the colonialist attitude takes curious forms, usually in company with an anthropomorphic metaphor for Australian Literature, which sees it from time to time as “coming of age”. What it is supposed to do after that — lapse into middle age, senescence and die? — is a question never asked. The minor poet, Elisabeth Lambert, in a speech at the Australian English Association Annual Dinner in November 1942 announced that, with our literature’s “coming of age”, the Great Gum Tree tradition was dead. Norman Douglas, travelling in Italy, did not like gum-trees, so he would not come
to Australia. That should teach us not to write about them. Variations on this theme are still alive and well, and sometimes win prizes.

By 1955, *The Times Literary Supplement* (5th August) had reversed its favourable view of Australian literature, declaring that the social and intellectual background to a literary life in Australia was almost entirely lacking; it had no large, prosperous middle class, no intelligentsia, no Bloomsbury, no Left Bank, no life of café or salon. This singularly ignorant article was written at a time when Australia, since 1950, had been leading the world in radio-astronomy and was to do so for nearly ten years more. Its radio physicists and engineers had invented and built pioneering equipment in the field, and one of their number at least became president of the world body of radio astronomers.

This survey raises the question: “Why, seeing that Australian studies with a small “s” have been contributing to the world’s intellectual life since Captain Cook observed the transit of Venus, has it been necessary in the 1970s to set up in various institutions around the country, Australian Studies with a capital “S”?”

Before attempting an answer, we must look at our brief, while insisting that no decade can be separated from its past, and that culture is a continuous flow, even when it winds back upon itself. The 1930s, so savagely lampooned (with perceptible nostalgia) in certain figures created by Barry Humphries, was extraordinarily productive in most areas of scholarship, scientific and humane, and vigorous in the field of adult education.

For instance, W.J. Dakin, the English-born Foundation Professor of Biology in Western Australia, became Professor of Zoology at Sydney University in 1928, and in 1930 set up a marine biology station at South Head. This laid the foundation for marine biology in Australia, which soon gained world recognition. Dakin wrote a history of whaling in the same decade, and other books, some semi-popular, which have kept their place to this day. His radio broadcasts were immensely influential and so were those of his assistant, A.N. Colefax, who was “Tom the Naturalist” on the ABC Children’s Hour. It was in 1930 that Dakin initiated systematic research into problems of the Great Barrier Reef. His predecessor in the Chair of Zoology had been Launcelot Harrison, who was reputed to have taught Zoology better than it was taught at Oxford. Harrison was the husband of the children’s writer Amy Mack, and himself wrote a charming book for children.

The internationally-famous Australian geologist Sir Edgeworth David, also of Sydney, died in 1934, leaving behind him his great *Geological Map of the Commonwealth . . .* (1932), a summary of the geological knowledge about Australia to that date. Notes for an even larger book were revised by W.R. Browne in the 1930s, then incorporated with much new material into a work which was not published until 1950, owing to its complexity and the outbreak of war.

Australia’s already outstanding contributions to Anthropology received new impetus in the 1930s with A.P. Elkin’s and Phyllis Kaberry’s studies of the Aborigines and Ian Hogbin’s on Polynesia. There was a great growth of interest in New Guinea, sparked off by the work of F.E. Williams, the Government Anthropologist, from 1928 to 1940. Other landmarks were I.F. Champion’s
Across New Guinea, and the intrepid Jack Hides’s three books on Papua, 1935, 1936, 1938. An outstanding pioneering work was S.D. Porteous’s *Psychology of a Primitive People* (1931), which scotched the myth of the innate mental inferiority of Aboriginals by showing that differences in “intelligence” were custom and culture-based.

It was in the 1930s, that Australians generally seemed suddenly to discover the dimensions of their continent. The period was remarkable for the number of books on the central desert country and the far outback. The public’s own discovery of Ion Idriess’s books gave the vogue momentum, but, beside the better-written, semi-popular work of Ernestine Hill, there were scholarly works like those of C.T. Madigan and H.H. Finlayson. Also noteworthy was West Australian J.R.B. Love’s *Stone Age Bushmen of Today*, a record of years among the Kimberley Aboriginals. Non-fiction certainly prepared the ground for Herbert’s *Capricornia*, 1938.

The record was equally strong in economic and general history. The decade opened with W.K. Hancock’s *Australia*, whose “multiplier” effect has been enormous, and with Edward Shann’s *Economic History of Australia*. Two books were written about the Depression long before it was over by Walker in 1933 and Copland in 1934. Other historians opening up new paths were Eris O’Brien, Fitzpatrick, Madgwick, Roberts, Evatt, Marjorie Barnard and “M. Barnard Eldershaw”, Mackaness and, on Japanese culture, A.L. Sadler. C.E.W. Bean’s war histories continued to appear steadily throughout the 1930s, making a totally new contribution to military historiography. In 1936, a beautiful example of Australian bookmaking from Ernest Shea’s Sunnybrook Press came out: *The Howes and their Press* by J.A. Ferguson, Green and Mrs. Foster.

During the thirties, the CSIRO continued making its massive contributions to Australia’s scientific and economic base. It succeeded in combating diseases in sheep by discovering the role of trace elements; its experiments in aircraft location were to bear fruit in radar research during the Hitler war; it initiated pasture research in northern Australia, and eradicated the scourge of bovine pleuro-pneumonia. As early as 1930, it began investigating zebu cattle as part of its tick-resistance campaign, and in 1934 work on the rabbit plague, which was costing Australia vast sums, began to take myxomatosis seriously. The following year David Stead (Christina’s father) brought out his book on the history of the rabbit plague, a not unworthy ancestor (though poorly produced) of Eric Rolls’s recent work on the subject.

Reference to the non-fiction sections of Green’s *History of Australian Literature*, to *Surprise and Enterprise: Fifty Years of Science for Australia* (CSIRO, 1976) and to *Ever Reaping Something New, A Science Centenary* (Sydney University, 1985) will give some indication of the scope of the achievement in Australian studies in these years; here one can only scratch the surface. If the history of science at Sydney University is any indication of general practice, it is clear that it was for years a battle of the two cultures, and that women played a teaching role in Science long before they did in Arts. Some science was taught from the beginning in 1852, but for long after a separate Faculty was established, Science students had to do a first year Arts course. In 1907, Science turned the tables and required Arts students
to do a year's Science. There were vigorous protests in 1910, but the requirement was not modified until 1914. The Physics Examination of 1888 combined both cultures, setting a Physics problem on a passage from *The Merchant of Venice*.

The third woman to graduate in Science in 1897 was recommended by her professor as a Junior Demonstrator in Biology. The Senate rejected the proposal, it is believed on the grounds that she was too pretty. But others, not necessarily plain, were appointed early in the new century. A non-graduate, Isobel Bennett, secretary to W.J. Dakin in 1933, became his assistant, made a world-wide reputation in marine biology and ended up with the Müller medal. Women science graduates were conspicuous in the profession from 1930 onwards.

**Literary Studies**

Mention should first be made of those unsung individuals, whose passion for their country's literature found expression in their daily life and work. It is impossible to over-estimate the influence that teachers like Machin Hall, at Sydney Boys' High School, exercised in the 1930s, or that of men active in the 1920s and earlier, like C.R. Long, and Dugald McLachlan of Victoria, and T.W. McCawley in Queensland. Information of this kind is needed from every state. Among those too often forgotten are booksellers like Tyrrell in Sydney, Preece in Adelaide, W.E. Fuller in Hobart. Preece's magazine *Desiderata* carried important articles in the 1930s. *Preece Publications* issued some notable titles. Another well-informed enthusiast was the Melbourne editor E.A. Vidler.

Here perhaps is the place to mention the role of the ABC, which took over from earlier broadcasting organisations in July 1932. From raw, amateurish and timid beginnings, colonialist and apologetic, it had made enormous strides by the end of the decade in talks, music and drama. Under Clewlow, and Leslie Rees from Western Australia, the number of Australian plays broadcast increased significantly. To some extent over the years, the ABC has filled the vacuum left by the demise of the *Bulletin* "network".

When A.G. Stephens made his plea in the *Bulletin* in 1928 for bibliographies of Australian Literature, these were already in preparation. A substantial one had indeed already been published in 1893, listing holdings in the Free Public Library of Sydney. It was compiled in the "spare" time of the Librarian and his staff. The Introduction to this volume, by the Chairman of the Free Library Board, the Hon. James Norton, still makes interesting reading. More important still is the Introduction to Morris Miller's great *Bibliography of Australian Literature* (excluding non-fiction) with which the decade ended. It opened with Green's *Outline of Australian Literature*, the first study to attempt a definition and to steer a middle course between over-praising and underrating. Sir John Quick, Miller, Ferguson, Green, together with private individuals, often journalists like Fred Broomfield, and the librarians around the Commonwealth, had begun their work in the 1920s; they were all in touch with one another and formed an unofficial Australian studies group in themselves. H.A. Kellow's *Queensland Poets* came out in 1930, five years
after Percival Serle’s pioneering *Bibliography of Australasian Poets* (1925). In 1932, Bertha Lawson and J. le Gay Brereton published *Henry Lawson and his Mates*; there were three books on Brennan in the period and a life of Furphy. In 1936 appeared the provocative *Foundations of Culture in Australia*, by P.R. Stephensen, followed by *Conditional Culture* by Rex Ingamells (1938) which initiated the Jindyworobak movement. Barnard Eldershaw’s splendid *Essays in Australian Fiction* appeared in the same year.

Australian contributions to European scholarship produced some impressive studies, and *The Times Literary Supplement* (20/2/37) devoted a front-page article to a group of Australian critics under the title of “The Australian Microscope: Critical eyes on English poets”. The reviewer ventured to detect a distinctive “Australian quality” in these books: “Their prevailing character is one of genial clear light and at the same time inexorable justice... it is as though no thing came before these writers with much advantage of reputation”. The writers were Mungo MacCallum, R.C. Bald, A.J.A. Waldock, R.G. Howarth, E.J. Dobson and H.M. Green.

The period was remarkable for the growth of literary societies and their activities. The older ones, like the Australian Literature Society (1899-), were joined in 1928 by the Fellowship of Australian Writers in Sydney. By 1938, after consultation with other societies, the F.A.W. felt strong enough to send a deputation to Canberra to ask the government to set up a Council of Literature, for purposes which have now become familiar. The only one not firmly in place is a scheme to keep worthwhile Australian books in print. The deputation was received favourably by Prime Minister Scullin and his advisers, and so began the long slow progress, via the old Commonwealth Literary Fund, to the eventual formation of the Australia Council in 1973.

The role of the great *Bulletin* network of contributors and correspondents all over Australia, especially that mine of information W.E. FitzHenry, can hardly be over-estimated in a history of Australian studies. Its formation of a consciousness of the general field between 1880 and 1961, when Douglas Stewart left the paper, was quite invaluable. The 1930s was a rich period.

During the Depression years University Extension Boards, Tutorial Classes and branches of the Worker’s Educational Association (W.E.A.) in all states paid particular attention to Australian studies, the W.E.A. emphasising economics and political science. In the 1920s and 30s, H.M. Green delivered regular W.E.A. lectures on Australian Literature and Drama, one set of which was described by Miles Franklin in the *Bulletin* in 1938. The vexed question of the role of the universities in that field cannot be discovered from handbooks and calendars, but must be settled by detailed research in each state. It has to be remembered that there were no separate Chairs of English Literature in Sydney or Queensland until the early 1920s, though Melbourne had a separate Chair in 1912. It is not surprising therefore that a Chair of Australian Literature was slow in coming. The Professor of English at Melbourne in the 1930s, T.G. Tucker, hardly furthered the cause of Australian literature, though his attitude like Walter Murdoch’s provoked lively public debate. In Queensland, on the other hand, the subject was taught by F.W. Robinson as part of the English course as early as 1923, and even earlier, considering his bias in its favour (on sound educational principles) by the Professor of
Modern Language and Literature, J.J. Stable. An editorial in the Courier-Mail, 16/3/1940, on the subject of the Commonwealth Literary Fund lectures put the date at 1920.

It is inconceivable that Brereton, when he became the first Professor of English at Sydney in 1921, did not raise the subject of Australian literature with his students, nor that Green, who followed him as Librarian, did not do so. A letter from Kylie Tennant’s husband, L.C. Rodd, describes attending a series of University lectures by Green on Australian literature, as part of the English course in 1930, and it is hardly likely this was a single instance. The article in Meanjin, Nos. 2, 3, and 4, 1955, on the universities and Australian Literature, need careful reading, especially the one by Professor Milgate. The recent, vague assumption that it all began in Canberra in 1956 needs serious qualification from more than one point of view.

The role of the schools is also difficult to establish. Educationists in Victoria were advocating more attention to local material in English lessons as early as 1912. In 1930 a very large proportion of poetry in the Victorian Primary School readers dealt with a wide range of Australian poets. Instructions given by education departments in various states laid stress on the need for English teachers to “foster a love of and a knowledge of Australian literature” in their pupils. Books like Stable’s A Bond of Poetry and The Highroad of Australasian Verse seem to have been widely used. It is difficult to get a coherent picture of what is going on in schools at the moment, since the choice of books and courses seems to be left to the discretion of individual English departments and teachers. There is no doubt that some teachers are creating enthusiasm for the subject, but the absence of what might be called “a national core curriculum” and the need for some systematic historical approach deserve more attention than they receive. Teachers of genius who are well-informed about their subject can turn any curriculum to educational advantage; ill-informed, run-of-the-mill teachers may need more guidance. A good education in English for Australian children too often seems to be a matter of pot-luck.

When a Melbourne journalist can still write in the Canberra Times (22/9/86):

Think of Australian poets and the names Henry Lawson, C.J. Dennis and Banjo Paterson come to mind. Few recognise the name of John Shaw Neilson, another skilled poet of the era . . .

one is somewhat astonished. It is a habit of modern journalists to attribute their own ignorance to everyone else, but it is a long time since the above statement had much validity. Children who attended Victorian primary schools in the 1930s would certainly have heard of John Shaw Neilson and Christopher Brennan and Bernard O’Dowd and even J.L. Cuthbertson, along with many, many more.

The problem with schools is not simple; it depends still as it has always done, on what text-books are in print, on the contents of school libraries, on what training teachers have had at Teachers’ Colleges, on continuing in-service training (which is becoming restricted owing to shortage of funds),
and nowadays on the motivation towards learning of many of the pupils themselves. The task of teaching literature to the growing number of youngsters who dimly perceive themselves as redundant in a dangerously uncertain world is a very difficult one and there are too few charged with the responsibility for formulating the aims of such teaching, who see the study of literature as an essential part of the journey towards human liberty.

One answer to the question why Australian Studies courses have been institutionalised since the 1970s, may be a vague feeling that the tradition needs to be made visible, and transmissible, and that in an educational world where too much seems random, some substitute for the Bulletin’s program of consciousness-raising seems necessary. We have nothing to say here of more debatable motives, or of the dangers of over-lapping and lack of co-ordination of research projects.

NOTES
1. A concise, readable background to this subject is Michael Dunn’s Australia and the Empire from 1788 to the Present (Fontana/Collins, 1984).
2. An indispensable article by Eddie Clarke, of the Educational History Unit, Queensland Department of Education, entitled “Australian Content in School Curricula” (Quest No. 40, 1986) gives a splendid account of early attempts to free education from colonialism.
4. H. M. Green’s grandfather, from whom, no doubt, he inherited his enthusiasm for his subject.
5. As a student of four of these men, D.G. can testify to the perceptiveness of the reviewer. Oddly enough, nearly fifty years later, a similar quality was detected by a T.L.S reviewer, when writing about F.B. Smith’s study of Florence Nightingale.
6. Australian poetry and fiction texts had crept, like “single spies”, into school syllabuses in several states by the 1930s, sometimes as early as 1913. In other subjects, local material was used much earlier. Syllabus content was supplemented by school papers. Victorian Primary School Readers made extensive use in the 1930s of good Australian paintings as frontispieces. Years earlier Queensland had used photographic material. The Victorian Education Gazette (22/11/33) instructed teachers to make detailed use of metropolitan and general Australian material when teaching children letter-writing.
7. In the 19th century, newspapers faithfully reported almost verbatim the deliberations of literary and other societies in the regular news columns. Traces of this habit were still visible in the 1920s and 1930s. In 1927, the Age prepared for Australian Authors’ Week with a series of articles over a month. Newspaper “leaders” are to be found on literary subjects as late as 1940. The relegation of literary matter to special pages, near the end of the paper, must have made some contribution to public indifference to literature, unless the news had something to do with making a fortune, winning an overseas prize or scandalous behaviour.

Our thanks are due for assistance to the following: The Department of Education, Queensland; the Fryer Library, University of Queensland; the Department of Education, Victoria; to the Australian Defence Force Library and the National Library of Australia, and to the Archivist of the CSIRO. We are also grateful to the universities who allowed us to have photocopies of their calendars and handbooks; and wish to acknowledge information from K.S. Inglis’s This is the ABC (M.U.P., 1983).

Much useful miscellaneous information has come from H. M. Green’s extensive clipping files from newspapers and magazines.
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(Reproduced with permission of Joyce Corporation Ltd)
In 1929, a bold new poster appeared in the showrooms of Perth’s furniture retailers. Designed to introduce a new mattress to the buying public, its style was crude but effective. It borrowed that popular local image, the Perth Town Hall, but showed it at the unusual hour of five minutes to midnight. “The Night was made for Sleep”, the poster announced uncompromisingly, inquiring further, in blood-red lettering, “Was Your Mattress?” To the right, enclosed in a large oval space, a man was depicted in restful shades of pale blue and brown, sleeping soundly on a “Night’s-Ease” mattress: “The Only Mattress with a roll edge and machined woolly tufts.” In keeping with the moderate tone of the poster overall, its concluding message was the deceptively simple slogan, “Buy Better Bedding.”

The manufacturer of the new mattress was the Fremantle company, Joyce Bros. (W.A.) Ltd. The company’s owner, W.J. Draffin, had recently completed a tour of bedding factories in the United States and the “Night’s-Ease” mattress was introduced upon his return. It was made at the company’s factory in Josephson Street, Fremantle, with the aid of newly imported American machinery which had been selected by Mr Draffin during his tour. Produced at a time when this form of industrial advertising was still in its infancy, the “Night’s-Ease” poster is a classic of its kind. It is evidence, too, that Joyce’s owner had learned more from his research trip than how to make mattresses the American way.

W.J. Draffin was a member of the sect known as the Plymouth Brethren. When he went to America, accompanied by his wife, they stayed at each stopping-place with the families of their co-religionists. As well as being exposed to the strident and highly visual impact of American advertising at this time, which would have presented a dramatic contrast with what they were used to, it is likely that Mr Draffin also learned ways of promoting his products in a manner sympathetic to his beliefs. For the usual advertising hype was totally at odds with his religion’s strictures against vainglory. “We could never
say ours was the best product of its kind, because that would have been boasting”, recalls L.F.W. Vickridge, who began working for the firm in 1933 and is now Managing Director. (Hence the modesty of the “Night’s-Ease” poster’s plea to buy “better” bedding.) “We could never say we were proud to present a new line, because pride was a sin too.”

The advertising campaign which W.J. Draffin inaugurated upon his return was an enormous success. In the inter-war years, more than ever before, it paid to advertise; and Joyce was no exception. By the end of the 1930s, the company had gained a dominant position in the local bedding market and had made substantial inroads interstate. Our interest, however, lies not in the campaign’s sales results but in its artefacts. As a new promotional consciousness grappled with restraints held over from nineteenth-century religious fundamentalism, some fascinating images were produced.

The images are all the more challenging because of the years which the campaign spanned. For if W.J. Draffin’s advertising consciousness was raised in the late 1920s, it was in the early 1930s that new techniques of photography and design began to be used to represent a “modern” philosophy of the intrinsic merit and beauty of the factories themselves. These changes can be traced in the images we are about to explore. The results were not always harmonious. A catalogue cover which would not have disgraced Art in Australia might contain a range of iron bedsteads taken straight from the 1890s. Where illustrations had been updated, the copy might retain the earnest solemnity of Edwardian days: “This type [of wooden] bedstead has all the hygenic principles of iron . . . There are no crevices to harbour dust or vermin.” It would be wrong, however, to dismiss these anomalies as mere naïveté. There is nothing to be gained from lamenting that the commercial artists and copywriters involved did not get their act together as soon as the 1930s dawned. Instead, it is important to appreciate the value of these inconsistencies. They alert us to the processes by which, in a few short years, the face of industrial art was altogether changed.

Originally a manufacturer of calico, jute and linen bags and canvas goods, Joyce had expanded into mattress making in the early 1920’s. By the middle of the decade, under the newly registered trade-mark of “Trojan”, the company was also producing wooden bedsteads and wire mattress bases. Joyce was entirely a wholesale operation — as, indeed, it remains today — and such advertising as there was consisted mainly in circulars to retailers. It was not until Mr. Draffin’s return from America that bedding began to be publicized in a completely new way, followed gradually by Joyce’s other lines. In January 1928, shortly ahead of the “Night’s-Ease” poster, a de luxe catalogue was printed, replacing the simple price lists of previous years. Elegant in pale green and gold, it introduced the “Night’s-Ease” brand for the first time. What was new about “Night’s-Ease” mattresses was that their edges were rolled and their surfaces tufted by machine rather than by hand, and these features were certainly highlighted, but the catalogue did more than this. Its real object was to alert furniture retailers to Joyce’s arrival on the bedding scene.

Even more than the concept itself, the advertising copy had a decidedly American twang. “Everything we produce we warrant exact according to description”, the catalogue stated. “Our Bedding has got to carry a profit
for us, and one for the Retailer — and, withal, give satisfaction to the ultimate purchaser. Hence we will not stand for deceit in Bedding!” Advice to the retailer was also included: “A WORD FOR GOOD TICKING. Whilst a good Ticking does not in itself ensure a good Mattress, a low-grade Ticking certainly means an inferior Mattress. Feature Better Bedding and don’t put a lot of sales effort behind low-grade stuff.” For the time and place, these were forceful words indeed. Quaint as they may sound today, they were the 1928 equivalent of the hard sell.

What made this acceptable to the dictates of a religion which forbade pride and vainglory? If we look closely at the messages we can see, I think, that they matched extremely well with the requirements of Plymouth Brethren teaching. The emphasis was on honesty — ‘we will not stand for deceit in Bedding!’ — and on fair play. It was made clear that Joyce stood by its products, dealt equitably with its retailers and gave first priority to customer satisfaction. In eschewing, at the same time, any extravagant or unsupported claims, Joyce was in fact laying the foundation of a reputation for reliability and trustworthiness which persists even today. By 1938, this reputation was sufficiently well established for the catalogue of March that year to state simply, in support of a new wire mattress base with forty-eight “spiral springs”, “It’s a ‘TROJAN’ — That’s sufficient guarantee!”

It was not enough, though, to make these statements without substantiating them. The bedsteads, for example, were solid and reliable, like everything Joyce produced, or the claim could not have been made by 1938 that the “Trojan” label was its own guarantee. But the presentation of the various products, whether in catalogues or in newspaper advertisements, had in some way to reinforce the straight-from-the-shoulder approach of the campaign as a whole. This was done, in the first place, by diagram-like line drawings of technical details and by cross-sections of mattress contents. By these means, the message of the accompanying text, that nothing was concealed from view, could be underlined. As with the text, moreover, this policy combined American promotional expertise with fundamentalist directness. The ostensible purpose of the diagrams was to educate the retailer and his customers in the signs of high quality merchandise. He and they were being told, in the plainest way possible, what to look for. The fact that these pointers happened to be features of Joyce’s products was seemingly incidental.

In the second place, retailer and consumer were taken step by step through every stage of the Joyce manufacturing process. This was by far the most exciting and innovative of the familiarization techniques, because it made extensive use of photographs. The 1928 catalogue had photographs on almost every page: photographs showing every inch of the Josephson Street premises; photographs demonstrating beyond all doubt how well the “Night’s-Ease” mattresses were made. It is an axiom of industrial art in the 1930s that it involved an unprecedented use of photography and photomontage. Thanks to W.J. Draffin’s fact-finding tour, we have a comparatively early instance of the employment of this medium in the Joyce catalogue of 1928. And as a fringe benefit, so to speak, these photographs, which must have been commissioned some time in the previous year, constitute a rare visual record of a 1920s shop floor.
In succeeding years, such photographs became much more common and, as we shall see from the Joyce examples, they differed in their ideological emphasis. In one picture from the 1928 catalogue sequence, however, the newly emerging philosophy of industrial art was clearly foreshadowed. "The Wire-Weaving Plant" is a haunting evocation of what was to come. In it a series of men and machines are shown "weaving the now famous 'TROJAN RUSTLESS WIRE'" in a composition which is reminiscent of German work of the period. The men are faceless, frozen in the performance of the same task on a row of identical machines. The wheels they turn are the focus of the picture in a way that they themselves are not.

Perhaps for reasons of cost, or perhaps because of its wholesale orientation, Joyce did not immediately apply the same innovative technique to its newspaper advertising. An exception was made, however, for the Duke of Gloucester's visit in 1934. An advertisement in The Sunday Times for 28 October contained a photograph of a bedroom suite in suitably regal surroundings, discreetly conveying to the world that, for the duration of his stay, the duke would sleep on a "Night's-Ease" mattress. The catalogues, however, were another story. New sets of photographs were commissioned in 1934, and again in 1938, and were incorporated into the catalogues of both years using the extremely contemporary device of photomontage.
Photomontage, 1934 Catalogue.
(Reproduced with permission of Joyce Corporation Ltd)

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The images of 1934 are especially interesting. They indicate how far the newly emergent ideology of the factory, presaged in "The Wire-Weaving Plant", had now come to dictate the manner of its visual representation. The front page of the catalogue is dominated by photographs of the factory buildings from every conceivable angle; the staff, assembled below, are separated from their workplace. The outdoor shots have been retouched to include serene, English-style clouds, emphasizing the harmony of the whole environment. The cover of the 1928 catalogue had incorporated an earlier photograph of the factory which offers fascinating contrasts with its counterpart in the 1934 montage. By 1934, the dray and cars of the earlier shot have gone. Nor have they been replaced by their more up-to-date equivalents. Instead, the factory now stands supremely alone. The sides of the print have been cropped, as they were not in 1928, so that the building may be thought to stretch on indefinitely. The squared-off paving to the right and left of the main entrance has been retouched to give the appearance of (admittedly vestigial) lawns: lawns which, fronting factories as far apart as General Motors Holden at Pagewood and Hoover in West London, were to become a hallmark of the industrial architecture of the period.

An inside page of the same catalogue included as background detail to a line drawing of a truck complete with Joyce tarpaulin the fanciful portrayal of an idealized Joyce factory. In its long, streamlined shape and clean, airy lines, it bore a far closer resemblance to the G.M.H. and Hoover buildings than ever it could to the Josephson Street factory, which dated, after all, from before the First World War. Even the fantasy Joyce Bros. lacked the ship-like curves of the classic 1930s factory; but this vital contemporary image was conjured up in another way. The glossy wooden bedsteads in the 1938 catalogue were captioned with the magical names of the great P. & O. liners: “Orsova”, “Orcades”, “Oronsay”.

Joyce’s policy of promoting its products with unadorned, down-to-earth assessments of their quality matched so well with the religious predisposition of its owner that it remained in force for many years, even though, by the
later 1930s, this sometimes gave its advertising copy the flavour of a decade before. Even so, the preoccupation with honesty and lack of deception remained paramount and in this context modernity was obliged to take second place. “APPEARANCES Are So DECEPTIVE”, warned an advertisement in *The West Australian* for 16 July 1938, explaining in painstaking detail the superiority of the “Night’s-Ease” machined roll edge and woolly tufts over their hand-made equivalents, now described as “imitations” though they had in fact preceded the machined versions. Though the occupant of the bed featured in the advertisement is now female in gender and consequently has the leisure to read in bed, rather than sinking at once into exhausted slumber like her hard-working male predecessor of nine years before, the illustration nevertheless owes much to the “Night’s-Ease” poster of 1929.

The “Night’s-Ease” poster, indeed, survived many more changes in advertising fashion. It remained a predominant image in Joyce’s newspaper advertising for years to come. Its final appearance was on the cover of a Joyce brochure in 1959. Though the Town Hall had been redrawn, its clock still stood at five to twelve; and reflections still gleamed in the inky blackness of the Swan River. They were no longer those of the stars, however. The South Perth foreshore on the far side of the river was no longer the scrubland of thirty years before. It was now dotted with houses, and it was their lights that stood reflected in the water.

*Joyce Bros. Brochure Cover, 1959. Joyce Archive. Paper, 110 x 210 mm. (Reproduced with permission of Joyce Corporation Ltd)*
Newspapers for a Depression Child

I am a genuine Depression child, born according to a reliable family tradition around three o'clock of the afternoon on Thursday, 5 November 1931. This piece of oral testimony is corroborated by an advertisement in the following morning's *West Australian*:

Bolton (nee Ransley). On November 5, to Frank and Win at Nurse Harvey's Hospital, Bulwer-street, Perth, a son (Geoffrey Curgenven). Both well.

In a lifetime marked by a sufficient appetite for publicity it is the only occasion on which my name has appeared at the top of the first column on the front page of the State's leading morning newspaper; and although this was partly because my surname begins with an early letter of the alphabet it was largely because *The West Australian* for many years devoted its front page to advertisements, reserving the major news items for the centre pages. In this it followed the London *Times*, appropriately enough since Western Australia still looked to the United Kingdom for its cultural models. The layout of the Western Australian press in the 1930s followed the model of the more conservative London newspapers, or more precisely substantial provincial dailies such as the *Yorkshire Post*. This was true not only of the *West Australian*, but its metropolitan contemporaries the afternoon *Daily News*, the weekly *Western Mail*, and the weekend papers, the *Sunday Times*, the *Mirror*, and the *Call*.

There were as yet no tabloids, and nothing equivalent to the London *Daily Mirror*. Nearly all stories were reported in single-column prose with three short headlines summarising the story below, as in:

"SHOOT THEN!"

Retort Courageous

Woman to Bandit
The Daily News on the afternoon of my birth had an unusually important story, having secured advance notice of the forthcoming Ottawa conference which would seek to weld the British Commonwealth into a stronger trading partnership by encouraging British purchases of primary products from the dominions and Australian (or Canadian or South African) preference for British manufactures:

The Biggest Scheme in our History

Empire economists unity project

Biggest move in imperial history

Developments expected shortly

In a community of British migrants and the children of British migrants it was natural that British news should figure much more prominently than it does today. More than half the leading stories featured around the day of my birth had a British provenance. Ramsay Macdonald was selecting his new national government, and when he visited his native town of Lossiemouth the Scots fisherfolk greeted him with such enthusiasm that they dragged his car with ropes through the main street. Lord Kylsant, a business man convicted of fraud, would require a special bed for his 6 feet 5 inches frame while he served a year in Wormwood Scrubs and would be obliged to clean his own cell. Lord Tennyson had been scolded by the Daily Sketch for calling Don Bradman a publicity-hunter. And there was still an Empire, though already a troubled one. In Cyprus the traders in a revolt were to be deported for life after burning down Government House. Tribal unrest was feared on the North-West Frontier: Waziristan was a "volcano". Such stories gained equal prominence with the news that Japan, having occupied Manchuria, was defying League of Nations requests for evacuation.

Of course the depression was a preoccupation, though none of the contemporary newspapers gives any very lively impression of hardship and suffering in the Perth community. Such stories became commoner in 1932 and 1933 when it became evident that the depression would not suddenly go away. Hope still flickered in November 1931; the Daily News carried a report of a sudden rise in wheat prices on the Chicago wheat market due to an absence of competitive shipments from the Soviet Union. Experts claimed that this marked the end of the depression. (They were wrong.) A harassed Labor prime minister, J.H. Scullin was launching a fortnight-long National Prosperity Campaign to stimulate the economy. The Wheatgrowers’ Union was threatening to defy the federal government by holding up the harvest. An even stronger sense of déjà vu overcomes the reader who turns back a few weeks and finds both parties in State parliament combining to berate a federal Labor government for hitting at the gold industry by cutting an export subsidy.

Nor were politicians respected any more in 1931 than in 1986. The Sunday
Times wrote cryptically of ‘a soapbox orator who was elevated to a position carrying £1500 a year and subsequently “Fired” when a change of Government occurred but when the political wheel turned again got a fat billet to buy plenty of luxuries’. A baffling tale for those not in the know, but it served to feed the populist view that all politicians are crooks. The Daily News was up in arms at the proposal by the Deputy-Premier, to alienate a portion of Kings Park for a new public hospital. “HANDS OFF KINGS PARK” thundered an editorial on 21 October 1931, concluding in language which could apply equally today: ‘There is a tendency in these unrelenting days for . . . things to be done “under the lap” in the belief that public agitation will die quickly’. A fortnight later another Daily News editorial wrote of the Legislative Assembly:

Every minute that members are talking costs the country something over £1, it has been computed. On vital business that expenditive may be necessary, but some few pounds sterling were sent down the drain of futility yesterday and the people should not let such occasions go by without recording censure.

Indeed not, comments the reader; and if in these days of computerised technology the Legislative Assembly could be equipped with a tally-screen indicating the amount of public money consumed while Mr Burke and Mr Hassell are exchanging pleasantry . . . But perhaps we had better get back to the press in the early 1930s.

The life of working journalists in this era has been vividly described by two of their number, Sir Paul Hasluck and Victor Courtney. Both portray a world in which, as Hasluck puts it, ‘The literary staff was the aristocracy of a newspaper. The advertising staff and the business manager’s staff were not nearly as influential as they have become in more recent times’. It comes as a telling comment on changing public taste to find on the second page of the Daily News for 7 November 1931 a whole column headed:

TO PERFECTION
Goethe’s Way
Boundless Disinterest

It must be many years since the Daily News gave so much coverage to Goethe — or Foucault or Wole Soyinka. Yet it was clearly not aiming at the highbrow readership. The front page was largely given over to sporting results, with horse-racing at the fore followed by boxing and cricket (or, in winter, Australian rules). None of the major metropolitan papers boasted a cartoonist, although the Daily News and the Sunday Times each ran a single comic strip: ‘Us Fellers’, the forerunner of Ginger Meggs in the Sunday Times, and in the Daily News ‘Pop’ — a rather whimsical offshoot of upper middle-class England, its bold paterfamilias hero forever falling into scrapes with large ladies in tea-gowns and Bright Young Things. I don’t know the secret of its appeal to Western Australian readers, but it lasted for ages.
Coverage achieved on the whole a successful balance between overseas news and local stories. Readers relied on the *Western Australian* for the doings of outer suburban councils as for the League of Nations. Court cases seem to have possessed an element of theatre in them which justified extensive reporting; not only major murder trials in which distinguished local barristers displayed their prowess, but also homelier matters. All the newspapers around the date of my birth give a good deal of space to a slander case from the Southern Cross district when one farmer’s wife was alleged to have said of another that she couldn’t possibly afford all her dresses out of the egg-money, but would probably have less now that a certain neighbouring farmer had moved out of the district. All the names were given, as well as remarkably candid descriptions of the witnesses (‘a wizened, elderly man’, ‘a plain, gruffly-spoken middle-aged woman’). The *Sunday Times* for its part was given to a rather unpleasant form of anonymous mischief-making hinting at suburban adulteries. (‘They say that a certain Fremantle businessman has not claimed the umbrella with his initials which he left at a seaside hotel while staying in a double room last weekend.’) No doubt readers found this kind of thing titillating. Perth was in many ways still a big country town.

The *West Australian* still stood at the head of Perth journalism, although it had recently passed out of local ownership. Sir Winthrop Hackett, editor and part-proprietor for a generation, had bought out his partners before his death in 1916. His estate was administered for a decade by his successor as editor, Sir Alfred Langler, who sold out in 1926 to a public company with a capital of £550,000 in which the Melbourne *Herald* had the dominant shareholding. This made no immediate difference to the tone or policies of the *West Australian* under Langler’s successor as editor, Dudley Braham, an Oxford-educated Englishman who had once been foreign correspondent for *The Times*. Under Langler and Braham the *West Australian* maintained Hackett’s policy of seeking scrupulous standards of accuracy and objectivity in reportage while following a conservative line in politics. But not obsequiously conservative; the days had been when the *West* fancied itself a little as a king-maker in the anti-Labor politics of the State, and it was not above rapping even Sir James Mitchell over the knuckles if his actions smacked too much of slapdash planning or party expediency. Nor was the *West Australian* given to sensation-mongering; its restrained prose at times must have helped to take the heat out of potentially tense situations such as the demonstrations by unemployed workers in the early 1930s.

During the 1920s the *West Australian* acquired its evening competitor the *Daily News*. Editorial comment in the *Daily News* tended to focus on local issues, and perhaps its staff were a little less scrupulous about impartiality. Thus a report of a Sydney fracas in which the New Guard broke up a Communist meeting convened to protest against the eviction of tenants was headlined ‘Up Guards and at ’em!’ and prominence without disapproval seems to have been given to accounts of violent anti-Communist vigilante action in North America. The third mainstay of Western Australian Newspapers was the *Western Mail*, published weekly since 1885 and directed at a rural readership. A sixty-four page broadsheet, it carried repeats of news stories carried in the *West Australian* during the previous week, but its distinctive features
included several pages of useful information for farmers, a women’s section with recipes and other instructive material, a children’s section and selected fiction. In short, the Western Mail played an invaluable role in disseminating educational material to rural communities. It also contained an eight page centrefold with photographs of local activities which today constitute a useful resource for social historians. One regular feature was a series of snapshots of citizens photographed walking in St George’s Terrace, whose friends derived an artless pleasure from seeing somebody of their acquaintance in the media. Only the Sunday Times could boast a circulation comparable to the West Australian. Founded in 1897 as a populist, ‘tothersider’ rival to the conservative ‘sandgroper’ West, the Sunday Times in its early years built up a reputation for muckraking journalism of a somewhat indiscriminate nature. It was widely blamed for hounding C.Y. O’Connor to his suicide, and was forever sniffing out tales of graft and corruption in official circles. By 1931 it was long past its prime, with an ageing staff and a proprietor, James McCallum Smith, who with monomaniac intensity preached the secession of Western Australia from the Commonwealth. Faint traces of the old populism lingered in its contempt for most politicians, but much of its reforming zeal was lost in a trenchant anti-socialism.

Several other weekly papers sprang up to seize the lost ground. Victor Courtney, a young journalist who gained his training on the Sunday Times, teamed up with J.J. (‘Boss’) Simons, director of the Young Australia League in 1919 to purchase a small weekly, the Sportsman devoted to racing, trotting, and minor sports and theatricals. Simons, a strong anti-conscriptionist, was Labor MLA for East Perth in 1921-22 but broke with the party; however he and Courtney were decidedly less conservative in their editorial policies than either the Sunday Times or the West Australian so they expanded the scope of the Sportsman to cover general local news, renamed it the Call, and became a crusading journal which soon attracted libel suits from the mayor of Perth and other notables. Four years later they took over another struggling weekly, the Mirror, which filled the need for a popular Saturday night publication. ‘It was not a good paper’ Courtney later admitted, ‘but it was a paper with the news and it was the news dished out in a breezy fashion while the entertainment angle of news presentation was kept well in mind’. It was a portent for the future.

The early 1930s were a watershed for Perth’s newspapers. Courtney dated the change to the advent of the Audit Bureau of Circulations. This gave advertisers and their agents access to the audited sales of every major newspaper. ‘To put it plainly, most advertisers support the papers that appeal to the masses and the masses are not all university students or professional men.’ To Hasluck at the West Australian the change was heralded by the arrival of the Melbourne Herald’s C.P. Smith as managing editor, who supervised the paper’s move to a new building and streamlined managerial practices which ‘tended to change a club into a factory. The supremacy of the editor in fixing the contents of the paper was reduced to a share in the fixing.’

New media were also flourishing. In 1932 there were only two Perth radio stations, 6WF, acquired from Westralian Farmers by the newly formed Australian Broadcasting Commission and 6ML, the solitary commercial
station, owned by Musgroves, the music retailers. During the next decade they were joined by 6PR, owned by Musgroves’ competitors Nicholsons, 6IX, a second Musgroves station, 6PM, offshoot of a Northam operator, and 6KY owned by the Australian Labor Party, as well as a second ABC station, 6WN. In 1933 the West Australian launched a weekly journal, the Broadcaster, which not only published local radio programmes and features about radio personalities, but also maintained a cartoonist Clive Gordon, and provided a forum where local short story writers could earn a few guineas and an outlet for their work. The Western Mail was also opened to local writers. At the same time the Daily News went down-market. Its layout assumed several tabloid features. An opinion column was developed in which correspondents voiced their views in capsules of not more than one hundred words. The number of comic strips increased; Pop was joined by the space traveller Brick Bradford, Popeye the Sailor, and eventually Blondie and Dagwood.

The West Australian, to external appearances, remained the same dignified, conservative, responsible, slightly old-fashioned journal as before, and its editor during the 1930s, H.J. Lambert, was a product of the Langler school. Hasluck however believed that the shift to the ownership of a joint stock company was producing undesirable changes:

The space given to book reviews, criticism, and discussion of literary topics was related to the number of readers or advertising they attracted. Satisfying the shareholders took a higher place than responsibility to the public. Senior appointments were made with an eye to producing better dividends rather than a better newspaper. Circulation became more and more the yardstick by which to measure whether a piece of journalism was good or bad, and professional skill and probity took second place to any talent that improved circulation.4

Given the economic constraints of the depressed 1930s it would not have been wonderful to find the accountants and advertising managers taking a more assertive role in newspaper decision-making. The same constraints affected the weekend press. During 1932 the Mirror and the Sunday Times responded by initiating a series of crossword puzzle competitions in which entrants had to submit sixpence with their entries and the winner was awarded a prize of several hundred, or even a few thousand pounds. Circulation of both journals throve, but the churches attacked the crossword puzzle craze as an incentive to gambling and bookmakers complained that they were losing customers. The Mitchell government decided to divert the proceeds of gambling to government revenue by legislating in 1932 to outlaw the newspaper crossword contest and to set up a lotteries commission which would conduct regular draws, with the proceeds going to nominated charities. This put the weekend newspapers at odds with the Mitchell government. (The Sunday Times was already disenchanted because of what it saw as Mitchell’s lukewarm attitude towards secession.) The controversy helped to increase the government’s unpopularity and may have contributed to its landslide defeat in April 1933.

The ageing McCallum Smith, obsessed with fostering secession, was ready to sell the Sunday Times and in 1934 entered into negotiations with the West Australian. These failed to reach fruition, and Simons and Courtney intervened.
with an offer of £55,000. McCallum Smith saw nothing incongruous about selling to anti-secessionists or in accepting the chairmanship of directors of the new company. He insisted only that the *Sunday Times* should remain neutral on the question for twelve months. The fire soon went out of the secession issue, and in 1937 when Carlyle Ferguson attempted to start a secessionist paper with the memorable name of the *Daily Groper* it went out of business in less than a fortnight. Courtney and Simons in fact reverted to a moderately anti-Labor stance for most of the 1930s, and Courtney even stood as an independent UAP candidate at a by-election for the Legislative Council in 1941 but fell into dispute with the National Union, the anti-Labor funding organization, and during the Second World War became Perth's main source of media support for the Curtin government. Old friendship played a part here, as Curtin had edited the *Westralian Worker* during its heyday in the 1920s when its political comment and cartoons matched in quality anything produced by the mainstream press.

During the later 1920s Courtney and Simons reorganised the three newspapers under their ownership. The *Call* reverted to being primarily a sporting newspaper and the *Sunday Times* took over most of its popular features, dropping many of the farming columns and other unglamorous portions of its magazine section which had competed rather ineffectually with the *Western Mail*. The *Mirror* increasingly found its customers among Saturday afternoon football and racing crowds and Saturday night fans of the ‘trots’ or the cinema. For a while during the mid-1930s it made something of a feature of reprinting human interest stories from the overseas press. In one edition at the height of the Munich crisis of September 1938, for instance, there are a few trivial local stories — a burglary at a plumber's home from which nothing was taken, a complaint of inadequate afternoon tea at the Victoria League, a farm suicide — but most of the material is taken straight from the lower middle-class English press: poisonings, deaths of wealthy recluses, centenarians receiving royal telegrams, a youth cured of lockjaw, none of them stories obviously of concern to the people of Perth.

But the *Mirror* gradually won itself a peculiar relevance for Perth readers. It came to specialise in divorce reports and other delicious sexual scandals, and its illustrations of scantily-clad girls, while innocuous enough to the eyes of the 1980s, were sufficiently provocative to debar the paper from many respectable households. Its sub-editors developed a line in jolly headlines: ‘Butcher was in for his Chop’, ‘Roving Romeo Routed’. Like many other newspapers of the same sort, the *Mirror* represented itself as a custodian of morality exposing the vices of the iniquitous to public scrutiny; but in fact it was simply pandering to the insatiable human taste for prurient scandal. It represented one end of the spectrum of Perth's press while at the other end the good, grey *West Australian*, however diminished, still maintained the literate standards of a journal which included Walter Murdoch among its columnists and sometimes invited academics from the University of Western Australia to compose its editorials.

Then in 1939 the Second World War broke out. Newsprint rationing was to lead to the disappearance of many time-honoured features. Reliance on radio for news and entertainment, and particularly the emergence of the ABC
news bulletins as a yardstick for accurate reporting, meant that the newspapers would never again enjoy unchallenged pre-eminence. The wartime influx of American servicemen presaged familiarity with the Reader's Digest, Time, Newsweek, and other products of a more streamlined school of journalism. As technology changed and costs grew, control of the media would pass into fewer hands. Something of the individualism of Perth journalism in the 1920s and the 1930s would be lost: a combination of provincial identity and awareness of overseas literary and cultural traditions. These newspapers unquestionably had their limitations but at their best were motivated by a sense of awareness and responsibility towards their readers. Can as much be said for Perth’s press today?

NOTES
2. V. Courtney, op. cit., p. 241
3. P. Hasluck, op. cit., p. 241
4. Ibid p.243
Poetry of the Nineteen Thirties

I

A decade has no more shape and sense to it than a mile or a verst. It is something arbitrary which we use to put a handle on our immediate chaos. It gives us a sense of our own proportion and a comfort in knowing where we are; and it gives a certainty to events which was not apparent to those in the middle of them on the plain or the steppe. The very idea of a decade is a product of a linear notion of time and it invests all change with the notion of progress; it was a turning away from this idea of teleological progress which produced some of the best poems of the 'thirties. Another feature often remarked in 'thirties poetry is its stylistic conservatism; I would like also to look at this aspect of the poetry to see if Australian poets were as far divorced from the rest of the world as many commentators have made out.

As far as style is concerned, my notion of the period is one of poets struggling with two conflicting desires: one to 'say it new' and keep their art alive, the other to use and exploit the traditions which all of them seem to have felt were still valid and necessary. There is no sense of all the old forms being diseased from 'the old bitch gone in her teeth', but there is a sense of it being a time when some difficult choices had to be made. Far from rejecting modernism, I feel that many of the poets (as distinct from the novelists) tried to find a modern style to fit Australian conditions. There is little doubt when one reads the poetry of the decade that the ideas which lay behind the changes in European thought in the early years of the twentieth century (psycho-analysis, relativity and quantum theory, and liberal economic theories) were incorporated into Australian poetry as they had been in Britain and the United States, but with this difference: Australian poets used a wider range of styles — styles which ranged from mock cavalier, to Brennan-like metaphysicality; from Imagism, Miltonics, formal stanzas, to the use of models from traditional cultures, and contemporary speech in ballad form.

FitzGerald's response in December 1939 to a collection which contained Slessor's finest mature poems was not to the ideas nor to the imaginative scope of the poetry, but to the metrical techniques used in the collection. This was not unusual for the period; both academic and non-academic commentators on poetry wrote at length on prosodic features. What is interesting is
FitzGerald’s view of Slessor’s cadenced metrics. First of all it ‘is something with four arms and two heads’, but then it is not quite a sideshow exhibit — each arm has a special function and the ‘creature utters wit and wisdom with both its mouths’ (the creature was “Last Trams”). And secondly, ‘although its technique is experimental; we are spared any crude laboratory process’.1 There we have one of the main attitudes to stylistic change in the ’thirties — evolutionary conservatism.

Cyril Pearl, less part of the conservative mainstream (in 1931 he edited Stream, a short-lived avant-garde magazine in Melbourne, and published in it Bertram Higgins and Edgar Holt), wrote in Art in Australia in December 1933 about Higgins’ poetics. He was not interested in the mechanics of the poet’s prosody, but more in the nature of modern poetry. He defended Higgins’ ‘Mordecaius’ Overture from the charge of unintelligibility by citing Valéry that obscurity ‘is the product of two factors, the thing read and the being who reads it. “The latter rarely blames himself.” ’ Modern poetry, Pearl argued, needs an audience with a ‘minimum education’ otherwise art is democratized to a ‘sub-journalistic level’.2 Once more we see the problem with style: change and experiment in art need a discriminating clerisy, and Pearl, like FitzGerald, sees its development as being part of an evolutionary conservatism.

A little earlier, in September of 1931, Kenneth Slessor had given an address to the English Association in Sydney in which he also struggled with his conflicting desires to be both forward looking and respecter of past traditions. This Janus-like evolutionary conservatism can still be seen in the statements by R.D. FitzGerald two decades later when he tried to reconcile the desire to experiment with the necessity for beauty and lucid expression. Slessor’s impatience with Joyce (he had just read part of Work in Progress — “Haveth Childers Everywhere” — in 1931), Gertrude Stein, and e.e. cummings was not based on the techniques they used — neologisms, para-sensical repetition and free verse he could understand — but on the grounds of the technique being taken to irrational extremes: ‘Movement in poetry is to be achieved by a gradual building process . . . There can be no sudden explosion of revolt, such as is attempted by the incendiaries under the domination of Cummings and Gertrude Stein’.3

Though neither Slessor nor FitzGerald had much desire to move far away from traditional styles, they both responded positively to the intellectual currents of the time. It would seem to me that the opinion which sees the response in Australia to modernism as delayed is wrong. If one looks only for the stylistic features of modernist poetry, then that would appear to be the case. Australian poets persisted for a variety of reasons — the influence of powerful polemists like Norman Lindsay, inertia, delight — with traditional forms of prosody, but then few poets in Britain or the United States in the ’thirties followed the examples of the early Eliot or the later Pound. However, in terms of content, of prevailing mood, of the imaginative processing of current ideas in psychology, physics, and politics, our poets took up the challenge, and at least three great poems were conceived and completed in the mid-thirties. The point seems to be that in stylistic matters Australian poets remained vitalist, and committed to a teleological notion of progress.

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In the wider arena of ideas concerning physics and metaphysics there was no such certainty, and their poetry dealt directly with dilemma.

II

These then are some of the opinions around in the decade, but what of the practice? What was the poetry like?

Frank Wilmot's ('Furnley Maurice') _Melbourne Odes_ appeared in 1934. This city poetry contrasted markedly with Sydney's. Slessor's tinkling light verse, the romantic glitter he finds in the misery of William Street, and Colin Wills' sesquipedalian light-heavy-weight verse also on city subjects showed the effects of the Depression in Sydney, but let the city keep its marcel wave in place (a double message also apparent in the Sydney novels of the time). Wilmot, on the other hand, is much more robust and direct in his depiction of an anti-romantic cityscape in the "Victoria Markets Recollected in Tranquillity", and even though occasionally he lets a solemn and beautiful sunset glow on the city in the "The Towers of Melbourne" one is always conscious of Whelan the Wrecker at one's back. The right modernist tone of Eliot's Preludes or Baudelaire's _l'immonde cité_ is there, but the prosody is not that of "The Waste Land":

Along the shadows furtive, lone,
The unwashed terrier carries his week-end bone.
An old horse with a pointed hip
And dangling disillusioned under-lip
Stands in a harvest-home of cabbage leaves
And grieves.

("The Victoria Markets . . .")

That is not surprising. In 1922 after reading Carl Sandburg and Ezra Pound, Wilmot railed against the deadening conservatism of Australian prosody, but went on to argue that it was not good enough to 'copy Mr Ezra Pound'; instead we should find our own style to express the 'restlessness of the times'. Wilmot opted for control — for a music based on short lines and rhyme — which seems to me, like Slessor's four arms and two heads, to be the ideal form, half-ironic, half-compassionate, for the well-composed and carefully edited _cinéma verité_ with which Wilmot creates the physical and human milieux of the markets. It has its continuation in the work of Ronald McCuaig in Sydney later in the decade.

If these were the images and prosody of the city, how was the bush seen?

Katharine Susannah Prichard's _The Earth Lover_ was published in Sydney in 1932, Kenneth Mackenzie's _Our Earth_ in Sydney in 1937, and Paul Hasluck's _Into the Desert_ in Claremont, W.A. in 1939. That all had Western Australian affiliations might account for their vivid sense of the natural world and their discontent with industrialised suburban societies. Their attitudes, however, to the natural world differ considerably. Prichard's desire in the title poem
of the collection is to blend into the landscape; not to impose her will or personality on her earthy lover, but to mingle:

For I am an earth child
An earth lover,
And I ask no more than to be,
Of the earth, earthy,
And to mingle again with the divine dust.

The poem shows considerable lyric grace with its precise imagery and a sure fluent line. Unlike many of her contemporaries Prichard uses the rhythms of prose and speech rather than well-established literary cadences. The opposite is true of Kenneth Mackenzie's *grand œuvre* "Our Earth". This ambitious poem in a sumptuous edition published by the Halstead Press was introduced by Norman Lindsay, illustrated by him and contained as well, in each of its 225 limited edition copies, an original engraving by the artist. The poem is a long, ecstatic celebration of natural processes — love-making, pregnancy, birth — which are contrasted unfavourably with the 'iron' world of the present. Although Lindsay claims the poem is written in blank verse, much of it is written in unrhymed alexandrines. The style is Keats with overtones of the apocalyptic romanticism popular in England in the late 'thirties — in fact in places the imagery moves into the surreal and could have been as easily illustrated by James Gleeson as Norman Lindsay:

We who are clipped and duly shaped in stamp and size
link hands — who have no hands in this unheard regime
of wheel and cog. That’s sleeping, and from that sleep
too soon will be no waking, when the harnessed tides
and chained obedient seasons vomit out their hearts
and sleep in sleep for ever; and the wheel tells them,
the cogs command them chattering, they obey the steel
that rapes and rapes to death with perfect piston motion
beauty who fought, and fled, and fell, and could not rise.

The moral is clear — industrialism is violent and destructive. The earth is the power we should worship. In an earlier section of the poem which invokes some hot and sweaty love-making, Mackenzie makes the point that through physical love men achieve a unity with Nature (the Earth). Where Prichard was content to mingle, Mackenzie must ‘know’ and ‘enter’:

Love blends in such a unity my scattered parts
that I am in this space made perfectly a man,
knowing my Earth, entering once again my heaven.

How much more appealing are the austerities of Eliot’s waste land.

Paul Hasluck’s desert is conveyed in the language of an abstract Georgianism with a leavening of early twentieth-century ennui; it is Lawson written by Ralph Hodgson out of Poe:

These tell great mysteries:
The tired winds crooning in unblossomed trees
Dull syllables of magic spent, leaves thrown
Thriftless and turned to mould; the moan
Of dirges played o’er grey hills, slumbering,
When autumn clouds droop on purple wing
And in one moment's maze a man may know how centuries
sweep by.
Death's thankful sigh.
(“Autumn”)

Closer to the coast, however, the land waits for progress and development. In “Songs of Australia” Hasluck uses a long line and ‘thirties’ documentary images to express his positivist beliefs in economic progress and development. Like Mackenzie’s Earth, his land is also feminine:

Here on a coloured couch the ripening land
Waits for the rape.
The small round hills push pointed breasts into the skies.
The long smooth flanks are stretched at ease.
Here mid green crops the purple fallow lies,
Set round by guardian trees.
(“An Inventory”)

There is another side to national development. Unlike agrarian development, urban labour is not so violently and sensually fulfilling. Hasluck finds ennui and spiritual malaise the order of the day in the suburbs — as they were for the generation of writers in the first decade of the century.6

Having once walked in that land I am sick with desire.
The tarred road through the suburb is lined with dying trees
And grey dried weeds
Between a palisade of skinny poles and whining wire.
Summer heat strikes upward blow on blow stabbing the brain.
The harsh nails in cheap boots, daily stampeding to doom,
Click one refrain:
You’ll miss your train. You’ll miss your train. You’ll miss your train.
(“Discontent in the Suburbs”)

Even on the coast the male poets of the decade saw the land as female, and the sea as its complementary male. In the poems of E.G. Moll and Ronald McCuaig there is the same image of the sea or the surf as a lecherous old man licking the breasts of a young woman, the beach. And in Kyneton, far from the salacious sea shore, Leonard Mann invoked the same spirit in his memories of the willows in the Kyneton Gardens by the Campaspe:

And trembling in their fret of fever
Suspend their quivering fingers over
Her breasts like a too timid lover . . .
(“Basement Restaurant”)

Mann’s style is representative of minor poets with major themes to communicate. The problem was finding that right style. Mann chose a Miltonic blank verse, which when roughly treated had some vitality. Like many of his contemporaries in the smaller magazines of the time, he shows his social conscience when he tries to answer the music hall question of ‘What about the workers?’:

What! Is this all? Is there no satisfaction;
Not merely a sensation in the belly,
In flowing muscles and the certain eye,
In treading girders free of vertigo,
In physical prowess, in lustful loins,
In solace of the cool drawn pot of beer,
In virtues that the animals possess
As man the greatest of the carnivores?

Mann’s verse is too mechanical, and although like McCuaig’s it affects
the metaphysical, Mann does not bring it off. The roughness of the language
defeats the grand gesture. Thus in “Ballet”, which in parts is very similar
to FitzGerald’s “The Hidden Bole”, the abstractions do not live and the ideas
are too diffused.

In Mann’s collection the Bathurst burr of the ‘twenties, Australia as home
to the exotic import of Hellenic myth, still flourished in “Pan Reborn”:

He feels new hope rise in his flesh
And ruminates how close a mesh
Knits head to hoof and soul to sense . . .

Unfortunately, it was more hoof than head in Mann’s verse, and despite
the design on Peter Hopegood’s title page for his Austral Pan (1932?) which
shows that the horns and ears of Pan can grace the human and geographic
face of black Australia, there was little progress in integrating European myth
and Antipodean reality in the period. Hopegood’s energetic poetry with its
rough metrics, its parodies of Milton (again — particularly the “Ode on the
Morning of Christ’s Nativity”), and its skill in light verse registers, records
the final failure of Slessor’s “Pan at Lane Cove”. For Hopegood Pan is the
quintessential white squatter regulating his flocks, but every now and then
going troppo:

But Pan, though moving with the times and counting pride the worst of crimes,
Evolving the communist plan and equalising black and tan
With white in one jazz spectroscope . . .
. . . He seeks again His ancient haunts.
A squatter born, a squatter bred, with horns, Himself, upon His head,
His steps outback with glee are bent. He sniffs the salt bush
with content
The deeper for His knowledge sure, His ancient ways and works endure.

A much more powerful evocation of the bush, this time the Northern
Territory, is found in F.T. Macartney’s Hard Light (Surrey Hills, Vic., 1934?).
There is an awkward use of rhyme and staccato lines, and a tropical eroticism
— ‘The moist, promiscuous jungle clasps the hill / With that industrious
harlotry which dims / Exhaustion into mournfulness . . .’ (“The Rainbird
Comes Again”) — which is rather over-dramatic, but those same images can
be used to communicate moving states of despair in “Rhyme of the Wandering
Shadows”:

Tribal Dance

“We have grown pliant with life’s many needs,”
They seem to say;
And so
In a long row
They crouch and sway
Whistling like wind in reeds.
There's a world divided, a conflict
between materialism and aesthetics.
These, the lives influenced and influencing,
are the torn edges — imperfect shapes of what will be.
("Torn Edges")

A year earlier, also in Adelaide, a much more convincing poetry describing that divided world was published in Enid Moodie Heddle's *Solitude and other vagaries* (Adelaide, 1937). An unpromising title, but the poetry itself is inventive.
It shows the influence of the imagists in an unsentimental verse characterised by clear observation and a cinematic documentary approach. The language is spare and has considerable descriptive power:

And somewhere,
Round a corner
Through the wavering shadows,
Through the pale, blinding light,
A dead man calmly sitting
In a room;
And a dead woman huddled
On a small kitchen floor
In a block of such comfortable,
Adequate,
New service flats.
And the traffic
In torment
On the Cross —
And no Eros . . .

("Mock Piccadilly")

Mary Finnin's poems, *A Beggar's Opera* (Melbourne, 1938) and *Look Down, Olympians* (Melbourne, 1939) — published in one volume as *Poems* (Melbourne, 1940) — are traditional in form, but their diction does not break down and revert to the literary gestures of the Georgians as other minor poems of the period often do. "A Beggar's Opera" in particular is rich in imagery and deals very imaginatively with the convict theme.

Probably the most interesting collection of minor poetry in the period was Ronald McCuaig's *Vaudeville* (Sydney, 1938) — poems written between November 1933 and January 1934. The subject matter is sex (the book had to be printed by the author as no publisher would take it on), and the style is that of the ballad (*cf* Auden's Miss Gee"and "Victor" of four years later), and the Metaphysical and Cavalier revival of the 'twenties.

Many of them are written as dialogues or monologues and often are mock-pastorals. Though they use rhyme intelligently, they capture contemporary speech rhythms with a wit and verve that no other poet was to do until Bruce Dawe in the 'sixties. They are a fine philippics against the shallowness of modern urban life and its effect on the vital instincts.

'William Baylebridge's' (C.W. Blockidge) ambitious sonnet sequence *Love Redeemed* (Sydney, 1934) suffers from being at too many removes from the remover. The poet writes of love using the conventions (and often the language) of the Elizabethans, and the actuality of the experience and the communication of a realised world are lost in abstractions. Baylebridge followed Brennan's path but turned acutely right into a cul-de-sac of the over-literary. The *Sydney Morning Herald's* praise of the collection sums up the sonnets of *Love Redeemed:* "they are rich in "fundamental brain-work".

The most impressive love poem of the decade must be Tom Inglis Moore's "Druidic Gums", which won second prize to FitzGerald's "Essay on Memory" in the 1938 sesquicentennial poetry prize. There is nothing lyrical about the poem (moving lyrics may be found elsewhere in his *Adagio in Blue* [Sydney,
1938); rather it is epic in its scope. In its attempt to explore the similarities between the awesome power of the Australian landscape, western civilisation’s myths, and the experience of lovers at night beneath gum trees it is the erotic equivalent of FitzGerald’s “The Hidden Bole”. The verse, though rich in its rhetoric, is supple and dynamic and in both its ideas and expression it is a major achievement. It is a pity that it is neglected today.

III

Such are the strengths and weaknesses of the minor poems of the period, but it is three major poems from the decade which I think show the triumph of modernism in Australia.

They are Higgins’ “Mordecaius’ Overture” in 1933; FitzGerald’s “The Hidden Bole”, 1938 (started in 1935); Slessor’s “Five Bells”, 1939 (started in 1935 and finished in 1937). Each poem is an attempt to make sense of a world in physical and metaphysical confusion. Physically it is a world where time is no longer a universal but a relative fiction of impermanence and uncertainty; and metaphysically it is a world where the value systems of aesthetics and ethics are equally problematical. Where Eliot found answers in orthodox religion, and Auden in political and religious dogmas, the same certainty is not to be found in Australia. FitzGerald’s poem ends with the reassurance of beauty and a sense of order despite the relativity of time, but that certainty did not survive the coming war. His “Face of the Waters” (1944) has in it some of the most profoundly pessimistic writing to be found in Australian poetry.

Higgins’ poem is an Overture — for what, we are not certain. The first disquieting element is apparent: this is not a poem based on linear causality. Mordecaius is a fragmented voice. He speaks like one of Pound’s Cantos, as if all history were speaking through him. He is present at the eruption which is destroying Pompeii; he witnesses each hour of the Crucifixion; like Leopold Bloom he carries round in his head the inheritance of the Judaeo/Roman world, but it does little to save him from those who mock him; in fact he mocks himself. The poem gives us a frightening picture of a collapsing world — physically at Pompeii, teleologically at Golgotha — and it makes sure that through its speaker we can locate these times and feelings in our present. It is an apocalyptic poem of great power which shows the crisis (in the old sense as an argument between voices approaching a judgment) in the decade, and conveys it through an ingenious rhetoric and controlled imagery without the distraction of conceited metaphors.

The problem which both FitzGerald and Slessor tackle in their poems is also teleological — possibly a product of trying to make sense of the vitalist tradition in which they developed.

Slessor’s desperate search for purpose and design in the world is never rewarded. Although time appears to be causally linear — a ’bumpkin calculus’ — it proceeds nowhere; it is a ‘flood that does not flow’. Any convincing answers as to what we are and what life means can only be gained outside
the causal progression of Newtonian physics, in an alternate world. In his sonnet sequence “Out of Time” (1935) Slessor describes the 'moment's world' of insight, relief from pain and decay as a static moment — a surface of a bubble without cause and without issue. The same fragile image of an eggshell instant is used by FitzGerald at the end of “The Face of the Waters”. Both images express a desire to escape from causality, from the 'long nightmare of history', which in an agnostic age leads nowhere. For Slessor at the end of “Five Bells” causality wins out; the insight is lost, and the flood flows on, plot-less and purposeless like the lives of the city people glimpsed from the “Last Trams” — 'stars of a film without a plot / snippings of idiot celluloid'.

In “The Hidden Bole” FitzGerald’s more optimistic nature takes Pavlova’s dance as an example of ephemeral beauty (even more so after her death in 1931) which could only come into being through linear temporality, and equates it with the vitalist view of the natural world as an eternally renewing biological entity, with beauty as its by-product. Pavlova’s individual art must be impermanent for ‘permanence . . . is death’ because the life-force is linear and progressive. The Banyan tree, which provides the major motif and title for the poem, expresses in its curious rooting system the argument from design, except in the case of the banyan tree, the design, the central bole does not exist — the centre is a metaphysical mystery. FitzGerald was content before the war to let the mystery remain — later he was to confront it head on.

These three major poems show that Australian poets did respond to modern dilemmas. The styles they chose were different, as were their temperaments. Higgins perhaps was influenced by his residence in Europe during the 'twenties, FitzGerald by his deep-rooted belief in traditional practice as a necessary function of communication, and Slessor by his continual exploration of the sensuous and melancholic sounds of the language. Whatever their styles, these poems show clearly the anomy of the early twentieth century, and the collapse of the certainty associated with nineteenth century vitalism. As such they show that Australian poetry was not as isolated from world trends as has been argued in the past. It would seem that in the 1930s ideas were being processed as promptly as they were in the 1960s and 1970s. What did remain home-grown were the styles which were used to express those ideas. Poets may have become disillusioned with vitalism as a set of ideas, but the vitalist model persisted in their attitudes towards the evolution of style.

NOTES

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Portia Bennett, "Howard Street Perth", 1934.
(Reproduced with the permission of the Art Gallery of Western Australia.)
DAVID BROMFIELD

Modernism's Back Alley — Perth Streets as Signs of the Times

The city street has always been central to the experience of modernism and the changing image of the street has been its most potent icon. From the time of Baudelaire and Manet the act of observing changes in buildings, their functions and various, apparently disconnected, events in the street has been the mark of "modernist" art. The key experiences of simultaneity, voyeurism, intoxication with technical change and the contrasting moods of a passive spectatorial indifference and the attempt to manifest the need for political reform all take place in the street. Modernism has been described by its prophets as the road to an utopian future for all and by its critics as the leading edge of an international capitalism which aimed at the subordination of all local differences and demands to some universally accepted system of values and goals. It has been seen to promise both heroic freedom and debased enslavement.

This article looks at changes in the image of the street in Perth in the thirties principally through the work of two artists, the painter Portia Bennett and the photographer Fred Flood. It is concerned with documenting the changes that their work invokes and with making suggestions as to their relevance to the experience of being "modern" in Perth in the thirties. It is vital to determine the extent to which the local image of the "modern" street which was produced at that time differed from the international model which had appeared as part of the recovery from worldwide depression of the early 1930's. By doing this we may understand a little more of the effect modernism has had on the attitudes of the citizens of Perth and the development of the city from then until the present.1

Portia Bennett arrived in Perth from Sydney in 1932. During the thirties and forties, she produced a marvellous series of watercolour views of the urban environment as it changed, many of them centring on the Town Hall. She used the Town Hall tower both as a picturesque compositional device in the manner of Bonington's city views of the early nineteenth century and as a historical monument which evoked both Perth in the 1850s and the mythic middle ages of nineteenth century civic pride.2 A photographic spread of various towers in Perth in the Western Mail Christmas issue for 1938, Towers Old and New confirms this reading of the historical dimension of Bennett's work as it uses the Town Hall as a sign for the imagined "ancient" history of the city.
However we shall concentrate on a relatively early and minor work in the series which does not feature the Town Hall, a view down *Howard Street* which she painted in 1934, shortly after she had become a member of the newly formed Perth Society of artists. Bennett had been a student in Sydney with the Dattilo Rubbo and Julian Ashton school and had been much influenced by the Sydney modernists who painted the urban scene. However she found in Perth neither apparent outward icons of modernity from the Sydney Bridge downwards that were so prevalent in Sydney nor a group of determinedly modernist artists informed by the environment. Her colleagues in the Perth Society thought of themselves as up to date professional artists but their ideal artists were Gruner and Heysen, both of whom exhibited with the society.

Indeed Perth was still, visually at least, a British country town and thought of itself as such. Bennett’s image of Howard Street plays on this quite consciously and conceals her still quite potent modernism within many reminders of a conservative environment. The most clear example of this is her detailed rendering of the red brick and gold standstone of the *Surrey Chambers 1903* on the left hand corner of the street and St George’s Terrace. This semi-ecclesiastical architecture which ultimately harks back to the reassuring gothic of St Pancras Station was intended to confirm an impression of the stability and security of the professional activities it housed; the stability that is of the country solicitor or doctor who perhaps might also buy the occasional watercolour.

There are however several elements of the composition which conflict with this view of the painting and may account for its ultimate inadequacy. They also point to the inadequacy of the self image of Perth as a country town. The buildings on either side of the street are far too high and the gulf they form between them is far too vast and deep. Bennett has made use of the spectacular shadow cast across the street to emphasise this even more. At the bottom of the gulf in the light in St George’s Terrace one can see a small Morris car and a few diminutive pedestrians. This dramatic effect is found in early romantic watercolourists like Bonington and also in the anxiety-laden images of Piranesi. In this case I believe it is a product of an anxious compromise between Bennett’s desire to see the streets of Perth as the streets of a modern city and the fear that this would provoke amongst her most likely patrons.

Her selective record is easily exposed by the account of another, fictional, observer, looking from just down the road, in 1934:

"The city he knew was a city at work, living, significant: a city of two hundred thousand souls; with crowded narrow footpaths and wide busy streets; with clanging electric trams, painted a dull grey green and decorated with advertisements, with red diamonds painted on either end from which the headlamps looked out like Cyclopean eyes; with a morning and evening and four important weekly newspapers; with fine public buildings; with bronze and stone and marble memorials to the War and others of the great and noble deeds of men; with green parks and public gardens; with chambers of Commerce and Industry; with wealth amounting to hundreds of millions of pounds sterling deposited in bills and deed and currency in a dozen banks; and with thousands of unemployed who huddled in the trees in the parks, their shabby clothes and drawn, worn out faces spoiling the pleasant prospects for the more fortunate."
Billett's The Modern Cafe

Environmen is important — but not everything. The delightfully modern surroundings of Billett's Cafe are backed up by efficient service and unrivalled cooking.

Billett's Cafe, Gledden Bdg., Perth, W.A.

Westerly, No. 4, December, 1986
The eyes of the magistrate Riddle in J.M. Harcourt's novel *Upsurge* have seen far more than Portia Bennett in the immediate environment. Later in the novel Harcourt is to use the city street on many occasions as the site of his most dramatic events. It is the scene of a strike picket outside a department store and the scene of riots by the unemployed which refer to the real life Treasury riots of 1931. For Harcourt the street has become essentially the site of class conflict and of a change in the nature of sociability that can best be illustrated by one minor quotation describing the employees of the department store leaving for home:

"The groups broke up and the assistants, men and girls, went out to swell the crowds on the footpaths. For some of the girls, young men belonging to a different stratum of society were waiting with cars. The girls entered their cars ostentatiously, bidding goodbye to their less fortunate comrades in self conscious, affected tones. Other girls paired with men from the shop. The bulk of them hurried away to board the clanging, grey green trams which would carry them to the suburbs.

Many of them had to stand in the trams, clinging to overhead straps or to metal hand holds on the backs of their seats, they smiled fixedly beneath their powder and rouge while the muscles of their legs ached and knotted into hard lumps on their calves."

On occasion the confrontation of class values in the street was direct and immediate. It is almost certainly the fear of this which has given Bennett's side street the quality of a gothic ravine.

In the mid 1930's there were to be several isolated modern buildings erected in Perth which were in direct contrast to the style of the *Surrey Chambers*. For instance the Gledden building in Hay Street built for the University of Western Australia in 1938 with its charmingly "modern," cafe *Billetts*. These buildings were presented as a group in several newspaper photographic layouts in the late thirties; for instance in *The Western Mail* in February 1938. The intention was to suggest that the whole of the city centre was undergoing a monumental modernisation and that a corresponding change in general lifestyle was taking place. In fact, as the paintings of the city centre made at the time by Harald Vike show, only very select spots were "modernised." Works such as Vike's *Perth roofs* in the Art Gallery of Western Australia show how sparse such sites were; most of the inner city was to remain residential or to echo the image of an English country town until the 1970's.

There was however one place where three modern style buildings were grouped close together. The next street up the Terrace on the river side from Howard Street is Sherwood Court, which during 1937 and 1938 became a back alley of modernist buildings. First the Colonial Mutual Insurance company built its head offices on the Terrace corner of Sherwood Court in 1937. This building has been described as "a miniature American skyscraper of the 1930's" and featured as such, its height exaggerated by splendid isolation in their advertisements in the Western Mail Colour supplements of 1937 and 1938 and elsewhere. The company then built a block of luxury flats, The Lawson Flats at the bottom corner of the Court near the Esplanade with a view of the river. Across the Court the Atlas insurance company built their headquarters, a
John Oldham Design for Lawson Flats, n.d.

Fred Flood, "Perth Rises", 1938. (Reproduced with the permission of the Western Mail.)

Advertisement for Colonial Mutual, 1938. (Reproduced with the permission of the Western Mail.)
smaller building with a semi-modern classical facade on the top of which was the sculpted image of Atlas carrying the world on his shoulders. The sculpture was picked out when the building was floodlit at night. The use of floodlights was itself an indication of modernity, of the 24 hour use of the street and of nightlife. A similar suggestion is made in John Oldham’s rendering of the Lawson building, which shows the flats brilliantly lit at night with a couple waving to their friends from the second floor.

In the 1938 Christmas number of the Western Mail there appeared a photograph by F.W. Flood entitled Perth Rises. This photograph was taken from a position looking up Sherwood Court from across the road in front of the Atlas Building with the camera tilted up to the sky so that virtually the entire picture plane is occupied by the images of the three buildings which loom and tilt overhead in the manner of New York Skyscrapers. The impression is of an arbitrary image taken in a complex modern metropolis. In fact the image could only have been found at this one spot in Perth and is profoundly intended and artificial. It goes one step beyond the photoins sets and panoramas of modern buildings which had appeared in newspapers previously to suggest a seamless modern environment modelled closely on New York.

Photographs of New York may well have provided the impulse from which Flood made this image. The iconography of New York was flooding into Perth in the late 1930’s as part of a worldwide campaign to develop a “modern” international consumer economy. At the time this photograph was finished several films featuring this imagery were playing in Perth for the Christmas season, including the Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers musical film Carefree which was doubled with The Saint in New York at the Ambassadors. The reviews for this programme make it clear that cinema goers would have been familiar with all the R.K.O. musicals from Flying down to Rio onwards.

Had Flood taken a more orthodox “straight on” photograph of Sherwood Court not only would it not have evoked the air of dynamic capital which the owners of the buildings wished to see expressed by them but it would also have shown the fake Elizabethan Facade of the shopping arcade London Court across the Terrace at the end of Sherwood Court. This had been erected by a resident of the Lawson Flats, the millionaire speculator Claude de Bernales, presumably in imitation of Liberty’s in London. Whatever Flood’s sources for his photograph it is clear that he wished to create a purely modern image redolent of the claims to success of “modern” capital.

There could be no greater contrast than that between the Perth street scenes of Portia Bennett and Fred Flood. The buildings in each are radically opposed in style and in the kind of society they anticipate and serve. Yet at another level they share several circumstances. Both images depend on models of urban life from elsewhere, the British country town and the American metropolis; both are of relatively minor thorough-fares, backalleys indeed, and both exclude depictions of the use of the street by the community at large. This last is the most important connection.

Fred Flood had made one attempt to produce an image of the heroism of modern city life in a photograph entitled Late afternoon in St. George’s Terrace Perth. (Plate 6). It shows the view towards West Perth from the corner of William Street taken from a high window. The figures on the pavement
Fred Flood, "Late Afternoon in St. George's Terrace Perth", n.d.
(Reproduced with the permission of the Western Mail.)
cast long expressive shadows from their heroic silhouettes. Their capacity for independent social relations, their differences of class and role have been completely denied. This street view, these dream-like puppets have a long lineage in Modernism from the nineteenth century boulevard paintings of Manet and Pissarro to the Berlin photography and moviemaking of Moholy Nagy and Walter Ruttmann in the 1920's. Flood himself is most likely to have seen it employed in American feature films as means of producing a dramatic and heroic image of street life in the city. Yet even as we look we can see the “modernity” of the Terrace peter out into the small country-town buildings at the back of the image. The photograph speaks of the attempted erosion or concealment of difference within a community through the use of a modernism from elsewhere, a utopia which does not spring from the urban context of Perth but from the need for a myth of the urban in keeping with the myth of a harmonious society so desperately sought after in the thirties.

That is why there are no visual images of the street to match Harcourt’s novel. Only by excluding by extreme contrivance the social use of the street and its history and context was Flood able to turn Sherwood Court into Modernism’s back alley.

NOTES

1. Much of this article is based on material uncovered by postgraduate students in the Centre for Fine Arts U.W.A. in particular Robyn Taylor, Helen Shervington, Julian Goddard and Yvonne Geneve. A broad view of the visual arts in Perth in the 1930’s can be found in the catalogue of the exhibition “Aspects of Perth Modernism 1929 to 1942” available from the Centre for Fine Arts U.W.A.

2. For Bennett’s career and a list of her works see the Catalogue of the exhibition “Portia Bennett and Marj Tarling.” Undercroft Gallery U.W.A. October 1986.


5. See The Western Mail February 24th 1938 page 4.

6. See the essays by Robyn Taylor and David Bromfield in Aspects of Perth Modernism for further discussion of these matters.


8. (My colleague) Professor Tom Stannage of the History department U.W.A. is researching the work of Fred Flood and should shortly be publishing an account of his career as a photographer.

9. For a photograph which shows this see White and Pitt Morison, p.272.
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Study for ‘The Cattle Track’ c1930 by Beatrice Darbyshire. Carbon pencil and white highlights on buff paper 30.2 x 28.1 cm. Private collection.
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