

THE MODERN AUSTRALIAN NOVEL

A study of
theme, characterisation
and background.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Between nineteen-twenty and the present day Australian novelists have, in the settings of their works, ranged widely over the Australian continent, and have peopled their creations with characters representative of very many aspects of our complex national life. Geographically this section of our literature moves from the western forests of K.S.Prichard's "Working Bullocks" to the eastern seaports of Vance Palmer's "Cyclone", from the extreme north of Xavier Herbert's "Capricornia", southward to the Van Diemen's Land of G.B.Lancaster's "Pageant". The setting is now the great and crowded city of Christina Stead's "Seven Poor Men of Sydney", now the great loneliness of Brian Penton's "Landtakers"; now the burning desert of Idriess's "Lasseter's Last Ride", now the luxuriant sub-tropics of Vance Palmer's "The Passage". Heroes and heroines are usually white, but sometimes black, as in "Coonardoo", sometimes half-caste, as in "Capricornia", sometimes even animal, as in "Manshy". The characters include the very rich of "A House is Built" and the very poor of "Foveaux", the job-hunting nomads of "The Battlers" and the deeply-rooted timber-workers of "Working Bullocks", the coal-miners of "The Earth Cries Out" and the wool-growers of "Southern Saga", the pioneers of "All That Swagger" and the idle rich of "Come in Spinner". Nor, in the presentation of Australian life, are our novels less comprehensive in time than in space. We may travel down the years from the earliest settlement of Eleanor Dark's "The Timeless

Land", through the extension of settlement, the opening up of the inland, the gold rushes, the First World War, the depression years, the Second World War, to the present post-war age of Dymphna Cusack's "Say No to Death".

H.M.Green says of the Australian literature of this half-century that " with all its defects and limitations it represents an extraordinary achievement for fifty years." It is a remarkable achievement for a country as young as Australia to have produced, in so short a time, a literature which can be regarded as "national", and, of course, such a literature could not have come into existence except as a continuation of, and, at the same time, a divergence from, a parent literature. It is a continuation of English literature in that it uses the English language and inherits, along with other English literatures, a literary tradition extending over many centuries. It is divergent in that it is the literature of a somewhat isolated people, having their own peculiar social conditions and social outlook; a literature produced in an environment physically and socially different from that which produced the parent literature, exploiting its own native themes and gradually developing a language of its own.

But, for a people or an environment to be different is not, in itself, any guarantee of the production of a national literature. On the contrary, it is very improbable that any national literature will be produced in a new country which provides interest or inspiration only because of its differences from a mother country. There will be no distinct-

ive national outlook, and consequently, no distinctive national literature, till these new conditions come to be regarded as normal conditions, till the new way of life is accepted as the normal way of life.

Thus, for a period of over a hundred years from the first settlement at Port Jackson, very little literature of any note was produced in Australia. Yet this was one of the great ages of English literature, particularly of the English novel. It was the age of Dickens, of Thackeray, Jane Austin, Meredith, Emily and Charlotte Bronte, of Mrs. Gaskell, George Eliot and a host of minor writers.

There are obvious reasons for the dearth of literary contributions from this country during this first hundred years. The greatness and popularity of the English novelists was, in itself, an important one. Australian readers enjoyed, and were content to enjoy, the works of English novelists. England was, after all, the country to which they owed their first loyalty and with which many of them were most familiar. Australia, however else it was regarded, was seldom seen as a source of literary inspiration. Works based on Australian life were too essentially different from the literary tradition to which readers had become accustomed for them to have achieved any great popular esteem. Moreover, though it is certainly not a fact that Australia in those days lacked people with sufficient talent to produce literature, it is not probable that such talent was here in any great abundance. More

importantly, those writers who possessed talent were themselves, even more so, perhaps, than their readers, steeped in the literature of another land. They saw Australia through minds conditioned by a literary tradition with which, without the grossest distortion, this new land and its people would not conform. They were impressed by the stark differences in the countryside and the way of life, but failed to appreciate the significance of the universal instincts and emotions of a humanity which was attuning itself to, and being moulded by these differences. The country was greater than its people, the way of life more absorbing than the individual. The works of these early writers had little more claim to being Australian literature than have those of Pearl Buck to being Chinese literature. They must be classified as English literature written in Australia. True, Australians are the only people who today take any interest in them; even so, such interest is confined chiefly to students and is determined, not by the intrinsic value of the works, but by the evidence they provide of the development of a national literature.

For there is an all-important distinction between English literature written in Australia and Australian literature. All Australian literature is, of course, English literature. But the standards by which we judge the value of a contribution to English literature are not necessarily those which will decide its value as Australian literature. A hypothetical case will illustrate this point. Had Swift written about an actual English-speaking people called the Lilliputians

and had his account of them been entirely false, his "Travels" would still have been great English literature, for Swift's greatness lies in an intimate knowledge of, and a depth of insight into the way of life, not of the Lilliputians, but of the English. Therefore, while the work was justly acclaimed by the English as a mighty contribution to their literature, it could have been just as rightfully rejected by the Lilliputians as a contribution to theirs.

Scrupulous accuracy of portrayal is not, of course, a requisite of a contribution to a national literature. Swift's picture of the English themselves is a very distorted one. It is the type of distortion which is important. A writer who presents a false picture because he is ignorant of, or fails to understand, a people and a way of life, will add little to the literature of that people. On the other hand, a large part of all national literatures is produced by writers who distort, either deliberately, to serve their own ends, or because they are prejudiced by a too-intimate knowledge of certain aspects of national life. Parochialism in a writer is not always a defect.

Henry Kingsley who lived in Australia from 1853 to 1858 wrote, after his return to England, a novel called "The Recollections of Geoffrey Hamlyn." Into it he has packed all the horrors that would have been of most arresting interest to a person fresh from the green security of England. He has omitted nothing; bush-fire, drought, flood, pioneers, snakes, convicts, gold, kangaroos, blackfellows and bushrangers are

strung together on the most tenuous of themes. These are the things of which Kingsley wanted to write, the essential elements in his picture of Australia. Plot and character are important only in that they provide a suitable means of introducing these elements.

The picture is false, not in its elements, but in its entirety. Bush-fires, droughts, bushrangers and all the rest did play a part in Australian life, but not all of them, all the time, for all Australians, as Kingsley's novel suggests. Even in those days Australians did not regard themselves as a people living always on the thin edge of peril, walking hourly in the shadow of impending disaster. Strangely enough, although the Buckleys are wealthy enough to import the son of a Derby winner, their means of livelihood, which might be expected to be their chief interest, is scarcely mentioned.

There are major defects, other than these, which would prohibit the inclusion of this work in Australian literature. In the first place there are no Australians. Major Buckley, Captain Brentwood and all the other characters are English people living outside England. They would have been the same people had they lived in Burma or on the fringes of the Gobi Desert.

But the characters are unimportant because Kingsley was interested, not in persons, but ⁱⁿ events. Had he been a more gifted writer, with a deeper insight into the emotional reactions of people continuing their lives under new and

strange conditions, the novel could have been a valuable addition to English literature. As Kingsley treats them however, the Buckleys and the Brentwoods might have been, as the author himself was, merely temporary sojourners in this harsh and perilous land. He does not envisage them as the forerunners of a new people, and his novel cannot claim to be Australian merely because it has Australia for its setting.

While being an Australian was a geographical rather than a national distinction, a truly Australian literature could not come into existence, and, from a literary point of view, a nation does not come into being over-night, by Act of Parliament. There must be a consciousness of nationhood, a desire to accept the responsibilities of national existence, an outgrowing of the conception of colonial or dominion status. A national literature will in one sense precede, and in another sense result from, the development from colonial to national status. A thriving literature will help to mould public opinion and hasten the progress towards nationhood. But on the other hand, literature must always lag a little behind the development of a people, because it can only reflect changes in conditions and outlook after they have taken place.

Australia has now reached the stage of nationhood. In outlook, as well as in fact, we are a nation. At what period we came to so regard ourselves, it would be difficult to say. There were indications of national yearnings in our early colonial days, and the conception of ourselves as a

nation has become steadily more pronounced and more general. The First World War gave impetus to our progress, and the Second World War practically completed what the first had hastened. Today Britain is, much more than technically, a sister nation rather than the mother country.

The origins of our literature date back to our earliest days. There is no arbitrary rule by which we can decide at what period this branch of English literature became Australian national literature. There are definite indications of its growth in the closing decades of the last century. As is logical to expect, our poets were in advance of our novelists. There was a sudden outburst of poetry, mostly of the ballad type, and with a distinctively Australian flavour - a poetry which could not have been produced by any other people. While our novelists were still absorbed by pioneers, convicts and bushrangers, our poets were using as their themes the doings of the ordinary men and women with whom they came into daily contact.

There was no corresponding effluence of prose work till the nineteen-twenties. By that time the work of the bush-balladists was giving way to a finer, more mature, if less popular, type of poetry. The First World War had been fought and won, and the majority of Australians had, for the first time since Federation, seen themselves as one people. Somewhere we had crossed that indefinable borderland which distinguishes a nation from a group of colonies.

It is safe to say that the literature produced by

our writers from 1920 onwards is Australian literature. Since then the contributions and authors have become increasingly numerous and our novelists have continued to gain ascendancy over our poets. The field is, however, still sufficiently limited for us to be able to discern general tendencies and to perceive general developments. It is interesting to watch the convicts and bushrangers fading from our literature, just as years before they had faded from our society. There is a growing realisation of the fact, for long disregarded, that most Australians are city-dwellers. The pioneers, never the great proportion of our population that early works would suggest, are passing, and ordinary, less valiant men and women are taking their places. The country has become the home, rather than the enemy of the people, and the wonder of man's existence here has given way to a sober acceptance of the fact that man not only exists but progresses. Our novelists no longer see us as on the fringe of an ever-flowing Anglo-Saxon wave, but as a people independent and self-contained, finding within ourselves the momentum to carry us forward. The small and insignificant members of our community have gained a place in our literature such as they have never previously enjoyed. Their struggles and their difficulties are attracting the attention which was previously given to the more obvious elements of society.

This is what would be expected to happen when a national literature develops, when literature is produced by a people instead of about a people. The literature which

our novelists are producing at the present time could be written only by Australians and fully understood only by Australians.

It is a developing literature and has not yet, except in a very few cases, produced anything comparable with the best of English literature. Our greatest novel, "The Fortunes of Richard Mahony," stands among the masterpieces, not only of English literature, but of world literature. Though it could not have been written by an author who had not been an Australian, its greatness is, in large measure, due to the fact that, by the time of her writing it, Henry Handel Richardson had been profoundly influenced by intimate contact with cultures other than Australian.

It is dangerous to make generalisations about a national literature because it is so very easy to quote examples which would seem to prove the generalisation wrong. And that even in a field as limited as that covered by the modern Australian novel. However, in this case, the risk is worth taking, for to anyone who is at all familiar with this section of literature, there are at least three general defects.

In the first place the literature is morbid. Unless one falls back upon those writers whose works are not generally considered to have any particular literary value, it will be difficult to disprove this contention. Our novelists seem to have embraced the theory that the only aspects of our national life worth writing about are those of which we have least

cause to be proud. In their search for realism they seem to have subscribed to the idea that there is no reality other than that which is found in misery and iniquity. This has had a disastrous effect on our literature. The most persevering reader will eventually tire of novel after novel whose chief aim seems to be the portrayal of the futility of yet another aspect of our way of life. More importantly, this gloomy concentration on our defects has caused the production of a national literature which gives a very distorted picture of our national life.

The history of Australia is not a tale of the impotence of man in the grip of natural and social forces, but rather the refusal of man to be vanquished by such forces. Few among the nations of the world can show more remarkable progress towards the recognition of the importance and dignity of the individual. This progress is not reflected in our literature. If we were born in darkness and misery, a fact of which our novelists leave us in little doubt, surely there is something inspiring, some romance, in the exalting of ourselves above these conditions. From the most inauspicious of beginnings Australia has produced a race of a representative selection of whose young manhood an Englishman could say:

" They were the finest body of young men ever brought together in modern times. For physical beauty and nobility of bearing, they surpassed any men I have ever seen; they walked and looked like the kings in old poems and reminded me of the line in Shakespeare:-

' Baited like eagles having lately bathed.' "

This country whose name, but a short time ago, meant damnation to so many, is now the goal of those who seek the freedom, the dignity and the contentment denied them in other countries. Surely something of this could provide colour to relieve the greyness of our fiction.

The second defect is that there is too much concentration upon topic and not enough upon character. Though there are novels against which this charge cannot be laid, the fault is sufficiently general to be obvious. The ambition of our foremost novelists to produce a literature which depict the Australian way of life is in some measure responsible for this defect. Our novelists seem, however, to have overlooked the fact that a successful national literature is interpretive of a people primarily through the characters of that literature and not through the description of activities, industries or social groups. K.S.Prichard's " Golden Miles," for example, gives an excellent picture of the opening up of the great Western Australian gold fields, but as a novel it is very far from great.

The third fault is that most of our novels are not sufficiently interesting. This is partly due to the fact that sufficient attention has not been given to the drawing of characters who would capture the reader's imagination. Added to this is a looseness of construction. In very few of our novels is there a carefully developed and sustained plot, nor sufficient to hold the interest in the absence of a plot.

The man in the street rarely reads an Australian novel and it is not altogether his fault. An Australian novel is rarely written for the man in the street. Yet by his reaction, must the value, not of a particular work, but but of a national literature, be judged. It seems that in this peculiarly democratic literature of ours our authors have stopped too short. They have believed in democracy in principle without practising it in their writing. They have produced a literature of a people, but not for a people.

Our authors have tended to overlook the fact that the approach of the author is entirely different from that of the reader. An author may quite legitimately write a novel because he is interested in a particular way of life. Very few people however read a novel because they are anxious to learn something of a particular way of life. The author must respect the reader's interest as well as indulging his own. If he indulges his own interest at the expense of the reader, the remedy is in the reader's own hands and he will inevitably apply it.

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CHAPTER TWO

THE FORTUNES OF RICHARD MAHONY

The greatest Australian novel yet written is Henry Handel Richardson's dramatic work, "The Fortunes of Richard Mahony." This is a tragedy in the grand style, and stands head and shoulders above the works of all other Australian writers.

It is a trilogy of which the first volume, "Australia Felix" was published in 1917, the second, "The Way Home," in 1925 and the third, "Ultima Thule," in 1929. It covers the years 1854 - 1870 and, apart from two brief periods when the Mahonys return to England, the scenes are set in Victoria.

The work is to some extent biographical, Henry Handel Richardson's own father, a doctor, being the original from which Richard Mahony is taken. Like Mary Mahony, the author's mother became a country post-mistress. The Gymgurra of the novel is Koroit in Victoria's Western District, and the road which Mahony travelled on his last journey, "running without curve or turn through the grassy plain" is the same as was taken by the author's father in like circumstances. In the little cemetery, "within sound of what he had perhaps loved best on earth - the open sea," where Mahony was laid to rest, can still be seen the head-stone erected to the memory of Dr. Richardson.

But in a deeper sense the work is autobiographical. Henry Handel Richardson was very young when her father died. She herself has written - "He died when I was too young to

know much about him." But it is certain that in her own character she recognised a great deal that had been inherited from her father. In this profound insight lies much of the greatness of "The Fortunes of Richard Mahony."

The story traces the fortunes of Richard Mahony, an Irish migrant who arrived at Ballarat while the events which led to the Eureka Stockade were taking place. After an unsuccessful attempt at digging, he opened a store on the gold-fields, but this flourished for a little while and then, like so many of Mahony's enterprises, its business faltered and faded to nothing. At the instigation of his young wife he returned to his profession of medicine, and, having built up at Ballarat a flourishing practice which was bringing in an ample income, he yielded to a whim and returned to England. He bought a practice at Leicester, but this proving a dismal failure, he moved to Bubblecombe. This, due to a slight offered to Mary Mahony, he left suddenly and returned, with all haste, to Melbourne. He was greeted on his arrival with the glad news that some shares which for a long time had done nothing but make calls had boomed suddenly and that he was consequently a person of considerable wealth. He retired from practice, built himself a comfortable and commodious home on the outskirts of Melbourne and for a short time lived the life of a normal person of wealth, education and culture. The freedom from the everyday cares of earning a living allowed, however, the peculiarities of his nature to assert them-

selves; he turned first to spiritualistic inquiry and later, becoming increasingly discontented, sold his home "Ultima Thule" and, after spending a few restless months in London, set out on what Mary Mahony always afterwards thought of as "that mad race across Europe." This was cut short by the news that his broker had absconded with his fortune. Finding upon his arrival in Melbourne that he had something less than three thousand pounds left, he built himself a house and set up his plate at Hawthorn. From this point calamity succeeded calamity with ever-increasing tempo. Mahony left Hawthorn to take up a practice at Barambogio. This failing, he moved to Shortlands. Here his poor tortured mind, long tottering on the brink of insanity, finally gave way, and after appalling treatment in a State mental asylum, he ended his days at Gymgurra where his wife had secured a position as post-mistress.

But a mere chronological review of the events of the novel can give the reader no conception of the nature of the greatness of the work. It is not a tale of a being constantly assailed by, and finally overcome by misfortune, nor of one who struggles against insuperable forces, nor of one who prospers and is then brought low by the fickleness of fortune, nor does it trace the steady disintegration of a mind which moves towards its inevitable end. And yet there is in it something of all these. For the magnificence of Henry Handel Richardson's achievement lies largely in the

complexity and the perplexing profundity of the character she has presented. Few fictional characters are so intimately revealed as is Richard Mahony. The reader is familiar with both the strength and the weakness of his character, and yet is repeatedly surprised by his actions. Even so, once a step is taken, its inevitability is accepted. There are obvious reasons for this. In the first place, Mahony is, to a far greater extent than most fictional characters, a human being, influenced by such immeasurable cross-currents as determine the actions of all human beings. Secondly, he is a developing being. The tragic central figure of "Ultima Thule" is a logical development from the store-keeper of the Ballarat diggings, and yet so vastly changed, that one who had not witnessed the gradual transformation would never recognise in the two figures the same man. Again, he is, to a marked degree, an abnormal person, actuated by sensibilities which would not greatly affect the actions of a more normal man. Lastly, readers are, in the great crises of the novel, too involved with Mahony, too affected by his mental conflicts to be able to judge his probable actions dispassionately.

Added to these is the fact that in Mahony's character there is an element for which the author has given, and the reader can find, no explanation, though its existence is recognised both by Mahony and his wife. There is in his nature a secretiveness which goes beyond mere sensitiveness or reserve. He lives always, it seems, consciously and deliberately behind a mask. One gains the impression that

deep down in his mental make-up is an instability caused by some indeterminate fear. Most probably it could be traced to some experience of his boyhood days in Dublin. For Mahony's picture of himself as a boy light-heartedly treading the pavements of his native city is a most improbable one, and is almost certainly coloured by the self-pity he feels for himself in middle age. But whatever its origin, it is there, and its results can be seen in his horror of meeting old acquaintances, shrinking from contact with the scenes of his past life, whether these scenes were reminiscent of success or of failure, his refusal to face obvious facts, his hungry craving to be forever on the move. Mahony was afraid of life. He sought always for escape, for a fresh field where he would be free of the nameless something which tormented him. And perhaps in the dim realisation of the fact that nowhere on earth would he find escape is the explanation of his delving into spiritualism. Perhaps he saw there the chance of living, still as Richard Mahony, the life without fear which was denied to him among mortals.

Mahony saw himself as a man fleeing always before fear. During one of his periods of agonised soul-searching, his thoughts ran:-

"What was that in him over which he had no power, which proved incapable of adhesion to any soil or fixed abode. For he might arm himself, each time, anew, with another motive for plucking up his roots: it remained mere ratiocination, a sop flung to his reason, and in no wise got at the heart

of the matter. Wherein lay the fault, the defect that had made of him throughout his life a hunted man?....harried from place to place, from country to country. Other men set up a goal, achieved it and remained content. He had always been in flight. But from what? Who were his pursuers? From what shadows did he run? - And in these endless nights when he lay and searched his heart as never before, he thought he read the answer to the riddle. Himself he was the hunter and the hunted: the merciless in pursuit and the panting prey. Within him, it would seem, lodged fears.....strange fears. And at a given moment one of these, hitherto dormant and unsuspected, would suddenly begin to brew, and go on growing till he was all one senseless panic, blind flight the only catholicon. No matter what form it took - whether a morbid anxiety about his health or alarm at the swiftness with which his little day was passing - its aim was always the same: to beat him up and on. And never yet had he succeeded in defying it. With the result that, well on in years and loaded with responsibilities, he stood face to face with ruin."

But whether this interpretation of his character be accepted or not, it is undeniable that Mahony was an escapist. The theme of the novel is the struggle of a character, fine and strong in many ways, but lacking the one quality necessary for him to overcome his difficulties. At every stage his own material welfare and the happiness of those near to him would best have been served by ^{his} standing firm. And this was the very thing he could not do. His solution to every problem

whether boredom or something more serious, was to flee from it, to seek in another field the contentment which he could not find where he was. As his circumstances straitened and physical flight became more and more difficult, his tortured mind turned to the last refuge open to him - insanity.

Early in his life Mahony recognised this trait in his own character. After Mary had broken down his objections to his returning to the practice of medicine at Ballarat, he bares to himself, his own soul.

" But now he had owned up and there was no more need of shift or subterfuge: now it was one rush and hurry to the end. He had capitulated; a thin-skinned aversion to confronting difficulties, when he saw the chance of avoiding them had won the day."

But this was early in his life. It was true of him throughout, but the ageing Mahony would not have so readily admitted it, for his ability to recognise his own subterfuge gradually decreased as his ability to deceive himself grew.

The episodes which had the most disastrous effects on Mahony's fortunes resulted from difficulties which seemed neither very tangible nor, to anyone but himself, very great. Yet his relinquishing his practice at Ballarat and his fleeing to England, the disposal of "Ultima Thule" and his second return to London are, though undeniably ill-considered, understandable if the reader is able to accept Mahony's own reasons for the desired change. Not till Mahony, tiring suddenly of the whirl of London diversions, set out on his

visit to the continent, are we fully aware that the goad which drove him onward was something far more compelling than an aversion from facing difficulties or a whimsical desire for change. "For the Channel behind them, Richard's restlessness broke out in a new form: it seemed impossible for him to be content in any one place they visited for more than a day or two..... It was not the physical discomforts alone that defeated him. The fancies he went in for, as soon as he set foot on foreign soil, made his life a misery to him." And in the short page given to the European tour, the predominant emotion which emanates is fear - fear of traffic, fear of heights, fear of being suffocated by the nearness of the mountains, fear of being cheated by foreigners, fear of being laughed at. Yet Mahony was not a timid soul. It is surely reasonable to conclude that these unsubstantial and transient fears were but the outward and visible signs of an all-pervading insecurity.

It was not only that Mahony chose the easier path. Had that been the case he need have differed little from the great majority of men. It is in the nature of what he considered easier that the great difference lies. For him the easier path had always to be an entirely different one. As long as it was open to him, actual physical flight from the scenes of his mental torment was the only solution he would accept.

Mahony is too complex a character for anyone to be able to say that in this or in that lies his weakness, or the

explanation of his actions. He is a mass of contradictions beside whom that other literary enigma, Hamlet, appears the most guileless and transparent of individuals. He is wise, intelligent and mature, and yet at times childishly wayward; a devoted father and husband, often carelessly indifferent to the happiness of those dear to him; broad-minded and unbiased, yet, in many ways, the most intolerant of men; kindly and selfless in another's trouble, yet, when she opposed his will, unmindful of the misery he caused his wife; sensitive where other people's feelings were concerned, yet, at times, unnecessarily brusque and tactless. Nevertheless these characteristics all fit without incongruity into his personality. There is nothing incredible or etherial in the character that Henry Handel Richardson has drawn. Only in retrospect, or through the eyes of Mary Mahony, are these contradictions apparent. All men under differing circumstances display, at times, opposing characteristics, and Mahony, in this respect, was no exception. So powerfully is he portrayed so close the correlation between event and character that the reader not only accepts Mahony's reactions as natural, but, in the more moving experiences of his life, shares them with him.

The reader is not concerned with a diagnosis of Mahony's character. His chief interest is in what will happen to Mahony. He would, however, be a very undiscerning reader who did not recognise that Mahony is not just an eccentric character playing a leading role in a succession of

events, but, because of his eccentricities, the principal architect of the events in which he figures.

The question, beloved of examiners - "Which do you consider the greater, the plot or the characterisation of Richard Mahony?" - is one which should not properly be asked. One cannot, or one should not, distinguish between the plot and the characterisation of this work. They are one, and indivisible. Plot, in the narrow sense of the means by which the author gets the central characters into difficulties and then extricates them, does not apply to this work. The term 'action' would perhaps, here, be preferable, for with Richard Mahony the action at once reveals the character and is the outcome of the character. For Henry Handel Richardson's task was to interpret the development of his ever-growing abnormality as it affected and was affected by his changing fortunes. As Nettie Palmer has said, - "Almost intolerable it is to think that for, at least, fifteen years she lived in full consciousness of the gradual downfall of Richard Mahony, suffering with him in the trivial details of his early crotchets, while recognising them as the sign-posts they were. To interpret the fortunes of Richard Mahony was her sacred task It is known that when she sent to the publisher the manuscripts of the third volume of "The Fortunes of Richard Mahony," it met with a "shuddering resistance." "The public, the public, will be harrowed beyond bearing. Can't you alter it?" But the chronicler, having for so long looked into the heart of darkness, into "Ultima Thule,"

answered, "I can only write as it is given."

When Mahony has made the decision to act in a certain way, however much the reader might regret it, it in almost all cases seems inevitable that it should have been made. This is an important factor in a novel of this kind. There must, at the one time, appear to be freedom of choice before a decision is made and inevitability once it is made.

Mahony's fate, like that of all men, was the product of his character and his environment. It is interesting to speculate upon the importance of the part played by each. Was he more the victim of circumstance than the author of his own doom or was the reverse the case? It is inconceivable that Mahony, however different had been the conditions of his life, would have found any lasting measure of contentment while still retaining his sanity. But had the conditions been different, would the tragedy of his life have been so great, the final break-down so complete? Mahony, at times, at least, saw himself as guided by forces outside his control. At the close of the second part of "Australia Felix" occurs this passage:-

"But as he sat and pondered the lengthy chain of circumstances,- Polly's share in it, John's, his own, even the part played by incorporeal things - he brought up sharp against the word "decision." He might flatter himself by imagining he had been free to decide; in reality nothing was further from the truth. He had been subtly, silyly guided to his goal - led blindfold along a road that was not of his

own choosing. Everything and everyone combined to constrain him: his favours to John, the failure of his business, Polly's inclinations and persuasions, his own fastidious shrinking."

But Mahony never really accepted circumstances as the ruler of his destiny. On the contrary, his whole life is a negation of this comfortable belief.

Mary Mahony, too, - and it is through her that a great deal concerning Mahony is revealed - sees Richard at different times in contrasting ways. At one stage her view, though more practically and less profoundly expressed, closely resembles that of her husband, previously quoted.

"No, her quarrel, she began to see, was not so much with him as with the Powers above. Why should her husband alone not be as robust and as hardy as all the other husbands in the place? None of their healths threatened to fail, nor did any of them find the conditions of life intolerable. That was another shabby trick Fate had played Richard in not endowing him with worldly wisdom, and a healthy itch to succeed. Instead of that, he had been blessed with ideas and impulses that stood directly in his way."

Yet Mary, in her innermost heart blamed Richard, and Richard alone, for the impasses to which, in the later stages of the work, he led them. Her quarrel was not with the Powers that be, or the circumstances of their life, but with a person who acted, or wished to act, wilfully, in direct contradiction to all the dictates of reason, experience

or common sense.

On the other hand, as Mary Mahony suggests, how different would have been the story of his life had he been a person of different calibre! Had the weaknesses of his nature been supplanted by the strength of his wife's, his achievements would doubtless have been magnificent, even under the most adverse of conditions. The tragedy of Mahony's life was not that he suffered so much, or lost so much, but that, having within his grasp so much that was desirable, so much that would content a normal person, his character would allow him to gain no measure of happiness from it all.

The novel is no exposition of the cult of hopelessness, of the impotence of man in the face of superior forces. And this is so despite the fate of Mahony, of Emma and John Turnham, of Agnes Ocock or of Hempel. Failure is individual, not general. Those whom misfortune strikes drop out of a world that is dynamic, purposeful and advancing. They are not straws borne on a human current that carries them irresistibly towards destruction. Whether there is reality in the apparent freedom to choose or to decide is a matter for the philosophers. The general belief is that such freedom does exist, and that being accepted, the weight of evidence seems to suggest that in character, rather than in environment, lies the cause of Mahony's downfall.

Therefore it seems a weakness that one of the most critical episodes in the book should be one where the character and actions of Mahony have little influence. The absconding

of Wilding was a piece of sheer misfortune, which could have happened, and presumably did happen, to people of an entirely different character from Richard Mahony's. Of course it was due to Mahony's weakness that Wilding was entrusted with his affairs in the first place, but even in this he was the victim of a rather unusual succession of coincidences. The illness of Simmons coming just when it did, the chance meeting with Purdy Smith, Smith's 'happening' to know of something, all seem part of a rather too-obvious plan on the part of the author to make Mahony lose his money. This does not detract from the greatness of Volume III of the work, but, since the tragic occurrences of this volume can be traced in part to the loss of Mahony's fortune, it seems a pity that this event is not marked by the sense of inevitability which characterises other events of less far-reaching importance.

Though no other personality is presented with such delicacy or such deep insight as is Mahony, he is not the only outstanding character in the book. He is always the central character, but, particularly in the first two volumes, only the most striking of many striking characters. The scenes of the first two volumes are broad and thickly peopled. When Mahony's plight becomes more tragic, there is a narrowing of compass. In the final scenes our attention is focussed more and more closely upon him, to the exclusion of all but his immediate kin. The minor characters are drawn more boldly, the author of necessity being more sparing of line. Yet they are powerfully drawn. Henry Handel Richardson has been

particularly successful in extracting from their essential humanity the outstanding qualities of the personalities who move across her pages. John Turnham's humorless self-satisfaction, Tilly's coarse heartiness and shrewd common-sense, Jinny's meekness, Lizzie's selfishness and affectation are skilfully suggested. Even characters making the most transitory appearance are strongly drawn and impress their personalities on the reader. Bolliver, Tangye, Mat Doyle, Baron von Krause and a host of others, though playing but a minor part in the story, are all given personality as well as names. Indeed the reader will recall the personality long after he has forgotten the name.

Mary Mahony's party, in their palmy days at Ballarat, provides a striking example of the author's skill in character-drawing. Crowded into the small drawing-room were many of the minor characters of "Australia Felix." And yet, what reader walking into that room could fail to recognise any one of them? -Tilly, Zara, Archdeacon Long, John and Jinny Turnham, Henry and Agnes Ocock, Amelia Ocock, Jacob and Mrs. Devine, Purdy Smith, all are there, distinct in their differences, yet all most definitely human. For Henry Handel Richardson achieves her effects without resort to caricature. There is nothing Dickensian in her characterisation.

Of the other characters, the least successfully drawn is Purdy Smith. Henry Handel Richardson, like Mahony himself, seems never quite able to make up her mind about

Purdy. There is no mental development to correspond with his middle-aged baldness and corpulence. Thus the scene in which the author finally dismisses him, the dinner-party at Shortlands, strikes a jarring note. If the utterly coarse, noisy, tactless and unlikeable fellow presented there to the reader is the real Purdy Smith, it is inconceivable that he could ever have been the intimate friend of both Richard and Mary Mahony, that once he was.

It comes as a surprise, when one begins to search for material, how very little the children, in person, actually come into the novel. Their existence is more predominantly in the minds of their parents. Cuffy is by far the most fully drawn of the three. The author shows deep insight into the reactions of a sensitive and exceptionally gifted child. For this she probably drew on the recollections and impressions of her own childhood. But despite the undoubted brilliance of the portrayal of the torments of the child mind, the actual physical presentation of none of the children is convincing. Henry Handel Richardson seems not really familiar with children. Possibly in her own childhood she was too exceptional and in her adult life was too excluded from them. The speech of the Mahony children is childish rather than child-like. There is in it a quality too reminiscent of an adult engaging in baby-talk.

The characterisation of Mary Mahony stands second only to that of her husband. If it is lacking in depth, that is because Mary herself was essentially a simple character.

Indeed, part of the greatness of the novel lies in the success with which the author has presented two such magnificent characters, one so complex and perplexing, the other quite the reverse. While it is true that through the robust common-sense of Mary Mahony the reader gains a deeper insight into the character of Mahony, it is no less true that through Mahony the limitations of his wife's character are revealed. For there were limitations. Intellectually she was far from being her husband's equal. Her education, though well above the average of her day, was limited. She had little use for books, no conception of, or patience with, the deeper problems of human existence. She could not rise above the notion that a book, unless it were to teach something that could later be put to use, was just a means of killing time. Her clarity of vision was due, in large measure, to the fact that it was not obscured by doubts arising from a profound knowledge of human motives. She knew her husband well, but not with the intimacy that the reader gets to know him. Her knowledge of his probable reactions came much more as a result of experience than of insight. Despite the sound common-sense which showed her clearly the difficulties and dangers of a proposed course, and despite the unyielding purpose which she could pursue, she never succeeded in turning Mahony from any one of his tragic enterprises. True, it is almost impossible to imagine anyone being able to do this, and even if someone had been successful, a Mahony held against his

will would have been, -if possible, a more unhappy figure than he was. But the reader, in the closing chapters of the book, has a great deal of sympathy with Mahony as he constantly seeks refuge from the tormenting logic and sharpening tongue of his wife. The title conferred on her by the other postal officials, "That Tartar from G.G.," was earned by a side of her nature revealed long before she took up her duties at Gymgurra.

Yet, despite this, she is a great character, fine, kindly, upright - magnificent would hardly be too strong a word. When she is left to fight alone for Mahony and the children, the greatness she displays comes as no surprise to the reader. It is no small commendation of the skill of Henry Handel Richardson that, despite the fact that on so many occasions, particularly in Volume III, Mahony and his wife are violently opposed to one another, the reader has always a full measure of sympathy with both.

When considering the setting of "The Fortunes of Richard Mahony," the human elements of the background must be taken into account, as well as the physical elements. The author has pointed out the close relationship between physical surroundings and mental outlook. The ordered, perfected and limited English country-side is reflected in the smug self-satisfaction, the opposition to change or innovation of the English people. Their society, like their fields, was ordered, parcelled and planned to the last detail. It had been so for as long as they could remember, and they could

see no possibility of its changing, nor had they any desire for such change. Australia, on the other hand, was a land of no visible physical limitations, of constant change and development. It was a land, moreover, where a man rose or fell according to his own qualities, not those of his predecessors. This is reflected in its people in a broader outlook a set of changed and somewhat indefinite standards, and the absence of the petty conventions and bigotries of a static society.

The nature of Richard Mahony made him more than normally susceptible to the effects of background. Setting in this novel is never a mere back-drop against which the characters are seen, but is inextricably woven into the events of the story. Sometimes it is the social background which causes developments along a certain line, sometimes the physical background. It was, for example, the society in which Mahony found himself at Bubblecombe which influenced his actions, while at Barambogie the climate was an important factor in his defeat. But it must be remembered, in assessing the authenticity of the author's portrayal of the background, that neither author nor reader sees it quite dispassionately. For both, the conception of social and physical background is influenced by its effect on Mahony. The appalling snobbery of Bubblecombe is an example. The evidences of its existence are incontestable. But it is so obvious to the reader chiefly because he sees it from the point of view of Richard and Mary Mahony. It shocked and antagonised Mary Mahony because

she was used to an entirely different mode of life. It was brought home to her because she made mistakes which a person more familiar with Bubblecombe life would not have made, and the reader's attitude towards it is influenced by his sympathy for Mary Mahony. Yet to other people and under other circumstances it would not have been so obvious. Had Mahony, in the days of his affluence, been the guest of the Trehernes or of the Saxeby-Corbetts, he would not have been affected by this snobbery - might not even have noticed it.

The physical discomforts of life at Barambogie are no less impressive. Barambogie remains always with the reader as a place of almost unendurable climatic conditions. Yet it is in a part of Australia not generally so regarded. Many men, before and since Mahony, have lived and thriven in the Ovens district. Cuffy, it will be remembered, looked back upon it with a certain nostalgia. The reader's concept of Barambogie must always be influenced by the picture of the pathetic, bowed old man, trudging, bag in hand, through its dust, the perspiration trickling down his back, the tormenting flies defying his attempts to brush them away.

More obviously biassed is Mahony's stated opinion of the people of Ballarat: "This sordid riff-raff! These hard, mean, grasping money-grubbers!" And to counteract this there are other opinions, - Mary's, Richard's under other circumstances - of an entirely different nature.

There are no lengthy passages of description of either society or scenery. The author is primarily interested

in people as people. She was not, as so many of our lesser writers are, more concerned with the Australianism of the social and physical background than she was with the humanity of her characters. But she is a gifted writer, she knew the countryside of which she wrote, and her brief pen-pictures capture the true atmosphere of the Australian scene. Here is her picture of a bush road: "Then, branching off at right angles, it dived into the bush - in this case a scantily wooded, uneven plain, burnt tobacco brown and hard as iron."

"Here went no one but himself. He and the mare were the sole living creatures in what, for its stillness, might have been a painted landscape. Not a breath of air stirred the weeping grey-green foliage of the gums."

She describes the house in which Mahony lived at Ballarat. "It was of weather board, with a galvanised iron roof and might have been built from a child's drawing of a house: a door in the centre, a little window on either side, a chimney at each end." What Australian is not vividly reminded of numerous examples of this type of architecture?

In her description of the countryside there is exaggeration neither of its beauty nor, as is too often the case, of its dreary monotony. Yet there seems to be, to an Australian at least, a faint touch of nostalgia in those moments, when, briefly and vividly, the Australian scene comes uppermost.

Despite the fact that the setting of the work is the Australia of nearly one hundred years ago, this is no

period novel. Modes of life and dress, as described by the author, are true to the period but they are never the predominant characteristics of her characters. Mahony and his associates are contemporary with all ages because the author has been interested primarily in their inner and ageless humanity. The speech of the characters, unless one looks very closely, does not date them. Nor, though they are noticeable here and there, are beards sufficiently luxurious or profuse to make us acutely aware that these people are not of our time. Indeed it comes as something of a shock to the reader when he finds this sentence:- "and Mahony carried away with him a couple of volumes by a writer of modern verse named Browning."

After all, neither period nor setting are of really great importance in this book. Mahony is the book and our appreciation of its greatness is dependent upon the extent to which we suffer with Mahony in his mental torment. The reader finds relief only when Mahony finds peace. He passes into oblivion still with the riddle of life unsolved. The old man, so pathetically content in the presence of his wife, so utterly dependent on her care, is the only Mahony we can regard without perplexity. "He was now the least troubled of men. Content and happiness had come to him at last in full measure. No more doubts or questionings, or wrestlings with the dark powers in himself" - no more, in fact, of those very qualities which we have come to recognise as the very being of Richard Mahony.

CHAPTER THREETHE PIONEERS

It is natural that, Australia being a nation whose origin is so close to its present, a good deal of our literature should deal with those who first carried civilisation into the unknown regions of this continent. Time, and the works of writers who saw only the grim side of the lives of the pioneers, have added a touch of melodrama to the portrayal of this section of our people. The concentration on distance, loneliness, difficulties and dangers has given a somewhat distorted picture of the opening up of our land. What has been written is, on the whole, true, but it is true of only a very small percentage. The far more numerous, but less sensational people, who have opened up the coastal belts, and the greater part of Victoria and Tasmania, are almost unrepresented in our fiction. Their tasks were not unmarked by difficulties and dangers, nor were they lacking in endurance, fortitude and vision, but they have been overlooked in favour of those whose lives offer to the novelist more dramatic and sensational novelty.

There is, in the modern novel dealing with the pioneers, a change of outlook and a difference of treatment which distinguish them from the works of earlier writers. For our early writers the starkly unusual experiences of the pioneers provided sufficient inspiration and a sufficient topic for a novel. As a general rule they were more interested

in the incidents in the lives of the pioneers than in the pioneers themselves. Their novels were tales of fortitude, perils and ruthlessness, but chiefly tales of wonder, and they helped to surround the pioneers with an aura of romance which was not altogether undeserved.

Of later years the treatment of the pioneers has been generally a good deal deeper and more subtle. There has been an attempt, not merely to describe, but to interpret their lives. Writers like Brian Penton, Eleanor Dark and Dorothy Cottrell have seen them, not merely as the subjects of unusual and therefore inspiring experiences, but as people whose particular and peculiar lives are influenced by eternal and universal problems. The writers' attitudes to the social and economic problems, not only of the times with which they deal, but of the present time, have considerably influenced some of these novels. In some it is impossible to escape the conviction that the primary interest of the author is not the pioneers themselves, but the light they throw upon our present social conditions.

Eleanor Dark's "The Timeless Land" is an example of this. This is the most ambitious, and the greatest of the numerous works of this author. It deals with the first settlement at Port Jackson under Governor Phillip, though the story opens in 1789 soon after the visit of Cook to Botany Bay, and continues until the arrival of Governor Hunter, the four-year period of the rule of the New South Wales Corps being touched upon lightly in the closing pages.

The primary concern of the writer, however, is the reign of Phillip. It is safe to assume that the story would not have been continued into the governorship of Hunter had this not been necessary in order to bring back Bennilong to his native land.

For Bennilong, the aborigine, shares with Phillip the position of central character. He is the most prominent of the black people, just as Phillip is the leader of the whites. The novel begins and ends with Bennilong, and, had the author confined her work to the main topic, the effect of the advent of the white settlers on the lives of the blacks, Bennilong would unquestionably have been the hero. The desire of the author to cover also the historical aspect of the settlement, brings Phillip into such prominence that he cannot be relegated to a position second in importance to Bennilong.

The author says in the preface to her work, "My aim has been to give a picture of the first settlement of Sydney which is always true in broad outline, and often in detail, but I make no claim to strict historical accuracy either in my dealings with the white men or the black." In the achieving of this stated aim the author has been eminently successful, and there are few inaccuracies with which even the historian will be greatly concerned. When one pauses to consider it, there must be both admiration, for, and wonder at, the prodigious amount of research which has preceded the production of a work such as this.

As a portrayal of the foundation of Australia, this is as fine as anything in our literature. The squalor, confusion, disappointment and despair have been depicted with reticence, and yet with telling effect. The visionary idealism of Phillip, the rare touches of humour, the frequent revelation of the ordinary weaknesses of ordinary human beings while in no way relieving the surrounding sordidness, do help to prevent the forming of any impression of deliberate exaggeration.

While it is fairly obvious that the sympathies of the author are not on the side of authority, the characterisation of those in whom authority was vested has been handled with delicacy and justice. Of the character of Phillip, the author says, "The comments of his contemporaries shed a little light - his actions and the results of his actions still more. Certain qualities appear too obviously to be questioned - physical courage and endurance, moral fortitude, a struggling humanitarianism, and a streak of illogical faith." She has been very successful in building, to embody these qualities, a personality who is always and distinctively human, -none the less so because he is not always entirely wise, entirely just or entirely logical.

Of her portrayal of the aborigines the author says:- "Of the tribes which lived on the shores of Port Jackson at the time of the white men's arrival, less is known than of almost any other tribes, for the obvious reason that, being the first to mingle with the invaders, they were the first

to disintegrate, and die out. Therefore, where I have wanted to introduce songs, words, legends, customs, for which I have been able to find no record for these particular groups, I have borrowed shamelessly from other tribes, often far distant. The result from an ethnologist's point of view, must be quite horrible; but I am not really very repentant. These people were all of one race, and it is the quality of the race which I have tried to suggest, without regard to minor tribal differences. The important thing has seemed to me to be that these were the kind of songs they sang, the kind of legends they loved, the kind of customs and beliefs by which they ordered their lives."

The reader who is not also an ethnologist must accept this. Indeed for the average reader it is quite acceptable and quite sufficient. For most readers it is a matter of no great moment whether a certain word was used by a tribe at Port Phillip or at Port Jackson. The average reader will have, as a result of reading this work, a much clearer conception of the way of life of the Australian aborigine than he previously held. It is undoubtedly, in many respects other than that of religion, over-simplified, but as it is given it is clear, comprehensible and enlightening. The aborigines emerge as a race of very real human beings, if at times, compared with ourselves, a little overpoweringly virtuous.

But at this point it is legitimate to question the real purpose behind the author's portrayal of the virtues

of the way of life of the aborigine. Was she primarily concerned with their virtues, or is her chief aim to throw into relief the vices of our own civilisation? Unfortunately the more closely one studies this work, the greater becomes the conviction that the latter is the case. To quote again from the author's preface:

"...but I do not believe that we, nine-tenths of whose 'progress' has been a mere elaboration and improvement of the technique, as opposed to the art of living, might have learned much from a people who, whatever they may have lacked in technique, had developed that art to a very high degree."

This undoubtedly is true, but the reader who becomes aware of the fact that the civilisation of the aborigines is being used merely to propagate such a belief is inclined to view with some scepticism the authenticity of the portrayal of these people. The literary quality of this work would have been enhanced had the author been more successful in disguising her dissatisfaction with our social system, and had she confined herself to her stated aim, which was "to give a picture of the first settlement of Sydney."

In the first place the simplification of the religion and the social customs of the blacks takes on a more sinister aspect. The life of the aborigines, by being simplified, gains in virtue, becomes more logical and more faithful to the ideals of the law which governs it. But in order to apply the same measuring stick to the civilisation of the whites, this must be simplified accordingly. And here the

white civilisation is at a severe disadvantage. It cannot be so simplified and so judged. The seeming illogicalities and contradictions of our civilisation assume comprehensibility only when there is some understanding of the multitudinous complexities of our social life. That is not to say that with full understanding will come complete vindication. But, in the opinions of most people our way of life has virtues which are denied by Eleanor Dark's treatment of it.

Bennilong's amazement at seeing white men cut down a tree and erect it in another position is merely amusing to those who understand the significance of a flag. So, too, would be the reason for the homage paid, at times to Governor Phillip, at others to the Reverend Mr. Johnson. The author, however, goes further than this. Time after time, she, with her gifted and purposeful pen, makes the social customs of the whites appear as ridiculous and illogical to the reader as they appear to the aborigines. But in most cases, it will be seen, after more careful consideration, that the illogicalities are more apparent than real.

In her enthusiasm to decry our civilisation, the author has often been guilty of extracting from the minds of the aborigines ideas and reflections which it is extremely improbable would have been theirs. For instance, Bennilong, in the early days of his acquaintance with the whites, sums them up thus: "There was a sickness, he thought, uneasily, in the hearts of the white men. He felt that it was hatred - not the swift-flaring and swift-fading hostility of enemies

in battle, but a slow hatred that never died, a dull, sullen hatred like a poison, a self-hatred, perverted and obscene...! Yet the implication is that this was an emotion unfamiliar to the mind of the aborigine.

When it was quite obvious that the experiences of the aborigine would make it impossible for him to indict our way of life to the full extent of the author's desire, she quite unreservedly adds her own thoughts to his. Passages such as the following occur frequently throughout the novel. "Troubled by their instinctive awareness of qualities in the white man which must keep him always a stranger, they were still incapable of even guessing at the workings of his mind; the mind which had travelled so far from their primitive wisdom in its search for knowledge that it was already astray in the labyrinths of its own psychological chaos..... It was a mind which, finding its activities incompatible with its faith, had gradually substituted for that faith a system of mechanical worship by which it was enabled to believe that it might simultaneously serve God and Mammon It was able to say devoutly in one section, "Thou shalt not kill," while from another it invented plausible justifications for massacre. It was able to proclaim: "Blessed are the poor in spirit," and bend all its energies to the building of power and domination. It was able to extol mercy and be merciless, to preach kindness and be brutal, to praise truth and practise deceit. And it was still able to regard itself with sincere complacency. Here were mysteries for ever beyond the understanding

of the race of Murri."

Though there might be a good deal of, at least, superficial truth in these remarks, they do not seem to have particular bearing on the settlement of New South Wales, nor do they add any clarity to the author's portrayal of the impact of the white civilisation on the life and outlook of the blacks.

The whole point is, of course, that, in passages such as those quoted, the civilisation which the author wishes to condemn is not merely that of which the settlement at Port Jackson was a result. The attack is not only upon the social system of which the convicts were such a stern indictment, but upon any system which produces or depends upon an underprivileged or dispossessed class. The author's most bitter attacks upon the social system are invariably worded in such a way as to apply equally today and a century and a half ago. On one occasion she has not been able to stifle the urge to make her meaning unmistakable.

"He sat thinking, his forehead on his hand, his eyes unusually sombre, scribbling aimlessly on a scrap of paper with his pen, and struggling with a thought whose obvious common-sense was, even a century and a half later, to remain unappreciated. He wrote slowly:

"But toil cannot be long supported without adequate refreshment. The first step in any community which wishes to preserve honesty, should be to set the people above want."

The outlook of the blacks and their conception of our civilisation are used repeatedly to put forward similar ideas. Many readers will have no quarrel with the ideas which Eleanor Dark, through her various mediums, advances. Nor can there be any real objection to her crediting the natives with ideas which we are more accustomed to hearing from exponents of socialism. As the author portrays their way of life, it was socialistic to a high degree, even though, of necessity, in a primitive form. Among the finest sections of the novel are those dealing with the attitude of the blacks to life, and with their reactions to what they saw of white civilisation.

Unfortunately at times her enthusiasm carries her a little too far and her purpose becomes too obvious. The finest novel must suffer if the reader becomes convinced that what he has been accepting with unbiassed appreciation is largely clever propaganda.

It is significant that the only representative of the free settlers is Stephen Manion. In him the author has presented a character who is neither fine nor likeable. He is a wealthy man, a member of the Irish aristocracy, proud and arrogant and unmoved by tolerance or compassion. He saw Australia merely as a source of revenue, an investment. The land was to him something which, with the power of his wealth behind him and a plentiful supply of cheap convict labour available, he could exploit.

The story of the Mannion family is carried on in

"Storm of Time", which covers the period of the governorships of Hunter, King and Bligh.

This work falls easily into two sections. The first is historical, dealing chiefly with the struggle between the three governors and the landed officers of the New South Wales Corps. The second part, which is fictional, deals with the varying fortunes of the Mannion and Prentice families. The blacks who played such a prominent part in "The Timeless Land" touch only the fringes of this second work. Their function as exponents of the iniquities of the social system, is taken over by the convicts.

There is not a great deal of connection between the historical and fictional aspects of this novel. The events in the lives of the Mannions are not the results of disagreements among the higher officials, nor do these disagreements seriously affect either the Mannions or the Prentices. The work, as an historical novel would have been greater without the Mannions, and as fiction would have been better constructed had historical events been less prominent and more closely connected with the life of the Mannions. It is difficult to see where there is any dramatic parallel between the overthrow of Governor Bligh and the debacle which ended in the death of Stephen Mannion. Both are treated by the author in such a way as to compel the interest of the reader, but they are wholly independent and unrelated. The author's device in giving brief alternate episodes from the two denouements is, to say the least of it,

annoying. It is something like reading two gripping stories at the same time and being allowed a few minutes of one, then a few minutes of the other.

Though Macarthur in fact, and Mannion in fiction, were very definitely pioneers, it is not that aspect of their lives on which Eleanor Dark has focussed our attention. Nor, finely and realistically as she has portrayed them, are the purely historical events of the day her chief interest. In "Storm of Time" as in "The Timeless Land" social problems provide the inspiration for a great deal of the work.

Thus she divides her society into two distinct classes, the exploiters and the exploited, the oppressors and the oppressed. The only exception is Conor Mannion and her function is to emphasise the degradation of the oppressed.

There is consequently, since the author's sympathies are all with the oppressed, an underlining of the vices of one class and a glossing over of the vices of the other.

The landed class is represented by such men as Mannion and Macarthur. Mannion is portrayed as utterly callous and brutal, none the less so because he has all the outward semblance and bearing of a gentleman. To him all those not born to wealth and position are an inferior and coarser people, all convicts vicious and sub-human felons, all social reformers purveyors of seditious, pernicious, inflammatory and revolutionary doctrines.

Macarthur, too, is treated with less respect, though probably a good deal more justice, than is usually given,, by school history books, to this "hero of the fleece." The author sees his services to Australia in a harder and grimmer light. "As he spoke of it the land swung before the eyes of his mind, and his mind subtracted from it ruthlessly all but that which he wished to see. Imagination did not paint for him the progress through it of the rum which had so materially assisted his fortunes; nor follow it into huts where food had been bartered for it; nor to hospitals where men and women fought the death it hastened; nor to dark corners where the law was cheated to obtain it; nor into the desperate minds and hearts of people confronting a life so base that they could trade every human decency for an hour or two of the oblivion it brought. He saw no shabby little settlements stretching their poor cottages along dusty streets he saw no convicts dragging half-starved bodies to another day of exhausting labour; he saw no lonely huts standing in a few acres of painfully tilled soil where small settlers staved off bankruptcy from month to month; he saw no bewildered hordes of dark-skinned people retreating dispossessed before his dream. He saw only land, land, land -empty land, sun-drenched and grass-covered, its green slopes dotted with thousands upon thousands of woolly, moving shapes - a land virtually untouched and unrealised. A land for plunder....."

Plunder in some form or other is depicted as being the chief concern of the ruling classes, who, it is pointed

out, are empowered to indulge in it, not by delegated authority, but by reason of ill-acquired wealth - wealth which, in fact, puts them above the authority of the law. The author has not missed the opportunity of drawing the comparison between the lot of the wealthy man who flouts the law for his own advantage and the lot of the penniless would-be reformer.

The period with which the author deals is, because it deals with a world in miniature, particularly suited for portraying the evils of the capitalistic system, and she has exploited it to the full.

Nowhere has she done this more successfully than in her treatment of the convict problem. In "The Timeless Land," due, no doubt to her sympathetic treatment of Governor Phillip and also the fact that in this first settlement as she depicts it, there was no moneyed class to exploit the convicts, the brutality of the convict system is not overstressed. In "Storm of Time" however, the utter inhumanity of the treatment, by the landowners, of the miserable wretches from whose labour they made their wealth is painted in vivid colours. In a system depicted as being one wherein the merciless treatment of the unfortunate and powerless was accepted as natural, Mannion cannot be regarded as an exception. In the selection of her convicts from the ranks of the Irish political rebels, Eleanor Dark has put the cause she espouses at a powerful, even though slightly unfair, advantage. There were, of course, land-holders who were not

inhuman in the treatment of their convicts, just as there were convicts guilty of more vicious crimes than a desire to reform society. But it is entirely credible and undoubtedly true that men were unjustly exiled for advocating long-over-due reforms, and, like Finn, flogged for reading and preaching doctrines such as are contained in Tom Paine's "The Rights of Man." The cases of Redfern and Palmer were, incredible as it may seem, authentic, and the author has quite justifiably woven them into her story.

Yet the element of propaganda in this novel is not so obvious as it is in "The Timeless Land." In the first place the conditions of the times, in many ways so clearly parallel with certain aspects of our present-day society, call so obviously for reform that there is little need for the author to point the moral too apparently. Secondly, there is a more coherent chain of events, to which reflections on the conditions of the times seem incidental, and not, as in "The Timeless Land," an end in themselves.

The city in which the dynamic quartermaster, James Hyde, set up the business from which was to spring the great fortune of the Hydes, bore little resemblance to the turbulent, squalid and unhappy settlement of "The Timeless Land." At the close of the work, nearly a century after the first settlement, M. Barnard Eldershaw, the authors of "A House is Built", describe it thus: "Far away, blurred and ennobled by the thickening light of the late afternoon, the

city serrated the sky. It was a city that had never heard the tocsin or raised barricades, a place of peace and plenty.

Yet despite this peace and plenty, and despite the fact that the novel deals almost exclusively with the wealthier members of society, this is an unhappy story, in its closing chapters almost overwhelming in its sadness.

The Hydes are a people who, in their striving for contentment, seem to spurn the transient substitutes of mirth and jollity. They are ambitious and successful and yet never enviably happy. Their wealth and power increase until their future seems one of the surest things in the world. They are too strong to be ruined by economic upheavals, there is no suspicion of a social upheaval which might dispossess them of their wealth, there is a son and a grandson, both well fitted to safeguard and to increase the might of the House of Hyde. If ever there was a house built upon a rock it is this one. Yet, at the very peak of its power and security, this stately and solid structure is brought tumbling about the ears of the reader. The Hydes are not financially ruined. It is in fact, the bitterest irony, that after all the glory, attendant, in the quartermaster's mind, on the building of his fortune, has turned to ashes, the fortune and the source of the fortune still remain.

The crash is not due to a failing in character, though there is a suggestion that this is so. Adela's failure to give James the comfort and protection of a

mother's love is portrayed with feeling and understanding. But it is not responsible for either her son's folly or her son's death. His death is accidental, his foolishness, as portrayed by the authors, quite incredible. It is not expected of our serious novelists that, like the authors of second-class radio serials, they should permit any improbability as long as the hero is left triumphant. On the other hand, the reader is entitled to demand that the author does not introduce improbabilities for the purpose of bringing about a calamity desired by the author. Yet the event which constitutes the crucial point of "A House is Built" is improbable in the extreme. Here is the scene between James Hyde and Laurel Franklin:-

"I'm afraid, James, I should want everything. I'd never share you."

"I'd give you everything."

"No," she said, her voice hardening to a sort of challenge. "You would not give me everything. You would not give me your honour and I should want even that."

"You are tormenting me, Laurel. Why do you raise these ridiculous points? There is only you."

"Would you even give me a secret that wasn't yours?"

"Yes," he muttered, sinking his head on his hands.

"Yes, anything."

There was a pause, and then the question fell with a curious inconsequence.

"Will you tell me what your grandfather is tendering for the Red Funnel contract?"

James almost laughed. He saw the figures of the tender painted across his eyelids, and drawing a sheet of paper that was lying on the table towards him, he copied them upon it. Somewhere in the house a door banged."

A scene such as this should not be found in a serious work of considerable worth. Yet it is upon this that all the latter part of the novel depends. The disgrace of James and the deaths of the quartermaster and William all result from this piece of over-dramatic improbability. The Hydes are destroyed neither through their own failings nor through any defect in the system of which they are a part. The authors themselves, with pre-conceived malice and bitterest irony, have destroyed them, and it is in the pursuit of this irony that they have introduced this scene. The two most important things in the old man's life are the stress he places upon business integrity and his pride in his grandson. His strict honesty causes him to make a bitter enemy of Franklin. Through his love for Franklin's daughter, the grandson, James, betrays the House of Hyde. The quartermaster is informed of the betrayal at the very moment when James is carried lifeless into the hall. He, who all his life has been renowned for his boundless energy, ends his life, a poor defeated old giant, lying two years in a coma. William, the humourless son, dies while attempting

to perfect the stability of the Hydes. He, all his life has appeared entirely emotionless, stirred by no feeling deeper than wounded pride or offended propriety - an automaton, cold and passionless as a fish. Yet he dies, we are told, of a broken heart.

After cancer has cut short the only period of real happiness Adela has known among the Hydes, Lionel and Fanny alone are left - Fanny, who was her father's daughter, busying herself with a sardonic pleasure in charitable works, -and Lionel "Lionel knew that it was not for such as he that his grandfather had striven. Beside the old man who was dead, he felt himself a ghost. He did not belong to the Hydes, and their wealth and power hung on him like a garment that is much too big. He was the mouse that the mountain had brought forth."

There is subtle irony, too, about the very house, "Firenze." It was a stately house, quite alien to the bustling life of Sydney, a place of graceful, quiet ease, standing austere aloof from the worldliness of business enterprise. Adela sensed the true beauty of the house; it "made her feel incredibly young and inexperienced, and an intruder on its predestined solitude. Was it possible, she wondered suddenly, that the Hydes could not feel it, too, could really feel as as they seemed to do, that it was excellently suited to them and to their purpose?" To the quartermaster it represented merely a vulgar display of the wealth and power of the Hydes. To William it was the proclamation of a prized gentility.

To him, to whom "the highest elegance was and always would be the ornate and overcrowded furnishings in which the forties, and even more the fifties, found the highest expression of domestic art," the noble lines and the beautiful austerity of the house cried in vain for an equal simplicity and austerity in its furnishings. Not till Lionel, for whom the house had never been intended, became the owner, did the interior attain the stately beauty which its creators had intended for it. But by that time, Lionel was immersed in the business of the waterfront store.

The extent and bitterness of this irony demands a questioning of the purpose of the authors in evolving the plot of this novel. And here one finds oneself completely baffled. Though it is well known from other of their works that the authors' sympathies are not with people such as the Hydes, there is no recognisable attempt here to propound social doctrines. The authors have treated the Hydes with sympathy and understanding, and yet, despite their many virtues, - and they are, on the whole, a virtuous people, - they are not really likeable. It is not possible to say whether this is a fault or a design of the authors. If the purpose of the novel is to trace the establishment in Australia of a successful business, what is the point of the conclusion? If the aim is the final collapse, the obvious moral to be drawn is the futility of building for the future. This, upon closer consideration, cannot be seriously accepted. But if there is no underlying purpose, if it is to be re-

regarded as a personal and family calamity, the construction is wholly unsatisfactory. In the first place, there is no suggestion, before the climax, of the possible conclusion. The two sections, as divided by the climax, are unrelated. Secondly, there is no building up to the climax, and the climax does not indicate or make probable its results. Thirdly, as has been pointed out, the climax is highly improbable.

In its utter devastation, the conclusion to this work is comparable with that of Brian Penton's "Inheritors," but there are important differences. The whole nature of "Inheritors" led the reader to expect some such end, and the nature of the characters made them deserving of it. That cannot be said of "A House is Built."

The characterisation of "A House is Built" is strong without being great. The characters are distinct, with definite, if, in most cases, somewhat harsh, personality. Yet there is something a little wooden about them all. They, apart from the quartermaster, are definitely period pieces and seldom, if ever, emerge as vibrant men and women.

The background is drawn with care and without exaggeration, and yet about it, as about the Hydes, there is always a touch of unreality. Sydney of the day is there, but usually as in a painting. The Hydes, the Gillams and the Franklins seem to move in an empty world. The work is written with competence and insight, but never with quite enough

genius to allow the reader to forget that it is, after all, a book.

Miles Franklin's epic of the Murrumbidgee pioneers, "All That Swagger" is, despite the eulogies of the press critics, not a great work. It has no discernible plot, and, apart from Danny and Johanna Delacy, little to hold the attention in the absence of a plot. Secondly, it drags tiringly and pointlessly to no very definite conclusion.

The story deals with the opening up of land along the Murrumbidgee by Danny Delacy with whom Johanna Cooley has eloped from County Clare. He later takes up more land near what is now Canberra. The story is carried on by his children and grandchildren, and ends with his great-grandson Brian returning to the scene of the struggles of his forefathers in a helicopter which he has flown from England.

Though the novel ends with a dissertation on the value to the outback of aerial transport, and draws a comparison between the ease of air-travel and Danny Delacy's laborious and lengthy journey by bullock wagon, this seems insufficient justification for the inordinate protraction of a work which at no stage could be described as gripping.

Had the author confined her story to that section wherein Danny Delacy is the central figure, her novel would have gained in strength what it lost in length. The life of the hero is sufficient to give a vivid picture of the conditions under which the country was opened up. The lives

of his descendants add little to this picture. The work, in fact, before being rescued by the flying Delacy, degenerates into the recital of insignificant family bickerings quite unworthy of the opening chapters of the work.

Moreover, Miles Franklin has not the genius for characterisation necessary to handle successfully a work as thickly peopled as is this. Danny Delacy is the most strongly-drawn character, and he is, to a great extent, a caricature. There is no depth in his characterisation. It might be argued that Delacy was in no way a complex character, being all, and nothing more than, he appeared on the surface. After a study of the other characters however, it seems more than probable that this author is not capable of portraying a character of any complexity.

At one stage during the work, the reader finds himself surrounded by children and grand-children distinguished by the author only by name. Because of the absence of strong and effective characterisation, this causes considerable confusion. The reader repeatedly feels the necessity of referring to a genealogical tree, or in the absence of that, of searching back through the book, in order to discover who is who.

Danny Delacy is, despite his limitations, a character sufficiently arresting to hold the interest of the reader. The author's presentation of him is skilful enough to make quite credible the legend of "fearless Danny" which grows up round his name and persists long years after his

death. There is an engaging vivacity about all those sections of the book in which Danny Delacy figures. When he ceases to be the central character, the work tends to go to pieces.

Certain contemporaries of Danny Delacy are far more interestingly portrayed than are the characters of later sections of the book. Bella Rafferty, Euphemia Fitzhugh, Johanna Delacy are, though superficially, strongly drawn, and will remain long in the reader's memory. The sharp and stinging battles of words between Danny and Johanna Delacy make delightful reading, and the author responsible for them cannot be dismissed lightly. Johanna's caustic comments are particularly intriguing. Her remark when told that the daughter she hoped would become a nun was to marry a youth of no particular family standing, was: "It only remains for William to run away with old Mother Euphemia Hennessy and Harry to take wan of Bella Rafferty's sisters, to complete me joy and proide in me family, all established among the quality."

Had the author concentrated her attention on Danny and Johanna Delacy and their contemporaries, and excluded from the work the sections dealing with their numerous and far less interesting descendants, she would have pleased her readers better, and her novel would have been a finer contribution to Australian literature. All the finer parts of the book are contained in the first twenty chapters.

As well as the interesting characters, there is much fine humour - a quality rare in Australian literature. The background is delicately and finely drawn, with a poetic quality peculiar to the pen of Miles Franklin.

"Day and night there was no relief from the Morumbidgee, so lone and dark and far, with the voice of a ravaging wind - thousands of miles of it until it met an unknown sea."

"Guarding the elusive land were throngs of giants - the stateliest trees on the globe. Delacy was like an ant in the isles of box-trees and towering river gums but he attacked them as an army, grunting with effort, sweat dripping from him."

The remaining thirty-two chapters are largely lacking in the qualities which make the first twenty memorable. The characters become dull and uninteresting, the humour disappears. Nothing is added to replace what is gone. It seems, unhappily, that the author has continued to write long after she has ceased to have anything worthwhile writing about.

Brian Penton's "Landtakers" is a novel which, in the conception and treatment of its central character, Cabell, approaches true greatness. The primary aim of the book is to strip from the pioneers the aura of nobility and romance with which sentiment has surrounded them. Underlying this there are subsidiary and complementary themes. The author himself has stated his aim thus:- "Growing up in a period

when Australians had begun to feel in themselves the germ of a new people and to fumble for words to express themselves I often wondered what roots that new psyche was coming from. Then it struck me that the answer was somewhere in the life of this old man and his generation. If I could piece together the picture of the epoch as I had inherited it from him - the savage deeds, the cruel life, the hatred between men and men, and men and country, the home-sickness, the loneliness, the despair of inescapable exile in the bush; the strange forms of madness and cruelty; the brooding, inturnd characters; and, joined with this, an almost fanatic idealism which repudiated the past and the tyranny of the past and looked to the future in a new country for a new heaven and earth, a new justice; on the one hand the social outcasts, men broken by degradation and suffering, on the other the adventurers: blackest pessimism balancing the most radiant optimism - if I could only see all this, then I would understand."

The work, as a piece of creative fiction, would have been infinitely greater had Penton not seen fit to ask that it be regarded in the light of the above. In the first place Cabell was not the type of person from whom one could inherit an authentic picture of an epoch; secondly, the balance between blackest pessimism and radiant optimism is not maintained by the author, the scales being always and increasingly weighted in favour of the former.

Moreover, Cabell was too eccentric a person, too

singular as regards both character and circumstance to typify a class, or for his life to be representative of an epoch. Certain events in his life do typify the disasters and dangers which confronted many of the pioneers. Trouble with blacks and corrupt politicians, the prodigious exertions needed to get the wool by bullock dray over bush tracks and unbridged rivers, loneliness, the relentless battle against natural forces were experiences common to most men in Cabell's position. But these in themselves are not the most significant events in the life of Cabell, nor is it from these that "Landtakers" gains its colour. It is not the way of life which is important in this novel, but the way of life of the hero, and this was moulded by forces far more subtle and powerful than those of his physical and social environment. It is always Cabell's action or reaction which is all-important and he predominates, not because he is typical, but because he is different.

Three great queries concerning the life of Cabell are stated by the author.

What caused his development to a physical type so different from that which the daguerrotypes of his youthful self, and of his father and brothers, indicated he would become?

Why, hating Australia as he did, did he never go back to England?

Was he, as he believed himself to be, lying when he said

that he did not wish to return to England?

To these questions the novel provides satisfying, if not complete, answers. Whether a certain way of life could be responsible for a straight nose "with a sensitive bridge and a delicate, womanish septum" becoming "predatory, hooked, with splayed enormous hairy nostrils," is scarcely a question for a critic, but it is logical to assume that the life led by Cabell would soon have changed that soft rosininess which a gentle English life would have preserved.

The reasons for his never returning to England are numerous and comprehensible. First he could not leave because his pride would not have allowed him to return with his fortune unmade; then he lingered because by waiting a little longer he could have been so much richer; then before he had all he desired misfortune struck and he had to begin again. When finally he could have gone, he found that there had been growing slowly and surely, like the fruit trees that the more far-seeing Emma Surface had planted, the knowledge that the gentle way of life to which he had longed so ardently to return, was no longer suited to him, nor was he to it.

To the more profound question- "Was his desire to return a form of self-deception?" there can be no unequivocal answer. Certainly young Cabell did desire to return once his fortune was made. Just as certainly old Cabell, with his fortune made, did not. But this is the Cabell of the "Inheritors," not "Landtakers." Here his desire takes the

form of wishing to send home his daughter so that he might enjoy by proxy the triumph he had once envisaged for himself personally. Is this another expression of the old ambition, or is it merely a means of relinquishing an ideal which, to have abandoned completely, would have seemed a defeat of purpose? It is impossible to say. As far as "Landtakers" is concerned, there is no need to doubt Cabell's closing words - "I'm satisfied. To be what I am. Where I am."

In his drawing of Cabell, the author has shown himself to be a writer of outstanding ability. Certainly he takes a somewhat unorthodox view of the deterioration of Cabell's character. It was a change he says "over which he had no control, for what are men but the creatures of each other's power or helplessness?" We may disagree concerning the truth of this contention but we cannot deny that the gradual and logical development of the story is a powerful exposition of it. We cannot reject, either the cynicism of the author's point of view, since he is competent to make it plausible. Cabell is the author's own creation and he is entitled to deal with him as he thinks fit provided he does not strain our credulity. But in his handling of young Cabell Penton has done less than justice to young Australia. That was something which he had, not to create, but to reproduce,

The prevailing note of the work is struck in the first chapter. Cabell registers the scene as he waits for his convicts to be flogged,- the only sound along the dusty

roads the rattle of a chain here and there; faces of soldiers prematurely aged and withered; convicts deformed by disease and misuse; everywhere the pock-mark of spirits desolated by ennui and despair; Mrs. Duffy waiting to take home the husband she has brought in to be flogged; the grog shanty where was sold a villainous, black, thick mixture of rum, tobacco-juice and bluestone; the faces of the settlers - "Whatever had been there of friendliness, forbearance and common decency, life had scored out with her crudest die. The skin hung to their skulls like shrunk leather, their eyes had retreated into deep sockets and were calculating and suspicious;" - the death of the man burnt in two in the bush, which provided a passing joke for the bar; O'Duffy, the dirty flogger, up to his old trick of making the lash curl round under the belly, where no protective crust of calloused weals had grown; the scarecrow made from the skin of an abo. flayed for the purpose and stuffed with straw. It is a sordid picture and, considered item by item, not entirely false. But in its entirety it is false, first, because too many horrors are crowded into too small a canvas, secondly, and more importantly, because all else but horror has been deliberately excluded.

Australia of that day had her share, more than her share, of cut-throats, thieves, drink addicts, murderers and desperadoes. But though the percentage was too great, it was, nevertheless, only a percentage of the population. There is no recognition of the fact in Penton's book. There is not in

in the Australia of "Landtakers" one wholly decent, normal character. There is scarcely a mention of any one of the gentler graces of human life. There is abounding courage, unflinching fortitude, boundless energy and initiative and little else that is commendable. Yet we know, and of course the author knew, that the greater portion of the Australian population was not essentially different from the greater portion today. All the softer virtues and all the better types of men and women were there. The way of life was harder, but it was not as destructive of human decency as the author suggests.

The vicious acts which were a feature of Cabell's life were not wholly the result of his Australian environment.

Cabell was never, except in his own nostalgic fancies, a fine or gentle character. Something of his true nature is revealed on the second page of the novel. "He spoke in a petulant way and when the old man did not move, his full red lower lip thrust out like a spoiled child's. "I'll wake you up," he muttered, and seizing a stick from the ground, threw it with all his strength at the old man's head."

Cabell was a moral coward and had within himself, when he came to Australia, the power to indulge in mean, spiteful and blackguardly actions - a power which, in the lawless life of the infant colony, he exercised whenever circumstances made it expedient. His dedicating himself to

deeds as vague and glorious as the Milky Way was in reality nothing more than a vindictive desire to get even with the brothers who had mistreated him. When, in order to save his sheep, he robbed Gursev of the freedom which was almost his, his action was despicable and inexcusable. It was small wonder that Gursev hated him, and that, even on his death bed, Cabell sought to hide from himself the enormity of his crime.

It was a matter of the deepest irony that Cabell, a man from an honoured and noble family - his brother was a bishop, his cousin an earl - and having an overbearing pride of his own, should have been tricked by circumstances into marrying a woman notorious in the way that Emma Surface was notorious. Yet, as "Inheritors" reveals, Emma Surface was not an evil or immoral woman, only an unfortunate one. She was sufficiently fine of character for many a decent man to have found happiness with her. Cabell, however, lacked the necessary moral fibre. Her virtues were of no consequence to him because, except in a superficial sense, he placed no value upon her virtue. What was important to him was that Emma Surface had been a convict, and thus was responsible for shaming him before men. But neither shame nor exterior circumstances can explain away the neglect and misuse with which he repaid the debt he owed her for saving his life.

Cash, in "Inheritors," summed up Cabell accurately when he said, " So all the time he's been here he's been ashamed of himself as if there was a part of himself still in

in England watching the part of him here. And that's real bad - being ashamed. It gets you on the run. You've got to have a special kind of courage to accept what you are and not care what anybody says about it."

Ludmilla Barton-Darvall's opinion of him is less kind, but nobless true. "Take that young Englishman. He was full to the back teeth with spite. Because the world had humiliated him and given him some hard knocks he wanted to make it hard for others. He wanted to throw mud on the honour of that fine old English gentleman and see him brought down - so that his smarting pride would be satisfied. He used to taunt his neighbour till the old man was driven to some ridiculous act, and then would go home laughing up his sleeve."

It is true that Cabell did receive some hard knocks and many of them could have been directly attributed to his life in Australia. But for Cabell's reaction to these knocks Australia cannot be held responsible. The way of life may have brought to light the defects in his character but it was not the cause of them. They sprang from weaknesses in a nature which could scarcely have been a shining example of rectitude in any land.

As a novel dealing with a character vitiated by the twin evils of shame and spite "Landtakers" is a profound and successful work, even though a sordid one. But, though these vices may be the predominating influences in the life of an i

individual, they cannot conceivably be regarded as characteristic of a class or of a generation. Therefore Cabell cannot faithfully interpret the lives of that valiant and heterogeneous band, the pioneers. And, indeed, there would be no necessity to regard Cabell as a medium for a generation were it not for the fact that Penton has expressly stated that such is the case. If it must be considered as typifying the lives of the pioneers the work must be dismissed as wrong in approach, prejudiced in development and false in effect.

The reader, however, is left in little doubt that "Inheritors," the dreary sequel to "Landtakers," was not inspired, merely by a desire to complete, for the world's benefit, the picture of the life of Cabell. This is an inferior work which adds nothing to the greatness of "Landtakers." In fact, the literary value of the first work is considerably lessened if it is studied in conjunction with the second. For in "Inheritors" it is obvious that the author was concerned with men and women as representatives of classes, rather than as individuals.

The background, particularly the social background of the cities, becomes increasingly sordid. We are given extensive glimpses of what purports to be Brisbane society of those days. There was, apparently, not one person who had not some grisly skeleton in the family cupboard, not one but whose chief aim in life, apart from the making of money by questionable means, was to conceal or explain away some ghost of the convict days. Apart from being an obviously false

picture, it is not even a logical one. There would not have been this acute anxiety to deny the existence of these skeletons had they been common to all members of society. Only if their owners had been in the minority would they have mattered so much.

Though a period of twenty years passed between the close of the first book and the opening of the second, and though during that interval the convict system had ended and the colony had grown considerably in wealth and importance, the life of the Inheritors is, if possible, more sordid than was that of their predecessors. Graft, violence, and respect for violence are still there, and to these have been added a pettiness, a shabby snobbishness and a superficial striving for gentility. The robust adventurousness, one of the saving graces of "landtakers" has disappeared and not one decent quality emerges to take its place.

The principal characters are treated no less harshly than is the background. Despite his defects, Cabell of "Landtakers" was sufficiently enigmatical for the reader to allow him some measure of greatness. While he was not a noble character, he was at least a valiant one, and at no time lost entirely either the respect or the sympathy of the reader. "Inheritors" strips him of all semblance of decency. We are forced to the conclusion that any greatness which we may have accorded him was due, not to any merit on his part but to our ignorance of his real character. Nothing is left to him but a sheer physical dauntlessness, and this is

invariably displayed under circumstances calculated to take from it any virtue. He becomes simply a vicious and somewhat unreal old man, going from wickedness to greater wickedness through obstinacy or sheer force of habit. Any kindly or repentant action was the result of superstition. He hated his sons and had no real love for his daughter. She was valued only because he saw in her the means of requiting the vindictive malice he bore his relatives in Overbury.

Emma Surface, too, completely loses the intriguing and arresting personality which made her such a memorable character of "Landtakers." The victories of the dogged and astute Emma over the choleric Cabell were immensely satisfying to the reader and lent a good deal of strength to the first book. In "Inheritors" she becomes so different from the original Emma, so dispirited and nebulous that she ceases to arouse either interest or sympathy. The fact that she was killed by Cabell's striking her because she had helped to prevent his achieving the one aim of his life, loses its significance. It is just another sordid and violent act in a work in which sordidness and violence are commonplace.

The most predominant emotion in this novel is that of hatred. There is hatred between parent and child, between man and man and between class and class. The radiant idealism of which the author speaks in "Landtakers" becomes here in the privileged classes, greed for power and wealth. With the under-privileged it springs far less from a faith in the future than a hatred of the present and the past.

But the reader becomes increasingly and uncomfortably aware that there is a deeper and more pervading hatred than these which the author depicts. The author himself in his treatment of Cabell seems to be motivated chiefly by hatred, not only for the hero but for the class to which he belongs. Yet, as a plea for the under-dog, this novel is ineffective because the under-dog himself is treated with scant sympathy. Larry is an ineffectual fellow, both a moral and a physical coward, Coyle sly, repulsive and vindictive, Berry a timid procrastinator. The author cannot plead a worthy cause because of his apparent aim that nothing decent or worthwhile should lighten the pages of this book. If his intention was to depict the utter depravity of the landed or moneyed classes his treatment defeats his own purpose for it makes vice commonplace, and therefore insignificant.

James and Gerald hate and despise their father and are in turn hated and despised by him. The sons are equally despised by the reader. They are both quite without virtue, and yet in outlook and character entirely different from Cabell. There seems to be a bitter and vindictive irony in the author's portrayal of these two characters and their relationship with Cabell. This irony is accentuated by the fact that Larry, the only son with whom the reader has any sympathy whatever, should, by his vicious attack upon his father, leave him in his impotent blindness, at the mercy of Gerald and James.

The death bed scene is overwhelming in its depravity, though magnificent in its devastation. Cabell's revelation of himself and his wife as accomplices in the murder of McGovern effectively disposes of the superficial gentility of the odious James. Unhappily the old man is not allowed to stop there but must be stripped of his last shred of decency. He goes on to reveal the shameful secret of Aurelia, the keeping of which was practically the one decent thing in his life. It was the last vicious stroke which brought down the tottering edifice he had built. The reader however, is not unaware of the fact that, in the final analysis, the author and not his creation must be held accountable for the utter remorselessness of this scene.

Dorothy Cottrell's novel, "Earth Battle," is not in the same sense as "All that Swagger" and "Landtakers" a novel of the pioneering days. H.B. Henrics was not the first who had attempted to wrest a living from "Tharlane." Nor are there the long treks with the bullock drays which were a feature of the early days. Murgan, a township reasonably close for that part of the world, - the south-west of Queensland -, was linked to the coast by rail.

The period is considerably later than that vague age to which the pioneers are considered to belong. There are no dates mentioned in the novel - apart from the old man whose claim to fame was that he had not had a bath since the flood of '72 - but Henrics and his neighbours proceeded to

the scene of the fire by car, those who could not get inside standing on the running-board. This was thirty years after the opening events of the story, which, therefore, would seem to have taken place in the first decade of this century, - perhaps a little earlier. Mrs. Bellephoebe Henrics unquestionably belongs to the age of ankle-length skirts.

But by the very nature of the work Henrics is a pioneer. He, unassisted by his predecessors, faced, just as Cabell and Delacy had faced in other parts of the continent, the untamed wilderness and the unconquered forces of nature. He did not follow where others had blazed the trail. His earth, "Tharlane," was virgin earth, for it had long since all but effaced the marks put upon it by its former occupiers. Nothing remained to show of their struggles but a ruined six-wire fence and the decaying stockyards which enclosed the springing mulga bushes, and near which the dingoes bred.

The underlying theme of the novel is the impotence of man when opposed to the forces of nature. In her introduction the author explains that she has tried "to set against the immensity and indifference of nature the poignant and yet strangely passing lives of men." "I have always," she says, "been staggered by both the pathos and the immeasurable valour of men, both good and evil, as silhouetted against the great waste places of the world."

There is nothing novel, of course, in this conception of man, nor is it in any way exclusive to the great South-West of which she writes. In the course of that time

of which history is so infinitesimal a fraction, the Pharoahs, no less than the Esquimaux, must bow before its truth. But for that time which is all-important to man, his unlived future, its truth is neither generally nor unreservedly accepted.

And in the exposition of her theme the author has not been entirely successful. Old H.B. was not a man who would struggle vainly against recognisedly unconquerable forces. He struggled because he believed he could win, and the facts of the story in great measure justify this faith. Certainly he could not make it rain, but by foresight and ingenuity, he went a long way towards overcoming the effects of drought. It is possible to believe that coming generations will be completely successful where old H.B. was only partially so. He could not prevent the grass growing, nor the west wind blowing, yet he would have been successful in his fight against the fire which destroyed him had he had to contend only with physical forces.

For the author defeats her own purpose in allowing Henrics to be destroyed, in the final analysis, as the result, not of natural, but of human forces. If the fire which reduced both "Tharlane" and Henrics to ashes was lit by the little man, who, through Henrics' desire for vengeance, was unjustly sent to gaol for thirty years, Henrics reaped the reward of his own wickedness, and the fire was of no greater significance than the current which kills the criminal in the electric chair. Of this, however, the reader is never certain

But the fire was the result of human action, and the "little man" was by no means Henrics' only enemy. Even so, the greater part of "Tharlane" would have been saved had it not been for that incomprehensible change of heart which made Henrics leave "Tharlane" in order to save Sary Strathmore's selection.

In this is the second and the greatest weakness of the novel. In her hero, H.B.Henrics, the author has created a character who is not big enough to play the part she has demended of him. In the closing scenes she has introduced a poignancy out of keeping with the previous character of the work and a nobility inconsistent with the character of the hero.

Henrics and his wife Bellephoebe are the characters of comedy. Fantastic and grotesque as they both are, they hold our delighted interest as they perform their various antics against a slightly too flamboyant background which is Australia, as this author sees it. Bellephoebe Henrics is never sufficiently human for the amusement we derive from her discomfiture to be spoiled by any sharp consciousness of her bitter humiliation. Old H.B., gross, boastful, vindictive, dishonest, cowardly, greedy, and ungrateful is, nevertheless, not a character who incites in us any feeling of acute repulsion. But he is scarcely a character for whom we should be asked to have any feeling of respect or pity.

The paltry meanness of the old man in robbing Sandy Gutter of the fifty pounds which he had almost lost his life in earning is quite in keeping with the character of old H.B.

But the visionary quality we glimpse while he is in the very process of this dishonesty leaves the reader with the feeling that the author, having got the old man to his vantage point on the cliff, has been unable to resist the temptation to indulge in a piece of fine speculative writing, expressing thoughts more likely to emanate from the mind of Dorothy Cottrell than from H.B.Henrics.

The gross old man sitting at the dinner table to which he has neglected to bring her, pointing with his fork at his ludicrously genteel and over-dressed wife, and exclaiming for the edification of the crowd round the bar, "Does anyone want a old galah parrot ? Come, a old galah parrot for sale! is the Henrics with whom the reader is familiar. But the old man who, at the close of the book sees "Tharlane" about to be destroyed is a complete stranger.

"His mind strove to realise that this was ending.... for him! He, H.B. was beaten by his earth at last!

"He sought barren comfort, raising a fierce, haggard old face to the flaming south, in the thought that all men who live with the earth see at last their transience in comparison with the earth."

The destruction of "Tharlane" and the death of old H.B. are the results of actions incompatible with the character of the old man. It is difficult for the reader to believe that Henrics would have saved Sary's selection at the expense of "Tharlane"- for no other reason than that Sary was a good woman. Such a consideration would not have influenced him

in the slightest degree. It is even less conceivable that, having saved Sary's selection, he would have gone deliberately to be consumed by the fire that had consumed "Tharlanet". A man of H.B.'s character, old certainly, but active enough to have fought a fire unceasingly for days, a man not unused to serious set-backs, was not the type to have ended his life in this manner. Nor, would he, when faced with disaster, have resorted to vain speculation on the insignificance and transience of man.

There is a great deal in this work that is delightful, and the utter odiousness of old H.B. is an important factor in its appeal. Had the author allowed him to pass from our knowledge still as a character of comedy the quality of the work would have been better sustained. The conclusion however, ~~demands~~ a sobriety of contemplation for which we are not prepared. Henrics provides amusement only while it is not necessary to take him too seriously. If we are not allowed to laugh at him, we can regard him only as utterly despicable. But to accept the conclusion of this work as logical we must grant to Henrics a greatness which could outshine his defects. This is the apparent intention of the author. She has attempted to show that the battle against nature calls forth from men, however vile, a certain magnificence. She has doubtless envisaged a character who, for all his wickedness, yet has that core of greatness, and doubtless, too, such men exist. But the Henrics she has presented in her novel is not such a one. It is not enough

for the author to assure the reader that this hidden virtue exists. If the whole structure of the novel depends upon its existence the character must be presented with sufficient depth of insight for the reader to be aware of it. There is, however, no reason to regard Henrics' love of the earth as anything finer than a greed for money and self-aggrandisement. We cannot accept him as a hero, or grant to him a nobility of character merely because the author, in the portrayal of her theme, demands it. Innumerable and diverse characters could have satisfactorily played the hero in a novel with this theme. Dorothy Cottrell has been unfortunate in selecting in H.B.Henrics the only very character incapable of doing so.

There is evidence that the author recognises the existence of inconsistencies in her story. But it is not sufficient to put them down to the "inexplicability of life." No tale which hinges upon inexplicabilities can be truly satisfying. No human action is inexplicable if all the facts are known, and the novelist who presents only half a character and yet bases all-important actions on the unknown other half is making of creative fiction a very questionable art.

R Roy Connolly's "Southern Saga" is a story of the Burnett district of Queensland between the years 1849 and 1856. This period has been selected because it was during this time that the trouble between the white settlers and the

blacks, aggravated by the conduct of the Native Mounted Police, was most acute. This trouble plays a major part in the novel.

This work gives a more authentic picture of pioneering life than is given by "Landtakers." The dangers, loneliness and roughness of the life are well depicted but the work has not the sordidness of Penton's novel. The life of Stephen Everett, the hero of this work, is, apart from his domestic troubles, more truly representative of the life of the pioneers than is that of Derek Cabell.

In showing the barbarity and the foolish injustice with which the native troopers, with the approval of some of the squatters, and of remote and ignorant officials, treated the aborigines, Connolly has used two exceptional characters. These are the warped and sadistic Hedley Hampton, the white leader of the troopers, and Coontajanderrah, 'the noble savage,' between whom and Everett there existed such mutual respect and affection. The characters of these two, however, add poignancy to the distinctly personal story of the enmity between them, without distorting the reader's general view of the problem. Coontajanderrah's fate is the result both of the foolish and unrealistic policy of officialdom and of the personal hatred of the abnormal Hampton. Hampton's hatred is, however, so distinctly a part of a singular story, that the reader is not in danger of generalising from this particular case.

This novel has a definite and well-sustained plot

into which the background and the problem of the blacks are skilfully woven. Unhappily, it is marred by a rather heavy touch of melodrama. The characters are either a little too good or a great deal too bad.

The story hinges on the inability of the spoilt, selfish and shallow Georgiana, 'the belle of two Sydney seasons,' to accept the loneliness, discomfort and lack of admiration which she finds to be her lot as the mistress of "Goolara."

If Georgiana is merely the superficial and inconsequential person that Connolly has presented, Everett must be dismissed as a person of little discernment. More importantly, the reconciliation of the couple makes the ending of the work weak and inconclusive.

The whole of the author's sympathy is with the husband and he has none at all for the wife. The novel would have been considerably stronger had this not been the case. It is not improbable that a person such as Georgiana, spoiled by her mother and used to the admiration of Sydney society, should have found life at 'Goolara' intolerable. But it does not follow that because she could not be noble, she had to be worthless. She could have been a fundamentally decent person and still have been infatuated with Lieutenant Hampton. She had plenty of time to brood over the injustices of her lot and a very real cause for doubting the depth of Everett's love for her. After all, had Connolly been a little more sympathetic to Georgiana, Everett's refusal to accept the

partnership offered by his father-in-law might have displayed a selfishness which matched his wife's.

If Georgiana is allowed no stability and no intrinsic worth, it is a matter of little moment whether she is reconciled with her husband or not. As this is the end to which the events of the novel are directed, the whole plot becomes ill-balanced and inconsequential, and the note on which the work ends is impermanent and unsatisfying. The reader who accepts Everett at the author's valuation is entitled to demand, for so noble a character, something more than a reunion with a wife who has nothing save physical beauty to recommend her.

The other leading characters are handled no more successfully than is Georgiana. Hampton is very much the villain of the piece. There is an attempt to explain, but not to excuse, his viciousness. Stephen Everett, the hero, is, in all things, what the villain is not. But despite the fact that he does, on occasions, lose his temper with Georgiana and reiterate the author's opinion of her, he is a very wooden character and never captures the interest of the reader.

It is a pity that this work is marred by these defects for it has qualities which one would like to see in works which have greater claim to literary worth. Foremost among these is the fact that there is a story, sufficiently coherent to hold the interest of the reader.

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THE SOCIOLOGICAL NOVELS

Of recent years the attention of many of our foremost novelists has been focussed on the social problems of our community. Many years before 1920 there were novels which dealt with social evils. "For the Term of his Natural Life" and "The Broad Arrow" were both written to portray the horrors of the convict system as it functioned in Van Diemen's Land. But there is a great difference between these works and those which are included here under the heading of sociological novels. In the first place both these works were written long after the convict system had come to an end. Secondly, neither indulges in an attack on the general social order of the day.

We have, today, a group of what might be termed "crusading" novelists. Their mission, as they see it, is to attack our present social conditions, to proclaim the desirability of a new social order or to portray certain iniquities of certain aspects of our social life. Many, therefore, are quite obviously propagandist, some quite undisguisedly politically biassed.

This section of our literature provides an interesting field of study for the student though, unhappily for the novelists, for the causes they espouse and for our literature generally, a like interest is not aroused in the general reader. Many belong to what Margaret Walkom describes as "the current trend of sordid fiction." The purpose for which they are written demands, in many cases, that they should deal

with the sordid side of life. But a sordid novel can still be well-constucted, well-written and interesting. One would expect, indeed, that the first requisite of a novel which pleads a cause is that it should hold the reader's interest.

Yet this section of our literature is remarkable for its dullness. Seldom has such a large proportion of a nation's most competent authors treated the reading public with greater disregard than is the case with the writers of these sociological romances. In many, too many, the characterisation is weak, the characters unsympathetically treated, the story almost non-existent. Some even inflict on the readers long passages of political propaganda which could quite conceivably have come direct from the pens of political pamphleteers.

There is no reason, of course, why a worth-while novel should not plead a social, or even a political cause. But the social or political beliefs of the author are not in themselves sufficient excuse for the elevation of a novel to the rank of good literature. In the final analysis the standards by which a work is judged as literature will be largely the same whatever the purpose behind the work. But these Australian novels fail also as propaganda, and for the very same reasons that they are defective as creative literature.

Social evils are not so effectively remedied by making people aware of their existence as by arousing sympathy for the victims of social conditions. There is no such thing

as an impersonal hatred. People do not hate a social system simply because it is unfair or unjust, but because they, or someone who matters to them, has suffered under that system. Therefore the first aim of the crusading novelist must be to create characters whose misfortunes acutely affect the reader. This can never be achieved by making the character appear to the reader as insignificant as he is to the directors of the social order. There can be no real sympathy for the over-worked cog in the social machine unless he becomes something a great deal more human than a cog. It is not enough for a novelist to be vitally interested in social themes. His chief preoccupation must be with the individual as a human being, not as a mouth-piece for the political and social theories of the author.

Yet in many of these novels the central characters have no appeal to the reader. The writers, it would appear, are more interested in man as a unit of a social order than in the essential humanity of man. Jessica Daunt, in Kylie Tennant's "Tiburon" sums up their attitude to the individual and to the purpose of their writing when she says, "Nobody's worth it when it comes to that. But it's the principle of the thing."

In some works such as "Tomorrow and Tomorrow" and "Come in Spinner" there is gross and obvious distortion to serve an obvious purpose. This detracts from the value of such works both as literature and as propaganda. In some

the dissatisfaction, though obvious, is general and vague and the reader, though having no doubt that the writer considers the social order generally unsatisfactory, closes the book without being quite clear as to what is specifically wrong.

There are, however, certain works which deal with definite evils in our national life and these are among the best and consequently the most effective of our sociological novels. Two such novels are Xavier Herbert's "Capricornia" and Dymphna Cusack's "Say No to Death." The first deals with the plight of the half-castes in the Northern Territory, the second with the plight of impecunious tubercular sufferers in Sydney, and, presumably, in other Australian cities.

There is a great deal that is sordid in "Capricornia". One would expect this in a work whose aim is to portray the appalling conditions of the lives of the half-castes or "yeller-fellers" of the Northern Territory. But where it is most sordid it is most real. There is a good deal of undoubted exaggeration in the treatment of the white officials. But we find with this a good deal of humour, which makes the work entertaining while taking nothing from the general picture of foolish and incompetent administration. Since the plight of the half-caste is largely a result of the social system, the persons responsible for maintaining the system are given little quarter. The petty snobbery, stupidity, hypocrisy, selfishness and inefficiency of the white officials are mercilessly ridiculed.

There is both satire and humour in the names which Herbert has given the numerous characters who drift through his pages. In many cases the name is the chief indication of the character. In no case, not even of the central figures, is there any great development of, or insight into, character. The characters are the obvious, if somewhat superficial, results of their environment. The significance of the names compensates in some degree for what the work lacks in depth. The marriage of a mere Shillingsworth to a Poundamore needs little elaboration from the author to make the reader aware of the upheaval in social conventions consequent upon such an ill-sorted match.

The white officials are caricatured but Herbert has very wisely refrained from caricature in the case of the half-caste, Norman Shillingsworth. He is treated with reserve and realism and it is his reality as a human being which emphasises the degradation of his existence. This is true, in a lesser degree, of the other half-castes.

Nor has Herbert portrayed the half-caste as an individual whose lot is without possibility of hope or betterment. His plight is the result, not of fundamental defects in either his own character or in the character of his oppressors, but of a localized system and outlook. In Batman, Norman Shillingsworth found the colour of his skin no hindrance to his progress and happiness. The contrast between the possibilities of life for him in Batman and the actualities of his life in Capricornia is a stronger condemnation of the

system than would be any picture of unrelieved hopelessness. The changing attitude of Marigold, too, emphasises the effects of such a system, not only upon the happiness of the half-caste but upon the fundamental decency of the whites.

Although the names have been changed, the setting is quite obviously Darwin and the surrounding area of the Northern Territory. The author has been particularly successful in capturing the atmosphere peculiar to this part of Australia. The ridiculously class-conscious existence of petty-officialdom is in striking contrast to the sordid and bizarre lot of the peculiarly conglomerate mass of the lesser orders.

Dymphna Cusack's "Say No to Death" is an entirely different type of book from "Capricornia." There is no satire and no humour in this work. The canvas is much smaller and there is a well-defined and coherent plot. The interest is focussed at all times on the central characters Jan and Bart.

The plot has been designed to allow the author to portray in all its horror the plight of the victim of tuberculosis who is not sufficiently wealthy to pay for treatment.. The matrons of the hospital and the rest home are probably not typical of all such matrons. But there is enough reality in Dymphna Cusack's picture of them and of the conditions over which they preside to cause the reader serious concern. The conditions in the state institutions are portrayed with grim realism and it is difficult to believe that there is any

great exaggeration. For example, the idea that a patient should have to wait till a certain number of tubercular victims die before he or she can gain admission to a hospital is horrible in the extreme. But, even more horrible, is the realisation that this is no flight of the author's fancy, but, when there is a shortage of beds, stark and incontestable reality.

The novelist has strengthened her case by weaving into the plot happier cases to show what an enlightened approach to the subject could do to alleviate the lot of these unfortunates. Doreen, the sister, over-worked, worried and sharing with Jan an airless and uncomfortable flat, contracts the disease. But, because she is an ex-service woman, she is admitted at once to Concord, where she has the best of treatment and is freed of all financial worries. Her response to treatment is swift, and in a very short time she is discharged, completely cured.

In the treatment of her theme the author tends to belabour a point when it has already been made. In the course of an apparently casual conversation the fact is revealed that horses in a near-by racing stable are housed considerably better than the patients in the hospital. The most obtuse reader will have grasped the point and the author could with advantage have carried on with the story. Unfortunately she still seems dissatisfied and elaborates the point till the reader becomes conscious that he is being proselytized. There is in most readers an instinctive

aversion from this. The author who can lead readers to formulate ideas for themselves, is a much more effective protagonist of a cause than is the author who quite obviously presents his own ideas to the reader.

This work pleads effectively a worthwhile cause and because of this is of considerable value. This, however, is not sufficient to ensure for it any permanent literary value, and as literature this is not a work of any outstanding merit. It relies for its appeal on the poignancy of its subject rather than on the strength of its characters. Character drawing is not a strong point of Dymphna Cusack's works. Her characters are always a little too ordinary and a little too obvious. Jan is always the frail patient upon whom we gaze with pity, rather than a person with whom we suffer. Because of the weakness of the characterisation of the heroine the reader sees the problem always from the point of view of the onlooker. Pitiful as this view of the problem is, the work would have been considerably more effective had the reader been made to see the problem more from the point of view of the sufferer.

Bart is a peculiarly drawn character. There seem almost to be two Barts, and of the two the rather ordinary and not apparently heroic character is the more real. The other Bart seems a little uncomfortable in the mantle of nobility which the author has draped about him.

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Nobility in the characters of Australian novels is,

however, a characteristic rare enough to be welcome. One wishes that a little of it could have lightened the dreary pages of Barnard Eldershaw's "Tomorrow and Tomorrow." This book deals principally with life in Australia between the two world wars, and prophesies the final destruction of the present Australian nation.

J.D.B.Miller states that this is a hard book to write about because one is never sure whether the authors expect their anticipation of social and political events to be regarded as accurate prognostication or not. In the assessment of this work one should not be hindered by such doubts. It is reasonable to expect that a novel as careful and as serious as this one should voice the genuine opinion of the authors, that there should be no suggestion of its having been written with the tongue in the cheek. In any case it does not greatly matter. The underlying suggestion is plain enough. This is, that present day conditions in Australia are so corrupt and the Australians so temperamentally incapable of improving them that nothing but the destruction of both the system and the people will bring anything better.

It is another of those works dealing with the hopelessness of the lot of the Common Man. Harry Munster, we are expressly told, is the Common Man. If such is really the case we are indeed a miserable and a hopeless people. Happily for us all, a closer inspection will reveal that Munster is far from being the Common Man. He is in face

and figure, in education and intelligence as near as one could get to, if there is such a person, an average Australian. These, though, he could number among his blessings. The misfortunes which, at every turn, the authors force upon him bring him far below the level of the average Australian.

The average Australian is not cursed with a wife such as Ally Munster. Are we to regard her as the Common Woman? She is an appalling creation. Though she is endowed with a certain youthful grace and beauty, the power of loving passionately and of enjoying life, poverty, plus the base inclinations natural to Mrs. Common Man, makes of her an unscrupulous trollop,- stupid, cunning, lazy and selfish, living in an atmosphere of petty gossip, crafty manipulation of time payment demands, unmade beds and grubby little paper bags. Similar women no doubt exist but they are not typical of the wife of the average working man.

Ally is not Harry Munster's only misfortune. Forced, in the middle twenties, to give up the struggle for existence on an over-mortgaged poultry-farm, he and his family move to Sydney. They move into a dismal tenement in a dirty slum - temporarily they hope, but it becomes their permanent residence. The night they move in, Munster's son dies because of a kidney condition. Munster gets a job as a lorry driver but loses it at the beginning of the depression because he is a unionist. Despite constant tramping and seeking, he is five years unemployed. He is the helpless victim of social conditions, knowing no struggle but the dreary struggle to

exist. Where there is a slight amelioration of his distress it is due to luck and the influence of money. The turn in his fortunes brings him into contact with Gwen and he finds the love of which poverty has robbed him at home. His love for Gwen brings a succession of dreadful calamities - estrangement from his best-loved daughter, death to himself, drunkenness, prostitution and finally death to Gwen.

One or more of these disasters could befall anyone but no author can inflict them all on one person and still typify him as the Common Man. Consider too, the characters who make up the world in which Munster lives. There is the talkative old harriidan, Mrs. Blan, an unscrupulous racketeer and his unscrupulous wife, a conscientious objector, a communist taxi-driver, a prostitute who wins first prize in a lottery, a wealthy philanthropist and his free-thinking daughter Surely we are not expected to believe that this is a fair cross-section of Australians. These are oddities, the eccentric few, the non-conformists, who comprise a very small percentage of our population. The great mass of the people, - those who live quietly and peacefully, who care nothing for political philosophies, whose existence is not an orgy of temperamental instability - form no part of the picture at all. Yet their differences from the characters of this work are the very qualities which would make the later events - the revolution and the exodus from Sydney to make way for its destruction - extremely improbable.

The authors of this work have deliberately and

patently falsified life. Such events and such people as are depicted here are exceptional. An author cannot take an unfortunate group in the midst of the worst depression Australia has ever known and hold up their lives as typical of the Australian way of life. He cannot cite as typical the victimisation of a man for being a unionist and ignore the rapid progress that unionism has made during the last twenty years. Nor can he justly make an imposing list of the apparent contradictions in the attitude of the Australian towards life without being prepared to admit that these contradictions are the result, not of fickleness in our national character, but of important forces in our history, and that a similarly imposing list could be compiled regarding almost any group of human beings.

An author, of course, cannot be condemned because he dwells on the darker side of life, or because he seems unduly pessimistic. We may question the value of this type of writing but we cannot deny its legitimacy as a form of art. But if, in the presentation of his dismal picture, the author claims to mirror the life of a people, the reader is entitled, if he considers the reasons sufficient, to charge the author with falsification. And the authors of "Tomorrow and Tomorrow" lay themselves open to this charge. For they advance the definite claim that in Harry Munster they portray the Common Man, that the conditions which they describe present a faithful overall picture of contemporary life. "I've wanted to make again that lost world," remarks Knarf,

and the lost world to which he refers is the Australia of our generation. It is inconceivable that the authors would have allowed Knarf to paint of us a picture which we are not expected to accept as life-like.

Though this work is undoubtedly propaganda it is rather difficult to see to what end the propaganda is directed. Quite obviously the authors are no admirers of the capitalistic system. The whole of the work which deals with that period up to the destruction of Sydney is a stern attack upon capitalism and capitalistic institutions, even including the universities. Early in the work the authors sum up the Australians. "They had drawn a hardy independence from the soil and had maintained it with pride and yet they had allowed themselves to be dispossessed by the most fantastic tyranny the world has ever known, money in the hands of the few, an unreal, an imaginary system, driving out reality. They had their hard-bitten realism and yet they co-operated in the suicidal fiction of production for profit instead for use. They thought of Australia as a land of plenty and yet they consented to starve among the plenty. They lost the reality of their land to the fantasy of the Banks."

A little later we find " They strove enormously for the thing called profit. In competition men's efforts cancelled out, one against another; they could succeed only, one at the expense of another, but when competition merged into monopoly they were worse off, for as the forces became more powerful they were more destructive."

This capitalistic order survives until the Australian people are dispersed and destroyed. Then, under some nameless oriental race, a highly developed system of socialism prevails over the land. Of this age Knarf remarks, "If we looked back at today instead of living in it, we would say it was the Golden Age. There has never before in the whole history of man been anything like this, peace and plenty."

But the authors display little sympathy for the victims of capitalism. The lesser orders of humanity are condemned along with the system because they are seen as being a part of it, rather than a result of it. There is no suggestion that the working classes are capable of evolving, or of living under, a more rational system. On the contrary, the suggestion seems to be that the destruction of capitalism and the destruction of the Australian nation are, of necessity coincidental.

But when, under another people, the Golden Age comes into being, its peace and plenty seem to bring no great measure of happiness. The citizens of the Tenth Commune are not depicted by the authors as a joyous or a contented people. Indeed, the latter section of this work deals almost solely with the attempt to remedy the acknowledged defect of the socialistic state, the loss of personal liberty.

"The Little Company" and "Prelude to Christopher," both by Eleanor Dark, are both vehicles for anti-capitalist

propaganda.

"The Little Company" is, in conception and execution a work far below the standard of other novels by this author. It is a fantastic hotch-potch of unrelated and poorly-developed themes and insignificant emotions. It is almost impossible to discern the novelist's purpose in producing it at all. It is possible that she was suffering from the same complaint as her hero and had decided in desperation, to construct a novel around that theme.

The work begins, and ends, with the problem of the creative artist who is barren of ideas. But this theme fades very early in the novel, only to be resurrected at the end with no clear or logical development towards that end. Nothing in the novel explains why the period of sterility should end and Gilbert Massey should resume his interrupted career as a novelist. World conditions are held responsible for the inability to write. Marty says, "Well, I know you don't like my fanciful way of putting things, but at the moment I can't think of any other way. Our brains are, so to speak, tuned in to creativeness, and at present the mass brain is tuned in to destructiveness. We're suffering, Gil, my poor lamb, from 'interference.' The waves we try to give out are being jammed."

There is no development of this idea which appears, at first, to be the central theme of the novel. Marty's theory would apply at the time of the ending of the novel,

just as much as at the beginning. Yet, when we leave them, Gilbert, Marty, and Elsa are all engaged on new books, though the war is still raging and there has been little change in world conditions.

In the absence of any recognisable theme the story is carried forward by the reproduction of newspaper headlines dealing with the progress of the war. These were, by most, well-remembered and therefore meaningful at the time of the publication of this work but they must inevitably, as the years pass, lose significance and therefore cause the work to lose coherence. This is true, too, of the rather crude pro-Russian propaganda which presents itself as a possible explanation of the novel's existence. Every opportunity is taken of presenting a point of view which was, for a short time and under unusual circumstances, generally acceptable. The ideas expounded by the author were not new at the time she wrote this book. On the contrary they were, in large part, the views of a considerable proportion of the population. But changing circumstances have considerably reduced the general acceptability of these views and the author, however firm her faith, would scarcely express her beliefs in the same terms today. In any case the propaganda is too obvious, too redolent of the leading articles of leftist periodicals. It descends at times to the levels of soap-box oratory.

As a piece of pro-Russian propaganda the whole

work is superfluous, for the author says nothing that had not been already said as well, or better, by leftist speakers and leftist papers.

But the novelist appears to tire, too, of this aspect of the work. It becomes a rather pathetic and unconvincing little tale of human infidelity and human weakness. There is a triangle made up of Gilbert Massey, Elsa Kaye and Phyllis Massey. Gilbert Massey and Elsa Kaye seem quite disinterested participants, Phyllis Massey too dull and hysterical to have any appeal to the reader. The situation reaches its inevitable and rather inconsequential conclusion. Gilbert is quite illogically lifted from the role of 'that man' to that of 'Dear Gilbert.' The reader is left quite unenlightened as to the feeling in the matter of either Elsa Kaye or Gilbert Massey.

This is essentially a novel dealing with people and the background has no direct bearing on the events of the story. It is interesting to note, however, that the climax of the story, as was the climax of "Tomorrow and Tomorrow," is the submarine raid made by the Japanese on Sydney Harbour. In M. Barnard Eldershaw's novel the incident is exaggerated beyond recognition. But its use by two novelists is rather significant. It strengthens the impression that one gets, that, in the production of our literature, our novelists have made the most of our misfortunes.

"Prelude to Christopher" displays much finer craft

craftsmanship in its construction. There is a definite plot into which are woven two distinct but inter-connected themes. The first is the sociological theme dealing with Nigel Hendon's island experiment. The second, which deals with the right of a person who could be the victim of congenital insanity, to lead a normal life, is a sociological problem as far as the island experiment is concerned, but predominates throughout the story as a definitely personal problem. This is the dominant theme of the work. The sociological aspects are of secondary importance.

Despite its construction this is not a satisfying work. Its defects are, however, not so obvious as are those of "The Little Company." The sociological and psychological problems of congenital insanity are beyond the comprehension of the general reader. Yet, because the author herself has left the question unanswered, the reader must decide for himself whether the insanity of Linda Hendon was congenital and inevitable or whether it was brought about by the circumstances of the life. The answer to this question is of vital importance in assessing the literary value of this work.

If the heroine is the predestined victim of congenital insanity, the author is guilty of a type of confidence trick. The bait which lures the reader onward is the question, "Will Linda Hendon finally become insane?" Throughout the whole narrative runs the suggestion, not explicitly stated but undoubtedly intended to influence the

reader, that, despite the evidence of her thoughts and actions, Linda is not going insane, that her fears are groundless, that she may cast from her all the nagging doubts and emerge as a normal, happy woman. There are few normal, happy women in the novels of Eleanor Dark, and Linda Hendon has less chance than most of achieving that happy state. Therefore the reader is justifiably indignant when, at the close of the work, he finds that the novelist's technique in holding his interest has been to make him doubt what he should have known was inevitable. The suggestion that Linda was not insane comes from her husband. It is his faith in his wife's sanity which really misleads the reader. Yet the reader finds at the close of the work that actually he has no such faith. His sending Kay to see that Linda does his mother no harm is proof of that. This is the basis of the deception which is imposed on the reader. If Nigel's belief in his wife's present or ultimate sanity is false, or deliberate self-deception which does not stand up to its first real test, the reader, having been given no inkling of this, feels himself treated with scant courtesy.

But if the insanity which finally overwhelms Linda Hendon is not congenital, but the result of the circumstances of her life, the novel must be regarded as structurally sounder and the problem it deals with more profound. The question then is, whether she could, under other circumstances have led a normal life. Was Nigel's refusal to have children

by Linda an adherence to a principle or the expression of a doubt ? Was it the factor which decided her ultimate fate? Is it possible that, had Nigel's faith in her sanity been stronger, he would have undone the harm that had been done by her fiendish uncle, and by the knowledge of her father's collapse?

This would open up the whole question of whether, and to what extent, congenital insanity is brought about by heredity, or by atmosphere, environment and fear. It is a deep problem and the novelist who wishes to make it the theme of his work must have a specialized knowledge of the subject. The theory that what appears to be the inevitable result of heredity may, under different circumstances, be avoided, would be a powerful theme for a competent writer to handle. Unfortunately Eleanor Dark seems to have no definite view on the subject and, because of her indecision, a work which has in it the possibilities of greatness is allowed to become vague, unsatisfying and needlessly depressing.

An important event in the process of the general collapse is the failure of the island experiment. The reader is given very inadequate grounds for believing that the fiasco which terminates this "brave new world" is a logical outcome of events on the island. As far as the reader can gather - the details are extremely vague - the community progresses happily and successfully enough till there arises in some members the desire to answer the call to war of the Australia they have left. Hendon says, logically enough, "Why ask me?

I can't stop you." It is inconceivable that this should have resulted in a scene of senseless mob violence and destruction, culminating in the murder of Pen. Surely, when the selection was made of the physically and mentally fit, mentally fit should have implied more than not having had relatives or ancestors who had been certified as insane. For a planned society such as this, being mentally fit should surely have demanded that a person be of average, or above average, intelligence. And, not forgetting the astounding examples of mob psychology that have been witnessed, it does not seem credible that people of average intelligence would have acted as these people did, - leastwise, not for the reasons given by the author. It is suggested that Hendon's marriage to Linda was the underlying cause of the failure. This seems unlikely. It is improbable, in the first place, that Hendon would not have known that the brother of a famous scientist like Hamlin was insane. But, granting the possibility of this, it is logical that, loving Linda as he did, he should have taken her with him to the island. He was faithful to the principle of his plan in that he refused to have children by her. Any normal person, under normal conditions, would have understood his predicament and accorded him the fullest measure of sympathy and respect. After all, the members of this society were all volunteers. In the unlikely event of any of them having had wives in a position similar to Linda's they were under no compulsion to come to the island and leave them behind. Yet only in circumstances such as these would Hendon's

taking Linda with him seem to endanger the contentment of the community. It is more reasonable to believe that the resentment of Linda's presence was only the vocal expression of a more deep-seated discontent Jealousy, dislike of authority, resentment of an inferior position would be more satisfying explanations of the hatred and violence that ended the experiment.

Whatever explanation of the failure of this ideal community is accepted by the reader the conclusion to be drawn from this section of the work is obvious. There are so many pitfalls, in the paths even of the wary, that it is not possible for human beings to organize and maintain a social system under which they can live comfortably and happily. Eleanor Dark is not alone among Australian novelists in subscribing to this theory, but fortunately the belief is not so prevalent in more real walks of life.

The same author's "Return to Coolami" is a slighter work but one in happier vein. The theme is the rather hackneyed one of the marriage of convenience which turns out to be a true love match. It is not a marriage of convenience in the ordinary sense. The girl, the father of whose expected child is killed before the marriage takes place, accepts the offer of a disapproving elder brother to give a name and a home to his brother's child. The eternal triangle is given an unusual twist in that one of the three leading characters is dead before the story opens.

It is an improbable and yet a satisfying story. It unfolds during a two-day car journey from Sydney to "Coolami," a station in the back country of New South Wales, and therefore appears peculiarly restricted in both time and space. This restriction, however, is not real for Eleanor Dark indulges the novelist's privilege of juggling with both the clock and the calendar, and the story in actuality covers much more than the two-day journey. Interspersed with, and giving meaning to the events of the trip is the recapitulation of an orderly progression of memories. The temporal sequence of these reminiscences is of the utmost value to the story-teller but, of course, quite at variance with what would actually happen.

It is improbable that the events which constitute the plot of this novel would happen or that, if they had happened, that they would have had such ultimately happy consequences. But the author has been successful in making the reader believe that they did happen and, in the contriving of this, she is in the favoured position of having the reader whole-heartedly on her side. This is no small consideration in that all-important relationship between the author and the reader.

"Return to Coolami" is a distinctly personal novel in which the background is incidental. There are brief, though authentic, glimpses of suburban and station life, but they are never of a nature to take the reader's attention away from the central characters.

An entirely different approach has been adopted by K. S. Prichard in her trilogy dealing with the Western Australian goldfields. "The Roaring Nineties" is the first of this trilogy of which the other two novels are "Golden Miles" and "Winged Seeds." Of "The Roaring Nineties" the author says:- "In this story of the gold fields of Western Australia I have tried to tell, not only something of the lives of several people, but to give also the story of an industry." "The story," she says, "grew from the reminiscences of two people I have called Dinny Quin and Sally Gough. The incidents of their lives are authentic, and other characters have their counterparts among pioneers of the gold-fields, although for the usual reasons it has been necessary to avoid being photographic."

The reader will find little reason to doubt the authenticity of the author's portrayal of the opening up and development of the gold-fields of Kalgoorlie and Coolgardie. Here, as in other of her work, the author has shown herself a master in the re-creation of the physical background of her novel. Her success is due, not so much to the brilliance of her pen, as to her intimate and detailed knowledge of the scenes she depicts. This book gives, of the early days in the gold-fields, a far more vivid picture than a purely historical account could give. The author is concerned chiefly with the prospectors and miners and their points of view predominate. The mining companies are treated with little sympathy, being invariably depicted as the dishonest and inveterate enemies

of the working men.

But the reader who seeks in a novel an absorbing story will find this work disappointing. The novel is loosely constructed and the story too fitful to hold the interest of the reader. As with the other two novels of the trilogy Sally Gough is the central figure, and the plot, in so far as it exists, is the story of her life. It is quite obvious however, that K.S.Prichard's primary concern was to tell the story of the industry, rather than to build around a central character, a novel dealing with the industry. It is questionable whether works which are as loosely constructed as this trilogy can rightly be regarded as novels. The author has largely disregarded the accepted principles which govern the structure of a novel.

There are no distinguishable crises in the work, nor is there a climax or a conclusion. Dinny Quin can scarcely be regarded as a central character, yet the concluding paragraph appears to exalt him to that position.

"He stood a moment, a slight, intrepid figure, looking out over the moonlit plains to where the grey-dark scrub stretched away inland and the mirages quivered on endless horizons. Then he turned, the quirk of a smile on his wizened face, jerked his head, and limped away: S'long! "

Though there is something in this of an impressionistic picture of the eternal prospector, it is scarcely a satisfying conclusion to the work, nor an apt reflection of its general tenor.

Sally Gough is not a heroine in the accepted sense. She is the central character only because she figures more prominently in the work than do other characters. The story does not revolve round her. Indeed all reference to her could be deleted and the more important part of the work, the story of the gold-fields, would be unaffected. The author finds it convenient to forget her for four or five consecutive chapters while she delves into the struggle between the prospectors and the mining companies.

A good deal of the earlier part of the work is composed of the reminiscences of the pioneer prospectors. These are interesting in themselves and the numerous incidents provide background and atmosphere, but, if there were a well-defined story to hold the reader's interest, it would be unpardonably interrupted by these anecdotes.

More tedious are the passages, running at times into chapters, of purely factual information, which have no bearing whatever on the story of Sally Gough. Passages such as the following become increasingly frequent in the latter part of the work.

" Meanwhile Great Boulder shares and the shares of half a dozen other mines along the Boulder lead were falling. Quotations were half what they were six months ago. One or two shrewd shareholders had started an investigation and blown the gaff.

" The Great Boulder Company had found money, £20,000 to finance the Milling Company. They held big wads of

shares and were using the Milling Company to bleed shareholders of the Great Boulder.

At the same time, directors of the Great Boulder, as trustees for the shareholders, were drawing £4,500 a year between them, and were well supplied with vendor shares which cost them little or nothing.

"The Great Boulder is regarded as the pioneer Mining Company of Western Australia," said Billy Barnett when it came to a show-down. "It has paid magnificent dividends, and although the directors have given great credit for this, personally, I believe that God Almighty made the mine, and all the directors have done is to put a thirty stamp battery in it." "

Passages such as this, while admissible in a book which aims merely to describe and explain the opening up of the fields, should not figure too prominently in a novel. Nor does the interposing of a slang term or a christian name change purely factual information into creative literature. The introduction of large amounts of these semi-historical facts is particularly weakening in a novel when they relate to an aspect of the work which has no connection with the central characters. The whole point is that, had K.S.Prichard wished to write a novel dealing with the struggle between the prospectors and the companies, she should have placed her central characters in roles entirely different from those played by Sally and Morris Gough.

The next work of the trilogy, "Golden Miles," is

structurally sounder. The mining industry recedes into the background and allows Sally Gough to take her place as the heroine. It is a far more personal novel than is "The Roaring Nineties," and holds the interest of the reader more than do either "The Roaring Nineties" or "Winged Seeds." It has neither the lengthy factual passages of the former nor the blatant political bias of the latter.

The aspects of the mining industry which figure most prominently are the gold stealing rackets and the fight put up by the unions for better and safer working conditions. The author has treated the gold stealing more successfully than she has any other aspect of the mining industry. She has given a clear and detailed description of the type of thing that went on, and she has made it the subject of an absorbing episode in which the leading characters play the leading parts. It was her failure to do this in "The Roaring Nineties" which made that novel so structurally defective.

Here, as in all other shady aspects of the mining industry, the author makes it quite clear that the chief villains are not the unfortunate miners but the directors and managers of the mines. There is too little subtlety in her propounding of this belief. There are lengthy passages of eulogy concerning the innate greatness of the miners. The reader does not question the existence of this greatness, but he is inclined to wish that the author had contrived it that he could have deduced it for himself. The same lack of

subtlety is evident in the author's treatment of both the war and the strikes. There is seen here the same political bias, which, in "Winged Seeds" is so heavily underlined that it becomes a major defect of the work.

The enmity between Paddy O'Cavan and the Gough family and the marriage and estrangement of Dick and Amy play a major part in this work. These are sustained throughout the work and give to it a cohesion and a grip on the reader's interest which the other two novels lack.

The physical background is not so fully drawn as it is in "The Roaring Nineties." This is due to the more personal nature of "Golden Miles" and to the fact that the setting of the work is Kalgoorlie itself rather than the mines. The social background is portrayed with reality and with clarity, even though with the political bias already mentioned.

By the time she has come to write the third of the trilogy, "Winged Seeds," K.S. Prichard appears to have exhausted her topic. This is even more structurally defective than is "The Roaring Nineties" and lacks the interest that the author has succeeded in giving to her first work. It carries forward the never very intriguing or arresting story of the Gough family, and, to be frank, the Gough family is not capable of carrying a trilogy. Both "The Roaring Nineties" and "Golden Miles" are mediocre novels, but "Winged Seeds" is so inferior even to these that one can only conclude that the author has allowed her political enthusiasms to over-ride all sense of literary values.

Strictly speaking, "Winged Seeds" is not a novel at all. There is no plot and but the most tenuous of themes - a few poor threads left hanging from her previous works. The real theme of the work, and the only apparent excuse for its existence, is the greater glory of the Communist Party in Australia, and particularly on the gold-fields.

But even this is not treated successfully. It is propaganda of the most blatant kind - the reiteration of ideas which have over the past three decades been ground out ad nauseam. There are huge sections, page after page, of undisguised political vituperation. There are quotations from political leaders, from Church fathers, from prominent statesmen and from newspapers, dragged in on the flimsiest possible excuses and with no regard whatever for the structure of the work. There is absolutely no subtlety in the exposition of the author's ideas, and the most intimate scenes provide her with the opportunities of advancing the creed she appears to embrace.

Several chapters are devoted to a bird's-eye view of the 1939-45 war. For most present-day readers this is an unnecessary recapitulation of events with which they are familiar. But the value of this particular section of the work will not increase as these events fade from the memory of the general reader. The author's interpretation of the events of this war adds no literary worth to a work which is too biassed to allow to it much historical value.

The background is that of "The Roaring Nineties"

and "Golden Miles," with Kalgoorlie, of course, grown from the primitive settlement, which was Hannan's of the first work, to a city of some magnitude. In "Winged Seeds" the tin and bag encampments of the unemployed replace the tents and shanties of the pioneer prospectors. There are considerable insertions of purely descriptive writing, which, admirable as they are as description, do little to advance the story.

A considerable section of this work deals, not with the gold-fields, but with the attitude of the Communist Party towards the last World War. Her interpretation of this, particularly in the early stages of the war, is very questionable, but her whole outlook is so obviously prejudiced that the reader is not in any danger of accepting her opinion as fact.

Since this is a novel of such indefinite construction there seems little reason why the author could not have leavened its mediocrity by the ameliorating grace of a happy ending. There is no reason why Billy Gough should have to die. His death adds nothing to the novel either as a vehicle for propaganda or as a description of the mining industry. Nor would his living have been in any way a defect in the general structure of the work. After all, this novel can scarcely be called a dramatic tragedy. The fact that, by Billy's death, Sally Gough is left, the last and alone, seems to be insufficient justification for it.

Moreover, the reader is given some reasons for believing that Billy Gough will still be found alive, but at the end of the book, and well after the cessation of hostilities, he is still missing, believed killed. This certainly adds a little interest to the closing chapters of the work. But the reader who ploughs through several chapters of propaganda only to find that his quest has been in vain feels that he has been the victim of a rather poor type of practical joke.

The characterisation is not a strong point. It is at once too flamboyant and not sufficiently delicate. It is superficial and artificial and seldom gets beneath the skin of the character. It is certain that K.S.Prichard's reputation as our foremost novelist is not based upon this trilogy.

Certainly, here, as in other novels of hers, she shows herself a master of the intimate details of the physical background of her works. The amount of research which precedes any one of them must be prodigious. But her treatment of persons is not successful and there is a certain touch of hardness in all her characterisation. There is, too, repeatedly evident throughout her writing, an immaturity of style. She keeps telling her readers what a competent author should not need to tell them.

Though in both "Golden Miles" and "Winged Seeds" war plays a prominent part, the actual fighting is not dealt with. It is the effect of the war on the Australians and

particularly the Australians of the gold-fields which is K.S.Prichard's primary concern.

A novel of much purer quality is Leonard Mann's "Flesh in Armour." This is the finest war novel yet produced by an Australian author. It is, too, one of the most carefully constructed of our Australian novels. It is based on the First World War, but this is used only as a background for the tragedy which springs directly from the characters of Frank Jeffreys and Charlie Bentley. Jeffreys was a quiet, over-sensitive person, unworldly, introspective and too keenly aware of his own deficiencies. The war to him was a protracted agony from which he could gain no relief in the comradeship of his fellows. As a soldier and a hero he felt himself a complete failure and this to him was something more bitter than it would have been to a less idealistic person. Charlie Bentley was an entirely different person, considerably younger than Jeffreys and a great deal more confident of himself. He lacked, and failed to appreciate, the finer qualities of the older man. Both knew Mary Hatton. To Bentley she was the means of ridding himself of the inferiority he had always felt in the company of his more sexually experienced mates. There was love on neither side but he continued to write to her chiefly because his inexperience would not allow him to be entirely casual about his first affair. Frank Jeffreys loved her. She was, to him, all that his timid, romantic and idealistic nature had

envisaged as the perfect example of womanhood.

It was ironical, but not entirely coincidental, that two such opposing characters should have quarrelled over the same woman. Bentley, with his immaturity and lack of insight, was the very type of character with whom it was most unfortunate that Jeffreys should clash. Yet, even though Jeffrey's defeat was the more bitter because he saw in Bentley the qualities he knew himself to lack, it was the inexperience of both men which really caused the tragedy. Bentley, his nerves frayed by prolonged exposure to danger, found Jeffrey's 'pinching' of his girl an affront to his newly-found male pride. In his attempt to save his pride and to get even with Jeffreys he shattered the latter's flawless image of Mary Hatton. This, coming on top of the recent realisation of his abject cowardice, completely broke Jeffreys. He went quietly away and blew himself to pieces.

The characters in this work are real, -distinct without being exaggerated. There is cohesion and a well-conceived and carefully developed plan. Incidental tragedies, like the deaths of Fred Rogan and Jim Blount are there, not to depress the reader, but to emphasise the mental anguish of Frank Jeffreys, and to prepare the reader for the tragedy of his death. Character and incident, the one dependent upon the other, lead directly to the destruction of Jeffreys, which is both the result, and a solution, of his unequal struggle against the forces which the war brought into his life.

One criticism which might be levelled at this work is that it dwells too much on the evil aspects of war. For, though war breaks many men, it leads others to a fuller realisation of their own capabilities. It promotes self-respect as well as destroying it; it brings to light the finer, as well as the baser qualities of man. These are truisms which it is unlikely that the author has overlooked. Here such criticism is scarcely just, because the author has set out, not to present a balanced picture of the vices and virtues of war, but to show the tragic effects it can have on the life of an individual such as Jeffreys.

The background, particularly the portrayal of the trenches and of trench warfare, is very fine, and shows clearly that the author has an intimate knowledge of the scenes he describes. The background is not merely a setting but plays a definite part in the events of the novel.

The rather condescending attitude of the Australians to the British troops is brought out clearly. Unfortunately, it also becomes clear that this attitude is shared by the author. On the fleeting occasions when the British come into the story, they are invariably depicted as a somewhat inferior race. The author ridicules mercilessly the snobbery and class distinction of certain aspects of English life, and in doing so unhappily creates the impression that Australians are beyond such petty weaknesses.

The same setting, the trenches in France in the

First World War, is used for the closing scenes of another Australian novel, "Boomerang." In this work Helen Simpson has proved herself a competent novelist. She is a woman of education, of mature outlook, and with a delicate and fascinating sense of humour. Sharp and arresting touches of cynicism accentuate the appeal of the novel. Moreover, Helen Simpson has an excellent style of writing - clear, pleasant, with none of those amateurisms and conscious strivings for effect, which mark the works of so many other of our novelists.

Structurally the novel is loose, being one of neither character nor incident, but having a balance of both. Its conclusion - and its name - puts it vaguely in the category of "the wheel has come full cycle" novels, though the closing words, "a road that led back to safety - safety! and all the weariness of beginning again," must, of necessity, refer to the life of Clothilde and not to the cycle begun and ended with the Chateau Mortemart-en-Artois. This device is not a new one. The return to Artois, "where we started from," provides a convenient and neat closing scene - that is all. The value of the book does not lie in any such superficial device.

The theme of the novel is at times scarcely discernible. It is a series of incidents in the lives of the Boissy family, beginning with the eccentric and flamboyant Auguste-Anne and ending with his great-grand-daughter Clothilde Boissy who tells the tale in the first person.

There is a certain causal sequence in the chain of events, due sometimes to character, sometimes to incident, sometimes to a combination of both. This gives some cohesion to a work of which cohesion is one of the minor virtues.

The greatness of the work lies in the author's treatment of the many only slightly connected events which constitute the novel. There is, indeed, material here for quite a number of novels. The work is, in fact, a series of novelettes based on the Boissy family, and though the structure of the novel is loose, the structure of the component parts is most definite. Each incident is treated separately, each having its opening, its climax and its denouement. Each is satisfactorily rounded off before the author passes on to the next. Helen Simpson exploits a series of what the instructors in the art of short story writing would call "powerful situations." They form the basis of such episodes as the supplanting of Yellow Mary by Auguste-Anne's newly and strangely - acquired wife, Bella - an extremely improbable incident, but it makes delightful reading; the circumstances leading to the death of Gustave-Felicite; the recovery of the treasure of San Ildefonso; the Martina Fields episode. Though the Boissys are always present, the leading characters change. Now it is Auguste-Anne, now Gustave Felicite. Sometimes, as with Martina Fields, the leading character is not even a Boissy. Despite their intrinsic completeness, few chapters could be omitted without making a great difference to the structure of the work

or the lives of the characters. The Martina Fields incident, for example, has recurrent repercussions throughout the work and was the cause of first, the betrothal of Clothilde and Lord Frome, and again, under different circumstances, of their marriage. The quarrel of Jacques-Marie and Gustave-Felicite was directly responsible for the events leading both to the death of Gustave-Felicite and to the death of Rudd. Though the death of each of these characters satisfactorily closes an episode in the novel, the effects of their deaths are seen later in the lives of other characters.

All the characters, with the exception of Clothilde Boissy, are essentially flat characters. There are two reasons for this. First, the various characters hold the limelight for a short period only, and, secondly, the events in which they figure do not call for characters which are drawn in the round. True, with Laura and her daughter Philomena we meet them as young women and later in their seventies. But in neither case is there development of character. We know neither of them well enough to assess the probability of their becoming as they were in their old age.

The character of Clothilde Boissy is difficult to assess. Since the reader is closely in touch with her from her youth till her early forties, one would expect considerable development. There is development but it is predominantly physical. The woman who visits the Somme battlefront is quite definitely matronly and yet this gradual transformation

has taken place without any obvious direction from the author. The change from the young girl to the middle-aged woman is gradual and yet the reader is always conscious of it.

There is no corresponding change in character. The young girl who uses a stable boy's expression to get rid of her cousin Georgette is essentially the same person who visits the Australian trenches. This is not a defect. There need not be any noticeable change in character. Moreover this book is written in the first person and the reader sees Clothilde only as she reveals herself, or as the incidents of which she tells reveal her. Though there is a certain flamboyancy in the drawing of the minor characters - Auguste-Anne, Martina Fields, Mr. Rudd and Gloria Jebb, for example - the drawing of the heroine is particularly reticent. It is slightly surprising, though gratifying, to hear her say, on the occasion of her being invited to the captain's table, "The Captain looked at me with attention, and I have always had, if people will only put me at my ease by admiring me, the Boissy aptness of phrase." Of this aptness the reader is given abundant evidence at later stages in the work. Despite the lack of any great depth, the characterisation of Clothilde Boissy is strong and sound. She is sufficiently interesting to carry a rather lengthy story, and her character is such that it makes the rather unusual events of the novel credible.

Each incident of the work has its own setting.

There are consequently rapid, numerous and diverse changes of scene. In all cases the setting strikes the note most appropriate to the event. Thus Auguste-Anne's island is bizarre and colourful, the trenches stark and grim. The background is always subsidiary to the events and the characters. Sydney, as portrayed by this author, could well be any other Australian city. The outback, where the Boissys make their home, takes a rather un-Australian colour from the very un-Australian Gustave-Felicite.

It is fairly safe to say that this novel could have been written by an author who was not an Australian. There may have been slight differences, but its general tenor, and the qualities which lift it above the standards of mediocrity would not have been affected. Since, however, it is written by an Australian, has a heroine who is an Australian, and is set, in part, in Australia, one is justified in claiming it as an addition to our literature. The same claim could scarcely be advanced with regard to other books by the same author.

A novel with a far more distinctively Australian setting is Frank Dalby Davison's "Manshy". This work traces the fortunes of a red heifer which has early in life acquired an acute dread of all human contact. But the critic who has dismissed this work as 'just a story about a cow' is very wide of the mark. In the first place it is a remarkably

clear, faithful and unemotional description of the Australian beef-producing industry.

The background is an integral part of the story and has been drawn clearly and realistically. The author's style is simple and vigorous and the events are described with a pleasing economy of words.

The strength of Davison's novel, however, lies not in the fidelity he has preserved in presenting the emotional reactions of a heifer but the extent to which the animal has become a human being while still retaining the outward form of a heifer, and performing only those actions which a heifer would conceivably perform. It is very doubtful whether the animal would have been actuated by the sharply defined emotions or the clarity of reasoning with which the author has endowed his unusual heroine. The reader finds himself moved by such sympathies as would, in fact, be extended only to another human being.

"Manshy" is a powerfully written work and, despite its brevity, a valuable contribution to Australian literature. A close study of it will reveal some extent of the divergence between Australian literature and other branches of English literature.

Descriptions of phases of life other than pastoral are found in the novels of K.S.Prichard, Kylie Tennant and Vance Palmer. K.S.Prichard has produced other novels which are of much greater literary value than any of the novels of

her trilogy. "Coonardoo" is a moving study of the havoc that close contact with the whites has made of the lives of the aborigines. It deals too with the problem of mutual attraction between black and white and the evil effects of such attraction when opposed by an all-powerful social convention.

"Haxby's Circus" is concerned chiefly with the experiences of the members of a small travelling circus. Here again the author displays a mastery of the intimate details of the scenes she describes. Her portrayal of circus life both inside and outside the 'big top' is vivid and realistic. In this work, too, she has made the scenes she describes a more integral part of the plot of her novel than is the case with other of her works. Here her canvas is smaller and more sparsely peopled and consequently greater attention is paid to the central characters. This gives strength to the work.

The plot is slight but sufficient to hold the reader's interest. It traces the varying fortunes of Georgina Haxby, the heroine of the work. There is a definite clash of character which adds depth and interest. This clash centres chiefly around the struggle between Georgina and her father Dan Haxby. To Dan. Haxby the show was paramount, while to Georgina the welfare of the members of her family was most important. The two frequently found themselves violently opposed to each other and their clashes constitute the most profound and interesting sections of the

work.

Unhappily, the rather casual characterisation of Dan. Haxby robs this struggle of a good deal of its poignancy and dramatic effect. Haxby appears generally as a bluff, hearty and thoughtless fellow, wrapped up in the circus and determined, at all costs, to keep faith with the public. On closer inspection, however, he emerges as an inhuman monster, callously indifferent to the welfare, health and even the lives of his wife and family. The fact that this is not the impression that the reader gets of him is due, not to any sympathetic depth of treatment of his character, but rather to a too superficial presentation of him.

The reality of Georgina Haxby fades with the progress of her physical and emotional deformity. She is so definitely not an ordinary human being at the time of her love affair with Mart Bergen that this becomes little more than a curious incident. At the end of the novel she is to the reader just what she is to the spectators - a grotesque figure masquerading as a clown. It is difficult to see just what the author means when she claims that in thus exposing herself to the mirth of the public Georgina was working out her own redemption.

There is in certain respects a similarity between the works of K.S. Prichard, Vance Palmer and Kylie Tennant. All bring to their work an intimate knowledge of the background of their works and of the lives of the types of people they portray. All three at times allow the theme of their

works to overshadow the characters. None of them is particularly successful in the drawing of character, though all, and particularly Vance Palmer, are adept at the creation of atmosphere. They all take their characters from among the less privileged and poorer members of society.

They all aim, in most of their works, to portray the way of life of certain sections of society. Anyone wishing to gain an intimate knowledge of the timber industry in the south west of Western Australia could do little better than to read K.S.Prichard's "Working Bullocks." If the literary value of a novel were dependent solely upon the clarity and reliability with which it describes an industry, the value of this work would be high. But a great novel must, whatever its aim, be primarily concerned with men and women. Both K.S.Prichard and Vance Palmer seem to confuse ordinary people with uninteresting people. Their characters are, all too often, insipid and this detracts considerably from both the value and the interest of their works.

The characters of "Working Bullocks" are extremely uninteresting. Red Burke, even when afflicted by the misfortunes which figure so largely in the work of K.S.Prichard, arouses in the reader little of either sympathy or admiration. Tessa is definitely a type. She is any vain, selfish, well-dressed, fluffy-headed, second-rate young woman. The heroine Deb, is the most lifeless of them all, being remarkable chiefly for her calico underwear and a certain long-suffering bovine quality.

In Vance Palmer's "Golconda" neither Macy Donovan nor Neda Varnek is really successfully drawn. Donovan is not sufficiently interesting to be worthwhile. He is probably a faithful representation of the ordinary individuals of whom he is a prototype. But as A.A. Phillips has suggested an author is not entitled to bore his readers in order to present a boring individual, particularly when that individual is the hero of the work. With Neda Vardek the author goes to the other extreme. She transcends reality. She floats through the novel like a disembodied wraith, a vagrant spirit having but casual contact with solid humanity. This would not matter so much if the reader were not expected to be as alarmed, as is Macy Donovan, when Neda elopes with the equally ethereal Farelli.

Nor are the principal characters in the same author's novel "The Passage" quite successful as personalities. Linda and Clem are both too vaguely drawn to capture the imagination. There is a dreamy unreality about the marriage of Linda and Lew Callaway, consequently Linda's subsequent unfaithfulness lacks significance. As was the case with Macy Donovan, neither Hughie nor Lew Callaway are very interesting people. Hughie is a noisy, ineffectual little fellow, too jarring to call for sympathetic understanding, while Lew never seems to emerge fully from the background of a sleepy, sub-tropical fishing port.

Yet neither "Golconda" nor "The Passage" can be dismissed as a second-rate work. The first is an excellent

portrayal of the opening up and development of a mining town, the second paints a realistic picture of life in a township such as "The Passage."

Kylie Tennant's "The Battlers" gives a vivid description of the life of the unemployed who wandered from dole town to dole town during the depression of the early thirties. There is no definite plot in the novel. The events follow the travellers as they wend their partly-directed, partly-aimless way across the back country of New South Wales. Yet there is sufficient cohesion of incident to hold the interest of the reader.

The characters are over-exaggerated. There is no development of, or insight into, the characters of Dancy Smith, Dora Phipps, Snow or The Busker. The reader knows them no better at the close of the work than he did on first making their acquaintance. With a few bold strokes the author has given them form rather than personality, and has then concentrated on their antics. They never arouse in the reader the sympathy which unfortunates such as these would deserve, because they lack the humanity necessary to give poignancy to their suffering. Dora Phipps, for instance is utterly unreal and unconvincing, unless she is mentally deranged, in which ^{case} her inclusion is in rather poor taste. The reader never becomes sufficiently familiar with the woman in Dancy Smith to be able to forget the absence of her 'teef.' Yet these physical imperfections do disappear, in real life, as a deeper understanding of character develops

There is a danger of judging too hastily, and consequently unfairly, Kylie Tennant's "Ride on Stranger." This appears at first to be a novel peopled by social, intellectual and physical oddities. Closer inspection reveals, however, a greater depth of insight into character than is found in any other of her works. Certainly the probing below the surface brings to light more that is discreditable than creditable. But that is quite in accordance with the theme of the work which appears to be the portrayal of the shallowness, the falseness and uselessness of a great deal of the earnest work which aims at the betterment of man's existence. Shannon Hicks is changed somewhat too suddenly from an awkward and plain country girl into a poised, attractive and intellectually mature young woman. Once the change is made, moreover, it is complete, and the heroine remains at the same stage of development throughout the greater part of the novel. Kylie Tennant has put herself under the prodigious handicap of presenting as her central character a young woman of no definite convictions who spends her life in a fruitless search for an ideal, the nature of which neither she, nor the reader, is aware. She finds, and finally accepts, disillusionment. It says something for the skill of the author that she has built round such a heroine a readable novel.

With Kylie Tennant, K.S. Prichard and Vance Palmer the chief defect in their works seems to be that they write always from the position of observer rather than of

participant.

At the close of "Golconda" occurs this passage. Palmer is speaking of Golconda itself.

" Staring down on it, Donovan was struck sharply by its insignificance, and that of the crawling life about its base, against the vast background of sky and desert. A few tiny figures moved along the hot threads of track; they greeted one another like ants and passed on; trucks no bigger than beetles stirred up a faint dust. He felt a curious change in the focus of his inner vision. Was this the place whose people and future prospects had occupied his whole mind? Had he till yesterday been one of those ants, creeping along in the shadow of their rock, thinking their patch of sand was the world, making a song about the arrival of a few newcomers, getting worked up when someone died? It was a joke when you could look down from a height and see the place for what it was. A little ant-hill rising out of the hot, crumbly dust."

This is not of course an admission on Vance Palmer's part that he writes from this point of view. But, consciously or unconsciously, he does do so, as do K.S. Prichard and Kylie Tennant. Though from this height might be produced fine descriptive work, the production of good literature demands that the human being should become something a great deal more significant than an ant, and the author must bring to his aid powers other than that of minute observation.

Background, whether social, historical or physical is never sufficient to carry a novel. A novel must deal with people and the human element must be more important than the background.

M. Barnard Eldershaw in "Tomorrow and Tomorrow" makes an apt though unintentional comment on much of our sociological literature.

"What about the story?" Ord asked. "It seems to have bogged down in world history. Did it ever get out again?"

"The story goes on, but as the book rises to its crisis it shifts into the major theme of the whole community. It is people in a context and the context grows more and more important. They are only little fishes in a maelstrom."

And Ord answers for the reading public,
"I'm fond of fish. What happened to that poor fish, Ally?"

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