

**MALE AND FEMALE RELATIONSHIPS**

**IN AUSTRALIAN FICTION**

**1917-1956**

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written requirements for the degree of Master  
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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this thesis is the product of my original work except where due acknowledgement has been made through the footnotes and bibliography.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

My purpose in this study is to examine a number of Australian novels which portray love relationships between men and women, and to suggest some reasons for the quality of these relationships as fictionally depicted. Traditionally, Australian culture has been male dominated, therefore, central to the culture are stereotypes of the masculine and the feminine. Sexism in Australia and the gender stereotypes which legitimize it have been recognised generally both by historians and sociologists. Miriam Dixson and Anne Summers have presented strong analyses of the effects of sexism in Australian society, both past and present;<sup>1</sup> even a non-feminist historian such as Manning Clark notes not only male-dominance, but the development of social humiliations to which men subject women.<sup>2</sup> Manning Clark traces a possible connection between this male dominance and the disproportionate number of male to female convicts. Dixson argues that the male convicts demeaned their female

1. See Miriam Dixson, The Real Matilda -- Woman and Identity in Australia 1788 to 1975, Melbourne, 1976.  
Anne Summers, Damned Whores and God's Police -- The Colonization of Women in Australia, Melbourne, 1977.
2. Manning Clark, A Short History of Australia, Melbourne, 1981, p.109.

counterparts unconsciously as a means of compensating for their own lowly positions.<sup>3</sup> This, she argues, resulted in the majority of women in early generations of white settlement internalizing a negative self-image as the defining trait of a sense of self, in contrast to the potential positive 'real' self which her humanist psychological orientation assumes. She attributes the main problem to the men who settled Australia as convicts, rejects, and negative and resentful administrators. Likewise Summers has posed a socialist-feminist analysis to identify the means of women's oppression in a patriarchal society.<sup>4</sup> She also argues that the problem lies with male power and female colonization.<sup>5</sup> But both writers recognise that women accept their inferior status within patriarchy unconsciously, and conform to patriarchal stereotypes of female sexuality.<sup>6</sup> Kay Schaffer has restated this case, though from the viewpoint of more recent developments of social theory which reject the assumption of a 'real' self.<sup>7</sup> Nevertheless, these and others recognize that sexism has existed in Australian culture since white settlement.

This sexism is shown in the depiction of love

3. Dixon, op.cit., p.60.

4. Summers, op.cit.

5. Ibid, Chapter 7, "A Colonized Sex".

6. Summers, loc.cit., Chapter 4, "The Ravaged Self", and Dixon, op.cit., Chapter 2, "Theories and Beginnings".

7. Kay Schaffer, Women and the Bush -- Forces of Desire in the Australian Cultural Tradition, Melbourne, 1988, p.69.

relationships in Australian fiction. However, I shall make a distinction between writing that depicts sexism critically as an element of Australian society/culture and writing that is informed by sexism in its depiction of love relationships. However, this is not a firm and definitive way of distinguishing between works, because they may contain elements of both factors.

In this regard I shall investigate the relationship between the general culture, with its traditionally sexist orientation, and the specific cultural form of literature. Karl Marx argued that "it is not the consciousness of men that determines their being, but, on the contrary, their social being that determines their consciousness."<sup>8</sup> I want to argue that the relationship between culture and social structure is significantly illustrated in the way that the traditionally patriarchal nature of Australian society is reflected in Australian literature. For instance, commenting on traditional Australian literature, Jeanne MacKenzie has written that in Australian literature one 'rarely' finds 'any expression of rich human emotion, of young love, or any profound relationship between two people of the opposite sex.

8. Karl Marx, from the "Preface" to A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy, as quoted in Rick Ryland (Ed.), Debating Texts -- A Reader in 20th Century Literary Theory and Method, Stony Stratford, England, 1987, p.202.



... "nearly all Australian fiction reveals some aspect of sexual loneliness".<sup>9</sup> In 1973 Max Harris agreed with this observation:

Geoffrey Dutton has examined the almost complete absence of amatory themes in Australian writing. As far as Australian writers are concerned, right up to modern times, male-female relationships have no potential literary substance. There are no Australian love-poems. There are few detailed studies of women in the Australian novel.<sup>10</sup>

Likewise, Fay Zwicky has discussed a poverty in male-female relationships shown in Australian novels.<sup>11</sup> I shall examine the implications of these claims specifically in regard to novels written between 1917 and 1956.

Leslie A. Fiedler has noted that the great American novelists have tended to avoid the passionate encounter of a man and a woman. Instead of mature women, they present monsters of virtue or bitchery, symbols of either the rejection or fear of sexuality.<sup>12</sup> As with later, more feminist oriented critics, Fiedler argues that the Pure Maiden image represents an insidious form of enslavement.

9. J. MacKenzie, Australian Paradox, Melbourne, 1961, as quoted in Miriam Dixon, The Real Matilda, Melbourne, 1976, p. 32.
10. Max Harris, The Angry Eye, Sydney, 1973, p. 41, as quoted in The Real Matilda, op. cit., pp. 32-33.
11. Fay Zwicky, "Speeches and Silences" in Quadrant Number 189, Vol. xxvii, No. 5, May 1983.
12. Leslie A. Fiedler, Love and Death in the American Novel, London, 1970, p.24.

The idealization of the female is a device to deprive her of freedom and self-determination; an attempt to imprison woman within a myth of Woman. The archetype is degraded to stereotype.<sup>13</sup> Literature has thus been more confident in its depiction of male-to-male relationships. Males are shown to join soul to soul, not body to body, and the love between males is depicted as superior to the ignoble lust of man for woman.<sup>14</sup> In some ways the development of Australian literature resembles that of America, but the causes and outcomes are quite different. Fiedler argues that the Protestant rejection of the Virgin created a need of a substitute notion of love sanctified by marriage, of the wife as a secular madonna who takes over special authority. The first American novels were influenced by these ideas from Europe.<sup>15</sup> From such beginnings there developed in the American novel gothic romance, horror, violence and a covert nihilistic and diabolic stance.<sup>16</sup>

Just as with American fiction, the absence of amatory themes has been a feature of Australian writing although this has not been as a consequence of religious forces. It has often been claimed that in Australian culture there is a general distrust of emotion and this has been reflected in

13. Ibid, p.65.

14. Ibid, p.343.

15. Fiedler, loc.cit., pp. 53-57.

16. Ibid, p.466.

the nature of the treatment of love relations in our literature. Many writers have depicted Australia as being without a soul. This may be because the Australian, as typified, reveals very little of self. D.H. Lawrence notes this trait in his novel Kangaroo. Today the Australian image has become that of the "ocker", often used for purposes of humour, but, in reality, one that many Australians can move in or out of according to the company.<sup>17</sup> Subterfuge like this is arguably a means of hiding self, suppressing emotion, and inhibiting meaningful relationships, especially between the sexes. This tendency may be seen as a consequence of both convictism and the gold rushes. Most convicts were unmarried, and the family lives of married Irish convicts were shattered by transportation.<sup>18</sup> The gold rushes led to men leaving families behind to seek their fortunes. Prostitution was rife on the gold fields as it had been in the earlier days of settlement, but this was a substitute that even widened the gap between men and women and made deep emotional involvement and love less likely. Psychologically, the gold rushes may have had a similar effect to war,

17. Peter Fitzpatrick, "Australian Drama: Images of a Society" in John Carroll (Ed.), Intruders in the Bush, Melbourne, pp. 160-161.

18. M. Clark: "The Origins of the Convicts Transported to Eastern Australia, 1787-1852", Historical Studies ANZ, vol. 7, nos 26 and 27, May and November, 1956.

L.L. Robson: The Convict Settlers of Australia, Melbourne, 1965.

A.G.L. Shaw: Convicts and the Colonies, London, 1966.

severing family relationships and bonding men together in mateship. If, as Marx proposed, social structures mould consciousness, both convictism and the gold rushes have had an influence on our culture and on the development of sexism within it. However, there may be some doubts that this historical influence would persist unless reinforced by subsequent social circumstances. The two depressions, the exploration and pioneering of the land, and Australia's involvement in wars have arguably all contributed to the continuation of a male-dominated society and it was from this culture that our artists emerged. In this thesis I shall seek to identify a relationship between this pattern in Australian culture, and its reflection in Australian fiction. Our literature has suggested covertly either the poverty in or the unimportance of relationships between men and women by omitting it as a major theme, by treating it as a major theme in a sexist way, or by treating the sexist social reality critically. I propose that there is a connection between the gender stereotyping portrayed and the understanding of male-female relationships that the novels reveal. Where there is strong gender stereotyping, the depiction of the problems in relationships is understood in a sexist manner. In contrast, Henry Handel Richardson's trilogy, The Fortunes of Richard Mahony, for example, is critical of gender stereotyping in a patriarchal society and the consequent lower status of women. Richardson is thus able to show the unsatisfactory nature of loving marriage relationship in a less sexist manner. Of course, I do not suggest that there was an absence of loving

relationships in Australian society itself. What can be argued is that writers, both male and female, have rarely given serious attention to the theme, or have done so in unsatisfactory ways, and that this fact reflects the nature of the culture from which this writing has sprung.

In evaluating any relationship between Australian culture and fiction, consideration needs to be given to the role and vision of the writer. There are differing ideas of literature from which I am drawing -- in particular, literature as inseparable from a social context, and literature as to some extent free of the dominant culture and capable of being detachedly critical. I have suggested that our history has had a bearing on our development and, in particular, our attitudes. Yet, as T.S.Eliot has pointed out, tradition cannot be inherited, because it involves a perception of the past and present. The writer writes not only with a sense of the present but of all literature ever written. This makes the writer traditional and at the same time conscious of his own place in time. Literature needs to be appreciated aesthetically in contrast or comparison with that which preceded it. The conscious present is an awareness of the past in a way that the past's awareness of itself cannot show.<sup>19</sup> Thus, when female authors of the 20s

19. T.S.Eliot, "Tradition and the Individual Talent", in Rylance (Ed.), op.cit., pp.7-8.

and 30s wrote of the inferior status of women, it was a perception of the past from the time they were writing, and it is significant that male authors still did not share that perception.

Eliot's argument that the author writes with a perception of the past interpreted in terms of the present is reinforced by Raymond Williams and many others, including the Marxist Levis Althusser, typical of the school of thought that sees literature as a vehicle of ideology. The influence of Marx and Foucault can be found in recent critical writings going under the guise of the "new historicism". Raymond Williams contends that literature cannot be separated from the general social process, and that most writing contributes to the effective dominant culture.<sup>20</sup> As noted before, Dixson, Summers and others have shown the dominant Australian culture to be patriarchal. Schaffer has used the propositions of Foucault to support the feminist view of literature as an agent of patriarchal ideology. He had argued that literary discourse can be both an instrument and an effect of power by at once transmitting and producing power.<sup>21</sup> I shall argue that much of the fiction published between 1917 and 1956 supports patriarchy. Literature may also express residual meanings and values from previous

20. Raymond Williams, "Base and Superstructure in Marxist Cultural Theory", in Rylance (Ed.), op.cit., p.213.

21. Schaffer, op.cit., pp. 80-81.

social formations, and emergent practices and meanings, which may be incorporated eventually into the culture. In this latter process, the dominant culture changes in many of its expressed features, but not in its essence.<sup>22</sup> Thus, after World War 11, some novels depict women with strong individuality, but the underlying assumptions still support patriarchy. A pertinent example of this is Patrick White's, The Aunt's Story.

In contrast to the theories of Eliot and Williams, there is also a body of opinion that literature is characteristically capable of providing a perspective of critical detachment from social ideologies. This viewpoint is characteristic of traditional humanist criticism, be this of the New Critical, Leavisite or Marxist varieties. New Criticism rejected the context in which novels were written, and, in the view of Drusilla Modjeska, its influence during the 50s may offer some reason why female writers of the thirties and the socialist realist writers of the forties and fifties have been afforded scant attention.<sup>23</sup> In the following chapters I shall investigate the application of the theories discussed to Australian fiction in the period to be studied.

22. Ibid, p.214.

23. Drusilla Modjeska, Exiles at Home, Melbourne, 1981, pp. 254-255.

Christina Stead and Henry Handel Richardson are two exceptions who escaped this fate.

Current Australian Feminist criticism is re-appraising the literature of the bush which is shown to be a means of reinforcing patriarchal ideology. Certainly the lack of love literature is reflected in the writing that expresses the rural myth. Up to and beyond 1917 there emerged in such literature an Australian 'type' or 'ideal'. The rural myth, even in the environment of the city or at war, was male-oriented just as society itself was, at least in terms of work, power, politics and finance.<sup>24</sup> The lower status of women is evident in the literature of the myth whose heroes are the bush men, Ned Kelly, and the male characters of Steele Rudd, Joseph Furphy, Henry Lawson and others. The larrikin, the AIF soldier, the urban and rural protagonists are all male. Some of the early female novelists attempted to depict women, but had to choose from the inferior roles of the bush women and the Aborigine (Coonardoo). The characters usually cope with or endure lives they have not chosen and do not enjoy. They are shown suffering extreme loneliness, as are the men. Yet generally, the men seek comfort in mateship, not with wives or lovers.

Kay Schaffer has recently reinterpreted the bush myth, by which national identity has been defined as a masculine construction, and stressed the implications of this for the

24. Summers, *passim*.



representation of women.<sup>25</sup> It is not that women are absent in ideas about our culture, but that the myth defines them in relation to the male. She argues that in the fiction of the bush, seldom are women portrayed in their own right, but rather in their relationships to men.<sup>26</sup> In the bush tradition, the land is the feminine other against which is set the heroic figure of the bushman.<sup>27</sup> Moreover, because the bush is shown as feminine, harsh, and unforgiving, women suffer the consequences of the metaphor.<sup>28</sup> The linguistic system itself defines women firstly as 'not men', then categorizes them as wives, mothers, lovers, daughters and sisters, instead of people in their own right. The self in culture is presented as male and women as individuals are subsumed into this category.<sup>29</sup> Thus, we have words such as 'mankind' which are presumed to include women.

Schaffer has built on the arguments of Dixon and Summers with a perception of the power of the linguistic signification of women.<sup>30</sup> She cites an example from Manning

25. Kay Schaffer, Women and the Bush -- Forces of Desire in the Australian Cultural Tradition, Melbourne, 1988, p.4.

26. Ibid, pp.62-63.

27. Schaffer, loc.cit., p.52.

28. Schaffer, loc.cit., p.4.

29. Ibid, p.10.

30. Ibid, p.70.

Most definitions of culture show it as a social attribute, a significant system, or better still, a system of significances.

See Jonathan Culler, Saussure, Glasgow, 1976;

Raymond Williams, Keywords, London, 1976.

Understanding can only occur where there is a mutual acceptance in interpreting signs, forms and symbols.

See Claudio Veliz, "A World Made in England" in Quadrant, March, 1983.

Clark, who shows woman gaining power and status bestowed on her by God, Moses, St Paul, and Australian men. Far from being autonomous to individual women, this status is confined to that of wife and mother, who replaces the 'natural' place of the absent bushman husband. Schaffer has suggested that in these roles the woman is only preserving a masculine status. She has argued further that Christianity, capitalism and patriarchy can be used to support and naturalize each other.

31

Feminist criticism resembles the Marxist approach because it is grounded in a perception of social disadvantage. But it differs in the sense that feminism confronts the experiences of women in a culture dominated by men. There are two types of feminist criticism; the first concerns woman as reader of male authors; the second concerns woman as author. Elaine Showalter called the first kind of analysis the feminist critique, a historical investigation of ideological assumptions in literature.<sup>32</sup> It includes the stereotypes of women, the omissions and misconceptions, and the absence of women in the histories written by men. The concerns of woman as writer include female creativity; the problems of sexism within language itself; women's literary

31. Ibid, pp. 71-72.

Schaffer quotes from C.M.H. Clark, A History of Australia vol.111, p.272, to illustrate her contention.

32. Elaine Showalter, "Towards a Feminist Poetics", in Rylance (Ed.), op.cit., p.236.

careers; literary history; and studies of female writers and their works.<sup>33</sup> the scientific criticism favoured by males rejects subjectivity; feminist criticism, on the other hand, elevates experience, and denies that it is emotional and irrational. Showalter argues that women are torn between a divided consciousness -- the one derived from male cultural institutions, the other from their female awareness and commitment.<sup>34</sup>

These interests and critical debates are relevant to the general understandings authors have of male-female relationships and sexist stereotypes, and how they are depicted in Australian fiction. It is relevant if men and women authors portray gender stereotypes from differing perspectives, or, indeed, if they depict the same stereotypes. The question I ask is, to what extent is Australian fiction a vehicle for the sexism in Australian culture, to what degree has it been able to offer a critical perspective, and in what ways are the answers to these questions apparent in the fictional treatment of love relationships? I have assumed that literature and culture interact, that one does not transcend the other. Given the patriarchal nature of Australian society, the establishment and even rightness of the associated values may permeate its literature.

33. Ibid.

34. Ibid, p.246.

In examining the love depicted between men and women in Australian literature, I have understood such relationships ideally to encompass much more than the sexual aspect. Among the intrinsic qualities I believe to constitute a loving relationship are heartfelt caring, open and deep communication leading to mutual understanding, and a genuine friendship and desire for togetherness. A non-Australian fictional example of such a loving relationship is to be found in that which developed between Emma and Mr Knightley in Jane Austen's Emma. Despite Emma's snobbishness, egotism, errors of judgement and self-delusion, her character begins to mature through her friendship with and eventual love of her greatest critic, Mr Knightley. Both suffer from mutual misunderstandings but, because of their unwavering friendship, they finally learn to communicate their feelings more openly and the quality of their relationship becomes more deeply loving. It is this aspect of friendship in love relationships that is absent in Australian fiction of the period under investigation.

Awareness of the work of female writers of the 30s and 40s was, until recently, obscured by the New Criticism. Many female novelists during the 1920s and 30s were concerned with social criticism of the inferior status of women. This contrasts with a relative neglect of such themes by male writers. Geoffrey Serle argues that the novelists up to 1939

provide a valuable historical record,<sup>35</sup> so the fact that the male writers of this period did not consider the status of women to be of serious importance may be significant. Nevertheless, in 1948 Patrick White made this the focus of his novel, The Aunt's Story.

I shall turn now to some general trends apparent in the depiction of male and female relationships in Australian fiction. Male authors are more obviously sexist in the ways they portray women. Between 1917 and 1939, male novelists tended to be critical of women and to vest the highest potential in the man. At the same time, they seem uncomfortable in their attitudes to the opposite sex, even lapsing into sheer exaggeration as with William Hay in The Escape of the Notorious Sir William Heans (and the Mystery of Mr Daunt), (1919), and Xavier Herbert in Capricornia, (1938), which I will discuss in some detail later. Hay's description of his heroine Matilda is so extreme as to be comical, and it reflects his own discomfort in relating to women. Herbert, too, lapses into exaggeration to explain Norman's response to Tocky as "the joys of Arcady". Vance Palmer critically portrays men's speech and behaviour towards women in a way which reveals (perhaps unconsciously) a puritanic view, one which is shared both by himself and his characters. He

35. Geoffrey Serle: From Deserts the Prophets Come, Melbourne, p.123.

describes women physically in terms that suggest such features are all-important, as in the following description of Anna in The Passage :

The shortening of her frocks revealed the fact that she had shapely feet and ankles, and in spite of all the hard work she had done, she had never let her figure go to pieces as Rachel had, pottering about among her melons in Uncle Tony's boots and carrying<sup>36</sup> buckets of water from the well by the creek.

These thoughts are as much Palmer's as they are Anna's. Palmer's attitudes are emerging in his own narration for certainly there is no sense of his criticism of them. Rachel's activities are trivialized and she is put down in terms of the physical. There is an element of detraction in Palmer's perceived importance of beauty and this reflects social attitudes. This is even more apparent in Patrick White's, The Aunt's Story.

Male authors of the period tend to categorize women far more rigidly and critically than their female counterparts. Their women tend to be either "good" or "bad", with no mitigating or softening portrayals. These attitudes are often only suggested through the nuances of phrasing. In The Passage, Palmer depicts Anna as the "good", long-suffering,

36. Vance Palmer, The Passage, Cheshire, Melbourne, p.93, 1957 edition used throughout my text.

uncomplaining wife and the concerned and loving mother:

An unsatisfactory man to live with, but if Lew's mother had found him so she had never admitted it while he was alive! She had enjoyed, like other people, his thin good-humour, his stories, and violin-playing, and had accepted his belief that life could be a long picnic in the sun if people didn't worry too much about time or money. (p.14)

"Cold out there waiting for the tide, Lew? Get your wet clothes off, and I'll have tea on the table as soon as you're ready ... you must be chilled to the bone." (p.53)

In contrast with this portrayal, Lena is an example of a "bad" wife, not only in Anna's eyes, but in the author's sustained depiction:

Before Lew had been married many weeks, Anna had formed her own judgment on the girl he had brought home, her sharp eyes missing nothing of Lena's laziness, the sketchy nature of her housework, her fondness for buying tinned things at the store rather than for cooking a real dinner in her own kitchen. (p.136)

Clearly Palmer depicts Lena as unbending and harsh:

A hardness, even hostility, came into her mind when she thought about Lew. (p.167)

In contrast with such attitudes towards women and men's relationship with them, Vance Palmer and others celebrate a nobility in man's relationship with the natural environment with which he must wage continual battle. It is this conflict which Kay Schaffer has demonstrated to be associated with the

concept of the female other. The important world in most novels written by males belongs to men. Vance Palmer seems to reassert a general male presentation of the inability of women to find enlightenment except through a man.

I propose that there is a relation between the stereotypical thinking of male novelists and their understanding of the problems in male-female relationships. With such thinking, male authors accept as unquestionably right that the male role is to provide well for his wife and be faithful to her, and the female role is not only to be faithful to her husband but completely supportive of his activities which are shown to be all important. It then follows that any failure in their relationship is the fault of the wife alone because she is not totally subordinate to and supportive of her husband. Stan and Amy Parker in The Tree of Man are examples of characters who are depicted in stereotypical terms and their relationship declines as a consequence. Both initially conform to the social expectations of their roles but they are nevertheless dissatisfied with each other and unfulfilled in their relationship. Yet author Patrick White clearly blames Amy for the deficiency and he elevates the potential of Stan and ennobles his vision. He does not recognise that the stereotyping of their roles has drawn them apart and hindered their ability to understand each other. Such thinking does not recognise the female need for self-identity and individuality, and consequently, the male character portrayed



neither recognises this nor realises his contribution to an inadequate relationship. Moreover, these attitudes are condoned by the author.

During the period between World Wars 1 and 2 male authors seldom focus on females. Their treatment mostly comes as a secondary interest to a theme grounded firmly in the male. Critic D.R. Burns noted that one "peculiarity" of Australian fiction from 1920 to the 70s is its concern with man's work, and he suggested that the novels of this period show Australia as a man's country.<sup>37</sup> Burns was examining the directions taken by Australian fiction as a whole. There was an exception of note after World War 2, when a male writer, Patrick White, focused with sympathy and understanding on a female character in The Aunt's Story. Yet even though White suggests that Theodora reaches the transcendental experience permitted only to males in the novels they write, he allows this only at the expense of her sanity. The inference is that there must be a punitive consequence for a female who trespasses into the male domain. Rather than seriously challenging the stereotypical gender portrayals so evident in earlier Australian fiction, Patrick White has thus confirmed them. Despite his sympathetic treatment of Theodora, he has shown how the characteristics that set her apart from the cultural female stereotype deny her the possibility of a loving relationship with a male.

37. D.R. Burns, The Directions of Australian Fiction 1920-1974, Melbourne, 1975, pp.1-2.

My next concerns are the attitudes shown by female novelists of the period. I shall investigate the extent to which gender stereotyping is the object of their critique, the degree to which they are themselves complicit with such stereotypes, and the effects such stereotypes may have on male and female relationships. One might not guess the general position of women from the number of novels written by females. Historian Geoffrey Serle acknowledged that most of the best novelists during the 20s and 30s were women and that they accounted for almost half of the novels published.<sup>38</sup> Fiction of the thirties portrays patterns of behaviour between males and females living in a patriarchal society. Some writers were unambiguously critical of the position of women. Miles Franklin, Dymphna Cusack, Eleanor Dark, Kylie Tennant and others saw writers as social critics and literature as having social influence. Such female authors have used the novel successfully to explore the difficulties they face in their society, while retaining a certain distance from their characters.<sup>39</sup> However, a tension can be found in the works of women writers of the thirties. Many criticize the plight of women trapped in unhappy marriages or economic dependence on males, yet there is no general questioning of the validity of the institutions that support them.<sup>40</sup>

38. Serle, *op.cit.*, p.123.

39. Modjeska, *op.cit.*, p.214.

40. Modjeska, *loc.cit.*, p.10.

As Drusilla Modjeska has pointed out, women's low self esteem and low confidence as public people is learnt socially <sup>41</sup>. If this is so, then writers may be expected to reflect such influence. While women novelists had independence of outlook, for some, duties as wives and mothers often interfered with their writing, and those who stayed at home were financially dependent.<sup>42</sup> This problem no doubt has had an influence on how some female novelists portrayed the social position of women. Female writers, as the products of a patriarchal society, have internalized self-doubt, and this shows in their representation of society, which is consequently half critical and half acquiescent. Fiction can show the day-to-day experience and conflicts of the social and intellectual system; it can indicate and criticize the values of liberal ideology and patriarchal culture <sup>43</sup> and at the same time condone it. Even such a staunch feminist as Nettie Palmer, who was to play a vital part in developing a significant network of women novelists, was a victim of this ambiguity. Her husband, Vance Palmer, along with other male authors, believed women

41. Ibid, p.12.

42. Modjeska, loc. cit., p.11.

43. Modjeska, loc. cit., p.10.

writers to be inferior to men.<sup>44</sup> Nettie Palmer herself suffered bitter self-doubt, and allowed her own writing to take second place to her husband's.

Political developments in the 30s also weakened the feminist impulse in Australian literature. Writers responded in different ways to the imminent economic crisis from the late twenties. Some were drawn to Marxism, others to democratic Liberalism. Rising Fascism attacked freedom of speech and brought censorship and violence. By the end of the thirties more writers became Communists in response to the urgent needs of the times. As a result of this those writers who had been sensitive to the social plight of women were led to extend their criticism to social inequalities. During the 20s there had emerged from women's writing a growing awareness of the social restrictions on females, but with the deterioration of the economy women writers joined men in making social comment on the wider community. Women's issues were abandoned in the face of a greater threat. Thus, Marxism caused women to desert their feminist perspective.

44. Modjeska, loc. cit., pp.8-9. It would appear that women writers have been assessed by female as well as male writers and critics in comparison to **other women**. They have been allowed some apparently grudging acclaim when their writing has fitted into literary history's existing periods and genres. Those who ventured outside the mainstream of a radical nationalist view of literature, particularly those who treated themes of protest for women, tended to be disregarded or only assessed in relation to other women.

The Communist Party at the time did not take Feminism seriously and the current Liberalism was too concerned with Fascism to deal with women's oppression. The readiness of many women writers to abandon their own concerns in order to support male-constructed and controlled issues is reflected in the way in which they depict male-female relationships. They accept the supportive role, and by implication justify its existence. An analysis of how this same acceptance of a position of inferiority is portrayed in fiction will be undertaken in the chapters to follow. It offers some explanation of how sexism is evident in novels written by women.

In this thesis I have drawn from the works of authors many critics have considered illustrative of traits associated with nationalist concerns. In particular I have consulted H.M. Green<sup>45</sup>, D.R. Burns<sup>46</sup>, Harry Heseltine<sup>47</sup>, and Ian Reid.<sup>48</sup> In making my selection I have also sought diverse settings, rural communities, the outback, mining settlements, a fishing village, towns, and large cities with slums. There is representation of diverse class strata

45. H.M. Green: A History of Australian Literature, Vol.II, 1923-1950, Melbourne, 1961.

46. D.R. Burns: The Directions of Australian Fiction 1920-1974, Melbourne, 1975.

47. Heseltine, op.cit.

48. Ian Reid: Fiction and the Great Depression -- Australia and New Zealand 1930-1950, Edward Arnold (Australia) Pty Ltd, Melbourne, 1979.

including the poorest working class, the racial outcasts, middle and upper class with a variety of occupations and professions. I have considered novels during the 20s after World War 1, and examined if any changes occurred during the Great Depression of the 30s. Finally, I have investigated if any new directions emerged after World War 2. I have not considered literature beyond 1956, the year television was introduced to Australian society, because this would necessarily involve an investigation into the effects of that medium. In addition, 1956 is a convenient point at which to separate "traditional" from "contemporary" Australia. Limitations on the number of authors studied have had to be made. My main criterion in omitting certain novels or authors is that they would only repeat propositions already made.

In Chapter 2, I shall examine some works by male authors who maintain a sexist stance in depicting their characters. Male writers whose characterizations are less sexist in emphasis will be considered in Chapter 3. The fiction of female authors investigated in Chapter 4 supports conformity to stereotypes strongly, while that of Chapter 5 presents less sexist portrayals.

From among the strongly sexist male authors, I have chosen to include in Chapter 2 Henry Lawson though he does not formally belong to the period I am examining. He contributed so much to the establishment of the bush myth,

which Kay Schaffer argues, celebrates the conflict between concepts of masculinity and femininity and thus mitigates against loving relationships. William Hay's The Escape of the Notorious Sir William Heans ( and the Mystery of Mr Daunt) is considered briefly not because of any significant literary worth, but because it is an early example of a male author's discomfort at attempting to depict a woman and to portray a loving relationship. The novel suggests social attitudes between the sexes, including stereotyping. According to Burns, Martin Boyd based his saga, The Montforts, on his own family history. Published and read in Britain, Boyd may have meant it to show that upper middle-class immigrants from Britain to Australia could retain their class values. I have included the novel in Chapter 2 because it reveals authorial sexism. Although the novel may also suggest to the reader a connection between sexism and poor relationships between men and women, the author does not seem to grasp this with any certainty. Vance Palmer's focus was on the male in a variety of settings, and by emphasising the importance of male work and control he trivialises females. Like Boyd, his novels depict in a way that is itself sexist the failure of men and women to share warm and understanding relationships. I have included Golconda as representative of his sexist writing in Chapter 2. Xavier Herbert's Capricornia provides evidence of strong sexism in the frontier society of the Northern Territory. I have chosen this novel because Burns believes this to be a great novel in which Herbert paints an anti Garden-of-Eden picture of the Australian

outback.<sup>49</sup> Certainly Schaffer's proposal, that the bush is presented in literature as the forbidding feminine other, holds true in Capricornia. The strong sexism in this novel not only destroys Tocky, but Norman too; for the conflict between reason and nature is really one between male and female. In Patrick White's novel The Tree of Man, the hero Stan Parker is the very centre of being with all else on the circumference. The novel opens with his axing of the virgin forest, symbolic of male dominance over the female. That same attitude contributes to his failure to develop a loving relationship with his wife Amy, just as her conformity to and aberration from her social stereotype do. Yet Patrick White does not seem to understand the connection between the inadequacy of the marriage relationship and the characters' acceptance of stereotypical expectations of each other.

In Chapter 3, I have examined Patrick White's novel, The Aunt's Story. This is a significant work not only in purely literary terms, but because a male author has focused on a woman who does not fit the female gender stereotype. White recognises that a female character warrants serious consideration and he investigates the female perspective. He endows Theodora with attributes usually accorded only to the male -- directness, intelligence, independence of character,

49. Burns, op.cit., p.71.



and especially transcendental enlightenment. For this reason I have classified the novel as less sexist, although White finds it expedient to allow Theodora her special qualities only at the price of her sanity. A more dubious inclusion in Chapter 3 is Vance Palmer's The Passage. However, although there are many strong sexist assumptions in this novel, Palmer here has nonetheless posed a doubt about the value of manly attitudes in human relationships.

Chapter 4 is devoted to examining some examples of female authors who depict and express strongly sexist attitudes in their understanding of poor relationships between men and women. Miles Franklin's chronicle All That Swagger is included because it deals with these attitudes in a pioneering outback setting with Irish characters. Russel Ward and others have noted the Irish influence in Australian colonization <sup>50</sup> so I decided to investigate how the Irish character is depicted in this novel. Tomorrow and Tomorrow and Tomorrow, although not published until 1947, was written by M. Barnard Eldershaw during World War 2. I have classified the novel as strongly sexist in gender stereotyping and in supporting the concept of the prime importance of the male even in projections into the future. Ruth Park's The Harp in the South allows some genuine love

50. Russel Ward, The Australian Legend, Melbourne, 1958, pp. 44-45.

between men and women, but it demonstrates its inadequacy and strongly supports stereotyped gender roles.

In Chapter 5 I have examined some less sexist works by female authors considered by critics as significant. H.M. Green believed Henry Handel Richardson to be one of Australia's greatest authors of her time. Her trilogy, The Fortunes of Richard Mahony, is critical of the effects of gender stereotyping although it is not strongly radical. However, Richardson has shown an understanding of the detrimental consequences of such stereotyping on the relationship between Mahony and his wife, Mary. The trilogy can be termed a tragedy, because Mahony does not find happiness in his relationship with his wife, even though Richardson suggests that fulfilment will be achieved with her after death. I have also included in Chapter 5, M. Barnard Eldershaw's, A House is Built. Written in the 20s, it speaks with the authors' voices of their times and shows gender stereotyping and a consequent poverty in relationships between men and women. Its particular interest rests in its strong feminist message of protest in the way it depicts such relationships. Two of Katharine Susannah Prichard's novels are examined in Chapter 5 because they depict male and female relationships in less sexist terms which are revealed in the way they attempt to reconcile ideas that do not easily cohere. In The Black Opal there is both a sense of individual fulfilment and a sense of conformity to the social norms and conventions of gender roles that repress

individualism. Coonardoo is included in this Chapter because Prichard shows a connection between women and nature from a feminine point of view. The connection Prichard establishes distinguishes it from works which equate femininity and nature in order to justify male superiority. The love between a black woman and a white man is doomed, not just because of racism, but because he denies natural intuition in allowing himself to be constrained by a stereotypical male self-image. Prichard also shows women succeeding by assuming characteristics usually depicted as masculine.

The negative attitudes reflected in sexism are to be found in Australian fiction written between 1917 and 1956. To varying degrees both male and female authors may be victims of stereotypical gender models. In the period under consideration, there are novels written by authors who have demonstrated some understanding of how acceptance of such attitudes may affect adversely loving relationships between men and women. However, they have not challenged seriously the social institutions that support them.

## CHAPTER 2

### STRONGLY SEXIST MALE NOVELS

There are many examples of strong stereotyping in novels by male authors and these depictions of roles have a significant effect on the representation and implied understanding of loving relationships. In some instances the authors clearly show the attitudes and expectations of the characters themselves. These can reflect social norms and conformity. A few male authors in the period being investigated have criticised these occasionally, albeit in a qualified manner. However, in most of the works by male authors of the period in general, the stereotyping remains unchallenged, not only by the characters, but by the male authors themselves, despite the depiction of the unsatisfactory nature of male and female relationships. There is a pervasive assumption that accepted gender identity is founded on Nature rather than being a social construction which, at least theoretically, is alterable. In this the authors remain ideologically bound to the culture they are also reacting against. I have classified these male authors as strongly sexist, particularly because the inadequacies of relationships between the sexes are imputed mainly to the females.

This sexism is an element common to both the literary

culture of the novel and the equally male-oriented forms of the contemporary mass culture. In one way the connection between literary and mass culture undermines the historical, 'popular' distinction. I digress here from literary culture to discuss how works from both can share the same limitations in outlook, and how both can be 'ideological' in the Althusserian sense. Hence, the same sexism as in novels is also evident in the popular cartoons produced by males during the period. For instance, in the 1920s, cartoonist J.C.Bancks developed the popular character, Ginger Meggs. For thirty years from 1922 this small, red-headed boy in a black waistcoat enjoyed universal appeal. Bancks was responsible for the scripts and his characters were developed over a period of time. Ginger was the little Aussie battler, mischief-maker and con man, albeit a boy with a social conscience.<sup>1</sup> Bancks modelled the Meggs on his own family, with the mother depicted in the stereotyped and paradoxical image of both harridan and stabilizing family influence. Barry Andrews has suggested that Bancks aimed to create an Australian world that "readers would approve of as ideally theirs."<sup>2</sup> Andrews poses the view of Wahlstrom and Deeming, that Ginger Meggs has reinforced Australian attitudes to

1. For an analysis, see:  
Barry Andrews, "Ginger Meggs: His Story" in Susan Dermody, John Docker, Drusilla Modjeska (Ed.), Nellie Melba, Ginger Meggs and Friends - Essays in Australian Cultural History, Malmsbury, Vic., 1982.
2. Ibid.

sexuality, particularly the strongly entrenched concept of an "opposite sex", <sup>3</sup> an attitude which is a male construction within a patriarchal society. Sarah Meggs, whose life revolved around domestic duties, became the matriarch. In fact, gender roles are sharply defined -- women nag or cry, little girls are shy and feminine, while men must work and boys will fight.<sup>4</sup> Violence was ever present, with Ginge in many fights with his "terrible right hand" but seldom a match for the local bully, Tiger Kelly, except at a distance, using perhaps a rotten tomato. Minnie Peters tries to encourage Ginge to Church or Sunday School, with no success. In this instance, she fits quite literally into the role of "God's Police" suggested by Anne Summers.<sup>5</sup> Ginge himself lives by the male materialistic value of rejecting that which offers no discernible advantage. Ginge considers himself a capable sportsman, a thinker, a "good feller" full of self-confidence and craftiness. He is a courageous opportunist who resents all authority, a male characteristic appealing to Australians by being in the mould of the national myth. The clearly defined gender opposition is the basis of what has given rise to different gender cultures, so that in bourgeois society, religion and the Arts, for example, have come to be seen as

3. Wahlstrom & Deeming, "Chasing the Popular Arts Through the Cultural Forest" in Journal of Popular Culture, vol. 13, Spring 1980, pp. 412-27, as cited by Barry Andrews, op.cit.

4. Andrews, op.cit.

5. Summers, passim.

female. This is in keeping with Fieldler's literary gender appraisals discussed in Chapter 1, and there are parallels to be found in Mark Twain's Huckleberry Finn and Tom Sawyer.

<sup>6</sup> The gender stereotyping in the Ginger Meggs cartoons has a strong influence on the way male-female relationships are depicted. The righteous "God's Police" image of the females causes the males to hold them in some contempt as the opponents of excitement, adventure and self-assertiveness. The females, on the other hand, sanctimoniously regard the males as incorrigible. Both attitudes inhibit mutual understanding and love. Barry Andrews has discussed the cultural attitudes supporting the materially improving middle-class Meggs family. Sarah Meggs is socially responsible in cooking for church bazaars and she affirms the family unit as a matriarch who domineers the domestic affairs. <sup>7</sup> John Meggs, on the other hand, is depicted as a diminished Australian father who continually fails and who suffers constant reminders of his inadequacies by his wife. He is cast as the stereotypical "hen-pecked" husband, and the absence of a truly loving relationship with his wife can be attributed to the lack of mutual communication between the couple. Despite her poor opinion of her husband, Sarah is at pains to maintain her husband's self-esteem as family

6. See Fieldler, op.cit.

Also Ann Douglas, The Feminisation of American Culture, New York, 1978, for parallels with Mark Twain.

7. Andrews, op.cit., p.223.

breadwinner.<sup>8</sup> Andrews has discussed how the female consciousness now exposes the plight of women trapped in the domestic situation like Sarah Meggs and how this leads to the establishment of the defence of matriarchy. In such a social structure men support the family financially and women nag and manipulate.<sup>9</sup>

Other cartoonists of these years used the digger humour of World War 1. This was derived from bush humour and attitudes of equality. However, as I have argued in Chapter 1, this ethic excludes women certainly in terms of equality and defines them only in an inferior relation to man. Army life reinforced Australian bush mateship and the all-male society glorified by Henry Lawson in his writings.

Schaffer, Summers and others have shown how sex stereotyping is pervasive in the first distinctively national literary tradition, the writing of the bush, which has persisted to the present time. Among associated themes, there is an emphasis on the bushman and his loneliness, while male-female relationships are rarely shown to have any substance.<sup>10</sup> The outback tends to be male-orientated and

8. Ibid, p.224.

9. Ibid, p.228.

10. Max Harris: The Angry Eye, Sydney, 1973, p.41. Miriam Dixon develops this point in The Real Matilda, Victoria, 1976, pp.32-3. Dixon suggests that the ethos of the "typical" Australian "sprang mainly from male convict, working-class, Irish and native-born Australian sources ... " Ibid, p.24.



often lacking family life. Henry Lawson, for instance, records historical fact about the nature of itinerant work, by isolating his bushmen from their families. However, he also suggests that loving relationships between men and women are often intrinsically unsatisfactory:

" I suppose your wife will be glad to see you," said Mitchell to his mate in their camp by the dam at Hungerford ...

"Yes," said Mitchell's mate, " and I'll be glad to see her too."

"I suppose you will," said Mitchell ...

"I don't think we ever understood women properly," he said ... "I don't think we ever will -- we never took the trouble to try, and if we did it would be only wasted brain power that might just as well be spent on the black-fellow's lingo; because by the time you've learnt it they'll be extinct, and woman'll be extinct before you've learnt her ...

"Somebody wrote that a woman's love is her whole existence, while a man's love is only part of his -- which is true, and only natural and reasonable, all things considered. But women never consider as a rule ... He's got her and he's satisfied; and if the truth is known he loves her really more than he did when they were engaged, only she won't be satisfied about it unless he tells her so every hour of the day ... But a woman doesn't understand these things -- she never will, she can't -- and it would be just as well for us to try and understand<sup>11</sup> that she doesn't and can't understand them."

Although Lawson wrote this in 1897, before the period under investigation, the tradition of the 90s persisted in literature after World War 1. This conversation between

11. Henry Lawson, "Mitchell on Matrimony" (1897) in A Camp-Fire Yarn, Sydney, 1984.

Mitchell and his mate shows a pessimistic view of male-female relationships. It not only accepts an impossibility of mutual understanding between the sexes, but it also suggests that any depth in the loving relationship is unimportant. The closest relationship in Lawson's writing is not the love between men and women, but between men themselves. For instance, his series Previous Convictions i-viii (1919-1921) portrays the strong relationship between Previous and Dotty. Both men have criminal records and are shown as the victims of an unforgiving society. Lawson presents the mateship between these men as one of the closest relationships he knew. As Judith Wright has pointed out:

The 'mateship' ingredient in Australian tradition was always and is necessarily one-sided; it left out of <sup>12</sup>account the whole relationship with women.

Many critics, including A.A. Phillips, consider the Joe Wilson series to be Lawson's master-work. <sup>13</sup> In these stories and others he treats his female characters with great sympathy and understanding. For instance, Desmond O'Grady has suggested that "The Drover's Wife" is regarded as Lawson's finest work and it conveys the woman's thoughts. The narrative is personal and reveals the loneliness and

12. Judith Wright, Preoccupations in Australian Poetry, pp.138-39, as quoted in The Real Matilda, op.cit., p.185.
13. A.A. Phillips, "Lawson Revisited" in Chris Wallace-Crabbe (Ed.), The Australian Nationalists, Melbourne, 1971.

austerity of bush-life for a woman.<sup>14</sup> Nonetheless, his depiction of love relationships remains a pessimistic one of melancholia and lack of fulfillment. This is arguably as much because of the nature of the gender stereotypes within which the stories instinctively work, as to any personal pessimism of Lawson or the generic sardonic tone of outback humour.<sup>15</sup> A.A. Phillips has pointed out that Lawson himself claimed that the sadness itself was intrinsic to outback humour.<sup>16</sup> The married lives Lawson shows are inevitably tragic despite the sympathetic treatment. Mary is cast in the image of "God's Police" because she influences Joe to settle in the bush to distance him from the temptation of over-indulgence in drink. As A.A. Phillips has pointed out, Joe Wilson was largely a self-portrait of Lawson.<sup>17</sup> This perhaps explains why Mary's nagging for a buggy while Joe struggles to establish some financial stability is authorially tinged with criticism of selfishness, for all Lawson's sympathy for her position. Even though Mary always puts aside her wish for a buggy in deference to Joe's goals, he senses and resents her disappointment and convinces himself that she does not appreciate his own desire to satisfy her:

I'd thought of how, when Mary was up and getting

14. Desmond O'Grady, "Henry Lawson", in *ibid*, p.77.
15. A.A. Phillips, *op.cit.*, p.88.
16. *Ibid*.
17. *Ibid*, p.94.

strong, I'd say one morning, "Go round and have a look in the shed, Mary; I've got a few fowls for you," or something like that - and follow her round to watch her eyes when she saw the buggy. I never told Mary<sup>18</sup> about that - it wouldn't have done any good. [My emphasis]

Bearing in mind that Lawson himself identified with Joe, two points are noteworthy here - the lack of communication between husband and wife and his presumption that such communication would be to no avail because Mary, as a woman, is inevitably going to be as she is. Thus, when Mary nags Joe to sow a crop of potatoes, this leads him to distance himself from her:

I didn't listen to any more. Mary was obstinate when she got an idea into her head. It was no use arguing with her. All the time I'd been talking she'd just knit her forehead and go on thinking straight ahead, on the track she'd started - just as if I wasn't there - and it used to make me mad. She'd keep driving at me till I took her advice or lost my temper - I did both at the same time, mostly.

I<sup>19</sup> took my pipe and went out to smoke and cool down.

When the crop proves profitable he again resents her rising hopes for a buggy:

18. Henry Lawson, "A Double Buggy at Lahey's Creek", in A Camp-Fire Yarn, p. 734.

19. Ibid, p.735.

I made a few quid out of mine - and saved carriage too, for I could take them out on the wagon. Then Mary began to hear ... of a buggy that someone had for sale cheap, or a dogcart that somebody else wanted to get rid of<sup>20</sup> - and let me know about it in an offhand way.

The 'offhand way' suggests that Mary could not discuss matters with Joe openly, because they harbour some mutual resentments and they have not developed the habit of communicating. Joe's resistance stems from the consistency of her nagging about the matter and a sense of injustice which she, too, feels about him. Joe's resentment is further confirmed by his perception of a female conspiracy against him:

Whenever Mary's sister started hinting about a buggy,<sup>21</sup> I reckoned it was a put-up job between them.

Just prior to the surprise arrival of the buggy he buys her, Mary nags Joe about swearing in front of the children. This confirms the female role stereotype and highlights lack of understanding between husband and wife caused by withholding close communication. Lawson implies that the couple have not discussed the matter previously and certainly they do not decide just why the rather harmless swearing of their son, Jim, is undesirable. Joe's affectionate sympathy is more a

20. Ibid, p.736.

21. Ibid, p.738.

response to Mary's distress than understanding that Mary wants a better life for her son than he has been able to offer her. Moreover, when Mary expresses her loving gratitude for the buggy, both talk of the past, not of the future with the possibility of change:

Then we sat, side by side, on the edge of the verandah, and talked more than we'd done for years -- and there was a good deal of "Do you remember?" in it -- and I think we got to understand each other better that night. And at last Mary said, "Do you know, Joe, why, I feel to-night just -- just like I did the day we were married." And somehow <sup>22</sup> I had that strange, shy sort of feeling too. [My emphasis]

Joe here acknowledges that he has not shared thoughts with his wife in meaningful conversation for years. The warmth of feeling is strange and thus unfamiliar to Joe, but it does not hold a ray of hope in the love relationship because he is "shy" and hence still withdrawing from a total commitment to it. Joe's behaviour reflects the influence of the bushman's stereotype of taciturnity and suppression of any outward show of emotion. The same reservation is evident in Mary because she, too, has not developed the habit of close communication. } Both partners thus refrain from forward planning. The preoccupation with the past only confirms that their individual courses will remain static.

22. Ibid, p.743.

However, whilst Lawson shows the lack of communication between the sexes to be a problem, he fails to see this as deriving from gender stereotypes themselves. Rather, he avoids the issue by explaining outcomes fatalistically, as if deriving from the unalterable 'natural' differences between gender. By contrast, Lawson depicts strong, bonding relationships between men and he is not alone amongst the writers of the 90s in glorifying mateship with strong sexist implications. Kay Schaffer has pointed out that "masculinity and femininity are cultural constructs"<sup>23</sup> and although Lawson's stories uphold gender divisions, masculine identity is insecure against the bush. As I have discussed in Chapter 1, Schaffer has shown how the bush has been depicted in fiction as female, and Lawson shows how this bush can reduce man's characteristics to those associated with the feminine. Joe Wilson's identity is threatened with weakness, passivity, pessimism and despair, not only by the bush itself, but by his wife as well. In "Water Them Geraniums", Joe expresses these fears:

"If I don't make a stand now," I'd say, "I'll never be master. I gave up the reins when I got married, and I'll have to get them back again."

What women some men are!      24

23. Schaffer, op.cit., 123.

24. Henry Lawson, "Water Them Geraniums" (1900) in A Camp-Fire Yarn, p.722.

Lawson, in identifying with Joe, is really expressing a fear of loss of masculinity within marriage, while at the same time assessing femininity to be inferior. Lawson had already considered this issue before in 'Mitchell on the "Sex" and other "Problems" (1899). Mitchell attributes all of such problems to have originated in the curse of Eve. Schaffer argues that what Mitchell is explaining to Joe and the readers too, is that conflict between the sexes is natural in God's order of creation. He does this through the bond of mateship, one which Schaffer shows to be a masculine construction against the feminine other.<sup>25</sup> Mitchell goes on to lay some of the blame for the problems on men who surrender their dominance to women:

It was Eve's fault in the first place - or Adam's rather, because it might be argued that he should have been master. Some men are too lazy to be masters in their own homes, and run the show properly; some are too careless, and some<sup>26</sup> too drunk most of their time, and some too weak.

It is only within a patriarchal culture that men are considered to be "weak", "lazy" and "careless" if they do not retain dominance, because it is assumed that women should be submissive.<sup>27</sup>

25. Schaffer, op.cit., p.125.

26. Henry Lawson, 'Mitchell on the "Sex" and Other "Problems" in A Camp-Fire Yarn, p.614.

27. Schaffer, op.cit., p.126.



On the other hand, Lawson has approvingly depicted tender and chivalrous protective affection to women, although this is not based on communication. A clear example of this attitude is to found in "Telling Mrs Baker" (1901). The two bushmen feel genuine pity for Mrs Baker but cannot bring themselves to tell her that her husband has been unfaithful to her and has died of alcohol poisoning:

"Why not let her know the truth?" I asked. "She's sure to hear of it sooner or later; and if she knew he was only a selfish, drunken blackguard she might get over it all the sooner."

"You don't know women, Jack," said Andy quietly. "And, anyway, even if she is a sensible woman, we've got a dead<sup>28</sup>mate to consider as well as a living woman."

Jack doubts that Mrs Baker is likely to be sensible, but in any case he believes the protection of a man he does not admire is more important than the truth. His elaborate construction of lies shows his inability to communicate effectively and truthfully with a woman without hurting her. This derives not from his character however, but from the specific nature of what he has to communicate. Nevertheless, there is the implicit assumption that women in general are not sensible. Women are assumed to be more tenacious in their feelings, but in a case such as this, not sensible and consequently inferior to men. Lawson wrote many stories

28. Henry Lawson, "Telling Mrs Baker", in A Fantasy of Man, p.60.

which focused on women, but, as Schaffer has argued, he defined them in relationship to men. <sup>29</sup> This is evident in the titles, such as 'The Drover's Wife', 'The Selector's Daughter' and 'The Pretty Girl in the Army'. In others he regarded women as unfathomable although men could speak with authority for them, such as in 'Mitchell on Women' ... on Matrimony ... on the "Sex" and other "Problems" ... on The Sex Problem Again'. Lawson depicts women as belonging to men however curious they may regard them. Schaffer has argued that Lawson's women of the bush are associated with the harsh and alienating environment against which men must battle to retain their masculine identity. <sup>30</sup> In such depictions there can be little hope of loving relationships and communications between men and women.

The same strongly sexist orientation that is found in Lawson and other writers of the 90s tradition is continued in many of the novels written by males in the post World War 1 period. Such novels range from those aiming at historical recreation to contemporary social realism; from nostalgic conservatism to be found in the works of such authors as Martin Boyd to democratic socialism as with Vance Palmer. One example of strongly sexist male writing immediately after World War 1 can be found in the work of William Hay who

29. Schaffer, op.cit., p.118

30. Ibid, p.120.

grafted the character novel to the convict theme and concerned himself with the plight of the aristocrat felon in The Escape of the Notorious Sir William Heans (and the Mystery of Mr Daunt), (1919). Marcus Clarke's novel of the convict system, His Natural Life (1870) had already shown Australia as a place of terror and exile from a lost motherland, a feminine Other which is at once both feared and desired.<sup>31</sup> Hay continues this theme in his portrayal of Heans, a proud young Irish baronet, who is transported to Australia for abducting an attractive married woman. Although he must suffer restrictions to his liberty, he is granted privileges befitting "persons of quality", and he is accepted into polite society. Nonetheless, he is distrusted by police officer, Captain Daunt, who hates him because he, too, loves the married woman Matilda. The author maintains sympathy with Heans although he does not idealize him. He shows, for instance, how Heans tries to enlist Matilda's help in his escape, regardless of the probable consequences to her reputation.

In the novel, Hay criticises convict gaol designer Captain Shaxton's unromantic and scoundrelish treatment of his wife, Matilda, and his domineering sense of her as property. Yet the novel fails to establish a viable alternative, because the author himself is writing from a

31. Schaffer, loc.cit., p.88.

position of acceptance of a romantic female stereotype of delicacy and spirituality. This entails a sense of women as superior, but it is a superiority of a kind which is practically ineffectual. This precludes him from imagining real, meaningful and loving male-female communication. The novel as the romance it claims to be in its sub-title, could only support such attitudes if they were acceptable to the society at the time. Concepts of ownership of women and female repression are intrinsically antipathetic to loving relationships between men and women.

Hay's description of Matilda Hyde-Shaxton seems quite ridiculous, yet it does reflect conventional social attitudes of the time to women as delicate, beautiful beings full of romantic desires:

Her sweet face seldom smiled. It was high, small, bright, and shyly serious. She seemed taller than she was; would have been active if she had not been delicate; and was straight as a needle. You would see her talking with someone in her drawing-room, near a chandelier, with that fine antagonistic eye of hers wild and full of strained yearning. (p.4)

As this suggests, Hay's depiction of women throughout the novel shows that he is also projecting his own conventionally male attitudes, which trivialize females by the idealistic treatment. Matilda is shown to be sensitive but ineffectual, and Heans quickly recognises that her soft, sympathetic, feminine character prevents her from understanding her husband's male perspective:

"My husband has just invented a scheme for dealing with the desperado: silent confinement. To me it is hideous beyond words." ... (Her voice quivered. She seemed entirely unaware, or to have forgotten in her intense interest in the subject, the barrier she was erecting between her husband and herself in Sir William's mind.) (p.7)

Matilda is attracted to Heans because of his refined manners, which contrast so sharply with her husband's coarseness and insensitivity. The latter jokes about her distaste for the harshness of the prison he is planning:

"Ho-ho! it's the 'poor malingerer, the 'poor' absconder, to Matty!" ... It's all sentiment to Matilda -- sentiment and self-discipline. She won't have you disciplining anyone else."

He gave a great bushy laugh, and whisked out of the room, beckoning the men after him. ...

"That reminds me, I've got a laugh for you fellows over old Clisby ... It seems that old Miss Milly Shadwell, the old maid" (even this appeared to be a fact of some amusement), "wouldn't marry him because she said he looked too goody-goody. Ho-ho ho!" (pp.10-11)

Hay portrays Captain Shaxton's sexist attitudes unfavourably, but nonetheless Matilda and the other females in the novel are ineffectual in influencing such attitudes. Matilda's concern for a Chapel for the prisoners is not shown to help them, as Captain Shaxton sees clearly; the effect is more likely to alienate because the prisoners are put in stalls so that they can only see the parson, thus destroying the concept of communion.

In the beginning Heans is prepared to abduct Matilda

even though Captain Shaxton is his best friend in Hobarton. Although Matilda loves him she refuses to accompany him in his escape, for to do so would have been to her an unthinkable breach of her role of wife:

"Good-bye, Sir William Heans," she said. "Death -- and, they say, a better re-uniting -- nay, even a kinder affection -- are not so far from us all ... No - no - no, the other is not for me -- no-- nor you." (p.98)

This portrayal of character is in keeping with the female stereotype of "God's Police" shown so comprehensively by Anne Summers.<sup>32</sup> It is also in accord with Shaxton's awareness of his wife's self-discipline. Hay portrays Matilda as completely selfless, remote and pure, but he does not develop her character, and she appears only in a few cameos. He clearly does not regard her of major consequence and so he allows the story to unfold solely from the perspective of Heans. The inference may be drawn that females are of relative unimportance. The interest lies in a male struggle against social decline, contempt, suspicion, hatred and attack by jealous authority. Hay's sexism is apparent in the assumption that the female stereotype typified in the delicate and ineffectual Matilda is natural. The stereotype certainly functions as a role-model, and it logically implies that women, by virtue of their spiritual

32. Summers, op.cit., especially Chapter 9.

superiority, are of little consequence in the world of practical action.

Heans is assigned as groom to Charles Oughtryn who directs him to teach his daughter, Abelia, to ride as a gentlewoman. Heans is prepared to use both Abelia and Matilda to his own advantage at grave risk to themselves.. There is always a sense of Heans working for his own liberation and self-identity, but Matilda and Abelia are both colourless, weak and inept characters by virtue of their femininity. Hay reinforces this impression by highlighting their fears, instability and nervousness:

Abelia gave him one quiet, fluttering glance. She then made across the yard in her wavering, half-blind way. [My emphasis] (p.129)

Abelia's poor eyesight is made analogous with the weakness of her femininity. She is plagued with fear and nervousness just as Matilda is, and indeed, Hay conveys an inevitability as a consequence of being a woman.

Heans forfeits his second escape attempt to defend Abelia. While Hay may have wished this to be Heans' regeneration, the impression cannot be avoided that the subsequent fight with Spafield concerns more a male conflict between a gentleman and a scoundrel. There really is no evidence of great love or even a desire for it in the novel. The implication is that although romantic, even sexual

activities are desirable to the male, deep and loving relationships are unimportant. In fact, the stereotyping of women is so strong, that even these activities are repulsed and only mild flirting is enjoyed with suitable safeguards. Moreover, the stereotyping differentiates between the various classes of women, allowing breaches of standards if certain women are regarded as outside acceptable society:

"It wasn't a woman, sir, it was a female prisoner." He chuckled so much that a crumb stuck in his throat, and Daunt had to smack him on the back. Meanwhile he was holding out his cup for more, and Heans, who handed it to his wife, saw in the instant that his eye touched her face that she was flushed and cowed. (p.9)

Thus all women are demeaned by such male attitudes, not just the convicts who are the subjects of the derogatory comments, as indicated by the conversation between male guests at Abelia's home:

"How can a woman judge! ... It would seem they are either all mercy or all severity."

"For every young woman willing to learn ... there are fifty mad to teach -- and these, as stands to reason, the more ignorant."

In fact, the great insult a man can be given by another male is to be likened to a woman, as indicated in this comment about Daunt:

"I've known him go on like a mean woman." (p.130)



Moreover, men are also demeaned by their own remarks because they are using women for their own gratification. Hay even uses indirect methods to convey an unfavourable attitude to women. Captain Shaxton, after a sword fight with Daunt, expresses his detestation with his fate in terms of his resentment of women:

"Ha, well, ... if she [Fortune] hasn't satisfied me, the bitch has not left me without comfort."  
(p.267)

While the allusion may well apply to Matilda as well, his comfort rests in the knowledge that he has injured Daunt for his perceived offences against his possession of his wife. Of course, Shaxton's remarks provide further evidence of the coarseness which the novel criticises, but Hay does nothing to challenge the male attitude of female inferiority and unimportance. Society in general is shown to condemn Matilda, not because she has loved a man other than her husband, but because she has been indiscreet enough to be discovered. Thus, hypocrisy lies at the basis of social expectations. It is clear that it is possible for a woman to be assessed as "good" as long as she is discreet rather than it depending on her morality. It is the upholding of the stereotype of a "good wife" that is held to be important.

On the other hand, the male stereotype requires the upholding of a sense of honour in preserving rights to ownership of a wife. The quality of the relationship is of

little consequence in maintaining this honour. For this reason Captain Shaxton is driven to engage in a second duel with Daunt, this time with pistols. When Daunt fails to kill him with the first shot Shaxton allows him because his own life has been spared in the first duel, Shaxton insists on his right to the next shot. However, Daunt dies as a result of illness robbing Shaxton of his revenge. Yet none of this bloodshed is really about rivalry for a woman's love; rather it is a matter of ownership rights between men. Hay's position supports the male sense of honour, particularly in his treatment of Heans, but also of Shaxton himself. Despite his depiction of Shaxton's uncouthness and ungentlemanly sexism, he gains the reader's sympathies by contrasting his sense of honour with Daunt's villany. Even Daunt has already acknowledged his obsession with Matilda as a weakness:

"But I admit -- well -- it was a case in which I was to blame, Shaxton, for a piece of bitter weakness: an old matter of belief in women"  
(p.135)

Thus, the blame for the relationship problem with a woman is attributed to untrustworthiness of the female sex itself. Even Heans' defence of Matilda's honour is more a male act of chivalry to feed his own sense of dignity:

If she had been a bad woman, you understand me when I say I should not have faced you. (p.135)

Heans has definite concepts of goodness and badness in women although he is prepared to compromise the stereotype of goodness that he admires. In the Introduction to the novel R.G.Howarth quotes Hay as having stated that " I had to find / a crime that I could bear in a man for hero". Heans has been transported for the abduction of a married woman of his own station in life. He attempts the same crime in the colony and yet he is still presented by Hay as a hero. Hay suggests that women treat his crime indulgently as a misdemeanour although condemned by men. Certainly the portrayals in the novel support his aim. I contend that such attitudes are possible because women consider their stereotyped roles to be repressive, while men see any abuse of their women as an unjustified attack on their property.

### THE MONTFORTS

Martin Boyd's The Montforts (1928) is a family saga highlighting the futility of snobbery. However it can also be read as touching on, and certainly being shaped by, questions of gender. Boyd's position in relation to these questions remains ambiguous throughout the novel. For instance, he shifts from approval of emotional repression to being critical of it in his attitudes to both males and females. As a consequence, Boyd is trapped in a position of ennobling males who control their emotional instincts for moral

purposes, while at the same time he arouses the reader's sympathy for, and impatience with, the self-sacrifice. However, he depicts females who cast off such repressions in unfavourable terms.

Boyd presents a chronicle of the lives of successive generations of "The Montforts of Farleigh-Scudamore", based upon the history of his own family. The novel opens with the arrival in Australia of Henry Montfort and his family. He has followed his elder brother, Simon, to the colony on the latter's recommendation to forge a better life. In another sense though, Henry is endeavouring to escape from the scandal of a French great-grandmother who was "careless with her virtue", a scandal whose fruits he believes are reproduced in his own father. Thus, from the outset, the author assumes a sexist position in some instances against women and in others against men. There is evident in the novel in relation to questions of gender, an uncertainty, an anxiety and tension which Boyd does not resolve.

In the Prologue, Boyd demonstrates how males are repressed by conforming to cultural stereotypes. Here he is critical of social constrictions on male behaviour, but later he ambiguously assumes a sympathetic attitude to Richard's self-imposed discipline. Nevertheless, the repressions treated critically in the Prologue are shown later to affect adversely the loving relationships between men and women. One significant factor is the social expectation for males to

stifle their emotions. Henry is ashamed that his father reveals his sorrow in farewelling them from England and he interprets his love as inherited weakness:

It was yet another exhibition of the unseemliness which had characterized so many of old Raoul's actions ... He had bent down to kiss his grandchildren, and his sensitive lip was twitching and tears rolled down his cheeks, and Arthur, staring with round interested eyes, had projected his grandfather's emotion into the foreground of attention by exclaiming:

"Grandpapa's crying!"

Henry's last impression of his father was one of a man for whom it was natural to feel little respect, a man who was faintly grotesque, whose nature was marred by an emotion and weakness<sup>33</sup> which were foreign to an English gentleman. (p.15)

Henry's sexism is reinforced by the fact that despite his condemnation of his father, old Raoul, he lays the blame quickly upon his "wanton grandmother" (p.15) because she defied the conventions expected of a female.

Boyd seems to be conveying some criticism of Henry's attitudes to his father. However, he is ambiguous because he later shows criticism of, and the negative consequences of, Henry's repressions. With his death imminent, Henry feels

33. Martin Boyd, The Montforts, 1972 Penguin Edition used throughout my text.  
The emphasis given is mine to indicate how choice of language is used to convey disapproval of such behaviour by a male.

not only the bitterness of his self-imposed alienation from humanity, but his own identification with all of its weaknesses. Henry is shown critically for being repressed, yet his father, Raoul, who is not repressed, is depicted as weak. Henry realises that he is no better than the man he, as a judge, has condemned to death for rape, for he has chosen to have a marriage without really helping to develop a loving relationship :

He had an awkward sense of relationship to this vile felon. The wretched man was the victim of his own uncontrollable impulses, impulses which in some degree were common to the whole human race ... His self-esteem was undermined. He found it difficult to regard himself as of a superior order of creation. He shared his human nature with the lowest criminal. (p.94)

Letitia often reminisced about how peaceful her husband's face was in death, and this indicates that Boyd wished to show how Henry only found happiness in release from his life-long repressions. But Boyd remains ambiguous. Even his criticism fails to impress because Old Raoul remains a pathetic, ineffectual character, just as prejudiced against the independence of Madeleine du Remy des Baux as his son is. Moreover, Boyd does nothing to dispel that attitude throughout the novel.

Boyd shows Old Raoul's emotional "weakness" to be inherited by Simon's son Sim, who nonetheless has learned some greater measure of repression. Upon sailing for England to be educated:

Sim waved gaily to his father and to Sophie, and to Sam and Harry, who had come to see him off, and then went down to his cabin and wept.

A bluff, elderly merchant, with whom he shared it ... came in and found him in this condition and, smacking him heartily on the back, told him to be a man. (pp.48-49)  
( My emphasis)

Again, although Boyd associates this treatment with being "bluff", he condones it by the use of "heartily". Moreover, he describes the expression of grief as a "condition", almost analogous with an illness. Boyd seems to approve of repression by the way he writes about it. However, he does reveal a different attitude also by making repression the key to the inadequacies in male and female relationships. Henry represses his own feelings throughout his life, and this inhibits the expression of his love of Letitia. In his capacity as judge he has divorced himself from any sentiment for the criminals he was condemning. Nonetheless, the consequences of his judgements play heavily on his mind. Yet at the point of death he is just as incapable of sharing with Letitia the burden of the sentences he has handed down as he is of expressing his love for her. Boyd's position shifts from being critical of Henry's repression to being sympathetic with his emotional isolation. Moreover, he implies a criticism of Letitia in her seeming unawareness of Henry's sufferings.

Like Henry, Sim's son, Richard, experiences and internalizes strong emotions of grief when he must part from

Aida, and although he affects great control, he does resent the male requirement for such repression:

Dona Brigid was standing near him. The tears were trickling down her withered face.

"She can cry," he thought resentfully. "But she can't care as much as I do, and I have no public right to cry." (p.103)

Richard's repression, far from strengthening him, contributes to his inability to defy convention as had Madeleine du Remy des Baux. His relationship with Aida fails because of his stereotyped conventionality. He is shown as a victim of the social expectation of male reticence in expressing emotion, and as a consequence, he is unable to bring himself to demand her divorce from her husband or even to suggest that she leave and live with him. He withdraws from a truly loving commitment to Aida, consoling himself upon her death with an ineffectual substitute for the physical:

His grief was dry and bleak, yet underneath it was a faint consoling feeling that now Aida was all his. Her spirit would live with him to the grave. (p.169)

Nevertheless, Boyd is not unambiguously critical of Richard for failing in a loving relationship, for he presents Richard's personal tragedy. Richard's inaction is shown as both weakly passive yet with its own kind of principled nobility. Boyd seems unable to choose a definite position. He presents Richard as weak in Aida's eyes:



Richard's weakness had always roused some protective instinct in Aida. He had only to appeal to her for any kind of help, to bring this to the surface. (p.166)

Boyd's commentary affirms Aida's hostile attitude:

An impulse came over her to taunt him with his lack of force, his feeble submission to convention. (p.167)

Yet Boyd has presented a moral principle by which Richard is guided:

Aida. It's no good. We must do what is right. We shouldn't love each other so much if we didn't. (p.165)

As for Aida, she is depicted as submissive even to Richard's weakness because of deference to the male as decision-maker. She is his superior in love because she is prepared to sacrifice more in terms of social status and security.

In contrast to Aida, her mother Ada has been overpowered and dominated sexually by Florez. She has married him, not for love, but because she has believed that to be the only acceptable outcome to her own physical arousal. Boyd shows here with approval the female sense of guilt in sex, which may be more a male construction of female sexuality as inferior, rather than portraying the events as a

disinterested observer. Boyd's attitudes are shown in Ada's conversation with her mother, Letitia:

"You are quite happy about this marriage, my darling?" she said, after some preliminaries.  
"But yes, mama, of course," said Ada automatically.

"You love Florez?"

Ada blushed and nodded her head. A reference to the throbbing physical passion which Florez inspired in her filled her with embarrassment. Her schoolgirlish adoration had died two years before and now had been supplanted by this attraction which she could not resist, and by which she felt in a way half degraded.

(p.79)

Ada's sense of guilt affects her relationship with Florez, yet Boyd fails to recognise the cause of it. She is unable to proclaim any love for Florez when Letitia queries her in this regard, because she does not associate physical passion with love.

She had been brought up in the innocence which was then considered desirable in a young girl, but she had read her Bible, and she knew of the existence of women like Jezabel and Mary Magdalene. She believed that if now she were not to marry Florez, having suffered his embraces, she would be as one of these.

(p.79)

Boyd not only shows how the Bible has affected Ada, but he has also constructed a guilt that is male-induced. He justifies his critical position by the patriarchal orientation of his allusion to the Bible. She is made to feel guilty because he has suggested that she has committed a sin associated with man, but one of which she is totally to

blame because of her femininity. Boyd does not acknowledge that she has not been entirely in control of a normal physical response, but rather lays upon Ada responsibility and guilt for her sex. Nonetheless, his attitude remains ambiguous because he implies some sympathy in her guilt-ridden sense of obligation to marry because of her sexual indiscretions. This is emphasised by his suggestion that she has "suffered" the embraces rather than enjoyed them. Here again, Boyd seems uncertain whether he should condemn or sympathise with the expression of human emotion and sexuality and the suggestion of tolerating it rather than enjoying it only highlights his own ambiguities.

As well as the problem posed about Ada's guilt, she is shown to be submissive as a natural consequence of her gender. Boyd portrays her as inferior to Florez because she only reacts to the forcefulness of his passion. Even his proposal of marriage is phrased more as a statement of determination than as a question -- "You will marry me?" "Yes, you will." (p.78) In depicting the inevitability of Ada's submission to the male, Boyd is confirming it and implying that male dominance is "natural".

Boyd does not challenge the validity of male supremacy in the novel. Consequently, when Henry brings Letitia to Australia against her own wishes, this is not only shown as his male right, but Letitia accepts his decision submissively:

She would not have dreamed of questioning Henry's decision. (p.20)

Letitia likewise defers to her husband in the naming of their child. She wishes to call her Aida, but "Henry was strongly opposed to this. To his mind it was bizarre and would make his daughter conspicuous, but he agreed to the name Ada, as a compromise and to please her, though Letitia did not particularly value the name in this form." (p.30) Henry enforces his will in controlling his wife because the name she chooses has romantic associations. Boyd suggests his approval of Letitia's submission to her husband because he notes that she is behaving in an unusually sentimental manner in contrast to the usual authorial assessment of her as "cold" (p.30). It is, too, Henry's male rationality that assures that the child will not have to suffer a foolish name. Moreover, Boyd shows a certain generosity in Henry's compromise in pleasing his wife rather than himself.

Nevertheless, despite Boy's seeming approval of male control such as that exerted by Henry, it is shown to impoverish the quality of the relationship by inhibiting the sharing of ideas and the development of mutual respect and consideration. Even in discussing their children there is little sharing of insights. Boyd chooses the most intimate time of retiring to bed to show this, for when Letitia muses, "I think Arthur will be a poet", Henry retorts, "I had rather he were a useful citizen." (p.36) Letitia has that day noted

Arthur's love of trees, but she does not convey this to her husband, and he does not attempt to explain his attitude. Neither partner has developed the habit of communicating in any depth. Boyd comments that Letitia treasures her family life because it protects her from the turbulence of the gold-rush, not because of loving relationships. When Henry gives her the news of his appointment as a Justice of the Supreme Court and the probability of a knighthood, she is pleased for the gratification of her own social ambitions rather than his. Yet, in a sense, this is merely the consequence of the lack of true friendship between husband and wife, for Henry acknowledges that he has not told her earlier of his impending success. (p.40) There have been no confidences especially about feelings, attitudes and hopes, so there is no mutual understanding.

The quality of the love in the marriage of Letitia and Henry is unfulfilling. It is only after a social evening when Letitia has been aroused and flattered by the subtle attentions of Don Gomez, that the two are drawn to an expression of love:

Henry embraced his wife, for the first time for many years, with something of the ardour of a lover, and Letitia, stimulated by Don Gomez to an appreciation of the poetry of life, and to awareness of her own desirable womanhood, gave herself less passively than usual.

(p.29)

Boyd is showing Letitia's need of another man to arouse her,

and the reader might presume that Henry has been aroused by the social occasion. Nevertheless, even this rare instance of love-making is qualified and less than fulfilling, as demonstrated by "something of the ardour" and "less passively". Letitia is relieved when the attentions of Don Gomez conclude with the marriage of Ada and Florez. This bears a resemblance to Hay's depiction of Matilda. Both women withdraw from any commitment because there is no love involved. Letitia has engaged in mild flirting to compensate for the unsatisfactory nature of her marriage. In showing the consequences of unfulfilled needs in marriage, Boyd has implied a critique of the stereotypical gender submissiveness of Letitia to Henry. She comes to Australia against her own wishes, she is denied returning to Britain and all the important decisions are made by Henry. In using her own daughter to gratify her whims, snobbery, and pride, Letitia contributes substantially to Ada's destruction. Boyd's language shows Ada's needs in using "abandoned", and "outstretched", and has the effect of leading the reader to condemn the mother, Letitia, who after a party, moans her lost youth:

She sat at the foot of the bed and, shading the light with her hand, gazed for a long time at her little daughter, who lay breathing softly and peacefully, with her dark lashes resting on her rosy cheeks, and her head lying on an abandoned outstretched arm.

She would make Ada's life, so she planned, a compensation for her own. (p.62.)

Letitia contrives to bring about the unhappy marriage of Ada to Florez. Even half-way up the aisle to the wedding ceremony Ada is "weak with dread." (p.80) Because of acceptance of social gender stereotyping, she falls into the same submissiveness to Florez that Letitia has to Henry in having to leave her homeland and family to settle in Spain. When her cousin, Sim, asks if Florez always gets his way, she nods and turns away to indicate that the matter is too painful to discuss. (p.96) When her Aunt Sophie visits her in Spain she prays that Ada "might be relieved from whatever trouble gave her that look of haunted misery." (p.117) Boyd here implies the same critique of female submissiveness in patriarchal society as he does in regard to Letitia. Yet despite all that, he does not criticise seriously the husbands' rights to expect such submissiveness. Rather he implies that the blame lies in female weakness. This is a similar position to that of Patrick White in The Tree of Man, in which Amy's unfaithfulness to her husband is not shown as a symptom of marriage based on gender stereotypes, but as evidence for the stereotype of female weakness. I shall discuss this in more detail in relation to White's novel later in this chapter. Boyd, likewise, does not clearly connect marital dissatisfaction to stereotypical gender behaviour and the need for self-identity. Although he implies a critique of the former, he is not concerned with the latter. His portrayals show more of the stereotype of female weakness and inadequacy.

Ada's misfortune is continued in the frustrated life of her daughter, Aida. Boyd gives the impression that her death in childbirth is partly the result of her lover's confusion between his true feelings and his mistaken ideas of gentlemanly behaviour. Here is the problem again intruding on the male-female relationship, for the male withholds the expression of his emotions because of attitudes he has learned. Henry, too, has suffered the same emotional repression and this contributes substantially to the poor quality of his relationship with Letitia.

Boyd shows his sexism in another way by insisting on the bad effects in a relationship in which there has been a reversal of male precedence. When Sim's finances dwindle overseas because of the failure of the banks, it is his wife Jane's money that saves the family and her position of provider causes her to assume the dominance of the male:

Jane, placid and agreeable when all was going well, asserted herself in an emergency. She had a sense of justice, and felt that, as it was now her money which was supporting the family, she should have some say in its movements.

(p.125)

Jane gains the ascendancy over Sim, confirming the role of money in social control:

JANE TOLD Sim that he must go and meet Amy. Sim said that he would not go ... Jane said that it was uncivil not to meet her with one of the family. Sim whimpered when arguing with Jane,



though he generally resorted to this to obtain money from her. Jane said that if he did not go, she would not buy him a new mare on which he had set his heart. Through the later years of his life, Jane's attitude to Sim was that of a mother to a naughty child.

Sim stopped crying, and grunted:  
"All right, I'll go."  
(p.154)

Clearly Boyd himself is disapproving of Jane's tactics because he comments on her attitude by capitalizing "JANE TOLD" and by using "must" to suggest that she has assumed authority over her husband. He is showing in an unfavourable light a female daring to usurp the male role, and a male too weak to take control. He does not treat in a similar fashion Henry's control in forcing Letitia to migrate to Australia by her dependence on him. In that instance Henry is shown to exert his rights and Letitia accepts willingly, if not happily. Nonetheless, in both cases the loving relationship suffers as a consequence of one partner dominating the other. Jane assumes a mothering role and considers Sim as a "naughty child", instead of a loving and loved husband. Boyd shows this to be an "unnatural inversion of the proper order" which causes unhappiness.

I have classified The Montforts as an example of strongly sexist male writing, because not only do the characters portray sexist attitudes, but Martin Boyd himself often conveys a similar attitude. Women who achieve significant individuality and independence are depicted in an

unfavourable light; males who are not domineering leaders, or those who reveal their emotions, are demeaned. Yet despite this there are complexities in the novel which create ambiguities in Boyd's position. At times he is critical of gender stereotypical behaviour of both males and females but he at other times implies that such behaviour is natural or right.

### GOLCONDA

Martin Boyd and Vance Palmer had very different backgrounds and social philosophies, but they shared the same sexist attitudes. Vance Palmer's Golconda (1948) is the first of a trilogy tracing the career of Macy Donovan, the Queensland ore miner who becomes a union organizer, and later enters the political arena. As with The Passage, which will be discussed in Chapter 3, Palmer presents his view of manhood in Golconda by celebrating a nobility in man's relationship to the natural environment with which he must wage continual battle. The important world in Palmer's novels belongs to the male. Golconda is set in the country where, whilst the love between human beings is shown to have meaning, the male role is more important and females are complementary. From the natural environment mateship develops as a means of mutual support in order to maintain

independence. With the expansion of mining interests mateship gradually leads to unionism, a new alternative to survival. Yet it is unionism that ultimately destroys male independence and replaces it with group solidarity.

The old miner, Christy, who has the respect of the gougers, promotes the established values of individuality and independence supported by the strength of mateship. But it is apparent that his values are becoming obsolete, for unionism is the new form of mateship to combat the threat of capitalism. Macy Donovan is shown the means of promoting this form of mateship by Union Executive boss, Mahony. Christy believes in an ideal Australian life based on independence from such controls, with help coming not from the State, but from the support of mates:

An independent community. One built on the idea of mateship, which was the true spirit of the country. The pride of free men who owned the tools they lived by and worked for the common good. We<sup>34</sup> few, we happy few, we band of brothers.  
(p.54)

This anarcho-socialist ethic is totally male, ignoring the female condition. The outback man has learnt to survive on his own initiative, with help from no one but a mate. Christy

34. Vance Palmer, Golconda, University of Queensland Press, 1972 edition used throughout my text.

Neda's lifestyle, Donovan feels critical of the undesirable people with whom she is allowed to associate:

He was exasperated at the way May let her [Neda] mix with that kind of scum. Deep down he had strong feelings about the atmosphere of innocence that should surround a young girl. (p.70)

This puritanic attitude is not only Donovan's but Palmer's as well. Palmer has already shown his opinion of Mother Gregson who runs a sly-grog shop and brothel, for he comments that she is an "old slut" (p.66) who would think nothing about dumping an unconscious man in the scrub. Yet when May expresses a kinder attitude that Mother Gregson and her girls are only "women battling for a living" (p.67), Palmer comments that Donovan "could not understand what moved her unless it was some obscure loyalty to her own sex." (p.69) The impression is quite clear that Palmer himself finds May's understanding obscure, because he condemns such women while he is loyal to the men who seek such services.

At times Palmer does attempt to show freedom from gender stereotypes, but there are limitational ambiguities in this. One side of this ambiguity is his unease in the treatment of mateship and individuality. Donovan abandons the philosophy of mateship to pursue his own ambitions but this is necessary to protect the rights of the miners. Such is his obsession, that he cynically manipulates and uses the old miner, Christy, who advocates both individuality and

mateship:

This is on you, Christy. There's a great spirit on the field now, and we can't let it leak away. You're the man to hold the crowd together with that line of talk about mateship and what working-people have in common. (p.105)

Palmer seems to approve of Donovan's individuality just as he has elevated mateship, although these two ethics are in a conflict which he fails to resolve. In fact, he casts Donovan in the role of champion of the cause of the miners, leading them to a more co-operative form of mateship at the expense of individuality in owning and working their own mines. Yet Donovan's motives are clearly based on self-interest. Palmer's ambiguity rests in his alternate upholding of stereotypical values and his admiration of the rejection of them in favour of individualism.

Another aspect of Palmer's ambiguity is his stereotyped understanding of gender relationships. This is shown in his treatment of Donovan's need for women. May and Neda are the two women Donovan most cares for and admires. Palmer portrays both as the stereotyped ideal of good women, yet Donovan's relationship with them is inadequate to meet his needs and for a time he drifts away from them. He decides to seek out the wife of the mining boss, Carita Keighley, with whom he has had a brief affair. She by then lives in the city away from her husband, but she frustrates his intentions and he cannot force himself upon her in the presence of her young

female companion. He is annoyed that women can withstand his will:

There was a clannishness about women that beat anything men could manage: they stuck to one another like swarming bees. (p.168)

He forgets the ideal of the bonding of men in mateship because of his resentment at his rejection. Palmer condemns Carita for failure to conform to the female gender stereotype, but his attitude remains ambiguous, because he also depicts her in an unfavourable light for rejecting Donovan.

Upon Donovan's return to Golconda he learns that May has died. Mahony and May have been the two people whom he has admired and respected. Disappointed with Union Leader, Mahony, May's death is all the more tragic for him:

Donovan had an acute sense of personal loss. Whatever in him was selfless, uncorrupted, hungry for an ideal human comradeship between men and women, had been drawn toward May. She had stood with Mahony as someone who had opened up his own possibilities for him, giving life a significance beyond the day-to-day scramble for money and power. (p.174)

Mahony has shown him how to achieve power, but May has demonstrated to him basic humanity and sympathy. She has aroused in him a conscience which holds the potential for Donovan to use his power to benefit others. In a sense May fits the role of 'God's Police, a stereotype depicted as

admirable in a female, but nonetheless inferior, submissive and advisory only.

Keighley sums up the male view of the supportive role of the good woman, the type selected for marriage. This role is one which may never impinge on his separate, superior world:

He was not even certain of her feelings for him; indeed he shied away from the temptation to probe it ... A solid marriage was the answer to most young woman's romantic yearnings. He was ready to spend money on his Carita ... but he did not want her to share his mining interests or play any active part in his life. All he asked of her was that she should preserve a cosy nest for him ...  
(p.97)

Here is the essence of the shallowness of the male-female relationship so prevalent in Australian fiction. The man strictly avoids developing an understanding of the woman's innermost feelings, and repulses any attempt she may make to share his life. Yet he wants a wife so that his domestic arrangements may be comfortable for him. With the importance given to man's endeavours, the implication to be gathered from his preservation of a separate domain is that it will maintain his social precedence. The different sphere stereotypes inhibit the communication and companionship which, arguably, a good marriage requires.

As a consequence of her husband's adherence to the male stereotype to preserve his sense of identity, which involves

his making no effort to contribute to their relationship, Carita Keighley is positively deprived of any meaning in her life.

She prowled about among the empty buildings, tormented by something eager and unsatisfied within her. Catching a glimpse through the office-window of her husband standing still, hands in pockets, pipe in mouth, she came to the door with an accusing look.

"But Walter -- you told me you were so busy, working your head off. You're not really." ...

"What's your idea of work, Carita? There are all sorts, you know ... sometimes it has to be done in the mind."

"How thoughtful of you to explain that to me ... Often you talk to me as if the mind was something I could know nothing about."  
(p.115)

In showing Carita's loneliness Palmer may seem to reveal some critical reserve about the separate spheres doctrine. However, the impact of this is dissipated largely by his use of unfavourably biased language in referring to Carita. "Prowled" is used instead of perhaps the neutral word "wandered" and Carita has an "accusing" rather than a loving look. This is suggestive of the stereotypical "shrew". The connotation of the predatory animal has implication of the 'deviant woman as sexual animal' stereotype for which Carita stands condemned by Palmer. He clearly implies that her subsequent infidelity is caused by her 'natural' female animality, not by the patriarchal inadequacies in her marriage. Her loneliness makes her ripe for her infidelity with Donovan. Palmer does not depict her adultery as a sad



consequence of a stereotype-produced empty marriage, because there is no love in the brief affair, only gratification of sexual needs. Moreover, sympathy for Carita is lost by her sarcasm even though it is in response to her husband's. This is all the more so because Keighley is not shown in a similar light of unfaithfulness.

The affair between Carita and Donovan at the opening of the new picture theatre is not merely a sexual response to her implied invitation, but it is really Donovan's reaction to a power game in which he wins against Keighley. Thus Palmer restores the male need for control rather than have Donovan respond to a female sexual initiative.

If Carita is cast in the role of a "bad" woman, May epitomises the image of the "good" woman, one who cares for the comforts of the men unstintingly in her capacity as food caterer of the fields. Palmer obviously approves of her activities and has Donovan respect her integrity even though he cannot understand her tolerance of what he sees as 'fallen women'. Palmer uses May as a standard of 'goodness' more effectively and comfortably in the absence of a male partner. In such portrayals he does not need to account for male superiority and it is significant that he ignores the circumstances of Neda's birth. This allows him to idealise May without it being to the detriment of a male. Yet May does not understand her own daughter, Neda. She tells teacher Dora Venn:

That child, they said, I've suckled her and given her all I have to give, but I'll go to my grave without knowing anything about her. (p.138)

May projects a warm personality, but Neda has more of the introspective, solitary qualities that are suggested about her dead father. There is a sense of deep integrity about Neda, and it is all the more tragic that mother and daughter cannot communicate their feelings and ideas to each other. Neda has been fascinated by the old miner Christy's male ideals. She has always wandered off on her own and shown a strong, independent personality. Her character approaches the ideal of the bushman's individuality. In this regard Palmer is to a certain extent free from gender stereotyping.

However, there is an ambiguity in Palmer's treatment of Neda, for she remains an isolate who refuses all offers of close personal relationships. Yet she embarks with Farelli on a sexual relationship which Palmer leaves inadequately explained in feminist terms. Neda has failed in her relationship with her mother because she has not been prepared to give of herself. This relationship is important to her and she regrets her failure all too late when May dies. Palmer suggests that her strong individuality is a barrier to human relationships, but his characterization of her is ambiguous because he also depicts her integrity and self-sufficiency as admirable qualities.

Palmer sets Neda as a contrast to Carita who, despite

the sympathetic treatment of her situation, as I have just shown, nonetheless is a bad wife, an adulteress, a seducer and user of man. Although Neda is condemned by some women for her illicit relationship with Farelli, Palmer allows her a measure of integrity and respect:

To some of them the Farelli affair was a scandal; they were even more shocked by the girl coming back than by her going off with the fellow. Why should she refuse to lie on the bed she had made for herself! ... there was a disposition to stretch a point for May's daughter; most of them owed a good deal to May. (p.204)

Besides, unlike Carita, Palmer shows Neda as having acted not only to satisfy her immediate needs, but also out of sympathy for another and not for any sense of using him:

His pleading voice beating in upon her, wearing down her defences, his eyes reflecting her hurt. The feel of his arm around her shoulders emphasizing his human need of her. (p.185)

Palmer's degree of generosity in this portrayal of Neda's motives is nonetheless ambiguous, because he is critical of her sense of independence and her rejection of "normal" heterosexual relationships. Neda only reacts to Farelli's needs when they coincide with her own, but she does not manipulate him as Carita does Donovan. Her needs are emotional not physical and this is a ground of Palmer's criticism of her. Although Carita's sexual excesses are shown in a censorious manner, Palmer is equally critical of Neda's

seeming frigidity:

Neither her body nor her mind had been ripe for the close intimacy that living with a man entailed. That first physical contact had revealed to her what strangers she and Farelli were to one another; she had found herself shrinking from his touch, even from the sudden hunger in his eyes. He had been sullenly angry when she wanted to go off and sleep alone. (p.185)

Palmer does indicate a reason for Neda's self-sufficiency in her growing sense of self-awareness, individuality, need for freedom and goals, yet this independence of conventional stereotypes is also seen by him as the cause of her failure in human relationships. She explains her position to Donovan:

"I found myself out. Freedom to go my own way means everything to me -- everything." (p.189)

When Donovan tells her he feels responsible for her, she rejects his genuine concern:

"I'd rather die than that anyone should feel like that." (p.189)

What might be seen from a feminist point of view as her resistance to domination is shown rather as a rejection of genuine male concern and a mutual relationship. Hence, her struggle for her own sense of identity is demonstrated as ungracious, fearful of weakness and even repulsive:

...she was suddenly afraid of the male force in him. When he masterfully took her arm to help her into the saddle her body drew away from him with such an instinctive recoil that he flushed as if he had been struck in the mouth. (p.190) <sup>35</sup>

It is Donovan who is shown to have the more mature understanding and sensitivity, even retaining good humour, until finally Neda acknowledges her lack of gratitude. It both amuses and bewilders Donovan to find attitudes of strong individuality in a female.

Palmer's continues his ambiguity about Neda in terms of her individuality and self-sufficiency, for her one definite goal after leaving Golconda is to return one day to carve a monument to Christy to stand beside that of her mother. Yet she has withheld any expression of love and understanding from her mother who has died alone. Christy, too, spends his final days alone and unloved, so a monument after his death is of no consequence. By having Neda fashion a monument to a strong individualist who fails, Palmer implies the inevitability of her own failure as an individualist and he also shows Neda's failure in the personal relationship with her mother. Yet May, who has an equally strong sense of identity, is held in respect by Palmer and the characters in the novel. This is a reversal of the gender stereotyping

35. This resembles D.H. Lawrence's way of seeing similar women, for instance Gudrun in Women in Love.

that he otherwise supports through Donovan with whom he identifies.

Harry Heseltine points out that Vance Palmer is concerned with demonstrating man's need for ethical, humanist values of the highest order.<sup>36</sup> He and other critics have been blind to Palmer's sexism by seeing betrayal of mateship as Donovan's only failing. In addition, they have not recognised Palmer's sexism in valuing Donovan over Neda. Critics have argued that Macy Donovan's search for power leads him to exploit his mates and thus fail as a human being. However, I maintain that he also exploits women and fails to develop meaningful relationships and in so doing he loses the capacity for love and morality. This is his greatest failure, not his quest for a power that could have been beneficial to his former mates. Palmer offers no alternative for Macy Donovan, but I believe Donovan's corruption is due to failure in human relationships. He begins with a potential to use his natural leadership qualities for worthy purposes, but the reader is not drawn to any sense of that probability, because Donovan does not relate to others in a loving and unselfish way. The novel concludes with Donovan flying away from Golconda to the city with Neda. He intends to further his political career, and

36. Harry Heseltine: "Australian Fiction Since 1920" in Geoffrey Dutton (ed.), The Literature of Australia, Melbourne, 1976, p.207.

there is an impression of his shrugging off his past experiences in Golconda. Neda is embarking on studies in art, and although she does not cherish any affection for Golconda, Palmer suggests that her experiences there are part of her essential self. Donovan, for all his selfishness and shallowness, is depicted as a far warmer character through his genuine concern for May and Neda despite his belief in male dominance. His faults are shown as acceptable male traits. His indiscretion with Carita is understood more readily than Neda's frigidity. His self-centred ambitions are nonetheless shown to be dynamic in a way that is not envisaged for Neda. Palmer's final expression of Neda's feeling is that "it was something at once deeper and less intimate." (p.287) This paradox contains the unresolved conflict in his depiction of her because he maintains his support for male superiority.

### CAPRICORNIA

Xavier Herbert's Capricornia (1938) depicts men as pawns of a cruel fate which thwarts their attainment of the noblest heights. One important aspect of this is the way it shows that relationships between men and women are impoverished by lack of understanding. This is further complicated by racial misunderstanding. Barely tolerated by the Whites in Capricornia, half-caste Norman could be

expected to find comfort with the natives. Fate eventually brings him to Tocky, the simple, natural native girl, but his lack of understanding of her prevents a deep and loving relationship from developing:

The joys of Arcady soon palled on Norman. His nymph, he found, was not the amusingly artless and sweetly amorous creature he had taken her for, but a shameless little fool. Poor Tocky! Her experiences in love, though by no means few, were all of necessity hasty, and hence were too brief and practical for her to learn from them much about the peculiarities of the male. Not knowing that men are prudes when not desiring, she did not realize that it was unseemly to behave at noon as she had done at midnight, or at sundown as she had in the middle of the afternoon; and not knowing that to hold the interest of an undesiring man a woman must listen, or at least pretend to listen, to his talk, she did not scruple to interrupt to say something for herself nor<sup>37</sup> to yawn in the talker's face. (p.384)

Herbert's language here shows male attitudes instilled by white society to be ridiculous and hypocritical. Norman considers Tocky a "shameless little fool" with "unseemly" behaviour, for providing him with the pleasures he desires, his exaggerated "joys of Arcady",<sup>38</sup> in a spontaneous and irregular way he does not expect. His censorious attitude to her is formed not because of her sexuality itself, but because she has deviated from his stereotypical expectations

37. Xavier Herbert, Capricornia, Angus & Robertson Publishers, Melbourne, 1981 edition used throughout my text.

38. Here Herbert may be alluding to the European "noble savage" image of the primitive.



of a woman's behaviour. His seeming hypocrisy is brought about because he sets appropriate times for love-making. Tocky is not "shameless" for she has nothing to be ashamed about. She rightly assesses his attitudes as "peculiarities" in contrast with her natural behaviour which is not regulated by the time. It is Norman who suffers from scruples, not Tocky. He exploits her sexual favours lightly, yet after he has his way he repels her attempts to follow him by the use of violence:

He had to handle her roughly to silence her ... And to stop her clamouring to come, he had to sit down and tell her how the country into which he was going was now swarming with murderers and those debil-debils incarnate the police ... He was forced at last to cuff her. He resorted to it several times during the rest of the argument.  
(p.384)

Norman takes Tocky home with him, "but not with intent to keep her" (p.406) for he fears "he might get into trouble for consorting with her. (p.406) Norman already has a Black mistress, Opal, so he is ever ready to exploit women. When Tocky fights Opal openly in the yard Norman does "nothing in the matter but laugh" (p.407) for it is immaterial to him from whom he is to have his sexual needs satisfied. Consequently, Tocky quickly learns to win Norman in a way quite at odds with her cultural upbringing by conforming to his stereotypical expectations:

Now when he came home weary and sodden from days of working in the rain, there was not even need to ask for his wants, because there were

intelligent eyes to see them and eager hands to get them -- good food, hot water, fleecy towels, dry clothes, a snowy-sheeted bed, and a soft companionship that was not mercenary ... Tocky had at last learnt something of a man's peculiarities. (pp.407-8)

In Norman's eyes she has changed from a "shameless little fool" for now she has "intelligent eyes." His new attitude stems from the fact that his comforts are being met conventionally and in an appropriate manner. He is prepared to use Tocky without a commitment to her, for "having learnt ... that the marriage was unavoidable, he had been cursing the day he met her." (p.457). He reveals that he has contemplated an abortion for her and even infanticide of his own child. It is evident that he now accepts her as fulfilling the stereotypical role of "good wife" although he avoids assiduously all attempts to force him to the commitment of marriage.

In this way, Capricornia, like the novels so far discussed in this Chapter, presents some criticism of sexism. However, Herbert is also ambiguous in his treatment, because of the manner in which he depicts his protagonist. Certainly the licentiousness so evident throughout the novel is presented as one of the freedoms available from bountiful nature.<sup>39</sup> In fact, it represents the exploitation of women

39. D.R. Burns, The Directions of Australian Fiction 1920-1974, Melbourne, 1975, p.76.

for which Herbert shows some sympathy. His male protagonist, Norman, is shown as a likeable victim of an unjust and uncaring society. He has been raised as a White but he is ultimately rejected because he is half-caste, and he is unable to identify with the Blacks because of his upbringing. Norman attempts to bridge both cultures but he does not find acceptance, peace or happiness. Because Herbert arouses sympathy for Norman's victimization, the reader is loath to condemn him for his exploitation of Tocky. Hence, the shocking death of both Tocky and her baby is related to a ruthless environment emphasised by the "dismal" cries of the crows from the "gnarled dead coolibah" (p.510) Norman's responsibility for the tragedy is thus clouded, although he is really the cause of Tocky's death by his carelessness and forgetfulness in leaving her in the tank. He has exacerbated the fear engendered by her upbringing at the Mission of the capital punishment meted out by the White Government. He relates to her stories of "murders and man-hunts and trials and executions." (p.383) Thus she fears the consequences of being captured by the police, because she has killed the white man, Frank McLash, who tries to rape her. When the police patrol approaches Norman's house, he orders her to try to escape or if this is impossible to hide in the tank. Her fear is of being put to death; his is of being forced to marry her because she bears his child.

When Norman returns to his farm after a long absence during a court trial, he discovers the tragic death of Tocky

and her baby in the tank where he has suggested she hide from the troopers. By referring to Tocky and her baby rather than their baby, Herbert distances the reader from focusing on Norman's responsibility. The horrifying "Kah! - Kah!" of the crows suggests the brutality of Nature rather than that of Norman. This final impression together with the manner in which Herbert distracts the reader's attention from criticism of the protagonist confirms this novel as strongly sexist.

#### THE TREE OF MAN

Patrick White's novel, The Tree of Man (1955), is strongly sexist because not only do the characters he depicts have sexist attitudes but White himself shares them. He both depicts and expresses the prevailing attitudes to women in Australian society. Not only are males the dominant, strong characters with initiative, but they alone reach special enlightenment or transcendental experience. Stan Parker, absorbed in his activities on the farm, is shown consistently, with authorial approval, to be concerned with a superior relationship between God and man, and unconcerned with an inferior loving relationship with his wife. Voss and The Vivisector continue the cultural attitude of The Tree of Man.

In The Tree of Man White portrays men and women as divided from each other by strong stereotypical gender differences, and as thus incapable of achieving a satisfactory relationship. However, he is unable to see that the 'reality' he depicts is only one possibility - sexual relations as constructed by patriarchy. He sees it rather as being in the nature of life, in which man is inevitably woman's spiritual superior. White frequently refers to the central characters, Stan and Amy Parker, as "the man" and "the woman", thus typifying his gender differentiation. In this, his vision itself is imbued with patriarchal assumptions. Hence, in a work such as this, Patrick White, while not completely unsympathetic to women, does reflect and subconsciously endorse Australian male attitudes. These are stilted and restricted, because both men and women have internalized the attitudes inherited from their forebears, distortions handed down from the convict days, and further developed by historical circumstances. These are still too close for us to have outgrown.<sup>40</sup> Patrick White has reflected these attitudes realistically, while not perhaps as a man being aware of their implications for women.

The Tree of Man opens with Stan Parker's claiming and

40. Miriam Dixson, The Real Matilda -- Woman and Identity in Australia 1788 to 1975, Melbourne, 1976, especially Chapters 4 and 6.

clearing virgin scrub for himself, an analogy of the male dominance of women. This is precisely the image of Australian identity that Kay Schaffer has shown to mitigate against women.<sup>41</sup> Stan Parker's actions are clear, positive, strong and aggressive. He is in control. This opening may be compared with the book of Genesis in the Old Testament with the account of the beginning of things and this association suggests a legitimising of the patriarchal attitude expressed by White's text :

Then the man took an axe and struck at the side of a hairy tree, more to hear the sound than for any other reason. And the sound was cold and loud. The man struck at the tree, and struck, till several white chips had fallen. He looked at the scar in the side of the tree. The silence was immense. It was the first time anything like this had happened in that part of the bush. (p.9)<sup>42</sup>

His actions become harmonious with the tranquillity of his environment. He is simultaneously one and not one with the natural order. He is at the centre of nature, controlling in much the same way as God is the Master of nature. Stan experiences a tension between "the nostalgia of permanence and the fiend of motion." He tries to resolve this tension by establishing his property within the permanence of the natural tree setting. This implies a sense of male dominance

41. Schaffer, op.cit.

42. Patrick White, The Tree of Man, Penguin Books Ltd, Victoria, 1977 edition used throughout my text.

as needing to be balanced by the 'female element', but clearly that element is to be made submissive to his will. He clears the land, builds a homestead and brings his new wife to it. White establishes Stan definitely as a positive, dominant, controlling influence on his social environment.

Many male critics have failed to recognise White's gender bias, so I digress to establish the overall sexism of the novel. At the end of the novel Stan Parker looks back on his ordinary life. He has cleared the land, built his house and brought his wife to it. They have experienced all the vicissitudes of nature, the ups and downs of rearing a family, their association with others who moved into the district. Their own relationship has known earlier times of happiness and later infidelity. At the end of his life Stan sees that his youthful pioneering dream has not amounted to anything of great significance. Yet he recognises a unity which gives his life its meaning. He believes he is an individual at the centre of a reality which is within himself. But there is another surrounding circle of transcendental experience which he is moving towards. Stan believes that God is within life not outside it. Brian Kiernan contends that The Tree of Man's achievement is in its tracing of a life lived out to the full.<sup>43</sup> However, Stan

43. Brian Kiernan, "The Novels of Patrick White" in The Literature of Australia, op.cit., p. 469.

does not attain a deep relationship with Amy and his life's work does not hold meaning for her. In this regard he can be seen as having failed. The basis of this failure can be seen as the internalization of gender stereotypes of male superiority and dominance, frustrated expectation of the female role and lack of understanding of female sexuality. In White's eyes, however, Amy contributes to the failure of their relationship and although he shows Stan sharing the responsibility for the distance between them, he maintains more sympathy for him. This is accepted by male critics such as William Walsh, who argues that Stan is a representative man, one in whom ordinary decency is "raised to the level of virtue". On the other hand, in Walsh's view, Amy is narrow, more reflectively self-conscious and there is a wider discrepancy between herself and her behaviour.<sup>44</sup> Walsh, in drawing an analogy between their lives and Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, implies that Amy is somehow the cause of Stan's failure. However, whilst it is true that she cannot share his total commitment to the land and its rhythms, neither does Stan appreciate her earlier commitment to home and family. Her efforts are trivialised not only by Stan, but by White's treatment of her also. Brian Kiernan has pointed out that the epilogue implies that Stan's life achieves a meaningful unity,<sup>45</sup> but I do not believe that

44. William Walsh, Patrick White's Fiction, Sydney, 30-31.

45. Kiernan, *ibid*, p.469.



such a conclusion can be drawn from the depiction of Amy's life. I thus contest Walsh's acceptance of White's implied value judgement that appreciation of Nature is superior to home and personal relationships.

The Tree of Man thus strongly supports conformity to gender stereotypes which nonetheless inhibits the development of loving relationships. The novel gives a picture of the social relationships existing between ordinary, simple people leading uneventful lives in the bush. White presents a sharp contrast between his male and female characters shown in terms of the patriarchal gender stereotypes. Amy has some insight into Stan's male perspective when she observes him at his grindstone surrounded by his land, the fruit of his labours:

Outside the circle of the cool tree there were his cleared paddocks, burned to a white-grey by the heat of summer, and the house he had knocked together, and enlarged and improved, and that had finally taken its place with some dignity in the fields, even pretending a bit beneath the tendrils of vines and a shower of roses. All was ranged around him, radiating out from him in the burning afternoon. (p.110)

In this scene Stan is very much in control, for he sees himself at the centre of the pattern of life around him, in keeping with the stereotype of the male in Australian society. Amy feels and accepts his control willingly, for she is ready to offer herself up to his designs:

She watched the white knife in her husband's hands ... She held her throat up, in the dim cool light of the tree above the well, offering it almost to the gleaming knife, that she would have received with what cry of love. [My emphasis] (p.110)

This typically Patrick White bizarre detail here reinforces the point that female submissiveness is an authorially approved masochism. White is here suggesting that women accept their inferior roles not only willingly, but as an expression of their own love.

At the end of his life, Stan no longer has the power to be in control. He must be still and accept the situation fate has brought him. He needs to be reconciled to the fact that he is not the controller of his fate. He is, nonetheless, at the centre of what he has created by virtue of his own endeavours:

There was little of design in the garden originally, though one had formed out of the wilderness. It was perfectly obvious that the man was seated at the heart of it, and from this heart the trees radiated, with grave movements of life, and beyond them the sweep of a vegetable garden, which had gone to weed in the months of the man's illness, presented the austere skeletons of cabbages and the wands of onion weed. All was circumference to the centre, and beyond that the worlds of other circles, whether the crescents of purple villas or the bare patches of earth, on which rabbits sat and observed some abstract spectacle for minutes on end, in a paddock not yet built upon. The last circle but one was the cold and golden bowl of winter, enclosing all that was visible and material, and at which the man would blink from time to time, out of his watery eyes, unequal to the effort of realising he was at the centre of it. (p.474)

"The last circle but one" implies the existence of an ultimate, spiritual life with the transcendent God. In this sense, it is a religious novel. But as with Lew Callaway in Vance Palmer's, The Passage, it is the male who is shown by the author as having the potential for the ultimate, spiritual heights. The novel opens with Stan axing the trees, dominating his environment. It ends with his turning to transcendental experience. This does not seem to be a progression, but White portrays a life that leaves him no alternative. There is a melancholic mood of failure, which, in viewing the lives shown in the novel from another perspective, one might see as the result of Stan's inability to achieve a loving relationship with his wife, although, significantly, White does not suggest this. Thus Stan, despite his insights, is fatalistic and without hope at the end of his life. He tells the young and brash evangelist who visits him:

"I'm not sure whether I am intended to be saved."  
(p.475)

This represents his greatest failure -- his perceived doubt in his own salvation. He points to the gob of his own spittle and claims:

"That is God."  
(p.476)

While White is suggesting through Stan the reality, unity and

nobility of nature itself, the implication may also be drawn that what Stan perceives as truth is what he has cast from himself. It is significant that Amy is subsequently brought back into focus and her presence is resented by Stan:

How long will they leave me like this, he wondered, in peace and understanding?

But his wife had to come presently. (p.476)

She, too, feels a sense of failure in her irrelevance to her husband:

She . . . took his hands as if they had been inanimate objects, and looked into his face, and said, "Is there anything you want, Stan?"  
"No," he said.  
What could she have given him?  
She herself began to suspect this. She went away, wandering through the garden in search of an occupation. (p.477)

Here Amy clearly shows that she realises that she has failed to achieve a fully communicative, loving relationship with Stan, and she continues to search for an occupation that will give her life meaning that has been lacking in her domestic situation. Yet despite this latent insight, White returns his attention to the nobility of Stan's ordinary life, because as Stan dies Amy is afraid that "she had been left behind" and that "he was escaping from her." (p.477)  
White's use of "escaping" suggests that Amy has been a hindrance who has somehow imprisoned Stan and inhibited his

potential. Stan has mused previously that Amy is a burden and he feels he could have married someone who would serve his needs better. Amy takes the responsibility for this burden upon herself when she blames herself alone for being pregnant and encumbering Stan financially. Yet neither she nor Stan communicate these concerns and discuss how they might solve the problems mutually. Despite their silence Amy senses Stan's dissatisfaction.

Both Stan and Amy find their relationship to be inadequate, although neither is able to communicate verbally the cause of the dissatisfaction. Perhaps their undeclared problems could have been resolved if they had been able to discuss them in a loving and understanding manner. Early in their marriage Stan already harbours criticism of Amy's ill-mannered indulgences, which he relates to her desire for his love:

Sometimes she would look up from her plate and speak, after tearing a mouthful of bread, speak with her mouth too full, the voice torn. He would hear and remember this voice again when he was alone. Her too greedy voice. Because she was rather greedy, for bread, and, once discovered, for his love.

Her skin devoured the food of love, and resented those conspiracies of life that took it from her before she was filled. (p.32)

It is clear that Stan feels stifled by Amy's need for love because he cannot satisfy her, and he blames her for it. His

critical attitude has the approval of White as well. However, Stan does not discuss his concerns with Amy, and this leaves her feeling dissatisfied and in need of companionship. Consequently, when new neighbours settle nearby, Amy is happy to make a friend of Mrs O'Dowd, although Stan is not impressed with the Irish. Amy explains her need of a friend:

'It is lonely here. ... It is nice to have someone to talk to.'

'And what about me?'

'Oh,' she said, 'you! ... That is different,' she said. (pp.45-46)

This conversation shows that their marriage relationship has failed to develop a deep friendship between them. Amy wants a companion with whom she can share confidences in a way that has been lacking with Stan. The early reticence to share their feelings with each other becomes even more firmly entrenched, so that Amy does not explain her desperate longing for a child, and Stan does not explain his resentment and hurt when she brings home a boy found alone during the floods. As a consequence, Stan does not respond to Amy's love, and she feels hurt and rejected:

'Good night, Stan,' said the woman. 'What a day!'

She put her mouth on his. She was his wife. Her mouth was rather moist, and familiar. But as he leaned on his elbow to blow out the candle he remembered the strange, dark figure of the girl standing above him on

the shore as he sat in the boat, and the greenish-white shadows, the shadows of the white roses in the thighs of his wife once when he had come quickly into the room. He turned quickly from his thoughts. He was tired and could easily have become irritable.

'Yes,' he yawned. 'Those poor buggers that lost their homes. And that kid. Do you think he's all right?'

And now the sadness that she could no longer ward off was floating over the woman who had kissed the mouth of her husband good night. She smelled the sad wick of the candle flame.

'I don't know,' she said.

Her position in the bed was intolerable. (p.94)

The hurt and resentment of both Stan and Amy are quite apparent, but neither puts their emotions into words, and it is this failure that draws them further apart. Stan and Amy only converse about more superficial matters and they thus avoid sharing their deepest feelings even after they have two children. Stan's opinion of Amy fluctuates according to his response to her behaviour, without discussing the reasons for her moods. Because he only interprets her conduct, he thinks of her as different people:

Stan Parker would sometimes fail to recognize his wife. He would see her for the first time. He would look at her and feel. This is a different one, as if she had been several. She was, of course, according to which dream rose to the surface. Sometimes she was beautiful.

Or again, they would look at each other in the course of some silence, and she would wonder, she would wonder what she had been giving away. ... Then she would become sour and strident ... At these moments too he saw her for the first time, and was surprised how sour and ugly she was ... Yes, she is ugly and bitter,

he said, and he could not have touched her unpleasant skin. (p.147)

All of these feelings remain unspoken, hidden by superficial talk, but troubled by guilt:

For he too was speaking for the sake of speaking. Their presences were sufficient, but some feeling of guilt made them speak in code words to hide their wealth. ... But they were forced to speak. They spoke about their delicate child, Thelma, who had developed asthma, until he began to tell again about cows ...

'It's all cows with you,' she said. (p.148)

Amy's spoken complaint is that Stan seems unconcerned about his children. However, her real resentment is that he does not show enough love and appreciation to satisfy her needs. His lighthearted response, 'What am I to do?' (p.148) also disguises his own resentment that he feels excluded emotionally from his children by Amy. The tragedy of this inability to communicate and develop a loving friendship persists even into old age, when Stan is deeply troubled spiritually. He longs to be able to share with his wife the agony of soul which he suffers:

I should tell her something of this perhaps, he said, but how to mention, and what to mention, so he could not. He realized that it was some time since they had spoken together. Except to ask for things and recount incidents, they had not really entered into each other. She was closed, he saw. He was perpetually looking at her eyelids, as she walked or sat with these drawn down, in a dream. (p.296)



White evokes sympathy for Stan in his final and deepest sense of loneliness, and the reader is led to blame Amy for his suffering. Undoubtedly, she has contributed to the gulf that has developed between them, but Stan has been equally responsible because of his attitudes. White has revealed his own sexist position in implying that Stan's loneliness is entirely her fault.

Stan's social conditioning as a male has contributed to his attitudes, but White accepts these as 'natural'. His treatment of women lies in sharp contrast to his treatment of Stan Parker and his other male protagonists. Stan's mother is described as a "humourless and rather frightened woman" who "had read a lot, through frail gold-rimmed spectacles, which did not so much frame her watery eyes as give them an unprotected look. She had begun to read in the beginning as protection from the frightening and unpleasant things." (pp.10-11) The words "frightened", "frail", "watery" and "unprotected" certainly convey the impression of female weakness in need of protection, obviously by a male. Stan's "watery eyes" show his mortality, but merely indicate that his earthly life must pass in order that he rise to a higher existence. Moreover, Stan's mother believes in a God "of pale-blue gentleness", a soft feminine virtue that the boy Stan cannot share:

His mother's God ... was a pale-blue gentleness.  
He had tried to see her God, in actual feature,  
but he had not ... (p.11)

In contrast, Stan's father is "obscene", "drunk regular", and because he can "twist a piece of iron into a true lover's knot", gives the impression of masculine strength. This makes drunkenness and obscenity forgiveable and even admirable in the aggressive male. His father's God is associated with masculine concepts of strength, action, punishment and aggression:

The God of Parker the father, the boy saw, was essentially a fiery God, a gusty God, who appeared between belches, accusing with a horny finger. He was a God of the Prophets. And, if anything, this was the God that the boy himself suspected and feared rather than his mother's gentleness. [My emphasis] (p.11)

This impression is conveyed by the use of the words "fiery", "gutsy", "belches", "accusing". This is the God Stan accepts rather than the God of his mother, because in Australia gentleness is seen as beneath a man. The boy is impressed with the violence in nature itself, and sees this as a reflection of the Divine Attributes associated with the male. Even in later life, Stan is exhilarated and somehow fulfilled by experiencing and matching the violent storm. By equating natural violence with the male stereotype of strength, aggression and dominance, Patrick White has confirmed the stereotype as "natural" and inevitable.

The effectiveness of Stan's conditioning is such that when the mother who has nurtured him all his life dies:

Some people said that young Stan Parker had no feelings, but it was just that he had not known her very well. (p.15)

This highlights the wide gulf between male and female. Stan's apparent lack of emotion may be explained in terms of his social conditioning, for males are taught to suppress the outward show of feelings. His father was "an obscene man" (p.10) who showed no feelings for his mother. Stan helps his blacksmith father and he learns and accepts his values which are far more attractive to him. Having identified with his father, he rejects his mother's appeal for comfort denied her by her husband before his death:

"At least you will be a comfort to your mother, Stan," said Mrs Parker, her nose grown thin and pink, not so much from grief as from remembering many of those incidents which had pained her in a world that is not nice.

The boy looked at her in horror, not understanding altogether what she implied, but knowing for certain he could not be what she expected. (p.14)

Martin Boyd portrays a similar emotional repression learned in childhood in The Montforts, although Henry is repulsed by what he perceives as feminine and weak characteristics in his father. His male models are drawn from society itself. White shows Stan's model to be an insensitive, coarse father whose assertive ways are nevertheless acceptable because they are 'natural'. This acceptance of the naturalness of violence is evident in the analogy White draws of Stan's

excitement during the violent storm. White shows the attractiveness of his father's coarse model as a preferable alternative to that of the gentle emotionalism of his mother. While people may be surprised at young Stan's control when his father dies, White seems to suggest that the reason lay in the emotional distance between mother and son together with the singularity of identification with the father. Later Stan takes this acquired emotional reservation into his marriage, but without this being seen as problematic by the author.

Rather than seeking a loving relationship with a female, Stan Parker has a male need for action and initiative, which from the nineteenth century British heritage means ownership. He sets out for the untamed bush to claim something for himself. This involves an element of destruction and aggression:

Stan Parker ... simply looking at what was his,  
began to tear the bush apart. (p.16)

In his relationship with women he behaves in a similar manner. He uses Amy's affection and he regards his ownership of her in the subsequent marriage as a benefit he has bestowed upon her. It is interesting to consider White's earlier description of Stan's visits from the bush to the home of his mother's cousin who has three daughters:

Alice, Clara, and Lilian, who had all three put up their hair and were taking an interest about the time Stan Parker had become interesting. (p.18)

Now White, by suggesting that the girls are interested in Stan without his reciprocation, implies that males are the objects of attraction to females while themselves remaining uninterested. This is because society expects young women to marry, while a man is admired for resisting their lures. A woman who fails to find a husband is made to feel a certain social disgrace. Yet by a curious double-standard, the bachelor is considered to succeed in being clever. In Kangaroo (1923), D.H. Lawrence has a similar perspective of the Australian attitudes existing between men and women. He, like White, suggests that women are the pursuers while men remain indifferent to them:

... they were like the birds, quite without fear, impudent, perky, with a strange spasmodic self-satisfaction. Almost every one of the younger women walked as if she thought she was sexually trailing every man in the street after her. And that was absurd, too, because the men seemed more often than not to hurry away and leave a blank space between them and these women. But it made no matter: like mad-women the females, in their quasi-elegance, pranced with that prance of crazy triumph in their own sexual powers ...  
(Kangaroo, p.337)

However, this is not the diffident, colourless, supportive young wife in The Tree of Man, but self-confident, forceful women who are sexually overpowering. Men fear such dominance and withdraw rather than risk their masculinity.

At a dance Stan sees a thin, hence weak girl, Amy Fibbens:

'Sit down', he commanded her. (p.19)

Note the "commanded", not invited or requested. Stan is asserting his male dominance. White also describes the subsequent relationship between Stan and Amy Fibbens, whom he marries, as one of dominance and aggression:

She was so frail.

The woman Amy Fibbens was absorbed in the man Stan Parker, whom she had married. And the man, the man consumed the woman. That was the difference. It did not occur to Stan Parker, in the suit of stiff clothes he wore for town, that his strength had been increased by an act of cannibalism. He swallowed, and forgot his own body too, when once he had been conscious of it, in the presence of other men. (p.33)

Here White seems critical of Stan's male assumptions by using his grotesque image of the relationship as cannibalism. Nonetheless this male attitude is made to seem legitimate by White's depiction of Amy. He depicts the frailty or weakness of women, who have no identity of their own, but who derive their identity from their husbands. White does not show Amy's lack of personal identity to be socially produced, but as natural, just as it is natural for a female to passively await a man to choose her. Yet her passive conformity to the stereotype of wife and mother, can be seen by the reader as consequent upon her low social position in which any offer of

marriage is preferable to none. There is also evidence that social conditioning is involved for Stan's three cousins Alice, Clara and Lilian who are conditioned to believe that a suitable and economically advantageous marriage is most desirable, though they show that they also identify with a social position in life acceptable to themselves:

Not that it was intended any of the Bott girls should marry the blacksmith's son, himself with hard hands and a shack somewhere in the hills. Oh dear, no. (p.18)

Yet such was their conditioning to believe in romantic love that "they waited for signs of intimacy." (Ibid) Stan is not considered good enough for the Botts, but he is socially superior to the orphan, Amy, and a meeting with her is contrived:

Almost before he could uncross his legs Stan Parker saw that the parson's wife had gone, leaving in her place a thin girl. (p.19)

Amy feels she must find a husband and her socially induced tension is reflected in her apparel:

Her blue dress was quite anxious, and the narrow sash that had been tied too many times. (p.20)

This points to the repressive social attitudes, which make her feel a burden on her aunt and uncle. The absence of

family love is exacerbated by the social conditioning of girls to cherish romantic concepts of love in marriage:

Amy had not yet been loved, except by her mother, fretfully, for a short time before she died. The thin girl did expect something to happen eventually, because it does, but these expectations were timid and wholly theoretical.

(p.21)

White shows Amy to be passively waiting for something to happen rather than that she take control of her own life, and he assumes this to be natural, just as he assumes that it is natural for Stan to dominate her. Lack of identity is also shown in White's depiction of her as 'frail' and 'timid'. His attitude seems to be that these traits are natural to femininity.

White's habit of analysing and evaluating his characters, particular Amy, can be annoying. Here is an example of this:

I have a good husband, she would say, not aware that she was specially unworthy, yet unworthy she was in some yet-to-be-discovered way ... I am ignorant of almost everything, I am ignorant of the sensations in my body, and of the meaning of almost everything; I cannot really believe in God. Then she recoiled also at the thought of the man with whom she lived in a house, whose strength was no substitute for her ignorance and weakness, and whose passion was disastrous.

(p. 57)



White is actually making Amy blame herself for her own inadequacies, rather than recognising that she is the product of a patriarchal society. However, the insufficiency of male strength to compensate for lack of identity, knowledge and female sexuality is highlighted in this passage, despite White's value judgement of Amy. She is forced to feel this way following the violent storm. Although Stan experiences the same fear that she does, his social conditioning as a male enables him to hide his human weakness. He assumes the role of strong comforter despite his own insignificance against the might of hostile natural forces. When the storm subsides it is Stan who restores the farm to normality by his endeavours, while Amy's supportive efforts seem to pale into insignificance. She sees herself as an "ant-woman" (p.50), busily working in areas not noticed and her assessment is just because White offers no evidence of husband and wife discussing their mutual misunderstanding of each other. Moreover, White does not criticise their lack of communication, but rather implies that each should fulfil their particular roles without the need for recognition. In White's portrayal, Amy's self-reflection assumes an indulgence in self-pity when she should be concerned with her husband's tragic set-back.

Hence, it is not only Stan who assumes importance and Amy who accepts an inconsequential role, but White himself offers no genuine alternatives. Certainly, he does not

challenge their inherent values in the novel and he assumes the validity of the patriarchy on which they are based. Both Stan and Amy are the victims of social conditioning in their acceptance of patriarchal values as natural and White does not question this. Amy realises that she is pregnant at a time when she and Stan can ill afford a child. She feels like her cow, that Stan wants to sell because she is getting old. Her dependence and sense of inadequacy, and the burden she knows she is to Stan, depress her. She can feel no comfort in Stan's strength as she craves independence and self-sufficiency for herself. Amy even regards Stan's passionate strength as a cause of disaster -- in this case the birth of a child when their living conditions seem inadequate to support a baby. This may imply an authorial doubt about the conventional ideology of male as strong protector, but White dispels this doubt because Stan is shown as succeeding in supporting his family. Amy feels powerless in her pregnancy, and there is no escape for her. What is significant is that neither Amy nor Stan express their concerns and feelings in this matter. Their repression of their feelings is a consequence of their perceptions of their roles, Stan as male provider and Amy as willing mother. White shows sympathy for Amy's feelings but he does not challenge seriously the values that support them. His portrayals support the concepts of male as provider and female as nurturing mother. Thus, Stan does not express dissatisfaction about the pregnancy because he understands

his role of supporter of the family to be natural and right. Amy, too, accepts this concept and consequently lays the responsibility solely on Stan. Moreover, because she has this attitude, she attributes 'blame' to Stan. White does not question the validity of these assumptions but rather confirms them. Certainly he does not condemn the failure of Stan and Amy to express their misgivings.

As evident from our early history, when females are demeaned, they compensate by dominating in the domestic situation and assert themselves arrogantly over their children.<sup>46</sup> Amy reacts in this way:

The mother reared her children, first with diffidence and cyclopaedia, then with arrogant infallibility as her experience grew. Very soon no one could tell her what she did not know. Indeed, she became oracular, giving advice to others in flashes of inspiration, for which the younger and more timid were grateful, but which older women received with slow, sour-sweet smiles. (p.122)

I contend that Miriam Dixson's argument applies to Amy who dominates the domestic affairs as compensation for her otherwise unimportant role in society. Yet White suggests a value-judgement of women as devious and hypocritical by his description of the "sour-sweet smiles" of the older women.

46. This case is argued in detail by Miriam Dixson, op.cit., especially p.223.

A potential situation of conflict between the sexes arises when Stan uses his son to assert male superiority over his sister by giving him a knife with which the boy cuts his knee. Even though Stan's decision is unwise, he still thinks in terms of his superiority when Amy challenges him:

He ... knew that he owned the horse and buggy, and even the woman and the two children beside him.  
(p.123)

Thus, even his token submission to a measure of domestic dominance cannot shake his confident superiority because of his ownership and her dependence. This also adds weight to my argument that Stan believes his marriage gives him ownership of his wife, just as an inanimate possession, with the associated right of use or abuse. Moreover, this is White's attitude also because he identifies with Stan's point of view using "he knew" rather than "he believed", and by avoiding direct expression of Stan's thoughts.

The attitudes of Stan and Amy are transferred to their children. The following conversation between Thelma and Ray brings out male dominance over a mere token female resistance:

'Mum,' said the boy, 'can I climb some trees?' Because he loved to shin up and clamber from branch to branch, until he was almost the bending crest, and now this sensation was most imperative. To touch the thick wood. To struggle with and finally overcome it.

'Do you really think it'll do you any good?' the mother asked with an effort, as if she had been ascending a hill, though the slope they were on was still gentle. 'Last time you tore your pants. And your knees are all scabs.'

'Ah, please, yes,' he sighed, clasping her hand and pressing against her like an animal. 'Let me'.

'I don't want to climb old trees,' said the girl. She shook her straight pale hair.

'You couldn't,' he said. 'You're soft. You're a girl.'

'I'm not,' she cried, twisting her mouth.

'What else are you?' he said. 'A heifer perhaps?'

'If I'm a heifer you're a bull,' she cried. 'They keep heifers. But they kill bulls.'

'Not all of them,' he said. 'Not the best.'

(pp.133-34)

Although the quotation is long it focuses on interesting attitudes already well developed in the children. The boy associates with assertion and action. He overcomes his mother's objections by an appeal through his sexuality. The girl is considered "soft" and the paleness of her hair conveys an impression of weakness and inferiority. The boy pushes home this point by calling his sister a heifer, meaning to humiliate her. He even undermines her retort by re-asserting his superiority.<sup>47</sup> White comments that Amy "was lulled, except that here she could indulge her fancy with a lesser sense of guilt than in her solid home." (p.134) He

47. One of White's concerns in this episode is similar to that of Alan Marshall in his short story, Tell Us About the Turkey, Jo (1946). In this latter, a younger brother seeks importance and identity in recounting his misfortunes and accidents. Thelma's "misfortune" seems to be her female weakness and she is eventually put in her place just as effectively as the young boy is by his older brother in Tell Us About the Turkey, Jo.

sees her guilt in the home as letting her household duties lapse, and her guilt with her children in not asserting discipline in forbidding climbing. White fails to condemn Amy in not endeavouring to influence her son's attitude to females. This is a tacit approval of the underlying patriarchal assumptions about the abilities of women.

Although both Stan and Amy are dissatisfied with their relationship, it is significant that it is Amy whom White shows as unfaithful to her marriage vows. Here Amy is implicitly condemned by White because her affair is so gross and loveless. She is not shown to succumb to human weakness in mitigating circumstances, but rather as being the active seducer. Amy is ripe for her infidelity with the commercial traveller who chances her way, and offers her a means of asserting herself over her inferior life-style. The infidelity is more a means of expressing aggression, initiative, adventure and an element of risk. Even in the heat of passion, it is noteworthy that the commercial traveller, Leo, is the one to withdraw from her sexuality:

'Steady on now,' breathed the man's hot breath into her bursting ear. On putting aside surprise and fear, he had quickly risen to the moderate heights of which he was capable, of rather trite and panting sensuality, of stale words and physical cosiness. Now he tried to calm this woman, whose passion overflowed the bounds that he knew.

'Take a hold of yourself,' he laughed, touching her with heavy, superior hands. 'I'm not gonna run off and leave yer.'

If he was her inferior in passion, he was her superior in quickly appeased lust. So he could afford to laugh, and light another cigarette, and watch the soul writhe mysteriously in her body.  
(p.303)

White has focussed briefly on female sexuality and suggested the possibility of male inadequacy to satisfy it. However, his depiction shows female sexuality out of control and in need of a male steadying domination. The female's sustained passion is depicted in distasteful terms; certainly White is not praising it. He is critical of the shallowness of Leo, despite his more urgent lust, but the brief affair is not meant to represent a meaningful relationship as that between husband and wife is expected to be.

It is true that Stan commits adultery in his heart in the episode of rescuing Madeleine from the burning house:

It was not their flesh which touched but their final bones. Then they were writhing through the fire. They were not living. They had entered a phase of pain and contained consciousness. His limbs continued to make progress outside himself. Carrying her. When her teeth fastened in his cheek it expressed their same agony.

"Look! He is there," they were crying.  
"They are there. He has her." (pp.180-181)

There are strong sexual allusions here and Stan continues to remember the incident later in his life. However, it is not a realised adultery, and it occurs as a consequence of Amy's encouragement for him to rescue Madeleine. The mitigating

circumstances are heroic and ennobling in contrast to Amy's infidelity.

After Amy's children, Ray and Thelma, leave for the city to find employment, she loses her sense of self-esteem. She and Stan have not developed a meaningful relationship to replace the vacuum. Stan notes that Amy is becoming careless in her household chores. They have lost their meaning and importance to her own identity and they are not appreciated, but merely taken for granted:

'Is this really my house?' the woman thought, pausing with her empty can, looking through the dusty oleanders at the curtains waving from the shell of the house. Sometimes the man her husband, who had his own preoccupations, would promise himself to tell her she was letting the house go, and that she must do something about it, but he postponed this, because it is something you do postpone, out of delicacy, even pity. (p.298)

Stan, too, has begun to have his doubts, because there is not a truly fulfilling relationship with Amy. He is expressing his individual identity, but Amy really has no identity of her own.

In The Tree of Man it is Stan who gains a special insight concerning life and its meaning, of God and His relationship to man. Amy never achieves this. At the height of Stan's vision of his relationship with God, Amy appears happy at finding her long-lost nutmeg-grater, a matter of



small consequence, but one of great importance to her. Brian Kiernan suggests that this confers a circularity and unity on the random pattern of her life, and that it reinforces the impression of her inability to appreciate Stan's vision that "One, and no other figure is the answer to all sums." (p.477)

<sup>48</sup> Stan's vision is of a unity of all life within the natural world, and of the essential isolation of the individual. <sup>49</sup> I suggest that this isolation is partly the cause of Stan's failure to achieve a fulfilling marriage and that it is White's sexist bias to be unable to see this. He downgrades Amy's life and character, and, like Vance Palmer, seems to reassert the inability of women to find enlightenment except through a man. White accepts the gap between the perceptions and concerns of Stan and Amy as natural, and this identifies him with the problem he is trying to diagnose. Stan is never able to communicate fully with Amy, or indeed anyone. For White, the communication problem is inevitable, given Amy's "natural" inferiority. He portrays men and women as not having the capacity to communicate in a meaningful way with each other. However, although White suggests some criticisms of Stan's 'maleness' the overall impression conveyed by the novel is that of his nobility.

48. Kiernan, Patrick White, New York, 1980, p.38.

49. Ibid.

H.M. Green does not consider that The Tree of Man is successful because White does not set the basis of the universal in the particular.<sup>50</sup> He sees a failure in White's vagueness in characterization and inadequacy to draw the reader into the scene and action. I believe that the basis of Stan's vision remains obscure and the characterization of Amy is unsatisfactory. Stan and Amy's relationship is depicted as a failure, but the depiction itself involves a failure of understanding on White's own part, since he seems to suggest that the fault is totally Amy's, rather than equally Stan's. For this reason, Stan's higher vision is hardly credible. He cannot analyse his own life let alone experience higher perception of God.

White concludes the novel with Stan's grandson's aspirations to express himself through poetry. By stating that "in the end there were the trees" (p.480) White may be returning to the earthly reality of Nature or he may be alluding to the replacement of the bush which Stan aimed to control. The meaning is obscure in all but the fact that it is a male endeavour. I agree with H.M. Green that the impact of the novel is not entirely satisfactory although I believe that inadequacies in relationships contributes as much to

50. H.M. Green: A History of Australian Literature, Vol.2, 1923-1950, Melbourne, 1961, p.1407.

this' as poor characterization. White has not investigated adequately the reasons for the failure to achieve a loving relationship possibly because society, and he as a member of it, has not yet solved the problem.

Henry Lawson, William Hay, Martin Boyd, Vance Palmer, Xavier Herbert and Patrick White provide representative examples of the sexism rife in the writing of many Australian male authors. They may be depicting society as it really was in the period they were writing, or they may be conveying their own perceptions of the past. The significance of the sexism lies only partly in the portrayal of the gulf between men and women and/or the unsatisfactory nature of male-female relationships. More important than this is their failure to understand that it is the gulf that creates the failure, and that culture, not an eternal human nature, is responsible for both.

## CHAPTER THREE

### LESS SEXIST MALE NOVELS

Although strong sexism is evident in much of the writing of Australian male authors, there are some examples of less biased treatment of gender issues. Vance Palmer and Patrick White are less sexist in The Passage and The Aunt's Story respectively, even though they show society supporting conventional gender stereotyping. In general, Palmer is strongly sexist, but in The Passage he does cast a doubt on the Australian myth of masculinity. In The Aunt's Story White challenges the socially defined concept of femininity and depicts it as repressive, insensitive and cruel. Nonetheless, he offers no viable alternatives for women and he does show the non-conformist woman destroyed ultimately.

Palmer was fascinated with the world of men and practicalities. His concern was manliness and strength, and he was wary of emotion, "the feminine atmosphere", suburbia and the suffocating crowd. In fact, Palmer felt awkward in intimate situations preferring to distance himself from other people, including his wife Nettie, and this influenced his writing. He aligned democracy with men and suggested that women threatened his perceived world. There were exceptions,

but only where a woman surrendered herself to a man.<sup>1</sup> Palmer's attitudes expressed the strong bias of the literary culture of the times. He modelled his own life on the underlying assumptions of the superiority of male objectivity and consequently his writing was critical of the more subjective female perspective. Palmer frequently implies that he would like women to develop what he considered a mainly male capacity for "impersonal interest" and independence. His attitude obviously affected his own relationship with his wife, for in much of his correspondence with her he addressed her as 'mate'.<sup>2</sup> David Walker claims that fear of intimacy weakened Palmer's writing and marred his relationship with Nettie.<sup>3</sup> Palmer considered that writing spare of emotion, writing that ignored a feminine perspective, was superior to that which catered for women's tastes. He believed that such writing was of particular value in Australia. In this assumption, he both reflects and is the product of, the prevailing social attitudes.

If Palmer aimed to write for a male reading public, or for women who would accept its value system, then he would seem to have based his perspective on socially acceptable

1. David Walker, Dream and Disillusion - A Search for Australian Cultural Identity, Canberra, 1976, p.177
2. Walker, loc.cit., p.174.
3. Ibid, p.175.

grounds. Certainly female novelists of the period believed that they suffered constant discouragement and less freedom than their male counterparts. <sup>4</sup> They argued at a meeting of the Fellowship of Australian Writers in Sydney in 1933 that writing should be judged on merit and not on the sex of the author. Ada Holman reported that the male authors responded with a "note of fear". Frank Davison proposed that only the woman with a "masculine mind ... succeeded intellectually". <sup>5</sup> Thus the male attitude only attributed worth to female authors if they abandoned their feminine perspective and acquired a presumed superior and unemotional male style of writing.

For Palmer, ethical behaviour is an inescapable facet of life, not deriving value from religious or metaphysical systems, but from an individual awareness of mutual need that any person of integrity must discover in relating to others. His characters thus develop humanist values in their domestic relationships. Palmer has been praised by Jack Lindsay, A.D. Hope, H.P. Hesteline and others, though David Walker has given a less favourable assessment of his writing. Palmer concerned himself with the treatment of the common man and an ennobling relationship with the natural world, but his

4. Modjeska, op.cit., p.9.

5. Report of F.A.W. meeting, 18 October 1933, "All About Books", 13 November 1933, pp.187-8, as cited in Modjeska, ibid.

characters are rather dull considering their biographical details, and there is a reductive bias aimed at women.<sup>6</sup> In Palmer's opinion, most of the overseas' fiction of his times was written for women and this he deplored because he considered that this produced a "microscopic, intense and rather suffocating" atmosphere which he described as "warm and enervating, like a small room heated with an asbestos stove."<sup>7</sup> This reveals Palmer's fear of female constraint. In line with his criticism he emphasised manliness because he thought that manly qualities were threatened by feeble female tastes. He felt that men wanted "vivid character, robust humour, a touch of philosophy, and tragedy without the superfluity of tears."<sup>8</sup> This attitude completely disregards the value of emotion and a female perspective. In fact, he hoped that writers could be "sheltered from that feminine public that would destroy them."<sup>9</sup> Such an attitude is imbued strongly with the patriarchy of Australian society and especially it elevates the ethic of mateship.

6. Walker, p.173.

7. Ibid.

8. Ibid.

9. Ibid.

(i) THE PASSAGE

My discussion so far has pointed to the strong sexism in most of Palmer's works, so the inclusion of The Passage (1929) as an example of less sexist male writing may appear rather surprising. Certainly Palmer's general avoidance of emotional intimacy is apparent in this novel as well and he does not recognise that this contributes substantially to the failure of his protagonist, Lew Callaway, to find happiness in marriage. Yet Palmer is not totally sexist, for he is critical of Lew's inability to meet his son's emotional needs. Moreover, he does show the shallowness and failure of Lew's brother, Hughie, who characterises the masculinity embodied in the Australian myth. Palmer is often ambiguous in his treatment of his characters in terms of gender stereotyping. He elevates the male, but is at times critical of the attributes he sees in their emotional reserve by showing the adverse consequences of this.

In The Passage Palmer portrays the individual swamped by the tide of collective society. Set by the side of the sea, the characters are members of a small fishing village on the Queensland coast. The Callaways are as much at one with the water as with the land. This is symbolic of their innate morality, in their proximity to all that is seen to be best and simple in life. Certainly Palmer is making the world



appear symbolic to Lew Callaway, who in pondering on the sea reflects:

Its steady breathing made the boat lift like a  
tiny shell. (p.3) <sup>10</sup>

Palmer imagines the sea to be a supportive, even nurturing force. He expresses the relationship between Lew and old Tom in terms of the same symbolism:

Some sort of physical communion existed between them, and they drew their thoughts from the same current of life. [My emphasis] (pp.49-50)

The symbolism of the relationship associates with the sea, just as does the description of Uncle Tony:

Uncle Tony ... moved through the water like a seal. That deep chest of his took in so much air that he was almost as much at home below the surface as above it. (pp. 71-72)

In this way Palmer supports strongly the relationship between man and Nature.

In contrast to his depiction of man's direct affinity with Nature, Palmer shows woman relating to it only via man,

10. Vance Palmer, The Passage, F.W. Cheshire Pty.Ltd., Melbourne, 1957 edition used throughout my text.

and such relationship is shown to be never as strong as his. However, he does show that by supporting her husband's masculinity and caring for his children, the good woman is able to achieve a harmony with Nature, despite its degree of inferiority to that of her husband. Such a woman is Lew Callaway's mother. Another type of good woman is young, athletic Clem, who is also able to achieve a closeness to Nature, although of lesser quality to that of Lew. Clem considers Lew to be so much one with his environment that he may not even notice the beauty of Nature around him:

Perhaps there were more ways than one of being aware of things. He absorbed them through that big, slow body of his, made them part of him ... It was the sense he gave her of a strong, unconscious life, rooted in the earth about it, that had always drawn her<sub>11</sub> to him. All the Callaways had it. (p.20)

Palmer reinforces the concept of male affinity with Nature in writing of Lew's father, Bob:

He had been born on an island at the other end of the Passage, and seemed as native to the place as the inconspicuous tea-tree of the mud-rooted mangroves. (p.13)

In contrast, Palmer depicts the woman, Clem, as having an affinity with the man, Lew, rather than with Nature itself:

11. My emphasis -- to show how the language symbolises an affinity with Nature, and it is this that attracts Clem.

She stood now on the edge of the water, wondering how much her sense of belonging to this place, soul and body, was affected by the knowledge that he belonged to it, too. Was there anything in the trees, contours, channels of this Passage strong enough to hold her loyalty, apart from him? Had the sandy soil of itself any power over her? ... she had felt his power laid on her again.  
(p.238)

Clearly, Palmer implies that man's affinity with Nature is superior to women, who only share some sense of it through the male and his power. In Chapter 5 I shall discuss Katharine Susannah Prichard's novel, Coonardoo. In this she maintains a contrasting position to that of Palmer, for she shows a direct connection between women and Nature, although she also establishes a conflict in that she shows this to be a means of sexual exploitation. Thus, she too, affirms women's lack of power. Palmer also puts down even his concept of the good woman to a level inferior to and dependent on the male.

Even more inferior than the type of male that he criticizes, is the bad woman, whom he depicts as one with no appreciation of either Nature or male authority. Lew Callaway's wife Lena comes into this category. Palmer's language reflects his critical attitude of Lena. When Peter is ill, Palmer portrays Lena unfavourably, because when she finds Lew she says:

"Where in God's name have you been, Lew?" she burst out. Lew sprang from the boat to the jetty at a bound.  
[My emphasis]

Upon reaching the house Palmer has Lew assume rightful control and direct his wife:

"All right. Get him into a bath right away."  
(p.189)

Palmer's use of "burst" in relation to Lena suggests his disapproval of her. In contrast, "sprang" is admirable in Lew. As a male Lew naturally takes control and directs his wife rather than discuss with her, and this, too, seems to be strong and right. Palmer even places Lew's mother, Anna, in an unfavourable light for her possessive and self-interested jealousy. Palmer shows this in describing Anna thinking about Lena:

Her body went hard and stiff.  
[My emphasis] (p.89)

Later Palmer reinforces this idea of hardness in women when he writes of Anna:

...from his mother's tone he could feel that some  
hard crust covering her had broken.  
[My emphasis] (p.135)

Despite his criticism of women, Palmer does qualify male potential in succeeding in gender relationships by depicting disharmony in Lew's marriage. Lew does not communicate warmly with his wife, preferring his relationships with other males. However, when his brother,

Hughie, is about to leave for the city, Lew ponders his inability to relate in a meaningful way, not only with his wife, but with people in general:

...you walked along beside people till you found you were on opposite sides of a gulf that widened the further you went on. Who would he have to yarn with now in the timeless summer evenings, when the moon came flooding over the Passage and vague thoughts stirred in a man's mind as he lay on the grass by the breakwater? There was so much of what went on inside him that he couldn't share with Lena. He had already discovered that.

(p.133)

This unwillingness to share his feelings with his wife or try to understand her could well be seen as a major cause of the marriage failure. Yet instead of allowing this some critical prominence, Palmer maintains sympathy for Lew and denigrates Lena. Even before his marriage, Lew's inability to communicate his own feelings or understand those of others is recognised by his childhood friend, Clem, who loves him. She complains to Lew:

"You never tell me what you've been doing or thinking. And when I rattle on about things I've been chewing over, you're silent as an owl."

(p.19)

However, Palmer even suggests that Clem, as a female, is inferior to Lew in a way that renders her incapable of understanding him:

A vague depression was weighing Clem down. Lew had seemed dull that day, absorbed in his own thoughts, loving deep down in some current of love that was beyond her depth. (p.29)

Palmer's ideological orientation prevents him from really understanding what might be the causes of Lew's marriage failure, because he shifts the blame to Lena in a way which expresses not just her nature in particular, but his general sense of female inferiority. Palmer's own withdrawal from expression of loving intimacy with his wife Nettie is reflected in the way he portrays the relationship between Lew and Lena. The failure of the union is attributed entirely to Lena and Palmer fails to recognise any contributory blame in Lew. Moreover, he does not assess critically Lew's belief that his love for his son, Peter, is stronger than hers:

...there was Peter -- he belonged to both of them. And Lena had shown him that evening that she was as fond of the boy, in her own way, as he was. (p.194)

By using "in her own way" Palmer is suggesting, through Lew, that the quality of Lena's love is inferior. This attitude is also shared by the local men, who comment after Peter's death:

"It hit her damn near as bad as it hit Lew," they told one another. (p.232)

Lena's sorrow is assessed as "near", not equal to Lew's. Palmer clearly portrays Lew as superior to Lena in his capacity to love, and if he fails to love her, it is because she is undeserving of it.

Despite Palmer's elevation of the male, he does suggest some reservations. When Lew is first attracted to Lena, he describes his feelings in this way:

He had a rankling desire to impress himself on this girl with the white skin and the low laugh, to make her take notice of him. It was a strange feeling she roused in him, different from any other he had known -- savage, male, possessive.  
(p.78)

There is ambiguity in Palmer's description, for despite the criticism implied in the words 'savage' and 'possessive' there is an attraction in the passion they represent. Palmer is more clearly critical of Lena for intruding on the male stereotype of dominance:

"If you're coming part of the way home with me, I'll walk and lead my horse," she said, with a touch of condescension that was like a command.  
(pp.86-7)

While Palmer is ambiguous in the way he describes Lew, alternating between ennobling and criticising him, the latter is always balanced by criticism of a female without any attempt to elevate. Thus, his description of Lew as "heavy-

footed" (p.98), "sluggishly ... lugging up his thoughts like a heavy anchor from a twenty-fathom sea-bed" (p.99), he balances by referring to Clem as "abrupt" (p.98) and "aggressive" (p.99). Nonetheless Palmer is clearly critical of Lew's lack of self-knowledge in assessing his own feelings for Clem, and his inability to recognise that she is communicating to him her love indirectly as it is not stereotypically acceptable for her to do otherwise. This is a major reason why I consider this novel to be less sexist than those discussed in Chapter 2. Likewise, though to a lesser degree, Palmer is critical of Lew's aggressive dominance in winning Lena's hand in marriage:

It was only his vehemence, the sheer power of his will, that had forced the decision. (p.121)

Nevertheless, Palmer weakens the impact of this criticism by following it with a description of how happy Lena first is in accepting the lifestyle Lew makes for her. (p.122) Palmer assumes that it is natural for a woman to submit to her husband, so his criticism is ambiguous.

Palmer more clearly qualifies symbolically the ideal of harmony between man and Nature. Although The Passage embodies images of the sea's ebb and flow, which symbolically represent natural behaviour and the source of the spiritual renewal and strength upon which Lew Callaway draws, stern demands are made on this purely human morality. Palmer shows



that Lew Callaway's affinity with the sea lulls his mind and weakens his intellectual perceptions:

It was only on these diamond bright days at the beginning of winter that you could peer down through the clear water and see the rainbow tinted fish darting by in shoals, the giant anemones stretching out their horny tentacles, the lazy carpet sharks threading their way through labyrinthine passages.

... A fascinating world for Lew, one that liberated his mind! (p.4)

In this Palmer poses a doubt about the harmony he has idealized, because despite all the serenity of the scene, the symbolism suggested in the words "winter", "tentacles", "sharks", and "labyrinthine" is of a threatening environment. This symbolism of potential conflict suggests that Palmer is qualifying the harmony he has sought to establish.

Conflict between the disruptive spirit of modernity and the pursuit of "right" feeling of the unfeminine kind, wholeness and coherence, is vital to The Passage. In this novel, Palmer is concerned with the fear that simple virtues were being threatened by shallow cosmopolitanism and he contrasts the therapeutic rhythms of natural life and the more corrupting influences of bourgeois individualism.<sup>12</sup> Palmer's need to defend his own ideas of authenticity,

12. Ibid.

integrity and creative growth lead him, in the novel, to romanticize such strengths in the character of Lew Callaway and dismiss the motivation and interests of his younger brother, Hugh.<sup>13</sup> This position renders him less sexist because he is thereby criticizing a current masculine ideal of individualism, drive and self-sufficiency though from the standpoint of an alternative ideal of masculinity. Palmer rejects the more socially accepted concept of masculinity and supports rather the assessment of Hugh by his mother, Anna:

"Hughie can't stand hard knocks." (p.250)

Palmer's attitude to the male whose goals are material success seems to be expressed through Anna's doubts:

Until now she had had an almost mystical belief in Hughie's essential rightness and his power to make things work together for good. What if she had been banking on an illusion! (p.251)

Certainly Palmer is challenging the established male stereotype, though this does not counter-balance his dismissal of women in his concept of the masculine myth in Australian culture.<sup>14</sup> Moreover, his characterization of women in The Passage follows a stereotyped mould.

13. Ibid, p.181.

14. Schaffer, op.cit., p.31.

However, it is interesting that Vance Palmer does raise doubts about the value of manly attitudes even as embodied in Lew, for instance the episode in The Passage when Lew takes his delicate, sensitive son Peter out on his boat. The boy is severely upset watching sharks preying on a whale, but Lew is raging with hatred of his wife's lover Craig and quite unconcerned with his son's distress. Peter, straining his eyes out to sea says:

'I can't see anything now. Do you think the whale got away Dad?'  
'Perhaps.' [Lew answers] 'We'll say he did this time.'  
(p. 185)

The child's emotional horror holds the greatest depth and realism of the novel. Lew's easy reply does not reassure the boy and only reflects his own murderous ponderings about his wife's lover, Craig. Palmer is making a definite point that all of Lew's masculine qualities have somehow failed in an important human relationship. This is another reason why I have classified the novel as less strongly sexist despite the stereotyping of the female characters.

However, Palmer represents the highest human values as a deep appreciation of the goodness of Nature and he maintains that man achieves a greater affinity with Nature than woman. Consequently, he establishes Lew's integrity and shows this in his directness, loyalty, honesty, reliability, confidence, strength of character, enthusiasm, and spirit of

co-operation. Clem notes "how Lew had the power to rouse the passion of loyalty in all around him!" (p.242) Lew establishes a fishing co-operative based on his ideals of fairness. The fishermen follow his lead because they recognise in him the values they admire:

There was something in his direct approach that won their confidence, something ... that made them warm to him. A solid, self-confident figure he looked ... with his head set squarely on powerful shoulders ... The sort of fellow you could trust to keep rooted in the one place! (p.264)  
[My emphasis]

The language used here symbolises these values -- "solid", "squarely", "powerful", "rooted" -- all suggesting high integrity. Moreover, "rooted in the one place" reinforces Palmer's idealization of male closeness to Nature.

Palmer focused on the great potential in male relationships apart from women about the time that M. Barnard Eldershaw showed the social constraints on women. Palmer does not raise this latter issue, and in this he resembles such authors as Louis Stone, William Hay, and Xavier Herbert. It is not so much that these male authors are unaware or unconcerned about the constraints on women, but that they neither focus on them nor seriously challenge them.

(ii) THE AUNT'S STORY

Patrick White's novels The Aunt's Story and The Tree of Man reflect the cultural attitudes to women in Australian society. Females are important in both novels, but in The Tree of Man the male is shown as the socially dominant character with initiative and the capacity for special transcendental enlightenment. By contrast, The Aunt's Story (1948) stands out as a most unusual novel, because it focuses attention on a female. Patrick White recognises that a female character warrants serious consideration and he investigates the female perspective. For this reason I have classified The Aunt's Story as an example of less sexist male writing, although White's resolution of Theodora's conflict is grounded in sexism, as I shall discuss later. In this novel, White breaks from the previous patterns of Australian novels written by males, not only in elevating the inner, imaginative reality, but in endowing a female with a superior affinity with natural forces.<sup>15</sup> The novel clearly and critically presents the sanctions imposed upon women who do not conform to social expectations. However, The Tree of Man (1956) reverts to the male potential for superior nobility through higher

15. Such treatment, however, is commonplace in the 19th Century English and European novel. Katharine Susannah Prichard also presents the female in this light in Coonardoo.

enlightenment and affinity with nature.

While Patrick White's The Aunt's Story is an example of less sexist male writing, nonetheless it is not entirely free of sexism so the reasons for this needs to be investigated. One possible explanation of his failure to completely free himself of sexism although his intention seem to be to do so, may be found in the insights of the role of authors shown by Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar. These critics have shown how the word 'author' is associated with concepts of authority, and the imagery of its derivatives suggests succession, paternity or hierarchy.<sup>16</sup> There has been a patriarchal notion that the author 'fathers' his text<sup>17</sup>, and Gilbert and Gubar argue that because writing was developed as a male endeavour, the author uses his pen as an instrument of generative power like his penis.<sup>18</sup> This notion of 'ownership' or possession has lead to the belief that the author is the owner/possessor of the subjects of his texts and, in particular, of his female characters.<sup>19</sup> The roots of 'authority' claim that woman is man's property so he must have authored her just as surely as if he has authored her she must be his property. Patriarchy and its texts

16. Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, The Madwoman in the Attic - The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination, Yale University Press, Ltd., London, 1979, p.5, (1980 second printing used in my text.)

17. Gilbert and Gubar, loc.cit., p.4.

18. Ibid, p.6.

19. Ibid, p.7 and p.12.

subordinate and imprison woman and, as Gilbert and Gubar have argued, the male author has 'framed' her in his own perceptions. She has been both 'framed' (enclosed) in his novels, and 'framed up' (found guilty or wanting).<sup>20</sup> In so doing, the male author silences women by depriving them of their autonomy. Arguably, White has 'framed' Theodora in this way as do other male writers who condemn the female characters they create because they assume what Gilbert and Gubar call 'monstrous' autonomy.

In this process of framing, Gilbert and Gubar argue, male authors have invented for women the extreme images of 'angel' and 'monster'.<sup>21</sup> The angel-woman's vital act is the total sacrifice of herself to the male, and it is this that seals her fate to death and heaven; for to be selfless is not only to be noble, it is to be dead. The monster-woman is the antithesis, the damning otherness of the flesh rather than the uplifting otherness of the spirit.<sup>22</sup> Male authors have shown this to be presumptuous desire rather than the angelic humility and dullness for which they assume she is created. The monster-woman embodies irreconcilable female autonomy, which Gilbert and Gubar claim to cause male anxieties.<sup>23</sup> Assertiveness and aggression, characteristics

20. Ibid, p.13.

21. Ibid, p.17.

22. Ibid, p.25.

23. Ibid, p.28.

of the male's 'significant action' are depicted as monstrous in a woman, because 'unfeminine', and are therefore unsuited to the patriarchal image of angelic passivity.<sup>24</sup> Monster-women embody male dread of women as a threat to their masculinity and to their sense of identity. However, no person can be silenced totally by a text, and characters consistently defy the literary authority because stories have a habit of getting away from the authors. Gilbert and Gubar point out that herein lies the irony of literature, the inconstancy of woman in refusing to be fixed and to allow her identity to be killed by the author.<sup>25</sup>

In The Aunt's Story, the heroine, Theodora Goodman, is denied love-relationships by White because she fits into the 'monster-woman' image which poses a threat to masculinity. She is depicted as such not only by her strong, independent character, but also by her higher creative imagination and spiritual superiority to potential male suitors. To reinforce the monster-woman image, White portrays her as the antithesis of the female gender stereotype, because she is ugly, ungainly, assertive and insubordinate to males. However, her characteristics also represent an element of the "monster" breaking free of the constraints of the stereotype itself.

24. Ibid.

25. Gilbert and Gubar, loc.cit., p.13.



Theodora spends her childhood on the family country estate of Meroe in New South Wales, where she is strongly influenced by her father, a gentle but weak and unpractical man, who transfers to Theodora his love of classical Greek literature. This interest colours her entire perception of Meroe and leads her to question the nature of existence. Theodora's selfish and socially rigid mother has always rejected her. White has also depicted the mother in the monster-woman image with no other identity for the reader to gain any sense of her as an interesting or attractive character. He shows Theodora, as a consequence of her monstrous mother, to later seek out the company of people who shun social class distinctions. From an unattractive child Theodora grows into a scraggy, yellow-skinned woman with a moustache. White's creation of Theodora's physical appearance not only assures her rejection, which, in male terms must ultimately come, but it reinforces her possession (and thus usurpation) of male features. Two men, both social conformists, are attracted by Theodora's personal qualities. However, they fear her directness and self-sufficiency, a characteristic acceptable only in a male. One marries Theodora's more attractive and socially correct sister, Fanny. Theodora is denied a loving relationship and she must accept the family role of spinster aunt to her beloved niece, Lou, who is so like her. White recognises the cruelty that must be borne by females who do not fulfil the social expectations of beauty in a woman, and he is criticizing men by showing that no man is capable of loving a woman such as

Theodora for fear of her dominance. She possesses the strength of mind and character that is a male monopoly in society. Although White is critical of these social constraints, he nonetheless seems to accept an inevitability in the denial of love-relationships for a woman who is a challenge to gender stereotypes.

Following her mother's death, Theodora leaves for a tour of Europe. It is to be her quest for self-discovery and the ultimate of existence. Part 2 of the book is set in the poor Hotel du Midi in the south of France. Here, in the cactus garden, the Jardin Exotique, Theodora finds an imaginative harmony with the strange group of impoverished guests of doubtful background, 'deviants' by Australian standards. These disreputable guests provide a richness representative of European civilization. Theodora comes to identify herself with the characters that the residents recall and exaggerate. Gradually, a unity develops in Theodora's imagination and this in turn unifies her life, which threatens to disintegrate because she perceives potentials hidden from most of her companions. Not only does the distinction between individuals disappear in Theodora's mind, but that between reality and imagination also. Theodora briefly assumes the identities of those in her past life, and these relate to people in the past lives of the residents of the hotel.

Theodora's imagination is her psychological problem,

which is attributed to her being struck by lightning when she was twelve.<sup>26</sup> Here Patrick White may be making a kind of comic allusion to St Paul who is said to have been struck down by lightning and thereby converted and regenerated. He seems to suggest that the lightning represents a metaphysical experience leading ultimately to higher transcendental perception, and therefore her imagination is presented as a holy gift. The first evidence of Theodora's heightened sensitivity appears when she identifies with a hawk she is about to shoot:

Theodora looked at the hawk. She could not judge his art because her eye had contracted, it was reddish-gold, and her curved face cut the wind.  
(p.35)

Confusion in the novel is created by the many and sudden changes not only of places, but of Theodora's personal identity, such as in the metamorphosis by imaginative identification. This is a reflection of Theodora's conflict between the 'real' world and the reality she perceives. The 'real' world has rejected her because she does not fit female social expectations. But Theodora finds a rich, rewarding and inviting world within herself and her imagination. This world becomes her reality where she can find her own meaning and worth.

26. This comparison is half-straight and half-burlesque in a way that is characteristic of White.

Part 3 opens with Theodora on a train journey across the American Middle West, obscurely making her way home to Meroe. She writes to her sister, Fanny:

The time has come to return to Abyssinia. (p.266)

Theodora's cultural allusion is not understood by her sister, who believes her to be "quite mad". However, the reference draws on the classical Greek literature which Theodora has learnt from her father. He relates to her a story of another place called Meroe in Ethiopia. As a child, Theodora has been repulsed by the deathliness of the Ethiopian counterpart of her home, so she rejects the concept. Thus, in equating her planned return home to a return to Abyssinia, Theodora has a vision of her own destruction. Gilbert and Gubar have pointed out that in Hebrew mythology, both the first woman and the first monster, Lilith, specifically connects poetic presumption with madness, freakishness and monstrosity.<sup>27</sup>

White has associated Theodora with all of these traits. She senses that by leaving her rich imaginative world she must face a cruel and destructive reality that her previous role in society represented. She decides to remain within her imaginative world and develop further her own meaning and reality. Theodora is now able to accept the concept of Meroe

27. Gilbert and Gubar, op.cit., p.35.

suggested by her father for she has developed the capacity to savour the rich delights of the world of the imagination. Her childhood resistance to a vision of death has now been transformed to her father's vision of the exotic. Yet this vision of death is also White's male need to destroy her identity and to justify it by suggesting that it is the right and proper choice she must make.

Leaving the train somewhere in the country, Theodora destroys all means of identification and assumes a false name. Thus, she moves outside society altogether. She takes refuge in a deserted house, which she identifies with Meroe. Here she talks to an imaginary man, Holstius, who seems to her to be quite real. He represents her rationality, and it is noteworthy that White chooses a male character to depict this aspect of Theodora's mind. Holstius sums up for her all that she has found to be true in her "several lives":

You cannot reconcile joy and sorrow, or flesh and marble, or illusion and reality, or life and death. For this reason, Theodora Goodman, you must accept. And you have already found that one constantly deludes the other into taking fresh shapes, so that there is little to choose between the reality of illusion and the illusion of reality. (p.289)

It is significant that Holstius is male. Despite the fact that Theodora has been rejected as a marriage partner, her father has opened the doors for her to realize her potential

in the world of the imagination. Holstius continues the task of resolving her inward conflicts by convincing her to withdraw herself by deliberate choice from social reality. But as Holstius is a figure of her imagination, the resolution is really made by dialogue between her imagination and her rationality. This, of course, is White's construction and he himself identifies with Holstius. He has to resolve the conflict he has depicted between his own male perceptions, and a female who has 'usurped' the male domain of creative imagination and, more particularly, autonomy. Theodora realizes her potential, that which, as a male author, he cannot allow her. Holstius' advice can thus be seen as White's enforcement of this prohibition.

Theodora recognises that she cannot change the society into which she is born, and society will not accept her for what she is - an unattractive woman of strong and independent thought. For this reason, she has little sense of social identity other than her minor role of aunt. Rather, the novel supports the potential of the inner life of the outwardly sad Theodora. It rejects any other responses, preferring the riches to be found in her withdrawal into what the world considers to be insanity. The life within offers truth, integrity and a unity with natural forces. To the world, her life could be viewed as a descent into a world of delusions, but for her, it is a progression to a more intense perception of the true nature of life. In this regard, White offers not only the imaginative construction of life, but

different levels of reality. By distancing herself from the 'real' world, Theodora can transcend her separateness and melt into the great, unifying natural forces. Such a position allows White to assume a noble conclusion for his female protagonist and to retain a semblance of non-sexist generosity, but he is really maintaining male superiority within patriarchy. Theodora's separateness is her identity, so her 'melting' is a surrender of own identity and autonomy. To justify and ennoble this capitulation White seems to give the novel a religious significance, because Holstius speaks of the nature of the human spirit or soul, and Theodora bears the burdens and longings of others as Christ required of his followers. Here White is attempting to endow Theodora's submission to inferiority and passivity as her divinely ordained position in life. To realize this she must, and indeed in White's terms, should, sacrifice the highest human faculty, her mind. Such "religiousity" can be seen as an instance of ideological mystification by which White makes Theodora's sacrifice of her mind seem a gain and not a loss. Certainly madness is a solution that many authors have found for women who assume 'monster' proportions by daring to usurp characteristics men deem as their own.

For this reason, I cannot accept Brian Kiernan's claim that Theodora Goodman's life is a quest for self-discovery and that she only finds reality by casting off her social roles. Initially Theodora does not choose to defy her social roles; rather she is rejected by society and her escape into

her own imaginative plane of reality is her response to ostracism. Kiernan believes that the novel rejects any response other than Theodora's withdrawal into insanity.<sup>28</sup> This seems to be Patrick White's intention, but the fact remains that Theodora does have a choice because she needs to be convinced by her imaginary Holstius. Theodora finds her choice more attractive than living with social disapproval. She chooses to escape rather than develop personal integrity. However understandable is her plight, it nonetheless represents defeat. In view of this it is hard to accept that she rises to a higher plane of consciousness by recognising honesty and integrity in basic items such as tables and chairs instead of seeking them within herself. I cannot accept Kiernan's contention that reality and higher transcendental experience can be found in madness. I believe that critics such as Kiernan are complicit in White's sexism by the way their own critiques legitimise and propagate it.

Patrick White is thus limited in his freedom from sexism in this novel, because he equates female 'deviation' with madness. Although he suggests that Theodora does reach transcendental experience, this is achieved at the expense of her sanity. He does not find this a necessary consequence for his male protagonists, perhaps because as a male he sees

28. Brian Kiernan: "The Novels of Patrick White" in The Literature of Australia, op.cit., pp.464-65.



such experience as belonging more fittingly to men. He has treated sympathetically a female character who does not fit the social stereotype, and in this respect he is less sexist here than many other male authors. However, his approval for such females is qualified because he allows Theodora no positive alternative to society's expectations other than a retreat from reality. Moreover, it is a male figure, Holstius, who leads her to choose the defeat of madness. White appears to suggest this to be a fulfillment, but it is really the only solution male sexism can find for a female who does not conform to the accepted social stereotype. William Walsh argues that Theodora achieves total lucidity and simple wholeness, a condition of soul which the novel intimates as necessary to appreciate purity of being.<sup>29</sup> But this purity of female being is just what Gilbert and Gubar have argued to be the extreme angel-woman invention of male authors, the mythic mask which has enabled them to stifle her inconstancy and to possess them more completely.<sup>30</sup>

As the functioning of the intellect is the highest human faculty, I cannot accept Walsh's proposition that in abandoning all the elements of conventional identity, Theodora attains a state more valuable than reason. I reject White's solution because it is born of sexism, although it

29. William Walsh: Patrick White's Fiction, Sydney, 1977, pp. 28-29.

30. Gilbert and Gubar, loc.cit., p.17.

may be one which is acceptable to society itself. Nevertheless The Aunt's Story does break with the previously established pattern of Australian novels in giving a female a higher affinity with transcendental experience. Theodora is in absolute conflict with the female stereotype. White clearly shows her to be rejected by society as a whole, and even by her own mother. Men admire her intellectual attributes and character but cannot overcome the internalized prejudice against women who usurp qualities that are accepted as the male prerogative. Theodora is denied a relationship not only in marriage, but even in fulfilling friendship. White demonstrates the might behind gender stereotyping, for the consequence of Theodora's non-conformity is her eventual insanity. For a woman who lives radically beyond gender stereotypes White offers no love-relationships. Madness, being isolation within oneself, is incompatible with love-relationships which are social in nature.

Patrick White and Vance Palmer are two male authors who are less sexist in their treatment of women than many of their counterparts. There is a dearth of male writers who have raised doubts about the wisdom of conformity to gender stereotypes and the injustice of social expectations. This suggests just how firmly entrenched the stereotypes are in society and highlights the foresight of Patrick White and Vance Palmer in questioning them.

## CHAPTER 4

### STRONGLY SEXIST FEMALE NOVELS

With the significant number of Australian female authors writing during the period under investigation, it may seem strange that there are many examples of strongly sexist novels which they had published. This is even more curious when considering the number of them who were committed to feminism. Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar have suggested a reason for this contrariety. They have argued that not only is there a coercive power of cultural constraint on female authors, but also on the literary texts which incarnate them.

<sup>1</sup> As I have discussed previously, our fiction was based on the distinctive bush tradition. Marilyn Lake has argued that the Australian legend represented "the promotion of a particular model of masculinity -- the Lone Hand". This model assumed a rigid position about gender relations and, in particular, the rejection of the idealisation of the cult of domesticity of man. <sup>2</sup>

1. Gilbert and Gubar, loc.cit., p.11.

2. Marilyn Lake, "Historical Reconsiderations IV: The Politics of Respectability: Identifying the Masculinist Context", in Historical Studies, Vol.22, No.86, April 1986.

Even literate women learn that they are expected to be dull. Not only does the language that they must use describe a patriarchal notion of female identity, but it also produces moral and perhaps physical identity.<sup>3</sup> Hence, even the female author has a tendency to 'kill' herself into an art in order to 'appeal to man'.<sup>4</sup> Consequently, the male created images of woman as 'angel' and 'monster' have also pervaded women's writing.<sup>5</sup> Gilbert and Gubar argue that monster-women incarnate a male dread of women and, specifically, male derision of female creativity. This has demoralized the self-images of female writers, negatively reinforcing the attitudes of inferiority and submissiveness conveyed by 'angelic' women.<sup>6</sup>

#### (i) MILES FRANKLIN

#### ALL THAT SWAGGER

The Australian novelists of the thirties had to come to terms with the extensive basic information gathered by the earlier writers before attempting more intensive, imaginative

3. Gilbert and Gubar, op.cit., p.11.

4. Ibid, p.14.

5. Ibid, p.17.

6. Ibid, pp.29-30.

works. For this reason, the simple saga, with its neutral manner and earnest realism, was the predominant method chosen to express national self-definition and understanding. Miles Franklin was noteworthy in shaping the saga and giving it an Australian quality. Many critics have considered Miles Franklin to be a feminist writer and certainly that assumption could be made in perusing the details of her personal life. H.M. Green argued that her writing was "satiric at the expense of masculinity"<sup>7</sup> and this is particularly evident in her first novel My Brilliant Career (1901). The position here is so antipathetic to males that it precludes the imagining of loving relationships between the sexes. In All that Swagger (1936), however, although there is feminist criticism, the general perspective elevates and ennobles the male vision. This exemplifies the way that feminism in the thirties was weakened, as Drusilla Modjeska has discussed.<sup>8</sup> Modjeska has attributed this to the lack of theoretical basis that female authors had to counteract the social challenges of the times. On the one hand there was the threat of Fascism, and on the other was the ideology of Communism which regarded women's issues as insignificant. The looming political crisis was so important, she argues, that women reverted to their supportive roles against the common threat of Fascism. Thus, it is understandable that

7. H.M. Green, A History of Australian Literature. Vol.1, 1789-1923, Melbourne, 1961, pp.640-641.

8. Modjeska, op.cit., pp. 256-7.

feminist protest declined during this period.

All that Swagger accepts the worth of bush values in the scheme of Australia's development, not only physically, but morally too. As I have already discussed, such values have been traditionally male and antipathetic to women, making the novel an instance of the process Gubar and Gilbert have described. I have thus classified this novel as an example of strongly sexist female writing. Indeed, it is arguably this very sexism that has made the novel so easily celebrated as Australian. This position is a departure from the more generally accepted opinion of Miles Franklin's works. D.R. Burns comments that "She is militantly, at times quite splendidly Australian and, as portion of that, espouses an egalitarian point of view."<sup>9</sup> I do not accept this position because in All that Swagger both the utopian vision and the human strivings are very much the prerogative of the male, and as such, women are excluded from the egalitarianism. In commenting as he does, Burns has been blind to the sexism evident in Franklin's gender portrayals, and he has further disguised it by an appeal to a concept of 'Australianness'. Harry Heseltine hints at Franklin's sexism when he acknowledges that All that Swagger "might with some justice be described as chivalric ... More than chivalric, the book is patriarchal."<sup>10</sup> Of course chivalry pre-supposes

9. Burns, op.cit., p.25.

10. Heseltine, op.cit., p.204.

that women are in every way weaker and consequently inferior to men.

The Australian bush legend is also the subject of Patrick White's novel The Tree of Man, written in 1956. The same patriarchal portrayal of gender relations persists and is endorsed by the author. Likewise, in All that Swagger it is the men who are visionary, whereas females are depicted as more pragmatic and supportive than visionary. This same elevation of the male blinds Franklin to a proper understanding of the inadequacies of the relationship that she is diagnosing between the main protagonist Danny and his wife Johanna. Franklin endows Danny with a utopian vision of Australia, but it is not one that is shared equally by his wife. Franklin here confirms Australian gender stereotypes by depicting Danny as the pioneer, the decision-maker directed by ennobling goals and initiative. In contrast, Johanna has no personal goals, but she accepts and supports those of her husband. She sacrifices herself totally for Danny's ideals although he gives scant regard to her wishes. As a consequence, their relationship to each other does not achieve a fulfilling harmony and they do not develop a deep and loving friendship.

When Johanna elopes with Danny she is not only lured by romantic love but by the deception of elegance in the new colony, although she does not share Danny's love of the land:

She did not share Danny's visions, but was it not in print that the people of Sydney Cove "enjoyed to a far more substantial extent than in many of the large towns of Great Britain itself, the tastes, the pursuits, the comforts and even the elegancies<sup>11</sup> of English Society"? Johanna adored elegancies.

Johanna is led to believe that she will enjoy a higher standard of living in Sydney than she could hope for in Ireland. However, she is quickly disillusioned when Danny insists on settling in the outback with the consequent hardships and loneliness. She has no affinity to the land and she feels bitterly disappointed and betrayed in being forced to live there rather than in Sydney. She attributes her hardships to the curse of her father for her abandonment of her Catholic Faith and family. (p.18) Her despondency in her perceived social decline is in sharp contrast to Danny's elation at his ascendancy:

He ... was as full of satisfaction as though his frontage had put him among the landed gentry of Ireland. (p.18)

Johanna feels completely alienated in the bush environment and her long hours of loneliness in the house with her child begin her alienation from Danny. He is so enthusiastic with

11. Miles Franklin, All that Swagger, Angus and Robertson, Melbourne, p.8, 1974 edition used throughout my text.



his task of clearing his land that she fears to share her feelings with him:

These fears festered; she dared not confess them to Danny. He had none of the cruelty of the cowardly, but he had an inability to estimate the torments of the timid, which is sometimes part of fearlessness. (p.19)

Therein lie the seeds of their declining relationship -- an inability of Johanna to communicate and of Danny to understand. This is the beginning of a tragedy which Franklin recognises, but because her concern is the elevation of the ideals of the bushman she suggests that the fault rests with Johanna in her need to "confess" to her feelings. Thus there is an implied guilt. Franklin is torn between her loyalty to her sex and her idealization of masculine bush values and this leads her to an ambiguous position. Franklin cannot sympathise with Johanna's socially defined values, and thus she blames her for the gulf that the male-female antithesis creates, rather than seeing that it is in the socially constructed antithesis itself that the evil lies. However, she is critical of Danny's lack of awareness of Johanna's heroism, particularly in being left alone during her confinement:

Danny scarcely realised her heroism in remaining there. (p.20)

Danny forgets his impending fatherhood during his long

absence in search of pasture land and only feels guilty upon his return home to find that his son has been still-born. Johanna's coldness and rebuff of him sets the pattern of her emotional rejection of him and he can only offer:

"I'm sorry, Johanna. Sure, there are things that can't be explained." (p.36)

He cannot share with her the dream which impels him, but he rightly assesses that he is rejected for "he dared not caress her." (p.36)

Danny maintains his enthusiasm for the land throughout his life, but Johanna can only retain a positive attitude to their lifestyle while she enjoys a youthful passion for her husband. This wanes along with the limited vision Franklin allows her, because of Danny's lack of appreciation for her contributions and her own disenchantment with her inferior position. Danny is actively involved with pioneering and her support is of secondary importance if recognised at all:

She never had Danny's luminous satisfaction in pioneering. He was a torch of purpose; she had to step as well as she could in the rugged pathway lighted by that torch. (p.41)

The extent of Johanna's expectations of life declines in proportion to the quality of the marriage relationship. She is willing to renounce family, religious beliefs and the

comfort of her home in Ireland for love of Danny, but she is convinced that she will be able to change her young husband later. Franklin depicts her in the stereotyped image of the romantic and naive young girl attached to insignificant material possessions and the trappings of elegant society, yet willing to suffer deprivation for the sake of Danny's dream:

He was more occupied as the founder of one of the first families on the Morumbidgee, and was as full of satisfaction as though his frontage had put him among the landed gentry of Ireland. His gunyah of shrinking slabs, covered with bark, elated him; but the drips spoiled Johanna's bed curtains and made it necessary to hide her few linen treasures, and thus defeated the elegance dear to her heart.  
(p.18)

However, Danny's dreams are not Johanna's and she feels that her life is inadequate. It is not really how society regards her that is the problem, but how she feels about herself. Danny's long absences not only cause her to suffer great loneliness, but torturing doubts of his love:

Johanna felt in her lonely nostalgic mind that Danny had deserted her for livelier adventures or seductions of a fresher woman.  
(p.53)

Although her resentment is softened when he returns after losing a leg following a fall, she is unresponsive to him because she has lost her child, Kathleen Moyna, in their house fire. Their priorities remain at odds -- Danny forever

drawn to the bush; Johanna valuing children and home. She survives her loneliness during Danny's long absences by becoming indifferent to him, and he feels justified in remaining away after rebuilding a home for her at Burrabinga:

Women's part in the struggle was accepted as their unpaid duty -- Burrabinga. (p.73)

Danny's son Robert supplants him in Johanna's love. When Danny returns home he finds that he is denied the marital bed and that he is held in contempt:

She saw Danny as an insignificant, ineffectual old man, hopping on one leg. His once gallant daring now seemed foolhardiness. Tippling made him insupportable. She had outgrown or outworn him and was as careless of his feelings as though oblivious to them.

"Ye'r a black-jack and tobacco kag combined, and I have no taste for sleeping with such. I'll make ye a bed in the ind room," she said. (p.84)

Her cruelty is completed by deriding Danny for shrinking "back to childhood ahead of time." (p.85) Franklin shows Johanna as a heartless and revengeful woman, as cruel as the bush which causes Danny's physical disability. This portrayal reveals Franklin's ideological bias, because she secures sympathy for the bushman Danny by denigrating Johanna as frigid and without acknowledging his responsibility for her loneliness, disappointment and deprivation of his loving friendship. Finally Johanna abandons even her limited

commitment to Danny's pioneering endeavours for the quality of the loving relationship has declined. She is critical of his ideals, particularly those associated with the bush ethic of egalitarianism:

Danny's notion that a man should be judged by character regardless of financial or social success, was to Johanna rankly foolish. Who was Danny to judge men? He had no special rights in divination. It had been lively enough for him, leathering about the country, but she had been restricted to uncouth loneliness beside the waterhole of evil reputation in the sombre river with its lorn casuarinas. (p.103)

This shows a great departure from the admiration and respect she held for Danny when she married him. Franklin's apparent dislike of Johanna is based on her being bourgeois and materialistic, whereas Danny is egalitarian. Thus Franklin's socialist sympathies trap her into this sexist preference and distract her from seeing the role that the gender stereotyping antithesis plays in constructing Johanna as bourgeois by constraining her to home and children. Consequently, when Danny arrives home after yet another long absence and is bedded "in the ind room" (p.129), Franklin appeals to the reader's sympathy and condemns Johanna's seeming heartlessness and frigidity. She chooses to ignore Johanna's lengthy emotional deprivation and how she has had to cope with it, and emphasises instead Danny's disappointment:

Danny was chilled and disappointed. Time had emancipated Johanna from the urge for a husband, but Danny was not yet released from sex. (p.130)

Here Franklin not only reveals the decline in Johanna's love for Danny, but also her own sexism. She is suggesting that the lack of passion represents emancipation and that it is achieved sooner by women. This is in contrast to her general elevation of Danny so that Franklin seems to pose a conflict in her own attitude to the sexes. Overall her depiction is critical of Johanna, but in this instance she expresses sympathy for Danny's rejection and denial of love from his wife at the same time that she is suggesting that Johanna is liberated from the demands of love. The apparent conflict adds weight to Gilbert and Gubar's argument that the female author suffers social duress to destroy the female image. Women are expected to please and gratify their husbands and Franklin shows Johanna's coldness in a critical manner. Although her apparent indifference to Danny can be explained as her means of coping with imposed loneliness, the reader is drawn to sympathise with him because he does return to her to escape his own deprivations.

Johanna has no personal sense of her own identity and value. In the important decisions of life she is always expected to sacrifice her own wishes for those of her husband and he even denies her last request because it does not conform to his own beliefs:

"I wish ye would fetch Father Shannon," said Johanna.

"Nonsense!" exclaimed Danny, a little sharply because he was startled. (p.268)

Johanna has abandoned her religious faith to please Danny, and he even resents her wish for its comfort on her deathbed. Yet Franklin softens the implied assessment of Danny, for as Johanna lay dying:

It was Danny -- surprised to see it -- who picked up the rosary on the coverlet and handed it to her. (p.269)

Yet despite Franklin's attempt to restore sympathy with Danny, the fact remains that Johanna has been deprived of a deep need in the same way as she has been throughout her life. At the end of his own life, Danny still feels a sense of guilt about his behaviour to his dying wife. He accepts that he is denied his final wish to see his whole family as a just retribution. Just before his death Danny says:

"It's me family I'd like to see for a little conversation about important mysteries."

...

"Sure," said Danny resignedly. "Johanna wanted Father Shannon, and I was too benighted to bring him. This makes it square. Human ignorance will keep on repeating itself till the end." (p.303)

But Danny's realization comes all too late, for he has missed a lifetime of opportunity to develop a loving and sharing

relationship with his wife. Even though Franklin is critical of Danny, she retains sympathy for him in his regrets, and she does not challenge the social attitudes which have led to the failure to develop a deeply loving relationship. Johanna has sacrificed any dreams of her own and deferred to her husband, but this has not brought her happiness, a fact of which Danny seems to be totally unaware. However, Franklin has not given prominence to this tragedy but is rather at pains to highlight the nobility of Danny's cause. She shows Danny to have a vision that extends beyond himself to the society of the future:

Danny lay for a time looking into the night and pondering on posterity. His urgency for future generations was tempered by what he had gathered on the hill-tops. Liberated, as he now was, from the time limitations of the earth-bound, he recognized that posterity should not be in haste to squander its dwindling heritage of unpeopled spaces. There was endless time for posterity. The more time and the less posterity, the better for posterity. Posterity could afford to wait. (p.302)

By celebrating the pioneering vision about the land, Franklin has favoured men who have acquired it. She shows clearly the breadth and wisdom of Danny's vision and in so doing she is distancing him from any responsibility for the poor quality of his marriage relationship. Yet Johanna must share some of the blame because she has willingly relinquished her own sense of identity as a consequence of social expectations placed upon females.



Danny's hopes rest with his son, Harry, in whom he perceives a similar affinity with the land. True to his father's estimate, Harry does have sufficient sensitivity to the land to recognise how it has been abused. His love sees Australia as unique and special. Yet it is the male alone and not the female who has such vision. Moreover, male sensitivity is not shown to extend to wives, who are exploited and their efforts largely unappreciated. Franklin traces the pioneering ideal from Danny to his son, Harry, and finally to his great-grandson, Brian, the pilot, who is inspired by his grandfather, Harry, to strive to achieve Danny's dream. However, I believe that this fails to convince and it is clear that it is Miles Franklin herself who is speaking through Harry to present her own vision of the nobility of pioneering. By its association with the bush, pioneering is shown to be antipathetic to women because it elevates male domination.<sup>12</sup> Brian is a selfish opportunist, using his own mother and wife to further his own ends. He believes he can fulfil his grandfather Harry's vision, but he lacks the character to persevere in the task. Franklin seems more concerned with presenting a futuristic inspiration of pioneering in flying rather than in examining character. Brian manipulates and disappoints those who love

12. Kay Schaffer has argued this case strongly in Women and the Bush, as I have discussed and supported previously.

him, and he shows no real devotion to the land. He is of shallow character, unprepared to persevere with any commitment unless it is to his personal gratification. He even admits to his young lover, Adrienne, that he has married his older wife, Lola, for her money, and he is unfaithful to her without any sense of guilt:

"But you would never, never have thought of her if she hadn't money. That's true, isn't it?"

"It's true that she wouldn't have been able to afford me only she had money." (p.405)

Not only does Brian show little regard for his wife's feelings when she discovers his affairs with women, but he is equally unconcerned with the hurt he causes by trifling with the affections of Adrienne. Lola is an able aviator but she is trivialised as much by Franklin as she is by Brian:

She had as much nerve as he in the air but lacked the hardihood to confess that she was ten years his senior. So long as her youthful appearance remained she would conserve her romance. (p.387)

This shows that Lola has internalized social expectations that women should be younger than the men they love. Franklin endorses this attitude and she clearly depicts Lola to be hypocritical in using Brian for her own gratification, as her response to his offer of marriage shows:

"I'm fond of you, and would like to marry you if we did no flying at all."

"Then no backing and filling about the difference in our ages later. I've always said I'd never be such a fool."

"I'll forget it, if you do."

"That settles it then." Joy suffused her to have her Brian plus respectability. There would be no need to stick to him for ever if the union became impossible. (p.388)

Franklin shows Lola to be satisfied with winning Brian's commitment to her and she contrasts this adversely with Brian's aims:

Brian regarded marriage as inviolable. ... As with his great-grandfather, his vision of life itself was more seizing than his amorous abandon to it. Marriage was the completion of a man's person. Now that this was achieved he could push forward as a bridegroom of Australia -- the attitude held by all great men, perhaps, towards their country, their people, their art, or career. (pp.388-89)

Certainly Franklin recognises idealistic nationalism to be more important than the loving bond between a man and a woman. Moreover, she attributes a noble and superior vision to the male in contrast to the stereotyped image expected of a woman as younger than the male, attractive, romantic, and weakly insecure. Despite the fact that Brian has married an older woman for her money and position, and that he has been unfaithful to her with a younger woman, Franklin allows him to retain his honour. For this reason, when he discovers that his wife is expecting a child, he is shown to revert to

the stereotyped role of proud father-to-be and devoted, if not loving, husband. Perhaps Franklin poses a doubt that Australians have the moral fibre and necessary drive to develop their country to its full potential. Nonetheless, Franklin's vision is entirely through the male despite her feminist sympathies.

All that Swagger reveals a world where the overriding structures of society are male. One of Franklin's concerns is pioneering in a society where the men "swagger". However, she does not focus on the role of women who nurture the family and hold it together. Although Franklin may be regarded as a feminist she offers no alternatives to traditional gender roles. She merely shows critically male attitudes to women through the characters, but only at the margins of the novel, rather than focussing more intently:

The Delacy men were helpless without women -- respectable women. Other grades were unknown to any of them but Robert ... Jean Urquhart was reaching the no-man's land of spinsterhood, and deserved to be rescued. The property that would later be hers was a bait to him. (p.270)

Spinsterhood is despised, but Jean is deserving of "rescue" because she will have property to be taken over by a husband. This is exposed for its hypocrisy. Society has little opportunity for women who remain unmarried, and no recognition except "the name and business standing afforded

by marriage".(p.224) Of course, such sexism is derived from the characters themselves rather than from Franklin. It was not feasible for her to depict the pioneering society other than male dominated without it appearing fantastic, for the legend of the bushman had already been created and firmly established by Henry Lawson, Banjo Paterson and others. Although Franklin depicts the inadequacy and separateness that may be experienced in marriage, she does not give this issue prominence and importance, because her priority is the celebration of the male pioneers. Moreover, there is evidence that Franklin had a pessimistic view of marriage, because she has documented her attitude in this matter by writing:

Oneness in marriage: it is impossible. After the first flush of<sub>13</sub> passion has subsided each regains separateness.

Such pessimism reinforces her acceptance of the gender stereotypes that, arguably, create the distance she sees, in a mystifying way, as being inevitable. This attitude does not recognise the possibility of a total commitment to a loving relationship between a man and a woman. Franklin's

13. Miles Franklin, Notebook, p.88. ML.MS. 1360, as quoted in Modjeska, op.cit., p.179.

attitude is cynical and sexist for she considers that a woman's bargaining position is dependent on bearing a son to gain "more security of sexual tenure."<sup>14</sup> Moreover, Franklin's involvement with Socialism and her concern with the political and economic upheavals of the period came into personal conflict with her feminism. This may account for her conservative treatment of women and the fact that she portrays them as subordinate and supportive of men who retain the utopian vision. Nonetheless her position is a retreat from that of her first novel My Brilliant Career and the overall impact of this later work supports traditional gender roles. Her criticisms fall short of offering alternatives for her female characters, and her enthusiasm for male pioneer values leads her to attribute divisions in marriage relationships to the lack of visionary quality in females and to extenuate male insensitivity to females. In this regard Franklin's position is similar to that of Patrick White's portrayal of the relationship between Stan and Amy Parker in The Tree of Man.

14. Miles Franklin, All that Swagger, p.412.

(11) M. BARNARD ELDERSHAW

TOMORROW AND TOMORROW AND TOMORROW

M. Barnard Eldershaw's final novel, Tomorrow and Tomorrow and Tomorrow was conceived in 1937, written from 1941 to 1942, but not published until 1947.<sup>15</sup> This novel looks at Australia four hundred years from now, with the population living in agricultural communes scattered around where Sydney once was. There is an administrative elite ruling all from this central position. The construction of the novel enables the authors to comment directly in the middle section through Knarf, a character in the outer or secondary narrative and 'author' of the inner or primary story. The novel has an anti-utopian vision, for even in its pastoral setting, some characters long for liberty and individual freedoms.

By exploring possibilities for the future, Barnard and Eldershaw had the potential to pose alternatives to social gender stereotypes; however they fail to do so. It is true

15. Jill Roe: "The Historical Imagination and Its Enemies - M. Barnard Eldershaw's Tomorrow and Tomorrow and Tomorrow" in Meanjin, Vol.43/Number2 June 1984, pp.241-51. Jill Roe notes that the Virago Modern Classics publication in 1983 restored M. Barnard Eldershaw's original version, which was heavily censored as Tomorrow and Tomorrow in 1947. Roe presumes that the censorship was made in the name of post-war morale.

that they offer social criticism, but by suggesting that the male and female stereotypes will persist, they are asserting an inevitability. Barnard and Eldershaw are caught between, on one hand, a potentially optimistic view of gender identity as socially constructed and therefore changeable, and a pessimistic feeling that women will go on being women as if gender identity is innate. Because this latter impression prevails I have classified this novel as strongly sexist. Women's sense of identity is shown to be based firmly on romantic ideas of marriage. Even when marriage is resisted by the male, as in the inner story, the female suffers a sense of loss and sublimates her yearnings and ideals in a role totally supportive of the male. Thus she is subsumed by patriarchy. Society is shown to be constructed by a male vision, and, even when this brings destruction, the authors do not suggest an alternative harmony and equality between the sexes. They are critical of women of the twentieth century, and even though most of these women in the novel suffer the oppression of the working class, the authors blame them for their mindless complaining and selfishness. 16 Drusilla Modjeska has pointed out that Barnard and Eldershaw have not envisaged any political action by women against their oppression, and they have not given any prominence to this issue. Their main concern is the nature of the crisis in capitalism. 17

16. Modjeska, op.cit., p.243.

17. Ibid.



The commentator, Knarf, describes living in Sydney and its outer suburbs after World War 1, some four centuries earlier. He reconstructs the lives of the "second people" (p.9)<sup>18</sup> mainly using artefacts. He explains to a friend that he wants to knit many characters into "a large pattern" like "a patch of fibrous, nervous tissue lifted off the pelt of the city". (p.89) He does this very successfully, so that Sydney is faithfully shown with its individual residents moulded into one image:

The city making men in its image, conditioning their characters as well as their daily lives.  
(p.91)

This image is conditioned by social expectations of gender roles. What M.Barnard Eldershaw are really criticizing is the ethic of consumerism which lures females with false claims of happiness. This critique, in itself, suggests that women are inferior by falling easy victims to materialism. Conversely, Harry is ennobled both by his freedom from the false attractions of consumerism and by his traditional Australian male affinity with the land.

The novel's focus is on Ally Munster at Sydney's Central Station, yet because she is called merely "the

18. M.Barnard Eldershaw, Tomorrow and Tomorrow and Tomorrow, Virago Press Ltd, London, 1983 edition used throughout my text.

woman", she is representative of many stereotyped women. Ally is attracted to the city, which seems romantic to her imagination in comparison to the dullness of rural life. Although she broods that "the promised land was a mirage" (p.46), her attitude arises only from her failure to find excitement during the day. Ally likens the shop-window fashion dummies to "brides who will never go to bed with their waxen bridegrooms." (p.46) This analogy is a tragic reflection of the poverty of the male-female relationships depicted throughout the novel both in the inner and outer stories. Ally's expectations are based more on romantic and tender ideas of a relationship with a man than from the roles of wife and mother. Her initial attraction to marriage remains, although both her relationship with her husband and her roles of wife and mother fail to bring any personal fulfilment. Ally wrongly blames her lifestyle for her unhappiness and she imagines that a change in environment will alleviate her discontent. Despite her unpleasant day in the city, she still insists that happiness will be found there. Harry's misgivings about moving from his beloved farm are to prove well-founded. The dummies that Ally sees in the shop windows are symbolic of the glamorous and romantic models that the city offers to females. The reward of marriage is suggested as doomed to disappointment in illusory joys because males cannot embody these romantic fancies. Moreover, by implication, males will find the artificial attractions of females to be equally illusory. Thus Barnard and Eldershaw negate the value of love between a man and a

woman as presently defined. The failed relationship between Ally and Harry is explained as a product of the socially conditioned false romantic expectations that derives from the "consumerisation" of the female role. However, their criticism here still abides by traditional stereotypes of gender opposition, and the respective valuations these imply. The novel suggests that marriage fails because society is encouraging women to abandon their traditional, pre-consumer society femininity as humble workers in the home, where they have been content to leave glamour to the upper classes.

Ally is called "the woman", just as Amy is in The Tree of Man, and she, too, is never able to recognise the innate weaknesses in both herself and her environment. Instead, Ally continually blames her husband for her frustrations, rather than her false, socially-conditioned expectations :

This new anger was like a sudden tongue of flame in the smouldering resentment that had filled her heart all day, against her lot, against her child, against her husband, who was the author and prime cause of them both. (pp.51-52)

Ally is completely self-centred and her weakness lies in her own lust for gratification. She does not care for others and she lives in a non-caring society. She is not comforted when she is met at the station by her husband, Harry:

The woman was aware of the man's strong thin hands on the wheel. She hardened her heart against those hands but she knew that they had always

meant and always would mean her security, and that, despite herself, she'd go on trusting them.  
(p.57) [My emphasis.]

This may seem to show that Ally does not really love Harry and is only using him for her own and her children's support. However, Ally's feelings are really ambivalent because she needs to harden her heart, a conscious effort of resentment against her own instinctive emotions. The conflict between her observation of Harry's "strong thin hands" suggests the tension of her own feelings. In marrying Harry she believes her passions are synonymous with love. Yet she blames him alone for the children consequent to the expression of their sexual drives. She finds the children's dependence a burden which deprives her of a measure of indulgence. Her affections for Harry are superseded by the family's need for his support, and in their place she harbours resentment that has been exacerbated by the confirmation of another pregnancy -- one which they can ill afford and which must make further demands on her thoroughly selfish character. M.Barnard Eldershaw present Ally's attitude critically, and show it to be a symptom of the false expectations of modern marriage. However, they do show that they realise the female oppression involved in working-class women's lifestyles.

As "woman" and "man", Ally and Harry are stereotyped characters. His first reaction in learning of the pregnancy is concern for his financial commitments. Between husband and wife there is an "undeclared quarrel." (p.59) Harry

recognises his own contribution to this, for he ponders:

... he was the guilty party. His attitude had made things worse, for it was at once an admission and an opposition. He had not given a word nor a gesture of tenderness, the tenderness that was still in his heart for her, only overlaid by cares and anxieties. (p.60)

Here Barnard and Eldershaw are revealing their own sexism against a male, because they use their own commentary to establish a guilt rather than using the direct pondering of Harry. In recognising the difficulties involved with Ally's close pregnancies they are affirming her complaint against Harry:

"We've been married just over five years and I've got three children and another one coming. What sort of a life is that for a woman? D'you expect it to go on? I could have ten children by the time I'm thirty and all you'd think about would be paying for them and having them work for you later on. What about me? I'd be an old woman if I wasn't dead." (p.60)

However, the authors have failed to acknowledge Ally's own sexuality, and hence her own contribution to the closeness of the pregnancies. Moreover, Harry's concern with fulfilling his role of provider is not shown sympathetically. The breakdown in communication between Harry and Ally has been a reaction to the circumstances of their lives. He has been worried about keeping up repayments for their chicken farm, while she has been burdened by child-bearing. They each have

different expectations of life so that they do not share the same priorities. The authors imply that enduring, loving and understanding friendship between a man and a woman is impossible.

Barnard-Eldershaw's pessimism permeates the entire novel. Misfortune arrives quickly for Harry and Ally's child Jackie, who takes ill and soon dies. The grief does not bring Ally and Harry closer together for they continue to communicate their resentments to each other silently:

Their eyes met as they rarely met now. She said nothing, but he was laid open to her jeering silence. Her burdened body was a reproach to him, the sickly child was a reproach to him. There was no need for words ... They had this grudge against one another but they could never express it.  
(p.67)

Their failure to talk about these resentments and their own needs prevent them from ever developing a mutual understanding and love. Not only Ally, but Harry too has his grudges. He has long suspected Jackie's illness, but this is not recognised by either Ally or the doctor who diagnoses her pregnancy.

Harry has come to believe that there are forces which are far stronger than the individual. He identifies these forces as urban although the novel shows them subsequently to be more generally social. In this frame of mind he longs for

a return to his army days with the comfort of mates and the removal of responsibility for his family. Yet Harry knows their struggles have not been his fault, for they have been determined by social forces:

Ally was right, he was a mug. What she didn't get was that he couldn't have been anything else, hadn't any choice. (p.79)

While Harry convinces himself that he has no choice in the direction of his life, both he and Ally refrain from making positive efforts to heal the rift in their relationship:

He no longer expected much from life and thought they were getting on well enough. But in his heart he was discontented. And so was Ally. Both waited, as most men wait all their days, dumbly and uncomprehendingly, for an exterior force to fuse their lives into coherence. (p.89)

This suggests that the poverty in the relationship is due to inaction and unwillingness to make positive efforts to develop it. However, Ally's love has been destroyed within the socially induced "mass grievance" of women against men because she has not been provided with a falsely expected romantic and gratifying lifestyle. Married life for Ally and Harry is beset with disappointment and frustration for both, because neither can satisfy the stereotypical expectations of the other. For her part, Ally finds a substitute comfort in gratifying her lust for luxuries:

It was the dark side of what she had once found bright, and in a vague unconscious way it reassured her of the brightness. (p.115)

Throughout his married life Harry has come to despise Ally for her gratifications and self-indulgence, for these have been at his expense. Now as a liftman his disgust spreads to all well-endowed women whom he considers to be like leeches on society:

Most of all he hated the big bosoms. He took them up and he brought them down, load after load of self-satisfied big bosoms. (p.150)

He sees man cheated in love which does not endure and frustrated in his highest aims:

Love was a fairy tale told so often that people believed it. There was sex but not love. It wasn't enough. It left you empty and disappointed. It only lasted a little while, a relief, but you wanted something to go on ... No such thing as love. Not between men and women anyway. You loved your children, but that couldn't amount to much ... (p.152)

The authors here not only maintain their pessimistic attitudes to love between men and women, but they also retain sympathy with the male by describing women as "self-satisfied big bosoms". This is an attack on females who gratify themselves with luxuries at the expense of their hard-working husbands. However, by using "big bosoms" in particular as



the symbolic focus of criticism, they also choose to attack their femininity in a way that withdraws any attractiveness, and without giving due regard to the social conditioning and restricted opportunities of women. Certainly Ally is depicted as self-indulgent and a total drain on Harry. As a consequence he falls deeply in love with Gwen, the young girl he meets at the store where he works. She is shown to be equally dependent, weak and inadequate, but she is depicted as a more attractive character than Ally, who is cast in the role of the nagging wife. Even the strong female character of Gwen's flatmate Shirley is depicted as lacking in self-sufficiency because of her longing for a male protector, an attitude of which the authors are critical.

Harry is ripe for his extra-marital affair with the young Gwen, although at his age he cannot match her passion. The authors retain sympathy for him because they have chosen to depict Ally as an unattractive, selfish, indulgent and dependent character, who nags her husband continually. They fail to understand the causes of her vanity and excesses particularly in regard to female social conditioning and expectations, and they fail to recognise that the same social injustices that Harry must suffer have direct consequences for Ally. Thus the reader's sympathy for Harry is retained even though he is attracted to the innocuous Gwen and he is merely re-producing his mistake of the past in choosing a woman to love. He is just as readily drawn to her

vulnerability and need of his protection -- the same characteristics he admired formerly in Ally. This is because he feels the need to be a dominant protector. Harry really seeks out an inferior character to confirm his masculinity and sense of superiority.

Ally and Gwen both accept the stereotype that women ought to be supported, cared for and pandered by their menfolk. Neither are capable of taking responsibility for their lives. As a consequence of their acceptance of the romantic stereotyping of women, they thrust all personal, family, and financial responsibility on Harry, who accepts his burden as a duty. Both Harry and Ally contribute to the failure of their relationship by not sharing responsibilities. Harry makes the same mistake in the relationship he forms with Gwen. The breakdown in the relationship with Gwen becomes as inevitable as that with Ally, although he dies pursuing a futile expression of his need to protect her.

Harry remains firm in his belief in a male stereotype of provider, protector and head of his house, and he is only crushed during life when he has not been able to fulfil these roles. The authors use Harry as a model of "Everyman" to analyse a social process by which individual consciousness changes. Harry's five years of unemployment turns his social impotence to anger which finds no outlet until his self-

destruction when Sydney is bombed in the revolution. The authors suggest that revolt will come when people are desperate enough to pay the price.<sup>19</sup> They show the injustices of society as the cause of Harry's suffering without recognising an equal injustice for women or an equal role in the revolution.

The authors are also sexist in their critical assessment of single women's attitudes to marriage without giving due consideration to the social influences that nurture them. These attitudes and those of males relate to concepts of self-determination and control and the authors place both of these roles more favourably with males. Because Harry feels the need to be dominant, he fears Gwen's flat-mate Shirley, for she is self-sufficient and totally in control of the direction of her life. Nonetheless, Shirley is convinced of the absolute social need of marriage for a woman:

She had a scale of failure and success. Not to be married before thirty was failure. While she remained coldly experimental, she wanted the boy to lose his head. She was more afraid of losing face than of losing her immortal soul. (p.202)

Shirley is really the victim of social conditioning to

19. Ibid, p.245.

conform to the stereotyped role of married woman:

Always, since she had grown up, she had longed for a fairy tale ... She had only known the stale commercial name for it. Romance ... The marriage itself was hollow, only a means. None of them would get what they wanted, and in a few years it wouldn't matter. Shirley accepted the immutability of her new state, just as she had accepted the fairy tale at its face value.  
(pp.264-65)

Clearly the authors are critical of Shirley's views because they use language that disparages her -- she is "coldly experimental" in wanting the boy "to lose his head", and they contrast this calculated manipulation with a shallow attachment to "a fairy tale" concept of romance. Shirley is strong and independent. She believes in marriage for its social status of success, but she clearly means to gain control of a man by using his sexual need of her. Shirley's cynicism is based on her perception of the hollowness of marriage. It is her claim to the control society bestows on the male that repulses and strikes a chord of fear in Harry. He prefers Gwen to be weak rather than to absorb any of Shirley's attitudes because he fears a threat to his perception of masculinity.

The authors imply the same criticism of Ally that they convey about Shirley. Both build their lives on the romantic illusion that marriage alone will bring them a sense of identity, social prestige, fulfillment and happiness. The

female stereotype that embodies these concepts is accepted generally even when it fails to satisfy. The authors' sexism is not derived from their censure of the false female expectations generated by patriarchal society, but from the blame they attribute to the female characters who are themselves the victims. While it may be argued that characters such as Shirley and Ally are seen as self-defeating because they comply with conventional role-models, the authors nonetheless condemn them because they choose to depict them in repulsive terms rather than sympathetically. For example, this is how they describe Shirley:

Her looks were negative, but she knew how to handle them. Thin, flat-chested, with fair straight hair, pale eyes, and a thin pale mouth, she had determination, strength, and a sort of thin hard courage. Over her whipcord mouth she painted another, a scarlet cupid's bow, her hair, tinted golden, was sculptured in the latest mode. ... her eyes were greedy. (p.202)

She is described either in such unattractive terms as "negative", "flat-chested" (a masculine feature), "straight hair", "whipcord mouth" and "greedy", or the usually accepted attractive features are artificial such as "painted --- scarlet cupid's bow" and hair "tinted golden". Her "pale eyes", "thin pale mouth" and "thin -- courage" emphasise a shallowness of character, and even the determination and strength which are admirable qualities in a man add to the impression of hardness and unfemininity in a woman. Harry is distrustful of the motives of all women except Gwen, because

he is conditioned to feel the need to be dominant in his relationship with a female. Gwen offers herself as a weak and subordinate woman and this appeals to his sense of male superiority and role of protector. He fears all other women because he senses a general antagonism to men, and certainly the authors do not challenge his attitudes seriously.

Harry's daughter Ruth represents the self-sacrificing female stereotype, which is shown by the authors to be noble. Ruth has always been one imposed upon because of her generous nature. She is drawn to the revolutionary Sid despite the extreme of sacrifice and misery this brings her. She sublimates her life in his although she does not share his grim ideology. She has accepted the notion that the woman's role in life is to be supportive of the male's ideals and aims, and, indeed, Barnard and Eldershaw elevate her sacrifice. In this way, their sympathy assumes a sexist position and an acceptance of patriarchy. This is evident in their description of the relationship between Ruth and Sid:

Out of his hard intellectual plane, his need of her would rise suddenly as a whirlwind. It was not her idea of love, it affronted her and laid waste, but she found the strength to face it and to snatch joy from it. She grew into his life. She was content with that. Silence and discipline beat her love to an enduring hardness. (p.303)

Ruth sees her role as one of giving rather than receiving, and she pursues this ideal despite its cost to herself. However, the authors' position in this regard is somewhat

ambiguous, because they also imply criticism of females for accepting insignificant roles. They seem to elevate self-sacrifice, but censure female subordination. Sid accepts Ruth's sacrifices without recognition or tenderness because, for him, the revolution is all important and personal relationships are insignificant. There is really little quality in their relationship. Yet at least Sid has an all-consuming cause and this is more exciting than the lacklustre, supportive existences of the females. Even Ruth, who is involved in the revolution, is merely supportive. Barnard and Eldershaw elevate her character and sympathise with her deprivation of fulfilling love from Sid. They do not appear to recognise that the character traits which she has developed involve abrogation of her femininity and an assumption of male values. This is a strongly sexist position which gives precedence to a cause above the nature and needs of females.

In contrast to their criticisms of women, Barnard and Eldershaw show a greater appreciation of the consequences of the stereotypical conditioning of men. Thus, they show sympathetically that Harry feels but cannot express his tenderness for Ally, because he has been conditioned to male self-sufficiency, strength and circumspectness so enthroned in the male ethic. This socially induced male inhibition also affects the relationship between Harry and his son, Ben, who is influenced to re-produce the same male constraints as his

father. Ben is a survivor because of his adaptability to adverse circumstances. As a child he is shown to have deep sensitivity, for he is upset when Ally chides Harry for mistakenly eating the boy's dinner. He later learns to suppress any outward expression of his feelings. Tragically, Harry is just as unable to develop a meaningful relationship with his son as he has been with Ally, because he allows himself to be constrained by a stereotypical concept of the father-son relationship and this prevents a friendship from developing:

Harry and Ben felt constrained. They knew they were in a fast changing world, that because of their different ages the changes must carry them apart further and further. Almost for the first time the thought of their relationship to one another was in the forefront of both minds. I am father. I am son. We have something to say to one another now. Each was embarrassed by the pressure of the demand to which he was too inarticulate to yield. (p.323)

Thus it is not only the male-female relationship that suffers from inability to communicate but relationships between men as well. The inability to express feelings openly is shown to be learnt socially and it is from his father that Ben learns to mask his own deep emotions. When his best friend, Tony Nelson, is killed in the war he cries as he has never done since he was a child:

... he would not cry again ever again in his life. for that was the unmarked end of his youth. Afterwards he'd been ashamed, and if the others talked of Tony Ben walked away. (p.343)



His sense of shame in allowing others to witness his grief has been learnt socially and he determines to repress all such feelings in the future. Ben is independent but his belief in male self-sufficiency leaves him isolated from warm, sharing relationships with either men or women. He has absorbed the characteristics of the male stereotype in hiding his emotions from others. However, Barnard and Eldershaw do qualify their critique by a tendency to accept an inevitability in this male stereotype, thus confirming it as 'natural'. This is present, for instance, when they show Harry's inability to share his grief with Ally when his son Jackie dies shortly before the birth of Ben:

Their life ground on. Ally was avid for emotion. Harry was too tired to give it, too unperceiving to know what was wanted ... He was confused. He was tired. He had always worked hard, but now the strain was falling in an unaccustomed place. There was no relief in his home. He supposed that most people's marriages went phut sooner or later. He'd heard men speak of their wives with latent hostility often enough. Jackie's death had shaken his confidence in life as neither the war nor his own struggles and defeats ever had ... his heart bled secretly, without his knowledge. A bitter realization that this was how things were and always would be, that he'd been a mut to expect anything better, began to form, like a slow accretion of limestone, at the root of his mind.  
(pp.84-85)

Harry's suppression of his emotions is used by the authors to gain the reader's sympathy and it is thus condoned. In contrast, Ally's grief is shown to be used in an 'unnatural' and negative way to cover and defend herself against the

reproach she senses from her husband. Her suppressed grief is further condemned as false because "she was going to see to it that she was recompensed" for her "bad time". (p.84) By contrast, hiding emotion is shown to be both noble and natural for a man, even the "latent hostility" of Harry's acquaintances for their wives.

M. Barnard Eldershaw show problems inherent in the relationships between men and women, and indeed, between men themselves when there is a strong emotional tie. Much easier are mateship bonds and Ally's female neighbour circle, for they make few personal demands and their expectations are not so high. Yet mateship, the male bonding that Harry remembers so fondly from the army, deserts the men during the Depression. There is no room for warm companionship and support now, for all are competing for employment:

Anxiety is like an acid sweat which eats the tissues. Many other men were on the same mission: they did not join forces - they were competitors, enemies; there was no brotherhood between them yet. (p.105)

It is clear that mateship is only effective when there is no possibility of competition. The unemployed victims of the Depression are spurned by the employed survivors for fear they may be doomed to the same fate. Here the fortunate cling tenaciously to the stereotype of the male as the natural breadwinner and provider for the family. In

maintaining this image the unemployed are condemned to disgrace for not wanting to work. The authors here portray sympathetically the suffering caused males by stereotypical expectations, but they do not explore the effects of such attitudes on females. The situation of women remains peripheral to their social concerns, but in this position they are confirming implicitly the injustices of sexism. They are ignoring the importance of half of humanity.

The same problems that exist in the relationship between Harry and Ally is shown in that between successful businessman Olaf Ramsay and his wife. Again the sympathy remains with the husband deprived of love and there is an implied condemnation of his wife rather than exploring the causes as resting independently of either partner. Instead, Olaf's wife is shown to be somewhat heartless:

She had not loved Olaf, she had meant to, but she hadn't. He had been her husband and she had been his faithful competent wife, the convention had been fulfilled. (p.263)

She is shown to be concerned merely with conforming to social expectations than in actually loving her husband and he suffers as a consequence. Olaf Ramsay is a lonely man who seeks the brotherhood the army once afforded him. For that reason he employs former army comrade Harry, but he does not achieve a deep mateship with him:

It wasn't that they had nothing in common. It was that Olaf Ramsay wanted too much in common. Harry wasn't used to people lonelier than himself. They made him uncomfortable. He was better at bearing things for himself. (p.162)

Previously Harry has yearned for mateship, but he has been so moulded by circumstances that he has lost the capacity for sharing his feelings not only with his wife, but with anyone at all.

In the middle section of the novel in which the authors convey their own ideas, the same male inhibitions in expressing feelings is apparent in the relationship between Knarf and his scientist friend Ord. Knarf's vision represents the revolutionary ideal; Ord, who espouses the ideal of "exact truth" (p.374) represents realism and conservatism. Their ideals are in conflict but neither is able to express their inner feelings about this. As a male, Ord feels acutely a sense of alienation both from his friend Knarf and the truth:

He saw how infirm the mind of man still was, how easily taken in by the nimble imagination. Under his censure Ord too felt sorrowful as if he were also a deprived and lonely child shut out of an unknown kingdom.

Knarf, recoiling from the unspoken rebuff, returned to his book as if to take cover in it. (p.374) [My emphasis]

Ord's concerns remain 'unspoken' because they necessitate

conflict with his friend, a conflict between exact science and creative imagination. Knarf, too, withdraws from acknowledging an emotional reaction to his friend's rebuff lest he lose his friendship. The authors accept the inevitability of such alienation and inability to understand a differing perspective.

However, more important to my argument than the inability of two male friends to acknowledge their feelings, is the concept that the two authors have of a male conception of society. It is not that their pessimistic vision is antipathetic to women, but that it totally ignores women in the scheme of society. In the futuristic depiction of Australia in the twenty-fourth century, the position of women remains just as powerless and uninfluential as in the twentieth century.<sup>20</sup> The role of women thus continues to be largely domestic. An example can be found in Knarf's wife Lin, who sees little meaning in the problems of her unfulfilling married life. Yet in using Knarf to make social comment, the authors have not only failed to portray Lin sympathetically, but they have positively criticised her willingness to sublimate her identity within her husband and her resentment of his lack of appreciation:

Though she was over forty her youth had not left

20. Modjeska, op.cit., p.242.

her, it had hardened, so that she was like a fruit turned woody. She was still waiting for heaven knew what improbable spring. She was disappointed, vaguely, envelopingly, and she blamed him for it. Opportunity, both before and after her marriage, had been as much open to her as to any one else, but she had not risked taking it. She had wanted her husband, home, and children to absorb her, and when it hadn't been like that she blamed Knarf for her inability to deal with her own life in her own way. The situation was chronic and insoluble. (p.25)

Although this implies some authorial criticism of female exclusion from extra-domestic life, they clearly condemn women for not seizing the opportunities available to them. The authors' position is ambiguous because certainly they themselves offer no viable solutions for women in the revolutionary society they envisage, for Ruth's role is just as unimportant and subordinate as Lin's. However, more important to my argument than the relative positions of men and women are antagonistic and resentful attitudes which prevent loving relationships. Just as Franklin in All That Swagger, rather than attributing such attitudes to the structure of society and stereotypical expectations, Barnard and Eldershaw criticise and blame women alone:

There was a malign feminine world, a pool of discontents, a treasury of bruised vanity, constantly recruited. Women as women, rather than individuals, had a grievance, a mass hostility, a mass frustration. (p.203)

In the inner novel Ruth alone struggles to escape this "mass grievance" by achieving her own individuality all to no

avail. Yet the authors are strongly critical of women, for in that part of the novel about the twenty-fourth century Knarf comments:

She is merely one of those unfortunate women who are women only and not human beings. They are quite common. (p.203)

Through Knarf the authors are implying that women must take individual responsibility for their social condition. They do not suggest any collective action against women's oppression in their revolutionary explorations, because this is secondary to their focus on the nature of the crisis they see in capitalism.<sup>21</sup> The struggle of the working class with which they are concerned is shown as a male struggle and their criticism of women who are merely passively supportive rather than being actively involved is strongly sexist. They do not recognise that the resentments consequent to denial of individuality, equal human value and dignity inhibit the attainment of loving relationships between men and women. They blame women themselves rather than socially imposed stereotypical gender attitudes.

The inner story of the novel is reflected in the outer narrative, for Lin is disappointed in her marriage to Knarf,

21. Ibid, pp.242-43.

and he has developed little rapport with his son Ren. Lin wants Knarf to shoulder full responsibility for her life just as Ally does with Harry. The novel demonstrates that it is a failure to give away complete responsibility, just as it is a mistake to accept it from another. In effect each wants to receive from the other, and ultimately neither gives. Harry finds no satisfaction in providing for his family, and Ally is never content with what she receives from him. Thus the novel suggests that the poverty in relationships brought about by inability to communicate feelings is a continuing tragedy. The inadequacies are exacerbated by constraints imposed by stereotyping, particularly by males concealing their emotions, and by females cherishing romantic dreams.

The novel says something of the twentieth century ways of viewing life. Yet it offers no solutions, for ironically, the revolution which destroys the city, eventually reproduces the same attitudes in the new society of a commune. This suggests that attitudes are passed on more from people themselves rather than the environment in which they live. There is an inevitable circle in which people are trapped, because they determine the nature of the society, which in turn moulds the individual.

M. Barnard Eldershaw's view of society is bleak and remote. While this may be attributed to the authors' personalities, it may also be a consequence of their



perceptions of the Depression and the misery experienced during the war years when the novel was written. Marjorie Barnard had written to Nettie Palmer in 1939 that she was "in agreement with the philosophic principles of Communism", but could not accept its "means of survival".<sup>22</sup> She was supporting author Frank Davison who was closely allied with the Communist Party and favoured the concept of a revolutionary party. It was at this time of social unrest and ferment that Marjorie Barnard and Flora Eldershaw wrote Tomorrow and Tomorrow and Tomorrow. They offer no hope of deep and loving relationships between men and women and they are strongly critical of women. They attribute most of the blame for the failure of loving relationships between the sexes to women, even though they are critical of society itself. They imply that women themselves ought to be different and they give scant regard to the indoctrination and victimization of females that are a consequence of accepting the rightness of female deference and subordination to men. In contrast, the males, who are also victims of the same social system, are shown sympathetically. For these reasons, I believe that the authors have shown a definite sexist bias.

22. Marjorie Barnard to Nettie Palmer, 12 October 1939. Palmer papers, NLA.MS.1174/1/5610-1, as quoted by Modjeska, op. cit., p.113.

(iii) RUTH PARK

THE HARP IN THE SOUTH

In The Harp in the South (1948), Ruth Park implies that happiness may be found in conformity to gender roles and acceptance of one's place in life. Her portrayal of character is both sexist and sentimental especially when examined in the context of slum living. The novel is set in Surry Hills, Sydney, just after World War 2. It is concerned with the difficulties and tribulations of the working-class, Irish-Catholic Darcy family. Park records all the violence, dirt and squalor of the slums. Although everywhere there is the ill-health and deprivation so often associated with poverty, women are shown to bear a greater burden than men. Yet despite all of their sufferings, the female models portrayed in the novel cling tenaciously to the stereotypical gender roles which add to their oppression. Not only does Ruth Park treat with sympathy and respect those characters who adhere to gender stereotypes, she suggests that they are ennobled by their conformity to them.

The fact that the reader never learns Mrs Darcy's given name, but only knows her by her role as Mumma, confirms the stereotype to the detriment of individuality. The same position is taken in Alan Seymour's play, The One Day of the Year, in which the mother is called just 'Mum' as a character

in the script, and only her husband, Alf, refers to her as Dot. However, Ruth Park clearly does not present Mumma's conformity to the female stereotype in a critical light, but rather as a virtue to be admired. She reserves her criticism for capitalism, because she implies that the poor are condemned to suffer by heartless landlords and exploiting manufacturers:

Wherever there are poor you will find landlords who build tenements: cramming two on a piece of land no bigger than a pocket handkerchief<sup>23</sup> and letting them for the rent of four. (p.5.)

Park's depiction of the New Year celebration illustrates the extent of despair among the poor working-class people of Surry Hill. They accept their condition as inevitable and the festival offers an opportunity to blot out the squalor and futility of their lives. The measure of their suffering needs to be counter-balanced by the excesses of their festive behaviour. The joyful outlet is uninhibited by the restraints imposed by the religious associations of Christmas. There is no need for family commitments, so the wider relationship of the slum dwellers expands the celebration itself into an expression of the community's sense of identity in their shared values:

23. Ruth Park, The Harp in the South, Penguin Books Australia Ltd., Ringwood, Victoria, 1981 edition used throughout my text.

The New Year was important in Surry Hills. It was really the great feast of the year, uninhibited by religious thoughts, and with a pagan finality about it. Those people, simple and primitive, but with a great capacity for feeling the abstract strong and vital about them, really heard the Old Year's faltering footsteps, and the clang of the door which sounded in the midnight chimes of December 31st. So they made it a feast, with lots of noise and ribaldry, as ancient peoples did when they were a little fearful, and wanted to frighten away their fear. (p.86)

Here again is the need to obliterate awareness of a cruel and threatening environment. The feelings of the slum-dwellers on this occasion are secular rather than religious, and they are based on a shared sense of despair for the future.

Park attributes the social problems in the slums to economic factors, but she fails to recognise the destructive nature of gender stereotyping in human relationships. In fact, all of the characters are confirmed by the author in roles that are determined by the slum society in which they live. In focusing on the model of the Darcy family, Park shows Hugh as husband and father providing only minimum material support, but he affords to drink excessively with his mates at the hotel. This is treated sympathetically because of the circumstances of his poverty. In contrast, Mumma, a stereotypical "good" mother, continually sacrifices herself for her family without ever expecting or receiving material comfort. However, far from focusing attention on the inequalities wrought by stereotypical gender behaviour, Park ennobles Mumma's acceptance of deprivation, not only of

material necessities such as shoes, but of emotional deprivation within the marriage relationship itself. She is the giver who willingly endures, forgives, understands and sympathises. While Hugh really does love her, he offers little emotional support because he is not keenly aware of her needs. Park does not explore the causes of this poverty in such relationships. By ennobling suffering of women in the conventional marriage relationships depicted in the novel she confirms the stereotype. She ascribes the causes of the suffering to the social injustices of poverty rather than the nature of the relationship itself.

The entire plot of the novel reveals men and women enduring lives of misery because of their lowly social condition. Yet there is no sharing of suffering, no comfort in mutual love. Stoic endurance is the implied virtue, and for the frequent explosion of frustration into sordid violence, there is either understanding or non-interference. The total environment is accepted as hostile and there is no will to change it, but rather a systematic obsession with blotting it from consciousness. Men resort to drinking and violence, and their wives accept this role as men's right, even though it exacerbates their own suffering. Women fit readily into accepting their lot without complaint. They use this acceptance, non-involvement and avoidance of all forms of unpleasantness, as a form of self-protection. If men drink they forget the hurt they must bear; if women expect nothing they cannot be disappointed. Freda Freiberg

suggests that Ruth Park has underestimated the social damage wrought by alcoholism. <sup>24</sup> Research has shown alcoholism to be a cause of poverty, accidents, mental and physical illness, and a major factor in domestic violence. and family breakdown

Hugh Darcy is insignificant in his environment, doomed to a lifetime of failure and frustration. For this reason he drinks excessively, and in so doing, he achieves a false sense of self-importance. If his drunkenness is a means of blotting out the distasteful reality of the present, his consequent behaviour is really a form of self-hatred unjustifiably turned against his wife.

... when he got home he started in on Mumma.

He hated her then, because in her fatness and untidiness and drabness she reminded him of what he himself was when he was sober. (p.71)

Hughie is totally absorbed in himself and lives for the gratification of drink. His social condition makes him an opportunist who cannot be bothered by Mumma's sensitivity to the prostitute Delie's activities. He happily accepts Delie's money given to him to provide medication for his daughter, Roie, but his selfishness is so overpowering that he uses it

24. Freda Freiberg, "The Harp in the South", in B.A.Creed and I.L O'Loughlin (ed.), Insight '90, Flemington, Vic., 1989.

to buy drinks for himself and his mates at the pub. Hughie's self-interest is further shown when he insists that his ageing mother-in-law is put into a geriatric institution. He is not entirely lacking in sensitivity, for he recognises her subsequent deterioration and arranges to bring her home to die. Yet even this apparent act of charity is more to feed his own feelings of self-righteousness than to benefit Grandma. All of Hughie's actions are motivated by selfishness, either for physical or emotional gratification. Consequently, he lives up to social expectations and values in bringing Grandma home to fulfill a twofold purpose. First, Hughie's male pride is fed by his success in winning against the strong resistance of the geriatric authorities, who believe in their role of isolating the aged from society. Second, Hughie unexpectedly achieves a reputation for magnanimity in the eyes of his wife and his local community. He has never before been able to savour the sweet taste of admiration for his fine qualities. His longing for instant riches is as strong as that shown in the novel Jonah. Hughie builds his hopes on winning the lottery and even associates this with his seldom practised religion. His bitter disappointment is followed by a blasphemy compared to that of Judas.

In contrast to Hugh's means of coping with the sufferings associated with poverty by excessive drinking, Mumma finds solace from her devotion to her Catholic

religion. In its practice she is able to live amid evil while not being of it, and she can accept peacefully her deprivations and disappointments. In this way Park ennobles her sufferings.

Another way in which Mumma copes is by self-deception which is to become increasingly a part of her life. Mumma has so rationalized her role of devoted wife, that even in later life she deliberately refuses to face the damning evidence of her past experience of Hughie's drunkenness, selfishness and abuse:

... For the first time in her life she began to think that perhaps it was not much use wishing and praying that Hughie would come off the drink.

'For what else in life is there for him?' argued Mumma with herself. 'He was a good husband when he was young.' And she convinced herself of this, in spite of all the appalling evidences to the contrary with which her memory, presented her. 'I've put up with it for twenty-five years,' said Mumma defiantly, 'and there's no reason why I shouldn't put up with it till the end of me life.' (pp.244-45)

She deludes herself in believing that Hughie loves her so much that he would be a different, generous husband if he had the means. When he tells her the story of his mistake in thinking he had won the lottery, she is as happy as if he really had given her the gifts he imagines:

'Oh, Hughie, a fur coat, and an electric stove!' She was just as delighted as if she had really received them. Hughie felt proud of his generosity, and expanded visibly. (p.174)



Mumma conceals the outward expression of her own disappointment for she sees her role as consoler of her husband. She has the same fatalistic acceptance that she has to her whole life, in expecting no joy:

'It's not for the likes of us', she breathed.  
'Not ever.'  
(p.175)

Her defiance of the evidence that Hughie is not a good husband is an example of her self-deception as a means of coping with her misery, and her justification involves clinging to the enduring role of the good wife. Yet it does give her life purpose and this enables her to retain her own self-respect.

Mumma convinces herself against all reason that her beloved long-lost child, Thady, is still alive and that she will find him again still the age he was years before. By this deception she shields herself from the full sorrow of his probable death. She becomes the grieving mother, and this gives her a certain identity. Hughie identifies her role of grieving while acknowledging his remoteness from it:

'Whatjer thinking of, old hen?' he asked.  
(p.251)

This question suggests his vague concern for her, although it fixes her in the female role of 'old hen', with the

derogatory implication of having outlived her usefulness. Hughie offers pity rather than compassion, even though he is as old and suffering as she is. His somewhat clumsy tenderness to Mumma in the end, together with his pride in his little granddaughter, do indicate some joy in his life. For her part, Mumma is content with her deprived life because she does not fight against it within herself. She finds meaning in her caring role and in cherishing the memory of her lost child.

The unpleasantness of life does not draw Hughie and Mumma closer in mutual compassion but leads rather to his detestation of her because he recognises in her his own lowly status. Park's use of the word "Mumma" de-personalises her in the same manner as Grandma, and it establishes her role of mother, rather than loved and loving wife. This role is extended to include Hughie, for Mumma really mothers her husband as a little child who needs her pandering, support and care. Her emotional and material needs are never considered seriously by Hughie. Ruth Park treats this deprivation with sympathy, but because she ennobles Mumma's self-sacrifice and generosity, she is supporting the characteristics of the female stereotype of good wife and mother. This prevents her from criticizing the patriarchal attitudes which have constructed the stereotype. Park clearly sees that women like Mumma only survive by self-deception. However, the edge is taken off this seeming feminist critique because the self-deception and passive acceptance of

injustice on religious grounds is ennobled. Thus Freda Freiberg has noted that although the novel has several strong women characters, three of them are feminine archetypes of traditional culture -- the stoic mother, the folk grandma, and the tough madam with a heart of gold -- who support traditional values and attract a sentimental rather than a critical (and feminist) response.<sup>25</sup> The television series based on the novel was reviewed by Phillip Adams in the Australian of 9 May 1987. In this he claimed that the novel shows the miserable, mean-spirited side of mateship, but 'with neither cruelty nor bitterness.' This is an example of a male critic's blindness to the book's weakness from a feminist viewpoint. Although he recognises that Park retains sympathy for Hughie despite his misplaced loyalty to his drinking mates, he does not note the novel's appeal to acceptance of traditional female stereotypes.

Unlike Mumma, Grandma has survived by her craftiness and wisdom to foresee and avoid trouble. However, she has suffered the same deprivations as her daughter, and Park shows the only escape to be in death. When Hughie brings her home from the geriatric hospital, she cannot enjoy a time of happiness because she is unaware of where she is. Her mind has returned to her past for a brief re-living of what was

25. Ibid.

dearest to her and she soon departs this world. Her granddaughter Dolour feels "chained to earth", condemned to the sorrow that her name implies. If she senses briefly Grandma's release from her earthly imprisonment, she concludes immediately that there is no after life for "... Grandma was nowhere, nowhere at all." (p.159) The implication is that there is no reward of a happy hereafter, only an escape into nothingness to blot out all misery.

It is Grandma who sees the need to instruct Roie for her safety and she warns Mumma:

'You want to wise her up about men, lovie.'  
Mumma flushed. She had a curiously pure and naive mind and although every form of sin and obscenity had affronted her eyes while she lived in Plymouth Street she cringed away from it as though it had been a beast, sly, lithe and poisonous. (p.107)

Grandma thinks that Roie should be instructed to fear and distrust rather than seek a loving relationship. The pattern is to be continued from mother to daughter, and although she falls victim to the same romantic notions her mother once had as a girl, she ultimately assumes the same values of the female stereotype embodied in Mumma.

Roie is basically good, but she succumbs to the emotional blackmail of her first lover, Tommy Mendel. She has been a victim of the romantic dreams that society sets before young women, especially in the movies she frequents.

Her illusions are shattered when she realizes that Tommy only wants to use her to prove his own manhood. Her withdrawal from a planned abortion is followed by a brutal assault. Life seems to punish her for trying to abide by her moral values. Ruth Park seems to imply a feminist critique in this but she has already qualified this position by ennobling Roie's protection of the shortcomings of her lover from the possible criticisms of her family. She claims that Tommy has given her a brooch for Christmas. When Mumma discovers that Roie herself has purchased the second-hand brooch from a neighbour, Mrs Siciliano, she keeps her secret and she is proud of her daughter:

'Oh, Roie ... Roie, my little girl.'

The innocence and naivete of Roie made her feel both proud and sorry, for she had been the same herself until she learned that nobody could be so naive in such a world as this and not end up with a broken heart.

'I wish she hadn't fallen in love so early,' said Mumma sadly, for to her love meant sacrifice, and Roie's sacrifice both of her truthfulness and her thirty shillings was solid proof indeed that she loved Tommy Mendel. (p.85)

Here is Mumma's concept of the female role of sacrifice and the inevitability of being disappointed and hurt. What Mumma has experienced in her own relationship with Hughie, Roie is to suffer at the hands of Tommy. Yet Mumma does not doubt the rightness of the female stereotype, and Roie is to follow in her footsteps. Park does not criticize this attitude, but rather elevates it to nobility.

Park moves even further away from a feminist critique by re-affirming the female gender stereotype of good wife when Roie later marries Charlie. They achieve a warm and loving relationship, although Roie is too fearful of losing it to share with her husband the horror of her earlier sexual experience with Tommy. The couple accept their lowly social status and are content with their poverty. Certainly Park maintains her conservative position because she suggests that happiness is to be found in accepting one's role and status in life. This in turn presupposes that an adherence to gender stereotypes contains the seeds of human contentment because Roie moves from her former misery to find happiness in marriage.

Those characters who do not typify accepted gender attributes are portrayed either in unfavourable or unattractive terms. Such characters are Delie Stock, Miss Sheily and Patrick Diamond. These characters do not have a conventional relationship with the opposite sex. However, despite the sordid associations of prostitute Delie Stock, she is shown to have a generous side to her nature and there is an implied criticism of social attitudes contained in her pleas to the Catholic priest:

"You don't know what it's like being a woman.  
Everyone's got it in for you, even God. Even  
God." ... "What chance does a woman get around  
here?" (p.51)

Yet Park does not explore the circumstances that have brought Delie to her state in life, and her association with crime remains in an unfavourable light. Similarly, the unmarried mother, Miss Sheily, is depicted as an unfeeling, forbidding woman, without Park exploring the social circumstances that have made her that way. Even when she is about to marry Roie speculates:

Did Miss Sheily love Mr Gunnarson, or did she marry him just to escape into another environment and another sort of life? (p.202)

Park reinforces Roie's assessment of Miss Sheily as forbidding because she responds to Mr Gunnarson's tender kiss with an immediate swipe over his hat with the red-hot toaster. (pp.202-3) Not even her gentle revelation of her Christian name to Dolour when she is leaving for her new life can wipe out the impression Park has made of her as a frustrated and cold woman. But Park's sexism is not confined to females for she is equally indifferent to lonely bachelor, Patrick Diamond. His rejection by Hugh and Mumma when he becomes a Catholic, apparently to gain acceptance, is shown in a comical way that glosses over his personal tragedy.

The Harp in the South shows clearly defined stereotyping of the characters into gender roles with a resultant lack of understanding and love. The urban slum environment is a shaping influence on the stereotyping, so that the

characters seem to be moulded as if by an inevitable force. Yet for all of its depressing sordidness and hopelessness life does hold some possibility for deep and fulfilling relationships. Ruth Park's treatment of the characters tends to be over-sentimental, perhaps because she is attempting to arouse sympathy for poor urban dwellers. Moreover, Irish characters lend themselves readily to such depiction. Yet because Park's emphasis is upon economic injustices she has failed to recognise the patriarchal nature of society and attribute the seeds of the problem to be sown in attitudes based on gender stereotypes. For this reason, women accept their deprivations because they believe that they derive their identity from self-sacrifice and a lack of desire for material possessions. Espousing the same ethic, men believe that they may only gain their sense of worth by being important in the work-force, and by providing well for their families. In depicting the main two couples, Mumma and Hughie, and Roie and Charlie, in relationship to these stereotypes, Ruth Park has implied a sympathy, acceptance and even elevation of them. For these reasons, Ruth Park has presented a sexist position in the novel.



## CHAPTER 5

### LESS SEXIST FEMALE NOVELS

I have discussed how female authors have been trapped within a literary system that has been defined by males. Kay Schaffer has noted that Australian female writers have challenged the frequently expressed male assumption of their dominance of the land and, by implication, of women as well because the land has been depicted as female.<sup>1</sup> Schaffer sees the female-land equation as the basis of the patriarchal order. Both she and Modjeska argue that female compliance with this permits a degree of critique within a final acceptance of gender stereotypes. Some female authors, such as Katharine Susannah Prichard and Henry Handel Richardson, have achieved less sexist positions than those discussed in Chapter 4, although they are still constrained by patriarchal constructions of the feminine in a symbolic order.<sup>2</sup> I support Schaffer's contention that even when female authors seem to challenge these masculine constructions they, in fact, reinforce them.<sup>3</sup> A prime example is to be found in the writing of Katharine Susannah Prichard, who, even though

1. Schaffer, op.cit., p.106.

2. Ibid, p.107.

3. Ibid.

recognised by Modjeska and others as having feminist sympathies, confirms the phallocentric conception of the feminine and inferior 'other' by promoting a national identity through the acceptance of the female-nature/land equation.<sup>4</sup> Schaffer argues that even less sexist female writers complement and fulfil masculine representations,<sup>5</sup> for as long as the self is male and the other is female the masculine cultural order is not challenged at the deepest level.

### KATHARINE SUSANNAH PRICHARD

#### (i) THE BLACK OPAL

In The Black Opal (1921) Katharine Susanannah Prichard is less sexist than the female authors examined in Chapter 4, although she is conventionally sexist in her endorsement of male superiority in their endeavours and their affinity with nature and in the need she sees for female supportiveness. However, in The Black Opal she does pose a challenge to this through the story of Sophie and her inability to live by the conventionally feminine self-sacrificing ideal, an inability with which Prichard has a degree of sympathy. Certainly she shows how socially imposed gender roles can lead to tragedy

4. Ibid.

5. Ibid, p. 110.

for the individual. I believe Prichard is being less sexist in depicting inevitable tragedy in Sophie's choice of marriage to Potch because she wants to live a stereotyped role rather than follow her own emotions. However, the tension remains, because she justifies the need for women to sacrifice themselves, through the character of Martha, who recognises Sophie's need to lose herself in service to others. Martha remembers the pride and pleasure this subordination has brought her. It has given her an identity of her own and it is this that Sophie craves in place of her former role of singer and sophisticated socialite.

The novel focuses on the lives of opal gougers in far western New South Wales. Women are supportive of males, not of each other. In contrast, mateship is the strong bond among the men of the Ridge, where the unwritten law ensures that they share equally the opal they find. Prichard emphasises the nobility and rightness of mateship between males, but she does not depict a similar relationship of support between women themselves, or between men and women. Mateship on the Ridge is a co-operative male endeavour in plundering the land to rob it of its treasure. Prichard accepts and even elevates this shared male pursuit, because she describes the miners' philosophy through the character of Michael Brady in terms of closeness to nature, simplicity and freedom from material greed:

Any and every man could have immortal happiness by hearing a bird sing, by gazing into the blue-dark

depths of the sky on a starry night. No man could sell his joy of these things. No man could buy them. Love is for all men: no man can buy or sell love. Pleasure in work, in jolly gatherings with friends, peace at the end of the day, and satisfaction of his natural hungers, a man might have all these things on the Ridge.

Ridge miners love fearlessly, with the magic of adventure in their daily lives, the prospect of one day finding the great stone which is the grail of every opal-miner's quest. They are satisfied if they get enough opal to make a parcel for a buyer ...

Among the men, only the shiftless and more worthless are not in sympathy with Ridge ideas, and talk of money and what money will buy as the things of first value in life.

Clearly Prichard shows the miners' values to be noble. However, by this attitude she also implicitly endorses male exploitation of women, for the land is represented in Australian literature as female. So confident are the miners of the loyalty of their mates that they believe all 'ratting' or dishonesty to stem from outsiders:

They could not bring themselves to admit there was any danger to the sacred principle of Ridge life, that a mate stands by a mate ... But rats, the men who sneaked into other men's mines when they were on good stuff, and took out their opal during the night, were never Ridge men. They were newcomers, outsiders, strangers on the rushes, who had not learnt or assimilated Ridge ideas.  
(pp.27-28)

6. Katharine Susannah Prichard, The Black Opal, Angus and Robertson (Publishers) Pty Ltd, Melbourne, p.60, 1973 edition used throughout my text.

"To go back on a mate", is considered the most heinous crime of the Ridge code of behaviour. Mateship, the bonding of men in loyalty and mutual support, is the highest relationship and Michael Brady is respected as representing the living ideal of it. Against breaches of this ideal, those between men and women are of far lesser importance. An example of this contrast can be found in the incident when the young Sophie is lured to sing to the men at the hotel. Michael has warned her against going because he honours his promise made to her mother on her death-bed to care for Sophie as if she were his own child. Michael has loved her mother and he assumes the protective and caring role so neglected by her ineffectual and weak natural father, Paul. However, Sophie does not heed Michael's words of wisdom, and Prichard shows her behaviour to be naive, and the sexual attitudes and advances of the men to be the consequences of her failure to be advised by a man. Even though the improprieties take place in the presence of her father, there is no indication that he intervenes, nor is there any real condemnation of the men. There is merely the 'excuse' that the men have been drinking. Certainly Prichard blames Sophie because she notes that "Looking into her eyes he [Michael] read her contrition, asking forgiveness, understanding all that he had not been able to explain to her." (p.101) Michael may have shrunk from an adequate explanation in deference to his loyalty to his mates. It is difficult to accept that he does not wish to upset Sophie's sensibilities, because the consequences to her welfare and reputation should have held precedence.

Prichard presents what is held to be the noblest role of the male - a loyal mate, a man close to nature. In this treatment of males she resembles that of Vance Palmer whose attitudes expressed in The Passage are discussed in Chapter 3. However, Prichard does show man plundering the land in his quest for opal, a quest which bears an analogy to the domination and, at times, the exploitation of women. This analogy can be found in the treatment of Sophie, whose innocence and emotions are assaulted.

Prichard portrays women in stereotypical terms. Maggie Grant embodies the stereotype of the good woman, supportive of a husband, a reflection of his goodness:

Women like Maggie Grant share their husband's outlook. They read what the men read, have the men's vision, and hold it with jealous enthusiasm.  
(p.60)

Maggie gives endlessly of herself to others and is held to be a mother figure. She is affectionately called Mother M'Cready. Yet Maggie is only identified by her role of midwife and dispenser of motherly, unflagging service. There is general acceptance of socially defined roles:

Ridge folk as a whole have set their compass and steer the course of their lives with unconscious philosophy, yet conviction as to the rightness of what they are doing.  
(pp.60-61)

This shared philosophy is readily recognised by the outsider,

opal-buyer John Armitage, when he witnesses the simple exuberance of Sophie and Potch:

He understood as he had never done what the Ridge stood for - association of people with the earth, their attachment to the primary needs of life, the joyous flight of youthful spirits, this quiet happiness and peace, when the work of the day was done. (p.82)

The work of the day is that of the miners, and their women's supportive activities are subsumed within the nobility of their cause. John Armitage recognises that man's affinity with the earth is a basic necessity on the Ridge, because from it he must either survive or be destroyed. The mother earth hides the wealth which he may discover, in however small a part. He must constantly seek a deeper understanding and union as in a loving relationship. On the other hand, with authorial approval, the woman has an inferior role of support in an endeavour which she may share only indirectly through her affinity to her husband. The necessity for his success is just as vital for her survival, but at the same time, it represents, in a literary sense, her own destruction, and Frichard must have been aware of this. It is essential for men and women to be mutually supportive in order to survive, but in this pact the women must participate in the destruction of their identity. In the relationship depicted between man and woman, he must have some measure of success by domination, and she must support him in his efforts by accepting a position of inferiority. This

treatment is similar to that of Patrick White in The Tree of Man. Prichard has used this patriarchal construction of gender roles, and even the sensitivity she shows for her female characters does not completely eliminate the sexism.

Prichard shows the stereotyped attitudes existing between the sexes in the relationship which buds between Arthur Henty and Sophie, daughter of the weak and selfish miner, Paul Rouminof. In the naive and romantic way expected of a young girl, Sophie is attracted to Arthur Henty, manager of his father's cattle station. Her innocence appeals strongly to him and a loving communication develops through their eyes rather than with less natural words. Arthur has already fallen victim to social conditioning in his attitude to females:

Henty looked at her sometimes as if he had discovered a new, strange, and beautiful creature: a butterfly, or gnat, with gauzy, resplendent wings, whose beauty he was bewildered and overcome by. (p.93)

Thus, Arthur believes that Sophie has a fragile, delicate quality which he is afraid to hurt by expression of love. His vision is not of a human being at all, and as such he does not consider her emotions. On the other hand, she is immature and consequently does not recognise the social barriers hindering the development of a loving commitment between them.



Gossips change Sophie's friendship to romance, then from romance to the idea of marriage. She has accepted the romantic, social attitude that marriage entails living "happy ever after". (p.94) For Arthur's part, teasing from others causes his resentment, because it cheapens the idealized and respectful nature of his feelings for her. He cannot bear to have his imaginary vision of her as an untouchable madonna tainted by an association with the reality of a relationship with a woman:

The last time they had been together, he had longed to draw her to him and kiss her so that the virgin innocence would leave her eyes; but fear or some conscientious scruple restrained him. He had been reluctant to awaken her: to change the quality of her feeling towards him. (p.93)

He believes his sexless fantasy to be superior to a genuine loving relationship, but he is unable to recognise if his attitude is based on fear or conscience. Prichard is clearly critical of his self-deception, because Arthur exploits Sophie's emotions without any intention of committing himself to her. The growing interest of others in their friendship causes Sophie to become shy and confused about talking to Arthur in front of others. Thus, the natural growth of a loving relationship is restrained by social attitudes to friendship between man and women. Friendship between the sexes is not perceived as an option in the way that mateship is. The only expected relationship is a sexual one.

Michael represents righteousness and wisdom accorded by Prichard to males, but Sophie is too headstrong to accept his guidance. As a consequence, she has her first experience of sordidness, lust and drunkenness from a group of men, including Arthur. This is an example of Prichard's sexism, in having Sophie punished for not recognising a male's superior wisdom. Arthur's pride is hurt when he is beaten fighting over Sophie. Such behaviour is a depiction of a stereotyped and animalistic male reaction to any other male competing for a female he believes to be his property. Arthur's humiliation at losing the fight, combined with his resentment of the teasing over his attraction to Sophie, render him far from willing to face the heated opposition of his family. For Arthur, marriage to Sophie is unthinkable:

Arthur did not want to love her: he did not want to marry her. He did not want to have rows with his father, differences with his mother. (p.110)

Sophie is ignored at the Warria station ball. Arthur gives all his attention to Phyllis, the girl approved by his parents although they know she is a "minx". Rejection leads Sophie to accept the attentions of John Armitage and she copies the flirtatious behaviour of Phyllis towards Arthur. However, this does not coincide with Mr and Mrs Henty's expectations of the behaviour required of a girl of her lowly social position. Here Prichard shows critically how gender expectations are influenced by status.

Prichard presents scant reference to Paul, Sophie's father, for he is not shown as possessing qualities admired in the mining community. Prichard's sexism is implicit in ignoring a male who does not conform to the acceptable male stereotype. Michael is the father-figure, both in his relationship to Sophie and the enduring love he cherishes for Sophie's dead mother. Prichard can maintain Michael's nobility in this love only by having the mother dead, for if she had been alive Michael would not fit the admirable male stereotype because he would then love another man's wife. This is a further example of Prichard's sexism in depicting male/female relationships.

Part One of the novel ends with Michael's sense of failure not only in his father role, but also in his ideal of the Ridge man. He realises that by trying to force Sophie to conform to the life he and her mother have envisaged for her, he has driven her to a path of sorrow. Prichard clearly suggests tragedy both in Sophie's break with the natural environment and Michael's breach of the Ridge code of morality. The former confirms the patriarchal association of the land as the female other discussed by Schaffer, for it implies a betrayal of herself. Prichard is being sexist in attributing an inevitable tragedy to Sophie's leaving the Ridge. For a time she is depicted in terms of the condemned

image of "damned whore" described by Ann Summers.<sup>7</sup> Certainly Prichard seems to condemn her life in the city and to suggest that her return to the Ridge is the path to her human salvation. Presumably, the consequence and punishment for her apparent moral fall is the loss of her ability to sing. Prichard could have shown Sophie's career to be a successful pursuit of her identity as an individual and allowed her to find fulfilment. However, she has not allowed this because her main purpose was to show the men's struggle against capitalism. Here, as Drusilla Modjeska has discussed, Prichard's writing seems influenced by several traditions and genres, both the nationalist tradition of Henry Lawson, and that of D.H.Lawrence's romanticism in showing a richness and vitality in the natural world.<sup>8</sup> These influences were male literary constructions and they led Prichard to create her female characters in relation to them. Her Marxism sought ways of promoting Socialism in her writing, but, as I have discussed earlier, the Socialist philosophy was defined in terms of a male struggle. Modjeska has argued that the conflict between Prichard's loyalty to the Communist Party and loyalty to her role of a female author is evident in her novels.<sup>9</sup> Certainly this tension is apparent in her depiction of Sophie.

7. Summers, op.cit.

8. Modjeska, op.cit., p.121.

9. Ibid, p.124.

Sophie's childhood friend, Potch, takes upon himself a caring role for her father, Paul. The services he renders are typified socially as female, and the Ridge folk rationalise them as reparation for his father's involvement in the theft of Paul's opals. Potch has accepted the poor opinion held of himself as his father's son:

A quiet, awkward fellow he was, Potch. For a long time nobody thought much of him. "Potch," they would say, as his father used to, "a little bit of potch!" Potch knew what was meant by that. He was Charley Heathfield's son, and could not be expected to be worth much. He rated himself as other people rated him. He was potch, poor opal, stuff of no particular value, without any fire. And his estimate of himself was responsible for his keeping away from the boys and younger men of the Ridge. A habit of shy aloofness had grown with him ... (p.133)

Socially rejected as a male, Potch develops characteristics of females -- shyness and gentleness, and he becomes the imposed upon work-horse of all. Prichard treats with compassion the character of a male who is sensitive and gentle. She is obviously critical of society's intolerance to expected female characteristics in a male and in this she is less sexist.

Modjeska has identified Prichard's commitment to a romantic human relationship with the natural environment. <sup>10</sup>

10. Modjeska, op.cit., p.135.

Nettie Palmer attributed this commitment to her Australianism.<sup>11</sup> Prichard's position in this regard led her to ignore the consequences to Sophie instead of espousing a feminist approach to Sophie's potential. Sophie is depicted as surrendering her identity and talents in a return to an inferior role, a role which Prichard suggests as a regeneration. In Sophie's endeavours to recapture her former simple lifestyle, she is drawn inevitably to her childhood friend, Potch, who has always loved her. She is grateful for his adoration, and uses him to escape from the torment of guilt and the realization of her own passions:

It was like being a baby and lying in a cradle again to have Potch's arms about her; no harm or ill could reach her behind the barrier they raised. Sophie knew Potch's love was an ocean into which all her misdeeds of commission and omission might be dropped ... She loved him, she said, with a love of the tenderest affection. If it lacked an irresistible impulse, she grieved that it was so; but she hoped that some day she would love Potch as he loved her - without reservations. For the time being she loved him gratefully; her gratitude was as immense as his love. (p.181)

To be like a baby again is to accept dependence and inferiority. Sophie submerges herself in Potch's love, accepting his dominance as if accepting a greater good. Prichard's sexism seems evident in this, but the novel then goes on to reject the appropriateness of a relationship based

11. Nettie Palmer's views were cited by Modjeska, *ibid*.

so fully on this kind of dependence. There is a tension caused by the doubts she raises about the possibility for female fulfilment without passion, a passion she has previously condemned. Potch realises that Sophie's affection is not a passionate love, but he believes mistakenly that he has enough love for both of them. Sophie is torn between her need for the peace and security Potch can offer her, and her passionate restlessness which cries out against chaining herself to the calm boredom of the Ridge. When Sophie drops the large opal Potch gives her as a symbol of his great love, the shattering foreshadows the tragedy that the match must bring because it is not based on mutually deep love. Prichard's depiction here is less sexist in expressing female sexual needs. The model of the Ridge woman, Martha, explains these natural female sexual needs to Michael in discussing Sophie's 'unnatural' rejection of Arthur:

"That's just it," Martha said. "She doesn't want to -- but there's something stronger than herself drivin' her ... the feeling a woman's got for the man who's her mate. Sophie married Potch, it's my belief, to get away from this man. She wanted to chain herself to us and her life here. She wants to stay with us ... She kept herself up with ideas of duty and sacrifice: serving something more than her own happiness. But love's like murder, Michael -- it will out, and it's a good thing it will ..." (p.262)

Here Prichard identifies with Martha's view of the elements necessary to satisfy 'natural' and vital female sexuality. In this she may have been influenced by D.H. Lawrence who

believed that civilization had degraded sexual life. This author's belief in the passions seem almost to be mystical.  
12

Sophie is swept away from her sober intentions by the excitement of the Ridge Ball and her obvious attraction to the men, especially Arthur, whom she loves passionately. Afterwards repentant, Sophie finds Potch and pleads with him to marry her, but for all the wrong reasons. She fears her own passions and those of Arthur, and believes Potch is the means of escaping them. Both she and Potch are shown by Prichard to be wrong in deciding on marriage. She admits to Potch that she loves Arthur, but is afraid of the intensity of their feelings. Instead, she wants to immerse herself in the accepted role of Ridge wife, with a quiet life of faithful service, devoid of all excitement and pleasure, to save herself from the dangers her own wilful nature may bring. Prichard attributes her marriage to Potch to her fear of passion, and hence, of part of nature itself. Here the author has to confront a conflict between her loyalty to her feminine instincts and her loyalty to the Communist philosophy and the latter prevailed. Here Prichard seems to be ambiguous because she does not condemn a marriage which

12. Ifor Evans, A Short History of English Literature, Penguin Books Australia Ltd, Ringwood, Victoria, 1969 edition, p.210.



confirms Communist working-class solidarity even though she has shown this marriage to be a mistake in terms of natural gender relationships. Potch can more readily be identified with the struggle of the working class, while Arthur represents capitalism. Prichard is tempted here into a sexist endorsement of repression of female sexuality which, if expressed, could be interpreted as wilful and hence wrong. However, she is not finally endorsing the Sophie-Potch relationship.

Sophie believes that she can suppress the intensity of her passions in marrying Potch, and, at first she achieves all of her hopes:

The days had been long and peaceful since they were living together, an anodyne to Sophie, soothing all the restless turmoil of her soul and body. She had ceased to desire happiness: she was grateful for this lull of all her powers of sense and thought, and eager to love and to serve Potch as he did her. She believed her life had found its haven: that if she kept in tune with the fundamentals of love and service, she could maintain a consciousness of peace and rightness with the world which would make living something more than a weary longing for death. (p.231)

However, as Modjeska argues, Prichard's honesty forces her to recognise her problem in faithfully characterising the nature of the female when this conflicts with the Communist philosophy and genre which she has otherwise espoused. 13

13. Modjeska, loc.cit., p.134.

This conflict poses an ambiguity which Prichard does not resolve, because she suggests that her female protagonist is at peace although she is not fulfilled sexually. This peace is only disturbed by an influence outside of herself, in the person of Arthur. Sophie's marriage does not bring her joy, and she pities Potch for his loss:

Her glance and gesture were always tender and pitiful. Potch realised it. He knew that he worshipped and she accepted his worship. He was content - not quite content, perhaps - but he assured himself it was enough for him that it should be so. (pp.234-35)

Already Potch is beginning to feel the inadequacy of their relationship. It is not really enough for him to love alone, and he cannot be satisfied with pity.

The Ridge women interpret Sophie's charitable labours as a penance for her scandalous behaviour and dress at the ball. To be provocative and alluring to men is condemned, and Sophie's kindnesses are seen as a futile attempt to redeem herself. However, this is not Sophie's purpose, but rather, it represents her search for a social role which can give her life meaning and bring her happiness. For Prichard, this fits her own commitment to the Communist cause which required women to support the largely male struggle. Prichard's Communist sympathies also affect her treatment of Michael, whom the Ridge folk regard as the epitome of their ideals. His life seems to be shattered when his implication

in the theft of Paul's opals is exposed. Calls for retribution are ignored because they come from a man deemed a newcomer to the Ridge. The men believe that Michael must be judged by his mates only, not on a matter of law, but of principle or honour. Michael's position of respect is restored and he is able to convince the men to retain ownership of their mines and remain their own masters. Thus, for the time at least, individuality, mateship, and a simple, almost primitive life close to nature is assured. Here Prichard confirms the traditional Australian bush myth. Men can forgive a mate if he confesses the error of his ways and returns to their code of honour. But Michael has not been honourable. Prichard has assumed that his leadership in the male struggle against capitalism is a more important issue. In contrast, the women do not forgive Sophie for her earlier indiscretions and they misjudge her motives for later kindnesses. Prichard condemns female lack of charity to each other and approves of the men's willingness to forgive.

After the ball Arthur's passion for Sophie is kindled. He has married unhappily in carrying out his parents' wishes, and now turns to heavy drinking to blot out the tragedy of his life. His attempt to escape his passions is even less successful than Sophie's, and he pleads with Sophie to run away with him. Both declare the intensity of their love and grief, but Sophie refuses to break away from the married life

she has chosen with Potch. Martha, the mother-figure, again is the one to interpret Sophie's actions accurately. She realises that Sophie will keep her promises to Potch just as her mother had to Paul, despite the heartbreak it will cause her. Prichard's own attitude is conveyed through Martha, because in the novel, she is shown to embody feminine wisdom. Consequently it is Martha who identifies the reasons for Sophie's marriage to Potch. Prichard is aware of the tragic cost of Sophie's conformity and she suggests that Potch senses it too:

She was lying on the sofa under the window, when Potch went into the hut. He closed his eyes against the sight of her face; he could not see Sophie in the grip of such pain. (pp.264-65)

Moreover, Prichard shows Sophie's grief and remorse because she has her ride to the graveside on Henty's horse as if to signify a unity in death:

...she did not dismount. The horse came to a standstill beside it, and she sat there, her eyes closed ... Sophie thrust the long, purple trails she was carrying into the saddle-bag, where Arthur had put the flowers she gave him, that first day their eyes met and drank their love potion. (p.274)

Prichard equates Sophie's sacrifice of her love for Arthur to her rejection of her vocal talents, because she only sings again to mourn his death:

As she left the cemetery, Sophie began to sing, listlessly, dreamily at first. No one had heard her sing since her return to the Ridge. But her voice flew out over the plains, through the wide, clear air now, with the pure melody it had when she was a girl. (p.276)

Sophie's tragedy lies in trying to live a stereotyped role rather than trusting her own feelings and personality. This in some respects parallels Arthur's obedient acceptance of the role his parents had mapped for him as station manager, a man of means with a wife of similar standing in the community. This conformity leads not only to unhappiness, but contributes largely to his suicide. It has been fear of earning his family's displeasure in marrying beneath his social position that has led to ultimate misery. Without social sanctions to conform to the demands of his position, Arthur's first natural attraction to Sophie may have blossomed and she may never have set her course to emotional disaster. However, although Prichard is critical of and sympathetic to the tragedies of Sophie and Arthur she does not offer any viable alternatives, particularly in regard to Sophie. If Prichard had allowed Sophie to succumb to her love for Arthur, she would have had to deal also with an acceptance of capitalism. She chose to maintain her Communist philosophy rather than bow to her understanding of female emotions. Moreover, she accepts conventional attitudes to marriage and, consequently, she is trapped in

the morality of Sophie's final rejection of Arthur.

In The Black Opal, Prichard is really trying to reconcile ideas that do not easily cohere -- the value of individual fulfilment, and the rightness of conforming to social norms and conventions that repress individualism. These norms carry extra force for Prichard because she understands them in terms of socialist solidarity. While her reconciliation is not completely successful, she is less sexist in that she is more strongly aware of the claims of both sides of this opposition than the female authors discussed in Chapter 4. The bush, shown as noble, shapes the social environment and, for Prichard, affirms the rightness of mateship, supportive wives, charitable women and fundamental lifestyles. In contrast, however, the novel does show that conformity to socially defined roles can be destructive to the individual, and in fact, contradict the whole bush principle of democracy and individuality. This is particularly true in the depiction of the inevitability of tragedy in Sophie's conformity to the female gender stereotype.

(ii) COONARDOO

As in The Black Opal, Prichard shows in Coonardoo the destruction of loving relationships by acceptance of gender and class stereotypes, further complicated in the latter novel by ethnic stereotypes as well. In both novels the barriers are not only class differences, but also an incompatible set of social expectations -- that one can find fulfilment within a social structure which is hierarchical so far as gender is concerned, and ostensibly egalitarian so far as men are concerned. In both novels the male clings doggedly to his social role of station boss, a position of status and privilege. While the two female protagonists are very different, they still both believe in the female stereotype of supportive, faithful server of the male. Neither are in love with their husbands, and both are rejected by the men they love and by whom they are loved. In each case the cause of the rejection is the expectations of society, and the stereotypical roles towards which both lovers are impelled. Coonardoo is set in a cattle station in north-west Western Australia. White station owner Hugh Watt denies his love of the native girl Coonardoo because of his socially formed concept of chivalric manliness. On the other hand, Coonardoo does not make a stand against this attitude because of her own passivity. Yet Coonardoo's contribution to her fate is not made so apparent in the novel in that the novel's perspective itself is grounded in stereotypes, with the male dominant and superior, and the female endorsed by

the author as passive and supportive. This had the effect of making her passivity seem merely 'natural'. The stereotype of woman is confirmed by her identification with nature, an association which Kay Schaffer has shown to disadvantage the female image.

Men wield mastery over both women and the land they symbolise. Both are exploited and destroyed. Coonardoo is Hughie's other, and when he brutalises her because of guilt for his sexual possession of her, he brings about his own inevitable destruction. Prichard's depiction is less sexist for this reason although she does not seriously challenge Hughie's domination of Coonardoo, but rather it is his betrayal of his moral responsibilities to her that she criticises. Coonardoo is at one with instinct, the environment and her passions. Hugh, on the other hand, is alienated from the colonised outback and, as victim of white social convention, he is unable to pursue his perceptions or risk his passions. Coonardoo is a romantic figure who is content to be lovingly servile to Hugh. It is not so much this that Prichard condemns, but Hugh's misguided self-denial of his love for her. Coonardoo is destroyed by colonisation in the same symbolic way that the land is raped. Yet Prichard shows her enduring power in her affinity with her land, her people and their ritual <sup>14</sup>, and it is significant

14. Modjeska, op.cit., p.137.



that she chooses a female character to illustrate this. Coonardoo accepts a life of loving service and inferiority willingly, but this is exploited by males. Hugh assumes the superior role of master and this leads him to repress his instinct to commit himself to a loving and equal relationship.

There is a major conflict in Prichard's attitude to women. She portrays them as sexual beings who are part of elemental passion which she relates to nature, but she also shows this to be the basis of their exploitation by men. Coonardoo gives Hugh her lifelong love, but this leads ultimately to her destruction and lonely death. Hugh's problem is that he refuses to recognise his love for her. After his education in Fremantle Hugh returns to take control of the Station, accompanied by his young fiancée, Jessica. Her arrival dressed "in a white muslin frock and white shoes, holding a pink silk sunshade" (p.30)<sup>15</sup> shows she is totally at variance with the rural environment. Hugh's mother, Miss Bessie, can see that Jessica will never belong in the bush. Jessica cannot share their attachment to the outback lifestyles, but she feels guilty at not living up to her own mother's expectations of her making a good marriage to a wealthy man. Hugh seems to her to be different because

15. Katharine Susannah Prichard, Coonardoo, Angus and Robertson, Melbourne, 1968 edition used throughout my text.

he is now in the environment dear to him. He quickly acquires the outback male's habits of solitude and independence and masks all evidence of his inner feelings. Clearly, Prichard recognises that Hugh's assumption of the outback male stereotype is the cause of the failure of the relationship with Jessica. He makes no real effort to dissuade his fiancée from returning to her city home and family for he now realises that they have nothing in common.

Hugh is an ordinary, dependable man, who briefly succumbs to his own needs with the attractive Aboriginal girl, Coonardoo. She bears his son, Winni, but both Coonardoo and her tribal husband, Warieda, accept the boy as their own, believing all Coonardoo's offspring to be naturally Warieda's. Hugh shrinks from a more permanent arrangement because he is beset by his own puritanical beliefs and the cultural gap. Prichard is critical of his exploitation of Coonardoo and the hypocrisy in his concern for the preservation of his sense of superiority.

Sam Geary, another cattle station owner, has no such qualms and "he had been known as "a gin shepherd" for some time and a family of half-castes swarmed about his verandas." (p.30) When Sam jibes at Hugh:

You're one of those god-damned young heroes. No 'black velvet' for you, I suppose.

Hugh answers:

I'm goin' to marry white and stick white.

Geary laughs:

Oh, you are, are you? ... Well, I'll bet you a new saddle you take a gin before a twelvemonth's out - if ever you're in this country on your own. (p.46)

Hugh desires the same natural lifestyle as Sam Geary, but he has absorbed too thoroughly social attitudes of morality and superiority. Geary's 'naturalness' is not shown, however, as a positive alternative to Hugh's repression. Geary is a limited character, incapable of giving or receiving great happiness. His ineffectual lifestyle is commensurate with his character. With Hugh it is different. He has the capacity to love and contribute to the lives of those on the Station, but he is affronted by Geary's jibes and shrinks from any similarity to his behaviour. This leads him to withdraw from Coonardoo and to resist his own love of her.

On a trip to the city, Hugh chooses a white wife, Mollie, for practical reasons, not for love. Ironically, this represents the same moral degradation as that of Geary whom he despises. Hugh believes he needs a white wife just as earnestly as Geary believes he should console himself with Aboriginal women. Both exploit women for they are motivated by practicality, not love. Prichard is critical of both ways in which women are used by men as objects. Geary is a repulsive character who exerts male power over women who are

in an inferior and dependent position. Initially Hugh is not depicted in this way for his intentions appear honourable and in keeping with the accepted male stereotype. Hugh does not expect to be treated as a superior, but he accepts his role as a responsible protector and guardian, almost a parent. He is a caring, concerned provider, rather than an employer, and he does not think totally in terms of benefits to himself. Nonetheless, this role itself presumes a covert superiority. He deceives himself in believing he treats the Aborigines as equals instead of servants, because he cannot conceive of a permanent attachment to Coonardoo. Hugh has an affinity with the bush but he cannot totally be at one with its society.

Prichard's treatment of Mollie is harsh and in keeping with her stance of ennobling an affinity between women and nature. She does not allow for the cultural effects and very real deprivations of a lonely outback environment on one unprepared for it. She has cast Mollie in the role of bad wife just as uncompromisingly as Vance Palmer has cast Lena in The Passage. Mollie makes some early genuine attempts to live up to the social expectations of her as a good wife and mother, but with the birth of each successive daughter, she feels a failure in not bearing a son and heir. Her resentment towards her husband grows as she blames him for all her child-bearing, for a detested lifestyle, and for the apparent precedence of the station over her. Discovery of Hugh's affair with Coonardoo and the presence of his bastard son heighten Molly's disenchantment. She abandons Hugh,

taking her girls to live in Perth. She has become a bitter, nagging woman, unloved and unloving. Prichard's portrayal leads the reader to condemn rather than sympathise with her, because she does not represent the female stereotype of a wife supportive of her outback husband and his ideals.

Perhaps to explore possible solutions to the problems posed by the female gender stereotype, Prichard has created gender-crossing types. Hugh's mother, Mrs Bessie, is a prime example. The Blacks call her 'Mumae' because they have heard Hugh call her that as a child. Yet in their dialect the name means 'father'. In a way she is both father and mother to her son, and as female master of Wytaliba Station fills a male role. Even in her marriage to Ted before he died she had assumed a similar role because of her stronger and more competent attributes. She successfully controls the Aborigines because she is "the iron hand in the velvet glove" (p.84), an acquired masculine attribute. This reversal of gender roles does not seriously challenge the traditional code however, because it can only be maintained in the absence of a husband and in the presence of a servile and exploited people. Moreover, the traditional order is re-established when Hugh assumes control. Thus, Prichard's exploration maintains her ambivalence to departures from the female stereotype.

There is a further example of Prichard's ambivalent treatment of a woman of strong character who assumes aspects

of the male stereotype. Phyllis, Hugh's eldest daughter, corresponds to the patriarchal concept of the 'good' bush woman. She returns to Wytaliba as a young woman fired with enthusiasm for dedication to work and hardship on the land. She is quite different from her mother, Mollie, who had come to Wytaliba with romantic notions of outback life and her higher status of both class and marriage. Phyllis has a close affinity with the bush. For her, the hardships, the privations, and the harsh climate at Wytaliba give meaning to life. Unlike her mother, Phyllis does not wish to be treated as a delicate woman, but as if she is a strong, enthusiastic son, with qualities like her grandmother, Mrs Bessie. Even her short cropped hair is styled like a boy in keeping with her request that Hugh treat her like one:

I want to go out and away with you ... I'm as strong as a bullock really. If I were a boy you'd let me ... And I ought to have been your eldest son ... Let me knock round like that. Forget I'm a girl. (p.145)

Phyllis feels the social preference for the eldest to be a boy, and longs to be valued as a male. In the remoteness of the outback Hugh can be free of the social disapproval of allowing a departure from stereotypical female behaviour, so he grants her request to endure the rigours of camping out on the long rides. Phyllis brings comfort and companionship to him, but she eventually falls in love and marries. With this marriage she commits herself to life in the outback, but necessarily severs herself from Hugh's jealous attachment.

Prichard's portrayal of Phyllis is less sexist in demonstrating that women can break from conformity to stereotypical behaviour without loss of femininity, but it nevertheless restores the stereotypical gender order in the way she falls in love. However, by showing that Phyllis finds fulfilment in the traditional female role of supportive wife, Prichard is also implying that her former "tomboyish" role involved a denial of femininity. This ambiguity causes something of a tension in the portrayal.

Following the marriage of Phyllis, Hugh is left to his loneliness once more. When he brutally repulses Coonardoo, bringing about her horrifying burns and banishment from Wytaliba, his desolation is complete and he degenerates thereafter. He becomes an unloved, morose and unsuccessful station owner, finally abandoned by all, including his son Winni. His guilt about his affair with Coonardoo and the subsequent birth of his half-caste son is just as much a consequence of his refusal to follow his own natural inclinations and commit himself to love as it is with his sense of morality. Hugh casts off natural and human values in repulsing Coonardoo, whom he has really loved. His act of betrayal alienates him not only from his environment, but from humanity itself. It is Coonardoo who is more the sensitive visionary, while Hugh becomes increasingly the practical, but prejudiced realist. His decline has been shaped by social attitudes. As a consequence Coonardoo is destroyed tragically by the white intrusion into her society.

Hugh and Coonardoo could only have found hope of salvation in their mutual association with the bush, yet it is this that draws them apart. As master of the station, Hugh has sexual control over her and the power to banish her from her own land. The happiness he could have gained with Coonardoo thus eludes him:

She was like his own soul riding there, dark, passionate and childlike. In all this wide empty world Coonardoo was the only living thing he could speak to, Hugh knew; the only creature who understood what he was feeling, and was feeling for him. Yet he was afraid of her, resented a secret understanding between them. (p.61)

This indicates that communication is central to Prichard's sense of the romantic possibility of their relationship.

The Blacks believe Coonardoo's departure has brought a curse on the station, and in a sense it has. She is the innocent victim of Hugh's rejection of love because he chooses to repress his own instincts and accept instead conformity to the white male stereotype. Coonardoo returns to her tribal country, but she dies not knowing how she went wrong and why she did not make Hugh happy.

Modjeska argues that Hugh is a victim of cultural convention which binds him to a male role of exploitation of



both land and women that could have brought him happiness.<sup>16</sup> Moreover, Coonardoo's passivity, which Prichard has ennobled, actually inhibits the loving relationship as much as Hugh's repressive sense of honour. Had she taken a more positive line of communication by actively confronting Hugh rather than assuming a pathetic position, she may have shaken him from his self-delusion and instigated loving communication. Prichard shows that Coonardoo waits passively for Hugh to take the initiative in the expression of love:

So light a sleeper usually, he did not hear Coonardoo move to put cow-dung on his fire during the night. Dark and silent she stood beside him, then returned again to the other end of the veranda; and lay down to sleep on the ground near by, writhing against it, a prey to all the tugging and vibrating instincts of her primordial hunger.  
(pp.183-184)

Not only does Coonardoo fail to confront Hugh about their relationship, but Prichard herself shows no awareness of the intrinsic nature of the problem. However, she does maintain a sensitivity to the plight of both male and female in failing to achieve a loving relationship because of social influences.

The tragedy of Coonardoo lies not only in the cultural gap, but in Hugh's inability to communicate in a meaningful

16. Modjeska, op.cit., p.235.

and honest way with a woman or with his own feelings. His tragic failure is with his wife as much as with Coonardoo. He, too, is a victim in an environment that has severed him from his own culture. Yet it is not just racial prejudice that inhibits loving relationships, because Prichard has shown the same consequences in the relationship between Sophie and Arthur in The Black Opal. The failures occur in both novels because, by living in conformity with stereotypical self-images, the male protagonists have denied instinct and passion. In The Montforts Martin Boyd shows a similar male reaction in the character of Richard, who denies his love for Aida in deference to a stereotypical male code of honour. She, too, is destroyed by the ensuing tragedy although Boyd's assessment of Richard is less critical than Prichard is of Hugh.

Prichard draws attention to the contradictions inherent in gender expectations in both of the novels discussed. However, she does not tackle the issue rigorously enough to propose viable alternatives. It is true that in Coonardoo Miss Bessie assumes a male role, but this is shown as a temporary situation until Hugh is old enough to take over management, and justified by the absence of a husband. Her position is sustained only in the remote outback, removed from most White society, and even a female author finds it suitable to endow her with tough, masculine characteristics rather than have her retain her femininity. Moreover, Prichard suggests that Miss Bessie's independence is

premissed on the absence of a husband. The only white women who can find contentment in the outback are those like Miss Bessie and Phyllis who assume masculine characteristics of independence and strength. They can avoid the conventional forms of domesticity by using the services of the Blacks.<sup>17</sup> It is true that Prichard allows Phyllis eventually to revert to a conventional gender role within marriage. However, such ambivalence compounds rather than resolves the problems of gender stereotyping which Prichard has sought to investigate. She is equally ambivalent in The Black Opal because despite her criticisms she does not suggest that Sophie should do otherwise than conform to social expectations although she does portray her suffering as a consequence.

Prichard has made an unquestioning use of the nature-femininity equation in her portrayal of Coonardoo. Modjeska has shown how Prichard depicts Coonardoo as an elemental passionate being who is exploited for her sex. In the novel, sexuality is identified with nature, and the language of the bush and the elements are used to describe it. Modjeska argues that in contrast, male sexuality is shown in terms of aggression and lust.<sup>18</sup> This is a sexist interpretation by Prichard. Aboriginal women like Coonardoo suffer humiliation and sexual abuse from men like Sam Geary

17. Modjeska, loc.cit., p.234.

18. Ibid.

who aggressively gratify their lust for both land and women. Yet despite Prichard's scathing criticism, her attitude to sexuality remains equivocal. Certainly she recognises female passion, but she shows it to be passive and she describes it in terms of the naturalness of the bush. Men always retain the initiative and there is no expression of female sexuality other than as a response to that of men.<sup>19</sup> This is demonstrated clearly when Coonardoo allows the drunken Geary to rape her:

Coonardoo could have moved past and away from him in the darkness. But she did not move. As weak and fascinated as a bird before a snake, she swayed there for Geary whom she had loathed and feared beyond any human being. Yet male to her female she could not resist him. Her need of him was as great as the dry earth's for rain. (p.180)

Herein lies the great weakness in Prichard's position, one which she does not resolve in either of her novels discussed in this chapter.

Prichard has idealised Coonardoo as a passive female sufferer:

Oblivion overwhelmed her as when Hugh had dashed his hand across her face. What had she done? Was it Youie to knock her about like that? She cowered away still from the memory, as if she would slink out of sight at his demand that never again should he see her face.

19. Ibid.

Youie had sent her away, driven her far from the place where she belonged, her place and the place of her people. She had gone; his will carrying her, when she did not know where she was going. Her feet, her legs, her arms and hands had been obedient to him; taken her away, wandering through the ranges, for how long she did not know, ... For no other reason could she have left her own country and the country of her people.  
(p.205)

The bush setting gives a romantic and mythifying dimension to the same kind of stereotypical thinking informing Ruth Park's thinking in The Harp in the South. She endows passive female acceptance of inferiority and exploitation with an heroic and virtuous quality. Despite the difference in perspective to that of male authors' assumptions, it is nonetheless grounded in a masculine order.<sup>20</sup> There remains a problem in the relative male/female positions and novels such as those by Prichard that I have discussed confirm male representations of female identity.<sup>21</sup> Although Prichard provides a feminine context, she still writes from the same system of male representations that has constrained female authors. Schaffer argues that the female representation of the landscape is false because women are not the land<sup>22</sup> and with this position I concur because it accepts the masculine construction of the female other. Prichard is ambiguous in relating sexuality to the natural environment and in using

20. Schaffer, op.cit., pp.106-107.

21. Ibid, p.107.

22. Ibid, pp. 110-111.

this as the basis of an analogy to the relationship between Coonardoo and Hugh. As a consequence, their one hope of unity is their bond with the bush, and Modjeska contends that this is the real cause of their division.<sup>23</sup>

HENRY HANDEL RICHARDSON

THE FORTUNES OF RICHARD MAHONY

Anne Summers uses Henry Handel Richardson as a specific example of a woman forced to deny her sex by the use of a male pseudonym in order to be accepted as a writer.<sup>24</sup> While such a ploy enabled her to write freely, Summers has argued that it nonetheless involved a psychic schizophrenia or even a loss of her female identity.<sup>25</sup> Certainly in her major work, The Fortunes of Richard Mahony, she attempts to sink her identity in the character of Mahony, a man suffering from cultural and psychic alienation and married to a rather dull and unimaginative Australian woman.<sup>26</sup> Summers argues that the consequences of Richardson's assumption of a male persona is to reinforce the attitude that women inhibit male self-

23. Modjeska, op.cit., p.235.

24. Summers, op.cit., p.40.

25. Ibid.

26. Ibid, p.41.

realization just as Mary Mahony hinders Richard's aesthetic imagination. Summers has pointed out that Australian society itself has forced women into this role by denying them the right to individuality and self-determination, and that Richardson's perspective has confirmed the problem.<sup>27</sup> Richardson accepts Mary Mahony's limitations as if they are naturally feminine rather than being socially conditioned. Summers counters this with the advocacy of androgynous self-identification propounded by Virginia Woolf in 1928<sup>28</sup> and others since to avoid sexism. Summers considers that the author's repression of sex does not of itself lead to deeper portrayals.

Despite showing sympathetically the stultification of the Australian housewife represented by the Mary Mahony, Richardson's emphasis is on the tragedy of Mahony's alienation because of his artistic personality and intellectual potential. Nevertheless, I have classified the trilogy as an example of less sexist female writing because Henry Handel Richardson has treated with sympathy a male character who does not conform to the stereotyped role. A second reason for classifying the trilogy as less sexist is that the author breaks the connection often shown between femininity and passivity. The author maintains sympathy for

27. Ibid.

28. Virginia Woolf, A Room of One's Own, Penguin Books, 1965, pp.102-3, as cited by Summers, *ibid*.

Mahony's wife in her denial of self-determination and she shows her finally in the role of decision-maker. Mary Mahony, initially known as Polly, marries Mahony with socially induced expectations of him. Because of his character and personality he is unable to live up to these expectations and this ruins their relationship. For Polly, the quality of her relationship with Mahony fluctuates according to the degree he approaches the social expectations of a male. The Fortunes of Richard Mahony is less sexist because it shows that failure in the loving relationship between Mahony and his wife is caused by stereotypical expectations, and because the novel itself transcends stereotypes by being sympathetic to a 'feminine' man and a 'masculine' woman.

Dorothy Green points out that Mahony and Polly have little in common. Each begins by idealizing the other, but by the end of the first volume of the trilogy each becomes aware that the other represents a threat to their essential beings. Polly is grounded in the feminine conservative principle, the earth, the flesh, life in the visible world, the settler. Mahony represents the masculine destructive principle, the pilgrim spirit, the nomad, the death of the visible world. <sup>29</sup> While Mahony does not represent the

29. Dorothy Green, Henry Handel Richardson and Her Fiction, Sydney, 1986, p.256.



Australian male stereotype, Green does show him to possess certain traits identified as male. Certainly Green's evaluation of him contains many symbolic similarities with Stan Parker in The Tree of Man, and Polly resembles Amy. Their relationships are equally doomed because there is no deep understanding between the sexes. However, Richardson's position is less sexist because the tragedy and cause is shown to derive from social expectations rather than from the characters themselves.

In The Fortunes of Richard Mahony trilogy Henry Handel Richardson presents the eventual alienation of a character whose priorities are not grounded in material contentment. The first novel of the trilogy, Australia Felix, was published in 1917. Richardson endeavours to present Australia as her characters view it in the gold rush era and to allow the facts to convey their own message. This first novel opens with a 'Proem' presenting the conflict of the male with the land depicted as female, again to women's cultural disadvantage just as in Coonardoo:

A passion for the gold itself awoke in them, an almost sensual craving to touch and possess; and the glitter of a few specks at the bottom of pan or cradle came, in time, to mean much more to them than 'home', or wife, or child.

Such were the fates of those who succumbed to the 'unholy hunger'. It was like a form of revenge taken on them, for their loveless schemes of robbing and fleeing; a revenge contrived by the ancient, barbaric country they had so lightly invaded. Now, she held them captive - without

chains; ensorcelled - without witchcraft; and, lying stretched like some primeval monster in the sun, her breasts freely bared, she watched, with a malignant eye, the efforts made by these<sup>30</sup> puny mortals to tear their lips away. (p.8)

This focuses on male identity in relation to the land, and, by implication of the symbolism, in relation to women. As Kay Schaffer has pointed out, it represents a mastery of self by defeating the land and confirms the dichotomy between self and other.<sup>31</sup> Thus, at the outset Richardson not only sets man against the land, but woman against man. The earth itself is presented as a vindictive mother who thwarts man's highest endeavours.<sup>32</sup> Schaffer argues that Richardson's depiction perpetuates our masculine history and reinforces women's cultural repression.<sup>33</sup> Although Schaffer acknowledges that Richardson is highly contemptuous of the idea of man as nature's conqueror, she remains sexist in her eyes by sustaining the nature-female equation.

Overall, Australia is depicted as an uncouth, uncultured, hostile land of unrelenting heat and dust. Here, the creative, sensitive spirit of the male withers, whilst

30. Henry Handel Richardson, Australia Felix, Penguin Books Australia Ltd, Ringwood, 1975 edition used throughout my text.

31. Schaffer, op.cit., p.104.

32. Ibid.

33. Ibid.

there is contentment for pragmatic, shallow and unimaginative characters, especially females. In this latter category are Polly and Tilly, who are the true realists. Not only does happiness evade the central character, Richard Mahony, but also John Turnham, despite all of his success in business. The latter is disappointed with each wife's failure to provide him with perfect love. Even the minor characters reinforce the impression that only very average, practical people can find contentment in Australia. Men with sensitivity and vision are destroyed mercilessly because these characteristics are not seen to be appropriate to males in Australia. 34

Australia Felix opens with the horrific setting of the Ballarat gold fields where "a man had been buried alive". (p.1) In the metaphorical sense, this is to become increasingly Mahony's view of his own position in Australia. The mining township is anything but attractive with its mud and "rut-riddled thoroughfare of Main Street". (p.27) Richardson describes the unpleasantness of the township in these terms:

There it lay - the scattered, yet congested,  
unlovely wood and canvas settlement that was  
Ballarat. (p.27)

34. Richardson may have associated with this because she left Australia to seek a congenial environment to further her musical and literary career.

The contrast between "scattered" and "congested" suggests not only the confusion of aims in the new colony, but the sense of alienation apparent even in the growing township.

In contrast with the unattractiveness of the township, Mahony sets out into the bush which is "alive with with the rich, strong whistling of magpies." Yet even this richness is chilled with the hostility Mahony feels in the land itself, for "they rode on, leaving the warmth of the early sun-rays for the cold blue shadows of the bush." (p.27) He sees in the country a "wild, sad-coloured landscape, with its skimpy, sad-coloured trees." (p.28) Thus Richardson depicts an unresolved conflict between the richness of the bush and its relentless cruelty. It is a conflict which remains unresolved for Mahony and one which Kay Schaffer shows to be a reflection of a continuing confrontation between men and women.

Australia Felix presents a society predominantly utilitarian, materialistic and realistic. Men, driven by a particular form of masculinity, are the family providers and their behaviour reflects the acquisitive values of society. Historian Geoffrey Serle describes the materialistic attitudes consuming the diggers on the goldfields:

Most were driven on by the hope of pleasure or security or freedom which gold would bring (or by lust and greed), working with grim and determined perseverance. Success was largely

a matter of luck, but not entirely: the more claims dug, the more chances there were. <sup>35</sup>

Mahony, as an aethetic dreamer, does not fit into such a society. In pondering what he is doing in such an environment, he confronts his own materialistic motives, so typical of the contemporary settlers. Geoffrey Serle notes that "those who prospered most from the diggings ... were gold-buyers and storekeepers on the fields, and property-owners, merchants and publicans." <sup>36</sup> Mahony has abandoned his medical profession to seek his fortune in gold prospecting, but instead he sets up a general business retailing on the goldfields:

Here he was ... as greedy of gain as any tallow-chandler. Extraordinary, aye, and distressing, too, the ease with which the human organism adapted itself; it was just a case of the green caterpillar on the green leaf. (p.28)

Green, often associated with envy and greed, is used to convey the materialistic values which prevail. Mahoney realises that he shares these values, but he acquires no sense of belonging, for like the caterpillar, he aims to utilize and gain all he can in Australia and move on:

35. Geoffrey Serle: The Golden Age - A History of the Colony of Victoria 1851-1861, Melbourne, 1963, p.74.

36. Ibid, p.86.

He had struck no roots; and it would mean little to his half-dozen acquaintances on Ballarat when he silently vanished from their midst, as it would to him if he never saw one of them again. (p. 28)

He will make no mark on this society for he will vanish silently. To him the land is "sad-coloured" because he is not in total harmony with it -- he feels an uneasy guilt for his own materialism. Henry Handel Richardson's language conveys Mahony's attitudes and feelings quite clearly, and as she has already established a connection between the land and women, Mahony's selfish use of his wife must be associated. Mahony's character is adversely shaped by a society which expects the male to be dynamic, business-like and successful in making money. Despite his innate restlessness he is reasonably content as a lowly storekeeper living in the primitive conditions of the gold-fields. His lifestyle as a single man is in keeping with the other men so he has not come into conflict with stereotypical expectations.

However, problems arise as soon as his marriage changes the social gender expectations. His young wife Polly anticipates that he will fulfil his role of husband and provider in the manner she has been conditioned to believe as his duty. Consequently, she is discontented when she is confronted with conditions she is fated to suffer. Although she is a simple and unpretentious girl, she is aghast at the poverty of the hut Mahony provides for their married life.

She reacts in the way she does because of her stereotypical gender expectations of her husband:

Her heart was heavy as lead and she felt a dull sense of injury as well. This hut her home -- to which she had so freely invited sister and friend! She would be ashamed for them ever to set eyes on it. (p.85)

Polly feels this way because of the social attitudes she has learnt. This is evident in relating her emotions to the responses she anticipates in those dear to her. Henry Handel Richardson's language also identifies an early resentment towards her husband as an "injury" which the social role demand of loyal wife stifles to a "dull sense". Polly is influenced by the visit of her foster-mother, Mrs Beamish. This lady wastes no time in criticising the primitive conditions under which Polly must live:

...if I'd known this was all 'e 'ad to h'offer you, I'd 'a' said, stop w'ere you are, my lamb, in a comfortable, 'appy 'ome. (p.144)

Polly's social conditioning arouses doubts about Mahony's role of provider, a role which she expects of him as a natural right and as proof of his masculinity. Even this early in their marriage, Polly's disappointment with Mahony effects the quality of their relationship for he senses her disapproval and consequently resents her attempts to change him. The more she does to encourage improvement in his status, the more he feels rejected by and alienated from her.

Polly resolves to influence Mahony to fit into the pattern of behaviour acceptable to society. She sets about the task of changing her husband. She reflects social attitudes and cannot understand his apathy and lack of ambition. She believes her wifely role is to inspire and encourage him to achieve a better financial and social status towards which men are supposed to strive. To this end, Polly encourages Mahony to leave the goldfields and return to the practice of medicine. Although he has expressed hatred of Ballarat, Polly argues that he will be happy there because of his higher social position. Mahony begins to toy with his wife's suggestion and the possibility of obtaining finance with her brother's offer of surety.

Polly feels justified in assuming the male role of family financial planner to stimulate her husband into action. She succeeds in obtaining her brother John's financial backing for Mahony's medical practice. Mahony has had no part in this planning and he comes faintly to recognise the social constraints forcing him into an unchosen mould:

But as he sat and pondered the lengthy chain of circumstance - Polly's share in it, John's, his own, even the part played by incorporeal things - he brought up short 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 and slyly guided to his goal - led blindfold along a road that was not of his own choosing. Everything and everyone had combined to constrain him: his favours to John, the failure of his business,



Polly's inclinations and persuasions, his own fastidious shrinkings. So that, in the end, all he had had to do was to brush aside a flimsy gossamer veil, which hung between him and his fate. (p.163)

In this mental evaluation Mahony deludes himself. Polly's manipulation is successful only because he allows it. Her scheme really satisfies his own desires for a superior status and standard of living. After all he only migrated to Australia to make a quick fortune. His departure from the male stereotype of planner and decision-maker is self-chosen, but his subsequent disquiet and rationalization serve only to confirm his own acceptance of the social stereotype. Both Mahony and Polly have inner conflicts in this regard and these affect their relationship. He becomes increasingly resentful and she loses respect and admiration for him.

Instead of joyful enthusiasm for his new medical practice, depression overcomes Mahony. He cannot bear a financial adviser sharing what he sees as his private affairs and he cannot understand the logic of loans or debts in order to make money. Others, including Polly, do not recognise his anguish because men are expected to have business sense or believe in the advice of those who do. Hence Mahony's depression, melancholy and withdrawal from society are set on an inevitable course to his mental and physical destruction.

Mahony's first socially significant medical call is arranged by Polly. Here his conversation with Mrs

Glendinning is used by Richardson to illustrate the prevailing social gender roles:

To Mahony she instinctively turned a different side out, from that which she captured Polly. With all her well-bred ease, there was a womanly deference in her manner, a readiness to be swayed, to stand corrected. The riding-dress set off her figure; and her delicate features were perfectly chiselled. ("Though she'll be florid before she's forty.")

(p.190)

Not only does this demonstrate the subordinate role assumed by women, but the later comment of Mahony to Polly implies the critical male assessment of females based on mere physical appearances.

Each success that Polly has in manipulating Mahony drives him further into himself causing him to withdraw more from society and Polly herself. He becomes more aware of his personal inadequacies in the eyes of society. Even at this early stage of renewed hope for the future there is clear indication of the contrast between Polly's and Mahony's personalities although there is as yet no overt conflict. "Mahony dreamed of a garden, Polly of keeping hens." (p.165) Polly is practical in a society that expects men to be so. Mahony craves aesthetic joys without any will to gaining them from physical effort, in this case, digging and planting a garden. Society does not condone such fanciful dreams in a male although toleration may be afforded a woman.

Circumstances lead Mahony to feel uneasy about his own identity as a male. He has allowed himself to be manipulated into accepting the decisions of others. Because these decisions are aimed at achieving status and material gain, society expects him to make them himself. Mahony is not in harmony with prevailing social attitudes and for this reason he feels repulsed by what he sees as a hostile, arid environment which reflects a spiritual death:

The window of Mahony's room faced a wide view: not a fence, hardly a bit of scrub or a tuft of grass-tree marked the bare expanse of uneven ground, now baked brown as a piecrust by the December sun. He looked across it to the cemetery ... Only the day before - the second anniversary of the Eureka stockade - he had watched some two to three hundred men ... march there to do homage to their fallen comrades. The dust raised by the shuffling of these many feet had accompanied the procession like a moving cloud; had lingered in its rear like the smoke from a fire. Drays and lorries crawled for ever laboriously along it, seeming glued to the earth by the monstrous sticky heat of the sun. Further back rose a number of bald hills ... And behind all, pale, china-blue against the tense white sky, was the embankment of the distant ranges. Except for these, an ugly uninviting outlook, and one to which he seldom lifted his eyes. (p.173)

The wide view, which seemed to make him content for a short time in the bush, does not soothe him in Ballarat, because his restlessness is from within. Mahony sees only the repulsive aspects of his environment, ignoring the pleasant and promising. He is totally introverted, preferring to shut out the rest of the world and live within himself. This is symbolised by his withdrawal to his own room. Even Polly is

excluded. Mahony is content for her to remain on the periphery of his existence, making life comfortable but never intruding on his privacy. He senses that he is criticised in Polly's estimation just as he is by social standards. Both he and Polly have accepted and internalized the prevailing male stereotype and his departure from it affects their relationship.

Mahony is unconcerned that his practice is not an immediate success, but Polly, on the other hand, worries about his shortcomings in business:

...she could not help reflecting what she would have done at this pass, had she been a man. She would have announced the beginning of her practice in big letters in the "Star", and she would have gone down into the township and mixed with people and made herself known. With Richard, it was almost as if he felt averse from bringing himself into public notice. (p.179)

Mahony had been able to mix to some extent on the goldfields, and he had been confident enough to woo his bride. His inability now has come about because he has lost his identity as a male in society. Polly is not able to substitute her business acumen because such dynamism is not befitting a woman. She thinks Mahony is strange because he is not concerned about earning the money for his loan repayments, but when reminded of the approaching payment date he is inordinately upset:

How strange Richard was ... how difficult! First,

to be able to forget all about how things stood with him, and then to be twice as upset as other people. (pp.183-84)

Such behaviour is not associated with the male, whom society regards, ideally, as financially astute and in full control of his emotions. Nonetheless, with Polly's encouragement and assistance, Mahony does succeed in his medical practice. Profitable speculation in mining shares sets the pattern of Mahony's ascending fortunes and his acceptance in the higher social circles ameliorates, to some extent, his discontented attitudes.

Geoffrey Serle has shown how the majority of migrants at the height of the gold rush in 1852 were young, single men who "rushed off in a spirit of high adventure to make their fortunes and return home as quickly as possible.<sup>37</sup> If Serle's findings are correct then the behaviour of Mahony in returning to Britain is understandable. He has only delayed because of his financial gains<sup>38</sup>, but success can never satisfy his restless and over-sensitive nature and his discontent is soon aroused. It is not that Mahony is averse

37. Geoffrey Serle, The Golden Age - A History of the Colony of Victoria 1851-1861, Melbourne, 1963, p.47
38. Serle's position is supported by C.M.H. Clark in Select Documents in Australian History 1851-1900. Historian Clark refers the reader to The Fortunes of Richard Mahony and other works to gain an insight into the conflicting claims of England and Australia. (p.663)

to money. In fact, it is only when he is comfortably affluent that he can happily pursue his deeper interests. He wants money, but abhors the means of obtaining it. He craves unearned income to placate both his greed and his pride. It is the loss of money that exacerbates his decline. Success whets Polly's ambitions for her husband, ambitions he does not share. Yet she is more able to cope with their financial loss when the economic crash comes because she is more practical.

Looking back to the gold rush years and the Depression which followed, it would be tempting for an author to emphasize corrupting materialism as Louis Stone does, in treating the period after Federation. However, Richardson does bring out the excitement, vigour and enthusiasm of the times. It is not corruption that she presents, but rather the effect of money and loss of it on different characters, and the bearing this has on personal relationships.

Australia Felix ends with a contrast between Mahony's buoyancy and Polly's depression. This latter conveys a foreboding of ultimate tragedy. She is the practical partner who can see the temerity of his decision to return to Britain, but she is helpless in a society that denies women the right to determine the course of their lives. Mahony has no social status in Britain and his over sensitiveness makes him quickly discontented. His return to Australia becomes inevitable.

In the second novel of the trilogy, The Way Home, published in 1925, Mahony returns to Australia where his financial gains enable him to commence medical practice in the larger and more progressive Melbourne at the height of the gold boom years. While Richard Mahony finds the prevailing materialism and hedonism distasteful to his sensitive, cultured nature, he loves the money that flows from his investments. This enables him to withdraw from the distressing aspects and enjoy the dignity of his social status and a lifestyle of comfort. He can see no advantage in money if it does not free him to seek knowledge. Polly, now known as the more befittingly dignified Mary, is at first appalled by Mahony's plan to give up practice for a life of leisure. She knows that he will soon tire of having nothing to do, but she is attracted to the social status of not needing to work. Her attitude is now bourgeois and her desire is for status and upward social mobility:

... to be nothing, to have neither trade nor profession, to fold one's hands and live on one's income - that was the 'ne plus ultra' of colonial society, the ideal tirelessly to be striven after. Work brought neither honour nor glory where all too many had been manual labourers, the work itself of a low or disreputable kind. And the contingency of Richard ending as the private gentleman, the leisured man of means, had never been wholly absent from Mary's mind ... (p.105)<sup>38</sup>

38. Henry Handel Richardson, The Way Home, Penguin Books Australia Ltd, Ringwood, Victoria, 1976 edition used throughout my text.

Mahony's withdrawal from the practicalities of social living is beyond Mary's understanding and the quality of their relationship becomes poorer. She still expects her husband to conform to the male stereotype of practical realist and she fails to comprehend that his innate restlessness stems from his idealistic, pilgrim nature which cannot be at home in a utilitarian society. Polly does not want to go on the proposed world trip but, as a female, she has no option in the matter. She realizes that Mahony's decision is based on his need to find personal fulfilment but she cannot fully comprehend his attitudes. Mahony's quest is of a metaphysical nature and, as such, cannot be grasped by Polly's limited perspective. There is some sexism in Richardson's portrayal of Polly, for, despite her apparent sympathy for her lack of self-determination, Richardson depicts her limited attitudes as a natural feminine response:

Why, oh why, could Richard not be content? And that he could forget so easily how he hated England ... and disliked the English ... But oh, her home! ... her beautiful home ... She had asked nothing better than to spend the rest of her life at 'Ultima Thule'; and here now came Richard, for whom even a few years of it had proved too many. Luxury and comfort, or poverty and hard work, it did not seem to matter which: the root of the evil lay in himself. (p.229)

Polly identifies Mahony's drives as evil rather than potentially good. She does not recognise his dynamic goal and he is so obsessed with a twelve months overseas' trip that he pushes aside every obstacle including Polly's pleas. Against



Mary's wishes and his own intentions, he sells their home. His recklessness is more the result of his male need to assert his authority over Polly for her voice of rationality riles his pride. He needs to make arrangements for the management of his business affairs, but rather than postpone his trip, as Mary suggests, he grasps eagerly at Purdy's recommendation of a Ballarat broker. Mahony has his own secret scruples, for he is not entirely irrational, but when Mary conveys her misgivings he ignores caution and asserts his control:

Might one not safely assume a hint on Purdy's part that he himself meant to keep an eye on things, during his friend's absence from the colony?  
(p.251)

In the use of "one", Richardson shows how Mahony distances himself from the consequences of his decision. Mahony should know that Purdy is unreliable by nature. He misjudges Purdy's loyalty just as badly as he has done in the past. When Purdy made amorous advances to Mary, Mahony blamed her for the incident and his estrangement from her began. His belief lies more easily with a male friend than with his wife. Mahony's attitude is similar to that of Hugh towards Coonardoo when he discovers that Sam Geary has raped her. In both cases blame is laid on the female for her sexual attractiveness. This male attitude is based on a presumption of ownership of the female who is thereby objectified. Yet

such an attitude that the female belongs to her man is culturally instilled and nurtured.

In a sense, both Richard and Mary fail and contribute to the miseries to come. For her part, Mary cannot accept her husband for what he is, and her disapproval of him is communicated to him:

Oh, there's no talking to you nowadays, your head's so full of windy stuff. But I tell you this, Richard, I refuse to have my children dragged from place to place ... as I've been. It's not as if it's ever helped a bit either, our giving up home after home. You're always wild, at the moment, to get away, but afterwards you're no happier than you were before. And then, what makes me so angry, you let yourself be influenced by such silly, trivial things. (p.242)

Mary's disapproval goads Mahony even more so into asserting his wishes despite his own misgivings. The Way Home shows Mahony straying further away from the behaviour expected of a male by society. He withdraws from society and the management of his business affairs, yet he still clings tenaciously to decision-making to validate his masculinity. However, his insistence on travel when prudence should warn against leaving his business affairs without wise and assured management negates his masculine credibility.

The third book of the trilogy, Ultima Thule, published in 1929, is set in the early Depression years following the gold boom. Fortunes are lost and the victims are rejected by

the survivors:

No sooner did he learn the full extent of his losses, than he was ripe to detect a marked reserve, not to say coolness, in the manner of his former friends and acquaintances. More than one, he fancied, deliberately shunned him. Bitterly he regretted his over-hasty intrusion on this, the most exclusive club in the city; <sup>39</sup>to which wealth alone was the passport. (p.2)

It is not that there is any verbal snub, but Mahony has interpreted the attitude of the other wealthy members to one who can no longer share their privileged position. Vance Palmer, in The Legend of the Nineties, wrote of such a class of people:

A new middle class, based on the varied sources of wealth opened up in the gold era, was coming into being; it began to assert itself in the seventies. This was the society in which Henry Handel Richardson's Richard Mahony found himself. (p.42)

Mahony's own over-sensitive character magnifies the social attitude to him. Although he has a professional status, he is no longer financially stable in a society whose values are strongly materialistic. Mahony takes the social rejection upon himself. Mahony's plight is exacerbated by his own

39. Henry Handel Richardson, Ultima Thule, Penguin Books Australia Ltd, Ringwood, Victoria, 1976 edition used throughout my text.

unwillingness to start again at a lower standard of living. Undoubtedly there are areas graded according to success and status. But Mahony is over-sensitive to social attitudes and ignores the Australian admiration for the battler who achieves success.

It is Mahony's wife Mary who is able to adapt and cope. With her simple, practical good sense, her strength of character increases in proportion to his demise, but the gulf between them widens. After the death of their daughter Lallie, Mary takes her remaining two children away from the bush to recuperate at the seaside resort of Lorne. Like Mahony himself, Mary is "worn down by heat and mental suffering". (p.94) Such is the poverty of their relationship that he is glad to be rid of the reproaches he senses from her:

... he would, for several weeks to come be spared the mute reproach ... Nor need he ... be chafed by Mary's silent but pregnant glosses on the practice. In a word he was free ... free to exist unobserving and unobserved. (p.96)

His interpretation of Mary's unspoken criticisms is accurate because she has never rid herself of the social expectation for the male to be a successful provider of comforts for his family. He wants to be free from her because she reflects his own sense of failure and guilt, for he, too, has internalized social expectations of a male.

Richard Mahony's decisions, through the period of his life traced in the three novels, are generally disastrous. He is never totally at home in his adopted country which does not understand sensitive, intellectual dreamers. His relationship with Mary gradually declines, until she thinks of him as a child, and he resents her ascendancy. Nonetheless, he continues to wield the power of decision-making over her. D.R. Burns argues that, although Mary Mahony's limitations are evident in what she says and thinks, there remains a doubt about whether Richardson has fully perceived them.<sup>40</sup> He considers that there is a remorseless opportunism in her character. I believe this assessment of Mary to be too harsh and Burns only grudgingly acknowledges that what he has evaluated as Mary's shortcomings are the very means of the family's survival in the end. Certainly Mary's character develops over the course of the trilogy. Her poor education does not permit her to match Mahony's intellectualism. I agree with Burns, however, that Richardson has depicted a certain shallowness in her character which inhibits her from any real understanding of Mahony's visionary nature. I believe that the problem lies in Richardson's attempt to identify with Mahony, to depict from a male perspective. Thus, Mary's commonsense which eventually holds the family together is shown to contribute

40. Burns, *op.cit.*, p.9.

to Mahony's destruction. Mahony has always struggled with the phantom of the after-life, with threatening abstractions reflecting in a remorseless world with which Mary is identified.

Mahony sinks into insanity and finally death in what he sees as a hostile environment. The impression is of freedom of an oppressed spirit to go home to eternity. Mary is the survivor who will cope in a harsh land, for she is a practical realist. Richardson leaves the reader with the sorrow of Mahony's tragedy, the failure of his sensitive, visionary nature to find an understanding, nurturing environment in Australia. Burns argues that the trilogy affirms that the most powerful means of survival is the marriage bond, in which the man is the provider and his wife is a dutiful and subordinate helpmate.<sup>41</sup> I cannot agree with this evaluation, because Mahony may have succeeded if he had not become the victim of economic forces and Mary succeeds when she is independent of her husband's control.

Perhaps Mahony could have maintained some contentment if his social and financial position had remained high and if Mary had been able to accept his personality. If both had

41. Ibid, p.13.

been able to free themselves from the constraints of their social conditioning, Mary would have been more fitted to make the practical decisions. To do this Mahony would have needed to be willing to allow her that right, and Mary would have needed to accept her husband's right to be an impractical dreamer without her censure. Even on the goldfields Mahony was content to a degree. It was Mary's ambition, not his, that led Mahony to climb the social ladder. However, Richardson does not speculate in this way. Dorothy Green argues that it does not appear to be her intention to canvass the possibility of Mahony ultimately rising in the world. Her characterization of Mahony demonstrates certain notions about society, gender roles, culture, and wealth. She is illustrating a concept of a tragic rhythm in desire, fulfilment and disillusion.<sup>42</sup>

Neither Mahony nor Mary can be blamed totally for the disastrous decisions made. Both are the victims of social attitudes. At the time of the novel's setting, Australian society had clearly defined roles for men and women. Mahony fits more into expectations of the female role of sensitivity and impracticality. On the other hand, Mary assumes increasingly the male role of rationality and drive. Yet both accept the social conventions and thus inevitably grow

42. Green, *op.cit.*, p. 297.

apart. In Mahony's case, his personal contradictions lead to a sense of failure and rejection. He craves money, prestige and all of their advantages, yet he lacks the socially expected will and drive to pursue his ends. If social norms contribute to his decline, his own acceptance of them seals his doom.

Purdy is shown as uncouth but likeable, adventurous and unstable, a believer in mateship, but an opportunist who accepts benefits without thought of gratitude. Mahony retains his bond of mateship with Purdy until Purdy himself fractures it with the insult of payment of money for an act of hospitality. Mahony is more loyal to this bond of mateship than to his attitude to Mary. In fact, Mahony gives more weight to mateship than to marriage, for he believes in the integrity of Purdy rather than Mary. In the first two novels of the trilogy Purdy falls in love easily, but withdraws from the responsibilities of a lasting relationship. Yet his characteristics bring him success, happiness, and eventually marriage to Tilly. Even the failings in his character are socially acceptable because they are associated with acceptable male behaviour. His restlessness is seen as adaptability, excitement and will to survive. His craftiness in pursuing personal gain is acceptable as male business acumen. In Australia Felix he is a mate among the diggers during the unrest of the uprising. As an opportunist, he offers mateship because he, too, needs support. He gives his



friendship to Mahony because he receives more support from him in return. It is the survival ethic of the bush. By Ultima Thule when he is successful in the city, he no longer needs such support. He has no qualms in forgetting his former mateship with Mahony and so he does not concern himself with Mahony's business affairs during his absence overseas. Purdy shows no appreciation of Mahony's sensitivity and his action in leaving a five pound note in return for Mary's catering for him is not seen in terms of mateship. The ethic of mateship fails Mahony and this wounds him deeply. Miriam Dixson argues that mateship is an informal male-bonding which involves a powerful sublimated homosexuality and which is deeply antipathetic to women.<sup>43</sup> In a sense Mahony is much more comfortable with mateship with Purdy than he is with his relationship with his wife, Mary. Certainly his mateship with Purdy is far less demanding of him emotionally than that with his wife.

In Australia Felix Mahony is content enough with the environment of the diggings. His living conditions do not irk him unduly, and he is not depressed excessively by his poverty. Geoffrey Serle notes:

43. Dixson, op.cit., p.81.

Most of the men who came to Victoria worked for some period on the diggings where social relations were entirely egalitarian, or even turned inside out ... Nearly all new migrants, uncertain in a strange environment, tended to adopt the protective colouring -- the customs, manners and habits of old residents ... inherent in process of migration was the assumption<sup>44</sup> that all should start again from scratch .

At least on the gold fields Mahony has his male identity and he is accepted for what he is. His chosen bride is an unpretentious, simple, relatively uneducated girl of natural refinement. She may have adapted well to her lowly state if social views had not impinged on her attitudes through the person of Mrs Beamish. Mahony's attitudes change when he leaves the diggings and its prevailing ethic. Returned to the practice of medicine, his social position alters as do his own perceptions of his status. Mahony's dislike of Ballarat stems from his loss of male identity there. Both his medical and marriage status incur disapproval of his roles. Mahony does not fulfil social expectations of the male as wise decision-maker, nor does he conform to the behaviour expected of a doctor. He blames Australia for his inadequacies, and his return to Britain is a means of escape. But he cannot escape from himself even in his improved social status when he returns to Australia. His

44. Serle, *op.cit.*, p.376.

move to Melbourne is really his attempt to avoid critical assessment, although he justifies it as a social advance, and uses it to prove his male prerogative of power. Mahony's problem is in not coinciding with the expected male role. He is more at peace single on the gold fields because less demands are made on him.

Mary's marriage to Mahony is a disaster because she expects him to conform to social expectations, and her growing disapproval, even when unspoken, drives him to cling more doggedly and disastrously to his male power. Her common sense exacerbates his problem rather than relieves it. The stronger her character becomes, the more inadequate he feels. Her practicality fills his vacuum and he resents it. Society does not condone his aesthetic appreciation of the world of nature and his classical studies, and his final, desperate delvings into spiritualism are interpreted as a folly of the highest order.

Overall, the trilogy presents the tragedy of accepting gender roles that do not suit certain personalities. Richardson suggests a nobility in the individual character and argues for a society that would allow a free development of personality. The reader's sympathies are drawn to Mary. She, along with her brother John Turnham and Tilly, expresses

the world's arguments, and these placed beside Mahony's capricious behaviour are compelling. Mahony and Mary are psychic opposites, but in spite of their apparent differences, Dorothy Green argues that they recognise their need for each other in spirit. She suggests that the aim of their spirits when freed from their bodies is to unite their wills and understanding to form one "divine hermaphrodite".

<sup>45</sup> Certainly Mahony's brief flash of sanity on his deathbed and Mary's response suggest that Richardson intends an assumption that their task will be pursued in the hereafter. However, the novel can only be assessed in terms of the earthly life depicted, and as such can be termed a tragedy. At the end of Ultima Thule, Richardson has Mahony absorbed back into the "rich and kindly earth" (p.279), which is depicted as a loving mother. Herein lies a serious problem, because it reverses the images of the earth that are presented in the text of the trilogy.<sup>46</sup> This problem is equally unresolved in the relationship between Mahony and Mary, for it, too, fails in terms of deep, earthly love.

45. Green, op.cit., pp.317-318.

46. Schaffer, op.cit., p.107.

M. BARNARD ELDERSHAW

A HOUSE IS BUILT

M. Barnard Eldershaw's, A House is Built, published in 1929, looks back to the early development of the city of Sydney between the 1830s and 1870s. This novel is concerned with male and female relationships, marriage, maternity, morality and family life. It shows the inevitable tragedy awaiting women who do not conform to social norms. It also shows a great tragedy in the inability of men and women to love and understand each other deeply. Social conditioning is shown to mould some to a happy acceptance of the unwritten conventions. Stronger, more individual characters are forced finally to conform. But these social conventions rigidly define different social roles for men and women and ultimately lead to a wide gulf in their perceptions. This prevents deep understanding and more fulfilling relationships. There is a contradictory state of affairs in the incompatible set of gender expectations, and women are expected to remain subordinate to men who profess egalitarianism among themselves. The novel portrays critically how social life is shaped by stereotypes. For this reason the authors challenge the mythical stereotypes in fiction, and while they do not attack the characters themselves, they do aim to change social attitudes.

Because the novel is critical of the social expectations of males and females and sympathetic to the consequent sufferings of both men and women, I have classified it as an example of less sexist female writing. This is a paradox because I have used M. Barnard Eldershaw's later novel Tomorrow and Tomorrow and Tomorrow to illustrate strongly sexist female writing. Marjorie Barnard admitted that she had been apolitical before 1935 but the world situation caused her to change that, and in Tomorrow and Tomorrow and Tomorrow she makes strong political comment through the male writer-character, Knarf. Modjeska argues that there was a shift from feminism to communism in the mid-thirties because of the crisis in capitalism<sup>47</sup> but this is not apparent in A House is Built.

At the beginning of the novel James Hyde brings to the city of Sydney the British ethic of merchant business of the times. Order, control, hard work and success are very much virtues in the hands of the male. The symbols of success are material, and status demands that a man should be able to support the females in his family, preferably in a life of leisure. Still there remains in James Hyde a lack of originality and initiative, a certain fear of the new and an attachment to the known. He considers this to be a virtue. He believes that certainty lies in the old and established

47. Modjeska, op.cit., p.238.

culture. A different, untried social system is avoided in the colony. Hyde's attitudes reflect the emerging upper middle class male values that exerted an important influence on Australian society. This was a world satirised in The Fortunes of Richard Mahony.

The new country James Hyde plans to introduce to his children has already established well-defined, separate roles and expectations for males and females. James Hyde thinks "indulgently" of his daughters but is critical and "disappointed" that his son William is not fired with his enthusiasm and "sense of opportunity" to build a profitable business. William is expected to be lured by the likelihood of financial gain and business status. Maud, on the other hand, is offered only the romantic inducement of the soldiers at the barracks, for her father ponders "what a pretty lass she has grown!" (p.11) <sup>48</sup> His only interest is in her decorative qualities and in her need for romance, male attention and flattery.

When James Hyde establishes himself with a wharf-side store and home, he separates areas according to the roles he perceives:

48. M. Barnard Eldershaw, A House is Built, Harrap, London, 1967 edition used throughout my text.

Novelist David Ireland's works are examples of the persistence of traditional attitudes in the modern novel. They show ambivalent attitudes to women, and although they are seen as indispensable, they are depicted as inconsequential to men in the real business of living as ockers.<sup>23</sup> P.K. Elkin has illustrated how Ireland portrays women in one or other of two extremes: either they are very special, or they share the same vulgar characteristics of the ocker men.<sup>24</sup> Thus, Ireland depicts two opposing stereotypes of women, one too ideal -- the stereotypical and domestic Australian "little woman" -- the other the sexual object, the whore.<sup>25</sup> The special girls are elevated above those used casually for sex, common girls like Crystal and Cicely in The Flesheaters (1980). Speaking through the character of Lee Mallory, Ireland shows the male attitude to women as sex objects:

"Did the moon no longer exist because of this lack of attention? Girls, itching for love, would be glancing up at it and hope to be observed glancing, prodding their men into action." (p.6)

However, the moon, symbol of woman, shines not on love, but on all that is evil in mankind:

23. P.K. Elkin, "David Ireland: A Male Metropolis", in Shirley Walker (Ed.), Who is She? -- Images of Woman in Australian Fiction, St Lucia, Queensland, 1983, p.163.
24. Ibid, p.168.
25. Summers, op.cit.



The store was his kingdom; he was absolute master there. The living rooms above he handed over to the girls to do with as they wished. (p.15)

The store is what is important, his domain of power. By implication, domestic matters are of no great consequence and can be handed over to females to occupy their time. James Hyde retains his initial enthusiasm, but later recognises that his romantic vision is not identified socially as unemotional male realism:

He had wished for his son's companionship in his romantic optimism; but since he was himself embarrassed by, rather than proud of, his streak of idealism, he could scarcely blame William for not sharing it. The young man's imperviousness appealed to him as admirable restraint and strength even while it disappointed him by its stupidity and blindness. (p.40)

He is ashamed of his own buoyancy because he believes that men should be so in control of themselves that feelings are never expressed. Implicitly, men of little or no emotional response are to be admired also, since they cannot be distinguished from those with restraint.

While Maud fits easily into her slight and shallow female role, her sister Fanny chaffs under the social restraints. She sees clearly the impossibility of fulfilling her ambitions and needs:

'I wish, oh, I wish, I was a man!' thought Fanny, suddenly, passionately, in the midst of her trivialities. 'I'd go whaling in Captain Hilderbrand's boat, or I'd go exploring. I'd ask Mr Eyre to take me with him. I'd like, oh, I'd like to be hungry and thirsty and burnt to a chip. Why doesn't William go? I wish I was William.'  
(p.19)

Fanny chafes under the same female constraints that Hugh's daughter Phyllis suffers in Coonardoo. Both long to be a male in order to enjoy freedom, individuality and a more adventurous lifestyle. Fanny longs for the right to make decisions about the direction of her life just as Mary Mahony does in Australia Felix when Mahony decides for her that the family will return to Britain:

Richard was about to commit an out-and-out folly, and she was powerless to hinder it. (p.358)

Women in this world have no power in decision-making and must accept directions from males who inevitably control them. Fanny even yearns for unpleasant experiences available to men because they seem more important, exciting, challenging and admirable. But far worse than lack of adventure is the stifling of her intellect and strength of character:

Her life was as full of 'ifs' as any woman's. If she had not been so restricted, if her really considerable powers of mind and character had been given scope, Fanny would not have fallen a victim to the first colourful stranger she met. She had less and less to do and the quartermaster more and more usurped its management. Even the marketing had been largely taken from her, as it was found

more businesslike to buy direct from the farmers.  
(p.49)

Fanny becomes increasingly unable to fit the female role expected with the family's improving financial status. Her resentment finds an imprudent outlet which wounds her for life.

Society is not only cruel to strong female characters like Fanny, but to weak ones as well. Fanny recognises that Euphemia Giles is tormented, however unwittingly, by her own mother:

She felt as if she were peering at life of the Giles through a pane of thick, greenish glass. Day and night that terrible woman tried to harry Euphemia into being attractive, being a success. She couldn't bear the reproach that her child should fail to win a husband and a home. Possibly her love for Euphemia had turned sour with the rest of her character, had turned, too, to a black violence. She was trying to save Euphemia by force.  
(p.60)

Mrs Giles believes she is saving her daughter from the social disgrace of not being married, not being attractive enough to be chosen. No doubt she thinks she is right because of her own social conditioning, but Fanny considers such treatment to be evil, as typified by "green". The women are again adhering to the values of a system which actively disallows them equal participation, and which proposes worth as a function of male determinants embodied in sexual attractiveness.

Fanny fights for her freedom to express her individuality. She surprises her father by requesting work at the store. He thinks women have only flippant concerns, amusements and domestic tasks:

Haven't you the house to see to, and all your little fal-lals? - you used to seem busy enough. I'll get that dull dog William to take you to more parties if you like. (p.120)

When Fanny persists he ridicules her and tries to put her back in her place of insignificance:

Hoity-toity! What use do you think you could be here, miss?

But when Fanny refuses to be humbled so easily, he reminds her of her socially acceptable role:

Now don't get all worked up, girl. I don't say you mightn't be some use, but womenfolk have no place in a business. And a handsome girl like you ought to be getting married. (Ibid)

Business is the important domain for men only. Even when men marry they continue their vital positions, while the women are expected to be fulfilled and happy in marriage alone. Clearly William and his daughter Fanny do not have the loving relationship necessary to understand each other's perspective. William's expectations of Fanny are derived from a socially defined female stereotype, and these

frustrate her strong individualism.

Fanny's sister-in-law, Adela, hints at the tensions that build up among women confined so much to the home. She is upset by the animosity between Fanny and Esther and has this in mind when she tells her husband, William, "I am glad that James is a boy." (p.164) William reflects a male sense of superiority in his reply, "But naturally." The account continues, "They smiled at one another, kindly but without understanding." (Ibid) Neither appreciates the gulf between their perspectives, the result of their social conditioning for male and female roles. Here the novel clearly shows gender stereotypes inhibiting mutuality in marriage. As a consequence of this lack of perception and loving understanding, William does not respond to his wife's emotional need for "he was too tired ... He was content with the well-being of his home." (Ibid) Adela, on the other hand, is more attuned to William's emotional state when he is upset about his father's pre-occupation with the business potential in the gold rush. But when Adela is concerned and questions him, William is annoyed:

William ignored the repeated question, and Adela knew she had transgressed his most rigid law - that women must not concern themselves in business. (p.187)

Her attempt to share his problems as a unified and loving concern is rejected, because William cannot allow even his

wife to trespass in the male domain of business.

When her father is about to depart for the gold-fields, Fanny again pleads to be allowed responsibility at the store. Because of the shortage of male labour at the time, she is successful and "So for a few brief years Fanny found satisfaction." (p.195) Fanny becomes such a proficient businesswoman by determined effort and a total commitment of herself to mastering the bookkeeping methods. Men at first mistrust her, but necessity of business takes priority over prejudice eventually:

... they soon found out that Fanny was neither formidable nor soft, that she was the most businesslike person in the place. She had a rare power of sinking her sex in her individuality.  
(p.222)

She is accepted only in "sinking her sex". This implies that she enables the men almost to forget she is a woman, and this removes the obstacle to transacting business with her.

The business so absorbs her interest that it becomes her whole life, her reason for living:

Now the dry bones of her clerical work began to take on flesh ... She had thought of work at the store as providing her with occupation and independence, but she found in it romance as well. She did not know it, but the quartermaster's feelings toward his life work were being reproduced in her ... Fanny yielded to something in her blood that she had held off in

her youth, she reverted to the type of her family and found her own peculiar fruitfulness.  
(pp.222-23)

Fanny has not been fascinated by her father's business when she was younger, because she has been prevented from sharing any but the most superficial knowledge of its workings. Now, however, her positive and productive association with it becomes her means of sublimating her sexuality, of substituting her activities at the store for devotion to children. The business becomes just as much a romance for her as for her father. But her quest for happiness and fulfillment in it is as illusory as romance, and as doomed as her father's dreams.

William plans to put an end to Fanny's happiness in a meaningful life. He aims to force her back to her lower, female role in society:

It was not fitting that his sister, Miss Hyde, should attend the business each day and work there like an ordinary clerk. William admitted that Fanny had been useful, almost indispensable in the early days of the gold-rush, when business had multiplied every day and labour was unobtainable. She was very useful now, with her clear grasp of the business and her meticulous accuracy in accountancy. But things were quite different now. People had understood the urgency earlier; they had recognised the necessity; but now there was no necessity ... (p.276)

William has absorbed the British bourgeois attitudes handed on to him by his father. James Hyde has wished to reproduce

British culture in Australia, and he has been successful in doing so through his own son. The prejudice against female work in the business world was typical of the times rather than Australia in particular. But William's attitudes embrace more than that. He thinks of the type of position Fanny holds - ordinary clerk - a position beneath the family status. British attitudes demanded that this status should enable a man of position to boast that his women-folk enjoyed a life of leisure. Such was the mark of male success in privileged society. Of course, such attitudes did not prevail in the poorer classes and this is reflected in Australian fiction which shows Australian pioneer women toiling without recognition in primitive circumstances. Such is the condition of Richard Mahony's young wife, Polly, and the miners' wives in The Black Opal. At times women had to continue alone while the men were away in the bush. In these circumstances, women's heavy toil was socially acceptable and even expected.

William's attitudes have been shaped not only by his father, but by the commercial city itself. His opposition to allowing females responsibility is only modified when there is a need during the shortage of male labour at the time of the gold rushes. After the gold peters out and the men return to work in the city, he cannot justify Fanny working because that is unacceptable in the eyes of his social class. He needs to force her back home to be dependent on and



submissive to him in order to maintain his status. William does not intentionally set out to be cruel to his sister and he believes that his decisions for her are right and proper. There is no loving understanding between brother and sister because William's attitudes are moulded by stereotypical expectations.

Fanny at first resists William's wish for her to abandon work for the business, but then she has to stay at home to nurse the ailing Adela. In her absence, William reinstates Travers, recently returned from the gold-fields. In Fanny's eyes, William's apparent treachery is a cruel blow to her life:

She could not go back to the narrow, interminable sameness and triviality of the life before she had found her place at the store. The work was hers; she was part of it. It would be losing part of her life to lose that. (p.288)

Fanny knows she can fight William, but her father's words destroy all her hope:

... with Travers back in charge of the office there's really nothing for you to do. (p.289)

He has no understanding of the depth of her feelings and believes a man should be given preference even over his own daughter who has proved herself to be most proficient. Fanny can fight no more against such social restrictions:

She had defied that destiny once before; now  
destiny had won. (p.290)

Fanny's life is blighted by the social constraints on women. For all her work in her father's store, she receives no inheritance. She has been forced into a state of dependence upon father and brother. Her potential is thwarted and she becomes a bitter woman. It is significant that female authors recognised the inhibiting roles of women in the past at a time when women were becoming more liberated.

William's elder son, James, is a victim of a female attitude that casts men as insensitive and uncaring. Just as William's naturally reserved nature turns cold with emotional stifling, so too does James (Junior) lose the ability to easily express his feelings. William is coerced into the business mentality to please his father, and he, in turn, places tremendous pressure on his son and heir to carry on the family empire. James comes home from school and holidays to find his mother seriously ill with fever caught from his brother, Lionel. James feels hurt and rejected because he has not been informed, and he admonishes Adela:

'You ought to have told me, Mamma; it wasn't fair not to tell me.' It was not what he meant to say. He wanted to tell her how glad he was that she was getting better, but the other burst out. (p.284)

This is a further example of failure in loving relationships,

this time between mother and son. The gulf that exists between them is widened when Fanny intervenes and chides the boy for selfishness in upsetting his mother. This exacerbates the sense of rejection he already suffers. James feels even more rejected. He knows Lionel is his mother's favourite, and he resents Lionel having nearly died with his mother whose love he desperately needs. Adela rejects James as a baby precisely because the family claim him for the continuance of the line and business domain. She convinces herself that he is self-sufficient like his father. On the other hand, the sickly and delicate Lionel, whom James Hyde (Senior) considers girlish, needs her. She can possess and control Lionel. This is compensation for a disappointing marriage to William, who has changed from the more romantic young man in Britain to the withdrawn businessman in an alien society.

The young James sees the happiness of his mother and Lionel convalescing and he feels excluded from love. Here the authors are implicitly critical not only of Adela, but also of a society that expects manly self-sufficiency. They are showing that men, too, need emotional support but are denied it. This is a less sexist position which they reinforce because James becomes morose and Adela does nothing to help him as her words clearly show:

'These are very dull holidays for you, dear. I am sorry. If there is anything you want to do now, don't let me keep you,' and he would take it as his dismissal and go sulkily away. (p.286)

Instead of providing her love, Adela gets William to buy James a dinghy and he grows fond of being alone on the water. She requests a home tutor for Lionel so that he will not have to go away to boarding school like James. This reinforces the rejection James feels. William also pacifies Adela by agreeing to piano lessons for Lionel, which James (Senior) holds to be strange for a boy. William shares his father's stereotypical assessment that any form of artistry in a male is effeminate:

It's waste of time for a boy, of course, but as Lionel is delicate and it does not look as if he were going to do anything with his studies, I think there would be no harm in his taking music lessons as you wish it, my love. (pp.293-94)

He gives in because he believes Lionel to be useless and feminine, and this is as damaging to Lionel as his high expectations are to James. Thus, the authors show how stereotypical expectations have inhibited the loving and understanding relationship between grandfather and his grandsons.

James Hyde (Senior) makes an enemy of his business competitor Franklin, and forbids the family to socialize in the future with his daughter, Laurel. Lionel and James (Junior), who are both attracted to Laurel Franklin, decide not to let it make a difference to their association with her. James is passionately in love with the girl, and in an agony of fear of losing her. Adela notices her son's

distress. However, she recognises in him William in love with her twenty-five years ago, and this hardens her against James. Adela transfers her disappointment of her husband to her son, and fails to help him in his time of need. James pleads with Laurel to marry him, and although she warns him that they are both inevitably bound to their families, she vindictively demands of him his honour in betraying the family business. He deliberately puts his life at risk by sailing out in a storm, so in a sense his death is suicide. William is inconsolable at the loss of his heir. The tragedy is exacerbated for there is no deep and loving relationship between William and Adela:

When Adela went to comfort William he comforted her. He remembered to be very gentle with her, for she had lost her son. But he had lost James his heir, and that was a grief he could not share with any woman. If only he could have wept with her, if they could have clung together equally helpless before so great a sorrow, Adela's heart was softened to love him again; but William remained himself. Only with the quartermaster could he share his grief. (p.337)

He believes compassion, suffering "with" is only possible with another male. With William and Adela there is only comfort, the sympathy offered from one to another as separate beings; and while William is ready to offer comfort, he will not receive even that from the woman closest to him. Such is the poverty of their relationship.

The shock of his grandson's treachery and death

cause a stroke and the ultimate death of James Hyde (Sen.). All of his hopes have gone because he has tried to force them through his heirs who have not freely shared his dream. James Hyde's injustice is firstly to William, who did not want to go into his father's business. William learns to conform, but at the price of his own personality. The injustice is compounded when both William and his father place the same pressure of expectation on James (Junior). The entire family contribute to the young man's downfall and ultimate death. He needs but is denied love, and in its place he must bear the intolerable expectations of his family. He is believed to be strong and fortunate, when in fact he is only human, insecure and deprived.

Lionel replaces James in the business, and, despite his lack of acumen, he does not question the inevitability of it. He suffers by comparison with his dead brother. In fact, the authors seem to dismiss Lionel in much the same way that his father has. Harry Heseltine accepts that this is the attitude of the authors for he has quoted the comment about Lionel that 'He was the mouse that the mountain had brought forth.' <sup>49</sup> He has added his own perception that although the

49. Harry Heseltine, 'Australian Fiction Since 1920' in Geoffrey Dutton (Ed.), The Literature of Australia, Pelican Books Australia Ltd, Ringwood, Victoria, pp.205-6.

remark contained the seeds of powerful irony, it remained largely unrealized.<sup>50</sup> In this regard the authors have been sexist in not developing Lionel's potential. The impression remains that Lionel is a weakling who somehow manages to plod along. Adela comes very near to hating William because he undervalues her beloved Lionel and frets for James. William drives himself endlessly in his business activities. He equates duty with business not family. His life's work in striving for the continuity envisaged by his father has been shattered, and he does not recognise Lionel's efforts. He has closed his heart now that James is dead, and he will never open it to anyone again. Adela can see that William's health is deteriorating, but she fails to help him. Both have developed a habit of separation and no confidences are possible between them. Adela has failed to love both William and James.

William believes that his father's vision of family business has failed. Yet it is the unlikely Lionel who ensures the continuity. He, too, feels the pull of duty to a business he has no ability to run. He obtains the necessary advice and guidance, taking up the yoke, just as his father has done. He, too, marries without love to secure continuity of the family. Lionel is another victim to conform to the

50. Ibid, p.206.

role expected of him.

Barnard Eldershaw do show gender role conformity to be destructive, because they clearly show Fanny's failure at resisting conformity as a tragedy. The authors challenge the stereotypes, but significantly, they do not criticize the characters themselves. Thus, their critique is of a social nature and the characters are the victims of stereotypical gender expectations. William has never appreciated Fanny's feelings, and she cannot understand the depth of his. Fanny's tragedy lies in the frustration of her potentials of mind and love. For a time she is able to flourish as an individual when she is allowed the freedom to direct her life. However, society's values finally crush her capacities when they are imposed upon her. She is powerless in a society that places women in the home, with no rights to decide the course of their lives. The authors show critically male power exercised as a natural right and forcing women into roles that are inferior, unimportant, supportive in marriage and the home.

It is significant that some female authors are sympathetic to males, while male authors generally tend to more critical of women, particularly in the language they use. Female authors often allow longer dialogues so that the reader has an insight into the complexity of character. Male authors are usually more direct and they use short, sharp



dialogue. Palmer used this method to create honest, direct men. In general, between World Wars 1 and 2, little attention was paid to women and they were portrayed as only as secondary interest. Even most female authors maintained traditional gender attitudes.

Henry Handel Richardson, Katharine Susannah Prichard and M. Barnard Eldershaw were all critical of the societies they portrayed. Richardson's emphasis is on characterization, but at the same time she shows how Mahony is destroyed by a society that will not accept a sensitive and aesthetically appreciative male. Mary is prevented from averting disasters because that same society does not approve of a female decision-maker and Mahony enforces this norm. Yet Richardson offers no "real" alternatives to the defined gender roles. Prichard, too, is critical of social structures. She does suggest an alternative for Sophie in the city, but she does not allow this to bring her happiness. She implies that contentment is to be found in conventional structures although this is denied Sophie. Likewise in Coonardoo, she offers no viable alternatives to society's expectations. Sam Geary finds contentment, even happiness, in defying conventions. However, this is only achieved when remote from the mainstream of white society. Moreover, Prichard depicts Geary as a shallow, disgusting character, so she is not offering his lifestyle as an acceptable alternative. Barnard Eldershaw are the most critical of

social structures so far considered. Nonetheless, no "real" alternatives are offered for either Fanny or her brother William. Even Fanny's aspirations are dependent on males, and William is coerced into a lifestyle of male responsibilities he does not enjoy. Overall, many novelists of the twenties and thirties attack social structures to varying degrees, but viable alternatives are not generally proposed. This might be a sign of their realism rather than an indication of sexist orientation.

Richardson, Prichard and Barnard Eldershaw not only attack gender stereotypes themselves but they show how conformity to them inhibits the development of loving relationships between men and women. Certainly Richardson shows the loving relationship between Mahony and Mary to change to a mothering role for Mary and a wilful child's resentment of mother's authority for Mahony. The reason lies in the socially induced perception each has of the male and female stereotypes. Prichard portrays inevitable tragedy for Sophie and Arthur because they allow conformity to social expectations of gender stereotypes to restrain the expression of their love for each other. Barnard Eldershaw depict the withering of love between William and Adela because his character is hardened by conforming to a male role he does not naturally fit and she reacts by assuming the worst aspects of the domestically constrained woman. Thus these authors and others have demonstrated the negative

consequences not only of conformity to social gender stereotypes but also the destructive effect on loving relationships between men and women.

## CHAPTER 6

### SOME CONCLUSIONS AND DIRECTIONS SINCE 1956

In searching for the roots of our national characteristics it could perhaps be noted that our forebears may not have passed on a sense of our history because of their inability to communicate verbally on a deeper level. It is true that there are memories of the two world wars and the Depression of the 1930s, but we have no awareness of the everyday patterns of life between these great catastrophes.<sup>1</sup> Australia's convict past has been alleged to be the basis of the recurring historical theme of alienation from parents, family and mentors. Such alienation persists today and is derived from lack of communication. The family is the reproducer of emotional deprivation in society and this is depicted in literature. Clinical psychologist, Ronald Conway, has explained that the true antithesis of love is not hate, but indifference<sup>2</sup>, and failure to communicate in a loving and friendly way is its consequence.

The loving and sharing friendship, which, I have

1. Patrick Morgan: "Keeping it in the Family" in Quadrant, May-June 1974, p.11.
2. Ronald Conway, Land of the Long Weekend, Melbourne, 1978, p.2.

argued, is an intrinsic quality of a loving relationship, is generally lacking in Australian fiction. Our poetry also attributes failures in relationships to an unwillingness to share lovingly. James McAuley records the common Australian family fear of familiarity:

On relatives my parents were agreed:  
Too much association doesn't do,  
And doubly so with the bog-Irish breed -  
They're likely to want something out of you.

On friendship too the doctrine was as cold:  
They're only making use of you you'll find;  
Prudence consists in learning to withhold  
The natural impulse of the sharing mind.

What is the wisdom that a child needs most?  
Ours was distrust, a coating behind the eye  
We took in daily with the mutton roast,  
The corned-beef salad, and the shepherd's pie.<sup>3</sup>

In "Because" McAuley shows the suffering caused by the emotional inadequacies of a father. There is also the overall poverty of the family relationships shown in these excerpts:

My father and my mother never quarrelled.  
They were united in a kind of love  
As daily as the 'Sydney Morning Herald',  
Rather than like the eagle or the dove.

I never saw them casually touch,  
Or show a moment's joy in one another.  
Why should this matter to me now so much?  
I think it bore more hardly on my mother,

3. James McAuley: "Table Talk" in Collected Poems, Sydney, 1971, p.202.

Who had more generous feelings to express.  
My father had damned up his Irish blood  
Against all drinking praying fecklessness,  
And stiffened into stone and creaking wood.

His lips would make a switching sound, as though  
Spontaneous impulse must be kept at bay.  
That it was mainly weakness I see now,  
But then my feelings curled back in dismay.

Small things can pit the memory like a cyst:  
Having seen other fathers greet their sons,  
I put my childish face up to be kissed  
After an absence. The rebuff still stuns

My blood. The poor man's curt embarrassment  
At such a delicate proffer of affection  
Cut like a saw. But home the lesson went:  
My tenderness thenceforth escaped detection.<sup>4</sup>

Not only is there an inadequacy in the expression of love between husband and wife, but it is also extended to inhibit the relationship between father and son. McAuley shows that the stifling of affection is learned rather than natural, and that it becomes such a habit that the capacity to express love is lost.

Since 1956 the institution of marriage has come under great scrutiny in novels. Some have challenged its validity or relevance in modern society and explored the possibility of an alternative form of loving relationship between men and women, or even homosexual relationships. Currently there seems to be a sub-genre of the lesbian novel developing.

4. James McAuley, "Because" in A Map of Australian Verse, Melbourne, 1975, pp.214-15.

George Johnston challenges marriage in his novel My Brother Jack (1964), in which he shows how conformity to both male and female stereotypes does not bring happiness. The narrator, David Meredith, who is devious, uncertain of himself and complicated, marries the beautiful and sophisticated Helen Midgeley. In many ways she fits the male ideal of a woman as pretty, charming and a perfect hostess. She satisfies him sexually as a lover, fulfills all of her wifely duties and is admired as the perfect hostess. Yet the marriage fails despite her perceived attractive qualities, perhaps because of them. David resents the ascendancy he has allowed her because of her seniority to him. Johnston's protagonist Jack personifies the male stereotype of the times. Unlike his brother David, he is straightforward, simple, brave, self-reliant and dominant and he has a demanding need to feel important. His wife Sheila is simple, pretty in a homely way, devoted to domesticity, yet a satisfying lover. However, Jack's relationship with his wife fails just as surely as David's does to the more socially glamorous Helen. Both wives are sexually satisfying, but this is insufficient to achieve a loving and enduring relationship. Thus, Johnston questions the possibility of marriage attaining total human satisfaction. Moreover, he shows the complete failure of mateship, the bonding relationship between men, which has run so persistently through Australian literature. In Thoroughly Decent People (1976), Glen Tomasetti is even more critical of marriage. This novel looks back to Melbourne in the thirties when

marriages were considered to be more stable and concludes that outwardly harmonious marriages may have been shams. The novel is sub-titled "An Australian Folktale", quite aptly because it strikes chords of recognition, while it shocks the reader with the tragedy and disillusionment behind seemingly happy marriages. The novel not only shows the deprivation of love suffered by both husband and wife, but it also challenges the validity of marriage held together hypocritically by a sense of duty rather than by love.

Frank Dalby Davison's lengthy two volume chronicle, The White Thorntree (1968), attacks what he sees as the narrowness of social conventions that restrict the sexual urges of people in monogamous marriage. However, for all his pessimism about marriage, he does not advocate free love. Davison focuses on human sexual weaknesses and male-female relationships. He suggests that one problem derives from socially induced romantic notions of marriage based on the stereotypical expectations of each partner. However, because both bring to marriage self-centred attitudes, disappointment is bound to follow upon realization of the other's weaknesses. Hume Dow has contended that The White Thorntree is concerned mainly with the destructive nature of romantic love.<sup>5</sup> Davison not only dismisses conventional concepts of

5. Hume Dow, Frank Dalby Davison, Melbourne, 1971, p.42.



marriage, but he also shows alternative male-female relationships to fail in bringing enduring and satisfying love.

Patrick White's novels after 1956 investigate the effects of gender stereotyping on male and female relationships, but his position remains sexist. As I have discussed, in The Aunt's Story (1948), he explores the female potential by isolating his protagonist Theodora from a loving relationship with a male. In A Fringe of Leaves (1976) he creates an extra-ordinary set of events to remove his female protagonist, Ellen Roxburgh, from the society which has moulded her. This allows him to investigate the effects of gender stereotyping. Ellen has the opportunity to cast off the repressions of social conventions, but in the end she is not shown to be totally liberated and she prefers to accept the consequences of gender stereotyping, as her comments show:

A woman, as I see, is more like moss or lichen  
that takes to<sup>6</sup> some tree or rock as she takes to  
her husband.

Clearly, White is here using the 'clinging vine' stereotype of woman. Although this former role of wife has failed

6. Patrick White, A Fringe of Leaves, Penguin Books Australia Ltd, Ringwood, Victoria, 1982 edition, p.363.

Ellen, White seems to endorse her final acceptance of gender expectations. He does not offer a fulfilling relationship with a man, but rather a potential for integrity within the framework of existing society. As in Voss (1957) he allows this integrity only in the absence of a loving relationship with a male. Perhaps he implies that the nature of the relationship will act as a barrier to its achievement. This is a continuation of his position in relation to Stan in The Tree of Man. In Voss he investigates man's potential to achieve a greatness not available to women. Moreover, he implies that it is necessary for man to reject a deep relationship with a woman to attain it. He assigns this task of leadership to the male just as society does, and although he endows Laura Trevalyan with strong qualities of intelligence and perception, her role remains secondary. White depicts a strange heightened love between Voss and Laura, a love rejected physically but declared by letter when its culmination is unlikely. Voss believes his emotional love to be a weakness and he prefers a mystical relationship. White seems to elevate this kind of loving relationship because he is at pains to stress the explorer's transcendental vision and larger-than-life heroism. He shows Voss destroyed physically but undefeated spiritually, and by implication, he sets mystical love between a man and a woman as superior to an actual relationship. This does not account for the human condition, so it would seem that White has not found a viable alternative to the conventional male-female relationship and he can only suggest avoiding it. The

'mystical' love which he elevates can be seen as a way of evading real relationships. Sylvia Gzell has pointed out that in Voss White implies that "perfectly fulfilled love is an almost inaccessible goal." <sup>7</sup> This is a pessimistic attitude to the human potential to attain a loving relationship between the sexes. White suggests only a spiritual fulfilment that is totally unsatisfying to the physical needs of both men and women. This might lead us to question Veronica Brady's suggestion that White's quest to find an answer to "who am I?" offers a hope that Australian society will find a new vision of the mystery of life. <sup>8</sup> However, whilst White himself has not conveyed the answer, his explorations of male and female relationships, along with those of other Australian novelists, may pave the way to deeper insights. Nevertheless, it is true to say that the old attitudes to gender stereotypes, particularly in regard to male-female relationships, persist in his work, as in that of other writers, into the 70s.

This capacity of past traditions to reproduce themselves is also shown in other media. In the live theatre there have been some interesting parallels to the social

7. Sylvia Gzell, "Themes and Imagery in Voss and Riders in the Chariot", in Clement Semmler (Ed.), 20th Century Australian Literary Criticism, Melbourne, 1967, p.261.
8. Veronica Brady, "Patrick White's Australia", in John Carroll (Ed.), Intruders in the Bush, Melbourne, 1977, p.202.

attitudes depicted in our literature, particularly in the absence of intense love between men and women. The Melbourne Theatre Company presented "A Fortunate Life" for its 1984 season. The play is based on the autobiography of A.B. Facey, an ordinary, undistinguished Australian battler, who typifies all the values of the bush. Currently, A Fortunate Life is best-known in print form. Its publication received much attention, sold well and even became a "syllabus" book. Because Facey is portrayed as the ideal of Australian maleness, his life lacks any strong emotional relationship. He sets out for the outback with his swag on his back at the tender age of eight. Young Bert tries many jobs in his struggle to survive, and his experiences lead him to droving, gold-mining and travelling with a boxing-troupe. With the outbreak of World War 1 he enlists and is injured at Gallipoli. After the war he works a soldier settlement, and with his wife and family battles the austerities of the Depression. Facey's life is hard but quite ordinary for the times and the play's interest is in the traditional concept of his battling against the odds. Facey seems to be searching for something but it is never quite clear what that is because he seems merely to respond to events and accept them rather than mould his life. Even his marriage appears to just come his way as a result of meeting a girl who knitted socks for the soldiers during World War 1. . When World War 2 breaks out Facey is quite fatalistic in accepting the enlistment of his son and consequently the death comes as no surprise. Facey's life seems full of misfortunes so his

claim that he is "thrilled" by his fortunate life is an irony that the play does not explore.

Another example of contemporary revival of the past is Peter Weir's film "Gallipoli", which in 1981 won great acclaim and support by giving further weight to a continuing pride in a disastrous military blunder. Reviewing the film in the Age, Phillip Adams calls it "The great Australian love story."<sup>9</sup> Yet women appear only fleetingly as wives, sisters, waitresses, nurses and prostitutes. The love is a deep mateship between the two men Frank and Archie. In a sense, it is an unrecognised homosexuality, based not on carnality but on what Adams calls a strange "eroticised idealism". Nonetheless, their relationship has all the ingredients of a love until death. In the concluding scene, Archie's death becomes inevitable to the achievement of a transcendental vision of glory in dying, not even for his own country, but for Britain. In both of these great loves, women have no part. The film, in fact, elevates the love possible between two men.

"Gallipoli" is a good example of the conservatism which, Brian McFarlane has proposed to exist essentially in modern Australian cinema.<sup>10</sup> Two of the kinds of conservatism

9. Phillip Adams: "Gallipoli - The Great Australian love story" in the Age, 22 August, 1981, p.24.

10. Brian McFarlane, "Conservatism in the New Australian Cinema" in Australian Cultural History, 1988, p.38.

he discusses are relevant to my thesis. These are the characteristic endorsement rather than the critical examination of the Australian myths; and the strong support of conventional critical responses.<sup>11</sup> McFarlane argues that the film "Gallipoli" was probably so popular in this country because audiences accepted so wholeheartedly the celebration of heroic images of Australian manhood.<sup>12</sup> Sylvia Lawson has compared a scene in the 1915 recruitment-propaganda feature, "The Hero of the Dardanelles" with one from the 1981 film, "Gallipoli", and found virtually no difference in the ideology celebrated.<sup>13</sup> McFarlane contends that the popularity of male mythical images in films such as Peter Weir's "Gallipoli" and Bruce Beresford's "Breaker Morant", confirms their enduring acceptance.<sup>14</sup> By contrast, films scrutinizing the myths have not been popularly acclaimed. One exception, perhaps, is "Wake in Fright" (1970), a film by Canadian Ted Kotcheff based on the novel by Kenneth Cook. In this film man is shown to be weak or brutal or depraved, and mateship is treated in a highly critical manner.<sup>15</sup> Nonetheless, this film is an untypical exception to the pattern of endorsement of gender stereotypes and elevation of the mateship ethic.<sup>16</sup> It may have some significance to the

11. Ibid.

12. Ibid, p.41.

13. Sylvia Lawson, "Gallipoli" in Filmnews, Nov.-Dec. 1981, p.11 as cited by McFarlane, *ibid*.

14. McFarlane, *op.cit.*, p.42.

15. McFarlane, *loc.cit.*, p.41.

16. Ibid, p.42.

interpretation that director, Kotcheff, is not Australian. In general, many of the most successful Australian films made after 1956 have been adaptations of Australian novels and they have endorsed, rather than scrutinized, the images of the original sources.<sup>17</sup> McFarlane argues that Australian films have used the historical and literary past to celebrate triumphs rather than to explore the present, and that they have done this in ways too safely respectable and by extensions of concept of the mythical "Aussie".<sup>18</sup>

Similarly, Dirk den Hartog has investigated the ambivalence apparent in much of the "new wave" drama of the 1960s and 1970s directed at Australianness as "ockerism".<sup>19</sup> He notes that playwrights themselves have not opposed clearly the social attitudes they are ostensibly satirizing. His critique discerns a tendency among male Australian writers to disguise their own individuality behind a guise of a mythically national persona.<sup>20</sup> In this, Den Hartog argues that such plays are ambivalent, because although they depict the ocker satirically, they nonetheless restore him to the role of traditional larrikin hero by means of the contrast

17. Ibid, p.43.

18. Brian McFarlane, Australian Cinema 1970-85, London and Melbourne, 1987, p.222, as cited in *ibid*.

19. Dirk den Hartog, "Self-Levelling Tall Poppies: The Authorial Self in (Male) Australian Literature", in S.L. Goldberg and F.B. Smith (eds), Australian Cultural History, 1988, p.227.

20. Den Hartog, *op.cit.*, p.228.

between masculine vernacular earthiness and feminine cultural pretension.<sup>21</sup> This is particularly evident in David Williamson's play "Don's Party", in which the exchanges between arch-ocker Cooley and Kerry, the only woman with intellectual and artistic goals, provide not only a study of sexism, but also Williamson's own implication in how the male character thinks and behaves.<sup>22</sup> The uncertainties and ambivalences suggested in the play itself are shown in Don. Williamson shows this character to have a gentler side by such things as his liking for native plants, although Don can only bring himself to discuss this new interest with his mates by sending it up. This is symptomatic of an uncertainty of identity which also expresses itself in the uncertain way in which Don is shown to act towards his wife throughout the play. Den Hartog suggests that "Don's Party" thus offers some insight into masculine identity within the general culture of the "new middle class" in Australia at the time, both in what it shows and in what it unwittingly reveals. A similar ambivalence can be found in the presentations of one of Australia's leading sceptics, satirist Barry Humphries, who has developed the characters of Dame Edna Everidge, Sandy Stone and Sir Les Patterson to show his deep perceptions of the Australian stereotypes.

21. Den Hartog, op.cit., p.234.

22. Ibid, p.235.



Novelist David Ireland's works are examples of the persistence of traditional attitudes in the modern novel. They show ambivalent attitudes to women, and although they are seen as indispensable, they are depicted as inconsequential to men in the real business of living as workers.<sup>23</sup> P.K. Elkin has illustrated how Ireland portrays women in one or other of two extremes: either they are very special, or they share the same vulgar characteristics of the worker men.<sup>24</sup> Thus, Ireland depicts two opposing stereotypes of women, one too ideal -- the stereotypical and domestic Australian "little woman" -- the other the sexual object, the whore.<sup>25</sup> The special girls are elevated above those used casually for sex, common girls like Crystal and Cicely in The Flesheaters (1980). Speaking through the character of Lee Mallory, Ireland shows the male attitude to women as sex objects:

"Did the moon no longer exist because of this lack of attention? Girls, itching for love, would be glancing up at it and hope to be observed glancing, prodding their men into action." (p.6)

However, the moon, symbol of woman, shines not on love, but on all that is evil in mankind:

- 23. P.K. Elkin, "David Ireland: A Male Metropolis", in Shirley Walker (Ed.), Who is She? -- Images of Woman in Australian Fiction, St Lucia, Queensland, 1983, p.163.
- 24. Ibid, p.168.
- 25. Summers, op.cit.

"How bright the moon was. Yes, Lee Mallory, but don't be deceived. What it illuminates -- trees, gardens, flowers, ghostly buildings, are all illusions. Vice, crime, selfishness and apathy fill the buildings, fill the hearts inside them ... But the buildings are largely empty, Lee Mallory."  
(p.6)

Ireland is not only saying that sexual activities are not synonymous with love, but that love is mostly lacking in human beings. Ireland conveys the same cynicism as Lee Mallory, particularly in depicting base sexuality in both men and women. Lee Mallory finds sexual gratification in sadistic brutality to Crystal, and when she protests about the pain he is inflicting on her, he explains his twisted nature:

"My conscience is very happy when I hurt you. My whole way of life from now on will be hurting you."  
(p.173)

Crystal accepts his physical abuse just as the dog Casanova accepts O'Grady's abuse, laying weight to the saying 'kick a dog and it will follow you'. The dog licks O'Grady's face after he is attacked by a passer-by who witnessed the dog's ill-treatment. (p.104) Ireland's portrayal of a male-female relationship based on physical abuse is in the terms of a misogynist. While it might be unfair to accuse Ireland as such, or to claim that he condones brutality to women, there is little evidence of his condemnation of it and his satire

is too mild. <sup>26</sup> In an interview with Mark McLeod, David Ireland rejected the polarization of men and women evident in Australian life and mythology, and claimed that men and women share "so much in common of human nature that the division between them [seems] quite wrong." <sup>27</sup> However, his position is ambiguous, because he depicts the means of social control of men and women not only to be different, but that of women showing them to be intrinsically inferior. In The Flesheaters O'Grady needs only to challenge a man's 'guts' to gain compliance:

"If you won't sign it you've got no guts." (p.102)

This threat to male pride in courage is a useless ploy with women, who are presumed to be weak and to accept that condition. Throughout the novel, women are controlled by fear and drugs. Alice Bost is terrified of her husband and thus controlled by him:

She cowered in the kitchen while the banging and bashing went on. He came in when he was finished.

"Buck up, love. About time you took yourself in hand," he said menacingly.

She didn't know what to say. The dog was as browbeaten as Alice. (p.100)

26. Ibid.

27. Mark McLeod. Interview with David Ireland at Macquarie University, October 1980, in Kunapipi, 3, no.1, 1981, as cited in Walker, op.cit.

Granny Upjohn, inmate of a nursing home, is controlled with drugs. She is antagonised by a young boy Wayne throwing sticks and gravel at her while the mother ignores his humiliating behaviour:

... the incident upset her. No doubt about it. For a week she kept throwing her meals at the wall ... To keep her alive and make sure her pension didn't die, O'Grady had to tranquillize her every day with blowpipe and doctored darts. He fed her when she was calm and sedate. (pp.139-140)

Both of these examples of male control of females clearly show them to be inferior even to men who are themselves controlled, so that Ireland's claim to portraying the common traits of men and women appears to be if not untenable, at least ambiguous. P.K Elkin argues that David Ireland's perspective of women is limited, and that this is typical of the Australian male view of women. <sup>28</sup>

In much contemporary Australian fiction, however, the themes of alienation and unhappiness in male-female relationships has less to do with gender stereotyping. There is now an insecurity in the new sense of possibilities bred from changed attitudes to marriage, fidelity, commitment and enduring responsibilities to relationships between men and women. Helen Garner's novel, Monkey Grip (1977) is among

28. Elkin, op.cit., p.177

works which explore the possibility of finding a satisfying relationship based on love given freely without legal or emotional commitment. In this Garner's position is similar to that of Frank Dalby Davison in The White Thorn, and both show free love to fail in bringing happiness to men and women. In the 70s, short stories by female writers like Viidikas and Amy Witting contained sexually explicit descriptions, but Helen Garner's Monkey Grip was the first female novel in this vein.<sup>29</sup> Set within the drug-taking subculture of inner-city Melbourne in the mid-70s, the novel gives a female account of sexual relations that vacillates between explicit realism and romantic longing for love, between independence and submission.<sup>30</sup> The consequence of this is unhappiness, leading to the taking of drugs with which people destroy themselves both physically and spiritually.

The novel shatters traditional conventions and stereotypes and shows a society built entirely upon new values. Nora is the dominant sexual partner, who, despite her sexual activities with a number of men, idealizes her sexual relationship with drug addict Javo, to whom she constantly returns. In fact, her sexual activities during Javo's many absences are only a substitute for the idealized loving

29. Ken Gelder & Paul Salzman, The New Diversity -- Australian Fiction 1970-88, Melbourne, 1989, p.177.

30. Ibid.

relationship she imagines might exist with him. Yet she is ambivalent in this, because she senses a threat to the independence which she values:

"I would like to love, and yet not to love." 31

In a subculture which sets the individual self central to behaviour, relationships of enduring commitment are of little concern. Consequently, Nora's longing for love comes into conflict with her need for independence. Her society is based on non-involvement and non-commitment to others. Under the guise of freedom for individuality, men and women are abandoned to personal desolation and frustration. Free love is shown to bring only misery, and its own particular bondage to an endless quest for gratification. Nonetheless, the painful experiences of the central character, Nora, lead her to recognize a potential within herself to find happiness within that society. It is significant that Garner sees that potential within a female in isolation from a male. Although this may be the view of a female author it does suggest the impossibility of a fulfilling male-female relationship. Garner does not lay the blame on males, for they are shown to suffer alienation as well. However, her attitude to Nora is ambivalent, because on one hand she shows her intrinsic need

31. Helen Garner, Monkey Grip, Melbourne, 1978 edition used, p.149.

for love, and on the other she has her finally accepting an inevitable and even happy solitude for the sake of her independence.

Despite the explorations of novels such as Monkey Grip and The White Thorn tree, marriage remains as the generally accepted relationship between Australian men and women to the present time. However, there has been an increasing challenge to its obligations and institutionalization and this challenge is apparent in some of the fiction written after 1956. It has been argued that love should not be bound by duty, yet in Monkey Grip free love does not bring happiness to Nora in the end and it does not satisfy Javo with whom she has had such a relationship. The novel leaves a despondent impression of the hopelessness of seeking and finding an enduring and loving relationship with the opposite sex. Certainly no satisfying alternatives are offered and a return to the traditional values of marriage is not implied. What Garner is proposing is that the highest human fulfilment is to be found in strong individualism, although this presupposes a self-imposed alienation from others. If such an ethic is accepted, loving relationships are impossible. What authors such as Garner and Davison seem to propose, is that suffering comes not so much from stereotypical expectations, as from the denial of permanence in relationships.

In The Children's Bach (1984), Helen Garner has tried to find a form to depict the changing ideology of the times.

To this end, she has set this novella around the lives of three females -- Athena, Elizabeth and Vicki -- and her first truly central male character, Dexter. Monkey Grip and The Children's Bach document the changing mores of the inner city from the early 70s to the new life of the 80s. The former explores the 60s dream of group-living, but the later work focusses on marriage and family life. In The Children's Bach, Elizabeth represents the continuation of the Monkey Grip Bohemian ideology carried into the world of popular music and the trendiness of the 80s. Her male counterpart, successful musician Philip, tempts the married Athena to taste his lifestyle. Athena is Garner's 'new woman', though committed ultimately to the family. Ken Gelder and Paul Salzman have contended that Garner, unlike more radical female writers who have investigated separatism, has always been concerned with family life.<sup>32</sup> Even Monkey Grip is an attempt to free the family from conservatism and replace it with an alternative ideal of warm communal living.<sup>33</sup> However, The Children's Bach is firmly committed to the value of domestic family life, which becomes Athena's strength and refuge. Garner suggests that the third female, Vicki, will accept Athena's values ultimately:

32. Gelder & Salzman, loc.cit., p.56.

33. Ibid.



'Hey! The bins are out! Athena must be back.'

...

and the clothes on the line will dry into stiff shapes which loosen when touched,

and someone will put the kettle on, (p.95)

However, Athena's domesticity suggests possibilities denied despite her disillusion with the unsatisfactory nature of her supposed freedom with Philip.<sup>34</sup> Garner, nonetheless, shows that Athena continues to fantasize about possibilities other than her domestic life:

and Athena will dream again and again, against her will, of Philip, or rather of not-Philip, of searching for him, of climbing endless stairs in a building full of rooms whose occupants have just quitted them, leaving warm cushions and sunny floors and disturbed air, (p.95)

Garner clearly shows such hedonistic possibilities to be a threat to the family. Sydney is the symbol of this threat, because it is to there that Athena escapes to have a brief affair with Philip.<sup>35</sup> She has left her husband and child for a harder and more promiscuous sub-culture that both attracts and frustrates her. She is fascinated by his liberated sex life, although she is ultimately frustrated when he so easily moves from the passionate encounter to the dehumanized

34. Ibid.

35. Ibid, p.103.

business world.<sup>36</sup> When she returns to her home in Melbourne, her night-time waking dreams of liberated sex life anticipate her later frustrations. She indulges in a romantic metaphorical sex, but this is shattered by an imaginary, and successful defence against rape.<sup>37</sup> Consequently, there is a sharp contrast between the waiter who "kisses her on the mouth and glides away" (p.64), and the attempted rape when "she kicks him, her foot meets bone, she throws his arms back, she screams so loudly and so well that a car stops ..." (p.64) Athena's "solitary" sex life is shown to be "disembodied" in both the physical and metaphorical sense. The "disembodied" soft feminized sexual metaphors both lead towards and are contradicted by a sketch of the woman aggressively defending herself from the unwanted hardness of rape.<sup>38</sup>

There thus appears to be the same trend towards narcissism as expressed by Australian fiction that Christopher Lasch described in American literature.<sup>39</sup> Lasch contends that the new narcissist is haunted not by guilt but by anxiety. He demands immediate gratification and

36. Ibid, p.178.

37. Ibid.

38. Ibid, p.179.

39. Christopher Lasch, The Culture of Narcissism -- American Life in an Age of Diminishing Expectations, London, 1980.

lives in a state of restless, perpetually unsatisfied desire.<sup>40</sup> Such narcissism is evident in the works of Garner and Ireland as discussed. It is also the subject of Patrick White's, The Vivisector (1970). Narcissism offers a way of coping with the tensions and anxieties of modern life. Lasch argues that the narcissistic traits present in everyone are heightened by prevailing social conditions.<sup>41</sup> This tendency has had a devastating effect on the family, and this has been a major concern of Helen Garner. Lasch has shown how the modern priority given to self-fulfillment leads to remoteness and emotional detachment. A society grounded in valuing the present because it has no hope for the future, has little to offer the next generation.<sup>42</sup> Marriage is no longer binding so that there may be the possibility of a new intimacy between men and women, one not based on legal compulsion. Lasch argues that such an intimacy is an illusion because the cult itself conceals a growing despair of discovering it.<sup>43</sup> In such an environment, personal relationships are inhibited. The pursuit of sexual pleasure as an end in itself, the liberation of sex from many of its former constraints, and the emotional expectations of personal relationships, have all contributed to the modern conflict between the sexes.<sup>44</sup> In a sense, chivalry has disguised

40. Ibid, Preface, xvi.

41. Ibid, p.50.

42. Ibid.

43. Ibid, p.188.

44. Ibid, p.189.

the exploitation of women, because by it men appeared to be their protectors in return for their deference. Women have now come to recognise the connection between their debasement and their sentimental exaltation, and have demanded the demystification of female sexuality. However, as a consequence, men and women now find it even more difficult to be equals or loving friends. Male protection no longer justifies domination, so supremacy is often shown to be enforced directly. For example, in films the emphasis has shifted from adulation to rape. <sup>45</sup>

Lasch contends that the former connections between sex and love, marriage and procreation, have been so weakened that the pursuit of sexual pleasure is now an end in itself without the embellishment of romance. Moreover, he has pointed out that the most common escape from strong feelings is its separation from sex, and the posing of this as liberation and progress. <sup>46</sup> Using such an ideology, "nonbinding commitments" and "cool sex" are set as virtues of disengagement while they purport to criticize the depersonalization of sex. <sup>47</sup> According to Lasch, radicals promote the expression of human needs and wishes, but they deny that satisfaction can be found in a single mate. There is a conflict in an ideology that supports a connection

45. Ibid, p. 190.

46. Ibid, p. 200.

47. Ibid.

between sex and feeling while simultaneously condoning the defensive withdrawal from deep emotional commitment and intimacy.<sup>48</sup> Certainly, Helen Garner, David Ireland and others including Patrick White, have been caught in such ambiguity. Their more recent writings support the contention made by Lasch, that authors show the inability of heterosexual relations to satisfy human needs. The narcissist is consumed by inordinate sexual desires, while at the same time he asks and only offers casual, temporary relationships.<sup>49</sup>

Lasch argues that men have a great fear of the two demands of women for sexual satisfaction and tenderness. His view is pessimistic, because he does not anticipate the likelihood of an androgynous and utopian society following the introduction of equality, new family and personality structures. However, he does accept that changes would eventuate between gender attitudes if we could learn to accept inevitable sexual tensions more generously.<sup>50</sup>

Australian fiction has not found a solution to the conflicts which is shown to be intrinsic to male and female relationships. Since 1956 there have been more intensive explorations of the inherent inadequacies. These have

48. Ibid, p.201.

49. Ibid, p.202.

50. Ibid, p.206.

included investigations of alternatives to conventional relationships, although there is still a tendency to return to the security of traditional values as more likely to placate, if not totally satisfy, human needs. Perhaps our fiction is suggesting that complete satisfaction is not part of the human condition, and that contentment may only be found in accepting the limitations of men and women to fulfil each other's desires.

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