UTTAR PRADESH
RAJARSHI TANDON OPEN UNIVERSITY

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LITERARY CRITICISM AND THEORY

Block

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UNIT 1 AUSTRALIAN LITERATURE

Structure

1.0 Objectives
1.1 Introducing Australian Literature
1.2 Problems of Definition
1.3 Matters of Relevance
1.4 Juxtapositions
1.5 Let Us Sum Up
1.6 Questions
1.7 Works Cited

1.0 OBJECTIVES

The purpose of this unit is to give you a broad overview of Australian literature and then introduce you to some of the problems that are part of any attempt to answer the questions: What is Australian literature? Why is it relevant for the Indian student of English literature? What is the nature of its relation to Indian literature?

1.1 INTRODUCING AUSTRALIAN LITERATURE

Australian literature is a large body of writing that can include early versions and English translations of Aboriginal song sequences or folktales, the memoirs, journals and ballads of early European explorers and settlers. It also includes the more formal works of literature that followed as writing and publishing established its sway on the island continent. Like the literature of any other nation it captures in many ways the growth and development of Australia into the country that we know today.

It can be said that much of what we can include under the category of Australian literature from the early phases of its development was not what would be traditionally considered literature. For example, the oral songs and stories of the Aboriginal peoples of Australia were passed on orally from generation to generation without being written. Even when they were recorded in English versions it was done more with an anthropological intention than a literary one. The idea was to learn more about the culture and values of the Aboriginal peoples from a scientific point of view than to study the aesthetic aspects of these creations. Similarly, the records, memoirs, diaries and journals that are today included under the study of literature were not always meant for this purpose. They were often the private or official records of explorers, administrators and settlers. However, these works are important sources that reveal how the land, circumstances and people of Australia evolved in the thoughts and imagination of the people who lived there or visited it. They show how Australian literature came to be written and the early influences on this body of writing.

The ballads of the convicts and the bush songs belong more to a period when Australian literature began to be an institution in itself. Periodicals like the *Bulletin,* which started publication in 1880, were part of this trend. The ballads and bush songs, which had earlier been mostly part of the folk tradition, now became part of the literary tradition. Writers began to consciously cultivate and develop the forms, themes and figures of the oral ballads and bush songs. 'Banjo' Patterson belongs to this school of writing. 'Waltzing Matilda' a ballad about a swagman – a travelling farm worker in the Australian outback – has become to many Australians of European descent, a kind of unofficial national anthem. This is in part because it

captures the spirit of surviving in a harsh landscape, the pioneering spirit as well as a bold attitude to life and the authorities.

Literature in Australia developed and began to take on many other forms such as the popular short story, the literary version of the fireside yarn. Henry Lawson and Barbara Baynton were prominent short story writers who contributed greatly to the growth and development of this genre during this formative stage. Their writing captured features of the growth of the Australian cultural myths of the Bush and its people. The hardships and spirit of the European settlers and bush people during the pioneering days finds expression in their work.

At this early stage of development it was but natural that the writers who were mainly from among the British settlers would bring to their writing the values and forms of the British traditions of literature. In this sense, early Australian literature was constantly looking over its shoulder at England. This soon developed into a source of tension as some writers felt that the best direction for Australian literature was to follow and maintain British traditions of great literature. Others felt that as Australia was so different from England that it should cut the umbilical cord from the mother country and develop an identity of its own as a nation and this should be reflected in Australian literature.

Australian history and literature do reveal the many tensions that have gone into the making of the Australian nation. These are : the tension between the old country of England, the metropolitan colonial centre and the new country of Australia on the antipodean margins of the British Empire; the tension between the settlers and the indigenous Aborigines; the tension between early waves of settlers and more recent immigrants; the tension between the old language, images and literary forms of British literature and the idiom, images and literary forms taking root in the new environment of Australia. All these tensions shaped the themes and forms of Australian literature.

As in much of the rest of the English speaking world, in Australia the first half of the twentieth century saw the genre of poetry being more popular and the second half saw the novel rising to prominence. A.D. Hope and Judith Wright are the canonical figures of Australian poetry during its heyday. Patrick White, Australia's Nobel Prize laureate, is probably the best known and most taught of Australia's novelists. Their writing began to move away from both a purely derivative imitation of European forms as well as a focus on the people and mores of the Bush. Modern Australia, of the cities began to figure more distinctly in their writing. As the face of the Australian nation began to change, its literature began to reflect that change. Writers like Kath Walker, Mudrooroo, Kevin Gilbert and Sally Morgan have brought the poetry, drama and stories of the Aboriginal peoples to the forefront. There has also been a trend towards autobiographies, biographies and life-stories gaining more and more popularity. The multiculturalism that is being promoted at a political level is being reflected in the diverse voices being heard in the realm of Australian literature. Today there are more women, Aborigines, immigrants whose voices join the exciting confluence that is Australian literature.

1.2 PROBLEMS OF DEFINITION

Having briefly introduced Australian literature is let us look at some of the problems associated with trying to answer the question: "What is Australian literature?" How do we define Australian literature? This is not an easy task as different people have different definitions of it in different contexts. The difficulty of defining 'Australian literature' is connected to the problems of giving clear simple definitions to the terms 'Australian' and 'literature', both separately and together. The reasons why these

difficulties arise are because the meaning of these terms keep on changing with time and with different contexts.

Many people take it for granted that literature should be studied with "the 'nation' as a primary context and framework of reference"(Bennett and Strauss, 1). One of the important reasons for this is that the nature and themes of literature are influenced by, and in turn influence contemporary social and political realities. Since for a long time, the category of the 'nation' has been seen as a unit in social, political, cultural and historical terms, the study of literature has been linked to it. The study of literature has thus become deeply related to the way national identity is created and presented. The nature of both the 'nation' and the literary storytelling or 'narration' connected to it, are constantly changing. The definitions and content of both the nation and its literature change as social and political conditions change, demanding similar changes in the way both are presented. This situation is seen in the case of 'Australian literature' as well. In their introduction to *The Oxford Literary History of Australia*, the editors Bruce Bennett and Jennifer Strauss make a comment about the wide and changing range in the presentation of Australia in its literature. According to them the images of the country includes many things. There are images from an Aboriginal Dreaming describing how the world came into existence according to Aboriginal folklore. There are the pre-discovery European imaginings of Australia as *Terra Australis Incognita* – an empty and unknown land. There are also experiences recorded by early settlers, which vary from paradisiacal to purgatorial. More recently the literature has also revealed shifts from the sense of a 'white Australia' or Australia for Australians of Western Europe to the more recent notion of Australia as 'part of Asia'. Many of these representations operate at times well beyond the confines of the 'national'. (4-5)

The land now known as Australia had been occupied for several thousands of years before the British invasion and eventual colonization of the island continent. Often, that past of the land and the peoples who lived there before the colonizers came, is hidden when Australian history and literature is presented as having its 'beginnings' only in the past two hundred years during which the colonizers have been there. This way of presenting Australian history and literature was connected to the legal misrepresentation of the Australian land as being *terra nullius* – an 'empty land' that could therefore be claimed and legally possessed by the colonizers without any consideration for any earlier claims by Aborigines who lived there before. This kind of presentation of the civilization, culture and contribution of the Aborigines as not existing, was a colonial act that for a long time left the Aborigines outside or on the margins of discussions of Australia as a nation.

This way of thinking about Aborigines is increasingly being challenged by and on behalf of the Aboriginal people. The Aborigines are telling their own stories and histories of the Australian nation and making them available for everyone. They are also laying claims to the legal possession of the land. Later waves of immigrants from Southern Europe and Asia, as well as other groups silenced by the powerful colonial version of Australian identity, history and literature are also producing histories and literatures. These versions question the traditional presentation of the Australian nation as a nation created by white colonizers, mostly from Britain. All this is forcing people to take a new look at what has traditionally been considered 'Australian' literature and make it include texts and voices it had earlier ignored.

Within traditional 'white' Australian literature itself, the idea of what constituted the 'Australianness' of Australian literature was a point of debate. This became especially marked as the people of the Australian settler colonies tried to define both for themselves and others the nature of their political, social, cultural and literary relationship with the former colonial centre, Britain. At least two positions became important in the early decades of the twentieth century. One argued that truly great

literature had to follow the rules and traditions of the literary models of British and European literature, as these were universal and eternal. The other position argued that the distinctive features of Australian literature should express the tendency to define 'Australia' without using Britain as a reference point or model. Ian Turner captures the sense of urgency felt at that point in history, to define the Australian nation as different from Britain through literature, when he quotes Nettie Palmer from *Modern Australian Literature* (1924):

> Australia was no longer a group of more or less important colonies hanging loosely together...on the ample bosom of Britannia; Australia was henceforth Australia. What that name was to mean it lay in the hands of her writers, above all, to discover. (43)

This sense of urgency was however complicated by the problem of the actual nature of the difference which Australian literature was supposed to present. If Australia and its literature were to be defined in terms of their differences with Britain and its literature, it was not very clear which areas of difference would be focussed upon. Would it be the real and very obvious differences seen in the land or differences in the spirit of the people that were more difficult to define and describe? Either way both sets of differences were constructed and depended on whatever aspect writers consciously chose to focus on – the land, the people, their spirit or a combination of these three. Another aspect of this whole effort of creating a distinct national identity was the two-way pull of wanting to cut loose from Britain while still desiring to retain its respect, interest and recognition. Literature was supposed to perform the function of creating national images that projected a national identity. This national identity was marked by a sense of distinction and a sense of national pride in its differences from the British identity. Australia wanted to be more than just another colony or just an imitation of Britain. Ian Turner quotes T.G. Tucker from *The Cultivation of Literature in Australia* (1902):

> If we ever have an 'Australian' school of literature, it will not be because of the fauna and flora and geography and idioms of Australia which may be introduced. These make nothing in art. ... It will be because our Australian atmosphere, our national life, occupations, religious ideas, have inevitably and unconsciously created in our eyes and hearts and intellects some difference in our way of regarding things, so that we perceive strength and beauty and pathos in some new light, and adapt our representation thereto. (43)

As any nation attempts to tell its stories through literature and history, the nature of the identity that the nation wishes to present defines the standards that decide what is considered valuable and authentic within those literary and historical representations. The nature of the target audience of those literary and historical representations will also determine their tone and content. For example, when the writers, who belonged to the group of the European settlers, wrote with the audience in the metropolitan centres of Britain and Europe in mind, for a long time the emphasis was on the exotic and bizarre in the new land. The inverted seasons where summer peaked in December and winter in June, trees that shed their bark instead of their leaves and animals like the kangaroo were presented as points of fascinating interest. Later on, when publication and the primary reading audience shifted to Australia, the emphasis shifted as well. The focus was on creating a white Australian settler identity through the rather repetitive literary creation of characters, themes, and situations that were symbols of that identity. The myths of the Australian Bush and the culture of bush life developed in a big way during this period. Now the boundaries of the reading public and the publishing industry have expanded to include the voices and points of view of previously ignored and marginalised groups such as the Aborigines,

immigrants and women. As a result, there is more diversity in the set of historical and literary representations available in Australia.

Australia – the nation with its many cultural, political and social aspects – and Australian literature – the body of writing that have been used to present some aspects of the nation and its sense of identity – have always and continue to be constantly changing. 'Australian literature' is thus a term used to categorize a constantly changing body of writing and not any fixed set of books or ideas. There is no simple answer to the question, "What is Australian literature?" Just as there are no simple answers to the questions, "What is Australian?" or "What is literature?". Because of these reasons it would be harder still to attempt to define 'Australian literature' in the traditional terms of certain 'characteristic features' or any 'recognised canon' or set of books that are considered 'great literature'.

This block makes no attempt to do either. Instead, an attempt has been made to quickly and briefly discuss some of the changes the term 'Australian literature' has been used to cover within the traditional Australian literary studies programmes. These programmes have focussed on the more widely studied white Australian literary canon, as well as outside it on texts and ideas that challenge the values and standards of the white literary canon. The traditional canon of Australian literature mainly included only white writers of European descent. As a result it made it seem like the only narratives of importance in the Australian continent were white ones – with a leaning towards white male perspectives. Today that is being challenged as Aboriginal, women and immigrant writers assert the importance of their narratives and literary creations. One example of how this is happening is the way life-stories have begun to gain prominence equivalent to that of the novel. This trend was started by the spate of Aboriginal and immigrant biographical and autobiographical writing. The block simultaneously attempts to suggest and explain why what has been included under the category has changed and continues to do so. Since the term 'Australian literature' and the standards connected with it are themselves dynamic, our understanding of it must also be flexible and open.

1.3 MATTERS OF RELEVANCE

Postcolonial studies in English departments became important in the latter half of the twentieth century as literature departments began to explore the influence of colonization on history, society, education and writing in the colonized countries. Postcolonial studies have on many occasions tried to show how English studies in the colonies has been part of a deliberate programme to create colonial subjects who would believe in and follow colonial norms and values. In India, the introduction of English education helped create a class of Indians who could not only help British officers in their work of governing India, but who also were aware of and were expected to believe British values and ideas on culture. Their education in English thus made them very useful to the British in maintaining colonization.

This was a pattern that repeated itself in many colonized countries. It was realized that even after independence, the choice of books and the points of view taught in English literature courses helped continue a kind of mental colonization. As a result of questioning the traditional English literary studies curricula in India and abroad, they were revised to include a wider range of writing in English. This wider range taken from many countries was supposed to expose the student of literature to many different points of view, different standards, values and cultures.

In Australia, the questioning of literary studies programmes that focussed only on British literature was part of the creation of a national identity that wanted to be different and separate from a British colonial legacy. Historically, the emergence of

Australian literature as an academic subject (Dale, 134) began with the inclusion of non-British texts, lectures and postgraduate research starting in the field around the 1920s and 1930s. In the 1940s, Adelaide boasted the first full-fledged course in Australian literature. By the 1970s and 1980s a Chair of Australian literature had been created in Sydney. Scholarly journals, literary histories and bibliographies were being produced as proof of the acceptance of Australian literature as a subject in academic institutions.

During this period, Australian literature as a subject developed in a spirit of trying to cut loose from the British colonial influence. This was similar to other attempts at the national and political level to move away from a British colonial identity. The limits of this trend were reached by the 1990s. At that time as links between various subjects began to be explored, a need was felt for literary studies to go hand in hand with historical and cultural studies as well as to move beyond the narrow limits of a purely national focus.

Traditional English literature courses in many Indian universities after independence, too focussed primarily on British literature from Chaucer to Eliot. American literature and Indian writing in English were included within these traditional curricula as optional papers, mostly at the Masters level. The changes made in the curricula to include the points of view such as those of postcolonial and feminist studies brought in a new body of texts and alternate interpretations of traditional texts.

The introduction of Australian literary studies courses to Indian universities is part of the result of the sudden popularity of postcolonial literary studies at universities. At first, the trend was to include samplings of literature from postcolonial regions such as Australia, Canada, Africa, the Caribbean and the Indian subcontinent under the term Commonwealth literature or Postcolonial literature. One of the main areas of similarity among the literatures of all these places was seen as the British colonial experience. It was not long before it was pointed out that the experience of colonization was different in different regions and places. The nature of British colonization in Australia and Canada was vastly different from that in Africa, India and the Caribbean. For one thing, Australia and Canada were settler colonies where people of British origin came to settle down. In that sense their colonial experience was in many ways more similar to that of the United States of America (which has never quite called itself as postcolonial).

Furthermore, it was felt that the whole postcolonial studies project, while seeming to bring into English literary studies courses books and literatures in English that had till then been outside it, still maintained Britain as the dominant reference point. At this point, the tendency was to move away from the broad category of Commonwealth or Postcolonial literature. Instead English literary studies programmes began to separately focus on specific areas such as Africa, Canada, America, Australia and India while maintaining the postcolonial point of view as one of the contexts of interpretation and criticism. There was also a shift in terms used and it became more acceptable to use New Literatures in English instead of Commonwealth or Postcolonial literature.

When Australian literature studies was taken out of the larger field of postcolonial studies where the primary focus was the nature of the response of Australian literature to and its questioning of the colonial experience with respect to Britain, new angles of study began to emerge. The traditional Australian canon was itself questioned on the grounds that it was preoccupied with the male point of view and was quite closed to the writing of women, Aborigines and new immigrants. At its worst, it was seen to simply substitute Henry Lawson and Patrick White for the study of Chaucer and Shakespeare in the traditional canon. A study of Australian literature that focussed on more local issues such as its relation to Aboriginal writing or the

writing of women revealed power struggles within Australian literature that questioned its values in exactly the same way that it questioned the values of traditional British literature.

As the 'global village' – a phrase coined by the communications guru Marshall McLuhan—becomes a reality, there are opposing trends towards the globalization as well as localization of studies. The universal and the particular are becoming subjects of interest at every level possible. They are not merely seen as opposites but as connected parts of the same system. Any understanding and questioning of the study of the global/universal notions of literature requires a comparative understanding of the specific features of the literatures of as many nations as possible. This is where the study of Australian literature gains significance for the student of English literature in India. On one level, it is a questioning of the traditional focus on British literature. On another, it also includes a criticism of the politics and some of the problems with categories such as Postcolonial and Commonwealth literature. Finally, it makes us aware of a body of writing that reveals interesting power struggles of its own. In short, the focus has shifted from British English literature to literatures in English. Just as there is a shift from English with a capital "E" to world englishes, so also the study of world literatures in English has become important within academic institutions.

1.4 JUXTAPOSITIONS

The literatures of India and Australia can be compared and contrasted in many areas. Two such areas are the similarities and differences in the postcolonial situation in both countries and how both countries deal with cultural diversity. As discussed before, the idea of postcolonialism is itself quite controversial and raises many questions. This not a bad thing on its own. Like many other concepts, the idea of postcolonialism often assumes for purposes of argument that the postcolonial situation is or has been more or less the same everywhere. This is often justified as being for the purpose of opposing the forces of colonialism more effectively. However, once colonialism has itself been opposed, it becomes necessary to find what aspects of 'postcolonialism' need to be examined and questioned.

It has been argued that as studying aspects of postcolonialism became popular and fashionable, the field of 'postcolonial' studies began to continue certain negative trends of colonialism in new ways. This is known as neocolonialism. One way this happens is when the study of postcolonialism keeps Britain and British colonialism at the centre of almost all discussions. Even when they are being analyzed from other critical perspectives, British writers like Shakespeare, who are considered the major writers of British literature and the English language, are at the centre of most arguments. The only difference is that in a traditional curricula they were praised and now they are analyzed from different critical perspectives. While it is crucial to examine and criticize colonialism and make an analysis of its effects, there is a need to eventually move away from just discussing the colonizer and colonised. Also, it is not a solution to just move from praise to criticism or merely reverse the order of importance.

Another criticism of some types of postcolonial studies is that their arguments and discussions seem to assume that colonialism is a historical phase that is over. This kind of an assumption does not take into consideration aspects of colonialism that continue to affect society, culture and politics even today or new forms of colonialism that now hold sway. Simplifying the concepts of colonialism as well as postcolonialism for the purpose of studies and analysis tends to make it seem as if 'colonialism' as well as 'postcolonialism' are the same in all contexts and situations. Distinctions are not made between different degrees to which people in a colonial

situation played along with or resisted the colonization. Vijay Mishra and Bob Hodge point to an instance of this when they comment that many postcolonial theorists, such as Bill Ashcroft and Helen Tiffin of *The Empire Writes Back* (1989) fame, "do not sufficiently recognise the differences between 'settler' colonies such as Australia and colonies like India which were colonised by a foreign power" (xii). According to Mishra and Hodge this perpetuates wrong points of view that merely assumes that the colonizer and the colonized were against each other in all situations.

This is not to argue that one context is more or less truly 'postcolonial'. It is merely to recognise some of the problems of assuming that the word 'postcolonial' is always used to refer to the same thing or that the colonized always opposed the colonizer. It is also to stress the results when these differences are ignored. It would be a mistake to celebrate the ways in which white Australian literature opposed Britain without realizing the role that white Australian literature has played in pushing Aborigines and their experiences to the background. The same principle applies to the difficult relations between the better-known canonical texts of Indian writing in English or texts available in English translation and untranslated writing by Dalits and literature in the regional languages. The latter have often been ignored or pushed to the background by the 'postcolonial' framework in English departments which has given maximum coverage to texts available in English, most often by expatriate writers. These are then used to study how the postcolonial spirit is reflected in 'Indian literature'.

'Multiculturalism' became a popular public and political slogan in Australia from the 1980s when the entry of immigrants from Asia began to change the population profile of the island continent. Though the first settlers were also culturally a mixed group, coming mostly from Anglo-Saxon and Irish backgrounds, cultural and racial differences became more obvious within the population when in the post World War years the entry of immigrants from South -Eastern Europe and then later from Asia began. The policy of multiculturalism became a way to controlling the wide variety of socio-cultural values and differences that came into contact with one another.

On one hand, this focus on multiculturalism gave a great boost to Aboriginal and immigrant culture, art and literature. On the other, in the process of creating a space within the larger framework of Australian culture for so-called alternate cultures and practices, there was also a tendency to take only some aspects of those cultures – like specific art forms or food – and 'sell' them as different from 'mainstream Australian culture'. This kind of marketing promotes certain kinds of difference while at the same time always making clear that it is not quite part of the mainstream. It leads to a very subtle kind of marginalization. This face of Australian multiculturalism has also at times drawn attention away from tendencies towards conservative right wing nationalism and beliefs that Australia should be for 'white' Australians.

In India, questions of cultural pluralism were taken for granted for a long time, as the main focus of most discussions on culture was on the impact of British colonialism. The existence of social and cultural divisions, be they religions, caste or class, was blamed on the British colonial policies of 'divide and rule'. Today, there are developments in the social and political fields, such as the rise of right-wing versions of nationalism in India, which are making us think about our claims to cultural tolerance and pluralism. In this context, looking at the Australian situation may help throw light by comparison and contrast on how the practice of cultural pluralism has hidden the many ways in which the voices of women, migrants, dalits and adivasis have been ignored in social, cultural and political fields, as well as in the area of literary studies. The diversity of languages in India and the politics of translation and marketing within an academic/publishing context wherein Indian writing in English, especially that produced by expatriate Indians has gained a sort of importance over

writing in the regional languages and writing by groups such as Dalits or tribals, too become interesting points of study.

Thus though both Australia and India can be broadly classified as postcolonial nations with multicultural social frameworks, a more detailed analysis reveals similarities and differences that can be used to question the reasons behind these frameworks and their ground level implications.

1.5 LET US SUM UP

Australian literature is a term that should be used with awareness of its limitations and the political implications of what it includes or leaves out. The changing body of writing the term has been used to refer to is relevant to the Indian student of English literature because many aspects of it provide a valuable tool to compare and contrast Indian literature against.

1.6 QUESTIONS

1. Explore some of the limitations and possibilities of using the term 'Australian literature'.
2. Discuss some criticisms of the idea of postcolonialism in relation to Australian literature
3. Compare and contrast some aspects of Indian and Australian literature, making clear why such comparisons may be useful.

1.7 WORKS CITED

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UNIT 2 AUSTRALIA – LAND AND HISTORY

Structure

2.0 Objectives
2.1 A Question of Beginnings
2.2 Shaping the Course of History
2.3 Acknowledging Aboriginal Ownership
2.4 Early Settler Images of the Land
2.5 Let Us Sum Up
2.6 Questions
2.7 Works Cited

2.0 OBJECTIVES

This unit discusses certain aspects of the issue of land and history in Australia. It is hoped it will help to answer questions such as: When does one begin to take into account the history of 'Australia'? How did the nature of the land shape the course of Australian history after colonial settlement? How have questions about Aboriginal claims to the land changed the way the land and its history are thought about? What do early white settler images of the land reveal?

2.1 A QUESTION OF BEGINNINGS

When one starts to tell the story of a nation where does one begin? According to some theories in geology, Australia was part of a large land mass called Gondwanaland, a million years ago. Besides Australia, this land mass joined together what are today the continents of America, Asia and Africa. Therefore, in a way, India and Australia were 'connected' even in those days. With time the land mass moved apart and Australia became an island continent.

The first aboriginal settlers were supposed to have reached the land around 50,000 years ago. William Jansz, a Dutchman who sailed along the West Coast of Cape York Peninsula is considered to be the first European to reach the island continent in the antipodes. The first British sailors to the continent were shipwrecked there in 1622. In 1688 and 1691, the Dutchman William Dampier explored the continent and sent back bad reports of the miserable aboriginal people and the hostile land.

Captain James Cook landed at Botany Bay, which is near present-day Sydney on April 29, 1770. His reports of the land were better. He claimed the land for the British monarch King George III and called it New South Wales. Over ten years later, it was decided to make New South Wales a penal colony to keep British prisoners in. On January 26, 1788 the first fleet of ships carrying convicts from Britain landed at Sydney Cove. Other colonies of the British Empire on the Australian continent came up in the nineteenth century – Tasmania (1825), Western Australia (1829), South Australia (1836), Victoria (1851) and Queensland (1859). Each of these six colonies were separate and given powers of partial self-rule by the British Empire until 1901 when they decided to come together and form a federation which came to be what we now know of as the country of Australia.

The Bicentenary 'celebrations' of 1988 raised in a significant way questions about how the beginnings of 'Australia' as a nation have been portrayed in history, literature and popular culture. The celebration of January 26 as Australia Day or Foundation Day (which we in India celebrate as Republic Day) and of 1988 as the Bicentenary of the arrival of the first settlers have evoked reactions that have revealed the problems about assuming that there can be one simple national identity for

Australia. On the one hand, the Bicentenary was a commemoration, for the white settlers of British origin, of Governor Arthur Phillip's landing on Australian shores with the first fleet of convicts and the beginning of British colonial settlement nearly two hundred years ago. On the other hand, to the Aborigines it "commemorated a white invasion of Aboriginal lands and the destruction of so many Aboriginal people and their traditional way of life" (Lohrey, 150). As far as the Aborigines are concerned, the day historically holds next to no positive meaning for them. There is nothing worth celebrating in an event that was to eventually lead to the destruction of their cultures, civilization and relationship with the land. What is 'Australia Day' to the former group of British origin, is to the latter group of Aborigines 'Invasion Day'. To the former, it is marked by the need to create the myths of national foundation and beginnings that justify their presence on the island-continent. To the latter, it underscores the beginning of a history of loss and the need to question those myths of the Australian nation.

The choice of the arrival of Governor Phillip in 1788 over the constitution of the federal Australian nation state in 1901 is significant. In some ways, the discussion over identifying the actual beginning of Australia is very similar to the debate in India as to whether our nation is over 5,000 years (if we go back to the Indus valley civilization) or just over 50 years (if we take 1947 as the starting point). The choice reveals the nature of the foundational moment that was sought to be presented. Bob Hodge and Vijay Mishra comment:

> The Bicentenary took as its starting date the first invasion by the British in 1788, not the founding of the state of Australia itself, which happened in 1901, only 87 years before the 'Bicentenary'. There is here a characteristic Australian move in regard to history. On the one hand time is stretched out, to give a longer history to the nation than it has. But then that double century was drastically shortened and emptied out in the celebration, reduced to two moments juxtaposed: the pioneering moment, in which heroic blue-coats gazed at the empty land, and the contemporary moment, filled with cheering spectators. (ix)

Hodge and Mishra point out two areas worth noting about this choice in telling the story of the Australian nation and the making of the Australian national identity. The first is that in this choice, '[t]he decisive event was the act of invasion, not the gesture of independence'(x). This choice is one aspect that shows that Australia's 'postcolonial' status is different, especially in relation to countries that 'fought' for their independence. The British monarch still remains the titular head of the Australian state. The referendum held in the second half of the year 2000 on whether Australia should become a Republic or stay under the British Queen, decided in favour of monarchy.

More important about the way the history of Australia has been told for a long time is the way in which beginning this story with the arrival of the British, ignores the histories of the Aboriginal peoples that lived on the continent before 1788. Ignoring those histories erases the nature of the colonization of the Australian land. Traditional white histories present the arrival of the British as a peaceful and benevolent settlement. This justification of colonization by arguing that it was part of the 'white man's burden' to bring civilization and culture to the rest of the world is being questioned and revised. New histories attempt to show how colonization was racist in its thinking and led to the invasion of Aboriginal lands and the systematic destruction of Aboriginal cultures. Both of these became areas of contestation during the Bicentenary celebrations and continue to be so.

When Arthur Phillip claimed the territory of Australia as a British possession, he did so on the principle of *terra nullius* – 'empty land'. The land was declared uninhabited

and annexed to the British Empire. This allowed what was an act of violent conquest to be presented as an act of peaceful settlement. It also removed any obligation on the part of the British settlers to negotiate a treaty with the existing Aboriginal population. It is estimated that at that time, the Aborigines had been in occupation of the land for at least 40,000 years. With the arrival of the British, a period of dispossession, disease, and the destruction of indigenous cultures began for the Aborigines.

With the invasion and later colonization of Australia, land came to be under the control of the British Crown, with the colonial governor as the administrator. He controlled settlement, land purchases and leases. Ex-convicts and free settlers were leased land for development. The actual owners of the land – the Aborigines – were completely ignored in this process. The material and deep spiritual significance of the land within Aboriginal traditions was not understood or taken into account by the discourses of Australian nationhood – legal, historical or cultural.

Part of the social and cultural justification of this can be traced to racist ideas in anthropology that presented the Aborigines as inferior to the British colonizers. It was therefore argued that there was no need to treat the Aborigines as the equals of the colonizers. Even in official documents the Aborigines were regarded as either non-existent or half human. In some cases they were regarded almost like dogs, with all the negative connotations that such a connection can carry (Ward and Robertson, 334). Ross Fitzgerald quotes one such passage that shows how in some cases the Aborigines were portrayed in this way.

> Like his own half-wild dogs, the black could be frozen into shivering immobility or put to frenzied flight by people or things that provoked impressions of terror, or moved to yelps of delight or to racing round, or striking grotesque poses, or to expressing frantic excitement by any sort of clowning when what might have been menace proved, instead amusing or brilliantly productive. In his bushland home he lived in such insecurity that his immediate response to any situation of surprise was almost a conditional reflex – instantaneous: to strike, to leap aside, to fall and roll. Like his dogs, too, he would be cowed by direct and confident stare into a wary armed truce but would probably attack with fury if an opponent showed signs of fear, or ran away, or fell disabled....(72-73)

The British colonizers who considered themselves torchbearers of culture and civilizational values used their perception of the Aborigines to justify their inhuman treatment of them. The report of the National Inquiry into the separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from their families, which came out in 1980, exposed Australia's shameful history of racial control and cultural genocide or destruction. It dealt with the testimonies and records of the Stolen Generation of Aboriginal children who were separated from their families and brought up in white orphanages or foster homes in an effort to assimilate them so that they become part o mainstream white Australian values and culture. The stories of this generation, which are part of a biography revolution in Aboriginal writing, have revealed how hidden histories can question the motives behind and the ways in which national identities have been imagined and sold to the public. The history of massacres during frontier conflicts between the Aborigines and the white settlers is bad. So is the even more terrible history of the cultural genocide committed at the level of government policy. All of these things place a question mark on the nature of the culture and civilizational values that the settlers were so proud of.

It is thus not surprising that until recently any writing that dealt with Australia documented primarily the history of the white people in Australia. Such histories recorded the experiences of the settlers from their point of view and gave the wrong

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impression that before the coming of the Europeans, there was nobody living in Australia, hence the idea of the land as till then unknown and empty -*Terra Australis Incognita* (unknown) and *Terra Nullius* (empty).

2.2 SHAPING THE COURSE OF HISTORY

From the very outset, the land played a very decisive factor in shaping the history and literature of what came to be known as Australia. Dutch sailors reached Australian coasts as early as 1623, and the British explorer William Dampier reached the west coast of Australia in 1688. However it was in 1770 that Captain Cook reached the east coast of the continent and claimed possession of Botany Bay on the eastern coast for King George III. Trade and commerce were the original purpose behind Britain's desire to establish a colony in the Antipodes – which means on the other side of the world in relation to Britain. However, according to Ian Turner, Lieutenant James Cook reported of New Holland, as the land was then called: 'the Country itself so far as we know doth not produce any one thing that can become an article in trade to invite Europeans to fix a settlement upon it' (14).

The focus of the colonial plan thus shifted away from trade to other uses of the land. The overcrowding of British prisons and the loss of the newly independent American colonies made it necessary that a new place be found for deporting British prisoners. The unproductive yet vast nature of the land in Australia made it seem perfect for this purpose. As a result, the culture and ways of the Penal System became a part of the early history of New South Wales and Van Damien's Land (now known as Tasmania) from 1788 when Captain Arthur Phillip landed at Sydney Cove and became the first Governor of the colony of New South Wales.

The transportation of convicts continued for a little over half a century, during which Ian Turner documents that "150,000 men and women came to Australia in chains"(14). As a result of the policy of transportation, most of the people that came to live in these colonies in the early days from Britain were a mixed crowd coming mostly from the lower classes of the British society of those days.

> They were mainly illiterate peasants, workers, vagabonds, professional criminals, transported for thefts or crimes of violence against the person; but among them were a few (English, Scots, Irish, Canadian) transported for such 'gentleman's crimes' as forgery, embezzlement, or abduction (Turner, 14).

Besides the jailed, the rest of the population consisted of the civil and military officials who took care of the administration of the penal colony. The wealthy aristocracy who in Britain were the producers, consumers and patrons of literature did not find much representation in the social framework of that period. Furthermore, in those early years the concern and effort of the few in the colony who had, to whatever extent, enjoyed the cultural benefits of education and higher social status, was directed first towards survival and then to making a fortune.

It was inevitable then that most of the written output of the upper classes during this period was restricted to journals, letters or other pieces that held descriptions of the strange sights and experiences encountered by these new residents of the island continent. Turner comments on the way the land and historical situation shaped the literature of this period:

> Those who, in those first years, wrote of the antipodes were concerned mainly with the prestige or profit to be won from satisfying that intense interest in the novel and the picturesque, the history of the earth and the origins of man, which was a major product of the Enlightenment. And there

> was much in the new world that was novel and curious – the landscape, flora fauna, the Aborigines; but those who set out to depict these strange phenomena saw the land through English eyes. They looked at it as visitors, excited by the unfamiliarity of what they saw…; but they did not look yet as exiles, overwhelmed by the unfamiliarity and possessed by the intractability of the land – that was to come. (15)

Changes became visible in white Australian society as free settlers began to replace members of the Penal System as the ones who set the socio-cultural pace of this Antipodean British colony in the first two decades of the nineteenth century. Realizing the potential of the land to sustain sheep rearing, large holdings of land were devoted to the pastoral enterprise directed at an export market that satisfied the demands of the British textile industry. This trend initiated by the officers in the New South Wales Corps soon started a series of explorations that led to the founding of other settlements at places like Melbourne, Adelaide and Swan River. Until the economic depression of the 1840s the growing pastoral industry resulted in the establishment of towns. The gold rush of the 1850s too caused more clear changes in the population patterns as waves of immigration washed the shores of Australia in search of the precious yellow metal.

The gold rush began in 1851 when a discovery near Bathurst was made public. Soon gold was found in large deposits in Victoria at Clunes, Ballarat and Bendigo. Later discoveries in Queensland led to immigrants and people moving there as well. The news of these discoveries caused the workers within Australian colonies and immigrants from outside the island continent to come pouring in. Turner says, "Within the two gold decades, the population of the Australian colonies grew fourfold"(23). Till that time close to fifty percent of the population was of convict origin or descent. In the final analysis, the gold rush phenomena gave Australian colonies, capital and labour from overseas. This newfound prosperity, according to Turner, gave "a sense of permanence to the occupation of the land; the startlingly rapid, yet solid, growth of the colonial capitals provided a new pivot for colonial society"(25).

This consolidation of the colonies had two faces. On the one hand, the pastoralists assumed the leisured lifestyle of the powerful landed rural rich. Turner comments on them, "Socially, they were the most conservative stratum of colonial society; they aspired to a prestigious education and culture, but not to the searching of science or the storm of creative art"(25). The only things that roused them were threats to their property interests from land reformers in parliament. On the other hand, in the cities, intellectual and professional pursuits began to flourish. Libraries, universities, museums and galleries found their place in the city landscape and brought with them a heightened refinement of tastes and culture. However, Ian Turner notes that in the more practical atmosphere of the colonial middle-class society, subjects like law, medicine and the natural sciences had more takers than the liberal arts, classics and mathematics (26).

Growing literacy across the board also produced a growing demand for popular literature. However, the small size of local audiences forced the early Australian writers to publish only in magazines and newspapers in Australia; they had to look to publishing houses in London for publication in book form. According to Ian Turner, this was not a big issue with these writers as most of them were British-born and sought to write for the larger audience in Britain that enjoyed the exotic flavor of their works. Among this early group of writers who wrote about Australian life and landscape, **Catherine Spence** occasionally made the cities her theme, **Marcus Clarke** wrote about the Penal system, while **Boldrewood** made the Bush the setting of his work. Imitation of the English literary tradition and a desire to become a part of it marked their writing. As a result their influence on urban Australian culture was

very little, the newly literate people of the bush however responded very well to whatever was particularly Australian in this writing.

By the 1890s the concept of Australian nationhood began to become more concrete as the ideals of socialism, unionism and nationalism began to spread. The possibility of the six colonies being perceived as one nation began to emerge. In 1898 the Australian constitution was approved by referendum. Isolation and distance began to cut the umbilical cord from the Old World. By the 1900s, when most of the people of the continent's six colonies were native-born in Australia, the movement for federation caught on and gave a new angle to nationalism. In 1900 the British Parliament passed an Act to constitute the Commonwealth of Australia and all the states joined the Federation. 1901 witnessed the proclamation of the Federal Constitution as well as the first national election, leading to the opening of the first Federal Parliament on May 9. This was also the year the 'White Australia' Policy was enacted as a legislation that would prohibit permanent settlement by non-Europeans. Ian Turner quotes **Henry Lawson** in 'Jack Cornstalk'(1901):

> And I said to him, 'Jack!' as he gripped my hand fast,
> 'Oh, I hear that our country's a nation at last!' (36)

By the 1900s the publication scene in Australia too had changed. Many of the writers of this period were born on Australian soil. Their ties with the metropolitan centre were not that strong, nor was their orientation to cater to the tastes of the British reading public. Besides *The Bulletin*, *The Worker* and other papers that published their work, the publishing house of Angus and Robertson started publishing the books of Australian writers regularly from 1895, starting with **Banjo Patterson's** *The Man from Snowy River*.

The spread of railways, a State education network, faster communication networks and mechanization of farming ended the isolation of the bush communities and narrowed the cultural gulf between the urban and rural areas. "There were still (as indeed there remain today) many differences of response and taste; but the bush community, aided by universal literacy, was passing from active creation of a hand-tailored culture to passive reception of the ready-to-wear urban commodity"(Turner 38). Soon many writers began to reflect these trends by churning out more predictable narratives of adventure, humour or romance to supply the new breed of Australian paperback publishers such as the New South Wales Bookstall Company. Though the assertion of the nation and faith in social reform still surfaces strongly in the work of the writers of this genre and period, the middle-class origin and higher educational background of these writers made them turn to the cities for their intellectual environment.

The Australian participation in World War I (1914 – 18) and the tragedy of Gallipoli – where many soldiers from Australia and New Zealand died fighting a European war under the British banner—were important in the nation's formation of an identity different from that of Britain. The great world Depression that darkened the interwar years left nearly one-third of the Australian workforce unemployed by 1931. World War II (1939 – 1945), which brought the theatres of war closer to the Antipodes due to the threat from Japan, too was another watermark in the nation's history. It accelerated industrialization and opened Australia to both alliances with America and an awareness that it was part of Asia. The Vietnam War of 1965 brought together these trends and heralded the repercussions they would have for the nation and its construction of a national identity. The influx of immigrants from Southern Europe and Asia that followed in the postwar years set the stage for a change towards a more multicultural paradigm of national consciousness and social policy.

2.3 ACKNOWLEDGING ABORIGINAL OWNERSHIP

Most of the histories of Australia written in the past neglected the experience of Aboriginal peoples, women and members of other ethnic or racial minorities. They ignored the fact that the so-called 'settler society' was in actuality the product of white invasion and dispossession (Davidson, 24). The Aborigines were not considered official citizens of Australia and their numbers were not even counted in official censuses. It was assumed that they were a part of the population that would soon be extinct or become fully assimilated into the white population. Selective Immigration policies sought to ensure that Asians would not be admitted into Australia or allowed to settle down there in substantial numbers. One of the early acts of the Australian colonial government was to introduce the 'White Australia policy', which controlled the right of settlement for Europeans only. This policy was supported by all the groups and parties within the political spectrum and reflected the predominantly white population profile they wished to maintain for the island-continent.

Aboriginal land had been forcibly taken by the State-Federal government without compensation from the time of the arrival of the colonizers. Aboriginal people were physically and often violently removed from the land they had previously freely roamed and kept segregated in government reserves or church missions. Their children were forcibly taken away for adoption by white foster parents or placed in institutions that were supposed to guide them towards the goal of assimilation – becoming part of mainstream Australian culture and thinking. They were denied land rights or titles – they could neither own nor till the land. It was then argued by some government officials and policy makers that Aborigines were not advanced enough to be granted freehold land. The racist attitude of the response of Mr. Ken Tomkins – the Queensland State Minister for Aboriginal and Island affairs—when asked to comment on the Aboriginal struggle for land rights in October 1982 is quite evident:

> Blacks do not understand freehold tenure and are not used to a lot of money. They live out in areas where they don't use it much. They catch birds and goanas and fish and this sort of thing .... The women do not wear 'very expensive dresses' and neither do the men. The fact that they drink a lot now doesn't do them any good. They just can't do it. Years ago when they didn't want to drink they were very good people ....' (Ward and Robertson, 340-41)

Meanwhile the Aborigines had begun to organise against the official government policies of paternalism – which assumed that the Aborigines as a race needed to be taken care of like children—and assimilation in the 1950s and 1960s. The movements for land rights and empowerment were led by leaders like Charles Perkins from the late 1960s onwards. Soon this mobilization began to bear fruit in terms of social reform, greater civic rights and a greater public awareness of Aboriginal issues. On 10 May 1962, the national vote was given to Aborigines. In 1962 the Institute for Aboriginal Studies was established and in 1965 reforms such as the establishment of the Aboriginal Welfare Conference was put into force. The 1967 referendum granted citizenship rights to Aborigines, allowing them to be counted for the purpose of the national census. There was however strong resistance, to this kind of social reform that empowered the Aborigines, from vested interests in the state governments of Queensland and Western Australia, as well as from mining companies and the landed rural population. This was because in these regions it was felt that these kinds of reforms would ultimately lead to the land being returned to Aborigines. Since farming and mining were very important in these areas this was a big threat to the white people involved in these businesses.

Despite the racial prejudice that has been directed towards them, the Aborigines have continued to fight for their ancestral land. Some have even taken legal action. The high watermark of the land rights movements was the Mabo judgement (Mabo vs. Queensland) resulting in the historic decision of 1992. Before 1992, there had been no legal recognition of pre-existing rights of the indigenous peoples of Australia to their lands and resources. The High Court's decision granted land title or claims to the Aboriginal Torres Strait Islanders in the Mabo judgement. This decision strengthened the legal position of native title against action by the State and Territory governments. The provisions of this judgement firmly provided "against removal of the indigenous peoples from their land other than with their free and informed consent, after agreement on just and fair compensation and where possible, with the option of return"(Nettheim, 42). As a result of this High Court decision, the Native Title Act of 1993 was enacted by the Australian federal Parliament, which set out among other things, to recognize and protect native title.

The High Court's decision was significant in many respects. **Firstly**, it corrected the wrong perception that Australia did not belong to anybody before the coming of the white man. **Secondly**, it will serve as a guide and beacon for any future cases concerning native land and compensation to the Aborigines for the wrongs inflicted on them. **Thirdly**, it brought the issue of land ownership in Australia into sharp focus. This has had far-reaching influence in the legal, political and economic spheres in Australia. Since the landmark High Court decision in the Mabo case of 3 June1992, the fallacy that Australia had been an empty land prior to 1788, was laid to rest and the Native Title Act of 1993 put in the law the recognition of native title or claim to the land.

This has not failed to have its repercussions in the field of cultural production and history writing in Australia. Bob Hodge and Vijay Mishra comment in their preface to *Dark Side of the Dream: Australian literature and the postcolonial mind*:

> The study of Australian history and literature in schools and universities was able to marginalise Aboriginal history and silence Aboriginal voices, acting in parallel to the repressive government policies that attempted to 'eliminate' the 'Aboriginal problem'. This pattern has now been broken. Aborigines are at last being written back into the history of Australia. In literature and art, Aboriginal creativity is being recognised and valued as a major component of Australian cultural production. Recent histories of Australian literature can now be expected to have a (small) section at the end devoted to Aboriginal writers. Cultural justice, however belated, now seems to have come. (xiv)

2.4 EARLY SETTLER IMAGES OF THE LAND

The nature of the land strongly influenced the course of settler history in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. It also left a mark in the cultural consciousness of the new arrivals to the land. The land became the most prominent thing against which the identity of the settlers could be constructed. By the end of the nineteenth century, myths of the new land had taken formal literary shape in Australia in the writing of the early settlers. The experience of the settlers and the weekly *Bulletin* fuelled the formation and establishment of the myths that linked the land and the early white settlers.

According to John Rickard "the function of the myth was to idealise the men and women who confronted the environment" (65). He details two different variations of the myth linked to the land at two connected periods of the history of white settlement. **First**, the traditional 'Australian legend' highlights the life of the shearers and migratory workforce of the Outback (the Australian word for a remote settlement

in the interiors of the land) recruited from the convicts or their descendants. According to Rickard, in the versions of this legend that have found their way into ballads and stories, the image of the travelling bushman was an idealized personification of the environment's ability to transform the convict attitudes of disrespect for authority and crime into democratic and collectivist ideals that eventually earned him the status of a cultural hero (65). Rickard notes that, most often, this was a male centered legend. **Second**, by contrast, the later pioneer legends focused on the life of settlers attempting to make a part of the land their home. These incorporated women to a greater extent, even though the focus remained on men and their lives. Another point of difference with the bushman legends was that later became the odds against which the pioneers struggled and overcame to establish their presence in the land.

The early writers also had to invent ways of presenting the vastly different environment and atmosphere of the island-continent. The seasons there were reversed with summer peaking in December and winter in June. The flora and fauna too seemed so different from anything in the metropolitan centre. Antipodean inversion thus became one device for transmitting the land's alienness. Rickard quotes **Marcus Clarke** as having written thus in 1874:

> In Australia alone is to be found the Grotesque, the Weird, —the strange scribblings of Nature learning how to write. Some see beauty in our trees without shade, our flowers without perfume, our birds who cannot fly, and our beasts who have not yet learned to walk on all fours. But the dweller in the wilderness acknowledges the subtle charm of this fantastic land of monstrosities. ... The phantasmagoria of the wild dreamland called the Bush interprets itself, and he begins to understand why free Esau loved his heritage of desert-sand better than all the bountiful richness of Egypt. (66-67)

John Rickard argues that it was a simple change to move from presenting the alienness of the land to depicting a certain alienation or distance from it. **Henry Lawson**, who had a major hand in developing the popular image of the Bush, according to Rickard, celebrated the spirit of the white bush folk but depicted the outback as bleak and unrelenting. Another aspect of this early depiction was that the celebration of the bush was at the expense of the city. The ballads of **Banjo Paterson** and the bushman's bible the *Bulletin* encouraged the construction of this opposition. The Bush and its mores were seen as authentically Australian.

The Australian legends, Bush lore and pioneer myths have in recent times been open to much criticism on the grounds of being sexist because they focussed mainly on the male point of view and did not inscribe the reality of contact between the settlers and Aborigines. They have also been seen as no longer satisfactory symbols to represent the Australian identity in the era of multiculturalism.

These images, however, are an important barometer of the times and socio-cultural environment that produced them. For example, John Rickard argues that the celebration of the pioneers was a way to replace the convict as victim by focusing on the settler as the agent of progress and national consciousness (72). He feels the emergence of this myth did not, therefore, so much reflect social reality as a historical socio-cultural need to change a cultural identity and construct a more favourable one. He also points out that its romanticizing of the past involved a kind of falsification through selectively presenting things. For example, in assuming a tradition of alienation from a harsh environment the myth structure ignored the different variety of environments actually encountered by the early settlers, from the bays and inlets of Sydney Harbour to the deserts of Central Australia. Like the larger narratives of history and literature, cultural symbols and myths too can be read both with and

against the grain to reveal much about the society that produced and perpetuated them.

2.5 LET US SUM UP

The land and history of Australia are inseparably linked. The connection of the two has been actual as well as discursive. The outcome of the links have had results that are political as well as socio-cultural. Be it in history, the law or legends, the way the land has been presented is very important in the context of Australian studies in general and the study of Australian literature in particular. In all these cases it is important to read the discourses as they are presented as well as to read between the lines and against the stated intention of their texts.

2.6 QUESTIONS

1. Discuss why the question of beginnings is an important one in relation to Australia's construction of history.
2. Discuss the position of the Aborigines with regard to the land and writing of history in Australia.
3. What do some of the early settler myths and legends about the land reveal?

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UNIT 3 AUSTRALIA – PEOPLE AND CULTURE

Structure

1.0 Objectives
1.1 Cultural Background to British Settlement
1.2 Cultural Control of Aborigines
1.3 'White' Australia
1.4 Cultural Fissures – Internal and External
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  3.4.3 City and Bush
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3.0 OBJECTIVES

This Unit will discuss the socio-cultural backdrop in Britain, which shaped the nature of British colonization in Australia. It will look into the reasons behind Australian policies that sought to construct a national identity through policies that sought to control the cultural influence of Aborigines and immigrants. It will also attempt to hint at some of the cultural divisions that are part of white Australian society and can be used to question its presentation of itself as a homogeneous group. Finally it will look at some of the ideas and implications of the policy of multiculturalism in the changing Australian context.

3.1 CULTURAL BACKGROUND TO BRITISH SETTLEMENT

During the sixteenth and the seventeenth centuries, England and the rest of the British Isles was undergoing rapid socio-cultural changes because of the beginning of the Agrarian and Industrial Revolutions. In keeping with certain agrarian reforms of the time, known as the Enclosure System, people with small farms and land holdings were forcibly removed from their property. Their land was then given to aristocrats and the landed gentry allowing the consolidation of land holdings and the application of economies of scale to farming. It was argued that it would be more profitable to farm one large farm holding than it would be for several small holdings to be farmed separately. The people dispossessed by these developments were driven to the towns in search of employment and often ended up providing cheap labour to the industries growing there. The social displacement produced by the combined effect of the Agrarian and Industrial Revolutions had profound socio-economic and political effects. It led to the overcrowding of industrial towns, unemployment and other accompanying social evils. Crime was soon on the increase and English prisons were bursting at the seams with convicted criminals.

It was during the same period that England was also emerging as a great naval and expansionist power. When Australia was 'discovered' by Captain Cook, the British government decided to establish a colony at Botany Bay – the site of Cook's first landing. Eventually, this colony served several purposes with respect to the colonial prisons in Britain. Delys Bird in 'The 'Settling' of English' posits:

> The British Government's 1786 decision to establish a penal colony at Botany Bay was the outcome of an ongoing debate about how to deal with

> extreme overcrowding in English gaols. That situation had been exacerbated by the loss of the American colonies as a dumping ground for the English 'criminal' class after Independence. The decision was bolstered by imperial objectives: a desire to thwart French colonial advancement, the need to establish a southern trading post, and the recognition of the advantages of having easy access to New Zealand flax and Norfolk island pine for ships' ropes and masts. Settlement of the South Land was represented in English according to a range of discourses – of discovery, economic interest, defence, natural history and science, law and punishment and so on – and justified by Enlightenment and religious imperatives. Late eighteenth century colonisers believed their God-given duty was to improve the natural landscape of the new world by making it productive; in addition its indigenous inhabitants would be Christianised and civilised. (23)

There was also another social agenda at work in the whole process of British colonization. On the completion of their jail terms, the ex-convicts were given the option of settling in the colony under government assistance. In *A Spirit of Play: The making of Australian consciousness*, David Malouf calls this government plan to settle the former convicts in Australia as the outcome of the "need to balance deterrence, or as they would have called it, terror with the opportunity to reform. Botany Bay was not just a dumping ground for unwanted criminals; it was also an experiment in reformation, in using the rejects of one society to create another" (12). The former convicts were given land to develop; some provided itinerant or permanent labour to the then thriving wool industry as shepherds (drovers) and shearers, while still others worked in the stations as drivers or carters. This group of individuals and their hard, adventurous lives became part of popular myths that formed the cultural legacy of the Australian legend of the Bush.

This whole British exercise in empire building and experiment in social reform had terribly negative effects on the lives of the Aboriginal people who resided in the land before the arrival of the British. The social and cultural effects on the Aboriginal communities bear witness to another face of the cultural nature of European colonization. The nature of their dispossession or loss was founded on various cultural assumptions. According to these beliefs, the Aborigines were seen as a dying race in accordance with social Darwinist ideas. Darwin believed in the survival of the fittest. It was believed that the Aborigines as a race were not developed enough to survive alongside the British. Another approach was to seek to paternally protect them by bringing them to the fold of what the colonizers saw as the enlightening values of civilization and Christianity. British settlement was portrayed as benevolent and the spotlight was turned away from a violent history of frontier conflict and cultural destruction.

Racist ideologies continued even though in the second half of the nineteenth century Aborigines became an important source of labour, especially in the pastoral industries of northern Australia. The racist ideology was employed to justify the lower wages paid to Aborigines as well as their segregation on reserves and missions which would provide a supply of cheap labour dependant for their livelihood on work in local stations and farms.

After the initial establishment of the penal colony, the arrival of free settlers and the exploration of lands beyond Botany Bay, a phase during which the cultural fabric of the colony was both made strong and transformed, came into play in the second half of the nineteenth century. This was the period during which the tainted legacy of having started off as a penal colony was sought to be distanced from, as cultural lore changed its focus from the former convict turned bushman to the newly arriving free pioneers.

According to Hancock (89-90), this period was dominated by **three themes** that reflected the changing social and cultural models of white Australian society. **The first** of these was the dramatic growth of economic activity resulting from the expansion of the pastoral and mining industries and of the growth of urban centres. This progressively changed the cultural focus from the outback to the newly growing towns and cities. This cultural shift from a rural agrarian or pastoral way of life marked by hardship and the pioneering spirit to an industrial urban one marked by opportunities and a higher standard of living came to be gradually reflected in the settler literature and popular culture of the times, in the thematic change from the bush to cityscapes. The 'gold rushes' of the 1850s provided some stimulus to this growing trend towards urbanization, especially in Victoria, but the important factors behind the sustained economic boom of 1860-90 were migration, British capital investment and active colonial participation in the development of public works, pastoral farming, mining, small scale manufacturing and urban affairs.

The **second theme** was the growth of responsible and democratic government. All the colonies sought to govern their affairs independently from British government supervision. Efforts in this direction ensured that by 1901 a federal constitution giving key powers to the states was enacted. There was also a clear interest in the concept of an Australian identity distinct from the metropolitan British or European centre. This attempt to invent and popularize a distinctive nationalism formed the **third theme** dominating Australia's history in the latter part of the nineteenth century. With it was established the various attempts to make a discrete cultural identity which used the Australian nation space as a reference point. Davidson (24) comments on how historians taking the cue on the need for a national identity have 'manufactured our past'. He says:

> In Australia, without the taints of a superior world-culture in our midst, there is a more general acceptance that the nation has been invented.

As discussed earlier, the identity sought to be established was marked by traces of what it sought to exclude and ignore. The historical legacy of having been a British penal colony, or the unpleasant conflicts and encounters with the native Aborigines were dealt with by employing neutralizing cultural tactics such as romanticizing or undermining their significance. The culture of the penal colony became material for romantic ballads and stories while the stories of the conflict between the Aborigines and settlers were hardly considered worth telling. The policies created to manage the Aboriginal population in the twentieth century were similar to policies created to control the population changes resulting out of the entry of immigrants from various backgrounds. Both were part of efforts to shape a national identity through cultural policies. As waves of immigration washed the Australian shores and brought together a mixture of people from different backgrounds, the nature of the identity sought to be manufactured had to change. The quest of new arrivals to the island-continent, to be included in the attempts to make an Australian identity, ran at odds with the traditional 'White Australia' policies that had initially controlled immigration and settlement. The changing social and cultural relationship between the Aborigines and new immigrants was clearly revealed in government policies directed towards containing and controlling cultural difference.

3.2 CULTURAL CONTROL OF ABORIGINES

Henry Reynolds in *Frontier: Aborigines, Settlers and Land* outlines some of the ways of thinking that determined the cultural response of the newly arrived settlers to the Aborigines. According to him, many of the early settlers were of the opinion that the elimination of the Aborigines would be a positive development (58-62). A counter opinion came up in the 1830s when a small group of humanitarian officials and

members of the church sought to protect Aboriginal people and culture from the destructive results of settlement (83-88). Attempts at conversion to Christianity and British notions of civilization, however, had the actual effect of increasing the decline in numbers of Aborigines and were met with pockets of Aboriginal resistance that reinforced the belief that the Aborigines were obstinate and hard to help.

However, by the second half of the nineteenth century both these trends had developed into rather oppressive modes of cultural destruction albeit sometimes from a paternalistic attitude. These were made worse by social Darwinist ideas, which became popular in the 1860s (109-123) and argued that the Aborigines were a dying race that the process of natural selection would lead to extinction. It was during this period that the Aboriginal population began to be tapped for the purpose of providing cheap labour to pastoral stations. Government reserves and church missions inadvertently became suppliers of this highly exploited labour force.

According to Stephen Garton in 'Aboriginal History', the early years of the twentieth century was marked by the emergence of more unified native policies (193-95). He says, at that time a theory of eugenic that "argued that western civilization was being undermined because the unfit (the poor, drunks, lunatics and lower races) were breeding at a faster rate than the fit"(193) became popular. The comparatively high birth rate of Aborigines and the problem of children of mixed descent began to be addressed through new 'protection' policies. 'Full-blood' Aborigines were segregated in government reserves and many children of mixed descent, especially those with fair complexions, were taken from their parents and sent to orphanages or foster parents in an effort to urge their assimilation with the white population. Garton comments on this supposedly liberal paternalism:

> In this framework the Aborigines were the students or the children while white reformers were the guardians or fathers who would educate the Aborigines and facilitate their assimilation into wider society. ...While the assimilationist position was humanitarian, it denied Aborigines self-determination. (195)

The policies of assimilation reached their high watermark during the 1950s and 1960s. They resulted in the 'Stolen Generation' of Aboriginal children whose stories documented in autobiographies, research efforts and reports of bodies such as the Human Rights and Equal Opportunities Commission question the reality of what has been constructed as Australia's history and culture. Debates about racism and its place in the colonial enterprise—which had till then claimed to have been a civilizing mission – that emerged in the second half of the twentieth century have shown these cultural policies in a very bad light. The need for the Australian nation to redefine itself has been underlined.

3.3 'WHITE' AUSTRALIA

Another unpleasant aspect of Australia's cultural policies is found in the 'White Australia' policies employed to regulate the racial nature of immigration. As settlements expanded and the wool industry grew particularly in the 1820s, the demand for farm hands and other workers became more urgent. From 1830 to 1850 many migrants, especially with government assistance from Britain, moved to Australia. During this period there were many men in Britain who needed jobs and such migration helped solve their unemployment problem. Most of these migrants were men of Anglo-Saxon or Anglo-Celtic descent and the migration policy favored British subjects. **David Malouf** accounts thus for this policy:

> The idea grew up that if we could only keep ourselves pure in a contaminated world – morally pure but racially pure, too – it would one day be our privilege as a nation, to carry forward into history the British ideal. (78)

As an outcome of this policy, therefore, white Anglo-Saxon British people formed the group, which was most encouraged to migrate to Australia during the early years. However, with the discovery of gold and the ensuing gold rush, the pattern of migration changed. Europeans and Americans were allowed to come to Australia to look for gold, look for jobs, to set up business or even to settle. Within the space of a decade, the Australian population doubled. Even at this point, the demographic composition of the population remained mainly and comfortably 'white'.

However, by the 1890s, this wave of migration had almost stopped due to the great economic Depression. With the shrinking supply of white labour, the Australian colonial government looked for labour elsewhere. It was only then that non-Europeans, non-white colored workers, mostly of Asian origin, were allowed in to provide cheap labour in the sheep farms inland, in the sugar plantations of Queensland and in the building industry. Restrictions were however, put on their settling in Australia.

The white Australian working class far from appreciated this change of policy to allow non-whites to immigrate to Australia. The working people feared that coloured immigration would bring about lower wages and a fall in the standard of living. The following prayer of waterside workers who lived through the Depression years in the port town of Melbourne, clearly describes the hatred and violence caused by the struggle for too few jobs:

> The Lord above, send down a dove,
> With wings as sharp as razors
> To slit the throats of bloody scabs
> Who cut down poor man's wages
> (Ward and Robertson, 72)

Discussing the same theme Lowenstein in *The Immigrants* places this fear in the context of the unique position and geography of Australia. She explains it thus:

> This fear of strangers, this dislike of people who are not white and Anglo-Saxon, is an important strand of our history, and economic factors were not its only cause. Our isolation in the Pacific, a huge land with a tiny white population surrounded by people of totally alien culture and way of life, has helped to make us paranoid. We have felt surrounded, convinced that the hungry people of Asia have their eyes on our empty deserts. Cheap labour therefore was a threat to living standards and coloured cheap labour affronted the ideal of a free homogenous white Australia. (5)

Thus it is from this circle of fear that we can trace the seeds of racism and discrimination being sown in Australia. The perception that Australia belongs to and was built by white Anglo-Saxon British people continued to dominate the writings of this period. Bennett and Strauss argue that the European settlement, the traumatic consequences of black Australians, the discovery of gold, large scale white and non-white immigration to Australia, Australia's involvement in the two World Wars and in the Vietnam War were some of the major significant events in Australian history. '[E]ach of them had immediate and long term influences on Australia's thinking and writing about themselves, and at each of these points Australians asked themselves difficult questions about hope and despair, power and marginality, love and death' (4).

In the post World War years, the influx of immigrants from South Eastern Europe and Asia became more pronounced. This contributed to about half the growth of the population. The justification for the large immigrant intake was that it was in the interest of building the nation's economy, the population and defense. Immigration became a form of nation building. 'Populate or perish' became adopted at the level of policy change. Initially, the cultural effect of this was sought to be controlled by setting up policies that shamelessly recommended that both Aborigines and new immigrants assimilate into mainstream white Australian culture. More recently, multiculturalism was adopted as the containing strategy for controlling the cultural diversity of Australian society.

Official Australian policies have of late been reduced in force because of the realization that there is a need to add to the labour force and intellectual resource pool of the nation. With increased economic globalization and the formation of strategic trade regional blocks, Australia has realized it has much to lose by not seeing itself as part of Asia. While Australia's metropolitan cities have for the most part incorporated these waves of immigrants with a willing acceptance of the inevitability of a cosmopolitan mix of cultures, white cultural nationalism has from time to time reared its head. Most recently in the passion that Pauline Hanson (political leader) was able to whip up when her One Nation Party recommended a more selective immigration policy and a less compromising stand towards the Aborigines. The more dominant discourses in Australia have however moved away from this standpoint and seek to give rise to cultural frameworks that are more inclusive and open to difference.

3.4 CULTURAL FISSURES–INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL

3.4.1 Breaking Free of British Moulds

> Land and language have been the two major rival determinants of written literature in Australia.... A sense of exile may, through the perspective of distance, sharpen appreciation and assessment of the homeland, but it can also be an inhibiting factor in coming to terms with the new circumstances.
>
> The contrast between gloom and hope runs roughly parallel to the contrast between colonialism and nationalism in the first century or so of settlement. Language, with its often unrecognized cultural biases, tended to pull the settlers back towards British values. The land, with its many phenomena unnameable in the English language, tended to pull them towards a sense of national uniqueness. (Goodwin, 1)

In 1788 white settlers, who sought to set up a British penal colony in Australia, brought to the Antipodes the English language, printing technology as well as assumed ideas about culture and literature. The realities that faced them in the new land defied and stretched the conceptual boundaries of the language, culture and literary models the white settlers had previously been working within. These tensions were heightened in later periods of the history of settled Australia by internal divisions within the white settler community itself, as well as the contact between the indigenous cultures of Australia or non-English speaking immigrant cultures and the white settler cultures.

Many early white settlers in Australia tried to create a copy of British culture. The island nation in Europe formed the model for the island continent in the antipodes. Literary and other artistic creations became an effort to translate new unfamiliar Australian realities into more familiar British cultural terms.

> Underlying the seeming stability of the early areas of settlement, there was the loneliness of exile, and buried still deeper, fear of the Australian unknown – dark uncertainties which they sought to dispel by...recreating familiar social patterns and forcing the environment into familiar images and moulds. (Turner 20)

However, the initial tendency to turn back to British cultural values and forms had eventually to give way to the creation of new or modified ways of cultural expression that were better suited to meet the new demands of experiences in the new land. With the felt need for a distinct Australian identity that stepped out of the shadow and moulds of a British colonial identity, there was an attempt to define identity in terms of difference and uniqueness. Language, literary forms and other cultural products were to be roped in for this endeavour.

The cultural values that gained importance in the frontier outback owed much more to the demands of survival in that environment than to anything drawn from their British legacy. The celebration of mateship with its resonances of courage, competence, hospitality and the lack of social pretension was born out of the need to confront the realities of a travelling life in the Bush. The Bush achieved the status of a national cultural legend for the white settler community as it fostered cultural values all its own that initially manifested itself artistically through ballads and narratives. These, though orally transmitted at first, came to be canonized in white Australian literature as unique and almost symbolic of the life and spirit of settler Australia. On one level, this was an attempt to establish ways of linguistic and literary expression in a cultural framework seen essentially as distinctly Australian whatever its roots may be in a colonial British legacy.

According to Ken Goodwin, the need to shape language, literary and cultural forms to reflect changing Australian realities and images projected for public consumption still remains. As a matter of fact, the demand for a more flexible and adaptive model and patterns of writing are increasing in the face of multiculturalism. He avers:

> Australia still contains substantial numbers of advocates for cultural colonialism (the 'cultural cringe'), who emphasize commonality with and derivativeness from Britain. They exist alongside vociferous nationalists – advocates, for instance, of republicanism and a new flag – and those who reject both colonialism and nationalism in favour of either internationalism (that is, emancipation from the pull of both language and land) or of personal withdrawal and self-identification (that is, emancipation from all social pressures, expectations and categories). (Goodwin, 2)

To these socio-cultural groups within the white community, Goodwin adds Aborigines and non-English speaking migrants. "Both groups have cause to express a sense of alienation from land and from language. Both have lost their homelands and both are required to use an alien language" (2). Since their voices and discourses are being promised a hearing within the national space, it becomes imperative, that not only the British, but also the traditional 'white' Australian moulds too must be broken free of.

3.4.2 The Anglo-Saxon/Anglo-Celtic Divide

The initial white settler communities included a high proportion of convicts, administrative officers and settlers of Irish origin. As a result, the cultural and political tendencies of this community revealed itself quite clearly in the early literature of Australia. The strains of Republicanism and the desire for a cultural identity that cuts loose from the British umbilical cord too has its strongest roots here.

To those of Anglo-Celtic descent, Australia represented an opportunity to break free from the colonial legacy that chained Ireland to Great Britain. To those of Anglo-Saxon origin the primary impulse was to continue the British heritage in the new land. Culturally, this manifested itself at times as two distinct trends in literary output and political ideas.

Ian Turner argues that while upper class literature and art tried to copy British models, the convict ballads and narratives that constituted the oral literature of the settler community "carried a defiant challenge that had in it as much of Irish protest against oppression as of the usual criminal's sense of persecution.". Turner goes on to give an example of his position by quoting:

> I'd rather range the bush around, like dingo or kangaroo,
> Than work one hour for Government,' said Bold Jack Donahoe. (20)

The myth of 'White' Australia would seek to construct an appearance of uniformity in the early white settler community that populated Australia in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. This was of course a deviation from truth, which like most attempts to make a single uniform social block ignores divisions and internal differences. The cultural divide between those settlers of Anglo-Saxon descent and those of Anglo-Celtic or Irish descent was most pronounced in its manifestations during the early phase of Australian settlement. Later, the external threat from new waves of immigration pushed differences to the background. However, recent debates like the referendum in 2000 to determine whether Australia should officially become a Republic, doing away with the Queen of England's titular position as head of state, can be traced back in part to impulses in this initial divide.

3.4.3 City and Bush

Besides a tension seen in early Australian literature between British values and Irish values, there soon developed an opposition between the cultures of the city and the bush. Once the settler communities began to tap the agricultural, pastoral and mineral potential of the Australian land, urbanization was only a matter of time. According to Ken Goodwin, a division between the cultures of the city and the bush began to reveal itself in the literature produced in the latter half of the nineteenth century. "The expression 'Sydney or the bush' is the result of an urban choice for the easier life of the city and contempt for the discomforts and lack of pastimes in the bush"(3).

This division or dichotomy has historical roots and present-day cultural impact. As early settler communities were predominantly based in the country, the earliest legends and folklore of white Australia focus on the socio-cultural values and traditions of that background. The popularity of Bush ballads, the figure of the roaming Bushman and the pioneer legends, as cultural symbols, add to the conception of the Bush and the country an aura of the authentically Australian. This was especially important at the time when the main impulse was the construction of a national identity built around distinct 'white' cultural symbols and myths. The city, however is slowly taking that place in the cultural consciousness as the cosmopolitan face of multicultural Australia is being projected over its more conservative rural counterpart, which has, in any case, come a long way from the images immortalized by traditional Bush lore. Russel Ward writes about this change in 'The Australian Legend':

> Up to 1900 the prestige of the bushman seems to have been greater than that of the townsman. In life as in folklore the man from "up the country" was usually regarded as a romantic and admirable figure. The attitude towards him was reminiscent, in some interesting ways, of that towards the "noble savage" in the eighteenth century. ...in general, he had more influence on the

manner and *mores* of the city-dweller than the latter had on his. The tide turned somewhere between 1900 and 1918. Even today the tradition of the "noble bushman" is still very strong in both literature and folklore, but at least since the publication in 1899 of *On Our Selection*, it has been counterpoised by the opposing tradition of "Dad and Mum, Dave and Mabel".... Since the early days of federation the capital cities have grown rapidly both in prestige and their relative share of state populations, and bushmen are now usually willing to be taken for city-dwellers where formerly the reverse was the case. (183)

3.5 MULTICULTURALISM – POLICY AND PRACTICE

Australian history in the second half of the twentieth century has been marked by several government policies to control the cultural features of the social makeup of Australia. From 1947 to 1964 the official policy was one of assimilation and during 1964 to 1973 it was one of integration. Both these policies stressed the need for people from other cultural backgrounds to adopt the cultural practices and values of the politically powerful white mainstream society. In 1973 under Prime Minister Whitlam Australia was declared a multicultural society.

Multiculturalism is a policy that is used to manage effectively the reality that there is much cultural diversity in Australian society. In a multicultural society certain basic values of civil society are given importance along with the assurance that specific ethnic and cultural values and practices will be respected. The Constitution, political system and legal system are above these specific cultural aspects, however. In Australia, Multiculturalism has had two phases. In the **first phase** organisations built around non-English speaking groups were encouraged. Ethnic broadcasting – radio and television – was started. Interpreter services and education programmes for migrants were also started. The **second phase** dealt with the way government and other organisations were structured with the aim that inequality and social disadvantage be removed.

The Prime Minister's statement on 'Multicultural Principles' issued in 1995 defines the policy dimensions of Multiculturalism. The opening part of the text is a list of statistics that are used to explain the need for a multicultural policy of control and reads:

> Multicultural policies respond to the need to manage Australia's diversity in the interests of the individual and society as a whole....
>
> As a multicultural society, Australia is unique among the nations of the world. Australia's indigenous communities are extremely diverse and pluralistic. There were around 750 indigenous languages in Australia at the time of permanent European settlement in 1788. Since that time people from every corner of the globe have made Australia their home. The 1991 census shows that: 42% of our population were either born overseas or have at least one parent who was born overseas; 23% were either born in a non-English speaking country or have at least one parent from such a country; workers from non-English speaking backgrounds make up some 15% of the total Australian work force; and 17% of the Australian population speak a language other than English at home. It has been estimated that some 21% of Australia's 800,000 small businesses are owned and operated by people whose first language is not English.

The actual 'Multicultural Compact' reads:

> We share this land with the first Australians who hold a unique position in our society. As a result of immigration we also share a wealth of cultures, histories and traditions. What unites us as a nation is our common identity – our first loyalty – to Australia.
>
> Australia expects certain commitments from all members of the community, regardless of their background:
>
> - to share an overriding loyalty to Australia, its interest and future;
> - to accept the basic structures and principles of Australian society – the rule of law, tolerance, equality of opportunity, Parliamentary democracy, freedom of speech and religion, English as a national language, and equality of the sexes and races; and
> - to acknowledge the right to express one's own culture and beliefs involves a reciprocal responsibility to accept the right of others to express their views and values.

In return Australia promises "equality of access, opportunity and participation in the social, political and economic life of Australia", "fair and equitable" responsiveness to "cultural diversity" at the institutional level, recognition of "the potential contribution of all Australians" and "opportunities for all Australians to acquire and develop proficiency in English and in languages other than English' in order to foster "cross cultural understanding". The three cultural policy dimensions of the compact are "the development of a more inclusive national identity" to allow the expression of different cultural identities, equal access to social justice and fostering "productive diversity" in the work place.

Multiculturalism is itself not a simple concept or practice. For example, in the three settler communities emerging predominantly out of British colonialism – America, Canada and Australia – three different models of multiculturalism are supposed to be in practice. The **'melting pot'** version of the USA works towards the eventual inclusion of differences into a broadly common American cultural framework. The cultural **'mosaic'** model of Canada sees differences as remaining discrete and distinct while still coexisting functionally. Australia claims to have a **'salad bowl'** variety of multiculturalism, wherein differences remain distinct yet adding flavor to the loosely connected whole.

The policy began to officially take shape when in 1988 John Howard initiated the 'One Australia' debates. These led to the formulation of the National Agenda of 1989—a forerunner of the 1995 Multicultural statement. Kay Anderson says, "Multiculturalism is an officially endorsed set of principles designed to manage ethnic diversity"(69). Anderson continues that on the theoretical plane of policy-making, multiculturalism seems to mark a significant shift away from the closed cultural orientation that was a legacy of the racist model inherited from colonialism:

> Multiculturalism is a harmonious metaphor for fashioning the concept of nation. In its emphasis on 'equality of respect', 'the equivalence of cultures', and 'the benefits of cultural diversity', it can be made to signal a distinct break with the classically racist policies of the period in Australian history to the end of World War II, and the assimilationist project of the post war period. Both of those ethnic management strategies had embedded Anglo
>
> Australia. (75)

On one level, multiculturalism seeks to move out of this model that expects everyone to adopt white values and culture. However, discussions about cultural pluralism and relativism or the seemingly innocent idea of ethnic difference move away from race

but still trade in images and biased ideas that are often built on Eurocentric interpretations of clear cultural difference, otherness and alienness. This tends to lock the agenda in an essentialist model of thinking that assumes that certain characteristics are essential features of a particular race while pretending to use the ideas of multicultural inclusion. Difference becomes both biased and commodified at the institutional level, and therefore easier to accommodate, neutralize or ignore.

The Bicentenary celebrations threw this up most clearly. The dominant narrative remained that of British settlement; other narratives when included were subordinated to it. Loyalty to the Australian nation makes any attempts to argue positions that completely overthrow the dominant narratives of its establishment a problem.

> For Aborigines, however, celebrations of white settlement were not events to rejoice in. While celebrations were meant to be a commemoration of national unity and achievement, for Aborigines, they symbolized the invasion, conquest and dispossession of their land. (Garton, 203-204)

Within such a framework, the idea of multiculturalism and within it of white 'Reconciliation' with the Indigenous peoples of Australia are seen as exercises directed towards either conveniently putting a history of dispossession aside through gestures that are for appearances only or attempting to adopt an Indigenous past for Australia as it moves slowly towards becoming a republic.

Equally a problem is the inclusion of Aboriginal writing and diasporic writing in literary histories of Australia or Australian literary studies programmes for the sake of appearance. That said, their token inclusion has allowed hitherto silenced voices to be heard and is eventually allowing those voices to question and renegotiate the very nature of their inclusion.

3.6 LET US SUM UP

The cultural sphere of Australia has been and continues to be witness to ongoing changes and displacements. None of them are static, but each passes on a historical and cultural legacy that manifests itself in the literary production of the nation and its construction of a national identity. As one reads Australian texts it is important to be aware of these tensions and displacements.

3.7 QUESTIONS

1. Discuss the different trends that were part of the cultural backdrop to the colonization of Australia.
2. Discuss the nature of colonization with respect to the Aboriginal population, explaining the points of view that argue that it is either a 'benevolent settlement' or a 'racist invasion'.
3. Discuss the possible reasons behind and results of the 'White' Australia policies.
4. Critically discuss some aspects of Australian multiculturalism.

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UNIT 4 LITERARY BEGINNINGS – ORAL LITERATURE

Structure

1.0 Objectives
1.1 Oral Literature – A Contradiction in Terms
1.2. Aboriginal Traditions
1.3 Colonial Traditions
4.3.1 Convict Traditions
4.3.2 Bush Traditions
1.4 Let Us Sum Up
1.5 Questions
1.6 Works Cited

4.0 OBJECTIVES

This section will introduce certain aspects of the oral traditions within the Aboriginal and early settler communities. Two broad aims of this section are to show the need to broaden the traditional boundaries of 'Literature' to include oral traditions and to show how they have influenced the more conventional forms of written literature in Australia.

4.1 ORAL LITERATURE – A CONTRADICTION IN TERMS?

The fact that the phrase 'oral literature' seems like a contradiction in terms tells us about the assumptions that have become connected with the word 'Literature' in academic and cultural discussions. Though in most cultures the narrative traditions that eventually developed into written forms have had a very strong oral aspect, the inclusion of literary studies at different levels of education, with the emphasis on the printed word, has often led to this aspect being ignored. This has been felt even within literary studies programmes, especially in relation to genres such as drama and poetry. A purely text-centred focus in these cases takes away much from those aspects of these forms, which deal with performance and the spoken word.

Literature has also become in certain circumstances a term implying superiority in relation to popular cultural forms. Oral forms such as Aboriginal song cycles, colonial ballads and bush songs are often seen to fall outside the scope of literary studies on the grounds of their oral nature as well as their origins in folklore or so-called popular culture. Just as new ways of thinking about culture has questioned the constructedness of divisions like high culture/low culture, it has also questioned the importance given to the written word over the oral. Cultural studies programmes now see the need to include as many aspects of cultural production for a more complete picture of the ways in which people have expressed themselves.

In the study of Australian literature, oral forms are of great importance. To overlook the existence of Aboriginal song cycles passed on from generation to generation, simply because they do not fit conventional literary paradigms would be similar to the colonial act of dismissing Aboriginal cultural values simply because they were not easy to understand from the point of view of European models of civilization and culture. To bypass the rich popular tradition of convict ballads and bush songs that was born during the early phases of colonization would be to lose sight of some of the dominant influences that came to be part of some of the early written forms of the island-continent and its cultural consciousness. Just as the boundaries of 'English

literature' have been widened to include more than the literature of the British Isles, there is also a need for the range of 'literature' to become more flexible and inclusive.

4.2 ABORIGINAL TRADITIONS

Any search for starting points will be dependent upon what is thought of before hand as a 'beginning' for the purpose. In the article 'White on Black / Black on Black', Adam Shoemaker identifies as one of the problems in any attempt to search for literary beginnings with respect to Aboriginal writing, the question of whether we adopt the traditional parameters of Literature being primarily "poetry, drama and verse" or "consider Black Australian writings to encompass any meaningful inscriptions: petitions (in any medium), diaries, letters, song lyrics, transcribed oral narratives, message sticks, sermons, carvings, rock art, body markings, drawings, speeches, articles and submissions"(10). He recommends the latter, more open definition. The point however, remains that the framework used shapes and conditions the nature of the product. In the case of Aboriginal culture and literature, the models of reference have most often been imposed from outside. Shoemaker says:

> The historical dates which constitute what is known as 'chronological time' have often been used to imprison Australia's indigenous people. Terms such as 'prehistory' and 'preliteracy' carry with them the strongest possible sense of a time before – and a time after. Of course, these dividing lines have been imposed retrospectively upon Black Australians by those who are not members of that culture. Such arbitrary demarcations also imply that the past begins when it is recorded in legible script, not when human beings began to commit stories to memory.
>
> What cannot be ignored is the fact that scores of Aboriginal verbal artists have told and re-told tales which defy datable chronology. (9)

Instead of joining the "tyrannical quest for 'the earliest poem' or the 'first letter in English'", Shoemaker states the need to "explore the signposts of *all* indigenous Australian literature"(9).

Ken Goodwin says that the rich oral tradition of the Aborigines may be as old as the existence of human language in Australia, which he puts at "some 40,000 years"(8). According to him this tradition includes in its fold long song cycles often of a sacred nature, briefer communal songs and narratives. The themes may be sacred, concerning public or contemporary events, dealing with topics such as love, marriage, birth, death and war or telling mythical tales of the beginning of the universe. "Much also concerns the right relationships that human beings must have with the land, its creatures, relatives and others in the clan, and the spirits: some of it is concerned with sacred sites, some of it with secret symbols whose meaning is known only to the initiated"(8), catalogues Goodwin as he tries to provide a brief overview of the subject.

The oral traditions of the Aborigines had deep spiritual and communal meaning and were often associated with the mythical time of the Dreaming. The Dreaming is an English term used to capture what is expressed in different Aboriginal languages using different words with slightly different meaning within different Aboriginal cultural frameworks. In very simplified general terms it refers to the collection of ancient narratives of creation and the beginning of cultural practices, beliefs and values within Aboriginal communities prior to British colonization. The customs of the Dreaming include a way of talking, seeing, knowing and socio-cultural practices which are in themselves as mysterious and beautiful as any poetry. These oral traditions, just like other Aboriginal art forms, were not primarily aesthetic but had

specific functions within the social network of the Aboriginal communities. They were born of the close relationship cultivated by the people living on the land, travelling through it, naming it and constantly making new songs and stories to tell what the land presented or meant to them. The oral tradition was also the primary way of passing on the communal treasure of knowledge. Take this translated example from the Pilbara district of Western Australia.

> Sit with dignity and talk with composure!
> No small talk! Elaborate on this:
> What means more to you: The silly splinter that went in?
> Or the spirit from heaven – which you really are –
> To wait in the waterhole?
> (Cited in Shoemaker, 12)

Mudrooroo Narogin in *Writing from the Fringe* is of the opinion that the importance of this oral tradition lies also in the fact that "it describes Aboriginal lifestyles before the invasion"(6). To put this tradition into a framework that may be more easy to understand for western thinking, Mudrooroo adds "the surviving fragments" of this tradition "are important to Aborigines and others as a classical literature. In future it may serve as the basis for the written literature. They are as important to the Aborigines as the *Iliad* is to Europeans"(7). In a later edition of this book, *Indigenous Literature of Australia: Milli Milli Wangka*, also points out the importance of these oral records in reconstructing Aboriginal history. Epics such as the *Djanggawul* from Arnhem Land, and the *Wati Kadjara* epic, for example, reveal how Aboriginal communities who came to the land and became its inhabitants, completely disprove the *terra nullius* proposition.

> Let us rest on our paddles, brother,
> Let us rest, for I am tired.
> What is happening there, brother,
> My body aches with tiredness,
> I worry because of our sacred emblems;
> I am tired because we threw them away.
> Now we are close to the shore;
> Now our journey, our paddling is over.
> We land on the beach at Port Bradshaw.
> This is our country, plant our flag here,
> We have arrived, O brother. (17-18)

Adam Shoemaker deals in 'White on Black / Black on Black' primarily with Black Australian writing in English and discusses some aspects of the nature of English influence in early Aboriginal texts in the language. In translation, Aboriginal song cycles appeared first in the works of anthropologists such as T.G.H. Strehlow's *Aranda Traditions* (1947) and *Songs of Central Australia* (1971); Catherine and Ronald Berndt's collaborative work in *Djanggawul* (1952) as well as Ronald Berndt's *Love Songs of Arnhem Land* and *Three Faces of Love* (1976). These song cycles belonged primarily to the public domain of Aboriginal society, as most sacred songs were either to be performed only in the midst of the initiated or were restricted on the basis of gender. As a result, the song cycles made available for translation consist of a very small segment of a rich tradition of Aboriginal lore.

Shoemaker goes on to show the other problems that limit the attempt of making Aboriginal oral forms available for an audience basically familiar with the English language and written medium. In presenting Aboriginal song cycles in English and in the form of written texts, yet another series of cultural translations come into play.

> Public song cycles – which involve all members of a community – have intrinsic relationship with travelling and journeying (both in the geographic and the mythical sense); they showcase music dance, mime and storytelling skills in a way to which no English transcript on the page can do justice. (11)

Shoemaker argues that when these songs are then reprinted as excerpts in anthologies and collections, such as Rodney Hall's inclusion of the Wonguri-Mandijigai 'Moon-Bone Song' in the *Collins Book of Australian Poetry* (1981), they are often placed at the beginning of such collections "as if they were a preface to the contemporary world of Australian writing, mired in the past"(11).

However, these song cycles are very much a part of the cultural heritage and framework of Aboriginal Australians even today. The rhythms and the patterns of these traditional song cycles are even employed to put across issues of contemporary importance in the texts of Black Australian writers such as in Mudrooroo's cycle of 35 poems in *The Song Circle of Jacky* (1986).

> On Nadoc day a youthman strangled in a cell:
> Who killed him; who were his murderers?
> 'Not I,' said the cop, 'I only took him in.'
> 'Not I,' said the town, 'I never spoke his name,
> It's no fault of mine that he had to die –
> We treat them as we would our own,
> There's no racism in our town. (46)

Shoemaker also cites (12-13) variations on the translated songs that exist in the form of dual-text material published in an Aboriginal language and English. Examples of this can be found in *Tom Petrie's Reminisces of Early Queensland* (1904) and the more recent *Stories of Obed Raggett* (1980) which is in Pintupi/ Luritja and English.

These Aboriginal traditions also found their way into the Jindyworobak movement that became important between the 1930s and 1950s. The Adelaide based group that started this movement had at its forefront **Rex Ingamells** who adapted the Aboriginal word 'Jindyworobak' which means 'to annex' or 'join' to name a movement that tried to mark a break from colonial traditions that focussed on Europe by associating itself with Australian Aboriginal ones. Ken Goodwin says the movement used the term 'Jindyworobak' in particular and traces of Aboriginality in general, as indicative of a 'distinctive Australian quality in literature' (Goodwin, 134). Ken Goodwin quotes Ingamells as averring: 'From Aboriginal art and song we must learn much of new technique; from Aboriginal legend, sublimated through our thought, we must achieve something of a pristine outlook on life.'(134) This movement tried to adopt Aboriginal traditions to develop a distinctly Australian tradition that drew inspiration and materials from the land and the cultural creations of the Aborigines. The movement tried to move away from the colonial legacy of British and European models and language in literature through an almost romantic glorification of all things Aboriginal. The superficial adoption of Aboriginal themes, words and motifs for a 'postcolonial' cultural agenda that only redefined the relationship between white members of the colony and the metropolitan centre has been criticised. Shoemaker comments in *Black Words White Page*, "their usage of the ostensible trappings of Black Australian languages was indicative of a kind of souvenir mentality" (57).

4.3 COLONIAL TRADITIONS

The oral traditions that arose during the early phase of colonization sprung from the social environment of the penal system and that of the pastoral stations in the bush. Many times the latter was a continuation of the former as former convicts, on completing their sentence, were encouraged to settle on the land or serve as travelling

labourers linked to local stations. Speaking of the period till the 1850s, Ian Turner says:

> The conquest of the land had been half a century of violence: many men had been destroyed, and some had destroyed themselves. But, so far, few had paused to write it down. For the new colonial upper class, the act of possession was necessarily the transplantation of a culture: except for the works of description, designed to satisfy or whet the metropolitan appetite, the journals of the first colonists and the explorers, and the uniformly derivative poems of nostalgia or hope, there was as yet no literary response. The colonies held few attractions for men of literary culture or pretence, and what power of imagery and words the accounts and journals had was incidental to their main purposes of conveying information, awakening interest. It was in the unwritten literature of the lower and further out segments of colonial society that there came the first distinct – and distinctive – imaginative response. (22)

These colonial oral traditions were very much a part of the popular culture of the new colonies of Australia. The characters and environments they described however passed into the more formally recognized 'literary' traditions as well and were soon used to symbolize the 'distinctly Australian' in literature and what was projected as national culture.

4.3.1 Convict Traditions

The ballads created by the convict community made a vibrant and colourful oral literature that captured this group's response to the natural and social environment of the penal system and Australia. The genre was a natural continuation of the folk ballads and narratives that the lower social classes of British society and those of Irish descent produced in the colonial centre. Edgar Waters in 'Ballads and Popular Verse' traces them back to the broadside ballads of the metropolitan centre (293-4).

Life within the Penal System provided the themes that were dealt with in these oral pieces. Ian Turner elaborates:

> The ballads of the convicts expressed their situation: at first the sentiment was nostalgic, and sometimes mock-repentant, with an ironic acceptance of the moralizing of their judges and goalers; later (say by the 1820s although it is impossible to date the ballads precisely), the nostalgia disappeared, and the spirit was hatred and defiance of the authorities, fear or bravado for the brutalities of the System, admiration for those who bucked it (notably the successful escapees), and a bitter humour which set out to subvert the moral values of their betters.(16)

Waters documents (294-5) how in the second half of the nineteenth century many of these ballads and bushrangers were regarded as "treason songs" by officials and though there is no evidence of a formal ban, the performance of these ballads in public places could result in a night in prison. Two of the most popular ballads of this period, which are still extant are 'Bold Jack Donahue' and 'The Wild Colonial Boy'. The opening stanzas and chorus of the latter run:

> 'Tis of a wild Colonial boy, Jack Doolan was his name,
> Of poor but honest parents he was born in Castlemaine.
> He was his father's only hope, his mother's only joy,
> And dearly did his parents love this wild Colonial boy.

Chorus
Come, all my hearties, we'll roam the mountains high,
Together we will plunder, together we will die,
We'll wander over valleys, and gallop over plains,
And we'll scorn to live in slavery, bound down with iron chains.

He was scarcely sixteen years of age when he left his father's home,
And through Australia's sunny clime a bushranger did roam.
He robbed those wealthy squatters, their stock he did destroy,
And a terror to Australia was the wild Colonial boy.

The challenge and treason written into these verses presents its central figure in the same cultural light as the literary and folklore traditions that surround a figure like Robin Hood.

4.3.2 The Bush Tradition

The bush fraternity of Australia was a loose nomadic community that reached its creative peak in the thirty years of the post-gold rush outback boom. It inherited something of the pre-gold tradition as well. Hugh Anderson quotes a 1923 issue of the *North Queenslander Register* which says that almost every cattle run had "...generally someone who could turn out bush jingle of a sort. Some of these verses were remarkably good, and it has to be regretted that most of them are now forgotten"(34). Anderson also quotes Edward Sorenson, who had spent his life in a variety of bush occupations and contributed regularly to the *Bulletin*. Sorenson felt that the isolation of life in the outback was responsible for the popularity and spread of this forceful tradition: "'With nobody to talk to and seldom anything to read, the solitary bloke either yarns to himself or turns to writing. Very often he does both.'" (cited in Anderson, 35).

The colonial traditions of ballads and bushsongs may have had a strong anti-establishment tone at the original time of their creation and popularity. However, with time and the change of social environments in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, these very pieces and the characters they immortalized became very much a part of the establishment's sense of cultural identity. Early colonial writers such as **Alan Lindsay Gordan**, **'Banjo' Paterson** and **Henry Lawson** drew on these traditions in their verse and prose writing. The *Bulletin* school of writing, started in the 1880s, saw the bush and its cultural creations as an ideal source to tap in the literary creation of a characteristically Australian identity. Ian Turner writes of the output of this ballad community:

> It was eclectic as to sources: it drew its melodies from the popular songs of drawing-room or music-hall, or from folksong (commonly Irish), and created its texts by parodying, or by re-writing the more 'literary' productions of the homestead, or by the creation of rough verses of its own. Its language was, however, all its own – colourful and not uncommonly lurid. It had two kinds of 'hero': the bushranger, whom it revered...and the 'flash' bushman, whom it cut down to size. Its characteristic attitudes, as evidenced in its yarns as well as its ballads, were admiration for daring and resourcefulness; dislike for the law and the squatter; contempt for the cocky-farmer, the new-chum, and the coloured races; deflation, not unmixed with wry self-recognition...and a sardonic spitting in the eye of fate. This was a living, unlettered, popularly created literature – the last in Australian history – and it was of considerable importance, because so much of its spirit, even its language and style, passed into more formal literary expression in the 1890s (30-1)

4.4 LET US SUM UP

The oral traditions of the Aborigines and of early colonial settlers in Australia are a store of information about the cultures and peoples that created them. Both streams of oral traditions have been adopted at different instances to project within a more traditional literary framework, the notion of a distinct Australian identity in opposition to the Eurocentric colonial literary legacy.

4.5 QUESTIONS

1. Why is an awareness of oral traditions significant in the study of Australian literature?
2. Discuss some of the problems involved in studying Aboriginal oral traditions within a conventional English literature framework.
3. Explore how the anti-establishment oral tradition of colonial ballads was eventually adopted as symbolic of authentic 'Australianness' within its literary tradition.

4.6 WORKS CITED

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UNIT 5 EARLY LITERATURE

Structure

5.0 Objectives
5.1 Provisional Demarcations
5.2 Colonial Writing
5.3 Women's Writing
5.4 Aboriginal Writing
5.5 Let Us Sum Up
5.6 Questions
5.7 Works Cited

5.0 OBJECTIVES

In this Unit, we shall briefly sample the early English literary works in Australia and their themes from the colonial period. We shall also try and find out whether these works are/were inclusive or exclusive with respect to the various sections of Australian society and if so, how these groups were portrayed in the literary discourses.

5.1 PROVISIONAL DEMARCATIONS

For the purpose of this section, Australia's literary history has been divided into three: the **first** deals with the early colonial writings, which were mostly dominated by white males. These consisted of travelogues, poems, bush tales, yarns and ballads. They mostly described the experiences of various people, the heroic hardships endured by the convicts, ex-convicts, settlers and government officials in the development of Australia. The **second** section deals with women's writings that tended to tell the white woman's story and her experiences during this period. The **third** deals with Aboriginal writings. Aboriginal writers give their own version of events during the conquest and occupation of Australia by the white colonizers. In their literary works, themes about dispossession, economic deprivation and racism are covered. These literary works give us glimpses of Australia from the establishment of the penal colony to the present as seen, experienced or presented by various authors. It is through these writings that we see how Australia has been trying to come to terms with its past and the struggle to build a multicultural society.

5.2 COLONIAL WRITING

The journals, diaries and letters of early voyagers, explorers and settlers were the first pieces of writing to be inspired by European contact with the Australian continent. Of these documents of initial contact, according to Delys Bird, the accounts of William Dampier published as *A New Voyage Round the World* (1689) and James Cook which respectively provided a picture of the land as "degraded and barren" and "as offering a fertile future" established " the terms of a dialectical paradigm ... moving between ... prison and paradise, gloom and optimism, that shapes much colonial writing" (23). Excerpts from Cook's account of April 20, 1770 in the Macmillan Anthology tells one side of the beginning of the story of Australia's colonization:

> The weather being clear, gave us a good view of the country, which has a very pleasing appearance: it is of a moderate height, diversified by hills and vallies, ridges and plains, interspersed with a few lawns of no great extent, but in general covered with wood: the ascent of the hills and ridges is gentle, and the summits are not high. We continued to sail along the shore to the

> northward, with a southerly wind, and in the afternoon we saw smoke in several places, by which we knew the country to be inhabited... (16)

Literary writing traces its origin to 1800 when the first printing press was imported for use in the production of government orders. In 1802, the first books: *New South Wales General Standing Orders* and *The Road to Botany Way* were produced. Thereafter, the colony's first newspaper, *The Sydney Gazette*, was published. The gazette served as a forum for people to express their experiences by way of poems, ballads, plays and short stories. Ken Goodwin while analyzing the writings of this period notes that "the question of relationships between the governing class and the governed" (14) was central to several of the plays of this period. For example, in the works of Charles Harpur (1813-68) and other early novelists we see a graphic description of the experiences of the convicts. They deal with the depiction of guiltless convicts, harsh overseers, brave bushrangers, and brutal police and magistrates. **David Burn's** (1799-1875) earliest play, *The Bushrangers*, is based on the exploits of Mathew Brady, a notorious leader of a bushranging gang of escaped convicts. Its aim was not so much to glamorize bushranging but to expose the Governor's oppression of free settlers such as Burn. In 'A Captain's Lament on the Death of Captain Logan' we catch a glimpse of some of the dilemma and agony of being a convict:

> Our overseers and superintendents –
> These tyrants' orders we must obey,
> Or else at the triangles our flesh is mangled
> Such are our wages at Moreton Bay.

Much of the writing of this period contained the idea that Australia was a vast empty land and that it is the convicts and the early settlers of European stock who developed the land. This gave them the right to call themselves 'pioneers'. Here, attempts at re-creating history in a way that simply denies the indigenous Aboriginal presence in Australia can be noted. Laurie Hergenhan in his observations notes that "the suppressed lack of an indigenous history" (xi) – the idea that for Australians, history is what was initiated or happened overseas – is a colonial legacy. Instead of being a weakness or cultural handicap, this myth of Australian emptiness has driven many writers: **Lawson, Clarke, Richardson, Keneally** and others before and after them, both to claim and re-create an indigenous past as a way of being independent and escaping from a history forced from the outside and modeled on to Eurocentric narratives. Mary Gilmore, for instance, re-writes the past and suggests in 'Old Botany Bay' that the convicts were the first pioneers:

> I was the conscript
> Sent to hell
> To make in the desert
> The living well;
> I split the rock;
> I felt the tree
> The nation was –
> Because of me.

While looking at the understanding of this period (1855-1915), Shirley Walker observes that "it is interesting that there is little suggestion of love or passion in the male poetry of the period. Moreover the stock perception of the typical Australian required a re-assessment of the past: the rehabilitation of the convict and the bushranger to bring them to an historical relationship with the popular image"(165). Russel Ward (1965) in 'The Australian Legend' proposes this historical relationship when he suggests that the values of 'mateship' originated in the close bonds between fellow convicts.

As we see in Gilmore's 'Old Botany Bay' the guilt shifts from the convict, no longer the villain, to the system itself (imposed on the colonies by the British). In novels like **Marcus Clarke's** *His Natural Life* (1874) and the short stories of **Henry Lawson,** the suffering of the convict is justified in metaphysical terms – he becomes a Christ-like figure who gives his life for another.

The image of Australia that emerged from this self-determining process was an indigenous one, centered upon the bush. By the 1880s, Shirley Walker (165) observes that the bush had become a label for both the landscape and a social reality characterized by egalitarianism, collectivism and 'mateship'. Central to this idea of the bush was the dignity of physical labour, the elevation of the bush worker as a hero, and the celebration of radical nationalist values, which were presumably to be, found in their purest form among the bush workers. The Sydney *Bulletin* established in 1880 and edited by J.F. Archibald encouraged writers such as **Gordon, Paterson** and **Lawson,** and it served as an influential instrument for the expression of national ethos. Its snappy paragraphs, verses, ballads, anecdotes and short stories, all of great vigour and authenticity, helped to mould a group myth about the nature of Australians and their society.

The writers of the 1890s wrote against the social context of a growing awareness of a sense of nationhood, unionism and socialism. Ian Turner comments:

> The first thing about the writers of these years was that the tone of voice was unselfconsciously, unmistakably and often 'offensively' (as Joseph Furphy said) democratic, lower-class Australian – and this was possibly the first time in any literature that this had been the dominant tone. Not that there were no gradations: Lawson characteristically saw the country from on foot, and his feet were mostly hot and tired and blistered, while his contemporary, and a better balladist, 'Banjo' Paterson, saw it from on horseback; Lawson's future was unlike anything that had gone before, while Paterson's was a return to an idyllic pastoral beginning; Furphy wrote of bullock-drivers, Edward Dyson of miners and city workers, Miles Franklin of remote feckless station-owners, 'Steele Rudd' of small selectors grubbing a living out of a back-breaking farm. But there was a sufficient community of language and sentiment to link all these, and many more, with what was fresh in the nineties air.... They rejected old-world models, both literary and social; they spoke the vernacular, and spurned romance. They shared a humour whose central element was an ironic understatement which seemed designed to make more manageable the manifold difficulties of the lives they knew. Their view of human nature was optimistic: there was pathos, even horror and despair, in their work, but not tragedy, for defeat when it came (as it often did), came from without and not within. And in all this they were close to their people and their time. (Turner, 34)

The Bulletin published these writers and had an agenda to lampoon and shame the hypocrisy and imitativeness of Sydney society. Turner quotes J. F. Archibald's comments on the city of Sydney in *The Lone Hand*, (1907):

> It was a Cant-ridden community.... Sydney, socially, limped in apish imitation after London ideas, habits and manners. Politically and industrially it was the same.... Sydney invited revolt from existing conditions, and The *Bulletin* was the organ of that revolt. (35)

The *Bulletin* writers of the 1880s and 1890s were also the first to exploit the Bush tradition as a sort of cultural alternative to metropolitan values. By their time Ross comments:

> .... almost a hundred years after its foundation, Australian society and culture had changed considerably. The rigid structure of the penal settlement had broken down as a result of the emancipation of convicts, free immigration, the growth of a native born population and the extension of settlement to other centers around the Australian coast. (11)

In the cities—particularly in Sydney and Melbourne – cultural circles evolved around periodical journals and literary groups. The *Bulletin* writers drew on vernacular sources – the ballad and the yarn; they introduced the 'Australian' voice and language into literature, and therefore gave their readers that shock of recognition which occurs only in transplanted cultures when the double vision they instill is suddenly resolved into a single familiar image (Ross 13-14).

The principal writers of the Bulletin school, as Shirley Walker puts it, were also heirs to both a populist tradition and a cosmopolitan one. As Graeme Davison has pointed out, many of them were urban dwellers, closely connected with radical movements such as secularism, republicanism and land reform. These according to him would have promoted the same egalitarian ethos, which Russel Ward maintains was derived from the conditions of early settlement.

Literature of the period however, depicted racist tendencies and ideas. Most Australians at that time wished to exclude other races from the island continent's social fabric, as these were seen in derisive terms. Australia's white Anglo-Saxon and Anglo-Celtic (to include the Irish) make-up, as Walker observes, "was always emphasized, racial purity was a national obsession and violence to minorities such as Aborigines was endemic". According to David Malouf in *A Spirit of Play*, this belief in racial superiority and exclusiveness resulted in deliberate attempts to eliminate Aborigines. It was one way of effecting a white Australia policy. Malouf continues, "As the *Bulletin* put it with its usual brutal candour: 'Australia for the Australians – the cheap Chinese, the cheap nigger, and the cheap European pauper to be absolutely excluded'"(105).

What is characteristic of the literary writings of the colonial period is that most of the writers were men. This was because firstly, the convicts and the early settlers were mostly males. Secondly, the first migrants to Australia were mostly men. "Mateship', an expression of male solidarity, vigourously excluded the woman, often delegating to her the passive virtues of stoicism and endurance.

5.3 WOMEN'S WRITING

However, one of the first female writers of this period to gain prominence was **Catherine Spence** who migrated with her family from Scotland to South Australia. Jane Austen was a strong influence on her literary output. Her novels dealt with the problems of white female immigration. She thus has the distinction of being the first woman novelist to write about Australia and the first to deal with women's problems. Her first novel, *Clara Morison, A tale of South Australia during the Gold fever* discusses from a woman's perspective the social, financial and moral issues of the time in Adelaide (Goodwin, 20-21).

The male writers of this period showed an inclination to portray men as heroic, hardworking, and thus responsible for Australia's growth and development. The women were, as a result, often depicted as subordinate, weak and dependent upon the men for protection and their livelihood. In some of the plays, poems or novels of this period the Aborigines were presented as "half human, stupid, amoral, and unworthy of consideration".

Later in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, we see women writers such as **Judith Wright, Beverly Kingston, Ruth Teale, Kay Daniels, Barbara Baynton, Elizabeth Jolley, Helen Garner, Kylie Tenant, Christina Stead, Katherine Susannah Prichard, Sally Morgan** and **Glenyse Ward** narrating their experiences in the Australian society. In his review of women's writing in Australia, Hawthorne (114-122) critically looks at their place in the larger Australian society and argues for its consideration as central rather than 'marginal' in the understanding of an emerging culture in Australia.

In his review of individual writers, Hawthorne describes how **Barbara Baynton's** short stories show the extent, to which it is possible for men to go in order to humiliate women, and suppress any outcry against that behaviour. Barbara Baynton was the daughter of a carpenter and, although at the end of her life she mixed in upper-class circles, it was not until her marriage to a wealthy seventy-year old doctor that she no longer had to sell bibles from door to door to secure a living for herself and her young family. In their 'Introduction' to Barbara Baynton, Sally Krimmer and Alan Lawson write that each story in *Bush Studies*:

> has an inexorable progress towards a dire conclusion – death, rape, rejection or some combination of these – and the progress itself is in the form of an ordeal which serves to heighten the victims (and our) perception of his or her vulnerability

The story 'Squeaker's Mate', for instance, tells of the poverty of bush life and the cruelty of Squeaker (the man) to his mate (the woman). The title of the story portrays a male-centred social environment wherein the woman's identity revolves around her social relationship with the Squeaker. It is also an implied criticism of the male-centred cultural vision of 'mateship'. This discursive bias extends along the realm of work as well.

However, when a tree falls on the woman, breaking her back, the Squeaker's cruelty towards his mate reaches new proportions. But the woman whose name, Mary, we learn only towards the end of the story, despite her immobility, has her revenge. It is evident that Mary knows precisely her powers and also the mind of her oppressor. Once disabled, she knows, too, that waiting in silence is her most powerful weapon. She finally does demonstrate this power at the end of this extraordinary story.

In Barbara Baynton's stories, Walker observes, "the bush is grotesque and actively malevolent, inhabited by sinister and predatory creatures, both male and female. The victims mostly are raped or murdered or left, broken-backed to die when their usefulness is over". The bush society is far from the egalitarian caring community of Lawson's dreams where people toil and bake and suffer and are kind. One of its most grotesque female manifestations is the wretched old hag begging for money for drink at the roadside shanty in 'Billy Skywonkie':

> She pointed to her toothless mouth (the minion of which seemed to be to fill its cavernous depths with the age-loosened skin about and below). A blue bag under each eye aggressively ticked like the grills of the fowls....
> Alternatively she pointed to her mouth or laid her knotted fingers on the blue bags in pretence of wiping tears. Entrenched behind the absorbed skin-terraces, a stump of purple tongue made efforts at speech. When she held out her claw, the woman understood and felt for her purse....

Images such as this should be set against the sentimental versions of pioneer womanhood that reinforced the narrow male tradition.

Similarly, **Mary Murnane's** *Uphill All the Way* (1980) documents the hardships suffered by women in domestic life, childbearing and sweated labour, the vicious double standards of colonial society and most disturbing of all, prostitution of convict and Aboriginal women and the removal of children conceived by them. Feminist histories such as Anne Summers' *Damned Whores and God's Police* (1975) and Miriam Dixon's *The Real Matilda* (1976) challenge the idealized images of women. Dixon sees the distinguishing feature of Australian society to be its contempt for women and traces this to "our formative decades" with their violence and brutality towards women and widespread prostitution of women (Walker, 168).

5.4 ABORIGINAL WRITING

Adam Shoemaker includes in the early phase of Aboriginal Australian writing in English (14-17), journalism exemplified by *The Aboriginal* or *Flinders Island Chronicle* published between Sept 1836 – Dec 1836 in Tasmania and public petitions, the most famous of which he regards the bark petition presented by the *Yirrkala* people of Arnhem Land of 1963. The publication of **Kath Walker's** poetry, the plays of **Jack Davis** and **Kevin Gilbert** and the novels of **Colin Johnson** (later known as Mudrooroo) after the 1960s strongly proved the literary presence of Aboriginal voices. Since then there has been no looking back.

Among Aboriginal writers as well, the initial pattern of publication brought to prominence more men writers than women. In more recent times, Aboriginal women have gained ascendancy in this field of telling their stories. **Ruby Langford** in her novel *Don't Take Your Love to Town* describes her life as a travelling worker in Queensland. As an Aboriginal woman, we read about the ordeals she has to undergo in order to earn a living. She also gives a brief description of her life, and the gradual disintegration of her Bundjalung community and Aboriginal culture, and their deliberate dispersal to the towns and cities by the colonial administration. She describes:

> I felt like I was a living tribal but with no tribe around me, no close knit family. The food gathering, the laws and songs were broken up and my generation at this time wandered around as if we were tribal but in fact living worse than the poorest of the poor whites and in the case of women, living hard because it seemed like the men drank and gambled and disappeared. One day they'd had enough and they just didn't come back .... my women friends all have similar stories.

From her work we get a vivid glimpse of racist Australia in the late fifties and early sixties.

Similarly, *My Place* by **Sally Morgan** and *Wandering Girl* by **Glenyse Ward** are two other autobiographies, which document the experiences of Aboriginal women in the Australian society. In her book Sally Morgan describes how the Aboriginals are mistreated and discriminated against and her own self-discovery of her roots as an Aboriginal. In *Wandering Girl*, **Glenyse Ward** describes the life she led as a slave girl in a farm during the 1960s. From her book we get an idea of the general perception of whites towards the Aboriginals. They were meant to be invisible, silent and nameless:

> Soon as I opened the door all the chatter and laughter stopped. You could Hear a pin drop as all eyes were on me. All of a sudden, some poshed-up Voice with a plum in her mouth came out of the crowd, 'Tracey dear, is this your little dark servant?' I just stood there smiling. I thought it was wonderful that at least people were taking notice of me. There were sniggers and jeers for everywhere. I turned to the lady who did all the talking and said

my name is Glenyse. She was startled; she said 'Oh dear, I didn't think you had a name' (Hawthorne, 119).

These writings mirror the experiences of the Aboriginal womenfolk and their circumstances in a society that has been dominated for a long time not only by white male administrative officials but also male writers. What is significant is that the black experience in white Australia had not been told before from a black person's perspective. From the time of the invasion to the nineteen seventies or eighties, the black presence in Australia had either been ignored or deliberately distorted by white Australian writers. The emergence of these black writers has to an extent filled this lacuna and corrected the biased distorted picture of the Aboriginal history, presence and experience in white dominated Australia.

5.5 LET US SUM UP

The early literature of Australia is marked by the changes in the cultural environment that produced it. The perspectives of this Unit and the way it has been arranged are just one way of looking at the writing of this period. As you become more familiar with Australian literature yourself, other perspectives should inform your awareness.

5.6 QUESTIONS

1. Discuss some of the reasons why the early colonial writing may have been dominated by male writers.
2. Discuss some aspects of women's writing in Australia.
3. What has Aboriginal writing contributed to Australian literature?

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UNIT 6 THEMES AND TRENDS

Structure

6.0 Objectives
6.1 Thematic Strands
6.2 Recent Trends
  6.2.1 Hybridity
  6.2.2 Diasporic Voices
  6.2.3 Authenticity Debates
  6.2.4 Theoretical Perspectives
6.3 Let Us Sum Up
6.4 Questions
6.5 Works Cited
6.6 Select Bibliography

6.0 OBJECTIVES

This Unit hopes to deal with some notable or often discussed themes in Australian literature as well highlight what are considered some recent trends in the field and the theoretical points of view that have been used to understand them.

6.1 THEMATIC STRANDS

Approaches that focus on literary themes and trends usually focus on some aspect or point of view. No such approach can be complete, since they are by their very nature and purpose selective. This applies to the following sections on thematic strands and recent trends in Australian literature as well. Only limited aspects of a few perspectives have been presented and the rest is left to the adventurous student moving out into the territory of Australian literature.

Brian Kiernan in his study of Australian literary history, divides its characteristics and themes into three sets. He explains and describes them thus:

> The first two sets of characters are conventionally evolutionist and synthesise much nineteenth century discussion which emphasized the difficulties encountered by a pioneering society, and which speculated that climatic and other environmental factors would mould the people and their culture. The third set relates to national character and its expression through literature and their relationship to historical experience and social institutions. (19)

It is clear that his perspective focuses mainly on Australian literature in relation to the white colonizers and their ongoing attempts to tell the stories of their nation as they thought of it. Many of the early perspectives on Australian literature are biased by this tendency. This was and is part of a way of thinking that gave importance to the white colonial experience in Australia and made its ideas the important ones socially. These days this kind of thinking is being challenged and questioned in a big way by the very groups of people whose voices, ideas and interests were ignored by it – the Aborigines, recent immigrants, women and others. There have been two responses to this criticism. One is the superficial and token inclusion of writing coming from these groups without really dealing with the issues and problems connected with the ways in which they were left out or are being included. The other is more critical and deals mainly with the point of view of the specific group or groups whose cause it is taking up against the more traditional colonial perspectives.

Later writers in this field, like Ken Goodwin, include Aboriginal and immigrant writing, but almost like a token gesture. The work of Aborigines and immigrants is often clubbed together in a final chapter that deals with 'other writing' in Australia. The emphasis however, remains on the points of view largely containing the discussions and issues that concern the white colonial experience.

Ken Goodwin mentions the dominance in early Australian literature of themes like "the search for identity by a wanderer or explorer, the establishment of a habitation and family line, the quest to recover the past, the sense of being an outcast, and the threat of impending violence"(3). According to him, the quest theme shows itself as both connected to the land and the human spirit, especially in the novels of **Joseph Furphy**, **Christopher Brennan**, **Xavier Herbert**, **McAuley**, **Patrick White** or **Randolph Stow**. He comments: "The exploratory quest to discover what lay at the heart of the continent – a quest not completed until the early twentieth century – provided a natural metaphor for the exploration of the country of the mind"(3).

Goodwin also points out that as in the prairie literature of Canada and the frontier literature of America, the land becomes a symbol and a myth in itself. "The urge to settle the country, to tame the frontier, to acquire such tracts of land as the Old Country could not provide and to found a dynasty was both an historical fact and a literary commonplace"(3). There were however differences in the way this same theme was treated. While success graced these endeavours in popular romantic novels, the novels of **Henry Handel Richardson**, **Brian Penton** and **Patrick White** were marked by what Goodwin refers to as "ironic incapacity by nature or human genetics"(3).

The quest for the past evinces itself in historical novels such as *His Natural Life* by **Marcus Clarke** from the 1930s onwards as well as in the poetry of **R.D. FitzGerald**, **Judith Wright**, **Thomas Shapcott** and **David Malouf**. This theme is "associated through the operation of memory with the attempt to align chronological and experiential measurements of time or to escape entirely from the dominance of chronological measurement"(Goodwin, 3)

Goodwin notes the preponderance of the outsider figure in many strands of Australian literature. He says, "The outcast figure may be a runaway convict, a bushranger, an Aboriginal or a new migrant"(4). This can be seen for instance in early settler genres, for example in escaped-convict novels like *His Natural Life* (1874) by **Marcus Clarke**, bushranger novel such as *Robbery under Arms* (1882) by **Rolf Boldrewood** also known as (a.k.a.) **Thomas Alexander Browne**. The same applies to the presentation of Aborigines – in white literature, for example in, The *Chant of Jimmie Blacksmith* (1972) by **Thomas Keneally**, *Capricornia* (1938) by **Xavier Herbert**, *Poor Fellow my Country* (1975) by **Xavier Herbert**, and A *Kindness Cup* (1974) by **Thea Astley**. The outsider figure also finds manifestation in works by Aboriginal writers, such as in *Wild Cat Falling* (1965) by **Colin Johnson** and *The Day of the Dog* (1981) by **Archie Weller**. Diasporic or immigrant writers have also figured in this position from the presentation of the 'new chum' of the white literature of the 1890s to the non-English speaking newcomer in the work of recent ethnic writers. Thus in a sense, according to this model the experience of the white colonial is presented as being copied by the Aboriginal or diasporic writer at the level of theme.

Goodwin also traces the theme of violence in Australian literature in writers as disparate as **Patrick White**, **Thea Astley**, **David Ireland**, **Roger McDonald**, **Colin Johnson** and **Archie Weller**. "Its presence is often associated with a sense of the absence or fragility of culture, a sense that culture is never here and now but always elsewhere or at another time"(4). Goodwin also sees as stylistic characteristic repetition (4-5) and sees this as linked with a preoccupation with a sense of void,

boundlessness and timelessness which "can represent either absence of cultural landmarks or a return to the void of Nature or the loss of self-identity or a mystical union with the divine."

As can be seen from the above discussion, the themes Goodwin chooses to focus on are drawn mainly from white Australian writing. When other groups are mentioned as in the case of Goodwin's treatment of the use of the outsider figure, it is to trace parallels with the dominant white use of this figure. The differences in the way groups like Aborigines and immigrants explore themes of identity, the past and their relationship to the land are areas that should be rich sources of insight.

The other response has been to give importance to marginalized discourses and often employs them in ways that question and challenge the accepted ideas of mainstream thinking and writing. Bob Hodge and Vijay Mishra's work falls in this category. In the *Dark Side of the Dream: Australian literature and the postcolonial mind* they have employed Aboriginal texts and perspectives to destabilize the construction of Australianness, of literary canons and myths that inform popular culture. For example, in the Preface they take apart the symbolic figure of Australianness, the Bushman. They argue that the figure "encodes a class, race and gender identity which classifies women, Aborigines and new migrants as 'unAustralian'"(xv). At the same time, in demographic terms the bushman never occupied more than fifteen percent of the population, even during the high water mark of settlement in Australia. Therefore to say that this stereotype is the 'typical' Australian is a deviation from truth with interesting political implications of exclusion within the nation space. What emerges out of such and similar efforts is a multitude of perspectives, each marked by change and open to resistance.

6.2 RECENT TRENDS

6.2.1 Hybridity

As discussed in earlier sections, after the first World War the Bush, the Outback and Aborigine became cultural myths and symbols for a whole generation of Australian writers writing in the inter-war years. They came to represent the uniqueness of the continent in relation to the rest of the world. "To define is to distinguish, and seeking to define Australia, most writers turned instinctively to the bush" (Turner, 44). At one level, this was one way of resisting the fact that industrialisation had led to the replication of Europe in Australia, to a practical extent that was almost a denial of the uniqueness sought to be projected. At another level, the cultural/ intellectual values of the land irked some Australian writers with its materialism and lack of the finer aspects of culture. Furthermore, the idea of 'Australianness' remained firmly trapped in boundaries connected with white Australians. Referring to the Jindyworobak movement, Ian Turner states also that "the use of Aboriginal language and imagery remained a cult; for most, the Australian nation meant the Australian common man"(45). Slowly this has begun to change as within the hybrid multicultural framework images have begun to acquire a layer of cultural meaning, which transforms them.

A hybrid refers to anything of mixed origin. The word hybridity used in relation to Australian society points to the fact that there are now many different influences in that society that shape the writing, the thinking and the very existence of the people there. These influences and points of view must be taken into consideration when studying Australian literature.

Susan Lever writes, "In a diverse, multicultural, fragmented society there can be no complete and all encompassing visions"(330). Literature, cannot in this situation "

form part of the cultural binding of society", instead, according to Lever, literature and other cultural products "now are marketed as other products, so that they are not only for children or adults, but for women, feminists, Aborigines, migrants, gays, lesbians, liberals or, even, for men" (330). All these fragments taken together, separately or in various combinations throw light on some of the various perspectives which inform Australian culture. Though as students of Australian literature one may choose to focus on a few selected aspects, one must be aware of and open to the insights of other points of view.

6.2.2 Diasporic Voices

The post-World War influx of immigrants into Australia, mostly from Southern Europe and Asia has made its own contribution to Australian literature. Ken Goodwin comments, "While all white Australian writers are migrants or the descendants of migrants, those who come from non-English speaking countries commonly express feelings of alienation, loss and rejection akin to those of Aboriginal writers and the more disaffected of early British and Irish immigrants"(267).

According to him, some writers with a diasporic background, such as **Judah Waten** and **David Martin**, have merged into the so-called mainstream of Australian literature. Their writing however, was marked by and portrayed the tensions of a diasporic existence. Judah Waten's semi-autobiographical protagonist in the short-story 'Mother' says of his mother:

> ...She was preoccupied with my sister and me; she was forever concerned with our future in this new land in which she would always feel a stranger.
>
> I gave her little comfort, for though we had been in the country only a short while I had assumed many of the ways of those around me. I had become estranged from her. Or so it seemed to Mother, and it grieved her. (113)

Others, have chosen to foreground their diasporic or immigrant status in various ways, be it in the choice of subjects, themes, language of expression or place of publication. **Dimitris Tsaloumas**, **Pino Bosi**, **Angelou Loukakis**, **Sergei Liberman**, **Banumbir Wongar**, **Rosa R. Cappiello** and **Fontini Epanomitis** can be listed among the later group. More recently, writers belonging to the Asian diaspora have been making their literary presence felt as well. **Yasmine Gooneratne** of Sri Lankan origin, the Bangladeshi **Adib Khan**, **Satendra Nandan** of Fijian-Indian origins and the Malaysian born **Beth Yahp** can be counted among their ranks.

Though most of these writers have chosen to draw primarily on their diasporic experiences, a writer like Banumbir Wongar (a.k.a. Sreten Bozic) who is best known for his writing on Aboriginal themes, such as in *The Track to Bralgu,* has shown that the diasporic status need not be a confining boundary. The way ideas like 'authenticity' and 'identity' are thought about in relation to voice in the context of writers from marginalised groups is evinced in the fact that Wongar was for a long while assumed to be a writer of Aboriginal origins.

6.2.3 Authenticity Debates

The question of the 'authenticity' of cultural identities and the way in which society constructs them has arisen quite strongly within the scene of Australian literary production in the 1990s. The debates about the legitimacy of works such as Helen Darville's *The Hand that Signed the Paper* (1994), Leon Carmen's temporarily successful attempt to pass in the literary world as a female Aboriginal writer by the name of **Wanda Koolmatrie**, and the questioning of the 'authenticity' of the

Aboriginality of **Mudrooroo**, **Archie Weller** and **Sally Morgan** are part of such a socio-literary environment troubled at times by niche marketing.

The Hand that Signed the Paper, published in 1994, dealt with "the complicity of Ukrainians with the Nazis during the Second World War and the question of the guilt of their descendants" (Bennett, 250). It was marketed as being the work of **Helen Demidenko**, a young Ukrainian-Australian writer and received prestigious literary prizes such as the Australian Vogel award in 1993, the Miles Franklin award in 1995 and the Australian Literature Society's Gold Medal. In 1995 when it was revealed that the Australian-born Helen Darville who was of British origin had actually authored the book, the controversy that followed threw up debates about 'authenticity', 'identity' and 'appropriation of voice'. Did someone who was not really Ukrainian have the right to discuss such a sensitive issue? Was using the voice of a Ukrainian protagonist or assuming the identity of an Australian-Ukrainian morally and creatively right? What do you think?

Similar issues were thrown up in the realm of Aboriginal literature, when it was revealed that Mudrooroo was actually of African-American stock and not of Aboriginal. This was especially disturbing because Mudrooroo had made substantial contributions towards carving a space for Aboriginal writing in English within the academia and publishing sector. A series of such controversies were to follow suit that involved attempts to question the degree of Aboriginality manifested in the persons and writings of Sally Morgan and Archie Weller. In most of these arguments the discussion always came back to questions of authenticity and identity. What are the features of an 'authentic Aborigine'? Is it a question of purity of blood? Is it connected to having been through traumatic experiences because one was thought of as an Aborigine? Does it have to do with the kind of themes or subjects one writes about? These are really very difficult questions to answer because the writing of groups like Aborigines is not just for the sake of producing a piece of literature. It is deeply linked to the politics of creating a place for Aboriginal people and culture in modern Australia. This politics has been connected to questions of identity for a long time because in the beginning Aborigines were discriminated against on the basis of their racial identity.

The success that **Leon Carmen** - a white Australian male—had in passing himself off as a female Aboriginal writer to prove that niche marketing favored minority writers too reinforced these debates. Bennett comments on the implications of these developments:

> From one point of view, these exposés represented a necessary honesty, an insistence, as it were, on correct advertising and fair trading. From another point of view, they may suggest a backlash against a period of 'politically correct' social engineering during which minorities, or apparently silenced groups in the community – the young, migrants, Aborigines, for instance – were emphasised, and subsidised to encourage their work. (251)

Another thing brought to light by these issues was the way literary and social labels are created within discourses of the nation, popular culture, the publishing industry and academic/literary circles. The politics of exclusion and inclusion, which are part of terms and categories, may at one level be of significant political importance for groups trying to build representations of themselves that challenge and replace former stereotypes. At another level, they tend at times to rigidly define the boundaries within which literary creation is done and marketed. Issues of identity construction and representation, as well as the nature of authenticity, appropriation or assimilation will continue to be important as long as the identity politics is part of the Australian social setup. You may find that in India we can see a parallel situation in relation to

Dalit literature. What is Dalit literature? Who is a Dalit writer? Can a non-Dalit write Dalit literature? These are some of the issues related to identity politics.

6.2.4 tical Perspectives

Australia has been home to quite a few developments in the field of theories linked to literature – its study and interpretation. The most significant of these include theories linked to postcolonial and culture studies. Culture studies, which began in Britain in the 1960's subsequently moved to the US and are now thriving in Australian universities. Much work is being done in these two fields at Australian universities, so ideas are constantly being challenged and changed. Below I will be just briefly dealing with two texts that became very popular when postcolonial and cultural studies were gaining importance as fields of study.

The Empire Writes Back by Ashcroft et al was an important piece of postcolonial theorizing which sought to draw parallels between the writing of literature in various former colonies of Britain in areas such as formation of literary canons, themes and the subversive use of 'english' to represent a postcolonial reality. Though *The Empire Writes Back* drew a bit of criticism after an initial positive reception because of its tendency to gloss over differences in postcolonial situations in the search for parallels, it still remains a significant contribution to postcolonial theorizing.

Cultural studies opened the frontiers of literature allowing it to be informed by historical and cultural points of view as well as modes of research. This has meant that history and culture have ceased to be merely contexts in the study of literature and have become co-texts, insights from which are connected to those from the literary texts. This meant that literature stopped being studied only in terms of literary features. An effort was made to place literature and writing within larger contexts and alongside the writing and ideas from the historical, social and political fields of society. Simon During's *Culture Studies Reader* is a significant contribution to this field. Let me also refer you back to MEG-5, your course on Literary Criticism and Theory, where you were introduced to Cultural Studies.

6.3 LET US SUM UP

Hybridity and difference mark the nature of literary production in Australia today just as its multicultural social composition is being emphasized. The themes and trends discussed in this section reflect to a certain extent the degree to which the construction of identity at the personal, community and national levels have influenced the world of Australian literature.

6.4 QUESTIONS

1. Discuss some thematic strands in Australian literature.
2. Discuss the role of history and culture in literary studies.
3. What do recent developments in Australian literature reflect?

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6.6 SELECT BIBLIOGRAPHY

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BLOCK INTRODUCTION

The greatest literature is the one which is universal and yet all great literature is local in the sense that it is based on a certain culture and all great culture is conditional on the environmental values of the place where the writer belongs. The geographical position and the natural distinctiveness of a country is a fact, too fundamental to be ignored while assessing and appreciating its art, its culture, the psyche of the people inhabiting it and their literary output. The same is true of Australian literature, the natural distinctiveness of the Australian continent is axiomatic in this history of this continent, its bearing on the people who inhabited it either as natives or as migrants is self-evident.

To trace the history in a nutshell, Australian literature is a new literature in English. It is only two hundred years old. White people from Britain came to Australia towards the end of the eighteenth century. Prior to that the nomads from Indonesia and adjoining countries moved to Australia which was earlier a part of Australasia. But as the continent of Australia drifted apart from the mainland, the nomads could not go back. They were of black skin. They inhabited several parts of Australia as separate groups. They followed the primitive style of living and did not develop any written dialect. In 1770, Captain Cook discovered the route from England to Australia, and in 1788, Captain Phillip landed at Port Jackson in Botany Bay on 26 January 1788. The First Fleet brought numerous convicts, and some jailers along with provisions for settlement in Australia. The British colony developed over a span of one hundred and twelve years and then in 1901, Australians became a free nation.

During the colonial period, Australian poetry was started by the convicts and officers. Australian poetry made a steady progress since then. The colourful history of the development of Australia and her white people along with the Aborigines at different stations of life found a reflection in the poetry that was written by migrants as well as native - born Australians. The history of the beginning and growth of a new literature in a new country with its barren lands is not only interesting but also a subject matter of great curiosity.

In this Block, the history of the nineteenth century Australian poetry will be unfolded. But it is not a mere history. In the Block, the life and works of several significant Australian poets of the nineteenth century are discussed. Some of their outstanding poems are analysed in detail. The noted scholars and critics on the subject are referred to. Thus the Block will take you through the panoramic history of Australian poetry during the first century of its existence, and acquaint you with the works of its outstanding poets. You will also come in contact with the texts of their poems which you can enjoy and analyse for yourselves. However, a commentary has been added in each unit for facilitating your critical understanding of the poems.

The Block has been divided into six units as follows :

UNIT 1 Nineteenth Century Australian poetry : An Introduction
UNIT 2 W.C. Wentworth
UNIT 3 Charles Harpur
UNIT 4 Henry Kendall
UNIT 5 A.L. Gordon and A.B. Paterson
UNIT 6 Ada Cambridge

In Unit 1, you'll find a critical survey of nineteenth century Australian poetry with highlights of the main thematic concerns and stylistic features. In the subsequent units, you'll be introduced to the life and works of the significant poets, and detailed analyses of some of their representative poems.

Good luck to you!

UNIT 1 NINETEENTH CENTURY AUSTRALIAN POETRY : AN INTRODUCTION

Structure

1.0 Objectives
1.1 A Survey of Nineteenth Century Australian Poetry
- 1.1.1 Impact of British Poetry
- 1.1.2 Flora and Fauna of Australia
- 1.1.3 Colonial Setting and Sentiment
- 1.1.4 Australian Identity

1.2 Major Themes and Stylistic Features
- 1.2.1 The Land and the People
- 1.2.2 Estrangement and Alienation
- 1.2.3 Mateship
- 1.2.4 Women's Voices
- 1.2.5 Australian Poetics

1.3 Let Us Sum Up
1.4 Questions

1.0 OBJECTIVES

In this unit, we will study the development of Australian poetry from its inception to the end of the nineteenth century . To understand the distinctive features of Australian poetry published during the nineteenth century, we will examine its predominant thematic concerns and modes of articulation. This survey of nineteenth century Australian poetry will equip you better for comprehending the significance and the historical context of the individual poets and their poems which will be analysed in the subsequent units.

1.1 A SURVEY OF NINETEENTH CENTURY AUSTRALIAN POETRY

You must remember that though Australia existed as a landmass since the pre-cambrian age, it did not have human population for a considerable period of time. Its earliest inhabitants were nomads who migrated from South-East Asia about forty thousand years ago. They developed an indigenous culture of their own though they did not have any written dialect. They were designated as Aborigines by the white people who discovered the route to the island continent in the late eighteenth century. In 1770, **Captain Cook** (1728 - 79) discovered the route from England to Australia, landed at Botany Bay, named the whole of the east coast of Australia 'New South Wales' and took possession of it for Britain.

On 26 January 1788, **Captain Arthur Phillip** (1738 - 1814) unfurled the Union Jack on the shore of Sydney Cove. The day is celebrated as Australia Day. He was appointed the first Governor-General of the British Settlement which began as a penal colony with convicts and jailers transported from Britain. Hence, in the eighteenth century there was no Australian literature. In this respect **Judith Wright** has observed :

> If there were men of a poetic turn among the convicts and soldiers of the first settlement, they had probably no time or inclination to exercise the gift. Mere survival, and a fair share of the rum, perhaps filled the early ambitions of

Australian lifestyle is reflected in Australian poetry much more perceptibly by the expatriate poet **Adam Lindsay Gordon** (1833 - 70) . He arrived in Australia in 1853 and remained there till he committed suicide in 1870. In 1864 he published the ballad *The Feud*. In 1867 he published *Astaroth*. His poetic reputation, however, rests on the poems published in two volumes, *Sea Spray and Smoke Drift* (1867) and *Bush Ballads and Galloping Rhymes* (1870) . **Brian Elliott** points out :

> Nothing in all Colonial poetry matches in importance Gordon's signal achievement, the fixation of the Australian image. (Serle : 34)

With the launch of the most significant Australian literary journal, *Bulletin* , in 1880, a movement for nationalism in Australian literature was initiated. The impact of this is most felt in the poetry of **A.B. Paterson** (1864 - 1941) . Paterson is also known as 'Banjo ' as he used that pseudonym for his early contributions to the *Bulletin*. His first volume of poems entitled *The Man from Snowy River and Other Verses* (1895) sold out in the week of its publication, and it went through six editions in six months. His ballads about drovers, teamsters, bushrangers, picnic race meetings and animosity between squatters and drovers made him a very popular poet. His other books of poems appeared in the twentieth century. **H.M.Green** highlights the signal contribution of Paterson :

> Paterson more than any other balladist, more indeed than any other Australian writer of verse, conveys to us the atmosphere of the Australian countryside and its inhabitants . (405)

You must know that nineteenth century Australian poetry included feminist voices. The most notable Australian woman poet of the century is **Ada Cambridge** (1844 - 1926) . She published her most important book of poems *Unspoken Thoughts* (1887) anonymously. **Patricia Barton** mentions the themes of her poetry :

> *Unspoken Thoughts* expresses indignation at social and sexual injustice, longings for love and sexual expression, explorations of motherhood, fear of death and the agony of illness, and a challenging of conviction and orthodox beliefs . (139)

The span of one hundred years of the nineteenth century witnessed not only the growth and proliferation of western civilization in the newly found continent of Australia but also the development of poetry in English in a new landscape wherein a new civilization gradually matured. Australian poetry started under marks of inheritance from British poetry but gradually absorbed the Australian themes from the nature and people of Australia and simultaneously developed a matching Australian idiom and poetics. Thus nineteenth-Century Australian poetry offers an interesting scope for studying the growth of a new kind of poetry. The various aspects of the same will be studied in the following sections.

1.1.1 Impact of British Poetry

Judith Wright has rightly commented :

> The history of Australian poetry from the First Settlement in 1788 until the end of the first world war is largely a study in the adaptation of the European (and specifically English) poetic consciousness and tradition to entirely new, and apparently hostile, conditions. (58)

The adaptation of English poetic diction of Britain is markedly apparent in the poetry of the early versifiers of Australia. For example, the following lines by M.M. **Robinson** immediately echo the metrical rhythm of the heroic couplets used by Pope and other poets of the eighteenth century in Britain :

Be then the Bard of thy Country ! O rather
Should such be thy choice Than a monarchy wide !
Lo, 'tis the land of the grave of thy father!
'Tis the cradle of liberty ! - Think and decide.

(Wilkes ; iv - iv)

In the Australian poetry of the second half of the nineteenth century, perceptible marks of the influence of British Romantic poetry are traceable. **Wilkes** further remarks :

> If **Harpur's** main affinity among the Romantics is with Wordsworth, **Gordon** is closer in temperament to the melancholic and reckless Byron , and in literary protection to Scott as a writer of ballad and narrative verse . (vi)

About Kendall , **Wilkes'** observation is appropriate ;

> Kendall is the foremost exemplar of the Romantic treatment of Australian landscape in nineteenth-century verse ... Like Harpur , he was influenced by the Romantic conception of the poet as a solitary dreamer ... (ix)

Thus the poetry of Harpur , Kendall and Gordon bears the imprint of the British Romantic poetry in various ways. This will be illustrated in detail in the subsequent units.

1.1.2 Flora and Fauna of Australia

However , despite the marks of imitativeness , as pointed out in the preceding section, what redeems the Australian poetry of the nineteenth century is the attempt on the part of the poets to assimilate into English language the names of the Australian flora and fauna. The emotional imperative of both the expatriate and native-born poets of Australia of this period find a literary reflection in the re-oriented vocabulary and idiom of this innovative poetry . Distinctively , the flora and fauna of Australia as reflected in the poetry give it an indigenous colour and flavour.

Wentworth's *Australasia* mentions and depicts the local space , as in the following lines, but does not incorporate the typical Australian flora and fauna :

Here lowing kine, these bounding courses graze,
Here waves the corn, and there the woody maize ;
Here the tall peach puts forth its pinky bloom
And there the orange scatters its perfume.....

(Wilkes :5)

Barron Field mentions Kangroo as ' the spirit of Australia '.**Judith Wright** observes:

> 'Botany Bay Wildflowers' (Field's poem) is appreciatively of the flora of the sandstone near Sydney, which had sent Banks into professional ecstasies.....(60)

Harpur's vow to be ' the bard of thy country ' manifests itself in his vivid description of the land. Though he made efforts in his poetry to recreate the landscape. Australian sohitude and desolation are very sensitively evoked in the following lines :

Not a bird disturbs the air,
There is quiet everywhere:
Over plains and our woods
what a mighty stillness broods.

(Wilkes :15)

Gradually, however, the tendency towards nationalism gathered force, and by the end of the century, Australian poetry got rid of inferiority complex and moved towards a robust sense of pride in the country, her people and their achievements, Paterson's poetry registers this change.

1.1.4 Australian Identity

Homesickness, initial surprise and disgust with the strange and uncouth landscape and seasonal variations of the antipodes (while it is summer in Britain, it is winter in Australia) and sense of alienation and displacement gradually gave way to the development of a growing sense of attachment to the land . People of different states came together , and formed the Commonwealth of Australia in 1901. During the whole of nineteenth century, the process of integration and development of Australian identity was under way. The identification of the Australian flora and fauna, the bushlife , mateship, horsemanship and other features that charcterised the Australian identity find a continual reflection in the nineteenth - century Australian poetry. The poetry of Harpur, Kendall, Gordon, Paterson and Cambridge reflect the development of Australian identity.

1.2 MAJOR THEMES AND STYLISTIC FEATURES

From our discussion of nineteenth century Australian poetry in the preceeding sections it appears that Australian poetry focuses on certain themes; to get a closer view of the characteristics of nineteenth century Australian poetry , we will identify the recurrent themes in the nineteenth century Australian poetry in the following sections. Since the themes can be embodied only through words and patterns of verbal representations, a brief study of the stylistic features of nineteenth century Australian poetry will be included in this unit. There could be some repetition; but repetition, in distance education, is - you must remember - for reinforcement.

1.2.1 The Land and the People

For the pioneer Australian poets, the land and the people of Australia were a tantalizing subject matter of utmost curiosity and interest. The landscape encountered by the Australian poets appeared strange and uncouth to them. But gradually they accepted the landscape, and made it a recurring theme of their poetry. Of the first poets to encounter the strangeness of the land, **Barron Field** is most articulate and straightforward in his perception as revealed in the first stanza of the poem ' The Kangaroo ' :

> Kangaroo, Kangaroo !
> Thou Spirit of Australia,
> That redeems from utter failure,
> And warrants the creation
> Of this fifth part of the Earth,
> Which would seem an after-birth,
> Not conceived in the Beginning
> (For GOD bless'd His work at first,
> And saw that it was good),
> But emerg'd at the first sinning,
> When the ground was therefore curst ;
> And hence this barren wood !
>
> (Ackland 1993 : 14)

With the passage of time, a different mode of perception developed. Instead of disgust, a sense of wonder at the manifold grandeur of Australia's natural setting emerged in the poetry of the poets born in the land itself. **Emily Manning** (1845 - 90), born and educated in Sydney contributed many poems under the pseudonym 'Australie'. Her exquisite description of the landscape of Australia is found in most of

with the bizarre landscape of Australia, and the reminiscences of the British homeland bred in the first poets a deep sense of estrangement and alienation which the later poets gradually overcame. The agony of estrangement and alienation receives an intense verbal articulation in the lines of the three stanzas quoted from the middle of a poem entitled ' The Female Transport ' by an anonymous poet :

To hurt my heart when on a coach I my native town passed by ;
To see so many I did know, it made me heave a sigh ;
Then to a ship was sent with speed along with many more,
Whose aching hearts did grieve to go unto Van Diemen's shore.
The sea was rough, ran mountains high, with us poor girls 'twas hard,
No one but God to us came nigh, no one did us regard.
At length, alas! we reached the land, it grieved us ten times more,
That wretched place Van Diemen's Land, far from our Native shore
They chained us two by two , and whipped and lashed along,
They cut off our provisions if we did the least thing wrong ;
They march us in the burning sun until our feet are sore.
So hard's our lot now we got to Van Diemen's shore

(Ackland 1993 : 87)

To the first white occupiers of Australia , who were mostly convicts, the land represented punishment , hence it became a symbol of torture and penalty. So the mental associations of the country were gloomy and forbidding . **Francis Macnamara's** poem 'A Convict's Lament on the Death of Captain Logan' embodies a deep sense of estrangement and alienation. Two stanzas from the poem are reproduced below :

I am a native of Erin's island
But banished now from my native shore ;
They tore me from my aged parents,
And from the maiden I adore.
In transient storms as I set sailing,
Like mariner bold my course did steer,
Sydney Harbour was my destination --
That cursed place at length drew near.
He said : ' I've been a prisoner at Port Macquarie,
At Norfolk Island and Emu plains ;
At Castle Hill and cursed Toongabbee --
At all those places I've worked in chains :
But of all the places of condemnation,
In each penal station of New South Wales,
To Moreton Bay I found no equal,
For excessive tyranny each day prevails

(Ackland 1993 : 89)

1.2.3 Mateship

After the penal colony came to exist as a reality, with more and more shipments of convicts from British shores, Australia witnessed the emerging phenomenon of bushmen and bushrangers -- in the early phase, mostly escaped convicts ranging in the bush. After lonely travels in the daytime through the dry land, the bushrangers settled for the evening and met the fellow - travellers, camped in the bush, and gradually developed a sense of mateship among themselves .

The mateship gradually became a cult phenomenon in the nineteenth century Australia It acquired the mark of national identity of Australians. Particularly the ballads of Australia celebrated this mateship among bushrangers and horsemen. The sense of mateship permeates the Australian poetry of the nineteenth century : and perhaps this accounts for sympathy and admiration for the escaped convicts who later

illustration of Cambridge's forthright and daring style which projects the spirit of rebellion in woman, the following four lines of her poem ' An Answer ' are quoted below :

Thy love I am. Thy wife I cannot be,
To wear the yoke of servitude - to take
Strange, unknown fetters that I cannot break
On Soul and flesh that should be mine, and free.

(Ackland 1993 : 209)

1.2.5 Australian Poetics

As pointed out earlier, Australian poetry in its initial phase depended on the poetics of the British poetry of the eighteenth century. The narrative style, the ornamental rhetoric , rigidity in verse pattern and heroic couplets of the eighteenth century British poetry left their indelible stamp on the poetics of early Australian poetry. But at the same time, the simplicity and colloquial diction of British ballads, many of which reached Australia with the convicts and other settlers who came from England, Scotland and Ireland, found its way into the evolution of the Australian poetic diction of the nineteenth century . With the passage of time, a traceable impact of the style of Romantic and Victorian poetry is also discernible in the later evolution of Australian poetic style. The poetry of Harpur, Kendall, Gordon, Paterson and Cambridge exhibits a fusion of all the strands mentioned above. However, what transformed the poetic style of Australia during the nineteenth century is the infusion of the images and mataphors culled from Australian flora and fauna, local place - names and the gradual evolution of the ethos of the Australia milieu. The poets gradually adapted the British poetic style to the local situation, and a new distinctive style indigenous to Australia gradually evolved, and gave to Australian poetry a distinctive mode of articulation reflecting the Australian temper.

The specific aspects of the Australian poetic style will be noticed and commented upon in the subsequent units where the texts of several Australian poems of the nineteenth century will be analysed in detail.

The above sections of this unit give you a general overview of the nineteenth century Australian poetry, and draw your attention to certain singular features that characterize this poetry. However, while reading the specific poems, analysed in the subsequent sections, and the reference books mentioned in the Bibliography, you may draw your own conclusions, thus making your new acquaintance with the nineteenth century Australian poetry more interesting and rewarding.

1.3 LET US SUM UP

Australian poetry is a literary offshoot of the British colonization of Australia which began in the late eighteenth century. During the one hundred years of the nineteenth century, there developed a new kind of poetry in English in the new environs of Australia. The white convicts and jailers and other settlers who kept on coming to Australia as well as their offsprings dwelt in Australia and built a new western civilization in Australia. As a part of the cultural life that developed among the new generations of white people living in Australia, Australian poetry gradually took a new definitive shape and colour. The smell of the Australian earth, water and sky and the flavour of life lived in the Australian landscape found a palpable embodiment in the Australian poetry that was written over the period of one hundred years during the nineteenth century.

Gradually, the Australian poetry shed its marks and features of imitation of the British poetic mode and style, and developed an indigenous tradition incorporating

UNIT 2 W.C. WENTWORTH

Structure

2.0 Objectives
2.1 W.C. Wentworth :His Life and Works
  2.1.1 Characteristic Features of Wentworth's Poetry
2.2 *Australasia* : Text
  2.2.1 Discussion
2.3 Ballads and Folk Songs of Australia : A Bird's Eye View
2.4 'The Wild Colonial Boy': Text
  2.4.1 Discussion
2.5 Let Us Sum Up
2.6 Questions

2.0 OBJECTIVES

After you are acquainted with a general survey of the nineteenth century Australian poetry and its characteristic features through your reading of unit 1 , I'd like to make you more closely familiar with the details of some of the important poets and some of their representative poems. While Unit 1 took you through a macrocosmic study of the nineteenth century Australian poetry , the rest of the units in this Block will make you acquainted with a microcosmic study of the same.

Through this unit, you'll know , at first , the characteristic features of an early versifier W.C. Wentworth's verses, and thereafter analyse a long poem *Australasia* by him.

In the second section of this unit, you'll be introduced to the ballads and folk songs that were first orally transmitted, and then written down, which, obviously, are mostly anonymous. The folk ballad that will be presented to you as a representative ballad of the time is 'The Wild Colonial Boy'. The ballad gives you the flavour of the colonial life led in the nineteenth century Australia.

2.1 W.C. WENTWORTH : HIS LIFE AND WORKS

He was born in 1793, five years after the Australian Settlement. Being born in Australia, he was the first native Australian to have written poetry about Australia. He was the son of a surgeon and magistrate D'Arcy Wentworth and Catherine Crowly. He was born while his parents were en route from Sydney to Norfolk Island. He was sent to England for education. He came back to Australia in 1810. Thereafter he was appointed acting provost - marshall by Governor Lachlan Macquarie in 1811.

He developed a passion for trekking in Australia . He crossed to Blue Mountains with Blaxland and Lawson in 1813.

He returned to England to study law during 1817-20. He was deeply interested in Australian landscape and Australian political affairs. In 1819 he published *A Statistical, Historical, and Political Description of the Colony of New South Wales.*

While at Cambridge in 1823, he wrote the poem *Australasia* which was awarded the second position in the Chancellor's poetry competition for that year.

transmitted. But in the second half of the century, poets of considerable merit took up writing the literary ballads in order to project the national life of Australia, and evolve certain characteristic images, metaphors and symbols that specify the features of Australia and Australian lifestyle. Poets like Gordon and Paterson immortalized the ballad form for the Australian nation through literary ballads like ' The Sick Stockrider ', and ' The Man from Snowy River ' which will be analysed in the subsequent units

Judith Wright makes a fine distinction between the ballads that evolved in Australia and the poetry that was composed in the augustan mode by the educated Australians the nineteenth century . Wright comments :

> A few ballads achieved print in various newspapers , but in general this was considerably later than the period of their first circulation : on the whole this earthy and constant undercurrent of song, which of course continued far beyond the days of transportation, was orally transmitted. Most of the ballads appear to have been adaptation of English and Irish originals ; but these early songs and recitations had about them an atmosphere of reality which was in general sadly lacking in the productions of literary - minded men such as W.C. Wentworth. (56)

In *The Oxford Companion to Australian Literature*, reference is made to the times when he ballads in Australia were composed :

> In Australia the terms ' folk - song ' and ' ballad ' describe a body of songs, often but by no means always of anonymous authorship, which tell stories of or depict Australian life and which have had currency among ordinary Australian people as a result of oral performance, particularly between the early days of European settlement and the advent of recordings and the radio. (267)

Edgar Waters throws new light on the character of Australian balladry and show, through illustrations how they relate to Australian life :

> The ballads which are fairly certainly convict - made can be numbered off on the fingers of one hand. Perhaps it is surprising that so many have survived for us. All but one of them are in Irish street ballad styles. Before the gold rushes, something like half the population was Irish, if not by birth, then in great degree by cultural background. The Irish street ballad was to remain probably the strongest of all influences on bush song making until near the end of the nineteenth century.
>
> None of the surviving convict-made ballads could have been written earlier than the 1820s. Gentlemanly observers noted that convicts were making ballads before this time , but did not think their words worth the trouble of recording. We need not be in any doubt that they made a powerful appeal to the people who sang them. The most widely sung of them all was the ballad of the convict bushranger Jack Donahoe; it survived in oral tradition into our own day (in North America as well as in Australia). It has been said that the government banned the singing of ' Bold Jack Donahoe '. A formal interdict is undocumented and unlikely, but a Riverina bushman recalled that as late as the 1890s the police took their own steps at least to discourage the singing of ballads of convicts and bushrangers in public places. One of his mates spent the night in the lock - up after singing ' The Wild Colonial Boy ' (which, apparently in the 1870s, took the place of 'Bold Jack Donahoe' as the chief of bushranger ballads). Ballads of convicts and bushrangers, this bushman said, were known as *treason songs*; this is the name the Irish gave to some of their songs in the Penal days. Folk song adds a good deal to our knowledge of parts of history which are not well documented in the printed record. (260-1)

Wild Colonial Boy, The, one of Australia's best known folk-songs, tells the story of an Irish-born bushranger, named Jack Doolan, who terrorizes the squatters, holds up the Beechworth mail coach in the 1860 s and robs Jodge MacEvoy, and is eventually killed when surrounded by three troopers, Kelly, Davis and Fitzroy , to whom he refuses to surrender, (745 - 6)

In Australia, the popularity of the ballad is such that ' wild colonial boys' became a phrase describing the bushrangers in general, as in Frank Clune's book Wild *Colonial Boys* , and even any Australian sharing their bravado and daring.

A ballad like 'The Wild Colonial Boy' represents the infusion of simplicity and bravery into the composition of Australian poetry. In the subsequent units, you'll find even educated poets like Gordon and Paterson adopted the ballad form for some of their most well known poems.

2.5 LET US SUM UP

In the early poetry of Australia, we find an impact of the eighteenth century heroic couplets of British poetry as well as a continuity of ballad tradition from Britain. Thus both literary and popular styles of poetry of Britain may be said to have influenced the poetics of Australian poetry.

W. C. Wentworth represents the best example of the eighteenth century poetic mode practised at the early stage in the development of Australian poetry. Wentworth's poetry is important from another point of view, namely, the Australian orientation in the thematic aspects of evolving the poetic tradition of nineteenth century Australia.

'The Wild Colonial Boy ' is an Australian ballad that represents the early history of Australia. It chronicles the story of the escaped convicts who braved the wild bushes of Australia, and laid their lives out of courage and bravado . The outdoor life of the early white Australians and their indomitable spirit to confront the challenges of life in a newly discovered country are typified by the bush hero depicted in the ballads. Thus the ballads and folk songs play an important part in the development of indigenous Australian poetry that depicts the Australian outback and the Australian lifestyle in the nineteenth century. Australian poetry of the nineteenth century thus provides a mirror to the nineteenth century Australia.

2.6 QUESTIONS

1. Do you think that Wentworth has been able to project a vivid picture of Sydney in *Australasia*?
2. Do you think *Australasia* can still be read with pleasure and curiosity? What are the most attractive features of *Australasia*?
3. What is the significance of ballads and folksongs in the development of nineteenth century Australian poetry?
4. Do you think ' The Wild Colonial Boy ' still can hold interest for readers outside Australia?
5. Does ' The Wild colonial Boy ' appeal to you? On what account does the ballad appeal to you?

UNIT 3 CHARLES HARPUR

Structure

3.0 Objectives
3.1 Charles Harpur : His Life and Works
3.2 Characteristic Features of Harpur's Poetry
3.3 'The Bush Fire ' : Text
3.3.1 Discussion
3.4 'A Midsummer Noon in the Australian Forest ' : Text
3.4.1 Discussion
3.5 Let Us Sum Up
3.6 Questions

3.0 OBJECTIVES

After discussing the growth of Australian poetry in its first phase and the poetry of W.C. Wentworth, let us now turn to the poetry of **Charles Harpur**, who, for the first time on the Australian soil, professed to be known as the *Australian* poet. Though he was underestimated as a poet during his lifetime, he is now recognized as the first Australian poet to write about Australia with a genuine sense of belonging to the country. You will study two of his poems in this unit.

3.1 Charles Harpur: His Life and Works

Charles Harpur was born in 1813 in the valley of Hawkesbury River in New South Wales. Both his parents, Joseph and Sara , were convicts transported to Australia. However, when Charles was born as their third child, they were emancipists. Charles lived his early life at Windsor.

In the little town of Windsor with its central square, its Greenway church and the bridge across the river, Charles discovered his love for poetry and determined on his vocation. Later, in 'The Dream By the Fountain ' , he wrote of those days; making the Australian Muse address him :

> For I felt thee - even then, wildly, wondrously musing
> Of glory and grace by old Hawkesbury's side,
> Scenes that then spread recordless around those suffusing
> With the purple of love - I behold thee, and sighed.
> Sighed - for the fire - robe of thought had enwound thee,
> Betokening so much that the happy must dread,
> And whence there should follow, howe'er it renowned thee,
> What sorrows of heart, and what labours of head .....
>
> (Gifford : 41)

In a manuscript book dated 1851, Harpur gives a self - portrait :

> I was earnestly imaginative, simple of mind, and single of heart, I could greatly venerate whatever I could believe in, as being righteous and true. I was affectionate to all -- forgiveness -- perhaps to weakness I was (as I am still) an enthusiast in the cause of human liberty and progress: liberty in all directions and progress infinite. (Wright 1963 : 6)

In 1829, when Harpur was sixteen, his family broke up. He went away to work on the Hunter River, inland from Newcastle, probably as a farm - labourer.

When he was twenty years old . Harpur's verses began to appear in various issues of the colony's newspapers, and thereafter he wrote, and was published, fairly continuously. He was at this time in Sydney where he found occasional employment.

In 1859 he was appointed assistant gold commissioner at Araluen. But a few years after, he was beset with misfortune after misfortune. In 1866 his goldfield position was retrenched. In 1867 his farm at Nerrigundah was ruined by floods. The greatest blow came when his son Charles was killed in a shooting accident. Together with these personal setback, the lack of recognition of his literary efforts made the final years of his life bitter and frustrated. He died in 1868.

Harpur's poetic works are fairly representative of the transition in Australian society during the second and third quarters of the nineteenth century. In his poetry, he undertook the novel task of adapting English language to communicate the local flavour of Australia, and inculcate a sense of pride in the local scenario and habitation. Harpur's poetry is important in this respect. **Wright** aptly observes :

> It seems fairly clear that the young native-born Australians, the ' Currency Lads ' of the early nineteenth century, felt a certain solidarity among themselves, and a pride and independence that may have been a reaction against the earlier days of the settlement, when authority and the heavy hand of English officialdom ruled. Whether Thompson's example decided him or not, Charles Harpur seems to have chosen his calling early. His life from his youth onward was to be remarkable for the tenacity and dedication with which he clung to the almost impossible task of laying the foundation for an Australian poetry, under conditions that would have discouraged most writers. (Wright 1964 : 57)

Harpur's poetical works that were published during his lifetime have already been mentioned in Unit 1. He wrote various types of poetry, from lyric to ode to sonnet to long narrative verses. **Wright** may be quoted again to specify Harpur's commitment to poetry and politics of equality and liberty :

> He (Harpur) produced throughout his life not only lyrical and narrative verses by a few of which, of convenient length for reprinting in anthologies, he is generally known, but a flood of polemical and political verse, lampoons and topical epigrams, of fierce sincerity and wit not wholly obscured by the ponderous diction of early nineteenth century verse - journalism. He remained throughout his life (as could not be said of all his early contemporaries) a radical reformist in politics and a believer in Australia's future as a country where equality and liberty might flourish ; but his political aims were always subsidiary to his self-dedication to poetry and the search for philosophic and religious truth. (1964: 58 - 59)

When *The Bushrangers and Other Poems* was published in 1853 , forty poems were included in the volume. The rigidity of augustan mode was relaxed in Harpur's poetry which, however, indicated a broader assimilation of the influence of Milton, Wordsworth and Shelley, Thus Harpur's poetry brought about a change in the evolution of Australian poetry.

His poem ' The Creek of the Four Graves ' is a long poem, narrating the story of settlers murdered by Aborigines, that has remained as his best - known longer work . This work indicates the particular quality of Harpur's observation of Australian landscape and his indebtedness to Wordsworth. 'The Bush Fire' is an excellent piece of local description. The same will be analysed in a subsequent section.

The following observation by **Wright** on the relation of Harpur and Kendall as poets throws into sharp relief Harpur's essential concerns and achievement as an Australian poet of the nineteenth century :

> What took Kendall's imagination in Harpur's poetry was probably less the elder man's method and manner than his dedication to the ' Australian Muse ' and his treatment of Australian subjects. (1964 . 64)

Also, the following assessment of **Bruce Bennett** is noteworthy:

> Charles Harpur, Australian-born son of emanipist parents, is, however, the only poet of this period, who achieves an original 'Australian Voice: Harpur successfully adopted English poetic forms as well as classical cultural traditions to the conditions of Australian colonial life, and his poetry conveys his delight in the Hawkesbury River country side in which he grew up; his passionate republican beliefs and political reformism; his religious mysticism; and his condemnation of tyranny. His work often radical in tone and he was an accomplished satirist. (28)

3.2 CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES OF HARPUR'S POETRY

After knowing Harpur's importance as an Australian poet, and his contribution to the growth of Australian poetry, you'll be familliarized with certain distinctive features of his poetry.

The first change that Harpur introduced into Australian poetry is the assimilation of the Wordsworthian concept of the poet as one ' endowed with a more lively sensibility, more enthusiasm and tenderness ... and a more comprehensive soul ' (Wordsworth : 737). **Wilkes** observes :

> The theory of poetry as primarily a form of self - expression, and of the poet himself as a special kind of being ... becomes firmly established in Australian verse with Charles Harpur. (iii)

Thus Harpur's poetry endowed Australian poetry with a new dimension. From stiff Augustan poetic mode, Australian poetry was released ; it came under the impact of Romantic poetry through Harpur's poetic efforts

Through Harpur's poetry, the impact of both Milton and Wordsworth was transmitted to Australian poetry. In Harpur's imagination, poetry assumed the persona of an inspiring Muse. In one of his early poems, ' The Dream by the Fountain', Harpur expresses his dedication to poetry and in particular to the Australian Muse, the poetic genius of his own country. The poem is illustrative of the characteristics of Harpur's poetry both in terms of his thematic preoccupations and stylistic attainment:

> I am the Muse of the Evergreen Forest,
> I am the spouse of thy spirit, lone Bard !
> Ev'n in the days when thy boyhood there worst
> Thy pastimes drew on thee my dearest regard.
> For I felt thee - ev'n wildly, wondrously musing
> Of glory and grace by old Hawkesbury's side,
> Scenes that then spread recordless around thee suffusing
> With the purple of love -- I beheld thee, and sighed ...
> Then would I prompt in the still hour of dreaming
> Some thought of thy beautiful country again,

Of her yet to be famed streams, through dark woods far - gleaming,
Of her bold shores that throb to the beat of the main ...
Be then the Bard of thy Country ! O rather
Should such be thy choice than a monarchy wide!
Lo, 'tis the land of the grave of thy father!
'Tis the cradle of Liberty ! Think, and decide ...

(Wright 1964 : 62)

Harpur's experiences in the environs of the Hawkesbury River during his early youth cast a profound influence on his choice of the subject matter of his poetry. His love of the mountains and valleys that he roamed through in the Hawkesbury countryside manifests itself again and again in his verses. He particularly highlights the effects of light of dawn, noon, sunset and moonlight as well as 'the light that never was on sea or land, (Wordsworth : 452) on the Australian landscape so dear to him.

However, though Harpur had to struggle to make the prevailing verse style of the Australian poets adaptable and pliant enough for the depiction of the strange landscape of Australia, some of the best lines in ' The Creek of Four Graves', as quoted below, cannot claim to be entirely free from the impact of the eighteenth century English poetic diction :

Out extending , lo,

The heights rose crowding, with their summits all
Dissolving, as it seemed, and partly lost
In the exceeding radiancy aloft ;
And thus transfigured, for a while they stood
Like a great Company of Archeons, crowned
With burning diadems, and tented o'er
With canopies of purple and of gold! (Wilkes : 17)

The theme of Nature became a dominant subject in Australian poetry with the advent of Harpur. Perhaps it was also timely, as there was a need to project the Australian landscape in the poetry of the time in order to make it Australian, which was the avowed aim and mission of Harpur as a poet. Harpur represents Nature in his poetry in its larger movements -- as seen in a bushfire or a storm in the mountains, or in the darkness enveloping those lost in the bush. Wilkes observes :

> Indeed what identifies the scenery as Australian for Harpur is not the presence of the dingo or bidawong, the wattle or the eucalypt but this sense of immensity ... Among the " large effect " which he captures most strikingly are the effects of light in Australian forest and mountain , sometimes shimmering, sometimes dazzling, or flooding the view :

Before them, thus extended, wilder grew
The scene each moment - and more beautiful!
For when the sun was all but sunk below
Those barrier mountains , - in the breeze that o'er
Their rough enormous backs deep fleeced with wood
Came whispering down, the wide upslanting sea
Of fanning leaves in the descending rays
Danced interdazzlingly, as if the trees
That bore them were all thrilling -- tingling all
Even to the roots for very happiness :
So prompted from within, so sentient, seemed
The bright quick motion - wildly beautiful.

("The Creek of the Four Graves")

> Here again nature is made to seem sentient, as though sharing the consciousness of the beholder, and the emphasis falls on the " wildly beautiful " quality of the scene. (Wilkes: v)

Finally, the two features that mark out Harpur as the progenitor of serious indigenous Australian poetry are his appreciation of the landscape of his country, its mountains and 'yet - to - be found streams', and his faith in his own mission as a poet.

For him, the important qualities of Australian scenery were its light (his mountains appear again and again, but always transfigured by different qualities of light) and its solitude. Wright has rightly pointed out :

> Human figures are always part of his landscapes (' The Creek of the Four Graves', 'A storm in the Mountains', ' A Storm in the Mountains', ' The Kangaroo Hunt ', etc.) -- but they often seem dwarfed by the sky and the surroundings. His poems on people and events, conversely, ('Ned Connor', 'To an Echo on the Banks of the Hunter', 'Lost in the Bush ') often contain sudden glimpses of the surroundings that act as a counter- point to the story. This vision, of landscape emphasized as it were by human occupation of humanity against a background of landscape (usually a solitary and strange landscape of trees and hills) is characteristic of Harpur. (1964 : 63-64)

In *The Oxford Cornpanion to Australian Literature*, Harpur's accent on Australian landscape as well as his handling of traditional verse forms for projecting the Australian scenery are highlighted:

> In the early years of settlement, when colonial poetry was largely ignored or derided, Harpur's ambition was to be Australia 's first authentic poetic voice. He believed that Australian poetry should be modeled upon traditional English verse before seeking its own individuality. Thus his own poetry relies heavily on traditional poetic techniques such as ornamental diction, wide use of personification and metaphor, solemnity of tone and ponderous movement, while attempting on some occasions at least to describe and interpret the colonial Australian scene, such attempts include his nature poems, 'A Mid - Summer Noon in the Australian Forest', 'Dawn and Sunrise in the Snowy Mountains', 'The Bush Fire' and 'A Storm in the Mountains', which describe some of the typical though more dramatic components of the Australian landscape, and convey a sense of vast distance and wide horizons. (318 - 319)

Thus the significance of Harpur's position as a pioneer-poet of Australia during the nineteenth century may be perceived when we take into account his initiative and sustained efforts at enlarging the thematic range and stylistic variety of Australian poetry .Marks of the influence of some British poets on Harpur's poetry, however, only accentuate the depth and range of his endeavour to broaden the parameters of Australian poetics for the purpose of verbalizing the patriotic and national concerns of the Australians, in general, as their nation was gradually heading towards her own identity. Harpur is a representative poet embodying the Australians' reach for identity within the framework of a transplanted culture.

3.3 'THE BUSH FIRE' : TEXT

I

'Tis nine o'clock -- to bed! cried Egremont,
Who, with his youthful household, long ago,
(The sturdy father of seven sturdy boys)
Dwelt in a lone home nested far within

Our virgin Forest, that, scarce broken then,
As with an unshorn fleece of gloomy wood
Robed the vast bulk of all the mighty Isle
But ere retiring finally, he went
Forth as his wont was to survey the night.
'Twas clear and silent; and the stirless woods
Looked dreaming in the witch-light of the Moon,
As, like a boat of stained pearl, she rode
Dipping, as 'twere, with a propendent motion
Amid the ridges of a wavy cloud -- --
The only cloud in heaven : round which afar,
The larger stars out of the depths of space
Swelled pendulous, trembling with a glow globose --
So keenly clear the night. And while our Friend
Looked thus observingly abroad, he marked
All round him, listing the horizon's verge,
Save where against the starry aether, one
Enormous ridge drew its black line along,
A broad unusual upward glaring gleam --
Such a drear radiance as the setting sun
Dffuses when the atmosphere is stormy.
Nor long was he in doubt whence this arose --
Divining soon the cause -- a vast Bush Fire !
But deeming it too distant yet for harm,
During the night betiding, to repose
With his bed-faring household he retired.
Sound was their sleep ; for honesty of life
Is somewhat lumpish when 'tis once a -bed.
And now the darkness of the night was past
When with the dreams of Egremont , a strange
And momently approaching roar began
To mingle, and insinuate through them more
And more of its own import -- till a Fire
Huge in imagination as the world,
Was there sole theme : then, as arising wild,
His spirit fled before its visioned fear,
He started from his sleep -- to find indeed
The hardly (it seemed) exaggerated type's
Conflagrant hugeness, from abroad derived
In warning! For what else, however terrible,
Save ocean snoring to a midnight storm.
Might breathe with a vitality at once
So universal, so immense, and fierce,
As that which now reigned roaringly without.
Upleaping from his couch, scarce did he wait
To clothe himself, ere forth he rushed, -- and, lo,
Within the circling forest he beheld
A vast and billowy belt of writhing fire,
That shed a wild and lurid splendour up
Against the whitening dawn, come raging on !
Raging and roaring as with ten thousand tongues
That prophesied destruction ! On it came !
Devouring with a lapping hungriness
Whatever shrivelled in its scorching breath --
A dreadful Apparition ! -- such as Fear
Conceives when dreaming of the front of Hell !
No time was there to lose. "Up -- Up !" he cried
To all the house ! instantly all within
Was haste and wonder, and in briefest space

The whole roused family was staring out
In speechless admiration ! Yea, in that
Wild sympathetic union with the Terrible,
Which in the sudden and unlooked for midst
Of a tremendous danger, oft ensues,
And, for a time, through its own extreme,
Keeps terror dormant ! But more urgently,
The voice of Egremont again was heard ; --
" Lose not a moment ! Follow me at once !
Each with whatever he can grasp of use,
And carry unencumbered as he flies ! "
Out from the doorway, right before them,--lo,
A narrow strip of clearing, like a glade,
Stretched on towrds a bald summit. Thitherward
The periled people now were hurrying all;
While in their front, beneath the ridge, a dense
Extent of brushwood into which the Fire's
Bright teeth were ravening, -near, and nearer, brought
The rapid danger! Shall they reach that hill
Unscathed, their only refuge? Well they speed
Past the red-rushing fronts of fire! and see,
As thus they hurry on, how more and more
Disclosing spectre-like from the red gloom,
And brushing through them with long whizzing bounds,
The kangaroos string forth in Indian file
Across that strip of clear; with here and there
A wild dog slinking rapidly along
Amid the general rout, human and brute!
And all, for once, unharried as they go
By those keen foes of theirs, the household dogs,
That whining hang upon their master's flight
As it strains onward, so bewildered seem they !
Thus passingly involved, yet pauseless rush
Our people - urged into a desperate pace
By the glare that now comes sweltering round,
And the loud roar that loudens all along
The line of their wild flight, as if the flames
Were wrathful at their prospect of escape
And hurried also - hurried with a swoop,
And raged more ruinously while they weaved
To intercept and blast them! - But at length,
The brush-bald border of the summit's gained,
Even as the Fire, upon the left hand, breaks
Against the hill's base like a ruddy surge;
And halting, they look back - in safety all,
Though scorched and blistered by the cinders, blown
Like burning sleet against them as they ran.
But see, no sooner had they crowding passed
Out from the brush, where into a broad dell
It dipped on all hands round a sullen pool,
And where the rank and withered runners lay
In tangled heaps, - than a vast swath of flame
Lifted and hurried forward by the wind
Over their very passage track, was pitched
Sheer into it, with a loud thud like thunder!
With such a thud as the sea-swell gives up
From under the ledges of some hanging cliff;
And, in an instant, all the wide sere depth
Was as a lake of Hell! And hark! As then,

Even like a ghastly pyramid the mass
Of surging flames, inlapping as they rose,
And welding as it were all into one
Dense pile, rushed lancing up,- up with them still
A long mad shriek of mortal agony went
Writhing aloft! - so terrible indeed
That those who heard it, never, until then,
Might deem a voice so earnest in its fear,
So strenuous in its anguish, could have being
In the live bosom of the suffering world!
But soon did they divine, even to their loss,
Its import; there a giant Steed, their best,
Had taken cover, and had perished so.

II

Tented with heaven only, but all grouped
In safety now upon that hill's bare top-
Egremont and his household looked abroad
Astonished at the terrors of the time!
Down sunk their roof-tree in the fiery surge:
Which entering next a high-grassed bottom, thick
With axe ringed trees all standing bleak and leafless,
Tenfold more terrible in its ravage grew,
Upclimbing to their tops! And soon, as when
Upon some day of national festival,
From the tall spars of the ship-crowded port,
Innumerous flags, in one direction all,
Tongue outward, writhing in the wind; even so,
From those dry boles where still the dead bark clings
Hanging in ragged strips half shelled away,
And from their intermingled mass above
Of withered boughs, myriads of flaming tongues
Lick upward, or aloft in narrowing flakes
Stream quivering out upon the tortured blast-
Quivering and flapping and committing all
Into one wide and multifarious blaze!
Scared ever onward, in successive starts
By the fast following roarings of the Fire,
A flight of parrots o'er the upper ridge
Comes whizzing, and then circling low, alights
In a gay colored crowd amid the oaks
That skirt as with a feathery fringe the base
Of yon steep terrace, being, as it seems,
Deterred from still proceeding by the smoke
Uprolled in front, heap ridging over heap,
Like a dim moving range of spectral mountains.
There they abide, and listen in their fear
To the tremendous riot of the flames
That out beyond the range comes billowing fast,
Though yet unseen from thence, - till, with a hoarse
And pouncing swoop, as of a hurricane,
Furiously seizing on the drouth-sered brakes
That shag the terrace, all their serpent shapes
Rush upward, glaring into sudden view,
And ghastly prominence; then quick as thought,
All culminating in the blast, they bend
Sheer o'er the oaks wherein the birds abide!
At once are these in flight! But from above,

As suddenly, a mightier burst of flame
Outsheeteth o'er them: down they dip-but it
Keeps swooping with them even to the ground,
(Drawn thither by leaf-drifts, layer on layer
There lodged, as rain swept from the heights above)
And writhe convulsed - blasted and plumeless all!
Out through the Forest looming through the smoke
Where dim and mist-like, farthest forth it rolls,
Behold how furiously a horseman rides,
Hitherward tending. 'Tis a Messenger,
Sent from the nearest Station, though thus late,
To warn our people of the mighty Fire
Ere haply it reach them :-- telling them in time
How there, so lately, its red waves had brought
Sudden destruction, and wide loss --and then
Surged on illimitably through the woods,
Bearing right hitherward. Bravely on he steers
To where the fronting flames from either hand
Are closing to a gap! No other way,
All round ,is open ; and he nears it -- But
Too late, alas ! or so to those it seems
Who watch him from the clear. Too late, for lo,
The lines of fire (ere't seemed they would) have met,
And man and horse are swallowed out of sight
In one red gloom of mingled flame and smoke!
But for a moment only. Bursting forth,
As if developed from that lurid mass,
The noble hackney brings his rider through,
All but unsinged. Our friends hurrah; and he
Soon joins them -- welcome, though too late for help.

Thus through the day the conflagration raged :
And when the sings of night o'erspread the scene,
Not even they with all their world - wide pomp
Of starry blazonries , wore such a live
And aggregate glory to the eye,
As did the blazing dead wood of the Forest --
On all hands blazing ! Yet , for off , the dells
Lay like black gouts amid the general view
Of glimmering height, which through the red light showed
Like some imaginary waste of Hell,
Painted in blood.

But nearer , all the view
Was frightfully brilliant ! From vast hollow trunks
Whose ponderous heads, in some great hurricane,
Where the bole narrowed had been snapt away,
The wild fire, with a sudden roar , would burst
In quivering columns chapitered with smoke
Half turned itself into a lurid glow,
As out of craters; or some carious bough,
The white heat seething from its spouty flaws,
Would, with a dread crash , from the hill-top trees
(Massing aloft over the gleamy dark
That shut in under some o'erjutting steep)
Swoop flaming , like an unsphered group of stars,
Torn and disfeatured in their ruinous fall,
And run together ,-- a swift dropping mass
Of luminous points, and flaring limbs, that met

All in one fiery train, back streaming , -- till
It shattered as it struck the blackened vale
Into a cloud of quick resulting sparks,
And igneous dust! Or down the flickery glades
Ghastfully glaring , huge dry-mouldered gums
Stood 'mid their living kin as barked throughout
With eating fire expelling arrowy jets
Of blue -- lipt, intermitting , gaseous flame,
Boles, branches , -- all ! like vivid ghosts of trees,
Frightful to see ! -- the immemorial wood's
First hoary Fathers wrapt in burning shrouds,
Come from the past , within the Whiteman's pale,
To typify their doom. Such was the prospect !
Illuminated cities were but jests
Compared with it for splendor. But enough !
Where are the words to paint the million shapes
And unimaginable freaks of Fire,
When holding thus its monster carnival
In the primeval Forest all night long ?

(Wilkes: 28-35)

3.3.1 Discussion

The above poem was published in the volume entitled *The Bushrangers and Other Poems* in 1853. The various features of Harpur's poetry that have been discussed in the preceding section are well illustrated in the long narrative-cum-descriptive poem 'The Bush Fire'. The poem is outstanding on various counts.

First of all , this is the first poem in English on a typically Australian natural phenomenon. Harpur is a pioneer-poet in this respect. He presents a vividly graphic portrait of the bush fire that used to rage in Australia during those days. That Harpur utiilized the language of Britain to portray a nature - phenomenon of Australia ,and that too, he succeeded superbly in his poetic effort, at a time when he did not have any outstanding predecessor in the field, corroborates the creative originality of Harpur as an Australian poet .

The poem is outstanding in another respect. It has been able to create and preserve the portrait of the Australian bush fire of the nineteenth century. The bush fire was a wild ferocious occurrence of nature at a time when the bush was an all - pervasive phenomenon in colonial Australia. Thus the poem is not only a pioneer effort in the description in verse of the bush fire but also remains a historical document of the eco-system of Australia of the nineteenth century. Therefore, Harpur's poem is significant also on the historical ground.

Though Harpur was influenced by Wordsworth, Harpur's distinctiveness as a poet of Australian landscape lies in the fact that he did not minimise the horrific and destructive aspects of Australian landscape of that time. ' The Bush Fire' offers a record of nineteenth century Australian landscape in its tooth and claw.

Another significant aspect of Harpur's nature - poem is that he always places human beings against the natural setting to establish the relation between mankind and nature, It is pertinent to note that the poem starts with a man, Egremont by name, who is the father of seven sturdy boys. Egremont mentions human time (' Tis nine o'clock') and affirms discipline in the house by asking all the inmates of the house to go to bed by then (' -- to bed ! cried Egremont').

Another point to notice is that the poet is level-headed and down -to-earth in his description of nature without the diffuseness and vague romanticism of Shelley's

poetry. The horror and destructive power of advancing Bushfire are presented with vivid accuracy and telling effects in the following line:

Within the circling forest he beheld
A vast and billowy belt of writhing fire,
That shed a wild and lurid splendor up
Against the whitening dawn, come raging on!
Raging and roaring as with ten thousand tongues
That prophesied destruction! On it came!
Devouring with a lapping hungriness
Whatever shrivelled in its scorching
A dreadful Apparition!-Such as fear
Conceives when dreaming of the front of Hell !

In the poem, the description of the flight of humanity followed by animals from the advancing bushfire becomes a dramatic and spectacular, almost cinematic, representation of a large movement of living beings against a sentient natural phenomenon. Brilliant passages after passages fill the poem with a rich tapestry of memorable poetic effects.

The dramatic scenario becomes much more humanly interesting when the poet introduces a horseman, a messenger from the nearest station (which, in Australia, at that time meant a ranch for raising sheep) hurrying towards the mountain top where Egremont along with the members of his family and neighbours have taken shelter from the bush. The messenger on the horse seems for a moment to be swallowed by the fire but the horse carries him out from the fire !

Bursting forth,
As if developed from that lurid mass,
The noble hackney brings his rider through,
All but unsinged. Our friends hurrah; and he
Soon joins them-welcome, though too late for help.

Thus nature and man, together with the animal, at the time of a crisis phenomenon like the bushfire are portrayed movingly by Harpur. The event was so vast and engulfing, and the bushfire so rampant throughout arid Australia of that time that Harpur felt the inadequacy of words for portraying the savagery of bushfire raging through the continent. He is an honest poet who confessed the difficulties of a pioneer poet when he concluded the poem with the following words:

Where are the words to paint the million
And unimaginable freaks of Fire,
When holding thus its monster carnival
In the primeval Forest all night long?

However, despite Harpur's perception of his limitations, the poem 'The Bush Fire' proves the creative aility of Harpur in making memorable poetry out of the newly discovered country of Australia.

3.4 'A MID-SUMMER NOON IN THE AUSTRALIAN FOREST': TEXT

Not a bird disturbs the air,
There is quiet everywhere;
Over plains and over woods
What a mighty stillness broods.
Even the grasshoppers keep

Where the coolest shadows sleep;
Even the busy ants are found
Resting in their pebbled mound;
Even the locust clingeth now
In silence to the barky bough;
And over hills and over plains
Quiet, vast and slumbrous, reigns.

Only there's a drowsy humming
From yon warm lagoon slow coming:
'Tis the dragon-hornet-see!
All bedaubed resplendently
With yellow on a tawny ground-
Each rich spot nor square nor round,
But rudely heart-shaped, as it were
The blurred and hasty impress there,
Of a vermeil-crusted seal
Dusted o'er with golden meal :
Only there's a droning flight
With a slanting track of light,
Till rising in the sunshine higher,
Its shared flame out like gems on fire.
Every other thing is still,
Save the ever wakeful rill,
Whose cool murmur only throws
A cooler comfort found repose:
Or some ripple in the sea
Of leafy boughs, where lazily,
Tired summer in her forest bower
Turning with the noontide hour,
Heaves a slumbrous breath, ere she
Once more slumbers peacefu1lly.
O'tis easeful here to lie
Hidden from Noon's scorching eye,
In this grassy cool recess
Musing thus of Quietness.

Charles Harpur

(Wilkes : 15 - 16)

3.4.1 Discussion

That Harpur was capable of writing poetry on a variety of the natural scenery of Australia of the nineteenth century becomes evident in ample measure when we turn from 'The Bush Fire' in the preceding section to 'A Midsummer Noon in the Australian Forest' in this section. In the last poem, he encountered the ravaging aspect of Australian nature; in the poem 'A Mid-Summer Noon' which was first published in the newspaper *Empire* in 1858, Harpur presents a soothing picture of Australian midday in summertime when all sounds are hushed into 'Quietness'.

'A Mid-Summer Noon in the Australian Forest' is perhaps the best - known and most-anthologized poem. It has been appreciated and praised for 'its creation of the hushed somnolent atmosphere of the summer noonday in the Australian bush' (*OCAL* : 480).

The most striking feature of the poem is its soothing, lulling lyricism. Whereas 'The Bush Fire' is written in blank verse, Harpur uses trimeter rhyming couplets in 'A Mid-Summer Noon'. This exhibits the wide range of Harpur's command over a variety of metrical patterns. In 'A Mid-Summer Noon', the poet uses a tripping rhythm with several metrical variations in order to convey and impress the lyrical atmosphere and mood on the reader's mind. Harpur's art has been so effective that the reader's response is immediate. The poet's insistence on the pervading mood of quietness that

he observes in the entire range of the landscape at that particular point of time in the Australian forest, results in the production of one sustained lulling rhythm. At that period of time in Australian poetry, such a poetic phenomenon was unique.

The loneliness of the Australian landscape is accentuated when the poet concludes the four-line first stanza with the following words:

> What a mighty stillness broods.

The picture that is evoked is entirely in contrast to the one evoked in 'The Bush Fire'. 'A Mid-Summer Noon' is not only a lyric in form but also a romantic lyric as it expresses the poet's personal perception. What, however, redeems the poem is the fact that the private perception is communicated through a set of images that record and perpetuate the impression of loneliness in the quiet landscape of Australia.

The grasshopper, ants, locust, all the small insects accentuate the loneliness of the Australian forest where

> Quiet, vast and slumbrous, reigns.

Word upon word, image upon image evolve the atmosphere of the quiet and vast Australia. All sights and sounds of nature, marshalled into the poem, emphasize the quietude of the place, the novel place, the just-discovered continent.

The influences of the poetry of England may be there but all have been harnessed to portray Australia. Thus the Muse of the Forest that exhorted Harpur to 'Be then the Bard of thy country' finds fulfilment of her prophecy through the poetry of Harpur. Harpur may be regarded as the originator of Australian poetry, and 'A Mid-Summer Noon in the Australian Forest' may be said to have begun Australian lyricism in the nineteenth century.

3.5 LET US SUM UP

Harpur's position in the nineteenth century Australian poetry is unique. He is the first Australian poet who seriously took upon himself the task of developing Australian poetry. For Harpur, poetry was not a mere amateurish pastime. He gave Australian poetry a mission and a goal. He harnessed the resources of British poetry for portraying the various aspects of Australian landscape and Australian people. Chaucer is said to be the father of English poetry, you may say Harpur is the father of Australian poetry.

Australians find themselves and their country reflected in Harpur's poetry. Thus for them as well as for us as the students of Australian poetry, Harpur is one of the most remarkable poets who deserve a thorough study. Hence, two of his significant poems have been studied in detail in this unit.

3.6 QUESTIONS

1. Do you think Harpur should be regarded as the father of Australian poetry? State the reasons in defence of your answer.
2. What are the specific aspects of Harpur's contribution to the growth and development of Australian poetry?

3. Do you think 'The Bush Fire' is representative of Harpur's poetic achievement? Give reasons with illustrations in defence of your answer.
4. In what aspects is 'A Mis-Summer Noon in the Australian Forest' typical of Harpur's nature poetry?
5. Can you trace any influence of British Romantic poetry in Harpur's poetic works?

UNIT 4 HENRY KENDALL

Structure

4.0 Objectives
4.1 Introduction
4.2 Henry Kendall: His Life and Works
4.3 Characteristic Features of Kendall's Poetry
4.4 'Bell Birds': Text
4.4.1 Discussion
4.5 'After Many Years': Text
4.5.1 Discussion
4.6 Let Us Sum Up
4.7 Questions

4.0 OBJECTIVES

In the last unit, you've learnt how Harpur contributed to the growth of Australian poetry by writing verses on Australian landscape and people, and by modulating English language for projecting the Australian images and reflecting an urgent commitment to the development of the Australian nation. Harpur was followed by Henry Kendall. In this unit, you will study two poems of Kendall.

4.1 INTRODUCTION

Kendall was born when Charles Harpur was twenty six years old. In 1862 Kendall's first volume of poems *Poems and Songs* was published. Kendall confesses in a letter to Harpur:

> I feel already deeply indebted to you for the great good and large comfort. I have derived from your writings. There is no living author to whom I could turn and say as much. This may be a necessary result of my Australian birth and education. But, strangely fascinated by almost everything you have published, I have always looked upon you as the man who alone could express what I had so often dimly thought. (Harpur:159)

The relation between Harpur and Kendall enshrines a phenomenon of succession in the field of Australian poetry during the third quarter of the nineteenth century. Kendall strengthens the position of Harpur through his admiration of Harpur's poetry.

In this unit, we'll examine the nature and quality of Kendall's poetic efforts, and the contribution of the same towards the growth and development of nineteenth century Australian poetry. Kendall continues with the love and admiration of Australian landscape, and enhances the commitment to the projection of Australian lifestyle. However, it may be noted that Kendall developed much more fluency and command over English metrics and rhythm but the enchantment created by his verbal music sometimes reduces the depth and profundity of his poetic portraits. Still Kendall is quite notable for perpetuating the Harpurian tradition till Gordon and Paterson appear on the Australian poetic scenario.

4.2 HENRY KENDALL: HIS LIFE AND WORKS

By the time Kendall had attained maturity of youth and met Harpur and got acquainted with his works, Australia, as a country of white settlers, was more than sixty years old. Australia started producing quality wool, gold and other minerals, its population had increased, and people's sense of isolation diminished. Australia was on her way to nationhood, as Harpur had hoped. But still the country was in her transitional phase. Kendall's poetry reflects this stage of transition through his portrayal of the landscape, the people and the society. Even his poetic craftsmanship involving a manipulation of the British poetic tradition for projecting the land of emus, peacocks and kangaroos reflects the phase of transition in Australia. Kendall is an important. Australian poet since his poetry mirrors the transition period in Australia.

It is Kendall who recognized and celebrated the importance of the poetic talent of Harpur, and valued his supremacy among the poets following in his footsteps. A few lines from his poem addressed to C.H. are quoted follow:

> I would sit at your feet, for I feel
> I am one of a glorious band
> That ever will own you and hold you their chief
> And a monarch of song in the land!
>
> (Wright 1966:21)

In his poem on the death of Harpur, Kendall pinpoints how the Australian landscape has found a permanent image in Harpur's poetry:

> Strange words of wind, and rhymes of rain,
> And whispers from the inland fountains,
> Are mingled in his various strain
> With leafy breaths of piny mountains.
>
> (Wilkes:88)

Through his admiration of Harpur's poetry, and his emphasis on certain features of Harpur's poetry, Kendall betrays his own predilections. Kendall too was a poet of Australian landscape and had assimilated the influence of the Romantic and British Victorian poetry of Britain.

Kendall spent his impressionable boyhood in the coastal districts of Illawara in the South and the Clarance river in the north. Their cool moist rainforests, deep shadowed gullies and lush pastures are evocatively portrayed in Kendall's best-known poems, the landscape lyrics such as 'Bell-Birds', 'September in Australia', 'Araluen', and 'Narrara Creek'.

Kendall spent his childhood among the mountains. The death of his father brought misfortune to his family but, while it seems to have made a lonely wanderer of him, it brought him into contact with a landscape which was to dwell with him all his life. At the age of fifteen he went to sea for two years on a whaling cruise, as cabin boy in a ship owned by his uncle.

Returning to Sydney, he found commonplace employment and began to write verse. The fluency of his verses at once brought him to the notice of a small circle of literary personalities in Sydney. Henry Parkes published some of his verses in *The Empire*, and by 1861 there were proposals for the publication of a volume. *Poems and songs* appeared in 1862. Although generously received by local and some British critics, the volume failed to sell its first edition of 500 copies. Beset by debts and personal problems, including a growing dependence on both literacy patronage and alcohol, Kendall sought a new life in Melbourne after his marriage in 1868.

Kendall's second volume *Leaves from Australian Forests* was published in Melbourne in 1869. The failure of the Melbourne venture which led to increasing poverty, alcoholism and the death of his daughter Araluen, brought him back to Sydney in 1870, where the rapid disintegration of his personal and literary life continued.

This painful period, described by him as 'The shadow of 1872', brought alienation from his wife and periods of treatment for addiction in the Gladesville asylum. He was restored to health and sanity, and cured of alcoholism, by the extraordinary kindness of the Fagan family, timber merchants of Gosford and Sydney, who for two years 1872 - 75, looked after his rehabilitation in their home near Gosford.

In 1876 Kendall was reunited with his wife and family when he began a new life at the Fagan timber mill at Camden Haven on the north coast of New South Wales. His return to writing was signalled by his winning the *Sydney Morning Herald's* International Exhibition poetry competition in 1879, and by the publication of his final volume *Songs from the Mountains* in 1880.

In 1881 he was appointed Inspector of Forests by Sir Henry Parkes, his long - time patron. But Kendall's health deteriorated under the strain of the travelling and work associated with his new position. He died in 1882 in Sydney of pthisis when he was only forty - three.

Henry Kendall, like most of the other Australian colonial poets, fell into partial eclipse from the 1920s until the 1950s when the revival of interest in the colonial phase started. But like Harpur he can now be seen quite clearly as an important and impressive poet in his own right. There is still perhaps a slight tendency to underestimate his work and his value but there can be no doubt that *Leaves from the Australian Forests* and *Songs from the Mountains* are two of the most important books of the Australian colonial poetry, books which, whatever the merits of the individual poems, have a total impact greater than their parts.

Green has made an accurate estimate of Kendall's position as an Australian poet. It will be most appropriate if we conclude this section with an excerpt from Green's assessment of Kendall :

> Kendall is much more than merely a landmark in Australian poetry ; Harpur was that and a little more as well, but Kendall is one of Australia's leading poets, and a landmark besides : his limitations are as evident as his qualities, but his position is unassailable, in its own kind, has not been surpassed here, and in the poetry of the English-speaking peoples also he has a definite place, if not a high one. The two strands that have come together to form Australian literature were for the first time interwoven in Kendall's second book of poems, *Leaves from Australian Forests* ; in 1869, eighty years after its beginnings, the young literature has produced a book that was Australian in a sense in which no other book has been: with this, therefore, Australian literature, in the narrower sense of the word, may be said to have begun; the rootlet had not merely struck, it had produced a bud. This fact was early recognized in England as well as Australia; besides the *Athenaeum's* praise, Wilde in a by no means favourable review of Sladen's *Century of Australian Song*, which contained some of Kendall's best work, spoke of his marvellous music and said that his poetry was " full of beautiful things"; and some of Kendall's poems were included by Palgrave in his *Golden Treasury* and by Quiller-Couch in *The Oxford Book of English Verse.*

Then, in the words of **Bruce Bennett**, 'Kendall's work has had substantial critical support from scholars. (60)

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4.3 CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES OF KENDALL'S POETRY

Kendall will be remembered for presenting the images of Australian landscape in lilting rhythm. His pictures of the natural sights and sounds of Australia are suffused with a sadness emanating from his heart that was often burdened with a sense of melancholy. Some critics regard his melancholy as a mark of weakness that even affects his craftsmanship. Perhaps it is the colonial environment in which he had to live and write poetry that led to the sadness and listlessness in his character and poetry.

In *The Oxford Companion to Australian Literature,* it is rightly pointed out :

> Kendall's literary reputation, extrordinarily high in his own lifetime and immediately after his death but never at the same peak in this century, still rests chiefly on his lyric poetry. 'Bell - Birds', 'September in Australia', and 'The Song of Cattle Hunters', with their elaborate word pictures, extravagant melody and haunting melancholy, endeared themselves to succeeding generations of Australian readers and established Kendall as a favourite school room poet. (384)

The *Companion* mentions other types of poetry written by Kendall as well:

> Kendall's affectionate though tart commentaries on the colonial outback types, e.g. 'Bill the Bullock Driver' and 'Jim the Splitter' are now seen to have anticipated Henry Lawson's and A.B. Paterson's portraits of similar bush characters .... His love poetry, especially 'Rose Lorraine' and 'At Nightfall', which tell of his lost love for Rose Benett, and the poignant 'Araluen and 'On a Street', which reflect his guilt over the years 1869 - 72, are powerful statements of the problems of his troubled life. His patriotic verse, such as ' The Fair Future', which attempts to create new loyalties and new hopes ; his public poems, written for important occasions such as the 1879 International Exhibition in Sydney ; his memorial verses for Charles Harpur, James Lionel Michael and Adam Linday Gordon, and his attempt in the fragmentary 'The Australian Shepherd' to begin the first Australian rural epic, all support the claim that Kendall was the most substantial poet of the Colonial period. (385) .

The importance of Kendall's contribution to the growth of Australian poetry is now established beyond doubt. Despite certain blemishes that are detectable in his treatment of his themes and general craftsmanship, Kendall's poetry is memorable and significant. **Green** points out the salient features of his poetry :

> Kendall's verses are filled with the music of falling water : he was possessed by the rich soft shapes and colours of the coastal foliage, the smooth curves of the coastal boys and hills, their rainy mists, their glimmering woods , the delicate dew - dropping ferns, of their " deep green gracious glens" , the bright voices of their birds, their golden blossom, the murmur of their waves and falling streams, by their " great dark hills of wonder " , and by the " silver sleeping seas " , the " lights and thunders " of the waves along their shores and the storms that come from the Pole. The best of his work is possessed by this sort of loveliness and by that of the smooth-sounding native names, Araluen, Mooni, Orara, which he knew well how to weave into his verse : drawn outward by sympathy with the explorers or the pioneers, he could tell of " swarthy wastelands , wide and woodless ", of " stark desolation and a waste of plain " , and of the desert " glaring like a sea of brass " ; but one feels that these are for him excursions, in which except for a

few lines, he is not near his best . And his talent was almost wholly lyrical and descriptive, not so much of the objects he observed but of the moods they evoked in him . (162)

The points of strength and weakness in Kendall's poetry in general, and in workmanship as well as the obvious marks of influence of Romantic and Victorian poets on his choice of themes and his stylistic devices are dwelt upon in great detail by Green. **Green's** relevant comments are quoted below :

> Kendall was a " nature poet " only in the sense that he found in natural scenery moods of the human spirit, using woods and mountains, streams and birds and trees as symbols of the emotions that he wished to express : Wordsworth reinforced his reverence towards the most solemn of these moods, but here is something of Shelley in his " aerial perspectices " and in the intensity rather than the serenity of his connection with the natural world; and in such lines as " the light that is love to the flowers " there is an obvious Shelleyan reminiscence . Shelley meant much more to Kendall than to Harpur, but unfortuately encouraged in him a tendency to wordiness that he possessed already ; still his verses are suffused with very human emotions even when they stay closest to the natural features that are their symbols, and these emotions, which are intense if gentle, are always ready to flow out in sympathy with men and women, even if he cannot enter into their personalities sufficiently to enable him to characterize them individually. The influence of Tennyson also is everywhere in Kendall, but especially in his blank verse; there are occasional Swinburnian phrases, and the influence of Swinburne shows markedly in his alliteration and in some of his rhythms ... (163 - 164)

Our concluding observation on Kendall's workmanship and our final impression of his poetry may best be put in the words of Green :

> The general effect of Kendall's rhythms is of flowing music that is sweet rather than strong, full rather than concise : the frequency of light syllables makes for wordiness, and now and in the longer lines it is obvious that something has been added to fill up the measure. This is perhaps the worst fault in Kendall's workmanship, though there are also other faults, the result of imperfect taste or sheer carelessness; his fondness for pairs of adjectives such as " rose red " , " soft sweet ", " grave mute " (see the "Ode on the Sydney International Exhibition") and the alliteration of which he makes such effective use are overdone sometimes ; he takes queer liberties with phrase and rhyme ; and sometimes his lack of humour betrays him : he has no marked power of self - criticism. Kendall's images are as characteristic as his rhythms. The best of them are not merely beautful ; they show how he, as well as greater poets, was able some times by intuitive contemplation to work upon what he observed, to saturate it with his mood, to marry the two and translate them into sound and rhythm, until the result conveys, in drops of light and music, something that one feels is not only beautiful but true, because it could not have been different : something that is of the essence of poetry. (165)

4.4 'BELL - BIRDS' : TEXT

By channels of coolness the echoes are calling,
And down the dim gorges I hear the creek falling :
It lives in the mountain where moss and the sedges
Touch with their beauty the banks and the ledges.
Through breaks of the cedar and sycamore bowers

Struggles the light that is love to the flowers ;
And , softer than slumber , and sweeter than singing ,
The notes of the bell-birds are running and ringing.
The silver - voiced bell-birds, the darlings of daytime!
They sing in September their songs of the May - time;
When shadows wax strong, and the thunder - bolts hurtle,
They hide with their fear in the leaves of the myrtle;
When rain and the sunbeams shine mingled together,
They start up like fairies that follow fair weather;
And straightway the hues of their feathers unfolden
Are the green and the purple, the blue and the golden.
October , the maiden of bright yellow tresses,
Loiters for love in these cool wildernesses;
Loiters , knee-deep, in the grasses, to listen,
Where dripping rocks gleam and the leafy pools glisten :
Then is the time when the water-moons splendid
Break with their gold , and are scattered or blended
Over the creeks, till the woodlands have warning
Of song of the bell-birds and wings of the Morning.
Welcome as waters unkissed by the summers
Are the voices of bell-birds to thirsty far-comers.
When fiery December sets foot in the forest,
And the need of the wayfarer presses the sorest,
Pent in the ridges for ever and ever
The bell-birds direct him to spring and to river,
With ring and with ripple, like runnels whose torrents
And toned by the pebbles and leaves in the currents.

Often I sit , looking back to a childhood,
Mixt with the sight and the sounds of the wildwood,
Longing for power and the sweetness to fashion.
Lyrics with beats like the heart -beats of passion;-
Songs interwoven of lights and of laughters
Borrowed from bell-birds in far forest-rafters;
So, I might keep in the city and alleys
The beauty and strength of the deep mountain valleys :
Charming to slumber the pain of my losses
With glimpses of creeks and a vision of mosses.

(Wilkes : 102 - 103)

4.4.1 Discussion

The poem ' Bell-Bird' is illustrative of **Wilkes'** general appreciation of Kendall's landscape poetry :

> Kendall is the foremost exemplar of the Romantic treatment of landscape in nineteenth century verse ... Landscape suffused with feeling is the characteristic of Kendall's poetry : nature for him is a source of consolation to the human spirit. (viii - ix)

Kendall's treatment of nature in this poem is extremely evocative. The writers of *The Oxford Companion to Australian Literature* attach great importance to this poem by Kendall when they observe: ' The bell - bird and its bell - like notes have been immortalized in Henry Kendall's poem ' Bell-Birds'. (Wilde : 84)

In '**Bell - Birds**', one of his most characteristic poems , Kendall creates an enchantment with rhyme, rhythm and word music that reproduces the spellbinding harmony generated by the bell-birds, the Australian birds who keep on singing during the Australian spring in the months of September and October. The typical Australian

mossy arbours and woodlands where bell-birds' music echoes incessantly are recreated by Kendall in a series of words , images and rhythms that perpetuate the poet's perception of the Australian landscape suffused with his memories of his childhood and adolescence. Nature and man are fused into the poem that attains the position of a landmark in the evolution of Australian poetry during the nineteenth century. This poem is representative of the stage of progress achieved in the development of Australian poetry by the third quarter of the nineteenth century.

In parts, the poem may appear alliterative more than once, and thus forced and artificial to some extent but when read as a whole, the poem's strength manifests itself in the poet's ability to recreate the Australian landscape echoing with the music of birds . But this does not appear to be an imitation of Wordsworth. The poem bears Kendall's distinctive stamp. Its mellifluous arrangement of words and images heightens the effect of evocation. Does the music of the following two lines mark the beauty of the image?

> And straightway the hues of their feather unfolden
> Are the green and the purple, the blue and the golden.

Not at all. Maybe crisp and concise phrasing found in Wordsworth's or Shelley's poetry is not noticeable in the quoted lines. But we must remember Wordworth's or Shelley's poetry was written in England as a part of the British poetic tradition which was more than twelve centuries old. Kendall's poem belongs to an Australian poetic tradition which was only about sixty years old. The flaws in the poem, therefore, need not be attributed exclusively to Kendall the individual poet but rather to the infancy and weakness of the poetic tradition in Australia.

Certain phases leap out of the text of Kendall's poetry as outstanding , and sometimes they appear quite unexpected in the context of a nascent literature. For example, an expression like 'the leafy pools glisten' lends to the whole poem an aura of bright natural beauty. Hence, whatever weaknesses there may be. the brighter aspects of Kendall's poetry definitely enhanced the growth of Australian poetry. And this poetry may not be stigmatized as colonial poetry alone. It might have been written during the period which is called colonial in the historical context but what redeems this poetry is the poet's effort to advance the Australian poetry beyond the limitations of the colonizer's culture. The shadow of the colonizer may be there but the verbal embodiment of the indigenous phenomenon of Australia speaks of Kendall's poetic progress towards the formulation of the Australian culture:

> The silver-voice bell-birds, the darlings of daytime;
> They sing in September their songs of the May-time.....

The context of Australia with all her own peculiarities is set and evoked in the fourth stanza. December is the hottest month in Australia, and the bell-birds, with their music, take the 'far-comers' and 'wayfarers' to spring and river:

> With ring and with ripple, like runnels whose torrents
> Are toned by the pebbles and leaves in the currents

The last line wouldn't be found in an anthology of British poetry. It is Kendall's poetic lines that enhance the beauty of blossoming Australian poetry.

The last stanza further individualizes the poem. The poet spent his childhood in the countryside but later during his youth, he went to Sydney and Melbourne in search of livelihood. While studying his life which is given in an earlier section, you'll notice that Kendall spent an unhappy life in the urban setup. In the cities, however, the memories of the songs of the bell-birds, as mentioned in the last stanza, reduce 'the pain of my losses/ with glimpses of creeks and the vision of mosses'. Thus the appeal of the poem is on both the levels of the personal and the universal. The charge of

generalization against Kendall's poetry does not always hold good. 'Bell-birds' epitomises Kendall's remarkable achievement as a poet in the context of nineteenth-century Australian poetry, and it also indicates the magnitude of his contribution to the growth of the same.

4.5 'AFTER MANY YEARS' : TEXT

The song that once I dreamed about,
The tender , touching thing,
As radiant as the rose without--
The love of wind and wing--
The perfect verses to the tune
Of woodland music set,
As beautiful as afternoon,
Remain unwritten yet.
It is too late to write them now,
The ancient fire is cold :
No ardent lights illume the brow
As in the days of old .
I cannot dream the dream again;
But when the happy birds
Are singing in the sunny rain ,
I think I hear its words.
I think I hear the echo still
Of long forgotten tones,
When evening winds are on the hill,
And sunset fires the cones.
But only in the hours supreme
With songs of land and sea,
The lyrics of the leaf and stream,
This echo comes to me.
No longer doth the earth reveal
Her gracious green and gold:
I sit where youth was once , and feel
That , I am growing old.
The lustre from the face of things
Is wearing all away:
Like one who halts with tired wings,
I rest and muse today.
There is a river in the range
I love to think about :
Perhaps the searching feet of change
Have never found it out.
Ah ! Oftentimes I used to look
Upon its banks, and long
To steal the beauty of that brook
And put it in a song.
I wonder if the slopes of moss
In dreams so dear to me --
The falls of flower and flower - like floss -
Are as they use to be!
I wonder if the waterfalls,
The singers far and fair
That gleamed between the wet green walls,
Are still the marvels there!
Ah ! let me hope that in that place
The old familiar things

To which I turn a wistful face ;
Have never taken wings.
Let me retain the fancy still
That , past the lordly range,
There always shines, in folds of hill,
One spot secure from change !
I trust that yet the tender screen
That shades a certain nook
Remains , with all its gold and green,
The glory of the brook!
It hides a secret , to the birds
And waters only known --
The letters of two lovely words :
A poem on a stone.
Perhaps the lady of the past
Upon these lines may light :
The purest verses and the last
That I may ever write.
She need not fear a word of blame ;
Her tale the flowers keep;
The wind that heard me breathe her name
Has been for years asleep.
But in the night , and when the rain
The troubled torrent fills,
I often think I see again
The river in the hills.
And when the day is very near,
And birds are on the wing ,
My sprit fancies it can hear
The song I cannot sing.

(Wilkes 124-126)

4.5.1 Discussion

Kendall is to be remembered for his lilting lyricism, haunting vignettes of Australian landscape, description of nostalgic memories of passing time and burden of unfulfilled dreams. Full of the above-mentioned qualities, 'After Many Years' is a poem from his last volume of poetry , *Songs from the Mountains* . The lyric exhibits a maturity in craftsmanship and a rare restraint on Kendall's natural verbosity. The poem is important as it discloses with superb verbal restraint and suggestiveness the inner world of Kendall's poetic dreams and aspirations. It also hints at the inadequacy of the then Australian poetic idioms for verbalizing the dreams and aspirations of Australia and her people. When Kendall speaks of his as-yet unwritten poetry, he actually articulates the vision of the poetic activities that would take place in future in Australia.

'After Many Years ' projects the vision of the future. Though tinged with sadness, the poem indicates the poet's relation with the land , how the land kindles in him a hope for the future:

I cannot dream the dream again;
But, when the happy birds
Are singing in the sunny rain,
I think I hear its words.

The relation between the land and the poet is not only a romantic lyrical infatuation but also represents at that point of time the close bond developing between the land of Australia and the white settlers. The relationship is, however, embodied in a very

moving manner through a few words only. Kendall's mastery over the medium of poetic communication expressed itself in a very effective manner :

Ah! oftentimes I used to look
Upon its banks, and long
To steal the beauty of that brook
And put it in a song.

The last stanza of the poem marks a new beginning in Australian poetry. The art of economy in verbal expression reaches a climax in the stanza quoted above . Kendall holds the hope for the future poets of Australia , and indicates that what could not be achieved by him would be attained by the future generations of poets in Australia :

And when the day is very near,
And birds are on the wing,
My spirit fancies it can hear
The song I cannot sing.

Kendall might have been a derivative poet on certain occasions but in his most remarkable poems like the two poems discussed in this unit, he strikes a note of originality. Along with Harpur, Kendall introduced Romantic lyricism into Australian poetry but he also struck a new path to be followed by the future poets appearing on the Australian poetic scenario.

4.6 LET US SUM UP

Harpur's poetic innovation and practice in Australia in the middle of the nineteenth century was followed by Kendall who regarded Harpur as his master. Kendall perpetuated the Romantic strain of Harpur's poetry. Kendall's signal contribution is, however, to be traced in his love and admiration of Australian landscape. He also brought in more flexibility in versification and metrical patterns. His nature lyrics are soothing but tinged with a touching sadness. Hence Kendall's poetry is to be admired, and his poetic efforts appreciated for their signal contribution to the growth of Australian poetry. You must have read and analysed the poems of Kendall. Do you agree with us on the conclusions we are arrived at?

4.7 QUESTIONS

1. Do you think Kendall furthered the progress of nineteenth century Australian poetry? How did he do it?
2. Do you think the romantic strain brought in by Kendall into Australian poetry during the third and fourth quarters of nineteenth century did have any salutary impact on the progress of Australian poetry?
3. Analyse and comment on two poems of Kendall of your choice, indicating why you prefer them.
4. Can you make a comparative study of nineteenth century Indian English poetry and Australian poetry, and identify some Indian English poets whose poetry may be compared with Kendall's poetry?

UNIT 5 A.L. GORDON AND A.B. PATERSON

Structure

5.0 Objectives
5.1 Introduction
5.2 A.L. Gordon : His Life and Works
5.3 Characteristic Features of Gordon's Poetry
5.4 'The Sick Stockrider' : Text
5.4.1 Discussion
5.5 A.B. Paterson : His Life and Works
5.6 Characteristic Features of Paterson's Poetry
5.7 'The Man from Snowy River' : Text
5.7.1 Discussion
5.8 Let Us Sum Up
5.9 Questions

5.0 OBJECTIVES

With the publication of the poetry of A. L. Gordon and A. B. Paterson in Australia, the pace of progress in the growth of Australian poetry was hastened. While Wentworth, Harpur and Kendall laid the foundation of Australian poetry, Gordon and Paterson built the base of the structure of Australian poetry. For first Gordon and then Paterson made poetry entirely out of Australian lifestyle that had evolved in Australia; diggers, bushrangers and other personae and properties of outback life of Australia found a permanent place in Australian poetry through the pens of Gordon and Paterson. In this unit, you will study two poems each of Gordon and Paterson.

5.1 INTRODUCTION

A.L. Gordon was born in Scotland, and had his education in England but after he migrated to Australia in 1853, Gordon engaged himself in the adventures of life in Australia - horse riding, steeple chasing, politics and publishing and created lively ballads out of them. It is Gordon who first made the horse an Australian poetic image and metaphor standing for energy and speed of people in Australia. The sheepstations, bushmates, the open fields and blue sky of Australia found a mirror in Gordon's poetry which replaced the eighteenth century poetic diction and Romantic - Victorian wistful poeticisms with vigorous Australian colloquy. Hence Gordon deserves the lionization which, however, was accorded to him only after his suicide.

The last volume of Gordon's poetry, published a day before his suicide, is entitled *Bush Ballads and Galloping Rhymes* (1870). In a way, Gordon is a progenitor of the literary ballad in Australia.

With the publication of the *Bulletin* from 1880 onwards, a wave of nationalism developed in Australian literature. You should remember that at the historical and political levels too, Australia was on the move towards nationalism and attained freedom from colonialism in 1901.

A.B. Paterson (1864 - 1941) is the chief balladist of Australia. His early ballads kept on appearing in the *Bulletin* from 1886 onwards. The first ballad from Paterson published in the *Bulletin* was 'A Dream of the Melbourne Cup : a long way after Gordon'. Paterson signed the ballad with a pseudonym, 'The Banjo', the name of a

racehorse of Paterson's fancy. The verses which he published regularly in the *Bulletin* from 1886 onwards were collected in 1895 in a book entitled *The Man from Snowy River and Other Verses*. Its success was outstanding : no later collection of bush ballads can compare with it. The first edition sold out in a fortnight, ten thousand copies were sold in the first year. The succeeding volumes of Paterson's poetry were published in the first half of the twentieth century. Hence they fall outside the purview of this Block.

In this unit, we will discuss the life and works of Gordon and Paterson, the characteristic features of their poetry, and make extensive commentary on the most well-known and representative poem by Gordon andd then by Paterson, which will illustrate the two poets' identity as writers of ballads that embody the national character of Australians of that period.

5.2 A. L. GORDON : HIS LIFE AND WORKS

Adam Lindsay Gordon (1833 - 70) was born at Fayal in the Azores in Scotland. He had his education in England. In 1953, he was banished by his parents to South Australia. In a poem entitled 'To a Sister', which he wrote three days before he sailed for Australia, he confessed:

> My parents bid me cross the flood,
> My kindred frowned at me;
> They say I have belied my blood,
> And stained my pedigree.
> But I must turn from those who chide,
> And laugh at those who frown;
> I cannot quench my stubborn pride,
> Not keep my spirits down.
>
> (Wilkes : 58)

In South Australia, he enlisted in the mounted police. After two years he resigned from the constabulary service, and drifted about South Australia dealing in horses and riding in steeplechases. He received a legacy from his parents' estate, and then purchased several properties, married and lived in Dingley Dell, a small stone cottage still lovingly preserved near the seaside settlement of Port MacDonnell. From those years come many stories of Gordon's daring feats of horsemanship.

Gordon had a brief and unspectacular parliamentary career in 1864-66, an abortive grazing venture in the Western Australia in 1866-67, and then conducted a livery stable in Ballaratt in 1867-68.

After a severe head injury in a riding accident, followed by bankruptcy which was caused by a fire in the livery stable, and the death of his infant daughter, Gordon left Ballarat for Melbourne.

In Melbourne, Gordon led an unhappy and aimless life, worked intermittently at his writing, and suffered from depression, insomnia and pain from numerous riding injuries. When he failed to obtain heirship to the ancestral Gordon Land in Scotland, he faced financial disaster. On 24th June, 1870 , the day following the publication of his last book of poems, *Bush Ballads and Galloping Rhymes,* he committed suicide on Brighton Beach in Melbourne.

In 1864 Gordon published *The Feud,* a ballad inspired by Noel Paton's engravings of scenes from the ballad, ' The Dourie Dens O' Yarrow ' .

His second publication is *Ashtaroth* (1867). It is a long dramatic poem indebted to the Faust theme, but it has not produced any critical response.

Gordon's poetic reputation depends on his third and fourth publications, entitled *Sea Spray and Smoke Drift* (1867) and *Bush Ballads and Galloping Rhymes* (1870).

In *The Oxford Companion to Australian Literature*, a concise estimate of Gordon's reputation is made:

> In 1934 a bust of Gordon was unveiled in the Poets' Corner of Westminster Abbey, making him the only Australian poet to have been thus honoured. That mark of recognition reflects the adulation for him after his death and through the first decades of the twentieth century. His popularity sprang partly from the romantic aura of his life, his aristocratic background, his exile in the colony, his reckless riding exploits, and the pathos of his death. It sprang, too, from the gratitude of Australian nationalists for Gordon's acclaim in his poetry of the outback way of life. His verses were loved and recited around camp fires and in the homesteads and shearing sheds of the back blocks. (302)

In a nutshell, as **Bruce Bennett** says:

> Gordon's reputation continues to fluctuate but he remains today an even more popular poet than Kendall and also a focus of critical attention, although his status, as an 'authentic recorder of Australian bush life was eventually usurped by Lawson and Paterson. (60)

5.3 CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES OF GORDON'S POETRY

Judith Wright has drawn a comparison between Kendall and Gordon, pointing out what Gordon contributed to Australian poetry:

> But he did Australian writing a service at a crucial time, by indicating a new direction of interest. Kendall had been attempting to write much the same kind of verse as might have been written by an English contemporary poet; in spite of a certain success with character pieces such as 'Jim the Splitter' he had not taken much interest in local event and character, and he knew, and he knew little of the active life of the country as it then was. It was to this life of the 'back-blockers', the nomad workers, drovers and overlanders, that Gordon's rhymes drew attention. (1964 : 68)

Australian poetry was being nourished mostly on romantic wistfulness and landscape painting through the poetry of Wentworth, Harpur and Kendall. Gordon brought into Australian poetry the real lifestyle of the Australians in the outback, and to portray the picture accurately, Gordon introduced the colloquial style that could reflect the life as it was lived in the bush. **Wright** further observes:

> Gordon became an idol because of his adopting of Australian balladry and because he was himself a legendary horseman and man of action. The two currents of feeling (which, however contradictory, could exist almost side by side in certain people) once they were united, added force to the impulse towards a new kind of popular poetry. This allowed the acceptance of the more articulate of the 'bush-balladists', and injected a new vigour into Australian poetry, which had hitherto imitated the subjects and style of late-Victorian English verse.

> Gordon's popularity, then, represented a turning point in the growth of Australian poetry far more decisive than his actual work (which, properly examined, is of very minor value) seems to justify. It is rather as a national figure than as a poet that he is important; but his work gave a remarkable impetus and a new self-confidence to the popular poets, who now saw their hard inarticulate independence (1964 : 69).

Brian Elliott assesses Gordon's poetic talent from another point of view:

> Gordon made two striking but indispensable discoveries: first, he discovered the colonial audience itself, the heart of Colonial moral and aesthetic awareness, and words (however rough) through which to reach it; and second, the warmth and vitality of the Australian light, especially the archetypal of the summer sky and the long horizon: 'the sky-line's blue furnished resistance...'
>
> Nothing in all Colonial poetry matches in importance Gordon's signal achievement, the fixation of the Australian image. Emotionally , he simply spoke as he felt: the mood of his best work is conversational; its philosophy stoically grim, but spontaneously articulate; its visionary content based upon a broad impressionism; the keynote brightness and sunlight, starlight, a high luminosity in the air.(241)

Wilkes too makes very pertinent comments on the characteristic features of Gordon's poetry :

> Like A.B. Paterson after him, Gordon saw Australia from the back of a horse. The terrain is not to him as mysterious and intimidating as it appeared to Harpur...
>
> Nevertheless there is more of a sense of the outdoors in Gordon than in any other colonial poet, perhaps because he is so much a poet of action. The world of the stockrider, the squatter and the mounted trooper comes to life in his verse, always with a feeling of his relish for the open air. (vi-vii)

Kendall pays a trioute to Gordon in his poem 'The Late Mr. A. L. Gordon', the opening lines of which are quoted below as an epitome of our final estimate of Gordon's poetry:

> At rest! Hard by the margin of that sea
> Whose sounds are mirgled with his noble verse,
> Now lies the shell that never more will house.
> The fine, strong spirit of my gifted friend.
> Yea, he who flashed upon us suddenly,
> A shining soul with syllables of fire,
> Who sang the first great songs these lands can claim
> To be their own; the one who did not seem
> To know what royal place awaited him
> Within the Temple of the Beautiful,
> Has passed away...
>
> (Wilkes: 89)

5.4 'THE SICK STOCKRIDER' : TEXT

Hold hard , Ned ! Lift me down once more , and lay me in the shade ;
Old man , you've had your work cut out to guide
Both horses , and to hold me in the saddle when I sway'd ,

All through the hot , slow , sleepy , silent ride ;
The dawn at "Moorabinda" was a mist rack dull and dense
The sunrise was a sullen sluggish lamp :
I was dozing in the gateway at Arbuthnot's bound'ry fence ,
I was dreaming on the Limestone cattle camp ;
We crossed the creek at Carricksford , and sharply through the haze .
And suddenly the sun shot flaming forth.;
To southward lay "Katawa" with the sandpeaks all ablaze ,
And the flush'd fields of Glen Lomond lay to north
Now westward winds the bridle path that leads to Lindisfarm ,
And yonder looms the double-headed Bluff ;
From the far side of the first hill , when the skies are clear and calm ,
You can see Sylvester's woolshed fair enough .
Five miles we used to call it from our homestead to the place
Where the big tree spans the roadway like an arch ;
'Twas here we ran the dingo down that gave us such a chase
Eight years ago---or was it nine ?---last March .
'Twas merry in the glowing morn , among the gleaming grass ,
To wonder as we've wander'd many a mile ,
And blow the cool tobacco cloud , and watch the white wreaths pass ,
Sitting loosely in the saddle all the while ;
'Twas merry 'mid the blackwoods when we spide the station roofs ,
To wheel the wild scrub cattle at the yard ,
With a running fire of stockwhips and a fiery run of hoofs ,
Oh ! the hardest day was never then too hard !
Ay ! we had a glorious gallop after "Starlight" and his gang ,
When they bolted from Sylvester's on the flat ;
How the sun-dried reed -beds crackled , how the flintstrewn ranges rang
To the strokes of "Mountaineer" and "Acrobat";
Hard behind them in the timber , harder still across the heath ,
Close beside them through the tea-tree scrub we dash'd ;
And the golden-tinted fern leaves , how they rustled underneath !
And the honeysuckle osiers , how they crash'd !
We led the hunt throughout , Ned , on the chestnut and the grey ,
And the troopers were three hundred yards behind ,
While we emptied our six-shooters on the bushrangers at bay ,
In the creek with stunted box-tree for a blind !
There you grappled with the ladder , man to man , and horse to horse ,
And you rolled together when the chestnut rear'd ;
He blaz'd away and miss'd you in that shallow water- course --
A narrow shave -- his power singed your beard !
In these hours when life is ebbing , how those days when life was young
Come back to us -- how clearly I recall
Even the yarns Jack Hall invented , and the songs Jem Roper sung ;
And where are now Jem Roper and Jack Hall ?
Ay ! nearly all our comrades of the old colonial school ,
Our ancient boon companions , Ned , are gone;
Hard livers for the most part , some what reckless as a rule ,
It seems that you and I are left alone.
There was Hughes , who got in trouble through that business with the cards,
It matters little what became of him ,
But a steer ripp'd up MacPherson in the Cooraminta yards ,
And Sullivan was drown'd at Sink - or - swim ,
And Mostyn -- poor Frank Mostyn -- died at last a fearful wreck,
In " the horrors" at the Upper Wandinong ;
And Carisbrooke the rider at the Horsefall broke his neck ,
Faith ! the wonder was he saved his neck so long !
Ah! those days and nights we squandered at the Logans in the glen --
The Logans , man and wife , have long been dead ,

Elsie's tallest girl seems taller than your little Elsie then ,
And Ethel is a woman grown and wed .
I 've had my share of pastime , and I 've done my share of toil ,
And life is short -- the longest life a span --
I care not now to tarry for the corn or for the oil ,
Or for the wine that maketh glad of man ;
For good undone and gifts misspent and resolutions vain ,
'Tis somewhat late to trouble -- This I know ,
I should live the same life over , If I had to live again ;
And the change are I go where most men go .
The deep blue skies wax dusky and the tall green trees grow dim,
The sword beneath me seems to heave and fall ,
And sickly shadows through the sleeply sunlight swim
And on the very sun's face weave their pall .
Let me slumber in the hollow where the wattle blossoms wave ,
With never stone or rail to my bed ;
Should the sturdy station children pull the bush flowers on my grave ,
I may chance to hear them romping overhead .

(Wilkes: 83-86)

5.4.1 Discussion

The best way to throw into relief the characteristic features of Gordon's poetry is to analyse the poem 'The Sick Stockrider'. The poem is the best-known of all the poems written by Gordon. Before the poem is analysed, it will be interesting for you to know what different critics have said about the poem.

In *The oxford Companion to Australian literature*, the poem is commented upon under different entries :

> 'The Sick Stockrider', in particular, is recognized as the poem which sketched in broad outline the territory which later balladists filled with profuse and picturesque detail; it thus pointed literature in a new and more characteristically Australian direction. (302)

> 'Sick Stockrider, The', a popular and well-known poem of Adam Lindsay Gordon, was written in 1869 and published in *Bush Ballads and Galloping Rhymes* (1870). The ballad of the dying stockman, with its creed of mateship, its laconic acceptance in true bush style of whatever life and death may offer, led Marcus Clarke to assert that in Gordon's work lay the beginning of a national school of Australian poetry. 'The Sick Stockrider' is accepted as the progenitor of the Australian literary ballad. (630)

Brian Elliott pinpoints the chief characteristics and the contribution of 'The Sick Stockrider' :

> In its day 'The Sick Stockrider' seemed to epitomize the mood and atmosphere of colonial experience. Essentially a bush poem, it is impressionistic, reminiscent, relaxed, familiar; its great significance, however, lay not in what it was, but what it did. This poem alone captured, defined and established for its period the local image and fixed the hitherto hesitant, wavering local nostalgias. Henceforward no Colonial poet could write without remembering it; it represented an emotional point of rest, an end to lost poetical causes and a new creative beginning. (240 - 241)

Wilkes highlights certain aspects of the ballad in his brief, concise comments:

> Absorbed into the folk tradition behind 'The sick stockrider', it (the element of fatalism) makes that poem the classical pastoral elegy of its period. (viii)

Some of the sentiments expressed in the poem came to be important to the nationalist writers. Chief among them is the creed of mateship. The comradeship of the stockman and his mate Ned is recalled :

'Twas merry in the glowing morn, among the gleaming grass,
To wander as we've wandered many a mile,
And blow the cool tobacco cloud, and watch the white wreaths pass,
Sitting loosely in the saddle all the while.

His dying thoughts also recall other friends, the 'ancient boon companions' of the 'old colonial school', some of them have fatal accidents in the bush environs :

...a steer ripp'd up MacPherson in the Cooraminta yards,
And Sullivan was drown'd at Sink-or-Swim.

When we analyse the poem, we discover a summary of what came to be accepted as **the philosophy of the bush**. It may be said that Gordon is the first poet who has been able to put across this philosophy in the syntax of poetry. In the following lines we come across a verbal representation of the laconic acceptance of one's lot, a refusal to brood over life's disappointments and lost chances, and a shrug of the shoulders over the question mark of a future beyond the grave.

I've had my share of pastime, and I've done my share of toil,
And life is short - the longest life a span;
I care not now to tarry for the corn or for the oil,
Or for the wine that maketh glad the heart of man.

The poem concludes with a pleasantly sentimental picture of the bushman's grave :

Let me slumber in the hollow where the wattle blossoms wave,
With never stone or rail to fence my bed;
Should the sturdy station children pull the bush flowers on my grave,
I may chance to hear them romping overhead.

'The Sick Stockrider ' is one of the most popular poems of Gordon. The Australian public held it very close to their hearts. It was recited in the shearing sheds and station homesteads around the campfires in the outback. It has usually been included in almost all anthologies of Australian poetry.

An anonymous correspondent in a letter to *The Age*, dt. 4 February 1903, put it succinctly:

> In 1878 I was first introduced to Gordon's poetry when I heard a man in a shearing shed recite ' The Sick Stockrider'. From that day I have been a lover of Gordon. Fortunately in those far-off-days, I met not academic gentlemen who told me Gordon was not a great poet. (Quoted, Wilde 1972 : 38)

'The Sick Stockrider' will survive as a haunting glimpse of a picturesque period of Australian folk history and, as Marcus Clarke suggested, fore-runner of a whole school of poetry dealing with life in the bush.

For the modern reader, what is noticeable and striking in the poem is the ease with which the poem moves, how matter-of-fact reminiscences are arranged in matter-of-fact words and phrases, and how still a sense of pathos is generated by the tone of the speaker who is sick, and feels he is on the verge of death, and this touching sense of pathos suffuses the whole poem, endearing it to readers of all times and all places. Thus a stamp of the timelessness is put on the poem, despite its contemporaneity in terms of its historical, geographical and local references. It is not only the pathos but

ery genuine feeling of compassion for man, men and mankind, in general, that radually develops and permeates the whole ballad.

Finally, what redeems the ballad from being dated is the freshness of its style. The style of the ballad never palls. It remains as fresh as ever. 'The Sick Stockrider' will, therefore, never lose its position or appeal, nor will it be replaced from any anthology of representative Australian poetry in times to come.

5.5 A.B. PATERSON : HIS LIFE AND WORKS

A. B. Paterson's life and works span over both nineteenth and twentieth centuries. But since, in this block we'll focus our attention on the Australian poetry of the nineteenth century only, in this unit we'll restrict our discussion to Paterson's life and works that fall within the perimeters of the nineteenth century.

Andrew Banjo Paterson (1864 - 1941) is widely known as 'Banjo' Paterson from the pseudonym 'The Banjo' that he adopted for his early contributions to the *Bulletin,* the Australian magazine, published from 1880 onwards.

He was born at Narambla Station, near Orange in New South Wales. He spent his childhood in the bush on Illalong Station near Yass in New South Wales. In his early childhood with his innocence and inquisitiveness, Paterson delighted in watching the bullock teams with the 'bullockies' and their families and gold diggers who passed by that way. Thus he got acquainted with the great bush characters, He took his preparatory education in a little bush school at Binalong, riding there on horseback, ten miles each day.

In 1874 at the age of ten he was sent to Sydney Grammar School near Gladesville, a pretty waterside suburb of Sydney on the Paramatta River. There he congenially lived with his grand mother who too wrote verse. Thus he got literary inspiration from his grand mother. He used to spend his vacations at Illalong station enjoying the activities and associations of bush life. At the age of sixteen he matriculated and was articled to a firm of solicitors. After being himself enrolled as a solicitor, he became a managing clerk for another law firm and later practised in a partnership with the name of Street and Paterson.

Official work seemed dull, boring and irksome to him. So he wanted to get away from the tedious bondage by spending some time in the bush at Illalong . In *The Oxford Companion to Australian Literature,* it is observed:

> ....these early experiences provided him (Patereon) with a fund of incidents, character and scenes which his later writing turned into legend. (549)

In the 1980s, Sydney was progressing towards self - sufficiency in socioeconomic conditions. Side by side there was a cultural upheaval with the upsurge of theatre companies and musical orchestra and the emergence of an Australian School of Art. With the cultural upheaval, the nation was thirsting for its own literature. Leon Cantrell opines:

The legend of the nineties has insisted that their triumph was to throw off the shackles of an imported vision, which had recoiled from the strangeness of the local scene, to show us ourselves and our land, whole and clear. (xv)

Clemment Semmler comments:

> Everything Australian suddenly became worth writing about: the slums, the outback, the diggings, the seaports, the [illegible] fields. (1967-1)

In 1880, under the enthusiastic editorship of Mr. J. F. Archibald, *The Bulletin* came out with the intention of publishing the writing of the major as well as minor writers of Australia, Paterson, who was then well-known as a promising lawyer, attracted the personal attention of Archibald, who encouraged him to write about the bush and the people.

In 1890s Paterson adopted the pseudonym of 'Banjo' which was the name of 'a so called race-horse' in his station. Under this name he started contributing his verses. When his 'Clancy of the Overflow'(1889) appeared in *The Bulletin* , Rolf Boldrewood hailed it as 'the best bush ballad scince Gordon' Paterson wrote in this period 'Old Pardon, the son of Reprieve', 'The Man from Ironbank', and a number of other verses which aroused the interest among the readers who were curious about the identity of the poet.

According to Clement Semmler, ' he (Paterson)became a celebrity overnight ' (1967:9), as his identity is revealed in the publication of *The Man from Snowy River & Other Verses*. The success of this book was described in London Literary Year-book as ' without parallel in colonial literary annals ' and as giving its author a public larger than that of any other living writers in the language except Kipling. The first edition sold out like a hot cake in a fortnight. Their total sales exceeded one lakh copies .

At the beginning of 1895 while visiting Dagworth, a Queensland sheep station during holiday he wrote his next famous ballad 'Waltzing Matilda' for which he is known not only in Australia but all over the world .

For the next few years he wrote some prose pieces for *The Bulletin* reflecting the life of the bush for which he had an irresistable attraction. Towards the end of 1899, he decided to build up his career as a journalist and sailed for South Africa as war correspondent for the *Sydney Morning Herald* and *Melbourne Angus* in the Boer war.

5.6 CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES OF PATERSON'S POETRY

Since our focus is on the nineteenth century Australian poetry, we limit our discussion to the first volume of the Paterson's poems which was published in 1895. However, in this section we will study in general certain outstanding stylistic features of Paterson's poetry.

The first few lines from ' Prelude ' to his first volume of poems are quoted below:

> I have gathered these stories afar
> In the wind and the rain,
> In the land where the cattle camps are,
> On the edge of the plain,
> On the overland routes of the west,
> When the watches were long,
> I have fashioned in earnest and jest
> These fragments of song.

The lines from the 'Prelude' indicate the poet's preoccupation with the outdoor life lived in the wind and the rain and life in the cattle camps and the far areas of the land. His purpose is to write songs about this kind of life. And his presentation of that life will be both serious and funny.

The title -poem of the first volume ' The Man from Snowy River ' will be discussed in detail in the next section. The prime images of the poem are the horse and the horsemen. His other well-known poems like ' Rio Grande's Last Race ', 'Father Riley's Horse', 'The Old Timer's Steeplechase', 'Mulligan's Mare'and 'In the Droving Days' are notable stories of the horse. No doubt, horse riding is the staple theme of Paterson's poems but through this theme Paterson conveys an image of the life lived then, the character of the people who were involved with the horse-riding and makes certain characters stand out on account of their courage, sacrifice and determination.

The horse provided a pivotal image in Paterson's poetry. The following observation by **Geoffrey Dutton** pinpoints the dominance of the horse as a theme in Paterson's poetry:

> The seemingly untroubled success of the third major figure of the 1890s, Banjo Paterson , is exactly right both for the man and the time and place. He is as confident as a good horseman in the saddle of a good horse, with the added pleasure that he knows he has an audience of horse - lovers.(9)

Not only of the horses and the horse-riders but also of other kinds of people from the bush and the countryside, Paterson is the inspired singer. He peoples his poetry with a host of characters from the bush. *Paterson is the chief folk - poet of Australia.* 'Waltzing Matilda', Australia's national song, and 'The Man from Snow River', Australia's national narrative poem, substantiate that claim . Let us add such folk figures as ' Clancy of the Overflow ', 'Saltbush Bill', 'The Man from Ironbark' and 'Mulga Bill', and set them 'On Kiley's Run' at 'Conroy's Gap' , along 'The Road to Gundagai' or 'By the Grey Gulf Water', and have them sing 'A Bushman's Song' , dream 'A Dream of the Melbourne Cup' , swap old yarns of 'Father Riley's Horse' and 'The Geebung Polo Club', or ruefully recount 'How the Favourite Beat Us' — and the outlines of the map of Australian folklore are broadly drawn.

'Clancy of the Overflow' is included in Paterson's first volume of verse. The poem expresses an intense love of the countryside. The attraction of the drover's life are found mostly in the natural background of his landscape and his free movement across that vast landscape. The other attraction of the drover's life is the enjoyment of his mates. The appeal of the natural landscape and the enjoyment of mateship are evident in the following lines :

> And the bush has friends to meet him and their kindly voices greet him
> In the murmur of the breezes and the river on its bars,
> And he sees the vision splendid of the sunlit plains extended,
> And at night the wondrous glory of the everlasting stars .

At the beginning of 1895, while visiting Dagworth, a Queensland sheep station, he wrote the now - famous 'Waltzing Matilda' verses to a tune which, though an inherent part of band march published in 1893, seems to be that of an old marching song of Marlborough's soldiers. 'Waltzing Matilda' became enormously popular particularly among Australian troops and has assumed the status of an unofficial national anthem (and remains the song most closely identified with Australia) among overseas people, though its sympathy for the underdog is seen as characteristically Australian and is significant reason for its continuing appeal.

In 'Waltzing Matilda' Paterson immortalises the character of a swagman. Another important character in Patersons's poetry is Saltbush Bill. Through him, the character of a drover is immortalised. ' Saltbush Bill ' appears in *The Man from Snowy River and Other Verses.*

The bushman is a predominant figure in Paterson's poetry. He is presented as crude as he is, but the valour, the courage and dauntlessness of the bushmen are thrown into relief in his poems. Paterson's sense of fun and humour adds colour and vivacity to its presentation of the bushmen. His poem ' The Man from Ironbark ' is one notable example.

Many of Paterson's ballads are, of course, humorous and comic in tone. But he has also seen tragedies befalling life in the sheep - station. And he has presented poignant pen-portraits of the tragedies of station life in many a poem. In its opening verses, 'On Kiley's Run' presents an attractive glimpse, in the usual Paterson manner, of the carefree existence and camaraderie of bush life. But with droughts and unpaid overdrafts, Kiley's Run is eventually lost and passes through the bank to an absentee landlord in England. ' On Kiley's Run ' is an attack on the evils of the land grant system, made more personal by its echoes of a situation that had occurred in the poet's own family years earlier.

The pastoral map of Australia during the latter part of the nineteenth century provides all the themes of Paterson's poetry. The countryside and the remote outback of the nineteenth century and the inhabitants of those places — the drovers, the swagmen, the horsemen, the troopers, the squatters, the bushmen and the bushrangers— find permanent literary recognition in the verses of Australia through the ballads of Paterson. The simple stories told about them in Paterson's ballads enshrine for posterity the now-extinct nineteenth century ethos of Australia.

The themes of Paterson's poetry encompass the pastoral figures of Australia before civilization and industry changed the country into a modern one. The life portrayed in Paterson's poetry is simple and spirited. And Paterson has been able to embody the spirit of the place and the spirit of the people through a style that reflects the themes and their aura.

Paterson has chosen the form of the ballad to give a concrete shape to his vision of the Australian Arcadia in which drovers, swagmen, horsemen, bushmen and bushrangers communicate among themselves in a dialogue that is colloquial, earthy and informal. Even when it is not a dialogue, the poet's pen puts the poem in the language of the people whose life he portrays. His style matches his themes and becomes a fit vehicle of his vision. In this respect Paterson is one of the most successful poets who have developed right mediums for their poetry.

As Paterson chooses to tell a story to the common folk, he writes not about the internal working of the mind but about incidents which proved to be exciting or moving to the common people in the language common to them.

Perhaps it will not be out of place to remember that Wordsworth avoided the use of ornamental language and chose the language really used by men to bring back vitality into English poetry . Though Paterson does not refer to Wordsworth, you may reflect that to some extent Paterson proves himself a true follower of Wordsworth in choosing to exploit the possibilities of the language really spoken by poeple of the time in that particular period of history. The vitality of his poetry emanates from the language that he has used.

The study of Paterson's poetry is very important for it educates us about Australia and her people. Of course, the appeal of Paterson will be underestimated if we think of his significance as a poet only for the Australians. The artistry of his poetry appeals to us as well. Though we live outside Australia and outside the ambit of the cultural heritage of Australia, the breadth of Paterson's humanity and generosity towards the under privileged and the persecuted appeals to us or any body else outside Australia.

5.7 'THE MAN FROM SNOWY RIVER' : TEXT

There was movement at the station, for the word had passed around
That the colt from old Regret had got away,
And had joined the wild bush horses— he was worth a thousand pound,
So all the cracks had gathered to the fray.

All the tried and noted riders from the stations near and far
Had mustered at the homestead overnight,
For the bushmen love hard riding where the wild bush horses are,
And the stock-horse snuffs the battle with delight.
There was Harrison, who made his pile when Pardon won the cup,
The old man with his hair as white as snow,
But few could ride beside him when his blood was fairly up —
He would go wherever horse and man could go.
And Clancy of the Overflow came down to lend a hand,
No better horseman ever held the reins;
For never horse could throw him while the saddle-girths would stand —
He learnt to ride while droving on the plains.
And one was there, a stripling on a small and weedy beast;
He was something like a racehorse undersized,
With a touch of Timor pony — three parts thoroughbred at least —
And such as are by mountain horsemen prized.
He was hard and tough and wiry — just the sort that won't say die —
There was courage in his quick impatient tread;
And he bore the badge of gameness in his bright and fiery eye,
And the proud and lofty carriage of his head.
But still so slight and weedy, one would doubt his power to stay,
And the old man said, "That horse will never do
For a long and tiring gallop— only Clancy stood his friend—
"I think we ought to let him come," he said ;
"I warrant he'll be with us when he's wanted at the end,
For both his horse and he are mountain bred.
"He hails from Snowy River, up by Kosciusko's side,
Where the hills are twice as steep and twice as rough;
Where a horse's hoofs strike firelight form the flint stones every stride,
The man that holds his own is good enough.
And the Snowy River riders on the mountains make their home,
Where the river runs those giant hills between;
I have seen full many horesmen since I first commenced to roam,
But nowhere yet such horsemen have I seen."
So he went; they found the horses by the big mimosa clump,
They raced away towards the mountain's brow,
And the old man gave his orders, "Boys, go at them from the jump,
No use to try for fancy riding now.
And, Clancy, you must wheel them, try and wheel them to the right
Ride boldly, lad, and never fear the spills,
For never yet was rider that could keep the mob in sight,
If once they gain the shelter of those hills."
So Clancy rode to wheel them-- he was racing on the wing
Where the best and boldest riders take their place,
And he raced his stock-horse past them, and he made the ranges ring
With the stockwhip, as he met them face to face.
Then they halted for a moment, while he swung he dreaded lash,
But they saw their well-loved mountain full in view,
And they charged beneath the stockwhip with a sharp and sudden dash,
And off into the mountain scrub they flew.
Then fast the horsemen followed, where the gorges deep and black
Resounded to the thunder of their tread,
And the stockwhips woke the echoes, and they fiercely answered back
From cliffs and crags that beetled overhead.
And upward, ever upward, the wild horses held their way,
Where mountain ash and kurrajong grew wide;
And the old man muttered fiercely, "We may bid the mob good day,
No man can hold them down the other side."
When they reached the mountain's summit, even Clancy took a pull —

It well might make the boldest hold their breath;
The wild hop scrub grew thickly, and the hidden ground was full
Of wombat holes, and any slip was death.
But the man from Snowy River let the pony have his head,
And he swung his stockwhip round and gave a cheer,
And he raced him down the mountain like a torrent down its bed :
While the others stood and watched in very fear.
He sent the flint-stones flying, but the pony kept his feet,
He cleared the fallen timber in his stride,
And the man from Snowy River never shifted in his seat --
It was grand to see that mountain horseman ride .
Through the stringy barks and saplings on the rough and broken ground,
Down the hillside at a racing pace he went;
And he never drew the bridle till he landed safe and sound
At the bottom of that terrible descent
He was right among the horses as they climbed the farther hill,
And the watchers on the mountain, standing mute,
Saw him ply the stockwhip fiercely; he was right among them still,
As he raced across the clearing in pursuit.
Then they lost him for a moment, where two mountain gullies met
In the ranges -- but a final glimpse reveals
On a dim and distant hillside the wild horses racing yet,
With the man from Snowy River at their heels.
And he ran them single-handed till their sides were white with foam;
He followed like a bloodhound on their track,
Till they halted, cowed and beaten; then he turned their heads for home,
And alone and unassisted brought them back.
But his hardy mountain pony he could scarcely raise a trot,
He was blood from hip to shoulder from the spur;
But his pluck was still undaunted, and his courage fiery hot,
For never yet was mountain horse a cur
And down by Kosciusko, where the pine-clad ridges raise
Their torn and rugged battlements on high,
Where the air is clear as crystal, and the white stars fairly blaze
At midnight in the cold and frosty sky,
And where around the Overflow the reed-beds sweep and sway
To the breezes, and the rolling plains are wide,
The Man from Snowy River is a household word today,
And the stockmen tell the story of his ride.

(Seminlar 1978 : 2 - 4)

5.7.1 Discussion

Paterson's most outstanding poem ' The Man from Snowy River ' is the title-poem of his first volume of poetry. It is outstanding for many a reason . It has been turned into a successful film. This fact indicates the immense popularity of the poem. That the poem is very dear to Australians is confirmed by the following remarks by **Edgar Water** :

> Thousands of Australians who would be scared stiff of climbing onto a horse's back can recite from memory Paterson's long ballad of that reckless horseman, ' The Man from Snowy River '. (303)

Water's observation is further corroborated by the fact that the sale of this particular volume of poetry has exceeded one lakh copies.

The poem tells the story of a horseman coming from the Snowy River region. The story of his bravery is recounted in the poem. The story is not extraordinary, but it gripped the imagination of the Australians because the life lived by the Australians in

the pioneering days is portrayed in the poem with authenticity. The life of the early Australians, their dare-devilry, extraordinary feats of their courage and their readiness to face the challenges of life are all partrayed vividly in the ballad. The ballad recaptures the indomitable spirit of the early Australians fighting for survival on a heroic scale.

The poem is about horses and horsemen. In the days when the poem was written, horses were very important to the Australians. In the rugged countryside of Australia during 1890s the accomplished horseman enjoyed unlimited hero-worship. In this respect the comment of **Russel Ward** on the importance of the horseman may be quoted :

> he (horesman) had more influence on the manners and mores of the city-dwellers than the latter had on his . (5)

In the poem the horseman symbolises the courage of the Australian hero, hence the horseman becomes a myth. The Man from the Snowy River turns out to be a legendary figure like young Lochinvar, John Gilpin and Ancient Mariner.

About the background of the poem it is said that Paterson, with a companion, some time in 1890, on a visit to the Snowy Mountain area, camped in the hut of one Jack Riley at his lonely outpost on a cattle station bordering Mount Kosciusko. Riley, whose reputation as a fearless rider and stockman was almost legendary in the district, is said to have told Paterson a story of a colt that got away in the mountains. After the ballad was published a couple of years later, it was claimed that Riley was the original Man from Snowy River. However, Semmlar comments:

> Paterson, we can be sure, identifies with his young hero, because Paterson himself was known, when he wrote the poem, as one of the best horsemen in New South Wales .... perhaps that is one of the reasons why this ballad is so memorable and real — that Paterson wrote it with the sincerity and feeling of one who imagined that it was he who was the mysterious, rider, the Man from Snowy River. (1978 : 7 - 8)

The first stanza of the ballad introduces the subject : a colt has run away, and to find out the colt, all the skilled horsemen from the neighbouring areas gathered with their speedy horses. In the stanza of eight lines, the word ' horse ' has been mentioned thrice, and words associated with the horse like ' riding ' and ' colt ' have been used. The stanza evokes the image of horse and horsemen against a mountainous background.

In the second stanza as well, the word ' horse ' and words associated with it are repeated as if they were all in a march. Stanza after stanza re-emphasize the evocation of the image of the horse and the horsemen. They appear not only to evoke but also to invoke the horse.

The third stanza introduces the particular horseman who is the hero of this ballad. Though ' a stripling on a small and weedy beast ',

> he bore the badge of gameness in his bright and fiery eye,
> And the proud and lofty carriage of his head.

While other riders stopped short at the summit of the mountain because of the bad road after it, it was only the Man from Snowy River who made bold to ride on. Ultimately the Man from Snowy River made all the horses complete the chase.

Besides the theme of the horse, one striking thematic feature of the poem is the poet's descriptions of nature. In this poem the poet gives a memorable pen-portrait of the rugged mountainous region. The poet keeps the image of the mountains in the

background, never concentrating his descriptive focus on any particular aspect of it till he reaches the last stanza of the poem. In the last stanza, after the story of the Man from Snowy River is told , the poet paints graphically a cool, placid mountain side.

Paterson is the supreme balladist of the horse. In bushman fashion he viewed the horse as an animal trained for and useful in specific tasks and he admired it for its excellence in those tasks, one of which is racing. Racing involves feats of speed, courage and endurance, and there is plenty of human drama associated with it . The Man from Snowy River ' is the undisputed classic of Paterson's stories of the horse.

When we consider Paterson's style in ' The Man from Snowy River ', we find that he has not only chosen the language really spoken by people but also he has exercised an artistic control and verbal restraint to give the ballad an artistic finish. Hence, it is more a literary ballad than an ordinary bush song. Of course, there is no denying the fact that the poem despite its artistic control and finish has the flavour of the colloquial language which makes its appeal piquant and popular.

Right from the beginning of the poem , the story-element is pre-dominant . The style is simple and colloquial. The episode is introduced and it provides a pivot round which all the actions take place . The art of presentation of the story makes it dramatic. There is dialogue to punctuate the drama. There is a wealth of imagery which, however, lends colour and clarity to the evocation of high-drama associated with the events and action.

However, the ballad ends on a quiet tone, as if the high drama after its climax passes through different stages. Though a refrain is not used, the poet concludes the poem with a hint that this moving story continues to be told and retold by common people year after year :

> The Man from Snowy River is a household word to day ,
> And the stockman tell the story of his ride.

Clement Semmler has rightly pointed out :

> The phenomenon of this ballad is that it is still a " household word " nearly ninety years after it was written. If we reflect on its success, we see that Paterson combined several elements in its writing that have marked the most successful Australian ballads — excitement ; a genuine feeling , indeed love, for its bush setting ; and a statement of the dominant Australian characteristic, to "give it a go " and take a risk ... " The Man from Snowy River " has never lost its popularity, and this is primarily because , like other great ballads in our literature , it sustains these images still admired in the present day of adventure , courage and the determination to triumph over seemingly overwhelming odds. (1978 : 9 - 10)

5.8 LET US SUM UP

After Wentworth, Harpur and Kendall had built the foundation of Australian poetry, Gordon and Paterson started building the base of the superstructure of Australian poetry, It is really a wonderful phenomenon of stylistic variety and thematic width that the two latter poets brought into Australian poetry through their ballads that put accent on the lives of the Australian commoners like bushrangers and stockmen, and replaced the stiff eighteenth - century poetic diction and Romantic - Victorian wistful lyricism with robust and matter - of - fact colloquial style that smacked of real - like style of conversation among the Australians.

Gordon and Paterson transformed the character of Australian poetry. They created the poetry of the public at large. Australian poetry acquired its own colour and flavour. By the end of the nineteenth century, Australian poetry travelled a long way from convicts' verses in borrowed idiom to the pulsating rhythm of literary ballads which reflect the pathos and philosophy of life in the outback through a new Australian idiom which grew out of the Australian soil . Gordon and Paterson deserved to be recognized for their exemplary role in making Australian poetry truly Australian in both spirit and tone.

5.9 QUESTIONS

1. Can you draw a pen - portrait of Australian poetry during the end of the nineteenth century?
2. From a study of Gordon's poetry , do you feel Gordon had accepted the lifestyle of the Australians though he migrated from Australia?
3. What constitutes Paterson's signal contribution to the growth of Australian poetry? Include references to his poetry published within the nineteenth century.
4. Analyse 'The Man from Snowy River' to find out what features of the national character of an Australian of the end-of-the nineteenth century are revealed and celebrated in the ballad.
5. Do you think the poetry of Gordon and Paterson may hold interest for readers outside Australia? And for what reasons?
6. 'If Harpur's main affinity among the Romantics is with Wordsworth, Gordon is closer in temperament to the melancholic and reckless Byron, and in literary predilection to Scott as a writer of ballad and narrative verse'. Discuss with appropriate examples.

UNIT 6 ADA CAMBRIDGE

Structure

6.0 Objectives
6.1 Introduction
6.2 Ada Cambridge: Her Life and Works
6.3 Characteristic Features of Cambridge's Poetry
6.4 'An Answer': Text
6.4.1 Discussion
6.5 Let Us Sum Up
6.6 Questions

6.0 OBJECTIVES

In this unit, we'll discuss Cambridge's life and poetical works published within the nineteenth century and a detailed analysis of one of her most significant and characteristic poem illustration. This will complete our survey of Australian poetry published within the span of the nineteenth century. In this unit, you will study one of the important poems of Ada Cambridge.

6.1 INTRODUCTION

This is the last unit in the Block. Upto Unit 5 , we've discussed the history of Australian poetry right from the beginning to the end of the nineteenth century, and highlighted the significant works of the most important Australian poets of the century who played the most remarkable roles in the development of Australian poetry. One aspect of the phenomenon of Australian poetry discussed so far is that all the poets mentioned are male poets. Australian society that developed during the nineteenth century right from its beginning at the end of the eighteenth century had been dominated by men. The concept of mateship that characterized the Australian society of the century was also a masculine concept.

During the last quarter of the twentieth century, many women scholars and critics of Australia made investigations into the past of Australian literature, and discovered the works of women writers of the nineteenth century. In this Block devoted to the study of the nineteenth century Australian poetry, our survey and assessment will remain incomplete without assigning one unit to the study of the poetry of Ada Cambridge (1844 - 1926), the most important Australian woman poet of the century. Besides being a poet, she is well - known as a novelist. Like Paterson's, Cambridge's life and works also extend to the first quarter of the twentieth century. But we confine our discussion to the poetry of Cambridge published within the nineteenth century.

There were a few other women poets who published poems during the nineteenth century but none of their works registered women's protest against male values, or the male subjugation of women in the society as articulately and pronouncedly as Cambridge's poems, published mainly in her controversial book of poems, *Unspoken Thoughts* (1887).

6.2 ADA CAMBRIDGE : HER LIFE AND WORKS

Ada Cambridge was born and raised in Norfolk, England. During her youth she published moral tales and verses which reflected her strong religious feelings. In 1870 she married a young curate George Frederic Cross.

After marriage , the couple left for Victoria in Australia where Cross served as an Anglican minister at Wangaratta, Yackandandah, Ballan, Coleraine, Sandhurst (Bendigo) and Beechworth before moving to Willamson town in 1893 .

Cambridge's colonial experience is chronicled in her perceptive autobiography. *Thirty years in Australia* which was published in 1903.

Since in this unit we are interested in the poetry of Cambridge published in the nineteenth century, we'll discuss her poetry books that were published within the nineteenth century.

Cambridge's first book of poems, *The Manor House and Other Poems,* was published in 1875. In a letter to Bertram Stevens (5 October 1904, Mitchell Library) Cambridge, however, refers to the poems of the volume as ' the effusions of my extreme youth ' (quoted by Bradstock and Wakeling : 235) . Beilby and Hadgraft describe the collection as ' fairly mixed bag of religious, narrative and descriptive verse of little consequence, showing in parts the influence of Tennyson and the Pre-Raphaelites.' (4)

Her second book of poems, *Unspoken Thoughts,* published by Kegan Paul of London in 1887, is a major event in the annals of women's poetry of Australia. However, because of its controversial nature, the book was withdrawn from circulation by Cambridge herself.

The book was published anonymously. Several of the poems of the book contained extremely controversial ideas. Bradstock and Wakeling comment :

> Was she (Cambridge) hoping that these poems, many of them extremely controversial, would be more objectively received if the name of a female author was suppressed? Given the fact that she carefully avoided reference to the collection in either of her two books of memoirs, her motivation must remain a matter of speculation. Perhaps, like so many women writers before and since, she needed to distance herself from her private thoughts once they had entered the public domain. Such self - suppression could be parallelled to the attitudes of those earlier 'mothers of the novel' who were torn between the need to write and the norms of invisibility required of them as ladies. This 'denial of agency' - this time by the woman writer herself - might have occurred because Cambridge already felt considerable ambivalence about how her unorthodox thoughts might be received. (94)

The two critics continue their pertinent comment :

> *Unspoken Thoughts* is a volume of polemical poetry. It is the 'radical' nature of the arguments pursued that is the greatest surprise. According to A.G. Stephens, when the collection was first published 'the shock to the Rev. George Cross was overwhelming , and , if so , we can assume that it was not the quality of the rhyme which disturbed him.'
>
> At the time of writing *Unspoken Thoughts* , Cambridge apparently entertained some quite uncontroversial attitudes and felt the need to give voice to them. (94)

Unspoken Thoughts was withdrawn from circulation. However, Cambridge published another volume of poems entitled *The Hand In the Dark and Other Poems* (1913) in which she re-published some poems from *Unspoken Thoughts* but she removed the anti-establishment ideas from them. With such an act of suppression by Cambridge herself under compelling circumstances 'the most outspoken, and perhaps the most honest, comments on love, region and social reform' (Bradstock and Wakeling :118) by a woman were withdrawn from public circulation in nineteenth-century Australia.

6.3 CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES OF CAMBRIDGE'S POETRY

Cambridge did not receive adequate recognition for her poetry during her lifetime. Her poetry has been reassessed much later , and the importance of her feminist protest against patriarchal domination has been recognized only towards the end of the twentieth century. **H.M. Green** accords her a high status as a woman poet:

> ...she (Cambridge) is not merely the first Australian woman poet who matters at all, but remains today among the best of Australia's woman poets.....she was the first Australian writer, of prose or verse, to whom social problems really mattered; indeed they mattered to her so intensely that they aroused in her a passion of resentment : she was the first of the Australian "poets of revolt". (186)

Cambridge came to Australia with her husband in 1870, after having published in England a couple of books of hymns that are, however, of no literary importance. The poems of The *Manor House*, already mentioned in the preceding section, are conventional in outlook and not yet perfect in versecraft. As a specimen, the lines describing a woman in the title piece, are quoted below :

> Tall, with a slow, proud step and air, with skin half marble and half milk;
> With twisted coils of raven hair, blue-tinged and fine and soft as silk;
> With haughty, clear-cut chin and cheek and broad brow exquisitely Greek.
> (Green: 187)

In 1887, fifteen years after, appeared *Unspoken Thoughts*, the most challenging of the nineteenth-century Australian books of poetry. **Green's** comments are very illuminating:

> But during the next twelve years Ada Cambridge's whole mental and emotional outlook seem to have suffered a complete change: it may have been that the stimulus of the new life and the new country brought about a reaction from the attitude reflected in her previous books; they probably helped to bring an underlying stratum to the surface; at any rate in her second Australian book, *Unspoken Thoughts* (London,1887), from the rather conventional young clergyman's life, who has begun however to feel her way as a poet, she has now become an outspoken reformer in all spheres. It is true that she withdrew this book from publication, either because when she saw herself in print she thought she had gone too far for that conventional day and country, or perhaps because of a reference or two that might have been considered personal...(187)

According to *The Oxford Companion to Australian Literature*, *'Unspoken Thoughts'*, which reveals religious uncertainty,deals frankly with sexuality and marriage, and expresses strong concern for the socially disadvantaged' (137).It further notes that 'the poems which discuss religious uncertainty, e.g. the long opening poem 'The Shadow'; Sexuality, e.g. 'The Physical Conscience', 'A Wife's Protest'; and marriage,

e.g. 'An Answer', 'The Fallen', might have embarrassed or offended her clergyman husband George Cross.' (702)

Unspoken Thoughts, as its name suggests, offers poems in which Cambridge has expressed her original radical anti-establishment ideas which could not be expressed in public life in those days. Hence the poems in the volume affirm Cambridge's literary and intellectual courage. When, in the next section, one of her poems, in fact,the last poem of the volume,is analysed, it will be shown how radical her thoughts were,and how forthright she was in her expression.

There is no doubt that there is a Victorian mould of poetic expression in her poetry but iconoclastic ideas find a direct hand-hitting projection that must have shocked the patriarchal society of the day. **Patricia Barton** finds out the themes dealt with by Cambridge and the tone in which she articulates the themes:

> *Unspoken Thoughts* expresses indignation at social and sexual injustice, longings for love and sexual expression, explorations of motherhood, fear of death and the agony of illness, and a challenging of convention and orthodox beliefs. Emphasis on the physical, especially bodily effects of injustice and oppression serves to earth the more abstract musings in many of the verses, particularly in the poetry of sexual protest. This feature of her work coupled with the prevalent custom of reading women's writing autobiographically may have led to unwarranted and/or unwelcome assumptions being made about Cambridge's private life, especially in poems such as ' A Wife's Protest' and 'Vows' which cry out against the 'relentless bonds' of loveless marriage. (139)

Bradstock and Wakeling present in lucid details a list of the themes dealt with by Cambridge in her poetry. Cambridge's subversive approach is manifest in all the themes as listed below:

> Among the themes she explores are doubts about the consolations of religion and the nature of god, and elevation, instead, of the values of this world, especially earthly love; hypocrisy connected with the observance of many of the tenets of organised religion; the viability of vows of fidelity in marriage; the emergence of a strong and compassionate social conscience in connection with such issues as drunkenness, prostitution, free love, poverty, euthanasia and suicide. Cambridge sees wives in loveless marriages as prostitutes, commiserates with the plight of the Old Maid (without, however, recognising this state as valid alternative), and champions the cause and originality of those who stand outside the rest of their society—the seekers, the strivers, the questioners. (94-95)

Cambridge expresses her perception of the anti-establishment nature of her thoughts and themes in the poem 'Influence':

> So do our brooding thoughts and deep desires
> Grow in our souls, we know not how or why;
> Grope for we know not what, all blind and dumb.
> When the time is ripe, and one aspires
> To free his thought in speech, ours hears the cry,
> And to full birth and instant knowledge come.
>
> (Bradstock and Wakeling: 95)

Thus the unspoken thoughts find articulation through the poems of Cambridge. Cambridge becomes outspoken in asserting the demands of flesh, the urgencies of the earth, and primacy of the here and human above the piety of the imagined heaven in the poem entitled 'The Shadow':

No tale of alms and crowns my dull heart stirs,
That only hungers for a woman's kiss
And asks no life that is not one with hers.
Not such Hereafter can I wish to see;
Not this pale hope my seeking soul exalts;
I want no sexless angel -only thee,
My human love, with all thy human faults.

(Bradstock and Wakeling: 96)

Bradstock and Wakeling point out with illustrations how Cambridge protested against moral impositions from above :

> Not only does Cambridge express fears about the possibility of heaven and the nature of god, but she is forthright in her exposure of the pitfalls of organised religion. 'The physical Conscience', a brief poem of two stanzas, suggests that the word of god, 'the moral conscience', 'has lost its sacred fire…has become the slave/of all-compelling custom and desire'. That is, it observes the letter and not the spirit. By contrast, 'the conscience of the body' admits true passion and rejects the merely legal. Here, Cambridge would appear to be talking about marriage, which legitimates the sexual exchange whether love is present or not. This is a topic she picks up on again later in the collection. (101)

Cambridge put a challenging question in a poem entitled 'Fallen', where she conmiserates with the prostitutes, while critiquing the socially accepted marital relationship :

And who condemns? She who, for vulgar gain
And in cold blood, and for love or need,
Has sold her body to more vile disgrace—
The prosperous matron with her comely face—
Wife by the law, but prostitute in deed,
In whose gross wedlock womanhood is slain.

(Bradstock and Wakling.: 107)

Cambridge questions all hypocrisies that are practised through the institution of marriage. **Bradstock and Wakeling** analyse two poems on this topic:

> The following poem, of twenty four stanzas, 'A Wife's Protest', is the tale of a young woman enslaved in an arranged and loveless marriage. She wants no child to validate this unholy union, and sees the 'love child' as more blessed by nature. In particular, the poem is quite explicit about the physical side of such an unwanted union :

I lay me down upon my bed,
A prisoner on the rack,
And suffer dumbly, as I must,
Till the kind day comes back.
Listening from heavy hour to hour
To hear the church-clock toll-
A guiltless prostitute in flesh,
A murderess in soul.

> The wife points out that she did not feel this way at first but that, as her husband's 'slave', victim of his loveless lust, she has been shamed. Yet society will not recognise this :

I go to church ; I go to court ;
No breath of scandal flaws
The lustre of my fair repute ;
For I obey the laws.

The theme of marriage as prostitution is continued in 'London', which is worth quoting in full:

> The gorgeous stream of England's wealth goes by,
> Mixed with the mud and refuse, as of old—
> The hungry, homeless, naked, sick and cold;
> Want mocked by waste and greedy luxury.
> There , in their downy carriage-cushions, lie
> Proud women whose fair bodies have been sold
> And brought for coronet or merchant gold
> For whose base splendours envious maidens sigh.
> Some day the social ban will fall on them—
> On wanton rich who taunt their starving kin ;
> Some day the social judgement will condemn
> These ' wedded harlots ' in their shame and sin.
> A juster world shall separate them then
> From all pure women and honoured men.

This poem also incorporates the notion that riches are sinful, and that the rich have no moral right to any superiority they may feel over the poor. (107-108)

Cambridge's concern for the poor and outcaste finds eloquent expression in many a poem by her. **Bradstock and Wakeling** make a fine observation on this aspect of Cambridge's poetry :

'A Street Riot' is a justification of the uprising of the poorer classes and, at the same time , a suggestion that there is a humanitarian solution to social unrest :

> Must brute force rice and social order fall
> Ere these starved millions can be clothed and fed?

> The 1870s and 1880s were, it should be remembered , a boomtime for Australia's affluent , but at the other end of the social scale the male and female factory workers , whose grossly underpaid labour helped the rich to prosper, did not share in the general prosperity . Women , of course , fared must worse than men, so that they were often forced to resort to prostitution as a means of supplementing poor incomes. There is a recurrent concern in Cambridge's poetry for such victims and outcasts of society. (109)

Thus we find Cambridge added a new dimension to nineteenth century Australian poetry by dwelling on issues and concerns involving the poor and the women who suffered ignominy in the Australian society during that period of time.

Cambridge's style is a curious mixture of formal Victorian idiom and conversational questioning and answering informality. Her style might not have made much impact but surely her themes and her challenging treatment of the same contributed a great deal to the growth of women's poetry in Australia.

6.4 'AN ANSWER' : TEXT

> Thy love I am. Thy wife I cannot be.
> To wear the yoke of servitude - to take
> Strange,unknown fetters that I cannot break
> On soul and flesh that should be mine , and free.
> Better the woman's old disgrace for me
> Than this olo sin - this deep and dire mistake;

Better for truth and honour and thy sake—
For the pure faith I give and take from thee.
I know thy love, and love thee all I can—
I fain would love thee only till I die ;
But I may some day love a better man,
And thou may'st find a fitter mate than I ;
Some want, some chill, may steal 'twixt heart and heart
And then we must be free to kiss and part.

(Ackland 1993 : 209)

6.4.1 Discussion

'An Answer' is the last poem of the volume. It is not only a representative poem of Cambridge as a feminist rebel but also being placed at the last page of the volume, it seems to represent the climax of Cambridge's feminist rebellion.

The extreme position of woman advocated by the poem was shocking even for the female social reformer of the day . The leading suffragist and social reformer of the time , **Rose Scott** wrote about this poem: 'This poem is the one I am sorry is in this book ' (Bradstock and Wakeling:105).

The poem espouses the freedom of woman in a male - dorninated society where the wife is often treated as a legitimatised prostitute. Cambridge gave voice to the woman whose spirit is rebellious , and wants to uphold her own freedom of choice. The poem strikes us because of the force of the statements, the intensity of subjective expression, and the directness with which the woman states whatever she wants to state. In this poem , the feminist poetry of Australia finds a universal articulation. The poem is striking not only because it has transcended the formality of Victorian rhetoric and idiom found often in Cambridge's poetry.

What strikes us now is Cambridge's extreme courage in articulating a woman's assertion of individual independence in a society which was predominantly patriarchal. She never falters in her statement throughout the poem .The poem has the formal structure of a sonnet but the manner of speaking by a woman gives a new flexibility and dynamism to the whole structure and makes it lively and exciting. The reader is drawn into the network of questions raised by the woman projected in the poem.

Cambridge not only allows the woman to talk out her heart but also gives her the words to assert and affirm her point of view which is given a clinching expression in the last two lines which assume the shape of a couplet in order to unflinchingly champion and proclaim woman's independence :

> Some want , some chill, may steal 'twixt heart and heart
> And then we must be free to kiss and part.

The analysis of the poem shows how Cambridge developed a new mode of poetic communication for feminist causes in the context of a male-dominated Australian poetic scenario. Here is an original contribution to the diversification of the various strands of nineteenth-century Australian poetry. With the projection of feminist issues by a woman poet during the nineteenth century, Australian poetry acquired a new dimension. With Cambridge's feminist poetry, Australian poetry of the nineteenth century presents a wide panorama of poetic progression in the right direction in a country which was discovered and developed only a hundred years ago. Thus nineteenth century Australian poetry is not exclusively masculine poetry, it also includes feminist poetry thus making Australian poetry complete in more sense than one.

6.5 LET US SUM UP

During the nineteenth century the history of Australian poetry presents several landmarks in its progress. Cambridge's poetry published during the last quarter of the nineteenth century added a new dimension to Australian poetry. Thus Australian poetry became representative of the wide variety achieved in the spectrum of Australian culture over a hundred years of the nineteenth century. That women registered their protest in books of poetry speaks of the latitude of the Australian society and culture that found a true reflection in the nineteenth century Australian poetry.

6.6 QUESTIONS

1. What is your impression of Australian poetry by the end of the nineteenth century ? Is it totally masculine ?
2. Attempt an analysis of the social situation that might have led to the emergence of woman's poetry in Australia during the nineteenth century.
3. Do you find Cambridge's poetry is capable of handling and projecting anti - establishment ideas on poverty and woman's subjugation ? Answer with illustrations.
4. Analyse some of Cambridge's poems to study the contribution made by them to the development of Australian poetry .

BIBLIOGRAPHY

A bibliography is a list of relevant books on a subject. In this bibliography, a select reading list on nineteenth century Australian poetry is given. The list is not comprehensive. You may find more books in a good library. But definitely a reading of the following books will give you a fair idea about nineteenth century Australian poetry. Excerpts and quotations from many of these books have been incorporated in the units. The page numbers of those extracts as they appear in the books quoted from are given in brackets.

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BLOCK INTRODUCTION :

This Block will introduce short fiction to you. So far we have looked at poetry and an introduction to Australian literature. In this block we shall look at what short fiction is and how it has developed in the antipodes. We shall also study four authors namely, Marcus Clarke, Barbara Baynton, Henry Lawson, Arthur Hoey Davis (Steele Rudd) and Christina Stead. Marcus Clarke dealt largely with the convict system, Barbara Baynton with women in the Bush, Henry Lawson with 'mateship' and hardship in the Bush, Arthur Hoey Davis too explored the Bush with his images of the Rudd family namely – Dad, Mother, Dan, Dave, Joe, Kate, Sarah, Norah, the younger children, friends and neighbours. He dealt with the theme of the founding of the nation. Christina Stead is a later writer than the other four and she wrote more in the tradition of the psychological and Stream-of-consciousness novel. Once you have read the block you should be in a position to trace the development of short fiction in Australia, identify the major themes they dealt with and name some of the prominent short fiction writers of Australia.

Good Luck with your block!

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UNIT 1 SHORT FICTION / STORY

Structure

1.0 Objectives
1.1 Introduction
1.2 Short Fiction/ Story - History And Scope
1.2.1 19th Century American, English & Australian Short Fiction
1.3 The Origin and the Development of Australian Short Fiction/ Story
1.3.1 Short Fiction in the 1803s –1860s
1.3.2 Short Fiction in the 1860-1880s
1.3.3 Short Fiction in the 1880s-1890s
1.4 The Bulletin Years
1.5 Australian Short Fiction in the 20th Century
1.5.1 Australian Short Fiction in the Latter Half of the 20th Century
1.6 Emergence of Migrant And Aboriginal Writing in Short Fiction
1.7 Let Us Sum Up
1.8 Questions
1.9 Suggested Readings

1.0 OBJECTIVES

The objective of this unit is to provide a working definition of short fiction/ story and a basic background to an understanding of this genre. In this unit we shall trace the origins of short fiction/ story in European/ mainstream English Literature, the development of the Australian short fiction/ story and look at some of the important influences on this genre.

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Fiction means something made up of or created by an author/ narrator/ storyteller. Today the word means a prose piece based on the imagination of the writer and not on literary facts. Fiction has its roots in ancient myths and folk tales in other words in the oral tradition. In this unit we have used the term short fiction / to essentially mean the short story. As we are aware most novels are long and reading them requires dedication, motivation and time on the part of the readers. **Edgar Allan Poe** (1809-1849) the American short fiction/ story writer believed that a short, concentrated story or what he called a "brief prose tale", was better suited to the times as people lacked leisure hours. He was also of the opinion that such a story could create a powerful, strong, single impression on the reader. His views made practical sense and prompted many writers to work in the short fiction/ story form. Several writers have collected their works for inclusion in single volumes. Writers like **William Faulker, F Scott Fitzgerald, Ernest Hemingway, Guy de Maupassant** are good examples of short fiction writers who have also had their stories collected in this way. Let us now take a look at the origin of the short fiction/ story in mainstream English Literature.

1.2 SHORT FICTION / STORY -HISTORY AND SCOPE

The short story as a genre defies all attempts at classifications and is extremely elusive. It is a genre that has descended from the myth, legend, parable, fairy tale, fable, anecdote, exemplum, essay, character study, fabliau and the ballad. The short story as a work of 'prose fiction of indefinite length' was developed and established only in the nineteenth century. In 1842, **Edgar Allan Poe** reviewed **Hawthorne's**

Twice Told Tale and expressed a rather apt precept on the short story, by which he meant 'a prose narrative requiring anything from half an hour to one or two hours in its perusal of the tale, that, concentrates on a unique single effect and one in which the totality of effect is the main objective,' (J A Cuddens, Literary Terms). The short story has however, achieved such flexibility and variety that its possibilities now seem almost endless. For instance it could be concerned with a scene, an episode, an experience, an action, the exhibitions of a character or characters, the day's events, a meeting, a conversation or a fantasy.

If the attempts of a few Elizabethans like **Thomas Nashe** are not taken into account, the early pioneers of the genre (**Sir Walter Scott, Washington Irving, Hoffman and Hawthorne** deserve special mention here) paved the way for **Edgar Allen Poe**, who, is regarded by many as the first modern short story writer. Poe excelled in the detective story (*The Murders in the Rue Morgue*), the Gothic thriller (*The Pit and the Pendulum*) and a kind of early science fiction tale (*The Gold Bug*). He was greatly influenced by the German Romantics and their Gothic stories, and particularly by **Hoffman**. Another major influence was **Gogol** whose story *The Overcote* profoundly affected later Russian writers. Between the 1830-40s period and the end of the nineteenth century three other Russian and four French writers gained prominence with their exploration of possibilities with this form. These three Russians were: **Turgenev, Chekov** and **Tolstoy**, while the Four French writers were **Merimee, Flaubert, Dardet** and **Maupassant**. However, **Anton Chekov** and **Guy de Maupassant** are generally considered to be the masters of the short story in this period. Let us take a quick look at short fiction in nineteenth century America and England before we talk about Australian short fiction.

1.2.1 19th Century American, English and Australian Short Fiction

In American Literature the period between the Civil War (1861-64) and the outbreak of World War I (1914) may be considered to be the golden age of short fiction or the short story. As in France, Russia, England, in America too the short, effective, single blow story line began to dominate fictional literature. As in Australia, in America too, four stages may be traced in the development of short fiction/ story. In American short fiction owed its origin to the eighteenth century tales that were often colourless, formless, maybe even undramatic, and essentially serving only one function- Puritanical propaganda. Stories of this type like *Chariessa, or a Pattern for the Sex* and *The Danger of Sporting with Innocent Credulity*, (Carey's Columbian Magazine, estd in 1786), satisfied the readers for nearly half a century. This stage was followed by the writings of **Washington Irving**, who blended the moral tale with the Addisonian essay skillfully. Irving added to the moral tale of his day, characteriation, humour, ambience and literary charm. He was essentially a sentimentalist with great regard for the past. Some of his works are *Salmagundi*, *The Sketch Book* and *Rip Van Winkle*. The popularity of his *The Sketch Book*, his fame in England and Europe, the descriptions of lands across the seas, the romance, the vagueness and wonder of it all captured the imagination of a group of young writers who were to rule the mid-century. Out of all these writers Nathaniel Hawthorne stands out. He added depth, poignancy, and soul to short fiction by centering his attention and focus on one single situation while creating the impression of a unified whole. Following Hawthorne, Edgar Allan Poe was to become the next great short fiction writer. Times had changed and new scientific inventions and awareness created the demand for realism and logical order. This was Poe's contribution to short fiction. He wanted short fiction to be brief but scientific and as yet able to yield a totality of effect at one sitting and within one setting. His stories are all marvelous examples of one swift stroke of the brush type of creativity combined with precise use of diction. Though Poe was a critic and keen observer of the conventions of the age, and sensitive to

literary value, he was never really able to write from the heart and his works show a lack of this depth of human understanding. He was more of an artist than anything else who wanted to formulate the best short fiction/ story technique of his age. Poe is located ideally in the history of the development of short fiction in America. He was like the prophet peering into the next age, but he was adept at applying his new perfected art to the old sensational material of the thirties. By the early 1850s a great change had come over short fiction writing in America. The decline of the old type of story had set in and a new atmosphere was born. Writers no longer wrote the old Hawthornesque type of stories. This period stood for the dawning of definiteness, of localised reality, of a feeling left in the reader of actuality and truth towards human life and values. **Rose Terry Cooke** (1827-92) was the most significant writer of this period. She being a teacher in a school and experienced with the country districts, wrote with a deep knowledge an understanding and conviction of an area of life she knew best. In her long series of short fiction beginning in the forties with unlocalised stories and extending throughout the transition period into the 1870s and 1880s, and ending with her final collection as late as 1891, one may trace every phase of American short fiction in half a century. **Fitz-James O' Brien** (1828-62) added the new element of actuality with his short story *What Was It*? The short fiction of **Henry James** however, saw the end of the period of transition. With James the short story became an art form, a study of the surface of society, manners, and of human life. Beyond the brilliant art of Henry James, and the impressionistic study of situations from a scientific perspective, the American short fiction has never advanced.

Francis Bret Harte was another force to contend with. By the time Harte began writing, America was ready for local colour – and the emphasis was now on the nation rather than on the state. Following the war was an era of self- discovery. America was full of new and interesting life and the writers were to exploit this newness for the next two decades or more. What Harte added to short fiction apart from local colour was the dramatic element. In the 1870s however, two distinct schools of short fiction emerged: one, the school of unlocalised art, timeless and placeless, as Edgar Allan Poe and Nathaniel Hawthorne had written, and two, the new "local colour" school of Harte, which was moving more and more towards extremes. The nineteenth century was also a formative period in African- American literary and cultural history. Prior to the Civil War, the majority of black Americans living in the United States were held in bondage. Their, literary contribution include numerous poems, short stories, histories, narratives, among other things. Their short fiction as their novels and much of the other writing they produced addressed concerns of women about family, religion and slavery. Enough has been said about the American short fiction let us now try and see if we can find any such parallels or echoes as we go through the stories, the themes and the units in this block.

In England it was the period of **Dickens, Thackeray, Reade** and **George Eliot** or what may also be called the golden age of the later Victorian novel, yet, surprisingly the demand for short fiction did not decline. We shall not go into too many details on English short fiction here, as most of us will be well read in this and also aware of British literary trends. However, since American Literature and Australian Literature are new literatures, we have dealt with the former (American Literature) in some detail as for the latter. we will be making references to it throughout this block.

Australian short fiction developed through the centuries. What began as records, diaries, annals, journals of the early settlers later transformed and flourished as various genres of writing like short fiction, novels, biographies, autobiographies and annals. At the time of the first historic landing on Botany Bay in 1788, the men and women of letters were concerned with the immediate landscape. The environment- its differences/similarities to the home country, the seasons, the flora and fauna and the

local inhabitants formed their main themes. Even within this vast body of writing some were promoting emigrations to Australia while others were decrying what they believed to be the harsh, hostile environment. When more people from the home country came to inhabit the land, other issues became more serious. As most of the transported men and women were convicts, several tales on the convict system were written. Amongst the free settlers were often poor people/ lower class people who would earn their keep as servants. These people particularly the women needed to be taught the values of a good Christian, hence, several didactic stories came to be written. Then the original inhabitants of Australia- the Aborigines were another theme that prompted writing. They were often looked upon as "noble savages" or as sub human beings. As we shall see later on several stories about the capture of white women and children by the Aborigines and vice versa came to be written as well.

The early settlers also had to face a lot of hardships and a harsh, alien, natural habitat Professor Bruce Bennett in his introduction to **Encounters, Selected Indian and Australian Short Stories** (1986), too traces, the development of the genre through four phases. The first phase he calls the colonial phase that lasted until the early years of the 1890s. These stories owed their origin largely to European and mainstream British models. The second phase occurred when national awareness was generated in the minds of the people of Australia. Earlier on tales of murder, revenge, mystery, supernaturalism, women's romance dominated the literary scenario. However, in this second phase "nationalism" and what was also called "*bush* realism" (as being truely Australian) dominated the genre. This was the time when Lawson and the *bush* became inextricably linked together and the *bush* the symbol of all the hardships that Australia and the Australians endured. Barbara Baynton too wrote during this phase and her stories are told from the point of view of the women in the *bush*, the hardships they endured and the dominance and cruelty they faced at the hands of the men in the *bush* particularly in stories like *The Squeaker's Mate*. The Lawson type o "*bush* realism" however continued to fire the imagination of several writers through the 1940s and 50s as well. The third phase he marks is from about 1940 to 1970 when Australia was a party to World War II and various political activities dragged Australia away from its safe, isolated position into the very heart of international politics and affairs. Certain political activities that occurred then made the Australians realise that they were not isolated and that they too had good friends and neighbours in the far - east. But the aftermaths of World War II made some of the writers nostalgic about the past and made them long for the early pioneering days. Most of them went back to writing about those times. However, cities were springing up along the Australian coast - line and a new urban culture was being created continuously. Many writers dealt with this rising urban culture, their problems and concerns in their short fiction.

In the final and fourth post 1970s phase, we may note a lot of experimentation with both form and content of the short story. The Australian multicultural policy too lent to the spurge of multi ethnic and migrant writing. This period also saw the mergence of Aboriginal writers though not writers of short fiction. Since the 1970s and with changing Australian foreign policies, the people and the writers of Australia have come to realise that they are not that close to Europe and the home country and that there are people to the east of them as well. Hence, we find a lot of migrant writing emerging during this time and addressing the issues, concerns and problems faced by or likely to be faced by the new people who have now come to inhabit this new melting pot of cultures. At this stage it may be prudent to remember that though Australia promoted the migration of people of Anglo Saxon descent earlier on, from the early 1970s they opened their doors to multi ethnic and multi cultural migration on a large scale and Australia became a new melting pot of cultures, the title America held earlier on. Frank Moorhouse and Michael Wilding are the representatives of the

changes taking place in Australian society since then. They have experimented with both form and content and their stories are sometimes surrealistic and sometimes discontinuous. Women writers too contributed to the development of the genre. Notable among them are Elizabeth Jolley, Fay Zwicky and Thea Astley.

Let us now take a look at the origin and development of the Australian short fiction/ story.

1.3 ORIGIN And DEVELOPMENT Of AUSTRALIAN SHORT FICTION / STORY

Australia provided the writers with ample material. For instance the fact that the island continent was meant for transporting convicts from the mother country/ (in other words) the convict system, the bushrangers, the Aborigines, the country itself, with its forbidding bizarre and extremely fascinating nature. For convenience sake Cecil Hadgraft has used chronological divisions for the development of short fiction before Lawson, which we shall adopt as well. The time period shall be 1830-1860, 1860-1880 and 1880-1893.

1.3.1 Short Fiction in the 1830s -1860s

John Howison's *Tales of the Colonies* was the earliest to appear in 1830. Most of his stories are set in Ireland and the West Indies. But one story *One False Step* is set in Australia. This story bears visible resemblance to English tales of adventure and crime and is exciting and rather fast moving with a lesson to be taught at the end of it all. However, **David Burn** of the *Our First Lieutenant and Fugitive Pieces in Prose* (1842) fame is better known than Howison. Burn's was a playwright and his longest piece *The Three Sisters of Devon* is much like the eighteenth century picaresque novel but he had a flamboyant style and he wrote by circumlocution and evasiveness. His style was very euphemistic. For the next fifty odd years most writers of short fiction followed Burn's style of writing. Between Burn's *Our First Lieutenant and Fugitive Pieces in Prose* and **John Lang**'s *Botany Bay* in 1859, about fifteen volumes of tales set in Australia or with Australian themes was published. Popular writers of those days were **Mrs Vidal** (*Tales for the Bush*, 1845), **Mrs Charles Clancy** (*Lights and Shadows of Australian Bush Life*, 1854), and **Henry Giles Turner** (*The Confessions of a Loafer and the Captive of Gippsland, Tales of the Colony*, 1857). Mrs Vidal wrote for the lower classes or the servants and being the wife of a parson, was prone to didactic preaching in her stories. *The Black Troopers* (1850?) by an anonymous writer is worth mentioning as it deals with the pursuit of an Aboriginal criminal by troopers of his own race led by a white Lieutenant, and has been compared to **Thomas Kenelly**'s 1972 novel, *The Chant of Jimmie Blacksmith*. It is memorable for such an account of the pursuit of an individual is not to be found anywhere else prior to this work. Mrs Clancy's stories on the other hand are about people who are either moving from England or have just arrived in Australia. She appears to be promoting emigration to the colonies. The tales told by Turner appear to be a catalogue of disasters and could have been written as a response to the propaganda of the guidebook novels of the 1840s and 1850s. John Lang is one of the first Australian writers before Lawson who dealt with events in the history of the colonies. It is possible to gain some insight into the life of the period through his stories. Lang gives glimpses of customs and regulations of the convict period, but while he does not provide an elaborate social history of the times, he does convey a sense of the atmosphere of Sydney and other parts of New South Wales during those early years of the settlement of the colony. His descriptions of the landscape, flora and fauna are essential to the story and not mere descriptions. Moreover he does not

moralise as women writers were prone to doing. His stories were published in one volume entitled *Botany Bay* in 1859. Though Australian short fiction writers did not have any good models of short stories to emulate from, the age-old habit of preaching through stories trickled down through to the antipodes as well. Apart from these moral tales, stories about Aborigines – the relationship between white settlers and black Aborigines, the massacre of whole Aborigine tribes etc were also written. Other themes dealt with were inter related to the Aboriginal theme- those of the kidnapping and capture of white women/ children by Aborigines, or of the Aboriginal child in the custody of the whites. A third genre that had begun to emerge by the 1860s was the story based on historical facts. Amongst this category of writers mention must be made of John Lang, **Marcus Clarke**, **W H Sutton** and **Thomas Walker**. The most popular works of this period were Lang's *Botany Bay*, and Clarke's *Old Tales of a Young Country*. **Prince Warung (William Astley)** was the furthest away in time from the convict system than the other writers but he produced the most vivid and readable stories of them all.

1.3.2 Short Fiction in the 1860s-1880s

Between 1859 and 1880 eighteen volumes of short stories was published in Australia. Three writers were prominent during this period - **Horace Earle, James Skipp Borlase** and **J R Houlding**. Earl was prone to writing the guidebook novel (that we talked about earlier) and dealt with the flora and fauna of Australia. His short fiction was collected in *Ups and Downs* (1861), most of his short stories are set in the bush. James Borlase' collection *Darling Deeds* (1868) are stories of adventure but are also sadly lacking in characterisation. J R Houlding *(Old Boomerang)* was one of the moralist writers. The stories in his *Australian Tales and Sketches from Real Life* (1868) are relatively more indirect in their preaching than that of other writers. The most important writer of the period was however, Marcus Clarke. Clarke was a pivotal literary figure then. Though there were some good stories written before him, and even after him these stories rise only occasionally to his level. During this time several detective stories as well as tales of mystery were also being written. From 1887 onwards, tales of mystery, intrigue and detection became very popular. At the same time fictional accounts of children lost in the bush were also written. This theme provided the writer with a vast canvas. S/he could write about the virtues of obedience and the dangers of disobedience. They could also explore the wild, untamed Australian bush, the presence of Aboriginals in the bush or delve into human relationships particularly those marital relationship and the effects of such a loss on husbands and wives. **Lawson**'s *The Babies in the Bush* is a good example of such a story.

1.3.3 Short Fiction in the 1880s-1890s

While the nineteen century saw industrial, and material growth and the loss of pastoral lands, (as is lamented by Christina Stead in *The Old School)*, even saw the after effects of **Darwin**'s *Origin of the Species*, supernaturalism too found a place in the fiction of the times. **Tasma (Jessie Couvreur)** wrote ghost stories like *The Rubria Ghost*, other writers used ghosts in a serious manner like **P J Holdsworth** in *A Tale of New Year's Eve* or *Brushwood Grange*. Good short stories continued to be written after 1880 but Marcus Clarke was one of the best writers and none were there before Lawson to counter Clarke's position. The manner in which language was used then and the way it is used now are quite different. Even the use of certain words like 'mate' had acquired a different connotation, as you will observe when you read the stories in this block. As Cecil Hadgraft rightly points out that "the term 'mate' as address was less frequent: it occur in the third person, not so much in the second,"(Hadgraft, p.33). Though the author made a definite move towards modern

prose and less stereotypical themes, the past still influenced them, even as late as the last two decades of the nineteenth century. Love, however, was one theme that influenced writers and they used it throughout the century and all across the globe.

The short story writers we have discussed here dealt with most of the themes that writers after Lawson's were to deal with in the 1890s. While the novelists concentrated on a few themes like pastoral life, the convict system, and the bush, they did not really deal with urban life. This theme was utilised by **Rosa Praed**, Tasma, and **Ada Cambridge**. But the writer of short fiction were able to produce different genres like tales of murder and mystery, detective tales, historical, didactic, encounters with Aboriginals, to name a few. As Hadgraft points out however even within this diversity no development in the history of short fiction really occurred. For instances if we look at the vast body of literature surrounding the convict system, we will discover that though there is so much material on this one topic, it does not develop into a genre by itself. Having said all this by way of introduction let us try and discern for ourselves whether this is true or not as we deal with Marcus Clarke (*Seizure of the Cyprus*), Henry Lawson (*The Drover's Wife*, and *The Union Buries Its Dead*), Barbara Baynton (*The Chosen Vessel*), Steel Rudd (*Cranky Jack*) and Christina Stead (*The Old School*). These stories and the authors belong to different ages and have used different themes. Moreover the manner in which they have handled these themes, and their writing styles will bear testimony to the development of the short story as a genre. However, this does not mean that the short story as a genre did not develop, what Cecil Hadgraft indicates, is the fact that unlike the (picaresque, regional, stream-of-consciousness, to name a few) novels, these independent Australian short stories (on the convict system, on the harsh hostile natural habitat, etc.,) did not develop into independent genres. This detailed introduction makes clear the wide variety of writers and writing involved. In arguments that later followed – Keryn Goldsworthy amongst others, it is generally considered that some of the best pre-Lawson writers were those who better known novelists like Marcus Clarke and Rosa Praed. Having paved the way for the study of Australian short fiction, let us now take a quick look at the development of Australian short fiction/ story during the **Bulletin** years.

1.4 THE BULLETIN YEARS

The short story gained popularity because it was published regularly in the Sydney Bulletin of the 1890s. The writers who were normally associated with the **Bulletin** were **Henry Lawson** and **Barbara Baynton** along with **Edward Dyson, Ernest Fawence,** and **Prince Warung**. Lawson as mentioned in the introduction to the period wrote poignant stories about male bonding, virtues like endurance, courage and honesty against a harsh environment, an unfriendly even hostile outback, (for instance his stories *The Drover's Wife*, and *The Union Buries Its Dead)*. Barbara Baynton's vision of human nature ranges from the stern to the hopeless. Those of her characters who were not weak, dishonest, cowardly, cruel, or downright evil were always dominated by those who were, and the manner in which she draws on the Australian outback is remarkable. She frequently presents it as not only bleak and harsh but as in her terrifying story *The Dreamer* – as actively malign, the stuff of nightmares.

Henry Handel Richardson wrote numerous short stories that were collected and published as *The End of Childhood* in 1934. Her most notable stories are – **And Women Must Weep**, **Two hanged Women**, and **The Bathe: A Grotesque**. The latter involves female characters "with a fear of sexual maturity". She is however much better known for her novels, particularly *The Fortunes of Richard Mahony*. Individual stories published from the 1920s through the 50s had a large number of

titles to do with nature: landscape, weather and animals. The best-known short story writers of the period are – **Katherine Susannah Pinchard, Vance Palmer, 'Brian James' (John Tierney), Frank Dalby, Gawin Casey, Dal Stivens** and **Peter Cowan.** Keryn Goldsworthy has compiled a list of the names of animal tales that reads like this: *The Dog, The Cow, The Bull Calf, The Jackass.* But these stories are not mere animal fables instead metaphors of birds and animals are used to denote the goings on inside the minds and hearts of their human characters. From the prior mentioned group of writers **Dal Stivens** and **Margaret Trist** were exceptions. The former was more of a fabulist than a realist writer as was the tendency of the age, while the latter did not entitle any of her fifty-two stories with any animal references at all. These stories and their titles are indicative of the preoccupations typical of the age, with the external, physical and the rural world. The use of exterior landscape of the natural world as, simple and straightforward parallel to the internal landscape of human dilemma was also a common practice. They are characterised by a small parcel of often-related qualities: a realist mode; a rural or suburban setting; an implicit moral stance which demonstrates or upholds or mourns the lack of various human virtues, more often like those of honesty, egalitarianism, kindness and courage. Let us take a look at Australian short fiction/ story in the twentieth century.

1.5 AUSTRALIAN SHORT FICTION IN THE 20th CENTURY

The 1960s appear to be the most important period of transition in the history of Australian literature. This period marks the beginning of a reaction away from what had until then been firmly constructed and re-constructed, in a self-perpetuating process whereby critics and editors went on demanding a certain kind of writing which writers went on supplying as 'the Australian Tradition', or the 'Lawson Tradition'.

1.5.1 Short Fiction in the Latter Half of the 20th Century

The 1950s was notable for the writings of **Frank Hardy** *The Man From Clinkapella and other Prize – Winning Stories* (1951), **Judah Waten**'s *The Alien Son* (1952). Judah Waten anticipated 'migrant writing' by some thirty years. These two writers are closely linked by their overtly political motivation and their concentration on characters from disadvantaged social groups, another contemporary **John Morrison** was also in the same league. In 1972 the censorship ban was lifted, the first issue of the short story magazine *Tabloid Story* was published and the government supported the arts in a new and fresh manner for the first time. Frank Moorhouse and **Michael Wilding** gained prominence during this period with the quality and innovativeness in their fiction and in relation to the *Tabloid Story*. The new fiction of the 1970s was characterised by a schism from the hitherto realist and nationalistic stories, though **Patrick White** and **Hal Porter** in the 60s had already broken off from this tradition to a great extent as had Dal Stivens who wrote in the fabulist mode. The fabulist mode was swiftly becoming the dominant trend, and had started as far back as the 1930s.

Peter Cowan with *The Tins and Other Stories* (1973) and *Mobiles* (1975) experimented continuously with the short story form in which he exposed the frustrations, betterness and futility in contemporary living. **Christina Stead** was yet another force to contend with at that time. Elizabeth Webley comments on Christina Stead's *The Salzburg Tales*: "The vitality and stylistics and formal variety of Stead's stories would, I think, be quite a revelation to younger Australian writers who would be staggered to discover her anticipation of the current fabulist mode". The 'new'

fiction was largely influenced by contemporary European and American writing, and incorporated such elements as fantasy, surrealism, experiments with narrative chronology and narrative voice, a new awareness of the role and status of the author in the story and a generally enlarged consciousness of fiction as fiction, of a story as an artefact rather than a simple reflection of 'life'. Common to all the Australian writers of this period of Australian short fiction is an acute and articulated awareness of there being no simple, uncomplicated relationship between language and the experience.

Brian Kiernan's *The Most Beautiful Lies* (1977) is an anthology of stories by five writers – **Murray Bail, Peter Carey, Morris Lurie,** Frank Moorhouse and Michael Wilding. All five of them shared the same preoccupation. Of these five writers Peter Carey was the most concerned with fantasy and surrealism. Bail was preoccupied with the nature of language and writing, Moorhouse with narrative experimentation and ways of writing frankly about sex, while Wilding shared all the above preoccupations.

Keryn Goldsworthy observes that they tended 'to present' their stories "self consciously as 'fiction, to be less mimetic, less concerned with characters and social situations and more with style and form as part of the stories' content, they also tried to employ less usage of realistic forms and science fiction tales. Women were writing in the 70s as well. Elizabeth Jolley sent stories repeatedly to magazines but they were continuously rejected. **Thea Astley**'s *Hunting the Wild Pineapple* (1979) was however well received and taken very seriously by both literary critics and commentators. But Thea Astley had already been established as a successful novelist. Numerous anthologies since then have appeared through out the 80s and 1990s. Three important ones that were published during this decade have the collected works of 84 writers. These anthologies were " "The State of the Art: The Mood of Contemporary Australia in Short Stories" (ed) Frank Moorhouse, 1983; "Transgressions: Australian Writing Now" (ed) Don Anderson, 1986; "Coast of Coast: Recent Australian Prose Writing" (ed) Keryn Goldsworthy, 1986.

Out of the 84 writers in these three writers – Frank Moorhouse, **Helen Garner** and **Gerard Windson** – appear in all three. **Kate Greenille, Olga Masters, Elizabeth Jolley, Tim Winston, David Malouf, Maria Eldridge, Angelo Loukakis, Michael wilding, Ania Walzic** and **David Brooks** appear in two anthologies out of three. Of these thirteen only Frank Moorhouse, Michael Wilding and David Malouf have been well known for more than a decade. Short fiction in the 1980s dealt with growing taste in women's and in migrant writing. Not much is available as far as the Aboriginal writers of short fiction go. **Kath Walker, Jack Davis** and **Colin Johnson** the three well known Aboriginal writers had made names for themselves as novelists, poets and dramatists. Aboriginal short fiction writers then had not managed to carve a niche for themselves and instead concentrated on drama, novel writing and the writing of autobiographies like Sally Morgan for example.

1.6 EMERGENCE of MIGRANT and ABORIGINAL SHORT FICTION

Archie Weller's collection of stories *Going Home* (1986) is the first by an Aboriginal. This could probably be due to the fact that the shape and language of Aboriginal story telling did not easily fit within the short story mode. **Stephen Murecke, Krim Benterrack** and **Paddy Roe**'s *Reading the Country* (1984) demonstrates the difference quite accurately. During this period experimental writing increased steadily. Ania Walzic's work demonstrates how the fact of being a woman

and a migrant might, in its effects on one's use and perceptions of language liberate the writer into an experimental mode of fiction. Beverly Farmers *Milk* (1983) and *Home Time* (1985) are examples of Greek stories that invert the migrant experience and reflect the cultural and social vortigo of Australians in Greece. Gerard Windson's *The Harlots Enter First* (1982), *Memories of the Assassination Attempt* (1985) gained critical notice. Helen Garner's *Postcards From Surfers* (1985) has her famous piece on "The Life of Art". Frank Moorhouse moves away from charting the moods and movements of a counter culture and towards a closer attention to individual experiences, travel and transgressions; with the publication of his three later works: *The Everlasting Secret Family* (1980); *Room Service* (1985) and *Forty Seventeen* (1988). In these works his concerns with narrative structure, narrative voice and the relationship between experience and language is maintained and balanced.

1.7 LET US SUM UP

There was a marked shift over the last fifteen – twenty years in the literary community's focus of interest. Hitherto the focus was on 'Australianity' and towards a more locally based 'vision of place'. Thereafter the focus shifts drastically. An examination of the works of David Malouf amongst others will make clear the manner in which this shift takes place. By writing his fictional, autobiographical works in the manner he does and through his native Brisbane, David Malouf, has arrived at an -aesthetics of locale. His *12 Edmondastone Street* (1985), a collection of autobiographical essays, presents insight on of the relationship between places and the self and the ways in which that relationship can not only be expressed but constructed and re-created throughout writing. Malouf's Brisbane, Garner's Melbourne, Astley's North Queensland, Jolley West Australian wheat fields and Winston's South West Coast not only highlights the relationship between characters and places but also suggests new 'regional ways' of reading fiction of earlier writer. Regional Anthologies since then have been abundant: Queensland's "Latitudes" (eds.) Susan Johnson and Mary Roberts and South Australia's "Unsettled Areas" (ed) Andrew Taylor (1985). Regionalism can be seen as yet another experimental mode that is continuously moving away from an over-simple pre-occupation with 'nation'. It is another way of classifying, thinking about, and most importantly writing stories.

Writers of that Age	Their Works
Elizabeth Jolley	*Five Acre Virgin* (1976) *The Travelling Entertainer* (1979) *Woman in a Lampshade* (1980)
David Malouf	*Antipodes* (1985)
Olga Masters	*The Home Girls* (1982) *A Long Time* (1985)
Kate Greenville	*Bearded Ladies* (1984)
Tim Winston	*Scission* (1985) *Minimum of Two* (1987)
Barry Hill	*A Rim of Blue* (1978) *Headlocks* (1983) (His themes are politics and family relations or as Keryn Goldsworthy puts it 'the politics of family relations').

Joan London	*Sister Ships* (1986) (This book won the **Age Book Award** the same year).	

These are just a list of some of the writers of that age and should not be regarded as a comprehensive list.

1.8 QUESTIONS

(1) Who would you credit you credit for the establishment of short fiction as a genre?

(2) What were some of the types of short fiction produced in Australia? Which of these types appeal to you? Give reasons to support your answers.

(3) What were the prominent themes that captured the imagination of writers of short fiction in Australia? Discuss.

1.9 SUGGESTED READING

(1) The Australian Short Story Before Lawson, (1986): Cecil Hadgraft (ed), Oxford University Press, Melbourne. Australia.

UNIT 2 MARCUS CLARKE : *THE SEIZURE OF THE CYPRUS*

Structure

2.0 Objectives
2.1 Introduction
2.2 Marcus Clarke
  2.2.1 From Foreign Office to Foreign Shore
  2.2.2 Man of Many Talents
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2.5 *The Seizure of the Cyprus*- Text
  2.5.1 Analysing *The Seizure of the Cyprus*
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2.0 OBJECTIVES

The primary motive behind this unit is to provide you with some of the critical information surrounding the life and works of a great writer like Marcus Clarke. We shall, look into his biographical details, the circumstances related to the birth of his creativity, his position amongst the other short fiction writers of the age, and his contribution to the development of Australian short fiction.

2.1 INTRODUCTION

It is generally believed that the short story in Australia began with the writings of Henry Lawson. For most literary critics writing (of the short story / short fiction) before Lawson was not worth much critical attention. H M Green states in his introduction to the short story between 1850 to 1890 that, "the short stories of the period were many in number but poor in quality." He regards most of the short fiction before Lawson as mere 'sketches' in comparison with Lawson's stories. The short story as a genre gained popularity chiefly on account of it being published regularly in the **Sydney Bulletin** of the 1890s. In Marcus Clarkes's case however his short stories were published by other papers and not so much the by the **Bulletin**. The *Melbourne Punch*, the *Australian Monthly* magazine, *Australasian*, *Daily Telegraph*, *Australian Journal*, and the *Leader* published Clarke regularly. Clarke's stories particularly the story we shall be analysing in this unit (*The Seizure of the Cyprus*) belongs to the convict tradition or what is sometimes also called tales based on historical facts. Needless to mention all of us are by now familiar with the history of Australian settlement. Australian was meant to be a penal settlement for England and anyone convicted of a crime no matter how petty or heinous was transported to Australia in an effort to lower the burden on English prisons. Some of the other writers that dealt with this theme were **John Lang, Marcus Clarke, Thomas**

Walker and **William Astley** *(Prince Warung)*. It is however difficult to say how many of them actually saw the transportation of convicts to Australia for the system was stopped in New South Wales at around 1840 and to Tasmania at about 1855. The only writer who could have seen this sight would be John Lang, though Marcus Clarke may have seen as Cecil Hadgraft points out in "The Australia Short Story before Lawson":

> ironed convicts talking 'dog-sleep in the little fore-castle' or at meals in the prison, and the miserable relics in the asylum, and crippled, self-maimed emancipists in the streets of Hobart." He however could in no way have "witnessed chain gangs nor any active brutality," (1986, p.16)

But we shall look into this in more detail as we deal with the story for the time being suffice it to say that most of the horrors, depicted by the other writers apart from Lang are imaginary accounts of what might have occurred then. Let us now take a quick look at the life of Marcus Clarke, for we know that in order to understand a writer and his work we need to have some understanding of the circumstances that shaped his life.

2.2 MARCUS CLARKE

2.2.1 From Foreign Offices to Foreign Shores

Marcus Andrew Hislop Clarke was born at 11 Leonard Place in the London borough of Kensington on 24 April 1846. He was an only child and his mother died of tuberculosis when he was still an infant. He studied at the Cholmeley Grammar School at Highgate and befriended two young boys there who were to remain his friends for life. These two young boys were the poet Gerard Manley Hopkins and his brother Cyril. Clarke was however closer to Cyril. When Clarke was sixteen his father fell ill and had to be put into an asylum for the mentally disturbed. With the institutionalisation of his father, Clarke watched his dreams of going to France, and learning French crushed under the existing circumstances. This was because his father's financial affairs were in complete disarray and Clarke realised that the brilliant career he had planned for himself was never to be fulfilled. He did not see any future prospects and decided to go to Australia where his family still had connections. He sailed from Plymouth on 16 March 1863 while his father was still ill in hospital. His father lingered on and was to die eventually on Decrember1 that same year. Clarke arrived in Melbourne in June that year and on 19 November 1863 his first humorous piece "The Puff Conclusive", appeared in the *Melbourne Punch.*

2.2.2 Man of Many Talents

Marcus Clarke as mentioned earlier is, better known for his novel dealing with convict life, *His Natural Life* than for his other writings. His novel has been reprinted and re-edited several times, has been dramatised, filmed and translated into many languages like Dutch, German, Russian and Swedish. Mark Twain the American novelist and popular creator of 'Huck Finn' comments

> :"I may tell you that we think a deal more of Marcus Clarke in our own country than I am sorry to think you do here." (Prefatory quotation to Clarke's Australian Tales, Melbourne: 1896, quoted in "Marcus Clarke" by M Wilding, p 3)

Marcus Clarke's fame rests largely on *His Natural Life*, but he was also a short story writer, a journalist, a reviewer, and an editor. His other early publication was *The*

Lady of the Lake 'one of those items concluding the evening's show in a Melbourne theatre'. Marcus Clarke had however already made his presence felt on the literary scene of Australia, particularly in Melbourne. In 1867, he began writing for the *Argus*, a daily that published a weekend magazine of literary interest, where Clarke wrote reviews and theatre criticism. One of the earliest pieces he wrote for the *Australian* was an essay on *Balzac*. *Balzac* was a literary pioneer and revolutionary whom Clarke greatly admired and identified with. According to Michael Wilding, Clarke's portrayal of both the Melbourne Bohemia and the bourgeoisie was greatly influenced by Balzac. The same year he began writing a column for the *Australasian*, called, "The Peripatetic Philosopher" which proved to be instantly successful and later formed part of his first book. The topic closest to his heart was that of expatriation or the behaviour of the 'new' migrants to the question of and relationship to 'home'. He wrote prolifically during this period mixing in a world of similar literary and journalistic talent. In 1868, Clarke along with his associates formed the Bohemian Yorick Club. The other writers of the age who were co-founders of the club were: *Adam Lindsay, Henry Kendall, G G McCrae, F W Haddon*, and *JJ Shillinglaw*. Another important feature of nineteen-century bohemia was theatre and Clarke showed marked interest in this genre. He proved to be a prolific playwright, he wrote several plays, adapted, translated and collaborated with several other playwrights as well. Apart from his column "The Peripatectic Scholar" in the *Australasian*, he also started writing a series of articles in 1869 entitled "Lower Bohemia". This series is considered to be one of his most successful and sustained journalistic projects. It is written in the manner of expose journalism and Clarke wrote on subjects like the 'Immigrants' Home, the cheap lodging houses, the bars and eating places, and on the plight of the absolutely homeless,' (M Wilding, p 8). He is of course better known for his novel, *His Natural Life* than for his short stories however as his fame rests on this novel it would be a good idea to take a quick look at his novel.

2.3 *HIS NATURAL LIFE*

Marcus Clarke serialised *His Natural Life*. Though this book was planned for twelve installments he took twenty-eight months to complete it. For those who had never been to Australia then and had envisaged it as another Eden, Clarke's writings managed to shatter that illusion. From a historical and social point of view Clarke's *His Natural Life* is a record of society bereft of the civilising constraints of Victorian England and can be considered as a vision of human nature at large. His *Natural Life* then does not merely stand for the specific terms of the prisoner's sentence but for the natural life of man in a new environment totally devoid of any humane constraints. This freedom from constraints does not indicate a positive attitude but that of a reversal of all human faculties. We see men in all their brutality, degradation and despair within this convict system. According to Wilding 'the cumulative effect of the specific evils of the convict system is a vision of the futility, the hopelessness, the meaninglessness of human life,' (Marcus Clarke p 18). The Natural World – the barren bush, the violent sea- is depicted throughout the novel as basically indifferent and hostile to man's plight. But in this novel it is not nature alone that does this even men lose all sensibility and are little more than beasts – as they mistreat and practice cruelties of various types on their fellow human beings. It almost appears as if man is in turn influenced by the harsh environment and regresses to a lower state of being. The detached and restrained manner of narration makes the horrors in the novel all the more palpable. *His Natural Life* is one of those novels that take the reader back and forth through the narration to the documented reality on which it has been based. The convict years form the basic story line but Clarke has given the documented material an aesthetic appeal. It should however be remembered that by the time Clarke wrote this novel the transportation of criminals from the Home Country had

stopped. After 1840 it had ceased except to Western Australia till it was finally abolished in 1868. But many of the convicts still lived there.

2.4 THEMES IN CLARKE

There are two predominant themes in Clarke particularly in *The Old Tales*. These are that of exile and of brutality. Clarke conveys the fate of the exile, whether voluntary or otherwise very effectively in his writings. When studying Australian Literature it would be helpful to remember that Australia was established as a penal colony meant for deporting petty or hardened criminals away from the homeland, i.e., largely the Great British Empire. Apart from those who were exiled due to their criminal records there were also the second and following sons of not so big houses who desired to seek their fortunes at sea or in another land. Then with the great Australian gold rush thousands of people migrated to Australia with dreams of acquiring wealth instantly. Keeping this in mind it is easy to relate to Clarke's predominant themes... of exile and brutality. It would also be helpful to remember that Australia then was not tamed or settled in the larger context of the word. The early settlers were still trying to come to terms with the alien environment and very often the land was itself viewed as being hostile and harsh. It was after all nothing like the home country, (the early reports, journals and accounts of the first settlers were effusive in their expression of this reality). The convict system was yet another experience. The convicts transported from the home country led subhuman lives. They were governed by a remote authority (this was partially because the Home Department was responsible for all the transported convicts and this department was located in England). This remote authority was often arbitrary, and the system itself was full of injustice. Injustice, brutality, cruelties of man to man and of the harsh, alien environment to man comprised the quality of life in those early days.

Old Stories Retold were collected in book form and published as *Old Tales of A Young Country* (1871) What Nathaniel Hawthorne as a writer did for American Literary History, Clarke tried to do for Australia. In order to fulfill his self- chosen role of literary historian, he tried to create a sense of history by drawing attention to the romantic past and by creating archetypal characters and situations. This collection of fifteen stories is full of literary references to all the heroes and anti-heroes of the English classics. By doing this what Clarke proposed was an indication of the romantic tradition in Australian writing that was comparable with that of the Old World's literary tradition. He also explored the romantic possibilities of these characters in his famous work *His Natural Life*. But he is able to convey these sentiments without over emphasising the ' Australianness' that has been frequently adopted by many writers. He appears to be one of the few writers of that period who kept away from writing about the great Australian Ethos... the Great Australian Legend. Marcus Clarke as a writer is more concerned with events, characters, and people as the bases of society than with the Australian ethos. The Aboriginal community is however markedly absent from the writings of Clarke. He appears to have very little or no sympathy at all for the Black community. His attitude was a simple uncomplicated form of racism. In this connection he may have been largely influenced by the notion of what was acceptable to literary usage. He emphasised internationalism more than narrow Australian 'nationalism'. He is largely responsible for putting Australian Literature and the romantic material available within this literature on par with other national myths. He had a very cosmopolitan outlook and laid stress on that same nature of Australia's early history.

The Australian landscape also provided images and themes for Clarke. He used images of the landscape to create a naturalistic description of the Australian setting and also because these images lent to metaphoric expression of the various themes

that were close to Clarke's heart. He utilises "recurring, brief reminders of the barrenness and strangeness of the Bush" to create a particular ambience. The *Bush* did not offer any comfort or sustenance to the settlers. It was a strange type of beauty that could be as brutal and as cruel as the convict system. The very question of survival became manifest in that harsh environment. Clarke was aware of the atrocities committed by the "*Bush Rangers*, the escapees" and without portraying all convicts as innocent men he began to disassociate himself, from the established authorities and wrote tales of the convict suffering with a compassion that was hitherto absent from his works. Several stories from *The Old Tales* depict the violence in the world of the convicts and the *bushrangers*, the sentiments and despair of the exiles and the expatriates and also serve to heighten the dangers and the romance of the system. Marcus Clarke was at once a novelist and a short story writer, a dramatist and a poet. He was interested in history enough to seek out the " mythic characters of Australia's foundation". He was interested in the works of his contemporaries be they American, English, French or Australian. He had a keen critical eye and was good at research and documentation. He lived and wrote during the "colonial period" of Australian Literature. He was one of the greatest writers of that period and wrote on a wide range of topics drawing on an international literary culture. He was not parochial in outlook. Apart from being a writer of novels and short stories he was also a journalist, a reviewer and an editor. As an editor he encouraged, edited and published several writers of that period of Australian Literature. Marcus Clarke died at St Kilda on 2 August 1881 aged only thirty-five. In 1884 Hamilton Mackinnon prepared *The Marcus Clarke Memorial Volume*. After which several other publications of his or on him came into circulation. A G Stephen's influential view of Clarke appeared in the Bulletin in 1899 and was followed by a reprint in the *Bookfellow* in 1920 (Wilding, p 43).

2.4.1 Marcus Clarke in the 20th Century

Throughout the twentieth century Clarke's other writings fell out of print and critical notice. He also suffered as a result of the devaluation of the colonial period in an attempt to blot out the convict past of Australia and as a result of the rejection of writers not born in Australia, (Wilding, p. 44). Christina Stead though born and brought up in Australia was not considered Australian enough while Marcus Clarke was rejected on grounds of not being born in Australia or born an Australian. However with the development in Australian Literature his novels began to appear in the 1950s. Marcus Clarke has been acknowledged as one of the principle figures in nineteenth century Australian Literature chiefly on the basis of his novel *His Natural Life*. We have however discerned for ourselves his immense range of writings and know for certain that his fame does not rest on one book alone.

2.5 *The Seizure of Cyprus - TEXT*

From Old Tales of A Young Country (Melbourne: Mason, Ftank & M'Cutcheon, 1871), pp. 133-140. This originally appeared in Australasian (Melbourne), 9 April 1870, p.471.

On the 9th of August, 1829, the "Cyprus", a vessel which was employed by the Government of Van Diemen's Land to carry prisoners from Hobart town to Macquarie Harbour, was seized by the convicts and carried into the South Seas.

The story is a romantic one, and if it does not equal in interest the story of the capture of the "Frederick", of which I shall by-and-by have occasion to speak, it is remarkable as showing the condition of convict discipline in the early days of the colony.

Macquarie Harbour – abandoned in 1833 – was in these days the Ultima Thule of convict settlement. Established in 1821 by Governor Sorrell as a station for the most irreclaimable of the desperadoes who were sent in shiploads from England, the discipline had gradually increased in severity until it became a hideous terrorism, which often drove its victims to seek death as a means of escape. The picture of the place, as drawn by Mr. Backhouse, the missionary who visited it in 1832, is most dismal. The scenery is wild and barren, the scrub and undergrowth impenetrable, and from the swampy ground around the settlement arises noisome and death-dealing exhalations. The surf beating with violence on the rocky shore renders approach difficult; and the westerly winds blowing with fury into the harbour, opposes sometimes for days the departure of the convict vessels.

This place was the last home – but one – of the felon. Once sent to "the Hell," as the abode of doom was termed by the prisoners, return was all but hopeless. The iron-bound coast, the dismal and impassable swamps, the barren and rugged mountain ranges, combined to render escape impossible. Of the many unfortunates who made the attempt to regain their freedom, all save some eight or nine died or were retaken. The life of a convict at this hideous place of punishment was one continual agony. In those times, the notion of reclaiming human creatures by reason and kindness was unknown. Condemned for life to the settlement – often for small offences against discipline – the miserable beings were cut off from the world forever. The commandant – usually some worthy officer selected from the world regiment then in Van Diemen's Land for his severity or strength of will –dealt with the men under his charge as the humour took him. The guard was always under arms, and had orders to fire on any man who attempted to escape. The lash was the punishment most in vogue, but those wretches whose hardened hides the cat had cut into insensibility were marooned on rocks within view of the prison barracks. The work was constant and exhausting. Robbers, murderers, and forgers, told off into gangs, felled the gigantic trees which grew in the neighbourhood of the harbour. Chained together like beasts, and kept in activity by the rarely idle lash, they bore the logs to the water-side on their backs. Every now and then some feebler ruffian would fall from exhaustion, and the chain would drag him after the main body until he rose again. A visitor to the place in 1831 says that he saw "something which he took for gigantic centipede, which moved forward through the bush to the clanking of chains and the cracking of the overseer's whip". This was a log borne by a convict gang. Treated like beasts, the men lived the life of beasts. All the atrocities that men could commit were committed there. Suicide was frequent. Men drowned themselves to be rid of the burden of their existence. Three wretches once drew lots as to who should get a sight of Hobart town. One was to murder the other, and the third was to volunteer his evidence. The lottery was drawn, the doomed man laughed ere his companion beat out his brains, and the two survivors congratulated each other on their holiday on the scaffold of Hobart Town gaol.

To this place Lieutenant Carew, with ten soldiers, set out to convey thirty-one prisoners. As not infrequently happened, the weather proved unfavourable, and the vessel put into Recherche Bay for shelter. The prisoners were all desperate men. Two of them had been before at "Hell's Gates", and detailed the horrors of the place to their companions. In the semi-darkness of the lower deck, where, chained in gangs of four, the miserable wretches speculated on their doom, it was proposed to seize the ship. A prisoner named Fergusson was the ringleader. "At the worst," said he, "it is but death; and which of us wishes to live?"" But the others were not so bold. Degraded by the chain and the lash, they yet clung to life as the one thing the law had not yet taken from them. There were wooden bars studded with nails fastened across their prison, and two sentinels with loaded arms kept watch at the hatchway. How could they – unarmed, weak, and chained – hope to succeed? But with Fergusson was

a man named Walker, who had been a sailor, and he urged them on. "Once free, he could navigate the ship to China!" Six times did the trembling wretches essay the struggle with the soldiers and six times did their courage fail them. At last a favourable opportunity presented itself.

Lying at anchor in the channel, with the land in sight, life on board the ship became tedious even to the officers. Lieutenant Carew, confident in his soldiers and their muskets, thought he would take a little fishing excursion. His wife was on board, but; for some reason or other, refused to accompany him. The surgeon, however, was eager for some amusement, and taking with them a soldier and convict, the two lowered a boat and went into the bay.

It was the custom to bring the men on deck by sixes and sevens for exercise, and it so happened that on this morning it was the turn of Fergusson and Walker's gang. Fergusson, Walker, Pennell, M'Kan, Jones, and another, came up in their double irons, and clanked up and down under the supervision of the loaded muskets. Fergusson saw his chance – if ever he was to get it – had come now. "Now is your time, lads", he cried; "the captain's away; there are but the two men on deck." Sulkily eyeing the muskets, Pennell and M'Kan refused. "You have failed me six times," cried Fergusson with an oath. "If you don't join me now, I'll inform of your former plots." This threat terrified them into compliance. A rush was made. The two soliders idly staring over the bulwarks were knocked down before they could fire their muskets. The hatchway was secured, and knocking off their irons, the six were masters of the ship.

But the captain and soliders below did not intend to surrender without a struggle. They fired up the hatchway, but without effect, and the other prisoners burst their nailed bars and joined their companions. A parley now ensued, the convicts promising to spare the lives of the soliders if they gave up their arms. A volley was the only answer, and then two prisoners, by Fergusson's directions, got buckets of boiling water from the galley and poured them down the hatchway. Panic-stricken by the knowledge that thirty desperate men were at liberty on the deck, and that the seizure of the vessel was only a matter of time, the scalded soldiers surrendered and passed up their arms.

Carew and the surgeon heard the firing, and came back with all speed to the vessel. Standing in the stern-sheets, as the two rowers ran the boat alongside, he commanded the mutineers to return to their prison. A gun presented at his head was the not unnatural reply. Fergusson, however, had ordered the priming of the soldiers' pieces to be wetted before they were handed up, and the gun missed fire. Now began another parley. Carew, anxious, doubtless, for the safety of his wife, promised that if the men would give up the ship he would say nothing of their conduct to the authorities at Hell's Gates; but the easily-won liberty was too sweet to be resigned so easily. Confident in his own power, Fergusson told the mutineers that he could navigate the vessel to some foreign port. Where they could defy the wrath of the Governor and the commandant. The prospect of the sheds and the cat, as contrasted with freedom and China, was not too tempting. As might have been expected, they refused.

A muster was now held upon the deck, and Fergusson formally called upon the convicts to join him. All but thirteen consented, and one of the sailors possibly an ex-convict himself, threw in his lot with the mutineers. Boats were lowered, and the soldiers and the thirteen were landed by the now armed convicts on the barren coast. With a generosity which to those acquainted with convict customs will seem somewhat strange, Mrs. Carew, with her children, was restored to her husband

unharmed. Secure of safety, Fergusson ordered rations to be given to his late masters, and recommended them to make overland for Hobart Town. "The land party," says Mr. Bonwick, "received 60 lbs. of biscuit, 20 lbs. of flour, 20 lbs. Of sugar, 4 lbs. Of tea, and 6 gals. Rum. "The boats were taken back to the ship and hauled on board, and returning to their vessel the mutineers gave three cheers for their bloodless victory.

After a hearty supper and a pannikin of rum rum apiece, the seventeen set to work to organize their future plans. Some were for China, some for India, and two men proposed to go to one of the islands of the south Seas, sink the ship, and settle among the friendly islanders. After some talk, however, it was resolved to make for the Friendly Isles, where those who chose could remain.

With provisions for six months for 400 men, arms, ammunition, and a sailor captain, the mutineers felt that fortune had befriended them at last. Amid one knows not wht wild thoughts of future liberty, the night passed rapidly away, and at daylight the next morning the marooned Carew and his companions saw the "Cyprus" spread her sails, and move slowly out of the harbour.

Then began the sufferings of the conquered party. They were on a desolate part of the coast; impenetrable scrub and impassable mountain ranges lay, for many a weary mile, between them and Hobart town. It was impossible to communicate with the settlement at Macquarie Harbour; the country on that side was even more desolate and barren than on the other. Communication between the two places was most rare, and effected by that very ship which was now bearing the escaped party in safety to the south Seas. The only hope was that some passing vessel, either driven by stress of weather or urged by want of water, would put into the channel and take them off. The party in all consisted of more than 40 souls, and their slender stock of provision melted away like snow in the sun. Mr. Carew showed his courage. He apportioned out the victuals in equal shares, keeping the rum as a last resource. The soldiers were divided into watches, and he himself took his turn with the rest. Day after day passed with the same monotony of silence. The allowance of provisions was decreased, and despair began to sit heavily on their hearts. From east to west, from north to south, their haggard eyes turned in vain.

The blaze upon the waters to the east,
The blaze upon the island overhead,
The blaze upon the waters to the west,
Then the great stars that globed themselves in heaven,
The hollower-bellowing ocean and again
The scarlet shafts of sunrise, but no sail.

At last hunger broke through discipline. Two men set off overland for Hobart town, but, frightened at the perils before them, and menaced by hostile natives, returned. Five more attempted to head the Huon, and after coming near to death, were rescued. The others remained waiting for death.

Desperate, and with but two days' provisions left, Popjoy, a convict, determined to try and make a boat. Assisted by a man named Morgan, he framed a sort of coracle of young wattle trees, and covered it with sailcloth. Over this a mixture of soap and resin was poured, to keep out the water. After many failures, the thing floated. It was twelve feet long, and propelled by paddles. During the last two days of its construction the party were without food. In this rude craft Carew embarked the remnant of his party, and hoping against hope, got out to sea. Luckily, at a distance of twenty miles, they fell in with the "Oxellia", and the poor fellows were brought

safely to Hobart Town. Carew was tried by court martial, and honourably acquitted. Popjoy, who had been transported when eleven years old for stealing a hare, received a free pardon, and returned to England.

In the meantime the "Cyprus" was running for the Friendly Islands. The mutineers had chosen officers for themselves. Walker was captain; Fergusson, "dressed up in Carew's best uniform", lieutenant; and Jones mate. The days passed quickly by, liberty seemed before them, and all were in high spirits, getting out of their course, however, they came to Japan. Here in spite of Fergusson's orders, seven deserted, and cast in their lot with the natives of that lovely spot. Fergusson went on, but seems to have begun to lose his prestige among the men. One Swallow, a seaman and convict, now appears to have assumed the command. This fellow seems to have been both powerful and intelligent. He was originally transported from England for rioting, but on the way out saved the ship at the hazard of his life. Allowed to roam the deck and assist the sailors, he contrived to enlist their sympathies, and when the transport arrived in Hobart Town they hid him in the lower deck and the vessel sailed away with him. The crew gave him rations. Despite a rigorous search, he was not found until after some weeks. The captain landed him at Rio, and he was soon again in London. There an old companion "peached" upon him, and he was sent back to Van Diemen's Land. Half way to Hell's Gates, the mutiny restored him once more to freedom.

To this man was the charge of the vessel entrusted, and he took her to China. On the way a boat with the name of "Edward" on its stern was seized, and Swallow, knowing that he could not account for the "Cyprus", determined to try a new plan. There was a sextant in the cabin which had on it the name "Waldron", and with that and the boat Swallow laid his plot. Abandoning the vessel, he appeared, with three others, as "shipwrecked sailors". Swallow affected to be Captain Waldron, and exhibited his sextant as a proof of his story. The English merchants in Canton got up a subscription for them, and paid their passage home. Suspicion, however, was excited by the appearance of four more of the party, who did not know the captain's name, but said, "Wilson" for "Waldron". Swallow, trapped again, was at his wit's end. Arrived in London, the party were brought before the Thames Police Court, where a few days before a curious incident occurred.

Popjoy, having been landed by the mercy of the Crown in London, was cast upon the streets to find his way to gaol or starvation. Imprisoned from eleven years old, and knowing nothing save how to roll logs and cringe to the lash, the returned convict had taken to begging round about the docks. Begging, like stealing, was a crime, and he was brought before the Thames Police Court. There he told the story of the mutiny and the boat-building.

Though there was not criminating evidence, the appearance of "Captain Waldron" was somewhat strange, and the story of poor Popjoy – who had been honoured with several paragraphs in the newspaper town-talk – recurred to the mind of the bench. The suspected men were remanded.

This remand cost three of them their lives.

Strangely enough, a Mr. Capon, who had been gaoler at Hobart town, was in London, and, attracted by the report of the case, he strolled down to the police court. One glance was enough; Swallow, Watt, and Davis were detected at once, and the whole party committed for trial.

Watt and Davis, tried as pirates and escaped felons, were hung in London. Swallow and the rest were sent back to Hobart Town. One was hung at the gaol, and the rest sent back to Hell's Gates for life. Swallow managed to escape the death penalty, and went back to the chain. Twice more he tried to escape, but in vain. At last the weight of his doom broke his spirit, and he submitted to his fate. He worked in his irons for life, and died –still in yellow livery - - at Port Arthur, a melancholy instance of a brave man crushed into brutality by a senseless system of punishment.

Five Years later Popjoy died also. He made some endeavour to procure a pension from the Government, and only waited the arrival of documents from Hobart Town, formally attesting his services to Lieutenant Carew, to obtain it. In the meantime he obtained a seaman's berth in a merchant-vessel, married, and seemed to have lived respectably. Coming from Quebec in a timber ship, however, he was wrecked off Boulogne. Taking to the boats, the crew made for the shore, but the sea was running with great violence, and Popjoy, with another, was washed overboard and drowned, and so never got his "pension" after all.

2.6 ANALYSING *THE SEIZURE OF THE CYPRUS*

This story has already been mentioned in the introduction to Marcus Clarke and his works. It is to be found in his collection of short stories *Old Tales of a Young Country*. This tale is about the seizure of a ship that was carrying convicts. The picture Clarke paints of the convict system in this tale bring to mind in vivid detail all the points made known in the introduction to Clarke's writings. Incase you are unsure of the details please go back to the introductory remarks on Clarke and re-read it along with the *Seizure of the Cyprus*. It also brings to mind the novel *Mutiny on the Bounty*.

The Seizure of the Cyprus is a tale about thirty-one prisoners with ten soldiers and a Lieutenant on board the ship *Cyprus*. The Captain and the soldiers are part of that remote authority (that we talked of earlier) dispensing justice far away from home. They represent the authority figure while the prisoner faces the brunt of injustice and cruelty. The conditions were such both on route from the home country to Australia and on the islands used as prisons. Such were the state of affairs there that convicts would rather attempt an escape than face imprisonment and torture on the island:

> " Treated like beasts, the men lived the life of beasts. All the atrocities that, men could commit were committed here".

The reputation of "Hell's Gate" as the prison was called preceded it and men who had been there before made it known to the new comers. These conditions led to the germination of the idea to rise in mutiny and seize the ship that was carrying these thirty odd prisoners. Plans were hatched. Some were afraid of the consequences and clung to that one thing that had not been taken away from them...life. Others were bold enough to anticipate freedom or death which ever was their destiny. It was better to attempt to flee from these authorities, maybe even die in the attempt than to live in servitude in "Hell's Gate". This again reminds us of Satan's words in Milton's Paradise Lost Book I: "It is better to reign in hell than to serve in heaven." Only here the prisoners would prefer to try and flee maybe even die in the process than to stay, alive and to live bound by the chains of servitude. An interesting point that may be noted however is that despite being hardened by the life they lead as convicts, they have still managed to retain some of their human kindness. This is made clear when they seize the ship and maroon the captain with his party but they do not harm his wife, instead they even leave provisions for them. Even before we are told of the seizure of the ship or the plans to seize the ship, we as readers are made aware of the

bleak future that awaits the prisoners at Hell's Gate. The very words, "This place was the last home —but one —of the felon," strikes a terror in our hearts. The ensuing sentences compound our sense of terror and horror and invoke both pity and fear in our hearts for the prisoners and the inevitable fate that awaits them there.

The attitude of the prisoners on board the *Cyprus* is rather typical. They are a few brow-beaten souls, who would not take the risk of revolting against the authorities, others could not care less either ways yet some would sooner die trying to break free than live in chains for the rest of their lives. Finally thirteen convicts decide to try and sail for their freedom. Once free they are uncertain about their future The description of the standard party brings to mind Coleridge's "Ancient Mariner". The two stories run parallel thereafter- one of the *Cyprus* and the convicts now sailing to freedom and that of the Lieutenant and his men marooned on the island. While the marooned souls eventually find a ship and are rescued the convict story has another ending. Spinning yarns about their being shipwrecked, the thirteen manage to get rescued and reach the shores of London where they are captured all over again.

The Seizure of the Cyprus is one of the short stories taken from the collection entitled *Old Tales of a Young Land*. It describes the conditions that these transported convicts had to survive. It is written in the tradition of the romance. It tells of the horrors of the convict system and the heroes or anti-heroes therein. It is based on facts but the story is entirely the creation of Clarke's imagination. Please note that by the time this story came to be written transportation of convicts was a thing of the past. The description of the destination that awaits the prisoners on board the *Cyprus* is harrowing. "Hell's Gate" is the terminology used to refer to the convict settlement at Macquaire harbour. Even the natural environment around this island seems to convey the hopelessness and the desperation that surrounds and engulfs the inhabitants. Escape from such an island is next to impossible but the conditions there are such that many try to brave the seas and swim away to freedom. Their futile efforts at escaping have been expressed poignantly by Clarke. The horrors of those two men who have already been to "Hell's Gate" indicate the impending sense of foreboding to the doomed prisoners. It also serves as an index for the degree of desperation that makes them say:

> " At the worst, it is but death; and which of us wishes to live?" (p. 489).

Seizing the opportunity the convicts take control of the ship and are ready to lay down their lives for their chance to survive outside the gates of Hell. The 'opportunistic among the desperate' is also cleverly portrayed by Clarke, particularly in the character of Popjoy, who dies without ever receiving his pension. The system of punishment was cruel and the grounds for imprisonment were as trivial as stealing a loaf of bread or a hen. For a theft of that nature one could be convicted and transported to Australia. In Australia the conditions for survival were hardly conducive. If the convicts at "Hell's Gate" attempted to escape they were tried for felony and piracy and death by hanging was the usual mode of punishment. Clarke has effectively conveyed the irony of their situation, plight, and desperation in this short story. What Clarke stresses continuously is the futility of human effort, the futility in trying to survive when the odds are against a person. This story conveys the message of man's desperation, the risks he will take in order to survive. Clarke is also in a way decrying the system of punishment that makes poor, honest men criminals and transports them to Australia and fails to make better men of these so called criminals. Instead what this system of punishment does is make hardened criminals of men who have been transported for stealing a hare or a chicken. It is a tale of futile human endeavour. It has been written in a very lucid style and is effective in its purpose. It presents a sordid yet plausible tale of convict life and in its basic sense

conveys the "Australianity" of his work. It may be recalled that the debates were endless about what is Australian and what is not. It tells of an era when convicts were being transported to Australia. But most importantly it is peculiarly an Australian reality –the convict system –the convict past.

2.6.1 Action in *The Seizure of the Cyprus*

Action has essentially two meanings: (1) the main story line or as would be said in cinematic terms (story-line) of a novel, play, short story, narrative poem and (2) the main series of events that together constitute the plot .Whatever the definition of action, it is fundamental to drama and implies forward motion, this motion however can be achieved without any real physical movement on the stage or even without anything concrete being said. The unfolding of character and plot is crucial to the action of the play, story or drama.

The Seizure of the Cyprus is the story of thirty prisoners bound for Macquaire Harbour otherwise known as "Hell's Gate." Clarke begins in media-res:

> "On the 9th of August, 1829, the "Cyprus" a vessel which was employed by the Government of Van Damien's Land to carry prisoners from Hobart Town to Macquaire Harbour, was seized by the convicts and carried into the South Seas."

Media-res as you would know is a Latin term which means in the middle of the action. Clarke does not give us the background initially he merely tells of the seizure of the ship as already having taken place. This technique was, normally employed by epic writers, where the action unfolds in the middle. For instance in Milton's "Paradise Lost" (Book I) the narrative unfolds with the rebellion in Heaven already having taken place. After making known the date of the seizure of the ship and the purpose of that ship, the passengers (rather prisoners, in this case) the action unfolds accordingly. The narrator tells the story of the harbour and that it was established in 1821 by the then Governor Sorrelle as 'a station for the most irreclaimable of the desperadoes' and of how it finally came to be abandoned in 1833. The discipline was so severe there and the terrorism so hideous that several victims sought death as a means of escaping their plight. Not only was the discipline hard to live so was the environment. "Hell's Gate" as it was rightly christened was literally the point of no return for these transported prisoners. They would live there and die in chains or die trying to escape. We are told that many prisoners often committed suicide there. The prisoners hatched crazy schemes to try and escape this place or die in the attempt. Into this desperate place are Lieutenant Carew and his ten soldiers sent to transport thirty-one men from Hobart Town to Macquzire Harbour, (thereafter known as "Hell's Gate"). Bad weather forces them to take shelter at Recherche Bay and it is here that the prisoners begin hatching plans to escape after seizing the ship. Here is an instance of a plot within a plot, you will notice that while one plot or the main plot tells of the actual seizure and the future events this plot within a plot tells of the conspiracy being hatched to seize the ship and sail away to freedom.

The chief characters who plan the seizure are Fergusson, Walker, Pennell, M'kan, Jones and another unnamed prisoner. The opportunity presents itself when Lieutenant Carew and the ship's surgeon, decide to go fishing. The convicts lead by Fergusson seize the ship and formally announce their course of action. The seventeen mutineers take over the ship while the Lieutenant, the surgeon other prisoners and soldiers are left marooned on the island with provisions to last them a while. One astonishing feat that these desperate men perform is that of uniting the Lieutenant and his wife without harming her personal dignity. The plans of the mutineers include escaping

and making their way to China or India or South Sea Islands or the Friendly Islands. The action splits into two as the story of the mutineers and that of those marooned on the Bay unfolds. Those marooned have no means of communicating with Hobart Town neither do they have any possible means of escape by land as the thought of hostile natives keeps them from trying too hard to escape and they are basically land-locked. Their only means of escape is a raft that could carry them away from the bay at least. Popjoy an ex-convict who has cast his lot with the Lieutenant and his party instead of with the mutineers manages to construct a rough and crude raft that however keeps them afloat till they are rescued by the passing "Oxelia." Lieutenant Carew is tried and acquitted, Popjoy for his role in securing their freedom is pardoned and finds his way back to England. In England Popjoy has no idea how to fend for himself knows no other way of life than the chain and the cat –o- nine- tails. He finally takes to begging and is arrested once again. It is there in court that he recounts the story of the mutiny.

In the mean time life on board the *Cyprus* is full. The men have organised themselves into the established hierarchy and Walker is the Captain while Fergusson is Lieutenant and Jones mate. They are on their way to the South Seas when they go off course and land in Japan. Here against the Captain's wishes three ex- convicts do not return to the ship and stay on with the natives. This dissension causes Walker to lose face and a man named Swallow who was transported for rioting in England assumes Captain-ship. He has an interesting story behind him, he had escaped once and was being sent back to "Hell's Gate" when he is rescued in time by the mutiny. Swallow guides the ship to China, on route they seize a ship called "Edward" and with the sextant bearing the name of "Waldron" they pretend to be shipwrecked sailors and playing on the sympathy of the English Merchants in Canton find their way back to England. So far these two stories were running parallel to each other. In England the original people on board the *Cyprus* meet and it is at this stage that we realise that the events have completed a full circle.

England:

Popjoy as mentioned earlier is in England and has been remanded for begging in the streets. He has already made the tale of the mutiny popular in England. Meanwhile the escapees have made their way back to England. As circumstances would have it they are remanded and face trial. They are tried as pirates, escaped convicts and as felons and hung. Most of them are sent back to "Hell's Gates." Swallow himself manages to escape death penalty and is sent back to "Hell's Gate" the place he fought so desperately against. He tries to escape twice but fails. He finally dies at Port Arthur still in chains. He never managed to escape or die escaping and was a broken man an instance of a 'brave man crushed into brutality by a system of punishment'. Five years later, Popjoy who has settled down and married is travelling on a ship from Quebec. He is shipwrecked and while attempting to escape on a small boat he is washed overboard. He had been trying to procure a pension for himself and was awaiting papers from Lieutenant Carew but he dies without receiving any thing at all.

That in short is the action of this short story. It serves both the functions of the term 'action'. It is the main story line of the tale and the series of events that constitute the plot of the story.

Clarke does not leave any loose ends. Every thing is tied up neatly within this short tale and at the end of the story we are filled by a sense of the futility of human efforts against a system.

2.6.2 Characterisation

Characterisation consists of three main categories: a type, for instance a conceited man or a blunt man; a social type, an antiquarian or an old college butler; or a place or scene, like a tavern, or a cockpit. In this particular story the characters are essentially flat characters except for Fergusson initially, then Swallow later on and Popjoy. Flat characters very simply put are those characters that do not develop at all and remain the same from the beginning of the narrative to the end. Fergusson and Swallow though displaying some of the characteristics of the round character types are not fully developed. Popjoy's character too faces the same dilemma but he is interesting in his own way. He begins as a little boy convicted at the age of eleven years for stealing a hare. He grows into a criminal in the eyes of the Law and is one of the convicts being transported. But he develops further tries to save the marooned party. succeeds and is pardoned but not knowing what to do with himself gets convicted once again. But using his cunning and strong survival skills he manages to be acquitted once again. Begins leading a settled life, even applies for a pension but dies eventually. This story falls within the realm of the novel of action rather than that of character and displays all the characteristics of that genre even though it is a short story.

Conflict also plays a dominant role in this short story. There is tension between the characters as they are unsure about the success of the mutiny; there is tension once again when dissension takes place and when Swallow takes over as Captain. There is tension between the mutineers at large and the society; between the character of Swallow and the system and between the marooned party and the environment. The plot of a novel or a short story is the plan or the design; schemes; pattern of events in a play, work of fiction and the organisation of incidents and character in such a way as to induce curiosity and suspense in the spectator or reader or otherwise. In the continuum of time and space plot, we ask ourselves several questions: why did this happen? Why is this happening? What will happen next? Will something happen at all? Is anything going to happen?

Aristotle the great Greek Philosopher considered plot to be of prime importance. He believed that plot was the imitation of action as well as the arrangement of the incidents. He considered a plot to be whole only if it had a beginning, middle and an end. There are two types of plot mainly- simple and complex particularly in drama and that too in tragedy. The simple plot involves structural unity and continuity whereas the complex plot is one where there is a reversal of fortune (peripeteia) and a situation where ignorance gives way to knowledge (anagnorisis). Aristotle emphasised plot as compared to character. Keeping this in mind how would you view this particular short story? By the 1927s when E M Forster's "Aspects of the Novel" was published a plot had come to mean a narrative of events, the emphasis of which fell on causality, in which the time sequence was however preserved.

The plot in this short story can be drawn on a linear scale that splits into two and these two run almost parallel to each other for a short while. These two nearly parallel stories ultimately meet at a point that is England and from then on, again split into two. The plot construction is almost visual like a river. It flows quietly then when it meets some obstruction it bifurcates into two. These two branches run along each other till at some other juncture they unite and eventually branch out again. The manner in which Marcus Clarke writes is simplistic. He does not employ bombastic words or terms. His style is clear and lucid. He wrote of the romantic adventure and of convict life. His writing has a genuine quality that is difficult to find elsewhere. His writing is often set against a background of brutality, venality and sometimes savagery. He makes use of metaphors drawn from language, (remember what we said

earlier about his themes and how the environment provided him with a theme because of its metaphoric possibilities). The imagery is very vivid. He uses words so effectively that he is able to evoke visual images of the harsh environment, the perils of being cast on a little bay with rapidly depleting stocks, the dilemmas of the convicts before they commit to the act of seizing the ship. Let us highlight some issues in the next section.

2.6.3 Narrative Technique

Every storyteller has a tale to tell. The manner in which s/he tells us the story is the narrative style/narrative technique. There are several narrative styles to choose from but what needs to be considered is whether the narrator/ writer is able to spark an interest in the readers and to capture their imagination or not. While some writers would prefer to use the first person narrative others would prefer to let a character do the telling, (like Marcus Clarke in this story). He begins the story with an account of the first person narrative wherein he uses the authorial voice, "I" and the story is told but through the course of the story the authorial voice disappears and the story/ narration acquires an identity of its own. There is also a continuous to and fro movement between the telling of the seizure of the "Cyprus" and the events that have coloured the history of the place —"Hell's Gate". Clarke's use of phrases like "the surf beating with violence on the rocky shore" and "the westerly winds blowing with fury into the harbour" evokes images of violence and preeminent doom. The hostile environment seems to be working in tandem with the even more violent nature of man as the prisoners are transported to the island and ill -treated there. Nature seems to be conspiring against the ill-fated prisoners and making their escape futile. His use of language is such that it not only generates an interest in the mind of the reader but also communicates very effectively the atmosphere, the ambience he was trying to create. Humour is present in Clarke but is often tinged with just the right amount of sadness/ pathos and satire. It also contributes to the feeling of impending doom. What we have been saying about his peculiar brand of humour tinged with pathos is evident from these lines:

> "Three wretches drew lots as to who should get a sight of Hobart town. One was to murder the other, and the third was to volunteer his evidence. The lottery was drawn, the doomed man laughed ere his companion beat out his brains, the two survivors congratulated each other on their holiday on the scaffold of Hobart town."

Do you find any such passages in the text that bring out so clearly yet painfully the plight of the prisoners while at the same making us laugh at the absurdity of it all? Having said this let us now try and contextualise *The Seizure of the Cyprus.*

2.6.4 Contextualising *The Seizure of the Cyprus*

A good short story like a good novel usually has something to offer its readers. Normally a writer being placed in a certain time and place would write about what s/he feels strongly, would wish to express his/ her concerns and views on a particular matter and that would be done through the medium of writing. Clarke as we have discerned for ourselves was a prolific writer with a mission that of documenting the history of Australia through his writings. Keeping this in mind it may be concluded that even if the story itself was a creation of his mind, he was actually consciously/ unconsciously preserving for posterity the happenings of the early days of the settlement in his writings. He was providing a sense of history to Australia that was largely a transported culture still attached very strongly to the apron strings of the mother country. The transportation of convicts may have stopped by the time Clarke

began writing but it was a part of Australia's history being a penal colony as it was. It was something that could not be simply pushed aside and done away with. Though the early settlers were mostly convicts who had been transported for life to Australia and the conditions they survived under were pitiable as is evident from the story, they were still a part of what was to later become the Australian Federation and were in fact working side by side with the founding fathers of the nation that their presence no matter how degrading or otherwise and their contribution or lack of it cannot be neglected or ignored. Marcus Clarke was not only pointing out the ills of the society at that time but was also capturing the images of brutality and inhuman behaviour that characterised this practise towards the end of the eighteenth century in Australia. Clarke also kept in mind the harsh, and often, hostile nature of this strange land that they had come to inhabit under duress. For those largely descended from European stock, the antipodes was a complete inversion of nature with its strange flora and fauna and equally peculiar climate. This particular story is taken from a collection called **Old Tales of a Young Country** and is one of the stories on convictism. Mention is also made of this story in *The Last of Macquaire Harbour*:

> "Five years after seizure of the "Cyprus" it was resolved that Macquaire Harbour should be abandoned."

In a way *The Seizure of the Cyprus* echoes what Clarke talks about in *His Natural Life*. Similar aspects of convictism are depicted in both these works. It tells not only of the sentences of the prisoners' but also of the brutality, degradation and the despair within that system. It tells of the freedom from Victorian constraints and the misuse of that freedom by some. Even the depiction of the natural world as essentially hostile to the plight of man is not only visible but also a constant reminder of the futility of human effort and the mortality of mankind.

2.6.5 Highlights

It would be a good idea to read the story thoroughly after reading the introduction. It would be worthwhile to keep in mind the following facts :

(1) the transportation of the convicts from the homeland to Australia.
(2) the plight of the convicts
(3) the trivial reasons that lead to their conviction
(4) the life awaiting them
(5) the desperation that makes them do the things they do
(6) the futility of their lot

Other stories in "Old Tales of a Young Land" that tell of the Convict Past:

The Last of Macquaire Harbour
Port Arthur Nos 1,2 and 3
Correspondence Resulting from "Port Arthur No 1"

Other Stories:

Cannabis Indica
Pretty Dick
An Up- country Township
Poor Jo
Human Repetends
Holiday Peak
La Beguin

2.7 LET US SUM UP

This unit is about the life and times of Marcus Clarke and his short story -*The Seizure of the Cyprus*. His main novel, his other works, and his role in the creation or rendering of the Great Australian Myth, the position he occupies, the influences that worked on him and the literature he produced have been dealt with. It also provides us with the unique opportunity to read one of his works which were hitherto unavailable and relatively unknown. After a detailed and careful reading of the story it would be a good idea to sit and reflect on the many issues that have been raised. It would be worthwhile to reflect on the introduction to Clarke, his life, and his works.

This unit has been designed to provide a guideline for a beginner of Australian literature to think along several lines. Many issues related not only to the subject matter but also the development of the short fiction have been raised but I would suggest thinking aloud keeping in mind the development and trends followed by the short fiction in the Northern Hemisphere. Do the short stories from these two hemispheres have anything in common? How does the narrative unfold? What can be concluded from your reading of Marcus Clarke and any other short fiction writer of that period in the Northern Hemisphere? Are there any parallels or echoes? We could and we should spare some thought to these questions and think along those lines. In the contemporary world a lot is being said about, read about post-colonial Literature- do any of the stories you have read in this block or otherwise subscribe / conform to the set formulas? It might useful to read Edward Said and Ajaiz Ahmed along with writers of fiction.

2.8 QUESTIONS

(1) How would you create a distinction between the fiction of Marcus Clarke and Henry Lawson?
(2) Lawson belonged to the age of "Nationalistic Australia", where does Clarke fit in?
(3) What are the unique features of Clarke's style of writing?
(4) Have you read any other modern day story of convict life, escape? (Consider reading Pappilon).

2.9 SUGGESTED READING

(1) Adams, F., "Two Australian Writer (Clarke and Gordon)," Fortnightly Review CCCIX (I September 1892). Reprinted in "The Australians" (Unwin, London, 1893)
(2) Marcus Clarke's *His Natural Life*
(3) Greene's "History of Australian Literature" (Volume I)
(4) Marcus Clarke's *Old Tales of a Young Land*
(5) Michael Wilding's "Introduction" to "Marcus Clarke- *For the Term of His Natural Life*, short stories, critical essays and journalism"(ed) Michael Wilding, (University of Queensland Press: Queensland: 1976)

UNIT 3 BARBARA BAYNTON : *THE CHOSEN VESSEL*

Structure

3.0 Objectives
3.1 Introduction
3.2 *The Chosen Vessel* – Text
3.3 Overall Structure Of *The Chosen Vessel*
3.4 Interpretations
  3.4.1 A Feminist Reading of *The Chosen Vessel*
  3.4.2 Reflections on the *Bush* in *The Chosen Vessel*
  3.4.3 Motherhood and Baynton
3.5 Barbara Baynton's Ideological Position: Contextualising *The Chosen Vessel*
3.6 Let Us Sum Up
3.7 Questions
3.8 Suggested Readings

3.0 OBJECTIVES

The primary objective of this unit is to look at one of the first and finest writers of the Australian *Bush*, Barbara Baynton. I do not wish to go into the fascinating details of Baynton's own life but I will mention those episodes that seem to find an echo in her short stories. I will also critically examine her story, *The Chosen Vessel* as an indictment of the hardships of *Bush* life and as a paradigmatic statement of the dichotomous relationship between the sexes.

3.1 INTRODUCTION

Baynton wrote most of her short stories in the 1890s and her writings show an aching sense of discordance and disjuncture between the characters that people her stories and their habitat. Baynton's own life, specially her date of birth and her parentage is shrouded in mystery. The details supplied by her have been subsequently proved wrong (Her birth date given by her as 4th June 1862 was later shown to have actually been 4th June 1857). Baynton married thrice in her life and adopted the surname of her second husband, Dr Thomas Baynton, whom she married in 1890. It was during the period of this marriage that she wrote most of her short stories. Her first story was published in the Christmas edition of the **Bulletin** in 1896. After initial title changes (*The Tramp*, *What the Curlews Cried*) it was decided that the story be called *The Chosen Vessel*. Her early short stories were included under the collective title of **Bush Studies**. Some of her best stories of the 1902 edition published by Duckworth And Company, London, were *Squeaker's Mate*, *Scrammy* and, *Billy Skywonkie*, *Bush Church* and *The Chosen Vessel*. Her novel **Human Toll** was published in 1907 and **Cobbers** in 1917. Barbara Baynton died in Melbourne on 28th May 1929.

Most of her work shows an overriding concern about people in the *Bush*, their alienation from it and the shockingly harsh effects of the cruel landscape upon the people inhabiting it. Here she is almost at par with her contemporary, Henry Lawson, in depicting the evil, brutal nature of the *Bush*. She does not celebrate it as a singularly 'Australian' entity as most other writers did. The ideas of the Australian nation and a virile masculinity connected with the *Bush* are subverted very skilfully by Baynton's stories.

3.2 *THE CHOSEN VESSEL* - TEXT

She laid the stick and her baby on the grass while she untied the rope that tethered the calf. The length of the rope separated them. The cow was near the calf, and both were lying down. Feed along the creek was plentiful, and every day she found a fresh place to tether it, since tether it she must, for if she did not, it would stray with the cow out on the plain. She had plenty of time to go after it, but then there was her baby; and if the cow turned on her out on the plain, and she with her baby, – she had been a town girl and was afraid of the cow, but she did not want the cow to know it. She used to run at first when it bellowed its protest against the penning up of its calf. This satisfied the cow, also the calf, but the woman's husband was angry, and caller her – the noun was cur. It was he who forced her to run and meet the advancing cow, brandishing a stick, and uttering threatening words till the enemy turned and ran "That's the way!" the man said, laughing at her white face. In many things he was worse than the cow and she wondered if the same rule would apply to the man, but she was not one to provoke skirmishes even with the cow.

It was early for the calf to go to "bed" – nearly an hour earlier than usual; but she had felt so restless all day. Partly because it was Monday, and the end of the week that would bring her and the baby the companionship of his father, was so far off. He was a shrearer, and had gone of his shed before daylight that morning. Fifteen miles as the crow flies separated them.

There was a track in front of the house, for it had once been a wine shanty, and a few travellers passed along at intervals. She was not afraid of horsemen; but swagmen, going to or worse coming from, the dismal, drunken little township, a day's journey beyond, terrified her. One had called at the house to-day, and asked for tucker.

That was why she had penned up the calf so early. She feared more from the look of his eyes, and the gleam of his teeth, as he watched her newly awakened baby beat its impatient fists upon her covered breasts, than from the knife that was sheathed in the belt at his waist.

She had given him bread and meat. Her husband she told him was sick. She always said that when she was alone and a swagman came; and she had gone in from the kitchen to the bedroom, and asked questions and replied to them in the best man's voice she could assume. Then he had asked to go into the kitchen to boil his billy, but instead she gave him tea, and he drank it on the wood heap. He had walked round and round the house, and there were cracks in some places, and after the last time he had asked for tobacco. She had none to give him, and he had grinned, because there was a broken clay pipe near the wood heap where he stood, and if there were a man inside, there ought to have been tobacco. Then he asked for money, but women in the bush never have money.

At last he had gone, and she, watching through the cracks, saw him when about a quarter of a mile away, turn and look back at the house. He had stood so for some moments with a pretence of fixing his swag, and then, apparently satisfied, moved to the left towards the creek. The creek made a bow round the house, and when he came to the bend she lost sight of him. Hours after, watching intently for signs of smoke, she saw the man's dog chasing some sheep that had gone to the creek for water, and saw it slink back suddenly, as if it had been called by some one.

More than once she thought of taking her baby and going to her husband. But in the past, when she had dared to speak of the dangers to which her loneliness exposed her,

he had taunted and sneered at her. "Needn't faltter yerself," he had told her, "nobody 'ud want her run away with yew."

Long before nightfall she placed food on the kitchen table, and beside it laid the big brooch that had been her mother's. It was the only thing of value that she had. And she left the kitchen door wide open.

The doors inside she securely fastened. Beside the bolt in the back one she drove in the steel and scissors; against it she piled the table and the stools. Underneath the lock of the front door she forced the handle of the spade, and the blade between the cracks in the flooring boards. Then the prop-stick, cut into lengths, held the top, as the spade held the middle. The windows were little more than portholes; she had nothing to fear through them.

She ate a few mouthfuls of food and drank a cup of milk. But she lighted no fire, and when night came, no candle, but crept with her baby to bed.

What woke her? The wonder was that she had slept – she had not meant to. But she was young, very young. Perhaps the shrinking of the galvanized roof – hardly though, since that was so usual. Yet something had set her heart beating wildly; but she lay quite still, only she put her arm over her baby. Then she had both round it, and she prayed, "Little baby, little baby, don't wake!"

The moon's rays shone on the front of the house, and she saw one of the open cracks, quite close to where she lay, darken with a shadow. Then a protesting growl reached her; and she could fancy she heard the man turn hastily. She plainly heard the thud of something striking the dog's ribs, and the long flying strides of the animal as it howled and ran. Still watching, she saw the shadow darken every crack along the wall. She knew by the sounds that the man was trying every standpoint that might help him to see in; but how much he saw she could not tell. She thought of many things she might do to deceive him into the idea that she was not alone. But the sound of her voice would wake baby, and she dreaded that as though it were the only danger that threatened her. So she prayed, "Little baby, don't wake, don't cry!"

Stealthily the man crept about. She knew he had his boots off, because of the vibration that his feet caused as he walked along the verandah to gauge the width of the little window in her room, and the resistance of the front door.

Then he went to the other end, and the uncertainty of what he was doing became unendurable. She had felt safer, far safer, while he was close, and she could watch and listen. She felt she must watch, but the great fear of wakening her baby again assailed her. She suddenly recalled that one of the slabs on that side of her house had shrunk in length as well as in width, and had once fallen out. It was held in position only by a wedge of wood underneath. What if he should discover that? The uncertainty increased her terror. She prayed as she gently raised herself with her little one in her arms, held tightly to her breast.

She thought of the knife, and shielded its body with her hands and arms. Even the little feet she covered with its white gown, and the baby never murmured – it liked to be held so. Noiselessly she crossed to the other side, and stood where she could see and hear, but not be seen. He was trying every slab, and was very near to that with the wedge under it. Then she saw him find it; and heard the sound of the knife as bit by bit he began to cut away the wooden support.

She waited motionless, with her baby pressed tightly to her, though she knew that in another few minutes this man with the cruel eyes, lascivious mouth, and gleaming knife, would enter, One side of the slab titled; he had only to cut away the remaining little end, when the slab, unless he held it, would fall outside.

She heard his jerked breathing as it kept time with the cuts of the knife, and the brush of his clothes as he rubbed the wall in his movements, for she was so still and quite, that she did not even tremble. She knew when he ceased, and wondered why, being so well concealed; for he could not see her, and would not fear if he did, yet she heard him move cautiously away. Perhaps he expected the slab to fall – his motive puzzled her, and she moved even closer, and bent her body the better to listen. Ah! What sound was that? "Listen! Listen!" she bade her heart – her heart that had kept so still, but now bounded with tumultuous throbs that dulled her ears. Nearer and nearer came the sounds, till the welcome thud of a horse's hoof rang out clearly.

"O God! O God! O God!" she panted, for they were very close before she could make sure. She rushed to the door, and with her baby in her arms tore frantically at its bolts and bars.

Out she darted at last, and running madly along, saw the horseman beyond her in the distance. She called to him in Christ's Name, in her babe's name, still flying like the wind with the speed that deadly peril gives. But the distance grew greater and greater between them, and when she reached the creek her prayers turned to wild shrieks, for there crouched the man she feared, with outstretched arms that caught her as she fell. She knew he was offering terms if she ceased to struggle and cry for help, though louder and louder did she cry for it, but it was only when the man's hand gripped her throat, that the cry of "Murder" came from her lips. And when she ceased, the startled curlews took up the awful sound, and flew wailing "Murder! Murder!" over the horseman's head.

"By God!" said the boundary rider, "it's been a dingo right enough! Eight killed up here, and there's more down in the creek – a ewe and a lamb, I'll bet; and the lamb's alive!" He shut out the sky with his hand, and watched the crows that were circling round and round, nearing the earth one moment, and the next shooting skywards. By that he knew the lamb must be alive; even a dingo will spare a lamb sometimes.

Yes, the lamb was alive, and after the manner of lambs of its kind did not know its mother when the light came. It had sucked the still warm breasts, and laid its little head on her bosom, and slept till the morn. Then, when it looked at the swollen disfigured face, it wept and would have crept away, but for the hand that still clutched its little gown. Sleep was nodding its golden head and swaying its small body, and the crows were close, so close, to the mother's wide-open eyes, when the boundary rider galloped down.

"Jesus Christ!" he said, covering his eyes. He told afterwards how the little child held out its arms to him, and how he was forced to cut its gown that the dead hand held.

It was election time, and as usual the priest had selected a candidate. His choice was so obviously in the interests of the squatter, that Peter Hennessey's reason, for once in his life, had over-ridden superstition, and he had dared promise his vote to another. Yet he was uneasy, and every time he woke in the night (and it was often), he heard the murmur of his mother's voice. It came through the partition, he knew she was praying in her bed; but when the sounds came under the door, she was on her knees before the little Altar in the corner that enshrined the statue of the Blessed Virgin and Child.

"Mary, Mother of Christ! Save my son! Save him!" prayed she in the dairy as she strained and set the evening's milking. "Sweet Mary! For the love of Christ, save him!" The grief in her old face made the morning meal so bitter, that to avoid her he came late to his dinner. It made him so cowardly, that he could not say good-bye to her, and when night fell on the eve of the election day, he rode off secretly.

He had thirty miles to ride to the township to record his vote. He cantered briskly along the great stretch of plain that had nothing but stunted cotton bush to play shadow to the full moon, which glorified a sky of earliest spring. The bruised incense of the flowering clover rose up to him, and the glory of the night appealed vaguely to his imagination, but he was preoccupied with his present act of revolt.

Vividly he saw his mother's agony when she would find him gone. Even at that moment, he felt sure, she was praying.

"Mary! Mother of Christ!" He repeated the invocation, half unconsciously, when suddenly to him, out of the stillness, came Christ's Name – called loudly in despairing accents.

"For Christ's sake! Christ's sake! Christ's sake!" called the voice. Good Catholic that he had been, he crossed himself before he dared to look back. Gliding across a ghostly patch of pipe-clay, he saw a white-robed figure with a babe clasped to her bosom.

All the superstitious awe of his race and religion swayed his brain. The moonlight on the gleaming clay was a "heavenly light" to him, and he knew the white figure not for flesh and blood, but for the Virgin and Child of his mother's prayers. Then, good Catholic that once more he was, he put spurs to his horse's sides and galloped madly away.

His mother's prayers were answered, for Hennessey was the first to record his vote – for the priest's candidate. Then he sought the priest at home, but found that he was out rallying the voters. Still, under the influence of his blessed vision, Hennessey would not go near the public-houses, but wandered about the outskirts of the town for hours, keeping apart from the towns-people, and fasting as penance. He was subdued and mildly ecstatic, feeling as a repentant chastened child, who awaits only the kiss of peace.

And at last, as he stood in the graveyard crossing himself with reverent awe, he heard in the gathering twilight the roar of many voices crying the name of the visitor at the election. It was well with the priest.

Again Hennessey sought him. He was at home, the housekeeper said, and led him into the dimly lighted study. His seat was immediately opposite a large picture, and as the housekeeper turned up the lamp, once more the face of the Madonna and Child looked down on him, but this time silently, peacefully. The half-parted lips of the Virgin were smiling with compassionate tenderness; her eyes seemed to beam with the forgiveness of an earthly mother for her erring but beloved child.

He fell on his knees in adoration. Transfixed, the wondering priest stood, for mingled with the adoration, "My Lord and my God!" was the exaltation, "And hast Thou chosen me?"

"What is it, Peter?" said the priest.

"Father," he answered reverently; and with loosened tongue he poured forth the story of his vision.

"Great God!" shouted the priest, "and you did not stop to save her! Do you not know? Have you not heard?"

Many miles further down the creek a man kept throwing an old cap into a water-hole. The dog would bring it out and lay it on the opposite side to where the man stood, but would not allow the man to catch him, though it was only to wash the blood of the sheep from his mouth and throat, for the sight of blood made the man tremble. But the dog also was guilty.

3.3 OVERALL STRUCTURE OF *THE CHOSEN VESSEL*

The story of *The Chosen Vessel* is superficially, simple enough. It tells of a woman, alone in her *Bush* home with her baby. A visit by a *swagman* during the day unsettles her and she is afraid that he may return. When he does, she is terror-stricken. Just at the moment when he is about to enter her house with his "cruel eyes, lascivious mouth and gleaming knife", she hears horse hooves. She runs to the man on the horse for help but, Peter Hennessey, the rider, with his own particular problems, thinks that she is an apparition and rides away. The next day her corpse is found by a boundary rider, still holding on to her baby.

A summary of this sort cannot bring out the powerful undercurrents of the intense little story. What marks it as a gem in its genre is the telling itself. The story is repeatedly told in the past. There is a fascinating backward-forward movement of the tenses. We meet the unnamed woman in the evening when she is penning up her calf for the night. The first visit of the *swagman* in the morning is told in the past tense. Again, the identity of the horse - man to whom she runs for help, is not explained till later. Peter Hennessey gives his own account of a woman in white with a baby clasped to her bosom, running towards him. The actual rape and murder takes place in a black out of language. This telling of the story in flashbacks gives it an edge of suspense without lessening its dramatic immediacy.

The story itself can be divided into five unequal configurations. The first, when the woman goes about her work, thinking about the morning's encounter with the *swagman*. The second, when the *swagman* comes back at night, the woman's subsequent fear ending with her flight, rape and murder. The short third part is about how her body is discovered by a boundary rider. The fourth part is the succinct account of Peter Hennessey's life and politics culminating in his ecstatic vision of what he thought was the *Madonna* and *her child*, ending with his knowledge of her real identity. The miniscule fifth forms the conclusion of the story and tells about the murderer. It is an intriguing and haunting end because Baynton talks about how "the sight of blood made the man tremble". The story ends on a note of brittle equipoise.

3.4 INTERPRETATIONS

3.4.1 A Feminist Reading of *The Chosen Vessel*

The most noteworthy feature of *The Chosen Vessel* is the depiction of the time-honoured division of woman as an object of sexual desire and as a mother/goddess. However, the way Baynton does it is replete with hidden ironies and nuances. The anonymous young wife and mother, alone with the male baby are defenseless and vulnerable. Her urban/ town background is mentioned in passing which makes her even more alienated from

the *Bush*. Her loneliness is overwhelming and her defenses fragile. She has to resort to such flimsy pretences as impersonating a male voice to make the *swagman* think that there is a man in her house. She leaves food and her mother's brooch to bribe any intruder. She does not have any money to give the *swagman* showing how women in the bush were economically dependent on their husbands. Her husband himself never takes her fears of being left behind alone seriously. He taunts her by saying that, "nobody'ud want ter run away with yew." Of course, he is proved wrong.

The story takes up the bisection of woman as object of lust and woman as nurturer at the very beginning. The first sentence that the woman thinks about the morning visit of the swagman goes like this

> "She feared more from the look of eyes, and the gleam of his teeth, as he watched her newly awakened baby beat its impatient fists upon her covered breasts, than from the knife that was sheathed in the belt at his waist."

The same breasts that nurture the baby also awaken the glint of lust in the *swagman's* eyes. This motif is carried on throughout the story with several ironic undertones. The apparently harmonious relationship between mother and child, cow and calf, ewe and lamb, is invalidated by the agony of Peter Hennessey's mother praying for the salvation of her son's soul. The effect of the story is intensified by Hennessey's grotesque mistake of confusing a victim of rape with the virgin mother.

The story is also enlivened by several indirect barbs against the Church. The priest with political interests, "rallying the voters", the repetition of the words "good Catholic" for Hennessey when he rides away from the woman, entirely undermining the meaning of the words; show Baynton's concern about the meaninglessness of institutionalised religion.

3.4.2. Reflections on the *Bush* in *The Chosen Vessel*

The Bush had earlier been glorified by most male writers as the embodiment or as an identifying marker of the Australian nation and as a space within which male camaraderie, strength and machismo flourished. Baynton totally changes this bias. Peter Hennessey may have the time to notice the rugged beauty of the Bush

> "He cantered briskly along the great stretch of plain that had nothing but stunted cotton bush to play shadow to the full moon, which glorified a sky of earliest spring. The bruised incense of the flowering clover rose up to him, and the glory of the night appealed vaguely to his imagination."

For the woman, however, the *Bush* is an "enemy", just as the cow is an enemy, to be met head on with a stick. In fact, the gender divisions of the story are quite stereotypical. The men are all out in the open, traversing vast spaces. The husband, a shearer, had gone away to his shed, leaving his wife to look after the homestead and the baby. The priest is politically active, an important and busy man involved with his community. The *swagman* is almost a vagabond with his dog and his knife. And Hennessey rides to town to cast his vote. It is 1896 and there is, of course, no question of his mother going out to vote. She too is left behind to pray for her son's soul. The two women can be seen as appendages to the men, they do not really exist in their own right. The woman in the Bush does not even have the right to fear for her own safety, and as the story tells us, her self-esteem was frequently sullied by her husband's jibes and insults.

3.4.3 Motherhood and Baynton

Baynton has usually been seen by various critics as a writer who valorised the maternal instinct. In the collected works of Barbara Baynton, entitled by her name, the editors, Sally Krimmer and Alan Lawson write about this facet in their introduction to the text.

> "In contrast to the pervading vision of moral chaos and cruelty Baynton's images of motherhood emerge as a hope for humanity ... Amongst all the destructive, environmental forces ... motherhood is the one creative element."

This can be seen in the relationship between the murdered mother and the child. She does not let go of her child even after death. But the correlation is not without its own tensions as can be seen in the flawed bond between Hennessey and his mother. The bitterness and guilt in the relationship is almost galling for Hennessey and leads to not one, but two episodes of disorientation and confusion. The first is the obvious one when he thinks that the woman about to be raped and killed is a supernatural vision of the Virgin and her child. The second is when he actually sees a picture of the Madonna and Child in the Priest's house. The religious halo of the picture is eroded until he sees an ordinary woman with "half-parted lips" and eyes "beam(ing) with the forgiveness of an earthly mother for her erring but beloved child." The passion of her motherhood brings her down to ordinariness. And it is Hennessey's own blemished understanding of motherhood that makes her so ultimately proving her to be as counterfeit as his 'vision' of the night before.

3.5 BARBARA BAYNTON'S IDEOLOGICAL POSITION: CONTEXTUALISING *THE CHOSEN VESSEL*

In order to understand *The Chosen Vessel* we have to place it within the context of Baynton's entire oeuvre, see it as being framed by her own social/ideological concerns. To look at *The Chosen Vessel* as an isolated text is a risk that we cannot take because it would give us a false understanding of Baynton as a writer. I will try to connect *The Chosen Vessel* with her most overriding concerns that abound in all her writings. Namely her insistence on sexual difference between men and women and the special status accorded to pregnancy, childbirth and the maternal instinct in women. In fact the first point of sexual difference incorporates the second too to a certain extent because according to Baynton the maternal in women is what leads them to be superior to men; peace loving, caring, cultured as opposed to the crudeness, bestiality and the callousness of the men who are closely connected to the same adjectival qualities of the Bush.
A false reading of Baynton's ideological stance as a writer is what I wish to avoid and the isolated reading of *The Chosen Vessel* would lead us to exactly that: an incomplete comprehension of the tensions and contradictions in Baynton's writings. It is very easy to label Baynton as a feminist writer based on analysis of *The Chosen Vessel* but my contention is that her insistence on sexual difference based on the biological superiority of women leads her to a trap of her own making.

Firstly, I wish to clarify what exactly I mean by sexual difference. I use the term in the way the "the gynocritics" (a word coined by Elaine Showalter) of feminism use it — as an écriture féminine, the inscription of the female body and female difference in language and text. Hélène Cixous, one of the leading advocates of écriture féminine has said that there have been very few writers who have incribed their femininity into their writing. However as Elaine Showalter puts it:

> "The concept of écriture féminine provides a way of talking about womens' writing which reasserts the value of the feminine and identifies the theoretical

> project of feminist criticism as the analaysis of difference", (Elaine Showalter, Writing and Sexual Difference, p. 16, 1982).

If we follow this line of argument we can go further and say with Adrienne Rich that –

> "female biology ... has far more radical implications than we have yet come to appreciate. Patriarchal thought has limited female biology to its own narrow specifications. The feminist vision has recoiled from female biology for these reasons; it will, I believe, come to view our physicality as a resource rather than a destiny", (Adrienne Rich, On Lies, Secrets and Silence, p. 35, 1979).

I wish to first see Barbara Baynton as a writer who consciously and deliberately inscribed her feminine, biological self into her writings. Her repeated metaphors of pregnancy and motherhood is her way of citing the difference between men and women. In *A Dreamer* she talks about a young pregnant woman who is travelling home to see her mother. It is full of references to the special bond between mother and child. As the unnamed woman walks she listens to the birds.

> "From the branch of a tree overhead she heard a watchful mother-bird's warning call, and the twitter of the disturbed nestlings. The tender care of this bird-mother awoke memories of her childhood. What mattered the lonely darkness when it led to mother?"

And later the authorial voice says "She quickened her pace, but did not run, motherhood is instinct in woman."

I have already talked at length about the intense maternal instinct of the woman in *The Chosen Vessel*. Baynton, infact, wrote about the death of her son with Dr Thomas Baynton in her poem *Goodbye Australia!* and *Baby* both written in 1899 and the former published in the **Bulletin**. I will quote *Goodbye Australia!* in full

> Good-bye to it all!
> God still holds the land, haply;
> Still holds me - its toy.
>
> First, our one child died;
> And the heart-broken mother
> The summer sun slew,
>
> Last flood drowned the stock;
> The fires took home, fencing ...
> Her garden is gone.
>
> So, I will leave it.
> The blue waters roll the ship
> In the dull, sad bay
>
> Forget you, loved hearts!...
> This dead wattle holds your dear
> Memory ever.
>
> Good-bye to the grave
> On the hill; for the far isles
> Are calling. Good-bye!

This poem, entitled *Good-bye, Australia!* is a lament. not only for the dead son but also for the dead, cruel land which has forgotten how to nurture. The summer sun. the floods and the fires all compound the death of the son and increase the agony several times. Nature itself seems to be ruthless and uncaring and she has to move to greener climes In another poem, *To My Country*, she apostrophises Australia as a mother who breeds slaves. The concluding lines are :

> "O, nurse of serfdom, how shalt thou be shriven
> Of threadbare knees and dust-enshrouded brow,
> Mother of slaves who dare not speak their thoughts."

The idea of the maternal is carried on to the idea of the nation; but here the mother is to be pitied for breeding such sad progeny, "a painful tale of desperate men." Baynton's notions about sexual difference seem very subtly to talk about Australia. and more specifically, the Bush as male, dead and non-nurturing. As the University of Queensland Press introduction to her collected works puts it succintly.

> "In most of the stories woman is shown as maternal, loving and peaceful while man is portrayed as brutally sexual. Man's natural home is the cruel landscape while woman is instinctively associated with civilization and the town."

Baynton's complex identification with writing about the maternal is not without its own set of problems specially when she connects all that is anti-woman with the Australian Bush. When she does this, she in fact plays into the hands of patriarchal ideology. In a way it can be seen as an agreement with "the structure of patriarchy that have divided labour into mens' production and womens' reproduction ... (and) the familiar dualism of mind and body, a key component of Western patriarchal ideology. Creation is the act of the mind that brings something new into existence. Procreation is the act of the body that reproduces the species,"(Susan Stanford Friedman, Speaking of Gender, p. 75, 1989).

In *The Chosen Vessel* we can see the crosscurrents of all these ideas: The public sphere of men, the private sphere of women; the physicality of the women (the breasts of the nursing mother which arouses the glint of lust in the *swagman's* eyes, even the physical ordinariness of the *Virgin Mary* as seen by Peter Hennessey) and the valorisation of the bond between mother and child. The patriarchal order had always wished to relegate women to the processes of her body. As Nietzche says, "Everything concerning woman is a puzzle. and everything concerning woman has one solution: it is named pregnancy."(Friedrich Nietzche, **Thus Spake Zarathustha** (1883), quoted by Susan Stanford Friedman, p. 78). Susan Stanford Friedman says that such ideas project "the concept of woman as a being without thought, without speech, in the creation of culture. Before the discovery of the ovum, woman's womb was represented as the mere material vessel into which man dropped his divine seed. But even after womens' active role in conception became understood, cultural representations of woman based on the mind-body split continued to separate the creation of man's mind from the procreation of woman's body," (ibid, p. 78) According to patriarchal definition, de Beauvoir writes, woman "has ovaries, a uterus; these pecularities imprison her in subjectivity, circumscribe her within the limits of her own nature. It is often said that she thinks with the glands," (Simone de Beauvoir, **The Second Sex** (1949) ibid, p. 78).

Baynton's characters do the same. They think with their glands except may be in the one powerful exception, *Squeaker's Mate*. The same themes recur in her novel **Human Toll**. The heroine Ursula Ewart is given Baynton's mother's maiden name and also the name of one of her grandchildren. Ursula wishes to write but she feels that she has to first move away from the Bush in order to be able to express herself creatively. Ursula is

herself an orphaned child who is taken care of by a reformed convict called Boshy. Her only friend is Andrew and she grows to love him but later, a girl called Mina tricks him into marrying her and also has a child by him. Mina however ill-treats the baby and attempts to kill it. Ursula runs away with the child into the *Bush* but gets lost and the baby also dies. Ursula cannot forget the child as it was when alive and loves it all the more now that it is dead. Ironically, it had been Ursula's possessive love for the baby that had made Mina want to kill her own child.

The strange twists of fate that occur because of Ursula's fevered love for the little child seem almost to happen in the realm of madness. The rescue of the child and the flight into the *Bush* is also a flight into hysteria and delirium. When alone, tired and thirsty with the stiffening child, she cannot even make herself steal one egg from an emu's nest. She imagines that "the robbed bird was standing disconsolately over ... its nest" and she restores the egg. The meaning of her life is bound to Andrew's baby and its death makes her lose her hold on reality until Andrew and an Aborigine save her. Interestingly the drama of her hysteria, in a stream-of-consciousness mode, happens in the space of the Bush where "nature was frankly brutal". Baynton's carries the idea of maternity further by delineating it as an instinct that may transcend even natural laws. The maternal instinct may rise as in Ursula's case "like the spring sap in a young tree" even for a child that is not her own.

But motherhood in Baynton is not without its own problematics. In *A Dreamer* the promise of reunion with the mother is brought to nought. I have already mentioned the guilt and tension in the relationship between Peter Hennessey and his mother.

In her most anthologised story, *Squeaker's Mate* we meet a woman who is entirely different. Her strength is destroyed after an accident and the rest of the story happens with her lying alone in a room while Squeaker brings home another mate who is pregnant. Her former "man's strength" had alienated her from other womenfolk because she had "no leisure for yarning" and her barrenness makes her all the more alien. She is the only woman with a name in Baynton's collection of short stories and ironically, her name is *Mary*, the symbol of pure motherhood.

Various questions remain unanswered. Is the woman so strong, silent, and indeed, almost traditionally masculine because she is not like other women ("her uncompromising independence", her barrenness; her physical strength)? The questions become more plentiful when we see that the manuscript of the story tells the birth of the new mate's child and the death of the woman in hospital. What would this new birth have meant? Of course, the published version ends with the old mate still in power with a broken back, an unfeeling brute of a husband and childless. Is she so strange and superior because of the very fact of her childlessness? Interestingly, her husband repeatedly compares her to a snake that has now to crawl on her belly in order to live. (He found the "Go and bite yourself like a snake", would instantly silence her). The same epithet is used for Mina, Andrew's wife who tries to kill her own child. As The UQP introduction says, "Mina is continually described in terms of a serpent, her "venomous eyes" blaze with "green malignity"; she hisses, is "snake-head"; and her hands are "scaly!" She is therefore the "symbolic embodiment" of "evil". So is the Squeaker's Mate evil because she cannot bear a child and behave like a woman? Is her broken back a punishment for having tried to transgress gender roles?

Baynton herself had very fixed ideas about womens' traditional roles. She valorised the space of the home and household duties for women. In an article entitled "Indignity of Domestic Service" she gives reasons why domestic servants are no longer happy with their work and prefer to go and work in factories. She writes that now they no longer have to be servile and self-effacing in front of the mistress of the house.

> "No hated caps, or other "I serve" - insignia, and above all, that paramount privilege, men as masters."
> "I may sound disloyal to my sex, yet, it is a common truth; show me a woman in power, and I will show you a despot. Indeed, in my anti-suffrage canvass in London, my surest and most successful weapon for anti-votes was to just ask shopgirls. "Would you rather have a woman over you than a man?" Towards the end she states – "The domestic life is in the - to women - political wilderness just the one oasis which they understand... It is selfish thoughtlessness that has made girls leave this most womanly pursuit for the demoralizing factory life, with its pernicious, far-reaching after-effects."

Baynton goes back to the traditional roles allowed to women by a patriarchal society. Her anti-suffragism and the glorifying of "domestic life" as a "womanly pursuit" can only mean that her accordance of special status to the maternal is not an inscription of the feminine body in the masculine world of literature, but rather a kind of "regressive biologism" (a term used by Susan Stanford Friedman for Anais Nin). It is not a feminist interruption in male literary discourse, as the "gynocritics" would wish it, but a regression into the same old dichotomy of the male mind and the female flesh. Seen in this light, we can say that Baynton is in concordance with the kind of "patriarchal thought that has limited female beiology to its own narrow specifications." She too "thinks with her glands" and makes her characters do the same. For her feminine difference and maternity are not radical departures but sentimentalized depictions within the traditional patriarchal framework.

3.6 LET US SUM UP

Baynton's *The Chosen Vessel* is a terse, yet exquisitely forceful story about the ruptured interpretations of 'woman', she is a victim of lust as well as of worship. The Biblical allusion of the title makes the story that bit more ironic and expands its field of reference. What has woman been chosen for after all? Hennessey asks a similar question towards the end of the story, "And hast thou chosen me?" But his hope too turns out to be chimaera. We also see that the *Bush* has been depicted as malevolent, malignant and vicious.

In the last section I have tried to place Baynton's story within her entire oeuvre from the point of view of sexual difference and the inscription of the maternal into her texts. But I was led to conclude that Baynton's claim for the superiority of the reproductive female body is ultimately regressive and falls within the traditional patriarchal division of male production and female reproduction.

3.7 QUESTIONS

(1) Can you read Barbara Baynton's story. *The Chosen Vessel* as an indictment of *Bush* life?

(2) Explain the dichotomy of whore/goddess (mother) with reference to *The Chosen Vessel.*

(3) Write a note on how the short story has been structured. Does it have a 'twist' in the end?

(4) Make a note of the stereotypical gender differences that have been depicted through the characters in the story.

(5) What is écriture féminine? Do you think Barbara Baynton's valorisation of the maternal is a feminist interruption in male-centred literary discourse?

3.8 SUGGESTED READINGS

(1) Sally Krimmer & Alan Lawson (eds.) : Barbara Baynton : Bush Studios, other stories, Human Toll, Verse, Essay and Letters (Univ. of Queensland Press : 1980).

(2) Laurie Hergenhan's: "Shafts into Our Fundamental Animalism": Barbara Baynton's Use of Maturalism in **Bush Studies**. (Australian Literary Studies, Vol.17, no:3, May 1996).

(3) Jack Lindsay's "Barbara Baynton: A Master of Naturalism." from **Decay and Renewal** (published by Wild & Woolley, Sydney, 1976). and

(4) A.A. Phillips', "Barbara Baynton and the Dissidence of the Nineties" from **The Australian Tradition** (Angus & Robertson Sydney, 1966)

UNIT 4 HENRY LAWSON : *The Drover's Wife* : *The Union Buries Its Dead*

Structure

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4.0 OBJECTIVES

This unit introduces you to Henry Lawson and his short stories. We shall begin with a biographical approach by noting how Henry Lawson's life has influenced his art. We will then examine the critical approaches to Henry Lawson and his short stories *The Drover's Wife* and *The Union Buries Its Dead*. This will naturally lead us to a discussion on the themes in his short stories and the literary styles or devices used by him.

4.1 INTRODUCTION

Henry Lawson (1867–1922) is the best known of the contributors of the journal *The Bulletin*. His poems and stories were also published in *The Worker* and other radical papers. Writing provided only a meagre source of income and in 1899 in an article titled *Pursuing Literature in Australia* for *The Bulletin* he wrote:

> "My advice to any young Australian writer whose talents have been recognized, would be to go steerage, stow away, swim and seek London, Yankeeland or Timbuctoo – rather than stay in Australia till his genius turn to gall, or beer. Or, failing this – and still in the interests of human nature and literature – to study anatomy, especially as applies to the cranium, and then shoot himself..."

What does he mean? Clearly he believes that the literary capitals of the world are in Europe and America. For any writer to remain in Australia would mean obscurity. Moreover, the writer's talents would go to seed in this country. In short, it would be suicidal for any established writer to remain in Australia. Does he seriously mean this or is he writing in a higher vein? Or does this statement emanate from his own experiences as a writer?

He wrote both poetry and prose but it is his prose that is far more telling and carefully worked out. He regarded prose as his forte, not poetry as he recounted to a reporter in 1917 though in the early years his reputation rested on his poetry. At one time it was even held widely that he was the national poet of Australia but he lacked imaginative penetration as a verse writer. The best of his work was accomplished in the first fifteen years of his writing career. His story collections are *Short Stories in Prose and Verse* (published by his mother in 1894), *While the Billy Boils* (1896), *On the Track* (1900), *Over the Sliprails* (1900), *The Country I Come From* (a retrospective selection published in Edinburgh in 1901), and *Children of the Bush* (London, 1902). It is his short stories that we will analyse in this unit.

4.2 HENRY LAWSON – A BRIEF HISTORY

Henry Lawson led a poverty-stricken life and worked as a coach painter before becoming a writer and an outback *swagman*. He spent the last twenty years as an alcoholic beggar who was "in the end more an object of pathos than veneration". Though, when he died he was honoured by a civic reception attended amongst others by the then Prime Minister Mr William M Hughes, himself (Adrian Mitchell, 1995:1).

Lawson's father, Peter (Niels) Larsen, was a Norwegian who came to Australia in the early 50s but had little luck as a gold-digger at *Ballarat*. His mother, Louisa, was the granddaughter of early settlers. She was also a short story writer and proprietor-cum-editor of a radical women's magazine *Dawn* (1888-1905). She was a profound influence not only on his upbringing but also on his literary life. His father, who worked on *roving* commissions for the gold diggers in the outback, was mostly away from the family. Later, in 1883 the parents separated. Despite hard times Louisa was determined to provide her children with a good education as she herself had been denied one by her father. She took the initiative to avail of the provisions of the New South Wales Public Schools Act of 1866-67 for the opening of 'provisional schools', where twenty-five children could attend school regularly, and got a school started at Eurunderee. Henry was enrolled in this school on October 2, 1876. Thus, though difficult, his education was fruitful. As he describes:

> "And we learnt the world in scraps from some ancient dingy maps
> Long discarded by the public schools in town;
> And as nearly as every book dated back to Captain Cook
> Our geography was somewhat upside-down..."
>
> (S.Murray-Smith, 1975:7)

Nevertheless, such education as he had was entirely due to Louisa's ambition for him, already conscious, as she must have been, that he was a talented lad. Yet as Bertha Lawson, his wife tells us Henry's mother "could never have given him the sympathetic understanding or affection he most needed". Bertha's impression is that this helped increase his sense of loneliness and diffidence as a boy. His hearing had been impaired from the age of nine though that does not seem to have hindered his sensitivity. His inner ear could catch the "pace and phrasing of colloquial speech" as well as "the rhythms and cadences" in his prose writings while his observation came from a "good eye for detail" (Adrian Mitchell, 1995:3). All these attributes helped him in his writing career.

The *Bulletin* encouraged material that dwelt with Australian life. It emphasised realism, especially of bush experience, and a casual, colloquial tone. It also encouraged dark, melodramatic but often compelling stories of the convict system. What many of the *Bulletin* writers had in common was the dominating site of tl e

bush and some of the values and myths associated with it and with "true Australianness, including male *mate ship* and *egalitarianism*"; values endorsed by all writers especially Lawson and Barbara Baynton (Laurie Hergenhan, 1986:xiv). You must note the special Australian sense in which *bush* is used to refer to the vast interiors, the outback. It displaced words such as *forest* and *wood*. With it developed a new vocabulary of the *Bush – bushranger, swag, stockman*– to replace the names of an intimate countryside in England. For instance, convicts escaping in the bush came to be called *bushrangers*. The appeal of the *bush* gradually came to be the great myth of Australian history. In a way, it satisfied the Australian quest for identity.

You will recall that early Australian writers were in one way or another trying to approximate to the literary models of the mother country, England. However, Australia was quite different and it was within this context that the search for an Australian identity became a challenge for Australian writers. From these biographical details we can form an idea of the forces that shaped and determined the way he viewed the world in general and his surroundings in particular in his literary works. The emergence of the *Bulletin* – its proprietors, editors, readers and writers, helped him, as it did many others, in displaying their literary skills. And, though the flowering of the short story in the 1890s coincides with the peaking of the European short story in *Chekhov*, the two are apparently not connected (Laurie Hergenhan, 1986:xiii).

Lawson was greatly preoccupied with Australia's past. The outback, in particular (of which he gained first hand knowledge and experience through the six month tramp from Bourke to Hungerford on Queensland border, funded in 1892 at the age of 25 by the *Bulletin)* and Australian society, in general, influenced most of his literary works. As a nationalist he wanted to give his country a past to be proud of. Phillips (1971:90) in his review asserts:

> Lawson's love for Australia came from deeper levels than the ventriloquial folk voice, but it hardly colours at all his picture of the Australian scene. Reading Lawson's work consecutively, one becomes more and more convinced that he was not merely objectively delineating the New South Wales plains; he was projecting on to them the landscape of his soul.

There is a similar quality in Lawson's recordings of Australian society. He celebrates Australia as a land of splendid opportunity only when he is speaking through the folk-voice humour or yarns. The tone is very different when he speaks for himself. In the stories, as we shall observe later, his chosen human subjects are the people on the roads, rejects from an unjust society, the slum's victims, the *Selectors* struggling against a hostile environment, their wives facing slow spiritual destruction through hardship and loneliness.

It has been argued that Lawson wrote his best work during a period of drought and economic depression. The year 1892, when he undertook the outback trip from Bourke to Hungerford, was a year of severe drought. However, in looking at his works, one becomes progressively convinced that it is insufficient to accept the claim that there are subjective compulsions controlling his emphases (Phillips 1971, Mathews 1971, Mitchell 1995).

A number of qualities combine to make Lawson an outstanding writer although over the years he has not been valued for the same reasons. The themes that appeal today are not the comic ones of resilient battling but those concerning "loneliness, failure.... and a compulsive insistence on the gossamer precariousness of happiness"

(Hergenhan 1986). It is through the clinical description of the bush in his short stories and sketches that Barnes (Barnes 1986) in his critical appraisal comments, " Henry Lawson is the voice of the bush and the bush is the heart of Australia." Similarly, H. M. Green in Roderick (1966:8) in his admiration of Lawson stated "to read him in a foreign country is to breathe the air of home."

The qualities of Lawson's style that critics have classified and admired are "economy and simplicity, his deft use of implication to evoke what is left unsaid, his feeling for the fragmentary random quality of life, his sympathy for the outsider and an air of truthfulness which is not simply a matter of sparse but telling documentation, but of feeling of sensitivity and voice" (Barnes 1986, Roderick 1966 and Kiernan 1987). In his commentary Barnes also observes that many have sought to imitate Lawson's simplicity but no other Australian writer has managed so well to create that effect of natural unaffected speech, which is Lawson's hallmark. The absence of pretension and of self-conscious literariness enabled Lawson to write in a genuinely simple style. Roderick while describing Lawson's influential role in Australia's literary scene points out that "Lawson's power lies in his ability to capture tersely a mood or a wisp of sentiment" in his stories. Can you think of any Indian writers whose style resembles Lawson's?

To sum up briefly then, Lawson's strength lay in giving expression to the voice of the bush and his ability to represent things, mood, scene etc. with brevity and terseness as they really are (realism). An examination of two of his stories will help us in understanding him and his writing better. Having looked at Lawson's life and the factors that influenced his writing, it would be apt for us to turn to his short stories now. In the next section we shall examine closely the short story *The Drover's Wife* to see what we can learn of life in Australia at that time, particularly of life in the *bush*. We will also find here a sketch of what a woman's life was like in the *bush*. We shall also note the stylistic devices that Lawson employs. Now read the story carefully, making notes in the margins as you go along.

What do we mean by the drover's wife? Who is a drover? A typically Australian usage, drover means a person who moves along minding cattle/ sheep across vast distances, in search for greener pastures and water for the flock. He is akin to a shepherd/ cowherd. The title tells us that we will read about a woman who is married to a drover. And yet when we read the story, we find that the drover is an absent presence. He is never there and the wife is hardly a wife at all – she is a mother, the farmer, the protector of the farm and the family.

4.3 *THE DROVER'S WIFE* - TEXT

Henry Lawson's story "The Drover's Wife" was originally published as a book in the collection entitled **While the Billy Boils**. It is a wonderful story that portrays the hardship of life in the Bush of Australia from a woman's perspective – quite unusual for Australian writing of the period. This is probably Lawson's best-known work, very popular in anthologies of Australian short stories.

The two-roomed house is built of round timber, slabs, and stringy-bark, and floored with split slabs. A big bark kitchen standing at one end is larger than the house itself, veranda included.

Bush all around – bush with no horizon, for the country is flat. No ranges in the distance. The bush consists of stunted, rotten native apple-trees. No undergrowth. Nothing to relieve the eye save the darker green of a few she-oaks which are sighing

above the narrow, almost waterless creek. Nineteen miles to the nearest sign of civilisation – a shanty on the main road.

The drover, an ex-squatter, is away with sheep. His wife and children are left here alone. Four ragged, dried-up-looking children are playing about the house. Suddenly one of them yells: "Snake! Mother, here's a snake!"

The gaunt, sun-browned bushwoman dashes from the kitchen, snatches her baby from the ground, holds it on her left hip, and reaches for a stick.

"Where is it?"
"Here! Gone in the wood-heap;" yells the eldest boy – a sharp-faced urchin of eleven.
"Stop there, mother! I'll have him. Stand back! I'll have the beggar!"
"Tommy, come here, or you'll be bit. Come here at once when I tell you, you little wretch!"
The youngster comes reluctantly, carrying a stick bigger than himself. Then he yells, triumphantly:

"There it goes – under the house!" and darts away with club uplifted. At the same time the big, black, yellow-eyed dog-of-all-breeds, who has shown the wildest interest in the proceedings, breaks his chain and rushes after that snake. He is a moment late, however, and his nose reaches the crack in the slabs just as the end of its tail disappears. Almost at the same moment the boy's club comes down and skins the aforesaid nose. Alligator takes small notice of this, and proceeds to undermine the building; but he is subdued after a struggle and chained up. They cannot afford to lose him.

The drover's wife makes the children stand together near the dog-house while she watches for the snake. She gets two small dishes of milk and sets them down near the wall to tempt it to come out; but an hour goes by and it does not show itself.

It is near sunset, and a thunderstorm is coming. The children must be brought inside. She will not take them into the house, for she knows the snake is there, and may at any moment come up through a crack in the rough slab floor; so she carries several armfuls of firewood into the kitchen, and then takes the children there. The kitchen has no floor – or, rather, an earthen one – called a "ground floor" in this part of the bush. There is a large, roughly-made table in the centre of the place. She brings the children in, and makes them get on this table. They are two boys and two girls – mere babies. She gives them some supper, and then, before it gets dark, she goes into the house, and snatches up some pillows and bedclothes – expecting to see or lay or hand on the snake any minute. She makes a bed on the kitchen table for the children, and sits down beside it to watch all night.

She has an eye on the corner, and a green sapling club laid in readiness on the dresser by her side; also her sewing basket and a copy of the *Young Ladies' Journal*. She has brought the dog into the room. Tommy turns in, under protest, but says he'll lie awake all night and smash that blinded snake.

His mother asks him how many times she has told not to swear.
He has his club with him under the bedclothes, and Jacky protests:
"Mummy! Tommy's skinnin' me alive wif his club. Make him take it out." Tommy:
"Shet up you little ——! D'yer want to be bit with the snake?"
Jacky shuts up.
"If yer bit," says Tommy, after a pause, "you'll swell up, an smell, an' turn red an' green an' blue all over till yer bust. Won't he mother?"

"Now then, don't frighten the child. Go to sleep," she says.
The two younger children go to sleep, and now and then Jacky complains of being "skeezed." More room is made for him. Presently Tommy says: "Mother! Listen to them (adjective) little 'possums. I'd like to screw their blanky necks."
And Jacky protests drowsily.
"But they don't hurt us, the little blanks!"
Mother: "There, I told you you'd teach Jacky to swear." But the remark makes her smile. Jacky goes to sleep.
Presently Tommy asks: "Mother! Do you think they'll ever extricate the (adjective) kangaroo?"
"Lord! How am I to know, child? Go to sleep."
"Will you wake me if the snake comes out?"
"Yes. Go to sleep."

Near midnight. The children are all asleep and she sits there still, sewing and reading by turns. From time to time she glances round the floor and wall-plate, and, whenever she hears a noise, she reaches for the stick. The thunderstorm comes on, and the wind, rushing through the cracks in the slab wall, threatens to blow out her candle. She places it on a sheltered part of the dresser and fixes up a newspaper to protect it. At every flash of lightning, the cracks between the slabs gleam like polished silver. The thunder rolls, and the rain comes down in torrents.

Alligator lies at full length on the floor, with his eyes turned towards the partition. She knows by this that the snake is there. There are large cracks in that wall opening under the floor of the dwelling-house.

She is not a coward, but recent events have shaken her nerves. A little son of her brother-in-law was lately bitten by a snake, and died. Besides, she has not heard from her husband for six months, and is anxious about him.

He was a drover, and started squatting here when they were married.

The drought of 18— ruined him. He had to sacrifice the remnant of his flock and go droving again. He intends to move his family into the nearest town when he comes back, and, in the meantime, his brother, who keeps a shanty on the main road, comes over about once a month with provisions. The wife has still a couple of cows, one horse, and a few sheep. The brother-in-law kills one of the latter occasionally, gives her what she needs of it, and takes the rest in return for other provisions.

She is used to being left alone. She once lived like this for eighteen months. As a girl she built the usual castles in the air; but all her girlish hopes and aspirations have long been dead. She finds all the excitement and recreation she needs in the *Young Ladies' Journal*, and Heaven help her! Takes a pleasure in the fashion plates.

Her husband is an Australian, and so is she. He is careless, but a good enough husband. If he had the means he would take her to the city and keep her there like a princess. They are used to being apart, or at least she is. "No use fretting," she says. He may forget sometimes that he is married; but if he has a good cheque when he comes back he will give most of it to her. When he had money he took her to the city several times – hired a railway sleeping compartment, and put up at the best hotels. He also bought her a buggy, but they had to sacrifice that along with the rest.

The last two children were born in the bush – one while her husband was bringing a drunken doctor, by force, to attend to her. She was alone on this occasion, and very weak. She had been ill with fever. She prayed to God to send her assistance. God sent

Black Mary – the "whitest" gin in all the land. Or, at least, God sent "King Jimmy" first, and he sent Black Mary. He put his black face round the door post, took in the situation at a glance, and said cheerfully: "All right, Missis – I bring my old woman, she down alonga creek."

One of the children died while she was here alone. She rode nineteen miles for assistance, carrying the dead child.

It must be near one or two o'clock. The fire is burning low. Alligator lies with his head resting on his paws, and watches the wall. He is not a very beautiful dog, and the light shows numerous old wounds where the hair will not grow. He is afraid of nothing on the face of the earth or under it. He will tackle a bullock as readily as he will tackle a flea. He hates all other dogs – except kangaroo-dogs – and has a marked dislike to friends or relations of the family. They seldom call, however. He sometimes makes friends with strangers. He hates snakes and has killed many, but he will be bitten some day and die; most snake-dogs end that way. Now and then the bushwoman lays down her work and watches, and listens, and thinks. She thinks of things in her own life, for there is little else to think about.

The rain will make the grass grow, and this reminds her how she fought a bush fire once while her husband was away. The grass was long, and very dry, and the fire threatened to burn her out. She put on an old pair of her husband's trousers and beat out the flames with a green bough, till great drops of sooty perspiration stood out on her forehead and ran in streaks down her blackened arms. The sight of his mother in trousers greatly amused Tommy, who worked like a little hero by her side, but the terrified baby howled lustily for his "mummy." The fire would have mastered her but for four excited bushmen who arrived in the nick of time. It was a mixed-up affair all round; when she went to take up the baby he screamed and struggled convulsively, thinking it was a "black man;" and Alligator, trusting more to the child's sense than his own instinct, charged furiously, and (being old and slightly deaf) did not in his excitement at first recognise his mistress's voice, but continued to hang on to the moleskins until choked off by Tommy with a saddle-strap. The dog's sorrow for his blunder, and his anxiety to let it be known that it was all a mistake, was as evident as his ragged tail and a twelve-inch grin could make it. It was a glorious time for the boys; a day to look back to, and talk about, and laugh over for many years. She thinks how she fought a flood during her husband's absence. She stood for hours in the drenching downpour, and dug an overflow gutter to save the dam across the creek. But she could not save it. There are things that a bushwoman cannot do. Next morning the dam was broken, and her heart was nearly broken too, for she thought how her husband would feel when he came home and saw the result of years of labour swept away. She cried then.

She also fought the *pleuro-pneumonia* – dosed and bled the few remaining cattle, and wept again when her two best cows died.
Again, she fought a mad bullock that besieged the house for a day. She made bullets and fired at him through cracks in the slabs with an old shot-gun. He was dead in the morning. She skinned him and got seventeen-and-sixpence for the hide.

She also fights the crows and eagles that have designs on her chickens. He plan of campaign is very original. The children cry "Crows, mother!" and she rushes out and aims a broomstick at the birds as though it were a gun, and says "Bung!" The crows leave in a hurry; they are cunning, but a woman's cunning is greater.

Occasionally a bushman in the horrors, or a villainous-looking sundowner, comes and nearly scares the life out of her. She generally tells the suspicious-looking

stranger that her husband and two sons are at work below the dam, or over at the yard, for he always cunningly inquires for the boss.

Only last week a gallows-faced swagman – having satisfied himself that there were no men on the place – threw his swag down on the veranda, and demanded tucker. She gave him something to eat; then he expressed the intention of staying for the night. It was sundown then. She got a batten from the sofa, loosened the dog, and confronted the stranger, holding the batten in one hand and the dog's collar with the other. "Now you go!" she said. He looked at her and at the dog, said "All right, mum," in a cringing tone and left. She was a determined-looking woman, and Alligator's yellow eyes glared unpleasantly – besides, the dog's chawing-up apparatus greatly resembled that of the reptile he was named after.

She has few pleasures to think of as she sits here alone by the fire, on guard against a snake. All days are much the same for her; but on Sunday afternoon she dresses herself, tidies the children, smartens up baby, and goes for a lonely walk along the bush-track, pushing an old perambulator in front of her. She does this every Sunday. She takes as much care to make herself and the children look smart as she would if she were going to do the block in the city. There is nothing to see, however, and not a soul to meet. You might walk for twenty miles along this track without being able to fix a point in your mind, unless you are a bushman. This is because of the everlasting, maddening sameness of the stunted trees – that monotony which makes a man long to break away and travel as far as trains can go, and sail as far as ship can sail – and farther.

But this bushwoman is used to the loneliness of it. As a girl-wife she hated it, but now she would feel strange away from it.

She is glad when her husband returns, but she does not gush or make a fuss about it. She gets him something good to eat, and tidies up the children.

She seems contented with her lot. She loves her children, but has no time to show it. She seems harsh to them. Her surroundings are not favourable to the development of the "womanly" or sentimental side of nature.

It must be nearing morning now; but the clock is in the dwelling-house. Her candle is nearly done; she forgot that she was out of candles. Some more wood must be got to keep the fire up, and so she shuts the dog inside and hurries around to the woodheap. The rain has cleared off. She seizes a stick, pulls it out, and – crash! The whole pile collapses. Yesterday she bargained with a stray blackfellow to bring her some wood, and while he was at work she went in search of a missing cow. She was absent an hour or so, and the native black made good use of his time. On her return she was so astonished to see a good heap of wood by the chimney, and she gave him an extra fig of tobacco, and praised him for not being lazy. He thanked her, and left with head erect and chest well out. He was the last of his tribe and a King; but he had built that wood-heap hollow.

She is hurt now, and tears spring to her eyes as she sits down again by the table. She takes up a handkerchief to wipe the tears away, but pokes her eyes with her bare fingers instead. The handkerchief is full of holes, and she finds that she has put her thumb through one, and her forefinger through another.

This makes her laugh, to the surprise of the dog. She has a keen, very keen, sense of the ridiculous; and some time or other she will amuse bushmen with the story.

She has been amused before like that. One day she sat down "to have a good cry," as she said – and the old cat rubbed against her dress and "cried too." Then she had to laugh.

It must be near daylight now. The room is very close and hot because of the fire. Alligator still watches the wall from time to time. Suddenly he becomes greatly interested; he draws himself a few inches nearer the partition, and a thrill runs though his body. The hair on the back of neck begins to bristle, and the battle-light is in his yellow eyes. She knows what this means, and lays her hand on the stick. The lower end of one of the partition slabs has a large crack on both sides. An evil pair of small, bright bead-like eyes glisten at one of these holes. The snake – a black one – comes slowly out, about a foot, and moves its head up and down. The dog lies still, and the woman sits as one fascinated. The snake comes out a foot further. She lifts her stick, and the reptile, as though suddenly aware of danger, sticks his head in through the crack on the other side of the slab, and hurries to get his tail round after him. Alligator springs, and his jaws come together with a snap. He misses, for his nose is large, and the snake's body close down on the angle formed by the slabs and the floor. He snaps again as the tail comes round. He has the snake now, and tugs it out eighteen inches. Thud, thud comes the woman's club on the ground. Alligator pulls again. Thud, thud. Alligator gives another pull and he has the snake out – a black brute, five feet long. The head rises to dart about, but the dog has the enemy close to the neck. He is a big, heavy dog, but quick as a terrier. He shakes the snake as though he felt the original curse in common with mankind. The eldest boy wakes up, seizes his stick, and tries to get out of bed, but his mother forces him back with a grip of iron. Thud, thud – the snake's back is broken in several places. Thud, thud – it's head is crushed, and Alligator's nose skinned again.

She lifts the mangled reptile on the point of her stick, carries it to the fire, and throws it in; then piles on the wood and watches the snake burn. The boy and the dog watch too. She lays her hand on the dog's head, and all the fierce, angry light dies out of his yellow eyes. The younger children are quieted, and presently go to sleep. The dirty-legged boy stands for a moment in his shirt, watching the fire. Presently he looks up at her, sees the tears in her eyes, and, throwing his arms around her neck exclaims:

"Mother, I won't never go drovin' blarst me if I do!"
And she hugs him to her worn-out breast and kisses him; and they sit thus together while the sickly daylight breaks over the bush.

4.3.1 The Socio-Cultural Context

Lawson points out in the story that the drover's wife and her husband are Australians. The story first appeared in the *Bulletin* and was written when Lawson was only twenty five years old (1892), it is important to remember that the *Bulletin* was occupied at the time with the issue of nationalism. It was just a decade before the creation of the *Federation* that is it is set in the last decades of the nineteenth century. Lawson was himself a nationalist and hence this attachment of the characters to their country. Lawson portrays life lived in the bush as it was. As Roderick (1966) points out, " His pictures of life convey to us a great sense of the background of the whole people's life; their struggles and cares, their humour and outlook...."

4.3.2 Theme And Characters

We have here the story of a woman who as we can see from the title of the story is not anyone in her own right. She is identified as the wife of a drover who is away "droving" while she is left alone in the bush to fend for herself and her children. The

story revolves around her life, the problems she faces in the bush while her husband, an *ex-squatter* whose property has failed, is away and how she deals with the present danger of the snake. Hers is a life of hardship. She has had to deal with villainous-looking *sundowners*, death, and childbirth all by herself. Also grassfires, mad bullocks and threatening dams have to be encountered. Yet life has little to offer and life in the bush is monotonous with very little to do except maybe take a walk. There are no opportunities to socialise, as there are no people that she can meet here, her hopes and dreams have been lost in the Bush and her husband who is mostly away may even forget that he is married.

Lawson's objective here is not merely to document the place and the incident with the snake, nor is it merely to demonstrate the bravery of Australian pioneer settlers and the nature of the hardship they endured in the outback. Notice the way in which Lawson introduces his characters in a brief and detailed manner:

> The drover, an ex-squatter is away with sheep. His wife and children are left here alone....Four ragged, dried-up looking children are playing about the house. Suddenly one of them yells: snake! Mother, here's a snake....The gaunt sun-browned bushwoman dashes from the kitchen, snatches her lofty baby from the ground, holds it on her left hip, and reaches for a stick.

This description introduces the reader to the characters in the story. We also get the impression from the description of their dressing and physical appearance that they are a poor family struggling against the odds to survive. This is the author's style of building up his stories. In spite of the hardships we see the drover's wife as strong, loving, brave and resilient. In fact she appears to be the quintessential mother. We get a powerful description of her in the story:

> She has few pleasures to think of as she sits here alone by the fire on guard against a snake.... All days are much the same to her. This bushwoman is used to the loneliness of it. As a girl-wife she hated it, but now she would feel strange away from it.... She seems contented with her lot. She loves her children but has no time to show it.

The episode of the snake defines life, the strain of waiting. Yet there is something more than stoicism or fatalism here – the full weight of responsibility falls on the woman while the reader is being told that the bush is indeed "no place for a woman"; he is at the same time also depicting the heroic deeds of the woman in the outback. From the story we get a sense, a feel of the boredom and monotony of the environment:

> There is nothing to see, however, and not a soul to meet. You might walk for twenty miles along this track without being able to fix a point in your mind, unless you are a bushman. This is because of the everlasting, maddening sameness of the stunted trees – that monotony which makes a man long to break away and travel as far as trains can go, and sail as far as ships can sail – and further.

If a man cannot endure such a place, then surely it is not a place for woman to persevere here. Yet Lawson describes in the story how the drover's wife is able to fend for herself and her children despite these hardships. Notice how the writer subtly brings up this point rather indirectly without having to lecture to the reader. She is also portyayed as the fiercely protective mother of her children: She "snatches her baby from the ground, holds it on her left hip and reaches for a stick" to kill the

snake. The safety of her children is indeed dear to her. Also, we notice that loyalty looms large in the bush: notice the son Tommy's emphatic declaration:

> Mother, I wont never go drovin': blast me if I do!

Tommy reckons that his mother should be protected; she should not be left alone. This precocious loyalty, argues Mitchell (1955:10) "is the basis of defence against defeat".

The image of the drover's wife subverts the stereotype of the woman as a helpless, clinging creature who, needs to be protected by the powerful male. And even though in the story, she is referred to as the drover's wife, she is a powerful character in her own right.

Flashbacks are used as a device to reveal the pattern of the woman's life, its rigours, hardships and fears as well as, and more importantly, to invent the central incident with their own accumulating sense of spiritual and emotional exhaustion. The relief shown by the mother by hugging her son, Tommy, when the snake is finally killed exemplifies this:

> And she hugs him to her worn-out breast and kisses him, and they sit thus together while the sickly daylight breaks over the bush.

The flashbacks are significant also (Mathews, 1971:ii) in exposing the pitiable nature of the victory of killing one snake because it is not the first and most certainly not the last in a succession of crises, each of which further expends the dogged human spirit. It is not pioneering steadfastness that Lawson is portraying but slow human disintegration. It is the compassion of the story, its awareness of the human plight and not archetypal possibility, which suggest that Lawson's bush portrayals may be capable of fruitful development.

4.3.3 Use Of Language

In *The Drover's Wife* and indeed in Lawson's other stories we find uniqueness of sentences that are full of nouns but scarce on adjectives and excluding verbs. Such sentences are effective in emphasising the disjointed and discontinuous country:

> Bush all round – bush with no horizon, for the country is flat. No ranges in the distance.... No undergrowth. Nothing to relieve the eye.

The verbs that do occur are in the present tense, as in "the country *is* flat". It lacks connection with the past but then it is the human resilience that is significant, the heroism of the ordinary life – the woman having dealt with all sorts of situations – the situations we have already mentioned, such as saving the dam in a downpour, facing mad bullocks, deceitful sundowners, for example, the one who made a hollow woodheap for her despite all the trust that she put in him. It is a graphic description that provides us a sketch of a woman in the bush and has a visual quality about it that makes it powerful. You feel the whole action as if enacted before you. And aspects of bush life are presented also through the confiding tone of the author. This form of narration, of telling the story, of 'yarning', is Lawson's preferred form. Though it is not a carefully constructed form, such as we find say in Mark Twain's stories, it is an equally artful form that is also quite appealing and effective. Note also the use of words that are typically Australian. Beginning with 'drover' as opposed to shepherd.

The other words that you may have encountered for the first time could be 'bush', 'tucker', 'swag', etc.

4.3.4 Landscape Portrayal

The Australian landscape was something that the early settlers had to reckon with, as it was different from the one they had grown up in and so the uniqueness of this landscape, its beauty remained to be captured. It was seen primarily as monotonous and in this story it matches with the monotony of the life of the drover's wife:

> The everlasting, maddening sameness of the stunted trees – that monotony which makes a man long to break away and travel as far as time can go, and sail as far as trains can go, and sail as far as ships can sail – and further.
>
> But this bushwoman is used to the loneliness of it. As a girl-wife she hated it, but now she would feel strange away from it.

The woman is adjusted and resigned to life in the bush. There is a connection she establishes with it. She has become a *bushwoman* – that seems to mark her identity because otherwise she is merely the drover's wife. The landscape may seem as cursed but Lawson qualifies it by saying that this is how it would seem 'unless you are a bushman'. Who could better adjust to it than those who lived in the bush? And remember Lawson refers to them as Australians, which is significant in marking their new identity. It becomes a matter of pride. Having read *The Drover's Wife* and analysed it, let us now take up the next Lawson story: *The Union Buries Its Dead* in the next section of our discussion.

4.4 *THE UNION BURIES ITS DEAD* – TEXT

While out boating one Sunday afternoon on a billabong across the river, we saw a young man on horseback driving some horses along the bank. He said it was a fine day, and asked if the water was deep there. The joker of our party said it was deep enough to drown him, and he laughed and rode further up. We didn't take much notice of him. Next day a funeral gathered at a corner pub and asked each other in to have a drink while waiting for the hearse. They passed away some of the time dancing jigs to a piano in the bar parlour. They passed away the rest of the time skylarking and fighting.

The defunct was a young union labourer, about twenty-five, who had been drowned the previous day while trying to swim some horses across a billbong of the Darling.

He was almost a stranger in town, and the fact of his having been a union man accounted for the funeral. The police found some union papers in his swag, and called at the General Labourers Union office for information about him. That's how we knew. The secretary had very little information to give. The departed was a "Roman", and the majority of the town were otherwise – but unionism; is stronger than creed. Liquor, however, is stronger than unionism; and, when the hearse presently arrived, more than two thirds of the funeral were unable to follow.

The procession numbered fifteen; fourteen souls following the broken shell of a soul. Perhaps not one of the fourteen possessed a soul any more than the corpse did – but that doesn't matter.

Four or five of the funeral, who were boarders at the pub, borrowed a trap which the landlord used to carry passengers to and from the railway-station. They were strangers to us who were on foot, and we to them. We were all strangers to the corpse.

A horseman, who looked like a drover just returned from a big trip, dropped into our dusty wake and followed us a few hundred yards, dragging his pack-horse behind him, but a friend made wild and demonstrative signals from an hotel veranda – hooking at the air in front with his right hand and jobbing his left thumb over his shoulder in the direction of the bar – so the drover hauled off and didn't catch up to us any more. He was a stranger to the entire show.

We walked in twos. There were three tows. It was very hot and dusty; the heat rushed in fierce dazzling rays across every iron roof and light-coloured wall that was turned to the sun. One or two pubs closed respectfully until we got past. They closed their bar doors and the patrons went in and out through some side or back entrance for a few minutes. Bushman seldom grumble at an inconvenience of this sort, when it is caused by a funeral. They have too much respect for the dead.

On the way to the cemetery we passed three shearers sitting on the shady side of a fence. One was drunk – very drunk. The other two covered their right ears with their hats, out of respect for the departed – whoever he might have been – and of the them kicked the drunk and muttered something to him.

He straightened himself up, stared, and reached helplessly for his hat, which he shoved half off and then on again. Then he made a great effort to pull himself together – and succeeded. He stood up, braced his back against the fence, knocked off his hat, and remorsefully placed his foot on it – to keep it off his head till the funeral passed.

A tall, sentimental drover, who walked by my side, cynically quoted Byronic verses suitable to the occasion – to death – and asked with pathetic humour whether we thought the dead man's ticket would be recognized "over yonder". It was a G.LU. ticket, and the general opinion was that it would be recognized.

Presently my friend said:

"You remember when we were in the boat yesterday, we saw a man driving some horses along the bank?"

"Yes."
He nodded at the hearse and said:
"Well, that's him."
I thought a while.
"I didn't take any particular notice of him," I said. "He said something, didn't he?"

"Yes; said it was a fine day. You'd have taken more notice if you'd known that he was doomed to die in the hour, and that those were the last words he would say to any man in this world."

"To be sure," said a full voice from the rear. "If ye'd known that, ye'd have prolonged the conversation."

We plodded on across the railway-line and along the hot, dusty road which ran to the cemetery, some of us talking about the accident, and lying about the narrow escapes we had had ourselves.
Presently someone said:

"There's the Devil."

I looked up and saw a priest standing in the shade of the tree by the cemetery gate.

The hearse was drawn up and the tail-boards were opened. The funeral extinguished its right ear with its hat as four man lifted the coffin out and laid it over the grave. The priest-a pale, quiet young fellow – stood under the shade of a sapling which grew at the head of the grave. He took of his hat, dropped it carelessly on the ground, and proceeded to business. I noticed that one or two heathens winced slightly when the holy water was sprinkled on the coffin. The drops quickly evaporated, and the little round black spots they left were soon dusted over; but the spots showed, by contrast, the cheapness and shabbiness of the cloth with which the coffin was covered. It seemed black before; now it looked a dusky grey.

Just here man's ignorance and vanity made a farce of the funeral. A big, bull-necked publican, with heavy, blotchy features, and a supremely ignorant expression, picked up the priest's straw hat and held it about two inches over the head of his reverence during the whole of the service. The Father, be it remembered, was standing in the shade. A few shoved their hats on and off uneasily, struggling between their disgust for the living and their respect for the dead. The hat had a conical crown and a brim sloping down all round like a sunshade, and the publican held it with his great red claw spread over the crown. To do the priest justice, perhaps he didn't notice the incident. A stage priest or parson in the same position might have said, "Put the hat down, my friend; is not the memory of our departed brother worth more than my complexion?" A wattle-bark layman might have expressed himself in stronger language, none the less to the point. But my priest seemed unconscious of what was going on. Besides, the publican was a great and important pillar of the Church. He couldn't, as an ignorant and conceited ass, lose such a good opportunity of asserting his faithfulness and importance to his Church.

The grave looked very narrow under the coffin, and I drew a breath of relief when the box slid easily down. I saw a coffin get stuck once, at Rookwood, and it had to be yanked out with difficulty, and laid on the sods at the feet of the heart-broken relations, who howled dismally while the grave-diggers widened the hole. But they don't cut contracts so fine in the West. Our grave-digger was not altogether bowelless, and, out of respect for that human quality threw it down to deaden the fall of the clay lumps on the coffin. He also tried to steer the first few shovelfuls gently down against the end of the grave with the back of the shovel turned outwards, but the hard dry Darling River clods rebounded and knocked all the same. It didn't matter much – nothing does. The fall of lumps of clay on a stranger's coffin doesn't sound any different from the fall of the same things on an ordinary wooden box – at least I didn't notice anything awesome or unusual in the sound; but, perhaps, one of us – the most sensitive – might have been impressed by being reminded of a burial long ago, when the thump of every sod jolted his heart.

I have left out the wattle – because it wasn't there. I have also neglected to mention the heart-broken old mate, with his grizzled head bowed and great drops streaming down his rugged cheeks. He was absent – he was probably "outback". For similar reasons I have omitted reference to the suspicious moisture in the eyes of a bearded bush ruffian named Bill. Bill failed to turn up, and the only moisture was that which

was induced by the heat. I have left out the "sad Australian sunset", because the sun was not going down at the time. The burial took place exactly at midday.

The dead bushman' name was Jim, apparently; but they found no portraits, nor locks of hair, nor any love-letters, nor anything of that kind in his swag – not even a reference to his mother; only some papers relating to union matters. Most of us didn't know the name till we saw it on the coffin; we knew him as "that poor chap that got drowned yesterday".

"So his name's James Tyson," said my drover acquaintance, looking at the plate.
"Why! Didn't you know that before?" I asked.
"NO; but I knew he was a union man."
It turned out, afterwards, that J. T. wasn't his real name – only "the name he went by".

Anyhow he was buried by it, and most of the "Great Australian Dailies" have mentioned in their brevity columns that a young man named James John Tyson was drowned in a billabong of the Darling last Sunday.

We did hear, later, what his real name was; but if we ever chance to read it in the "Missing Friends Column" we shall not be able to give any information to heart - broken Mother or Sister or Wife, nor to any one who could let him hear something to his advantage – for we have already forgotten the name.

As in *The Drover's Wife* we will look at the art of storytelling that Lawson adopts – of concentrating on an incident. We note the significance or lack of it in the observance of ritual. This ritual is being performed in the face of absolute desolation that is physical as well as spiritual. An individual may face emptiness but culture assigns a pattern on the lives of people. Lawson inverts the emotional impact of the incident that is central to the story, that of the Union burying its dead.

The story first appeared in the *Sydney Truth* as *A Bushman's Funeral: A Sketch fron life*. It was an outcome of his trip to Bourke in the North-West. The far West, according to Kiernan (1987:10) had been romanticised by many previous writers, but Lawson was appalled by the life he found there.

4.4.1 The Social Cultural Context

This story is based on an incident that is recounted by Jim Grahame in *Rambles with Henry Lawson*:

> Just before we left Bourke a man carrying an Australian Workers union ticket was drowned in the river and the local agent of that union took the responsibility of the burial. Lawson and I went to the little funeral, it was a hot day and all at the graveside were bare headed, but an over officious publican opened an umbrella and held it above the officiating priest's head, irritation and maybe contempt flashed across the reverend's face. Lawson nudged me.

Lawson has used this incident to provide an insight into the way he looked at life. The story draws attention to Unionism and celebrates the spirit of mateship.

The story begins with the image of boating on a Sunday afternoon on a billabong of the Darling. We are amidst a very different setting that draws attention to the bush and the pertinent question here is whether the water is deep or not. How are we to

look at the death of a person who drowns there? Nobody had bothered to know the drover while he was alive and drove horses along the river bank. But when he drowned and was found to be a young Union labourer, everybody was concerned and came to the funeral to pay their last respects. This foregrounds the importance attached to Unionism as it presumably helps in the protection of their rights; this is what mateship is all about. The important thing about him is that he is a Unionist and unionism as a kind of systematised mateship is stronger than creed. As Lawson puts it:

> The fact of his having been a Union man accounted for the funeral.... The departed was a 'Roman' and the majority of the town were otherwise – but Unionism is stronger than creed.

The members of the funeral get together at one of the pubs and soon everyone is preoccupied in his own way, unconcerned with the tragedy, dancing jigs or even fighting. Nothing seems to matter much despite the solemnity of the occasion; in any case two-thirds of the mourners (the unionists) are too drunk to follow the funeral. The pubs close their bar doors out of respect as the procession goes past the place and temporarily it is the side door that the patrons use. It is noon time and three drunk shearers sitting on the shady side of a fence manage to get their hats off, not really out of respect but because propriety demands it. While the service is on the publican holds the priest's hat. The way the story is narrated does not reflect the seriousness that the title suggests. How is this to be interpreted and what is it that it reflects is examined in the next section. Lawson has in the title "ironically appropriated the representations from any number of pictures and illustrations of the aftermath of the American Civil War". Typically, these were large-scale representations, very sobering in their effect, of the Union troops mourning their fallen comrade. It is immediately apparent how Lawson has inverted the emotional impact, and reversed the contemporary meaning of the title.

4.4.2 Theme And Characters

The chronicler of the event describes the funeral thus:

> Just here man's ignorance and vanity made a farce of the funeral.

It is not the loneliness of the human condition and the deadliness of human indifference that is so overtly being described here. As Phillips points out (see Murray-Smith 1975:36-37) Lawson was unashamedly sentimental but was determined not to lapse into sentimentality; thus the skilful use of openings and endings:

> While out boating one Sunday afternoon....
> Anyhow he was buried by it and the most of....
> We did hear later on....

The same capacity for the apt and planned alternation of mood is also shown in the story. The story is highly charged with emotion. The funeral of the unknown young man, identified by a Union ticket in his pocket, is attended by fellow Unionists in the township from a sense of solidarity and respect. Time and again we are pulled up sharply from the verge of becoming sad:

> I didn't take particular notice of him, I said. He said something, didn't he? Yes, said it was a fine day. You'd have taken more notice if you'd known that he was doomed to die in the hour.

The solemn thoughts raised by this exchange are abruptly ended by the remark one of the mourners makes as he sees the priest: " There is the Devil." The narrator of the story continues: "I noticed that one or two heathens winced slightly when the holy water was sprinkled on the coffin. Having now established an iconoclastic and irreverent mood Lawson switches back again:

> The fall of lumps of clay on a stranger's coffin doesn't sound any different from the fall of the same things on an ordinary wooden box....but perhaps one of us – the most sensitive might have been impressed by being reminded of a burial of long ago, when the thump of every sod jotted his heart.

Immediately following this we are told:

> I have left out the wattle – because it wasn't there. I have also neglected to mention the heart-broken old mate, with his grizzled head bowed and great pearly drops steaming down his rugged cheeks. He was absent – he was probably "out Back". I have left out the "sad Australian sunset" because the sun was not going down at the time....

We are then made to recall the seriousness of comments on the name of the dead bushman and the story ends:

> ...we shall not be able to give any information to heart-broken Mother or Sister or Wife, nor to anyone who could let him hear something to his advantage – for we have already forgotten the name.

Yet all this is not so much the alternation of mood as the setting of one – complex, human and true – by the use of plain language, juxtaposition and interplay of detail. This is a highly skilled method of craftsmanship.

In the funeral we get a glimpse of the mourners from the narrator as people coarsened and spiritually debilitated by life in the outback, as people who can only accommodate the suddenness, the impartiality, the ever-presence of death by seeking to stave off or to soften the unadorned truth (Matthews 1971:xi). Our attention is constantly and cynically drawn to a whole range of complex facades and disguises used by the mourners to wall off the truth – fake sentimentality on the part of the mourners. Notice for instance that the pubs shut their front doors but leave their side doors open; there is even a desperate suggestion that the Drover's fate could have been fended off if only they had been warned:

> ....if ye'd known that, ye'd have prolonged the conversation...

But all these Matthews argues, further serves only to advance the fact of death and the true plight of the mourners more insistently, while transforming an apparent preoccupation with the burial of the dead into a study of the terrified living. The mumbled groping burial service affirms death as the story's great reality. The narrator has a perception of how the occasion should be observed which perhaps just points to the fact that propriety is difficult to observe in the bush. Yet it is imperative to observe certain proprieties.

Unlike the emotion of alarm and fear posed by the dangerous snake in *The Drover's Wife*, in this story we get the emotion of sadness, of helplessness in the face of death and man's

inability to do anything about it. As with other stories, there is no real resolution, no ending, only a feeling that one episode – a vital and somehow revelatory one – has been momentarily caught, its implications apprehended with □antalizing incompleteness. And though these characters remain enclosed and shadowy, a visionary element in the writing, a flicker of revelation in image and phrase brings us into contact with the great issues and aspirations of a man under stress, man on trial, man alienated.

4.4.3 Use Of Language

The writing in the story is pithy and to the point. It is written in such a way that the story is upon you as a reader at once and bears you along swiftly. The position of the narrator deserves attention. Mitchell (1990: 30) observes that "in Lawson, his narrator merges himself with the collective; there is no separating the attitudes and values of what is recounted from those apparently endorsed by the narrative itself. The narrator is not critical of the comic riot with which the funeral begins, and he is unperturbed that so many of the mourners are soon incapable of walking to the cemetery." He speaks in the first person plural, "we", because he identifies himself with the mourners; he is part and parcel of the drovers. This brings out the sensitivity of those who can feel – the grave digger even tries 'to gentle the clatter of the lumps of clay, out of respect for that human quality described as "feelin's" '. From the story we get the ironic feeling that nothing really matters, nothing surprises. Out in the broiling and dazed plains, in the heat and the dust, life such as it is goes on. Nothing of great significance happens. That man, apart from the constant pressure and demands of living, is also living under the shadow of an uncontrollable phenomenon: Death, and he can do nothing about it. But then the narratorial "we" becomes "I" and there is a thinking and noticing what the individual can do on his own account. And through the "I" we get to the next phase of the story in which the narrator registers details that indicate true feeling beneath the layer of indifference. Thus a true to life narrative is presented to the reader.

4.5 LET US SUM UP

We have looked at two of Lawson's stories in this unit. Lawson is successful in portraying life at the time, in foregrounding the prevalent societal concerns. In writing of the exploited selector, drover or the broken-down bushwoman, he was writing of all humanity in fear and suffering. His vision apparently so confined in a geographical or sociological sense was further afield. He displays a keen awareness, observation, and sensitivity and thus is a sympathetic chronicler of bush life. As a pioneer in the short story genre, he was able to give direction and colour to the Australian short story. He wrote his stories in a brief, terse manner and in a common man's language. What is unique is his ability to describe the human condition in a realistic manner. For example in *The Drover's Wife*, as Roderick puts it, we feel pity for the sorrow-laden community, while in *The Union Buries Its Dead* we see resentment against death, the manner of its coming and the helplessness of man. The latter story depicts the human being as sad and destined to suffer.

Lawson's influence is still as pervasive as ever. His stories have retained their power and finesse. His themes are still as relevant as a century ago. People still identify with him. Roderick (1966:63) with reference to *The Union Buries Its Dead* and its relevance to the present, comments that "perhaps it is because the story brings us up

suddenly against the fact of death, death robbed of sentimentality, intractable death, bleak, rigid, cold, unsparing; that it has this timeless power to attract even as it repels, a power gained from the marriage of fear and fascination that makes the fact of death an eternal mystery. In his stories Lawson mirrors the restlessness of humanity" and the situation is the same even today.

Finally, in *The Drover's Wife* and indeed in some of his other stories and poems, we note Lawson's Republican views: "...her husband is an Australian, and so is she..." These views are now in vogue. People regard themselves more as Australians with a unique culture now more than ever. Lawson's ideas, themes and socio-political views were thus ahead of his times and people are now beginning to appreciate the power and relevance of his genius even more. His contribution to the Australian literary landscape has, therefore, truly been phenomenal. It is perhaps because Lawson's stories are so local that they assume universal significance. For not only do they portray the specific conditions of bush life and what it means to be an Australian they also illuminate aspects of what it means to be human in a world often not arranged according to our convenience. It is this wider significance that contributes to the lasting appeal of the stories.

4.6 QUESTIONS

(1) Describe the life of women in the Australian outback as depicted in the short story *The Drover's Wife?*

(2) With examples from *The Drover's Wife* describe the literary style and language used by the author in the story.

(3) Discuss the themes covered in *The Drover's Wife?*

(4) Discuss the theme of helplessness in *The Union Buries Its Dead.*

(5) In what ways are the drovers portrayed as hypocrites in *The Union Buries Its Dead?* Show with examples from the text.

(6) Discuss the literary style used in the story *The Union Buries Its Dead.*

4.7 GLOSSARY

Ballarat	A place in Victoria well known for its gold fields. In 1864 the administrators of the gold fields antagonised the miners. a group of them thereby rose in rebellion against the administration. This was known as the Eureka rebellion. The event though not an actual revolution was a symbol of political radicalism (and the result of provocation by the authorities).
Billabong	A portion of a river that has become dry; billa means creek and bong means dead
Bulletin	The Sydney Bulletin was established in 1880. In 1896. A g. Stephens introduced the Red Page literary columns.

Bush	is used in a special Australian sense to mean the vast interiors, the outback. It displaced words like *woods* and *forests*. With it developed a vast range of vocabulary of the Bush like – bushranger, billabong, swag, stockman – to replace the names of an intimate country side in England. For instance, convicts escaping in the bush came to be called bushrangers. The appeal of the bush gradually spread until a time came when the bush with all its nuances and new vocabulary came to be the great myth of Australian history. In a way, it satisfied the Australian quest for identity.
Ex- Squatter	refers to a one time big landlord or land owner
Federation	refers to the coming together of the Australian colonies to from the Commonwealth of Australia on January 1, 1901
Pioneering	derived from the word pioneer refers to those who were the first to settle in Australia, and therefore, faced lot of hardships. Their endeavour to sustain in the land so different from their native place is seen as a positive attitude
Selectors	refer to the Australian farming community
Stockman	the term came into use in the 1830s and originated from the word stock used collectively for farm animals. From 1850 it became synonymous with cattle and a stockman is thus a cattleman
Sundowners	are typical wandering nomads who lie down to sleep wherever the sun goes down
Swag	was part of the bush vocabulary. Henry Lawson describes it as a tent "fly" or strip of calico (a cover for the swag and a shelter in bad weather...), a couple of blankets spare clothing and small personal effects often comprised the swag

4.7 SUGGESTED READINGS

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UNIT 5 ARTHUR HOEY DAVIS : *CRANKY JACK*

Structure

5.0 Objectives
5.1 Introduction
5.2 *Cranky Jack* – The Text
5.3 Overall Structure of *Cranky Jack*
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  5.5.1 The Pioneer Legend
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  5.5.3 Parricide
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5.8 Glossary
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5.0 OBJECTIVES

The main objective of this unit is to look at the story, *Cranky Jack* by Arthur Hoey Davis, better known as Steele Rudd. I will give a brief sketch of his life and take a quick look at his style and the kind of stories he wrote. I will also read *Cranky Jack* as an attempt to dismantle paternal authority.

5.1 INTRODUCTION

Arthur Hoey Davis was born in 1868. His pen name was derived from the eighteenth century editor and essayist of **The Tatler** and **The Spectator** Richard Steele. He aroused the attention of the founding father of the **Bulletin**, J.T. Archibald who already had Lawson and A.B. Paterson writing for him regularly. His first story in the **Bulletin** was called *Starting the Selection* and appeared on 6th April 1895. His *On Our Selection* tales were published routinely after that and they told the story of the Rudd family, Dad, Mother, Dan, Dave, Joe, Kate, Sarah, Norah, the younger siblings, friends and neighbours. The short sketches were basically a humorous look at the hardships of Bush life. These short stories however, exhibit neither pessimism nor sentimentality, just a never-say-die spirit of struggle that keeps everybody going. In a pithy, sardonic style, interspersed with frequent exclamations, Davis tells the story of his own family, which moved to a shingle hut in an out of the way place in Queensland's Darling Downs in 1870. In his 1895 story, he talks about this exodus to the Creek.

> "It's twenty years now since we settled on the Creek. Twenty years! I remember well the day we came from Stanthorpe, on Jerome's dray - eight of us, and all the things - beds, tubs, a bucket, the two cedar chairs with the pine bottoms and backs that Dad put in them, some pint-pots and old Crib. It was a scorching hot day, too, talk about thirst! At every creek we came to we drank till it stopped running."

As mentioned earlier, in the tradition of Steele and Addison, Arthur Hoey Davis' / Steele Rudd' short stories were published in periodicals. These short stories were later put together in a book form for the first time in 1899 and were also called **On Our Selection.** The book can be called a collection of various comic incidents with only a

very loose kind of co-ordination between the chapters. The stories tell of the initial misfortunes and privations, trials and tribulations of the Rudd family until the desperate fight for survival gets over and there is hope of eking out some kind of bargain from the inhospitable, harsh and alien land.

Arthur Hoey Davis / Steele Rudd (as he is more popularly remembered) wrote twenty-four books in all and his early books almost made the Rudd family a kind of grand myth of the Australian pioneer family. But as the fortunes of the Rudds soared, Davis himself faced financial bankruptcy. He lived on a pension of £ per week until his death in 1935. His last Rudd family book was published in 1926. Having talked about his life and the kind of stories he wrote briefly, let us now try and take a quick look at his style. Davis' style had steadily declined, making his stories more of the banana-peel variety. He desperately tried to keep entertaining an audience that no longer wanted to read him and was content with the fun, frolic and laughter of the earlier stories. Davis' stories can be seen as entertaining, farcical, and hilarious - and this idea was reinforced by the illustrations that accompanied his early stories that emphasised the idea of a kind of rollicking slapstick comedy.

Cranky Jack that forms Chapter VII of **On Our Selection** is somehow different from the other stories in that the apparent meaninglessness of Jack's actions and words awaken a sense of the absurdly gruesome. The violence and morbidity of the story needs a thorough explication of the nuances of humour and the problematics attached to paternal power.

5.2 *CRANKY JACK* – TEXT

It was early in the day. Traveller after traveller was trudging by Shingle Hut. One who carried no swag halted at the rails and came in. He asked Dad for a job. "I dunno," Dad answered—"What wages would you want?" The man said he would n't want any. Dad engaged him at once.

And *such* a man! Tall, bony, heavy-jawed, shaven with a reaping-hook, apparently. He had a thick crop of black hair—shaggy, unkempt, and full of grease, grass, and fragments of dry gum-leaves. On his head were two old felt hats—one sewn inside the other. On his back a shirt made from a piece of blue blanket, with white cotton stitches striding up and down it like lines of fencing. His trousers were gloom itself; they were a problem, and bore reliable evidence of his industry. No ordinary person would consider himself out of work while in them. And the new-comer was no ordinary person. He seemed to have all the woe of the world upon him; he was as sad and weird-looking as a widow out in the wet.

In the yard was a large heap of firewood—remarkable truth!—which Dad told him to chop up. He began. And how he worked! The axe rang again—particularly when it left the handle—and pieces of wood scattered everywhere. Dad watched him chopping for a while, then went with Dave to pull corn.

For hours the man chopped away without once looking at the sun. Mother came out. Joy! She had never seen so much wood cut before. She was delighted. She made a cup of tea and took it to the man, and apologised for having no sugar to put in it. He paid no attention to her; he worked harder. Mother waited, holding the tea in her hand. A lump of wood nearly as big as a shingle flew up and shaved her left ear. She put the tea on the ground and went in search of eggs for dinner. (We were out of meat—the kangaroo-dog was lame. He had got "ripped" the last time we killed.)
The tea remained on the ground. Chips fell into it. The dog saw it. He limped towards it eagerly, and dipped the point of his nose in it. It burnt him. An aged rooster strutted along and looked sideways at it. *He* distrusted it and went away. It attracted the pig—

a sow with nine young ones. She waddled up, and poked the cup over with her nose; then she sat down on it, while the family joyously gathered round the saucer. Still the man chopped on.

Mother returned—without any eggs. She rescued the crockery from the pigs and turned curiously to the man. She said, "Why, you've let them take the tea!" No answer. She wondered.

Suddenly, and for the fiftieth time, the axe flew off. The man held the handle and stared at the woodheap. Mother watched him. He removed his hats, and looked inside them. He remained looking inside them.

Mother watched him more closely. His lips moved. He said, " *Listen to them! They're coming! I knew they'd follow!*"
"Who?" asked Mother, trembling slightly.
" *They're in the wood!*" he went on. "Ha, ha! I've got them. They'll never get out; *never get out!*"

Mother fled, screaming. She ran inside and called the children. Sal assisted her. They trooped in like wallabies—all but Joe. He was away earning money. He was getting a shilling a week from Maloney, for chasing cockatoos from the corn.

They closed and barricaded the doors, and Sal took down the gun, which Mother made her hide beneath the bed. They sat listening, anxiously and intently. The wind began to rise. A lump of soot fell from the chimney into the fireplace—where there was no fire. Mother shuddered. Some more fell. Mother jumped to her feet. So did Sal. They looked at each other in dismay. The children began to cry. The chain for hanging the kettle on started swinging to and fro. Mother's knees gave way. The chain continued swinging. A pair of bare legs came down into the fireplace—they were curled round the chain. Mother collapsed. Sal screamed, and ran to the door, but couldn't open it. The legs left the chain and dangled in the air. Sal called "Murder!" Her cry was answered. It was Joe, who had been over at Maloney's making his fortune. He came to the rescue. He dropped out of the chimney and shook himself. Sal stared at him. He was calm and covered from head to foot with soot and dirt. He looked round and said, "Thought yuz could keep me out, did'n'y'?" Sal could only look at him. "I saw yuz all run in," he was saying, when Sal thought of Mother, and sprang to her. Sal shook her, and slapped her, and threw water on her till she sat up and stared about. Then Joe stared.

Dad came in for dinner—which, of course, wasn't ready. Mother began to cry, and asked him what he meant by keeping a madman on the place, and told him she *knew* he wanted to have them all murdered. Dad didn't understand. Sal explained. Then he went out and told the man to "Clear!" The man simply said, "No."
"Go on, now!" Dad said, pointing to the rails. The man smiled at the wood-heap as he worked. Dad waited. "Ain't y' going?" he repeated.

"Leave me alone when I'm chopping wood for the missus," the man answered; then smiled and muttered to himself. Dad left him alone and went inside wondering.

Next day Mother and Dad were talking at the barn. Mother, bare-headed, was holding some eggs in her apron. Dad was leaning on a hoe.

"I *am* afraid of him," Mother said; "it's not right you should keep him about the place. No one's safe with such a man. Some day he'll take it in his head to kill us all, and then—"

"Tut, tut, woman; poor old Jack! He's harmless as a baby."
"All right," (sullenly); "you'll see!"
Dad laughed and went away with the hoe on his shoulder to cut burr.

Middle of summer. Dad and Dave in the paddock mowing lucerne. Jack sinking post-holes for a milking-yard close to the house. Joe at intervals stealing behind him to prick him with straws through a rent in the rear of his patched moleskins. Little Bill—in readiness to run—standing off, enjoying the sport.

Inside the house sat Mother and Sal, sewing and talking of Maloney's new baby.
"Dear me," said Mother; "it's the tiniest mite of a thing I ever saw; why, bless me, anyone of y' at its age would have made three of—"
"Mind, Mother!" Sal shrieked, jumping up on the sofa. Mother screamed and mounted the table. Both gasped for breath, and leaning cautiously over peeped down at a big black snake which had glided in at the front door. Then, pale and scared-looking, they stared across at each other.
The snake crawled over to the safe and drank up some milk which had been spilt on the floor. Mother saw its full length and groaned. The snake wriggled to the leg of the table.
"Look out!" cried Sal, gathering up her skirts and dancing about on the sofa.
Mother squealed hysterically.
Joe appeared. He laughed.
"You wretch!" Mother yelled. "Run— *run*, and fetch your father!"
Joe went and brought Jack.
"Oh-h, my God!" —Mother moaned, as Jack stood at the door, staring strangely at her. "Kill it!—why don't he *kill* it? "
Jack didn't move, but talked to himself. Mother shuddered.
The reptile crawled to the bedroom door. Then for the first time the man's eyes rested upon it. It glided into the bedroom, and Mother and Sal ran off for Dad.
Jack fixed his eyes on the snake and continued muttering to himself. Several times it made an attempt to mount the dressing-table. Finally it succeeded. Suddenly Jack's demeanour changed. He threw off his ragged hat and talked wildly. A fearful expression filled his ugly features. His voice altered.
"You're the Devil!" he said; " *the Devil!* THE DEVIL! The missus brought you—ah-h-h!"

The snake's head passed behind the looking-glass. Jack drew nearer, clenching his fists and gesticulating. As he did he came full before the looking-glass and saw, perhaps for the first time in his life, his own image. An unearthly howl came from him. "*Me father!*" he shouted, and bolted from the house.
Dad came in with the long-handled shovel, swung it about the
room, and smashed pieces off the cradle, and tore the bed-curtains down, and made a great noise altogether. Finally, he killed the snake and put it on the fire; and Joe and the cat watched it wriggle on the hot coals.

Meanwhile, Jack, bare-headed, rushed across the yard. He ran over little Bill, and tumbled through the wire-fence on to the broad of his back. He roared like a wild beast, clutched at space, spat, and kicked his heels in the air.

"Let me up!— *Ah-h-h!*—let go me throat!" he hissed.

The dog ran over and barked at him. He found his feet again, and, making off, ran through the wheat, glancing back over his shoulder as he tore along. He crossed into the grass paddock, and running to a big tree dodged round and round it. Then from tree to tree he went, and that evening at sundown, when Joe was bringing the cows home, Jack was still flying from "his father".

After supper.
"I wonder now what the old fool saw in that snake to send him off his head like that?" Dad said, gazing wonderingly into the fire. "He sees plenty of them, goodness knows."
"That wasn't it. It wasn't the snake at all," Mother said; "there was madness in the man's eyes all the while. I saw it the moment he came to the door." She appealed to Sal.
"Nonsense!" said Dad; *"nonsense!"* and he tried to laugh.
"Oh, of course it's *nonsense,*" Mother went on; "everything I say is nonsense. It won't be nonsense when you come home some day and find us all on the floor with our throats cut."
"Pshaw!" Dad answered; "what's the use of talking like that?" Then to Dave: "Go out and see if he's in the barn!"
Dave fidgetted. He didn't like the idea. Joe giggled.
"Surely you're not *frightened?*" Dad shouted.
Dave coloured up.
"No—don't think so," he said; and, after a pause, " *You* go and see."
It was Dad's turn to feel uneasy. He pretended to straighten the fire, and coughed several times. "Perhaps it's just as well," he said, "to let him be to-night."
Of course, Dad wasn't afraid; he *said* he wasn't, but he drove the pegs in the doors and windows before going to bed that night.
Next morning, Dad said to Dave and Joe, "Come 'long, and we'll see where he's got to."

5.3 OVERALL STRUCTURE OF *CRANKY JACK*

The story starts with the entry of Jack himself. When he says that he does not want any wages for his work, Dad engages him at once. There follows a paragraph of description that seems slightly exaggerated and distanced from reality. He was

> "Tall, bony, heavy-jawed, shaven with a reaping-hook, apparently. He had a thick crop of black hair-shaggy, unkempt, and full of grease, grass, and fragments of dry gum-leaves. On his head were two old felt hats - one sewn inside the other. On his back a shirt made from a piece of blue blanket, with white cotton stitches striding up and down it like lines of fencing. His trousers were gloom itself ... He seemed to have all the woe of the world upon him; he was as sad and weird-looking as a widow out in the wet."

In fact, Dorothy Green in her essay, "No Laughing Matter", calls him a genuine bush-hatter – a man who is not merely eccentric, but also extremely alienated from material truth. He was a type of character made familiar by Lawson. Early on in the story, Mother realises that Jack is not all right in the head and creates a scene when Dad returns. Jack, however, refuses to leave. The family gradually gets used to him until one fine day, a snake enters the house. When Jack comes in with Joe to chase it away, he thinks that the snake is the Devil brought in by Mother. The snake hides behind the mirror in the bed -room and when Jack sees his reflection in it, maybe for the first time in his life, he screams, "Me father!" and runs away.

The next day, Dad and the boys find Jack riding a tree and shouting to imaginary entities. As he rises up from the trunk, Dad and the boys take fright and run away from the scene. Later, Jack agrees to be taken quietly into the barn and be shut in. Ultimately, the climatic moment of the story arrives when one day, Jack walks stealthily into the house, looks at himself in the mirror and takes an axe to it. The event is described in the following manner –

"He paused just a moment to grip the axe with both hands. Then with a howl and a bound he entered the room and shattered the looking-glass into fragments. He bent down and looked closely at the pieces.

'He's dead now,' he said calmly, and walked out. Then he went to work at the post-holes again, just as though nothing had happened."

The story gives us interesting insights about the back breaking work in a pioneering family and also gives us an inkling about what the *Bush* can do to someone who was "sad and weird-looking," someone who has not learnt to grin and bear all trouble.

5.4 INTERPRETATIONS

Cranky Jack was written long before Freud became a fashionable by-word in literature. Before we begin with an analysis of the story let us take a quick look at the theories of Freud and Lacan who promoted psychoanalysis and on whose theories we have based our interpretation of the text.

5.4.1 What is *Psychoanalysis*?

Psychoanalysis is a type of therapy that is aimed at curing people suffering from various mental illnesses or 'investigating the interaction of the conscious and the unconscious elements in the mind' (Oxford English Dictionary). This type of therapy is based on the knowledge of and an understanding about how three things work. Namely: the mind, a persons instincts and sexuality. *Psychoanalysis's* chief concern is and has always been the articulation of sexuality in language. The origins of the theory may be credited to **Sigmund Freud (1856- 1939),** who laid emphasis on the "literary unconscious" of the author (and its corollary, 'character') on the reader and on the text, (Raman and Selden, A Readers Guide to Contemporary Literary Theory, p. 136). Freud's work rests broadly on the notion of the *unconscious*, which is that part of our mind that is beyond our *consciousness* and as yet has a very strong influence on our actions, words and deeds. Freud was a firm believer of the idea of *repression* as well. *Repression* is the "forgetting" or "ignoring" impulse in our minds, that chooses to hide away/ suppress/ repress our unexpressed desires, impulses, passions, emotions and aspirations far away from our conscious minds to that of the unconscious. Another notion in addition to the unconscious and repression is that of *sublimation*. When a person tries to hide away all his/ her desires, passions, emotions, and does not succeed or think that s/he has succeed where as the mind having a will of its own not only does not suppress those instincts/ passions etc but also elevates them in status to some thing grand and 'noble', an act of *sublimation* occurs.

He also stressed the analogy of the relationship between the author and the text and the dreamer and his/ her dream / fantasy. According to Freud, when a male child is an infant, his libidinal drives are not directed towards any definite sexual object, he is too young to have formed any idea of gender or identity- it is only the 'pleasure principle' at work here. Freud made certain observations about the human mind that not only scandalised 19th century Europe, but also revolutionised the way people looked at and studied the human mind. His first observation was that the human mind was not merely a passive receptacle for information. He believed the human mind to be a vital, dynamic force that could if it chose to, function independently of the individual will. But he also believed in the sexual nature of the dynamic energy of the mind that he termed *libido*. Based on this first premise, he inferred that: the human mind could be divided into three (not water tight) components / chambers:

- the conscious: where all the impressions, images, information is gathered during a persons 'awake' state of being
- the unconscious: where the information, impressions, images gathered during the day are laid aside for future reference and use
- the subconscious: which lies somewhere between the conscious and the unconscious chambers.

To this third chamber 'the subconscious', he attributed the most significance, importance and power. He believed it to function only when the conscious was at rest, as in when a person is asleep. Once 'the awake'/ 'wakeful', mind is asleep/ at rest, the images, impressions, information gathered during the day are released. That is what Freud calls a *dream*. What he was also trying to do, was also establish his other theory about the interpretation of dreams, implying that dreams are the release of suppressed/ repressed emotions that have been pushed aside during the day but are however, constantly at play somewhere in the persons mind. These dreams are often those impulses, instincts, emotions and desires that we suppress during our conscious state as a result of societal / other pressures and prohibitions. In a way our dreams are the symbolic manifestations / representations of our repressed fantasies. Freud also talked about the *Oedipus Complex*. ***Oedipus Rex*** is a play written by the famous Greek Tragedian ***Sophocles***. This play is about the story of King Laius and Queen Jocasta of Thebes, and the birth of their son, in ancient Greece. When the baby was born, the court soothsayers predicted that the boy would grow up and kill his father and marry his mother, thereby begetting children from her. Meaning the baby would be guilty of not just *parricide* but also *incest*. As a result of this prediction the King and Queen decide to 'do away' with their son, as such foul acts were frowned upon very strongly by the ancient Greeks. The King and Queen therefore give their son away to a shepherd with instructions to leave him out in the open to be eaten by wolves. But the old Thebian shepherd ties the baby's feet together and pierces his soft ankles with thorns to prevent him from wandering away, but at the last minute feeling sorry for the little baby, hands him over to an old Corinthian shepherd and tells him to take the baby far away and to never let the baby come back to Thebes. Corinth was a kingdom some distance away from Thebes, so the old Corinthian shepherd having taken the baby away gives him to his King and Queen to bring him up as their own, as the couple lack children. The baby is named Oedipus, or the lame one. Oedipus grows up to be a fine young man, with no clue about his real identity or the future foretold by the soothsayers. On the day he is to take over his father's throne, someone in the crowd taunts him by saying that he is not even the real son of his parents. Greatly disturbed by this taunt, he demands the truth from his foster parents and is told that he has been brought up as their own. At the same time, he is also made aware of the predictions of his future actions and in order to present such consequences. He leaves Corinth and goes as far away as possible from Corinth. In a state of confusion, sorrow and anger at his fate, he meets an old man at a crossing of four roads and the arrogance of youth, goads him on to slaying the old man. Eventually Oedipus reaches Thebes that has been beset by plague and pestilence of the worst kind. At the entrance to Thebes is a *Sphinx* with a riddle that no one has managed to solve. The sphinx has brought the plague on Thebes. Oedipus ever ready to accept a challenge solves the riddle and Thebes is rid of the sphinx and the pestilence. News of King Laius' death is brought to the Queen. She is then offered in marriage to the person who can get rid of the sphinx and Oedipus marries the Queen and even begets children from her. Years later the truth is revealed to Oedipus by the old Corinthian shepherd who brings news of his foster parents death due to old age. Oedipus is shocked by this revelation, but his sorrow and confusion are compounded by the fact that he was supposed to commit parricide and incest, his worst fear comes true when the same shepherd reveals Oedipus's real identity, all the bits fall into place and Queen Jocasta, shocked by the knowledge that incest has been committed unknowingly, hangs herself and Oedipus overcome by grief and sorrow at

all that has transpired, and feeling cheated by destiny blinds himself with the pin on Jocasta's brooch. He then leaves the House of Thebes to wander blind and alone in his misery.

The *Oedipus Complex* that Freud talks about is based on this story. Deriving from the myth of *Oedipus*, Freud concludes that a male child will always try to replace his father for the affection of his mother and that the *reality principle* is something different as the mother's affections lie with the father figure, who threatens the male child with dire punishment like *castration*. It is only when the male child manages to suppress this desire for the mother that he can identify with and accept not only the presence of the father in the mother's life and within the family structure but also identify with the *masculine role*. This desire however, according to Freud does not really go away and lies suppressed in the boy's unconscious. *Libido* as described by Freud is the 'energy associated with sexual desire' whose main focus lies in yet another three fold structure: the *Oral*, the *Anal* and the *Phallic*. This *libido* is a part of a greater drive called *Eros/ the life force* that is often in contrast with *Thanatos / death wish*. *Transference* is another term associated with Freud, it occurs when a patient under treatment transfers and redirects his/ her feelings of desire, antagonism etc towards the physician/ analyst. *Projection* is a mechanism whereby the negative aspects of the person concerned are conveniently attributed to another person. *Screen memory* too works as a defense mechanism whereby a person blots out a more significant (painful) memory with a less significant one. *Freudian slip* that occurs every now and then when repressed material finds an outlet through the slip of the tongue or the slip of the pen is another such defense mechanism that our unconscious invents. Freud also had many negative views on women. He believed women's sexuality to be based on "feelings of *narcissism*, *masochism* and *passivity* and the ideal that they suffer from an innate form of *inferiority complex* known as *penis envy*".

Carl Jung a disciple of Freud applied this same theory to a group of people. He believed that just as a person/ an individual remembers events, images, impressions that lie buried within his psyche, so to would a community who share that same memory, though they may not have individual consciousness of it. At the moment we shall limit our discussion to Freud and Lacan as their interpretations bear most significance to our analysis of *Cranky Jack*.

Jacques Lacan (1901-1981) yet another disciple of the *School of Psychoanalysis* was of the firm belief that human beings enter into a world of pre-existing system of signifiers that take on meaning only in a language system. This entry into language enables them to find a subject position within a relational system be it male/ female, father/ mother/ daughter. These he believed to be totally governed by the unconscious. Instead of Freud's *Id- Ego- Super Ego* tripartite structure, Lancan brought in the concept of the 'imaginary' and the 'symbolic'. Lacan believed that till the child is three s/he has no idea of who s/he is. It is only when the child looks at him/her self in the mirror that s/he begins to identify with the image in the mirror, and makes the distinction between the subject and the object. But the mirror need not be a real/ physical mirror. The minute a child begins to identity with the image as a subject and a self-image is formed however fragmented, a 'fictional ideal' or 'ego' is created. Once the dichotomy between the two- 'being' and the 'other' is established and the father figure is involved, the child is hurled into the 'symbolic' world of differences (male/ female, father/ son, present/ absent etc). In Lacanian psychoanalysis instead of the *conscious*, *unconscious* are the *imaginary* and the *symbolic*. We did mention Freud and his theory of the *interpretation of dreams*, expanding on that Freud stated that the unconscious always hides meaning in the symbolic manifestations that need decoding. His *dream images* undergo

condensation, where several images combine and *displacement*, where significance shifts from one image to a contiguous one, (Raman and Selden, p 140).

Lacan on the other hand believed that the 'garbled and enigmatic dream work follows the law of the signifiers'. For both Freud and Lacan, the primal *Other* is the father within the Oedipal triangle, who, forbids incest, threatens the child's desire for his mother and thereby becomes an agent of Law. Lacan however is more concerned with the *imaginary* father than the real father. Lacan believed the *unconscious* to be the very core or the kernel of our being and this *unconscious* he said was structured like language. In order to prove this belief he gives the example of how *displacement* takes place in the *dream work* of Freud. He believed it to function like *metonymy* where one thing is represented by means of a part standing for a whole, and considered *condensation* to be analogous to *metaphor*, where several things are compressed into one symbol. His thoughts and beliefs also lead him to speculate on the way thoughts actually emerge into the *consciousness*. In order to explain this phenomenon he too goes back to the infantile stage of a child. He says that before a child reaches the stage where he can actually distinguish between the self and the other, he lives in a realm of the *imaginary*. In this realm of the *imaginary* a child forms an idealised identification with his mother. After this begins the mirror stage (during which the child sees its own reflection in the mirror) the child begins to see and conceive of him self as a whole being distinct from the others. At this stage, the child is normally between the age of 6-18 months and it is also during this stage that the child acquires some linguistic ability whereby he enters into the language system, which is once again "concerned with lack and separation", as language names "what is not present and substitutes a linguistic sign for it." The child begins to socialise during this time, in keeping with his share of *dos (prohibitions)* and *don'ts (restraints)* that he inherits from the society that he is born into (the *dos* and *don'ts* are normally associated with the figure of the father, the figure of authority). It is in this new order wherein a child conceives of himself as opposed to the other, (has entered the linguistic mode and is made aware of societal prohibitions and restraints), that he enters the realm of the *symbolic*. This is the basis of Lacanian psychoanalysis.

5.4.2 Psychoanalysing *Cranky Jack*

The father-son relationship based on bitterness, guilt, mutual loathing is treated with frivolously awesome depth and absurd directness. When Jack sees his mirror-image for the first time and sees his father in his own physical present, he is frightened out of his wits and runs away. But his sole aim after that becomes the need to annihilate his father, who he thinks has come back from the dead to haunt and terrify him. Maybe as he had terrified him in the distant past when Jack was a young boy, much like Dave or Joe. The intricate symbolism of the central event of the story deals with several layers of meaning. Not only does it deal with the subconscious desire to destroy paternal authority, but in the mirror-image of Jack, we see that Jack has himself grown to become the physical replica of the dead father - suggesting that the process of mobility from father to son is an on-going, never-ending process and maybe a process that deteriorates into madness with the misuse of paternal power or the misappropriation of filial respect.

Interestingly, the figure of paternal domination in the Rudd family, Dad, is not without his own blemishes. He is also a slave driver with his own sons as and when the need arises and that is almost always.

> "Middle of summer. Dad and Dave in the paddock moving lucerne. Jack sinking post-holes for a milking-yard close to the house."

In the scene where Dad, Joe and Dave run away from Jack, Dad has thoughts only of his own safety. When Joe catches hold of his father's shirt as he runs, Dad turns around and tells his off-spring to let go. Davis writes it thus –

> "Let go!' Dad gasped. 'Damn y', let me go!' - trying to shake him off. But Joe had great faith in his parent and clung to him closely."

The figure of the all-powerful patriarch, the pioneering father, who depended on his male progeny to continue the hard work and lend a hand in the fields, becomes a symbol of tyranny. The killing of the father by the "cranky" son takes away some of the responsibility of the act while simultaneously allowing for the resentment to show through the thin guise of filial acceptance of paternal control. The humour of this story is of the particularly macabre kind. Jack's movement away from language and meaning is of a very frightening sort - the type that does not allow him societal entry. The first words that he speaks tell of a persecution of some nameless variety.

> "Listen to them! They're coming! I knew they'd follow! ... They're in the wood!...Ha, ha! I've got them. They'll never get out; never get out."

The fear as well as the bravado has a certain child-like quality of miserable insecurity and emotional deprivation. Jack himself is never totally aware of his physical needs. He agrees to work without pay and at the end of the story, has been at the Rudds' place for fifteen years.

> "He slaves from daylight till dark; keeps no Sunday; knows no companions, lives chiefly on meat and machine oil; domiciles in the barn; and has never asked for a rise in his wages".

Jack never really realises the extent of his oppression. He 'kills' the patriarchal figure of authority formed by his own reflection but he does not realise that he has given up all his rights to his surrogate father, Dad.

The Rudds, at this stage, are, of course, very poor. Mother apologises to Jack for having no sugar to put in his tea and when she goes out to look for eggs, returns without any. But in the cruel, malignant *Bush*, only the truly indifferent can survive. And Jack in his grand madness is also truly indifferent. He is also "the best horse Dad ever had."

5.5 CONTEXTUALISING *CRANKY JACK*

5.5.1 The Pioneer Legend

Steele Rudd's best *On The Selection* tales were written in the last five years of the 19th century and the first few years of the 20th century. It was a time when Australian literature was still struggling to find a voice and a language for itself. It was not an easy struggle and was fraught with the problems of either exoticising or sentimentalising its differences from 'real' English Literature. This is what Frederick Sinnett (1830-1866) had to say about the first few attempts of Australian writers.

> "In the first place we may remark that most Australian stories are too Australian, and, instead of human life, we have only local 'manners and customs' portrayed in them. The dramatis personae are not people with characters and passions, but lay figures, so constructed and placed in such attitudes, as to display the costumes of the place and period." **(The Fiction Fields of Australia)**

Steele Rudd's tales about a pioneering family trying its best to make ends meet was another way of talking about Australia; its harsh landscape and the excruciating hard work that survival demanded. The fact that Rudd was actually talking about his own family and his own childhood maybe lessens the predilection seen in certain other writers to write merely about "local manners and customs". Brian Hoad (in the **Bulletin**, Dec. 27, 1994 to Jan. 3, 1995, p.105) talks about **The Steele Rudd Tales** under the heading "National Myth" and goes on to say that

> "The basic theme was the struggle for existence, a matter of simple survival through hard times. The basic technique was to laugh at the intolerable: at rotten food, foul water, ragged clothes and improvised shoes (if any); at drought (particularly in the 1880s), searing heat, flies, sandy blight, skin sores and foot-rot; at clearing and burning-off and harrowing and sowing, when you can't even afford a hoe, let alone a draught horse and plough."

This of course has all the ingredients that could go into the making of a national myth. It celebrates the virtues of courage, enterprise, hard work and perseverance and is a nationalist legend of its kind. It tells of the taming of a cruel, intractable landscape for man's use. And Steele Rudd's stories tell it better because "to Australian life and letters he brought the rich gift of honest laughter", as his epitaph puts it. The harshness is tamed not only by labour but also with laughter. But it would not do to take the laughter at face value because as Dorothy Green says in "No Laughing Matter" (the **Bulletin** Literary Supplement, Sep. 30, 1980, p.35) that the attempts at laughter have "something pathetic about them. They represent the pitiful effort made by the poor throughout history to put a good face on simply because it is otherwise intolerable. But the public just loved the myth of Dad, Mother & the brood of thirteen children on the Settlement. Maybe because they could not face the truth that mere hard work and perseverance were just not enough. J.B. Hirst in "The Pioneer Legend" says that

> "The pioneer story can also be described as legendary because of what it leaves out: there is usually no mention of the social, legal or economic determinants of land settlement. The pioneers are depicted in a world limited by the boundaries of their properties, subduing the land, and bathing the elements. Their enemies are drought, flood, fire, sometimes Aborigines." **(Intruders in the Bush, ed., John Caroll, p.15, OUP: Melbourne, 1982)**

These tales went into the myth-formation of the Australian nation. And the pioneer legend went a long way in creating the image of the diligent bush-battler with the never-say-die attitude. What it did was to create heroes out of ordinary men like Dad. As J.B. Hirst puts it, the legend "accords heroic status to the ordinary man — frequently the pioneers were squatters, but small settlers were also honoured with the title. The pioneer legend transforms the low-status selector of the nineteenth century into a nation-builder. The legend also proclaims that success is open to all since all may possess the requisite qualities of diligence, courage, and perseverance. Secondly, the legend provides a simple unofficial, popular history of the nation." **(Intruders in the Bush, p.29)**

Therefore the pioneer legend becomes a kind of false marker of the democratic ethos of the Australian nation. 'False' because it takes into account only the white settlers and sees the Aborigines, as intruders or dark forces that were to be controlled. Lawson's poem, "How the Land Was Won" (1899) talks about this element:

> "With God, or a dog, to watch, they slept
> By the campfires' ghastly glow,
> Where the scrubs were dark as the blacks that crept
> With 'nulla' and spear held low;" **(Intruders in the Bush, p. 20)**

There are other people too on par with the Aborigines in their social position. "The low-status selector," more often than not, had people even lower on the social rung working for him. Cranky Jack falls within this category. He has no rights to speak of; it is a different matter altogether that he does not ask for them. The democratic note that the pioneer legend elaborates actually reveals the false glorification of a superior white male settler who has had the opportunity to make good.

5.5.2 Labour and Alienation

Cranky Jack's labour is seen in the domain of work that does not have any meaning to the man who labours. The more he works, the less meaning his work has. He is relegated to the position of a mere machine or a workhorse. His alienation is closely connected to his labour, his involvement as well as his human estrangement from it. As Marx had said in his essay Alienated Labour:

> "The worker becomes poorer, the richer his production, the more it increases in power and scope. The worker becomes a commodity that is all the cheaper the more commodities he creates. The depreciation of the human world progresses in direct proportion to the increase in value of the world of things." **(Early Texts, tr. & ed., David McSellan, p. 135, Barnes & Noble, 1971)**

So the alienation of Cranky Jack here is actually his objectification, where the natural objects of his life lie completely independent and alien to him. It is actually the 'thingification' of Cranky Jack that we see here, where he becomes a mere commodity; i.e. he is reduced to a mere animal or a thing. According to the laws of political economy, Marx finds that the alienation of the worker increases in direct proportion to the increase in production. He says –

> "The more the worker produces, the less he has to consume, the more value he creates, the more valueless and worthless he becomes." **(Alienated Labour, p. 134)**

Therefore, since Cranky Jack produces more work than is actually expected of him, he loses all human importance in the Rudd household. His misery, his sense of self, his 'beingness' all come to nought, his only identity is the value that he creates. The process of dehumanisation is further explained,

> "Firstly, that labour is exterior to the worker, that is, it does not belong to his essence. Therefore he does not confirm himself in his work, he denies himself, feels miserable instead of happy,... (and) mortifies his body and ruins his mind." **(Alienated Labour, p. 140)**

Alienation then, as in the case of Cranky Jack, is the loss of self, the loss of spontaneity, and the separation of work from life. Ultimately, it also leads to the separation of man from man. Dad cannot even begin to think in terms of a human relationship with Cranky Jack. For Dad, he is just a machine who will labour without wages; he only wishes to use Cranky Jack's physical self and is not concerned about his spiritual well being. He is also sure that Cranky Jack is as "harmless as a baby." Marx had said,

> "On the one hand, there is the production of human activity as *labour*, that is, as an activity which is alien to itself, to man and to nature, and thus alien to consciousness and to the realization of human life; the abstract existence of man as a mere *working man*, who, therefore plunges every day from his fulfilled nothingness into absolute nothingness, into social, and thus real non-existence." **(Alienated Labour, p. 139)**

Cranky Jack's position in the Rudd family is concluded in the following lines,

> "He slaves from daylight till dank; keeps no Sunday; knows no companion; lives chiefly on meat and machine-oil; domiciles in the barn; and has never asked for a rise in his wages."

It is indeed slavery of the worst kind; a worker who does not realise that he is human and deserves better. Cranky Jack's internalisation of the fact of his alienation makes him accept his "meat and machine-oil", like an animal or a machine. It is just a linear progression towards nothingness and non-existence. The fake democracy of the pioneer legend and the myth of the nation of brave pioneering men become meaningless when confronted with such truths of tyranny. The pioneer landowner of immovable property with the 'slave' worker on his settlement is no different from the modern capitalist and the exploited worker in the factory. The alienation of Cranky Jack from his labour and the degradation of his human self becomes complete when he "mortifies his body and ruins his mind." His work only succeeds in making him "sad and weird" and he does not care about the torture that he inflicts upon his body and destroys his mind in the process. The saddest part is that he also "knows no companion".

5.5.3 Parricide

The state of Cranky Jack's mind takes us into the even more fascinating domains of guilt and murder. It takes us into the central core of the story - the killing of Cranky Jack's father, his own reflection in the mirror. Quite early on in the story, we realise that Cranky Jack suffers from some kind of persecution anxiety. He suffers from delusions that tell him that some unnamed persecutors have followed him and are in the woods. It is a strange mix of fear and aggression because he concludes that he has got them and that "The will never get out. *Never get out.*" Cranky Jack's alienation in the Rudd family is immediately established because his language holds no meaning apart from madness for Mother. The frightening visions of nameless persecutors are something that is beyond Mother's understanding of reality. She immediately decides on Cranky Jack's insanity and rebukes Dad for bringing a mad man into the house. The meaninglessness or rather the apparent meaninglessness of Cranky Jack's language sets him apart from normal, everyday people who have maybe reined in their madness.
The crux of the story talks about one of the key themes in twentieth century literature, the Oedipal nature of man: love for the mother and wish for the death of the father. Freud had first put forward his findings regarding infantile sexuality in 1905, just six years after the first actual publication of **On the Selection tales** in 1899. The story of Cranky Jack is interesting in the way it foreshadows the findings of Freud, where the son wishes to kill the authoritative father and gain the sole attention of the loving mother. The death, or rather the murder of the father is what the entire Cranky Jack story is all about. Freud had gone on to say that the first fear of the male child is that his father may take away the object of his affections (his mother) from him. His fear takes place, primarily because, he realises that his father possess greater phallic power, a bigger penis. The phallus plays an important role in this drama because this is what the little girl envies her brothers (penis-envy) and what the son fears that the father will cut off (castration complex). This latter seems to very real in certain societies where initiation rites of pubescent males take place.

> It seems as if initiation ritual in such societies provides a very definite trauma corresponding to the genital stage which begins at puberty and for which genital mutilations are therefore especially appropriate. The fuss that is usually made in such rituals about removing the boys from the protection of their mothers; the threats made against them in the name of their fathers; the beatings, punishments and humiliations which they collectively have to endure at their

> fathers' collective hands; the emphasis on the new responsibilities for sexual conduct which the newly initiated now carry, all these things add up to being a traumatic culmination of the Oedipus complex in which sons prove the strength of their identification with their fathers and the extent of their repression of the negative, hating, parricidal aspects of their own ambivalence." **(Christopher Baddock, the "Oedipus Complex", Essential Freud, pp. 91-91, Basil Blackwell Ltd, UK, 1988)**

The "negative, hating, parricidal aspect" of Cranky Jack is revealed in all its guilt-ridden, destructive force. Interestingly, the first incident of the sighting of his father, in Jack's own mirror image, happens when a snake enters the house and Jack, for no apparent reason says that Mother had brought in the snake:

> "You're the Devil!' he said; '*the Devil*! THE DEVIL! The missus brought you, ah-h-h!"

This strange connection can be interpreted in various ways. As a general indictment against all womenfolk for having succumbed to the seductions of the serpent; or more specifically, in keeping with the tone of parricide in the story, the snake can symbolise the male penis, the symbol of paternal authority which Mother allows into the house. Anyway, the fact of the matter is that Cranky Jack cannot rest until he kills his father, his own mirror image. The reasons behind this need to kill are not stated but we can guess at persecutory aggressiveness from Jack's father directed towards the child Jack. This may also be the reason behind his persecution anxiety and also his fear as well as the need to kill his father. John Carroll in the chapter, entitled "The Psychology of Guilt" states that:

> "When the infant, later the child, restrains his aggression out of a fear of physical retaliation he will suffer from persecution anxiety. ... His superego develops sadistic qualities, growing out of identification with the persecuting parent. The result is that aggressive impulses are checked by the superego and sent back in a sadistic form against the self. This is the superego that Freud personalised as a figure of archaic severity threatening the most ferocious punishments. It is the product of what Freud termed "identification with the aggressor." **(John Caroll, "The Psychology of Guilt", p. 34, Routledge & Kegan, London, 1985)**

Cranky Jack's fear of his father is very evident because after he sees what he thinks is an apparition he seems to run away from a fearsome physical presence. He rushes across the yard, tumbles through a wire fence, and shouts,

> "Let me up! -Ah-h-h! -let go me throat."

As he runs, he continuously glances back over his shoulder and when he comes to a big tree, he dodges round and round it. With the "fear of physical retaliation", however is also the "identification with the aggressor" and Cranky Jack ultimately 'kills' his father - as well as himself in his reflection. The irony is the mirroring ad infinitum of the father in the son - a sad tale of the continuity of paternal authority.

In attempting to contextualise Arthur Hoey Davis' *Cranky Jack*, I have tried to first pin it historically to the pioneer legend that gave rise to the popular myth of the Australian nation having been built by strong, masculine pioneering fathers. But the hardship and the labour required for such endeavours may result in the kind of alienation that we witness in Cranky Jack's derangement. The killing of the father may talk about a specific instance of castration anxiety and the desire for parricide but may, symbolically,

also tell of the fear and anxiety involved with the masculine, paternal pioneering effort; and the guilty need of the son to destroy the edifice of white settlement.

5.6 LET US SUM UP

A.H. Davis' *Cranky Jack* is a layered story of a son's destruction of his father, rejuvenated in his own reflection in a mirror. It also tells of exploitation and uses laughter as a means of normalising various macabre situations. In A.H. Davis' sketches of the Rudd family's labour and toil we can always see humour functioning as a defense mechanism. The optimism of the stories was the reason behind their wide popularity. The hardships and the backbreaking work on the selection were real enough but the humour helped disguise the cruelty of it all.

I have all also looked at *Cranky Jack* vis-a-vis the national myth of pioneering fathers, the problem of alienation from labour and the psychological implications of parricide.

5.7 QUESTIONS

(1) Read *Cranky Jack* as an attempt at dismantling patriarchal authority. What is the significance of the mirroring of Jack's Self as his father?
(2) Analyse the uses of humour in the story.
(3) Analyse the myth of the pioneer legend. Does the story realistically depict a pioneering family in the Bush? Point out instances from the text.
(4) Read *Cranky Jack* as the dehumanisation that arises out of the alienation of labour.

5.8 GLOSSARY

The Tatler and The Spectator

Those familiar with the literary history of the eighteenth century would know that Sir Richard Steele (1672- 1729) carved a niche for himself as miscellaneous essayists. He started **The Tatler** in 17709 and **The Spectator** in 1711 and several other periodicals as well. Steele worked in close alliance with Joseph Addison (1672- 1719). They worked very well as a team, while Steele brought wide experience of life to his work Addison polished it with a wonderful flourish of elegance.

5.9 SUGGESTED READINGS

(1) "No Laughing Matter" - Dorothy Green, 'The Bulletin Literary Supplement', Sept. 30, 1980.
(2) "Steele Rudd and Henry Lawson" – A.D. Hope, 'Meanjin', March 1956.
(3) "Celebrating Bush Battlers: Steele Rudd" - Brian Hoad, 'The Bulletin', Dec. 27,

UNIT 6 CHRISTINA STEAD : *THE OLD SCHOOL*

Structure

6.0 Objectives
6.1 Introduction
6.2 Christina Stead: Life and Works
6.3 Stead and Style
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6.5 *THE OLD SCHOOL*- Text
- 6.5.1 Analysing *The Old School*
- 6.5.2 The Title of *The Old* School
- 6.5.3 Plot
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- 6.5.5 Language and Style
- 6.5.6 Theme of *The Old School*
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- 6.5.8 Highlights

6.6 Let Us Sum Up
6.7 Questions
6.8 Suggested Reading

6.0 OBJECTIVES

This unit will deal specifically with Christina Stead and her contributions to the short story as a genre. After going through this unit it will be easier for you to understand the development and to note each writers' contribution to the short story. Christina Stead, her life, her works, her style, and an analysis of one of her hitherto unpublished short stories will give you a fair idea of how to understand a work of fiction, how to trace the development of the genre among other things.

6.1 *INTRODUCTION*

In this section we shall take a quick look at how the shift in themes and style had already begun by the time Christina Stead entered the literary stage. The Australian short story had moved away from the Lawson tradition to a completely new mode of writing. By the time Christina Stead began her works, the realistic novel, and the novel of character were no longer current. The realistic novel as we know concentrated on the here and the now, it dealt with every day life, events, with the social environment of the day and with movements (political, social, economic etc.,). It was down to earth and much closer to everyday life than it had had ever been before. The writers of the realistic novel paid greater attention to exact documentation and in getting facts right. This is however not to undermine their importance but to indicate the shift from one mode of writing to another. Christina Stead began writing stories, even novels that were more philosophical and even psychological in outlook. At this stage we shall get a glimpse of our writer for the first time. As she was to say herself, hers was a novel of psychology rather than spirituality. For Stead her characters were more important than any thing else. Her fiction ranges from fantasy to the most thorough of realistic documentation, as she moves through the layers of social class and from one continent to another expressing

a deep concern for the various social and political movements of her time and for those who were struggling to make something of their lives much as she had herself done in the past. She was conscious of the various strata and hierarchies in society and her literary work spans continents making the readers aware of various concerns prevalent then. Stead was Australian born and brought up, who worked by day and studied by night in order to procure a job and a passage to England. Once in England she traveled to many other countries, even went to Europe and America. Her physical movement resulted in her writings that span roughly four continents. Combined with her concerns was a poetic use of language, a keen satirical insight and an unparalleled imagination that gave her an edge over others and offered an entry into her characters. Her specialty lies in her ability to write and describe people and scenes as they unfolded before her eyes. She was able to translate both incidents and characters as they were and did not indulge in rumination. She wrote as she herself points out because she could. Robert Geering states that she never reused her books. Instead what she did was transfer the many sketches she had made into books and turned books into short stories. There have been many complaints about the evasiveness and disorder prevalent in her works but Stead's novels are drawn directly from life, and her characters too have the same source. Hence they tend to spill over the boundaries of conventional literary models and just as life cannot be contained, bracketed, similarly her work tends in this manner towards disorderliness and evasiveness. The short story form, however, forced her to compress her material and retain only its most important elements.

As one of her critics puts it, "the strength of Stead's work lies in her detailed observations, which she uses to illuminate the nature of her diverse subjects. These observations are made from an idiosyncratic perspective, moulded out of countless thousand impressions gathered and forgotten over the years. They form a constant body of material from which all her work is drawn." Yet however refracted they are, however unique, they are still part of 'the million drops of water that are the looking glass of all our lives.' She was interested in discovering the vast potential locked within the boundaries of closed societies -boarding houses, hotels and families- and the various fountains of passion that may be lying dormant merely waiting for the right moment to bubble and rise from within. Her fiction is a literature of interiors, filled with eccentrics, grotesque and all-time losers.

6.2 CHRISTINA STEAD: LIFE AND WORKS

Christina Ellen Stead was born on 17 July 1902 the year Australian women gained the right to vote in federal elections. She was a third generation Australian. When barely two and a half years old, her mother died leaving her with a father who was a curious mixture of an atheist and a puritan. Christina Stead may have acquired a literary bent of mind from her maternal uncle William who was a poet. Her father had a menagerie in the backyard of his house where he kept venomous snakes. He also had a keen interest in various types of fish. From an early age Christina Stead was an avid reader (with a special fondness for the tales of Hans Andersen, the Grimm Brothers, and the Arabian Nigh(s) and was a good storyteller herself. At the tender age of thirteen years she learnt French and became an admirer of Guy de Maupassant. At Sydney High School she edited and contributed prose and verse to the school magazine, "*The Chronicle*". By the time she began her two-year course at Sydney Teachers College, where she edited the College magazine, she was widely read in the classics and in the works of Poe, Balzac, Boccaccio and Rabelais. These biographical details are important as no writer can exist in a vacuum, moreover they contribute to the writer's development, her style and her work. Christina Stead left her literary and personal papers to the National Library of Australia. From her various notes, R G Geering, her literary trustee has extracted a number of her articles

and published them in the first issue of the *Southerly* (1984) that has thirteen of her hitherto unpublished short stories. dealing with various experiences ranging from her early childhood in Bexley and family life at Watson's Bay, to her voyages and journeys to several countries. Let us take a close look at her oeuvre. Her novels include:

Seven Poor Men of Sydney (1934), *House Of All Nations* (1938), *The Man Who Loved Children* (1940), *For Love Alone* (1944), *Letty Fox and Her Luck* (1946), *A Little Tea. A Little Chat* (1948), *The People With the Dogs* (1952), *Colours of Asia* (1955), *Miss Herbert (The Suburban Wife)*, (19), *The Palace With Several Sides* (1986), and *I'm Dying Laughing* (1986).

We have discussed a few relevant details on her life, we have mentioned her works we shall now rake a look at some of her important earlier works. Let us begin with her earliest novel the *Seven poor Men of Sydney* (1934) also the only novel set in Australia. This novel is about the lives of ordinary people and deals with the working class of Sydney during the Depression of the 1920s. Though it is a poetic novel, several publishers rejected it, before Peter Davis, a young London publisher, finally published it on the condition that she should write a more conventional novel that could be published before the *Seven Poor Men of Sydney*. This novel was to become *The Salzburg Tales*, a tale cycle with several narrators in different narrative genres. In her novel *For Love Alone* (1944), a young woman takes advantage of the 'chances of distant seas' that Sydney as a port offers. She rejects her home and family, and after imposing voluntary solitude, eventually makes her way to London. The novel however is more about an inner voyage, the process of discovery of the self through a gradual and growing understanding of love. Critics have considered *For Love Alone* to be an "honest and insistent evocation of female sexual longings" for the fact was that "such desire was generally acknowledged only tacitly if at all." It is largely autobiographical and deals with her early life in Australia. The novel is about a young girl Teresa Hawkins, who like Christina Stead endured personal hardships, worked by day and attended business classes at night in order to procure a passage to England and a job there. She eventually arrived in London in 1928. The first half of the novel is set in Australia and is fixed in an actual environment-both social and natural, while the second half is set in a strangely surreal London. The novel's terms change with the transfer of locale. Teresa Hawkins' need for love translates into a need to escape. through love, into a larger world. It is a long and uneven novel sometimes rather limited in its emotional range. Yet it is powerful too. Its attraction lies in Teresa's search of her inner being. her own consciousness. *For Love Alone (1944)* and her *The Man Who Loved Children* (1940) are the most autobiographical of her works. *The House of All Nations* (1938) is largely influenced by Stead's own experiences in international banking and is a portrait of financiers who manipulated and exploited the economy. In the *Man Who Loved Children* (1940), she probes the dangers that lie inherent within restricted family circles. Every day domestic squabbles and tensions that often conceal deep-seated antagonisms and damaging emotional pressures are clearly depicted in this novel. She manages to paint an extremely convincing picture of a family created and drawn partly form her own childhood. She also endows a sense of life. and defeat in the novel and in her characters. Her novel is at once both universal and unique.

Christina Stead had a strong tendency towards melodrama and this is to be found in largely in *For Love Alone*. She does not really have scenes of cozy intimacy between husbands and wives. but it contains several brother- sister relationships that often verge on incest. For instance. the various brother-sister relationships: between Michael and Catherine (*Seven Poor Men of Sydney*), Tom and Nellie Cotter (*Cotter's England*) and Philip and Nell (*The People with the Dogs*). Hazel Rowley her

biographer is of the opinion that "this loving brother and sister" clearly served as the unconscious model of a happy sibling couple. Christina Stead was also conscious about her physical unattractiveness in comparison with her cousin Gwen and her father. In all her stories about her childhood, she is aware of personal appearance. This awareness was, reinforced by her father who was obsessed with physical appearance himself. He expounded the theory that appearances reflected character and his own 'handsomeness' and fairness was the outward signs of his own goodness and innocence. For David Stead, plainness was a kind of deformity. Within ten years of her marriage to David Stead Ada had six children of her own. Ada was not easy to get along with and Christina Stead resented her. Rowley is inclined to believe that at an unconscious level Stead may have believed that her natural mother had left her because she was bad, at another level, she could have been angry about being deserted, rejected, unloved and unlovable. Where circumstances change thus, the unloved makes sure they are really unlovable and Christina Stead was to become as a writer, an observer, to be a professional outsider. While she considered herself an Australian writer living abroad, Australians rejected her on grounds of not having lived in Australia and the Americans criticized her for being Australian.

6.3 STEAD AND STYLE

Her fiction is about disrupted and oppressed lives and economic hardships, and the strain of meager living. Her situations are mostly domestic and mundane, not really remarkable. But from within these seemingly mundane situations she constructs elaborate studies of character, and charts the intricacies of the human relationships. The most distinctive feature of her fiction is her style. She was adept at combining the quirks / idiosyncrasies of her characters with the inner workings of their minds. She was good at portraying the emotions they (were barely aware of) are experienced and the good and the bad elements in such a detailed manner to conjure a unique yet probable character. Her characters appear to be those bordering on neurosis, they are those who cry, beg, coerce, rather than persuade and are extremely loquacious. Their loquaciousness however being an indication of their own confusion, the sense of anger, rage, fear, the whole range of emotions they are undergoing. This being too detailed at times proves tiring for the readers but it was her very own unique style of writing. Her writing though often uncoordinated (in the usual expectations of novel writing) is more of a response to a stimulus, generated by the chain of events in her novels. Her vocabulary has a very wide range- being brought up in such a culture (refer to her biographical details) with a naturalist and a botanist for a father and having read voraciously through her growing years –she ranges from the "further limits of scientific precision to the romantic extravagance of fantasy";(Robert Geering). Though she is so precise, so exact, and definite in her writing style, and her characterisation, she does not try to create an exactness of her characters. Instead what she does is try and identify her subjects by a process of continuous approximation. On the one hand she is exact (particularly where details are concerned) and on the other, defines exactness by assuming approximation.

She is quite often very inclusive in her fiction particularly in her earlier works like *The Seven Poor Men of Sydney*. In this novel the description of the setting is elaborate, but interesting and also helps contain some of the apparent formlessness (her novel is considered formless as opposed to the conventional novel which she avoids at every cost and chance) of the novel. She reconstructs the period, reflecting the conflicting idealism of the time, and the contending social philosophies. The patriotic fervour of the Great War that was being countered by the then emerging socialism not only fired the imagination of many but was also reflected in her novel. It was a period of labour unrest, economic uncertainty and of cultural and spiritual

doubt. The setting provides for the different emerging ideas, attitudes, social temper, and the local colour she adds to her work acts like a subsidiary to the ideas and proves supportive as well.

Her most famous novel "The Man Who Loved Children", (1940), probes the dangers that lie inherent in the restricted family circle. Every day domestic squabbles and tensions conceal deep-seated antagonisms and damaging emotional pressures. In this novel she manages to paints an extremely convincing picture of a particular family. This family that she has created is drawn partly from her own childhood, but amplified and fully endowed with a sense of life, and defeat that is peculiar to the story. The novel is at once both universal and unique. Christina Stead also has a tendency towards persistent melodrama and this is to be found largely in "For Love Alone." "The House of All Nations" (1938) is a portrait of the financiers who manipulated and exploited the economy.

She ranges widely from within a limited world (domestic world) and though this proves to be her trump card it also proves to be her main weakness of her work particularly in her next novel *The Man Who Loved Children*. In most of her novels Stead's characters take a stand. Once they have done so they do not / fail to hear or notice anything that stands in their way of thinking. This creates an impression of her characters (especially the main ones) as egotistical and often unappealing and therefore unattractive. Their ideology seems to form their mental life, but this mental life is also largely determined by their inherent/ innate inclinations. It often appears that there is an imperfect balance between the inner realities of her characters' mind and lives and the outer manifest realities. This is in fact a result of the misalliance of the novel of character with the novel of ideas. At this stage we are assuming that we are all aware of the different types of novels. For instance the novel of character, the novel of ideas, the picaresque novel, the regional novel etc., Incase any of us would like to refresh our memories we could always read any work that explains 'Literary Types and Terms'. Christina Stead's recreation of the social circumstances of the 1930s and 40s is impressive, and her expression of 'a particular kind of life' is thorough.

The success of Christina Stead's fiction, particularly her capacity to translate herself deeply into her characters' suggests that 'rage', envy or whatever, are edged aside by the novelist' loving absorption in individual personalities (Shapcott). She seems to be imaginatively losing her self in the process of recreation. Her response to that personality and the desire to give it expression drove her in her literary creativity. She is very clear about this in the following words: "...expression, which is an entity, a need, a frightful desire, stronger than any other physical desire..." (Web, Friendship, p 93-93). For Stead to love was to be able write. She believed both to be creative activities where one nourished the other, (Ann Blake, p13). She wrote in a spirit of revenge, using fiction to make a self-gratifying version of her experience: The fictionalization of her past gave her a real power: the power to recast reality. (Hazel Rowley, p79)

6.4 THEMES IN STEAD

Let us now analyse the important themes in Stead's fiction. Her very first publication *The Salzburg Tales* forced her to confront the possibility that one of her models would recognise herself and take offence. She also published her autobiographical family novel *The Man Who Loved Children*. It is believed that she changed the location to protect her family, but as Hazel Rowley has unearthed, she changed the locale to the United States of America, because of the resquest put forward by her publishers. (Rowley, p260) Christina Stead's supreme loyalty lay with her work.

Amongst her letters none of her personal correspondence with those she made models survives. Presumably she destroyed it all, (Ann Blake, pp16). Stead's gaze discovers within her central figures a greedy, even ugly, energy: " Every human being is a sort of monster, if you get to know them." (*I'm Dying Laughing*, pp345). As mentioned earlier her characters are loquacious and long after their verbal outpourings are over and done with, the readers is still struck by the scale of their passions. Her characters are authentic and individual because of her well-documented ability to catch the idiosyncrasies of her model's habits of speech. Stead could have provoked her models to pose for her, write to her, talk or play out scenes for her which may have led to them feeling offended and betrayed by her. But what emerged from the models, were her own figures of literary significance that had been made over in her imagination and brought into being through the repeated drafts of her work. For Stead the ideal scope of the novel was a work, which reached beyond the study of human psychology, however insightful or affecting. Critics have various opinions regarding using real models for fictional work. R G Geering is of the opinion that "...ultimately nothing of this really matters. People are used as models for characters and the important thing, the real achievement, is the literary work, the imaginative creation that emerges."

Her subsequent fiction confirms the accomplishments of her major works. After a break of nearly fifteen years, her new works continued to concentrate on 'the drama of the person', expressing the inner convictions and delusions of her characters and recreating the semi-transparent envelope of their lives. But the world of her imagination had become quite separate from the immediate pressures, real events of every day life and this becomes apparent in her later works *Cotters' England* (1966), *The Little Hotel* (1973), *Miss Herbert (The Suburban Wife)* (1976). For instance in *Cotters' England*, Nellie Cook's earlier political enthusiasm no longer has any substantial focus. Similarly in *The Little Hotel*, the stories of the various guests depict a decayed mode of life and *Miss Herbert (The Suburban Wife)*, shows the shallowness of a woman, who is quite blind to the social changes taking place about her. Stead resisted the conventional novel whenever she could. For a detailed understanding of what a conventional novel form is, it would be helpful to read Forster' *Aspects of the Novel*. She did away with plot in the conventional sense and instead diffused action through her various characters. By doing so what she achieved was a variety of perspectives rather than a single, unifying (read artificial structure). Her story element springs from her character's hopes, fears, disappointments, their motivations however demanding or conflicting, their disappointments and their sheer determination to succeed. You might recall what we said earlier about those ordinary people struggling to make something of their lives. She appears to be rejecting fictional strategies constantly and her work present the entire range and texture of experience, which does not have a shape or a form imposed upon it. She rarely has a plot, to compensate for her style she has tried to develop a more appropriate, a more inclusive form in coming to terms with life.

While Stead was sensitive to the seriousness of fiction: " A novel is philosophic. A person who writes a novel is being philosophical about society, but he needn't have a social line," she did not have a direct / manifest social message to deliver. Caught between the paradox of constructing sense of the un-constructed, Furphy turned towards the comic perceptions of relationship between fiction and reality, it had the opposite effect on Christina Stead. Her characters have a tendency of taking a negative or defensive stance very often. They seem to be resisting any restrictions, definitions imposed by society, they also appear to be fighting free of constricting personal relationships, they are defiant of any form of order, control / determinism. The only movement that becomes apparent in their restless quest is for freedom and knowledge. This could be the result of the writer's unconscious biography making its

presence felt through the inner minds of her characters, somewhat like the subconscious seeping into the very thought processes that plagued the author so often finding its way into her literary creations. If you ever manage to lay your hands on Hazel Rowley's biography of Christina Stead do not miss the opportunity of reading it. Christina Stead's life was in fact very akin to Teresa Hawkins in *For Love Alone* or that of Louis Pollitt's in *The Man Who Loved Children*. The ending images of her novels (particularly the last scene of *The Man Who Loved Children*) are often contradictory to the imaginative impetus of her work. Louie Pollit crosses the bridge to escape into the world, at the end of *The Man Who Loved Children*. Yet, the misery and emotional upheaval she incurs earlier on in the story, lingers on in our minds, long after the image of her achieving what she set out to attain vanishes from sight.

Though she gives all the details of the circumstantial world, the subject of Christina Stead's fiction lies in her detailed presentation of her characters' inner perception and presentation of the inner minds of her characters. Her character portrayal and analysis are excessive, in fact they appear larger than life and her ambition to account for character in terms of individual choices and social intention surpasses her capacity to control the imaginative design her creativity is giving way to. Hers is a fiction that expresses loss, exhaustion and defeat. It is genuinely unsentimental. No doubt we will all remember that the 'sentimental novel' was very popular in eighteenth century England and that it concentrated on the distresses of the virtuous and attempted to show that a sense of honour and moral behaviour was rightly rewarded. It also depicted effusive emotion as an evidence of the kindness and goodness of the character concerned. *Pamela or Virtue Rewarded* (Richardson) is a good example of such a novel. Keeping this in mind it will be easy fore us to determine the grounds on which it is said that Stead's fiction was genuinely unsentimental. Christina Stead did not have any such elements in her novels. Her fiction in fact documents the action thoroughly, much like the "naturalist novel" that had become the current literary trend at the turn of the century. Before we assume that we are all familiar with this term let us discuss very briefly what the "naturalist novel" was all about. In Literature "naturalism or naturalist" developed out of realism. The naturalist interpreted life concentrating on depicting the social environment of the times and dwelt on its deficiencies and on the shortcomings of human beings. *Emile Zola* was an excellent exponent of this form of writing and he influenced the works of *Maupassant* for instance. Other forms of literary creativity emerged which sought to mirror life with the utmost fidelity. We may have deviated slightly at this juncture but it is better that we know what we are talking about, to know what we are referring to then to proceed further in ignorance. Coming back to Stead's fiction, she maintains neutrality of point of view and expresses the inner life of her characters and registers the varying intensities of their experience. She was completely fascinated with the individuality of her characters and also with social theory. But she does not always manage to reconcile the two comfortably. Her writing gives the impression that she is constantly seeking the extra ordinary within the ordinary. What she discovers however, in her quest is "nervous strain, furtive desires and contradictory impulses. Even though she adopted the naturalist mode of writing, she is deeply interested in depicting the quality of experience than in exposing the failures of the world. She is favourably inclined towards the psychological rather than the spiritual aspect of writing.

Christina Stead's characters' vocal performances reveal the monsters underneath. She believed that a writer must work from life and develop skill in language and observation in order to produce something useful for the world, and to avoid the conventionally literary. Stead transforms real people into fictional accounts and makes them her own creations, (Ann Blake, p12). She described herself as a psychological novelist and her subjects as 'the drama of the person', and was always

a fervent advocate of drawing from life. She believed that people (characters) could not be invented for they would then be mere puppets, (Lidoff, p 217). For her a piece of work to have value had to be thoroughly grounded in reality. She therefore took her characters from life, their stories and her novels often following the course of events of their lives. According to Robert Geering: The short story for her was more than a literary form, it was an ever changing proof of man's universal needs for self - expression. "The story dies if written to a rigid plan or pinned down. It is a million drops of water that are the looking glasses of all our lives," (Kenyon Review XXX, 4 (1968), p 449).

Christina Stead's first publication *The Salzburg Tales* (1934) is a work that expresses a young Australian writer's fascination with European heritage. These stories are written with a detachment that frequently runs to satire. This collection was inspired by a visit to the festival city in 1931.It included a few stories, the only ones she can remember in detail, from an earlier Manuscript (now lost) that she tried, unsuccessfully, to get published in Australia while she was still at the Sydney Teachers College. In these stories Christina Stead works within the geographical and literary context of Europe and her collection of stories in this book are written with a sophistication and finesse that is not found in her earlier novel-*The Seven Poor Men of Sydney*. It will be obvious upon reading her works that most of Stead's characters are motivated by money, greed, envy and opportunism. The English working classes were bigots and its members lead dishonest lives, cheating landlords obsessed with getting something out of nothing, Stead seems fascinated by her characters- their behaviour, the result of circumstances of birth and upbringing. Many of her characters or character-types appear again in her works: there's Miss Chillard from *The Little Hotel*, the storyteller from *The Salzburg Tales*, *Seven Poor Men of Sydney*, *The Beauties and the Furies* and *Cotters' England*; and there's the cynical Benjamin Cullen, the real life Eric of *A Writer's Friends*.

Stead is a natural storyteller. As in *The Salzburg Tales* her enthusiasm for the form is palpable. Whether she's writing a fairy story, documenting her own voyage to London as the companion of a well to-do alcoholic, exploring the likelihood of dopple gangers or spinning a little horror story about the man who lost his face, Stead is obviously enjoying herself- and the reader cannot help but follow suit.

6.5 *THE OLD SCHOOL* -TEXT

The brick school in its yellow playground lay south west from and below Lydham Hill. One morning the wind-break on the knoll half sank to the horizon like a constellation wheeling; the house lay close to the breast of clay, shawled in pines. It turned out that there were trees in the school ground too – a Moreton Bay fig, a pepper tree with outstretched arms and in the lower part, near the headmaster's house, some flower beds for the infants.

The rumour about the school among the very small children who had never been there, was that children were beaten there and prisoned, 'caned and kept in, even the babies'. Mistrial and injustice were common at home, but there never was any particular conclusion, while in this new yellow earth, there were strange administrators, and things had a beginning and an end, the end at four o'clock, the conclusion liberty, sometimes delayed 'kept in half an hour.'

Cause and effect were much clearer than at home, effect often unlooked for, doomful and needing analysis. Cause and effect mostly concerned the boys. A boy who jumps over the fence in the evening and shouts while playing stolen football, who pick a pansy form the infants' garden, who takes a pear from the Jollys' fruit stall, will soon

be seen at the headmaster's table waiting for six cuts. There are even trusties, worthy little boys who do not seem to earn much respect, who are willing to take him there. And it is known pretty soon that the boy who stays away a whole week, a truant (that is a terrible word) in the hot silent gully, hidden by trees, paddling in the shallow creek, will go to the reformatory. The shadow of the reformatory was steep and dark. The informants – there are always a number of small sages about – know all about it. It had barred windows, food was bad, beatings the usual thing and you only came out of there to go to prison. In any case, in there they wrote blucher boots. Blucher boots were stiff work-boots with heavy soles, cheap and long wearing. It was accepted that children who came to school in blucher boots would leave school early and do rough work. They might even work on the road alongside their fathers, who, too, wore blucher boots. The very word was socially significant: 'he's wearing blucher boots!' The nice girls looked down and away in shame, the dirty girls grinned. Nevertheless there was Tom Biggar, a fleshy chestnut and rose boy often good at drawing. Mr. Roberts put upon the varnished table a blucher boot to draw and beside it some potatoes. There were protests from the girls and the nice boys. They also did not want to draw potatoes. Tom's were very good though. Mr. Roberts said he might be an artist. Tom laughed, 'I'm going to work on the road with father, when I can.' He did not mind the prospect at all: he would earn money like his father.

All the outside information, these certitudes, were spread by the informants, natural moralists, two or three to a class and as far as I knew, all little girls. There were girls and boys in each class, but in their own society, that is in the playground, they did not mix There was one moral little boy, though: he was called after one of the greatest English poets and had a good memory. Once the whole school was assembled in the long room to hear of a most serious crime. 'Who did it? It is a mistake to think you must be loyal to your classmates, when such a thing has been done.' The headmaster marched up and down and called 'Speak out'. Many moral questions were debated by the girls in large circular evasions but this was an obsolete law never debated. (The informants knew that someone had scandalously coupled the names of male and female teachers in stolen chalk on the boys' outhouse.)

In all the school assembled, only one child had the moral courage to tattle, Dryden Smith himself, an undersized clerkly boy of ten; 'It was Snowy Thorne.'

This delation froze the school in lessons and caused the playgrounds to move with wagging heads and hands, as a fern-slope under wind; whatever the verdict, Dryden was left alone, contaminated: such a lesson in public morality lasts through life. Even the informants dared not become informers.

At the end of the year, Dryden won a prize From Log Cabin to White House given by Mr Roberts, a man who protected children, and Dryden recited before the parents and the minister 'Horatius at the Brigdge', standing up trembling but brave. I can still see his pale serious round face as it rose, twice, once for the denunciation, once for the poem. And I saw him once more, at Christmas, at the old Anthony Hordern's with his little face just above the counter, where they sold men's ties. We saw each other but made no sign. He was at work. I was at school. I too had won a prize, 'Feats on the Fjord', which struck me as second best and I recited "There was a sound of revelry by night', I could see, as I proceeded, that the parents were stupefied with boredom and good manners.

The informants, our moralists, had clean dressed, pink, blue or sprigged, patent leather shoes and white socks, and curls natural or rag. They did clean school work too, even when we got to pen and ink. Goodness alone knows how, with their pink

cheeks and shiny curls and neatly dressed brisk little mothers, they got all this news about jails, reformatories, judges and sentences, lashings, canings, bread and water.

When wrongs took place in school or grounds, the informants instantly knotted together, a town moot: they discussed, debated and delivered an opinion. What the teachers said was brought forward but only as hearsay. I never had an opinion to give; in one way I did not understand and then I was always puzzled. I thought then that cruelty and injustice were natural and inevitable during all of a poor creature's life.

Now Snowy Thorne, the accredited bad boy of the school, a ten-year-old orphan with straw hair, tearstained face, a good Norfolk suit given him by his aunts and blucher boots – if the little girls picked him out for gossip and innuendo it was because the teachers had picked him out first. The headmaster, a grey haired small-headed socialist, a mild moderate mediocre fellow, thought he had been slighted in being sent out to this distant suburban school, a revenge for his opinions. He hated Snowy Thorne. Some iniquity discovered, Mr Fairway would call together the three upper classes (fifth was top class then), pack them into the long room which was built in a court house style, and make Snowy Thorne walk up and down, up and down, all the length of the room, by the three blackboards, up and down form the desk where he got his canings to the door to the yard through which he could escape (but Mr Roberts stood there), in his neat but yellowing Norfolk suit and his dull black boots. What annoyed Mr Fairway was that Snowy Thorne would not admit all of his crimes, until after being baited and exhibited and worn down he cried and was caned; and even then no one was sure. But who else threw ink into the new fish pond that Mr Fairway had just put in at his own expense to cheer up the boys' playground? Who else wrote certain symbols on the wall, for example, a rooster and a strange eye with long lashes? Whose pale poll was seen at evening star time alone in the playground and whistling to itself? Where had the toffee apples gone from the IXL shop? It could only have been the butter ladies' boy (his aunts sold butter). I do not know what became of Snowy Thorne. Poor Mr Fairway! The school was given more classrooms, a better grade; and a new assistant head, smart, conceited and lively and, worst of all, with a B.A.degree, came to push the aging man about.

When we first came to school, we sang a pretty song about the old bell,

> I was hung in my place when the village was young,
> And the houses were scattered and few,
> In the old dingy belfry for ages I've swung.
> But my song is the same as when new.

Though I knew it was about another place, it also seemed to me to be about Bexley, where the houses were scattered and few; But by the time Mr. Bobsley B.A. came, closer settlement had begun, many old paddocks were closed to us.

The first teacher I knew was a confident pretty neat woman, married; with two young children at home. She told us about them almost every day: luckily for her in these children she had met her ideals. She had large blue eyes and crinkled hair; and her children were fair, too. The school children caller her 'very strict', not a slur. This was another moral issue often debated – who was the better teacher, the strict or the slack?

'If I hear a single sound you won't go home to lunch, you'll stay in all day and I'll make rabbit pie out of you and eat you,' she said. This threat caused some of the infants to sob out of hunger in prospect; other sobbed out of fear. We were very

young. Each shiny morning she looked up and down the ranks as they marched in and standing at her desk would cry, 'Millie fall out, Jack Dodger, Will Hill, Polly – fall out' and by the time the class stood at its desks there would be on the floor a ragged line of the guilty, surveyed by the others with interest and guilt. It was not always possible to understand why they were guilty. It was easy to note some, torn jacket, hair 'like a birch broom in a fit', and Maidie Dickon of course, for truancy, though she hid in no sunny gully. We sang the first song, 'Good morning to you, glorious sun', sat down and the moment came, the review of the sinners, more exciting to the teacher than to them. Some after a homily would be sent back to their seats, two or three were left to tramp up and down. Then a general explanation of the law. If parents could not afford boots they must send a note explaining; but if children had boots and came without, then – and so forth. Children had the duty of asking their parents for boots and shoes; if the soles were worn out, they themselves must take them to the boot-mender's. I myself stood there once in broken boots, but was saved. As I stood there with flushed cheeks and resentful, the class sang its second song, with the chorus, 'Shoo, shoo, go out black cat'. At this moment the headmaster appeared winkling (he was younger and happier then). He pretended to be a black cat and ran out: the delinquents were sent back to their seats. When the class set to work, Maidie Dickon would be called to the desk and her case gone into. She had been away eight days, say, and only returned in response to the teacher's note. She must now go home and bring a note of excuse from her mother. The dark haired little girl went out silent, passive. As she clumped to the door, one of the informants, the censors (who felt themselves enabled to speak in class) remarked that Maidie was wearing boys' boots, blucher boots. So she was. Presently another who had been sent to the head with a message, returned to say that Maidie was sitting in a corner of the shed, doing nothing. So she was, she could even be seen from our doorway, quite still, head drooping. A willing messenger was sent to tell her to go home. The next day she did not come; but at mid-morning on the following day someone saw a motionless bundle there, with her two bare legs in the boots, crouched in the infants' shed: she had no note.

For a few days after, she sat in her desk in front, clumsily doing lessons with a book and pencil from the school cupboard were given out sparingly: you had to bring your own. The censors were indignant (though well provided with books and pencil cases). There was a considerable outcry, 'It isn't fair' they exclaimed. Usually a new book was given as a sort of prize, for very good work. Maidie would begin a new exercise book and then stay away for so long that the book would belong to someone else by the time she returned. She came without any property at all, no pencil box, sponge box, slate pencil, pencil, school bag, handkerchief, forlornly destitute.

The censors (the informants) were astonishing newsgatherers. How could they know? – but they did - that Mr Dickon was a roadworker who had been on strike (for them a criminal thing), that Mrs Dickon was a washerwoman, never home in the daytime. When she got a query form the teacher, Mrs Dickon always answered at once, on odd pieces of paper bills or newspaper, which were exhibited and read out to the class by the clean gold haired teacher. These notes would say 'Maidie had to help me,' and once she said 'I have a new baby and Maidie had to stay at home to help.' Maidie knew a brief populairty then: the informants loved new babies.

Monday mornings were bank mornings. Children with prudent parents brought each a shilling or a six-pence and went to the headmaster who wrote down in each bank book the sum brought. He complained about it – how did we know that? – and we could not understand his complaint at such a privilege: a moaner, evidently. I also banked one shilling a week and one Monday the shilling was missing. Neighbours and busybodies (informants should I say) helped me look for it, said it was stolen.

Knowing how confused I was, how I always lost things at home, I thought I had lost it myself. We turned out the little lunch case, poked at its seams and everyone studied the floorboards. 'Who stole it?' very soon became 'Maidie Dickon stole a shilling.' 'How do you know?' 'She must have, she's poor.' Even the teacher was shaken. Maidie Dickon remained as before, silent, forlorn. I felt guilty. I felt sure it was I. Justice without evidence took its course. The following Monday when I opened my case a shilling piece lay on top. 'Maidie Dickon must have put it back' they cried. As for me, I believed that I had over-looked it, that it had fallen out of a seam, a pocket. That notion of Maidie Dickon climbing up all those stairs (I was at the back in a banked classroom), opening cases, taking out, putting in and all with such cunning and stealth, she who never moved, never always late, did not fit. Even now, she never spoke, never volunteered word or action. There she is though, the little girl in white, with her bowed heavy shoulders and black eyes, in my mind; and with her, the horror of money.

She was sitting there one morning hunched more than usual because of the dress. Someone was reading the lesson, 'A man in a land where lions are found was once out late in the day far from home' (a phrase I have never forgotten), but the little girls' interest was glued to a topic right at home and they interrupted the fascinating lion story (I remember that the man hid in a hole under the cliff and the lion leaped right over him into the gulf), to remark to the teacher that Maidie was wearing a new dress made out of a sheet. 'No, it's a flour bag, her mother hasn't got any sheets.' This was a serious argument without malice. 'Mrs Taylor, she shouldn't come to school in a dress made out of a sheet' – craning, inspecting, deciding. They had been simmering with this news, waiting for the moment to let it out. Before school, she had pulled away form their inquisitive puzzled fingers and eyes, little sparrows pecking at the odd-feathered one, her large opaque black eyes on them and then away – with what feeling? Even in the lines that morning, they, the good, had been disorderly, fluttering. And now, when the bright haired woman settled them all, they told her she had been obeyed. Maidie had only stayed away the last time because she had no dress to wear. Now she had a dress, 'It's made out of a sheet.' 'Flour bags?' 'NO, it's a sheet.' The teacher, curious, went right up to Maidie's desk and studied the dress.

It was soft old thick cotton, made in fashion, with a deep yoke, long sleeves into wristbands, several inch wide pleats into a waistband, tucks and a wide hem to let down. It was white and remained white, though certain marks (which had made them say flour bags) had faded with washing.

Maidie never had any lunch. During the lunch recess she sat by herself at the far end of the wooden seats which ran round under the high brick walls. The rest of the girls in groups in the noonday shade of the buildings occasionally glanced her way, during a lull in their busy colloquies, condemning her for her misery, some, perhaps, curious about her life. If a newcomer, a wandering casual, not yet incorporated socially or perhaps even kindhearted, approached her, the playground leaders at once dispatched a messenger, 'You mustn't talk to her: she hasn't any lunch,' and some other parts of the indictment might be added, if the wanderer hesitated.

Some hungry children ate their lunches in snatches under the desks during school hours and had none left when noonday came. Some of these grasshoppers cast eyes on their friends' lunches and even begged; but they got little if anything. They too had the sin of lunchlessness, though it was understood they were more weak than sinning. Was it one of those who in the morning poached another's lunch? In the middle of the morning Dorothy (a sweet little girl who was not an informant) found her lunch gone. 'The thief – the thief' a word they liked to shrill and who could it be?

Yes, Maidie it might be – but for some reason the informants had grown a little careful since the episode of the shilling. They must have had doubts, too. But what a din!

She listened at her desk, motionless: she sat in the shed or playground. At last, the lunchless one, Maidie wept, but no one pitied her. They sang the midday song, 'Home to dinner, home to dinner, hear the bell, hear the bell, bacon and potatoes...' etc. Dorothy lived too far away to go home and the teacher gave her money for the IXL shop.

It is a hard cruel know that has gathered in the shade at the top of the yard, looking over their shoulders fiercely at the girl in the white dress, a bundle of submission in the sun sometimes shaking her black basin-crop which she scratches ('she has nits') and glancing mildly round her: perhaps she is shortsighted. 'Thieves oughtn't to be allowed in school,' and they bring into their talk the reformatory, these pink and blue girls, whispering secrets boasting and harsh; and yet all are afraid. The reformatory for Maidie, there with coarse dishes, coarse clothes, sleeping on sacking or planks, there children are flogged, though it serves them right, there is the cat o' nine tails, there they are put into cells alone, there are iron bars on the windows and if they escape the police catch them. The little girls in pink and blue know the names of the jails – Long Bay, Parramatta, Bathurst. Where do the charming little balls of fluff, their mothers' happiness, gather this awful lore? Mrs. Taylor, the teacher, comes round the corner of the infants' building where Maidie sits in the midday sun, close to the side gate leading into the headmaster's dark snug cottage. Mrs. Taylor speaks,

'Are you hungry, Maidie?'
'Yes.'
'Have you nay lunch?'
'No.'
'Don't you ever bring any lunch?'
'No.'
'Come and have lunch with me.'

She takes her by the hand. They go round the corner towards the infants' building where the teacher has her packet lunch, done up in a white damask serviette, on her desk.

The teacher does not acquire merit by this action. How set back the informants are now! 'She oughtn't to do it!' Yes, morality has got a black eye. The teacher has fallen from grace. 'She shouldn't give her lunch when she never beings any.' What Mrs. Taylor does will henceforth be debated with less than latitude: she has sided with the luckless, rebuffed the rightous. I was there. I was never able to make up my mind about things; and so it is still there, clear to me, the ever burning questions of good and bad which (to be fair to the informants) so greatly occupied their minds. I always thought it strange that adults do not notice how profoundly little children are engrossed and stirred by moral debate. They are all the time sharpening their awareness of the lines and frontiers.

6.5.1 Analysing *The Old School*

We shall analyse the short story -*The Old School* from several angles. We shall begin with a few comments on the title of the story, followed by a discussion on the plot. We shall then analyse the narrative structure of the story and also take a look at Stead's characterisation. We will end our discussion with the theme of *The Old School*. Our analysis will also include the contextualisation of *The Old School*.

6.5.2 The Title of *The Old School*

Let us reflect a little on the title of the story- *The Old School.* Sometimes the title itself tells us a lot about what the story contains. For instance *The Old School* could be the tale of any old school, a school that is old, the old school where the narrator studied, the old school as in people belonging to a certain tradition, a certain generation and thinking and behaving in a certain manner. A title that says so many things and conjures so many images in our minds would obviously strike a chord somewhere. Going a little further the title also brings to mind our own school, the schools we attended as children. The title invites us to refresh our own memories of the past. It also helps us draw analogies between other works written in England for instance. In fact the title has a very Dickensian resonance about it. It brings to mind images of schools and teachers like Mr Grindstone (in Dicken's *Hard Times*), of *Nicholas Nickleby, Great Expectations, Mill On The Floss* (George Eliot), and *Jude The Obscure* (Thomas Hardy). As was the tradition most Victorian novelists talked about education and the type that was appropriate for the age. England we may recall had just about managed to over throw the shackles of **Romanticism** and was now concentrating on **Utilitarianism**. We do know what Romanticism and the Romantic movement comprised. Utilitarianism was a concept promoted largely by Jeremy Bentham who believed that only that which had a practical purpose to serve and that, that was grounded in facts should be advocated while romantic frills and fancies were to be frowned upon. For instance in *Hard Times* Mr Grindstone asks a student to describe a horse. The student describes the horse as a quadruped, and herbivorous etc but has actually no clue as to what a horse looks like. Most of the Victorians were trying to come to terms with and negotiating the most practical method of imparting sound, useful education. All this was often reflected in their creative works like novels. Some were even trying to show the futility of the useless method and syllabi being advocated by the schools of those days. For instance *The Mill On the Floss*, is a comment on the uselessness of the type of education that is being imparted to Tom. This education is useless because it will not really prepare Tom for the life that he will have to lead in the future and also because it fills his head with ideas and notions that are above his station in life. Not only were most of the writers trying to negotiate the viability of this method of education they were also exposing the pitfalls of the system and that may also have been the case with Christina Stead. She offers us a comment on the schooling system of Australia in the early decades of the twentieth century. The title by itself seems to suggest four things:

(a) the old school where the narrator/ author studied
(b) life/ the oldest school in the world
(c) the old school as in the old school of thought and
(d) a comment on the schooling system of the times.

We shall not go into too many details here. If we read the story keeping these four points in mind, we will be in a position to discern for ourselves the various shades of meaning inherent in the text. Let us now take a look at the plot of *The Old School.*

6.5.3 Plot

What do we understand by the term 'plot'? Aristotle the ancient Greek philosopher was the first to recognise plot as the most important ingredient of a tragedy (the other five ingredients being, character, diction, thought, spectacle and melody). Though Aristotle talked about tragedy, these six constituents of a tragedy provide the basis of all narratives – be they novels, plays or tragedies. We shall take a look at plot or what Aristotle called the very "life and soul" of the story. A good plot is the outcome of a

writer's strategies and tactics to produce a story that is not a mere narration but has a life of its own and not only creates an interest but also sustains that interest till the end. Having said this let us now turn to a discussion on the plot of *The Old School. The Old School* as mentioned earlier is one of the last written of her stories but ir was the first in experience. It takes the reader back to the town of Bexley where Christina Stead grew up. Stead lets the reader know where the school is located, what it appears like at first sight, and what impressions one gets of it on first looking at it. The 'insider-outsider' relationship is evident throughout the short story. The school becomes a strange world that the narrator imagines to be a treeless and flowerless place. The narrator is amazed to discover that the school actually has trees and flower -beds and shows signs of being a habitable place.

The narrator knows only what s/he has heard the school to be. S/he believes it to be a place where there is a beginning (when school starts) and an end (at four in the evening) and where justice is meted out more swiftly than in a law court. It could even come in the form of a detention, crime is followed equally quickly by retribution and if the crime is not discovered then there are spies and informers or 'trustees' who will do the needful. The narrator believes the school to be a 'prison' where children are, ' beaten, caned, locked-in' all this is played off by a sense of the freedom that lies outside the gates of the school. Of the freedom in playing truant, but all this does not go unnoticed by the school or its administrators. The differences between 'home' and 'school' are quickly noted and accepted by all. Anybody breaking rules is punished with six canes at the Head Master's table. It is a world where justice is not delayed but where mistrials may take place. Note the language used to convey the sense of impending mistrials, right at the beginning of the story. Another amazing feature in the plot is the fact that these young, innocent children who are well dressed and neat, do neat work in class seem to know so much about the world outside the school. They seem to be aware of the fact that naughty children will be punished and will eventually end up in the 'reformatory' which was a school with barred windows, beatings, bad food and from where he would graduate to the prison. These children are also aware of crime, jails, lashings, canings, of the names of prisons and the conditions therein. It is a world where injustice prevails and people take out their frustrations on some one weaker than them, (Headmaster picking on Snowy Thorne, the girls picking on Maidie Dickon).

Another thought provoking element is the 'blucher boots' that strike the readers with the thought that it symbolises poverty. It stood for the working class. Anyone wearing these boots "would leave school early and do rough work", it meant that the wearer of the boot was from a poor family and that his father wore those boots to work on the road and so would the children. The words "blucher boots" receive added social significance, the working class for instance. It stands for those children who will never finish their studies but will join the work force as early as possible. The insider-outsider relationship becomes forcibly stronger as the girls (insiders) pass on information or ' message of certitude' to the outside world. But even within this seemingly homogenous world class distinctions are maintained and the not so well dressed, not so neat student is needlessly the butt of cruel jokes and malicious taunts. It is a microcosm of the adult world, but even within that little microcosm things change, developmental activities increase rapidly while the open spaces are being encroached upon and many of the paddocks are now closed. Within this microcosm children behave like miniature adults and are 'profoundly engrossed and stirred by moral debate.' Their teacher falls from grace for sharing her lunch with the poor child Maidie Dickon.

Let us now turn our attention to the mode of characteisation Stead employs in *The Old School.*

6.5.4 Characterisation

As students of Literature by now we do know about the two basic types of characters- round and flat. Flat characters very simply put are not well developed and are recognisable stereotypes like the "rogue", the "braggart" or the "clown". Round characters on the other hand are well-defined and well-drawn characters who have a breadth and a life of their own and who live through the narration. Stead too makes use of stereotypes like the poor child – Maidie Dickon and Snowy Thorne the social misfit. Why would a writer use stereotypes? Dickens uses the same type of characters, why should he have done that? These writers probably used the flat stereotypical characters in order that they may be recognizable immediately and that they would remain in the minds of the readers long after the narration itself is over. Stead's characters once again have a Dickensian resonance. She seems to be using her characters to serve a basic purpose that being to get her message across – essentially exposing the system of education prevalent then. Stead manages to record faithfully minute details along with personal traits and chains of thought, and is able to express the mixed and sometimes complex nature of her characters. Her characterizations appear authentic and individual as she manages to catch the idiosyncrasies of her individual speakers. Her portrayal of the character of Maidie Dickon is powerful. Maidie stands as a symbol of the underprivileged lot of our society. Along with Maidie is the other social misfit- Snowy Thorne have been constructed powerfully. The "blucher boots" almost becomes a character by itself as it symbolises the working class, the socially insignificant. Maidie is a helpless little girl, helpless because of her social class she has to bear the taunts of her classmates, and the curiosity they express at the lifestyle of the poor. Let us take a look at the there of the story.

6.5.5 Language And Style

She uses powerfully language to express her beliefs on social theory. Stead has tried to put across the social circumstances of the day. The children have been attuned in such a way as to consider poor to be bad. The poor have no voice. There are distinctions maintained between the rich and the poor are such that anything associated with the poor becomes a morally wrong choice. She expresses quite clearly the fact that social discrimination did exist and children were taught to think likewise from a very tender age. This has lead to the loss of innocence in her characters and they behave like miniature adults. Her choice of words particularly while describing the children is very interesting. She uses words like 'trusties', ' natural moralists', informants', 'informers', 'a town moot', 'censors', 'messengers', ' busybodies', 'playground leaders', ' hard, cruel knot' and 'indignants' which tell a different story, a story that takes one away from the world of the children, away from innocence. The language she utilizes is such that it is reminiscent of the world of adults, a world where people are aware of the ills of society and yet continue to perpetrate them.

6.5.6 Theme of *The Old School*

In this particular story her re-creation of the social and educational system of the early decade of the present century is remarkable. She has the ability of translating herself deeply into her characters and with great absorption she shapes the story. She □ictionalized her past in an attempt to recast reality and thereby tried to attain power over her own fate. Her strength lies in her detailed observation of her character's inner perspectives. You will find this particularly in the portrayal of the narrator who is amazed time and again by the incidents that occur in the school. *The Old School*

documents the various incidents that has affected the narrator profoundly but maintains a neutral point of view. Stead seems fascinated with the individuality of her characters. This is followed closely by her interest in social theory. The juxtaposition between the school as a prison and the real prison (in this case the reformatory school from where on the children will graduate to the real prison) are drawn out very well. The images juxtaposed between the school as a prison where children are kept in for the day and the real prison (in the shape of reformatory schools and later on the main prison) is well drawn in the story and seems to be constantly playing one against the other. *The Old School* tells of a social issue – the discrimination of the underprivileged and the mental and emotional stance of the young students. She believed that a writer should work from life. This story is true of her claim. It tells of her growing up days at Bexley.

6.5.7 Cultural Context

In terms of composition, the stories range from 1920-30, to the last decade of her life in Australia. Her last written stories *The Old School* and *A Little Demon* are actually her earliest experiences. After her return to Australia in 1974, she had only one more book to her credit, *Miss Herbert* (1976). Thereafter she concentrated on memories of her own childhood in Australia and to the histories of her parents' families. The University of New South Wales had decided on March 2, 1983 to award an honorary degree of Doctor of Letters to Christina Stead. She had accepted the proposal but her death on March 31, 1983 prevented her formal admission to the degree. Christina Stead's *Ocean of Story – The Uncollected Stories,* span five years but she does not propose any theories on life or even art within this wide time range. She does not have a moral message, or a theory to put across to her readers. She merely wrote because she could. She takes great delight in her characters but stand apart and observes them, as would an outsider. Her strength lies in her detailed observations. This collection is an "essential reading for Stead fans and a good introduction to those who haven't yet enjoyed her," (Elaine Lindsay, S M H 14/12/85). *The Old School* is a tale about the oldest school in the world, the school of humans that teach one early in life the ways of the world. It is in these play fields and classrooms that children learn all the lessons of life. It is about 'lines and frontiers' of boundaries being crossed, of children constantly sharpening their notions and awareness of the lines and the frontiers and the results of that.

6.5.8 Highlights

Note the manner in which the story is written. Does the writer have a social theory to project? From my understanding of the story it is obvious that Christina Stead had a social message to spread. This message was to do with the educational system and the social circumstances that existed at that time. Social hierarchies, class distinction, have been a part of our lives for so long that we never realise where it all began. This simple yet powerful tale tells of where the seeds of such thought could have possible been sown. What about the ending of the story is it the expected ending or is it unusual in some way?

6.6 LET US SUM UP

Christina Stead was one of those writers who never really received fame during her life span. She however has been rated as one of the best writers Australia has produced. She is often compared to Patrick White and Frank Moorhouse. We have traced the beginning of the short story and its development in Australia. What must be noted is the difference in this genre from one continent to another and also from the pre-Lawson and Lawson stories to the type of stories Christina Stead wrote. This

period in Australian Literature may be called the modern period if not, the contemporary period. It deals with literary style after Lawson, throws light on the development of the Australian Short Story after Henry Lawson and talks at length about Christina Stead's fiction. From talking about her novels and her style we moved on to an analysis of the short story from "Ocean of Story"...*The Old School*.

6.7 QUESTIONS

(1) What do you know about the short story form in general?

(2) How does the Australian short story develop?

(3) What differences do you find in the stories written before Stead's time?

(4) Have you read any other Australian short stories? How do they compare with Christina Stead's writing style?

6.8 SUGGESTED READINGS

Most Australian writers are hard to find in our libraries. But for a taste of Australian Literature it would be worth it to read Henry Lawson's short stories, Marcus Clarke's collection of short stories and the following books by Christina Stead:

(1) For Love Alone
(2) The Man Who Loved Children
(3) The Salzburg Tales
(4) Ocean of Story

For the more adventurous reader her biography by Hazel Rowley makes delightful reading and is also very informative

(5) Geering, R G — Christina Stead (Twayne, 1969; rev A & R 1979)
(6) Geering R G — Christine Stead (OUP, 1969) Australian Writers and their Work
(7) Geering R G — Ocean of Story –(Penguin Books, 1985) The Uncollected stories of Christina Stead
(8) Rowley H — Christina Stead: (Minerva Australia, 1993) A Biography Southerly – A Review of Australian Literature, Number One, 1984

Interviews By:

(9) Elizabet Riddell
(10) Elaine Lindsay

Article By:

(11) Blake Ann — A Reconsideration of Christina Stead at Work: Fact into Fiction.

Christina Stead's Bibliography:

- The Salzburg Tales (1934)

- Seven Poor Men of Sydney (1934)
- The House of All Nations (1938)
- The Man Who Loved Children (1940)
- For Love Alone (1944)
- Cotter's England (1966)
- The Little Hotel (1973)
- Miss Herbert (The Suburban Wife) (1976)
- I'm Dying Laughing
- The Beauties and the Furies
- *An Ocean of Story* *(1988) pub. Posthumously*

BLOCK INTRODUCTION

This block will attempt to dispel any myths or mistaken notions you may hold about the nature and content of Australian Literature. It will discuss at length, the social conditions and prevalent modes of thought from the beginning of this century to the 1970s. By contextualising the writers we will be able to see how various social and political factors influenced literary trends and in what way the poets were representative - or not - of the age in which they lived. Ten of these poets will be discussed, along with a selection of their poems, in great detail. By the end of this Block you should have a broad idea of the social and literary trends of the first seven decades of this century and a fair notion of who the most active of the poets were and how they thought and reacted to their external world. At the end of the Block you will find a reading list, which will be helpful in your understanding of Australian Literature in general and poetry in particular. The poems that we are going to talk about at length and a few that will provide further insight into our understanding of the poetry of this period are listed below and may be found at the end of the Block.

1) *Each Day I See The Long Ships Coming Into Port*	Christopher Brennan
2) *The Orange Tree*	John Shaw Neilson
3) *South Country.*	Kenneth Slessor
4) *This Night's Orbit*	R D Fitzgerald
5) *Legend*	Judith Wright
6) *Bullocky*	"
7) *The Australian Dream*	David Campbell
8) *Terra Australis*	James McAuley
9) *Australia*	A D Hope
10) *Moschus Moschiferus*	"
11) *Cock Crow*	Rosemary Dobson
12) *We Are Going*	Oodgeroo Noonuccal (Kath Walker)
13) *History*	Rex Ingamells
14) *Moorawathimeering*	"
15) *Durer : Innsbruck, 1495*	'Ern Malley'
16) *Australia. (prose)*	Ania Walwicz
17) *From Australia*	John Farrell
18) *Terra Australis*	Douglas Stewart
19) *Australia*	Bernard O'Dowd
20) *The Southern Call*	"

UTTAR PRADESH
RAJARSHI TANDON OPEN UNIVERSITY

MAEN – 04
LITERARY CRITICISM AND THEORY

Block

4

NEW CRITICISM

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UNIT 1 INTRODUCTION : AN OVERVIEW

Structure

1.0 Objectives
1.1 What is Australian Literature?
1.2 The Social Picture
1.3 Literary Trends
1.4 The Jindyworobaks
1.5 The Ern Malley Hoax
1.6 Let Us Sum Up
1.7 Questions
1.8 Glossary

1.0 OBJECTIVES

I remember, when I was studying in college, each time a new writer was approached with the comment that we would first 'do' a little bit of the background, we would all heave sighs of despair. That was THE most boring part of the entire exercise! However, it was only later that I realised that the study of any writer cannot be isolated from the age in which s/he lived. The ideas and modes of thought prevalent immediately before, during and after a particular period of time play a very significant role in shaping a writer's sensibility. Of course, one cannot make clear-cut divisions and say that such and such is the cut-off point but it is possible to make a wide generalisation. I will try to incorporate only the most important of the influences and trends that mark this period of our study - 1901 to 1970 - and hope that it will enhance your appreciation of the writers we will study at length in the later units. I will attempt to present a very broad picture of the socio-political events of the time and relate it to the literary and intellectual leanings of the people who were writing during those significant moments. Certain trends which sprouted up had their share of critics and admirers. There were counter-trends and writings of revolt. In other words, the field was thoroughly ploughed to allow a new literature to develop and flourish. Inevitably, there were extremes but those have gradually given way to a more balanced outlook.

Activity I

At this point, I would like to ask you to list what your expectations were prior to taking up this paper. What was it that you thought you would be reading about? What made you opt for this field of study in the first place? Please write down your responses and compare them with what I have to say later in this unit.

1.1 WHAT IS AUSTRALIAN LITERATURE?

Before I begin to talk about Australian Literature, I would like to share with you an experience I have frequently had when I tell people about my interest in this field. More often than not, the response is: "**Australian** literature? So you know Australian then?"! Everybody looks terribly impressed until I tell them that Australian literature is written in English! Have you encountered something similar while doing this paper?

To get back to the question I asked you earlier, what did you first expect when you took up this course of study? Did you imagine that you would find a broad expanse of an endlessly stretching landscape of the mind dotted by the exotic figures of unusual animals and unfamiliar vegetation, almost bizarre in their strangeness? That you would meet swaggering *stockriders* in outflung cattle stations, the whole enveloped in an atmosphere uniquely Australian and reflecting the upside down nature of the climate and geography of this southern continent? Most people expect that the literature of Australia will in many ways be 'foreign', wrapped in an aura of novelty. Have I guessed your responses - atleast some of them - correctly?

However, by now you must have realised that although the spirit of Australia is uniquely its own, the language and the poetry is made out of 'English' with all its inherited genius and not out of some off-spring language called 'Australian'.

This brings me to the point that I wish to make. Why then would one want to explore the uncharted regions of Australian writing only to discover some more English literature? This question could be answered by posing another. Why does one go to any literature at all? Do we read Wordsworth or Keats to journey through the woods, pastures and hamlets of England or to find a depiction of the externals of English life? Do we not approach all literature with the expectation that it will, in some way, enrich us by adding to our perception of life, certain ineffable qualities of thought and feeling? In that sense, the literature of any country - England, America, India, Australia, Africa - is at its most sublime when it concerns itself not so much with the externals of life but when it seeks to express the human and psychological facets of existence. It is not necessary to wrap sociological details or geographical features in verse and serve it up as the special offering of a specific country. To pick up an anthology of Australian poets and expect to find a guide book in verse, of Australian customs and physical features, would be to denigrate the very concept of literature. The best Australian poets, like the best English poets know that the true haunt of poetry is the ideas and emotions of Mankind and if they use a vivid picture of an Australian scene, it is not merely to add local colour but because it is the means of conveying something which is universal and not confined to the Australian ethos alone. When **Judith Wright** (a poet you will meet in one of the later units) penned her *Woman to Man*, she was not speaking as an Australian woman but as one who shares with countless others, the traits, apprehensions and joys of being a woman. So, if you have felt let down in certain ways, given the nature of your expectations before embarking on this journey through Australian Literature, and have been wondering why you need to read Australian literature at all, I would like to remind you, in the words of one of their critics, Alec King, that the people of that country are humans by necessity and Australian by accident.

1.2 THE SOCIAL PICTURE

A great many changes took place in Australia between 1886 and 1904 - the sharp division between the bush and city cultures, the characters of the two principal cities of Sydney and Melbourne (the former regarded as hearty and heartless while the latter was hailed as consciously conscience-ridden - though this has been dismissed as a myth) and the capacity of Australians to discriminate. The Australian character is sometimes summed up in the difference between the two major cities, Sydney and Melbourne. Sydney, the original settlement, was overtaken in the 19th century by Melbourne, which became the nation's banking and mercantile capital. However, in the 20th century Sydney has reclaimed supremacy, something often resented by Melbourne writers, who see themselves as intellectuals, ranged against Sydney's hedonists and stylists. Melbourne has had many schools of poetry, the most distinguished being that which was active at Melbourne University in the period between the 1950s to the 1980s.

The coincidence of universal education, the spirit of the nation, and the organisation of labour had brought a new voice into literature - one that was earthy, realistic,

democratic and optimistic. As it grew to a rapid consciousness of the world, its optimism died but its other qualities survived in rather different forms.

The years of World War I and the depression confirmed the patterns of urbanisation and industrialisation, adding at the same time, new elements to Australian thinking. Nationalism, in its first manifestation, had a republican flavour to it but with the outbreak of war in 1914, Australian sympathy was overwhelmingly on the side of Great Britain. There were many strange things about Australian participation in the War - Australian territory was not at stake, Australian troops were mainly centred in France and the Middle East and the soldiers were throughout volunteers. There was the overtone of affirmation of nationhood together with the undertone of a child seeking recognition from the parent of its maturity. There were mixed reactions about this participation. While some thought of it as a baptism of blood, others wondered whether the heroism had been well spent. However, all agreed that it had been a climactic moment in the nation's history. As British power waned, so did Australian security and with this grew the country's recognition that it must adapt to its special position in both geographical isolation and peculiarity in the world market. Through the inter-war years, pressure to 'Australianise' Australia kept growing.

The great financial depression was another momentous period in the nation's history. The 1920s had seen years of rapid growth and the inflow of migrants and capital had been substantial. New industries were established, old ones expanded. Thousands of men set themselves up as independent traders and artisans. Good seasons and prices raised farmers to high levels of optimism. And then came the crash and by 1931, almost one third of the workforce was unemployed. The slow climb back, as world markets recovered and local confidence was restored, could not wholly erase the bitter after-taste of the depression.

World War II too, changed Australia in many significant ways. The fall of Singapore and the Japanese drive south destroyed the comfortable belief that the Royal Navy was sufficient to protect the Australian continent. Isolation, which fifty years earlier had been a safeguard, now became a threat and the realisation dawned that the future of Australia could never again be separated from that of Asia. Secondly, American co-operation with Australia during the war now led to increasing American cultural, political and economic influences. American capital poured into the country and has been a major factor in post-war Australian growth. Although Australian politics still followed the British model, in foreign relations, it was increasingly influenced by the United States. Finally, Australian industrialisation accelerated rapidly and the war was followed by a period of great economic growth. A high inflow of capital from Japan as well and of migrants (predominantly from northern Europe), and healthy export markets has made the society an affluent one.

One event which, more than any other, changed contemporary Australian sensibility and the climate in which the arts were practised, was Vietnam. It polarised opinion on Australia's relations with the outside world as sharply as did World War I. It shattered beliefs and assumptions regarding the future of the country and forced Australia out of the political indifference in which it had lain for two decades. Vietnam engaged the minds and hearts of poets and painters in a way that no cause had done since Spain.

1.3 LITERARY TRENDS

The development of Australian Literature has been a slow and arduous process, marked by conflict between the old, convict legacy of *bush ballads*, a colonial hangover, the self-conscious attempt at carving out a distinctively national literature and the growing awareness that to be truly effective, it must offer insights and values

that are universal. Three broad phases may be distinguished in its pattern of development. The colonial period from the beginning to the late nineteenth century, the period of national independence from the 1890s to World War I and then from the 1920s to the present in which both the colonial and national outlook alike have been absorbed into a more diverse and balanced literary pattern.

For writers during the depression, unqualified optimism was already a thing of the past. The voices of the 1890s had almost universally rung with hope but the dominance of these voices proved exceptional and short-lived and the spirit which had nurtured them was passing. However, at least two of their attributes - an assertion of the nation and a faith in social reform were carried over to writers who followed them and to this was added a democratic concern to find a popular language and therefore, a wider audience. The most personal, the least concerned with immediate realities of time and place, the most desolate of Australian poets was **Christopher Brennan** for whom

> ...a bitter wind came out of the yellow-pale west
> and my heart is shaken and fill'd with its triumphant cry:
> You shall find neither home nor rest : for ever you roam
> with stars as they drift and wilful fates of the sky!
> (*The Wanderer*, 1902)

Brennan ignored the Australian scene and turned to Europe and Western philosophical thought, more specifically, the movement which was most important in contemporary literature and poetic thought - the Symbolist movement. He used myth to present a problem of choice, relating the story not for its own sake but using it as a symbol, a vehicle to convey a purpose beyond it.

The new writers were different - while many of them had their roots in the bush, most were of middle class origin and of higher and more systematic education and almost all turned to the cities for intellectual sustenance. These writers were caught between two conflicting impulses - a conflict which is perhaps characteristic of all colonial literatures. On the one hand was the urgent need to express the land to which they belonged and on the other was the demand that universal standards be imposed on the literature. There was the feeling that the *bush* and the *outback*, the distance and the *emptiness were unique to Australia and that by re-creating them*, writers could simultaneously delineate and define their country and create a new imagery. By singing of the lives of the pioneers, the explorers, the first settlers, even the misery of the convicts, they could create a depth of time, a substitute for ancient castles, churches and ruins - the memorials of past generations - the absence of which they believed, would retard the flowering of the new literature.

The strangeness of the new country - its inward flowing rivers, its monotony, its great deserts which were inhospitable to human habitation (even at the end of the twentieth century, the country supports a population of only 18 million people), the mixture of opposites - it is the smallest continent but one of the largest countries - demanded a setting aside of previous associations and a forging of new bonds. Through four decades, from the foundation of the Commonwealth at the beginning of the century to the outbreak of World War II, the way of these writers was not an easy one. They needed their own land yet its intellectual and cultural atmosphere was too thin for sustenance. The cultivated minority with 'elevated tastes, a lofty conception of writing, a severe standard of criticism, thinking and conversation, was disproportionately small.' Australia had 'no culture', it was 'crude, materialistic'. Many Australian writers sought inspiration from Europe and stayed there permanently but most came back. The novelist, Vance Palmer, wrote:

> 'Art is really man's interpretation of the inner life of
> his surroundings, and until the Australian writer can

attune his ear to catch the various undertones of our national life, our art must be false and unenduring.'

And later in London, he discovered that

> 'My loyalties were fixed : I had no intention of making a home in London. To me it was a gloomy, friendless place...[the] villagers of Hardy's novels were not as near to me...as the station-folk and camp-blacks of the Maranoa among whom I had been living.

If a date must be fixed for the beginning of 'modern' Australian poetry, the choice would be 1924, the date of **Kenneth Slessor's** *Thief of the Moon* - though Slessor himself would probably fix on 1909 when McCrae's *Satyrs and Sunlight* appeared. In the successive volumes from *Thief of the Moon* to *Five Bells*, Australian verse becomes contemporary in its attitude and technique. The tension in his work between surface irony and despair makes him recognisably modern. Another poet, writing at the same time as McCrae, was **John Shaw Neilson** who, despite having had no formal education, wrote hauntingly delicate lyrics and was one poet who was above all, a singer. He is not a representative of his age in the sense that his poetry has nothing to do with fashion of the twentieth century and it ignores the preoccupations of locality as well as time. If Slessor was considered to be the heir to McCrae, **R D Fitzgerald** was said to carry on the tradition of Brennan. From his earliest volume, *The Greater Apollo* (1927), he has shown a preoccupation with the situation of man in an inscrutable universe. In the 1940s and 1950s, a sudden rush of regional and national awareness was brought about by the onset of World War II as there was then a real danger to Australia's borders. At that time, Fitzgerald provided strength and reassurance as an elder poet asserting human and ancestral values in a world gone mad.

A weekly paper, *The Bulletin*, (started in 1880), greatly encouraged new writers, many of whom first published their verse in the journal. **David Campbell** characterised the best of *The Bulletin's* school of nature poets although by the late 1960s he had completely remoulded his style to deal with the 'modern', and the more immediate. Although there was some loss of the quality of timeless purity in his pastoral lyrics due to his later concerns, there can be seen a revitalisation of his style and the essential lyrical quality still underlies his work.

The Australian writers' need to come to terms with the land which they called home and to derive inspiration from it without looking towards Europe all the time, was exemplified in the verse of **Judith Wright** and **A D Hope**. They tried to maintain a balance between the colonial, slavish attitude on the one hand and the aggressively artificial, forced nationalism on the other. There is the acceptance of the country with all its alienness and hardships and a plea to stop being 'second-hand Europeans' and evolve their own culture and traditions. **Hope**, alongwith **James McAuley,** is known for his satires while **Wright's** is a powerful voice which seeks to draw attention to issues pertaining to women - their views and feelings - ignored in a male-dominated world.

Women writers, until a decade or so earlier, were a largely neglected lot although there have been many whose works have been so good that their omission from the history of the mainstream of Australian Literature is a reflection of their refusal to conform to the masculine image of the mainstream. Women writers project their own perception and point of view with regard to men, their attitudes and behaviour, and frequently question stereotyped notions. Of these, **Rosemary Dobson** is a noted poet, translator and critic who has been published extensively.

Australia's early history of British colonisation and the relations between the white settlers and the native Aborigines have been major concerns in many novels. Treated as savages in nineteenth century fiction and poetry, there has been a change in their portrayal although they are still seen as a mysterious and unfathomable people. However, a more realistic and credible portrait of the Aborigines has emerged from the writings of the Aborigines themselves. The first major work by an Aboriginal in English was **Kath Walker's** (now known as **Oodgeroo Noonuccal**) volume of poems *We Are Going* (1964). Her poems as well as those of others often express a vehement revival of self-respect and a demand for opportunities (including land rights) previously denied to them. After the 1960s, there has been an acknowledgement of Aboriginal rights - they were granted full citizenship, the right to vote (1967) and in the same year, included for the first time in population statistics.

Australia, which started off as a convict settlement and an outpost of the British Empire, is today a nation of many races, languages and cultures. Due to the large number of migrants (including Asian) who have now settled there, it is turning into a great melting pot of world cultures - a term that was once applied to America. Each of these groups of New Australians have had their share of problems in adjusting to the strange continent for each of them brought their own baggage of customs, food habits, myths and beliefs. This conflict between what was old on the one hand and the newness of the land on the other, has resulted in some beautiful and intense writing in which the tumult of the mind seeks to be expressed and, perhaps, resolved.

1.4 THE JINDYWOROBAKS

At the turn of the century, writers tended to concentrate on specifically political aims but the best work done was the putting down of markers towards a definition of the Australian character. The writers had an inward intention - to look into the Australian soul. The need to find a genuinely Australian niche was characterised in its extreme form by the *Jindyworobak* movement. In 1938, a writer called Rex Ingamells founded the Jindyworobak club in Adelaide and published *Conditional Culture*, its prose manifesto. They called themselves "Jindyworobaks", an Aboriginal term denoting specific local identity. Their chief representatives were Ian Mudie and Rex Ingamells. They rejected all European myths, opting instead for a culture derived from Aboriginal legends and modes of thought. This was too unnatural to be successful but their example is still observed today. Each year sees the publication of literary works claiming to interpret the country according to Aboriginal concepts such as *Dreamtime*, or attempting the refurbishment of major Aboriginal legends.

Jindyworobak is an Aboriginal word meaning 'to annex, to join' and the purpose of the movement was to free Australian art from the alien influences that chained it and to bring it into proper contact with its material. Ingamells laid down his credo in the following terms:

- a clear recognition of environmental values
- the debunking of much nonsense
- an understanding of Australia's history and traditions, primeval, colonial and modern

They found a fitting symbol in the Aboriginal *Dreamtime* of *Alchera or Alcheringa* - the myth of the first time, the time of creation itself, the root of all Aboriginal lore. In an attempt to break free of the shackles of colonial thinking as well as to counter the international influences that had breached Australia's isolation in the 1920s, the Jindyworobaks tried to force Australia's literary development into narrow nationalistic channels. They saw Australia as the country untouched by white men. They called this the real Australia and did not see that a railway train, a sheep station

a windmill or a city had become as much part of the natural background as 'the haggard outback valleys, silent deserts and straggly scrublands'. They insisted on including Aboriginal words which were incomprehensible to the majority of the readers and there was a forced and affected 'indigenous' tone. The movement was symptomatic of a deeply felt need to perceive and express a sense of national identity, and initially received much support. However, it faded out because it was too backward - and inward - looking, too isolationist and parochial in nature. The winds of change that gusted in after World War II simply swept the naiveté of the Jindyworobaks aside as of having no real relevance in the altered world situation. There are a couple of poems by Ingamells included in the Reader which represent the basic principles of this movement. Before going on, there is one activity I would like you to do.

Activity II

Please read the two poems of **Rex Ingamells**. How much did you understand of the poem *Moorawathimeering* ? What came in the way of your understanding? What do you need to know before you can enjoy the poem?

1.5 THE ERN MALLEY HOAX

In 1940, a magazine which published the experimental work of many Australian and overseas poets was first brought out and was called the *Angry Penguins*. Some of those who had been associated with the earlier Jindyworobak movement, also appeared on its pages. There was an attempt to assert allegiance to the Australian landscape often by the deliberate introduction of Aboriginal words and myths to achieve authenticity. Highly subjective imagery, obscure symbolism etc., were regarded in high esteem. The journal was the victim of Australia's most celebrated literary hoax in 1944. Known as the Ern Malley affair, the hoax was the brainchild of two poets, **James McAuley** and Harold Stewart who wanted to expose the false pretensions of the people associated with the *Angry Penguins*. To this end, they invented a poet - 'Ern Malley'- and sent poems apparently written by him and discovered posthumously, to the journal. The poems were published and were acclaimed as the work of Australia's first real genius. When the hoax was revealed, there was considerable embarrassment. One interesting off-shoot of the whole episode was that the 'fabricated' poems refused to die away for they were too full of moments of brilliant sensuous invention. The Ern Malley poems are now viewed in Australia as important documents in the process of national maturity. Based on passages selected from public reports and scraps of general cultural information, they feature some memorable phrases. They inspired later artists and acted as a key influence for later experimentation in Australian writing. I have included one of the 'Ern Malley' poems in the Reader. There is another activity I would like you to do at this point.

Activity III

Why do you think poems like the one given were accepted so readily by the *Angry Penguins*? Do you find anything there in common with the poem of Ingamells?

The Ern Malley hoax resulted in a mood of inhibition opposed to experimentation and an insistence on classical forms which was strangely at variance with the post-war changes of a quickly maturing society. **McAuley**, in the period of reaction against excess, was a secure force to hold onto and when the war with its atom bomb unleashed terror, his poetry was a means, like an incantation, of keeping it at bay. Well, I have taken you on quite an exhaustive (but I hope not exhausting!) tour of the social, political and literary landscape of Australia. You must have noticed that some of the poets' names are in bold letters. These are the poets whom we will study in

depth in the units which follow. This unit has been a wide-angle, generalised view which will soon give way to a zooming in for the close-ups! But first, a brief recap of what has been said so far.

1.6 LET US SUM UP

The twentieth century has been a turbulent one for a country which saw the two world wars at close quarters and experienced their devastating after-effects. Australia was witness to exciting changes from the 1890s onwards, starting with the welding of the six Australian colonies into a single nation; new pattern of politics in the early years of the Commonwealth; the two wars and the financial depression in the period between them; the arrival of waves of migrants and its emergence as a multi-cultural, multi-ethnic nation. After the six colonies were federated into a Commonwealth in 1901, the twin concerns were: (a) to create a nation independent of British control and ready to adapt British role models to local circumstances and (b) to discover and nurture qualities perceived to be wholly and admirably Australian.

World War I was a turning point in many ways, not least because the number of Australian casualties was not proportionate to the number of soldiers engaged. It also increased an awareness of Australian isolation amid its heavily populated neighbours in Asia and the South-East Pacific as did World War II.

Beginning in 1946, thousands of immigrants were transported from eastern and southern Europe to Australia. This migration rivalled the earlier one of convicts, and with the arrival of the 'boat people' from Vietnam after the Vietnam war as well as from other Asian countries. Australia became more cosmopolitan.

There has also been a coming to terms with the physical features of the country with its strange flora and fauna and an attempt to adapt to the environment as well as to adapt it to their needs.

The literature of the country has flowered and it is possible to trace its development through the convict legacy of the bush ballads and the early attempt to copy European modes and follow their traditions, to the rise of national consciousness, its extremist form as characterised by the Jindyworobaks and the subsequent, mature writing which maintains a balance between the two. There has also been a long-due recognition of women writers and their concerns as well as an expression of rights and the point of view of the Aborigines by those belonging to that dispossessed minority themselves.

The passion and horror of war, the emotional turmoil of migration, the plight of disadvantaged groups such as the Aborigines, the muted political and industrial conflict of the post-war years, attracted many writers who worked from within the democratic tradition. However, they were criticised for clinging to tradition and for having lost the sense of forward movement.

Definition of the nation and land remains a major concern of Australian writers. Although there were complaints from writers like **McAuley** against the blind acceptance of whatever was indigenous, even they could not escape defining atleast the spiritual and intellectual landscape around them while **A D Hope** believed that one day, from the deserts, prophets would come. The fascination with the unique remains.

1.7 QUESTIONS

The questions which follow are meant to refresh your memory of the facts outlined in the introduction and to help fix them there as well as to bring to your attention certain

important details you may have missed. They have been phrased in such a way as to ensure that you read the unit carefully. Please do not make the mistake of thinking that they are based on the pattern of questions you will be expected to answer during your examination.

1) What was it about Australia that disturbed writers?
2) Make a list of the poets you will study in this Block. Using the background information given in this unit, put down the qualities which characterise their work and make it distinctive. Make a table of the writers and their preoccupations and interests. You can keep adding to it as we proceed through the later units when each of these poets will be discussed in detail.
3) How did the two world wars and the intervening period affect social and literary trends?
4) What was the movement the meaning of which is 'to join' concerned with? What were its avowed aims and how far did it succeed in achieving its objectives?
5) What kind of writing did the *Angry Penguins* group encourage?
6) What did the *Angry Penguins* insistence on a certain kind of writing lead to?
7) Make a chronological listing of the major literary trends outlined in this unit.
8) Outline the characteristic features of the literary trends you have thus listed.
9) What sort of poems would you expect to find in an anthology of Australian poetry?
10) What are the different socio-political trends that have affected the writing of Australia?

1.8 GLOSSARY

stock riders — stock is used in the sense of animals used for breeding/farm animals like cattle, sheep, horses etc. A stock rider would therefore be some one on horse-back who rounds up cattle/sheep/horses, who rides with the stock.

bush — uncleared wild country especially in Australia or Africa.

outback — (especially in Australia) the part of a country far away from cities.

Bush ballads — ballads are fundamentally songs that tell a story/a musical accompaniment to a dance. Ballads have certain basic characteristics like an abrupt beginning, simple language, often tragic themes, with refrains. The story is told through dialogue and action and usually deals with a single episode, the action moves swiftly and there is a strong dramatic element. Ballads may be distinguished broadly between the literary ballad and the popular/folk. The reference here is to the latter, belonging to the oral tradition and handed down by word of mouth. Bush Ballads refer to those popular songs that originated in the vasts of Australia, the Bush as it was called.

UNIT 2 BEGINNINGS

Structure

2.0 Objectives
2.1 The Grand Old Man of Australian Poetry
2.2 *Each Day I See The Long Ships Coming Into Port*
2.3 The Native Singer
2.4 *The Orange Tree*
2.5 Let Us Sum Up
2.6 Questions
2.7 Glossary

2.0 OBJECTIVES

In this unit, we shall be looking at two of the earliest Australian poets - Christopher Brennan and John Shaw Neilson. I will tell you a little about what influences can be found in their work, about the kind of lives they led and if it has any bearing on their poetry. By the end of this unit you should be able to identify the distinctive style and preoccupations of these two poets. We will also be reading and discussing one representative poem of each poet in detail.

2.1 THE GRAND OLD MAN OF AUSTRALIAN POETRY

A few years before the death of Brennan, a distinguished Professor of English at Sydney, Professor John Le Gay Brereton, who was a close friend of the poet remarked that Brennan could have held any one of five chairs with distinction at the University. The five chairs were those of Philosophy, Classics, French, German and English. This will give you an idea of the range and depth of his encyclopaedic scholarship.

Many critics have pointed out that in taste and influence, Brennan (1870 - 1932) was fundamentally a nineteenth-century poet. Taken as the foremost Australian poet of the twentieth century, his verse was written substantially in the nineteenth. His poetry, though written in Australia, can only be understood in a European perspective. His first serious verse was written in 1891, under the influence of the English poet, Swinburne, and as a personal response to the metaphysic of **Absolute** propounded by Herbert Spencer and T H Green. Studying in Germany on a travelling scholarship in 1892-94, Brennan was influenced by French poetry of the later nineteenth century, especially by the works of **Baudelaire, Regnier** and **Mallarme.** He found in their poetry, a reflection of his own metaphysical search and became convinced that the single impulse behind all the writers of the 'symbolist' and 'decadent' schools was a search for a level of experience, some ideal of beauty that could not be found in ordinary life. From Mallarme he learnt to focus his vague aspirations on the ideal of Eden, and after his meeting with Elizabeth Werth (later to become his wife), he sought to achieve this in human love. Brennan's first volume of poetry, *XXI Poems : Towards The Source* (1897) is the record of this endeavour. This is an essay in the *livre compose*, 'the book of verse conceived and executed as a whole, a single concerted poem'. In the course of the next five years this preliminary sequence was extended and then merged with a more ambitious cycle, patterned on the symbolist pattern of Baudelaire's or Regnier's work. In 1902, the cycle acquired another chapter - the series *The Wanderer* - in which the tensions of the previous

chapters are triumphantly resolved. It ends on a note of conviction - conviction found in the attempt to achieve something, the attainment being a distant promise - and the Wanderer repudiating the dream of the lost paradise for the Miltonic conception of the paradise within us. Completed by 1902 but published more than a decade later, the cycle belongs to the poetry of the 1890s. Brennan acclimatised the symbolist *livre compose* in Australian verse and extended the frontiers of Australian poetry.

The Edenic vision which governs Brennan's poetry may be understood as a phase of romantic sensibility, just as the theories of the Absolute form, which he propagated, shows his conforming to the intellectual modes of the nineteenth century.

During the 1890s, a popular school of 'nationalist' poets arose, who exhibited an intensely patriotic attitude. The admiration for their type of work wore off quickly but they deserve to be remembered because this 'nationalist' movement alongwith an increasingly sentimental emphasis on the Bush irritated a few writers into taking up an altogether opposite position. One of these was Brennan who, completely ignoring the Australian scene, turned to Europe and to Western poetic thought. He alone, of all the poets of his time and place, immersed himself in the Symbolist movement - the most important in contemporary literature and Western poetic thought, foreshadowed by Baudelaire and summed up in the work of Brennan's most admired poet - Mallarme. It was a new poetic vision of the relation between man and his world, as between thought and thing, image and experience. For the Symbolists, nature became 'a forest of symbols', full of images which vibrated and corresponded to the truths of human experience.

Poetry, for Brennan, was that which mediated between the 'two lives' of man, the 'outer weariness which made Baudelaire a maniac' and the 'hours of insight'. The symbol would be the mediator between appearances and underlying truth. The 'two lives' - the real and the ideal - and their constant opposition and interaction form the great subject that occupies Brennan in almost all his poetry.

Brennan rejected intellectual analysis and was in favour of symbolism which he equated with poetry. He emphasised the role of the imagination and not the intellect in the task of humanising the universe and uniting soul and matter, man and his/her world. But when it came to actual practice, he chose the intellectual and the literary symbol, not the real facts of the real world - he preferred a generalised concept to an actually seen thing. For him, a Rose is a spiritual and not an earthly flower.

His somewhat abstract poetic thinking and the form of symbolism he adopted were a considerable help to him technically. Brennan was never involved as other serious poets in Australia have been, in the difficulty of finding imagery in his own environment which would convey the full weight of meaning and association that his poetry needed. Older countries with a long literary and cultural tradition do not pose this kind of difficulty for their writers. But for Brennan, who moved freely amidst the symbolic language of European thought, religion and philosophy, this was a problem which hardly arose. The flowers which he so abundantly fills in *Towards the Source*, are the symbolic roses and lilies, the familiar flowers that are scattered across the European landscape of his imagination, not the unfamiliar, unpoeticised flowers of his new country which yet had no associations of rituals or religions in literature - even to his own countrymen. Where there are any corresponding images from his immediate environment to be seen in his poetry, they are of a generalised nature and do not assume any personal or particular significance. Consequently, although Brennan's symbolic method allowed him to bypass certain obstacles and strengthened him as a poet, it took away an essential quality from his poetry - the immediacy which can come only from a direct contact with experiences on a sensual and emotional level. There is a distance from fact and daily problems and this does not bring Brennan closer to his readers. Also, as he seemed to have a foot each in two centuries and two hemispheres, it meant that he could not truly be in complete unison with either.

Although the focus of the symbolist movement altered with the change of the century, Brennan remained poetically in the nineteenth century, as demonstrated by his poetic task, his diction and versification. Though he could see the gradual breaking away from the stricter poetic forms in favour of speech which sounded more immediate, he refused to change his own style.

In Australia, his detachment from tasks that lesser poets saw as important to the time and his involvement with Western thought that was not perfectly understood there, ensured that he remained more a legend than a living, breathing poet. The radical-political thought or sprightly, uncomplicated songs of other poets seemed more attractive than Brennan's vague, symbolist lyrics and his readership was so small as to seem scarcely visible.

2.2 *EACH DAY I SEE THE LONG SHIPS COMING INTO PORT*

Now, before we go on, please read Brennan's poem and as you read it, jot down a few points regarding the following:

a) Does he use any obscure symbols or do you find the poem easy to read and understand?
b) Does he make any references to forces of nature? What are those forces and what does he have to say about their power?
c) Does the poet wish to wander around the world? Where does he express an opinion regarding this and does he change it later on? If he does, what reasons does he give for doing so?

Discussion

The poet watches huge ships coming into the harbour and, crowding the rails are people, eager to have a glimpse of land after being tossed around on the sea for months at a time. To the travellers, it does not matter that they have come to an alien land, one that will require a great deal of adaptation before it will finally seem 'home' to them. The monotonous song of the seas and the force of winds have swept away all fears and 'rancour' so that any land is seen as welcome. After all those months of isolation, cut off from the daily commerce of the world, 'not to have known of anything in any crowded way', the prospect of once more walking on firm land and coming into contact with other human beings, is a thrilling one. Although they may have left their native land filled with anger, disgust or disappointment at their fellow humans' behaviour, the sea and the wind together have swept clean all those negative feelings and they are once more eager to take up life from where they had left off.

In that sense, it is an acknowledgement of the power of nature to soothe, to repair and rejuvenate our spirit so that all bitterness is washed away and we are ready to face the trials of the world with a renewed faith. It also attests to the force of the human desire to seek companionship and the need to trust others even if one has suffered betrayals or losses. Man never gives up hope, no matter what he has experienced. At every turn, he feels a thrill of expectation course through him and the hope that there are good things in store for him in the future. To this end, he never gives up the struggle.

The people and the ships could therefore be said to stand for Man's restless, searching mind and eternally unsatisfied spirit of human consciousness. The quest and thirst for adventure motivates many a man to pull up his roots and leave home

and hearth for unknown dangers. History is full of tales of intrepid explorers who have mapped our world as we know it today.

The lack of antiquity in Australia led many writers and politicians towards adopting a stance in which a concern with history was replaced with a belief in the future. In the light of this belief, the ship is an appropriate metaphor since it figures prophecy, anticipation and contact with culture, spirituality and home to which the sailor hopes it will soon return him.

The poem also embodies the spirit of the migrant experience. Driven out of their familiar world through force of circumstance and/or human perversity, they now approach the new land with an eager, unquestioning acceptance, sure that it will provide succour.

The poet feels a twinge of envy at their open happiness on reaching the port and questions this unexpected emotion of jealousy. Surely he would not like to be in their place, to wander 'hither and thither upon the earth and grow weary with seeing many lands and peoples and the sea'? Would he like to take up the nomadic life of a wanderer, leading a rootless, unsteady sort of life? The question makes him pause to examine his own feelings. Not having thought of this before, he suddenly, in all certainty feels that if he could be sure of a welcome and a chance to rest his troubled mind somewhere, he too might take the opportunity to spread his sails wide and catch a wandering wind, allowing it to take him where it will. This is probably a sign that all was not well in Brennan's life. However, the lines 'but if I might, some day, landing I reck not where/ have heart to find a welcome and perchance a rest', indicate that it might make no difference wherever he went as his heart would be the same. He needs to come to terms with whatever is troubling him and only then will his heart allow him to find welcome and rest somewhere.

The short poem is reminiscent of the *Romantic tradition* in which the poet starts off with a description of a general scene and then gradually relates it to his own subjective experience, making it a part of his immediate reality.

2.3 THE NATIVE SINGER

Can you imagine a man, the son of a small farmer and contractor, with hardly any schooling, who spent years at hard farm work, and who, not having read much and with no encouragement and literary contacts, wrote poetry of an unexpected kind with the utmost delicacy? This was John Shaw Neilson, (1872 - 1942) who above all else, was a singing poet.

From the kind of life he led, you would expect his poetry to be of a distinctly national flavour and tint, full of the scenes, people and life around him. However, in reality, there is hardly a poem of his which is recognisably Australian. His descriptions of places or events are such that it is possible to place them anywhere in the English-speaking world. Because his poetry is so distinctive and in a sense so unlikely a product of his surroundings and education, it has the appearance of what can be called pure inspiration.

Neilson belonged to a selector's family which lived and struggled for thirty or more years in a semi-arid and monotonous bushland. Life was full of grinding poverty, continuous labour, disasters and disappointments. Finally, forced off the land, Neilson spent most of the rest of his life as a casual labourer on farms, railways, coal mines, grape-picking, ditch-digging and as a quarry worker. When he was past fifty, some friends got him a job as a messenger in a government department. It was well meant but the hours were long and city life did not suit him and he almost stopped

writing. By this time he had published several books of poems but he remained very much alone.

Although some literary people corresponded with him and helped him, he spent almost the whole of his life in surroundings where no one knew or cared about poetry. When he once requested a fellow labourer to take down a poem as he dictated it (his eyes were too bad for him to do his own writing), his mate was full of amazement, asking him, "Yeah, but what is it? What's it ***for***? Yeah, but what d'you want to ***do*** it for?" And finally, "But this ain't poetry anyway. Jock, you must be going off your onion!" The final remark is particularly interesting. Poetry that his mate would have recognised as poetry would probably have been a bush-ballad. But Neilson was writing something delicate, cultivated and highly civilised, similar to classical compositions like symphonies and sonatas in music and totally incomprehensible to the people he was surrounded with as would have been classical music.

Neilson, unlike Lawson or Kendall, did not have unexpected access to literature in unlikely surroundings. His father never went to school and his mother had no literary interests. Neilson himself went to school only enough to learn to read and write. Yet, both father and son were natural poets - the father started writing when he was thirty and the son almost as soon as he had learnt how to write.

Although he had read some *Shelley, Burns, Coleridge* and the Australian balladeers, Neilson's poetry shows none of their influence. After the age of thirty, his eyesight became so bad that he had to give up reading altogether. In 1934, he said that for the past twenty five years, he had been unable to read anything much or have someone read out to him. As a consequence, he was shut in a world of his own and had no chance of studying the language or the works of other poets. He acknowledged that when he was criticised for having become monotonous or for having a limited range of vocabulary, it was justified. However, we can understand the reasons behind these drawbacks of his poetry as they were the direct consequence of the kind of life he led

He knew nothing of literary criticism or theory and had never read any books *on* poetry. Yet his literary judgement on the few writers he had read shows the same quality of mind that his poetry does.

His own account of his creative methods suggests that poetry in him was nothing learned or acquired but a deep natural force that possessed him and forced a way out. He never selected themes or composed them. The poems came to his mind and he worked on what came from within. Often he would have dozens of poems in his mind at once struggling with one another to get to the light. *Dryden* too, once described this ferment and struggle of poetic ideas forcing themselves on his mind. Neilson seems to illustrate the view that the poetic imagination is an innate thing and that in those specially gifted, it expresses itself spontaneously and recreates the fallen world.

Neilson did not care for scenery. His poems often started from scenes and experiences he knew but they are entirely transformed in the poetic process. His poems do not describe the world, they use the world to create something entirely new - the world of the imaginative experience. His poetry has the underlying quality of clear and unearthly vision and a childlike simplicity which is impossible to imitate. The magical movement of his melody is based on very simple devices.

Neilson's method of composition was to make up dozens of stanzas and then choose from them what he considered the best, to be organised into one poem. This could sometimes make it irrelevant or inconsequential. However, his singing quality, and his felicity of verbal imagination gave him the power to create magical combinations of common words and ideas which Coleridge called 'esemplastic power'. He has the rhythmical genius of the born lyric poet.

Neilson had a high notion of poetry and believed sincerely in its basic function:

> Good brothers of the song,
> Be not too humble; it is you and I
> And a few others lift the world along.

His poetry was always the most important factor in his life although his circumstances prevented him from sparing it much time. His hard life and poor eyesight meant that a great deal of his work was lost due to the lack of leisure or people to write it down for him. These factors also influenced the kind of poetry he wrote. He had to confine himself to the simpler rhythms so that he could remember them easily since much of his verse was composed and carried around in his head till he got the opportunity to put it down on paper. He was an uneven writer who never fully smoothed the roughness from his poetry. He has a core of incandescence which allies him to the tradition of *William Blake* and the English *Mystics*.

His colour perceptions are consistent throughout his poetry. Green is for him, the colour of youth and spring, violet the colour of death and of the ground, red stands for strength and violence, white for innocence and childhood and so on. He fuses other perceptions and ideas in striking ways - 'the silence honey-wet'; 'the morning was too loud with light'; 'the tremble of the hollow year'; 'I saw the mushrooms hoping'.

His poetry was never very popular. It ignores the sentiments and absorption (and politics) of the time and place and this may well prove to be its strength rather than weakness. His poetry has frequently been dismissed as weak and feminine by critics immersed in the Australian cult of manliness and toughness. However, the best present day poets have begun to adopt an unselfconscious attitude towards the country which Neilson was one of the first to do. The poetry springs from the soil so to speak instead of being applied to it artificially like some strange cultural manure. Neilson is a remarkable phenomenon, a minor but genuine and gifted poet who is distinctly individual and not afraid to be universal - the qualities which make his work one of lasting value.

2.4 *THE ORANGE TREE*

The best of Neilson's poems have something of the subtlety and tender colour, the vague and shifting vibrant light, of a spring morning. They are never muscular in ideas or expression, their quality is as delicate as something newborn. This special kind of vision and expression is peculiar to Neilson, no other poet in the English language possibly possesses it in equal kind. This quality is best exemplified in *The Orange Tree.*

Please read the poem now and answer the following **before** you proceed with the discussion that follows:

a) What do you think the poem is about?
b) What do you feel served as the inspiration for the poem?
c) Do you think the poem is set in Australia?
d) What is it about the poem - language, imagery - which strikes you as special?
e) How many characters or voices are there in the poem? Can you say who they are?

Discussion

Now keeping your answers in mind, go on to reading the discussion of the poem. Keep a pencil and paper handy and jot down any points which occur to you as we go along.

If you look at the poem, you will detect nothing that suggests an Australian orange orchard - yet, it is this which gave Neilson the idea for the poem when he was working at Merbein in Victoria. In Neilson's own words:

> I think it was just after I gave up the horse-driving job that I did a little weeding amongst the oranges for a few days. It was then that I was struck with the very beautiful light there is in May in northern Victoria. The dark-green of the orange-trees and the beautiful sunlight gave them enchantment hard to describe. It was there that I got the main idea of *The Orange Tree*

Neilson had a perfectly definite Australian scene in mind but the poem may have been written in any part of the world where oranges grow. What he gives you is not the external details of the experience but the essence of it. It is the orange-tree transplanted into the internal landscape of the imagination where it links up with things not to be found in the external landscape of northern Victoria at all. Neilson made another comment regarding this poem:

> I have said before that I got some of the ideas when I was weeding oranges at Merbein. There was also something which I tried to drag in, some enchantment or other. I cannot well describe it. I have seen **Botticelli**'s wonderful picture "Spring" - I think that is the name. It has lovers, it has maidens and greenery, and I think a robber in the background. Of course I know nothing about art at all, but anything of Botticelli's I see fills me with emotion. Prints of other great pictures leave me cold.

The fact that the delicate-mannered and symbolic art of Botticelli should so intensely attract Neilson, is again proof of something in him which he could not possibly have got from his surroundings. Also significant is the fact that we see here a perfect example of the imaginative fusion of disparate images and impressions which is the basis of poetry. Many descriptive poets try too hard to give a rendering of what is in front of their external eyes and their imagination is all directed outward. Sometimes this tends to stop the ferment of ideas within from meeting and coalescing in new images and emotions as the impression of Botticelli and the impression of the Australian orange orchard meets and coalesces into a work of true poetic imagination in Neilson's poem. He sees the orange-tree with the inward eye of vision, not with the outward eye of descriptive assessment.

Please read the poem again as we look at its structure :

Out of ten stanzas, the first is balanced between the two voices, two lines for the man two for the girl; then every two stanzas devoted to the man's questions are counter pointed by a statement made by the girl, who also speaks the final lines, thus having the last word.

The first stanza describes the physical position of the two speakers who are standing side by side in front of the orange-tree. The girl is captivated and speaks the first words almost unaware that she does so. The man seems not to understand what she means. In the entire poem there appears to be a dialogue but no real communication between the man and the young girl.

The first stanza sets out the roles the man and the girl are to play - she to 'see' and he to 'tell', reporting and voicing not only her statements but also his own questions. This essential difference is conveyed through the negative :

> The young girl stood beside me. I
> Saw not what her young eyes could see:
> A light, she said, not of the sky
> Lives somewhere in the Orange Tree.

The words delineate the sense of loss in the man and also highlights the power that the girl still possesses. She is capable of seeing something that he cannot. However, she is not able to express her vision rationally but attempts to do so in indirect and imprecise terms. The girl is a 'spring' figure, a child who has a freshness of perception that the adult man lacks. Perhaps it is a perception, a power of the imagination which we all have as children but gradually lose later on.

The word 'light' can have a variety of meanings. The most obvious is that which is visible and makes other things visible too, eg., the sun, fire, etc. Another meaning denotes the eyes, our visual faculty. And the third metaphorically indicates our intellectual and spiritual faculty which discerns everything and transcends the limitations of the material and physical world. This light is not only 'luminous', it is 'almost a sound', 'a step', 'a call'. The girl knows intuitively that the light is not one of the sky - it is a heavenly or spiritual radiance which, though at the moment seems to be separate from her, she will soon realise is actually within herself. The poetic voice - the 'I' is struggling to recapture a vision he has lost and which he can see the girl still possesses. Although she too will lose it soon for that is a part of the life process, he still strives to grasp the essence of what she is experiencing.

The man's questions, his references to the 'luminous boy' are indirectly connected to the girl's statements and her destiny which will be the loss of innocence and vision, decay, death. His questions concerning the boy seem to trace an ideal journey which moves us away from the physical reality towards a spiritual experience that finally reaches a climax in the mysterious sixth stanza with its references to 'green' and 'blue'. This could refer to the light of knowledge and the abstract, ideal world that can never be reached because it is beyond the limits of human consciousness and perception.

The luminous boy, carried away, 'borne to the blue', his ascent and descent to 'the last word of a little child' at a grave, is a circular process which exemplifies the cycle of birth, growth, decay and death, and the loss of innocence. Entwined with this movement are the girl's statements concerning the mysterious presence of the light in the Orange Tree which she will finally 'listen' to within herself. This double movement - the luminous boy's journey and the girl gradually merging with the light - emphasises the similarity and relationship between these two spiritual journeys and diminishes the impact of the autumnal figure proceeding towards the grave with his inevitable load of disillusionment and loss of imagination.

The girl, inspite of her verbal inadequacy, her inability to describe her feelings clearly, is quite sure of her vision. Indeed, in a spiritual experience, 'feeling' counts for more than 'saying' and it is what is perceived which is more important than what is expressed. There are two inner forces here which pull the reader and form the core of the poetic tension. One is the visionary who experiences 'Truth and Beauty' through the girl's eyes and the other is the rational man trying to question this experience and obstructing the process with his flow of words through which he tries to express the vision clearly.

The girl exhorts the man twice to 'listen!' This is not only a plea to exercise his auditory powers but also to sharpen all his senses, to go beyond the sensory element and participate with his whole being in the experience. Divine Love and Truth can be

reached and perceived only through silence, not in continuous babble which is like the 'faltering flute', a 'stammering at a grave'. The girl's last command to the man is for silence, to stop his 'hapless', wearying, plaguing talk. By the end of the poem, the girl is 'listening like the Orange Tree' - she had begun by looking at the light that fell upon it but now she has drawn it into herself. There is a complete surrender to the Spiritual Principle that underlies all things and whose physical manifestation is the orange-tree. There is both a death and a birth here - the death of the ego, the 'I', and the birth of a more complete human being in whom the spiritual self has been wholly realised.

2.5 LET US SUM UP

Neither Brennan nor Neilson wrote recognisably 'Australian' poetry. In addition, neither were widely read in their day. However, the chief hope for poetry as such, at the beginning of the 1920s, lay in the sweeping vision Brennan had achieved and the lyricism of Neilson. While the former was influenced by Western thought and philosophy, specially the **Symbolist** Movement, the latter, with hardly any education or reading worth the name, wrote out of an innate gift. Both of them ignored their contemporary preoccupations and wrote poetry which, though, not offering an immediacy of experience, offers universal insights, not bound by time or place. *Each Day I See* ... expresses the unquenchable thirst of the human spirit for fresh worlds while *The Orange Tree* speaks of the other thirst of the human spirit - the quest for the sublimity of the spiritual experience which transcends the mundane and ordinary facts of existence.

2.6 QUESTIONS

As in the earlier unit, these questions are meant only to increase and clarify your understanding of the poems we have discussed. They will encourage you to read the poems a number of times and perceive the underlying, unsaid feelings that permeate them.

1) What are the issues that appear to be taken up in Brennan's poem?
2) What do you feel is the tone of the poem - cheerful, gloomy, non-committal... ? What makes you think so?
3) Does the poet express any personal opinions or is the poem a mere description of a general scene?
4) What, if any, is the relation between Man and Nature?
5) Imagine you are one of the people standing at the rail of the ship. What would your feelings be on sighting the new land?
6) Do the man and girl in Neilson's poem seem to be taking up opposite positions or are they both two sides of the same coin?
7) Though the girl speaks very little, she conveys a lot. What do you think is the essence of what she is saying?
8) Why does the man ask so many questions? What is he trying to establish?
9) Pick out the images and descriptions which appeal to you and try to explain why you find them attractive.
10) List the things the man compares the light to, in his questions, as he tries to find out what the girl is trying to convey. What effect do these comparisons have?

2.7 GLOSSARY

Absolute	variously defined in the philosophy of the day as the 'Unknowable' or 'the Unknown Reality'
Baudelaire, Charles Pierre (1821-1867)	French poet and critic, a leader of the symbolist school.
Blake, William (1757-1827)	English poet, painter, and engraver, who created a unique form of illustrated verse; his poetry, inspired by mystical vision, is among the most original, and prophetic lyrics, in the English language. His work in the literary and visual arts marks a rejection of the Age of Enlightenment in favour of the new Romantic Movement.
Botticelli, Sandro	real name Alessandro di Mariano Filipepi (1445-1510), one of the leading painters of the Florentine Renaissance. He developed a highly personal style characterised by elegant execution, a sense of melancholy, and a strong emphasis on line; details in his paintings appear as sumptuous still lifes.
Burns, Robert (1759-1796)	Scottish poet and writer of traditional Scottish folk songs.
Coleridge, Samuel Taylor (1772-1834)	English poet, critic, and philosopher, who was a leader of the Romantic movement.
Dryden, John (1631-1700)	English poet, dramatist, and critic.
Lawson, Henry (1867-1922)	Australian poet, writer of short stories and the best known of all the *Bulletin* contributors.
Mysticism	an immediate, direct, intuitive knowledge of God or of ultimate reality attained through personal religious experience.
Mallarme Stéphane (1842-1898)	French poet, one of the originators of the Symbolist movement.
Regnier	French Symbolist writer who later abandoned Symbolism for Classical forms and themes.
Romantic tradition	in the literature of virtually every country of Europe, the United States, and Latin America, a movement that lasted from around 1750 to about 1870, characterised by reliance on the imagination and subjectivity of approach, freedom of thought and expression, and an idealisation of nature. The term *Romantic* first appeared in 18th-century English and originally meant "romance-like", that is, resembling the fanciful character of medieval romances.
Shelley, Percy Bysshe (1792-1822)	English poet, one of the most influential leaders of the Romantic movement.

Symbolist Movement	a movement in literature and the visual arts that originated in France in the late 19th century. In Literature a Symbol combines an image with a concept. Baudelaire and his followers created the image of the poet as a seer, who could see through and beyond the real world to the world of ideal forms and essences.
Slessor, Kenneth (1901-1971)	Australian poet, newspaper editor, writer of light verse, and club raconteur.

UNIT 3 THE NOTION OF AUSTRALIA

Structure

3.0 Objectives
3.1 The Obsession with Australia
3.2 The Father of Modern Australian Poetry
3.3 *South Country*
3.4 R D Fitzgerald
3.5 *This Night's Orb*
3.6 Let Us Sum Up
3.7 Questions
3.8 Glossary

3.0 OBJECTIVES

In the last unit we looked at the work of Brennan and Neilson who were the precursors to the modern era in Australian poetry. I hope you remember that in Unit I, I spoke of the publication of Slessor's *Thief of The Moon* (1924) which can be regarded as the beginning of modern poetry. In this unit, we shall read about Kenneth Slessor and R D Fitzgerald for whom the way was paved by the earlier poets when they started writing in the 1920s. As usual, we shall touch upon the influences that affected their thoughts and style and how they influenced other writers in turn. We shall be reading one poem of each of these poets in detail. If you look into your reader, you will find that there are a number of poems which have Australia as their theme. Prose writers too have felt it necessary to write about Australia. In this unit, we will be looking very briefly at the possible reasons for this, see how the country has shaped the sensibility of its writers, in what ways they interacted with it and gave expression to their attitudes and involvement with not only the country but the ***idea*** of the country.

3.1 THE OBSESSION WITH AUSTRALIA

When I first got interested in the field of Australian literature, a friend who taught Geography at Mayo College, Ajmer, asked me, ' Do you know how Australia got its name?' I did not and I am pretty sure you do not either! So here is what he told me: before the continent was 'discovered' by white settlers, ships would routinely sail around the world, taking advantage of the trade winds. On one such voyage, the captain of a Portuguese ship noticed a land mass and entered it into his chart as *'terra australis incognita'* which means 'unknown land to the South' (*terra* - land, *australis* - southern, *incognita* - unknown). Although I have been unable to verify this, I have no reason to doubt my friend's version as it sounds quite plausible!

Well, the land is no more unknown, is it? And it has grown and developed its own identity to the extent that we are now studying its literature! The concept of national identity, a continuity of tradition and values, troubled thinking Australians. Writers specially, felt the lack of a rich repository of cultural resources to draw upon and as far as forms and genres were concerned, they had to rely upon their own, singularly unique perceptions of a cultural past and history which was basically European.

The Australian tradition did not flow with any continuity from one writer to another, all joined in some communality of interest. This feeling of fragmentation, of the lack

of a recognisably unified tradition tended to affect writers. The thoughtful Australian was trapped between allegiance to his European historical roots and the new geography : the size of Australia and the sense of his own personality expanding to accommodate that immensity. The new continent spoke in the present tense. Europe spoke in the past, offering values and cultural experience that put the traditionless Australian into a position of apparent inferiority. Even more destructively, it inhibited Australian self-realisation. The weapons of the country were its emptiness, its sameness, its distances, its extremes of climate; the weapons of its settlers were endurance, persistence, a home-made ingenuity, and a sardonic attitude to the failures and reverses that they soon learned to expect.

The process by which a writer seeks to secure a closer emotional relationship with his/her country is to produce an inventory of its features, to survey its flora and fauna, in order to revise its ideological place. By naming it, there is an attempt to bring the strange land into the domain of familiar discourse. But the strangeness of the land is not always to be overcome. The image of the land as exotic and harsh is a persistent one - it may be a device for retaining the power of the familiar culture to designate what is strange and what is familiar.

If white history is felt to be short, the maps unfilled, it is assumed to be the duty of writers to supply the lack, to provide images of the land and its experience that will sustain it. And while many of them take that metaphysical national duty seriously, most seem conscious of it as a discursive process by which cultural meaning is attached to images of the physical environment. There is the need to find an appropriate relationship between land and meaning. There is the implicitly held belief that geography is destiny.

Before one's country can become an accepted background against which the writer's imagination can move unhindered, it must first be observed, understood, described and absorbed. The writer must be at peace with his/her landscape before s/he can turn confidently to its human figures. But in Australian writing, the landscape seems to have a life of its own, it forces its way into the foreground and seems to take up an immense lot of room. This is because Australia means more to its inhabitants than mere environment and mere land to be occupied, ploughed and brought into subjection. It has been the outer equivalent of an inner reality - the reality of exile and the reality of newness and freedom. From the beginning, Australia loomed large in the consciousness of her white invaders - either as a prison to be escaped from as soon as possible failing which, to be endured till death or as a new country of hope and faith.

There has also been a resentment at being one of the British colonies, at the beck and call of British masters. In trying to write *about* Australia, there is an attempt to establish and confirm one's individual identity and the denial of a subservience to mainstream culture. It is as though the writers, by delineating the Australian landscape and character of its inhabitants, are trying to stand up in front of the world to shout 'Look at us - we are not English'. If, in writing about their distinctive characteristics they can make the world recognise the Australian as a separate entity, the writers will have achieved their wish.

Eliot would not have written a poem called 'America', Baudelaire one called 'France', or Rilke one called 'Austria'. Behind these "Australia' poems is a particular cultural phase, a different intellectual milieu and a completely different historical situation. In some poems there is the sense of Australia's future and destiny and the country tends to be viewed through the colours of fervent patriotism rather than dispassionately observed. Others sweep this sort of '*mera Australia mahaan' aside.* Some are dogmatic or monolithic in their vision; some, consciously or unconsciously, transport their vision from elsewhere and seek to impose it; some are pluralist and prepared to allow for contradictory demands. But all rely on Australia as a source of metaphor.

3.2 THE FATHER OF MODERN AUSTRALIAN POETRY

It is in the period from the end of World War I to the present that Australian literature has really attained maturity. It is a maturity attested by the emergence of fresh talent, the range and variety of the literary output and by the greater degree of sophistication and accomplishment to be found not only in creative writing itself but also in the criticism. In the period between the publication of *Thief of The Moon* and *Five Bells* (also by Slessor, in 1939), Australian verse can be seen as gradually becoming contemporary in tone, attitude and technique, in the sharpness of image and occasional cynicism, in its adjustment to the atmosphere of the city and the ability to even find beauty in city life.

When we talk about influences on modern Australian poets, one name that looms large is that of Norman Lindsay, who, in his lifetime, was a figure of controversy and adulation. A cartoonist, painter, novelist and author of one of Australia's classic children's stories, he very early laid down his philosophy and values to which he remained constant throughout his long life. The vitalism and gaiety which underscored his controversial paintings were too attractive to be ignored by the upcoming creative people of the day. Lindsay himself consciously expounded this **'vitalism'** as a philosophy. The immediately positive effects of Lindsay's 'vitalist' ideas upon the poets was to stimulate a delight in clear, colourful surface detail and a celebration of the overwhelming vitality of the masculine Life Force.

A poet, who as a young man, had come under the influence of the Norman Lindsay circle, is Kenneth Slessor (1901 -'71). He was one of Lindsay's earliest followers and in many of his attitudes and beliefs, remained constant to the Master. Lindsay's position was elaborately anti-materialistic - an attitude that is appealing to the idealistic young people of any generation and his demonstration of *Gaiety and Vitalism* was glamorous and intoxicating. Also, his promise of rekindling the classic culture in Australia, after snatching it away from decadent Europe, and lustful America, was tempting as Australians were only too painfully aware of the lack of cultural traditions in their own country.

Slessor may be called the father of modern Australian poetry, and is the most important poet in Australian history after John Shaw Neilson. His most active writing life occured between the late 1920s and the end of World War II. Once he had shaken off Lindsay's influence on his style, Slessor began to write the earliest poetry in the country that showed the influence of European and American contemporaries, especially **T S Eliot**. Slessor has more claim at being a more true national poet than any other outback writer. His masterpiece is *Five Bells*, a lament for a dead friend that portrays Sydney and its harbour from the time of the early settlement to the modern city of showboats and naval destroyers. Slessor's sense of history pervades his vision of the present day, and is displayed in poems of past hardship and cruelty, such as in *Vesper—Song of the Reverend Samuel Marsden.*

Slessor's early works rapidly outdistanced that of his contemporaries in its technical absorption of the material and attitudes of Lindsay. However, his continually introspective mind rubbed against a colder darkness beyond the dazzle of the asserted Life Force. In a later poem, *Stars*, there is a self-directed irony which barely conceals the whole horror of a universe from which godhead has been drained away, and in which man has been reduced to meaninglessness. Whenever he uses a light, cynical manner, one cannot help but remember the depths of darkness which lie behind it.

From this point, his poetry becomes a series of explorations along different corridors of escape from this dark vision. This was a specially disturbing vision for the man who had accepted the philosophy of Lindsay's 'vitalism'.

By the time Slessor virtually stopped writing poetry in 1938, he had made notable explorations into new territory. His *Five Visions of Captain Cook* opened a vein of 'voyager' poems that consolidated important myths of heritage and ancestry in Australian poetry, an area that continued to be mined by such poets as Fitzgerald and others.

His poetry is notable for its powerful images and visual impact. He shows signs of romanticism and a sense of humour which is more or less submerged. He is disillusioned about the conditions in which man is set, conditions which crucify him but he retains a sensuous delight in certain aspects of nature, an intoxication even, with their loveliness. He has a gift for the expression of the essential texture, shape, character and sensual impact of objects which allowed him to transform the merely ornamental imagist effects of the school he followed into a revelation of the metaphysical sense of the sensual. His poetry has the power of illuminating the miracle of naked existence. His humanity saves him from shallowness and his great triumph is taking unpromising material, accepting the romantic jumble and creating a genuine poetic world out of it. He has created a country of the mind for poetry and demonstrated that for Australia, such a country is as suitable a source of creation as the native landscape.

Slessor's small but significant number of landscape poems like *South Country* were important precursors of the 'poetic identification of regional inscape' that later characterised so much of the poetry written in the 1940s. He also attempted to domesticate certain current overseas influences - Owen, Sitwell, Eliot - at a time when European and American intellectual energy was regarded in Australia as decadent or too remote.

In 1940 Slessor was appointed official war correspondent with the Australian army, an experience that inspired his acclaimed war poems *Beach Burial* and *An Inscription for Dog River*. Slessor's later silence seemed puzzling to his contemporaries specially since he had set in motion the discussion of many issues that were taken up in the 1940s. However, the Creative Effort, as Lindsay had asserted, was justified for Slessor has survived : as a poet of desperation and despair

3.3 *SOUTH COUNTRY*

Please read *South Country* now and answer the questions that follow before you read my interpretation of the poem.

a) Does the poet relate the landscape to human beings in any way?
b) How does the poet evoke the senses in his description?
c) Do you think he is being serious or sarcastic in his comments?

Discussion

Slessor, a loving citizen of Sydney, was not really given to writing about Australian country scenes. But *South Country* is one poem which deals with the Australian landscape. This poem shows something of a quality very visible in his poetry - a physical rather than a sensual imagination, a sense of objective things vividly present but not deeply imagined in feeling. It is a quality not only found in the images he gives us but in the obvious need to give, in sound, texture and rhythm, the rub and bruise of solids that are in contact with us. Even the thunderstorm is 'flesh' and Slessor's fondness for the echoing of vowel and consonantal sounds within rather abrupt rhythms emphasises the sense of physique.

The senses of touch and sight are evoked repeatedly throughout the poem, whether it be in the detailing of the landscape, the quality of light, or the approaching storm. The vegetation is pale and characterless with no distinguishing landmarks to set the miles apart. There is only 'whey-faced anonymity', the monotony of which grates on the imagination. There is an ascribing of human qualities to the trees as though they have finally reached an end to their 'arguments...doubts and quarrelling... plots and pains' and have flattened out in clear distances 'like an abrupt solution'.

The 'flat earth of empty farms' is symbolic of the void that is so essentially a part of Slessor's work, his recognition of the emptiness that lurks in a spiritually depleted world. In a continuation of this idea, the colour of the sunlight is depicted as tainted - it is no longer bright and unclouded but is 'rotting' for it has been tinged by the hue of the imminent storm with its 'black, bruised flesh'.

The fourth stanza is vividly physical. The huge pressure of air 'pounding the bony ridge', the spine of the earth - its mountains - as it were, is vibrant with a sexual imagery which, combined with the reference to the 'drench of light', is suggestive of new life and beginnings. The storm clouds have passed and out of the blackness there pours forth a luminous ray of light which erases the horizon and obliterates the demarcation between sky and earth so that one seems to be walking 'on the sky's beach'. The 'dwindled hills' are implicative of the ancience of the land which has rounded and flattened the contours of the elevated areas over centuries of wind and rain. The little bulges seem to have forced their way up from under the earth like skulls seeking air in a spirit of rebellion, refusing to give up and just smother to death. The Australian spirit of determination is evoked in this image, giving rise as it does, to the picture of a frail, fragile life unwilling to give up the fight against the harshness of the land and the wrath of the gods.

The little knobs of hills are like 'skulls' evocative of the intellect, the thinker who, inspite of the adversity of his environment, still pushes his way up to the air in an attempt to express his thoughts and communicate his feelings. They are symbolic of the Australian writers who did not find an environment conducive to creative endeavour yet strove to leave their mark in the literary world.

The poem is most remarkable for its fusion of mood and style. It is a highly ambivalent piece - the initial solution of the plain landscape giving way to an oppressive sense of vastness and overwhelming clarity; the sense of understanding giving way to a sense of being obliterated. It expresses mingled distaste and fear. The combination and relating of images of decay with phenomena like sunlight and thunderstorms (usually associated with vitality and renewal) contributes powerfully to the ambivalent feeling of the whole. So does the sense of deadening immensity further reinforced by the image of the hills, so far away that they are dwarfed by the enormous sky and yet asserting themselves against the emptiness : they are buried by air. The poem's balance comes from this dynamic fusion of the dead and the living, the human and the inhuman, the growing and the diminishing. Here one feels that the landscape is not being used to convey a mood or a state of mind but that both inseparably illustrate each other.

There is irony in the poem, an emotion which is obviously not taking itself too seriously, a sense of slightly mocking emphasis and exaggeration. The landscape in the poem is experienced as something verging on the absurd, the portentous, unmanageable by the imagination, something which mocks any feelings one may start to have about it. This is genuine Australian irony, allied to their fondness for 'tall stories' of a wildly exaggerated improbability, their easy going slang, their liking to cope with immediate physical problems, their lack of passion and violent engagement. It is obviously a kind of defence, perhaps inevitable in a transplanted people face to face with the unhomely enormity of their oversized and intemperate continent.

This irony is the lesser irony - the defence-irony which moves too easily from the strength of not taking oneself too solemnly or pompously to the weakness of not

taking anything seriously. The greater defence is not defence but exposure : it knows how feelings passionately believed in can be opposed by others equally valid. It exposes one to the irony of existence.

South Country, full of quiet passion, unspectacular, finely made, shows how in an unexpected way, contemporary Australian poetry may express the experience of being Australian. The poem has a universal and not a local theme. It does not represent any Australian outlook but perhaps it does represent the isolation and loneliness of Australia in an indirect way. It expresses the experience of being a poet in Australia, far from the sophisticated centres of the 'old world'.

3.4 R D FITZGERALD

The influence of Norman Lindsay was not confined to Slessor. Robert D Fitzgerald 1902-1971, the only other Australian poet of stature in the '30s, was another disciple and, when Douglas Stewart took up the position of literary editor of the Sydney *Bulletin*, he helped to extend the basic tenets of the Vitalist philosophy. There was no exhibition of a romantic swagger or heroic self-consciousness. There was an emphasis on action rather than intellect, on the physical rather than the emotional, a rejection of subtleties of thought and feeling, a tendency towards statement rather than suggestion, a certain lushness of imagery and perception. These traces can still be found in the writing of certain writers. Fitzgerald's early work displayed an attachment to the Lindsayan fantasy, a phase which he soon left behind. The publication of his collection of poems *Moonlight Acre* established him as a poet of a comparable stature as his friend Kenneth Slessor.

Fitzgerald's voice is different from Slessor's, being more stocky and physical in a firm but not sensuous way. His gruff containment within the experienced world, 'It is enough that trees are trees, that earth is earth and stone is stone' opens up possibilities for the imagination. There is a reflection of Brennan's resolute, densely textured style in Fitzgerald's manner. He is a slow-moving and philosophical poet.

While Slessor seemed to be in danger of withdrawing from reality, Fitzgerald's attitude is threatened by complacency. His later work was a continual effort towards growth - leading to achievement - within the boundaries of a sustained determinist philosophy. His greatest achievement was to capture and compress a sense of historical presence in a world ridden with inherited guilt. The unyielding boundaries of events throw the poet back to the most fruitful of sources : man caught in action, and its interchange.

The richly allusive humanistic concern that can be found in his best poems stretches his imperiousness and restrained pride to more flexible limits. His technique of concentrating on each word and phrase makes it inappropriate to the lyric form and he is at his best in the longer, meditative and historical poems. Fitzgerald is fundamentally a scientist as well as a poet.

If one looks for romantic striving and life-enlarging ambitions in his work, one may be disappointed and apt to judge it limited in its range. However, his sensible, down to earth attitude may prove to be more enduring than the delicate responses of other poets.

Fitzgerald is fascinated by moonlight and the idea which predominates over the image is a clear statement and indignation over paradox and pity. Inspite of the limitations in his poetry from the point of view of sensuous immediacy or vitality and flexibility of language, he is a humanly appealing poet - resolutely optimistic, prepared to celebrate the world of human action and endeavour. He has a deep belief in the power which [illegible] some central energy in existence which keeps life moving. He believed strongly in the value of action, of doing things and nearly all his [illegible] ation of this faith.

His position in Australian literature is still uncertain. His poetry does not give the sense of width and experience or of feeling and there is a certain homogeneity of theme and ideas which limits his range. There is a preoccupation with the connection between past and present, the need to grasp life and a sense of meaning through action; admiration for dogged persistence and the sheer capacity to endure; a sense that every thing and every person is significant and must have a place in the scheme of things. His imagery is largely drawn from the world of tides and currents, rocks and stones, pylons, metal towers, concrete and steel - images of things that both endure, change and flow or else represent spiritual and mental creations.

In the 1940s and '50s, Fitzgerald provided strength, presence and reassurance when there was a sudden onrush of national and regional awareness brought about by World War II. There was the first genuine threat to the nation's borders and Fitzgerald's work, asserting human and ancestral values, was in response to the fears and trepidation of that period when the rejection of moral and traditional values was as unwelcome in Australia as it was in fashion abroad. At one point of time, the literary scene was dominated by the monolithic and conservative influence of Douglas Stewart and Fitzgerald.

3.5 *THIS NIGHT'S ORBIT*

Now, please read *This Night's Orbit* and try to understand what the poet is trying to say with the help of these questions.

a) What does the title suggest to you with regard to the passing of time?

b) Does the past vanish, never to return, or are we left with a certain residue of moments gone by? Relate this to the ideas generated by the title.

c) What, according to the poet, is the worst thing you could have done and which you might regret at a later time?

Discussion

The very title stirs up the sense of the inexorable movement of time, the feeling of continuity as expressed in a cycle of the orbit of the planets. The orbit moves in a circle where there is no beginning and no end. The revolution and rotation of the orbs is a sign of the universal order and the night's orbit indicates the passing of many such nights while, at the same time, presaging the approach of many more. Human life is also dictated by the sequence of night and day and is thus, of necessity, bound to the universal pattern and rhythm while the waxing and waning of the moon has its counterpart in phases of mortal life and existence.

While the poet walks back and forth on the moonlit grass outside his house, he is reminded of the other times that he has done so and recognises that those moments have vanished into the past, never to return and that this a natural occurrence. If this were not the case, he 'would not be bound in this night's orbit or this moon's'. Being mortal, he has to accept that time drifts away inevitably. Sometimes even one's memories dim and one is left only with hazy remembrances - but there will be other nights and days in the cycle of life, bound as we are to the night's orbit and the moon's.

The past is always with him at every turn of the road - 'old scenes are blown like sand across these hillocks' - as he revolves memories around in his head. The presen would not be what it is if it were not for the past and sometimes it is tempting to let go off the present and evade its responsibilities by escaping into the bylanes of memory, to allow one's head to 'bury in the past". But then the poet expresses his determination to meet 'the fresh hour' as he has always done. The past, precious as it may be, is not to be sacrificed at the altar of regret or fond recollections. There is the

acceptance of the need to get on with life, a rebuttal of Shelley's lament that 'we look before and after and pine for what is not'.

It is natural to look back on our life and catalogue our sins of omission and commission, 'regret blunders made, chances killed outright', the worst being not to use our time constructively. Days thus passed unprofitably are soul-destroying, entirely joyless without affording even an iota of satisfaction at something achieved. But as we leave that behind, the wheel of time and fortune turns on relentlessly and we find history repeating itself. The more things change, the more they remain the same. Although people and events may be different, the nature of the interaction is alike, given the sameness of human nature. 'Wars, business' go on as usual and one finds oneself participating in this grand pageant willy-nilly whether of one's volition or otherwise.

And while he gets on with the business of living, he makes forays into the past, drawing from previous knowledge and fashioning of it, the new stuff of experience which will lead him on Time's pathway - overgrown now - but one which he can still navigate blindfolded as the roads traversed earlier are still clear in his imagination.

The poem features a regular rhyme scheme of ab, ab. The similes where he pictures the past as being alive to him at every moment are vivid and evocative. Time is pictured as a winding road over the earlier part of which grass grows and is forgotten. The comparisons and images from nature serve to emphasise the cyclical nature of existence, our inextricable bond with and unquestionable obedience to its laws.

3.6 LET US SUM UP

The land becomes a natural subject for an Australian poet - the discovery of the South land, the significance of that discovery and hence of modern Australia in the history of the human spirit. Slessor and Fitzgerald, both influenced in individual ways by Lindsay's Vitalist philosophy, made strong statements about the nature of human existence. *South Country* is a passionately written poem which brings out the ironic mindset of the Australian spirit. It speaks of the isolation of the continent and of what it means to be a poet there, far from the 'happening' centres of art, culture and philosophy. *This Night's Orbit* is a more personal poem, meandering through the corridors of the poet's memory as he contemplates his past and future and revolves memories in his mind, seeking to relate them to his growth as a human being.

3.7 QUESTIONS

1) In what ways do the poets use the land to express their feelings? Why do you think there is so great a focus on the land? Please try to answer this in your own words, adding to the ideas I have already given you in this unit.
2) Why did they need to come to terms with the land before they could get involved in their creative endeavours? You could draw upon information given in other blocks as well, to answer this question.
3) Pick out the physical images in *South Country* and say how it sets the tone of the poem.
4) In what ways can you find the influence of the Vitalist philosophy in Slessor's poem?
5) Do you think *South Country* is a pessimistic poem or an optimistic one? Could you offer reasons, supported by the text for your opinion?
6) What sort of a picture of the Australian landscape is drawn in the poem? Could you, basing your observations on the text, write a brief description of the physical features of the country?

7) Is *This Night's Orbit* a forward-looking or a backward-looking poem? State your reasons.
8) When one looks back on one's life. what are the thoughts that come to mind according to the poet?
9) In what ways does the poet draw equivalents between the natural course of events and human life?
10) Make a list of the similes and metaphors used in the poem and say how they carry the poet's ideas across to the reader.

3.8 GLOSSARY

Determinism	the doctrine that all events including human action are determined by causes regarded as external to the will.
Eliot, Thomas Stearns (1888-1965)	American-born English poet, literary critic, dramatist, and winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature, who is best known for his poem *The Waste Land.*
Owen, Wilfred (1893-1918).	British poet.
Sitwell, Dame Edith (1887-1964)	English poet, critic, and biographer, who was most successful as a writer of satirical verse.
Vitalism	an aspect of the philosophy of idealism (the claim that ideas, or abstract and immaterial essences precede and give rise to the material) arguing that living organisms, no matter how simple, are distinct from nonliving entities by possessing a non-physical, nonchemical "vital force".

UNIT 4 KEEPERS OF THE FLAME

Structure

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4.0 OBJECTIVES

In this unit we will be looking at the first woman poet in this Block and see how her poetry developed over the years from voicing feminist and feminine concerns to an environmentally conscious one which overrides all gender and national barriers. We shall be reading two of her poems in detail in this unit. The other poet we will be discussing is David Campbell who has shown his excellence in the area of nature poetry. However, the poem which we will be discussing is concerned with Australian attitudes and is not a nature poem. The poem embodies many of the attitudes of Australian writers that I spoke about in Unit III. It is purely Australian in spirit and tone.

4.1 JUDITH WRIGHT

In 1944, Judith Wright (b. 1915) published her first *Bulletin* poem and was immediately hailed as a powerful new voice. The first impression did not prove illusory and the feeling that here was a great talent flashing with brilliance, was proved when a number of her poems appeared in rapid succession the same year. Those poems have now become a part of the accepted heritage of Australian verse. Her first collection, *The Moving Image* (1946), was seen as a landmark in which the shorter lyrics explored the landscape and inheritance in a spirit of restless enquiry merged with an apparently effortless mastery over technique. The second collection was *Woman to Man* (1949) and it consolidated her position on the poetic firmament. Her preoccupations with the concept of time led her to deeper, more abstract questions, to the idea of nothingness itself. The question of Man bereft of godhead became one of her central concerns. However, the 'Nothing' apprehended in her work does not possess the quality of cold panic that underlies Slessor's poetry. Despite her constant circling around the theme of mankind's place and purpose in the universe, there is an implicit earth-assurance, the deep knowledge that 'Nothing' is only flux - the continuous flow and change in existence.

Born in New South Wales into one of Australia's pioneer families, Wright grew up in the country, acquiring both a love of the landscape and a concern for the Aborigines which subsequently influenced much of her work. After completing her studies at Sydney University, she travelled in Europe and then, in 1939, settled in Sydney to write. During the war years, however, when there was a shortage of labour, she returned to the country to help out on the family stock farm. This renewed contact with her childhood environment stimulated Wright's creativity which led to the

publication in 1946, of *The Moving Image*. Over a dozen individual collections have followed as well as several selections including *The Double Tree: Selected Poems 1942-1976* (1978) and *The Human Pattern: Selected Poems* (1990).

In her early poems Wright uses nature as the key to a greater understanding of human experience, and the poems disclose an imagination responsive to the moods of nature, curious about the legacy of the past and moved by the suffering of people and animals. The lyrical impulse is strong and the poetic logic is shaped by feeling and intuitive awareness rather than reason and thought. But in later collections the quest for an ultimate reality takes her beyond the immediate world of the senses. The exploratory, tentative poetic statements were superseded by the assured, mature lyricism of *Woman to Man* at the heart of which are poems about a woman's experiences of love and childbirth. They are poems of passion which express fine shades of feeling in striking images and render the intangible in sensuous terms. In this collection, Wright revealed and gave voice to aspects of human experience which had hitherto been unexpressed. This was done dramatically, in the form of a monologue, frankly and with tact but without any affectation.

Her earlier volumes are densely packed with invocations and rich piles of imagery, in an attempt to define the undefinable fear that existence is really a black void and life itself is only an illusion of death. However, each successive book developed and remoulded her basic themes and the treatment of those themes. The thematic changes have been pretty radical. There has been a shift from the feeling that words are inadequate to a recognition that words are primal; Time as an intractable enemy, to time as an acceptable framework for freedom of action; from a view of the world as a shadowy form of death and Nothingness to a celebration of the life force and the affirmation that 'man (kind) is central to the maze where all's made new'. However, her search throughout has been a metaphysical journey seeking harmony with the essential energies of life. At all stages of her development, the illumination of her seeking has provided the context for the poems during that period. This is itself unusual in Australian literature as most poets are content to adopt a static viewpoint or have written from only one phase of their experience. Her poetry has matured from a mixture of country and feminist themes to an impassioned defence of the environment that now faces all kinds of commercial encroachment.

Judith Wright's work has little to do with the great movements and concerns which have consumed the European and American literary minds. The primary reason for this was that she needed to solve a conflict between language and experience itself - experiences of a land utterly foreign to the language that was being used to express it. She had been brought up on the land, she lived on the land, she loved the land but - she was not of the land. The spiritual power of an outcrop of rock for example which might be expressed by an Aborigine, would be totally out of the realm of the European collective consciousness and its vocabulary, symbolism and meaning. It is the problem of all colonial cultures that they never went through the period of a stage of trying or actually learning the land. This gives rise to intensely-felt cries of disillusionment, an emotion to be seen in Wright's *The Moving Image*.

What makes her poetry distinctive is that she manages to achieve a balance between the experience of the land and the imagist poetic form which arises from the culture she had her roots in. In contrast to Slessor's landscapes in *South Country* and *Crow Country*, which are like masterful colour sketches done in bold strokes, she does not treat the land as an object but as the action of the spirit. In one sense then, the land remains remote, outside her poems yet an essential part of them.

She was of course, not alone in attempting a true understanding of the land in its natural state for the Jindyworobaks tried something similar. What was different in the approach of the latter was that they wanted both the land and the language to remain untouched and as they were, with the addition or deletion of a few Aboriginal words.

Moving away from the theme of alienation of colonial sensibility from the genius of the land, in her next book, she goes on to a poetry that negates the whole idea of the land as an environment for the human consciousness.

It could be said that the development of themes in her books appear to follow the pattern of human relationships. The early poems have a solitude which slowly blossoms into the duality of sexual love culminating in parental love and are crowned by the realisation that all experience is valid to human life. Since 1961, Wright has moved away from large fixed issues. There has been an increased immediacy in her poems, one may even call it a relaxation. One of the aspects of her earlier volumes was an avoidance, even in the love poems, of nuances of human exchange but the later poems have opened up from their earlier reserve. Even if they have lost something in intensity, they have gained in warmth.

She is not a satirist and her poems on the subjects of environmental protection, war and technological development are impulsive cries of outrage rather than calculated essays in ridicule. She shows a compulsive urge in some of her poems to reach out to the far beyond, believes that there should be some fluid interplay between the human and the natural world and opposes the mystic world of the night against the perceptions of the day. There is a marked preference for an intuitive understanding of reality. She is mainly lyrical in most of her poems, with leanings towards a ruminative, mystical apprehension of experience. A fundamental tenet of her credo as a poet is that the basic fact of our human situation resides in our bold confrontation with the encircling night of silence and in forcing it to give out some kind of a spark. For her, the poet is basically a 'maker' - maker of poems and meanings - understood not in the sense of an inert phenomenon but as a vital living force. The poet does not function as an observer of nature but is an active ally in creating forms. The poet's role is described in terms of the functions of the soil and the lake - 'the source of all living things that are'. The attempt to get back to the core of the vitalist forces of the natural world also implies that one becomes aware of the glaring realities of the world around us, of the gaping chasm between the phenomenal world and the spiritual. In some poems she accuses Australian colonial society of crimes against the land and its original inhabitants as also against other lands and people - Vietnam for instance. The reason for this cruelty she says is because we have allowed ourselves to become mechanistic and have abdicated human responsibility. In the final analysis, she is the messenger of love, humility and courage.

Although best known for her poetry, Wright has also published short stories, essays, books for children, and a major critical study *Preoccupations in Australian Poetry* (1965). In her role as an activist she campaigns for Aboriginal rights and also supports conservation issues, such as the fight to save the Great Barrier Reef from mineral exploitation.

As I have done in the earlier units, I present a few simple questions for you to answer after reading the two poems of Wright.

4.2 *LEGEND*

a) Do you think *Legend* only tells the story of a blacksmith's boy or can it be read at a deeper level too?

b) What are the physical hardships described by the poet that the boy has to face during the course of his quest?

c) What do you think the rainbow stands for? Does the boy actually pick up the rainbow and take it home with him?

Discussion

The poem has an almost fairytale-like quality about it. One grows up reading stories of brave young men who, overcoming all manner of dangers, are finally crowned with incredible success and riches. *Legend* talks about the pioneering spirit of the settlers of Australia who were full of the spirit of adventure and willing to risk their lives for a dream. They had confidence in their ability to conquer all obstacles in their path, to attain their objective and the poem is a paean to the vibrant spirit of the founding fathers of modern Australia.

The very first words - 'the blacksmith's boy' - sets the tone. This is not a poem about people of noble birth or those born into the aristocratic fold with all its accompanying comforts and advantages, it is a story of a poor blacksmith's boy - a member of the labouring class - who sets out on his quest with a rifle (even that breaks up later) and a dog. The poem is placed in an egalitarian society and projects Australia as the land of opportunity, ready to reward those who have the heart to toil and the determination to succeed.

The 'cobwebs' of routine and tradition, the temptations of the creature comforts of a settled, secure life cling to his feet and try to hamper his seeking steps. Likewise, the land poses its own difficulties - 'rivers hindered him, thorn-branches caught at his eyes to make him blind' and the sky turns to an ominous hue, portending a violent storm. But, he 'didn't mind'. This is an optimistic understatement, with the lines that follow reflecting the dogged intention, die-hard spirit and stout-heartedness of the boy.

The second stanza delineates the physical adversities that beleaguer him, appearing suddenly as if from nowhere while the voice of convention discourages his adventurous spirit crying, 'you'll soon be dead'. But nothing deters him and he continues on his way, inspite of the heavy rain which falls upon him in sheets like a mat of hair. Soon, night falls and the blackness of oblivion and failure is ready to swallow him up. Gentle, faint-hearted creatures wail while the grass gets ready to receive his body. Everything fails him - his rifle breaks, his hat blows away and even his faithful companion, the dog, deserts him. But not for him the pliant acceptance of a malignant fate for he is willing to risk all in order to realise his vision.

And, sure enough, 'just as his heart foretold', he sees a rainbow cresting the mountain, appearing 'in front of the night', holding back the forces of darkness. The rainbow is a natural phenomenon, appearing as it does, after the rain and is symbolic of the reward that is to be attained if one perseveres long and hard enough. In order to get his hands on the rainbow, he needs to be nimble, fleet-footed and flexible - all qualities essential for success in the rough and tumble of life. Victory does not come without a price, however - the rainbow is not an unmixed blessing for it is both a 'ring of gold' and 'a bar of ice'. The pessimists - the pigeon, the magpie and the dove - stop their fearful wailing and crowd around to stare at his prize.

The entire poem is replete with similes from the world of Nature. The preponderance of the colour black in the first three stanzas is contrasted in the concluding stanzas, with the multi-hued brightness of the rainbow which is radiant and intense enough to drive away the night.

The last stanza presents the conqueror as hunter with his prey slung over his shoulder, homeward bound as obstacles mysteriously make way for him. There is the recognition of the Australian spirit of determination in ' all the world said... nobody else has done anything to equal it'. The Australians have created a nation, overcoming the alienness of the land and the hardships of its landscape and the poem pays tribute to the creative and experimental temper of the first settlers.

4.3 *BULLOCKY*

a) Does the description of the bullocky and his work sound familiar to you? Where would you come across a scene like this? Are the conditions the same?

b) Do you think the bullocky is a young man? Are there any markers in the poem which might suggest his age?

c) Is there a difference in the landscape towards the end of the poem?

Discussion

The poem depicts the hard, backbreaking drudgery of the early settlers, the hardworking toilers of the field who, in tandem with their strong beasts of burden, worked doggedly throughout the year in all vagaries of the weather to make the land fertile.

Time passes quickly as the bullocky labours without any human company, only his strong team of bullocks working shoulder to shoulder with him until finally, the 'striding years' take their toll and time 'runs **widdershins** in his brain'. Involved in his back-breaking labour day in and day out, he loses track of time which suddenly seems to start moving in the opposite direction so that he retreats into the mythical past. With no one to share his tedious hours, there is a detachment from reality and madness of a sort sets in as he begins to see 'fiends and angels' using his road.

There is the recognition that a land grows fruitful through the labour of its uneducated, working-class and not its aristocracy and that they should be given due credit. In so doing, the bullocky assumes a larger than life dimension and passes into the realm of myth and the Australian legend. He is **Moses** and there is the identification of the Australian tradition with pre-Christian and Christian traditions, sanctified by age, and the transfer of legend into myth. A new dimension of continuity has been added to the uniqueness. This too is part of the process of identification - this re-definition of the Australian symbols of the discoverer, the pioneer, the bushman, in terms of everyman.

The never-say-die spirit of the pioneers is epitomised in the image of the bullocky metamorphosing into 'Moses, and the slaves his suffering and stubborn team'. And, at the end of his day of labour, the bullocky fills the half-lighted funnel of the day with his prophecies, the future thus being inextricably linked with the past and present. The 'half-light pillars' reinforce the dreamlike quality of the situation while the 'steepled cone of night', with its evocation of a church steeple, in combination with Moses and his prophecies, underlines the spiritual connotations.

Beyond 'the campfire's crimson ring', the atmosphere is saturated with ancestral sounds; the land is alive with the past. The darkness, far from being threatening, is nurturing and filled with benevolent spirits and he is 'cupped' by it, as though enfolded in an embrace. The bullocky has vanished into the past and old methods have given way to new - 'grass is across the waggon-tracks and plough strikes bone beneath the grass'. However, the barrenness of the land has yielded forth fruitfulness for now 'vineyards cover all the slopes where the dead teams were used to pass'. The buried bodies still nourish the land - in life and in death, the people and beasts continually enrich the adopted country. The bullocky's bones feed the land he helped to open up and the intimacy of the relationship is suggested by the word 'hand' - the vine holds the land closely as in the sealing of a pledge or a pact, with its sense of inter-relationship and continuity. The land of exile has been converted into a lush and productive one, the font of future generations. There is a parallel drawn between Moses leading the Jews out of slavery in Egypt into the Promised Land of **Canaan**

and the bullocky through his labour, fashioning for posterity, a promised land of opportunity out of an alien, harsh land.

The bullocky was one of the stock, cliched images of Australian writing and has been the subject of widely different writers. Wright's poem is not a simple piece of realism or affectionately comic observation but a highly-wrought icon, elevating its subject matter through its range of references and its deliberately mannered choice of words and images. However, it bears the same kind of relationship to its predecessors as Hope's *Australia* bears to the patriotic, nationalistic poems which preceded it. For all the heightened realism of its detail, the poem builds up a sense of religious awe for human kind and their work. It relates two backgrounds - that of the bullock driver of pioneering days and of the Shepherd of the Bible, relating the former's life and the meaning of his existence to that of the Old Testament Prophet. The poem has an intricate pattern of symbolism and is shaped towards a sense of affirmation and a celebration of achievement and is an extraordinarily compact tribute to a pioneer.

There is the concept of time as an imposition, imprisoning its creators and the means through which the poet escapes its tyranny is by manipulating Time by spatially telescoping it. This can be seen very clearly in this poem, the most celebrated of her poems on the theme of the transplanted culture of the Australians. The tone of this imagery is repeatedly one of longing : the wish to be other, not to be an intruding European sensibility. As she has written approvingly elsewhere : 'Ours is a poetry without echoes ... may it not be that the only real maturity lies in striking out one's own line, remaining faithful to one's own experience?'

4.4 DAVID CAMPBELL

Brought up on the family sheep station in New South Wales, Campbell (1915-1979) went to Cambridge University where he developed a love for poetry. Returning to Australia he worked as a **jackeroo** before serving with the Royal Australian Air Force during World War II. After the war, Campbell lived on various stations in the Canberra area, dividing his time between farming and poetry.

His first volume, *Speak with the Sun,* appeared in 1949. Its tone is predominantly Australian, with poems about the landscape, life in the bush, and Aboriginal themes. The collection also includes the memorable war poem "Men in Green".

Among Campbell's other collections are *The Miracle of Mullion Hill* (1956), *Poems* (1962), *The Branch of Dodonna* (1970), *Devil's Rock* (1974), and *The Man in the Honeysuckle* (1979). Although his later work retains an Australian dimension, the focus is more universal, often concentrating on contemporary social issues.

In 1964 Campbell was appointed poetry editor of the *Australian.* He received numerous awards for his poetry; he has also produced two collections of short stories and, with Rosemary Dobson, published translations of Russian poetry.

Campbell characterises the best of *The Bulletin* school of nature poets. His first verse was published in 1942 in *The Bulletin* and until the late 1960s, his writing retained a consistent standard of quiet poise and unassuming precision. His admiration of the Elizabethan lyric sharpened the almost ethereal clarity of his countryside songs and sonnets. Under the editorship and encouragement of Douglas Stewart (for many years arbiter of the *Red Pages* of the *Sydney Bulletin*), Campbell worked steadily but by the late '60s, when Stewart's influence had waned and other influences assumed dominance in Australian poetry, Campbell completely remoulded his poetic style, moving beyond country pleasures to grappling - sometimes uncomfortably - with modern times. This striving for immediacy has revitalised his poetry although there has been some loss in the timeless purity of his **pastoral lyrics.** The essential lyric style still persists and

indeed, seems to be renewed in certain poems. There is a resilience in Campbell's work which becomes more apparent as his range of poetic concerns increases.

4.5 *THE AUSTRALIAN DREAM*

Read the poem and please give reasons for the opinions you express in the answers to the following questions:

a) Do you think the poet, as described in the poem, is a rich man? What makes you think so?
b) Does the Queen seem at a loss and unable to adapt to the situation?
c) Is it a serious or humorous poem?

The poem is written in an anecdotal style with a regular rhyme scheme which goes aa, bb, cc and so on. The first stanza has a felicity of expression that immediately grabs the reader's attention. The poet's head is 'bronze with claret' when he is suddenly woken up at three in the morning for, after having imbibed freely the previous night, his mind is still foggy and blurred with the effects of the alcohol. 'Light blinded the stairs' in a vivid metaphor as he stumbles down to the door and 'the hatstand sprang upright', assuming substance and shape once it is illuminated, springing up from out of the darkness that surrounds it. And finally, once he manages to open the door, what should he find there but the 'Royal Family with a wavering torch'! The unsteady and dim light of the torch is in ironic contrast to the imperial brightness of the sun that never set on the British Empire in bygone times.

The Queen proceeds to apologise for the intrusion and explains why they are there at all - 'the pubs were full, most of our subjects rude' ... it seems the Queen's Command brings only, "Tell the dead marines!" There is a questioning of tradition and blind loyalty to the Queen and an expression of resentment against the participation of Australia in the war at Britain's bidding, with its consequent high number of casualties. There is also the implicit notion that respect and awe cannot be engendered purely through status or taken for granted over succeeding generations but must be earned through one's life and actions. There is a movement towards a more democratic world in which everyone is equal and respected for their qualities of mind, heart and intellect.

This is brought out more clearly in the lines that follow in which the poet, 'with a laugh', puts them 'at their ease'. The commoner takes up the mantle of graciousness (once the prerogative of the Queen and her family) and hospitality to help bolster their confidence and ease their discomfiture in a delightful reversal of roles.

What a situation to find themselves in - where the Duke has to make do with bedding down in a tiny boiler room in the basement - a far cry indeed, from the grand opulence of the Buckingham Palace - and the Queen, with her mother, has perforce, to share the poet's bedroom! The poet, like a good and courteous host, is willing to make adjustments, and quite happy to spend the rest of the night curled up in a chair. However, the Queen, realising that she has no option but to move with changing times, insists that the poet will share the bed with the two ladies. There is the recognition that it is only through adaptation that a modicum of respect can be gained and that unless she follows the dictates of circumstance and changes her conduct accordingly, she will be consigned to the dust-heap of oblivion. This is symbolised by the act of her removing and placing ***The Garter*** on a **pouf.**

When the poet enters his bedroom, he finds their crowns and pearls and regal robes discarded on the 'lowboy', and other items of furniture. There is the contrast between the meanness of his possessions and their splendid dresses and jewellery, brought out tellingly in the line, 'ropes of pearls lassoed the plastic lampshade'. In a

most unlikely turn of phrase, the Queen Mother invites him to 'hop in' and go to sleep, flanked by herself and the Queen.

However, in a residue of awe, the poet finds himself lying rigidly 'like a stick of wood' and totally unable to come to terms with the situation. His heart pulses 'like rollers at the ebb of tide', indicative of an era that is passing, ebbing away. The time has come in which everyone is to participate equally in the dance of life and there will be no kings or commoners. In order to lighten the atmosphere, he says, using a totally incongruous mode of address considering they are all in bed together : ' I hope your Majesties sleep well'. The Queen, quick to recognise this inappropriateness and responding with the generations of graciousness bred into her, pats his hand and asks 'Jock' to call her 'Ma'am'. This too is a sign of transformed times - this shift towards a new informality in which the Queen addresses the poet by his nickname and herself moves several rungs down the ladder towards a more egalitarian position.

The poem is a dream of a time when everyone will be equal and Britain's dominance will be overthrown, to be replaced by a home-grown government more suited to and in tune with Australian aspirations.

4.6 LET US SUM UP

After the early work shaped by personal experience first of a recovered childhood and ancestral past, and then of fulfilment in love, Wright, without losing her sense of place and identity, became increasingly concerned with philosophical issues. Time becomes a central preoccupation. There is also another voice - that of protest - against the destructiveness of Man and his inhumanities. *Legend* depicts the struggle of the early settlers in a light-hearted manner which belies the intensity of the purpose underlying it - that of unveiling the determination and hard work that went into the making of the Australian legend. *Bullocky*, with its vivid evocation of the promised land, displays her concentrated powers of suggestion.

Moving away from his early focus on nature, Campbell remoulded his poetic temperament and perspective, to focus on contemporary issues. His essential lyricism still persists even in his later work, where it is combined with a more universal tone. *The Australian Dream* brings out Campbell's egalitarian attitude, incorporating within its folds, an ironic, hard-hitting critique of the Queen which is characteristic of the Romantics' general disapprobation of institutions and symbols of authority. This is also concomitant with the Australian national ethos - their profound dislike for the Queen which can be traced as far back as Lawson's *The English Queen.*

4.7 QUESTIONS

1) What, according to Wright, are the qualities needed to succeed in life? Does she express these openly or do you deduce it from the poems you have read?

2) How has the country been transformed into a promised land? What was it like earlier?

3) Do you think Australia is a classless society with equal opportunities for all? What make you think so?

4) In what way is the comparison of the bullocky with Moses, apt?

5) Who are the people who have made a home out of the harshness of Australia?

6) How does the repeated use of the adjective 'black' serve to reinforce certain ideas in *Legend*?

7) In what way is Campbell's poem democratic?

8) What ideas make up the spirit of the Australian dream?

9) Do you think the royal family cuts a sorry figure?

10) What is the tone of Campbell's poem and what are the factors which serve to set it?

4.8 GLOSSARY

Bullocky	a bullock driver.
Canaan	in the Old Testament, designation of the land to the west of the River Jordan, later known as Palestine, and the name of the reputed ancestor of the Canaanites, the original inhabitants of that land. The Israelites gradually conquered and occupied this territory during the 2nd millennium BC or earlier. It was probably the Canaanites who gave the Israelites the language now known as Hebrew.
Order of the Most Noble Garter	order founded by Edward III in 1348. It is represented by an eight-pointed star emblazoned with the cross of St. George. The order hangs from a blue ribbon. The number of knights (and ladies) companion is traditionally limited to 24 people. The motto is: *Honi soit qui mal y pense* ("Evil to the one who thinks evil").
Great Barrier Reef	chain of coral reefs in the Coral Sea, off the north-eastern coast of Australia. The largest deposit of coral in the world, the reef extends about 2,010 km from a point near Mackay, Queensland, to the Torres Strait, which lies between Australia and New Guinea.
Jackeroo	a novice on a sheep station or cattle station.
Lawson, Henry (1867-1922)	Australian poet and short-story writer.
Moses	Hebrew prophet and lawgiver and founder of Israel, or the Jewish people. Islam venerates him as Moussa.
Pastoral lyrics	portraying country life usually in a romantic or idealised form.
Pouf, pouffe :	large firm cushion used as a low seat or footstool.
Widdershins	in a direction contrary to the sun's course - anti-clockwise - and considered unlucky; dust devil, a whirlwind visible as a column of dust.

UNIT 5 COMING OF AGE

Structure

5.0 Objectives
5.1 James McAuley
5.2 *Terra Australis*
5.3 A D Hope
5.4 *Australia*
5.5 *Moschus Moschiferus*
5.6 Let Us Sum Up
5.7 Questions
5.8 Glossary

5.0 OBJECTIVES

We shall be carrying forward the discussion of the preoccupation with Australia and the Australian identity in this unit in our reading of McAuley and Hope. The two representative poems of these poets reflect this absorption. We shall, in addition, read one poem of Hope's which voices environmentalist concerns and should be of special interest to Indian readers as it is set in the jungles of Assam. By the end of this unit you should be in a position to compare the perspectives of the various writers we have already discussed alongwith their 'Australian' poems. The other poems I have included in the Reader which have Australia as their theme are meant to give you a clearer idea of the perceptions of the writers with regard to Australia.

5.1 JAMES McAULEY

James McAuley (1917 - 1976), apart from his complicity in the Ern Malley hoax, had at that time published only two volumes of verse *Under Aldebaran* (1946) and *A Vision of ceremony* (1956). While the first of these showed traces of a writer toying with the idea of a type of modernism which he was later to parody, it ends with a long, formal satire. The second collection, inspite of having some exquisite lyrics, was practically insulated in its remoteness and coldness of tone.

McAuley, who was a brilliant and tortured intellectual, lapsed into political and religious reaction, emerging only at the end of his life as a lyrical and elegiac writer. His was an inhibiting influence, though in a period of reaction against excess, his cool formalism offered something of poise and certainty to cling on to, a means of incantation against the terrible unleashed holocaust of the war and the atom bomb.

His own preoccupations in life and art seemed to be : a unified world view, a soaring ardour of heroic self-dedication and an opportunity of producing significant social results. His deep awareness of the spiritual tradition and spiritual malaise of the West was found not in Europe but in the jungles of New Guinea in the years during and immediately after the war.

His early poetic thought was nourished by a vision of the cyclical upheaval and stagnation of society and a concern for the revolutionary role of the poet. His aesthetic theory asserts the visionary and intuitive nature of poetry and speaks of the craft of the poet as a mystery requiring self-dedication which is ratified by exceptional experiences yet he sees the vital sap of poetry as flowing from the traditional values of Western society. His political concern is with the organic life of

society, just as in poetry, despite a sense of deepening despair, he is concerned with the unity of the human personality in a world which is seen to have essential metaphysical significance. As a literary figure, his influence in Australia is considerable.

Although his experimentation with fixed verse forms, his intellectual clarity, his subdued and noble music have earned for him the title of **classicist**, several critics believe that it is a misconception. McAuley is the most subtle and inward of Australian poets and his verse is romantic and symbolist. It continually recalls the cadences of the Romantics the **Metaphysicals** and diverse European influences. Essentially, however, he owes very little to any other poet or school and the individuality of his imagination is too conspicuous to be missed. Later, he experimented for a time with classical myth and wrote fragments of drama and epics.

McAuley is in agreement with Hope on the question of modernity but unlike him, he explores the meaning of modernism philosophically and in terms of the history of ideas. Like Hope too, he is a learned poet with interests and first-hand experience of anthropology, religious history, music, politics and those large movements of thought which shaped the intellectual debates of the twentieth century. But unlike Hope, his poetry is not overtly learned, does not display his range of knowledge, nor is it as allusive. He is essentially a lyricist who wrote with the sense of the spoken poem in mind. His early poems reflect his interest in periods of historical crisis and revolution, his sense of the intellectual sterility of the Australia of his youth, his thoughts on traditional values and his strong lyrical gift.

As he himself said, his poetic concern was 'the search for and the struggle to express, an intuition of the True Form of Man' and 'to write poems that are lucid and mysterious, gracefully simple but full of secrets, faithful to the little one knows and the much one has to feel'. His understanding of the True Form of Man is rooted in his belief in a world which is the expression of a divine order, and in which are to be discovered complex relationships between animate and inanimate form, the human and the divine.

Despair is a recurrent word in McAuley's poetry and his apparently simple, lyrical celebration of 'a world of sense and use' is qualified and enriched by the recognition of countervailing and disturbing forces. Images from daily life and the natural world present impressions of growth and decay, fulfillment and loss, age and youth, hope and despair balances against each other. His sensuous world shines through the simplicity of texture. His voice appears firm but not dogmatic, reflective, vibrant, wise yet unassuming.

5.2 *TERRA AUSTRALIS*

Please read the poem and try to answer the questions which follow:

a) To whom is the poem addressed? Is there a shift from a first/second person discourse to a more general tone? What purpose does this shift serve?

b) What are the adjectives and expressions the poet uses to describe Australia?

c) What are the different aspects of Australia portrayed in the poem?

Discussion

The first stanza speaks of Australia as a place of myth, a 'country of the mind', to use a phrase from **Patrick White**'s *Voss* (1957). It conjures up the Australia of fables and dreams, the unexplored continent, the yearned-for destination of intrepid explorers in days gone by. It is not a physical, experienced reality but an imagined

land which exists in **'Quiros'** vision - his **hidalgo** heart'. In order to reach this 'Southern Continent', one needs to voyage within oneself, on 'the fabled ocean' of fantasy and dream as Quiros and others of his ilk did.

The second stanza sets out the democratic and egalitarian values of the country. The surroundings 'give ease', and the **wattle** sows the seeds of faith in the hearts of the doubters, kindling love and loyalty even in those who are sceptical of the future and stable existence of Australia. It is 'home' there where you are recognised by the birds as the magpies whistle at you 'like **larrikins**' and 'call you Jack'. The recognition by the native inhabitants, the warmth, the easy familiarity, the use of the nickname - all signify the egalitarian, classless nature of Australian society. 'It is the land of similes', says the poet, for the landscape, its flora and fauna reflect certain human values and sentiments.

The third stanza draws a darker picture of alienation and exile, of the Australia of the convicts, the colonised land cut off from the mainstream of European culture. The angophora dots the hillsides, spreading and tossing its branches 'with the gestures of Moses' as the white cockatoo perches on the boughs and 'screams with demoniac pain' in its characteristic screeching voice. 'The insolent emu', all the while, struts 'on the edge of the plain', straddling the twilight world 'between morning and night'. It is a gloomy, abstract world in which alienation and exile loom large.

The last stanza takes us away from the darkness of the preceding one. Beginning as it does with 'but...', it indicates a change or reversal in perception and mood. The unearthly light between morning and night gives way to the 'valleys of the fiery Goat where the sun like a centaur vertically shoots his raging arrows'. Great heat and brilliant light is evoked in these lines as the poet draws a picture of valleys brimming over with the radiance of the sun which ignites 'the ecstatic solitary pyres of unknown lovers'. These are the markers of the isolated Romantic heroes who carved out an identity for themselves by overcoming all odds and are imbued with the light of life and vitality, serving as beacons to the uninitiated.

The invocation of Moses reiterates the image of Australia as the Promised Land which is peopled with strange creatures like the cockatoo shrieking with 'demoniac pain' and the 'insolent emu' striding on the edges of twilight in the boundary of the plain. It is a land which seeks to find its similes in the imagination and thus become a part of the living consciousness of its people.

The poem speaks in the language of metaphors and projects Australia as the symbol of imagined constructs which can be moulded according to the inclination of the perceiver.

The poem makes direct contact with the Australian reader for it makes the familiar new. It invites from him scrutiny of a different kind since he is able to assess the accuracy of the poem. He can hardly avoid measuring, and perhaps questioning, the poem in terms of the direct knowledge he shares with the poet. But the process is a two-way exchange. *Terra* Australis might invite a challenge from its Australian reader, but it also issues challenges; it challenges the reader's awareness of his familiar world and his understanding of what he sees.

5.3 A D HOPE

Born in Cooma, New South Wales, Hope (1907-2000), studied languages and literature at Sydney and Oxford universities. Returning to Australia, he taught at Sydney Teachers' College, then Melbourne University, and in 1951 was appointed Foundation Professor of English at the Australian National University in Canberra. He retired from this position in 1968 to concentrate on writing poetry.

Hope's first collection of verse, *The Wandering Islands*, appeared in 1955. Others followed including *Poems* (1960), *A Late Picking* (1975), *The Drifting Continent* (1979), *Ladies from the Sea* (1987), and *Orpheus* (1991). Through his poetry, which characteristically uses traditional rhythms and forms, he comments on contemporary values and seeks to provide insights into human experience. Acknowledged as one of Australia's leading poets, his work is acclaimed internationally. In addition to poetry, Hope has also written critical studies on aspects of Australian literature. He was made a Companion of the Order of Australia in 1981.

The early poems of both Hope and McAuley reflect their strong intellectual interests as well as their responses to experience. McAuley and Wright published their first volumes in 1946 and Hope, who is more than ten years their senior, brought his first volume out in 1955. These three poets became major poets in the next thirty years and along with R D Fitzgerald, Douglas Stewart and David Campbell, virtually wrote the history of Australian poetry in this period. Their poetry represents not so much a renaissance in Australian poetry as a first full flowering, as a form able to challenge what had hitherto been the dominance of fiction and, their work characterises both the diversity and quality which continue to characterise the work of younger generations.

Both Hope and McAuley have been labelled classicists and I have pointed out earlier the reasons for classifying the latter as one and why it may not be entirely correct. Hope's case is similar. In his poetry and critical essays, he has asserted the value of traditional modes and has argued that the modern period has presided over the destruction of the specialised forms such as the epic, epistle, ode, elegy and satire. In consequence, the modern poet has available to him only the short lyric which has largely replaced the earlier variety in forms and thus reduced the range of poetic possibilities. Yet, despite this, Hope is in important ways, romantic. Much of his best poetry is made out of experiences of frustrated or unfulfilled love, destructive passion, the inner conflicts of a divided will and a strong sense of isolation, loss and guilt. The pains and ecstasies of existence are mediated through fable, legend, myth or allusion and it is the manner rather than the content which marks him out as a traditionalist.

On display in his works are his range of interests and learning and his authoritative use of language. His tone is frequently didactic and the relationship between poet and reader that of teacher and student. Given the seriousness of his purpose, the most prominent quality of his expression is gravity. But his verbal facility also makes him a witty poet - a trait to be seen in his satires. Beyond the sharp edges of his wit is a sense of recoil, perhaps of horror, as though faced with a difficulty - the idea of close human exchange. Man is better seen as a predator, isolated from God and his fellows. In much of Hope's poetry of denial, the very framing of the denial stresses the agony of loss, of deprivation from a state profoundly wished for. Many of the early poems remind one of Slessor's similar hollow celebrations but the elegance and fussiness of Slessor is replaced by a harsher, more impassioned tone, a protest, the anger of someone starved of some birthright, of some nourishment withheld.

He is a poet of many contradictions as well as of consistent preoccupations. There is a conflict in the centre of his poetry between the world of nature and the world of the intellect. Some poems can be hard and grudging; others finely disciplined and tender. Certain themes have dominated his poetry at different times of his development. If at times he has viewed man in his absurdity and triviality, he has at other times shown him in his splendid, almost tragic isolation, or in the guise of an energetic genius or a Nietzschean hero. The idea of man standing alone in victory or defeat occurs in various ways.

He has not been influenced by modern trends in poetic subject matter and method and has indeed written about the disadvantages of the free verse forms. Strangely, inspite of defining himself as an inheritor and transmitter of tradition, he was thought of as the most controversial and daring of Australian poets. He was a fierce campaigner

for the inclusion of Australian literature as a course of study in Australian universities.

5.4 *AUSTRALIA*

After reading the poem, do the following:

a) Compare the description of the landscape to Slessor's rendering of it in *South Country.*

b) Do you find a change in tone or attitude during the course of the poem or is it uniformly the same throughout?

c) Is it an emotional, satirical, ironic, sad ... poem?

Discussion

The poem is a traditional 'homecoming' poem with the point of view presented at the beginning, of a revenant - of someone returning home but seeing his country from the outside, as if for the first time, after a long absence. It is necessary to keep this in mind if one is to understand the apparent change in the last two stanzas. It takes as its theme, the idea of Australia's qualities as a nation. The description maps the geographical and physical aspects of the country as well as its psychological territory. The poem begins in a disenchanted, sardonic but completely accurate observation - 'a nation of drab green and desolate grey'. There is a deliberate downplaying of natural beauty and the landscape emerges in muted tones of grey and green. Hope evokes the monotonous colour, the flatness, the sense of age and attrition. There is a direct comparison to the colours of army uniforms - an image replete with suggestions of horror, waste and destruction. This is further reinforced when he compares it with the Sphinx. There is no idea here of vitality or growth but only a stark picture of desolation and emptiness. It is a country as inscrutable as the Sphinx, characterised not by the vivacity and spirit of its people but by the flora that 'darkens her hills'.

'They call her a young country but they lie', he states unequivocally. Geographically, it is one of the oldest lands but is known as a young country because it has only recently been brought under 'civilised' white domination.

There seems no hope of fertility - no possibility that exuberant vitality will once more pour forth from its depths; it has seemingly exhausted all its resources of creation and rejuvenation. Hope dwells on the bleak prospect, painting a picture that is without joy or colour. He laments the paucity of a distinct Australian culture and identity as he cries out - that it is a nation 'without songs, architecture, history...' The men who inhabit this country do not - cannot - boast that they 'live' but only that they 'survive'. It bears out the theory of the survival of the fittest which implies that there is nothing delicate, artistic or innocent about them for they are tough, hardened veterans of life's battles in a harsh, inhospitable continent - ' a type who will inhabit the dying earth'.

It is not only the land itself that gives rise to dismal reflections. The men who have colonised the continent have made of its five major cities, 'five teeming sores' and have reduced the nation to a state where '...second hand Europeans pullulate timidly on the edge of alien shores'. These lines are among the most widely quoted of Hope's works and regarded as expressing his scathing contempt for his countrymen. In an attempt to imitate European culture and customs, the Australian is left without an identity of his own and is a pale, washed-out version of the original. His home is still alien to him for he pines for another country - England - which he regards as his true home. But since he can not participate in the mainstream of Europe's consciousness,

he remains, painfully, only a second-hand European, even if he may not be aware of this harsh reality and it is left to thinkers like Hope to point it out.

So much that Hope felt about Australia in the 1930s - its aridity, its stupidity, its colonial timidity - is suggested in the poem and is all the more forceful, coming as it does from an insider, an Australian who love-hates his country. It is interesting to note that at a time when so many Australian writers and painters were expatriates, Hope practised a kind of inner expatriation in an attempt to ascend the insularity of Australian culture. If Hope's poem consisted only of the first five stanzas, it would have been impressively concise with a directness of statement that would impose its own emotional tone and conviction. However, the last two stanzas are important for the feeling of the whole, being remarkably optimistic, offering a marked change from the dullness and desolation pictured so far. They change a disillusioned comment into a paradoxical affirmation of the place.

After the cruel indictment of his country and its inhabitants, Hope abruptly changes the tone and tenor of his thoughts. Other civilised societies are merely 'lush jungles' in which intellectualism and its pseudo counterpart walk hand in hand. If, as has always been the case, true prophets arise from deserts, then Australia seems the best bet. The desert, ostensibly its greatest drawback, might well prove to be its greatest asset and its distance and isolation may contribute in great measure to the birth of an original philosophy uninfluenced by modes and trends prevalent elsewhere. For, what is 'called civilisation over there', is nothing more than 'the chatter of cultured apes'. True to his name, Hope, expresses his belief in the power and energy latent in all creation and of its ability to renew and manifest itself in different ways. This recognition transforms the poem, leading it away from a wallowing in depression to the silver lining that lightens every dark cloud.

Whatever its defects, Australia, to Hope, is home. He in fact returns somewhat like the prophets of the old to the desert. Not only is Australia 'placed' in relation to the rest of the world in the opening stanzas, the rest of the world is 'placed' in relation to Australia. Here quiet work is possible as the place is conducive for undistracted concentration and there is hope for the future. Above all, there is contact with something ancient and elemental and profound as opposed to the superficial glitter of the modern which is often - and mistakenly - considered to be 'civilisation'.

This poem remains one of Hope's most distinctively personal and authoritative poems. Its savage inversion of all the accepted nationalistic clichés -'they call her a young country but they lie' - struck home with particular force in the late forties, when the Australians in the grip of post-war euphoria, did not on the whole feel like regarding themselves as 'second-hand Europeans'. It is a tough-minded poem, intent on facing the facts without subsiding into despair or ascending into empty optimism. It is also an adult poem for it is a sign of one's growth and development that one is able to handle criticism constructively, an even healthier sign if one shows the ability of introspection and self-evaluation. The adolescent person or nation cannot stand criticism and even if many Australian readers could not appreciate such criticism just then, it was still significant that a couple of Australian writers were capable of producing it.

5.5 *MOSCHUS MOSCHIFERUS*

a) What do you think the title means?

b) Is the poet conveying a message through the poem? If so, what is he trying to say?

c) The poem describes the hunting of the deer by human beings. Do you think the hunt is justified? What is the difference between an animal killing another and a human killing the deer?

d) Please try to read Dryden's *Song for St. Cecilia's Day* and contrast the description of the power of music with Hope's report of its destructive use.

Discussion

It is a poem set in India against the backdrop of the jungles of Assam. The 'kastura' deer, hunted unrelentingly for the musk it carries within its body, is the *leitmotif* of the poem. In an entrancingly vivid description, the poet unravels the process whereby hunters use music for perverse ends - to lure the deer within the range of deadly poisoned arrows.

The lines which describe the music resounding through the woods are exquisite in their evocativeness - '...a tremulous skein of melody wavers ... now dancing... now a rain of pure, bright drops of sound'. Hope makes the most effective use of language to convey the passionate intensity of the music which heightens the horror of the indiscriminate massacre. The silvery notes of the flute drift, soaking through the gloom of the forest, spreading enticing tentacles into its depths till the deer, forgetting fear and with souls aquiver with the melody, step into the clearing where the predators are waiting with infinite patience.

And how much more noble is the animal whose being responds instinctively to the haunting melody, making it oblivious to its innate caution while Man, who has the ability to create such beauty, makes such devilish use of it! The most noteworthy point here is that there is no overt condemnation of such cruel practices, no attitudes struck of horror or repulsion. There is just the detailed description of the progress of the whole hunt beginning with the siren-like notes of the flute. The horror emerges out of the narrative itself.

It is supremely ironic that music which has been described as the balm to sore minds, with the ability to soothe man and wild beast alike, is here monstrously used as a bait, as an instrument of destruction. Hope ends with a mock-reverent address to St. Cecilia (the patron saint of music), which bring up echoes of John Dryden's *Song for St. Cecilia's Day, 1687*, a poem in which Dryden speaks of the creative, regenerating power of music, set in contrast to the destruction wreaked by music in Hope's rendering.

The multiple ironies of the poem are characteristic of Hope. It is a song dedicated to the patron saint of music but it is about music perverted to cruel, profit-motivated destruction. The beauty of the language expressing the beauty of the music and of the deer is in total contrast to the viciousness of the situation. The moment of death corresponds with the most exultant movement in the music. The music continues after each death but the continual killing will soon make the deer extinct and the music redundant.

The hunters, like **Orpheus**, entrance the animals with music and the narrative celebrates music's power and refinement at the same time that it recounts the slaughter of the deer and the continuing depletion of their numbers. Many have praised the powers of music. Few have spoken of the uses and abuses it can be put to. The poem is a comment on the price to be paid for certain exquisite refinements and pleasures. The price is the final elimination of the very source of those pleasures.

5.6 LET US SUM UP

Evidence of the impact of an aloof and bleak landscape is best seen in Hope and McAuley. They both belong to a tradition in which the most important questions about man's fate are beginning to be asked.

Terra Australis insists upon Australia as a place in myth, as having its existence in imagined constructions, 'a country of the mind'. But the poem also makes it clear that the nature of that country may vary according to the ideological predisposition of the writer. So, it may be a land which reflects the egalitarian Australian legend, one which is modelled on a gloomy metaphysical conviction of alienation and exile, or one which is the natural site for the isolated Romantic hero. In each case, the land (topographical and intellectual) seems to make available an appropriate metaphor for the preferred ideology.

Hope, in his finest poetry, aims to strike at the core of human experience without raising the question of a national identity at all and what he celebrates is a radically human aspiration. *Australia* expresses a romantic desire for the spiritual purity of desert landscapes where Hope locates 'some spirit which escapes the learned doubt'. He defines 'his' Australia in terms of what it does not have and attempts to recuperate these deficiencies and see them as offering a distinctive site for a somehow purer human experience.

Moschus Moschiferus, a prayer or report to Saint Cecilia about the way the power of music is being misused, is one of Hope's most perfect and serene pieces. It is a poem of protest, a conservationist's plea to save from extinction the musk deer that are killed in horrific numbers for the perfume industry. The protest is delivered with all the resources of art and is a delicate tissue of language and sound.

5.7 QUESTIONS

1) What are the shifts in the poet's perception of Australia in each stanza of the poem, *Terra Australis*?

2) Where does the poet speak of Australia as a democratic country and how does he put this point across ?

3) In what ways is the poem different from or similar to Slessor's and Hope's poems?

4) What are the features referred to in the poem which set it out as explicitly 'Australian'?

5) Do you think that Hope's attitude to his native country is a harshly critical one or is it mixed with other emotions as well ?

6) Could we draw a parallel between the Australian and the Indian experience as post-colonial nations? In these days when everyone is talking of a cultural invasion, do you think Indians are in the position of being 'second-hand Europeans' or, more pertinently, second-hand Americans? This question requires you to draw on your own perceptions and ideas.

7) How do you think that the criticism of one's own country is different from a foreigner's criticism of it? Are you happy with all aspects of the Indian situation? How would you react if someone who is not Indian made adverse remarks about your country even if you happen to share the same opinion?

8) In what way does *Moschus Moschiferus* reflect Hope's concern over the degradation of art?

9) Can the slaughter of the deer also be called the slaughter of innocence and an environmentally unethical way of life?

10) How does Hope depict the horrors of the killing of the deer through music without making any overt references to the cruelty of the hunters ?

5.8 GLOSSARY

Centaur	(in Greek and Roman mythology) one of a race of animals believed to be half man and half horse
Classical Style (art and literature)	a descriptive term for art and literature of ancient Greece or Rome, or similar in style or quality.
Cockatoo	a type of Australian parrot with a number of large feathers on its head that can be raised or lowered at will.
Elegy	originally, in classical Greek and Roman literature, classical elegies were often songs of lamentation, but elegies were also written on other themes, such as love, war, or politics.
Emu	a large Australian bird, smaller than an ostrich, that can run very well but cannot fly.
Epic	long narrative poem, majestic both in theme and style.
Epistle : (Greek, *epistellein*, "to send to")	formal and instructive letter, often intended for publication, written in verse form.
Free verse	rhymed or unrhymed poetry composed without attention to rules of metre. Free verse was first written and labelled *vers libre* (French, "free verse") by a group of French poets of the late 19th century, including Gustave Kahn and other Symbolists. Their purpose was to deliver French poetry from the restrictions of formal metrical patterns and to re-create instead the free rhythms of natural speech. Pointing to the American poet Walt Whitman as their precursor, they wrote lines of varying length and cadence, usually not rhymed. The emotional content or meaning of the work was expressed through its rhythm. Free verse has been characteristic of the work of many modern poets, including D H Lawrence, Ezra Pound, and Carl Sandburg.
Hidalgo	Spanish gentleman; Spanish for *hijo dalgo*, literally 'son of something'.
Larrikin	a hooligan.
Metaphysical	exemplified by the poetry of John Donne and the other so-called metaphysical poets, which carried the metaphorical style to heights of daring complexity and ingenuity. This often paradoxical style was used for a variety of poetic purposes, ranging from complex emotional attitudes to the simple inducement of admiration for its own virtuosity; exhibiting subtlety of thought and complex imagery.

Moschus Moschiferus — the musk deer belongs to the family Cervidae. It is classified as *Moschus moschiferus*.

German philosopher, poet, and Classical philologist, who became one of the most provocative and influential thinkers of the 19th century.

Ode — dignified and elaborately structured lyric poem praising and glorifying an individual, commemorating an event, or describing nature intellectually rather than emotionally. Odes were originally songs performed to the accompaniment of a musical instrument.

Orpheus — in Greek mythology, a poet and musician, the son of the muse Calliope and Apollo, god of music, or Oeagrus, King of Thrace. He was given the lyre by Apollo and became such an excellent musician that he had no rival among mortals. When Orpheus played and sang, he moved everything, animate and inanimate. His music enchanted the trees and rocks and tamed wild beasts, and even the rivers turned in their course to follow him.

Quiros, Pedro Fernandez de — led an expedition in 1605-1606 in search of the elusive Terra Australis ("southern land") but Quiros abandoned the party at Espiritu Santo, an island of the Vanuatu group, and returned in one of the ships to Mexico (perhaps as the result of a mutiny).

Renaissance — period of European history that saw a renewed interest in the arts and in the classical past. The Renaissance began in 14th century Italy and had spread to the rest of Europe by the 16th and 17th centuries.

Satire — in literature, prose or verse that employs wit in the form of irony, innuendo, or outright derision to expose human wickedness and folly.

Sphinx — in Greek mythology, monster with the head and breasts of a woman, the body of a lion, and the wings of a bird. Her name means "throttler". Lying crouched on a rock, she accosted all who were about to enter the city of Thebes by asking them a riddle.

Wattle — an Australian acacia with long, pliant branches, with bark used in tanning and golden flowers used as the national emblem.

White, Patrick — became the first Australian to be awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature. He was cited for his "epic and psychological narrative art which has introduced a new continent into literature".

UNIT 6 THE MARGINALISED VOICE

Structure

6.0 Objectives
6.1 Women's Writing
6.2 Rosemary Dobson
6.3 *Cock Crow*
6.4 The Aboriginal Voice
6.5 Kath Walker
6.6 *We Are Going*
6.7 Let Us Sum Up
6.8 Questions
6.9 Glossary

6.0 OBJECTIVES

In this unit we will talk about the literature of two marginalised sections of society - women and the Aborigines of Australia. Women have been deified or demonised at will, neither extreme according them the status and dignity of human existence. Although they constitute one half of humanity, their thoughts, feelings, aspirations and wishes have been routinely ignored. Now, they are coming into their own, their innermost concepts, perceptions and experiences of being women, finding expression in an increasingly large number of works by women. The Aborigines of Australia too, having been dispossessed of the land of their forefathers and denied basic human rights, are finally voicing their concerns and hurt, and their anguish over the passing away of an entire way of life. Rosemary Dobson's poem speaks of the inner life of a woman while Kath Walker's delineates the collapse of the Aboriginal modes of living.

6.1 WOMEN'S WRITING

Women's writing has a pertinence and force for a variety of reasons. While projecting the observations, situations, responses and struggles of the female half of humanity, it also reflects a consciousness created by gender, the entity traditionally defined by the frameworks of kinship, marriage and procreation. At another level it questions values and constructs considered self-evident so far. It focuses attention on the definition of freedom and creativity and raises a number of queries related to oppression and colonisation. It has helped both to put together and express the idea of the female self as well as to dismantle the concept of the all-pervasive male figure.

Working through revolutionary movements as well as silent changes, through legal, political battles and by breaching psychological barriers, women are beginning to know and discover themselves. All women's writing is not **feminist** and, even when gender identification overrides cultural barriers, certain cultural concepts also define and differentiate feminist positions. Feminist interpretations, however, can flow out even through absence and denial and are not necessarily dependent on equivalence and identification. Many women writers are wary of their feminist affiliations even today for fear of being further marginalised as the feminist is not juxtaposed with the masculine but is regarded as a sub-culture and the voice and class of the victim and the oppressed, thrust upon it.

Feminism begins with the self - and not essentially the intellectual self. Most cultures define women's roles through their bodily behaviour, and their reproductive functions. Most societies have their own versions of conduct books for women, the majority of which have been written by men. Women's writing is occupied in changing the terms of these definitions, moving through individualism and analysis of the self toward assurance and confidence. It has projected different patterns and interpretations in lieu of the existing ones and attempted to crumble contrarieties. Men need, love and desire women but they do so in relation to their own selves. The desires and aspects of a woman's life which is not connected to their needs, does not usually interest them. Women's writing has learnt to express the untold narrative of being a woman through struggling against an internalisation of role models thrust upon them. It focuses attention on both the representation of a female sensibility, a feminine reality, and on its significance as a means of bringing about an awareness of this reality.

Women's writing has been slow to find recognition, for several reasons. There were not enough women writers and not enough access to education to make their writing possible; history has neglected and drowned their contribution and their work has been disregarded as being involved with a limited world of experience since they were limited to domesticity. Their writing has been dismissed as inconsequential on the grounds that, according to religious and political thought, they held a subordinate position and were labelled as less rational and intellectual than men.

Freedom is the first requirement for any type of creative endeavour for taboos, inhibitions and sets of controls fetter the pursuit of experience. Yet, women have been denied the freedom to move, breathe and meet people freely over centuries and confined to kitchens or behind the *purdah* and deprived of the openness and freshness of experience outside the domestic prison. Child-marriages, child-bearing and child-rearing were the other chains that prevented the woman's imagination from soaring and finding expression. They have been creatures split into two - the physical and the intellectual selves - with the latter having been largely left undeveloped due to the demands of society and family.

While on the one hand women have been placed outside culture and history, on the other, they have been projected as the guardians of culture, expected to preserve and continue it through procreation and an adherence to tradition and rituals.

Women's writing has questioned patriarchal concepts relating to their education, marriage and family. There has been a tremendous amount of work done in the last three decades - the result of the efforts of hundreds of women across continents and cultures who have resisted domination. The accessibility to education, right to economic independence, to vote and to inherit property have been the focus of socio-political struggles. While gender differences are acknowledged, they are not regarded as making women inferior in any way. This has led to an introspective analysis of the female self and the right to pride and dignity within it.

In a sense, women's writing is the literature of silence for its meaning lies enveloped and disguised, preferring the subtle means of communication to the more overt ones. It also qualifies for this nomenclature for it seeks to express what has been effaced and suppressed and blanketed in the muffling cloak of silence for so long.

6.2 ROSEMARY DOBSON

Rosemary Dobson (1920-1985), taught art, was involved with cipher work during World War II and was also in the publishing business. She has edited a feminist anthology, *Sister Poets* (1979). Her training in art manifests itself in poems on

painters, painting and design. Hers is a detached, reflective writing, characterised by craftsmanship and formal elegance.

The Ship of Ice (1948) illustrates the timelessness of art and its power to immortalise the fleeting moment. Her later poetry is concerned with personal expression -specially motherhood - and Greek themes.

Due to her training in art, her poetry gains a quality of stillness akin to the paintings of the **Dutch Masters**. The words of her poetry select and arrange images from an experience. The poems record the surface details that survive in memory or history or art, but in reading their careful relations, we reconstruct the passions and endurance, the despair and the agony that lie behind the surface. Each poem comes, to use one of her titles, like 'The Message in the Bottle' to the reader who can

> ... recognise in what I say
> the voice that speaks to me alone
> and he the predetermined, he
> the listener, finder, watcher of
> the wrack that's washed in from the sea.

The messages in her bottles speak of love, poetry and oblivion. Love is the force in her work which transcends and redeems the individual; poetry, the art with which she makes sense of life; and oblivion, which is not only death but the unknowingness against which poetry and all the arts speak. The images in her poetry are drawn from the commonplaces of life. From those simple forms, we build, in our minds, the patterns that constitute the miracle of life itself.

Although she takes the whole of time as her province, this makes her no less contemporary or Australian. She argues that 'every artist should have complete freedom of choice in his(her) ideas. It should not matter if(s)he ranges back in time provided ...(s)he tries to use the equipment of thought and technique that is available to him(her) in his(her) own time with which to shape his(her) work.' Her poetry belongs to our time, with its emphasis on both the power and the inadequacies of the human mind, on the recovery and analysis rather than on a direct re-creation of experience and expression of emotion. We are aware, always, of the distance between observer and action, word and reality, in a world where mind and observation are the only realities.

She writes as one who delights in the ambiguity of the detachment of art being not only an alternative to life but an essential part of it, revealing at once, the wonder and fragility of the world. The wonder is humanity itself, which invests the world with the love, art, ceremony and science that fills her poems. There is also the realisation, however, that humanity, which realises the wonder of the world, also threatens it.

6.3 *COCK CROW*

Please read the poem and answer the questions that follow so that you can understand it better.

a) What does the title suggest to you?

b) What does the poet mean when she says at the end that she knew the meaning of what the cock was saying?

c) Do you think 'three' has a special significance in this poem? What are the reasons for your opinion?

Discussion

The poem gives expression to a woman's wish to be herself, freed of all social roles of mother, daughter, wife etc. Wanting to be alone, the poet walks the road between the town and her lit-up house - to and fro she strides three times while thoughts pummel her and she experiences a riot of feelings. She is adrift from the normal course of her routine, closed round by the dark trees on the lonely stretch of road and gradually feels herself 'absolved' of her bonds until it seems as though she is suddenly light, freed from earthly ties, the only thing holding her being her feet on the ground.

There is a metaphorical cutting of ropes and she seems to be drifting weightlessly. She wants to snap all bonds and be her individual self but this is not so easy, however, for human bonds are elastic, you may walk away but they pull you back. Even while she feels herself 'absolved' of the bonds, thoughts of her sleeping mother and daughter consume her mind and she feels a betrayer for walking away from them and shutting the door that links them to her. The road that she walks is the bridge between the town and her house while she herself is the bridge between two generations - one with its feet in the past, the other with its eyes raised towards the future. The parallel drawn between the two images serves to reinforce the idea of linkages and connections.

And, as she continues her stroll, she feels herself 'separate and alone, cut off from human cries, from pain'. There is the recognition that if there is love, there will be pain and by cutting oneself off from hurt, one is also severing all ties with love. When one loves deeply, there is always the chance of being hurt by the loved one's actions or words and the anguish of parting. But one does not cease to love in fear of the suffering that will inevitably accompany it. 'No man is an island', wrote John Donne while A D Hope expresses the feeling that we are all wandering islands which come together for brief periods and are then torn apart again.

She feels the bonds dissolve but for a short while and is unable to sustain that experience - it is 'too brief illusion' as the cock crows thrice, recalling her to her duties. She turns the handle of the door, the symbol of her relinking with the realities of her existence and goes back to a world bound by relationships.

The title immediately brings up Biblical allusions, referring to the prediction of St. Peter's denial of Jesus Christ after he had been betrayed : 'I tell you, Peter, the rooster will not crow this day before you will deny three times that you know Me.' And later, when this prediction comes to pass, and Peter denies Christ the third time, he hears the rooster crow and he goes out and weeps bitterly.

The poet refers to the cock crowing thrice which brings her back to a sense of commitment. She walks the road between the house, in which her mother and daughter lie asleep, and town, three times. And three times does St. Peter deny knowing Christ. This intensifies the undercurrents of betrayal one can sense flowing through the whole poem. Inspite of her wish to be free, to be herself and alone, there is still a sense of guilt that she is in fact denying all that is dear and close to her heart. And just as Peter was reminded of his denial by the crowing of the rooster, so does the poet on hearing the herald of morning, walk back to her family as she 'knew his meaning well'.

In Christian religious art, the crowing cock has symbolised the Resurrection of Christ. The crowing also signals the advent of morning and therefore, of new beginnings. The speaker, having come to terms with her desire for freedom and having experienced it for a short while, is now ready to take up the reins of her life once more, knowing the cock's 'meaning well' - a reminder to acknowledge one's duty and perform the labours of love gladly.

The birth of a child involves the mother in the continuing life of the world. Yet th involvement is also painful, threatening the mother's life by absorbing it in the life of others. The poem embodies this dilemma, as the speaker flees from the sleeping

mother and daughter in her desperate need to be herself. The moment of relief enables her to create the symmetry of art from her own being and the dark trees and night that close her round. For a moment she knows herself '...separate and alone...' The separation allows the love, pain and cries to come together in their proper shape. Yet this moment, a metaphor for art, is broken by the sound of 'the cock crow on the hill', a reminder of Peter's realisation of his betrayal and of the continuing demands of life. Art and self-possession become betrayal and the speaker returns home. Although the moment is described as 'brief illusion', it remains, and gives the poem its value. The detachment of art is not the alternative to life but a necessary part of it.

6.4 THE ABORIGINAL VOICE

The indigenous, colonised population, the Aborigines, had a rich oral culture that was not translated into written form until the early 20th century, and has still made only a slight impact on the written literature of the country. The growth of a specifically Aboriginal literature in English has been slow and remains slight. The poets Oodgeroo Noonucul (formerly Kath Walker), Mudrooroo (Colin Johnson), and Lionel Fogarty have all published widely and achieved recognition. The chief repository of Aboriginal culture is in translation by anthropologists and scholars of ritual ceremonies among tribesmen. In spite of the existence of their rich oral culture, it was only in the 1960s that the first Aboriginal writing accessible to an English-speaking audience began to appear.

Although women writers have been undervalued in Australian society and their concerns pushed to the margins of public attention, women's writing has been important since the time of the gold rush. The Aboriginal people are those who have been pushed beyond the margins of society. Present generation Aboriginals are asserting their right to determine their own condition and Aboriginal writers have emerged who speak both for and to their own people. These are people who were colonised and find themselves forced to use the language of the coloniser to express their own condition. Yet, they have changed the language to make it speak of their particular experience. This experience continues to be circumscribed by the whites and so even when Aboriginal writers speak to their own people, the white community forms part of the dialogue.

The early history of the colonisation of Australia as well as the relations between the whites and the Aborigines have been the focus of novels by many Australian writers. In nineteenth century fiction and poetry, the tendency was to regard them as savages which is no longer the case but they are still depicted as mysterious and enigmatic. However, writings by the Aborigines themselves offer a more credible portrayal of the people. Kath Walker, along with Jack Davis can be seen as the founders of this new literature but their output has not been great and Walker, at least has virtually ceased to write. The forms favoured by Aboriginal writers have been drama, poetry and the short story. Aboriginal writing, as with all things aboriginal, is heavily studied and analysed. Is all their writing as some have said, necessarily political writing? There is the feeling that because they are in a minority, any Aboriginal who writes must have a message to convey. This can be stifling to creativity. Most writings by aboriginal writers are autobiographical and therefore the 'message' is clear for it is the story of the person who has written it. Whether it is political is another point of view but certainly many Aboriginal writings can be disturbing to the white Australian or the non-Aboriginal reader because everything said is true.

The time is past when the whites in Australia looked upon the Aborigines as miserable brutes. The present generation of Australians do not feel the burden the white man once felt nor the sense of guilt felt by his successors. Aboriginal people are alive and well in many shapes and forms. The word Aboriginal is deceptive and

most indigenous writers call themselves Murris, Nungas, Kooris, Nyamitje, Wongai Nyoogah or any of the tribal groups that still exist in the desert regions of the vast country of Australia. Many people tend to think of them as all one group when, in point of fact, there are several hundred groups each different from the other yet all united under the blanket of oppression. They have a strong sense of pride in being Aboriginal. There are great differences among Aboriginals themselves - there are those who live fully urbanised lives, those who live on the fringes of white society and those who are still able to maintain traditional ways. These differences are reflected in the language which ranges from original tongues through dialectical forms of English to common Australian speech. Even the term 'Aborigine' is rejected by some as a European classification which gives them identity only in relation to white society.

There is a strong bond between the Aborigines and the land and the latter has a special hold on the former. It is said that they are the oldest people on the earth and that the oldest bones of Man have been found right there in Australia. It is a well known fact that the Aboriginal people have been in Australia for around 100,000 years - much longer when compared to the two thousand years that Christianity has been around! So there is a great and unexplainable spirituality that is possibly even stronger than the **Druids** or other so-called pagan beliefs of a similar nature to protecting and restoring the land.

The first major work by an Aboriginal was a volume of poems by Kath Walker, *We are Going*, in 1964. We shall be studying the title poem in this unit. It presents the tragedy of the degradation and near-extermination of a people who loved and needed and were needed by the land they once roamed freely. Her later poetry expresses an intense revival of self respect and a demand for equal opportunities and land rights previously denied to them. She can be described as an activist.

The political writings of Kevin Gilbert and Charles Perkins, the poetry and plays of Jack Davis, the poetry of Kath Walker and the huge quantity of work by Mudrooroo, all Aboriginal writers who were the first to be published outside Australia and to find a world-wide audience, threw open the door so others could follow. Now there are any number of books that tell of the life and trauma of being a dispossessed person in Australia, and also the pride and humour these people employ in order to survive. The heroes and heroines hitherto unmentioned also get a hearing and there are, as well, glimpses of their strong beliefs and culture.

It should not be forgotten that it was only a couple of decades ago that Aboriginals were finally given the dignity of being recognised in their own land and given the rights every other Australian took for granted. So, their fight - and fighters - for justice and equality from the time of the first fleet up to the turbulent 1960s, can at last be seen and read about. The ghosts of the earlier people were once left to wander alone in the annals of Australian history as other myths sprang up in their place - myths of a people weak and dirty, savage or lazy and fit only to be servants of the ruling class. But being a people of oral tradition, the stories handed down by the elders have kept intact the lives of the boxers, football players, warriors and politicians who were the spokespersons of their depleted society. Also passed down were the laws and beliefs that made their culture strong.

6.5 KATH WALKER

Kath Walker (b.1920) belongs to the Aboriginal world by birth and upbringing. But 'civilisation' was forced on her, a curse on the flora, fauna and landscape of her childhood. Strandbroke, the backdrop of her early years, was once stocked with natural beauty and she lived there with her family - birds, beasts and trees. Several

laws implicit in the Aboriginal way of life, bound man, animal and nature together. For instance, an Aboriginal rule laid down that one can kill while hunting, only to eat and not for sport. This ensured the survival of the beasts and protected them from indeterminate slaughter. Aboriginal life was perfectly ordered and complete in itself. Into this closed road of unseen bonds, the white man made inroads and Aboriginal life slowly but surely got infected by alien ways including the white man's system of education.

Like members of all conquered races, Oodgeroo has seen enough of civilisation. Implicit in her writing is the omnipresent shadow of the dark and ugly underbelly of civilisation. Her poems are generally directed to the white community in a spirit of reconciliation and an appeal for understanding. The first poem in the collection *My People* concludes with the couplet :

> I'm international, never mind place;
> I'm for humanity, all one race.

This sentiment animates the whole collection, but the rather glib expression raises the issue of how we should read her poetry. It is a demand for attention rather than a reflexive pondering of a situation. In some of her poems where she concentrates on the situation without comment, the simple use of language makes its point with telling force. There is a sense of loss for all of humankind in the passing of the clans that once filled the place with the lightness of 'their hearts in the dance and the game'. Grief and hope are the two poles of Kath Walker's poetry. Anger breaks through only occasionally to destroy any complacent belief in the reader that the writer offers purely a literary experience.

6.6 *WE ARE GOING*

Please read the poem and answer the following questions :

a) Who is going and where in the poem?
b) How does the use of Aboriginal words make the poem distinctive?
c) Is the tone of the poem one of revolt or resignation?

Discussion

The poem expresses the agony of dispossession. The first five lines depict the contrast between the decimated indigenous people and the invaders who have proliferated in direct proportion to the dwindling numbers of the Aborigines. They are a 'subdued' and 'silent', pitifully small group of survivors while the whites can be seen hurrying about like 'ants'. Their 'semi-naked' state is symbolic of their situation for they are neither totally natural as they used to be in earlier times nor have they been completely assimilated into the white man's world and customs.

Their holy grounds have been desecrated and converted into rubbish heaps and in place of the 'old **bora** ring', there is a sign designating it as a garbage dumping site - the sacred place has been invaded by the trappings of 'civilisation'. Remnants of their culture struggle for survival but it is a futile effort and the bora ring has been 'half-covered' already. Their ancestral home has been divided up and sold to white settlers without their consent.

The rest of the poem is the lament and confusion of the original inhabitants of the land who have become strangers in their own home. Truths have been inverted - the race which had been one with the land for thousands of years now creeps around the country stealthily and timidly while the foreigners have appropriated the land and

made it their own. In a poignant dirge, they remember the past when they had lived in unison with the laws and rhythms of nature. It is a mourning for the passing away of an era, an entire way of life, culture and civilisation. The bora ground, the **corroboree**, the old sacred ceremonies, the laws of the elders, the wonder tales of **Dream Time**, the hunts and the laughing games are all symbols of their culture, history, music and literature which are slowly but surely passing into oblivion.

The 'wandering camp fires' are a reflection of their nomadic lifestyle when anywhere and everywhere was home. They lived off the land and conserved it too, taking from it only what they needed without depleting the resources. The land is sacred to them also because it is the repository of the bones of their forefathers whose spirits are all around them and join them as the last embers of their campfires die away. The lines are reminiscent of Judith Wright's *Bullocky* where too, 'the campfire's crimson ring' is evoked and the surrounding darkness is redolent with the spirit of the past.

In direct contrast to the respect the Aborigines have for the land, the white man has raped and plundered it, sending species after species into extinction. He is seen as a ruthless predator who is insensitive to Nature. Instead of adapting himself to the land, he has violently shaped and moulded it according to his needs and desires. The land lies like a slaughtered beast being picked clean of its richness by the despoilers.

The anguish of this dispossessed group is silent - 'they cannot say their thoughts' - for they are not politically strong enough for their voice to be heard and have any effect. The complete identification of the people with the land and forces of Nature is powerfully brought about in the lines 'We are the lightning bolt ... the quiet daybreak **paling the dark lagoon**'. They were an extension of nature, like lightning and thunder, full of the boundless, vibrant energy and force of the natural elements. The Aborigines were representative of a culture and way of life which could not be separated from the land. Now they have been stripped of their very life-force and have become 'subdued and silent'. From being a vigorous and powerful race, they have gradually become ghosts of their former selves, the symbol of a life destroyed and the portent of imminent extinction.

The last lines list the extermination of the original inhabitants of the land - bird, beast and human alike. Just as the ancient culture, ceremonies and beliefs have been eroded, so has the land been denuded of its vegetation and animals and soon, the Aborigines themselves will vanish from the face of the earth. The poem depicts the murder of an entire civilisation and way of life.

6.7 LET US SUM UP

The work of women writers reflects an engagement with social and political issues, with theoretical perspectives and moves outside cultural and disciplinary boundaries. The act of writing has helped them to move outside the narrow role and man's helpmate, outside the role of seductress, the angel or the witch. It helps problematise the areas of conflict and facilitates a search for alternative models as they deconstruct literary forms and socio-political structures. Rosemary Dobson's poetry reflects the woman's point of view, presenting a world that is a minefield of emotions where the woman's need to express her individuality is suffused with guilt.

The only human inhabitants of the country when the white settlers arrived there, were the Aborigines who were bound to the land that was taken from them, by the indissoluble link of religion and **totemic** kinship so that white intrusion on the land itself became a kind of bloodless murder, even where no actual murder took place. Kath Walker gives voice to the anguish of the dispossessed, mourning the passing of an era and a way of life.

6.8 QUESTIONS

1) What are the issues that women's writing is concerned with?

2) In what way does *Cock Crow* express the feminine viewpoint?

3) Is the feeling of guilt and betrayal expressed overtly or through symbols and metaphors?

4) Why does the woman in the poem experience a feeling of guilt and how does she come to terms with it?

5) Discuss the various images and symbols in the poem and try to relate them to the ideas and feelings running through the mind of the woman.

6) Can you think of Indian or other equivalents to the problems faced by the Aborigines of Australia? Are there any tribes or communities which are faced with extinction and/or threatened with drastic changes in their way of life?

7) What picture of modern Australia is conjured up in the poem?

8) What is the contrast between the Aboriginal and white Australian way of life?

9) In what ways was the Aboriginal lifestyle an environmentally friendly one?

10) Read the poem closely and list the words which describe the plight of the Aboriginals and the attitude of the whites. How do these words affect the meaning and emotion conveyed by the poem?

6.9 GLOSSARY

Bora — an Aboriginal rite in which boys are initiated into manhood.

Corroboree — a festive or war-like dance drama with song; large ceremonial meetings that took place in all parts of Australia when seasonal conditions were suitable and abundant food resources were available. Hundreds of people travelled vast distances to trade goods, arrange marriages, and participate in social and cultural activities. Such "corroborees" - which are possible because most Aborigines are multilingual - continue today, and involve strong elements of music and dance.

Dreamtime — in the mythology of the Australian Aborigines, the period of Creation in which the known landscape took shape and all life has its source. Aboriginal traditions generally do not record the origins of the cosmos itself, and the sky and Earth are thought to have been eternally present. There is, however, an exceptionally rich tradition of "myths of origin" relating to all aspects of the natural and social environment, which are thought to have taken shape during the Dreaming.

Druids

ancient Celtic priests, magicians or soothsayers of Gaul, Britain or Ireland. The Druids were well versed in astrology, magic, and the mysterious powers of plants and animals; they held the oak tree and the mistletoe in great reverence, especially when the latter grew on oak trees, and they customarily conducted their rituals in oak forests.

Dutch masters

the most illustrious national school of genre painting was that of the Netherlands in the 17th century. Probably never before or since was the ordinary life of a nation depicted so fully as was the Dutch life of this period. Not only the great masters but also the less outstanding Dutch painters excelled at it. The most important of the Dutch genre painters were the so-called *little masters,* including Gerard Ter Borch, Jan Steen, Gabriel Metsu, Pieter de Hooch, Gerrit Dou and Adriaen van Ostade. The three leading 17th-century Dutch masters, Rembrandt, Frans Hals, and Jan Vermeer, also created genre paintings of unrivalled beauty.

Feminism

general term covering a range of ideologies and theories which pay special attention to women's rights and women's position in culture and society. The term tends to be used for the women's movement, which began in the late 18th century and continues to campaign for complete political, social, and economic equality between women and men. Feminists are united by the idea that women's position in society is unequal to that of men, and that society is structured in such a way as to benefit men to the political, social, and economic detriment of women.

Peter, St (died 64 AD)

the most prominent of the 12 disciples of Jesus Christ, a leader and missionary in the early Church, and traditionally the first bishop of Rome. After Jesus' arrest, Peter denied being associated with him and suffered enormous self-reproach for having done so, but the first appearance of the risen Jesus was to Peter.

Totemism

a complex system of ideas, symbols, and practices based on an assumed relationship between an individual or a social group and a natural object known as a totem. The totem may be a particular species of bird, animal, or plant; or it may be a natural phenomenon or feature of the landscape with which a group believes itself linked in some way. The term totem is derived from the language of the Ojibwa, a Native North American people.

EACH DAY I SEE THE LONG SHIPS COMING INTO PORT

Christopher Brennan (1870-1932)

And the people crowding to their rail, glad of the shore:
because to have been alone with the sea and not to have known
of anything happening in any crowded way,
and to have heard no other voice than the crooning Sea's
has charmed away the old rancours, and the great winds
have searched and swept their hurts of the old irksome thoughts:
so, to their Freshen'd gaze, each land smiles a good home.
Why envy I, seeing them made gay to greet the shore?
Surely I do not foolishly desire to go
hither and thither upon the earth and grow weary
with seeing many lands and peoples and the sea:
but if I might, someday, landing I reck not where
have heart to find a welcome and perchance a rest,
I would spread the sail to any wandering wind of the air
this night, when waves are hard and rain blots out the land.

THE ORANGE TREE - *John Shaw Neilson* (1872-1942)

The young girl stood beside me. I
Saw not what her young eyes could see:
- A light, she said, not of the sky
Lives somewhere in the Orange Tree.

- Is it, I said, of east or west?
The heartbeat of a luminous boy
Who with his faltering flute confessed
Only the edges of his joy?

Was he, I said, borne to the blue
In a mad escapade of Spring
Ere he could make a fond adieu
To his love in the blossoming?

Listen! The young girl said. There calls
No voice, no music beats on me;
But it is almost sound: it falls
This evening on the Orange Tree.

- Does he, I said, so fear the spring
Ere the white sap too far can climb?
See in the full gold evening
All happenings of the olden time?

Is he so goaded by the green?
Does the compulsion of the dew
Make him unknowable but keen
Asking with beauty of the blue?

- Listen! the young girl said. For a
Your hapless talk you fail to see
There is a light, a step, a call
This evening on the Orange tree.

-Is it, I said, a waste of love
Imperishably old in pain,
Moving as an affrighted dove
Under the sunlight or the rain?

Is it a fluttering heart that gave
Too willingly and was reviled?
Is it the stammering at a grave,
The last word of a little child?

-Silence! The young girl said. Oh, why,
Why will you talk to weary me?
Plague me no longer now, for I
Am listening like the Orange tree.

SOUTH COUNTRY - *Kenneth Slessor* (1901-1971)

After the whey-faced anonymity
Of river-gums and scribbly-gums and bush,
After the rubbing and the hit of brush,
You come to the South Country

As if the argument of trees were done,
The doubts and quarrelling, the plots and pains,
All ended by these clear and gliding planes
Like an abrupt solution.

And over the flat earth of empty farms
The monstrous continent of air floats back
Coloured with rotting sunlight and the black,
Bruised flesh of thunderstorms:

Air arched. enormous, pounding the bony ridge,
Ditches and hutches, with a drench of light.
So huge, from such infinities of height,
You walk on the sky's beach

While even the dwindled hills are small and bare,
As if, rebellious, buried, pitiful,
Something below pushed up a knob of skull,
Feeling its way to air.

THIS NIGHT'S ORBIT - *R D Fitzgerald* (1901-1971)

I have walked on moonlit grass before,
back and along outside my house.
And if there is nothing can restore
that time, and little enough to rouse
so much as thought of it here within sound
of a clean sea, beside white dunes,
amid bottle-brush, I would not be bound
in this night's orbit or this moon's.
For all that I know now or have known
is even my life itself, outspread
where still I walk; old scenes are blown
like sand across these hillocks; and my head
could bury in the past. But always I have met,
and shall meet, the fresh hour. And though one might
read a learnt lesson through and regret
blunders made, chances killed outright,
harms done, and that greatest harm of all-
days wasted, profitless, without joy-
it is not that either. The turn and fall

of living brings me into the employ
of wars, business, events, to run
new errands, hardly or my own will,
along an old time's pathway, one
overgrown but known blindfold still.

LEGEND - *Judith Wright* (1915-)

The blacksmith's boy went out with a rifle
And a black dog running behind.
Cobwebs snatched at his feet,
rivers hindered him,
thorn-branches caught at his eyes to make him blind
and the sky turned into an unlucky opal,
but he didn't mind,
I can break branches, I can swim rivers, I can stare out any spider
I meet,
Said he to his dog and his rifle.

The blacksmith's boy went over the paddocks
with his old black hat on his head.
Mountains jumped in his way,
and the old crow cried, 'you'll soon be dead'
And the rain came down like mattocks
But he only said
I can climb mountains, I can dodge rocks, I can shoot an old crow
any day,
and he went on over the paddocks.

When he came to the end of the day the sun began falling.
Up came the night ready to swallow him,
like the barrel of a gun,
like an old black hat,
like a black dog hungry to follow him
Then the pigeon, the magpie and the dove began wailing
and the grass lay down to pillow him.
His rifle broke, his hat blew away and his dog was gone
and the sun was falling.

But in front of the night the rainbow stood on the mountain,
Just as his heart foretold,
He ran like a hare,
he climbed like a fox;
he caught it in his hands, the colours and the cold-
like a bar of ice, like the column of a fountain,
like a ring of gold.
The pigeon, the magpie and the dove flew up to stare,
and the grass stood up again on the mountain.

The blacksmith's boy hung the rainbow on his shoulder
instead of his broken gun.
Lizards ran out to see,
snakes made way for him,
and the rainbow shone as brightly as the sun.
All the world said, Nobody is braver, nobody is bolder
nobody else has done
anything to equal it. He went home as bold as he could be
with the swinging rainbow on his shoulder.

BULLOCKY - *Judith Wright*

Beside his heavy-shouldered team,
thirsty with drought and chilled with rain,
he weathered all the striding years
till they ran widdershins in his brain:

Till the long solitary tracks
etched deeper with each lurching load
were populous before his eyes,
and fiends and angels used his road.

All the long straining journey grew
a mad apocalyptic dream,
and he old Moses, and the slaves
his suffering and stubborn team.

Then in his evening camp beneath
the half-light pillars of the trees
he filled the steepled cone of night
with shouted prayers and prophecies.

While past the campfire's crimson ring
the star-struck darkness cupped him round,
and centuries of cattlebells
rang with their sweet uneasy sound.

Grass is across the waggon-tracks,
and plough strikes bone beneath the grass,
and vineyards cover all the slopes
where the dead teams were used to pass.

O vine, grow close upon that bone
and hold it with your rooted hand.
The prophet Moses feeds the grape,
and fruitful is the Promised Land.

THE AUSTRALIAN DREAM -*David Campbell* (1915-1979)

The doorbell buzzed. It was past three o'clock
The steeple-of-Saint-Andrew's weathercock
Cried silently to darkness, and my head
Was bronze with claret as I rolled from bed
To ricochet from furniture. Light! Light
Blinded the stairs, the hatstand sprang upright,
I fumbled with the lock, and on the porch
Stood the royal Family with a wavering torch.

'We hope,' the Queen said, 'we do not intrude.
The pubs were full, most of our subjects rude.
We came before our time. It seems the Queen's
Command brings only, "Tell the dead marines!"
We've come to you.' I must admit I'd half
Expected just this visit. With a laugh
That put them at their ease, I bowed my head.
'Your Majesty is most welcome here,' I said.
'My home is yours. There is a little bed
Downstairs, a boiler-room, might suit the Duke.'
He thanked me gravely for it and he took

Himself off with a wave. 'Then the queen Mother?
She'd best bed down with you. There is no other
But my wide bed. I'll curl up in a chair.'
The Queen looked thoughtful. She brushed out her hair
And folded up *The Garter* on a pouf.
'Distress was the first commoner, and as proof
That queens bow to the times,' she said, 'we three
Shall share the double bed. Please follow me."

I waited for the ladies to undress-
A sense of fitness, even in distress,
Is always with me. They had tucked away
Their sate robes in the lowboy; gold crowns lay
Upon the beside tables; ropes of pearls
Lassoed the plastic lampshade; their soft curls
Were spread out on the pillows and they smiled.
'Hop in,' said the Queen Mother. In I piled
Between them to lie like a stick of wood.
I couldn't find a thing to say. My blood
Beat, but like rollers at the ebb of tide.
'I hope your Majesties sleep well,' I lied.
A hand touched mine and the Queen said, 'I am
Most grateful to you, Jock. Please call me Ma'am.'

TERRA AUSTRALIS - *James McAuley* (1917-1976)

Voyage within you, on the fabled ocean,
And you will find that Southern Continent,
Quiros' vision-his hidalgo heart
And mythical Australia, where reside
All things in their imagined counterpart.

It is your land of similes: the wattle
Scatters its pollen on the doubting heart;
The flowers are wide-awake; the air gives ease.
There you come home; the magpies call you Jack
And whistle like larrikins at you from the trees.

There too the angophora preaches on the hillsides
With the gestures of Moses; and the white cockatoo,
Perched on his limbs, screams with demoniac pain;
And who shall say on what errand the insolent emu
Walks between morning and night on the edge of the plain?

But northward in valleys of the fiery Goat
Where the sun like a centaur vertically shoots
His raging arrows with unerring aim,
Stand the ecstatic solitary pyres
Of unknown lovers, featureless with flame.

AUSTRALIA - *A.D. Hope* (1907-2000)

A nation of trees, drab green and desolate grey
In the field uniform of modern wars
Darkens her hills, those endless, outstretched paws
Of Sphinx demolished or stone lion worn away.

They call her a young country, but they lie:
She is the last of lands, the emptiest,
A woman beyond her change of life, a breast
Still tender but within the womb is dry;

Without songs, architecture, history:
The emotions and superstitions of younger lands,
Her rivers of water drawn among inland sands,
The river of her immense stupidity

Floods her monotonous tribes from Cairns to Perth,
In them at last the ultimate men arrive
Whose boast is not: 'we live' but 'we survive'
A type who will inhabit the dying earth.

And her five cities, like five teeming sores
Each drains her, a vast parasite robber-state
Where second-hand European pullulate
Timidly on the edge of alien shores.

Yet there are some like me turn gladly home
From the lush jungle of modern thought, to find
The Arabian desert of the human mind,
Hoping, if still from the deserts the prophets come.

Such savage and scarlet as no green hills dare
Springs in that waste, some spirit which escapes
The learned doubt, the chatter of cultured apes
Which is called civilization over there.

MOSCHUS MOSCHIFERUS - ***A Song for St. Cecilia's Day - A.D. Hope***

In the high jungle where Assam meets Tibet
The small Kastura, most archaic of deer,
Were driven in herds to cram the hunters' net
And slaughtered for the musk-pods which they bear

But in those thickets of rhododendron and birch
The tiny creatures now grow hard to find.
Fewer and fewer survive each year. The search
Employs new means, more exquisite and refined:

The hunters now set out by tow or three;
Each carries a bow and one a slender flute.
Deep in the forest the archers choose a tree
And climb; the piper squats against the root.

And there they wait until all trace of man
And rumour of his passage dies away.
They melt into the leaves and, while they scan
The glade below, their comrade starts to play.

Through those vast listening woods a tremulous skein
Of melody wavers, delicate and shrill:
Now dancing and now pensive, now a rain
Of pure, bright drops of sound and now the still,

Sad wailing of lament; from tune to tune
It winds and modulates without a pause;

The hunters hold their breath; the trance of noon
Grows tense; with its full power the music draws

A shadow from a juniper's darker shade;
Bright-eyed, with quivering muzzle and pricked ear,
The little musk-deer slips into the glade
Led by an ecstasy that conquers fear.

A wild enchantment lures him, step by step,
Into its net of crystalline sound, until
The leaves stir overhead, the bowstrings snap
And poisoned shafts bite sharp into the kill.

COCK CROW - *Rosemary Dobson* (1920-1985)

Wanting to be myself, alone,
Between the lit house and the town
I took the road, and at the bridge
Turned back and walked the way I'd come.

Three times I took that lonely stretch,
Three times the dark trees closed me round,
The night absolved me of my bonds
Only my footsteps held the ground.

My mother and my daughter slept,
One life behind and one before,
And I that stood between denied
Their needs in shutting-to the door.

And walking up and down the road
Knew myself, separate and alone,
Cut off from human cries, from pain,
And love that grows about the bone.

Too brief illusion! Thrice for me
I heard the cock crow on the hill,
And turned the handle of the door
Thinking I knew his meaning well.

ARE GOING - *Oodgeroo Noonuccal (Kath Walker)*

For Grannie Coolwell

They came in to the little town
A semi-naked band subdued and silent,
All that remained of their tribe.
They came here to the place of their old bora ground
Where now the many white men hurry about like ants.
Notice of estate agent reads: 'Rubbish May be Tipped Here'.
Now it half covers the traces of the old bora ring.
They sit and are confused they cannot say their thoughts;
'We are as strangers here now, but the white tribe are the strange
We belong here, we are of he old ways.
We are the corroboree and the bora ground,
We are the old sacred ceremonies, the laws of the elders.
We are the wonder tales of Dream Time, the tribal legends told.
We are the past, the hunts and the laughing games,
the wandering camp fires.

We are the lightning-bolt over Gaphembah Hill
Quick and terrible,
And the Thunder after him, that loud fellow.
We are the quiet daybreak paling the dark lagoon.
We are the shadow-ghosts creeping back as the camp fires burn low.
We are nature and the past, all the old ways
Gone now and scattered.
The scrubs are gone, the hunting and the laughter,
The eagle is gone, the emu and the kangaroo are gone
from this place.
The bora ring is gone.
The corroboree is gone.
And we are going.'

HISTORY - ***Rex Ingamells***

These are the images that make my dreams,
strong images but frail, dimmed-with-glow clear:

Pioneer ships lumbering in the sunset,
lumbering along our sombre eastern coastlines,
swaying, awkward but beautiful, north to Port Jackson...

The stark hatred and reeking soul-fire of men's faces,
men pent in penitentiaries and chained in road-gangs,
herded as cattle, worked as cattle, fierce in their misery...

Stern-hearted freemen, felling tall trees, building
rough homesteads amid far, unfamiliar places,
hoping, cherishing their preconceived
vision of beauty and propriety...

Herds of cattle, lowing by the fertile banks
of eastern rivers; drowsing under redgums,
where the black-and-white magpie sits calling
ecstatically ..

Flocks of sheep bleating perpetually on green hillsides
tired of fine feeding, joyous at life ...

Deserted station-houses, quiet in drought.
Bones of cattle, camels, horses, men.
And the despised black who lives through it all,
finding himself water, native plums, yams,
and wild-honey from the honey-ants...

Cities growing up,
towering into the future;
and this land's destined
vast cities of imagination.

MOORAWATHIMEERING - ***Rex Ingamells***

Into moorawathimeering,
where atninga dare not tread,
leaving wurly for a wilban,
tallabilla, you have fled.

Wombalunga curses, waitjurk-
though we cannot break the ban,
and follow tchidna any further
after one-time karaman.

Fair in moorawathimeering,
safe from wallan darenderong,
tallabilla waitjurk, wander
silently the whole day long.

Go with only lilliri
to walk along beside you there,
while douran-douran voices wail
and Karaworo beats the air.

DURER : INNSBRUCK, 1495 - *'Ern Malley'*

I had often, cowled in the slumberous heavy air,
Closed my inanimate lids to find it real,
As I knew it would be, the colourful spires
And painted roofs, the high snows glimpsed at the back,
All reversed in the quiet reflecting waters-
Not knowing then that Durer perceived it too.
Now I find that once more I have shrunk
To an interloper, robber of dead men's dream,
I had read in books that art is not easy
But no one warned that the mind repeats
In its ignorance the vision of others. I am still
The black swan of trespass on alien waters.

AUSTRALIA - *Ania Walwicz*

You big ugly. You too empty. You desert with your nothing nothing nothing. You scorched suntanned. Old too quickly. Acres of suburbs watching the telly. You bore me. Freckle silly children. You nothing much. With your big sea. Beach beach beach. I've seen enough already. You dumb dirty city with bar stools. You're ugly. You silly shoppingtown. You copy. You too far everywhere. You laugh at me. When I came this woman gave me a box of biscuits. You try to be friendly but you're not very friendly. You never ask me to your house. You insult me. You don't know how to be with me. Road road tree tree. I came from crowded and many. I came from rich. You have nothing to offer. You 're poor and spread thin. You big. So what. I'm small. It's what's in. You silent on Sunday. Nobody on your streets. You dead at night. You go to sleep too early. You don't excite me. You scare me with your hopeless. Asleep when you walk. Too hot to think. You big awful. You don't match me. You burnt out. You too big sky. You laugh with your big healthy. You want everyone to be the same. You're dumb. You do like anybody else. You engaged Doreen. You big cow. You average average. Cold day at school playing around at lunchtime. Running around for nothing. You never accept me. For you own. You always ask me where I'm from. You always ask me. You tell me I look strange. Different. You don't adopt me. You laugh at the way I speak. You think you're better than me. You don't like me. You don't have any interest in another country. Idiot centre of your own self. You think the rest of the world walk around without shoes or electric light. You don't go anywhere. You stay at home. You like one another. You go crazy on Saturday night. You get drunk. You don't like me and you don't like women. You put

your arm around me in bars. You're rough. I can't speak to you. You hairy hunk. You're just silly to me. You big man. Poor with all your power. You ugly furniture. You ugly house. Relaxed in your chair you stop. All year. Never fully awake. Dull at school. Wait for other people to tell you what to do. Follow the leader. Can't imagine. Work horse. Thick legs. You go to work in the morning. You shiver on a train.

From AUSTRALIA—*John Farrell*

Land of wattle bloom, of Parrot's boundless,
Why were thou hidden in a dark, strange sea
To vast through ages, fruitless, soundless, soundless

Till, from thy slumber men should waken thee?-
Why did' st thou lie, with ear that never hearkened
The sounds without, the cries of strife and play,
Like some sweet child within a chamber darkened
Left sleeping far into a troubled day?

What opiate veiled thine eyes while all the others
Grew tired and faint in East and West and North;
Why did' st thou dream until thy joyful brothers
Found where thou wast, and led thee smiling forth?-
Why did' st thou mask the happy face thou wearest?
Why wert thou veiled from all the eager eyes?
Why left so long, O first of lands and fairest,
Beneath the tent of unconjectured skies?

Then sweet Australia, fell a benediction
Of sleep upon thee, where no wandering breath
Might come to tell thee of the loud affliction
Of cursing tongues and clamouring hosts of death;
And with the peace of His great love around thee,
And rest that clashing ages could not break,
Strong-sighted eyes of English seekers found thee,
Strong English voices cried to thee 'Awake!'

Here were no dreadful vestiges imprinted
With evil messages and brands of Cain,
No mounds of death or walls of refuge dinted
With signs that Christ had lived and died in vain;
No chill memorials here proclaimed the story
Of kingships stricked for and murders done;
Here was a marvel and a separate glory,
One land whose history had not begun!

One unsown garden, fenced by sea-crags sterile,
Whose iron breasts flung back the thundering waves,
From all the years of fierce unrest and peril,
And slaves, and lords, and broken blades, and graves;
One gracious freehold for the free, where only
Soft dusky feet fell, reaching not thy sleep:
One field inviolate, untroubled, lonely,
Across the dread of the uncharted deep!

O dear and fair! Awakened from thy sleeping
So late! The world is breaking into noon;
The eyes that all the morn were dim with weeping
Smile through the tears that will cease dropping soon!

TERRA AUSTRALIS - *Douglas Stewart* (1913-1985)

Captain Quiros and Mr William Lane,
Sailing some highway shunned by trading traffic
Where in the world's skull like a moonlit brain
Flashing and crinkling rolls the vast pacific,

Approached each other zigzag, in confusion,
Lane from the west, the Spaniard from the east,
Their flickering canvas breaking the horizon
That shuts the dead off in a wall of mist.

"Three hundred years since I set out from Lima
And off Espiritu Santo lay down and wept
Because no faith in men, no truth in islands
And still unfound the shining continent slept;

"And swore upon the cross to come again
Though fever, thirst and mutiny stalked the seas
And poison spiders spun their webs in Spain,
And did return, and sailed three centuries,

"Staring to see the golden headlands wade
And saw no sun, no land, but this wide circle
Where moonlight clots the waves with coils of weed
And hangs like silver moss on sail and tackle,

"Until I thought to trudge till time was done
With all except my purpose run to waste;
And now upon this ocean of the moon,
A shape, a shade, a ship, and from the west!"

AUSTRALIA - *Bernard O'Dowd (1866-1953)*

Last sea-thing dredged by sailor Time from Space,
Are you a drift Sargasso, where the West
In halcyon calm rebuilds her fatal nest?
Or Delos of a coming Sun-God's race?
Are you for Light, and trimmed, with oil in place,
Or but a Will o' Wisp on marshy quest?
A new demesne for Mammon to infest?
Or lurks millennial Eden 'neath your face?

The cenotaphs of species dead elsewhere
That in your limits leap and swim and fly,
Or trail uncanny harp-strings from your trees,
Mix omens with the auguries that dare
To plant the Cross upon your forehead sky,
A virgin helpmate Ocean at your knees.

THE SOUTHERN CALL - *Bernard O Dowd*

Come hither ye, o'er all the world who seek the Altar room
Of spacious Freedom ever lit for worshippers to be:
Come from the jaded lands to us, come from the sullen gloom,
To sunny soils and cities sweet, to Love and Liberty!
The Truth by which ye steer by day, the Good ye pray for nightly,
The Beautiful ye would be one with - here are glowing brightly!

Here ye will realise at last the Sempiternal Dream,
Join in the Great Adventure towards the Mystic Pilgrim's goal,
And reach the summit that ye sought for following the Gleam -
For here it is, we know, and now - the City of the Soul.

When men outgrew the simple fane that awed their fathers' eyes,
And waking found the Presence gone, the Memnon music dumb,
One of the dreams they loved the best, and yearned to realise,
Told of a star that leaps to light when new gods are to come.
Surely 'tis here Messiahs new the old world's chains will sunder,
In purer skies, the genial air, and omnipresent wonder!
So, come ye all whose lighted eyes behold the star above
The crib where waits maturing long the Hope that is to be:
And bring the gold of willing hands, the frankincense of Love,
And, priceless o'er Golconda's gems, the myrch of Liberty!

We need your grit to make the Wild the fair abiding place
That ages have been yearning for, the Land of Heart's Desire:
Yet while we beacon hill on hill with signals to the race,
Sorely we need your prudence old, lest reckless we aspire
To change the orbit of the world to gratify a passion,
Or Kings eternal to dethrone to fit the moment's fashion.
Away so long from war's dire lore, we half forget to fight,
Unused to hunger we despise our smiling plenty's worth,
Wrong is a stranger so to us, we scarcely know the Right,
Yet steadied by your wisdom we were Saviours of the earth.

And not alone to feel the mouths of children at her breast
Australia wafts her sibyl call wherever white men are;
But, Warden of the Boundaries, lone outpost for the West,
She dare not risk the paling here of splendid Furope's star.
Out in the might we seem to see piratic dangers sparkle,
And on our noon's horizon growing omens grimly darkle
O'come ye of the white race hither, come ye to her call!
'Tis not alone for us the word she sends you o'er the sea.
As ye shall rise while up we soar, our failure means your fall -
The fall of Truth, the fall of Love, the fall of Liberty!

Where ancient sorrow darkens not nor ancient evils stain,
There is no air on earth to-day gives oracles so clear;
The Creed is here that opes the Door the creeds have tried in vain;
No secret of the universe ye may not cipher here.
Hither hath come the Holy Grail that ages long ye fared for;
Yea, He is here, we know, we know, the God all gods prepared for,
And builds for us, if but we will, millennial nationhood;
Song for the soul, if but we call, will fill the desert hush,
His desert ravens' from wings will bear our bodies food;
If but we strike, the desert rock will with His fountains gush.

The clanking of the Iron Age grows musical at last;
The dove replaces owl and bat, leopard becomes a fawn;
Sinster angels with the gloom are disappearing fast;
The rumbling portents slowly change as midnight flowers in dawn
Out of the yearnings that ye sowed in centuries of sorrow
Springs the fruition of your faith, Australia and To-morrow!
The Sun-burst of the Coming Age is golden on the hills;
Shouting for joy the Sons of God amid the glory stand;
Alchemist Love elixirs new for jaded man distils;
And Time the wizard rends the veil that hid the Promised Land!

Unto the wronged of ages singing songs of Human Rights
Redolent of the wattle bloom and tonic with the gum:
Into the prisons olden flashing cleansing Southern Lights
Unto her citizens to be, Australia cooees 'Come!'

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BLOCK INTRODUCTION

This Block is entitled the **Modern Australian Novel**. The aim of this block is to introduce the Australian novel and to acquaint you with one of the stalwarts of Australian Literature—the Nobel Laureate Patrick White and his novel ***Voss***.

In the previous blocks you have been introduced to Australian Literature, poetry of the early period (1788-1901), short fiction and poetry from 1901 to 1970. In this block we will look at:

- the development of the Australian Novel
- human relationships in *Voss*
- romantic elements in *Voss*
- multiple themes in *Voss* and
- some of the modern readings of *Voss*.

A word of advice before we begin, please read the text i.e., *Voss* carefully. A careful reading of text will lighten your task whereas an understanding of the block will prove useful as it will provide the background to Block 7- Contemporary Australian Fiction as well. Let us now begin with Unit One. Good Luck !!!

Photographs: Courtesy David Marr, Patrick White A Life (1991)

UNIT 1 RISE AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE AUSTRALIAN NOVEL

Structure

1.0 Objectives
1.1 Introduction
1.2 Australia: Socio-Cultural Context
1.3 Australian Novel
  1.3.1 First Phase (1800s)
  1.3.2 Second Phase (1900s)
1.4 The Modern Australian Novel: Beginnings
  1.4.1 The Growth of Self Identity
  1.4.2 Phases of Development
1.5 Major Issues and Concerns of Australian Writers
1.6 Let Us Sum Up
1.7 Questions

1.0 OBJECTIVES

In this Unit, we will look at the development and rise of the Australian Novel, the primary issues and concerns of the writers of that period and try and place *Voss* within the cultural, literary, socio-economic and political milieu in which Australian Literature particularly fiction developed. Once you go through this unit you will be in a position to:

- trace the background to the Australian novel
- discern the concerns of the novelists
- summarise the developments of the Australian novel and
- place Patrick White's *Voss* in perspective

1.1 INTRODUCTION

For the purpose of creating order and providing semblance to our study material we shall divide the past two centuries into different periods – namely the first phase of novel writing in Australia (1800s) and the second phase (1900s). The other topics include the beginnings of the modern Australian novel, the gradual growth of self-identity, the various developmental phases and major issues and concerns of Australian writers. Let us now begin with the socio-cultural background to Australian fiction.

1.2 AUSTRALIA: SOCIO-CULTURAL CONTEXT

Australia was discovered by Captain James Cook in 1770 and colonised by the British eight years later when the First Fleet landed at Botany Bay in 1788, under the commandership of Captain Arthur Phillip. This historic landing occurred on 18 January 1788, but Captain Phillip and his crew did not settle there. The fleet sailed further north and landed eventually at Port Jackson (Sydney) eight days later. To

Australian Day. Once a colony was established at Port Jackson, other colonies sprang up at Hobart (Tasmania), Swan River (Western Australia), Adelaide on the Gulf of St Vincent (South Australia), on the Brisbane River (Queensland), while Melbourne was established on Port Phillip Bay (Victoria). The primary objective behind the colonisation of Australia by England was the need to relieve its overcrowded prisons. The secondary objective was to provide a base for the Royal Navy in the Eastern Sea. When the first historic naval expedition was undertaken it was not for the glorious purpose of establishing trade links or civilising the natives. Botany Bay, destination Terra Australis/Australia, was meant to be a convict settlement, a prison for "disgorging from the mother country to keep the remaining population sound and pure;" [p.2, quoted: Samuel Lorenzo Knapp [American Cultural History 1607-1829, when talking about Australia and Australian Literatures vis-à-vis American Literature]. In fact the first fleet comprised 1373 people of which 732 were convicts. As a result of which, the transportation of convicts continued till 1868. In total, more than 160, 000 convicts were transported to Australia within a span of 80 years. By the 1850s Australia had 405,000 people of European descent, mainly rearing sheep, while those who worked on sheep farms were largely convicts. Following the great depression of the 1890s, these six colonies formed an alliance amongst themselves because of common economic needs, a growing sense of nationalism and increasing defense concerns. By mid-nineteenth century, New South Wales, Queensland, South Australia, Western Australia, Tasmania and Victoria had emerged as independent states paying nominal allegiance to the monarch of Great Britain. The Commonwealth of Australia was formed as a result of the alliance of the colonies on January 1, 1901.

At the beginning of the twentieth century Australia was largely a WAS (White Anglo Saxon) settlement, most settlers being of English or Irish origin. It was only in the latter half of the twentieth century (after World War II) that several nationalities migrated to Australia and the island continent is now home to about 19 million people, with nearly 30% belonging to non- British stock. The new settlers in Australia were faced with several problems like, a strange, new environment, hostile physical conditions that necessitated adaptability, whereby survival depended on innovativeness and adaptability. The original inhabitants of Australia- the Aborigines lived with the land whereas the whites lived from the land and thus encountered many difficulties. This vital issue of survival in the new colony forms the theme of much of the early fiction of Australia where there are several recurring images of early settlers taming the land, of harsh and hostile scrub, of lonely outbacks.

But all this changed when gold was discovered in Australia. In 1851, Edward Hargreave, a gold digger from California discovered gold in New South Wales (NSW). Gold miners from Europe, America, China, the British Isles, arrived in NSW The golden era had dawned in the 1850s. Hitherto the image of life in Australia was hard and difficult, with the gold rush the image changed overnight to that of excitement, prosperity and adventure. Free settlers came to Australia as a result of the gold rush and between 1852 and 1861 more than one million people had migrated to the "land of opportunity". It is believed that the gold rush more or less marked the end of the pioneering phase of Australian society. By the mid 1860s the European population of Australia itself was about 150 000. The 1891 census depicts two- thirds of the population as Australian born of which 20 % were of Irish descent. With the growth of the sugar industry as many as 62 000 Pacific islanders were encouraged to migrate to Queensland. In 1901 the Australian population stood at five million. The Aborigines were granted citizenship rights only in 1967 and Australia began following a multicultural policy as opposed to its hitherto 'white only' policy in 1973.

Among the transported convicts were several educated people. These intellectually inclined individuals did not find an atmosphere congenial enough for extensive literary expression, but were however, able to produce documentary writing in the form of journals, memoirs, letters, annals and diaries. Not only was the penal

settlement not physically conducive for literary expression, even the period when the colony was created was not academically appropriate. The 1760s witnessed the end of the Augustan period. The Romantic Movement was yet to gain ground. This "chronological accident" (Mitchell, The Oxford History of Australian Literature, p.3) that lead to the settlement of the colony, at the end of one great tradition and on the eve of the other, is believed to have contributed to the uncertainty of early attempts at writing. The artistic influences of the mother country were so strong that Vance Palmer commented: "it almost imposed an attitude of detachment, a sense of alienation from the country that they had now come to inhabit". The difficult task ahead of these men and women of letters was the adoption and adaptation of eighteenth century English literary tradition, to suit their own literary purposes so far away from home. But they faced the challenge. The poet's role as "observer, moralist, philosopher and critic" was adapted to suit this new colony and its intellectual needs. These early settlers instantly adopted the new classical preoccupation with the taming of the wilderness and the cultivation of specialised virtues. Various literary modes like the ode, elegy, lyric, satire and the "English tradition of landscape poetry" found merit in this new land. While these influences worked for poetry, in fiction, Scott and Dickens were the paradigms.

1.3 THE AUSTRALIAN NOVEL

As mentioned earlier we have divided the beginning of novel writing in Australia into two sections: the First Phase (1800s) and the Second Phase (1900s). Let us begin with the First Phase.

1.3.1 First Phase (1800s)

In the beginning, fictionalised accounts of colonial life, mainly for the use of future migrants, were produced. These early writings (mainly memoirs, annals, diaries etc.,) were factual accounts of colonial life. However, *The Memoirs of James Hardy Vaux* (1819) marks the initial transition from factual accounts to fiction. **Vaux's** *Memoirs* is in the tradition of the English picaresque novel of the eighteenth century. Vaux was one of the first to take the trouble of creating a "vocabulary of the Flash Language" a dictionary for translating the idiom of the felons/ convicts to plain English. **Savery, Rowcroft and Harris** all began writing in the fictionalised mode. Henry Savery's *Quintus Servinton,* the first novel to be published in Australia is largely derived from English fiction. He wrote with a targeted readership- namely the lower class of migrants. He has given us the first romantically drawn convict character. *Ralph Rashleigh* (1844-45) by **James Tucker** sheds light on convict life. It deals with horror, brutality and even the picaresque experiences of Ralph. The novels chief charm lies in its historical interest and a growing taste for the romance of adventure.

From 1850s onwards, such documentised writing took the shape of novels and short stories. **Henry Kingsley's** *The Recollection of Geoffry Hamlyn (1859)* is the story of a migrant pastoralist family who having made a fortune in Australia wish to return home in order to enjoy the fruits of their labour in a civilised country. It is important because Kingsley began a new tradition whereby he appropriated the memoir style and adapted it to romance so well that henceforth romance became the dominant form in Australian fiction. His later novel the *Hillyars and the Bartons,* presents a contradicting picture of colonial life. A family of blacksmiths from England, who being low on the social ladder, have come to Australia, the land of equality and opportunity with the desire never to return to class bound and hierarchy conscious England. Within a short time we see the evolution of Australia from a penal settlement to the land of opportunity, (where one can make a fortune) and the land of equals (where rigid social conventions have ceased to exist).

Much of this literature was however for an overseas market, particularly England, which had developed a curiosity for life in their colonies. Whereas Kingsley used the figure of the convict as an agent of fiction, by the 1870s, both **Marcus Clarke** and **Prince Warung (William Astley)**, were making attempts at understanding both the system and the convict experience. The convict system provided two aspects of sensationalism – brutal horrors and prolonged suffering. At the same time attempts to re-investigate/re-assess this aspect of colonial life was also being made by several writers. This was largely due to the contributions of a wide spread European interest in questions related to "crime and punishment". Hence what we still find at this stage (in the development of Australian fiction) is a eurocentric Australia. Clarke was quick to realise that the convict system could be treated seriously, and that it could provide him with a platform for addressing questions of good and evil, issues of moral and social responsibility, the notion of accountability and suffering. [p.55]. *For the term of His Natural Life,/ His Natural Life*, was published as a novel in 1874. Clarke initiated the delineating of characters with psychological astuteness and great subtlety. **Rolf Boldrewood (T.A. Browne)** was a popular and prolific writer greatly influenced by Henry Kingsley and Sir Walter Scott. He is largely remembered for his *Robbery Under Arms* (1888), - [it appeared as a serial between 1882-83]. Boldrewood combines the narrative of reminiscence and the conventional romance of adventure in this novel.

Though these early writings are not considered to be of great literary merit, they are nonetheless examples of the various literary forms, the annalists and the early writers experimented with. They tried hard to reconcile their day- to - day experiences in an alien land with the great literary traditions they had left behind in England and Europe, but they were still very euro-centric in outlook. Other significant works of the early period are **John Lang's** *The Forger's Wife* (1855), **John Frost's** *Horrors of Convicts Life* (1856), Marcus Clarke's *For The Term of the Natural Life* (1874), Price Warung's *Tales of the Convict System* (1892), and **William Hay's** *Escape of the Notorious Sir William Heans* (1918). The early phase of writing novels was an attempt at historicising individual experiences.

Mention must also be made of the women novelists of this period. In the convict tradition is **Caroline Leakey's** -*The Broad Arrow* (1859). **Catherine Helen Spence** (*Clara Morison: A Tale of South Australia During the Gold Fever*, 1854) was opposed to the romance tradition, particularly the romance of the bush as she regarded it as a false impression created by certain writers to further their own literary careers. What Spence wanted to do was write about life in the colony, what she called "a faithful transcript of life in the colony" (p, 45). The novel is set in Adelaide. It deals largely with the conventions of colonial life. What Spence may have been trying to do, was emphasise the fact that the life of the community actually goes on inside people's homes and not in the great outdoor/the bush. She maps out the character of Adelaide life in the period of the gold rush (1951-52). Her novel is important for two reasons, one, it accords more importance to opinions, while treating plot and character as subordinates, and two, the setting which was normally, a mere backdrop in the earlier writings emerges as a foreground in the novel. The setting again is not a physical description of Adelaide but the cultural context and the very essence of the community. **Mrs. Campbell Praed's** best work is *Policy and Passion: A Novel of Australian Life* (1881). She concentrates chiefly on "the inner workings, the social interests" of Australian life (p.64) and uses the conventional romance mode to achieve this end. **Ada Cambridge and Tasma (Jessie Couvreur)** were some of the early women writers of the period. Tasma's best novel is *Uncle Piper of Piper's Hill: An Australian Novel* (1889) in which she analyses the cultural pretensions of the age.

These women writers were all writing about a particular class of society, who

affectations of the bourgeoisie. From here onwards we find a slight shift in focus. All these novelists though conventional in their writing style, narrative technique and range of vision, were also reflecting the aims, aspiration, dreams and points of view of a considerable section of the Australian public. The next tradition of writers who largely ascribed to the great outdoors - the Bush, were also extremely popular. They promoted the doings away with idealism and propagated the reality of life in the bush that was not 'idyllic'.

1.3.2 Second Phase (1900s)

In much of the early writings of the early period, we find the establishing of an Australian identity and the endorsing of it. In later works however, we find the complexities of rural life as against urban living being explored for instance in the short stories of **Henry Lawson** and the poems of **Christopher Brennan**. Hitherto Australia was a conglomeration of several independent penal colonies. What the Australians now wanted was a Federation. The political move towards demanding and creating a Federation necessitated the emergence of an Australian consciousness and an authentic Australian Literature that did not recognise English conventions, manners, social behaviour or literary achievement. What they needed was a body of literature that moved away from English and the Anglo-Australian literary tradition. What emerged therefore was a set of conventions glorifying the great outdoor, the romance of the Bush. It is generally believed that the **Sydney Bulletin** (hereafter referred to as the **Bulletin** (1880) was responsible for the promotion of the great Australian outdoor, but local colour, the currency lad, and Bush ethics had already made an appearance in the writings of people like Kingsley and Boldrewood, while **Furphy**, **Miles Franklin**, **Katharine Susan Prichard**, and **Frank Dalby** dealt with bush ethics in a romantic, sentimental manner. What the **Bulletin** did however, was bring about narrative changes, - and what now emerged was a dry, laconic style and an Australian voice, particularly in the bush ballads and the short stories. It was during this era that the *Bush* became truly Australian and indicative of the Australian Nation. The literature of this period reflects the values of rural life and small communities, while promoting independence and the right to equality. At around the same time, towards the last decades of the nineteenth century, political momentum garnered support and ultimately culminated in the formation of the Federation in 1901, and is reflected by works like Joseph Furphy's *Such is Life*.

This does not mean or in any way indicate that the early writers failed to pass the test of English literature, what they did however, fail at, was in satisfying or fulfilling what some critics perceived as Nationalistic Literature. Commenting upon the use of the English language E.A. Badham says as early as 1895 (Mitchelle, p.14) that the language inherited from the mother country should be localised to the land of popular usage in Australia. She writes, "we have to choose between the language of the Bible, of Shakespeare, and of Milton, and that of the comic penny-a-liners. By adopting the latter we should, no doubt, considerably hasten the birth of our National Literature, and when it came it would have the further advantage of being distinctly Australian for the Australians, for it is quite certain that no civilized nation would condescend to notice its existence. " It was only towards the end of the nineteenth century that writers like Henry Lawson and **A B Banjo Paterson**, were able to use local idioms with considerable skill and dexterity. Early writings documenting life in the new colony produced a mixture of fact and fiction, of information and romance, poetic diction and local colours. These early works were later succeeded by works dealing with Australian tradition, idiom and images that was largely "rural, proletarian and vernacular,"[p,15].

The short story too developed during this period and Henry Lawson, **Steele Rudd (Arthur Hoey Davis)**, **Edward Dyson**, **Barbara Baynton**, **William Astley** were the chief exponents of this literary form. We shall not go into any further detail at this stage in our discussion of the novel because the short story has already been dealt with in the previous block (Block III). Suffice it to say that all types of literary

activity that flourished towards the end of the nineteenth century were not sustained. It flowered again only in the late 1930s in fiction and the early 1940s in poetry.

1.4 THE MODERN AUSTRALIAN NOVEL: BEGINNINGS

From amidst the short story writers emerged Joseph Furphy's *Such is Life* in 1903, an "unreadable" classic that flouts the literary convention of the nineteenth century novel of character. It is a pretty complex mixture of the eighteenth century novels particularly those dealing with the comedy of intellectual life and journey of the road, in combination with the nineteenth century novel of social realism. *Such is Life* explores the various dimensions of the bush code – the political, the practical and the moral issues contained therein. Furphy is known as a 'novelist of strategies'. He is very serious in his concern with the relationship between life and literature. He deals with the recent past. His sedentary narrative style, reflective mode, use of language and his attitude towards local idiom, confirms the immediate past as recorded in diaries. Distinguished as he was, Furphy did not contribute much to the literary progress of the early twentieth century. In fact **Henry Handel Richardson** (*The Fortunes of Richard Mahoney*, 1917-29) whose works are derived from the nineteenth century European novel, is better placed as a link to the literature of the turn of the century. Like Mrs. Praed, Tasma, **Boyd** and **Christina Stead**, she (Richardson) too was an expatriate novelist, who helped free the novelists from the pressure to 'write Australian'. She learnt how to handle theme objectively from the works of Flaubert and Jacobsen. In *Maurice Guest* (1908), she moves away from naturalism towards psychological impressions, and tries to follow the paradigms set by the psychological and the stream of consciousness novels that deal with the fine workings of the inner mind. Her other novels include *The Getting of Wisdom*, *The Fortunes of Richard Mahony*, (1930) *Australia Felix* (1917), *The Way Home* (1925) *Ultima Thule* (1929), *The Young Cosima* (1939), an incomplete autobiography *Myself When Young* (1948) and a volume of short stories – *The End of A Childhood and Other Stories* (1934). She gave Australian fiction, its first sustained analysis of character. Her themes are romantic and she was the doyen of realism in Australian fiction. She is also the first substantial Australian writer to convey a large consistent vision of life.

William Gosse Hay's *The Escape of the Notorious Sir William Heans (and the mystery of Mr. Daint): A Romance of Tasmania* (1919), *Captain Quadring* (1912), *The Mystery of Alfred Doubt* (1937), was one of the minor writers of the same period. Round about the same time, a literature of the city experience too began to emerge, in which 'the bush was exchanged for the push'- **Louis Stone's** *Jonah* (1911) is a mixed study of street life in the inner suburbs of Sydney, in which Stone manages to catch the idiom of the area, the manners and values of the people. Miles Franklin *My Brilliant Career*, (1901) was fiercely loyal and totally committed to the distinctively Australian. Her narratives are heavily romantic both in theme and treatment. Her other works include – *My Career Goes Bung Purporting to be the Autobiography of Sybylla Penelope Melvyn* (1946), and, *All That Swaggers* (1936). **Norman Lindsay** though a short story writer is largely remembered for his encouragement of and influence on many of the budding writers of the earlier part of the twentieth century. His novels took great pleasure in scandalising middle class morality and his characters are largely cartoon figures, known for their eccentricities and idiosyncrasies. His writings were however free of the obsession with landscape realism and its preoccupation with bush life. His other words include *The Magic Pudding* (1918), *Redheap* (1930) and *Salurdee* (1934).

1.4.1 The Growth of Self- Identity

In the earlier section, we have already considered the gradual growth of the Australian novel. Our major concern here will be to emphasise the growth of self-

identity in the field of fiction. But this development of self-identity is the result of a continuous struggle with extraneous influences, of distinct socio-political changes appearing in Australia. This traditional notion of Australia may be noticed in Oscar Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest* (1895). Here is a bit of conversation between Cecily and Algernon:

Cecily: I don't think you will require neckties. Uncle Jack is sending you to Australia.
Algernon: Australia? I'd sooner die.

This conversation may lead us to consider some of the important aspects of the rise and development of the modern Australian novel. The initial phase of the Australian writer is characterised by a sense of divided loyalty. On the one hand the Australian writers used to pay allegiance to British mainstream tradition; and on the other hand, they tried to establish a distinctive sense of self-identity. Judith Wright, an eminent Australian poet has ably discussed this point. She has pointed out that the Australian writers have wavered between Australianism and Europeanism. The problem was thus reflected in the form of a question: How can the Australian writers write in English and go against British mainstream tradition? In her essay *"Romanticism and the Last Frontier"* she refers to the problem of the Fallacy of Engagement and the Fallacy of Disengagement. The Fallacy of Engagement refers to the condition of the early phase of colonial settlement, when writers used to work in small strife torn European colonies, distanced from their original homeland and with no claim on Australia by birth. These writers were yet to acknowledge the country in its totality. The Fallacy of disengagement recognises the distance between Australia and the European countries. In this way Australia was negated in terms of the European present. It therefore entered a phase of silence in its history and space. In keeping with these two levels of Fallacy, the Australian novelists began to suffer from a crisis of self-image. Thus a character in *Cockatoos* says, "they all go away - all the young ones with any promise." But gradually there is a distinctive change in attitude amongst Australian writers. The writers gradually tend to come back to Australia. Katherine Susannah Prichard went to Europe for six years and came back to Australia. **Jean Devany** started from New Zealand in 1929. She meant to go to Europe and came to Australia as a halting station and finally settled there. Even Patrick White returned to Australia in 1948. But the consciousness of a home away from home is a prevalent feature among the Australian writers. This notion is largely apparent in **Martin Boyd's** *The Cardboard Crown* (1952) and Henry Handel Richardson's *The Fortunes of Richard Mahoney*. Again Christina Stead left Australia in 1928 only to return to Australia in her old age in 1974. But she concentrated on Australia in her novel *Seven Poor Men of Sydney* (1934) and she looks at the problem of expatriation critically in *The Man Who Loved Children* (1940).

We should also consider the fiction of the interwar years. Australian involvement in the two world wars, the sending of Australian troops to these wars on behalf of the mother country, the gradual emergence of the Communist Party of Australia, Australian participation in the Vietnam War and the ascendancy of American influence led to the writing of many war novels dealing with Australian social realism. Thus Prichard in *Winged Seeds* (1950) gives us a telling picture of how Australian participation in World War II was announced over the radio on September 3, 1939. Carole Ferrier in her essay *"Fiction in Transition"* gives us an idea about the impact of the world wars on Australian novels. "In the goldfields trilogy (of Prichard) and *The Tree of Man* (of Patrick White), the narrator remains behind in Australia with the women, and those who did not go. The same is true of Franklin's *Cockatoos* in which Ignez reflects on her aunt Rhoda, who has raised her son to be a soldier:" She thought her darling son looked lovely in uniform, a short-distance intellectual that could not visualize his going far away to kill the lovely darlings of other women." Eric Lambert's *The Twenty Thousand Thieves* (1951) does visualize the going far away, and follows Australian and other troops to Palestine in 1941."

The impact of World War II was really intense. Thus in **Eleanor Dark's** *The Little Company* (1945), we come across a dramatic presentation of the air raid warning. Again **Dymphna Cusack and Florence James'** (joint authorship) *Come in Spinner* (1951) gives a very grim picture of wartime conditions. This is also noticeable in **Xavier Herbert's** *Soldiers' Women* (1961).

The Communist Party of Australia (CPA) was also gradually gaining ground. Many members of the CPA began to visit Russia and other places of Party activity. The members of the CPA included writers like Jean Devany, Katherine Susannah Prichard, Judah Waten, John Mansfield, Eric Lambert, Frank Hardy and Dorothy Hewett. This gave way to a new consciousness of realism. Jean Devany was an extremist who went as far as claiming that writers are workers and that her *Sugar Heaven* (1936) was "the first Proletarian novel of Australia." The members of the CPA largely canvassed the principle of "socialist realism" and this is particularly evident in Prichard's *Working Bullocks* (1926). The World Wars and the impact of the CPA (but the influence of the CPA gradually declined in the 1950s) however generated a new sense of engagement among the Australian writers. They are no longer afflicted by the burdens of the past. Prior to this their only concern was their attempt at tracing themselves to their original heritage in Europe. However, other influences have come to be merged in their creative activity. Despite this plethora of influences the Australian writers began to rediscover themselves in terms of formulating a sense of history and national consciousness. Thus Dark's novel *The Timeless Land* (1941) is largely based on a well-researched historical framework. She says in the Preface to the novel: "This book has borrowed so much from history that it seems advisable to remind readers that it is fiction." Dark again says in the Preface to *Storm of Time* (1948) that the novel is based on accurate historical details. **E V Timms** also writes historical sagas in novels like *The Pathway of the Sun* (1949), *The Beaconing Shore* (1950) and *The Valleys Beyond* (1951). Similar questions of historical consciousness and national identity have been addressed in **Nancy Cato's** *All the Rivers Run* (1948), *Time, Flow Swiftly* (1952) and *But Still the Stream* (1962). This problematising of history and identity is equally emphasised in **Patrick White's** *Voss*.

Patrick White seems to be the central protagonist in this story of the rise and development of the Australian novel. White established the fact that Australian reality can be handled with a touch of metaphysical intensity. But after 1965, in his novels like *The Solid Mandala* (1966), *The Vivisector* (1970), *The Eye of the Storm* (1973), *A Fringe of Leaves* (1977), he begins to concentrate on the post war reality of Australian society. In fact Patrick White became the path maker for such great contemporary writers like **Elizabeth Jolly, Thomas Kenneally, David Malouf et al.** The revival of writing begins only before World War II with the works of Christina Stead and Patrick White. It continues thereafter into the 40s and the 50s with the poetry of **R D Fitzgerald, Judith Wright, James Mc Auley, Douglas Stewart, A D Hope** and **David Campbell**, right through, till the rise of the Australian Drama in the 1960s and 70s. Thereafter Australian fiction came to be known as distinctive Australian, with little or no direct European / English influence. In the nineteenth century the past meant convicts, bush-rangers and gold rushes. However, after the 1940s the past began to appear more remote and as yet at the same time more prominent, giving birth to a new range of writing that explores and interprets the history of Australia. An interest in personal history has also gained prominence in the last thirty to forty years – the origins of which may be traced to the memoirs, diaries and accounts of early writers. In a sense history becomes of utmost importance as it helps place and locate Australian in time and space.

Voss was written in 1957. It is described as "the most florid of White's novels, and perhaps the most triumphant because of the rhetorical excess". (p.151). Voss is believed to have "established the mythic potentialities of Australian history, set a fashion for heavily symbolic and imagery-ridden writing, and localized the journey of exploration as spiritual metaphor." (p.150, Adrian Mitchell: The Oxford History of

Australian Literature, ed. Leonie Kramer, OUP: Melbourne, 1981). The world of Patrick White, his works and *Voss*, the novel under scrutiny will be dealt with in the next unit. Australian literature particularly fiction as we have discovered by now, was born of the convict legacy, its history dating back to the First Settlement in 1788, Botany Bay. Let us now look at the various phases in the development of the Australian Novel.

1.4.2 Phases of Development

The different phases of the development of the Australian novel in the twentieth century is given below:

- Romance Fiction: "The coming race" in Australia is the major theme of the early novels, as evident in Joseph Furphy's *Such is Life* (1903). The romance mode in such novels contextualises the theme of settlement and is often c d round an exotic and imaginary land. This is particularly noticeable in **H er Haggard's** *Fugitive Anne* (1902).

- Melodramatic Fiction: The melodramatic mode is largely projected in novels dealing with the contrast between the settlers and the Aborigines, the gaolers and the convicts, the landed and the lawless and so on. Xavier Herbert's *Capricornia* (1938) and Christina Stead's *The Man Who Loved Children* (1940) are pertinent examples. The melodramatic mode once again renews itself in the recent fiction of **Thomas Keneally** and **Kate Grenville**. But this neo-melodramatic mode is largely prompted by a sense of loss of identity by the hegemony of the European powers in present times.

- Historical Fiction: The fiction belonging to this category historicises the theme of settlement and exploration. Thus Martin Boyd in *The Cardboard Crown* (1952) shows the decline of lumpen-bourgeoise. **Robert Drewe** in *The Savage Cows* (1976) shows the gradual extinction of the Aborigines of Tasmania. Patrick White's *Voss* (1957) and *A Fringe of Leaves* (1976) deal with the complex theme of exploration and relationship. Again **Murdooroo Narogin (Colin Johnson)** in his *Long Live Sandawara* (1979) concentrates on the oppression of the Aborigines. In recent times, **Peter Carey** presents a comic-conspectus of the Australian colonial history in his *Oscar and Lucinda* (1988). These historical novels may be regarded as an attempt to rewrite Australian national history. In other words, these are fictional authentication of colonial memory.

- Realistic Fiction: The growing sense of realism in terms of sordid down-to-earth life also comes to be the subject of many Australian novels. Thus Louis Stone's *Jonah* or **Kenneth Mackenzie's** *The Refuge* presents a moving picture of the urban life of Sydney as also its working class life. There are even traces of creating certain forms of psychological realism. Elizabeth Jolly, for instance, in her *Milk and Honey* (1984) formulates a type of meta-fiction in which the central character Jacob recounts his past in a mental hospital.

- Aboriginal Fiction: The Aboriginal novel is also a remarkable segment of Australian literature. Despite the fact that the Aborigines have long been regarded as representing a subaltern social category, they have come to register their protesting voice. Murdooroo Narogin's *Long Live Sandawara* (1979) and *Doctor Wooreddy's Prescription for Enduring the Ending of the World* (1983) are significant examples. In both novels, Narogin tries to use history as a source of symbolic action. Narogin has meticulously portrayed the pretensions of mainstream white society in these novels. Women are also lending their voice to this spirit of protest. **Monica Clare** in *Karo Bran*

(1979) powerfully presents the story of an Aboriginal girl. These Aboriginal novelists try to project what **Jack Davis** (another Aboriginal writer) calls "the real Australian story".

This brief history of the developmental phases of the literary history of the Australian novel makes us aware of the general trends in fiction. At the same time it also creates a perspective for the study of Patrick White's *Voss*. Moreover some general remarks on White's novels have been made for substantiating his position as a novelist. Let us now take a quick look at the major issues and concerns of the Australian writers.

1.5 MAJOR ISSUES AND CONCERNS OF AUSTRALIAN WRITERS

The earliest Australian novels deal with a new environment, the ability or lack of it to adapt to this strange land. It is concerned with the issues of survival, and life depends on the innovativeness and adaptability of its people. Emerging from this concern the convict tradition gained prominence and was followed by the creation of a romantic convict character, who though a wronged man was nonetheless morally upright. The legend of the vast outdoors, the sense of freedom on the one hand, the building of friendships and bonding of males in the outback, life in the outback, the plight of women in the bush were other favourite themes with writers in Australia. With the discovery of gold and the progress made by urban centers, the distinction between life in the bush and city life captured the imagination of quite a few writers of this period. A growing consciousness of nationalism in the political world is equally reflected in fiction. With every major political change, the concerns of Australian fiction kept changing – when Australia adopted a 'multicultural policy' this was reflected in emigrant writing. Just as with the granting of citizenship to the Aborigines, Aboriginal literature has found a voice. By the early decades of the twentieth century (1930s) the **Jindyworobak** movement had started. These literary men and women believed in cleansing themselves and their literature from all European influences in an effort to promote and present the real Australia. Judith Wright, an eminent contemporary poet, later claimed "We are beginning to write, no longer as transplanted Europeans, nor as restless men who reject the past and put their hopes only in the future, but as men with a present to be lived in and a past to nourish us." The two world wars contributed in various ways to Australian fiction as a strong sense of anti-war sentiment developed. Not only this Australian fiction has always been concerned with its narrative style. In fact some of the novels deal with the very theme of narrative style. It has played an important role in the development of the modern Australian novel and has dictated terms to writers like **Frank Hardy**, Christina Stead and Patrick White. The other major concern of Australian fiction is the question of reality. The inevitable choice that the writer makes while working on his novel is a "device" that shows that "the chief consideration of Australian fiction has persistently been man's suspended disbelief in the world of his experience." [p.172]

Having gone through the major issues of the age we have now come to the end of the unit. Let us now sum up.

1.6 LET US SUM UP

A re-reading of the past, mythologising of the history of Australian development are important aspects of Australian Literature in the aftermath of World War II. Australian Literature has come a long way, since 1788. At this stage, we can afford to look at the memoirs, the journals of the early writers trying to come to terms with

their new environment, the early short stories and later works of fiction that shows the creation of the legend, the breaking of them, the building of a national literature and a nation the usage of the Australian idiom and the real flowering of Australian prose, poetry and fiction in contemporary times. We have also seen the change of themes through the development of Australian literary history. We may spend a few moments recapitulating all that we have said so far about the Australian novel and on the little that we have said about *Voss*. We are now equipped to tackle the novel and the novelist. It would help if you could get hold of some of the books mentioned at the end of the block and read up the history of Australian literature in detail. The next unit will introduce you to the author and the novel *Voss*.

1.7 QUESTIONS

1. Why were the earlier writers Eurocentric in outlook?
2. What were / are the chief concerns of Australian writers?
3. What role if any did the women novelists of the period play in the development of the novel?
4. How would you trace the development of the Australian novel?

UNIT 2 AS WE FIRST READ: *VOSS*

Structure

2.0 Objectives
2.1 Introduction
2.2 The World of Patrick White
2.3 Some Themes and Issues in Patrick White
2.4 The Making of *Voss*
2.5 A Reading of *Voss*
  2.5.1 Voss and Australia
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  2.5.3 Exploring Australia
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  2.6.1 Voss and the Bonner Family
  2.6.2 Voss and his Fellow Travellers
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2.0 OBJECTIVES

In the previous unit we traced the history and the development of the Australian novel. As Australian Literature is absolutely a new area, it is also extremely necessary for you to form at least a working knowledge about the land and people. It is therefore essential to consult a map that gives you a basic idea about the country. This topographical knowledge is to some extent useful because *Voss*, as you will see later on, is largely related to the problems of land and topography. In this unit, however, we will start a reading of the text and in course of this reading we shall try to explore some of the main features of the interweaving patterns of relationships, events and characters. Naturally this Unit may be looked upon as a preparatory phase.

2.1 INTRODUCTION

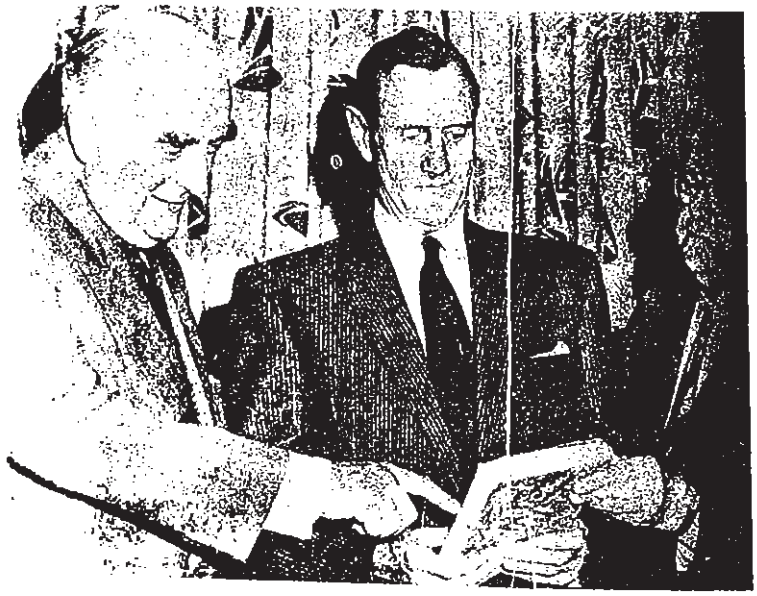
When we read *Voss*, what strikes us most is the essential concern about the theme of exploration. In other words, the novel's central emphasis is on a soul-searching journey into the heart of Australia. Patrick White seems to historicise a distinctively real pattern of events and offers a kind of symbolic explanation. This novel is supposed to be based on the true record of Ludwig Leichhardt who died in the Australian desert in 1848. The German explorer's endeavour to cross the Australian continent has been interpreted in terms of significant symbolic movement. It is therefore appropriate to approach the novel from the standpoint of Voss's character in the context of the complex nature of relationships. As we read the novel, we should try to discover how, as a stranger to the country, Voss reacts to the unknown land Patrick White's intention is to show how Voss gradually reacts to this strange land and how he is also able to involve others in the process. Laura Trevelyan, for instance, gets emotionally involved with Voss as also with the adventurous mission that he is going to undertake. Again Mr. Bonner, the uncle of Laura, is immensely interested in the adventuristic project of Voss. It has been already decided by him that Voss will undertake his journey in a ship called Osprey that will carry him to

Newcastle. He will then proceed towards Rhine Towers where Mr. Sanderson will meet him. Finally he will reach the last outpost Jildra where Mr. Boyle will welcome him. These arrangements initiated by Mr. Bonner show his intense involvement in the entire project. In fact the entire settlement of New South Wales seems to be absorbed in the project of Voss's journey. If we analyse the responses and reactions generated by Voss's project carefully, it seems that it is perhaps the most oblique initiation of the Australian dream -- the dream of reaching into the very heart of the country. Mere colonial settlement seems inadequate in essentialising a total identification with the land.

As we read the novel, we are always conscious of the fact that it is set in the post-convict period and that it is a phase when men coming with an overt intention of making money inhabited Australia. It is a time when Australia has not yet been fully explored. The importance of Voss's character lies in the fact that he simply intends to explore the mystery and intensity of this strange country. In this first reading, we may go on raising certain thematic issues embedded in the novel while examining at the same time some of the major problems of inter relationships. White has further created a sense of complexity in the nature of the expedition. He has presented different degrees of contrast and division. There is constant tension between the whites and the Aborigines. Again the division among the explorers further complicates the entire perspective of the journey. But it is through the multiple facets of experience that an idealised Australian dream is substantiated.

2.2 THE WORLD OF PATRICK WHITE

Patrick White was born in 1912 of Australian parents in England. He was just six-months old when he was brought to Australia. He was educated in Australia till he was thirteen. The next phase of his education started at Cheltenham College, England. But it was a public school that was more renowned for producing famous soldiers than great scholars. He however never really liked this British phase of his education. He described this college as a place to be "ironed out". After the British phase of his education, he came back to Australia. He started working as a jackaroo (portmanteau of Jack and Kangaroo- meaning a new chum or a new immigrant, a greenhorn) on sheep stations.



Prize Night for *Voss* with the then Prime Minister Bob Menzies and Labour's Bert Evatt

This particular experiential pattern has been reflected in his earliest novel *The Happy Valley (1939)*. Patrick White's intention to be acquainted with continental literature is evident in his return to England to study French and German at King's College. His life is one of journey and travel. During the early phase of his life, he frequently travelled between Australia and England. After this he also travelled through Western Europe and America. He also served in the Middle East and Greece as an intelligence officer in the Royal air Force (RAF). These travels through the world naturally widened the experiential dimension of his life.

Patrick White epitomises a sustained effort at fictionalising the Australian experience. His first novel *The Happy Valley* is projected against the background of the snow country of New South Wales. In this novel he concentrates on the intensity of human suffering in relation to the archetypal problems of love and jealousy. It deals with the monotonous and dissatisfied life of a local practitioner Dr Oliver Halliday, and his failing marriage that prompts an affair with a music teacher Alys Browne. This emphasis on various aspects of human passion is further examined in his next novel *The Living and the Dead (1941)*. Here Patrick White once again reorganises the acceptance of human sickness as also its ecstasy. In his next major novel *The Aunt's Story (1948)*, he exploits his experiences of travel through many parts of the World. In this novel, the story revolves around the heroine Theodora Goodman who travels through three different Continents – Australia, Europe and America. Here Patrick White's philosophy of life becomes more intense and pronounced. His central concern seems to be an examination of permanence in a world of multiplication and division. Another significant novel of Patrick White is *The Tree of Man (1955)*. In this novel, the shifts and changes in Australian society are depicted. The story is about the Australian farmer family of Stan Parker and presents the transformation of a pastoral society into a world of urban complexity. The gradual movement of time seems to lend a special dimension to the novel, thereby creating a sense of enchanting sense of mystery and ecstasy. *The Tree of Man* shows "that fulfillment lies in liberalization, lies in transcendence," and he examines the same theme in his other major novel *Voss (V Chatterjee, p, 23)*. As he gradually developed into a mature novelist, he increasingly showed leanings towards establishing a sense of mystical philosophy. This is largely evident in *Riders in the Chariot (1961)*. Here White deals with the mystical consciousness of four different characters--a lady residing in the dilapidated house of her father, an aboriginal artist, a Jew who has managed to escape from Nazi Germany, and a laundress married to a drunkard. Moreover the novel is replete with mystical associations of Greek, Hebrew and Roman-Christian culture. The search for mystical meaning is all the more intensified in his novel *The Solid Mandala (1966)*. The title of the novel itself generates much curiousity among Indian readers. The word "Mandala" is a Sanskrit word used with reference to Oriental esoteric religion. Patrick White looks upon it as a symbol of totality. Here White examines the interweaving relationship of the twin brothers-- Arthur and Waldo Brown as "embodiments of the living and the dead" (A Readers Guide, p, 209), whereby Arthur remains a disenchanted individual failing in his quest for totality.

The sense of quest is a significant theme in most of the novels of Patrick White. *A Fringe of Leaves (1976)*, to that extent, is an outstanding novel. Like *Voss*, this novel is also based on an authentic historical event. It is based on the actual experiences of Ellen Frazer. She was a nineteenth-century English woman who accompanied her husband to Van Diemen's Land to visit his renegade brother. But they were shipwrecked off the Queensland Coast in May 1939 and the aborigines captured her. While rewriting this historical event, Patrick White interfuses reality and romantic mysticality. Patrick White was also a poet and a dramatist. Even before he began writing novels, he produced a collection of about thirty-three poems– *The Ploughman and Other Poems (1935)*. Most of these poems were written during his undergraduate days. But these poems lack maturity and depth. These are marked by inordinate lyrical extravagance and bear the influence of Keats and the Georgian poets. But poetry never really left him. Many of the passages from his novels, if

extracted at random, may be enjoyed as splendid specimens of poetry. The following passage from *The Tree of Man* is a case in point:

> The darkness was full of wonder. Standing there somewhat meekly, the man could have loved something, someone, if he could have penetrated beyond the wood, beyond the moving darkness. But he could not could not and in his confusion he prayed to God, not in specific petition, wordlessly almost, for the sake of company. Till he began to know every corner of the darkness, as if it were daylight and he were in love with the heaving world, down to the last blade of wet grass.

As a dramatist, Patrick White is not very remarkable. The beginning of his career as a dramatist may be traced back to the staging of his play *Return to Abyssinia (*1947). His collection of plays entitled *Four Plays* was published later. One of his significant plays -- *The Ham Funeral* – seems to belong to the first phase of Australian drama that expresses a craving for an independent "nationalist" theatre. In this play, White has splendidly used the myths of national identity.

Patrick White was also an excellent short story writer. In the early part of his creative career, he wrote short stories like *The Twitching Colonel* (1937) or *Cocotte* (1940) that were published in significant journals of London. *The Twitching Colonel* is particularly important because here we come across a character like colonel Travellick who may be regarded as a forerunner of the later visionary characters of Patrick White. His later short stories have been published in a collection called *The Burnt Ones* (1964). This collection contains eleven stories. Four of these stories are set against the background of Greece; the rest of the stories are replete with varying moods and temperaments – farce, pathos, surrealism, and psychological analysis. What is essentially noteworthy is that most of the central characters are alienated individuals suffering inwardly. This theme of alienation is equally noticed in six novellas and stories collected in *The Cockatoos* (1974). In this collection, only four stories have Australian settings or characters.

2.3 SOME THEMES AND ISSUES IN PATRICK WHITE

Patrick White's achievement as a novelist lies in the fact that he for the first time creates a distinctive Australian consciousness. Novelists writing before White could not properly substantiate a dignified Australian vision. In 1925 **George M Barnard** wrote a novel called *Looena: A Story of Bush Life in Tasmania.* But it fails to establish a dignified impression of the Australian Bush and its people. Again **Nevil Shute** in novels like *A Town Like Alice* (1950) and *The Breaking Wave* (1955) creates Australian settings, but his chief intention was to cater to the taste of the British and the American readers. Patrick White was however able to perceive the predicament of the Australian tradition which was striving to establish its identity as a homogeneous culture. It is a pity that White was badly reviewed and criticised by a group of Australian critics. In fact he was not even warmly received in Australia as he had been in England and America. **John Hay** in his *Brief Memoirs of a Ravenous Reader* writes: "He seemed to produce controversy with every novel, as his work was exploratory and different to the Frontier Tradition of Australian Literature". His position as a novelist was however firmly established when he was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1973. Every novelist begins with a search for an individual idiom. Naturally the early phase of a creative writer could be more or less imitative. It is through imitation that he finally discovers his own creative voice. Patrick White's early novels therefore bear the influence of such eminent writers as **D H Lawrence, James Joyce, Virginia Woolf** and **T S Eliot**. But his original talent

a novelist begins to come to the forefront from *The Aunt's Story* onwards. White considers the act of writing as a "struggle to create completely fresh forms out of the rocks and sticks of words". In this struggle he has again and again discovered multiple forms and visions.

In order to understand the central complexity of White's novels, we should try to comprehend the opposition of two antithetical visions. White always curiously combines the worldly and the metaphysical. This specific principle has been appropriately projected in the epigraph of *The Solid Mandala*: "There is another world, but it this one". It has been therefore pointed out by the critics that White combines **Swiftian** satire and **Blakean** vision. White has always concentrated on the sordid reality of the mundane world. In *Voss* he has splendidly recaptured the colonial reality of New South Wales in the context of the house of Mr. Bonner. In *A Fringe of Leaves* Ellen's experience among the aborigines brings us close to the subaltern native tradition of Australia. This awareness of social reality is largely evident in *The Prodigal Son:* "In all directions stretched the Great Australian Emptiness in which the mind is the least of possessions, in which the rich man is the important man, in which the school master and the journalist rule what intellectual roost there is, in which beautiful youths and girls stare at life through blind blue eyes, in which human teeth fall like autumn leaves, the buttocks of cars grow hourly glossier, food means cake and steak, muscles prevail, and the march of material ugliness does not raise a quiver from the average nerve". But Patrick White at the same time switches over to a metaphysical world. White has described himself as a religious artist. He has therefore always tried to create "a splendour, a transcendence which is ... there above human realities". He of course shows a commitment to the material, rationalistic level of reality. But he also exhibits an intense attachment to the spiritual level of experience. Patrick White's world is therefore characterised by a principle of dualism. In other words, he creates a tension between spiritual and non-spiritual, reason and metaphysics, body and spirit, good and evil, male and female, life and death, dream and actuality, time and eternity. Patrick White has generally tried to live a life of seclusion. But he has often made public statements involving the socio-political situation of Australia. This distinctively shows his intense concern for the well being of his country. He has therefore never strayed away from crucial national issues. He criticised the war in Vietnam very sharply. He made thoughtful comments on the environmental crisis in Australia. He was also largely moved by the condition of the aborigines in Australia. He was intimately associated with the 1972 federal election campaign and this resulted in the formation of the Labour government. When it was dismissed in 1975, he strongly registered his protest. He also withdrew from the Order of Australia because he could not approve of the policies of the government. He established the Patrick White Literary Award.

Patrick White died on 30 September 1990. But his works are a constant source of inspiration to future generation of readers and writers. V. Chatterjee has therefore rightly pointed out that "Patrick White has taught us to suffer with dignity and to find strength in loneliness. This I believe, is no mean achievement".

2.4 THE MAKING OF *VOSS*

As *Voss* should be studied in detail, it is necessary that you know how the novel was written, how it was published and how it gradually established Patrick White as a great novelist. In fact the writing of a novel is as difficult as it is complicated to make it acceptable to both the readers and the critics. Patrick White always wanted to write a novel about explorers and exploration. But he put the idea aside especially in view of the failure of *The Aunt's Story*. But the idea was there at the back of his mind since the early days of the War. In the summer of 1954-55, he was suffering from a

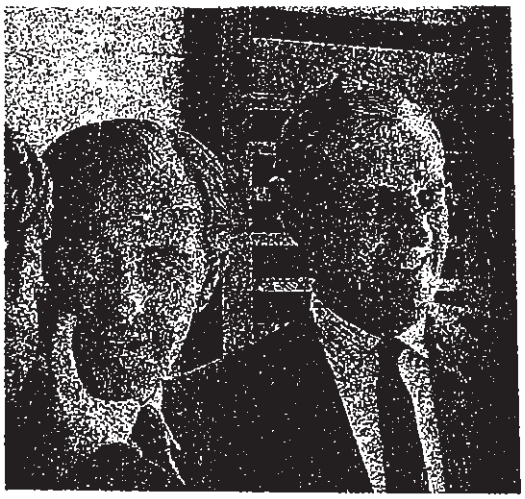
terrible attack of asthma. As a result, he lay in the public wards of Sydney hospitals. It was during this time that he conceived the idea of writing *Voss*.



London Dandy as the undiscovered playwright of the late 1930s

The progress of writing the novel was moderately swift. He started the novel in 1955 and he completed the work in 1956. In one of his letters to Ben Heubsch (a partner in the Viking Press and publisher to the American *avant-garde*), Patrick White writes, "I have almost finished the first version of a new book. Am pleased with it only by fits. I have never been pleased with anything really. I think it will be a long time before the one can be called finished. I shall have to rewrite it at least once, probably twice". He had completed the final version of *Voss* in December 1956 and he was greatly relieved. He writes to Naomi Burton (his agent in New York), "Today I sent you by registered air mail the MS of the new book *Voss*. ... I shan't write any more now. Finishing the book has put me behind with all my Christmas correspondence." He worked on *Voss* for eighteen months. But he did not make any public statement about writing this novel. Only some intimate friends like the Kriegers came to know about it. In fact, he hated talking about the books he planned. He said: "As you

know, I hate talking about books before they are ready." It was a novel in which he tried to create a fusion of history and passion. When he came back from the War, he decided upon writing a novel on Australia; and having explored the old records, he concentrated on the figure of the German explorer Leichhardt. He explained his own conception regarding the novel in one of his letters to Huebsch: "When I returned here (Australia) after the War and began to look up old records, my idea seemed to fit the character of Leichhardt. The latter was, besides, merely unusually unpleasant, whereas Voss is mad as well. I always wanted to write the story of a grand passion." *Voss* appeared in New York in 1957. The New Yorker praised the novel in the following manner. "His prose... tends to set up an obstinate and exasperating barrier between his subject-matter and the reader. Nevertheless, this is a heroic and sometimes brilliant novel." *Voss* appeared in London in December 1957. The appearance of *Voss* established White's position as a literary celebrity in London. The critics even went to the extent of placing him by the side of such great authors as Hardy, Conrad, Lawrence and Faulkner et al. The reaction from the Australian critics came rather late, though *Voss* became a best seller. Sometimes the Australian reviewers even tried to undermine the importance of the novel. Thus Douglas Stuart wrote: "One thing is certain. Overseas praise does tend to be excessive, and ... lacking in the fundamental knowledge of the subject which alone can give real authority." But the apathy of the Australian reviewers gradually changed into admiration.



Sidney Nolan whose friendship White valued above all others: "I feel I have known him all my life". White also asked Nolan to do the jacket of *Voss*

White's biographer David Marr writes, "That it was greeted at first with a general air of reproach was a source of great anger to White, especially as the critical verdict in Australia was reversed after a few years and the explorer novel came to be revered almost to the point of tedium." But White's position as a novelist came to be officially recognised as he won the Miles Franklin Literary Award for *Voss*. This award was given to him because *Voss* was considered to be a novel of "the highest literary merit, which must present Australian life in any of its phases." It was a £ 500 award. David Marr, (his biographer), narrates a remarkable anecdote in this regard: a journalist asked White what he planned to do with the money. "I'm going to buy a hi-fi set". He replied, then, added after a moment's reflection, "and a kitchen stove." With this we shall move on to our reading of *Voss*.

2.5 A READING OF *VOSS*

I hope you have read the text because we shall be making references to the text as we analyse the novel.



White – Cambridge Freshman with Moustache

2.5.1 Voss and Australia

In a sense, the central protagonist of Patrick White's *Voss* is Australia. Just as in Shakespeare's history plays the central protagonist is England itself, so also Australia as a strange country seems to be the focal point of this novel. The title of the novel seems to emphasise the character of Voss. At one level, the title is justified, because the novel is essentially concerned with the experiential phase of Voss in course of his journey. In other words, we discover a linear progressive pattern of Voss's expedition – the preparation of the journey, the journey on the ship Osprey, their progress through Rhine Towers and Jildra, the beginning of their expedition through an arid landscape, varying degrees of predicament, the encounter with the Aborigines and the death of Voss. But at another level, it may be read as an epistemological construct in relation to Australia. But we absorb this level of experientiality through the personality of Voss. It is always emphasised that the central concern of *Voss* is Australia. He is in Australia only for "two years and four months" (Chapter 1). But he has already formed a greater understanding of the land than the settlers of New South Wales. When Laura complains of the land being extremely monotonous, he finds himself quite at home. :"I am at home ... it is like the poor parts of Germany" (Chapter 1). Though Laura fails to be intimate with her new home in New South Wales, Voss discovers the intense complexity of the country: "Your country is of great subtlety" (chapter 1). In Voss's analysis, the expedition should not be merely considered at the concrete level of human experience. It is not just an adventuristic inclination that has drawn him to this precarious pursuit. In attempting to explore the country, he gradually begins to locate an element of infinity. Patrick White has always reiterated this theme of sublime infinity in most of his novels. The theme of topographical exploration is gradually sublimated to the level of a spiritual experience. This is possible because White is essentially preoccupied with certain notions of religious mysticism. He has said: "Religion – that's behind all my novels." Voss's knowledge about Australia therefore generates an awareness of infinity itself. Thus Voss says to Le Mesurier: "But in this disturbing country, so far as I have become acquainted with it already, it is possible more easily to discard the inessential and to attempt the infinite". Patrick White's *Voss* ends with a series of death. But how should we interpret this idea of death in the context of Voss's exploration of Australia? Does Australia itself symbolise a land of insurmountable obstacles? And those who try to concretise its strangeness in terms of an exploration may not come back to the normative pattern of reality. After Voss and his party leave

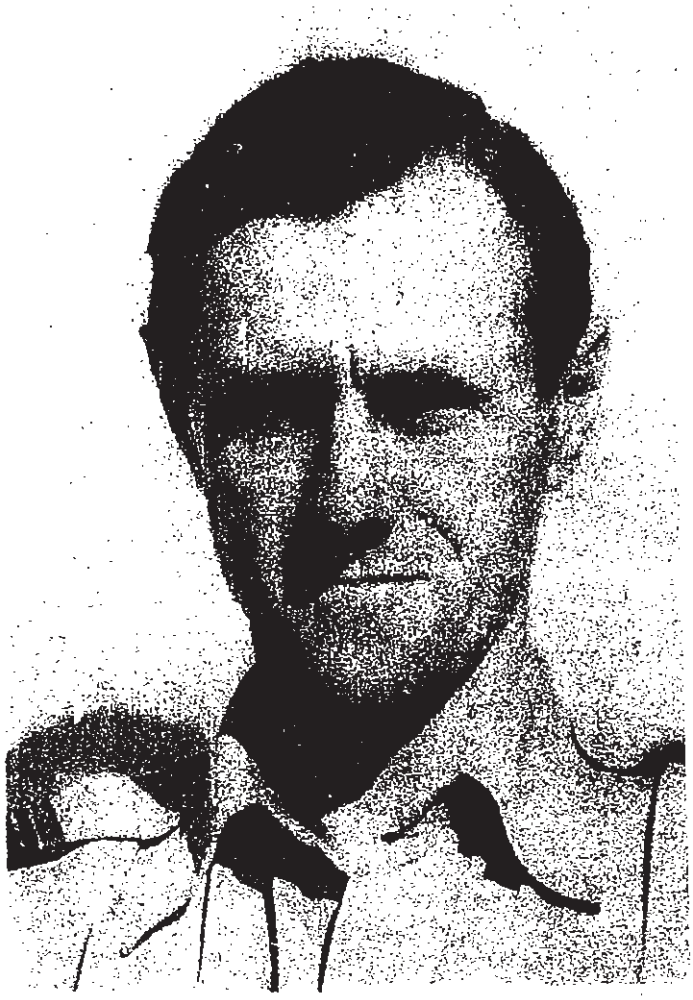
Jildra (Chapter 8) they are gradually confronted by different forms of adversity. It may be suggested that Jildra is the last terminating point of the normative civilised world. When the explorers are exposed to the ruthlessness of the Australian landscape, they gradually begin to develop multiple shades of feelings and reactions.



At the concrete level, their journey begins to be disturbed by the Aborigines. The loss of the compass is the preliminary signal of their gradual separation from the civilised world. As they lose the compass, they begin to unlearn the norms of traditional paradigms of reality. Again the Aborigines continue to attack them, trying to jeopardise their progress. They steal their cattle, terrorise them and render them helpless. But at the level of abstraction, it becomes a journey through dream, visions and emotive responses. In Jildra, for instance, there are elaborate references to the moon in its different phases and this seems to be congenial to dreams and visions. White has significantly presented this interweaving relationship: "Heavy moons hung above Jildra at that season. There was a golden moon, of placid, swollen belly. There were the ugly, bronze, male moons, threateningly lopsided. One night of wind and dust, there was a pale moonstone, or, as rags of cloud polished its face, delicate glass instrument, on which the needle barely fluttered, indicating the direction that some starry destiny must take. The dreams of men were influenced by the various moons..." (Chapter 8). Palfreyman who is an ornithologist feels the intensity of emotive experience. Thus Patrick White writes: "Their stay at Jildra had become for the ornithologist a season of sleep-walking, dominated by his dream-- it could have been -- of tortured moonlight and rustling shadow" (Chapter 8). We may also refer to the scene where Palfreyman and Voss are enraptured by the freshness of the flowers. On the last night before their departure from Jildra Voss finds Palfreyman making a

sketch of a "big, dramy lily propped in a tin mug". After having talked about the freshness of the Australian lily, Voss gradually undergoes a dreamy experience: "Written words take some time to thaw, but the words of lilies were now flowing in full summer water, and dark hairs of roots plastered on the mouth as water blew across. ...Tear out the black thing by the roots before it has taken hold. She was humbly grateful for it, however. In her kneeling position, she continued to bathe her hair in all flesh, whether of imperial lilies, or the black, putrefying, human kind" (chapter 8).

2.5.2 Voss and Laura



Patrick White at war in Egypt

Apart from the theme of expedition, there is also a complex emphasis on the relationship of Voss and Laura. It may be said that the novel operates at two different levels. At one level, it may be enjoyed as a novel of adventure, gradually taking us deep into the mysterious heart of Australia and inviting us to join this sense of quest starting from New South Wales and ending with the death of the explorers in the wilderness. But at another level, the theme of love runs parallel with the theme of expedition. This particular interweaving creates a distinctively critical design in the novel. Initially it seems that Voss and Laura seem to belong to two different worlds. They seem to have no compatibility as far as their specific inclinations are concerned. In this context, it is worthwhile to remember their first meeting in the house of Mr. Bonner. On their first meeting, they talk about different perspectives of Australia.

When Laura comes to know that Voss has walked all the way from Sydney to New South Wales, she finds it extremely ridiculous. When Voss compares the land with the poorer parts of Germany, she rigidly says: "I was never in Germany. But I find the road to Sydney monotonous, even from a carriage" (Chapter 1). But despite this external incompatibility, an internal or spiritual interconnection between the two is always emphasised. This curious mental parity is noticeable when, after their initial meeting, both of them suddenly lie embedded in their past. Here we notice a parallel pattern in their mental reactions, because both of them plunge into their past memories simultaneously. Thus Laura remembers how she came to New South Wales to live in the house of Mr. Bonner, she also registers her reactions to this strange land. Similarly Voss remembers his days in Germany and his final decision to come to Australia as an explorer.

While all others seem to misunderstand and misinterpret Voss, Laura alone can appropriately perceive the inner being of Voss. Laura points out that the settlers have not yet been able to assimilate themselves into this strange country, and will not say it: "We are not yet possessed of understanding" (Chapter 1). This country seems to be "foreign and incomprehensible". As all of them feel alienated from the country, they do not possess the right to be identified with the country. Laura realises that Australia is not her own country though she has lived in it. It is further problematised when Tom Radclyffe rudely points out that the German also does not possess the right to claim it as his own country. But immediately Laura says: "It is his by right of vision". This is substantiated when Mr. Bonner makes an elaborate statement: "Here we are talking about our colony as if it did not exist until now. Or as if it has now begun to exist as something quite different". Laura's inner perceptions gradually bring her closer to Voss. At the picnic, they become more mystically aware of each other. They begin to span the silent gulf operating between them. It is a curious gap that can be linked up with the mysterious stretches of time and space. Patrick White writes: "It was not exactly clear what they should do, only that they were suddenly faced with a great gap to fill, of space, and time ... Words, silences, and air had worked upon them subtly, until they had undergone a change" (Chapter 3). In the garden scene (Chapter 4), Voss and Laura begin to discover each other. Laura finds the personality of Voss especially enigmatic. While in the garden, they inspect the flowers the "marbled flowers". Contrasted with the flowers, the personality of Voss seems to be identified with the Australian desert. She says: "You are so vast and ugly. I can imagine some desert, with rocks, rocks of prejudice, and, yes, even hatred. You are so isolated. That is why you are fascinated by the prospect of desert places. In which you will find your own situation taken for granted, or more than that, exalted" (chapter 4). For Laura, Voss is as strange as the Australian desert. She therefore exclaims: "You are my desert". But the real intensity of Laura's emotion may be noticed after the departure of Voss's ship. She visualises the ship Osprey proceeding through the blue waters and the little white waves.

It is only through his separation from Laura that Voss discovers the intensity of his feelings for her. In his letter written to Laura from Rhine Towers, he for the first time acknowledges the need for an idealised relationship with her. He writes: "I would ask you to join me in thought, and exercise of will, daily, hourly, until I may return to you" (chapter 6). Both Laura and Voss begin to experience mysterious visions. Laura often begins to visualise Voss progressing in his journey. She also finds herself accompanying Voss: "... and they rode northward together between the small hills, some green and soft, with the feathers of young corn ruffled on their sides, others hard and blue as sapphires" (Chapter 7). This vision is nothing but a strange form of inexplicable knowledge. Although she cannot see Voss, she feels the existence of Voss in her very inner being: "I do truthfully believe that you are always lurking somewhere on the fringes of my dreams, though I seldom see you face, and cannot even distinguish your form" (Chapter 9). It may seem that this relationship is essentially tragic, because Voss and Laura never meet again. But Patrick White never intended to make it a tragedy. It is true that Voss dies at the end. But Laura continues to cherish the idea of Voss as a symbolic being. For Laura, Voss becomes

part of history. She believes "He is there still, it is said, in the country, and always will be. His legend will be written down, eventually by those who have been troubled by it." (chapter 16)

2.5.3 Exploring Australia

If we search far into the essential core of the novel, we find that the basic concern of the novel is the exploration of Australia. Every novel may be interpreted at two different levels: nuclei and indicial. At the level of the nuclei, the novel simply presents the structure of the story. But at the indicial level, we may locate the pattern of suggestion: in other words, it reveals the concealed intention of the novelist. Thus in Patrick White's *Voss*, the level of the nuclei projects the bare design of the story. But the indicial level of the novel unravels the hidden emphasis on the theme of exploration. In Voss most of the characters interrogate and interpret the meaning and significance of their existence in Australia. In the initial overture between Voss and Laura, they always concentrate on their reactions to this strange land. While Laura considers it to be a monotonous country, Voss discovers in it a distinctive notion of subtlety. It is also a country where people come to try their luck or make fortunes out of this country. Thus Laura says with reference to Voss: "He does not intend to make a fortune out of this country, like other men. He is not all money talk" (chapter 1). As a country of settlers, it is gradually developing. Thus Mr. Bonner substantiates this Australian dream in the following statement: "We have only to consider the progress we have made. Look at our homes and public edifices. Look at the devotion of our administrators, and the solid achievement of those men who are settling the land" (Chapter 1).





(above) Sue as a dumpling in ballet shoes
(below) Lazzie Clark their Scottish nurse and Paddy's real mother'



The boy at twelve, with big ears and sharp eyes

It is the consciousness of this Australian dream that makes them say: "This is the country of the future". But this Australian dream can only be fulfilled when the land itself is appropriately explored. Though they are settling the country, yet the true Australian dream can be realised only when they identify themselves as truly Australians. They still cling to the early memories of England. Thus Laura proudly affirms: "it is not my country, although I have lived in it" (Chapter 1). Again Tom Radclyff goes deeper into the psychosis of the settlers: "Everyone is still afraid, or most of us, of this country, and will not say it. We are not yet possessed of understanding" (Chapter 1).

But Radclyff's reference to understanding is nothing but a problem of knowledge. It is by knowing the land that one can substantiate this Australian dream. When Le Mesurier calls it a "damned country", Voss says: "Yes, I will cross the country from one end to the other. I have every intention to know it with my heart" (Chapter 2). Voss further philosophises the whole concept of exploration by saying that "It is possible more easily to discard the inessential and to attempt the infinite" (Chapter 2). Mr. Bonner looks at Voss's mission as an expedition. But there is a distinctive demarcation between expedition and exploration. Expeditions merely involve the concrete aspects of this adventurous project. He therefore simply concentrates on the organisational part of Voss's journey. But Voss intends to explore, to know and perceive the infinite strangeness of the land. For him it is very much like walking upon the bottom of the sea. The proposition of walking upon the bottom of the sea may be unreal, but it, can be experienced in a dream. Voss says: "I have not, except in dreams, of course. That is why I am fascinated by the prospect before me. Even if the future of great areas of sand is a purely metaphysical one" (Chapter 3).

2.5.4 Agony and Ecstasy

What strikes us most is the interweaving of agony and ecstasy in *Voss*. The element of agony is manifest in the emotive aspects generated by the novel. It may be particularly studied in the context of the relationship between Voss and Laura. Again the element of ecstasy may be analysed from the standpoint of complex reactions arising out of the process of the expedition. Voss and Laura come close to each other, and develop a spiritual relationship. But this leads to an agonising experience. Laura remains confined to her limited world of New South Wales and begins to suffer during the absence of Voss. Again Voss, despite his experience of the tribulations of the journey, remains absorbed in his memory of Laura. Even though they spiritually communicate with each other, they undergo a process of an intense agonising experience. But Voss's journey itself conduces to an ecstatic experience. Voss directly participates in this experience of ecstasy arising out of his close encounter with the immense strangeness of the land. Laura stands distanced from this direct participation in Voss's experience, but she is equally involved with the ecstatic idea of exploration. In fact the experiences of agony and ecstasy create an interweaving pattern that largely explains the basic implications of the novel. These two different phases of experience are artistically assimilated to create a unified emotive design.

2.6 HUMAN RELATIONSHIPS IN THE NOVEL

As we try to explain the multiple facets of a novel, it is always important to consider the various human relationships. Naturally it will be pertinent to analyse different patterns of human relationship in *Voss*. In *Voss*, we find that there are different degrees of relationships, as many as four different levels of relationship governing the fictional pattern:

1) Voss and Laura
2) Voss and the fellow-travellers

3) Explorers and the Aborigines
4) Voss and the settlers of New South Wales

These facets of relationship interrogate the basic thematic structure of the novel. We have already formed some ideas regarding these relationships in course of our discussion on different aspects of the novel. We should therefore emphasise two particular forms of relationships that have not been extensively dealt with in our earlier discussion. These two levels are:

1) Voss and the Bonner family
2) Voss and his fellow-travellers

2.6.1 Voss and the Bonner Family

What is the nature of the relationship that really exists between Voss and the Bonner family? It may be said that this relationship should be studied at two levels. Voss is related to the Bonner family at the most concrete level as far as his plans for the expedition is concerned. But Laura, even though belonging to the same family, seems to be related to Voss at an abstract level.

Mr. Bonner has shouldered the task of organising Voss's expedition. He has planned the entire programme for Voss's journey. In the picnic party (Chapter 3), he clearly spells out the essential plan of Voss's expedition. But a close analysis shows that Mr. Bonner stands out as an icon of the entire group of settlers assembled at New South Wales. He represents the enthused psychosis of the settlers who are gradually building up a nation. Thus Voss's relation with the Bonner family symbolically exhibits an interrelation of the explorer's sense of quest and the coloniser's intention to get beyond the land's strangeness. At the microcosmic level, Mr. Bonner symbolises a miniature representation of the country of settlers and Voss symbolises the perennial, unending quest of an explorer. But in the Bonner family, Laura is the only character who appropriately establishes an emotive relation with Voss. She correctly measures out the depth and intensity of Voss's vision. Voss also discovers in Laura a perfect co-sharer of his strange, mystical feelings.

2.6.2 Voss And His Fellow Travellers

In this strange expedition, Voss emerges as the perfect leader. He has stayed in this country for two years and four months only. But he has gradually identified himself with the spirit of this country. In order to carry on the expedition, he gathers together a number of fellow travellers. The fellow travellers of Voss belong to different backgrounds. Initially his expedition party comprises four men with distinctive backgrounds. Robarts is an English lad whom Voss has met on board a ship. Le Mesurier is a man with great qualities. Palfreyman is an exceptional ornithologist. Finally Turner is a labourer who intends to be included; and they will join Voss as they reach Mr. Sanderson's place at Rhine Towers. In the group is Angus as well, a spirited young fellow. Finally Judd, a man of physical strength and moral integrity, will join the party. The fellow travellers work together in a perfect state of amity till they reach Jildra. But with the beginning of the wilderness, there starts a gradual transformation in their attitudes and responses. Initially they come to be disturbed by the intermittent attacks of the Aborigines. Patrick White here begins to develop a sense of contrast between the White Australian world represented by the settlers and the indigenous Aboriginal world of the Australian wilderness. This is further precipitated by the growing sense of traumas that finally leads to distrust and disintegration. The expedition comes to be divided. In chapter 12, the two parties move in opposite directions. In the following chapters, White narrates the death of Voss and his fellow travellers. But do these deaths show the defeat of the explorers? Does the insurmountable wilderness of Australia prove ultimately triumphant?

Perhaps the answer to these questions remains in an unsuspected quarter. We should not try to magnify the death of these travellers. It is their attempt to identify the nature of Australia's strangeness that becomes important. It is through death that they endeavour to explore the inner being of Australia. They move beyond the concrete, microcosmic reality and discover the mystical, macrocosmic reality of Australia. It is true that all of them die in the end, but they die with a complete knowledge of the strangeness of Australia. Perhaps it is through their death that they concretise a vision of the Australian dream.

2.7 LET US SUM UP

Patrick white in *Voss* takes the role of a presenter who upholds the patterns and perspectives of the inner being of Australia. In his analysis, Voss emerges as a distinctive symbol trying to go beyond the limited vision of the settlers. His journey through Australia is therefore a symbolic journey. Moreover White has presented a pattern of intense emotive experience. This is largely evident in the Voss-Laura relationship.

2.8 GLOSSARY

Aborigines: The original primitive race living in a country

Historicise: interpretation of event patterns in terms of a rationalistic framework of history

Nuclei: in the art of narration, the essential story is considered to be the Nuclei or the primary level or the story pattern

Indicial: in the art of narration, the level of suggestive meanings is regarded as the indicial level.

2.9 QUESTIONS

1. How would you account for the relationship of Voss and Laura? Does this relationship substantiate the theme of exploration in the context of Australia?
2. How many multiple patterns of relationship can be found in *Voss?*
3. Would it be right to call *Voss* "an emotionally complex novel"? Discuss.

UNIT 3 ROMANTIC ELEMENTS IN *VOSS*

Structure

1.0 Objectives
3.1 Introduction
3.2 What is Romanticism?
3.3 Aspects of Romanticism in *Voss*
  3.3.1 Theme of Journey
  3.3.2 Element of Love
  3.2.2 Romantic Landscape
3.4 The Romantic World
  3.4.1 World of Voss
  3.4.2 Laura's World
3.5 Let Us Sum Up
3.6 Glossary
3.7 Questions

3.0 OBJECTIVES

The aim of this Unit is to acquaint you with the romantic elements that may be located in the thematic pattern of the novel. So far we have looked at the elements of exploration in the novel. But the theme of exploration, as we will see, explains only the exterior pattern of the novel. In order to appreciate the emotive intensity of the novel, it is essential that we isolate the romantic segments of the novel. And that is what we shall try to do in this unit. Let us begin with a brief introduction.

3.1 INTRODUCTION

Exploration as such is regarded to be the task of an adventurer. When a new land begins to be inhabited, scientists, geographers and anthropologists begin thorough research on the land. But this research is limited to the level of apparent reality. In other words, it becomes an exploration of the conditions of the land, its people and customs, its forests and rivers. But as we concentrate on the literary text (*Voss*), we find that the theme of exploration grows to acquire a new dimension. Exploration itself becomes a significant component stabilising a distinctive sense of romanticism. Patrick White's *Voss* may in this sense be regarded as a specific romantic text. *Voss* may be considered a paradigmatic text executing a process of exploration and journey. White meticulously portrays a complicated linear movement and creates an interweaving pattern of progression and suffering. It is this idea of exploration that therefore amounts to an accumulation of emotional intensity. In this Unit we will therefore try to locate the sense of romanticism at two distinctive levels. In the first place, we shall make an attempt at considering the presentation of the journey as a significant romantic component. Secondly, we shall also try to discover the emotional movement in terms of the relationship between the central characters. Let us look at what is understood by the term "romanticism"

3.2 WHAT IS ROMANTICISM?

Romanticism was an ideological and artistic movement that replaced Classicism in the nineteenth century. It stressed the freedom of individual self- expression and turned towards emotion, "inspiration, spontaneity and originality as against the

Augustan principles of mechanical, impersonal, artificial rationality" (MEG 05, Block 3). As an artistic method it expresses the artist's attitude to the depicted phenomena, which in a way elevates his/ her work and gives it some emotional colouring. Frederich Schegel is often considered to be the first person to use the term *Romantisch* in literary contexts. His brother August W Schegel, implied that romantic literature was in contrast to classical literature. Many people believe that this movement originated in England but the seeds of this movement were sown in Germany as far back as in the eighteenth century. However in eighteenth century England, a discernible shift had already begun to take place in sensibility and feeling, particularly in relation to the natural order and Nature. Wordsworth, Coleridge, Shelley, Keats and Byron were the chief exponents of the Romantic Movement in England.

Aspects of Romanticism in the 18th century:

- an increasing interest in Nature and in the Natural, primitive and uncivilised way of life
- a growing interest in scenery, specially its more untamed and disorderly manifestations
- an association of human moods with the 'moods' of nature- and thus a subjective feeling for and interpretation of it
- a considerable emphasis on Natural religion
- emphasis on the need for spontaneity in thought, action and in the expression of thought
- increasing importance attached to natural genius and the power of the imagination
- a tendency to exalt the individual and his / her needs and emphasise on the need for a freer and more personal expression
- the cult of the Noble Savage.

Most romantic poets considered themselves to be free spirits expressing their own imaginative truth. But what we need to remember is that Romanticism attaches great importance to the individual and the subjective dimension of the human experience. Rene Welleck has defined Romanticism as "a compound of a particular view of imagination, a particular attitude to nature and a particular writing style."(MEG 05, Block 3, p,6). The other characteristics of Romanticism include a reaction against tradition, the importance of nature and country life, escape to the middle ages, liberation of the ego, spontaneity, love of the supernatural and a revival of lyricism. We shall not go into too many details as you have already studied Romanticism thoroughly in Block 3 of your Literary Theory and Criticism Course (MEG 05). Instead we shall look at the various aspects of Romanticism to be found in our novel of study.

3.3 ASPECTS OF ROMANTICISM IN *VOSS*

Before we approach the aspects of romanticism in *Voss*, it is essential to address the basic principle of romanticism. Romanticism as a distinct form of ideology essentialises strangeness and enchantment. Again these two qualities at its most intense level embrace an exotic mysticism. Romanticism is in fact a quality of mind; and this is largely prompted either by the advent of a new philosophical mode or by an epoch-making event. British Romanticism was fortunate to be aided by both of these critical components: **German Transcendentalism** and the **French Revolution**. Australian literature was not fortunate enough to be nurtured by any of these critical factors. Moreover by the time Patrick White began writing his novels, Europe was groping under the shadow of the World Wars (White's first novel *The Happy Valley* was written in 1939). Again when *Voss* was written in 1957, Europe was experimenting with different forms dealing with such ideological proliferations as the

Angry Young Man Movement, Dadaism, Existentialism, and so on. Naturally Europe outgrew the ecstasy of romanticism. What is then the source of Patrick White's romanticism? Perhaps White's romanticism lies embedded in the growing consciousness of Australian individualism. While Europe was busy with intellectualizing its inward despair, Australia was gradually trying to substantiate its own identity apart from other places. In the domain of literature, the Jindiworobak Movement is a distinct sign of Australia's search for individualism and identity. The history of Australia is a history of the repeated attempts at coming to terms with the land. But in doing so, they began to discover a quality of strangeness and enchantment in the land. This sense of romanticism was earlier echoed in A.D. Hope's sustained statement of deep romanticism:

> They call her a young country, but they lie,
> She is the last of lands ...

Again Rex Ingamells, the founder of the Jindiworobaks, commented in Conditional Culture:

"The real test of a people's culture is the way in which they can express themselves in relation to their environment, and the loftiness and universality of their artistic conceptions raised on that basis." This specific statement largely points at the Australian quest for self-assertion and romantic individualism. In the following part of this Unit, we shall try to identify this sense of romantic quest with reference to Patrick White's *Voss*. Let us begin with the journey motif/theme.

3.3.1 Theme of Journey

The idea of the journey has always been a distinctive romantic component. If we delve into literary history, we will come across a large number of literary antecedents. The romantic predisposition with the idea of journey has also generated a sense of symbolic quest. This romantic and symbolic quest may be traced back to **Homer's** *Odyssey* that exhibits a sense of symbolic suffering. In the course of ten years' long journey Odysseus travels through many unknown lands and passes through many strange experiences. But there is also a hidden sense of romanticism because the entire journey is a progress towards his reunion with his wife and son in Ithaca. Again in **Dante's** *Divinna Commedia*, there is a symbolic spiritual journey. British literature is also packed to the full with such journey motifs. *Pilgrims Progress*, *Tom Jones*, *A Sentimental Journey*, *Heart of Darkness* are some significant and pertinent examples. In all these creative works, the romantic and the symbolic traditions are vigorously at work

Patrick White's *Voss* also projects an exploratory journey in which the spirit of romanticism is largely associated with the discovery of sublime strangeness. If it had been merely an exploration of the physical topography of the land, it would be nothing short of a travelogue. It is true that *Voss* presents a long journey through the arid topography of Australia. But Patrick White never intends to generate a geographical awareness of the land. He instead tries to make the readers intensely aware of the ecstatic romanticism growing out of the multiple emotions created by the mysticality of the land. The idea of journey projected in the novel is essentially experiential in character. In fact the progress through the land is a journey into one's own self. It is a kind of self-discovery. In New South Wales Voss comes to know the settlers - the small world of Mr. Bonner and other settlers forming an Australian microcosm. Voss encounters a mimetic version of the motherland the settlers have left behind. There is also a curious interweaving of the convict past projected in terms of some of the settlers.

> "The first stage of Voss's journey takes the party by sea to Newcastle and overland through the gentle, healing landscape of the Hunter to Rhine Towers"... Rhine Towers in the care of the Sandersons - is a place of

> simplicity and perfection, an Eden in the bush ... Voss leads the party from that sublime valley across New England to the flat coolabahs country... Jildra is the last outpost before the wilderness. West of Jildra lies the desert. Once the expedition left Jildra, Voss was on an expedition to the outer limits of his imagination," (David Marr, pp.315-316).

It is a linear progressive journey that gradually leads us to the strange romantic interior of the land. The more they progress into the land, the more they unlearn the normative customs and designs of life. As they go beyond the traditional frontiers of human existence, they are confronted with an arid, cruel nature. Exposed to the primal intensity of nature, they begin to perceive the perennial instincts of the land. Moreover there is a curious sub-text of the conflict between the whites and the Aborigines. The aborigines appear as the human agents of the primal simplicity of nature itself. The explorers are considered to be aliens disturbing the mystic innocence of the land. The loss of the compass seems to be extremely symbolic of a subversion of the civilised artifice of the settlers. Let us now examine the elements of love in the novel.

3.3.2 Element of Love

The element of love is also another significant component of the theme of romanticism. This specific emotional aspect of the novel may be located in the relation between Laura and Voss. White wrote,

> "I wanted to write a story of a grand passion – don't jump. So this is at the same time the story of a girl called Laura Trevelyan, the niece of a Sydney merchant, one of the patrons of Voss's expedition. It is different from other grand passions in that it grows in the minds of the two people concerned more through the stimulus of their surroundings and through almost irrelevant incidents. Voss and Laura only meet three or four times before the expedition sets out. They even find each other partly antipathetic. Yet, Voss writes proposing to the girl on one of the early stages of the journey, partly out of vanity, and partly because herealises he is already lost; she accepts, partly out of a desire to save him from his delusions of divinity; partly out of a longing for religious faith, to which she feels she can only return to through love..."

But the idea of love is not realised in the context of any direct involvement. Love is considered essentially as a spiritual experience. In the primary chapters of the novel, their relationship may be regarded as a kind of deep attachment. Laura seems to try to understand the intensity and the depth of Voss's emotional involvement in the exploration. Voss also seems to be touched by her sympathy and kindness. But it is not really possible to locate the element of love during this phase. In fact it is through their absence that they begin to discover the intense workings of the emotions of love. In other words, the idea of love is more a psychic experience than a concrete mode of physical realisation. Patrick White has tried to create a tension between the levels of abstraction and concretisation in the context of love. In the beginning of the novel, we come across an emphasis on the concrete level of love. But as the novel progresses and Voss leaves on his mission of exploration, both of them begin to experience an emotional attachment at the level of abstraction. This psychic intensity of love gradually conduces to deep feelings of love. They begin to undergo strange visionary experiences.

> "Or she closed her eyes, and they rode northward together between the small hills, some green and soft, with the feathers of young corn ruffled on their sides, others hard and blue as sapphires. As the two visionaries rode, their teeth were shivering, flashing, for their faces anonymous with love, was turned naturally towards each other, and they did, from time to time, catch such irrelevantly personal glimpses. What they were saying had not yet been

translated out of the air, the rustling of the corn, and the resilient cries of the birds. As they rode on, all metal was twining together, of stirrup- irons, for instance, and the bits in the mouths of their horses."

These abstract experiences create hallucinatory reactions.

"So he rode through hell, until he felt her touch him.
'I shall not fail you' said Laura Trevelyan.
' Even if there are times when you wish me to, I shall not fail you.'
He would not look at her, however, for he was not yet ready...
'You are not in possession of your faculties,' he said to her at last.
'What are my faculties?' she asked.
Then they were drifting together. They were sharing the same hell, in their common flesh, which he had attempted so often to repudiate. She was fitting him with a sheath of tender white."

But Voss does not come back in the end.

"As the two characters are separated by events and distances, their stories have to be developed alternatively, but they also fuse, in dreams, in memories and in delirium – most closely, for instance, when Voss is lying half-dead of thirst and starvation, and Laura is suffering from delusions as a result of a psychic disturbance diagnosed as the inevitable "brain fever". Voss is finally dragged through the dust, and accepts the principles Laura would have liked him to accept before he is murdered by the blacks. Laura recovers. She becomes a headmistress and a figure of some respect in the community, if also one that nobody really understands, because of some mysterious past,"(David Marr, p. 314)

Despite the tragic end of Voss, Laura does not behave like a suffering woman. In fact the idea of love has been sublimated in terms of the role Voss plays as a maker of history. The personal history of their love comes to be subsumed by the assertion of public history. Patrick White has used all the traditional components of a love story—feelings of attachment, absence, suffering, love's unhappiness and so on. But White has never lost sight of the essential theme of the novel. He has therefore created an interweaving of the theme of love and that of exploration. These two themes have been splendidly assimilated to form a unified design. Thus the projection of love in this novel has finally substantiated a greater theme—the Australian history that Voss cannot die because he has become part of history through his exploration of this strange land. Having talked about the elements of love in *Voss*, we shall now analyse the romantic landscape as well.

3.3.3 Romantic Landscape

In the beginning of the novel, we are placed in the urban settlement of New South Wales. It is a world that still clings to the memories of the original homeland. But gradually they are building up the settlement. It is a world that is slowly growing up. Mr. Bonner proudly proclaims how they are establishing the country. But in this way they are also destroying the native purity of the country. Their association with nature is limited to their occasional going out for a picnic. When the explorers cross Jildra, we begin to experience a distinctive change in the topography. The urban world of New South Wales comes to be replaced by a primitive, un-trodden landscape. Here human beings seem to be unprivileged, helpless creatures exposed to the sublime passivity of nature. It is a landscape where we notice an absence of man-made artifice. The explorers aided by their horses and the compass, seem to be paltry and sordid. The macrocosmic nature projected through its vast stretches of sand, stones and rivers creates a feeling of awe. There are also two different kinds of landscape associated with two contrasted sets of people. New South Wales is the

world of the civilised whites, while the unexplored interior of the Australian landscape fits in well with the native Aborigines. In other words, New South Wales represents artificiality and restraint, whereas the primitive topography symbolises, simplicity and sublimity.

This landscape generates multiple reactions among the explorers. As long as they are limited to the civilised landscape, they adhere to the urban code of discipline, order and restraint. But as they enter the macrocosmic world of Australian landscape, confusion and division gradually set in. Old Dugald is the first to underline this sense of division. He goes back to his own people (the Aborigines), thereby suggesting an antithesis between the Whites and the Aborigines. Voss' leadership is also questioned and a visible rift takes place in the party of the explorers. Perhaps the sublime vastness of the landscape creates an unbearable pressure on all of them. The uninhibited spontaneity of the landscape gives them a release from the long-cherished notions of discipline and restraint. Confusion finally leads to the death of all the explorers. They do not return to the urban world of New South Wales. It is through their death that they are consumed into the sublime landscape of the interior of Australia. Like the Greek philosopher Empedocles, they finally die, but they die with cognition and knowledge. Let us now look at the romantic world to be found in our novel.

3.4 THE ROMANTIC WORLD

We have tried to define the term 'Romanticism' very briefly as you have already studied it in block 3 of your MEG 05. We have also looked at the Romantic aspects in *Voss* we will, now take a look at the Romantic World of *Voss*.

3.4.1 World of Voss

The world of Voss is a world of strange discovery. He is a German explorer who has come away from his homeland in order to discover the strange primitiveness of the interior of Australia. Thus sitting at the house of Mr. Bonner (Chapter 1), he remembers how he wavered between different ambitions. His father was a timber merchant and his mother was a sentimental woman. At first it was decided that he would become a great surgeon, but he "was revolted by the palpitating bodies of men". Then it was thought that he would become a botanist. But finally he leaves Germany to become an explorer. But what does really bring him to Australia? Australia perhaps became a strange icon for him - an icon representing romantic obsession. Thus the stereotyped careers of a surgeon or a botanist do not really satisfy him. He want to work out a new kind of future. He says to Laura: "Your future is what you will make of it. Future is will" (Chapter 3). It is because of this emphasis on his personal will that he stands apart from the others. This naturally conduces to misunderstanding and miscomprehension: "Some pitied him. Some despised him for his funny appearance of a foreigner. None, he realized with a tremor of anger, was conscious of his strength. Mediocre, animal men never do guess at the power of rock of fire, until the last moment before those elements reduce them to ...nothing" (Chapter 3).

This demarcation may be explained only in terms of the specific mindset of Voss. Even though Voss seems to have planned the exploration of the Australian continent, yet he is actually interested in discovering the essential soul of Australia. Voss's quest is in fact a metaphysical quest emphasising the mystical infiniteness of the land. Through continuous settlement, the world of gods is gradually becoming the world of men. But Voss intends to move beyond the limited frontiers of concrete experientiality. He remains absorbed in a world of his own. Even though he travels with his other team members, he is emotionally distant from them. He begins to be identified with this strange world of vast natural perspective. When some of his group members leave him, he does not really consider himself alone. Loneliness is

actually a state of mind. But Voss seems to have annihilated this sense of loneliness through his metaphysical consciousness of probing deep into the eternal infinity of the Australian world. When the Aborigines through the treachery of Jackie finally capture Voss, he does not lose his faith in the powers of the innate goodness of man. Voss again and again tries to annihilate the barrier between the whites and the Aborigines. The Aborigines consider themselves as truly belonging to the land and as such they find themselves separated from the settlers. But Voss says to Jackie: " Where do I belong, if not here? Tell your people we are necessary to one another." When Voss finally awaits death at the hand of the Aborigines, he seems to undergo a strange mystic experience. He suddenly begins to visualise his release from the prospective violence and despair. He remains confined among the black fellows and this creates strange feelings in Voss. Before his death, he has a dream that seems to offer a sudden possibility of emancipation. He visualises himself riding away from his past: "Once he had ridden away, he did not look back at the past, so great was his confidence in the future" (Chapter 13). But even in his death, he is merged into the land. His blood goes deep into the mystic land and he becomes, through his death, a part of the mystic land: "His dreams fled into the air, his blood ran out upon the dry earth, which drank it up immediately. Whether dreams breed, or the earth responds to a pint of blood, the instant of death does not tell" (Chapter 13). Voss's death may be considered as an icon of the Australian dream. Voss's journey is therefore a distinctive paradigm of the mystic discovery of the interior of Australia. "Voss's expedition was not a failure, though he found no new pastoral Eden, made no maps, lost all the specimens his party collected, and failed to reach the sea on the far side of the continent. Through his suffering in the desert, Voss conquered his pride". (David Marr, p.312) Let us now examine Laura's world.

3.4.2 Laura's World

Laura belongs to a world of abstractions. She is essentially absorbed in her own world of mysticism. From the very beginning we find her distant from the world of sordid realism. As we see her for the first time, she appears a proud, snobbish woman who still clings to her British past. When she meets Voss for the first time she begins to remember how after the death of her parents she came to live in Australia with the Bonner family. Yet she does not consider Australia to be her own country. She also does not seem to have any interest in the Australian interior. She remains comfortable within the four walls of the house. She says to Voss: "We drive out sometimes, for picnics, you know, or we ride out on horseback. We will spend a few days with friends, on a property ... but I am always happy to return to this house" (Chapter 1). It is only through her contact with Voss that she gradually begins to recognise the mystic quality of Australia. But this creates of the concrete world of Australia. On the other hand, she participates in a strangely mystical world. Laura is basically a complex character. Her complexity lies in the fact that she fails to adjust herself with the level of concrete reality. Though she participates in the mundane affairs, she finds herself mentally distanced from all this. Thus she goes to the picnic, but she cannot take part properly in the usual forms of enjoyment. Again she attends the party organised by Mr. Bonner. But she escapes into the garden and begins a kind of metaphysical conversation with Voss. It is in this conversation that we get inkling into the mystical quality of her character. She develops a psychic intimacy with Voss and comes to be identified with Voss's journey. Voss becomes a distinctive icon of an unending, mystical quest. Even though she does not participate concretely in the journey, she becomes indissolubly related to it at the level of mystical abstraction.

We should also consider another mysterious aspect of her character. This is particularly noticeable when the Aborigines capture Voss. After Voss's capture by the Aborigines, she comes to be attacked by a mysterious fever. When Voss dies, she is cured. The fever works very much like a spell. An impression of this kind is noticed in Mr. Bonner's statement: "The fever is broken". However it seems that there is mysterious link between Laura's fever and Voss's death in the hands of the

Aborigines. Laura suffers from the spell as long as Voss (through his death) does not become a part of this land's mysterious enchantment. After his death, Voss becomes a part of the Australian history; and it is only now that Laura's spell is broken. Laura seems to find a fulfilment in the sacrifice of Voss. She now realises that Voss has become a part of history and indirectly she becomes a part of this historical consciousness.

3.5 LET US SUM UP

In this unit we have seen a curious interweaving of the themes of exploration and romantic sensibility. This seems to generate a distinctive romantic awareness. The journey itself implies a significant romantic mysticality. If we analyse the character of Voss appropriately we find that he is a specific romantic icon. His journey is therefore a romantic quest. In other words, it becomes a progress towards the unknowable. Moreover Laura becomes romantically inclined to the spirit of enchantment generated by this element of strange quest. Again the frequent alternation between New South Wales and the mystical interior of Australia creates a constant shift of focus. Thus throughout the novel, we notice a significant opposition between the level of reality and that of romanticism.

3.6 GLOSSARY

Angry Young Man Movement: A group of British novelists and playwrights of the 1950s who expressed hostility to traditional standards and manners of "the establishment". They depicted the oppressiveness, hypocrisy and demoralising values of the social world. John Osborne's *Look Back in Anger* is an example.

Cartography: The art of drawing maps that decides and validates a distinctive territory. The study of cartography has become a major component in the analysis of New Literatures.

Dadaism: A nihilistic movement in art started by Tristan Tzara, Hugo Ball and Richard Huelsenbeck in Zurich during World War I. The term was meant to signify everything and nothing, or total freedom, anti-rules, ideals and tradition. In art and literature manifestations of Dadaism were mostly in the form of collagen effects: arrangement of unrelated objects and words in a random manner. This movement influenced the poetry of Ezra Pound and T S Eliot.

Existentialism: Meaning 'pertaining to existence'. It is derived from Kierkegaard (1813- 55), who stressed that in God are the infinite and the finite. Heidegger and Jaspers both German Philosophers expanded upon this belief. The importance of this aesthetic tradition lies in their brief that human beings fashion their own existence and only exist by doing so, and by doing what they do or do not, gives essence to that existence. Jean-Paul Sartre is

the chief modern exponent of this tradition. In his view human beings are born into a void, a mud. But they are at liberty to remain in this stale passive, supine semi-conscious state in which they are scarcely aware of themselves or they may come out of this subjective passive state, become aware of themselves and then experience cogoisse (a species of metaphysical and mental anguish). They would then drag themselves out of this situation and begin to exist, whereby they give meaning to both existence and the universe. In other words human beings are obliged to make themselves what they are. Some of the other exponents of existentialism are Albert Camus, Simon de Beauvoir, Merleau- Ponty and Jean Wahl.

French Revolution: The French public rose against their monarch Louis XVI in a bloody revolution in 1789. They had been suppressed and over burdened with taxes for a very long time as a result of which they rebelled against their king and the nobility. The cry of the revolution was, "Liberty, Equality and Fraternity"

German Transcendentalism: Transcendentalism was a New England movement that flourished from c. 1835 to 1860. It had its roots in romanticism and in post - Kantian ideology by which Coleridge was influenced. It had a considerable influence on American art and literature. Basically religious it emphasised the role and importance of the individual conscience, and the value of intuition in matters of moral guidance and inspiration. They were also social reformers. Ralph Emerson Waldo, Bronson Alcott, H D Thoreau and Nathaniel Hawthorne were some of the propagators of Transcendentalism.

Jindiworobak Movement: This Movement started in Australia in the 1930s. Its founder was Rex Ingamells. This movement tried to emphasise an extreme craving for Australianness in the presentation of the land's perspective as well as its idiom.

3.7 QUESTIONS

1. Critically examine the interweaving themes of love and journey in Patrick White's *Voss*.
2. Do you think the world's of Voss and Laura contribute to each other?

UNIT 4 MULTIPLE THEMES IN *VOSS*

Structure

4.0 Objectives
4.1 Introduction
4.2 Perspectives on the Land
  4.2.1 Early Settlement
  4.2.2 Nature and Men
  4.2.3 Nature in Jildra
4.3 Problem of Identity
  4.3.1 Settlers of New South Wales and their Reactions
  4.3.2 Voss and his Sense of Identity
  4.3.3 Laura's Sense of Identity
  4.3.4 Theme of Suffering in *Voss*
  4.3.5 Religion in *Voss*
4.4 Let Us Sum Up
4.5 Glossary
4.5 Questions

4.0 OBJECTIVES

In this Unit, we shall acquaint you with certain problems of land and identity. When a group of people settle down in a country/ place, the question of their identification with the land naturally arises. If we analyse the basic thematic texture of the novel carefully, we will find that *Voss's* essential emphasis is on the curious interrelation between the question of land and identity. In this Unit, we shall therefore concentrate on different aspects of this problem.

4.1 INTRODUCTION

In the previous Units, we have seen how Patrick White has analysed a distinctive notion of exploration in the context of the discovery of the interior of Australia. This theme of exploration naturally evokes a sense of romanticism. This idea of romanticism is intricately related to an awareness of the strange, mysterious aspect of the land. If we consider the vast, primitive aspect of Australia, we may easily locate the components of romanticism working on this land. But the strange perspective on this land may be perceived only when we consider it in connection with the problem of identity.

4.2 PERSPECTIVES ON THE LAND

So far we have looked at the multiple aspect of the land in a sporadic manner. We have nevertheless been able to gather a certain amount of information regarding some distinctive traits of the land. Land comes to be connotative only when its identity is ascertained. It is therefore important to consider the perspective of nature, its relation to the world of man; moreover the ways in which different characters contribute towards creating, endorsing and stabilising its identity.

4.2.1 Early Settlement

The history of Australian literature is marked by a continuous struggle to resolve the tension between the individual identity of the settlers and the land they have come to

inhabit. This naturally presupposes a strategic adaptation to a strange land, which since time immemorial has been man's persistent effort at stabilising himself in varying situations. In prehistoric times, when the Achaean tribes invaded Greece around 2200 B.C. they encountered a similar problem in adjusting to the indigenous Pelasgian culture. If we suggest that many early poets and novelists of Australia were mostly convicts transported from England and as such their vision of Australia was that of foreigners artificially transplanted in a strange country, we would be holding the stick by the wrong end. In fact the early settlers gradually acclamatised themselves and discovered a new allegiance. One may be reminded of Mary Gilmore's famous tribute to the pioneers in her poem *Old Botany Bay:*

> "I was the conscript
> Sent to hell
> To make in the desert
> The living well."

After the initial phase of strangeness and the consequent mode of identifying oneself with the new land, there is a gradual and growing spirit of enchantment. Thus Mary Gilmore recounts the pristine purity of the early phase of settlement:

> "There were no bad smells about the bush when the kingdom of the wild was its own kingdom. ... It was not till the settlement came the earth sank, and sewers burst. Once Australia smelt like spice-islands.... Ships knew before they came to her, "we are near Australia", said the seamen, "can't you smell the flowers".

This spirit of enchantment is equally noticeable in Walter Murdoch who discovers a sublime ecstasy even in a spectacle of fire:

> "No language could convey an idea of the wonder and terror and beauty of the spectacle by night, when the valley below you and the hillsides around you are all one red roaring hell of furious destruction".

In short these facets are related to the problem of land, insofar as the settlers discover new roots in a strange country. But the problem of identity is complex and raises multiple themes and issues. When the British arrived in Australia, it was not an empty country. Even before the British arrived, the Australian Aboriginals were roaming about in this country for 40,000 years. When the first fleet of settlers reached the shore of Australia, there were at least 300,000 aborigines in Australia belonging to many different tribal groups like the Koories, the Nimbans, the Noongas, the Lora and so on. They survived with their hunting skills, indigenous customs and pagan totemism. This problem of land and identity naturally took the shape of a warlike confrontation between the natural citizens and the destined citizens, between the state of primal innocence and the strategic intention of settlement. These multiple layers of tension between the intruders and the natural inhabitants conduce to a complex structure of racist relationship. This is partly recorded in the sad history of such aborigines as **Bennelong** or **Permulwoy**. At this stage, we would like to tell you a little about these two men. When Arthur Phillip was the Governor, he was ordered to live "in amity and kindness" with the Aborigines. He however, wanted to develop a kind of relationship with them in order to be able to procure food etc., and to be able to take them English and "turn it to the advantage of the colony". With this intention in mind he tried befriending several Aborigines, when that did not work, he decided to kidnap a few of them, force them to learn English, and act as intermediaries between the two races. **Arabanoo** was the first to be captured and was quite successfully converted into an 'English Man' but he died during the epidemic of small pox that wiped out half of the Gamaraigal tribe in mid-1789.

Bennelong was then captured for the same purpose in 1790. **Bennelong** was however smart and clever enough to escape from the clutches of the English after six months and he made good with "a smattering of English, a love of wine and fund of stories", (Aboriginal Australia, R Broome, p, 27). **Permulwoy** on the other hand played a different role in the history of Aboriginal culture. As European settlement spread through the island continent, so did the violence. We have to remember that Australia was not a "terra nullis" when Governor Phillips landed in 1788, (it was inhabited by the indigenous population later termed Aborigines). By the late 1790s, the Hawksbury River area, eighty kilometers north west of Sydney, supported over four hundred Europeans who were mainly farmers and agriculturalists. These Europeans "farmed on both sides of the rich river flats for a distance of about 50 kilometres". As a result of this several conflicts broke out in the region. "The Aborigines explained to Governor King in 1804 that the settlers' farms blocked their access to the river and thus much of their food supply. When they crossed the farms to get to the river they were fired upon by the settlers who claimed the Aborigines damaged and burned their crops". The Aborigines retaliated against this display of European injustice by forming raiding parties and attacking the Europeans. Of these (so called) marauders was an Aborigine, the Europeans called 'Mosquito', who was captured and transported to Van Diemens's Land (Tasmania). He became a stock worker and then a tracker several years later. He then led the Oyster Bay tribe on one such raid, was captured and finally hanged in 1823. At Toongabbie, west of Sydney, in 1897, **Permulwoy** did the same thing. He led Aboriginal fighters against the soldiers and settlers until he too was eventually shot down. "In ghastly fashion, his severed and pickled head was sent to Sir Joseph Banks in England," (R Broome, p, 29).

We have mentioned these two Aborigines to you to give you an idea of the kind of society that prevailed then, the power struggle and the complexities of politics between the two races. We shall now look at 'Nature and Men' in the next section.

4.2.2 Nature and Men

In New South Wales, the natural background seems to be obliterated by the intrusion of a civilised pattern of life. Nature is here articulated into the artifice of a garden. Laura therefore asks Voss to see the garden of her uncle: "You must see the garden. Uncle has made it his hobby". When Voss asks if they go much into the country, Laura again refers to it in terms of pleasure-trips or picnics: "Not really. Not often. We drive out sometimes for picnics, you know". Here we come across a kind of drawing-room society, gossiping, chatting and absorbed in their world of small interests. But we discover different patterns of nature. In New South Wales, Voss is particularly struck by the growing pleasantness of nature: "It was a gentle, healing landscape in those parts".

Again Sanderson who leads Voss to Rhine Towers is a man of culture. Though he is secluded from the artificial pageantry of civilised life, he remains absorbed in his own world of contemplation: "They [Sanderson and his wife] had whole row of books, bound in leather, and were for ever developing them". Let us now take a brief look at 'Nature at Jildra'.

4.2.3 Nature in Jildra

At Jildra, nature becomes a dry and perched. "By now the tall grass was almost dry, so that there issued from it a sharper sighing when the wind blew". But nature here expands into something vast, mysterious and secretive. It appears to be a "flat country of secret colours": their figures look small and the horses become almost children's ponies, when they are fore grounded against the background of vast nature. Here light explodes and breaks "into flashes of clattering, shrieking, white and sulpher light"; and trees, too, were but illusory substance, for they would quickly turn to shadow, which is another shape of ever-protean light". The seasonal cycle in the novel develops a pattern of linear extremity. It starts with the spring. Thus Patrick

White describes. "One evening that spring when the street was already dissolving, and amiable pedestrians were calling to one another in friendship." But there is a distinctive change in the seasonal impression, as the explorers leave Jildra: "They had entered, as it happened, a valley sculptured in red rock and quart.' As they proceed further, they begin to be swept by intermittent showers of rain. In this context, we may also consider a significant topographical design. The story begins at New South Wales, which represents an apparently semi-urban civilised society with the Bonner family at the centre of the fictive design. We depart with Voss and his party to proceed towards New Castle and then to Jildra. Finally we are led into the arid topography of the continent. Moreover the journey by the ship Osprey is also briefly padded into the design. There are, therefore, three different topographical perspectives land, water, and the desert. These three topographical variables create a triune perspective that creates a sense of integrated totality.

In the next section, we shall look at the 'Problem of Identity' and examine the various problems emerging from this crucial notion of 'identity'.

4.3 PROBLEM OF IDENTITY

What do we really mean by identity? Identity means an assertion of the individual self. But this sense of identity comes to assume a greater significance only when it is studied in relation to its immediate context. In Australia this sense of identity should be examined with reference to the settlers. But their sense of identity becomes meaningful when their relation with the land is appropriately substantiated. Keeping this in mind we shall now look at the settlers of New South Wales and their problems with identity.

4.3.1 Settlers of New South Wales and their Reactions

The problem with the settlers of New South Wales is that they do not comprehend the nature of their identity. As the novel begins, the settlers show an inexplicable aversion to this country. Laura says to Radclyffe: "It is not my country, although I have lived in it". Le Measurier considers it to be a "damned country" and seeks to discover the real purpose of Voss. It seems to be a country where certain people come to make a fortune. Laura points out: "He does not intend to make a fortune out of this country, like other men". But still for Belle it seems rather outrageous to go far into the country for an exploration which is uncertain and disastrous: "I would not like to ride very far into it, and meet a lot of blacks, and deserts, and rocks, and skeletons, they say, of men that have died". Mr. Bonner is all the more forthright: "Everyone is still afraid, or most of us, of this country, and will not say it. We are not yet possessed of understanding". The basic inadequacy of their argument is that they examine this land absolutely in physical terms. Even when Mr. Bonner feels enthusiastic about this country in relation to their identity, he looks at it purely from the standpoint of administrative machinery which is for him imperative of progress and identity: " We have only to consider the progress we have made. Look at our homes and public edifices. Look at the devotion of our administrators, and the solid achievement of those men who are settling the land". In contrast to the problems faced by the settlers of New South Wales, is our protagonist, Voss. Let us now examine Voss and his sense identity.

4.3.2 Voss and his Sense of Identity

Voss's journey is not merely an explorer's adventurism. It is perhaps a quest for determining the nature of individual identity in a strange land. In endeavouring to explore this country, Voss and his team - mates begin to determine their identity within a particular framework of contextuality. The entire process of the journey

becomes in effect a linear progression into the psyche – a journey towards the self. But the question of identity may be properly ascertained with reference to the sense of totality. While the settlers themselves feel distanced from the spirit of the country, Voss even though an explorer may be identified with this land. While Radclyffe says that the country does not belong to Voss, Laura affirms: "It is his by right of vision". It is only this right of vision that generates identification with the land. Thus the unknown strange land that Voss undertakes to explore becomes incarnate in the personality of Voss. Laura therefore ecstatically says: "I am fascinated by you. You are my desert". This right of vision accelerates a greater perception of the country and its inhabitants. Though the whites living in New South Wales are firmly established in this country, they are culturally as well as psychologically distanced from it. They have come here either as free settlers or as convicts; hence, proper assimilation into its culture is yet to be achieved. Though settled in Australia, the country they have left still lurks in the background. Their basic inadequacies lie in their attempt to discover in Australia those value-systems they have left in England. They forget that England is their past and it is part of their memory but Australia is their present and it forms the total perception of their immediate reality. Therefore Laura's proud claim "I was born in England" seems to be self-defeating. But Australia is the governing symbol that exists as a form of strange timelessness. The final phase of Voss's journey is only apparently racist; but there is an inner layer of ritualism. The surface pattern of the journey projects a confrontation between the whites and the blacks. The blacks again and again interrupt and disturb the explorers. They steal their compass, their cattle and finally they take away Judd and Voss; and they kill Voss. The killing of the horse, the reference to the snake-king – all seem to be part of a ritualistic performance through which Voss ultimately comes to be amalgamated into the original native perspective of the land. Perhaps there is a suggestion of total self-extinction through which one can be absorbed into the land's native purity. Thus even before his death, he can perceive the archetypal pattern of native life: "The men had painted their bodies with the warm colours of the earth they knew totem by totem, and which had prevailed at last over the cold, nebulous country of the stars". Having looked at Voss's sense of identity let us now take a quick look Laura's dilemma.

4.3.3. Laura's Sense of Identity

Laura initially strikes us as a quiet, silent and reserved woman largely absorbed in her own world of mystical meditation. But gradually she is drawn to this search for identity. Laura seems to be a paradigm of waiting, but this particular aspect of her character is distinctively related to the central theme of identity. Living within the closed framework of civilised pattern, she almost runs co-extensive with Voss's journey. Thus even in the course of Voss's journey where she is not physically present, she appears and disappears in terms of Voss's mystic vision. She spiritually accompanies Voss and continues to be an inevitable part of the journey. Though she in fact remains confined to the concrete world of New South Wales, she undergoes a metaphysical experience of being transported to the world of Voss. It is through such experiences that she begins to be identified with the Australian world. She also becomes gradually entangled with Rose's psychic struggle in relation to her pregnancy. The entire household develops a sense of hatred against Rose. Mrs. Bonner particularly finds it extremely disturbing. But Laura becomes sympathetically associated with Rose. The birth of Rose's child and Laura's determination to protect the child after Rose's sudden death may be read as a distinctive symbol. The child is an Australian in its true sense of the term. All the characters presented here are mostly foreigners settled in Australia. Naturally they are implanted in this country and they have no indigenous claim on this country. But this child is born in Australia and it really symbolises the making of a country and foreshadows the Australian dream.

For Laura, it is perhaps the future – the determined future of a generation that properly belongs to this country, born and brought up in a country that they would

love. Thus Laura indirectly contributes to the specific theme of identity. It is therefore no more a strange land. She also indirectly partakes of Voss's crisis during the journey. The mysterious fever running alongside Voss's crisis in the journey may naturally be read as a symbolic correlation. How can we interpret this mysterious fever that grips Laura? Should it be merely taken as a physical illness? Maybe not! The co-extension of Voss's crisis leading to his death and Laura's illness may be considered as a telepathic relationship. It is this characteristic relationship that helps them to discover their own identity in the context of this mysterious land. In this way Laura progresses towards self-knowledge. In the beginning of the novel, she appears a woman absolutely dispassionate about Australia. But gradually she unlearns her earlier preconceived ideas and learns to perceive the true essence of the land. This permeates through her being and she considers Voss not as a concrete being but as a part of Australian history. Perhaps she recognises herself as a significant witness to this great event.

4.3.4 Theme of Suffering in *Voss*

In the epigraph to his first novel, *The Happy Valley,* Patrick White used a quotation from Mahatma Gandhi: " It is impossible to do away with the law of suffering, which is the one indispensable condition of our being. Progress is to be measured by the amount of suffering undergone... the purer the suffering, the greater the suffering, " (David Marr, p, 311). This quotation implies his assertion of suffering as a distinctive element in his novels. *Voss* particularly substantiates the nature of intense suffering. Though it fictionalises the story of a megalomaniac explorer, yet the major concern of the novel seems to be the complex virtue of suffering. David Marr in his biography of Patrick White has tried to relate this question of suffering with the novelist's personal life. He therefore comments: " White saw himself as a sufferer: as an asthmatic, homosexual, foreigner and artist." But he was at the same time aware of the fact that he had never been exposed to the worst misery: poverty. Moreover his intense friendship with Lascaris saved him from absolute loneliness. But Patrick White considered suffering as a constructive and positive principle of life. David Marr comments once again: "Yet he saw suffering as a force in his life, making him what he was, making us as we are. For White, pain is a force of history, shaping men and events". White once said: "I have always found in my own case that something positive, either creative or moral, has come out of anything I have experienced in the way of affliction". As Marr points out, "behind the suffering of Johann Ulrich Voss, in the Australian desert lay the pain White experienced writing *The Tree of Man.* Both men were explorers: Voss on horseback, crossing the continent and White at his desk trying to fill the immense void of Australia."

Voss's journey across the desert is also a progress through suffering. He tries to explore the nature of the void present in Australia. In other words, he investigates the true spirit of the infinite. But this quest involves a series of suffering experienced in his inner self. As a result of his journey, he seems to be submerged in a sea of futility. He suffers from the pain of unrequited love. Voss suffers from unrequited love in the sense that he proposes to Laura through a letter wherein he writes, "I have ever been aware of your friendliness, and since interest in our welfare, as well as the great value I myself place upon our connexion, however, slight this may present itself at first, and subordinate in the plan of life that fate has prepared for each of us." He also goes on to say, "... In the mean time, also, I would ask your allowance that I may write to your Uncle, Mr. Bonner, with necessary formality, for your hand," (Chapter 6). But he is able to confess his feelings for her and to write to her about this only when he is already at Rhine Towers. Laura responds by saying that she is "temporarily confused: and wonders whether "two such faulty beings (can) endure to face each other, almost as in a looking-glass? Have you forseen the possible outcome? And have you not, perhaps, mistaken a critical monster for a complaint mouse?" She concludes by saying that they "may pray together for salvation" and that she "shall intercede as ever" for his " safety and your (his) happiness," (Chapter 8). It is only after this exchange of letters that they begin to feel each other's presence and are united in

spirit though miles apart. But we know (after having read the novel) that they will never really meet each other again and that Voss will die eventually in the great Australian deserts. In his letters to Laura he mentions their love for each other saying, "That we should love each other, Laura, does at last appear inevitable and fitting, as I sit here alone in this immense country." He also refers to her as his wife, "Do I take too much for granted my dearest wife?" he thinks that distance has in fact brought them closer. He writes again, "you see that separation has brought us far, far closer Could we perhaps converse with each other at last, expressing inexpressible ideas with simple words?" He concludes by saying, "I send you my wishes, and venture by now also to include my love, since distance has united us thus closely. This is the true marriage, I know. We have wrestled with the gristle and the bones before daring to assume the flesh," (chapter 8). But Laura does not receive this letter. We will not go into details on why this unfortunate incident takes place. Instead we shall move on to discuss the dissension within the party that Voss suffers from. The dissension within Voss's group occurs soon after the strong currents in the river wash the raft with their supplies away. We do know that Voss is aware of the fragmentation that is about to occur when he asks Palfrey,

" I want you to be candid with me. Are you of Judd's party?"
" Of Judd's party?"
"Yes. Judd is forming a party, which will start off from me sooner or later."
"I will not split off," said Palfreyman, sadly. "I am not of any party."

The discontentment and anger finally leads to a confrontation between Voss and Judd with Judd saying that he is no longer under the leadership of Voss and that he wishes to go home leading, "anybody that is of like mind". Except for Jackie, the "black fellow", Le Mesurier, Harry Robarts and Voss, the rest of the party turn around and try to go back home, Palfreyman has however died during the course of the dissension and is spared the decision of continuing with Voss or turning back. We are aware of the fate that befalls the dissenters and Voss's party too. Voss also suffers as a result of the lack of faith between the whites and the indigenous aborigines of Australia as Jackie betrays them. The Aborigines capture Voss and his party, Le Mesurier cannot take the tension of impending doom and rather than die in the hands of the Aborigines, he slits his throat and kills himself. Jackie has turned traitor and the only people now left are Harry and Voss. Harry dies while a captive and his putrefying body is thrown into a canal while the Aborigines sing a weird song, and Voss has to await death. Jackie is chosen to kill Voss and the boy, "was stabbing, and sawing, and cutting, and breaking with all his increasing, but confused manhood, above all breaking... When Jackie had got the head off, he ran outside followed by the witnesses, and flung the thing at the feet of the elders..." The other members of the party that had deflected too suffer in the midst of the vast desert and die eventually. Both Jackie and old Dugald epitomise the lack of faith between Voss and the Aborigines that Voss suffers from. But, as David Marr points out, "through his suffering in the desert, Voss conquered his pride." With the extinction of self-pride, he comes to achieve self-knowledge through suffering. This idea of suffering brings us closer to the Christian principle of self- knowledge. Thus Laura says: "perhaps true knowledge only comes of death by torture in the country of the mind."

4.3.5 Religion in *Voss*

Patrick White's works are generally accepted as "marking a new departure in its concentration on the inner spiritual crisis and in individual religious experience", (Dorothy Green). His works are pervaded by Christian imagery and explore the various dimensions of the (Christian) doctrines of Grace and Salvation. Moreover as Amos Wilder and Charles Glicksbury comment, he realised the fact "that to be meaningful and relevant in the context of the contemporary world, the religious stance must necessitate an involvement with, not a withdrawal from the realities of ordinary human existence". So what Patrick White did was preach not any coherent set of orthodox doctrines but belief in the existence of a transcendental order that

more or less impinges directly on the life and destiny of the individual human being who must therefore work out a satisfactory relationship with and adjustment to that order. That is evident in our very own novel *Voss* as well. The religious spirit that exists in *Voss* (in keeping with that in his other novels) is also very responsive to nature, - the birds, beasts and flowers as also to the world of other fellow human beings. White has the unique capacity to draw imagery from the natural world and then to use that to dramatise his transcendental vision that once again reinstates the sense of its significance to the religious spirit. So what we have here is a professed religious order that is extremely responsive to nature and that which creates a religios order / vision with its imagery, while at the same time, creating the magic of the religious vision. We shall not go into too many details here. Just as in the previous section we did not go into details on the *theme of suffering*, we shall not try and analyse the minute details on religion in *Voss* too. What we shall do at this stage is to give you a line of thought that will make you question what you have read in the novel and try and analyse it, so that a clearer picture emerges before your eyes and the words on a page are not just words but have a story to tell. We also know that at this stage of our discussion on *Voss*, you are equipped to do some thinking for yourselves. Having said this we shall continue with our next and last unit of this Block.

4.5 LET US SUM UP

In this Unit, we looked at two significant aspects of the novel. It must be remembered that this novel is history as well as fiction. At the fictional level, we may locate a distinct pattern of story telling, making use of all kinds of usual characteristic components. But it also conceals a pattern of history. Patrick White has carefully historicised Australian nature and shows man's heroic struggle with this unfavourable topography. Again in the process of this struggle, he comes to rediscover himself. The distinctiveness of this land helps him to identify himself. In this way, a true perspective of history has been created in *Voss*.

4.6 GLOSSARY

Indigenous: It refers to the native, aboriginal people and their culture

Topography: Detailed description, representation of natural features of a land.

4.7 QUESTIONS

1. How does nature and men confront and coalesce in Patrick White *Voss?*

2. Do you think that the problem of identity in Patrick White's *Voss* foregrounds a more important question of self-discovery?

UNIT 5 MODERN READINGS: SOME IMPORTANT AREAS

Structure

5.0 Objectives
5.1 Introduction
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5.0 OBJECTIVES

In the earlier Units, we have covered most of the important components with reference to Patrick White's *Voss*. In this Unit, we would like to introduce to you some modernist and postmodernist methods to arrive at a larger understanding of this novel. As we belong to the postmodernist era, it is necessary for us to judge this novel from a postmodernist critical point of view. You are already familiar with terms like 'modernism', 'postmodernism', 'deconstruction' etc., having studied these critical theories in your Literary Theory and Criticism course (MEG 05). In this unit, we shall **firstly**, define 'modernism' and 'postmodernism' and **then** analyse the text using one of these critical approaches. Let us begin with the introduction.

5.1 INTRODUCTION

One of the essential methods of postmodern critical analysis is to deconstruct the codified levels of meaning. In this unit, we shall therefore consider some of the ways and means by which to examine the novel from many different angles. With the arrival of **Derrida** and **Paul de Man** on the philosophical as well as literary scene, many revolutionary changes in the methodology of literary analysis took place. This led to the subversion of the fixed code of meanings and encouraged a multiplicity of interpretation. This widening vista of interpretation will be evident in the following analysis. Let us look at the terms 'modernism' and 'postmodernism' before we go any further.

5.2 MODERN AND POSTMODERN READINGS

Before we begin one important question should be clear to us: **what is modern and what is postmodern?** Modernism is a refusal to accept the **traditional** patterns of thought. This element of critical denial of traditionality and the opting for experimentation comes to be strengthened especially **after the two World Wars**. This

naturally gave way to multiple forms of experiments in the fields of literature, philosophy and science. But in the 70s, we once again confront a critical shift in both the literary and philosophical circles. The critical thinkers are no longer content with modernist explorations. Postmodern critics attempt to subvert the rigid canons and formulate open-ended discussions on literature, philosophy, politics, sociology and so on. These critical approaches may also be applied to Patrick White's *Voss*. We may for instance, deconstruct *Voss* by analysing the novel in the manner given below. Many critics have called *Voss* a book of epic stature. Let us look at *Voss* from this point of view and discern whether or not it is fit to be called an Epic.

5.2.1 Characteristics of an Epic

Before we begin with the epic components of *Voss*, we shall try to formulate the distinguishing features of an epic. M H Abrams (in *A Glossary of Literary Terms*) has given us a relatively good idea of what an epic is. In the **first place**, an epic presents a great hero and his heroic deeds. Thus Achilles in Homer's *Iliad* is the mainstay of the Greek camp in the great battle against the Trojans. Thus Odysseus in the *Odyssey*, Beowulf in *Beowulf* or Rama in the *Ramayan* are some of the splendid prototypes of heroic figures. **Secondly**, the setting of an epic should be vast. Abrams in this context gives some examples: "Odysseus wanders over the Mediterranean basin", again Virgil's hero Aeneas (Aeneid) descends into the underworld. Milton's *Paradise Lost* covers a wide range of Heaven, Earth and Hell. **Thirdly**, the epic poet presents the superhuman deeds of the hero. Thus in Homer's *Iliad*, we come across the great deeds of Achilles in the Trojan War. In the *Odyssey* we come across the adventurous wanderings of Odysseus. In *Paradise Lost*, Milton describes the rebel angels against God and Satan's final attempt to corrupt mankind. **Fourthly**, an epic always concentrates on supernatural beings for instance we, find the Olympian Gods in Homer's epic, God, Christ the and the angels in *Paradise Lost*. In this way, the epic poet makes use of the divine machinery (*deus ex machina*), meaning thereby that gods come down to take part in human action. **Finally**, the epic poet makes use of a grand writing style. In other words, elevated or high style is used to bring grandeur to the subject of the epic. Having said this, let us try and compare Patrick White's *Voss* with Homer's *Iliad*.

5.2.2 Epic Components

Voss is supposed to be based on the true record of Ludwig Leichhardt who died in the Australian desert in 1848. In this novel, White has presented a mysterious German figure who, attempts to overreach the untoward circumstances of life by trying to cross the Australian continent for the first time. It has been sometimes interpreted as a novel with a significant epical dimension. In fact, traditional epic properties put forward in the context of a modern design may be found in many different forms of creative activity. It is possible to locate certain proximate patterns of parallelism between the traditional epics of Homer and Patrick White's *Voss*. It may be pertinent, therefore, to chart out the points of parallelism:

Iliad	***Voss***
1. Assembly of the Achaean Soldiers	1. Voss's collection of certain adventures.
2. Vastness of the epic battle	2. Vastness of the journey
3. Difference between Achilles and Agamemnon	3. Difference between Voss and Turner.
4. Achilles' withdrawal with the Myrmidons	4. Withdrawal of Turner and others with Judd as the leader

5. Laocoon and the snake signifying a decisive finality	5. The great snake and Voss
6. Final pessimism in death and destruction.	6. Finality reached through a series of deaths.

5.2.3 Text and Meaning

Based on these six points of parallelism, we may analyse *Voss* as a modern day epic and discern the probability or lack in it. Let us look at textuality in the next section. The idea of meaning is almost coterminous with knowledge. For the science of meaning itself signifies a system of knowledge. The modern quest for knowledge begins to take shape in a different direction with **Edmund Husserl's** phenomenological philosophy that considers the world as a reflection of consciousness; and speech has an expression of absolute meanings that exist separately from language. **Husserl's phenomenology** holds further that pure meaning exists first as a pre-verbal transcendental signified and then finds expression through the human voice.

But this critical position is challenged by **Jacques Derrida's** notion of **deconstruction** that stands firmly against Husserl's critical principle in so far as Derrida questions the latter's belief in the pre-linguistic absolute meaning. Derrida finds a difference or division within the sign between its two aspects. In other words, he discovers an infinite range of variables in the interrelation of the signifier and the signified. He believes that the signifier could suggest a large number of possible signifieds. Thus Derrida's post-structuralist notion of deconstruction finds fault with the absolute notion that confines meaning to a limited boundary. Derrida visualises, an open-ended, infinite possibility of meaning that opens up an appropriate perspective of modern explication

Patrick White's *Voss* may conform to a deconstructive pattern through a large number of explications intended in the text. He has, therefore, marked a sharp break from the traditional story arrangement and contrasted a terrible expedition with the normative design of life. Again frequent intrusion of visions and telepathic correlation presents a collapse of traditional realism. If we prepare a gist of the story pattern, it will appear surprisingly slight. We come across Voss, the German explorer, at the house of Mr. Bonner who is there with the explicit purpose of crossing the Australian continent. Here he collects fellow-adventurers, develops a mutual feeling of love with Laura and makes for the disastrous journey. Then follows an alternate pattern of Voss's progress and the reactions in the house of Mr. Bonner, with a distinct emphasis on Laura's lovelorn waiting. It ends with the creation of a chasm within the party and the consequent death of Voss and the others in the desert. Things are rounded off with the discovery of the mysterious conditions of Voss's death and Laura's prospective hopefulness. Voss has been presented as a figure that stands opposed to steadfast, fixed meanings. He in fact considers the deconstructive method of destroying limitations of meaning. When Mr. Bonner seems doubtful of the results of the expedition and asks: "You are aware, I should say, what it could mean?" Voss replies: "If we could compare meanings, we would arrive perhaps at different conclusions". Even the figure of Voss himself is deconstructed by means of the interactions of the other characters. When he refuses to dine with the Bonners, different perspectives of the man come to the surface:

"A rude man", saw Mr. Bonner. "A foreigner", saw the P.s. and "someone to whom I am completely indifferent," saw Laura Trevelyan.

Even in matters of primary discussions on the mapping of the journey, there is an emphasis on open-ended indeterminacy. When Voss's team-mates try to present a slapdash dependence on a fixed purpose, Le Mesurier ironically says: "Purpose? So far, no purpose." But Voss perfectly realises the nature of variability. He therefore

says: " I would be purposeless in this same sea". Again Le Mesurier asks about the time to be covered by this expedition. But Voss rejects any formulaic codification: "One month. Two months. It is not yet decided". The moment of their journey in a ship has also been conceived in terms of multiple reactions from the standpoint of involved spectators. Voss and the party set sail in a ship called Osprey that has become almost a symbol of a microcosmic world proceeding towards a strange, infinite, macrocosm. The entire picture, once again comes to be deconstructed through the varying attitudes of three women. For Laura, it is an escape out into a broad prospective world: "Yes, they have got away". Rose Portion feels inclined to pray for the explorers: "Oh, I will pray for them". Belle suddenly waxes eloquent on Palfreyman's nicety, quietitude and kindness. But such scattered, disjointed opinions are merged into a deep sense of melancholia. Thus the essential impact finally yields a larger dimension of inexplicable sadness: "Their bodies shivered in their thin gowns: their minds were exposed to the keenest barbs of thought; and the whole scene that their vision embraced became distinct and dancing beautiful but sad".

The cave experience of the explorers (Chapter 10) points to the range of flexible variables present in the novel. The cave with its rock drawings not only indicates a sense of shelter but a sense of mysterious interior that creates a design out of an apparent formlessness. But the experiential mode of all this has been deconstructed by the interpretive variety of the reactions: "The simplicity and truthfulness of the symbol was at times terribly apparent, to the extent that each man interpreted them according to his own needs and level". But the deconstructive variants finally lead up to a foreshadowing of Voss's death at the end. The picture in the cave, therefore, seems to point at a linear, teleological movement: "See, this man is going to die. They have gone in at the back through the shoulder-blades".

5.3 INNER MOVEMENTS

Yet another way of deconstructing the novel would be by analysing the two unities of time and place/space. Let us see how time and place/space are measured in the novel.

5.3.1 Idea of Time

The idea of time and space relationship is a significant contributing factor to the complexity of the novel. In *Voss* we are often led to look backward and forward—backward to the past and forward to the future. This movement of time naturally coalesces with the progress in space. It can be said to approximate a linear design that implicates the idea of the present through a demonstration of the past and the future. Consider, for instance, the first meeting of Voss and Laura. After initial formalities, both of them refer themselves to the past. Laura finds herself "threatening to disintegrate into the voices of the past". The stray, half-forgotten, silhouetted moments of past establish a new meaning of their essential existence. Finally Laura's invitation to see the garden (Chapter1) foreshadows the garden incident when they come to be co-sharers in the participation of mutual love (Chapter 4). The garden episode in its turn transcends the limited unit of time to move forward to a vision of the future. Laura and Voss are " faced with a great gap to fill, of space, and time". They come to discover that " future is will". The consciousness of future again and again torments them because of its uncertainty and mystery. Laura comes to be saddled with the pressure of an internal indecision: "The future? Laura Trevelyan could not bear to think of it, even though the present, through which the riding party moved, was still to some extent on unpleasant dream." The entire novel seeks to grasp the phases of past and future that finally conduce to an epistemological understanding of life and existence. This explains the pithy conversation between Mr. Ludlow and Laura. When Ludlow asks: "When does the future become present?" Laura curtly responds: "Now". Ludlow is extremely puzzled and Laura

explains: "Every moment that we live and breathe, and love, and suffer and die". Ludlow tries to concretise it with reference to Voss's death. But Laura goes beyond the limited frontier and strongly affirms a linear prospective ideal of life: "Voss did not die. He is there still, it is said, in the country, and always will be".

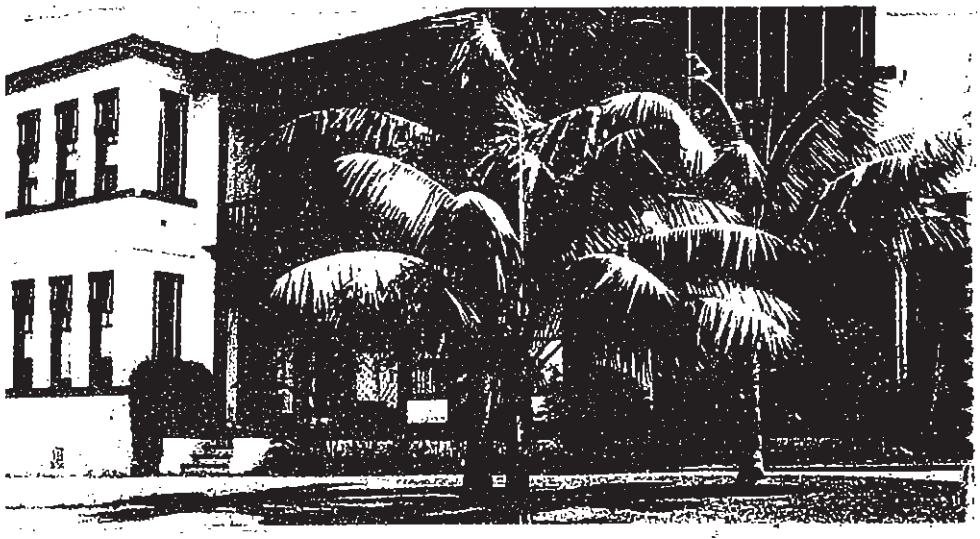
5.3.2 Dreams and Visions

The recurrence of dreams and visions shall be analysed in this section. There is also a co-extensive pattern of dreams, visions, hallucination and even primitive cults that unravel a complex design of thought. In fact the pattern of realism is interrupted by moments of extra-realistic visualisation. Palfreyman's precise reaction to the sailor's inexplicable story of guilt and romance perhaps sums up the entire idea: "You wished to live what you dreamed" (Chapter 5). But dreams often take the shape of visions and hallucination. When Osprey sets sail, Laura is absorbed in a persistent pattern of dream and sees the vision of the "whole rows of sailors' blackened teeth gaping from a gunnel" (Chapter 5). Again during the mystical experience in the cave, the image of the snake ritual comes to the forefront. The black fellow therefore refers to the King Snake that is the symbol of the father figure: "Father, my Father, all black feller" (Chapter 10). It is the Snake King that visits Le Mesurier in his dream. He finds himself wrestling with the "great snake, his king, the divine powers of which were not disguised by the earth colours of its scales" (Chapter 10). The ominous vision of the snake is concretised towards the end of the novel when Voss stoically waits for the final moment of death. Jackie enacts the story of the Great Snake and Voss anticipates the gradual progress towards death (Chapter 13).

This has been again curiously mixed up, through an inexplicable suggestion, with Laura's mysterious fever. There is a sporadic assemblage of cult-tokens like dew - gathering, the snake symbols, the appearance of a comet and the " odious pears" which foreshadow a seminal crisis. However, the crisis of Voss through a division in the party and his approaching death in the hands of Jackie is paralleled by Laura's crisis explicit through her undiagnosed mysterious fever. This finally reaches a level of mystical experience when Laura in a sort of delirious dream promises to Voss: " I shall not fail you" (Chapter 13). This comes to be alternately repeated in Voss's vision of Laura and it is further mystified when he visualises Laura's sickness, her strangeness and beauty: " Then he looked at her, and saw that they had cut off her hair, and below the surprising stubble that remained, they had pared the flesh from her face. She was now quite naked and beautiful" (Chapter 13).

5.3.3 Biography And Fiction: Some Comments

Often, there is a merging of lines where fact and fiction are concerned. Some critics have tried to discern traces of Patrick White's life in *Voss*. On the surface of it, it appears that Voss is the explorer trying to discover the mysterious interiors of the heart of Australia. But it could just as easily be looked at as a philosophical search for the infinite. To that extent, *Voss* seems to represent Patrick White's frame of mind. In Voss (the person/ character) we may also locate his maker who has always attempted to explore the mysterious zones of human existence. David Marr (White's biographer) has tried to establish biographical interconnections between Voss (the character) and Patrick White (the writer). Thus he suggests that Laura Trevelyan and her cousin Belle Bonner are modeled largely on White's "memories of the Ebbsworth children". The Ebbsworth family were linked with the White family through marital relations. Of the three Ebbsworth daughters: Mary, Elaine and Isabelle – Mary and Isabelle have been merged to create the character of Belle Bonner. Patrick White was deeply impressed by the deep and sensitive mind of Isabelle that he based Laura Trevelyan's character on her. David Marr writes: "From their older sister Isabelle, the boy sensed a measure of intuitive sympathy. This became the core of Laura Trevelyan's character. Isabelle was years older than the twins (Mary and Elaine), intense, and with a face of great interest," (David Marr, pp. 314-315).



White's childhood home at Lulworth, the source of all his Harbour houses with buffalo lawns, palms and wild gardens

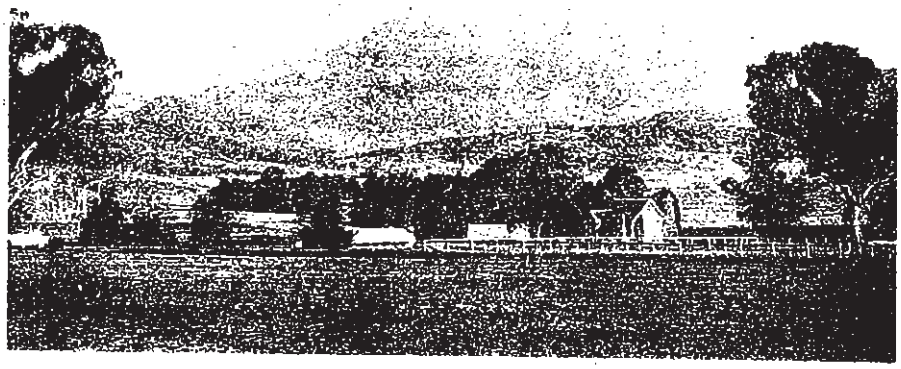
Moreover, Mr Bonner's homestead is largely reminiscent of White's childhood home at Lulworth. Marr comments: "As he was writing *Voss*, White drew deeply for the first time from the history of his own family. Mr Bonner, patron of the expedition, lives in a house with Lulworth's dark gardens overlooking a rushy marsh on the edge of a Harbour. There is a bunya bunya on the drive. The house is a wilderness of mahogany and Bonner's study (was) like Dick's room at the end of the verandah..." (David Marr, p.315). Again the landscape of Voss's journey from the Hunter to Rhine Towers largely resembles Belltrees in its placid, innocent days.



Memories of Belltrees are strong in *Voss*

In the early days of settlement of the Whites in Australia, James White (the brother of Patrick White's grandfather Frank, at the age of twenty), got the land of Belltrees on lease from an ex-democrat called William Charles Wentworth in 1848. Thus the backdrop of Belltreees is detectable throughout the novel. Moreover in the novel, we find that when Voss reaches Jildra, the description of the topography seems to be based on Patrick White's memories of Brenda. It was, as David Marr points out, "the station over the Queensland border to which he had driven with his uncle, where they woke at dawn to the sound of the birds and black servants padding about in bare feet." It has been further suggested that Patrick White was immensely impressed and influenced by the exhibition of the outback paintings of Sidney Nolan in March 1949

and March 1950. These paintings became useful in creating an imaginative experience for the author, especially in his projection of the landscape of the desert. David Marr writes, "years after these exhibitions, he told the painter how he felt they had both been exploring the same territory, and expressed what they found in the same way. So he asked Nolan to do the jacket for *Voss*, " (David Marr, p. 316).



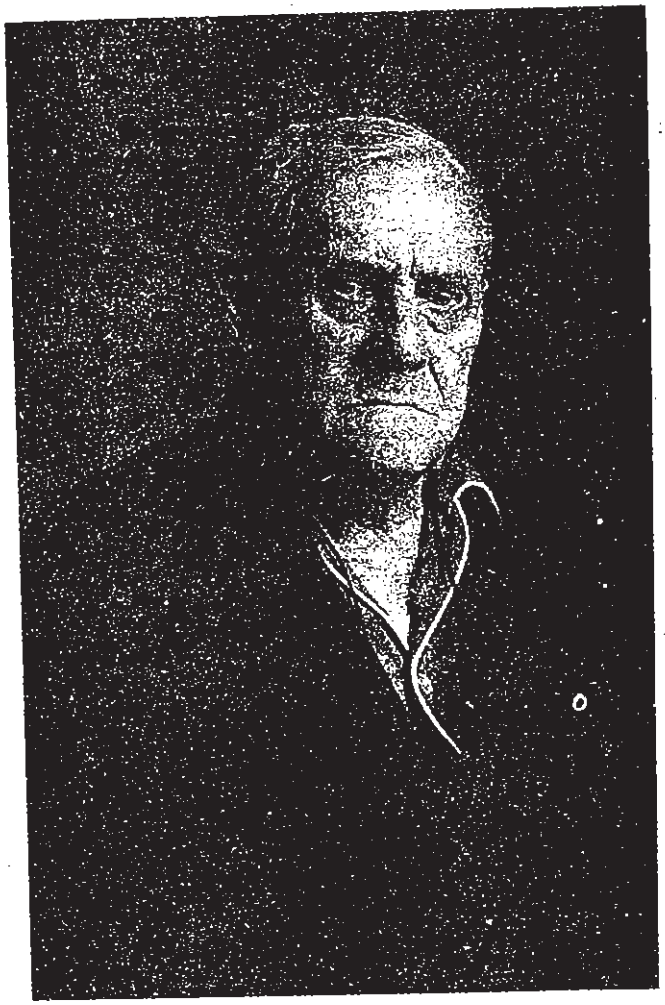
The valley at Belltrees looking east past the chapel to Mount Woolsoma

5.4 LET US SUM UP

White's novel, thus deconstructed, should however lead up to a significant conclusion. Deconstruction expands, through a presentation of a large number of un-codified variables, the perception of knowledge. This central force is also at work through the hermeneutics of signifieds. Thus Voss is sometimes an ordinary man, sometimes a foreigner, sometimes a leader, and sometimes a god. Laura is also a woman, an intellectualised idea, even a dream. These variables are posited in terms of a number of relationships. The journey that Voss undertakes and the inner development of Laura finally yield a process of gradual transition from being to becoming. In the garden episode (Chapter 4), Laura simply looks upon herself and Voss as floundering "into each other's private beings". But this shades off into an acceptance of life as a continuum that grows, develops and finally embraces the finality of life. Thus during the cave experience, Voss states: "The mystery of life is not solved by success, which is an end in itself, but in failure, in perpetual struggle, in becoming" (Chapter 10). It is this process of becoming that turns Voss's journey into a quest, into a myth, and makes him a part of legends and history. Thus Colonel Hebden says: "Mr Voss is already history" (Chapter 14). This makes Voss an idea, enwrapped in an inscrutable mystery. The people are all curious and keen to find out the concrete reality about Voss's end. Thus Dugald and Boyle question the black fellow in an effort to know the truth. The Colonel also continues his search for the truth. Finally Judd presents the bare truth of his death.

But it does not remain confined merely to an area of information; rather it becomes a part of the cognitive pattern of knowledge. Earlier in the novel, Voss had already underlined this principle of knowledge in his own mystical way: "Perhaps true knowledge only comes of death by torture in the country of the mind". Laura comes to visualise the ultimate meaning of an abstraction, of a man turning into an idea. She therefore says: "Voss did not die. He is there still, it is said, in the country, and always will be. His legend will be written down, eventually by those who have been troubled by it" (Chapter 16). This rightly affirms the development from being to becoming.

We have come to the end of our block. We hope we have been successful in our attempt to trace the development of the modern Australian novel, analyse the novel and place Patrick White within the socio-cultural milieu of his times.



White, back in hospital in 1985 facing an uncertain future

5.5 GLOSSARY

Canon: General standard or principle by which a work of art is judged.

Deconstruction: It is the most popular critical term in the postmodernist school of thought. It rejects the fixed code of meaning and accepts flexibility or interpretations. Derrida is the chief exponent of this school of criticism.

Derrida: Jacques Derrida is a French philosopher who read a paper entitled "Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences," in 1966 at an international colloquium at John Hopkins University in Baltimore. He attacked the pretensions of the structuralists and set in motion the deconstruction movement.

Paul de Man: Paul de Mann was a Belgian who migrated to the United States of America and studied

at Harvard University. He became Professor of Comparative Literature at Yale University in 1971. He was instrumental in propagating the philosophy of Derrida.

Subversion: It is a process of destroying the established beliefs and opinions. This critical principle is largely used in the postmodernist analysis of literature.

5.6 QUESTIONS

1. How would you consider the different levels of meaning in Patrick White's *Voss*?
2. How does Patrick White project the movements of time in *Voss*?
3. How does Patrick White present the interweaving of dream and visions in his *Voss*? Discuss.

5.7 SUGGESTED READING

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