

# **A Career in Writing**

## **Judah Waten and the Cultural Politics of a Literary Career**

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## Introduction

Judah Waten's achievement as a writer is a modest one and yet, in a number of ways, it is also peculiarly significant. His reputation is based largely on *Alien Son*, his first book, indeed on a small number of its stories which have caught the eye of anthologists. Waten himself was modest about his literary talents even while he thought his literary work was the most important thing he could be doing. He described himself as a clumsy writer, lacking the facility some others possessed, not a "big enough" writer to handle a large number of characters.<sup>1</sup> He is also an unfashionable writer according to the tastes of the last two or three decades. His writing is determinedly realist and suspicious of the power of language to seduce and distract even as it seeks its own seductive voices. Most of his work is now out of print and unread.

Nonetheless Waten's achievement can be seen as "momentous". This has to do both with his subject matter and the timing of his literary career; but his significance cannot be explained merely by the fact that he was, as has often been said, the first to write "from the inside" about non-English-speaking migrants in Australia. Coming first, of itself, tells us little about Waten's continued interest and meaning for Australian literature. Nor is this interest "merely historical". It is a literary interest and thereby also nothing if not historical. As an unlikely comparison we might think of Henry Lawson, another writer whose literary achievement is modest but nonetheless momentous, still capable of affecting what we mean by Australian literature and society.

My interest is in attempting to explain the meaning of Judah Waten's writing for Australian culture — and the meaning of writing in Australia for Judah Waten — through a discussion of his literary career or careers. But the work that follows is not conceived primarily as a single-author study, nor does it attempt an exhaustive textual analysis of an oeuvre, to cite two familiar modes of literary criticism. I would like it to be read as an essay in cultural history instead, a study of the institutions and discourses, the structures and techniques, of meaning making in a given society at a given time; for my purposes, in Australia from the late 1920s to the early 1980s. Of course neither the society nor the time is in fact "given" but is to be constructed discursively from discursively-constructed materials. The writings of Judah Waten and the stages of his literary career provide a focus for the investigation of a series of linked issues for cultural history and for theory.

The guiding question of my argument might be summed up as follows: in what ways was it possible or desirable to write *this* sort of text, to be *this* sort of writer, at this time and in this place? Already the single question begins to multiply

parenthetically into further questions for history and theory. How, for example, are we to define the "place" of Waten's writing — Melbourne, Australia, the Communist Party, international communism, Jewish culture, Australian literature? How does the writing place itself? There will be no single answer defining what I will call below the literary *occasion* (the "time and place") of this writing, not even for a single text let alone across the oeuvre. At each stage the occasion will need to be defined in both very local and international or trans-cultural (multicultural) terms, and as a structure or system of structuring possibilities and constraints. In what ways was it possible to conceive for oneself a career as a writer, a novelist, a "man of letters", an Australian-Jewish writer, a Communist novelist? What difference did it make that one were male, foreign-born, Jewish, communist? Where could such a career actually be pursued? What groups of writers, intellectuals, communists — what cultural formations — existed or could be brought into existence to provide models or means? What forms of publication, publicity and reception were available? What readerships were imaginable?

Such questions pose theoretical issues about the relation between text and context or — since this too easily implies a relation of subject to background or inside to outside — between the institutional and textual dimensions of literary discourse. By institutional I am referring to such aspects of the literary field as the means and protocols of publication, notions of authorship or genre, and cultural formations or "reading formations", all of which govern how texts get to be written and get to be read. By the textual I am referring to the techniques and strategies by which literary narrative (which will be my concern) organises both its literariness and its narrativity, its readability and interpretability. This relationship cannot be figured in terms of inside and outside, for the institutional dimensions will be discovered as textual or narrative effects which in turn will depend for their significance on the institutions governing what counts as literariness, as authorship, as appropriate reading, as a "serious" career in a specific literary system. As John Frow has argued:

The system is ... a normative regime, a semantic code which governs the nature and the limits of literariness and the relations of signification which are socially possible and legitimate for the genres it recognises...

[T]he text and the literary system are defined, given a determinate shape and function, through their relation to the "system of systems" — let us say their interdiscursive relation to other signifying formations and to the institutions and practices in which these are articulated.<sup>2</sup>

It is in articulating this relationship between the textual and institutional dimensions of writing that my interest in theorising the concept of the career arises. Despite its place in biographical studies and some historical work on the rise and fall of the man

of letters, for example, the concept of a career has played only a minor, footnote role in literary hermeneutics and literary history. In much romantic and post-romantic authorial criticism the career is at best something that adheres to the creative self or the creative act only incidentally or retrospectively, as a by-product of the main creative game for which the primary trope is always individuality (even when it is also tradition).<sup>3</sup> Second-rate writers, perhaps, are the ones who have "careers" and so the notion works in weak opposition to the notion of creativity.

My argument is designed to shift the concept of the career from this casual, even disreputable status to a more significant position, as structured and structuring in the very process of writing as well as in the "business" of a writing life. Again the relation between these two cannot be conceived in terms of inside and outside. Hence the double meaning of my title, "a career in writing", which refers to the career *as* a writer and the career actually prosecuted *in* the writing (as well as my own writing of Waten's career). Being a writer also means writing a being as an author, at least where the "author function" matters as it does, above all, in the literary field.

The concept of a career, then, itself has both textual and institutional dimensions and, for analytical purposes, can usefully mediate between the two. In any literary system, any print economy, there will be constraints on the ways it is possible to be a writer (to form a "career in the head", to get published, to get taken seriously). As I argue below, to write is to construct oneself as a writer, to construct a writing or authorial self. This is true in a peculiarly strong form in the literary field within the discourse of authorship which Foucault, and others subsequently, have analysed.<sup>4</sup> Perhaps the point is more accurately expressed by saying that to conceive of oneself as a writer (or man of letters or Party intellectual) is to *take a position*, to stake a claim to a position, within the network of current notions of writer, author, novelist, journalist, intellectual, Australian novelist, communist novelist and so on. The positions are never equal, never equally available, but circulate in an uneven system of differences driven by competing bids for power or authority. Control of the power to bestow or to claim authorship will be one of the stakes in play, and a recurrent concern in my argument will be this issue of cultural authority and authorisation: who is authorised to speak, how is this authority granted, seized or sustained? Just as literary narrators must establish and maintain their authority to narrate on the textual level, so too must authors establish and maintain their authority within the literary/cultural institutions.

To be a writer or, more powerfully, an author is to write in the formation of a career in what will always be a multiple, subtly differentiated, but delimited field of possible writing careers. To write involves situating the text in a particular career

trajectory the possibilities of which will be determined by the other texts and careers circulating in the relevant literary system (and both text and career will attempt to determine what counts as relevant). The writer's own prior texts and careers will be part of what is at stake, part of the structuring context, in any new act of writing; and any new writing which is granted status within the career will work to re-order, to re-write, this prior history.

Writing in this respect is also like capital, to be accumulated and invested in a career, thereby attracting interest which can be re-invested although never without certain risks, costs and responsibilities. In Chapters 4-6 below I examine what was involved for Judah Waten in re-investing his literary capital as an Australian Jewish writer in a career as a communist novelist. By pursuing the notion of a career, however, I am not necessarily interested in the ethical concept of "careerism" (to disdain which is one way of claiming serious literary authorship) nor in questions of motivation or intentionality except in so far as these can be understood as structural effects and as signs within the institutions of literature. Understood in this way, indeed, we need not be shy of pursuing intention and calculation, not on the model of the self finding expression but of positioning within the literary/cultural system.

The positioning which can thus be understood on the institutional level as a "career structure" (and a structuring career) can also be located textually. Here I find it useful to draw on certain developments within narrative theory, in particular the work of Ross Chambers on narrative "self-situation" or "situational self-figuration" and readability.<sup>5</sup> To summarise Chambers' argument in the simplest terms for the moment, each text can be interpreted as attempting, through a variety of means, to determine the conditions of its own readability and thus to situate itself as this rather than that kind of text (to be read in this rather than that way, and with this rather than that kind of effectivity): "textual self-figuration is always situational... it incorporates a model of the relational apparatus, the context of reading, that will produce the text as meaningful".<sup>6</sup>

In *Story and Situation*, in particular, Chambers focuses on the specific narrative strategies — of embedding, intertextuality and specular figuration — whereby this process of self-situation occurs in the readerly text and I have drawn directly on this work in my analysis of Judah Waten's readerly fiction. At the same time I want to emphasise what is already implicit in Chambers' argument, that narrative self-situation always functions at the institutional level. For the text situates itself not (only) in relation to ideal reading situations or to an ideal hierarchy of genres but in the context of local, contemporary, occasional — and therefore political — readings and generic systems which it attempts to anticipate, to determine, to bring into being.

In *Room for Maneuver*, for example, Chambers (re)defines representation as "the production of context(s)", that is, of contexts for reading.<sup>7</sup> One of these contexts, I would argue, is the career. The text figures the kind of career trajectory into which it seeks to be entered, possibly through overtly embedded models (for example in the *Bildungsroman* structure) or through more or less implicit figures of authorship, literariness, audience and narratorial authority. One reads with and against the momentum of a career which both pre-exists the text (even in the case of first books) and is determined and negotiated by the text. Self-situation involves the text situating itself in relation to other (kinds of) texts but also in relation to competing models of authorship, claiming or disclaiming their authoritativeness in the attempt to establish itself, as it were, as the kind of text written by *this* rather than that kind of author and meaningful therefore in the structure of *this* rather than that kind of literary career. Patrick White represents one, possibly extreme form of this textualisation, as the career (or anti-career) becomes an increasingly overt matter of scrutiny at the level of both *énoncé* and *énonciation* in his fiction. Judah Waten represents another kind of example, a writer whose career does not depend upon a strong form of the romantic notions of authorship and which, therefore, always finds part of its meaning in the "bureaucratic administrative" realms of literary entrepreneurship, cultural activism and in the role of spokesperson for one or other collectivity. Waten himself could construct his writing life in terms of "my two literary careers".<sup>8</sup>

Much of what I have said above regarding the role of the career as a concept mediating between textual and institutional levels could also stand as a definition of the function of genre — hence the foregrounding, in the arguments which follow, of questions of generic contracts and framing. The understanding of genre which motivates my analysis is that summed up in Anne Freedman's memorable phrase: "what we do with genres is not to know them inherently, but to know — 'tell' or enact — the differences *between them*".<sup>9</sup> This can clearly be linked to Chambers' notion of texts situating themselves through the embedding of what are both models and anti-models of their own narrative function or readability. Genre, understood in this manner, is an exemplary instance of a discursive "site" which is at once textual and institutional. A text, at least a modern literary text, needs to inscribe itself in a literary/cultural system as both precedented and unprecedented, as generically "one of a kind" (in both senses). Similarly, in this function genre inscribes the *author* into the literary/cultural system also as one of a kind, as individual and original but no less recognisable as a member of this or that species of author. In different cultural formations and different literary occasions, as we will see, the relative value of

individuality *vis-à-vis* recognisability or impersonality will vary but it can never disappear while authorship is at stake.

If we take our lead from this understanding of genre we will see that the notion of a career can never be pure or single but must be based on a process of interpreting similarity against difference in a semiotic system in which careers function as signs. The process of pursuing a career will thus involve crossing boundaries and appropriating categories into new combinations (communist/creative writer, novelist/journalist, Australian/Jewish, Jewish/Communist/author) always with an added dimension for the "post-colonial" or "migrant" writer; but it is also, therefore, a process of policing boundaries, of disciplining the cultural signification of writing and any other "literary" activity.

The notion of inscription used above needs a more flexible, elaborated theorisation which can be suggested through the notion of framing. In an argument that builds in part on the work of Chambers, Ian Reid has pursued the definition of genre precisely as a question of framing (and again we can take the notion as both textual and institutional in an exemplary manner).<sup>10</sup> Reid's argument is also situational, emphasising the place or occasion of an utterance rather than any essential linguistic features as determining factors in how a text is framed generically and how it frames itself. Reid identifies four kinds of framing which work to determine the generic co-ordinates of a particular text and a particular reading, moving as it were from the textual to the institutional or from the literary system to the "system of systems".

First, intratextual framing which refers to the devices by which a text signals internal sub-divisions and in particular those which change the "reader's mode of apprehending the text": sub-sections, typographically-marked shifts, stylistic juxtaposition, but also embedded tales-within-the-tale. Second, intertextual framing, the "devices by which a text signals how its very structure of meanings depends on both similarity to and difference from certain other types of text". These two sorts of framing include the processes of situational self-figuration defined by Chambers. Third, circumtextual framing, the tangible "material borders" of a text which work to "constitute it palpably as a text" and again to situate it within a particular system: physical format, cover design, blurbs, dedications, epigraphs, titles, prefaces, footnotes, and so on. As I show within, these details play a significant role in producing "authors" — for the publication of books is also the publication (putting into public circulation) of authors. Finally, extratextual framing, whatever "outside" knowledge, expectations or preoccupations are brought to the text by the reader — from notions of literary genre to explicit political interests — and which provide what we might call "reading frames" felt to be appropriate by the reader and/or

assumed to be presupposed by the text. Again the "outside" must be understood relationally, for what counts as appropriate will be constrained by the institutions of reading and (therefore) by the other framing elements defined above and the ways in which, in Chambers' terms, they produce reading contexts.

Although I have only occasionally used Reid's precise but somewhat awkward terms, they inform my discussion of framing, genre, situation and occasion throughout. I have also understood framing through the notion of generic contracts. The purpose of my argument is precisely to situate the occasion(s) of Judah Waten's writing and to examine how, through the various forms of framing and generic reflexivity, they attempt to produce their own situation and occasion. As will be clear my own theoretical co-ordinates are narrative theory on the one hand and, on the other, certain forms of (for want of a better general term) literary sociology or cultural history. My work might be seen in part as an argument that these two moments of analysis are not incompatible. Chambers' minute narrative analyses, for example, are always leading out to the question of how the text finds its readers and how readers find texts. New texts create new readerships which, in turn, make other sorts of texts possible. The blank page is already inscribed with the signs of publishability, publicity and "career-ness" through which the text must make its way.

Before turning to the organisation of my argument, there are two aspects of literary sociological theory which I would like to introduce at a little more length: Raymond Williams' notion of cultural formations and Tony Bennett's of reading formations. Williams puts forward his argument against romantic notions of authorship and for greater precision in defining the kinds of associations into which writers (etc.) enter. He elaborates a number of terms in order to distinguish between associations in terms of their *internal organisation* ("working groups" defined by formal membership, organisation around a collective public manifestation, or conscious group identification) and in terms of their *external relations* with other institutions (based on specialisation, or on alternative or oppositional programmes). In the course of my argument, Williams' analysis will inform my account of, say, the oppositional association of writers, artists and communists around the collective public manifestations of the little magazines of the 1930s (Chapters 1 & 2); also my account of the Australasian Book Society (Chapters 4 & 5), defined both by formal membership and group identification, and operating across both alternative and oppositional programmes. In general Williams' categories provide a way of articulating the institutional forms in which a writing career, for Judah Waten, could be conceived and prosecuted in a relation of similarity to and difference from the mainstream cultural institutions.

The notion of the reading formation is directed rather to text-reader relations and to the cultural and institutional frameworks governing readability. The argument is not simply that different socially and institutionally constituted groups of readers read in different ways, for this might still imply a stable text-in-itself prior to and beyond any of its readings. Reading formations are rather the institutions which regulate and organise the encounters between texts and readers: "a set of intersecting discourses which productively activate a given body of texts and the relations between them in a specific way".<sup>11</sup> Both texts and readers are "productively activated" (interpretation becomes productive activation) within specific reading formations. In this way many of the orthodoxies of authorial criticism, for example, carry a real historical gravity for they have worked productively and specifically to regulate both reading and writing. Bennett's argument can clearly be related to notions of framing and self-situation, as indeed it is in Frow's work.<sup>12</sup> The reading formation will govern what textual framing devices, on all four levels, are activated (and "activatable") in any given reading, or, put another way, what specific readers are activated by their capacities to frame texts. It will govern both the effectivity and the (inevitable) failure of the text ultimately to determine its own readings and to produce its own contexts. The reading formation is also to be understood interdiscursively, that is, as constituted relationally *between* discourses; especially, for our purposes, between the discourse of the literary and its "extraliterary" others, the political and ethical discourses it strives both to absorb and exclude. The concept is directly useful in a number of contexts below: suggesting the possibility of specific reading formations activated by distinct ethnic minority, nationalist or communist projects which Waten's texts, in turn, have an interest in activating.

Why have I chosen Judah Waten as the focus for these concerns? I could reply that any single case would do, and so why not Judah Waten, but although true on one level this would be an evasion of the motivation of my argument and the logic of exemplariness. First, then, there is an interesting and, I think, significant ambivalence in Waten's status throughout his literary career in relation to the institutions and traditions of Australian literature: he is almost always present but also almost always in a minor, secondary, even sub-literary manner. Even his "classic", *Alien Son*, has not quite been granted the canonical *literary* status of other works in the canon, although its presence in the tradition is virtually inevitable. One symptom of this ambivalent status is that there has been very little sustained critical treatment of Waten's writing, including *Alien Son*.

Another form of ambivalence can be discovered in Waten's contemporary status, for he was readily granted the place of a serious, respected and respectable writer in most quarters of the literary domain following the publication of the

earliest *Alien Son* stories. This position would later be expanded to that of "man of letters" as Waten comes to speak and write (and to be invited to speak and write) as an authority on a wide range of Australian and international literary and cultural matters. At the same time he was widely-known as a communist and, unlike John Morrison for example, as a Communist Party spokesperson from the late-1950s. Amongst much else this made Waten, then Australia's best-known Jewish writer, thoroughly controversial within Australia's post-war Jewish community and the target of some richly conventional cold war political and cultural criticism.

The more recent development of theories of migrant, multicultural or minority writing has, if anything, increased the ambivalence surrounding the figure of Judah Waten, on the one hand according him a new status as a migrant voice in Australian literary history but on the other consigning him to an earlier "assimilationist" phase in which he was all too readily accepted as an "Australian" writer (Chapter 8 below). I must confess to an interest in Waten not only as an ambivalent marginal-exemplary figure but also as a *recalcitrant* or resistant subject whose often stolidly realist texts would seem to have little to offer the writerly desires of post-modern readers. My argument at a number of points is that there is much to be gained by the unlikely conjunctions of texts and theories which I have brought into play, not least because of the way Waten's recalcitrance exposes the institutional and aesthetic limits of certain contemporary critical dispositions (which I largely share).

These points lead on to a second way of formulating the nature of my interest in Waten's writing career: at each point this career will be discovered as *hybrid* in a peculiarly strong form of what might always be the case, as suggested above, when we consider the concept of the career in formation. Waten's politics are significant here, not in the way of "beliefs finding expression" but in terms of how a position is taken within the literary system, moreover, a position which might well function as virtually oxymoronic within that system ("avant-garde realist" or "communist novelist" for example). Elsewhere Waten's identification — as an Australian writer — with migrant, Jewish or non-English minority cultures produces its own forms of hybridity. In short, I am interested in Waten's writing and more than that in his career — in the positions he takes or "figures" to take — as sites upon which a number of disparate discursive categories, categories significant in Australian cultural history, meet and overlap: Australian, communist, migrant, Jewish, avant-garde, modernist, realist, nationalist.... Both in his texts and in the way in which his career is "operational", Waten can be seen to exploit the doubleness, even the duplicity, that is variously available to him as at once inside and outside the mainstream of contemporary cultural institutions. And yet this must also be

understood as a set of constraints limiting both the narrative forms and the political effectivities of his career in writing.

The third issue motivating my interest in Waten has already been mentioned briefly: the predisposition, as it were, of his writing life towards analysis in terms of the career. Waten expressed a peculiarly unromantic sense of himself as an individual writer, if not of the social function of literature. He was as likely to emphasise stamina and discipline as imagination or inspiration, and he defended the involvement of writers in literary organisations.<sup>13</sup> In his own career literary entrepreneurship and cultural activism preceded authorship and continued to accompany it. Thus the business of a writing life can readily be foregrounded in Waten's case. Writing was a matter of professional, public activity not merely a confrontation between the imagination and the blank page.

Finally, these points might be summed up by the suggestion that, at least at this point in time, Waten is a writer about whom our arguments can make a difference — a difference, that is, not only to ways of reading his texts but also to ways in which we read our cultural history. For example, a major theme running throughout my book is a re-reading of literary realism in its Australian context — textually and institutionally — and in particular its mid-century relationship to modernism and, more broadly, to modernity. Waten figures both at the centre and the extremes of these debates. A concern with both realism and modernity in this period also demands a re-reading of Australian "cultural communism", another major theme throughout, and another field of debate in which Waten is to be found both at the centre and at the extremes. Each of the chapters that follow, singly and sometimes in pairs, can be read as an essay addressed not just to a Waten text but to a particular cluster of issues in Australian cultural history and its theory.

Chapter 1 introduces the category of the avant-garde, which has scarcely figured in Australian literary history to date, in order to read the earliest manifestations of Waten's writing career in the magazine *Strife* and the unpublished novel *Hunger*. The point is not to claim that these *are* avant-garde but rather to use the category, together with that of the proletarian, to analyse the modernity of their occasion and thereby to re-pose modernity as a problem for the cultural history of Australia. Chapter 2 pursues this argument in a range of other publications in order to ask what kinds of careers were possible in the distinctive cultural formations of the early thirties defined by an unprecedented conjunction of radical modernist aesthetics and radical revolutionary politics. Waten's own "first" career, and then its abandonment, are located in this milieu. The analysis is followed through to the end of the decade in order to trace the changes in notions of modernity, realism, political activism and literary careers effected by the emergence of new forms of cultural

nationalism — changes which would decisively affect the ways in which it was possible for Waten to launch his second literary career.

Chapter 3 is focussed on the writing of *Alien Son*. As well as continuing a concern with the historical meanings of modernity and realism, it initiates a new set of questions around the linked notions of the migrant, minority, ethnic or non-Anglo-Celtic writer. How did Waten re-create himself as a migrant or Australian Jewish writer before such categories were readily available within the field of Australian literature? How did he go about making a space for himself as a writer and in his writing?

Chapter 4 takes these issues into the more overtly political narrative of Waten's first published novel *The Unbending*. The novel is situated as an intervention into a particular cold war cultural politics. The theoretical force of the argument is, in part, to show that this historical background is never simply background but is anticipated and produced by the text itself. My analysis foregrounds contemporary debates over art and propaganda, the ethical nature of authorship and authorial responsibility, and the relations between literature, politics and nationality, the traces of which are still discernible in local cultural history. By drawing on Chambers' work I attempt to undo the literature/propaganda dyad and, by implication, to argue a more general case not in defence of realism but for ways of re-reading realism and in particular its modernity (in one sense against both modernist and post-modernist dismissals). This chapter also considers the conjunction of migrant/Jewish and labour/communist politics in Waten's literary discourse.

Chapters 5 and 6 together are focussed on Waten's most explicit attempt to write a political novel, indeed what should be considered seriously as an attempt at "the great Australian communist novel" in *Time of Conflict*. The more or less overt contradictions it produces are the subject of my extended focus on this particular text and on the "new" career that Waten pursues in this period (late fifties to early sixties) as what I have termed a communist man of letters. Chapter 5 analyses the major shifts in the nature and status of fiction writing, Australian literary institutions and communist cultural politics which make this new career possible, desirable (and impossible). It picks up the story from Chapter 2, following it through to the time of the novel's appearance in 1961 and tracing the steps whereby, through political and literary journalism, Waten positioned himself within the sphere of Australian literature despite (and because of) the marks of his communist difference. Chapter 6 turns directly to *Time of Conflict* in order to examine the narrative means whereby this work attempts to establish its status as a novel, as historical, as national(ist) and as communist. The novel is read against discussions of the *roman à thèse*, the Soviet

novel and the *Bildungsroman* in order to articulate its belated rewriting of literary tradition within the frames of a "modern", Australian, communist fiction.

In Chapter 7 I trace the local history of another genre which we might say Waten could scarcely avoid, the narrative of the author's visit to the Soviet Union. The Australian instances of this genre including Waten's *From Odessa to Odessa* have as yet scarcely been noticed, certainly not as a group of related writings. By defining the genre's antecedents in utopian fiction and by reading its transformations against shifts in literary and political discourse mid-century, the analysis produces surprising repetitions and equally surprising shifts: the persistence of aesthetic utopian structures; the "absence" of politics in communist literary travellers' accounts; and the increasing disaggregation of the utopian model in the 1960s, especially for communist literary travellers, as literature is mobilised in a new set of debates about freedom and humanity.

Chapter 8 returns to the question of migrant/ethnic writing, the categories through which Waten's respectable literary career is established (and which grants him the authority to write such a book as *From Odessa to Odessa*). The chapter first considers the more sophisticated recent arguments concerning ethnic minority or non-Anglo-Celtic writing in Australia, arguments which situate themselves in the same critical moment as post-structuralism and post-modernism. While granting the force of these arguments — their deconstruction of the categories of migrant, Australian and literature, their imperative to read for cultural difference — I attempt to identify a misrecognised aesthetics present in certain instances, one effect of which is to render realist texts unreadable or without political viability. Waten's critical writings about non-Anglo-Celtic literature are examined in order to see how he positions himself in relation to issues of ethnicity, assimilation and cultural difference on these public occasions; then his later migrant/Jewish stories are read against the categories of "multicultural" theory, both to see what the theory can reveal about the silences in Waten's fiction and to see what silences in the theory Waten's fiction might in turn reveal.

The final chapter introduces a new framework, that of autobiographical writing, and returns by way of conclusion to a number of themes raised earlier in the book. It returns deliberately to texts already examined, re-reading them through the frames of autobiographical interpretation, while also introducing some of Waten's writing not considered elsewhere. The categories of my reading for autobiography in this chapter are derived primarily from feminist revisions of autobiographical theory plus readings of women's autobiography. This is because I think the most interesting work on autobiography recently has come from these sources; because I am interested in the hypothesis that minority cultural difference might function similarly

to gender difference in certain circumstances, producing a comparable sense of identity and empowerment (or their lack) in relation to majority cultural institutions; and because I am also interested in the hypothesis that Waten's migrant/Jewish family history produces a different pattern of socialisation from that of the majority of his male literary counterparts, or at least that makes a different cluster of cultural positions available to him. The focus of my chapter is on the textualisation and framing of autobiography across Waten's writings. Finally, in the conclusion, I attempt to define the "excessive" sense in which the Waten (auto)biography is one of the contexts most powerfully produced by his writing and by the notion of the career to which it is tied. In more than one sense his career in writing and his autobiography produce each other and do so as further writing.

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- <sup>1</sup> Judah Waten, interview with Suzanne Lunney, National Library of Australia, 27 May 1975. Typescript in Judah Waten papers, NLA MS 4536 (National Library of Australia).
- <sup>2</sup> John Frow, *Marxism and Literary History* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986), pp.178-79.
- <sup>3</sup> See Dugald Williamson, *Authorship and Criticism* (Sydney: Local Consumption Publications, 1989), pp.3-19.
- <sup>4</sup> Michel Foucault, "What Is an Author?" trans. J. V. Harari, in *The Foucault Reader*, ed. Paul Rabinow (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1984), pp.101-20; Williamson, *Authorship and Criticism*, pp.34-39.
- <sup>5</sup> Ross Chambers, *Story and Situation: Narrative Seduction and the Power of Fiction* (Manchester: Manchester University Press; Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984); *Room for Maneuver: Reading (the) Oppositional (in) Narrative* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1991).
- <sup>6</sup> Chambers, *Room for Maneuver*, p.43.
- <sup>7</sup> Chambers, *Room for Maneuver*, p.36.
- <sup>8</sup> Judah Waten, "My Two Literary Careers", *Southerly* 31, 2 (1971), pp.83-92.
- <sup>9</sup> Anne Freadman, "Anyone for Tennis?" in *The Place of Genre in Learning: Current Debates*, ed. Ian Reid (Deakin University: Centre for Studies in Literary Education, 1987), p.116.
- <sup>10</sup> The summaries and quotations in this paragraph are from Ian Reid, "Genre and Framing: The Case of Epitaphs", *Poetics* 17 (1988), pp.25-35; and "Reading as Framing, Writing as Reframing", paper presented to International Convention on Reading and Response, University of East Anglia, April 1989.
- <sup>11</sup> Tony Bennett, "Text, Readers, Reading Formations", *Literature and History* 9, 2 (Autumn 1983), p.216.
- <sup>12</sup> Frow, pp.129-30, 186-87, 220-35.
- <sup>13</sup> Interview with Suzanne Lunney.

## 1

## Manifesting the Avant-Garde: The Moment of *Strife*

*Facts are the new literature.*  
(Judah Waten, *Strife*, 1930)

*During the time of the historical avant-garde movements, the attempt to do away with the distance between art and life still had all the pathos of historical progressiveness on its side.*  
(Peter Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, 1984)

### A Proletarian Form and Content!

In 1930 Judah Waten completed the manuscript of a novel called *Hunger* and published a magazine with the memorable title *Strife*. These two manifestations of Waten's writing and editing are the first which can be understood in terms of a writing career. To make this point enables us to give some meaning incidentally to the notion of "juvenilia", writings which occur before and outside the project of a writing career.<sup>1</sup>

The mode of both *Strife* and *Hunger* can best be described through a network of terms as left-wing, bohemian, anti-bourgeois, avant-garde, proletarian and realist. It is the relation between these terms in a specific local context that the present chapter aims to investigate, and in particular the uncommon conjunction of the proletarian and the avant-garde. But first, why focus on such ephemera, a magazine which is only marginally literary and which, in any case, disappeared after only one issue, and a novel which was never published except for a single short fragment in a journal based in Paris and The Hague?<sup>2</sup> I hope to show that to foreground this early writing, to read it in the light of categories which are largely absent from Australian literary history, is, however slightly, to rewrite that history. In addition, I will argue it affects how we conceive the shifting possibilities of a writing career for Judah Waten.

We can approach the topic first via the concept of the avant-garde. In what sense, if at all, can *Strife* or *Hunger* be understood as "avant-gardiste manifestations?"<sup>3</sup> In what sense was there a local (in this case Melbourne) avant-garde in the late 1920s and early 1930s? What are the historical conditions for the existence of avant-gardes and what textual, generic and institutional forms do avant-gardiste manifestations take? How does the writing frame the conditions for its own reading? To proceed through the concept of the avant-garde will, if it is an

appropriate category, lead us by turns into the other categories indicated above. What are the relations between avant-garde and bohemian? What were, then and there, the relations between avant-garde and proletarian, avant-garde and realist, avant-garde and left-wing? In what way do any of these categories contain the shape of a literary career?

The other context for my discussion, as suggested, is that of Australian literary history. *Strife* and *Hunger*, not surprisingly, have left scarcely a trace in this history; nor has the concept of the avant-garde. The archives *have* been turned over by art history, which, unlike literary history, has invested in the search for modernist and radical precursors.<sup>4</sup> It is only recently, with the appearance of a small number of books and articles which give a more elaborated sense of intellectual context and literary occasion, that the modernity of writers in the mid-1930s such as Eleanor Dark, Katharine Susannah Prichard, M. Barnard Eldershaw, Alan Marshall and Frank Dalby Davison has begun to be seen.<sup>5</sup>

The context of Australian literary history will be present therefore partly as a series of absences, of connections not articulated. There is no ready-made place in this history for the avant-garde to appear. *Strife* and *Hunger* are in many ways unprecedented locally. Indeed this quality of "unprecedentedness", something that *Strife* claims and proclaims about itself, is part of what can be explained by approaching the material through the concept of the avant-garde, for it is one of the self-defining and self-situating tropes of avant-gardiste manifestations.

*Strife* has a wholly negative relationship to the contemporary institutions of Australian literature: they are ignored or abused, ridiculed, banished. Its "occasion" is to be found elsewhere, in a set of social relationships largely outside those of the established institutions of literature; in a political discourse on history that has little place for tradition; and in a distinctive self-situation in relation to overseas models of artistic and political practice. While *Strife* has remained largely invisible to Australian literary history, that history, especially conceived of as a tradition, was in 1930 equally invisible to the magazine.

Charles Merewether has discovered a significance for *Strife* in accounting for the "formative years" of social realism in the visual arts. The magazine figures as an initiating moment in the history of "radical consciousness on the part of artists in Australia":

The editorial proclaims the "coming dawn" of the international proletarian revolution, signifying an early radical consciousness on the part of artists in Australia, and indicating the part they might play in gaining a working-class revolt, subsequently leading to a classless society under socialism.<sup>6</sup>

The term "social realism" compresses and so conceals some of the operative distinctions I will want to develop, around the notion of proletarianism for example, and Merewether's focus on the visual arts also turns his story in a direction which is not readily portable to literature. We will need, then, to disrupt and relocate his narrative to some extent. Nevertheless, his stress on the *proletarian* nature of the project ("working-class" did not necessarily carry the same connotations), on its internationalism and socialism, and, not least, on the very act of "proclamation" which the magazine performs all have a significant bearing on the questions I have posed. It will be crucial to understand proletarianism in this period as a quite distinct movement and discourse, and perhaps a distinct set of genres as well.

The sole issue of *Strife* was published in October 1930. Waten is listed as editor, Herbert McClintock as art editor. Others involved included Brian Fitzpatrick, then a poet and journalist, Colin Wills and Bernard Burns, both journalists, Huffshi Hurwitz, a young Jewish communist, and James Flett, a graphic artist.<sup>7</sup> As Merewether notes, the magazine was published in support of unemployed relief and its appearance coincided with a march on Parliament House at which Waten and McClintock were charged with vagrancy and most copies of the paper were seized by the police. The contents of the magazine might well have astounded police and unemployed alike:

#### "STRIFE!"

"STRIFE" is another force added to the world-wide movement to uproot the existing social and economic order of chaotic and tragic individualism!

INSTITUTIONS that represent this must be destroyed, and, on the newly-turned soil of free human aspiration, a nobler edifice erected.

ALL WHO DENY THIS MECHANISM of Progress are our enemies; all who await impatiently the new dawn our comrades! All who accept the permanence of the present regime, whether as protagonists or complacent nay-sayers and futilists, are our foes. All who believe in the permanence and validity of conscious and creative liberating energy, our blood brothers and friends!

"STRIFE" is an organ of the new culture, destructive and constructive, a culture plowing deep into the roots of life, and, as such, contemns and rejects all manifestations in form and content of the social disorder we oppose.

"STRIFE" affirms the validity of materialism in its widest sense. It affirms that, as the future belongs to the people, the new form and content must be a proletarian form and content!

#### APPEAL

On this broad basis we appeal to the people of Australia, both industrial and intellectual workers, whose revolt we embody, to further our aims. The columns of "STRIFE" are wide open to all who feel and can express forcefully and really this SPIRIT OF REVOLT.

The sinews of war, in the form of cash contributions, small or great, are urgently needed. We are confident that the advance guard of the NEW AUSTRALIA will not be niggardly in providing this publication, its first and most vital medium of expression, with the means of carrying its CAUSE a step further on its march through the long and stressful hours that herald the COMING DAWN. The attack has already sounded! Forward.<sup>8</sup>

It is thus that *Strife* announces its own lack of precedents and makes its claims to be of the advance guard — in the name of proletarianism. Merewether notes the statement's similarities to Marinetti's 1909 futurist manifesto in its "spirit of unheeded declamatory revolt, [and] naive poetic anarchism".<sup>9</sup> While I would want to qualify the final phrase through a more specific historical sense of the meanings of the proletarian, Merewether's point does suggest that the category "avant-garde" is a productive one for reading this material even if ultimately it leads to a conclusion as to the impossibility of an avant-garde in Melbourne in 1930. Moreover, although he is correct to differentiate these futurist and proletarianist manifestos on the grounds of their respective individualism and collectivism, there is more to be said about their similarities, about the overlaps between avant-garde and radical leftist. There are clear precedents for such overlaps in the example of the Russian futurist, LEF (Left Front of Arts), and constructivist groups of the 1920s.<sup>10</sup>

As Peter Bürger argues in his *Theory of the Avant-Garde* the avant-gardiste manifestation has both institutional and textual dimensions which cannot be understood separately. The concept "avant-garde" describes a genre or set of genres (despite Bürger's point that the distinctive thing about the avant-garde is that it developed no distinctive style), a program of action and, in the terminology of Raymond Williams, a distinctive kind of cultural formation.<sup>11</sup> It is in terms of these different dimensions that we can attempt to plot Waten's early writings and literary activities through a discussion of the nature of the historical avant-garde and the conditions of its coming into being; the manifesto itself as a genre and its association with left-wing politics on the one hand, avant-garde (anti-)aesthetics on the other; the specific meanings of proletarianism via Soviet and American models, but in this place — Melbourne — and at this time; and the nature of the cultural formation in which Waten's writing and editing occurred.

According to Bürger, what is distinctive to the historical avant-garde is its critique of art as an institution. The avant-gardiste critique no longer takes place *within* the institution of art, say between different schools of tragedy or realism, but is a criticism of the institution itself:

Dadaism, the most radical movement within the European avant-garde, no longer criticizes schools that preceded it, but criticizes art as an institution, and the course its development took in bourgeois society. The concept "art as an institution" as used here refers to the productive and distributive apparatus and also to the ideas about art that prevail at a given time and that determine the reception of works. The avant-garde turns against both — the distribution apparatus on which the work of art depends, and the status of art in bourgeois society as defined by the concept of autonomy. (22)

This argument provides a number of useful openings as well as a number of problems for its application to my Australian example. Bürger's concept of art as an

institution refers us to what I have already called the institutional dimensions of writing. The negative relationship of *Strife* to contemporary literary institutions can now be hypothesised not simply as a sign of its own marginalisation or insignificance but as institutional critique: a self-proclaimed, self-situating marginality. At the same time the terms of Bürger's argument, focussing as they do on a specifically European and early-twentieth century paradigm, do not obviously translate to the local conditions of *Strife*. In particular, it is not obvious what relationship there might be between dadaism and the proletarian realism that *Strife* announces and *Hunger* seems to practice. Secondly, it is not clear that the status of art — in the prevailing *literary* discourse in Australia — was as clearly articulated in terms of the concept of autonomy as Bürger argues for his European examples.

His argument turns on a dialectical model. It is only after art in the forms of nineteenth century aestheticism "has altogether detached itself from the praxis of life" (17) that the avant-garde critique can develop: "In bourgeois society, it is only with aestheticism that the full unfolding of the phenomenon of art became a fact, and it is to aestheticism that the historical avant-garde movements respond" (22); "the relative dissociation of the work of art from the praxis of life in bourgeois society ... becomes transformed into the (erroneous) idea that the work of art is totally independent of society".<sup>12</sup> The defining characteristic of the avant-garde therefore is its attack on the concept of art as autonomous, or, in positive terms, its desire to "reintegrate art into the praxis of life" (22). This project has a transformative not a reflective or self-reflexive function. Avant-gardiste manifestos are full of phrases and slogans which *manifest* the desire thus to re-integrate art and transform everyday life. To stay with examples drawn from the Russian avant-garde we can cite Malevich, "Integrate Suprematism into Life"; or Mayakovsky, "Let us make the squares our palettes, the streets our brushes!" — the avant-garde as agit-prop. (It is in this light also that something like Giacomo Balla's *Futurist Manifesto of Men's Clothing* can be understood as typical rather than eccentric, alongside constructivist functional designs for clothing.)<sup>13</sup> There are clear parallels between this kind of avant-gardiste project and Mike Gold's American reading of proletarianism, contemporary with Judah Waten's, which found its inspiration in the way "the Kremlin had transmuted 'vouchers, daybooks and index cards' into poetry".<sup>14</sup>

At the level of the text or work, the avant-gardiste attack on art's autonomy is directed at the *organic* work of art, an attack carried through via the principle of "montage". Bürger's references are dadaist works such as Duchamp's ready-mades which transgress the very category of the "work", but also explicitly *political* material such as John Heartfield's photomontages ("They are not primarily aesthetic

objects, but images for reading", 75). There is some slippage between the categories of aestheticism and realism in Bürger's dialectic as he moves from the level of institutional autonomy to that of the organic work. The concept of realism is scarcely present in his argument which thus rests on an unspoken liaison between the aestheticism of, say, late-nineteenth century poetry and the organicist ambitions of realist fiction in the same period. But the dual focus on institution and work central to his thesis enables Bürger to argue that the organicist model was itself a model of autonomy which guaranteed a work's *institutional* status as autonomous regardless of its actual political content or claims to reflect social reality. The "slippage" in Bürger's argument indeed describes a slippage within realist discourse itself between immanence and autonomy, the very slippage which socialist realism attempts to transcend by force.

Further, Bürger's generous categories allow us to enter the Australian context into his historical scenario after all. In Australia, I would argue, aestheticism as a coherent, distinct movement or theory had not been articulated in literary discourse to any significant extent. Cultural institutions were moralistic before they were aestheticist. Nevertheless the notion of art's (relative) autonomy was institutionalised in its middle-brow forms; and the "higher" the culture the more committed it was precisely to art's autonomy. *Vision* (1923-24) had already come and gone, leaving its traces on Hugh McCrae, Kenneth Slessor, R. D. Fitzgerald and the *Bulletin* whose literary pages were in the hands of the genteel David McKee Wright.<sup>15</sup> Most probably the Lindsays' magazine, at least via the person of Norman Lindsay himself, would still have had a reputation in 1930. Moreover it is an interesting precursor to *Strife* for all their obvious differences: first as a marked response to the First World War, second as a marked response to modernity. As Humphrey McQueen has argued:

While [*Vision*] rejected Modernism, it was up-to-date in a way that almost no other local publication had managed. Its contributors scoured the cultural presses of the world in search of decadence to attack.<sup>16</sup>

The language of decadence and rottenness summoned to describe the modern world was also *Strife's*, and it is not altogether surprising to find Jack Lindsay — as he passes P. R. Stephensen heading in the other direction along the trajectory from Marx to Nietzsche — soon willing to adapt his father's views to the point of claiming that "the Russian revolution displays a huge and happy uprush of the human spirit".<sup>17</sup> But of course *Vision* and (Norman) Lindsay-ism could have nothing to do with *Strife's* proletarianism, and even Jack Lindsay's Marxism would have to wait for a later stage in left-wing aesthetics.

More interesting for present purposes, despite its bohemian aestheticism or rather despite its vision of Life transformed by Art, the magazine had nothing of *Strife's futurism* or its sense of contemporaneity. In this sense it cannot be considered avant-garde. McQueen has argued that the few traces of modernism that did find a local home up to 1930 were "superficial", imitations of modernist mannerisms "in response to no problem — social, scientific or artistic — that could not find some answer in traditional means".<sup>18</sup> While this argument depends perhaps upon a dubious separation of form and content it does enable us to claim *Strife* as one of the first modernist manifestations that could indeed find no solution within traditional means to the social or artistic problems it posed.

*Vision*, and Sydney bohemianism, was one negative model for *Strife*. More broadly, the cultural economy in which *Strife* intervened was defined by the daily newspapers; the *Bulletin* or middle-brow publications such as the *Australian Journal* (1865-1962); high culture, high taste magazines such as *Art in Australia* (1916-42) and the *Home* (1920-42); the universities and gallery schools; the commercial theatres; and for those with eyes to see by Katharine Susannah Prichard and the Palmers (for example). *Strife* could not see this far, although the local "art theatre movement" does come into its view if only to be dismissed as the "hobby of a coterie of intellectuals" and "as completely divorced from the masses as the commercial theatre".<sup>19</sup>

*Strife* faced a militant, middle-brow conservatism and a tenuous modernism but scarcely an institutionalised high aestheticism. Its targets, whether in the academies, the press, the theatres or magazine and book publication, were thus more likely to be bourgeois gentility and commercial complicity than art for art's sake. But *Strife* is also a post-Depression cultural manifestation. To foreshadow in part the analysis that follows, my argument is that the avant-garde moment in a post-colonial situation such as Australia's depended upon this socio-political catalyst, on the sense of crisis, internationalism and simultaneous modernity which it could produce. Even more clearly than elsewhere, the avant-garde could not evolve from within the institutions of art itself. *Strife's* attack is directed precisely at the claim to autonomy or the dissociation of these art discourses from any *creative* praxis of life, overriding their apparent differences in style or content. Autonomy is banished to the past (and at the speed with which such writing "manifests" itself the present is always already the past). The empty autonomy of art, in other words, is discovered locally in the very discourses of the middle-brow, the orthodox "realist" novel and the expressive lyric respectively with their "sickly plots ... ecstasies ... [and] individual heroisms".<sup>20</sup>

For Bürger the avant-gardiste critique is not a call for a new socially-significant content but for a new principle of "construction" which problematises the very relations between form and meaning. It is interesting in this respect that if we do find in *Strife* something approaching an avant-garde manifestation it should take the montage form of a magazine before it takes the (organic) form of a work. Any unity which can be posited for the diverse materials collected in the magazine — articles, notices, appeals, graphics, verse — is at best strategic and occasional. It is scarcely decorative or decorous in the way of an "art" magazine. On the other hand typographically the magazine is relatively orthodox compared, say, to Wyndham Lewis's *Blast*, and its linocuts and drawings are figurative even when dramatically stylised. The cover, by McClintock, is striking and dynamic in design, modernist but in a figurative mode which might be called "proletarian monumental". The verse is quite conventional in form but anti-poetic in its subject-matter, satirising religious merchandise or efficiency experts for example. It is appropriately careless and indecorous about its form, which serves but has no necessity. These stylistic points reflect the range of attitudes the magazine assembles unevenly under the general sign of revolt and provocation ("strife"): bohemian, libertarian, communist — and avant-gardiste. Bürger's remark that for the avant-garde the "act of provocation itself takes the place of the work" describes the magazine accurately although its avant-gardism needs to be very locally defined.<sup>21</sup>

Rather than avant-garde, the dominant mode of *Strife* might best be described as "radical bohemian" or even "proletarian bohemian", with the tension between the implied politics of adjective and noun very much to the point. This description also accords with Waten's own later account of the group for which, in Raymond Williams' terms, the magazine stands as a "collective public manifestation":

Fitzpatrick and myself were the principal editors, and the art editor was Herbert McClintock.... There were others, at least four or five other people who wanted to become writers, who wrote poetry, who dreamt of writing novels.... It came partly out of a pub. It wasn't the Swanston Family, it was a pub in Elizabeth Street ... a very lively place where you could drink until two or three in the morning — the Licensed Victuallers Club.... But it was also partly a political journal as a lot of literary journals were in that time. It was a left wing journal. It was only partly specifically communist, because most of the people involved were not communists. But they were iconoclasts and radicals. Youthful radicals. Most of them had a university background. Some ... had abandoned studies ... often for economic reasons. Some of them had gone into journalism.<sup>22</sup>

The relative absence of the high aesthetic in Australia itself suggests that the magazine would fall short of avant-gardism so that its revolt can still take aesthetic forms. But my argument is that at certain points, and significantly those where

modern revolutionary art and modern revolutionary communism are co-present, *Strife* does participate in the historical moment of the avant-garde.

What is at least potentially avant-gardiste about *Strife* is, first, that its critique throughout is directed at the level of the institutions of literature, cinema, journalism and the theatre, directed at the "productive and distributive apparatus ... and the ideas about art" (22) rather than at the content of individual works or the practices of particular schools. This sets it apart from an earlier "bohemian" journal such as *Vision* which criticises art but in the name of Art. *Strife's* opening manifesto makes this leap to the level of the institution in characteristically excessive terms: "INSTITUTIONS that represent [the existing order/individualism] must be destroyed, and, on the newly-turned soil of free human aspiration, a nobler edifice erected". It is also present in what could seem to be a more orthodox piece of criticism:

Alongside the commercial theatre of the big trusts (dead so far as art is concerned) there exist in Melbourne and Sydney groups of intellectuals who are attempting to revive the drama by means of repertory theatres.... [T]his art theatre movement, however pure its aims may have been, has, in practice, remained as completely divorced from the masses as the commercial theatre. It has usually become the hobby of a coterie of intellectuals; and, for want of contact with social life, such new drama as it produces has tended to become increasingly introvert, obsessed with individual sex problems ... and its ideology increasingly mystical, both in form and content.... [These groups] do nothing more daring than produce works of some of the more advanced of bourgeois dramatists, Shaw and Galsworthy.... Or they produce home-made rubbish, like the "Touch of Silk", by Betty Davies, whose claim to literary distinction rests on the broad acres of her family. They are often dominated by middle-aged spinsters, who censor the appearance of anything shocking to morality.<sup>23</sup>

The critique at each stage moves beyond particular manifestations of the theatre to the broader productive and distributive apparatus, here in the name of "new forms" in a "new mass theatre of the workers". If this seems to stop short of an avant-garde project it might be because questions of form are not directly considered; Piscator's theatre, though, is offered as one model. It is typical of the critique and provocation in *Strife* that when its manifesto declares that "the new form and content must be a proletarian form and content" the range of reference is ambiguous — is it literature, art, or every institution of social and political life that must be so transformed?

A second avant-gardiste characteristic is that it is only on the grounds of such an institutional critique that the magazine is able to announce its radical break with history or tradition and thus produce its dramatic polarisation of past and future, old and new, bourgeois and proletarian. The projection of "free human aspiration" and, later, "conscious and creative liberating energy" is scarcely avant-garde in itself. What is avant-garde is the manifesto's projection of these categories,

categories which are or have become essentially aesthetic, back into the praxis of life. In Bürger's terms:

art was not to be simply destroyed, but transferred to the praxis of life where it would be preserved, albeit in changed form ... The praxis of life to which Aestheticism refers and which it negates is the means-ends rationality of the bourgeois everyday. Now, it is not the aim of the avant-gardistes to integrate art into *this* praxis. On the contrary, they assent to the aestheticists' rejection of the world and its means-ends rationality. What distinguishes them from the latter is the attempt to organize a new life praxis from a basis in art.<sup>24</sup>

Thus *Strife* proclaims itself "an organ of the new culture, *destructive and constructive*" (my emphasis). On one level the aesthetic is revolutionised "simply" as a reflection of social revolution. On another level though, the social revolution itself is to be understood as the liberation or forcing of the aesthetic into the praxis of everyday life, here as a "proletarian form and content". This avant-gardiste project is one mark of the difference between proletarianism in its fullest contemporary sense and more general calls for a working-class, popular or political art.

As David Bennett has argued, the avant-garde project could ultimately be aligned with fascism's "aestheticisation of politics" in so far as it lead to the embrace of idealist notions of art and community.<sup>25</sup> For *Strife* on the other hand — as for the constructivists and one wing of the surrealist movement — the project of forcing the aesthetic into the praxis of everyday life was generated by an explicit, mostly communist "politicisation of aesthetics". Such a project however could signal both the moment of the avant-garde and its passing. In the proletarianism of *Strife* as well as of its American and Soviet precursors we find just this ambiguity, above all in their radical anti-formalism.

### **Utility and Social Theory**

Bürger's point concerning the avant-gardiste attempt to reintegrate art into everyday life functions as a primary axis around which the arguments and declarations of *Strife* are divided; it acts to define the limits of *Strife's* avant-gardism. Similarities between the avant-gardiste and the proletarianist projects exist at the level of the artwork in terms of principles of composition or construction; and at the institutional level in terms of critique and the forms in which it is expressed (the manifesto, the magazine, the act of provocation, the radical writers' or artists' collectivity). But there are also fundamental differences in the ways that "artistic" material or content is conceived. It is here at the level of the material that we find near-relatives turning into deadly rivals, and it might well be the question of the inheritance that is at stake. The early history of Soviet art, spectacularly, suggests just such a scenario in the relations between futurist, constructivist and prolet-cultist: art as construction or

manufacture meets art as "fact" or "direct action" in a complex pattern of overlaps and oppositions.<sup>26</sup>

The metaphors through which *Strife* declares itself "an organ of the new culture" illustrate some of the ambiguities within avant-garde, bohemian proletarianism. On the one hand, the *Strife* manifesto sees historical progress as a mechanism, a metaphor which guarantees the dissolution of the autonomous institution of art, as art becomes a (mere) function of the mechanism of history. The metaphor is also anti-organic and anti-individualist, and thus a key sign of the avant-garde. Both avant-garde and proletarian projects characteristically centre on a celebration of the "destructive and constructive" power of the machine, of technology. The machine metaphor is generated by the very project of a radical break with the past, with all past traditions and institutions, and so it recurs in the futurists' dominant symbols, in the dadaist notion of automatic writing, in constructivist "factography", and in the avant-gardiste fascination with cinema and photography or with reading and writing machines. What other metaphor would do against the organic work, against art's autonomous status and bourgeois individualism? Writing, in one sense, is itself to become machine-like, which is to be understood as a *positive* image of "conscious and creative liberating energy" — the writer as type-writer, camera-eye, engineer (if not yet Zhdanov's "engineer of human souls"). Katerina Clark has shown how the image of the machine was a dominant cultural symbol in Soviet society between 1928 and 1931, the years of the first Five-Year Plan, a relevant reference for *Strife* as I will show. It functioned as an image of progress, of modernisation, of reason *and* a "release of energy".<sup>27</sup> We do not need to propose a direct influence although the USSR, above all in its contemporaneity, is foregrounded in all Waten's signed contributions to *Strife*.

Here is the writer as machine, with all the impersonality of a radio, a diagram or a headline, but also with their modernity, the dynamism of reason and "creative liberating energy" simultaneously:

The proletarian writer will tell us why wars are made. They (sic) will tell us about the international competition for oil, coal, steel, markets! He will state facts. He will condemn; he will annihilate.<sup>28</sup>

At the same time, the "destructive and constructive" culture projected in the *Strife* manifesto is seen as "a culture plowing deep into the roots of life". Are we returned to that most organicist of all images of culture, a culture "rooted in the soil" as earlier and later generations of Australian culture critics would want to put it? Not quite, although those connotations will not disappear altogether and are reinforced elsewhere in "vital" images of blood and sinews. The image is a rather muddled one but it is interesting that culture seems to be imaged as the plough rather than the

roots. The image of a *radical* cutting and over-turning (a turning over of the roots) seems a rather nice one for the purpose after all.

The more critical issue is discovered in Waten's pronouncement, as above, that the proletarian writer will "state facts". In what sense is this radical proletarian "literalism" also avant-gardiste? In what sense is it part of a critique of art as autonomy and thereby, in Bürger's terms, an attempt to return art to the praxis of everyday life? We can turn to Waten's specific project for literature:

#### LITERATURE

Facts are the new literature. The proletarian writers will break with the sickly plots, tremulous love chirpings, ecstasies, sex triangles, and individual heroisms of the writers of the past. He (sic) will work with facts. He will not worry too much about form; he will transcend the antiquated forms of the past, to create a new form based on facts.

Utility and social theory will create a beauty of form in the proletarian masterpieces of the future. In Soviet Russia this is already true. The works of the American proletarian writers, Gold, Dos Passos, Charles Yale Harrison, Paul Peters, and others herald the growth of the new revolutionary literature.

"STRIFE" is unique. We will confound the fainthearts and sceptics. We believe that the present conditions of our life can produce men who can give us masterpieces. Masterpieces are made from periods of great social activity.

The capitalist world has to be changed. We will contribute to the change.

"STRIFE" announces the birth of a new full-blooded fighting literature. To Hell with futility, hypocrisy, and sex obsession. Hey, there! Make way for the voice of the despised.<sup>29</sup>

Before answering our questions directly we can do so indirectly by commenting on the "manifesto-ish" form that Waten's writing tends to assume throughout *Strife*. As Jochen Schulte-Sasse notes, it "is no accident that the active, even aggressive artistic manifesto ... became the preferred medium of expression for the avant-garde artist of the twentieth century".<sup>30</sup> K. K. Ruthven, following an argument back from Pound and Eliot to Wordsworth, has argued that one mark of the modern work is that it appears together with discourse about the work, with an in-built or adjacent manifesto to announce its newness, its break with past or present.<sup>31</sup> For our examples, the point can be put even more strongly: the manifesto itself becomes a form of the avant-garde work or *manifestation*. As its name implies, the act of "declaring" functions not simply as exposition but is performative. Hence the characteristic address to an audience with which the manifesto signs off or rather sends itself out into the world: "Forward" or "Hey, there! Make way for the voice of the despised". The moment that marks the shift from narrative or exposition into manifesto throughout *Strife* (and this is typical of the genre) is the moment at which the text situates itself on the critical point between the death of the old world — "torn asunder by the crisis of over-production ... driven on and on ... to its final crash" — and the birth of the new, the birth of the *future*.<sup>32</sup>

What is declared in a "modernist" manifesto is a radical break with the past. It is in this light that Marshall Berman has described the *Communist Manifesto* as "the archetype of a century of modernist manifestos and movements".<sup>33</sup> This original radical polarisation of bourgeois and proletarian is also, for Berman, one of the great documents of modernism:

Marx is not only describing but evoking and enacting the desperate pace and frantic rhythm that capitalism imparts to every facet of modern life. He makes us feel that we are part of the action, drawn into the stream, hurtled along, out of control, at once dazzled and menaced by the onward rush.<sup>34</sup>

The comparison helps suggest the kind of "release of energy", the proximity of destruction and creation, the desperate pace of past into future that the writing in *Strife* can still evoke. It is thus that the choice of the manifesto form or of its typical gestures is significant in the fullest sense: the style itself comes to signify. This is the case, I think, with Waten's radical dissolution of the institution of literature quoted above.<sup>35</sup> His prescription for literature is avant-gardiste in so far as the manifesto form itself summons and embraces a moment of crisis in which it sides unreservedly with modernity. The "mechanical" emphasis on facts evokes a radical dissolution of art's autonomy and the artwork's organicism; and as utility becomes another word for beauty, both utility and beauty are changed utterly.

At the same time, Waten seems still to subscribe to the category of the masterpiece, the very antithesis of the avant-garde work. Perhaps there is a hint *avant la lettre* of the fatal attraction of socialist realism (the term is not recorded even in the Soviet Union before 1932). But there is little to suggest that the "proletarian masterpieces of the future" will look much like the (bourgeois) masterpieces of the past. They are not, in any case, seen to be the creations of individual genius but the products of "periods of great social activity"; and the cliché has a certain force in this context. Nevertheless, here we are up against the limits and reversals of avant-gardism in *Strife* and in the proletarianist project generally.

What is distinctive about the proletarianism of the period is the combination of the factual and the heroic, another form of the combination of reason and the release of energy that defined revolution. It is a combination that in one direction encourages the sense of art as construction — a radical new form, an assemblage or montage of facts, ripped from life itself — while in another direction it encourages a kind of super-reflectionism — beyond any form at all, life larger-than-life, "mass creative effort". The heroic here is impersonal, collective and relentlessly modernising. Its energy is produced by a dialectic between "utility and social theory" or between the mundane (the praxis of everyday life) and the revolutionary,

the unprecedented (the utopian). With the promise of a new form and content, proletarianism moves from ephemerality and the dissolution of art towards new forms of monumentality, a quality expressed in the still-modernist photographic work characteristic of the magazine *USSR in Construction*.<sup>36</sup> Hence the proletarian masterpiece: radically anti-formalist and radically materialist but offering a new "beauty of form" both before and beyond art.

John Frow's discussion of intertextuality and the relations between text and literary system provides a way of theorising these divergent or paradoxical tendencies. Intertextuality here is understood to refer not simply to textually embedded narrative models or situations but to the institutional relations which govern the functions of text, genre, author and reader within the literary system, and thus within the "'system of systems' ... their interdiscursive relation to other signifying formations and to the institutions and practices in which these are articulated".<sup>37</sup> Frow's emphasis is systemic and relational: an emphasis not merely on the conditions of textuality but "the way the text constructs itself in and as a specific *relation* to these conditions"; and not merely on the representation of "realities embedded in the knowledge conditions ... of particular genres of discourse" but of "realities which are constructed in the relations between genres". For our immediate purposes, this model of textuality and literary history shows that there "can be no total break with literary norms, since deautomatization (sic) can occur only as a relation and an ongoing textual process".<sup>38</sup> Thus *Strife*'s double relation to literature which, in a sense, it both appropriates and refuses. *Strife* is addressing itself to a specific organisation of the *literary system* (both words deserve emphasis), that is, to its organisation in terms of aesthetic autonomy, and this will inevitably leave its marks on the magazine's own discourse. In one sense this is all it can do, address itself to the existing organisation of literature; but in another sense, in its address to the whole system, we might say that it cannot do less than this all.

At the simplest level the demand for a new literature and for a new relationship between literature and social life takes the form of a call to "open the windows [and] let the clean sunlight of truth come in" or to "create new forms adapted to the workers' struggle".<sup>39</sup> But these modest calls for spring-cleaning or renovation are always ready to turn into a far more radical demolition job conducted of course under the authority of future construction projects of an utterly unprecedented kind. This is more likely to be the case, as it is in Waten's writing, when the projection of the new literature is informed by a more politicised and (here the two words are inseparable) *theorised* proletarianism — that is, where we get more than just a demand for a new political content in the artwork.

So what would a proletarian masterpiece look like? There is some suggestion of the forms such writing might take in the list of American proletarian writers Waten provides — Gold and Dos Passos and other writers of reportage, sketches, montage novels and of course manifestos. There is a rather more startling suggestion elsewhere in Waten's own "Notes of the Month", this time under the heading of another sort of proletarian construction:

#### SOVIET RUSSIA

A fascinating book has been compiled by the State Economic Planning Commission, and adopted by the Soviet Government. Published in England ... under the title of "The Soviet Union Looks Ahead: The Five-Year Plan for Economic Construction".

Every line in this magnificent book breathes of the mass enthusiasm for socialist construction; of mass creative effort.

Unlike most books of figures and tables, it is quite as exciting to read as is it important. It is of supreme importance, because it represents the concrete working programme of a socialist-planned economy, without the aid of capitalists. It is exciting because it represents a picture that forms a pattern to the eye, because it is conceived as a whole and a picture of a moving situation, a process of creation and growth.

Each successive year brings tremendous increases in the economic development.... It has become increasingly clear that, as industrialisation proceeds ... the economics of socialism would sustain the tempo of development. Moreover, the electrification schemes, the Turkestan-Siberian railway is bearing fruit, and creating new facilities of production which did not exist before.

The tremendous growth of socialist economy in Russia has not only confounded the sceptics, but has sounded the death knell of capitalist society. The U.S.S.R. is the beacon light of the Communist world revolution.<sup>40</sup>

What else is being described here but a new literature of facts? What else but the *aesthetic* experience of this new material as "conscious and creative liberating energy"? Utility and social theory create a new beauty of form which transgresses and so transfers the institutional categories of art, fragmenting its autonomy and thereby returning the aesthetic to the praxis of everyday social and political life. The objection that the Five-Year Plan is not a work of art misses the point (or hits it precisely). The alliance of the artwork, understood as construction, with the work of socialist construction was a deliberate and aesthetically-informed "offensive" move; and, posed against the bourgeois institutionalisation of art, it was as radical as it could be. Again there are precursors. It was the avant-garde LEF group in the Soviet Union who, in the late 1920s, argued for "a 'literature of fact' encompassing sketches, newspaper material, diaries and memoirs, biographies of people and of 'things', autobiographies, travelogues, ethnographic literature, historical records, and various kinds of reports".<sup>41</sup> Even more striking, the constructivists had conceived of their own *State Plan of Literature*, linking literature to the economic state plan, to "the growing of the state plan into art and imaginative literature".<sup>42</sup> And in the early 1930s under the dominant influence of RAPP (the Russian Association of

Proletarian Writers), proletarian literature was directly linked to the Five-Year Plan.<sup>43</sup>

All of which is to say that it is not mere fancy to read Waten's account of the Five-Year Plan report as "aesthetic" or even to hypothesise it as an avant-gardiste manifestation. No doubt such forced readings risk absurdity but they are worth entertaining seriously because they reveal what might indeed be paradoxical: the "socialist"/"realist" *and* avant-garde nature of Waten's writings. They can suggest why a prescription for literature that prefigures socialist realism also echoes avant-gardiste manifestos. If history is written by the victors, then the kind of avant-gardism that can be absorbed most readily into a modernist aesthetic tradition has won the day; but I would want to make the case also for the avant-gardism, however ephemeral, of a more politicised art or anti-art discourse that has had quite other historical progeny.

The same overlaps and oppositions can be observed at the level of the text. In the organic work the individual parts are conceived as immanent with the meaning of the whole; all elements are necessary and integral to a totality. The materials themselves carry meaning which the artist "respects" and treats as a whole even as they are made over into art. The work therefore stands in an homologous relation to reality, which it reveals or imitates. The avant-gardiste, by contrast, "tears [the material] out of the life totality, isolates it, and turns it into a fragment" (70). Meaning is posited, rather than revealed, in the clearly *constructed* and contingent nature of the work as montage. "Reality fragments" are inserted or obtrude, "left unchanged by the artist" but estranged from their "natural" context.<sup>44</sup> The avant-garde work, then, stands in a contingent relation to and "is continuous with a reality whose conflictual, non-synthetic materials (fragments of discourse, images, objects) it borrows or *uses* rather than imitates or re-presents".<sup>45</sup>

The organic work intends the impression of wholeness. To the extent its individual elements have significance only as they relate to the whole, they always point to the work as a whole as they are perceived individually. In the avant-gardiste work, on the other hand, the individual elements have a much higher degree of autonomy and can therefore also be read and interpreted individually or in groups without its being necessary to grasp the work as a whole. (72)

This description of the avant-garde work applies just as well to the proletarian work. The characteristic forms of proletarian writing are those which fall between or fall just short of literary genres: reportage, the sketch, the montage novel, the mass recitation, the statement, appeal or manifesto (in the visual arts: the cartoon, the poster, the photograph). These are the forms that were themselves, in contemporary terms, marginal to a literary career. They bear fragments of "undigested" matter such as newspaper headlines, political slogans, facts and figures or, as fragmentary

sketches, pose as such matter themselves.<sup>46</sup> Above all, this work falls short of or violates organic form although it might claim a new and more dynamic kind of "wholeness", deferred or dispersed rather than self-contained because of the way it is continuous with reality.

And perhaps these terms can even be extended to the book of the Five-Year Plan, for is not this new literature of facts, of "figures and tables", itself a non-organic assemblage or collage of "reality fragments" whose unity must be posited elsewhere. Further, no less than in a text like Dos Passos' *Manhattan Transfer*, the aesthetic experience manifested by Waten's description of the book is the experience of modernity, here, of "mass creative effort", speed and scale. It is thus in terms of "tempo" and movement that the facts are posited as a totality and an aesthetic experience is discovered in the transformed praxis of everyday social and political life. Its wholeness is perhaps that of the machine rather than the organism.

On the other hand, of course, the "facts" for Waten are nothing if not bearers of meaning, and their meaning is grasped in an image that could stand as the very definition of the organically-conceived realist novel: "it represents a picture that forms a pattern to the eye, because it is conceived as a whole". For the proletarianist as for the avant-garde, the material is conceived radically as *material* but never, for Waten, merely as an "empty sign" (in Bürger's terms, the precondition of the avant-garde montage-work). Avant-gardiste attacks on the autonomy of the art institution do not amount to a demand "that the contents of works of art should be socially significant" (49). What we find in *Strife*, by contrast, is a *content-driven* transgression and transference of the realm of the aesthetic. From this perspective we seem to have an absolute opposition between the avant-garde work which proclaims its own mediation and artifice, and the "proletarian" work which claims access to the truth of unmediated content — a clear distinction between the radical formalism of the avant-garde and the radical anti-formalism of the proletarian.

This is indeed the case. But form and content will not stay so neatly apart once we start to note that the "opposed" avant-garde and proletarian/communist attitudes to the material lead to similar practices of composition and programmes of action. Indeed it is at the extremes of both formalism and anti-formalism that the positions and practices overlap in their mutual assaults, through the art work and the discourse that surrounds it, on the institution of art. In the documentary/polemical works of proletarian realism, as in the montage works of the avant-garde, art is replaced by construction in the name of a new art practice *and* a new social practice. In so far as the oppositions refuse to stay neatly polarised, the provocation towards the autonomy of art retains its charge. *Strife* provides an exemplary case to illustrate two points argued incidentally in Frow's *Marxism and Literary History*: first, that

modernism "is not so much opposed to a realist aesthetic as it is the culmination of the internal contradictions of realism"; second, "that there is no political art (indeed, to put it brutally, no politics) which cannot be read as style".<sup>47</sup>

The necessary paradoxes of proletarianism are dramatised in Waten's own practice as a proletarian "artist" of fact. Waten's writing of *Hunger* probably began towards the middle of 1930 in Melbourne, that is, during the preparation and printing of *Strife*.<sup>48</sup> In March 1931 he sailed for Europe with the manuscript, and tried unsuccessfully in both Paris and London to have it published whole. The only piece that has come to light was printed in a magazine called *Front*, although Waten also appeared in Henri Poulaille's proletarian/avant-garde magazine *Nouvel Âge*, published in Paris between January and December 1931. Waten's contribution here, translated into French as "Guerre dans le monde", appeared in a special anti-war number which also included Blaise Cendrars, Dos Passos, Mayakovski, and Ernst Toller.<sup>49</sup>

The publishing history of *Front* (four issues between December 1930 and June 1931) has its own significance for the present argument, for the magazine situated itself precisely in the moment of the left avant-garde. It was a product of the Servire Press which also published the avant-garde *transition* after 1932. The press was located in The Hague, "but the books that bore its imprint were created in Paris, sold there, and read there".<sup>50</sup> Like *Strife*, *Front* was internationalist: it published work in English, French and German, and had editors in Spain, Japan, USA and the Soviet Union.

Beginning as a literary magazine with leftwing tendencies, but interested primarily in literature *per se*, *Front* ... emphasizes more and more the urgent necessity for a socially informed literature and art. The last issue announces its complete agreement with radical politics: "Henceforth, we will only concern ourselves with literature as an art when it arms the workers against the bourgeoisie". The magazine attracts writers who are alive to experimental tendencies in modern letters and who eagerly anticipate the fullest use of literature as a social weapon. V. F. Calverton's essay in the issue of December 1930, with its emphasis upon the "demands of social organizations", establishes a platform for many of the writers of the thirties. Contributions include poetry by Norman Macleod ... Louis Zukofsky ... William Carlos Williams ...; fiction by Kay Boyle, Robert McAlmon, John Dos Passos, and many young writers who are later to be published frequently in proletarian literary magazines; criticism by V. F. Calverton, Ezra Pound (a "dissenting voice"), and Louis Zukofsky.<sup>51</sup>

The list of contributors itself suggests the crossover of experimental art and literature as a social weapon. The proximity of an interest in "literature *per se*" to the sense of an *urgent* necessity for a socially informed literature is historically momentous (precisely of its moment). Perhaps it is even symptomatic that it is the magazine's *final* issue that announces its radical political project. *Hunger* found its rightful place, then, however fragmentary its presence. Indeed it is utterly

characteristic of the avant-gardiste aspects of this left literary project that Waten's novel could be broken up into fragments "read and interpreted individually ... without its being necessary to grasp the work as a whole".<sup>52</sup>

At the same time it is no less characteristic of this writing project that, in Waten's own words, "everything went into it":

I returned to Melbourne [from ] and I began my first novel which I called *Hunger*. Not an original title, considering that Knut Hamsun's novel *Hunger* was very much around then. Everything went into it — the unemployed, stowing away and jumping trains, gaol, burglars, religion and Communism. Not everything of course. There was nothing about my migrant background nor was there anything about sex.

I was under the influence of James Joyce and American left-wing writers like John Dos Passos ... and Michael Gold.... My pseudo-Joycean style guaranteed to some extent that my stories would be published in *avant-garde* publications in Paris and New York.<sup>53</sup>

This combination of left-wing and avant-garde models, which characteristically employs fragmentation in the service of a kind of globalism, produces fiction-writing like the following:

morning... a man in a room. cold and barren apartment house. ROOMS TO LET. bugs and lice. he dresses and his clothes smack of the sea. white canvas trousers and stink socks and washes in an iron bucket. shits. wipes himself with the editorial of the morning news. who reads an editorial anyway? wanders down decrepit staircase... rent? — pay or get out.

morning... the sky is pale and cold. a bird chortles. dogs piss at lampposts. he wanders dark slimy streets. peers into gloomy lanes and doorways. so many flagstones on that street. gloomy slimy street. spermatozoan reek and acrid pot and garbage. gloomy slimy street.

man must eat. food. dogs bark.

500 men are waiting for the gates to open. oh lord we thank thee in thy infinite mercy. AMEN. man must eat. food. smell of frankfurts. frying.

oh frankfurts is the life of man,

frankfurts for my johnny.

— dont push.

salvation army and ymca and police.

— behave yourself or you'll go without.

he is last. hahaha. no there are more. coming coming coming.

— THIS MORNING ONLY 150 MEN WILL BE FED.

salvation army and ymca and police.<sup>54</sup>

This passage clearly yields to analysis in terms of the principle of montage in its use of incomplete sentences, quotations, dissociations of sequence, and "reality fragments left unchanged by the artist" (in Bürger's terms). These effects are reinforced by typographical techniques: the use of lower case throughout except for the quoted "real" signs, the use of ellipses, the spacing. The prose is also de-individuating of both author and character. If in one sense it is all style, it is also anti-style. Its fragmentation says that it has no time for style or for art (there is an "urgent necessity" pointing elsewhere); yet it is the very fragmentation, along with patterning techniques, that lays claim to art. This double gesture is also performed

by the quotation from Francis Thompson's "The Hound of Heaven" which stands at the beginning of the passage in *Front*: "Must thy harvest fields/be dunged with rotten death". Waten thus lays claim to the literary but does so by displacing the literariness of the quotation, isolating it from its aesthetic context.

The array of montage techniques in the passage is in tension with a narrative trajectory which bears unambiguous "proletarian" and realist meanings. The point about such writing, its effectivity, I would argue, is precisely this quality of being both-and-neither. It is anti-art and anti-style via a highly self-conscious technical performance which claims the power of art; it frames itself as literary but refuses to be (merely) literary; in refusing art it aims to revitalise art; and it claims to be realistic but can do so only by violating the conventions of realism.<sup>55</sup> I have written elsewhere of a range of similar effects in the sketches and documentary writing, later in the 1930s, of Alan Marshall and John Morrison, and in novels by Marshall, Jean Devanny and J. M. Harcourt (and one might add the little-known novel by R. D. Tate, *The Doughman*, 1933).<sup>56</sup> These texts share a number of "experimental" techniques which produce their literary anti-literary effects: the use of present tense, very short sentences or sentence fragments, "camera-eye" narration, second-person narration, plotlessness, the absence of characterisation, abrupt shifts between the documentary and the didactic, and quotation from newspapers or other "factual" material inserted into the fiction. These are the marks of the distinctive attitude to writing and the distinctive grasp on reality which developed under the sign of proletarianism.

### **Modernity and Realism**

To return to *Strife* by way of conclusion. The magazine is an uneven mix of attitudes and positions. It is partly a bohemian refusal of middle-brow taste and bourgeois commercialisation, partly a call for a new political content in art. But when tied to a revolutionary sense of modernity, a complete break with the past, with art's autonomy, with individuality, it also represents a set of attitudes that participate in the historical moment of the avant-garde. Thus the assault on literature in *Strife* — and on the cinema, the theatre, the press — goes in two directions at once, aimed both at its present uses as propaganda or profit for the ruling classes and at its historical uselessness as sentimentality or mysticism. These are complementary lines of attack: where the latter assaults the "sensuousness" of the organic work in order to release its constructive and destructive energy, the former assaults the "means-ends rationality" of bourgeois society in order to overthrow it. Although lacking the alogism characteristic of the avant-garde, the magazine's extreme anti-formalism —

and Waten is to be found at its extremes — evokes its own "revolution of the word".

By reading *Strife* and *Hunger* in terms of the avant-garde we are able to see how certain demands for realism in this period occurred under the sign of modernity. The fact that the term "realism" was not used in the magazine is symptomatic of how *Strife* positioned itself in relation to literature. We can also see that demands for a new realism, for proletarian or mass art, involved more than just a call for new content. There is such a call but it tends to over-reach itself and to become involved in the revolution of form on the one hand and of the institutional status of art on the other. This in turn enables us to see in *Strife* signs of that dynamic in cultural politics — where cultural and political discourses fuse — which in the mid-1930s would manifest itself in the "unprecedented" development of new fiction writing and public literary activity.

The presence of the avant-garde moment in Australia, of a set of discourses and institutional positions that could produce something very like an avant-gardiste manifestation, reminds us that Australian literary history cannot be written in terms of evolution or maturation. Nor will it support the trope of the cultural "time lag". *Strife* and *Hunger* together provide us with unexpected access to a history of Australian modernity. If Bürger's arguments about the historical conditions of the avant-garde suggest why such a position could be held only partially and temporarily at this time and in this place, they also indicate how and why such a position could be held at all. The modernity that *Strife* and *Hunger* manifest when read against the categories of Bürger's thesis argues that there is no simple continuity of a realist tradition in Australian literature from the late-nineteenth century into the twentieth.

- 1 For example, the *University High School Record* of Christmas 1926 prints an article on  
 2 "Use and Beauty" by J. W., pp.23-24.
- 3 *Strife* is dated October 13, 1930. The novel *Hunger* was never published in full. An excerpt  
 4 was published in *Front* 4 (June 1931), pp.289-91 (see below). An excerpt from this excerpt  
 is reprinted in Waten's last published novel, *Scenes of Revolutionary Life*, (Sydney: Angus  
 & Robertson, 1982), pp.74-75.
- 5 Peter Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, trans. Michael Shaw (Manchester: Manchester  
 University Press; Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), p.50. Further  
 references will appear in the text.
- 6 See Charles Merewether "Social Realism: The Formative Years", *Arena* 46 (1977), pp.65-  
 7 80; Richard Haese, *Rebels and Precursors: The Revolutionary Years of Australian Art*  
 (London: Allen Lane, 1981); Humphrey McQueen, *The Black Swan of Trespass: The*  
*Emergence of Modernist Painting in Australia to 1944* (Sydney: Alternative Publishing Co-  
 Operative, 1979).
- 8 See David Carter, "Documenting and Criticising Society", in *The Penguin New Literary*  
*History of Australia*, ed. Laurie Hergenhan (Ringwood, Vic.: Penguin, 1988), pp.370-89;  
 Drusilla Modjeska, *Exiles at Home: Australian Women Writers 1925-1945* (Sydney: Angus  
 & Robertson, 1981) and "Dialogue with Dark", *Age Monthly Review* 5, 11 (April 1986),  
 pp.3-6; *Wallflowers and Witches: Women and Culture in Australia 1910-1945*, ed.  
 Maryanne Dever (St Lucia, Qld: University of Queensland Press, 1994; *As Good As a Yarn*  
*With You: Letters between Miles Franklin [et al]*, ed. Carole Ferrier (Cambridge:  
 Cambridge University Press, 1992); Susan Sheridan, *Along the Faultlines: Sex, Race and*  
*Nation in Australian Women's Writing, 1880-1930* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1995).
- 9 Merewether, "Social Realism", p.66.
- 10 See Don Watson, *Brian Fitzpatrick: A Radical Life* (Sydney: Hale & Iremonger, 1979),  
 pp.30-35; Colin Wills, *Australian Passport* (London: Dennis Dobson, 1953), pp.96-97. For  
 an affectionate account of Hurwitz see Audrey Blake, *A Proletarian Life* (Malmsbury, Vic.:  
 Kibble Books, 1984), pp.15-20. James Flett turns up later as a cover designer in the  
 conservative mode of the "pastoral utopia" for the journal *Australia To-Day*: Robert Holden,  
*Cover Up: The Art of Magazine Covers in Australia* (Sydney: Hodder & Stoughton, 1995),  
 p.31.
- 11 *Strife*, inside front cover. This editorial manifesto is signed "The Board of Editors". I would  
 argue that we can take Waten, listed as the magazine's editor, to be its principal author. The  
 style and argument are close to his signed column later in the magazine.
- 12 Merewether, "Social Realism", p.67.
- 13 See, for example, David Elliot, *New Worlds: Russian Art and Society 1900-1937* (London:  
 Thames & Hudson, 1986), pp.20-21 & 84-117; Herman Ermolaev, *Soviet Literary Theories*  
*1917-1934* (New York: Octagon, 1977), pp.73-77.
- 14 Raymond Williams, *Culture* (Glasgow: Fontana, 1981), pp.63-71.
- See Bürger, p.46: "the *autonomy of art* is a category of bourgeois society. It permits the  
 description of art's detachment from the context of practical life as a historical development  
 — that among the members of those classes which, at least at times, are free from the  
 pressures of the need for survival, a sensuousness could evolve that was not part of any  
 means-ends relationships. Here we find the moment of truth in the talk about the  
 autonomous work of art. What this category cannot lay hold of is that this detachment of art  
 from practical contexts is a *historical process*.... And here lies the untruth of the category....  
 In the strict meaning of the term, 'autonomy' is thus an ideological category that joins an  
 element of truth (the apartness of art from the praxis of life) and an element of untruth (the  
 hypostatization of this fact, which is a result of historical development as the 'essence' of  
 art)".
- Malevich and Mayakovsky quoted in Elliot, pp.15 & 16. Balla's manifesto is in *Futurist*  
*Manifestos*, ed. with an Introduction by Umbro Apollonio (London: Thames & Hudson,  
 1973), pp.132-34.
- The phrase containing Mike Gold's words is from Daniel Aaron, *Writers on the Left*  
 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), p.207.

- 15 McQueen quotes C. Hartley Grattan's description of Wright as "a kindly soul to whom rhymes and poems are indistinguishable, and to whom literature is something 'genteel' and 'refined' in the most wishy-washy senses of those wishy-washy words", *The Black Swan of Trespass*, p.15.
- 16 McQueen, p.19.
- 17 Jack Lindsay, "Vision and the *London Aphrodite*", in *Cross Currents: Magazines and Newspapers in Australian Literature*, ed. Bruce Bennett (Melbourne: Longman Cheshire, 1981), p.100. Lindsay is quoting himself from the *London Aphrodite* (1928-29).
- 18 McQueen, p.21.
- 19 Lawrence Watson, "The Theatre", *Strife*, p.13. Betty Roland's *The Touch of Silk* (first performed in 1928) is singled out for particular abuse. The name Watson does not appear among the associate editors. Could "Lawrence Watson" allude to Judah *Leon Waten*? There are similarities in syntax and argument with Waten's signed work.
- 20 Judah Waten, "Notes of the Month: Literature", *Strife*, p.7.
- 21 Bürger, p.56. The cover of *Strife* is reproduced in Charles Merewether, *Art & Social Commitment: An End to the City of Dreams 1931-1948* (Sydney: Art Gallery of New South Wales, 1984), p.50.
- 22 Williams, p.68. Waten describes his associates on *Strife* in an interview with Barret Reid, February 1967 (State Library of Victoria).
- 23 Watson, "The Theatre", *Strife*, p.14.
- 24 Bürger, p.49.
- 25 David Bennett, "transition: Modernism, the Avant-Garde and the Little Magazine", in *Outside the Book: Contemporary Essays on Literary Periodicals*, ed. David Carter (Sydney: Local Consumption Publications, 1991), pp.238-40.
- 26 See Dave Laing, *The Marxist Theory of Art* (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1978), pp.32-33.
- 27 Katerina Clark, *The Soviet Novel: History as Ritual* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), pp.93-97.
- 28 Waten, "Notes of the Month: War!" *Strife*, p.7.
- 29 Waten, "Notes of the Month: Literature", *Strife*, p.7-8.
- 30 Jochen Schulte-Sasse, Foreword to Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, p.xxxvi.
- 31 K. K. Ruthven, "Appropriating a Space for Modernism: Ezra Pound and the *New Free Woman*", in *Outside the Book*, ed. Carter, p.217. In the Preface to the "Lyrical Ballads" Wordsworth draws on the language of sickness and decadence to characterise the present but aligns himself with permanence and beauty in ways quite foreign to the later avant-garde; thus he claims access to a past in ways that are without interest to the later provocateurs.
- 32 *Strife*, p.8, from an unsigned notice of *Australia as Part of the World Revolution*, a booklet produced by the Communist Party of Australia: "A veritable text book of revolution".
- 33 Marshall Berman, *All That is Solid Melts Into Air: The Experience of Modernity* (London: Verso, 1983), p.89. See also Rosalind E Krauss, "The Originality of the Avant-Garde", in *Zeitgeist in Babel: The Postmodernist Controversy*, ed. Ingeborg Hoesterey (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1991), pp.69-70: "The avant-garde artist has worn many guises over the first hundred years of his existence: revolutionary, dandy, anarchist, aesthete, technologist, mystic.... One thing only seems to hold fairly constant in the vanguardist discourse and that is the theme of originality.... More than a rejection or dissolution of the past, avant-garde originality is conceived as a literal origin, a beginning from ground zero, a birth". Krauss's argument is to point to the repetition which underlies the originality trope, and to deconstruct the originality-repetition dyad.
- 34 Berman, p.91. Berman does not distinguish between modernist and avant-garde (cf Bennett).
- 35 Bürger's argument throughout depends upon the distinction between individual works and institutional frameworks: "works of art are not received as single entities, but within institutional frameworks and conditions that largely determine the function of the works" (12). Similarly: "[I]t is necessary to distinguish between the institutional status of art in bourgeois society (apartness of the work of art from the praxis of life) and the contents realized in works of art" (25).

- 36 This magazine was imported into Australia. See Merewether, *Art & Social Commitment*, pp.11 & 56. Elliot also reproduces examples of its work, pp.140-41. Avant-garde artists such as Lissitzky, Rodchenko and Stepanova worked on design and contributed photographs, and photomontage continued to be used. Merewether also reproduces covers of Australian magazines which show both montage and monumentality in operation: pp.58ff.
- 37 John Frow, *Marxism and Literary History* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986), p.178; and Chapters 6 & 7 passim.
- 38 Frow, pp.151 & 158.
- 39 Michael Juste, "The Dance of the Penny Paper Dolls", *Strife*, p.13 (the topic is the press); Watson, "The Theatre", p.16.
- 40 *Strife*, p.7. Clark has analysed the significance of images of electricity/electrification in literature and political rhetoric in the Soviet Union during this period (1928-31), *The Soviet Novel*, pp.96-97. Like the images of the machine with which they are closely linked, images of electricity stand both for the bringing of "light" (consciousness/reason) and a "release of energy", which might be destructive as well as constructive.
- 41 Ermolaev, p.74.
- 42 Ermolaev, p.76. The words are those of Kornely Zelinsky and actually pre-date the Five-Year Plan, referring rather to the New Economic Policy 1921-1928, which shows that the attitudes have a history.
- 43 Clark, pp.94-98; Ermolaev, pp.55-61.
- 44 Bürger, pp.70-78.
- 45 Bennett, "transition", p.229.
- 46 These points are argued further in my "Documenting and Criticising Society", pp.370-74.
- 47 Frow, pp.117-18.
- 48 On 4 May 1930 Waten was suspended from holding any office in the Communist Party for twelve months for leaving Sydney without permission. In Sydney he had been on the Editorial Board of the *Workers' Weekly*. Communist Party of Australia Records, Mitchell Library, ML MSS 5021 (Add on 1936), Box 3.
- 49 *Nouvel Âge*, no.11 (November 1931), pp.1006-7. Norman Macleod and V. F. Calverton were involved in both *Front* and *Nouvel Âge*. Waten's piece does not appear to be from *Hunger* although the style is similar.
- 50 Hugh Ford, *Published in Paris: American and British Writers, Printers, and Publishers in Paris, 1920-1939* (New York: Pushcart Press, 1980), p.311. :
- 51 F. J. Hoffman, Charles Allen, and Carolyn F. Ulrich, *The Little Magazine: A History and a Bibliography* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1946), p.295.
- 52 Bürger, p.72. Waten has spoken of bits of the novel appearing in magazines (plural), but the *Front* excerpt is the only one that research has brought to light.
- 53 The first quotation is from Judah Waten, "A Writer's Youth", in *Joseph's Coat: An Anthology of Multicultural Writing*, ed. Peter Skrzynecki (Sydney: Hale & Iremonger, 1985), p.206; the second, from Judah Waten, "My Two Literary Careers", *Southerly* 31, 2 (1971), p.83. Waten has also described the novel in similar terms in his interview with Barret Reid, February 1967, State Library of Victoria.
- 54 Judah Waten, "FOOD! FOOD!" *Front* 4 (June 1931), p.289.
- 55 A similar paradox is to be discovered in the status of the avant-garde work: "Paradoxically, the avant-gardiste intention to destroy art as an institution is ... realised in the work of art itself. The intention to revolutionise life by returning art to its praxis turns into a revolutionising of art" (Bürger, p.72).
- 56 Carter, "Documenting and Criticising Society", pp.371-78. R. D. Tate, *The Doughman* (Sydney: Endeavour Press, 1933). See also Chapter 5 below.

**"Modernize Your Technique":  
Proletarianism, Modernity and the Literary Career**

*The number of documents to be got is infinite. How are they to be represented?*

*We may stumble on the solution in the effort of trying to create the literary equivalent of the documentary film.*

(Storm Jameson, *Fact*, 1937)

**Paris, Moscow, Melbourne**

The initial moment of literary proletarianism and the left avant-garde in Australia occurs in the early 1930s. It is constituted by *Strife*, the unpublished *Hunger* and scattered pieces in magazines such as *Masses*, *Stream* and *Proletariat*. But the influence of forms of proletarianism continued throughout the decade. In Australia, as in England and the USA, ideas of proletarian or mass art, workers' art, reportage and documentary realism reached their widest influence in the middle to late 1930s as a specifically western post-Depression phenomenon. We find its traces in novels such as J. M. Harcourt's *Upsurge* (1934), Jean Devanny's *Sugar Heaven* (1936) and Alan Marshall's *How Beautiful Are Thy Feet* (completed 1937), in sketches and scripts in the communist press, and in the Writers' League magazine *Point* (1938).<sup>1</sup>

But proletarianism is also more than a series of texts. The magazines are significant as "manifestations" in their own right, not simply as containers of bits and pieces of writing; and the formation of writers' and artists' organisations, from the *Strife* "co-operative venture" to the Writers' Leagues, is one of the typical forms of expression that proletarianism takes. In the middle and later thirties proletarian avant-gardism is overtaken by a new array of discourses for both politics and literature such that the specific force of the concept of proletarianism is diffused. The institutional sites of proletarian writing also alter over the course of the 1930s. Nevertheless a significant number of works from the later thirties and early forties can be read in the light of Judah Waten's writing at the very beginning of the decade.

In this chapter I want to examine the institutional dimensions of my two primary texts, *Strife* and *Hunger*. By this I mean to answer such questions as: how could these texts occur, at this time and in this place? What models or precedents existed? What milieux? What cultural formations? And how did these change to make such texts no longer possible? To 1930 there is little evidence of any local precedents for either text. We might say that they are not only unprecedented but precocious. Indeed Waten's own precocity at this time, as a teenage communist and radical writer, is an historical sign in its own right, a sign of the speed of modernity and revolution. By 1932, however, it is possible to plot a number of sites where radical aesthetics and politics come together to produce new organisations and publications. Finally, by the late thirties, proletarianist models are widespread but have begun to be absorbed by other influences in a form of left literary mainstream.

*Strife* was marginal even to the literary left-wing in 1930 — and marginal again, we might say, by the end of the decade. Moreover, this marginality is what enables, or forces, it to enter into the scope of the avant-garde. As for *Hunger*, the communist and bohemian Guido Barrachi wrote to Nettie Palmer: "I am sending over to you Number 4 of 'Front', with an extract from an unpublished novel by a Melbourne boy, Judah Waten, well in front, & some language to make the hair curl on the first page".<sup>2</sup> Unfortunately we do not have Palmer's reply so we are unable to read off Waten's text against one "centre" of Australian letters. But Barrachi's note arrived a few months after Palmer had read Edmund Wilson's *Axel's Castle*. We might, then, imagine one interested context for the reception of Waten's text, as Palmer considered the fate of modernity in the hands of "writers who are unable to interest themselves in our contemporary society, either by studying it scientifically, by attempting to reform it, or by satirizing it".<sup>3</sup>

The most immediate models for proletarian/left avant-garde literary texts and for the discourse that read them appropriately were to be found in the American *New Masses* magazine and the early writings of John Dos Passos and Mike Gold. Part of what we need to explain is how experimental works such as *Manhattan Transfer* and *The 42nd Parallel* could be received as models of "the proletarian novel". In addition, up to 1931, there were scattered pieces in the local communist press; in overseas communist papers read here; in English-language magazines from the Soviet Union; and possibly in the English *Plebs*

magazine. A little later, the English *Left Review* (1934-38) would become important.<sup>4</sup>

Between 1927 and 1929, the *Workers' Weekly*, the Communist Party newspaper from Sydney, published a poem by Joseph Freeman from *New Masses*; an article from *Plebs* which in turn summarises the views of Americans Edén and Cedar Paul in their book *Proletcult* (1921); an article from the Soviet Union entitled "Art For Workers" ("scenic art has assumed a mass character.... Art in all its forms is becoming more accessible to workers — this applies particularly to the cinema — 'The most important of all arts' to quote Lenin"); and a review of Fedor Gladkov's novel *Cement* ("this story is based on fact; but it is none the less gripping and thrilling for that").<sup>5</sup> The notion of a proletarian culture was present, this suggests, but at best sporadically and from *elsewhere*, although the sense of global contemporaneity that internationalism brings should not be underestimated. There was a militant opposition made between bourgeois and proletarian cultures, but the call for the latter was also likely to turn into the simpler claim that literature was a universal good thing and the workers should have access to it.

Proletarian culture in other words had yet to become an immediate question of method and again it can be argued that it was not until the Depression that such questions became problems for local writers, artists and intellectuals that could not be solved within traditional means or indeed within traditional institutions. The different positions articulated locally in the late twenties reproduce broadly the Soviet debates about proletarian culture and the bourgeois tradition, and by the time of *Strife* Waten's politics and prescriptions for literature are certainly informed by a knowledge of Soviet literary policies as linked to the First Five-Year Plan and the sectarianism of the "social fascist" critique.<sup>6</sup> His call for a literature of facts nevertheless echoes the avant-garde slogans of LEF as much as the explicitly proletarian "ultra"-realist platform of RAPP.<sup>7</sup> More generally, although "formalism" was already available as a term of disapprobation there is no evidence in the period preceding *Strife* of any detailed local response to the positions of the Russian avant-garde. There is little, in short, beyond a general sense of a proletarian orientation in art. Readers of the Party press were advised to read Upton Sinclair and Jack London, but also Dickens, Scott, Thackeray, Hardy and Edén Philpotts.

The importance of *New Masses* against this background was that it grasped the political agenda in terms of immediate questions of artistic and intellectual practice, and provided textual models for both fiction and criticism. In the twenties and at least until the mid-thirties it was America rather than Britain that provided the models for a radical left-wing artistic practice. Influences from continental Europe, including the Soviet Union, were also mediated through their American reception. It was the Americans in Paris, no doubt, who were indirectly responsible for giving European literary modernism some presence in left-wing circles in Australia. John Sendy has recorded that Andrade's Bookshop in Melbourne stocked *New Masses*, and mentions Waten as one of the shop's regular customers. The *Workers' Weekly* of 19 April 1929 announces that "Michael Gold's mass recitation, 'Strike,' will be given by the Workers' Dramatic Club [in Melbourne]".<sup>8</sup> Waten's own column in *Strife* shares its title, "Notes of the Month", with Gold's column in *New Masses*.

We can thus establish, if with scanty evidence, that American models of radical proletarian art were present in Australia in the late 1920s and early 1930s. But we also need to argue *how* they were present, how they could become influences or models. One aspect was the perception of America as the epitome of capitalist modernity with its stunning decadence, its "destructive and constructive" energy. The American situation was comparable to the Australian but *more so*, for the USA was the very model of capitalist modernity in all its characteristic signs — the modern city, the cinema, technology, speed, massification, experiment and *crisis*. The radical (avant-gardiste) proletarianism of *New Masses* was projected, in part, against those other essentially modern and American "mass" cultural forms, the cinema and the newspaper. It could also be projected against the currency of British socialist literature represented by Shaw, Wells, and Morris: at best, the progressive literature of the old world. Despite their sometimes dubious politics from a communist perspective, the likes of Jack London, Upton Sinclair, Sherwood Anderson and Sinclair Lewis, no less than Gold and Dos Passos, represented a radical break from this "genteel" tradition.

This was the appeal of the American material: its absolute contemporaneity and radical difference. Further, the intellectual milieu of New York especially, *the* modern city, meant a relatively sophisticated articulation of writing practices as well as providing a

model of a distinctly urban cultural formation, a quality no less significant in the Australian (Melbourne) context. In September 1930, almost contemporaneous with *Strife*, Mike Gold published his own manifesto for "proletarian realism" in *New Masses*. Aaron has summarised its arguments:

1. Workers, because they are skilled technicians, must write with the technical proficiency of a Hemingway, but not for the purpose of engendering cheap and purposeless thrills.
2. "Proletarian realism deals with the *real conflicts* of men and women". It spurns the sickly, sentimental subtleties of Bohemians.... The "suffering of the hungry, persecuted and heroic millions" precludes the inventing of "precious silly little agonies".
3. Proletarian realism is functional; it serves a purpose....
4. It eschews verbal acrobatics: "this is only another form for bourgeois idleness".
5. Proletarians should write about what they know best ... "our own mud-puddle".
6. "Swift action, clear form, the direct line, cinema in words..".
7. "Away with drabness, the bourgeois notion that the Worker's life is sordid ... we know that the manure heap is the hope of the future; we know that not pessimism, but revolutionary elan will sweep this mess out of the world forever".
8. "Away with lies about human nature. We are scientists...".
9. "No straining or melodrama or other effects; life itself is the supreme melodrama. Feel this intensely, and everything becomes poetry — the new poetry of materials, of the so-called 'common man,' the Worker moulding his real world".<sup>9</sup>

Here we find the distinctive combination of positions and gestures that also belong to *Strife*: radical anti-formalism which betrays a direct investment in formal innovation, the banality of facts combined with the heroism of life as "the supreme melodrama", and a celebration of technique, technology and modernity ("cinema in words") in an anti-capitalist, anti-bourgeois manifesto.

A number of contexts for the reception and dissemination of this proletarianist aesthetic can be discerned locally: a minor but emergent

presence for international(ist) "high" modernism; a new understanding of Marxism as a radical intellectual discourse; and a developing critique of capitalist "mass" culture. Three magazines which appeared in Melbourne in the two years following *Strife* serve to exemplify these contexts and their overlaps: *Stream*, which had three issues between July and September 1931; *Proletariat*, the journal of the Melbourne University Labour Club, which ran from April 1932 to late 1935; and *Masses*, which appeared only once, in November 1932. Although it is unlikely that *Strife* directly influenced any of these, they do show a "thickening" of the contexts in which proletarian and modernist discourses became significant to each other, contexts in part constituted by such discourse. This in turn tells us something of the cultural formations in which Waten's own career might initially have been conceived, although it also underlines the "precocity" of *Strife*.

*Stream* is the most remarkable of the magazines to appear in the early thirties because of its unapologetic assumption of the simultaneity of the modernist project wherever it occurred — Paris, Moscow or Melbourne, "a place teeming with modern activities".<sup>10</sup>

STREAM ... is a medium of international art expression.

STREAM is universal in outlook, and does not definitely ally itself with any particular art movement of the day: it seeks, in short, only what is vital and genuine in contemporary art, literature and thought....

STREAM has no geographical prejudices: by Australian art it means no more than art that is created in Australia: and its evaluation of such works will depend entirely upon the degree of sincerity and vitality that informs them.<sup>11</sup>

Despite what seems conventional now, even the magazine's recognition of art *movements* and its linking of art and thought are marks of its "newness" in the local context. *Stream* manifests its internationalism in the range of its articles, references and contributors,<sup>12</sup> but above all in a column in each of its issues significantly entitled *Montages*. This is an assemblage of paragraphs of news about "contemporary art, literature and thought" and quotations drawn from magazines in France, Italy, Germany — and the Soviet Union. The form itself is modernist and internationalist for its montage structure implies simultaneity and speed; the quotations function not just as commentary on, but as virtual

fragments of, modernity. *Montages* works to suggest that its array of references is of immediate and pressing concern to readers here and now in Australia, not so much exotic as irresistibly contemporary.

The primary allegiance of *Stream* is to a broad modernism that would embrace symbolism, post-impressionism, surrealism, Eliot and Pound, Huxley and Lawrence. In its second number it announces that it has been granted exclusive Australian rights to publish any of Pound's new work. And in its first number it publishes the following aesthetic *Credo* from Rémy de Gourmont:

A writer's capital crime is conformity, imitativeness, submission to rules and precepts. A writer's work should not only be a reflection, but the magnified reflection of his personality ... his only excuse is to be original. He should say things not yet said, and say them in a form not yet formulated. He should create his own aesthetics, and we should admit as many aesthetics as there are original minds, judging them according to what they are not.<sup>13</sup>

It would be difficult to get much further from proletarian realism. But it is precisely the reception of the ideas of proletarianism in this unpropitious context that is significant for my purpose. Although *Stream* could celebrate the artist's individuality it was also alive to the radical democracy of modernity (evident if perversely even in the passage just quoted) wherein every person could be an artist and the materials of the everyday, from the city streets to dreams, the materials of their art.

It is possible to see over the course of the magazine's short life span an increased engagement with proletarian art as its modernity becomes irresistible. There is little in the first number to suggest that proletarianism or Marxism could ever become an issue for *Stream*. Indeed the magazine's editor writes that the very first requirement for understanding the artist and his work is that "he must be released from the meshes of sociology".<sup>14</sup> We might, though, note the cover used for the first two issues: it features a wispish, naked female figure, rather *fin-de-siècle* in style, holding a copy of Eliot's poems and a paint-brush; but she is partly encircled by two gear wheels which in turn are topped by a horizon of skyscrapers and factory chimneys shown with a dynamic distortion of perspective. The different signs in foreground and background are incongruous except that they all signify modernity. It also helps to thicken our context to note that Jack Maugham, whose

linocut it is on the cover, was a communist and a founding member, in 1931, of the Workers' Art Club.<sup>15</sup>

In the second issue of *Stream*, Soviet/proletarian writing appears on the agenda for the first time. There is an article on the Soviet writer Leonid Leonov and an article from a French music critic on collective music forms. Perhaps more significant, because of the way they stand as "news", are items in the *Montages* column: quotations from Eisenstein and Pudowkin; a piece from the *Moscow Literary Gazette* ("Proletarian literature must enlarge its field of conquest ... to surpass not only the Pilniaks, but the Tolstois and the Shakespeares"); and from Ernst Glaeser writing in *Bifur*:

The writer should be acquainted with the great laws of economics and their influence on our spiritual make-up. He should know modern man, conditioned by the ideas of the group to which he belongs and the economic laws that control him, as a representative of his social group.... He should express what is, neglecting no perspective of his epoch. He will only achieve this by studying the structure of his time and the collective forces which are at grips, and by abandoning the chimera of individual liberty.<sup>16</sup>

This quotation represents accurately enough the framework of terms through which proletarian writing enters the magazine's field of vision. The debate for *Stream* is framed by a set of key oppositions: the individual or the collective as the source of art, spiritual or "economic laws" as its field, and individual expression or social change as its end. Each option embodies a question of method as well. What was the appropriate post-realism: surrealism or the new realism or something in between?

The third issue of *Stream* goes even further in its dialogue with proletarian writing to include a short story by Soviet writer Valentine Kataev; a poem by Mayakovsky; a review of Lionel Britton's *Hunger and Love* ("England's first important proletarian novel") by Russian-Australian Sacha Youssevitch; and an article on proletarian literature by Soviet critic Zinovy Lvovsky, mostly a long quotation from the Soviet novelist Panferov on proletarian literature and his own "classic" Five-Year Plan/RAPP novel, *Brousski*:

What is important to-day is the literature of the masses.... We must carefully examine the production of workers who make literature their concern even while tending their machines. We must also pay the greatest possible attention to poster newspapers and factory publications.

.... The aim of our literature is to completely eradicate bourgeois ideology in the realm of art....

Every writer is obliged to keep in touch not only with current affairs but, above all, with industrial production and socialist reconstruction. We are witnesses of absolutely new industrial processes; we are spectators of the demolition of all old methods, of the colossal construction of a new world....

Our conception of life and literature is absolutely realistic; we shatter ruthlessly all the old canons, we reject all traditional and antiquated forms wherever we find them....

What is a soviet writer? We must define him once and for all. He is primarily a practitioner. But he is at the same time a theorist who, before commencing his work of art, makes a long and careful study of economics and marxism, the indispensable bulwark of all creative art.<sup>17</sup>

The *Montages* column prints an account of Ilya Trauberg's film *The Blue Train* ("The interest of this propaganda film derives from its technical perfection ... the realism of Trauberg is less brutal than that of Eisenstein, and employs all the resources of rhythm, of movement and photography"); and a quotation from *VOKS Bulletin* (USSR Society for Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries) presenting realism in its renovated organicist mode:

it is possible that never before was man capable of feelings of greater intensity than now, in the epoch of the greatest of revolutions. But we may see these feelings — "personal" as they may be — refracted through the prism of our unique integral life, in which not only is there no clash between the personal and the social, but these elements are indivisible.<sup>18</sup>

Paradoxically perhaps, there is nothing as doctrinally "orthodox" as this or the previous long quotation in the more explicitly militant *Strife*. Their presence underlines the way that mass, collective or Marxist forms were grasped here as one manifestation of modernity — alongside

Wagner, improbably, reclaimed as modernist precursor, a short story by the American Robert McAlmon, an attack on English letters by Basil Bunting, a Credo from Pound ("I would erect a temple to Artemis in Park Lane"), and a declaration from the *Union des artistes modernes* that "our modern architects and decorators point to locomotives and airplanes, dynamos and Chicago wheat silos, and say: There are our masters and our models". To note this extreme diversity — from socialism to symbolism, from late romanticism to Pound's late neo-classicism — is not to accuse *Stream* of incoherence but to define its remarkable modernity in both form and content.

The terms of the dialogue between proletarianism and a modern tradition in *Stream* are spelt out most explicitly in a symposium that the magazine announced for a future issue which unfortunately never appeared:

PARIS OR MOSCOW  
SYMPOSIUM

A

*Stream* announces for publication shortly a symposium on a subject of the first importance: the possibilities and claims of the two rival aesthetics indicated by the above title. Is individualist literature doomed? Is the collectivist idea capable of supplanting it? The question cannot be discussed without reference to the creative process itself. Is this process, as we see it manifested in masterpieces of the past, constant in art? Or can it be changed or radically modified by external life forces? It is possible to come to conclusions on this matter which shall be quite detached from current political considerations. The symposium, to which many writers will contribute, will therefore be non-political.<sup>19</sup>

As in *Strife*, proletarianism is seen here as a contemporaneous art practice of immediate and *local* significance — the crises and the energies of modernity can be discovered here and now and in Melbourne. Proletarianism can thus share the moment of the avant-garde, raising with it the spectre of a radical break with all the past institutions of art and the radical simultaneity of "modern art" and "modern life".

But it is also just at this point that we begin to distinguish the two magazines and their sense of the proletarian. Despite the avant-gardism of certain of its contributions *Stream* falls short of the avant-garde (or

goes beyond it) because of the way it situates itself within the domain of the aesthetic, still conceived of as autonomous. Although proletarian realism can be seen as a "rival", it is a rival on the same plane, a rival *aesthetic*. It is on this plane that the issues are comprehended as those of individual versus collective forms or the "creative process" versus "external life forces", questions to be concluded within the aesthetic rather than the political domain. It is interesting that the American proletarian writers are scarcely mentioned in *Stream*. Its interest in radical art-talk is not generated by communism but by a modernist aesthetic, while its internationalism is, we might say, cosmopolitan rather than proletarian.

By contrast, despite its "mere" politics — its calls merely for a proletarian content — *Strife* can function as something akin to an "avant-gardiste manifestation". It situates itself at the very moment of a radical break with the past, a break which it wants to manifest, to enact. It projects a dissolution of the aesthetic which, however content-driven, entails a dissolution and transformation of (organic) form: from form into construction. Unlike some later manifestations of proletarian realism, Waten's writing in both *Strife* and *Hunger* can still see form itself as transformation, not merely as the reflection of transformation.

Whereas the later magazine can assume a place within a modernist main "stream", a remarkable leap of the imagination itself given what one takes to have been the limits of its local audience, the earlier *Strife* announces itself as provocation, disruption. But it is the overlaps that we have been emphasising: that proletarianism became an irresistible question in the context of the modern; that it came in the first instance *as* a modern-ism not as a continuity with a realist past.

### **Alternative Cultural Formations**

The two further manifestations of proletarianism to be considered, the magazines *Proletariat* and *Masses*, present intellectual, political and organisational provenances overlapping with those of *Strife* and *Stream* but with certain differences which reveal shifts in the local politics of culture. *Proletariat* can be understood in terms of its organisational base within the university, as a "weapon" designed to break down the perceived traditional isolation of the academy from contemporary history and politics and from non-academic intellectuals.<sup>20</sup> To choose the name *Proletariat* for the magazine of a university club is to proclaim

a position against that "bourgeois". It proclaims that knowledges are class-based, not politically neutral.

It is significant that proletarianism rather than communism is the sign under which this occurs. Of course these concepts overlapped, just as the contributors to the magazine overlapped between members of the university and the Communist Party. But I would argue that proletarianism, at this time, signified more specifically a *politicisation of intellectual practice*, not least a politicised re-reading of history, whereas the meanings of communism were much broader (or much narrower, *viz.* the Communist Party). The primary interests of *Proletariat* are contemporary history and Marxism as a radical intellectual practice — Marxism *as* contemporary history — and this means frequent negotiation of the ground where Marxism meets other "modern-isms".

Literature enters as a sub-section of this larger concern, one of the areas of revolutionary change in contemporary history but not necessarily its advance guard or the very means of transformation. Proletarian art is nevertheless present from the very first issue. In an article by Winston Rhodes on the "New Realism" proletarian art is described as an "infant among new literary movements" and the article's primary question is how to respond to it. In other words, Rhodes writes from a position outside proletarianism even though his piece is an argument in its favour. The "we" who are constituted as his audience are the already self-constituted consumers of art:

This new school of writers is a reaction against the introspective literature of our time.... Individual problems, the personal experiences of separate egos may be of value at other times, but the living human experience of the workers is chiefly of another sort. Therefore Proletarian Art attempts to give vivid representations of social passions. The aim of such a literature is to reflect the forces conflicting in a revolutionary period, to look at life from the point of view of the masses....

[H]owever crude it may be, however horrible, here is something thrown into artistic form by the volcanic energy of a mind that knows what it is to be but a fragment of that nameless, formless thing which cries: "The Masses count, not men"....

[H]ere we have writers whose aim is to place the stamp of proletarian ideals on the culture of the world. We

may resist them if we will, welcome them if we can, but if we ignore them we will do no service either to reality or art, which is the expression of that reality.<sup>21</sup>

The dynamic force of contemporary history, in literature as in politics, is "the masses". This was the primary meaning of Marxism as proletarianism: the sudden irruption of "mass consciousness" into bourgeois history; mass consciousness perceived as energy, revolution, destruction and construction. These were the ideas — more than any utopian hopes for the brotherhood of man — behind the radicalisation of many within the universities in Australia and elsewhere in the 1930s. The masses meant history perceived as class struggle, the "idea of the proletariat as a class inheriting the responsibility for the production of a new social reality on the technological base of the present".<sup>22</sup> Proletarianism in art, in its fullest or strictest sense, thus meant more than a general working-class or socialist "content"; it meant an utterly new form adequate to the moment. *Proletariat* characteristically positions itself not so much *as* that force (unlike *Strife*) but as its ally. It asks how we, the young intellectuals, can align ourselves with the modernising, revolutionary movement of history.

Rhodes mentions Upton Sinclair and Michael Gold, and devotes the large part of his essay to Ernst Toller and his play *Masses and Men*.<sup>23</sup> *Proletariat's* second number recommends the American *New Masses* to its readers amongst other *political* journals. In February 1933 the magazine prints a fascinating essay entitled "American Scenario" consisting of a montage of quotations and headlines (unemployment, Sacco and Vanzetti) plus three "close-ups" of proletarian heroes, Big Bill Haywood, John Reed and John Dos Passos, using what it calls the "cinographic" techniques of the latter.<sup>24</sup> The effect is to dramatise the literary references as part of a general "revolutionary upsurge of consciousness" in American life: "the perception of the implicit economic forces that render life barren, and the will to participate in the making of a new order". The essay concludes with an account of Dos Passos's array of techniques — cinographic montage, the newsreel, the camera eye. The piece is representative of proletarianism understood in its contemporary meaning as a "modernist" revolutionary art practice within capitalism; and in its own construction as montage, its foregrounding of technique, it still bears traces of the avant-gardiste project.

Waten himself had left Australia before either *Stream* or *Proletariat* were established. Nevertheless, *Strife* is an early manifestation of a distinct and rather unusual kind of cultural formation which began to operate in Melbourne during the early thirties and which is crucial in the early shaping of Waten's writing career. There are no recognised literary or artistic figures in *Strife* — by definition we might say. The "co-operative venture" comprised mainly young journalists, young commercial artists, and young communists like Waten with no defined profession and no regular income. The critique of the institution of art comes, in other words, not from altogether outside it, but precisely from its borders — from journalism and graphic art, and from communism which was also always a discourse about art. Nor is it accidental that the critique comes from those working at the commercial end of both writing and visual art, for it is here that the claims of art to autonomy are at their most vulnerable.<sup>25</sup> Moreover, it is to the very techniques of these "marginal" areas that the radical writers and artists turn — to reportage and the prose sketch, the cartoon and the print block — techniques themselves marginal in the hierarchies of fine art. Communism also transgressed boundaries, providing both an intellectual and cultural framework for political practice and a political framework for cultural and intellectual practice. To become a communist was not simply to march or manifest; it was also, and above all, to *read*.

Charles Merewether's brief biography of Herbert McClintock, Waten's co-editor on *Strife*, describes the milieu in which commercial art, communism and bohemianism could overlap on the fringes of the established institutions:

As a young man McClintock took commercial artwork jobs.... He became a signwriter and then got a job where one condition of employment was to study at the National Gallery School. He studied painting under Bernard Hall and McInnes where he met George Bell, Eric Thake and Jimmy Flett. On Friday nights they met together to (sic) Fasoli's Cafe in King Street. This was the place for young bohemians. Here he met Roy Dalgarno, Judah Waten, Dominic Leon, Bill Dolphin and others. Meanwhile he began to paint and read voraciously, including the work of Nietzsche, Schopenhauer, and Dostoyevsky....

He returned to Melbourne in 1930, re-enrolled at the Gallery School, struck up old friendships with Flett,

Dalgarno, Waten and with those now meeting at the Swanston Family Hotel. At this point he also met Noel Counihan and [Nutter] Buzacott. With the Depression descending it seemed that the Communist Party was the only organization which offered hope and was ready to fight the oppressive conditions of most people's lives. He joined up.<sup>26</sup>

The groups being formed in the late twenties and early thirties were different from existing artistic circles in Melbourne such as that around Max Meldrum, although they might be seen to share bohemianism (as they shared certain pubs and restaurants).<sup>27</sup> The Meldrumites represented an alternative artistic practice within the institution of art; the younger "artists" were only tenuously connected with that institution. Their organisational rationale was as much political as aesthetic in art practice and life-style. In Williams' terms, it was always likely to be oppositional not merely alternative.<sup>28</sup> It is probably accurate enough, as suggested earlier, to describe *Strife* as "bohemian". What separates the cultural formation the magazine represents from earlier versions of bohemianism is the break with the aesthetic that can be brought about, not by communism alone, but by the intersection of aesthetic with revolutionary-political discourses. The difference between the two "generations" of artists is the post-Depression perception of modernity as a sudden break with the past and of contemporary history as mass history, a perception which transforms the relationship of art to the everyday praxis of life.

The journalists were in a similar position in relation to the literary institutions as the commercial artists were in relation to fine art, the radical students in relation to the academy, and the communists in relation to mainstream politics. The university could seem a very long way from *contemporary* literature and journalism. The establishment press could seem a long way from the realities of contemporary society. *Strife* keeps some of its most outrageous language for the press, that "most formidable fortress of Babbitry and Moronia ... a dance of lingering putrifying death":

giant dope machines, foul, slimy octopi that suck and suck and grow fat on the brains and hearts of men. In their stead, they leave flabby, bloodless, putrifying pulps of

sycophantic content, servile acquiescence, and lily-livered inertia....

[F]amily-owned bilge factories for the wholesale production and dissemination of reactionary propaganda, the sole purpose of which is to retain the people in their physical and mental chains.... We content ourselves with the realisation that at last the social stomach will be full, and that then there will be a magnificent vomiting....

[The press] always has its gun levelled at the head of any conscious constructive effort which aims at ending the existing social disorder.<sup>29</sup>

I suspect that local *literary* journalism would also have been perceived by the young radical intellectuals as anachronistic and irrelevant.<sup>30</sup> There was little until the mid-thirties to suggest the presence of a contemporary national literary tradition adequate to the critical present.

We have already noted that *Stream* positions itself differently from *Strife*, within an international modernist tradition. But at a local level, the editors and writers of *Stream* present a similar kind of marginality to *Strife*'s. Again there is a significant number of young journalists and students soon to enter journalism: editor Cyril Pearl, Alwyn Lee (then editor of *Farrago*, the Melbourne University student paper), Edgar Holt, David Lockhart. Others were communists without a professional footing in the institutions of culture: Sacha Youssevitch, Jack Maugham and Nat Seeligson. Unlike *strife*, however, *Stream* could also accommodate a group of professional cultural figures like Frank Clewlow, then director of Melbourne ABC radio; A. R. Chisholm, Professor of French at the university; Adrian Lawlor, painter, writer and free-lance provocateur; young symbolist Bertram Higgins; and Nettie Palmer, "well-known in Australian literary circles". The most important "event" in the production of the magazine appears to have been the Leonardo Art Shop, run by Gino Nibbi, which opened at 166 Little Collins St in 1930. This was the editorial address of *Stream*. Nibbi stocked "the more important English and American Publications, [and] books and periodicals in almost every tongue — French, German, Russian, Spanish, Italian, Polish, Yiddish". The shop advertised itself as offering "a flavour of Montparnasse ... a sophistication, an atmosphere of modernism, suggestive of some friendly little book-store in the Rue de l'Odeon", and the magazine carried an advertisement for the Venetian

Tower Cafe, "Melbourne's only true Bohemian resort". At the same time, Waten recalls that Nibbi took copies of *Strife* when it appeared.<sup>31</sup>

It is the convergence of these different "sites" that is significant, for although it is without the radical and declared marginality of *Strife*, *Stream* also represents the formation of an alternative cultural network, along the borders of the established institutions, which it is just as likely to find impotent, philistine and bourgeois. In this new artistic and intellectual formation the key figures are likely to be, not the established painter or poet, but the student, journalist or communist. It is within this cultural formation that "high" modernism meets "high" Marxism, communist discourse meets the academic and the avant-garde — or in simpler terms, "art" meets "thought" — in a re-drawing of the *local* map of culture. The magazine's own confidence is such that it is easy to forget how marginal its position was in relation to dominant literary, artistic and critical practices in Australia.

*Proletariat* provides further evidence of the existence of a cultural formation comprising student, journalist and communist. Jack Maugham and Noel Counihan did most of the covers.<sup>32</sup> Furthermore, as with *Strife* and *Stream* and the images of proletarian art itself, this cultural formation is distinctively urban. This city-centredness is not unusual, even in the prior Australian history of artists' and writers' groups.<sup>33</sup> But it has an added dimension in this period because of the dynamic sense of the modern city which forms an essential part of the discourse through which both art images and life choices (where to live, how to live) were made.<sup>34</sup> Here there are no images of rural retreat, only of bigger cities.

A further site of the cultural formations we are drawing together is present in *Masses* — almost inevitable as the name of a magazine at this time. *Masses* was the journal of the Workers' Art Club which had been established in Melbourne in late 1931. As with the Labour Club, the impulse to *organise* is itself significant of a new, political way of conceiving of culture and knowledge. From their different perspectives, both clubs existed "to draw together members of the working-class and 'progressive' members of the bourgeoisie".<sup>35</sup> The point is not that the provenance of and the constituency for the different magazines was identical. On the contrary, their discourses vary from the aesthetic through the bohemian to the communist, their personnel from academics and journalists to Communist Party officials and unemployed workers. The point is rather that at this time and in this place these diverse

cultural formations could overlap in significant ways — significant enough to produce these magazines and organisations. The roll-call of names in *Masses* will, by now, be familiar from both *Stream* and *Proletariat*: Lee, Gibson, Youssevitch, Seeligson, Lockhart and Maugham.<sup>36</sup> Counihan and Buzacott were also involved in the Club. Waten was overseas until mid-1933, but his name is also linked to it.

The primary model for *Masses* was again the American *New Masses*, an issue of which it reviewed. The moment of the Workers' Art Clubs was that of the Kharkov Conference of revolutionary artists and writers, held in November 1930, the resolutions of which are quoted and linked to the *Draft Manifesto of John Reed Clubs* (described as "the Workers' Art Clubs of USA").<sup>37</sup> Proletarianism in *Masses* is still as militant as ever, still prone to the manifesto. It calls to "Workers! Writers! Artists!" for "news from the Class Struggle ... Stories, Sketches, Reviews, Poems, Cartoons, etc. *ANYTHING REAL!*" It includes two proletarian prose sketches, by Ralph Gibson and Alwyn Lee. The former in particular shows the characteristic techniques of proletarian realism — short "objective" sentences or sentence fragments establishing time and place ("Nightfall."), an insistent present tense, structural fragmentation (the short sketch comprises five shorter sketches), the inclusion of "facts", and abrupt shifts from documentary to didactic rhetoric ("Churches with pulpits dedicated to the extirpation of Communism, materialism, and class-war").<sup>38</sup> Proletarian writing, or reportage more specifically, was as clearly opposed to naturalism as to formalism.

*Masses* thus shows a continuation and extension of arguments first articulated locally in *Strife*. But the comparison once more suggests that the "left avant-gardism" of the earlier magazine is in part the product of its precocity. Two years later *Masses* can represent itself — no doubt with exaggeration — as a left mainstream. It continues a concern with technique as workers are advised to produce newsreels, montage films and documentaries; it repeats Waten's sense of the Five-Year Plan as "plain historical fact" *and* "a story of sheer creative effort ... vibrant with the released energies of the enfranchised Russian masses"; and it declares again in the voice of the manifesto that "the pretence of the independence of art is worn thin". Realism, in other words, can still be found in dialogue with modernism and still in an aggressively marginal posture towards the institution of art. But there

are only faint traces of *Strife's* avant-gardism, and only when questions of technique are to the fore.

We can observe the conditions which, according to Bürger, guarantee that the avant-gardiste provocation cannot be repeated indefinitely. It will become an aesthetics or a politics, possibly one masquerading as the other. *Masses* declares a militant alternative art practice but it never risks an "anti-art" position as does *Strife*. Paradoxically, this is because *Masses* stops short of *Strife's* extreme anti-formalism:

Proletarian art gives expression not only to the essential humanity which can only derive from the social class, the workers, but to the actual field of antagonism between the working-class and the anti-social ruling class. The communist works to make complete and effective the social consciousness of the workers, and so for the struggle against capitalism; the proletarian artist strives to give expression to the spiritual renaissance which has its roots in that struggle.... [T]he working class carries the germs of an all-embracing civilization within it.<sup>39</sup>

In the *Masses* manifesto, under the banner "Art is a Weapon", proletarianism is a political imperative linked homologously to an aesthetic. As such it can be folded back into an organicism that is indeed ultimately aesthetic ("an all-embracing civilization"). Of course such confident pronouncements solved little for the artist or writer at the immediate level of the work, and the practical experimentation, the debates about technique and subject-matter, continued into the next decade. The avant-gardism of Dos Passos remained on the agenda throughout the thirties, alongside *New Masses*, Hemingway, Gorky, surrealism and expressionism.<sup>40</sup> There is nevertheless a "shrinkage" in *Masses* toward a simpler anti-modernism. Proletarianism here is more a struggle over the *popular*, over true and false mass cultures, than a struggle or dialogue over the modern.

### **A Proletarian Career?**

The proletarianist project as articulated in *Strife* or *Masses* re-cast traditional notions of a literary or artistic career. Such a career could no longer follow the trajectory of the bohemian detachment from life for the sake of Art and Life or the professional trajectory of the man of

letters; even the status of "serious" novelist, poet or painter was uncertain. The exemplary proletarian literary career was a kind of anti-career, a career path which defined itself by continually losing itself (in politics, in "work"...). Further, the examples of Gold, Dos Passos or Ernst Toller, as *Masses* itself points out, were not immediately transferable to a local context either as textual or career models.

Despite the problems and often the pathos of their attempts to express their historical moment, the new kinds of cultural formation that existed around the magazines, the writers', artists' and workers' clubs, the Communist Party, the Swanston Family and other pubs and cafes, did enfranchise a new intelligentsia from the fringes of the established cultural institutions. The process continued throughout the thirties, through the Writers' League, the New Theatre, the Contemporary Art Society and the reformed Fellowships of Australian Writers. In the first instance these cultural formations were enabled by the coming together of radical aesthetic and political discourses, and for a brief period proletarianism was the primary vehicle for this convergence or confrontation. By the mid-thirties, cultural opposition to international fascism together with an increased sense among younger writers of their occupational identity altered the discourse and mode of operation of the different groups.<sup>41</sup> Nevertheless the relatively sudden forcing together of artistic and political discourses marks the generational break for a wide range of emergent careers.

Beyond the better-known examples of painters such as Counihan and McClintock, a large number of the names I have mentioned went on to have significant public careers as artists, writers — not least as journalists — and communists. It is not surprising that in one way or another individual careers should eventually enter the more traditional institutions of exhibiting, publication, and politics; but they tend to do so via the alternative organisations and media which themselves transformed the existing institutions and so the possible trajectories of an artistic career. By the mid-thirties, the artists had begun to exhibit and scattered literary texts had begun to appear in the magazines, the Party press, and one novel with some proletarian claims, Harcourt's *Upsurge*.<sup>42</sup> Interestingly, Prichard's *Working Bullocks* had not yet found its place in the radical canon. But despite writing what must have been Australia's first proletarian novel with *Hunger*, Judah Waten did not emerge as Australia's first and foremost proletarian writer. This is not simply

because he was overseas at a crucial period (March 1931-June 1933), for there is evidence that on his return he was soon involved with the Labour Club, the Workers' Art Club, the Communist Party and the Swanston Family set. Instead we need to understand his very departure from Australia in terms of a "career structure". Whatever else was involved his decisions to travel overseas and then to abandon literature can be understood as career decisions, indeed as *literary* career decisions.

This is clearly the case for the former decision: after having made his first public literary statement with *Strife*, the young Waten set off in early 1931 for the Paris of Joyce and Dos Passos armed with his radical proletarian novel. Paris, above all, was the place where the European and the American, the avant-garde and the proletarian, converged. Waten had a room just around the corner from Shakespeare and Company, and his partner, Bertha Laidler, possibly worked for Black Manikin Press, the modernist publishing concern of Edward Titus.<sup>43</sup> As we have seen, he published in *Front* and *Nouvel Âge*, two of the key magazines where communism and modernism co-habited.<sup>44</sup> In London his rooms were near Bloomsbury, the centre of literary London and its marginal politics.<sup>45</sup>

Waten's second decision, to abandon literature, can also be understood positively as a "literary" career decision. After failing to get his novel published in London, where he was by early 1932, and after some initial contacts with literary and political circles there, Waten accepted an offer to become co-editor of the *Unemployed Special*, the newspaper of the National Unemployed Workers' Movement, on which he worked from July until his arrest in November.<sup>46</sup> His fellow editor was another Melburnian from the same circles, a communist, bohemian, drinker, university graduate and later journalist in Australia, Theo Moody. The move from marginal literature into marginal political journalism is utterly comprehensible in the career of a proletarian writer at this point in time. It is one extension of the logic present in proletarianism from the outset and a career pattern repeated numerous times worldwide.

Waten's decision can also be read as a critique of the avant-gardiste or "formalist" aspects of proletarian art which he had himself practised. On his return to Melbourne there was no return to literature despite the existence of the Workers' Art Club and then the Writers'

League. The model for his career at this stage might best be understood as that of the "Party intellectual". The *Workers' Voice*, the newspaper of the Victorian section of the Communist Party from September 1933, carries a number of announcements for Waten as a speaker — and more than once a speaker on that most "intellectual" of Party issues, Trotskyism. Fortunately or unfortunately, this career was cut short. The *Workers' Voice* of 12 July 1935 announced that the Party had "expelled Judah Waten from its ranks":

For a long time the Party has persevered in attempting to make a Communist out of Waten and to help him rid himself of his petty-bourgeois irresponsibilities which continually lead him away from the Party and which caused him on a number of occasions to hinder and damage Party activities.<sup>47</sup>

It appears that bohemianism and communism could still overlap but no longer quite so happily. The *Worker' Voice* added that Waten had "deserted" the Party. But perhaps even here there was a writerly imperative, an imperative towards "experience" or perhaps we should say towards literary material. In July 1935, together with Noel Counihan, Waten set off on a journey through Victoria and New South Wales; in 1936 they went touring again, to Sydney and eventually Brisbane. Counihan earned money from drawings and caricatures done along the way, and has spoken about the trip as a period of apprenticeship. He has also described the literary aspects of the journey for Waten:

He became very self-critical, very fed up with what he was doing and when he came back to Australia he didn't do any writing at all. We thought this might be an opportunity, while we were away together, that he might resume. As we needed money badly in Sydney to get going again, he started to try the commercial radio stations for short radio stories and of course, he discovered that they worked ... they would for example accept a script, read it, reject it and use it with variations, they would alter it.<sup>48</sup>

Waten is recorded in a number of places as a member of the Writers' League which began in Melbourne and Sydney in 1935.<sup>49</sup> However there is no evidence that any writing came out of this connection although his

membership of the League meant a continuing involvement with the issues of proletarian writing, new realisms and communism. In examining the League we can describe certain continuities with earlier organisations and their magazines, but also the shifts which would mean that when Judah Waten begins again as a writer in the 1940s the task, and the possibilities of a career, will be conceived in a vastly different manner.

From one perspective by 1935 the moment of proletarianism had passed. For the communist left, fascism rather than bourgeois ideology had come to be seen as the principal enemy although, of course, one might be merely an extension of the other. Comintern policy had shifted from the social fascist critique, which emphasised class consciousness and the historical revolutionary role of the proletariat, towards the policy of the united front against fascism. Thus for the communist there was a Communist Party bureaucratic imperative in the shift from a consciously proletarian organisation such as the Workers' Art Club to the non-communist united front and anti-fascist Writers' League. Whereas the policy of the former might be said to have been to proletarianise the progressive bourgeoisie, that of the latter was to "unite all progressive forces". In such a context, the radical emphasis on proletarian literature found in *Strife* or *Masses* appeared sectarian, divisive or "left formalist". In addition the proletarian era in Soviet literature had been officially declared over at the First All-Union Congress of Soviet Writers in August 1934. The era of socialist realism had begun.

It is unlikely, however, that either of these policy changes had significant effects on the way the League conducted itself and in particular on its *literary* ethos. Certainly the League was a united front organisation, set up in response to the visit of Egon Kisch to Australia (November 1934-March 1935).<sup>50</sup> Established writers and artists were involved from the outset, first with the Kisch visit itself — Vance and Nettie Palmer, Katharine Prichard, Louis Esson and Max Meldrum among others — and then with the setting up of the League. Kisch was a complex sign in his own right, a communist and a writer, co-chairman of the World Congress for the Defence of Culture, an established literary figure, and a leading exponent of the new realism of reportage, *the* art-form of proletarianism. Crucially he was "not just ... a practitioner but also ... a *theorist* of reportage".<sup>51</sup>

A communist imperative and, much more significantly, a literary/intellectual imperative among writers themselves coincided in the establishment of the Writers' League. Anti-fascism did not need the support of a Party platform to be prioritised, especially as it came to be associated with the defence of culture and thus with writers' own cultural and professional identity. In Australia as in England, proletarianism reached its high-point through a set of linkages between the crisis of the Depression (versus the Five-Year Plan) and the crisis of the rise of fascism; but these very linkages meant that proletarianism came to mean something different from what it had meant at the beginning of the decade.

Established writers, artists and critics figured in the League's activities in a way that differentiates it from the cultural formations that we have examined so far. John White recalls Nettie Palmer, Basil Burdett, Frank Wilmot, Frederick Macartney and Arnold Shore as speakers or visitors at its functions. Still, the bulk of the active membership was again comprised of those on the fringes of literature: journalists, commercial artists, students, communists. White gives a long list of members of the Melbourne League, noting only those who went on to some kind of public career: Kim Keane, Gavin Greenlees, John Fisher, Douglas Wilkie, Wilfred Burchett, Stewart Brown (all journalists), Frank Huelin, Frank Hardy, Robert Close, Albert Tucker, A. F. Howells, A. R. "Rem" McClintock, Bill Wannan, Dick Diamond, Catherine Duncan, Len Fox, Alan Marshall — and Judah Waten.<sup>52</sup> This list suggests that the League was continuing to function as an alternative cultural formation, its marginality but also its effectivity guaranteed by the conjunctions of literature and politics, and theory and practice which it instituted. Its institutional location is nicely suggested by White when he distinguishes the League from two contemporaneous literary organisations, the Bread and Cheese Club, established in 1938 to "foster a knowledge and love of Australian literature, art and music" (its journal was called *Bohemia!*); and the Victorian Fellowship of Australian Writers, also established in 1938 but restricted to "writers of definite standing".<sup>53</sup>

Despite a report of the First All-Union Congress being tabled for discussion at the League's first meeting in Sydney, there is little evidence to suggest that socialist realism arrived in Australia intact, little evidence that it was present as a method or style rather than a broad set

of ideals or a critical rhetoric — and there is little to suggest that even these were more than one voice in an on-going debate. The united front policy itself would have worked against it, and the cultural formation that the League represents, its emphasis on practice, would have baffled the monolithic bureaucratic ambitions of socialist realist doctrine.<sup>54</sup>

Within the League the issues show a good deal more continuity with those of proletarianism from the early thirties than with Soviet socialist realism. Its characteristic activities are classes on journalism, shorthand, poetry and languages, and competitions for short stories written from a working-class point of view: "the best written sketch, describing a shift at work, a day in the life of an employed or unemployed worker, a demonstration, meeting or strike, or some incident of working-class interest".<sup>55</sup> The notion of a literature of "facts" is still alive — Jean Devanny wrote that the League "threw open its ranks to those writers and would-be writers who would present to their readers the real facts of life, who would combat Fascism and war and other forms of oppression".<sup>56</sup> Although the "facts" might now be different, governed as they were by fascism and war, they still entailed questions of technique and appropriate contemporary models.

The dominant emphasis was on realism, and still on a *new*, modern realism. The Party press in Sydney records talks on "the trend of modern literature"; on the question "What is a working-class writer?"; on John Dos Passos, "the leading American writer and 'fellow-traveller' of the working-class movement. No writer is more discussed than Dos Passos"; plus C. Hartley Grattan, in 1937, on American writers, praising Dos Passos and Mike Gold. In Melbourne we find talks on Sinclair Lewis, "Proletarian Literature in USA" and "Modern Art".<sup>57</sup> White recalls that:

members of the League with literary ambitions generally had a realist approach to writing, to tell the facts and come to the point (this is exemplified in the title of the periodical produced by members), that the emotions and atmosphere will come naturally with the urgency and intensity the author compounds into the descriptions and narratives. Members felt this mode of expression was strikingly illustrated in the writings of Hemingway and Gorky, and even more so in the famous trilogy ... by John Dos Passos.<sup>58</sup>

The modernity of realism continued to be registered most acutely where art met politics (or work, the praxis of everyday life); and where this conjunction was posed as a question of method. The first publication of the League was a lecture by a Sydney journalist under the heading "Modernize Your Technique". Its subject was *Newspaper Reporting and Modern Reportage*: "With Notable Examples from the Works of EGON ERWIN KISCH". Reportage is distinguished from mere reporting, as "*a new literary form*":

A Reportage might be described as a report in literary form or as a dramatised report ... a report plus atmosphere, description, comment and deduction — all with the thread of accurate fact running through it....

The best reportage is propagandistic, and plus all these aspects it strives for artistic quality....

As reportage deals so seriously with dates, proclamations, placards, documents, and sometimes the minutest details of fact, some may fall into the error, that reportage is merely a mechanical recording of dry facts....

[M]y point is to emphasise that reportage must not be mechanical, and must be more than photographic.

[Reportage as a weapon is that] which seeks in the facts of industrial slavery and economic vicissitude, the lessons for further human progress — which fearlessly draws the moral from the situation before it and indicates with subtle finger or trumpet blast the newest stage of the long white road to human peace and social justice.<sup>59</sup>

It is the sense of newness that links this project, and the cultural formation it addresses, back to the proletarianist manifestos of *Strife*.

Within the network of the Writers' League both Harcourt's *Upsurge* and Devanny's *Sugar Heaven* were described as "proletarian". The first of Alan Marshall's works were collected as "Proletarian Picture Book"; and his novel originally entitled *Factory* remains the most remarkable local adaptation of Dos Passos.<sup>60</sup> Proletarianism could still operate as a sign of the new realism and as formal innovation. At the same time, there is little of what we might call the modernist celebration of modernity or the celebration of "destructive and constructive" energy — little sense that the modern everyday world itself might be rendered a work of art. Such gestures are scarcely possible in a context defined in terms of the *defence* of culture, truth and democracy (and, for some, the

defence of the working-class and the Soviet Union). While the mainstream literary ethos still insisted on art's separation from or superiority to political concerns — Nettie Palmer noted with some disquiet that the League wanted "poetry that makes you *do* something"<sup>61</sup> — even for League members it was not after all a great step from the defence of culture in the name of truth and democracy to the traditional defence of art's autonomy.

Realism, although still aligned to "the viewpoint of the working class", comes increasingly to be linked with a more populist notion of democracy. This change, in turn, is linked to the major shift in the literary and intellectual field since the early thirties: the articulation of an Australian literary tradition which could also be represented as a socio-political tradition. This was one consequence of the involvement of established Australian writers such as the Palmers, and both cause and effect of an increasing occupational identity among writers as *Australian* writers, with a set of shared local concerns. The communist profile of nationalism had also altered. The Spanish civil war provided a new model of internationalism which accommodated the idea of a *national* defence against fascism from both within and without. White describes opposition to fascism and Franco as the "binding influences for all members of the League".<sup>62</sup> Nationalist themes become prominent. The *Workers' Voice* records talks at the League on P. R. Stephensen's *Foundations of Culture in Australia*, on "Writers and the Eureka Stockade", and on Joseph Furphy.<sup>63</sup> By 1938 when the Melbourne League published its own journal, *Point*, anti-fascism and an Australian tradition together provide its occasion:

[W]e who have interested ourselves in this magazine — a group of writers of various political tendencies, agreeing only in our opposition to Fascism — feel compelled to use our first words for a plain statement which, as far as we know, neither could nor would be published by any other existing Australian journal....

Fascism, which the experience of other countries shows to mean little more than war, misery and the brutal denial of that love of freedom which is the best tradition of the Australian people, has been described as the "wedding of a condition and a myth"....

"Point" makes no apology for concerning itself with this subject. It is concerned primarily with literature and

literary values, but it is also deeply concerned with human values, which Fascism sullies and betrays....

"Point" holds high the great democratic tradition of Australia.<sup>64</sup>

It is as if realism no longer needs to be named or foregrounded as technique; proletarianism has dropped altogether from view. The model of literature as human expression and therefore the expression of truth and democracy is articulated together with the notion of an Australian democratic tradition. If nationalism is now high on the agenda, so too is "literature" (back) on the agenda in a way that we have not met before.

The distinctive perception of a literary tradition which this produces will, by the early 1940s, be the most powerful determinant for individuals conceiving of themselves, their writing, their career, in terms of the category of the "Australian" writer. That now becomes possible in new ways. But as certain options open, others are obscured. In the following chapters I will examine some of the ways in which it was possible for a writing career to be conceived and practised in terms of its Australianness from the 1940s to the 1970s. In what ways, for example, was it possible in the field of literature, in the local cultural economy, to be a migrant writer, an Australian Jewish writer or an Australian communist man of letters?

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- 1 Details for the magazines will be found in the text of this chapter; see also Merewether, *Art & Social Commitment: An End to the City of Dreams 1931-1948* (Sydney: Art Gallery of NSW), pp.50-58. For a discussion of the novels by Harcourt, Devanny and Marshall, see David Carter, "Documenting and Criticising Society", in *The Penguin New Literary History of Australia*, ed. Laurie Hergenhan (Ringwood, Vic.: Penguin, 1988), pp.374-79 and Chapter 5 below. For references to prose sketches and dramatic scripts printed in the *Communist Review* see David Carter, "Re-Viewing Communism: *Communist Review* (Sydney), 1934-1966: A Checklist of Literary Material", *Australian Literary Studies* 12, 1 (May 1985), pp.93-105.
- 2 Guido Barrachi to Nettie Palmer, October 8 1931, Palmer Papers, National Library of Australia, NLA MS 1174/1/3826, Box 6. Baracchi was one-time editor of the communist newspaper the *Proletarian* (1920-1922), too early, despite its title, to be considered a precursor to Waten's writing. It is interesting to consider whether Baracchi received *Front* in Melbourne or whether Waten had sent the copy to him from Paris. The former possibility would suggest more of a local audience for this kind of material than we might otherwise imagine — he does write of the magazine as if it did not need explanation.
- 3 Nettie Palmer, *Fourteen Years: Extracts from a Private Journal 1925-1939*: entry for 19 March 1931, reprinted in *Nettie Palmer*, ed. Vivian Smith (St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1988), p.67. Nettie Palmer's review of *Axel's Castle* appears in *Stream* 1, 1 (July 1931), pp.39-40.
- 4 Waten's papers contain numerous copies of *Left Review* from the 1930s, NLA MS 4536, Box 24. For a discussion of English debates of the 1930s concerning these techniques, debates which were available in Australia, see Stuart Laing, "Presenting 'Things As They Are': John Sommerfield's *May Day* and Mass Observation", in *Class, Culture and Social Change: A New View of the 1930s*, ed. Frank Gloversmith (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1980), pp.142-60, which underlines the importance of ideas of technique and audience based on cinema, the newspaper and the concept of the mass. In his interview with Barret Reid (State Library of Victoria, February 1967) Waten talks of having known Sommerfield in England, 1931-33. See also Janet Batsleer et al., *Rewriting English: Cultural Politics of Gender and Class* (London: Methuen, 1985), pp.41-69.
- 5 See: Joseph Freeman, "Let's Laugh", *Workers' Weekly (WW)* 1 April 1927, p.3; "Culture and the Workers", *WW* 6 May 1927, p.3; "Art for Workers: A Virile Force", *WW* 2 November 1928, p.4; "Building a Workers' State", *WW* 6 September 1929, p.2. Also "Books for Militants", *WW* 6 May 1927, p.3. A debate under the heading "Art and the Workers" is conducted in the pages of the paper, May to July 1927.
- 6 For a discussion of the Australian application of the line of the Sixth Comintern Congress see Robin Gollan, *Revolutionaries and Reformists: Communism and the Australian Labour Movement 1920-1955* (Canberra: Australian National University Press, 1975), pp.20-22.
- 7 Alan Swingewood, *The Novel and Revolution* (London: Macmillan, 1975), pp.91-101. A decade later, and on the other side of socialist realism, Katharine Prichard provides a fascinating retrospective view on Soviet literary politics. Her position is orthodox according to 1941 precepts, but the traces of an avant-garde proletarianism are still striking: "During the first years of Soviet organisation, creative expression in art and literature ran the gamut of all the erratic and ephemeral forms. Futurism, sur-realism, and all manner of extravagances, bidding for acceptance as the art form of the future". These had been revealed as "exotic Bohemianism ... revolutionary in form rather than content". Still the writer she notes as the "first to interpret the spirit of the new age" is Mayakovsky whom she praises for his poster poems and verse about "saboteurs and garbage, lice and traitors". She describes his poems as making "bright graphs on the mind" (my emphasis). Prichard, "Literature and Drama", in *Soviet Culture: A Selection of Talks at the Cultural Conference, November 1941* (Sydney: NSW Aid Russia Committee, 1942), pp.80-81.
- 8 John Senny, *Melbourne's Radical Bookshops: History, People, Appreciation* (Melbourne: International Bookshop, 1983), p.40. "What's On", *WW* 19 April 1929, p.3. The bulk of the political literature was from Britain or English-language material from the Soviet Union, although there was a significant proportion of American publications as well ("nearly a quarter" Senny notes of an advertisement for Andrade's: Senny, p.34). Waten has also spoken of books available in the Communist Party library in the 1920s: Upton Sinclair,

Nexo, Dreiser, Anatole France, Dos Passos, Mike Gold, Sinclair Lewis, Barbusse (Barret Reid interview). The Jewish immigrant element in *New Masses*, via Mike Gold, Joseph Freeman and others, was possibly also part of its availability as a model for Waten.

Daniel Aarons, *Writers on the Left* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), pp.208-9, paraphrasing and quoting from Mike Gold, "Notes of the Month", *New Masses* 6, 4 (September 1930), pp.4-5. Sharyn Pearce has compared Australian and American proletarian writing in a way that would support my argument, however she does not get far beyond noting a "literary confluence" and blurs the difference between proletarianism and socialist realism: "The Proletarianization of the Novel: The Cult of the Worker in Australian and American Fiction of the Depression", *Southerly* 48, 2 (1988), pp.187-200.

Lucien Bonnard [Gino Nibbi], "A Glance at the Melbourne National Gallery", *Stream* 1, 1 (July 1931), p.15.

*Stream* 1, 1 (inside front cover).

*Stream* 1, 2 (August 1931), for example, includes these contents: "Some Modern Masters", by Gino Nibbi; "A Young Soviet Writer" (on Leonid Leonov), trans. from *Le Mois*; "The Confrontation", by Bertram Higgins; "Music and the Social State", by Arthur Hoeree; "Surrealism: A Pre-Novel", by Azorin; "Modern Life and Art", by Fernand Leger; "Luigi Pirandello", by Carmelo Puglioni; "Baudelaire Psycho-Analysed", by Ernest Harden; and poems with titles such as "Strange Encounter", "Hamlet's Revolt", "Collapse of a Youthful Philosopher Dancing", and "Schizophrenic Testament", by Alwyn Lee, Arthur Davies, Edgar Holt and the magazine's editor, C. Alston Pearl (better-known as Cyril Pearl). See also John Tregenza, *Australia's Little Magazine's 1923-1954* (Adelaide: Libraries Board of South Australia, 1964), pp.39-45.

*Stream* 1, 1, p.4.

C. [Cyril] Alston Pearl, "La Ligne Générale", *Stream* 1, 1, p.44.

Merewether, *Art & Social Commitment*, reproduces this cover (p.58) and includes a biography of Maugham (p.102).

"Montages", *Stream* 1, 2, p.4. References to Eisenstein etc. on pp.1-2. Eisenstein is quoted as saying: "The germinal idea of our Russian cinema is the same as that which recently inspired our revolution, i.e., the predominance of the collective over the individual ideal". To put their position crudely, the magazine's writers are pro-cinema but anti-Hollywood.

Zinovy Lvovsky, "Soviet Literature", trans. Isabel Renfree, *Stream* 1, 3, pp.13-14. Panferov writes: "I have learned my trade from Knut Hamsun, Jack London, Tolstoi". For accounts of Panferov and *Brousski* see Clark, *The Soviet Novel: History as Ritual* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), p.100, and Ermolaev, *Soviet Literary Theories 1917-1934* (New York: Octagon, 1977), pp.105-6, 174-75.

"Montages", *Stream* 1, 3, p.46.

*Stream* 1, 3 (September 1931), title-page. The magazine also announces for its ill-fated October issue articles on "The New Soviet Theatre", on "American Literature" (by André Maurois), an unpublished fragment by Dostoevski, and a piece on Mallarmé (by A. R. Chisholm).

Communist Party members who appear in the magazine include Ralph Gibson, G. P. O'Day and Guido Barrachi. Judah Waten was overseas until mid-1933 and does not appear in the magazine, but his name is recorded in the Labour Club Minutes Book as a speaker on European literature, July 17 1933 (Melbourne University Archives).

Winston Rhodes, "The New Realism", *Proletariat* 1, 1 (April 1932), p.13.

Jon Christian Suggs, "The Proletarian Novel", in *Dictionary of Literary Biography Volume 9: American Novelists 1910-1945 Part 3*, ed. James J. Martine (Detroit: Bruccoli Clark, 1981), p.233. In the Australian context, Ian Reid has spoken of the mass perception of history in relation to the rise of the historical novel in the thirties. See his *Fiction and the Great Depression: Australia and New Zealand 1930-1950* (Melbourne: Edward Arnold, 1979); and David Carter, "'History was on Our Side': Memoirs from the Australian Left", *Meanjin* 46, 1 (March 1987), p.111.

*Masses and Men* had been produced by the Workers' Art Club in Melbourne in 1932. Angela Hillel, *Against the Stream: Melbourne New Theatre 1936-1986* (Melbourne: New Theatre, 1986), p.6.

- 24 C. P. [= Cyril Pearl?], "American Scenario", *Proletariat* 2, 1 (February 1933), pp.22-24. The article lists, along with Dos Passos "in the vanguard of the revolutionary movement": Sherwood Anderson, Mike Gold, Charles Yale Harrison, Theodore Dreiser, Edmund Wilson and Waldo Frank.
- 25 Journalists were Brian Fitzpatrick, Colin Wills and Bernard Burns; commercial artists were Nutter Buzacott, Herbert McClintock, Jimmy Flett, and Mervyn Wallis. Waten at this stage had mostly done journalistic work for the communist press. Two other historical moments that might be used as comparisons: the early writing of the *Sydney Bulletin* in the context of that new commercial, journalistic venture; the 'pop-art'/anti-art of the 1960s (Michael Brown, Colin Lancely) at a period when the commercial gallery scene in Australia was being established.
- 26 Merewether, *Art & Social Commitment*, p.100. Merewether also includes biographies of Nutter Buzacott, Noel Counihan and Jack Maugham pertinent to my argument.
- 27 The Meldrum circle and their offshoot centred around Justus Jorgensen are described in Betty Roland's memoir, *The Eye of the Beholder* (Sydney: Hale & Iremonger, 1984).
- 28 Raymond Williams, *Culture* (Glasgow: Fontana, 1981), pp.70-71.
- 29 Michael Juste, "The Dance of the Penny Paper Dolls", *Strife*, pp.11-13. *Masses* includes a critique of the *Argus*: David Lockhart, "'Argus' History", pp.11-12.
- 30 As suggested earlier, before the mid-thirties there was little sense of a local national literary tradition, that is, one that connected present with past and locale with nation. The *Bulletin* was still there of course, reviewing Australian books, and *All About Books* had carried reviews and notices since 1928. But the *Bulletin* scarcely functioned any longer as a kind of "national literary club" (see Ken Stewart, "Journalism and the World of the Writer: The Production of Australian Literature 1855-1915", in Hergenhan, pp.189 & 191); and perhaps *All About Books* suggests its milieu in the kinds of cultural formations for which it carries notices: not only publishing houses but also such literary societies as the Society of Australian Authors, the Henry Lawson Memorial and Literary Society of Footscray, the Dickens Fellowship, the Melbourne Shakespeare Society etc. (John McLaren, "Publishing in the Twentieth Century", in *The Book in Australia: Essays Towards a Cultural and Social History*, eds D. H. Borchardt and W. Kirsop (Melbourne: Monash University, 1988), pp.73-74.
- 31 Sedy, pp.95-97; advertisement, *Stream* 1, 3 (September 1931), p.1; Waten's point from Barret Reid interview.
- 32 See Merewether, *Art & Social Commitment*, pp.57-58 & 102.
- 33 See for example, Peter Kirkpatrick, *The Sea Coast of Bohemia: Literary Life in Sydney's Roaring Twenties* (St Lucia, Qld: University of Queensland Press, 1992).
- 34 Richard Haese gives a sense of this inner urban culture for a slightly later period in the 1930s and 1940s: *Rebels and Precursors: The Revolutionary Years of Australian Art* (London: Allen Lane, 1981), ch.1.
- 35 Merewether, *Art and Social Commitment*, p.11.
- 36 Alwyn Lee also turns up in the *Workers' Weekly* as co-secretary of the Workers' Art Club, defending their performance of Toller's *Masses and Men* from a correspondent who termed it "typically petit bourgeois" and "social fascist". *WW* 16 September 1932, p.2. By the 1960s he is in the USA as a contributing editor to *Time* magazine!
- 37 Daniel Aaron, *Writers on the Left* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), describes the American experience of the Kharkov conference, pp.219-30.
- 38 Ralph Gibson and H. Alwyn Lee, "Two Sketches: 'South Wales, 1928'; 'New South Wales, 1932,'" *Masses*, pp.5-6. The *Workers' Weekly* printed some sketches in early 1931, mostly (wholly?) by Jean Devanny. See: unsigned, "The Swagman Who Did Not Scab", 30 January 1931; J. D., "The Electrician: A Story with a Point", 13 February 1931; unsigned, "The Electrician has Further Adventures", 6 March 1931; Jean Devanny, "The Electrician Demonstrates", 20 March 1931. Apart from the use of the brief form, these are technically orthodox.
- 39 *Masses* 1 (November 1932), p.1.

- 40 I have in mind developments in the Writers' League (1935-1940 in Melbourne) and the Contemporary Art Society (1939-47). For the former see John White, *Alan Marshall and the Victorian Writers' League* (Kuranda, Qld: Rams Skull Press, 1987), passim. Julie Wells bases her discussion largely on information relating to the Sydney group: "The Writers' League: a Study in Literary and Working-Class Politics", *Meanjin* 46, 4 (December 1987), pp.527-34. For the Contemporary Art Society see Haese (passim) and McQueen, *The Black Swan of Trespass: The Emergence of Modernist Painting in Australia to 1944* (Sydney: Alternative Publishing Co-operative, 1979), Part 2.
- 41 On the politicisation and professionalisation of the Fellowship of Australian Writers and other groups see Drusilla Modjeska, *Exiles at Home: Australian Women Writers 1925-1945* (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1981), ch.5, and Julie Wells, "Writers and Fascism: The Kisch Case", in *Workers and Intellectuals: Essays on Twentieth Century Australia From Ten Urban Hunters and Gatherers*, eds Richard Nile and Barry York (London: Edward Blackwood, 1992), pp.67-83.
- 42 Early exhibitions include *The Embryos* (McClintock, Flett, Eric Thake), The Little Gallery, July 1930; *The New Group* (Dalgarno, Flett, Buzacott, Thake, Bill Dolphin and others), Athenaeum Gallery, 1931; and the showing of Jack Maugham's work at the Workers' Art Club, 1932. See Merewether, pp.84-113. Publication was more furtive, apart from the manifestos, essays and poems in the magazines discussed. As indicated above, some prose sketches appeared in the communist press in the early 1930s, a great many more between 1937 and 1940. See Carter, "Reviewing Communism", pp.95 & 99. *Upsurge* was banned after publication. Katharine Susannah Prichard described it as "Australia's first truly proletarian novel": Carter, "Documenting and Criticising Society", pp.377-78, and the introduction by Richard Nile to the 1986 reprint of the novel (University of Western Australia Press); also Peter Cowan, "J. M. Harcourt and the Nineteen-Thirties", *Westerly* 29, 2 (July 1984), pp.93-100.
- 43 Waten discusses the period in Paris most fully in his interview with Barret Reid. The detail about his partner is based on unreliable evidence, Waten's story/memoir "With Uncle Jacob and Auntie Malka in Paris", *Southerly* 43, 2 (1983), p.123.
- 44 The Poulaille archives also contain three letters from Waten to Poulaille (editor of *Nouvel Âge*), from London, October 1931, suggesting that Waten had established quite close contacts with the group around Poulaille's magazine.
- 45 His address on arrest in 1932 is given as Frederick St, Grays Inn Road. This is walking distance from the then headquarters of the League Against Imperialism and the National Unemployed Workers' Movement. Waten was involved in both.
- 46 *Unemployed Special* (July-October 1932); becomes the *Unemployed Leader* from November, 1932. Waten's arrest is recorded in the latter edition, p.2. The British Library, Newspaper Library (Colindale).
- 47 *Workers' Voice* 12 July 1935, p.4. Jack Beasley gives a sympathetic account of Waten's life at this time in his *Red Letter Days: Notes from Inside an Era* (Sydney: Australasian Book Society, 1979), p.104.
- 48 Noel Counihan, interview with Mark Cranfield (9 July 1981), National Library of Australia, Tape no.1059. The journey is described in Bernard Smith, *Noel Counihan: Artist and Revolutionary* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1993), ch.7.
- 49 Wells, "The Writers' League", p.532; White, p.21; A. F. Howells, *Against the Stream: The Memories of a Philosophical Anarchist 1927-1939* (Melbourne: Hyland House, 1983), p.119. The first meeting of the Melbourne Writers' League was held on 8 March 1935. The first National Conference was held in Sydney on 13 April 1935. The *Workers' Weekly* reports that the conference: "stressed the broad and non-sectarian nature of the W.I. [the Writers' International of which the League was the Australian Section]; traced the influence of the great Soviet writers on modern literature, dealt with the degeneration of culture, art and literature under the influence of Fascism and concluded on the optimistic note of the great work confronting the WI in connection with the orientation of the literature of the radical and groping social-political writers". (Jean Devanny, "Writers' League: First National Conference", *WW* 19 April 1935, p.6.)
- 50 Waten has spoken of being present on the wharf when Kisch made his spectacular arrival in Melbourne (review of Kisch's *Australian Landfall*, *Age* 27 September 1969, p.15), and a letter from Kisch to Bertha Laidler suggests that he had a little to do with Kisch during the

- latter's visit: "...I can hope that you one day will run away from Australia and visit me in Paris. Bring Juda Watton (sic) with you, and when all is allright in Germany I go with him to Bavaria and we will have a good time and you will have the pleasure to carry us home" (Kisch, aboard SS Orford to Bertha Laidler, 19 March 1935: Bertha Walker Papers, Box 1, State Library of Victoria). For details of Kisch's visit see Wells, "Writers and Fascism" and "Kisch Speaks to Australian Writers", *WW* 18 January 1935, p.6 (the same page reports Kisch addressing the Jewish-Communist group, the Gezerd, denying Soviet anti-Semitism).
- 51 Peter Monteath, "The Kisch Visit Revisited", *Journal of Australian Studies* 34 (September 1992), p.69. My emphasis.
- 52 White, pp.21-23.
- 53 White, p.29.
- 54 For discussions of socialist realism in Australia see Beasley, *Red Letter Days*, pp.169-88; Carter, "Documenting and Criticising Society", pp.378ff (and Chapters 4 & 5 below); Bernard Smith, "Reds and Other Colors", *Age Monthly Review* 1, 6 (October 1981), pp.7-8; plus essays by Patrick Buckridge and Carole Ferrier in *Gender, Politics and Fiction: Twentieth-Century Australian Women's Novels*, ed. Carole Ferrier (St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1985). For an extremely hostile account see Patrick O'Brien, *The Saviours: An Intellectual History of the Left in Australia* (Richmond, Vic.: Drummond, 1977), pp.35-63.
- 55 "Writers' League", *WW* 14 June 1935, p.5.
- 56 "Writers' International", *WW* 25 January 1935, p.6.
- 57 See "Writers' International", *WW* 25 January 1935, p.6; "Writers' League", *WW* 8 February 1935, p.2; "Writers' League", *WW* 12 April 1935, p.6; and "American Writers: Lecture by C. Hartley Grattan", *WW* 12 February 1937, p.2. For Melbourne see *Workers' Voice* 5 June 1936, p.6.
- 58 White, p.28.
- 59 Julian Smith, *Newspaper Reporting and Modern Reportage*, pp.4-5, 10-13. This document also includes the "Report of the First National Australian Writers' League Conference with Statement of Principles and Terms of Novel Competition". The document is advertised on its first page as "the first exposition in this country of Reportage — that combination of art and social realism which is the most modern form of describing the world and its events". Wells identifies Julian Smith as Sydney journalist Tom Fitzgerald ("The Writers' League", p.531).
- 60 Some of Marshall's sketches are reprinted in *Alan Marshall's Battlers* (Sydney: Pan, 1984). They originally appeared in the *Workers' Voice* November 1937-July 1938, *Left Review* November-December 1937, and *Communist Review* December 1937-January 1939 (the latter includes excerpts from the novel *Factory*, finished in 1937 but not published until 1949, under its new title, *How Beautiful are Thy Feet*).
- 61 From her diary, quoted in Wells, "The Writers' League", p.531.
- 62 White, p.27.
- 63 *Workers' Voice* July-September 1936.
- 64 "Editorial", *Point* 1, 1 (Autumn 1938), pp.1-2. The journal includes stories by Alan Marshall, Ilya Ehrenburg and Robert Close; criticism by Mike Gold and Vance Palmer; and verse by A. R. McClintock and Frederico Garcia Lorca.

**Before the Migrant Writer:  
The Writing of *Alien Son***

*... a collection of stories, a novel without architecture, a novel without a plot,  
a group of stories about the same subject, about the same characters,  
principally a father, mother and son.*  
(Judah Waten, Interview with Hazel De Berg, 1960)

The stories that comprise Judah Waten's *Alien Son* were written and revised over a period extending from the mid-1940s to the early 1950s. The first to be published was "To a Country Town", in M. Barnard Eldershaw's 1946 edition of the annual short story anthology *Coast to Coast*. Over the next six years further stories appeared in *Coast to Coast*, *Meanjin* and the *Bulletin*.<sup>1</sup> The collection itself, Waten's first published book, was released by Angus and Robertson in July 1952.

In the context of my discussion in the previous two chapters the question that arises is how the proletarian avant-garde writer who "disappeared" in the mid-1930s could re-emerge a decade or so later as the author of *Alien Son*. The main purpose of the present chapter will be to address this question, not through a directly biographical study of the changes in Waten's mentality, political beliefs or social circumstances, but through an analysis of the book's literary occasion. My focus will be on the writing of *Alien Son*, by which I mean both the institutional circumstances of its composition and the narrative "circumstances" of the composed text. By its literary occasion I mean the moment of the writing defined in terms of a network of ideas and styles, intellectual alliances and cultural formations, and publishing or career possibilities, all of which work to determine what literary options are open to a writer at a given time and in a given place — to Judah Waten, in Melbourne, in the 1940s and early 1950s.

Such an understanding of the literary occasion can be suggested here by a series of simple questions which I hope to illustrate are far from naively empirical in their consequences. What sorts of fiction were being written and read in Australia in the late 1940s? What specific value among genres did the short story have, and for whom, under what conditions? What groupings of writers existed? (Who knew whom; who read whom?) What kind of audience could a writer suppose? Who did you write for? What kinds of literary or writing careers were available both practically, in terms of getting published and getting paid, and conceptually — in what terms could a literary career be conceived? With each question focused on the

writing of *Alien Son* I want to trace the formation of Judah Waten's writing career, and in particular to locate it in a period "before" the migrant writer.

By this final phrase I am not referring to a period before there were in fact "migrant writers" in Australia. Whether we understand by the term writers born elsewhere, writers whose first language is other than English, or writers whose acculturation was other than Anglo-Celtic, it is doubtful if there was ever a time before the migrant writer in Australia. Instead I want to describe a period before the concept of the migrant writer existed locally, before it was available to the writer in Australia as a category through which a literary career could be conceived or as a speaking position from which a writer could intervene in the contemporary cultural economy. This last formulation entails — for the 1940s and 1950s — an examination of the process whereby the category of migrant writer becomes possible *within* Australian literature.

Because of my focus on the immediate post-war period I will use the term "migrant writer" in this chapter despite its limitations as analysed in more recent criticism, and despite the range of over-lapping but non-identical terms which have been proposed: ethnic writer, multicultural writer, non-Anglo-Celtic writer.<sup>2</sup> The term itself was not yet in common circulation, but "migrant writer" was the only available conceptual space before multiculturalism, subsuming the category of the "Jewish writer" for example. The period I will be discussing is still to be found under the sign of assimilation. Indeed the period of post-war immigration is one of emergent, even rampant assimilationism, a development itself significant for the shapes a writing career, a career as a migrant writer, could then take. Certainly Waten's writings in the 1950s and 1960s were received in terms of migration and the passage towards assimilation rather than in terms of ethnicity. He was perceived and valued as a writer who "records the path of assimilation trod and being trodden by thousands of tomorrow's Australians" or in similar terms "the arrival and adjustment, more or less, of New Australians to old Australia".<sup>3</sup>

*Alien Son* has secured a permanent if minor place in Australian literary history as the first significant work to take as its subject "foreign" or non-English-speaking migrants in Australia. There is often a form of assimilationism at work in this very history, whereby Waten is gathered up as evidence of the broadening stream of national/literary development. When ethnic difference is recognised it is often by way of demarcation: Waten is limited to minority status as a migrant or Jewish writer even as this supplies the terms for his recognition within the Australian literary tradition.<sup>4</sup> Although Waten's place within the canon is almost wholly on the grounds of *Alien Son* (indeed because this is so) his status as a migrant/Jewish writer has largely been taken for granted, taken as self-evident. My

discussion of Waten's earlier attempts at a writing career, however, will already have suggested that there could be nothing immediate or inevitable about this author's re-invention of his writerly self, even as a writer of "autobiographical sketches".

Although a number of Waten's associates in the late-1920s and 1930s were Jewish and immigrant, the prevailing discourses as we have seen were not those of ethnicity or nation. They were internationalist: the internationalism of the avant-garde, of the proletariat, or, as in Waten's case, a combination of the two. Left-wing Jewish identity itself was still internationalist in spirit. If there was an ethnicity that figured locally in bohemian and radical circles, it was Irish-Australian. Although ethnist and nationalist, this oppositional Irish-Australian discourse could be figured as a kind of proletarian (and anti-imperialist) internationalism, and as such it could be linked to the international Jewish diaspora of the early decades of the century.

But neither the avant-garde nor the proletarian inflections of this discourse could provide sustaining models of a *literary* career; at best they offered anti-models or models for an *anti-career*. Waten himself has characterised the mid-1940s as marking the beginning of his "second literary career",<sup>5</sup> and the phrase serves to remind us that any such beginning is a structured process. The forms of a career are shaped within a specific field of possibility, a set of options and constraints which operate intellectually, publicly and textually. To conceive of oneself as a writer or "man" of letters is to take a position within a contemporary economy of notions of the writer, novelist, journalist, intellectual, Australian writer, communist writer, Jewish writer, migrant writer and so on. The positions are never equal, never equally available, and in the mid-1940s the minority category of migrant or Jewish writer was scarcely visible on the horizon of Australian literature.

At the same time, Australian literature itself could be perceived as a minority discourse. To Vance Palmer, for example, it formed a continuous popular tradition but one neglected and disparaged by the most powerful cultural institutions and even by the populace at large.<sup>6</sup> The figure of the radical democratic *Australian* writer is in this sense an ambiguous one, both marginal and mainstream. So much so that on the grounds of their shared marginality the categories of migrant writer and Australian writer could be conceived as complementary rather than contradictory, with the former as a unique kind of qualification for entry into the latter. The Palmers were not just supportive of the immigrant Jewish writers in Australia but engaged with them as allies in a common cause.

In fact Judah Waten's second attempt at a literary career depends upon an increasing investment in both modern Jewish and Yiddish culture and in a distinctive, local national culture, an Australian literary tradition. This new dual investment in a democratic Australian tradition and contemporary Yiddish-Jewish

culture must be understood, in part, in the context of the "anti-fascist" war, for alongside its anti-Semitism fascism was widely perceived as a threat to democracy, culture and independent nationalities. Communism itself could now be understood in terms of the defence of democracy and popular national cultures. But what does the intensification of both Jewish and nationalist interests *simultaneously* mean for the formation of a literary career? What space was available for the Jewish-Australian or Australian-Jewish writer?

In the mid-forties we can find evidence of Waten's involvement in a range of writing, editing and publishing activities which reveal a literary career in the process of formation across both Jewish and Australian cultural fields, crossing and linking them in unprecedented ways. In 1945 he published an essay called "Reflections on Literature and Painting" and a pseudonymous story in an anthology called *Southern Stories*, edited by nationalist historian, civil libertarian and former collaborator on *Strife*, Brian Fitzpatrick.<sup>7</sup> Waten's essay situates itself in the moment of the anti-fascist struggle as it examines the role of the artist "in rousing the people of all freedom-loving nations against the barbarism of the enemy, and in expressing the deepest feelings and desires of those taking part" (52). A wide range of artists is argued into an heroic, anti-fascist tradition, Picasso and Chagall, Sholokov and Ehrenburg, the Yiddish writer Sholem Asch and even J. B. Priestley. Fascism, these artists had realised in common, was a "deadly menace to civilisation" (52) and "a systematic attempt to destroy the culture of every person enslaved by the Nazis" (53). The main theme of the essay is that the path of the future is that indicated "by the great realists of our epoch" (53). The "history of art reveals a continuous tradition of realism" engaged in "a ceaseless struggle [against the] flight from reality" — against "an art completely subjective and often meaningless ... completely divorced from the people" (54). Lawrence, Pound, Céline, Wyndham Lewis, Roy Campbell and T. S. Eliot are exposed as enemy agents.

Waten's essay argues for a "new realism" (55) which is also a militant, democratic *tradition* of western art, and which incidentally gathers proletarianism into its advancing ranks.<sup>8</sup> Most importantly, in the conclusion to his argument, contemporary Australian art is aligned with this historical development. A contemporary "artistic upsurge" is discovered in the writings of Prichard, Davison, Marshall, Casey, Palmer and Morrison and in the paintings of O'Connor, Counihan, Drysdale, Bergner and McClintock. It is both representative of a "new humanism" and "based on the realistic tradition which is the dominant feature of Australian art" (57). We have moved a very long way from the moment of the avant-garde.

*Southern Stories* printed contemporary Australian and New Zealand material, not least an introductory essay by Fitzpatrick entitled, momentarily, "The

Australian Tradition". An essay under this title still had to take the form of an argument that there *was* such a tradition and Fitzpatrick discovered it where it had always been, embodied in "Australian attitudes which have been given form in literature". The message for the present was that "it is this body of tradition, still fluid or malleable, that occupies writers and painters who are interested in Australia, 'Australia' meaning the Australian people and their environment and heritage" (5). Fitzpatrick's argument can now be recognised as a classic "radical nationalist" social history of Australian literature. Lawson, Furphy, Paterson and Richardson mark the period of national emergence. But for the present discussion the most interesting aspect is that Fitzpatrick's sense of the Australian tradition is "fluid and malleable" enough, and as it were *contemporary* enough, to encompass "three New Zealand writers and four Polish Jews" (16).<sup>9</sup> The common denominator of the publication, he explains,

is a lively sense that contemporary art and letters are functions of democracy. We all feel part of a tradition which can fairly be described as Australian.... [Australian and New Zealand writers] are not divided by any but a geographical or legal line. And as for the alien-born among our number, their home for many years has been Australia, and in my opinion they already share and contribute to our local cultural movement.... The basis of it is the sharing of a common heritage. (16-17)

*Southern Stories* was the first product of Dolphin Publications, an enterprise established by Waten and Vic O'Connor to publish cheap editions of Australian works past and present. Waten and O'Connor together edited Dolphin's second publication, *Twenty Great Australian Stories*, an anthology of short fiction from Marcus Clarke to Alan Marshall.<sup>10</sup> The collection, which was virtually the first of its kind, manifested the sense of an Australian literary tradition and most importantly a tradition grasped as contemporary and political. It was *the* literary tradition for any writer wanting to address — and to politicise — a contemporary Australian audience. Future Dolphin publications would include a re-issue of Carboni's *The Eureka Stockade* and the first collection of John Morrison's short stories, *Sailors Belong Ships*, both in 1947 and both extending and deepening the sense of a progressive tradition. The publications are arguments for such a tradition, arguing it into being in the process of arguing that it already exists.

At the same time *Southern Stories* contained two fictional pieces by the immigrant Polish-Jewish writers Pinchas Goldhar and Herz Bergner, translated by Waten from Yiddish into English.<sup>11</sup> In addition, in 1946, Dolphin published Waten's translation of Bergner's novel, *Between Sky and Sea*, graced with an Introduction by Vance Palmer. (In the following year Nettie Palmer would write an obituary tribute to Goldhar for *Meanjin*.<sup>12</sup>) Excerpts from Bergner's novel also appeared during 1946 in a magazine called *Jewish Youth*, published by the Kadimah cultural group.<sup>13</sup>

Waten was a member of this journal's editorial board, and by 1947 he was also working for the Jewish Council to Combat Fascism and Anti-Semitism, for many years post-war the most important Jewish community organisation in Melbourne.<sup>14</sup> A little later, in 1948 and 1949, he published two essays in Jewish periodicals arguing the case for the existence of Yiddish and Jewish literatures within Australia and more tendentiously within Australian literature.<sup>15</sup>

What should be clear from this brief account of the network of cultural activities in which Waten was involved is the relative complexity of the literary occasion for the writing of *Alien Son*. Waten was already consciously a writer and cultural activist, indeed an entrepreneur, and his literary career was, if marginal, already diverse, public and addressed to a mainstream. His writing was neither isolated nor unstructured, nor simply the result of direct experience (the "migrant experience") as later criticism would have it. It was an activity shaped within a specific formation or set of institutions: not only those in which Waten found himself but also those which he helped invent, especially those sites where the Australian and the Yiddish-Jewish intersected. He was working among fellow writers, artists and editors within a delimited publishing economy for "serious" fiction. The places where Waten published his stories — *Meanjin*, the *Bulletin*, *Coast to Coast* (and Dolphin Publications) — virtually exhausted the field for local fiction publication at this time. Despite their different editors it is not misleading to see them all sharing a preference for the well-made realist story tending to anecdote and yarn rather than complex plot.

More acutely we can find evidence of two sets of influences or models available to Judah Waten in the mid-1940s, models both for writing and for a literary career. Of course there were other exemplary figures, the short stories of Chekhov and Tolstoy in particular representing a modernising Russian heritage that could become for Waten part of a personal and family history, and thus of a career trajectory.<sup>16</sup> But the most immediate contemporary contexts were those defined on one side by the Yiddish writers Goldhar and Bergner, together with the painter Yosl Bergner; and on the other side, by the close-knit group of "Australian" writers in Melbourne which included the Palmers, Davison, Marshall and Fitzpatrick, together with the painters, O'Connor and Counihan.

Through the former we can describe the active presence of a Yiddish-Jewish literary culture, accessible not as a matter of nostalgia or cultural birthright but as an immediate and political presence. Modern Yiddish literature in particular could be grasped as at once popular, contemporary and deeply traditional. In *Alien Son* we find mention of Hayyim Bialik, Yiddish and Hebrew writer, and the Yiddish short

story writer Sholem Aleichem, while the magazine *Jewish Youth* suggests Waten's familiarity with a wide range of modern Yiddish writing.

Through the second group of fellow writers and artists in post-war Melbourne we can describe the presence for Waten of a nationalist Australian literary tradition; again, crucially, a tradition which had meaning as a contemporary intervention not merely an inheritance. As can be suggested by the involvement of the Palmers with Bergner and Goldhar as well as by the imbrication of themes in Waten's own early stories, the two sources of potential influence could be mutually reinforcing as well as disparate. The Palmers' nationalism was also a cosmopolitanism. They welcomed migrant writers as evidence of "national" and democratic cultural evolution all over the world, even as they welcomed them also as part of the evolving project of Australian literature.<sup>17</sup>

Waten also repeatedly told the story of how it was Goldhar who suggested that he write stories about his own Russian-Jewish immigrant experience rather than the stories about Aussie battlers and Aborigines which he had been attempting.<sup>18</sup> "Inspector Ryan" in *Southern Stories* is one of these earlier attempts. Set in an Australian country town just before and after the Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union — and interesting at least for this precise "dating" in the local setting — it is a lively, unsubtle tale in which the local communist, an irrepressibly cheerful and boyish worker, bests the new, fanatically anti-communist police inspector. Another early story, "Young Combo's Day", won Waten £20 in the *Sydney Morning Herald* short story competition for 1946. Reminiscent of some of Alan Marshall's work, it centres on an Aboriginal side-show boxer and his one, pyrrhic moment of triumph when he fights his planted white opponent in earnest. As the competition judges remarked, the story's main theme is frustration and impotence, "the frustrated aborigine at odds with life among the whites who deride and exploit him", and this theme is "simply and ably treated".<sup>19</sup> Aboriginal characters also appear in one story in *Alien Son*, "Black Girl". Perhaps via the theme of displacement it is possible to link some of the earlier "Australian" stories with the published "Jewish" stories. More immediately we might suggest links between these stories and Yosel Bergner's paintings from the forties which represent urban Aborigines as figures parallel to the dispossessed Jews of Europe.<sup>20</sup>

The *Alien Son* stories can be seen, not simply as the sum or product of these influences, but as a series of innovations within the field they describe. In this sense the concept of models is more useful than that of influences in that it suggests more readily the way a writer positions his or her work in relation to a contemporary field of writing. From both sets of models, then, there was a certain pressure towards the short story. Vance Palmer, Marshall and Davison, Waten's closest contacts, all wrote

realist stories with identifiably Australian settings. The first-person narrative voice is common, ranging from a limited psychological focus to the anecdotal yarn; and the stories, while clearly literary, are also popular in address.

What of the Yiddish writers? The modern European and American Yiddish writers such as Sholem Aleichem wrote stories which can be understood in part as literary imitations of the traditional folk tale but with an ironic edge hovering between comedy and pathos. In a later essay, Waten would describe Aleichem as the "funniest and saddest" of the Yiddish writers.<sup>21</sup> Their literary trick is to recreate a strong sense of *orality*, of oral narratives produced and received communally, but also, with their irony, to give their stories a modern literary doubleness and interpretability. The products themselves of a self-conscious literary milieu, the stories create the illusion of orality and community even as the literary *performance* of that community and of the story-telling is held up for appreciation. They often make use of the techniques of an anecdotal or "talkative" narration from a figure within the community and often from the position of a child-within-the-family. These aspects can be made to bear on our reading of *Alien Son*.

The Yiddish writers in Melbourne gave more emphasis to their own contemporary experiences of migration and displacement. If their stories still create a sense of community, the primary communal experience is now that of dispossession or alienation. In *Alien Son* migration is also a central theme — the stories are full of journeys and dreams of journeys. One of the main ways in which characters are differentiated is through contrasts in their attitudes towards staying on or moving on in their new country. The book's title also alerts us to the theme of alienation. Yet the interesting point is Waten's difference from these immigrant Yiddish writers, writers whose works he was in the process of translating even as he was writing *Alien Son*. The position of immigrant Yiddish writer was not available to Waten or rather not attractive, not empowering, as a cultural politics. This is not just because of his different experience of migration but, more importantly, because of his different relation to the community of Australian literature. If there is a sense in which Waten wants to speak *from* a position within the Jewish immigrant community, the stories also suggest he wants to speak *to* an Australian literary community and through it to an inclusive Australian public.

It might thus be argued that the stories themselves are written under the sign of assimilation, their modest realism and accessibility enacting a process of "merging into the life of this country" to paraphrase Vance Palmer's review of *Alien Son*.<sup>22</sup> But I would also want to argue that the position of mediation Waten discovers, both as a cultural activist and in the narration of his stories, is precisely what defines the effective cultural intervention of *Alien Son* and which continues to

define its effectivity. Waten situates his text, the writing situates itself, both inside and outside the Jewish-migrant community and therefore both inside and to one side of "Australian literature". The position of the narrator is suggested by the book's perfectly-judged title in which the son/narrator shares the alienation of his parents but is also alien to them. On the larger scale, it is this doubleness which "invents" a position for the migrant writer within, or at least provisionally within, the field of Australian literature. To put this another way, what enables *Alien Son* to get written, and what has kept it in print ever since, is not so much its discovery of original subject-matter as its discovery of a *point of view*. In some ways the stories hark back to the European rather than the local Yiddish writers, as Waten discovers his own means of imitating the oral and communal tale but with a distanced, ironic or comic edge.

The language is frequently proverbial in quality, both in dialogue and narration, as the story-telling voice takes on the phrasings of other voices: "The devil take horses and men with good legs" (69); "He smiled back at them like a deaf and dumb uncle" (7). Or again,

It so happened that on a number of occasions someone Father trusted acted on the plans he had talked about so freely before he even had time to leave the tea-house. Then there were fiery scenes with his faithless friends. But Father's rage passed away quickly and he would often laugh and make jokes over the table about it the very same day....

"How should I know that people have such long memories for hate? I've only a cat's memory", he would explain innocently.

"If you spit upwards, you're bound to get it back in the face", Mother irritably upbraided him. (176-77)

Within the stories there are also many embedded stories which resemble folk tales, at times in the manner of Isaac Babel. For example, in miniature, the story of Hirsh's sacks: "On one of the lower layers of bags nearest to the door old Hirsh had made his bed. Later I was to discover that his bed went up and down in the most remarkable fashion. Sometimes he slept on the ground and at other times almost touching the ceiling" (12).

But it is just as significant that this proverbial speech is not the main kind of language in the stories. The proverbial qualities are worked into a stricter, less idiomatic discourse of literary realism. This is why, importantly, the stories in *Alien Son* are not folksy or vernacular and, even more remarkably, not nostalgic. They are about alienation more than authenticity, and as much about asymmetry as assimilation. The asymmetry in what I called above their position of mediation is caught in the double negatives of the difficult final sentence of "Neighbours": "we did not speak to one another as we walked on, but neither of us knew that there could be no reconciliation with the ways of our fathers" (132). And in another way

in the final sentence of "Looking for a Husband" which allows no resolution: "Tomorrow morning we would land and go on for ever our different ways — Mother to beat her wings against an enclosing wall and Mrs Hankin to go on relentlessly upholding the old ways in the new land" (58).

The "simplicity" of *Alien Son*, a quality on which all the critics comment, is rather the effect of a subtle manipulation of distancing in the stories, and of a point of view that enacts distance and intimacy together. The following short paragraph is typical of the book's shifts of language and focalisation:

All this was in the early days of their marriage. But soon Mother was filled with misgivings. Father's world, the world of commerce and speculation, of the buying and selling of goods neither seen nor touched, was repugnant and frightening to her. It lacked stability, it was devoid of ideals, it was fraught with ruin. Father was a trader in air, as the saying went. (176)

This is the simplicity of Waten's style in *Alien Son*, a complex literary effect of choices made about diction and perspective. Unusually for a first-person narrative it often produces effects resembling those of free indirect discourse. There is a distance between the story-telling voice and the child character no less than between the narrator and other characters, a distance continually modulated throughout the narrative.

The proverbial touches and the apparent simplicity of communication or memory together suggest bonds of language and culture which create the sense of a community. These effects of orality and intimacy are reinforced by the impression the stories give of being shaped by the patterns of recall rather than of artful plotting. Similarly, their focus on and through the child-within-the-family creates an intimate "society" which seems to include the reader. But the child or narrator is also distanced from the Mother and Father of the stories, the distance, as well as their generational and communal identities, being represented by the way these words are capitalised throughout. We never learn their names or indeed the narrator's. The child, and no less the reader, is distanced from any simple, sympathetic entry into the parent's already tenuous community.

The composite child-narrator figure is discovered throughout the stories as both observer and observed, both innocent and implicated, both inside and outside any possible community. This is nicely suggested in "Uncle Isaac", through the child's position at the centre of a "strange" household. Even more telling is an episode in the opening story, "To a Country Town". Playing with a group of local boys — their Australianness is underlined as he takes off his shoes and socks to join their play — the child sees and is seen by an old Jewish man. They recognise each other's foreignness and Jewishness, and the narrator comments, "It was as though he had caught me out" (8).

This touches on a central point, for it seems to me that what *Alien Son* discovers as central to the migrant experience — at least to this experience of migration and alienation — is the experience of *self-consciousness*. The stories are full of moments of embarrassment, of being caught out in public or in private as hypocritical or ridiculous; or moments of shame and guilt often incommensurate with their cause. Again the position of the child as observer and observed is critical. We are most conscious of him when he is being looked at or is caught out looking, as at the very end of "Black Girl" or in the very first sentence of "Mother": "I was often morbidly conscious of Mother's intent, searching eyes fixed on me". The writing is especially revealing of the subtleties of the Father's self-conscious self-deceptions. Even the horses have a role to play, their innocence counterpointing the child's perspective: "as soon as [Uncle Isaac] ran out of the house he began shouting ugly and hateful words at the inoffensive horses who looked at him with grateful eyes" (93). Or again when Father strikes one of the horses with his fist:

Father looked round at me, his face twisted sheepishly.

"What did I have to do that for?" he asked in a regretful voice, more to himself than to me. "He's just like a human being, only he's dumb. Why should he know what to do in a bottle-oh's cart? Did I know what to do when I started? He's a gentleman come down in the world. He's not used to earning his living the hard way". (104-105)

Waten reveals a genius for horses in *Alien Son*, not least as they become symptomatic of their owners and of their awkward self-consciousness in the face of a stubbornly alien world.

Against self-consciousness is posed self-possession, the Mother's characteristic attitude as opposed to the Father's. And yet the Mother's strength is based largely on a refusal — "she had no intention of ever learning the language; she would not become a part of the new land" (14) — while the weakness of the Father is the other side of his openness. Both attitudes are impossible for the son. Such contrasts between Mother and Father, and between Mother, Father and child, form the organising centre of *Alien Son*. But the emphasis falls less on personality than on attitude and situation, although the book is full of memorable characters. Indeed many of the characters are truly "characters" — Hirsh, Mr Segal, Mrs Hankin, Mr Frumkin, the Sisters, the midwives, Uncle Isaac and so on. This theatricality is a feature of many of the stories, as it was also among the European Yiddish writers, for it is linked to their intimations of orality and community and not least to the recurrent scene of self-consciousness. There is a sense of performance among the characters themselves — of over-acting, self-dramatisation or speechifying — and the stories are structured around significant "theatrical" vignettes or exchanges, in

small details or in a single action that sums up a state of mind and a state of migration as it does with Mr Hankin:

He shrugged his shoulders and made a remark that he was often to repeat as one after another of his pupils left him, "It's the Australian sky; it draws my pupils away from the ancient learning. Somehow it is a different sky from the gentle one we left behind". (42)

There are extended theatrical episodes such as the party in "To a Country Town" and, in subsequent stories, the visit to the theatre or the scenes between Mother and Mrs Hankin on board ship, Father and his horses, Father and the three Sisters, or Uncle Isaac and the midwives.

Above all, the characters are memorable for their *talk*: they are overflowing with talk in contrast to the spare realist style of the writing which "contains" them. The way the characters tell stories, and the kinds of stories they tell or to which they prefer to listen, distinguishes them one from the other and governs how we "read" personality and attitude, and again this is centrally true of Mother and Father. The "migrant story" in this discontinuous narrative is full of other stories: tales of promise and regret, histories of the past or future in another place, moralities to help explain change and conflict. It is full of misreadings too, both within and beyond the community, full of missed signs and inappropriate or conflicting responses. These are sources of the book's comedy which is often overlooked — its theatricality, its scenes of self-consciousness, its cross purposes, its abundance of story-telling. Although it has not been much noticed by critics or anthologists — perhaps because it seems to describe only an isolated event — the book's second story, "The Theatre", is one of its keynotes, for it links all these themes and the characters' differences around the central "scene" of theatrical performance itself. In stories such as "Sisters" and "Uncle Isaac" we see story-telling or performance with another function too, creating a kind of solidarity among women. Although the scenes are often comic the book's sensitivity here is another of its unusual achievements, unusual certainly in the masculinist context of Waten's closest literary contacts. Unusual too is the poignancy but lack of sentimentality in "Mother". Perhaps a different socialisation as well as a different acculturation affects Waten's writing, placing him to some extent beyond the patterns of masculinisation of his literary peers.<sup>23</sup>

In my final chapter I will approach the *Alien Son* stories again, from the different perspective of autobiographical writing. There my argument will be that the stories' interest, not least their literary interest, comes not from the sheer intimate experience of a Jewish childhood which they make accessible but rather from the unresolved tensions of the family drama to which they return. In the present chapter I also want to distance *Alien Son* from what might be called assimilationist readings,

but by focusing on the institutional occasion of its writing and how the stories themselves frame the conditions of their own reading. In *Alien Son*, we might say, the migrant story comes to us as *story*. The different modes of story-telling and performance which it contains establish both an intertextual and specular framework for our reading of the text as a whole. Different models of story-telling and of art are juxtaposed: the Mother's sense of the seriousness and nobility of art from Biblical stories to Aleichem, to Tolstoy, Gorky and Beethoven is posed against the Father's love of entertainment and pleasure (the music hall!). Hirsh's "long stories of the past" (10) are posed against Mr Osipov's "different stories — of strikes and battles against our great oppressor, the Czar" (17). At the party described in "To a Country Town" each of the different songs and poems performed — from folk song to "La Donna e Mobile" to "Auld Lang Syne" — is carefully placed in terms of the effects it produces. There is no single model which emerges without qualification although there are clear evaluations implied. Even Father's "vulgar" responses at the theatre have their truth and virtue despite the embarrassment they produce.

The overall effect of these contrasts and evaluations can be understood in the way that they bring to bear on each other aspects of the folk tale or popular art forms and aspects of a "high" culture tradition. Both are appropriate references for our reading of *Alien Son*. In their very different ways, both give to art a serious communal or social role. Together they also suggest something of the work's own blend of styles which refers us both to orality and to literary realism, to traditional story-telling and to ironic literary art. They suggest how the work thus positions itself in a literary field and how it asks to be read.

Since being reissued in 1965 *Alien Son* has never been out of print. It has sold over half a million copies and has been, as they say, both a popular favourite and a classic. Recently it featured as one of "Australia's Greatest Books" in Geoffrey Dutton's *The Australian Collection* and in Manning Clark's list of "books every civilised Australian should read".<sup>24</sup> It might seem surprising, then, that it has in fact received very little sustained attention from literary critics and commentators. The book is mentioned in numerous critical surveys and literary histories but typically the remarks comprise only a few sentences of praise or description, perhaps with some biographical details about Judah Waten or a brief placing of the book as the first of its kind, dealing with the experiences of non-English-speaking migrants to Australia. The remarks are nearly always positive but also nearly always brief. This is not a case of "scandalous neglect". The writers of the surveys and histories have their eyes on larger horizons than Judah Waten or his short stories. Nevertheless the comments they do make about *Alien Son* can help us to explain the absence of

detailed or extended writing about the book, and such an explanation in turn can feed into my own argument towards new ways of reading its stories.

The critical reception of *Alien Son* exemplifies an ideological process noted by Sneja Gunew whereby migrant writers have been accommodated within the literary regime through the manner in which their texts are read as directly autobiographical or as so many documentary repetitions of "the migrant story".<sup>25</sup> Certainly, apart from sympathetic appreciations of his "rare gift of characterisation",<sup>26</sup> Waten's stories have been read by and large as the straightforward expression of the author's own childhood experiences, understood in terms either of the individual or of the migrant group.

Both these readings are arguably demanded by the stories themselves. Their retrospective first-person narrator combined with the plotlessness of the narratives certainly invites autobiographical (or at least "experiential") readings; and in their range of characters and situations, their self-effacing narrator and "oral" language uses the stories work to evoke a migrant community as we have seen. The stories are *designed* to appeal to us with the veracity of autobiography, or rather of actual experiences recalled for the autobiographical self becomes the centre of attention only briefly. Equally, this veracity of individual experience is designed to be understood in a more general way as communal and generational, for despite the idiosyncrasies of the central family we are not to read their experiences as a *migrant* family as merely idiosyncratic. The stories are full of other striking characters caught in the diverse stages of migration. These embedded stories set up an array of "migrant" perspectives which frame the central story.

The very success of the stories in establishing their veracity, their illusion of simple recall, has been the source of the critical silence, for their art has been mistaken for artlessness, their literariness mistaken for life. It is revealing that commentators have often failed to remark that these are stories of recall — that the narrator is not in fact a child — and have therefore missed the effects of distancing and dual perspective this technique produces. Reading *Alien Son* as the expression or reflection of Waten's own experience means that however highly the stories are valued the critics can find very little to say about them. Hence the rapid shift into biography or "sociology" in the commentaries. The distinctive qualities of the stories, their "flavour" and "taste" as one critic puts it,<sup>27</sup> can only be ascribed to the experience or background which preceded them rather than to the texts themselves: to qualities embodied in the author rather than to disembodied writing. But even when we know, as the author often said and as can be readily established, that the stories were indeed prompted by the experiences of his own migrant childhood — or more precisely by the *recall* of those experiences, their recall for the purposes of

writing fiction — we do not yet know much about how the stories were produced as writing and how they might now be read.

Because of its blurring of life and text, criticism of *Alien Son* has made its way through a procession of phrases such as "unforced simplicity", "observed life", "an easy style", "simple flat recounting", "unvarnished social realism", "a straightforward writer" whose "*instinct* is for the brief unstructured sketch" (my emphasis).<sup>28</sup> It is as if all Waten had to do was open his mouth. My argument, by contrast, is that the voice or point of view that Waten discovers in these stories is indeed a "discovery": an innovation and intervention in the overlapping fields which describe its literary occasion. The literary occasion shapes what counts as significant experience or recall, and what counts as its significant literary expression in the text and in the project of a literary career. In *Alien Son*, Waten finds a speaking position which invites readings and so claims significance in terms of autobiography and the migrant story, and yet which refuses to be contained wholly and simply within these terms. In this sense the narrator in the text is emblematic of the text and its author in the world, positioned both inside and outside the immigrant Jewish cultural sphere and both inside and outside the field of Australian literature. More than one of the book's early reviewers expressed surprise at finding *Alien Son*, as it were, already inside Australian literature.<sup>29</sup> To put it another way the position of migrant writer in this first post-war decade, if it were not to be perpetually in translation, perpetually foreign, was only possible via an accommodation within that Australian literary field.

We can draw these points together by examining the question of audience or address. The *Alien Son* stories do ask to be read in part as "Jewish" stories, via the range of references they contain to Jewish writers, songs and folk tales, for example, and the proverbial patterns of speech and narration noted earlier. Still, their address is not primarily to a Jewish or migrant community of readers but to a broader "Australian" readership which might indeed *assimilate* the Jewish/migrant community. For the stories also ask to be read in the light of the broad tradition of literary realism and local traditions of the short story: that is, as *Australian* stories. Their intimate sense of audience is less the product of a limited address to a Jewish/migrant community than something Waten shares with and has learnt from the community of his fellow writers such as Vance Palmer and Alan Marshall. Given the institutional position of Australian writing at this time, the nationalist literary community had developed its own sense of intimacy within marginality.

The migrant writer is not born but made, and made within a specific and uneven cultural economy. The shape of Waten's literary career is thus less a product of the "migrant experience" than of the particular field of possibility that was

Australian literature. I find it useful to understand Waten's position through the concept of a "minor literature" as described by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari. By a "minor literature" they mean a literature "which a minority constructs within a major language".<sup>30</sup> Their subject is Franz Kafka, a Czech Jew writing in German in Prague. There are some unexpected parallels with Judah Waten, a Russian Jew writing in English in Melbourne, although the point of the comparison must also be the differences it exposes.

Deleuze and Guattari argue that the primary characteristic of a minor literature is "linguistic deterritorialisation", both in relation to the vernacular language (Czech or Yiddish for Kafka's society) and the dominant bureaucratic and high cultural language (German). The conditions of this deterritorialisation produce two further defining characteristics of minor literatures: first that "everything in them is political", second, that "everything takes on a collective value" (17). As to the former, the "cramped space" of a minor literature

forces each intrigue to connect immediately to politics. The individual concern thus becomes all the more necessary, indispensable, magnified, because a whole other story is vibrating within it. In this way, the family triangle connects to other triangles — commercial, economic, bureaucratic, juridical — that determine its values. (17)

But as the very example of Kafka indicates, this minority politics is not a matter of accurate representation or representativeness. More at issue are questions of voice and positioning within language and literary traditions.

Each individual or family story becomes the story of a community or culture, the story of its marginalisation. Enunciation is thus inescapably always collective enunciation:

because talent isn't abundant ... there are no possibilities for an individuated enunciation that would belong to this or that "master" and that could be separated from a collective enunciation... [W]hat each author says individually already constitutes a common action, and what he or she says or does is necessarily political, even if others aren't in agreement. The political domain has contaminated every statement (*énoncé*)... [I]f the writer is in the margins or completely outside his or her fragile community, this situation allows the writer all the more the possibility to express another possible community and to forge the means for another consciousness and another sensibility. (17)

Kafka, according to Deleuze and Guattari, chose not the high road of "symbolic reterritorialisation" but the low road "always further in the direction of deterritorialisation ... sobriety ... a purely intensive usage of language" (19). Instead of mastering the master language by investing it with symbolic or mythic significance he hollows out a (minor) space within it, a space that resists incorporation.

As Sneja Gunew has noted, Deleuze and Guattari have "been accused of indulging in first-world theoretical tourism of the margins"<sup>31</sup> and certainly there is a liberationist (indeed theological) excess in their arguments in which "minor" seems to disappear into "revolutionary" or "avant-garde". What can be redeemed is not their sense of liberation but their articulation of limits, of the cramped field of possibility of a minor literature *within* a major language.<sup>32</sup>

In what ways can we discover *Alien Son* in this account of a minor literature? Waten's cultural engagements, as described earlier, suggest that he is actively taking on the conditions of minority status in ways that had not been the case in his earlier attempts at a writing career (avant-gardism, in this comparison, depends after all upon its insidership to the major language). There is a set of problems and possibilities in the "Jewish" stories that do not exist for his other writing precisely in so far as they come to occupy the position of a minor literature within a major language — problems that mean the stories stake everything on voice and point of view. There is a cultural politics as well as a family history involved, not least because Waten too remains "in the margins .. of his fragile community". The individual enunciation of the text in *Alien Son* is also a collective enunciation across its diversity of voices and in the strange anonymity of its very personal, intimate narrator. To paraphrase Deleuze and Guattari, here too each individual story has a whole other story vibrating within it, for attitudes and speech, however idiosyncratic, are never just personality traits; and the family triangle at the centre of these stories is always and, it feels, inevitably connected to larger cultural and political "triangles".

Since its first appearance critics have been baffled by *Alien Son's* mode or genre and struck by the apparent paradox of its modesty and yet its cultural significance: on the one hand a collection of simple, unassuming autobiographical sketches, on the other a work with irresistible literary, national and therefore *political* meanings. As Ian Mair put it, Waten "is not yet primarily a writer" (the book in other words is autobiographical or documentary before it is literature); and yet "the parents are, in small scale, two permanent additions to the short list of characters in Australian fiction who deserve to have permanent life in our imaginations". Or Vance Palmer:

there is an engaging quality in its style, which is simple and yet capable of subtlety. *Alien Son* is more than a collection of short stories and yet not quite a novel.... Perhaps consideration of the exact pigeon-hole into which it should be fitted is irrelevant....

*Alien Son* is bound to have an effect as an inside picture of a foreign group gradually beginning to merge into the life of this country. We have had no such book before.<sup>33</sup>

To read the book as an *Australian* reader and critic was to find that Australian "life" no longer looked quite the same. Yet it was difficult to say just how this was effected by such a slight work which was not quite fiction, not quite documentary or memoir, and which hovered uncertainly somewhere between the sketch, the short story and the novel. Such a response is still where our interest in the text begins.

Deleuze and Guattari locate Kafka in relation to four levels of language: the vernacular, the vehicular (bureaucratic/commercial), the cultural and the mythic. For Kafka's society of Prague Jews the vernacular was represented by the repressed or forgotten languages of Czech and Yiddish; the bureaucratic and cultural by German; the mythic perhaps by Hebrew. "What is complicated", they remark,

is Kafka's relation to Yiddish: he sees it less as a sort of linguistic territoriality for the Jews than as a nomadic movement of deterritorialisation that reworks German language. What fascinates him in Yiddish is less a language of a religious community than that of a popular theatre. (25)

One thinks immediately of "The Theatre" in *Alien Son*. There are parallels between Kafka's relation to Yiddish and Waten's subtle reworking of English through Yiddish phrasing, as well as his sense of Yiddish as a *contemporary* secular force albeit in the process of dying out through "deterritorialisation".<sup>34</sup> For Waten the vernacular language was split between Yiddish and English, which he spoke before school-age. English would dominate all levels of language despite the cultural languages of Yiddish and to a lesser extent Russian and Hebrew in the home, and the traces still of Hebrew as a mythic language. But however complete Waten's assimilation into English, his deterritorialisation from both Yiddish and English still leaves its subtle traces. His relation to language, at least when writing as a "migrant" writer, was still constrained by the unusual situation of Yiddish within Australian English within English. Waten was not an active Yiddish speaker although his texts suggest he had a memory full of Yiddish; he could follow spoken Yiddish and could translate with the assistance of the Yiddish authors. He could not but write in English, "his" language after all, and yet more than once there is a sense that the language is (also) another's.<sup>35</sup>

I would argue that this situation within language produces the "simplicity" and understatement of *Alien Son*, its formal irresolution, and the double perspective of its narration — intimate/ironic, personal/collective, inside/outside. The modesty of the text might be compared with Kafka's invention of "a new sobriety, a new expressivity, a new flexibility, a new intensity" (23). Waten's narrative voice hollows out a *minor* space for itself which it continues to occupy and which remains the source of its meaning and value, its power, within Australian literature. It will still not sit comfortably as a "major" work in the canon.

But any closer parallels between Waten and Kafka would be far-fetched. The divergences between them, between say Kafka's extreme "intensiveness" and Waten's confident referentiality and recall, are no less illuminating. The rhetorics of marginality are much less extreme in Waten's writing, the sense of an audience much more immediate, and his relationship to English much less fraught than Kafka's to German. There is still faith in the ability of language to communicate transparently and to reach its addressee. Only occasionally are we reminded that for the most part the characters we hear are speaking Yiddish, Russian or heavily-accented English although the occasions are always telling. In Waten's case the sense of belonging to a minority is tempered by the sense of also belonging to a local literary tradition, to a national community and to the larger traditions of European realism. The majority language is available to him in the form of a vernacular, a distinct, popular, local language. Further, Waten is never far from at least one possible universal or mythic language: humanism and more specifically communism. Unlike Kafka, according to Deleuze and Guattari, Waten certainly *is* interested in "styles, genres or literary movements [which want] to assume a major function in language, to offer themselves as a sort of state language, an official language" (27). In the light of his earlier and later careers, perhaps it is the *absence* of these desires in *Alien Son* that is worth remarking.

During the 1940s and 1950s there was, in the literary culture in which Judah Waten was involved and in Melbourne above all, a vast investment of signifying activity given over to the business of creating something to belong to, a tradition that was always and already there. Waten's own cultural entrepreneurship simultaneously on behalf of both Jewish and Australian nationalist writing was part of this activity. Nevertheless, or rather *therefore*, the conditions of a minority literature leave their imprint on the text of *Alien Son* in the "quiet" ways already indicated: in the subtleties of point of view, language and genre, and in the overall structure of the book as a series of short stories, often sketchlike and seemingly insufficient in themselves, the whole adding up to what Waten called "a novel without architecture".<sup>36</sup>

From the perspective of the narrator's recall in *Alien Son* Australia is no longer a foreign place. And yet the stories are still pervaded by an apprehension that, in Waten's own phrase, "in the twentieth century the Jewish migrant has been the symbol of the oppressed and the migratory person".<sup>37</sup> Far from being nostalgic recollection or quaint family anecdote, I think this political and symbolic dimension is why *Alien Son* can still seem to be the text that separates us off from the time "before the migrant writer". And in more than one sense it is the text that makes Judah Waten's literary career possible.

- <sup>1</sup> Judah Waten, *Alien Son* (1952; Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1990). Publications prior to the appearance of the volume as follows: "To A Country Town", *Coast to Coast: Australian Stories 1946*, ed. M. Barnard Eldershaw (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1947), pp.86-108; "Uncle Isaac", *Bulletin* 18 October 1950, pp.20 & 32 (also in *Coast to Coast 1951-52*, ed. Ken Levis, pp.59-71); "Father's Horses", *Meanjin* 8, 4 (1949), pp.193-200; "Neighbours", *Coast to Coast 1948*, ed. Brian Elliott; "Black Girl in the Street" ["Black Girl"], *Meanjin* 7, 3 (1948), pp.147-53; "Making a Living", *Bulletin* 30 January 1952, pp.16-17; "The Mother" ["Mother"], *Meanjin* 9, 2 (1950), pp.81-92 (also in *Coast to Coast 1949-50*, ed. Nettie Palmer, pp.105-22).
- <sup>2</sup> For discussion of the different terms see David Carter, "The Natives are Getting Restless: Nationalism, Multiculturalism and Migrant Writing", *Island* 25 & 26 (1986), pp.3-8; Jacques Delaruelle, "Multiculturalism", in *Writing in Multicultural Australia*, eds Jacques Delaruelle, Alexandra Karakostas-Sedá and Anna Ward (Sydney: Australia Council, 1985), pp.50-53; Sneja Gunew, "PMT (Post Modernist Tensions): Reading for (Multi)Cultural Difference", in *Striking Chords: Multicultural Literary Interpretations*, eds Sneja Gunew and Kateryna O. Longley (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1992), p.43; Sneja Gunew, *Framing Marginality: Multicultural Literary Studies* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1994), Chapter 1.
- <sup>3</sup> Quotations from reviews of *Alien Son*: *Sydney Jewish News* 15 August 1952, p.25 and Ian Mair, "New Australians Forty Years Ago", *Age* 9 August 1952, p.15. See also J. K. Ewers, *Creative Writing in Australia* (Melbourne: Georgian House, 1966), p.170.
- <sup>4</sup> See, for example, Cecil Hadgraft, *Australian Literature: A Critical Account to 1955* (London: Heinemann, 1960), p.267: "If the choice [of subject] is an unusual group of people, then a writer has a certain advantage. This has been the case with Judah Waten, who has written racy and penetrating and flavoured stories of a Jewish immigrant group".
- <sup>5</sup> Judah Waten, "My Two Literary Careers", *Southerly* 31, 2 (1971), p.87.
- <sup>6</sup> See, for example, Palmer's "Battle", *Meanjin* 1, 8 (1942), pp.5-6.
- <sup>7</sup> Waten, "Reflections on Literature and Painting", in *Southern Stories*, ed. Brian Fitzpatrick (Melbourne: Dolphin Publications, n.d. [1945?]), pp.52-58 (further references will appear in the text). Waten's story in the same publication, "Inspector Ryan", is printed under the name Matt Turner, pp.88-102. Two possible models for *Southern Stories* are *Australian New Writing*, edited in Sydney and appearing annually from 1943 to 1946 (eds, Katharine Susannah Prichard, George Farwell, Bernard Smith, Ken Levis [3-4]); and the New Zealand magazine *Tomorrow* (1934-1940) which Waten would have known in New Zealand 1939-40. Nettie Palmer wrote an "Australian Notebook" in the journal from July 1937 to May 1939. See Rachel Barrowman, *A Popular Vision: The Arts and the Left in New Zealand 1930-1950* (Wellington: Victoria University Press, 1991), pp.27-60. Waten was in contact with Frank Sargeson in the 1940s and later with R. A. K. Mason, Judah Waten Papers, National Library of Australia, NLA MS 4536/2/12-15 & 490-91.
- <sup>8</sup> The essay defends, but moves beyond, proletarian art. Proletarian novels are brought forward as evidence of the new realism of "real active struggle" and "historical humanism" (56). The term is defended against the strictures of David Daiches, quoted by Frank Dalby Davison in his Introduction to the 1943 *Coast to Coast* (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1944), who had argued that the proletarian novel will have a chance of producing good literature "only when it is the natural reflex of an existing culture, not a deliberate attempt to point forward to a new one" (56). Waten defends the latter project but argues nevertheless that "the term 'proletarian novel' is in itself inadequate to describe this new trend in art, for the proletarian novel was only a phase in its development, with its parallel in Soviet literature" (57).
- <sup>9</sup> Contributors to the magazine besides Fitzpatrick and Waten were Alan Marshall, Pinchas Goldhar, R. A. K. Mason, Gavin Casey, Gordon Watson (posthumous), Hertz (sic) Bergner, Frank Sargeson, Garry Lyle, Joseph [Yosl] Birstein, Vic O'Connor, Noel Counihan and Yosl Bergner.
- <sup>10</sup> *Twenty Great Australian Stories*, eds Judah Waten and V. G. O'Connor (Melbourne: Dolphin Publications, 1946). Writers included in the anthology are: Marcus Clarke, Joseph Furphy, Price Warung, Barbara Baynton, Dowell O'Reilly, Henry Lawson, Albert Dorrington, Lance Skuthorpe, Katharine Prichard, Vance Palmer, Frank Dalby Davison,

Gavin Casey, Alan Marshall. A second volume of *Southern Stories* was also planned featuring stories by Palmer, Davison, Marshall, Goldhar and Bergner, plus essays by Fitzpatrick and Counihan and an art supplement.

11 Goldhar, "Cafe in Carlton", *Southern Stories*, pp.29-47; Bergner, "The Boardinghouse", *Southern Stories*, pp.68-76.

12 Herz Bergner, *Between Sky and Sea*, trans. J. L. Waten (Melbourne: Dolphin Publications, 1946). Nettie Palmer, "Tribute to Pincus(sic) Goldhar", *Meanjin* 6, 1 (1947), p.50. Vance Palmer also selected a story by Goldhar, "The Funeral", in his edition of *Coast to Coast: Australian Stories 1944* (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1945), pp.15-26.

13 *Jewish Youth* ("Organ of Kadimah Youth Organisation") serialised the novel over its first issues, from July 1946. The magazine also reprinted stories by the Yiddish writers Peretz, Sholem Asch and Aleichem. The older Australian Jewish writer, Nathan Spielvogel, appears in the October 1946 issue, one imagines through Waten's initiatives. On the Kadimah itself see Hilary L. Rubinstein, *The Jews in Victoria 1835-1985* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1986), pp.155-57.

14 On the Jewish Council, see Philip Mendes, "The Jewish Council to Combat Fascism and Anti-Semitism: An Historical Re-Appraisal", *Journal of the Australian Jewish Historical Society* 10, 6 (1989), pp.524-41.

15 Waten, "Yiddish Literature in Australia", *Unity* 1, 1 (July-August 1948), pp.4-5 and "Contemporary Jewish Literature in Australia", *Australian Jewish Historical Society Journal* 3 (1949), pp.92-97. See Chapter 8 below for further discussion. Waten also publishes an obituary for Goldhar in *Voice* (February 1947), p.13.

16 See Waten, *From Odessa to Odessa: The Journey of an Australian Writer* (Melbourne: F.W. Cheshire, 1969), pp.1-8; "A Writer's Youth", in *Joseph's Coat: An Anthology of Multicultural Writing*, ed. Peter Skrzynecki (Sydney: Hale & Iremonger, 1985), pp.198-99; "Books that Influenced Me Deeply", *Educational Magazine* 36, 3 (1979), p.32.

17 I thank Ivor Indyk for the point about the Palmers' cosmopolitanism. It can be seen throughout Nettie's *Fourteen Years: Extracts From a Private Journal 1925-1939* (1948; repr. in *Nettie Palmer*, ed. Vivian Smith, [St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1988], pp.2-205).

18 Waten, "My Two Literary Careers", p.87.

19 *Sydney Morning Herald* 8 March 1947, p.10. No first or second prizes were given because the judges deemed the standard not sufficiently high, but ten £20 prizes were awarded. Waten's story is described first. His pseudonym for the competition was "J. Newcombe", suggesting a modest sense of himself as a newcomer to the literary scene. Two versions of the story survive in Waten's papers (NLA, MS 4536, Box 16): the first, apparently the competition entry, much longer and with literary flourishes ("a golden hue"); the second pared down to about a third the length and focused more tightly on the central character's perspective. About the same time Waten also completed a play script, *The Loser is Black*, concerning inner-urban Aborigines (NLA MS 4536/3/77).

20 See the Exhibition Catalogue, *Yosl Bergner: A Retrospective Exhibition* (Melbourne: National Gallery of Victoria, 1985), pp.9-14 & 32-33.

21 Waten, "A Writers' Youth", p.198; see also Helena Frank, ed., *Yiddish Tales* (1912, Jewish Public Society of America; repr. New York: Arno Press, 1975).

22 Vance Palmer's review of *Alien Son* makes the point about the "assimilation" of Waten's writings into a national project: "*Alien Son* is bound to have an effect as an inside picture of a foreign group gradually beginning to merge into the life of this country" ("Two Australian Novels", *Voice* [October 1952], p.25). The present essay could be read as an extended unravelling of all that is implied in this statement of Palmer's, and an analysis of the ways in which Palmer has proved to be right.

23 See Chapter 9, below.

24 Geoffrey Dutton, *The Australian Collection: Australia's Greatest Books* (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1985), pp.207-10; Manning Clark and Donald Horne, "The Essential Library", *Australian Magazine* 25-26 February 1989, p.44. *Alien Son* also appeared as an "Australian Classic" in the series published by Lloyd O'Neil (Hawthorn, Vic., 1974) and as an Inprint "Classic" in the new series from Collins/Angus & Robertson (1990).

- 25 Sneja Gunew, "Framing Marginality: Distinguishing the Textual Politics of the Marginal  
26 Voice", *Southern Review* 18, 2 (July 1985), pp.148-49; and *Framing Marginality*  
27 Ewers, p.170.
- 27 Hadgraft, p.267, talks of "racy and penetrating and flavoured stories of a Jewish immigrant  
group. The stories have a taste all their own. This background of belief and attitude gives  
28 Waten an unfair start, as it were...".
- 28 Little more has been said since Vance Palmer's early review cited above or those of Ian Mair  
in "New Australians Forty Years Ago" and a version of this given as a Radio Australia  
overseas broadcast, 28 & 29 August 1952. The quotations are, in order, from: David Martin,  
"Three Realists in Search of Reality", *Meanjin* 18, 3 (1959), p.118; Harry Heseltine,  
"Australian Fiction since 1920", in *The Literature of Australia*, ed. Geoffrey Dutton  
(Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1976), p.234; Ewers, p.170; Bruce Bennett, "The Short Story",  
in *The Literature of Western Australia*, ed. Bruce Bennett (Nedlands, WA: University of  
Western Australia Press, 1979), p.124; Ken Goodwin, *A History of Australian Literature*  
(London: Macmillan, 1986), p.165 (two phrases quoted); Adrian Mitchell, "Fiction", in *The*  
*Oxford History of Australian Literature*, ed. Leonie Kramer (Melbourne: Oxford University  
Press, 1981), p.130.
- 29 For example, Ian Mair, review broadcast by Australian Broadcasting Commission (Radio  
Australia): "The 'feel' of Australia in 'Alien Son' is remarkably keen"; and Anon. [Vance  
Palmer?], in a local ABC broadcast: "though it deals with a foreign family, it touches much  
more intimately than the other [book reviewed] on the nerves of our national life". Copies of  
30 both scripts are among Waten's papers, NLA MS 4536, Series 5.
- 30 Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Kafka: Toward a Minority Literature*, trans. Dana Polan  
(1975; Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), p.16. Further references will  
appear in the text.
- 31 Sneja Gunew, "PMT", p.38.
- 32 I'm thinking for example of their account of Kafka's relation to Yiddish "beside" German:  
Deleuze and Guaratti, p.25. See also Ross Chambers *Room for Maneuver: Reading (the)*  
*Oppositional (in) Narrative* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1991),  
especially pp.144-45, where he extends their points to read the Quebecois writer Hubert  
Aquino in a situation where within a major language (French) there is a "(re-)minoritization"  
of language, "*one's own* language as the site of *otherness*".
- 33 Palmer, "Two Australian Novels", p.25.
- 34 For a more extended discussion of Waten's attitude to Yiddish see Chapter 8 below.
- 35 Waten, "Writers From Two Cultures", *Aspect* 5, 1-2 (1980), p.50: "The idea of writing in  
Yiddish or any other language other than English did not and could not occur to me....  
English was the only possible means of communication with foreigners as well as  
Australians". The points regarding Waten's use of language are from interviews conducted  
by the author with Judah and Hyrell Waten, Fanny Waten and Mena Werder, in the author's  
possession. Cf Deleuze and Guattari on Kafka: "... the impossibility of not writing, the  
impossibility of writing in German, the impossibility of writing otherwise" (16).
- 36 Interview with Hazel De Berg, 13 March 1960. National Library of Australia, De Berg MS  
888, p.985.
- 37 From a 1966 interview on ABC television with Tony Morphett: "Spectrum: Judah Waten on  
Commitment", 18 December 1966. The comment recalls that by Abdul R. JanMohamed and  
David Lloyd responding to the minority literature argument of Deleuze and Guattari: "the  
collective nature of *all* minority discourse also derives from the fact that minority  
individuals are always treated and forced to experience themselves generically".  
"Introduction: Minority Discourse — What is to be Done?" *Cultural Critique* 7 (Spring  
1987), p.10.

## **Undoing *The Unbending*: Criticism and a Cold War Novel**

### **The True Position of this Gentleman**

On 23 June 1954 an editorial appeared in the Sydney *Daily Mirror* with the heading "Taxpayers' Money to Help the Reds". Its occasion was the publication of Judah Waten's first novel, *The Unbending*; its target was the Commonwealth Literary Fund (CLF):

The purpose of the Commonwealth Literary Fund is to help Australian writers. In fact, it is being used to subsidise Communist propaganda.

This is clearly shown in the case of the grant which was made in 1952 to Mr Judah Waten. In that year he was given about £600 to enable him to write a novel....

Mr Waten spent it on writing a book called "The Unbending", which is the story of the revolutionary IWW during the First World War....

The taxpayers are entitled to ask for something better than giving a blank cheque to an author to write something which will be used by a party whose chief aim is the overthrow of the Commonwealth in favour of an alien ideology.<sup>1</sup>

This was not an isolated attack. Another charged that *The Unbending* was "straight-out communist propaganda" while the CLF, "straight out of the Soviet text book", had "a stable of tame writers to plug a certain line". Yet another, writing in the journal of League of Rights director Eric Butler, used *The Unbending* as an occasion for that coldest of cold war themes: that "the fellow-travellers are even more dangerous than the communists themselves". Waten's novel "reeks of Communist propaganda".<sup>2</sup>

Hearing of such attacks the editor of *Meanjin*, Clem Christesen, feared a concerted campaign, perhaps a repeat of the 1952 assault on the CLF in Federal Parliament. He smelt a conspiracy, "a form of indirect intimidation", aimed at individual writers, the CLF and *Meanjin*, all public places where culture regularly consorted with liberal and democratic ideas. In May 1954, the Royal Commission prompted by the Petrov affair had already had its first sitting.<sup>3</sup> Christesen wrote to the CLF Secretary expressing his alarm at the attacks on Waten's novel and the Fund, and mentioned a rumour that two Melbourne newspapers had "diced" reviews and substituted others: "If there are renewed attacks in the House, the whole structure and future of the CLF might be threatened. It might also affect *Meanjin*, for I might have to decide not to accept any more CLF aid".<sup>4</sup> To support the novel's claim to seriousness as a literary work and not mere propaganda, as well as to defend his own "liberal line" in the magazine, Christesen organised a symposium on *The*

*Unbending* with contributions from Vance Palmer, Katharine Susannah Prichard, Brian Fitzpatrick and A. R. Chisholm. The symposium appeared in *Meanjin's* third number of 1954.<sup>5</sup>

On the occasion of the Parliamentary attacks two years earlier, Standish Keon (Labor), quickly supported by Liberals H. B. Gullett and W. C. Wentworth, led a well-prepared assault on the CLF, the chairman of its advisory board, Vance Palmer, board member Flora Eldershaw and many of the writers the Fund had supported.<sup>6</sup> Keon's charge was that the CLF was being administered to the benefit of a small group of communists and communist sympathisers to promote communist propaganda:

there has been an obvious and consistent pattern in the granting of recent awards. A certain group, and that group only, has benefited from the fund.... I have no desire to see literature put into a strait-jacket. I suppose that its proper function is to hold up a mirror to life and describe it as truly and faithfully as possible, having regard to ordinary decency and morality. But members of this Parliament and also the general public are entitled to ask what type of people have received this money....

I consider that the social revolt should be written about as much as any other subject, but I object to any plan to confine these awards to people who are either known Communists or active workers for the Communist Party....

I also believe that Australian literature will not receive any benefit in any way at all by the works of people who are avowed supporters of the Communist party policy, and who advance the Communist cause in the works they produce.<sup>7</sup>

The attacks mounted by Keon and Wentworth took place against the local background of the Lowe Royal Commission in Victoria (1949-50), the Communist Party Dissolution Bill (1950), the subsequent Referendum (1951), the celebrated Frank Hardy trial (1951) and most recently the affair of the "nest of traitors" in the federal Public Service (1952).<sup>8</sup> Their attack was a characteristic piece of cold war conservatism in that it targeted liberal intellectuals as well as declared communists. It was, as Allan Ashbolt has suggested, "systematically indiscriminate"; not an isolated act but "part of a thicker, more complex plot".<sup>9</sup> Wentworth focussed particularly on Eldershaw and Palmer, "neither of whom may be a member of the Communist party but both of whom have been associated with organizations in which Communists were prominent and which follow the Communist line. Both ... have done considerable service for the Communist party".<sup>10</sup> Despite Menzies' defence of his Board, Palmer soon resigned as chairman and a more conservative Board was installed.<sup>11</sup>

Keon's first exemplary target in 1952 was Judah Waten. Someone had been doing their homework, for his main piece of damning evidence, rescued from the obscurity of 1930, was material from *Strife* which thus entered the political if not yet the literary archive. As a "known" communist, although not in fact a Party member at this time, Waten was bound to become involved. In November 1951 he had been

awarded a grant of £600 to write what became *The Unbending*, a novel "designed to show the integration of a Jewish migrant family with the Australian community and the resultant conflict in the family".<sup>12</sup> *Alien Son* had appeared in July 1952, also the product of a CLF grant in the form of a publishing subsidy to Angus and Robertson. All this seems to have been too much for Mr Keon, who launched himself in August and then again in September:

I shall consider first Judah Waten. This man is a Russian who has received two grants from the Commonwealth Literary Fund, one to write a book and one to publish it... Dozens of instances of Mr Waten's activities are outlined in the Communist party newspapers. There cannot be the slightest doubt in the mind of any reasonable person concerning the true position of this gentleman.<sup>13</sup>

In both 1952 and 1954 communists and non-communist liberals organised together as writers in defence of their professional interests, civil liberties and literature.<sup>14</sup> But the defence of literature from politics — or was it the defence of political literature? — would produce some unexpected alliances and antagonisms.

These political manoeuvres might all seem to belong in the footnotes of literary history. But perhaps we can say, with Derrida, that footnotes or supplements point to a lack in the original plenitude — in this case, in the writing of Australian literary history.<sup>15</sup> We can indeed follow this politics on its adventures in the world until we find it right inside our literary texts. The attacks on writers and intellectuals served to highlight and intensify the *already* politicised nature of the cultural sphere, at the centre of which was literature. There were few literary activities or literary artefacts in the fifties untouched by cold war politics. It was likely to affect both what was written and how it was read, what was published and where.

The cold war rhetoric from which I have quoted was by no means outside mainstream political discourse. It was spoken in the name of liberal principles and literature itself. The occasions of the attacks on the CLF were extreme but the terms of the debate resemble those that Menzies himself used on numerous occasions.<sup>16</sup> Already in February 1952 a security check on Waten had been initiated on the Prime Minister's behalf by the CLF secretary, and the advice had been that despite his earlier expulsion from the Party Waten was "still regarded as a Communist at heart". Menzies had written on the bottom of the secretary's report, "In future all names put forward should be investigated by Security. This case is scandalous and embarrassing".<sup>17</sup> In this sense he was already well in advance of Keon and Wentworth. Further, Menzies seems to have misled Parliament in subsequently claiming that it was "not our role [his Committee's] to conduct an investigation into the political ideas of the persons concerned. It is a literary matter".<sup>18</sup> Waten's initial grant became the basis for security checks on CLF applicants which continued until 1970.<sup>19</sup>

As already noted, 1954 was the year of Petrov and less than three years since the Government's Referendum to have the constitutional power to ban the Communist Party. In this cold war atmosphere *The Unbending* was a scandal waiting to happen. The novel was published in March 1954; the Petrov defection was announced in April; the Royal Commission on Espionage first sat in May. Reviews of *The Unbending* first appeared in late May-early June. At such a time a novel by a Russian-born Jewish communist about Russian and Jewish immigrants, security police and subversion trials, a controversial referendum (the 1916-17 conscription issue) and a revolutionary political group (the Industrial Workers of the World or IWW) could scarcely have been read in a political vacuum. At least it would have taken an act of determined critical will to do so. It is difficult now not to read the novel as both allegorical and prophetic, and I will be doing both.

*The Unbending* can be seen as an active participant in a contemporary debate — or a less dignified staking out of positions — on the meanings of literature, liberalism, democracy, communism and Australian traditions. It can be seen to anticipate the political readings it would receive. In the process of writing during 1952, Waten's planned focus for the novel shifted from the between wars period to that of the First World War, the conscription issue and the IWW. Although it is unlikely he was responding directly to contemporary political events, the shift of focus offered Waten a means of intervening in the politics of the present through his story of the past.

By the middle of 1954, after the reviews and editorials on *The Unbending* had begun to appear, the members of the CLF Board were themselves becoming anxious about the possibility of another bout of Parliamentary and press attacks. Correspondence flew between Board members and the CLF secretary and thence to the Prime Minister concerning Waten's communism, the nature of the Fund's support, the newspaper reactions and the novel itself, which Board member A. R. Chisholm feared "leaves itself open to an accusation of Communist propaganda".<sup>20</sup> However, while appropriately concerned to defend itself against charges of communist influence the CLF could only do so by dissociating itself from the novel and, in effect, accepting the political grounds of the charges made against it.

The CLF Board made no attempt to defend the book on literary grounds or to defend their own administrative position of political disinterest. The CLF instead took the extraordinary step of writing to Angus and Robertson to ask for their Readers' Reports on the manuscript. In complying, Beatrice Davis wrote that the novel's length had made it unpublishable, but that the "quality of the work was very good — when it was not dealing with sociological or political matters.... The novel is certainly leftist ... but it is no more 'communist' than dozens of novels ... that have

been published and favourably accepted". George Ferguson was blunter: the novel was refused as "too long and too political".<sup>21</sup> On 18 July, Chisholm wrote to Christesen:

I think Waten has done the Board a real disservice, and in fact may have imperilled its existence, if some people in Parliament, as you and I both fear, make a fuss about it. My own view, which I am sure is shared by other members, is that a book should be assessed by the Board exclusively on its literary value. But literary value has surely to be kept clear of political *propaganda* (which does not of course rule out political *background*), which necessarily prevents it from being purely creative literature. And I am afraid that any normal reader would see propaganda in *The Unbending*.... I frankly think Waten is in the wrong....

I am quite convinced ... that other Board members share my view that a man's political affiliations are irrelevant. But it is up to the individual writer to reciprocate by keeping all traces of propaganda out of a work submitted. Moreover it is certain that *The Unbending* deals with a different period from the one specified when W. (sic) applied to the former Board for a fellowship, so that his original contract has not been carried out.<sup>22</sup>

The CLF secretary had written to Waten on the same theme on 24 June, the day after the *Daily Mirror* editorial appeared, charging that the book Waten had written was "apparently not the novel for which you were granted the Fellowship". The implication was that he had somehow broken his contractual obligations. As Waten pointed out in his reply, the Board had had his manuscript for fifteen months without raising a query until the newspaper commentaries had begun. He also pointed out that his novel was still the story of a Jewish migrant family as initially indicated.<sup>23</sup>

The CLF finally cleared itself with the thinnest of administrative defences, passing a resolution to the effect that although the writing of the manuscript had been done with its financial assistance the Fund had had "nothing whatever" to do with publishing the book. Board chairman, A. Grenfell Price, wrote to the secretary that the novel "would savour of naked propaganda if [it] dealt with present day events":

This shows our wisdom in dissociating ourselves from any future writing that might be really dangerous if it interprets current events for a similar viewpoint. As things are I hope we are safeguarded by the fact that "The Unbending" deals with a period thirty years back, and by the fact that the Jewish family depicted were harmless people who were to some extent accidentally involved in the activities of disloyalists.<sup>24</sup>

### **A Really Smart Bit of Business**

This is a good point at which to turn more directly to the literary sphere. For arguably such *political* readings of *The Unbending* as implied in Grenfell Price's words are in certain ways more appropriate than those of its defenders who looked to the novel's literary qualities as guarantees of its political innocence. One of the key issues in literary debates throughout the fifties was the relation between literature

and politics, literature and propaganda (the adjective "communist" seemed almost automatically to attach itself to the latter term). In many ways this was the issue that determined the reading — and writing — of *The Unbending*. The positions ranged from those who claimed that art could have nothing to do with propaganda to those who claimed that all art was political. However this opposition could be more apparent than real, for those who held the latter position would also tend to hold that the politics needed to be concealed or embodied, to be propaganda no longer. As Geoffrey Hutton wrote in his review of *The Unbending*, "Propaganda can never be banned from the novel, but in the best novels it is so completely assimilated into the human picture that it no longer appears as propaganda".<sup>25</sup> More accurately, the positions were divided between those who believed, with Mr Keon, that the proper function of literature was to mirror life, to "describe it as truly and faithfully as possible, having regard to ordinary decency and morality"; and those who believed that the proper mirroring function of literature would have regard to rather different qualities — to democracy, liberalism, nationality, socialism or communism.

Criticism of *The Unbending* as propagandist was not confined to disreputable journalism or the party-political right. It was no less present in the literary mainstream. Kenneth Slessor found it guilty of a "too conscious polemic intent".<sup>26</sup> More significant still, the charge was upheld by Waten's immediate critical community, those fellow writers to whom he would send drafts and whose advice he would seek: Palmer, Christesen, Frank Dalby Davison, Alan Marshall, Arthur Phillips and Leonard Mann.<sup>27</sup> The novel was praised on nearly all sides for its central characters, the Russian Jewish immigrants Hannah and Solomon Kochansky, but it was just as widely damned for its politics or for the failure of artistry its politics were seen to produce. Phillips was provoked to the memorable response: "the interesting thing is that so much survives your bloody stupid acceptance of the bloody stupid theories of your bloody stupid clique".<sup>28</sup>

In fact, despite the variously choreographed public controversies surrounding *The Unbending*, what is striking is not the polarisation but the large degree of consensus about the novel's successes and failures. This in turn discloses a large middle ground of opinion shared by writers and commentators of very different political persuasions regarding the proper nature of literature. This was especially the case as far as the novel form was concerned, and the novel was the key stake in the literary political game. The orthodox values of realism could tolerate a range of different emphases from documentary to psychological, as long as these did not violate certain assumptions about "truth to life" and the primacy of character. The representation of "life-like" characters and experiences in the novel functioned or was taken to function as the very *opposite* of propaganda.

Beneath the controversy, there is a common literary discourse at work among the critics which not only produces a large degree of consensus in judgements but can also support quite opposed interests, from Katharine Prichard to A. D. Hope, from the *Daily Mirror* to *Tribune*. Political and aesthetic differences are generated, but also constrained, within a single discourse: here on the shared but disputed grounds of literary realism. This local literary struggle was also reproduced on the larger political scale, in the sense that the cold war in Australia was primarily a struggle on the shared but disputed grounds of liberalism (it was seldom capitalism versus communism). The notion of a common literary discourse is able to suggest why literature played such a major role in ideological struggles in the fifties and sixties. It can also suggest why the literary left was at once so extreme and so conventional in its realist ambitions. Perhaps it can even show why "radical nationalists" and "new critics" can both be mistaken as Leavisites.<sup>29</sup> The more immediate question, though, is why the divisions among the critics appear to dissolve in the face of this self-divided novel.

The notion of propaganda is always "written over" a particular notion of the literary. For example, the reviewer for the *Listener-In* declared that "a literary foundation should be devoted to the promotion of literature and not to the peddling of political views"; *The Unbending* had "strong political overtones and to that extent is propaganda".<sup>30</sup> The literary and the political can readily be produced as opposites; what is more difficult is to see how strange this pure conceptual division is and how loaded it becomes when the actual political question of the role of the state is involved.

In relation to the concept of literature, "propaganda" signifies not just the overt presence of political views but, more powerfully, the distortion of truth. The *Listener-In* review concludes: "The book is objectionable in presenting a distorted view of Australian life". But not every expression of a contrary viewpoint qualifies as propaganda. Only those, we might say, where the rhetoric shows. Differences within the terms of liberal debate, for instance, are not propagandist but rather constitutive of the discourse. Stephen Murray-Smith's protest letter to the *Listener-In*, in response to its review, argues what looks like a weak case until we see it precisely as a strategy for putting *The Unbending* back inside the boundaries of liberal discourse. The novel, he writes, "does not present a 'distorted' view of Australian life. It presents a view of two highly important historical events ... from the standpoint of the author".<sup>31</sup>

The notion of propaganda operates to define the limits of discourse, of what can be said within the literary and the political mainstream. In this strongest sense the opposite of propaganda is not just another opinion but what we might call

"natural speech", discourse beyond or before rhetoric and ideology. When literature is argued as the opposite of propaganda it thus becomes the highest order of natural speech: the realm of "life". One effect of this opposition, at once literary and political, is a distinctive kind of reactionary nationalism in which propaganda is seen as "foreign" in multiple senses of the term. Prompted by the appearance of *The Unbending*, Kenneth Mackenzie wondered "whether in a post-war, non-Russian community like this country's [Waten's grant] should have been used for the purpose of expounding the author's evident Leftist sympathies".<sup>32</sup> He also gibes that the novel's title "can be taken in more than one way by those to whom English is a native tongue". The *Listener-In's* reviewer is offended because *The Unbending* criticised "all phases of Australian social and community life excepting members of the anarchical IWW — the precursors ... of Communist disruptionists of today".

In these attacks on the novel and the CLF it is as if literature as rhetoric remained invisible for the critics, properly invisible, until it transgressed the bounds of the properly Australian. "Australian life", in the *Daily Mirror's* words, is opposed to an "alien ideology"; that is to say, "life" is opposed to "ideology" as "Australian" is opposed to "alien". It is also the case that these critics are again, in one sense, responding appropriately to *The Unbending*, for the narrative forces the reader to entertain parallels between the two marginal groups within its Australian society — its "aliens" and its "ideologues", its "red-raggers and foreigners" (84) as one character puts it. The two groups are linked throughout, partly for documentary reasons but also as a way of establishing perspectives for the novel's counter-history of Australian "patriotism".

The editors of the Communist Party *Tribune* also understood that the issue did not concern just one book but rather the politics of national identity. In response to the *Mirror* editorial, *Tribune* published an article drawing readers' attention to a cheap thriller — *Whose Grave Next, Honey?* — which was part of a series published by the *Mirror's* owners. "Most Australians", the *Tribune* concluded, "think it's just cheap filth, that should be sent back to the American war profiteers from whom it originates".<sup>33</sup> In the face of a "systematically indiscriminate" cold war rhetoric, both communists and non-communist liberals such as Christesen and Palmer could regard a commitment to "Australian literary values"<sup>34</sup> as itself a guarantee against the ideological excesses of the period. The year of Petrov was also the year of *Overland's* first issue and the publication of *The Legend of the Nineties*.<sup>35</sup> Here too the notion of literature was inseparable from notions of democracy, liberalism and the nation. Waten's defenders, no less than his accusers, made links between *The Unbending* and patriotism. Gavin Casey found that the novel's critics and not its author had been "un-Australian".<sup>36</sup> *The Unbending* was "a reminder of times and

events that helped to mould our national character". Casey adds: "Waten is a Jew ... but he is as Australian as I am, and I like to think that I'm pretty much that way". Ian Mair praised "a breadth of feeling for Australian life greater than that of the creator of Mahoney", and Brian Fitzpatrick defended the novel by granting it significance through association with national historical significance: "I daresay the main nation-building force in Australia in those years [1916-17] was the anti-conscription spirit".<sup>37</sup>

*The Unbending* was fixed by its friends as well as its enemies in the funny mirrors of national identity. This crossing of literature and nationalist categories was also what made the CLF an inevitable rather than an accidental political target, for its own brief crossed the "innocent" category of literature with the highly-charged category of Australian. The charge of communist bias against Palmer's CLF was clearly absurd; a charge of "nationalist" or even "radical nationalist" bias would have been much more interesting, possibly exposing a set of cultural-political assumptions underlying the Fund's operation (in all innocence).<sup>38</sup> In 1953, looking back on the events of the previous year, Palmer remarked: "As a matter of fact most writers whose work came up for consideration had been associated with the Left; such associations were so traditional in the Australian literary world that they were taken for granted".<sup>39</sup> Literature becomes the object of political attention precisely because of its apparent innocence as mere reflection. Within the broad embrace of realism, such a view could sit comfortably beside what might otherwise look like its opposite, the notion of literature as an active force for democracy and "national life". But literature was disputed territory precisely because of its ability thus to authorise selective images of the nation.

The notion of literature underlying these positions is at once *mimetic* and *expressive*. Keon made the first point in 1952 by supposing that literature's proper function was "to hold up a mirror to life and describe it as truly and faithfully as possible, having regard to ordinary decency and morality". Literature is thus defined as either faithful mirroring or distortion, accurate or inaccurate description; in short, either truth or propaganda. Perhaps it is no coincidence that the editorial attacking *The Unbending* appeared in a text claiming to be the "daily *mirror*" (accurate reflection plus ordinary, daily morality). *Tribune* suggests a quite different rhetorical mode.

The second point is made by the *Bulletin* reviewer of *The Unbending*. On the basis perhaps of the assimilationist reception of *Alien Son*, this anonymous critic had anticipated "a study of the Australian life of the race that gave us Isaacs and Monash". How disappointing to such realist and patriotic expectations to find instead a tendentious novel about immigrant Jews and Russians, Irish rebels and

anti-war Wobblies! The key point is in the review's final sentence as it shifts "naturally" from the mimetic to the expressive, from historical distortion to *authorial duplicity*:

If Mr Waten had written this novel under his own steam, it might have been dismissed as a piece of political propaganda with a few touches of artistry; but to have done it on Commonwealth grant (sic), under a Liberal Government, elevates it to a really smart bit of business.<sup>40</sup>

Mimetic distortion thus becomes expressive of personal and politically-motivated duplicity on the part of the author: the novel was not just history from "the standpoint of the author", in Murray-Smith's terms, but calculated deception. *This* language of "ordinary morality" described what was typical of communism and communists: a subversive political program and an immoral philosophy embodied in the duplicitous individual. There is an extreme form of authorial criticism at work in such metonymic connections. Keon was less worried about the type of books being written under CLF funding than the "type of people" being funded.

In 1952 Wentworth had employed one of the great lines of conspiracy theory in arguing that "respectability is no guarantee that a man is not a Communist".<sup>41</sup> Just so, in 1954, *The Unbending's* respectable story of a migrant family was no guarantee that it was not communist propaganda. What pretended to be a novel —or, worse, history — was really a political tract, a "devious defence of the IWW".<sup>42</sup> This sense of duplicity is only a short step from the suggestion of political subversion. As we have seen, Menzies had already ordered security investigations of all names put forward by the CLF Board; the CLF secretary had sought a security summary on Waten which was updated after *The Unbending* was published; and Waten had been accused of acting duplicitously in writing a novel different from the story of "the integration of a Jewish migrant family" which he had originally described to the Fund.<sup>43</sup> Even in his defence of the literary principles of the CLF's operation, Menzies had made it clear that no "subversive agent" would be given a grant.<sup>44</sup>

On the other side of the cultural-political fence we also find a mimetic and expressive notion of literature, this time defending Waten's novel as true to life or at least "honest", as historically accurate and so "largely unpolitical", and as "Australian".<sup>45</sup> What is missing is a militant defence of the novel as indeed subversive (which is not to deny the political astuteness of its defenders' arguments). The Melbourne communist paper, the *Guardian*, claimed that *The Unbending* had been attacked because it was "too Australian" for people brought up on Micky Spillane, and "too realistic, too true to life". It "recreates the historical past, with all its topical lessons, more vividly than, unfortunately, is the rule in Australian fiction". Len Fox, in *Tribune*, found that Waten belonged to the progressive school of writers

sharing "a belief in the ordinary Australian people". The novel "effectively portrays the IWW"; it is "an honest and sensitive novel, with a clear depiction of the class forces in a small Australian town, and the lives of the common people in wartime". When the novel is criticised it is not for distortion but for giving a less than "comprehensive" picture.<sup>46</sup>

The commonsense assumptions about literature shared by left and right are those which Catherine Belsey has labelled "expressive realist", an inadequate term as a description of realist fiction but still useful in defining a critical orthodoxy.<sup>47</sup> If there seems to be a gap between the two aspects of language defined by her term, the expressive and the mimetic, then, Belsey argues, this is precisely the gap that expressive realism suppresses discursively. Even Mr Keon sensed that the mirrors of art could be deceptive unless "having regard to ordinary decency and morality". In fact in adding this coda Keon is only doing less subtly what literary critics have always done, managing rhetorically the gap between mimesis and message — in this case by welding ordinary morality to ordinary reality and hence to realism. *Socialist* realism is just one more attempt to weld together a theory at once mimetic and exemplary.

The notion of literature which underwrites the propaganda charge is also that which privileges the "classic realist" novel. My own later argument will work, in part, as a means of undoing this concept which has passed its critical moment; but it is still useful as a way of suggesting an object within realist discourse, a notion of the novel governing both writing and reading. It is in the space of the classic realist text, where the expressive and the mimetic coincide, that the two apparently contradictory attitudes towards art and propaganda can merge. Here we can even find A. D. Hope embracing Marx (although he should mean Engels): "as Karl Marx observed ... the most effective social propaganda is to show things exactly as they are and to leave the reader to draw his own conclusions".<sup>48</sup> The same relation of literature to propaganda is at the centre of letters to Waten from Palmer, Phillips and Davison, his democratic-realist muses. All three are sympathetic and encouraging but extremely hostile to what they see as Waten's *betrayal*, by "bloody stupid theories", of his talent and instinct, of truth and experience, of art itself.<sup>49</sup> The foregrounding of the ethical realm of the author's sensibility or morality — no less present in the rhetoric of Keon or Wentworth — is the reverse side of the same liberal coin that gives value to character or "individual experience" in the text.

Expressive realist discourse centralises character as the touchstone of truth-to-life, thus privileging the "intimate story" of *The Unbending*, in Kenneth Mackenzie's terms, over its "political background". Such an ordering of the novel is not surprising given the narrative's structure in which the political story is framed

internally by the story of the Kochansky family. Moreover, it is Waten's own defence of the book. In a letter to the *Daily Mirror* which they declined to publish he wrote:

My novel is the story of a migrant family in Western Australia in the years between 1910 and 1918. Some members of the IWW make their appearance in the novel.... They are a necessary part of a truthful picture of those years which form the background of my story. So are the Laborites and conscriptionists who appear in my pages. All of my characters speak as they would in real life from which I drew my material. All the political views arise from the characters.... The writer, to render the truth of life, must of necessity render accurately the views of his characters no matter how unorthodox.<sup>50</sup>

The literary work is argued as a guarantee of political innocence on the grounds of the *novel's* "truth to life" and the *author's* disinterestedness (both defences are necessary); these are guaranteed in turn by historical fidelity and a primary focus on character. Waten does not proclaim or defend the politics of his novel. This is strategic in the circumstances, but it should also be taken seriously as an expression of his aesthetic ideals. But although this ordering of character and rhetoric is the novelist's and the novel's own, it is not the only thing that can be said about the text, although it is virtually the only thing that can be said in the language of expressive realism.

*The Unbending* has always had its supporters, including such influential figures as A. D. Hope and Geoffrey Dutton, but its uncomfortable mix of literature and politics has meant that the novel has largely disappeared from the literary annals.<sup>51</sup> Both its publishing history and critical history have been affected. Subsequent appreciations of the work, beyond the initial reviews, have with good reason focussed on its very moving portrayal of the central characters, emphasising Hannah's irony, integrity and idealism; Solomon's vulnerability and seductive self-deception; their inevitable growing apart in which love is subtly replaced by pity and dependence; their unspoken "struggle for the souls" of their children. The characterisation is such that like Susan McKernan (and the *Guardian* reviewer) we might feel compelled to draw comparisons with Henry Handel Richardson — Martin Boyd also comes to mind.<sup>52</sup> With A. D. Hope we might even think of Tolstoy. These readings are all to the point, and it is impossible to resist the pleasure of accepting *The Unbending's* invitation to become a faithful or "classic" realist reader. But the novel also asks us to take on a political and historical framework, and to do so is likely to alter the emphasis we give to its story of individuals and their relationships. To emphasise the strengths of characterisation too exclusively is to risk leaving other dimensions of the novel out of account or rendering them "unreadable". Indeed this has largely been its fate.

In the twining together of expressive and mimetic notions, character comes to signify that which is prior to or beyond politics, theories, ideologies and rhetoric. Davison writes to Waten: "Can't you see that you are letting your concern for political tactics betray your gift for more permanent things?" — the more permanent things marked by the presence of characters who "come alive!"<sup>53</sup> Character is the embodiment of "natural speech" or simply "life". The Melbourne *Herald* review of *The Unbending* is entitled "Its Propaganda Kills It": "Mr Waten's central figures lose their human existence in the turgid old-hat propaganda of the novel".<sup>54</sup>

This emphasis on character is complemented by an equal and often simultaneous emphasis on autobiography. Mackenzie writes that the major characters and their relationships are "all done firmly with the unstrained conviction of personal experience". The *Australian Jewish News*, no friend to Mackenzie because of the alleged anti-Semitism of his novel *The Refuge*, nevertheless agrees: "there is no doubt ... that the boy is Judah Waten.... There is no doubt that she [the mother] is modelled on the real flesh and blood of his own mother".<sup>55</sup> Phillips and Davison are on similar ground when they criticise Waten for disobeying his instincts. In one sense, it is as if Waten was condemned by the success of his "largely autobiographical" *Alien Son* or perhaps we should say, by its largely autobiographical success. It was certainly the case that the "career capital" gained through the earlier work was reinvested in a different kind of operation in *The Unbending*, an attempt to "bend" together quite different stories and quite different notions of the writer's task which thus involved major political (and career) risks.

The widely-shared double emphasis on character and "life" — and hence autobiography — privileges certain kinds of representation: the authenticity of individual experience and the unmediated experience of individuality rather than the experience of the medium itself or the more abstract languages of, say, political theory (politics as a set of ideas not just a set of events). *The Unbending*, I would argue, is indeed a "novel of ideas" although in many ways it does its best to conceal this aspect of its own rhetoric. At the level of form the critics want natural speech, organic form rather than an artificial structure: "Mr Waten can create a fresh world without being seen too visibly pottering about the bricks and mortar of the construction".<sup>56</sup> Phillips, Palmer and Davison express the conviction that experience, truth or life will find their natural form so long as theories or rhetorical bricks and mortar do not get in the way. Armed with these impossible expectations, many of its readers have found, with Phillips, that *The Unbending* is really "two books sewn together with stitches six inches long"<sup>57</sup> as their own reading practice splits the novel apart.

These same issues have determined the novel's publishing history. The manuscript was first submitted to Angus and Robertson, the publishers of *Alien Son*, with whom Waten had an agreement regarding first option on his subsequent book. The text was returned to Waten with suggestions for extensive cuts which were not a matter of crude political censorship but were based nevertheless on a sense of the proper relationship between art, character and politics. Beatrice Davis wrote:

The Kochanskys, particularly Hannah and Solomon, are superbly drawn, and the pathos of her declining respect for him has the quality of genuine tragedy. This is the crux and meaning of the book as a novel — and for this alone it ought to be published. The Australia to which they come ... [is] vividly presented, too; and the political themes are admirably used to give atmosphere and express character — though they take up far too much space and time. (It rather weakens this aspect of the book, by the way, that all the Australians who are not unsuccessful "workers" or members of the IWW are either cravens or "baddies" ... a common type of fault in sociological novels of the kind KSP [sic] and Dymphna Cusack have been writing).<sup>58</sup>

The novel was eventually published without cuts as one of the first original works of fiction produced by the Australasian Book Society (ABS), a company with left-wing and trade union links established to issue Australian works of nationalist and progressive interest. *The Unbending* thus marks an important shift in the alignment of Waten's literary career, from the major Australian commercial publisher to a new, politically-engaged "minor" publishing group. Precisely because of its major literary ambitions combined with what we might call its minority politics, *The Unbending* was proclaimed by the ABS as just the sort of thing it was after.<sup>59</sup>

Perhaps the last item in the sequence of commentaries prompted by the book's initial appearance is A. D. Hope's essay "The Sty of Circe", originally a CLF lecture at the University of Sydney in 1957.<sup>60</sup> This lecture was written not long after the seminal essay "Standards in Australian Literature" in which Hope had described "a lack of comparative standards" in Australian criticism and a lack of works "of undoubted and recognizable genius" on which standards could be based. The essay makes an intervention in contemporary concerns about the place of Australian literature in the academy.<sup>61</sup> Hope discovers, in Australian writing, an "obsession with the scene rather than the individual, with what is typical rather than with what is distinctive, and with what is specifically Australian rather than what is specifically human" (7). He turns to *The Unbending*, in the later essay, as a work which promises to make the break "from the world of values which are relative into the world in which values are absolute, from the historical to the timeless" (13).

"The Sty of Circe" is a fascinating repetition of the themes already noted. Hope distances himself from earlier political interests in the novel; he is *disinterested* in the name of literature itself. Great novels, he argues, might or might not be propagandist; but "movements such as social realism tend to divert the novel

from its main dramatic function ... not because the writer is in fact tendentious but because he sees his characters as representatives of a class or a movement and not primarily as individuals" (277). This point too has its particular historical moment in the history of Australian criticism: seeing "the individual as such" is opposed to "the native Australian writer[']s] ... obsession with the typically Australian and with an accurate rendering of the Australian scene" (280). Waten, by contrast with the norm, "is by *instinct* and preference a classical novelist in the sense that his work is *instinctively* based in the individual situation" (278, my emphasis).

Waten is valued, then, because of his difference. But the language in which Hope articulates this difference discloses the sameness of his critical discourse. His category of "the individual" repeats other critics' notions of character or life, generating oppositions between experience and ideology, truth and distortion, art and politics. Again there is a powerful sense of the story developing its own natural form until "the novel of social purpose" takes over "about half-way through" (287) — an arbitrary but symptomatic division. Hope's desire for organic form comes out in his praise of the book's sense of Jewishness which barely avoids racial stereotyping. Waten, he writes, "has the Jewish depth and readiness of emotion and faith from which he can naturally and simply draw effects" (281). Hannah Kochansky has "the devotion and steadfastness of Ruth, the command of Miriam, the integrity and heroism of Judith" (285).

*The Unbending* is compared not only to Old Testament legend but also to Greek tragedy, Icelandic saga and "classical" European realism. Hope argues, interestingly, that "for the first time the European as opposed to the Anglo-Saxon and American tradition appears in Australian writing" (279). But if Hope praises the novel in terms of other literature he dispraises it, after all, in terms of life:

Waten gives a fair enough picture of the first referendum on conscription. But he is plainly a partisan of the IWW and the anti-conscription labour men. On the other side he sees nothing but tub-thumpers, profiteers, cartoon-type capitalists and corrupt politicians. I remember those days myself. I remember the bitterness common among middle-class people.... They were grotesquely wrong, yet they were for the most part decent, kindly, honest and humane people. Waten, I feel, has fallen into the familiar trap that social realism offers the novelist: the trap of giving us a doctrinaire cartoon of a social situation rather than a picture of things as they are.... [T]he whole picture would have been more effective for the end he had in view if he had been able to rise, as an artist, above his political convictions. (286-87)

Again, all at once, Waten has betrayed his instinct, art and "things as they are". Hope is reproducing, indeed at this point in time *capturing*, an expressive realist orthodoxy.

### **Propaganda and Seduction**

I want now to turn to the text of *The Unbending*, not to defend it in liberal terms as literature rather than propaganda or to re-argue its "unity", but to ask what the novel itself has to say about the relation between the two modes, the aesthetic (novelistic) and the propagandist. In terms of the literary discourse in operation, to say that the novel is propaganda and therefore not literature is equivalent to saying that it is literature and therefore not propaganda. In a sense I want to re-claim the novel as propaganda by considering how the narrative itself mediates, by textual means, between competing aesthetic and political discourses. *The Unbending* is indeed "full" of propaganda, full of quotations from pro- and anti-war songs, patriotic speeches, IWW pamphlets, religious and revolutionary slogans, moral maxims and so on. This process of quotation could just be documentary literal-mindedness or politics in disguise. But there are further questions to be posed: how does the novel establish the conditions for its own reading as realism, documentary or propaganda? What relations does it set up between representation and rhetoric? What do its divisions signify?

Propaganda in the novel functions not just as the recording of historic political positions but as a "way of saying": a narrative or rhetorical mode with its own powers of representation and persuasion. In this sense propagandist rhetoric as incorporated into the narrative presents possible models for the text's own rhetorical performance, models which, having once released their disruptive potential, it must overcome. We can draw here on the arguments of Ross Chambers in which he elaborates the notion of "narrative self-situation".<sup>62</sup> Chambers has argued that the readerly text, which category can describe *The Unbending*, establishes by textual means the conditions of its own readability, producing its own narrative situation and "point" by internal "repetition, reflection, and mirroring" (28). Each text includes more or less implicit models and *anti-models* for its own rhetorical performance, models such as intertextual references, internal narratives or story-telling situations, and figures in the sense both of characters and tropes which represent artistic processes, artefacts or narrative exchange. Intertextuality in this sense is more precise and more motivated than the rather loose notion of a text's (inevitable) allusions to other texts. The concept describes one of the specific means whereby the narrative (inevitably) attempts to situate itself, and thus to situate its reading, among a network of possible genres and readings as this *kind* of text, to be read thus and not otherwise. Intertextuality thus "works through devices by which a text signals how its very structure of meanings depends on both similarity to and difference from certain other types of text, involving a transposition of one sign system (or more than one) into another".<sup>63</sup>

The process of self-situation through narrative and figural "embedding" is, as Chambers argues, "the central device by which the 'readability' of the 'readerly' text is produced" (35). We have already seen this process at work in *Alien Son* in its juxtaposition of "high" and popular art forms. Perhaps there is more at stake, or at least the stakes are more politically charged, in the case of *The Unbending*. But in every case self-situation involves an institutional as well as textual dimension as the narrative makes its claim for a place within a specific ordering of genres and audiences in a given cultural economy, as well perhaps as in some ideal order of genres.

Propaganda in *The Unbending* is both model and anti-model, not just something the text "fails to avoid". As Hope saw, the work aspires to all the power and persuasiveness of the "classical" novel with its techniques for moral scrutiny and social density. This ambition sets it apart from some of the humbler realisms of Waten's contemporaries. The narrative needs therefore to distance itself from any form of propaganda in order to establish its credentials as "natural" realist discourse. At the same time, the text cannot rest content with the achievements of "bourgeois realism". The Kochansky's are only part of the story, part of an anti-bourgeois revolutionary history that the novel also relates. For *this* story the text needs to co-opt nothing less than the rhetorical excess and violence of revolutionary propaganda in order to establish its difference from bourgeois realism and bourgeois history. It needs to be excessive, even "crude", precisely because of the absolute claims bourgeois realism has on natural discourse as the critics show.

The text has both to ally itself with the great realist tradition and differentiate itself as telling a new kind of story. This is the problem the narrative sets itself: how to write a "complete" realist novel which is also something more. Thus we have the Kochansky story framed by the political story, but also the reverse, the political story framed by the Kochansky story with which the novel begins and ends. The novel's structure both centralises and disperses the "intimate" family story, on the one hand marginalising IWW and revolutionary rhetoric while on the other signalling its need of that rhetoric for the story to be complete. The narrative is framed and moved onward by the chronology of the Kochansky story but this continuous plot is fragmented "intratextually" into four parts and seventy-four different sections, some as short as half a page.

*The Unbending* in this reading needs to figure revolution and the history of the working class becoming a class-for-itself, but it must do so other than in the rhetoric of propaganda or utopianism alone. After all, the novel (this novel) makes claims on history. It must naturalise the figures of revolution or class-consciousness, even as the critics suggest, but do so without losing the marks, including the

violence, of their difference. This task adds a further twist to the already duplicitous role of realism (not of the author), its need both to conceal and reveal its art. As Chambers suggests, realist texts are "so successful in imitating 'natural' discourse that they must leave clues if they are to be deciphered as art ... and thus benefit from artistic authority. Such texts rely for narratorial effectiveness on a kind of internal inconsistency, the penetrability of their disguise" (63).

How to be art, history and politics all at once and still be all art? We might see this as a traditional problem for the realist novel but one posed in a new way for the mid-twentieth century "communist" novelist in Australia. *The Unbending* suggests both the desire to write according to the sheer life-likeness of characters and event *and* the desire to (re)write a political history. Waten's choice of subject-matter, the conscription fights of 1916-17, could scarcely have been better chosen as a way of throwing his novel headlong into the politicised discourses of literature and nationalism in the early fifties but to do so "in disguise". To make its mark and claim authority as serious literature *The Unbending* would have to conceal its political argument; but to make its political and historical point this argument would have to be recoverable or decipherable for the reader. This internally inconsistent task is borne by the novel's juxtaposition of different kinds of aesthetic and political language and different character types.

To go to the heart of the paradox, in its own text *The Unbending* reveals a profound scepticism towards rhetoric, indeed towards art. The prose is strict, spare and self-denying, earnest rather than enchanting; and in a revealing stutter even the mildest trope is likely to carry an "as it were" ("cut off from the world as it were", 208). At the level of character, Hannah's broken English and the reticence of militant worker George Feathers are preferred to the local politician's urging rhetoric and to Solomon's indulgent eloquence. In rhetorical figures and in human figures the novel is suspicious of adornment, sensuality and utopianism which it links, characteristically, in a single unobtrusive sentence: "'I have been given a *grand idea*,' [Solomon] said impressively, *stroking his golden moustache*" (54, my emphasis).

Characters, their modes of speech, and the tropes and stories which surround them can all be understood in terms of particular rhetorical models; and in these terms the Kochansky story and the "political" story can be shuffled back into each other. Solomon becomes central in this reading of character for he is, above all, a story-teller. And like Satan, that other great story-teller, he is also a great seducer. In his analysis of nineteenth and early twentieth century stories, Chambers focuses on the scene of seduction as the primary trope through which narrative self-situation and "narratorial authority" (51) is accomplished. *The Unbending* can be understood

as a story of anti-seduction, resisting or absorbing a range of seductive scenes and rhetorics. Still, in this it conforms to one of the repeated notes in Chambers' analysis: "the seductive power inherent in the device of denying seduction" (216).

We first meet Solomon on the ship telling stories of Australia, the promised land or Golden Kingdom, although only after first meeting Hannah and her "humorous and ironical speech" in the novel's opening sentence. Solomon's talk initiates recurrent themes. The image of the promised land, for example, links the hopes of the immigrants with the political desires of the working class, with the rhetoric of official politics and with myths of the working-man's paradise. *Gold* is a connecting figure in these themes and throughout the novel, from Solomon's moustache to the fool's gold discovered by Moses, the eldest son, in his passion for sudden wealth (65-69); from utopian stories of the golden future, which might be worthy or foolish, to the sordid reality of money with which they are contrasted. Solomon's golden dreams turn to scrap metal and then, very nearly, to old bones. The novel quietly produces these powerful symbols.

Early in the novel we also see Hannah's seduction by Solomon, above all by his golden talk:

He was a large, handsome man with a silky golden moustache, gentle and humorous. He was a fluent talker.... He had an innate ardour, an imaginative flight, so that even his most commonplace experience assumed more than life-like proportions; they were always larger....

Hannah had listened to him fascinated.... He was unlike any other man she had ever met; he was from another world, an opulent, velvety world. She overlooked his lack of ideals and convictions ... and took him at his word. (14)

Solomon is a romancer. The "ardour" of his words invites empathy and excite the passions, not least his own: "His careful descriptions of the dishes inflamed his appetite" (55). He is also a kind of aesthete, willing to lose all in the golden dreams of art: "'What is greater than beauty?' he asked himself almost rhapsodically" (42). For these very reasons his rhetoric *is* powerful. For Moses, "[h]is father fired his imagination and stood for a kind of *freedom*" (56, my emphasis). Solomon must be both model and anti-model for the narrative, for his power looks very much like the power of art itself.

The novel shows Hannah's ironical and reticent speech resisting and then overpowering Solomon's seductive, utopian eloquence. Realism, we might say, overcomes romance. Hannah is both lover and ironical reader of Solomon. She observes him at the synagogue as he intones the Kaddish for her parents:

Hannah watched him with curious eyes ... his pale, serious face, his movements assured, almost graceful when he recited the blessing....

Later, when he intoned the Kaddish ... his face shone with a pleasurable melancholy and his mellow voice was sweet and musical.

Hannah was not pleased that he could show himself off so effectively at such a time. (176)

Religion emerges as just another form of utopian romance and aestheticism, complicating Hope's praise of the novel's sense of "the religious ethos of the Jewish people".<sup>64</sup> The affective power of Solomon's sensuality and artfulness is overtaken by Hannah's "artless" and ironic speech which emerges from her broken English as frank and aggressive, "peculiarly strong, yet passionate and soft" (209). More than once her "foreign" English enables her to break the rules, to say what can't be said. She can proclaim, when forced, "I not want to be decent" (sic, 159). Hannah's relationship to Solomon is a story of disillusionment; stylistically and structurally the narrative is shaped to disillusion rather than entrance. On one side, as I have argued, the novel lays claim to the accumulated authority of a realist tradition and thus to the truths of an art, which, like Hannah, combines "life, harmony and beauty" (310). On the other side however, but still like Hannah, the novel has to be willing to sacrifice artifice, seductiveness and decorum for what *is* greater than beauty, for the "truths" of its larger story (beyond art).

*The Unbending* needs both to draw on the rhetorical and affective power of propaganda but also to absorb and qualify it. It must split propaganda, dividing the rhetoric that seduces from that which clarifies and distinguishing the fool's gold of patriotism from the real wealth of revolutionary working-class solidarity. Patriotic propaganda is shown as yet another type of romance ("Foreign travel! New lands! Alluring women!" 81); or a type of the sentimental tale ("We don't want to lose you/But we think you ought to go", 197). The novel's own realism is defined by its internal critique of these two alternative modes whose power to seduce is also their power to blind an audience to their rhetorical exclusions. Waten can manage this critique with subtlety. In setting the scene for a school patriotic concert the narrator notes a First Aid sign bearing the legend "Foreign Bodies in the Eye". The school sings "God Save the King" (196), but Moses is refused permission to recite "My Country" (199-200). Patriotic and religious discourse mutually define the foreign bodies.

By contrast the IWW propaganda is shown as having a "truth" or at least a seductive power beyond even the wisdom of Hannah, an effect due precisely to its rhetorical excess, its ability to break through, to say what classic realism could not say:

[Feathers] stared at the front page, unable to take his eyes away from the flamboyant language....

*War What For? For the workers and their dependents: Death, Starvation, Poverty and Untold misery. For the capitalist class: Gold, Stained with the Blood of Millions, Riotous Luxury, Banquets of Jubilation Over the Graves of Their*

*Dupes and Slaves. War is Hell! Send the Capitalists to hell and Wars are Impossible...*

*Workers of the World Unite! Don't become Hired Murderers! (96)*

Here as elsewhere the narrative has a more than documentary interest in the texts it quotes. The quotation comes from the IWW paper, *Direct Action*; but *The Unbending*, as classic realism, must work as indirect action or in Chambers' term "deferred communication" (25). So the IWW propaganda is placed and displaced. The novel registers its force by the way it overcomes Feathers' reticence and Hannah's irony (210). But it is also (dis)placed by the IWW's actual political failure, a failure which is revealed symptomatically in the excesses of their propaganda. The IWW is also criticised by Killeen, a strong character in the novel, an Irish socialist who sees the IWW as utopian, although Killeen himself is characterised as sectarian.

Waten is at some pains to incorporate diverse political perspectives through Feathers, Killeen, Fomin, Jones, Williams and others. The effect is not to produce a mere balance or range, but to mark out the steps of a political education for the reader. As Beatrice Davis suggests there is not much subtlety in the story in the way it divides up the political "goodies" and "baddies" but there is a range of positions among the former at least: the revolutionary utopianism of the IWW, Killeen's Irish rebelliousness, the quieter worker solidarity of Feathers, the Laborism of Williams. These are juxtaposed and weighed up against each other in a way that requires the reader to engage with the novel as indeed a novel (or history) of ideas. The split in Labor and the disintegration of the IWW as a political force prefigure the "historical need" for a communist movement. The Russian revolution, "the greatest thing in history" (297), is discussed by Feathers and Hannah in the book's final pages ("Very big thing true," Hannah agrees). This final resolution must remain off-stage, however, for narrative as well as historical reasons. Instead the novel enacts a process whereby the IWW's rhetoric is dissolved figuratively back into the working class, the people, the marginalised "red raggars and foreigners", where it awaits transformation by communism. The IWW's violent, excessive revolutionary utopianism is dispersed but also embodied, rewritten.

Few readers, I suspect, would fail to find *The Unbending* fairly crudely partisan at one point or another. We need to be wary of blaming this too readily on Waten's communism or taking it as the specific instance of a general law that politics and art do not mix. (At the same time, as I have shown, we won't get far by trying to argue that *The Unbending* is not political after all.) When we do feel the novel to be heavy-handed the problem is not "politics" *tout court* but rather a simplistic application of realism's golden rule that political attitudes need to be embodied. This produces a crude, moralising equation between, say, reactionary politics and personal ambition or cowardice. Elsewhere the novel seems to be caught between

two modes, what we might call the Tolstoyan or classic realist for its central characters but something closer to Dickens for minor characters such as Grogan and O'Handy (even the signifying role of names seems to alter). However it is not necessarily a sign of Waten's artlessness when he writes of the "watery, red-rimmed eyes" of the headmaster Mr Grogan, one of the caricatures for which he is condemned, that they "seemed to say like the Dickens character that boys were a bad lot" (75). Neither is it accidental that when police raid the Kochanskys they seize books by Tolstoy and Zola — "Foreign writers" and "Anarchists" reckons the detective (254-57). Dickens, Tolstoy and Zola are models, but also anti-models, for *The Unbending's* own readability.

Similarly, the characters' physical appearance and speech represent not just personalities or platforms but also narrative and rhetorical modes. Killeen is like a revolutionary text, a rhetorical figure of revolution itself:

The half-ironical smile on his long face, the axe-like nose, the burning eyes, produced the strongest effect on the onlookers. Those who believed evil of him saw in his face something frightening and unpleasant. But to those ... who did not believe the current gossip, there was something noble and heroic, something uncommon in this tall, gaunt figure. (148)

As rhetorical rather than human figures, the characters act in the way of mediating between competing discourses or narrative models from the sentimental to the agitational, from the "half-ironical" to the "noble and heroic", including those which produce "the strongest effect" on readers. Stories and modes of speech become ways of relating histories and projecting alternative histories. Thus the process of narrative self-situation in the text is also a means of political-historical situation.

*The Unbending* is concerned to rewrite history and in order to do so it must establish its own authority to narrate by this double process of self-situation. The novel is repeatedly bringing excluded histories into its narrative, bringing them in to show that they were always and already there. It brings in the figure of revolution, for example, through the IWW, Killeen and Fomin, an exiled Russian Social Democrat. The "foreign" histories each character trails behind him or her are thus discovered inside the novel's local, Australian history. The Kochanskys themselves bring not only their old world luggage (the stories on their Russian bedstead, "pictures in red and gold of courtiers and fair ladies with wigs after a painting by Watteau", 24). They also bring the revolutionary history of 1905. There are embedded textual models too — for example, references to books on radical economic and political theory — which repeat the pattern of introducing and naturalising alternative narratives (here the narrative of class history). Marginal or excluded positions whether at the level of language, politics or nationality are argued into the mainstream, thereby transforming it.

Given the embattled position of the Communist Party in the early fifties, the end-of-ideology climate and the institutional constraints on publication and publicity, perhaps *The Unbending* itself can be seen as a covert way of taking a marginal position: a position which must be disguised but whose disguise must be penetrable. It is in this sense truly a cold war novel, and the "internal inconsistency" upon which its artistic authority depends is doubled, as it were, by its political context (which becomes, in the novel, intertextual). The novel tells a revolutionary history that prefigures communism; it tells us, at the same time, that this revolutionary history is "simply" history, a simple story of characters in their time and place.

I have already noted parallels between the period of the novel's setting and the occasion of its writing, parallels not only summoned but in a sense anticipated by *The Unbending* in its representations of heightened political rhetoric, fear of foreign immigrants, a referendum which splits the nation and the Labor Party, a "crisis reading" of contemporary history and patriotism, and the suppression of a revolutionary minority. From Waten's perspective in the crisis-filled 1950s, 1916 and the defeat of conscription is read backwards as the initiating moment of a modern national history, not 1915 and the landing at Gallipoli. The workers and the Wobblies replace the Anzacs, a coming to class-consciousness replaces a coming of age.

The novel rewrites national history as class history (so the workers' Railway Hotel competes with the Commercial and the Golden Crown!). Further 1916, the year that split the nation, is made to anticipate 1917 and the ten days that split the world. This revolutionary history also threatens some golden Australian legends. Killeen says of the IWW:

"It's the first revolutionary movement in this country. But it's not the last. Australia's history's just begun. Before — I know about Eureka and the shearers — the capitalists had everything in the grip of their palms. They'll not be as almighty after this struggle." (99)

Len Fox, in his *Tribune* review, picks out a similar passage and argues instead for a longer Australian militant tradition. Already in the early fifties communism itself was drawn in contradictory directions between revolutionary vanguardism and populist nationalism. Nowhere was this more so than in the literary sphere as the progress of *Overland* would soon show.<sup>65</sup> In the cultural as well as political realms there were tensions between marginal and mainstream positions. For left-wing writers these could be expressed as tensions between possible literary modes and models from Zhdanov to Dad and Dave via Dickens, Balzac, Tolstoy, Gorky. As Ian Turner asked, did socialist realism "imply a positive revolutionary message, or merely a realistic account of working-class life?"<sup>66</sup>

These tensions, at once literary and political, are inscribed in *The Unbending* in its contradictory aspirations to be both modestly documentary and radically utopian; and to be both artless and artful, claiming the authority of classic realism but, as very late in the tradition, necessarily in some ironic relation to it. The novel is not only divided, but must in some way foreground its divisions, its violations of classic realist decorum. If the contradictions do prove too violent for the novel itself this is due not to the sheer incompatibility of literature and politics or art and ideology, but to contradictions within the literary discourse which the novel largely shares (but disputes) with its critics: to the gap between "natural speech" and rhetoric lodged within the discourse of expressive realism. By the same token, while the critics have brought *The Unbending* undone, exposing its gaps and contradictions, the novel in turn has proved the critics' undoing, exposing the irresolutions in their own attempts to "complete" the text in interpretation.

Perhaps *The Unbending* itself best describes the self-divided nature of its narrative when it describes a minor but valued character as "beautifully ugly" (185). That might also stand as a figure of revolution. The narrative is attracted to the oxymoron (and seems to attract them to itself, with its "awkward fluency", in Kenneth Mackenzie's phrase). The novel's political aspirations, we might say, are openly concealed in the text, hidden for all to see. So much so that it is unclear whether Waten would have been dismayed or delighted when the *Australian Journal* commented: "there is nothing to terrify even the most conservative in *The Unbending*".<sup>67</sup>

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- 1 "Taxpayers' Money to Help the Reds", editorial, *Daily Mirror* 23 June 1954, p.3. Judah Waten, *The Unbending* (Melbourne: Australasian Book Society, 1954). Further references to the novel will appear in the text.
- 2 Frank Browne, "Communist Propaganda and the Public Purse", *Things I Hear* (June 1954), p.1; "Does Mr Menzies Really Understand Communism?" *Intelligence Survey* (June 1954), pp.9, 12. The latter described itself as "A Special Intelligence Service for Australian Patriots". Eric Butler was thought to have been responsible for the circulation of the anti-Semitic *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* in Australia: although I have not emphasised it here, in the context of debates about "patriotism" anti-Semitism is a theme that keeps turning up in the material under discussion.
- 3 Nicholas Whitlam and John Stubbs, *Nest of Traitors: The Petrov Affair* (Milton, Qld: Jacaranda, 1974), p.104 and passim. The Christesens were interviewed by Security in November 1954 and summoned to appear before the Commission in January 1955 (Lynne Strahan, *Just City and the Mirrors: Meanjin Quarterly and the Intellectual Front, 1940-1965* [Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1984], pp.161-69).
- 4 Quotations in this paragraph from C. B. Christesen, letter to H. S. Temby, Secretary CLF, 25 June 1954, Australian Archives (ACT): AA CRS A463, (1956- ); 1969/2107; Judah Waten-Commonwealth Literary Fund, 1954-1971. See also correspondence in the *Meanjin* Archives, Baillieu Library, University of Melbourne: Christesen to A. R. Chisholm (a CLF Board member), 13 July 1954: "[following the appearance of Frank Browne's newsletter] the *Daily Mirror* published an editorial attacking the novel and the CLF; then the *Bulletin* review appeared (written, I'm told, by Malcolm Ellis), then the Melbourne *Herald* review by Tebbutt — all in part using certain phraseology similar to Browne in his newsletter. I'm told that Osmar White actually wrote a favourable review of the novel but it was diced and Tebbutt's substituted.... Some years ago I was told that Wentworth supplies Browne with a great deal of his information.... Further, it is likely that Wentworth and/or Keon had already complained to Temby.... Also, there just might be some anti-Semitic spite behind the press (and parliamentary) attacks; for Wentworth is a well-known Jew-baiter as well as Red-baiter".
- 5 Vance Palmer et al., "Comments on *The Unbending*", *Meanjin* 13, 3 (Winter 1954), pp.456-60. See also Strahan, *Just City and the Mirrors*, pp.147-52; and *Meanjin* Archives, letters between Christesen and Prichard, A. A. Phillips, Chisholm, Palmer, Fitzpatrick, June-July 1954. Prichard writes that she is "not very enthusiastic" about the book; Phillips, "I don't think much of the book ... Waten's politico-literary theory has led him on a false trial"; Chisholm, "His book is much more propagandist than I have said in my review".
- 6 See Allan Ashbolt, "The Great Literary Witch-Hunt of 1952", in *Australia's First Cold War 1945-1953: Volume 1: Society, Communism and Culture*, eds Ann Curthoys and John Merritt (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1984), pp.153-82. The full parliamentary debates can be read in *Commonwealth Parliamentary Debates (Hansard) (CPD)*, 218 (1952), pp.717-29 & 1031-41. Writers named include Vance Palmer, Flora Eldershaw, Dymphna Cusack, Kylie Tennant, John Morrison, Eric Lambert, Alan Marshall, Brian Fitzpatrick — and Judah Waten.
- 7 *CPD* 218 (1952), pp.717-18: 28 August 1952. The date follows closely on the publication of Waten's *Alien Son* and the appearance of reviews of the book. This appears to have been the catalyst (or perhaps the final straw!) producing Keon's speeches.
- 8 Frank Cain and Frank Farrell, "Menzies' War on the Communist Party, 1949-1951", in Curthoys and Merritt, pp.109-34; Ashbolt, pp.154-55.
- 9 Ashbolt, pp.158 & 163.
- 10 *CPD* 218 (1952), p.727.
- 11 Ashbolt, pp.178-82. The Advisory Board in 1952 comprised Palmer, chairman, Flora Eldershaw, Tom Inglis Moore, R. G. Howarth and Kenneth Binns. The Board in 1954 comprised Prof. A. Grenfell Price, chairman, Kenneth Slessor, Prof. A. R. Chisholm, Inglis Moore, and Howarth. Grenfell had published a "propagandist booklet denouncing communism" in 1931 (Ashbolt, p.180).
- 12 W. R. Cumming, Acting Secretary CLF, letter to Judah Waten, 20 November 1951. AA: CRS A463, (1956- ); 1969/2107.

- 13 CPD 218 (1952), p.1033-34: 4 September 1952.
- 14 The *Guardian*, the Melbourne Communist Party paper, reports a "mass meeting" in Richmond to hear Eric Lambert, John Morrison and Waten defend themselves (9 October 1952), and Brian Fitzpatrick used his radio program on 3XY to analyse the speeches, 6 September 1952 (typescript in Judah Waten Papers, National Library of Australia, NLA MS 4536, Series 5). Waten's CLF file includes letters to the CLF Secretary protesting the events of 1954 from Vic Williams, Secretary, WA Realist Writers; Lance Loughrey (member of the Melbourne Realist Writers); Ian Turner, as Manager of the Australasian Book Society; and John Morrison, as Secretary of the Victorian Fellowship of Australian Writers.
- 15 See Sneja Gunew, "Migrant Women Writers: Who's on Whose Margins?" in *Gender, Politics and Fiction: Twentieth Century Australian Women's Novels*, ed. Carole Ferrier (St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1985), p.164, drawing on the arguments of Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), pp.141-64.
- 16 Cain and Farrell, pp.112-13, 115.
- 17 AA: CRS A463, (1956- ); 1969/2107. Report dated 18 February 1952, Menzies' note dated 21 February. In a departmental minute on the same date Menzies repeats exactly the same message but adds that the case "does not add to my somewhat meagre confidence in the Advisory Committee". Minute reproduced in Richard Hall, "Menzies' Literary Lie", *Age Monthly Review* 3, 9 (January 1984), p.3.
- 18 CPD 218 (1952), p.724.
- 19 For a discussion of this incident see Hall, pp.3-4 and a follow-up piece, "Authors and ASIO (cont.)", *Age Monthly Review* 3, 10 (February 1984), pp.5-6.
- 20 AA: CRS A463, (1956- ); 1969/2107. Letters/minutes from Chisholm to Temby, 5 June; Temby to Grenfell Price, 21 June; Temby to the PM, 22 & 29 June; Temby to Grenfell Price, 29 June; Grenfell Price to Temby, 29 July; Temby to Grenfell Price, 6 August; Chisholm to Temby, 24 August.
- 21 AA: CRS A463, (1956- ); 1969/2107. Davis to Temby, 25 June; Temby to PM, 29 June.
- 22 Chisholm, letter to Christesen, 18 July 1954 (and Christesen's reply, 26 July). *Meanjin* Archive.
- 23 AA: CRS A463, (1956- ); 1969/2107. Waten forwards the manuscript on 16 February 1953; Waten's reply to Temby, the CLF Secretary, is dated 28 June 1954.
- 24 A. Grenfell Price, letter to Temby, 29 July 1954. The Board's resolution is contained in a departmental minute [n.d., 29 July?]. AA: CRS A463, (1956-); 1969/2107.
- 25 Geoffrey Hutton, "Novels", *Argus* 29 May 1954, p.10.
- 26 Kenneth Slessor, "Books of the World and the Week", *Sun* (Sydney) 31 July 1954, p.5.
- 27 See letters to Waten from Palmer (15 February 1953), Phillips (1 June 1954), Mann (21 June 1954), Dalby Davison (1 July 1954). Waten Papers, NLA MS 4536, Series 2. Mann comments: "... one-sidedness and caricaturing may be all right for politics, though I'm inclined to think it is wrong and weak in effect, even for that ... but it's no good for a work of letters, for a work of art which otherwise your book is", (NLA MS 4536/2/137).
- 28 Phillips, letter to Judah Waten, 1 June 1954, NLA MS 4536/2/133: "Even the propaganda suffers. You have got to weave the political influence in because you *want* it to be an influence (you criminal — a novelist making what he wants happen, happen — that puts you on the level of the commercial, even if your motives are better).... But it isn't novelist's truth — it doesn't feel inevitable and right.... Trust to it finding its own way of expression.... That's not art for art's sake; it's art for Life's sake, the only sort worth having".
- 29 The terms are John Docker's, from his *In a Critical Condition: Reading Australian Literature* (Ringwood, Vic.: Penguin, 1984), chs 1-5. A critique which suggests another reading of the influence of Leavis is Andrew Milner, "The 'English' Ideology: Literary Criticism in England and Australia", *Thesis Eleven* 12 (1985), pp.121-25. See also Patrick Buckridge, "Intellectual Authority and Critical Traditions in Australian Literature 1945 to 1975", in *Intellectual Movements and Australian Society*, eds Brian Head and James Walter (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1988), pp.188-213.
- 30 "Book of the Week", *Listener-In* 31 July-6 August 1954, p.24.
- 31 Stephen Murray-Smith, letter, *Listener-In* 14-20 August 1954, p.21.

- 32 [Kenneth] Seaforth [Mackenzie], "Fellowship and Quality", *Sydney Morning Herald* 14  
 August 1954, p.15.
- 33 *Tribune* 30 June 1954, p.5.
- 34 [Editorial], "Tradition and Today", *Overland* 9 (April 1957), p.2.
- 35 Vance Palmer, *The Legend of the Nineties* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1954).  
 For *Overland* see David Carter, "Coming Home After the Party: *Overland's* First Decade",  
*Meanjin* 44, 4 (December 1985), pp.462-76.
- 36 Gavin Casey, "An Important Australian Novel That's Been Misjudged", *A. M.* 27 July 1954,  
 p.45.
- 37 I. M. [Ian Mair], "New Australians 1910-1917", *Age* 5 June 1954, p.15; Brian Fitzpatrick,  
 [Comment on *The Unbending*], *Meanjin* 13, 3 (Winter 1954), p.459. See also his article on  
 the novel and civil liberties issues in the first *Overland*: "The Writer at Bay", *Overland* 1  
 (Spring 1954), p.3.
- 38 For a list of CLF grant recipients see Thomas Shapcott, *The Literature Board: A Brief*  
*History* (St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1988), pp.24-28.
- 39 Palmer in *Landfall* 28 (1953), pp.279-82, quoted in Ashbolt, p.181.
- 40 [Malcolm Ellis?], "Waten Novel", *Bulletin* 16 June 1954, p.2.
- 41 *CPD* 218 (1952), p.728.
- 42 Geoffrey Tebbutt, "Speaking of Books", *Digest of World Reading* (October 1954), p.122.
- 43 Waten's quarterly reports to the CLF throughout 1952 suggest that the first draft of the novel  
 was a much longer work, following the lives of the two children into a later period. There is  
 no mention of the book's "political" content, but the reports supply appropriate accounts of  
 the progress of the writing. AA: CRS A463, (1956- ); 1969/2107. Christesen did some  
 thorough research into the matter and satisfied himself that the changes Waten made were  
 for good literary and imaginative reasons and that the Board had been kept well-informed.  
 He correctly anticipates the line of attack, via the notion that Waten "has pulled a fast one":  
 letter to Chisholm, 13 July 1954. *Meanjin* Archive.
- 44 I should say, "*more or less* clear". Menzies' double negatives are a little confusing: "I am not  
 going to say that if, at the time, we were told that the person concerned was a subversive  
 agent, we would not have given him a Commonwealth grant. We would not have done so".  
*CPD* (218) 1952, p.724.
- 45 The phrase "largely unpolitical" comes from Fitzpatrick's "The Writer at Bay". See also  
 "Australian Realism on the March", *Guardian* 1 July 1954, p.4; L. F. [Len Fox?], "*The*  
*Unbending* is Interesting First Novel", *Tribune* 23 June 1954, p.8; Donald Cameron, "*The*  
*Unbending*", *Overland* 1 (Spring 1954), p.12. The review of the novel in *Common Cause*,  
 the Miners' Federation paper, was entitled "*The Unbending* Makes History", (August 1954).  
 Reviews collected in Waten's papers, NLA MS 4536/5/1.
- 46 From the *Guardian* and *Tribune* reviews cited above.
- 47 Catherine Belsey, *Critical Practice* (London and New York: Methuen, 1980), pp.1-36.
- 48 A. D. Hope, "The Sty of Circe: Judah Waten's *The Unbending*", in his *Native Companions:*  
*Essays and Comments on Australian Literature, 1936-1966* (Sydney: Angus & Robertson,  
 1974), p.277. Further references appear in the text. For correspondence from the time Hope  
 was preparing the CLF lecture (ironically enough) which eventually became this essay, see  
 Waten Papers, NLA MS 4536/2/191, 197-98 (April 1957).
- 49 Letters to Waten from Palmer, 15 February 1953 (NLA MS 4536/2/107-8); Phillips, 1 June  
 1954 (2/133-34); Dalby Davison, 1 July 1954 (2/141-48).
- 50 Waten sent a copy of this letter to Menzies as well (25 June 1954) with a covering note and  
 a copy of the novel. AA: CRS A463, (1956- ); 1969/2107.
- 51 Hope in "The Sty of Circe"; Dutton in his *Snow on the Saltbush: The Australian Literary*  
*Experience* (Ringwood, Vic.: Penguin/Viking, 1984), pp.175-76. Dutton repeats Hope's  
 complaint (see below) that "*about halfway through* ... the author abandons his art in favour  
 of his politics" (my emphasis).
- 52 Susan McKernan, *A Question of Commitment: Australian Literature in the Twenty Years*  
*After the War* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1989), pp.40-41. Another positive reader is D. R.  
 Burns: as well as praising the characterisation he argues that in the political material "the

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recountal is not propagandist in any debasing way" (*The Directions of Australian Fiction 1920-1974* [Melbourne: Cassell, 1974], p.109.)

53

Frank Dalby Davison, letter to Waten, 1 July 1954, NLA MS 4536/2/141-48.

54

Geoffrey Tebbutt, "Its Propaganda Kills It", *Herald* (Melbourne) 19 June 1954, p.18.

55

I. M., "The Unbending", *Australian Jewish News* 16 July 1954, p.8. For their critique of Mackenzie see "No 'Refuge' for Jews!" *Australian Jewish News* 2 April 1954, p.6. See also "Australasian Book Society Claims Attacks on Waten's Book Anti-Semitic", *Australian Jewish Herald* 13 August 1954, p.3. The ABS published a leaflet entitled *Attack on a Novel* (Melbourne: ABS, 1954).

56

[Vance Palmer?], "Current Books Worth Reading", typescript of ABC Radio broadcast, 23 May 1954. NLA MS 4536, Series 5.

57

Phillips to Waten, 1 June 1954, NLA MS 4536/2/133-34.

58

Beatrice Davis (Angus & Robertson), letter to Waten, 7 August 1953, NLA MS 4536/2/120-22. A Reader's Report is included.

59

See the *Tribune* review cited above and Jack Beasley, *Red Letter Days: Notes From Inside an Era* (Sydney: Australasian Book Society, 1979), p.140.

60

Hope, letter to Waten, 7 April 1957, NLA MS 4536/2/191.

61

A. D. Hope, "Standards in Australian Literature", in *Australian Literary Criticism*, ed. Grahame Johnston (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1962), pp.1-15. Further references appear in the text. The essay first appeared as a *Current Affairs Bulletin* in November 1956.

62

Ross Chambers, *Story and Situation: Narrative Seduction and the Power of Fiction* (Manchester: Manchester University Press; Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), pp.3-48 and passim. Further references appear in the text.

63

Ian Reid, "Reading as Framing, Writing as Reframing", paper presented to International Convention on Reading and Response, University of East Anglia, April 1989, p.5.

64

Hope, "The Sty of Circe", p.285.

65

Carter, "Coming Home After the Party", pp.462-68.

66

Ian Turner, "My Long March", *Overland* 59 (Spring 1974), p.39.

67

R. G. C., "Notable New Novel", *Australian Journal* 2 August 1954, p.80. Does R. G. C. stand for R. G. Casey, then Minister for External Affairs?

## 5

**The Communist Man of Letters**

*The revival of realism came after the Russian Revolution  
and the foundation of the Communist Party in Australia.*  
(Judah Waten, "Socialist Realism", 1960)

**Communist Fiction to the Cold War**

A career as a novelist and a career as a communist novelist might be rather different things, even for the novelist who is also a communist. This was certainly the case for Judah Waten in the late 1950s and early 1960s. *Time of Conflict* (1961), Waten's third novel, is explicitly communist in ways that make it a rare and interesting work. In a strict sense it is one of the few communist novels written in Australia — one of the few communist novels in the oeuvres of Australian communist novelists — and perhaps the only one by Waten himself. In this chapter, I describe the occasion of the book's writing through an account of institutional changes in the cultural sphere and post-war shifts in the discourses of literature, communism and cultural nationalism. In the following chapter I turn to the novel itself in detail in order to show how it manifests both its communism and its explicitness. What to write, how to write it, who to write it for as a "communist novelist"? What difference did communism make? How did the novelist *make* this difference? These are some of the questions through which the novelist and the communist novelist stand out one from the other.

Like *The Unbending* and Waten's second novel, *Shares in Murder*, *Time of Conflict* was published by the Australasian Book Society (ABS).<sup>1</sup> Original publication with the ABS meant an institutional location to one side of the literary mainstream. It meant, in advance as it were, a minority or sectional positioning in terms of readership and constituency (who you wrote *for* in both senses) despite the fact that texts published by the ABS typically aligned themselves with a nationalist or popular tradition. Their address was both broader and narrower than to the literary mainstream, sometimes to "ordinary Australian men and women", sometimes to "worker readers".<sup>2</sup> At the same time, as we have seen with *The Unbending*, if the fictional text seeks the authority of art it must also align itself — uniquely but familiarly — with a *literary* tradition in the fullest sense, that is, understood in terms of the autonomous institution of art. In the case of communist fictions it is in the shifting relations between their appeal to local or

"universal" literary traditions on the one hand and, on the other, to sources of authority conventionally outside the literary that we can see the difference that communism makes. In terms of Judah Waten's career, we can see both continuities and discontinuities generated by the operation of turning communism into novelistic plot.

This brief description of communist fiction in terms of resemblance and difference recalls the operation of genre itself as a system of differences.<sup>3</sup> This is appropriate, for despite realism's implicit claim to escape genre, strongest when the novel also lays claim to history, it is precisely questions of genre that are raised by the "communist novel". The adjective before the noun implies a level of explicitness, a didacticism or doctrinal motivation above the norm as would the bulk of its paradigmatic substitutes. It implies the possibility at every turn of other didactic genres: exemplum, utopia, satire, fairy tale, allegory, *roman à thèse*. The didactic novel is drawn to "genre" even when it resists clear generic marking in the name of realism. Waten's *Shares in Murder* is interesting in this regard, for its didactic element emerges in so far as the novel works as a parody of a clearly "marked" genre, that of crime fiction. The climax of the novel is not the revelation of the criminal but his concealment, and the "revelation" instead of the detective who accepts a bribe. Both the didacticism and the realism of the novel depend on this generic reversal and the pattern of resemblance and difference it establishes.

The genre system is institutional as well as textual. I want here to force a separation between the individual communist's political beliefs and the ways in which institutionally the position of communist novelist could be constructed or occupied at a particular moment. The difference between these two ways of locating communism is that the latter formulation allows for the position of communist novelist to be seen as a set of practices occurring in specific places (in reviewing, speaking, novel-writing, conferring) rather than a "state" which occupies or is occupied by the whole person and which then finds expression. Genres or the relations between genres provide one way of mapping this set of practices in the places where they occur — never in a pure form, always as process or performance. This first section focuses on shifts in the generic field for communist fiction from the 1930s to the 1960s. The later sections describe the institutional shifts that make the position of communist novelist possible (and perhaps impossible) in new ways in the period of the cold war.

The major forms of communist or revolutionary fiction-writing in Australia between the wars can be seen in a small number of texts including Harcourt's *Upsurge*, Devanny's *Sugar Heaven*, and Prichard's *Working Bullocks* and *Intimate Strangers*.<sup>4</sup> Although very different from each other they share significant features, significant in

the present context because they are largely absent from the post-war communist novel. First, each text makes explicit use of political discourses, as we might expect, but political discourses which are more or less violently juxtaposed against the novelistic. The clash of discourses becomes a compositional principle, a principle of montage which incorporates modes of documentary or reportage as well. The abstract or agitational rhetorics of political theory and what we might call political desire are incorporated in such a way as to underscore their difference and strangeness — their newness — rather than their "naturalness" in the discourse of the novel. The difference must be relative, of course, for the political rhetoric has to be shown to act on, to be capable of transforming, the social world and language of the novel. They remain realist and readerly texts, but there is a relative explicitness in their embedded narrative models and intertextual references.<sup>5</sup>

Second, in each text political themes are connected — indeed cathected — to the erotic. The story of transformation or revolution is a story of desire managed in the text by a displacement or doubling, as desire on one level (personal, sentimental) is transferred to desire on another (collective, political). This "conversion" of libidinal energy activates the story of political conversion which is the trajectory of each text. Religious imagery of conversion is similarly converted. The abstract categories of political rhetoric must become the object of desire for the reader, and the story of bourgeois sentiment, the marriage plot, must be displaced, not so much through the contrast between "romance" and "realism", as through that between sentiment and desire, or false romance and true. Thus the political arguments must be managed at every turn in the narrative through the juxtaposition of different generic possibilities, through self-reflection and self-situation. If the texts are sometimes "crude" or excessive this is better seen as a result of their experimentation than of their naivety, as the novels signal their break with "mere" fiction. Then again, naivety itself might not be altogether out of place, for an important message of revolutionary politics is that in one sense things are indeed *simpler* than they had otherwise appeared.

Some brief examples can illustrate these points. In *Upsurge* the political story is dispersed among a number of interrelated characters in a fairly elaborate plot. Graham, middle-class and a chemist, embodies the scientific appeal of Marxism. By contrast the petit-bourgeois Theodora Luddon is politicised through industrial experience, and Peter Groom, a wealthy "idler", is moved from despair to action by the power of agitational rhetoric. The story of transformation is carried by this juxtaposition of Groom's "reckless elation" (262), Graham's larger, abstract perspective, and Theodora's immediate experience. Through Groom and Theodora, the novel enacts the shift from

individual to mass consciousness: at a demonstration they are "borne along by the irresistible current of the crowd" (274). Finally there is the working-class communist Riley, communism as the force of history, revolutionary "upsurge" itself. His extreme character is a way of representing the disruptions to the bourgeois order of a "new ideology ... a new consciousness" (69). In addition, the potential erotic relationship between Theodora and Riley which would be the narrative's "natural" conclusion is never consummated. It is subsumed, rather, as part of the novel's unfinished business, the business of revolution itself as the story is turned back to the reader's world.

*Upsurge* provides models for its own readability which involves establishing the language of class as an appropriate reading frame. Revolutionary consciousness is shown to be a characteristic of certain — illegal — texts, texts as it were beyond the law of readability. It is Riddle the magistrate who observes:

Between novels by Henri Barbusse, Romain Rolland, John Dos Passos, Jack London, Upton Sinclair, were sandwiched such works as the "Capital" of Karl Marx, the "Socialism" of Engels, the "State and Revolution" of Lenin, the "Communist Programme" of Bucharin. The mantel was loaded with the literature of class-war and revolution! (52)

The list provides models against which *Upsurge* can be read, even in the sandwiching of revolutionary doctrine between works of fiction. Part of the novel's challenge to the bourgeois order is, and has to be, a challenge to the order of its fiction. Riddle senses that "his poets and philosophers were dead" (12). Later he views a didactic, stylised political play. He finds it "weird and unreal" (217) but disturbing precisely because of its unreality, its non-realism: "Was that extraordinary play a true representation of the facts?... His mind was still troubled by the bizarre fantasy he had witnessed" (222). The play models the novel's own departures from illusionism, for the stylisations of propaganda and theory in *its* "bizarre fantasy" of revolutionary upsurge are a "true representation of facts" that could not otherwise be represented.

In *Sugar Heaven* characters are also associated, beyond personality, with alternative generic and political possibilities. Hefty represents a potentially transformative physical vitality, like "the blood in the stalks" (14) of the sugar cane, but he is "only a militant" (270). Bill is able to talk theoretically, but is less "clean" (a recurrent figure in the novel). Eileen is "militant and clever" (144) but "fluent, without discipline or restraint" (95). She embodies the erotic and political desires, distributed elsewhere throughout the text, whose organisation would have revolutionary potential. It is the communists who provide the necessary figures of discipline and restraint. Hendry, the communist leader, is one of the novel's many figures of transformation:

once "rough" he is now "clear [and] philosophical" (134) and *gentle* (153). Throughout the narrative there are such dialectical models of transformation — based on oppositions between experience and intellect, emotion and reason, vigour and gentleness, desire and discipline, militancy and philosophy — which repeat and reinforce each other in prefiguring a revolution/resolution. Dulcie's first apprehension of class consciousness is a moment of "sublime reason" born out of "emotional tumult" (140-41).

The central story is Dulcie's transformation from self-consciousness to class-consciousness, enacted through the linking of erotic and political desires. Her conventional morality entails an "instinctual allegiance to conventional political forms" (55) which are linked in turn to conventional *literary* forms. Dulcie "had fed voraciously on paper-backed editions of the early Victorians" until, significantly, "Crisis conditions had ... dried up the fount of her literary digest" (12). In response to the "exotic infringements" (15) of the canefields, Dulcie's "self-sufficiency" (11) is transformed:

[S]he became infected with a perverted pleasure in the gross stirrings of her emotions. Here was drama! Here was colour! The great Painter, Life, was at work upon the hitherto dull canvas of her existence. The colours were impure, the brushstrokes heavy, but like a Goya canvas they projected intense and mordant life. (55)

In the terms of sentimental morality Dulcie had kept herself "clean" and "sweet" (also a recurrent figure in this canefields novel as her name suggests). "Hate and desire" (36) mingle in her subsequent transformation: "She felt herself changing, not subtly nor delicately, but violently, in leaps; a development in keeping with the lush tropical growth" (123). Sexual and political passions are shown to be both cleansed and cleansing: "The strike has washed all sorts of impurities out of me... I never thought of the relations between working men and women as being beautiful till now" (300). Dulcie's transformation is enacted in the semantic spaces of key words, from "sweet" (sentimental) to "sweet" (pure, clean).

The reference to Goya in the quotation describes one of the novel's own styles, a vitalist mode that links nature, sexual desire and militancy. The intense, subversive emotions of this mode are juxtaposed with the reasoned and disciplined discourse of communism. Out of the "impure" rhetorical styles of vitalist desire and "revolutionary hysteria" (227) the narrative attempts its own transformations, at times indeed neither "subtly nor delicately". Beside its documentary modes, the narration rises to an "epic" pitch, in Devanny's term, which is characteristic of attempts to express "the spirit of the war of the classes ... its immensity, its dramatic force, its terrific fervor".<sup>6</sup> At these moments the novel does not so much "lapse" into propaganda as launch into it.

Religious and utopian parallels are appropriated rather than suppressed as the novel attempts to redeem its own title from irony. The meaning of communism is registered in the visionary and *sensuous* language of "spiritual exaltation" and laughter (287), "expanded joys and vibrant life" (271).

Using one of the infamous phrases of socialist realism, we might well call *Upsurge* and *Sugar Heaven* novels in the mode of "revolutionary romanticism", taking the term to indicate an appropriation of the romance genre. This is clearest though in the two Prichard novels, partly because *Working Bullocks* and *Intimate Strangers* are more orthodox realist texts, more committed to organic form. Nevertheless they share thematic and structural qualities with *Upsurge* and *Sugar Heaven*: the displacement of sentiment by desire, the transformation of self-consciousness into class-consciousness, and mixed rhetorical strategies for incorporating a revolutionary perspective into a "faithful picture" of a non-revolutionary society. Pat Buckridge has demonstrated the juxtaposition in *Working Bullocks* of three narrative options: a folk tradition, romance and "agit-prop".<sup>7</sup> Further, the language of the novel's socialist, Mark Smith, is by turns factual, common-sensical, sensuous, "clean cut and clear" (152), theoretical and agitational. Each mode has its own powers of representation and persuasion yet none is sufficient, therefore the novel proceeds by their juxtaposition. For despite the attraction and authority of Mark Smith's rhetoric, his is marked as an alien discourse ("such talk had never been heard", 204). It is the task of the narrative to establish the *difference* Mark Smith's language makes — to romance and to realism — even as it shows the continuities of the "Marx myth" with what is already known as "experience".<sup>8</sup> Political purpose, as Buckridge argues, is "disseminated through the entire text as a form of *desire*",<sup>9</sup> a desire which violates the conventional plots of romance and, again, of realism.

In ways that find some similarities in *Sugar Heaven* and *The Unbending*, a number of Prichard's novels use the motif of foreignness. The force of political discourse and the force of desire are both represented as "strange" or exotic and *thereby* capable of transforming common sense and sensibility. Jack Lindsay has remarked of *Intimate Strangers*: "we feel the socialist viewpoint as something strange, almost foreign and exotic, set over against normal Australian life".<sup>10</sup> But this is better seen as part of the novel's narrative strategies than as a failure of totalisation (Lindsay's terms are Lukácsian). From its title on, *Intimate Strangers* produces a pattern of linked figures of strangeness or foreignness, all significant to its political purpose. These include "romantic" figures like Tony Maretti, Guido, Prospero, Jerome, or the central character

Elodie, who supply the novel's intellectual framework, its critique of bourgeois institutions, and its distance from the familiar.

The narrative of *Intimate Strangers* does not simply contrast romance with the realities of sexual and economic exploitation. Like *Working Bullocks* and *Sugar Heaven* the predominant mode of the novel itself is romantic. Its task, then, is to split romance, to reclaim it (from itself): to separate sentiment from sensuousness, false utopias from true, and the false promises of art from its true transformative capacities. Elodie's music provides the text's self-reflexive models and its erotics: only Beethoven is adequate to her "passion and despair" (98). Moreover, the description of this music, contrasted to "blithe, sentimental ditties" (111), recalls Mark Smith's language in the earlier novel:

Chords ... crashed with a proud violence. The lyric at its core, rising triumphantly, soared and dominated with its wild sweet song. The dark turbulent floods of destiny might carry it away ... but defiant in defeat, it could still sing on, inviolate, immortal.  
(98)

It also prefigures Tony's central political speech, where the despairing Elodie and the "depressed" working-class audience are together transformed by a "dazzling vision" (294). Again the narrative draws on all the resources of religious and utopian parallels. The "transfiguration" from dejection and despair to "energy and enthusiasm" (294) carries the text's primary political theme (the theme of all these communist novels): the difference between the old working class and the new which is the difference between hopelessness and optimism, despair and desire, alienation and organisation, experience and vision. This is what class-consciousness means. Finally, the text appropriates for socialism the very imagery of romance that would otherwise seem to belong to its discredited romantic hero, Jerome. The "struggle of the working people" is transformed from a "pitiful, hopeless resistance" to "a magnificent adventure, as magnificent ... as the adventure of Columbus embarking to discover a new world" (294-95).

In contrast to these pre-war novels, post-war communist fiction is marked by its embarrassment over "propaganda" or revolutionary romanticism and, more significantly, by its disarticulation of the political and the erotic. Of course this is a matter of degree: Ralph de Boissiere's *Crown Jewel* is one exception but perhaps not a significant one given its provenance. Dorothy Hewett's *Bobbin Up*, though, is a significant exception precisely because of the way it restores desire to the text's *énonciation* in its sensuous, rhythmic, slangy language.<sup>11</sup> But the generalisation can stand as a hypothesis against which to read particular works.

What has changed between the thirties novels and, for my purposes, Waten's *Time of Conflict*? Within communism there were two main developments — a new

nationalism and a new socialist realism — in the new context of the cold war. Although Party communism was as Soviet-centred as ever it was less internationalist, certainly in the modernising and modernist sense which had connected it to internationalist art movements. The Communist Party announced an "Australian Path to Socialism" in its 1951 policy, and this coincided with a new respectability for cultural nationalism among the Australian intelligentsia.<sup>12</sup> Local nationalism favoured populist modes of historical and literary narrative, but this populism could also coincide with one rendering of Soviet communism as it emerged from the "people's war" against fascism. Cultural nationalism had a curious institutional status in the 1950s, marginal in commercial and academic cultural spheres but constituting itself as a mainstream among significant groups of fiction writers, publishers, journalists, critics, historians and educationalists in the places where "Australian literature" occurred. Vance Palmer's *Legend of the Nineties* and the magazine *Overland* appeared in 1954, A. A. Phillips's *The Australian Tradition* and Russel Ward's *The Australian Legend* in 1958. *Meanjin* had been established in Melbourne, under the wing of the University, since 1945. By the fifties then, and especially in Melbourne, cultural nationalism supplied the primary literary and social traditions against which a local career would be established, even in opposition. Although the modern history of radical nationalism in Australia can be traced back at least to the early thirties, the *newness* of this post-war institutional development must be stressed. It meant that the national tradition could still appear as a *vanguard*.<sup>13</sup> Despite the role subsequently accorded to *Working Bullocks*, such a vanguard perspective was fully articulated only in the post-war period. As Jack Beasley wrote in 1957: "The first sign of revival was the great popularity of Australian classical literature (of the 1890 period), poetry and painting during World War II.... The second period of revival commences (sic) approximately six or seven years ago".<sup>14</sup>

I have already discussed some of the effects of this cultural nationalism in relation to Waten's *Alien Son* and *The Unbending*. It meant that politically-conscious writers could now position themselves at the centre of a progressive tradition rather than at the radical margins. As Susan McKernan has written, "Australian [communist] writers felt that a national tradition lay waiting for them to renew in a revolutionary and communist way".<sup>15</sup> This new alignment generated new debates about the literary tradition and changed how the (communist) novel was conceived. Instead of novels of contemporary life *historical* novels came to predominate, novels either of significant moments in the radical past, for example, Eureka in Eric Lambert's *The Five Bright Stars*, or large-scale "epochal" works such as Prichard's goldfields trilogy or Hardy's *Power Without Glory*. Waten's *Time of Conflict*, as its title suggests, is an attempt at

both kinds of historical novel at once, focussed on the crisis moment of the Depression but with its historical scope extending right across the modern epoch from the First World War to the present. The national history of the novel, as perceived by cultural nationalism, produced a novelistic history of the nation.

Why was it attractive for communist writers in this period to identify with a national cultural tradition? The answer might seem obvious given the authority and legitimacy that tradition confers. But although this power of legitimation makes cultural nationalism more like a necessity than a choice, tradition alone could never be adequate to communism, for the authority of claiming historical continuity was in competition with that of proclaiming a *break* with history. The tension between these two histories marks communism in its concepts of class, nation and people. In Australia it produces a series of novels including *Power Without Glory* and *Time of Conflict* which set out to show why the historical moment of Labor has passed and why minority communism represents the majority future — as a new history and an historical inheritance. Cold war politics produced a very different sense of the relationship between communism and history than in the "crisis" years of the 1930s and early 1940s. The dominant motif was no longer that of living in the moment between the death of the old world and the birth of the new which could only be represented by figures of sudden revolutionary transformation. The revolution was no longer new, and the post-war crisis was defined by the "success" of capitalism rather than its imminent demise. The communist definition of crisis was therefore now a defensive one and, most importantly, could be maintained only by projecting a *long historical perspective*, less apocalyptic than evolutionary. This is where the history of the nation and the progressive traditions of the people played their part, as the "hidden" bearers of this evolutionary development. The issue was no longer the crisis of modernity but the long-term working-out of history's laws. Whereas the former was internationalist, emphasising simultaneity, the latter (being "universal") needed local histories and traditions. It was in the fifties that Australian folk culture became a major public interest for communists, not just for individuals but in the Party press and organisations.<sup>16</sup>

Communism was also on the defensive against cold war charges of being foreign, undemocratic and "ideological". To address the debate about national traditions was not only to claim historical legitimacy but also to naturalise communist discourse as other than an "alien ideology". Communism had thus to be rewritten, not as the unprecedented, sensuous vision of a new world in a new language, but as the calm recognition of what had always already been there in our national history. It was not so much the difference as the sameness of communist discourse that needed to be revealed.

Here too the realist novel was "made" for the purpose (or re-made), revealing as it were for the first time what had always been implicit in our history.

These *new* pressures towards the realist novel defined realism once more in orthodox terms however unorthodox the message: a re-emphasis on organic form, a privileging of "ordinary" experience or the omniscient history-narrator, and the effacement of style or incommensurate discourses. One thinks of Prichard's goldfields trilogy, Hardy's *Power Without Glory* and *The Four Legged-Lottery*, novels by Lambert and Morrison, or Waten's *The Unbending* and *Time of Conflict*. This new-old realism meant aligning oneself with tradition, "taking up the never-furled banners of the classical realists and implanting them right before the enemy".<sup>17</sup> It meant "maturing" beyond the stage of proletarianism or mere reportage.<sup>18</sup> The new emphasis on politics as a kind of public history also meant that the erotic and the unconscious were marginalised as merely "subjective"; it rendered the political a matter of objectivity rather than desire, of common sense and experience rather than "strange talk". Still, as the novels by Hardy, Prichard and Waten show, the difference between the earlier and later texts is relative rather than absolute, for the desire to expand the scale of fiction to invoke mass historical movements or to incorporate local documentary detail and an abstract political interpretive frame can mean once again a disturbance of the novelistic story or discourse in a way that reasserts for these realist texts the embarrassing question of genre.

For communists the relationship between the national literary tradition and the "foreign" doctrine of socialist realism was an inevitable question. More accurately, it became inevitable in the 1950s. In fact nationalism could provide ways of understanding and applying socialist realism locally. By the fifties the experimental period in Soviet culture was well and truly finished. The authority of the Party over literature had been reasserted by Zhdanov after the war. Such developments probably had limited direct bearing on the writing of fiction in Australia, even though Zhdanov was published almost immediately in the *Australian Communist Review*.<sup>19</sup> As McKernan has suggested, Australian writers developed their own version of socialist realism especially in the historical novels.<sup>20</sup> Nevertheless, it is important to emphasise that socialist realism achieved a new status among communists in the fifties. Only then did the theory begin to be named and defined consistently, and to receive a full policy weighting.<sup>21</sup> Exactly what socialist realism meant in detail for writers, critics and Party spokespersons is a complicated issue — it might be about opening up a dialogue with cultural nationalism, closing off a dialogue with modernism, reinterpreting Marxism, or merely asserting the Party's authority over its intellectuals. For present purposes, though, the effects of

socialist realism can be described as simple and general. The theory set boundaries, proscribing what it labelled as formalism and subjectivism; and it prescribed a general set of realist priorities in subject matter, theme, types of character and plot. In so doing it reinforced the dual pressures towards orthodox realism and populist nationalism. Typically, in Jack Beasley's *Socialism and the Novel* (1957) there is no mention of "revolutionary romanticism". The dominant note instead is "truthful historical interpretation".<sup>22</sup> The Soviet novel now meant Gorky and Sholokhov, above all, great "national" writers, realist and epochal.<sup>23</sup>

Socialist realism, then, could lead writers towards the literary themes and treatment identified with national traditions; nationalism in turn could supply a local interpretation of socialist realism, "national in form, socialist in content" as the slogan put it.<sup>24</sup> But socialist realism also provided the terminology with which communist writers and critics could define their difference *within* nationalism. In an argument increasingly common over the course of the 1950s, a distinct socialist realist tradition was seen to be emerging from within the national tradition. As Judah Waten put it: "Socialist realism in Australia springs naturally from Australian realism, the dominant literary trend in Australian literature, the result of the whole course of Australian historical development".<sup>25</sup> Such an argument had strong and weak versions depending on how far the communist difference was stressed. Importantly it also had its defensive side. It emerged in its strongest forms at the moment when the radical national traditions seemed most threatened by new and anti-democratic developments in both "elitist" and "mass-commercial" cultural realms, from Patrick White to pulp paperbacks to pornography. Strong or weak, however, this was the space the communist novel and the communist novelist had to occupy: within the national tradition but appropriating it for a more or less explicit communist history, alternative, advance-guard and mainstream all at once.

### **Towards a Socialist Realist National Tradition**

Waten's (second) literary career was established largely "outside" communism. His closest literary contacts in the early fifties were, as they had been since the war, non-communist liberals such as Marshall, Davison, the Palmers, Fitzpatrick and Phillips. These were the people to whom he sent first drafts of his novels, to whose advice he listened and whose literary and critical practice he could take as models for an Australian writer.<sup>26</sup> As the list of names indicates, the democratic, liberal, populist or labour — rather than communist — rendering of cultural nationalism played a major role in determining the structures in which Waten's writing had to make its way.

Characteristically, while Waten was associated with the Melbourne Realist Writers group in the late forties and early fifties he was not a regular, core member. The Realist Writers included Frank Hardy, Stephen Murray-Smith, Ian Turner, Robert Close, John Morrison, Eric Lambert and Walter Kaufmann, mainly communists although it was not a Party or front organisation.<sup>27</sup> David Martin describes Waten's role as the group's "link with writers who, though not strictly of us, worked in a related tradition — Leonard Mann, Frank Dalby Davison and above all Alan Marshall".<sup>28</sup> There is little evidence to suggest that Waten's literary aspirations were defined in any significant way by his relations with the "worker writers" or *amateur* writers around this group or indeed by local communist writers as a distinct body. The author of *Power Without Glory* could be an ally but scarcely a sufficient model for the author of *The Unbending*. Again characteristically Waten did not publish in the Melbourne group's journal, the *Realist Writer* (1952-54), but he does begin to publish in *Overland* when, in 1954, it emerged out of the Realist Writers to seek a place in the same literary-cultural sphere as was already occupied by *Meanjin* (where he had been publishing stories since 1948). Waten was not a Party member at this time, having been expelled in 1941,<sup>29</sup> although this is less significant than might first appear because he was soon back on good terms with the Party. It is significant only in the light of the kinds of professional activities he became involved in after he formally rejoined in 1957.

In the early stages of his literary career in the decade after the war, Waten's activities were thus located in and addressed to that liberal, nationalist sphere defined by the Palmer and *Meanjin* circles. By the *late* fifties however his career comes to have a very different profile, inextricable from communism in ways that had not been the case earlier (although it would be part of the cultural politics of his situation to deny the discontinuity). He is published in the communist press and by the Realist Writers, he becomes a Party spokesperson and a functionary of the ABS. What institutional or political shifts made this "career change" possible — or unavoidable? The establishment of the ABS in itself was a major enabling condition. It coincided with the apparent emergence of a revitalised nationalist and left-wing culture. In the mid-fifties the sympathetic reader could survey a whole *new* crop of writers — Hardy, Lambert, Hewett, Morrison, de Boissiere, Vickers, Waten — plus a new magazine in *Overland* and a new theatre and folk movement in *Reedy River*. At the same time, the ABS emerged momentarily at what was widely held to be a time of crisis for the national culture in the face of censorship, conservative government, commercialisation and cold war cultural imperialism. This is not the place to recount the history of the ABS, although it is an exemplary story of the relations in the period between literature,

communism and nationalism.<sup>30</sup> Nor do we need to become involved in detail with the question of Communist Party control. It is sufficient here to acknowledge that from its inception, formally in 1952, the ABS was seen as an important site of Party scrutiny. For my more limited purposes, the point to be emphasised is Judah Waten's increasing involvement with the Society, from its partly accidental publication of *The Unbending* through to *Time of Conflict* which could not have been published anywhere else. By 1958 Waten was a regular manuscript reader and Melbourne chairman of the ABS after its head office had moved to Sydney. In 1961, when *Time of Conflict* was published, the ABS was at the height of its membership. It published one third of the new fiction titles published in Australia in that year.

The ABS was crucial in making a space or structure in which the formation of a literary career could be pursued in a rather particular way. Many of its publishing and other public activities reproduced those of more mainstream institutions ("mainstream" that is in the field of *Australian* literature). It co-released a number of publications from established publishers, including Phillips's *The Australian Tradition*.<sup>31</sup> At the same time, the Society clearly had quite other realms of activity and other purposes, conceived in terms of its constituency of "worker" readers and writers and, for some, its communist readers and writers. Thus it published works that were unlikely to be published elsewhere. It was the fluid language of cultural nationalism that allowed the Society to contain its divergent aspirations and to pursue them with some marked degree of success.

In these dual terms the ABS could still be the locus of a "serious", professional literary career, a career being shaped in the places where Australian literature itself was being shaped. At the same time — *and for the same individual* — it could sustain "alternative" or "oppositional" careers, as a working-class writer, a socialist realist writer, a communist writer.<sup>32</sup> Hardy's career in the fifties and sixties was largely defined by its oppositional location (and the publishing history of *Power Without Glory* had motivated the formation of the ABS). Waten's case was different in so far as he was already in possession of the status of serious literary author. The capital of being a recognised author, which for Waten still rested largely on *Alien Son*, had as we have seen to be re-invested. *The Unbending* had been an ambiguous success, marking Waten as a political, even sectarian, writer while also making a serious claim to that most important of titles, Australian novelist. What we see from 1955, and especially after 1957, is Waten's involvement in a new range of literary activities increasingly concentrated, increasingly invested, in the roles of communist writer and communist man of letters (that this sounds oxymoronic is part of the point). *Shares in Murder*,

published in 1957, can be understood in terms of this redirection. It would seem to be a sudden departure from the authorial project signalled by Waten's two earlier books, but as *anti-crime* fiction it finds its place within a contemporary communist, nationalist cultural politics. It is purpose-built and makes no claim to the "expressive" attributes of authorship; it would probably not have found a publisher other than the ABS.

Turning to the Communist Party itself, in the early fifties there was an increased scrutiny of "cultural matters" in general and literature in particular. *Tribune* began publishing a magazine section in mid-1952 featuring cultural and historical articles plus a literary page in 1955.<sup>33</sup> In the middle to late fifties, there was a more specific interest in discovering a socialist realist tradition within the Australian tradition. The argument had been around for some time, but in this period it moves from "fringe" publications such as the Melbourne *Realist Writer*, which in any case was still more likely to talk of *social* realism, to the centre of the Party's gaze in *Tribune* and the *Communist Review*. Perhaps the most important local event in these developments was the publication of *Power Without Glory*. The notorious success of the novel gave a contemporary point to the otherwise abstract debates about the tasks or techniques of the communist writer. And when, in 1952, Hardy began to publish on "art and culture" in the *Communist Review*, the roles of writer and Party spokesperson came together for the first time.<sup>34</sup>

The *Communist Review* of the early 1950s reveals a steadily more intense if still abstract interest in literature, national traditions and social realism.<sup>35</sup> In 1953 the Party organised a Conference of Communist Writers addressed by Jack Blake, a long-time Party official and one of its principal cultural theorists:

[I]n addition to our literature being national in its form, much of the content of our literature should be concerned with the national principle, with national independence ... if it is to reflect present-day needs, present-day realities....

[I]t is a characteristic feature of our literary tradition that those who have made it have always been directly associated with the toiling people of our country.... It was precisely these writers who, above all, gave expression to the Australian national psychology. This is not accidental, because the carriers or the bearers of the best national features, characteristics and traditions are the toiling masses. These national features and traditions consequently find their best expression in advanced realist art, in revolutionary democratic art.

.... We need a much more careful and systematic study of the Australian literary tradition. Certainly we don't want a blind copying of what is past in our literature. We want to study, understand and master that tradition in order to creatively develop it in our present-day circumstances and conditions.<sup>36</sup>

But 1956 emerges as a critical date, signalling a new urgency and immediacy in Party cultural politics, a mix of militant confidence and defensiveness about the communist writer's task. Practising writers rather than Party officials take over as the principal

voices in the debate, now a central rather than occasional feature of Party publications. The most significant essays in *Communist Review* can be listed to indicate their concentration in a relatively short span of time: Hardy, "Some Ideological Problems of Communist Writers", (June 1956); Beasley's self-published monograph *Socialism and the Novel* (1957); Paul Mortier, "Socialist Realism and the Australian Tradition", (February 1958); Waten, "The Australian Tradition and Communism", (October 1958); Beasley, "For a Working Class Literature", (July 1959); Beasley, "Questions of Australian Literature", (January 1960); de Boissiere, "On Socialist Realism", (March 1960); Waten, "Socialist Realism: An Important Trend in Present Day Australian Literature", (May 1960). Waten, it is important to see, becomes a participant, an activist, in these debates.

What these essays reveal is a new emphasis on a *socialist realist* national literary tradition. After Khrushchev's 1956 speech denouncing Stalin, it becomes important (again) for communists to stress work on the "broad front". Literature and nationalism together provided ideal grounds for this broad-front communism in so far as each was already defined as "progressive" and democratic. Hence Frank Hardy's repeated definition of the ABS, the Realist Writer groups and the literary tradition itself as broad-based, worker-oriented but not Party institutions.<sup>37</sup> (Hence also the Party's focus on broad-front Peace campaigns.) Literature was simultaneously the site of democratic alliances and the ground that had to be captured for the progressive movement. "Progressive" was a key word, a way of not saying communism but saying more than just "national" or "democratic", in effect giving the national a (communist) direction. This new emphasis was also reinforced by the fact that in the discursive regimes of the cold war the most immediate threat to a democratic or working-class culture was identified as cultural imperialism. From America, above all, came a "continuing flood of publications of the most harmful and degrading kind".<sup>38</sup> The threat posed by modernist formalism thus retreated. The success of *Overland* no doubt gave a higher profile to this argument in which the defence of culture, democracy, writers' freedoms, national independence and national traditions became one and the same project.

The case against formalism was soon rejoined, however, redefined by the nationalist context. Here it is impossible to overstate the significance of Patrick White's two novels of the fifties: *The Tree of Man* (1956) and *Voss* (1957). With their Australian settings and subject-matter but, as it was read, their formalist, subjectivist style and pessimistic, defeatist philosophy, White's novels were felt as a direct challenge to the national culture which the left were defining and defending: "White ... develops persistently the idea that all human relationships are false, life being a hopeless burden,

hardly worthwhile. It is a bastard literature, which has been left on our doorstep".<sup>39</sup> White was found guilty of obscurantism (versus realism), subjectivism (versus objectivity), elitism (versus popular appeal) and pessimism (versus faith in mankind). All were symptoms of the one capitalist, cold war disease. Not only did White's writing *import* an alien style and attitude into Australian literature, thus buying into the argument over cultural imperialism; worse still, at the very moment when the literary tradition was beginning to be noticed by mainstream critics and academics it was being hi-jacked by what Beasley described as an "alien literature": the "current escapist fad of 'prose-poetry' in the novels of Patrick White and Randolph Stow, with their gloomy misanthropic heroes fleeing from real life into the unknown".<sup>40</sup> The defence of the national culture by its clear definition as democratic and working-class becomes an inescapable task for the communist. In addition, the realist and communist writers were convinced of the *modernity* of their own project: it was progressive not just in its values but also because it was tied to the future. The "modern school of realist writing"<sup>41</sup> contested the ephemeral modernity of White and Stow and their overseas contemporaries. In the long historical perspective, it was the latter which belonged to the past even if for the moment it looked like the very newest thing.

Whatever else we might want to say, the communist writers were correct to identify the national literary tradition as a major site of cold war struggle. As Waten wrote in 1966:

From 1956 onwards there began a new revaluation of Australian literature particularly at the universities and in the organs of literary opinion. Gradually a group of younger critics began to assert themselves and replace the older critics who were more favourably disposed to the social realist democratic traditions. Briefly they found little in past Australian literature to praise; they minimised the importance of Lawson and the democratic school and even Henry Handel Richardson suffered in the process. Not surprisingly Vance Palmer's trilogy "Golconda" was dismissed out of hand and Katharine Susannah Prichard's work with the exception of "Coonardoo" was considered highly overrated.

Many of these academic critics also became contributors to "Quadrant" [which] from its inception declared war on the Australian tradition...

The success of the campaign against the Australian tradition among writers and intellectuals generally helped to place Patrick White in the premier position among Australian writers... At last a considerable novelist had arrived who could be counterposed to the social realist novelists, who would in fact overthrow the social realist novelists who were now being described as crude naturalists and in Donald Horne's elegant phrase "slobbered over the common man".<sup>42</sup>

The Australian Association for Cultural Freedom, a branch of the international Congress for Cultural Freedom, had been established in 1954. Its journal *Quadrant* first appeared in 1956 and James McAuley's opening editorial seemed to answer point by point the

foundational principles of cultural nationalism — to appropriate the very concepts of literature and Australianness, democracy, rationality, commitment, liberalism, tradition and contemporaneity which the leftish nationalists had claimed as their own.<sup>43</sup> Patrick White's novels were indeed recruited to play a major role in such revisionary arguments and they would make a lasting difference in the way Australian culture could be conceived. Not least, White spoke to those left-wing intellectuals who, post-Stalin and post-Hungary, were looking more and more keenly at the nature of the national culture for evidence of its depth and maturity.<sup>44</sup>

The strain on the Communist Party caused by the denunciation of Stalin and then the invasion of Hungary reached its (first) climax, at least in the cultural field, with the departure of *Overland* from Party ranks in 1958.<sup>45</sup> Again this is a complex story beyond our scope, for *Overland* continued to have its supporters in the Party and in its own terms it refused to become anti-communist.<sup>46</sup> What is of direct significance for our argument is the consequent emergence in communist discourse of the question of *revisionism* which becomes the major issue among communist writers from around 1958. For revisionism was also a question of nationalism:

A feature of revisionism in contemporary Australian literature is ... the distortion of our national traditions. One method utilised is the attempt to confine our national culture to what we might term the '1890' level and forms. It surely cannot be mere coincidence that the former Party members who succumbed to revisionism have studied and written prolifically on the development of 19th century Australia. For then the 1890 period was the apex of development and they seek to restrict the labour movement and culture accordingly. Their works clearly reveal an overestimation of the achievements of the movement for self-determination.<sup>47</sup>

This concern with revisionism joins with the nationalist attack on formalism. Their combined effects can be traced in a more radically polarised communist reading of the national literary tradition. There were *two* Australian traditions, clearly distinguished and aggressively opposed: one anti-realist, bourgeois, decadent, elitist, pessimistic and commercial; the other democratic, working-class, optimistic, realistic and progressive. From within the former a national socialist realist tradition had emerged, developed out of but clearly distinguishable from the broad realist tradition.<sup>48</sup> The concept of two traditions was something already implicit in literary nationalism, for there always had to be a principle of exclusion. But for communists its more radical and tendentious rendering in the late fifties and early sixties entailed an explicit reading against revisionism: do work on the broad front but do not confuse any old nationalism with the principles of a working-class literature; do continue in the realist tradition but do not

confuse any old realism with socialist realism. To do so might be to end up in the camp of the reactionaries quicker than you can say Murray-Smith.

The new *Realist Writer* (later the *Realist*) was established in 1958 as the organ of the Sydney and then National Realist Writers (a National Council was formed at the end of 1960).<sup>49</sup> It was an important "non-Party" site for the working out of these elusive lines of demarcation where literary and political discourses overlapped in the categories of working-class, democratic, socialist, realist, nationalist, progressive. While proclaiming socialist realism, the first *Realist Writer* announced that

the future of mankind and, in the final analysis, of literature, lies with the working class and its theories. And, because *the future of the nation and the working class are synonymous in this period* the Australian Democratic tradition of literature is nowhere more alive than in the Realist Writers Groups.<sup>50</sup>

Worker writers, realist writers of all sorts, were welcome; and yet there was a voice on hand to point out the limitations of "pre-communist" realism. The Lawson tradition was always there to be celebrated and yet it had to be developed, made contemporary, made to show history's own development. There was a recurrent call (therefore) for novels of contemporary life and work. The historical novels, even those with a communist perspective, were necessary but not, not quite, sufficient: for the communist critic there was still a lack that only the true socialist realist novel could make good.<sup>51</sup>

### **The Communist Cultural Commissar Judah Waten<sup>52</sup>**

Judah Waten's career as visible in his literary journalism from the mid-1950s to the early 1960s can be charted against the shifting positions described above. More than that his decision to rejoin the Communist Party in 1957 — post-Stalin but also post-Hungary — makes his case what we might call *ultra*-typical: the decision implies a commitment to the role of communist writer and Party spokesperson against the tide of literary intellectuals quitting the Party. I do not mean by this that he becomes the mere conduit of official policy; rather that he invests the power of his discourse in an explicitly communist sphere, an investment which carries over into adjacent fields such as his involvement in the ABS. It carries over as well into novel writing. Locally, Frank Hardy had left for Sydney in the early fifties; Eric Lambert had fallen from grace in 1956;<sup>53</sup> the Melbourne-based *Overland* went not long after. There was room for a "new" communist writer to make an intervention, to take centre stage.

Waten marks out the space of the communist writer both in the Party press and simultaneously in the public sphere of the literary-cultural magazines. While never less than adjacent to mainstream cultural nationalism, the difference that communism makes

is articulated with increasing confidence, the confidence that comes from an increasingly articulate sense of belonging to a tradition. Waten's new public career as a communist writer can probably be dated from the appearance of his short story, "Bitter Freedom", in the national *Tribune* (28 August 1957).<sup>54</sup> The story intervenes directly in debates about the meaning of the Soviet action in Hungary. It is largely the monologue of a petit-bourgeois Jewish Hungarian, a survivor of the fascist years thanks to the Russians, who flees during the uprising. In Australia, however, he finds only a "bitter freedom". He is unemployed, his daughter, a doctor, works in a factory; the uprising is shown to have been anti-Semitic. If only they hadn't left.... The authority of literature is brought into play at this moment of crisis in communism to clinch a "truth" about Hungary argued in another rhetoric in *Tribune's* news pages. This is a return to communist publication with a vengeance. Waten's communist literary career, we might say, is launched in the face of revisionism.

Waten's literary journalism shows a similar intensification of political purpose. From late 1957, while continuing to write for *Overland*, he begins writing regularly for the *Guardian*, *Tribune*, *Communist Review* and the *Realist Writer*. The first *Guardian* piece appeared with the by-line "Australian author, Judah Waten", for his literary status was in a sense more important than his communism. It concerns the case of the "literary renegade" Howard Fast: in a word, it concerns revisionism. Fast was a particularly painful case, for he was the author of the influential book *Literature and Reality* and an exemplary communist novelist who had not only left the Party but started publishing anti-communist books and essays: "[he] has not only repudiated everything he formerly stood for, but he has turned himself into a propagandist for the Yankee Dollar, a creature of the State Department and the American press".<sup>55</sup> Waten's attack on Fast was one way of defining what it was to be a communist novelist. It was also a defence of the Soviet Union. A few weeks earlier *Tribune* had published Waten's account of "A Great Literature Created by New Soviet Life" (6 November 1957).

But pro-Sovietism could only ever be half the story, and less than half of its literary meaning. The other half was nationalism. Waten's second piece for the *Guardian* is a short but detailed article on the Eureka incident, "the first great landmark on the road to freedom and Socialism".<sup>56</sup> W. G. Spence, Victor Daley and Henry Lawson are drawn into a socio-literary tradition which thereby identifies precursors for the communist writer by underscoring the socialist direction of the national tradition. With his established literary and intellectual networks Waten had better credentials for taking up this nationalist history, and better contacts, than most of his communist contemporaries. This was indeed the "specialist" authorial responsibility he assumed, as

an Australian novelist and man of letters writing as a communist. From this position Waten could attack *Quadrant's* nationalist and democratic credibility<sup>57</sup> and, more interestingly, articulate a position in relation to Phillips's *The Australian Tradition*. This book would define debate about the national culture for the next few years:

In dealing with "The Democratic Theme", perhaps the most important essay in the book, Arthur Phillips sees the close connection between the rise of the realistic Australian literature and the democratic strivings of the Australian people, each in turn affecting the other.

The author shows that the same democratic spirit is still strongly felt in the work of a great number of Australian writers.

*I would go even further — the traditional Australian democratic realism is inevitably developing into Socialist realism, a trend which unfortunately the author does not consider.*

If I have any criticism to make of "The Democratic Theme" it is this. The author does not appear to recognise that the democratic spirit is essentially revolutionary.... The history of the Australian people is the history of struggle.

It is perhaps another weakness of the book as a whole, that the examination of literary-cultural problems is divorced from the realities of the development of Australian society with its class antagonisms and social issues.

This kind of treatment, of course, would require from the author a degree of political consciousness which he does not possess.

I believe that since the onset of the world Socialist revolution as the dominant reality of our age, political consciousness, an understanding of Marxism-Leninism, is the indispensable foundation of a full understanding of cultural-literary problems.<sup>58</sup>

This quotation reveals the "simple" rhetorical strategies by which the communist critic could perform the rather complex task of appropriating an argument about democratic nationalism for a very different argument about revolutionary socialism. The traditions of the people are (merely) taken to their *inevitable* national and then world-historical conclusion. The national history is gathered up into quite another — and yet the same — historical trajectory. The argument renders communism as simultaneously the same and different, on the one hand just a matter of seeing clearly what has been there all along, on the other a matter of seeing something altogether new.

This relationship between nationalism and communism is repeated in the relationship between realism and socialist realism.<sup>59</sup> In a later, longer essay, "The Australian Tradition and Communism", Waten bids for a voice in the contemporary debates prompted by Phillips's book. He gives equal emphasis to the *continuities* of the Australian tradition "in life and literature" — its true "democratic and revolutionary nature" — and to the *difference* that communism makes. "Communism has become the inheritor of the Australian ideals of the past and has *shown the way to their realisation*."<sup>60</sup> A history is traced from convictism to communism via the French Revolution, Chartism, Irish rebels, socialism, Marxism and 1917. The argument is pitched explicitly at two sorts of revisionism: one claiming a "squatter-gentry" or

"religious" version of the tradition (pre-figuring John Docker's account of the "gloom thesis"); the other promoting a bourgeois version of mateship that denies its basis in class struggle. Against these, the conclusion must be unambiguous: "The present day writers influenced by the ideas of Communism are the successors of Lawson and his contemporaries".<sup>61</sup>

The *Guardian* and *Tribune* articles have a dual task: first, to defend the national culture against its cold war enemies; second, to define a distinct space for the communist writer and communist nationalist. Here the communist writer and critic can be given an *exclusive* role. In *Overland*, on nationalism's home ground as it were and in an unambiguously literary sphere, Waten writes from a more inclusive position — both before and after the magazine's break with the Communist Party — as if representing a broadly-representative Australian literature. His reviews for *Overland* in this period can almost be read as a series of exercises, position-statements perhaps, towards the writing of *Time of Conflict*. In his first piece, a 1955 review of Marshall's *I Can Jump Puddles*, he re-claims populism and optimism for a class-based literary tradition:

It is not however a subjective, egotistical book, a paean of praise for the courageous individual pitted against his fellows and divorced from society. On the contrary [it] reveals the close ties the hero has always had with the ordinary every-day people from whom he himself stemmed.... The class realities of Australia are well understood by the author. He is always on the side of the people....

*I Can Jump Puddles* is a contribution to the struggles of the people for a better life as well as being another landmark in the development of the progressive tradition in Australian literature.<sup>62</sup>

Waten next reviews reprints of Prichard's *Coonardoo* and *Working Bullocks*.<sup>63</sup> This almost inevitably involves him in the process of defining a precursor, for the latter had by this time been accorded pride of place in the socialist realist national tradition. In Paul Mortier's terms:

*Working Bullocks* was an artistic response to [the formation of the Communist Party] and marked a new stage in our literary tradition.

In it Katharine (sic) discovered the poetry in human labour, bared the cruelty of exploitation and the necessity for the working class to emancipate itself. It was, to my knowledge, the first novel written in Australia from a Marxist viewpoint ... the birth of Socialist realism in Australian literature.<sup>64</sup>

Hardy borrowed the language usually reserved for Gorky in Soviet literary history: "Comrade Prichard straddled like a giant the two modern epochs of Australian literature".<sup>65</sup> For Waten, both novels were among "the first realistic novels written in this country" (which at first seems a ridiculous claim but is accurate, after all, in a quite significant way). *Working Bullocks* is singled out, not only for its "sensitive and faithful

picture ... of the lives of the working people", but more importantly for "the appearance of characters who might be described as *heroes of our time*" (my emphasis). Waten agrees with the critics who have seen in Mark Smith "for the first time in an Australian novel an authentically drawn revolutionary worker". Here is the start of a tradition.

The plot thickens (let me mean this in a literal way for *Time of Conflict* was being written at the same time as these reviews) with Waten's later commentaries on Palmer's Golconda trilogy.<sup>66</sup> Palmer's oeuvre and reputation, especially after *The Legend of the Nineties*, has to be worked into the socialist realist national tradition as both model and anti-model. Palmer is thus celebrated as "an important link between the realists of the Lawson epoch and the realists of our time" and his fiction is contrasted to the typical "modern masterpiece" which expresses "a reactionary philosophy of life, an illusion of depth, queer and brutal sex, mystical twaddle, a general detestation of life and a swollen, pretentious style". Waten situates Palmer in a context he takes to be defined not only by nationalism and communism but also by *Voss*, *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, *Lolita*, and *Doctor Zhivago*.

In discussing Palmer's *Seedtime*, Waten chooses significantly to highlight the theme of *reformism*. Understood as the inevitable failure of Labor and mere trade unionism, reformism is virtually inevitable as a theme for the communist novelist for this is the story, the history, that makes the communist difference within the labourist or socialist national tradition. Reformism thus also echoes revisionism. Palmer "is really one of the first Australian novelists to deal with this important aspect of our national life" — the other mentioned is Hardy in *Power Without Glory*. Waten reads Palmer's story of individual failure as rather a story of historical political failure: "Inevitably there is something forlorn about the chronicle of a Labor misleader — it is a story devoid of ideals, filled only with personal calculations" (this suggests a moral universe that we will meet again in *Time of Conflict*). Moreover, Palmer's inability to see beyond this historical political failure leads in turn to artistic failure:

[The] general sense of failure which pervades the novel might have been obviated if the author had deliberately set out to depict the whole of Queensland's labor movement. Then Vance Palmer could not have helped but present other characters, men and women with confidence in themselves and in the future of the working class. He would in fact have introduced a rank and file Laborite of a kind who has recently changed the Labor Party there, and Communists and Communism, *the dominant reality of our time since 1917*, in Queensland no less than in the rest of the world. (my emphasis)

Waten praises the trilogy as "of the highest importance in the history of Australian literature.... a serious attempt to deal with the people of the Labor movement [which is] the chief repository of the democratic traditions of this nation, yet it has not found

adequate expression in our literature". Palmer's achievement is thus incorporated into the necessary tradition and argued from a minor to a major position in the canon. It is so positioned against the fact that "today the novels which win the widest acclaim are those which are the furthest away from real things and real people, above all from the people of the Labor movement" — again Patrick White stalks the text. But labourism, nationalism and "pre-socialist" realism cannot supply a sufficient tradition, a tradition adequate either to history or literature:

It is a pity that Vance Palmer never realised that there was an alternative to all this, in the revolutionary movement, in the new developments in the Labor movement which will inevitably bring an end to the era of the Macy Donovans.... The failure to see the Labor movement in all its complexities is one of the chief weaknesses of the trilogy.<sup>67</sup>

The role of the communist novelist is thus defined in terms of historical adequacy — sheer reflection — rather than in the language of revolutionary fervour or desire. Behind this definition lies the socialist realist category of typicality.<sup>68</sup> As Buckridge has argued, realism within communism was by this time "fundamentally an epistemological category, referring to the knowledge of history available to the revolutionary class or its artistic representatives".<sup>69</sup> The relevant historical knowledge was nothing less than the "typical" which is to say *inevitable* development of the working class, the labour movement, the Australian people into a revolutionary class, movement and people. One sees the task that the socialist realist novel "of our time" and place must set itself: to be at once artistically whole in the great realist tradition and thus historically "adequate", historically totalising; but also (therefore) to be revolutionary, class-conscious, a workers' book in the great socialist tradition. It must seek both "environmental" — local and occasional — significance, where usefulness or recognition might be more highly valued than interpretability, but also "monumental" significance as a work of art.<sup>70</sup>

Waten's most extended essay in literary history from this period is his "Socialist Realism: An Important Trend in Present Day Australian Literature". Published in *Communist Review*, the Party's "Organ of Theory and Practice", its appearance in May 1960 coincides with the completion of a revised final draft of *Time of Conflict*.<sup>71</sup> Waten is writing his novel, we can say, at the moment when he is most acutely involved in articulating the links between socialist realism and the Australian literary tradition. Even here, though, Waten writes as a "man of letters" rather than a Party theoretician — unlike Blake, Beasley or even Hardy. His authority to speak is not and cannot be based solely on his communism but draws on a broader literary and national historical inwardness.

Waten articulates what is by now a socialist realist canon — Prichard, Hardy, Morrison, de Boissiere, Hewett — and drawing on his literary insidership he notes that "there is not a study of modern Australian literature which does not make mention of the work of the socialist realists". Throughout his literary journalism Waten constructs himself as a man of letters, both inside and outside communism, by framing his own voice through others: by references to Australian and overseas literature and criticism, by quoting the *Times Literary Supplement*, by discussing the review pages of Australian newspapers and literary journals. He reports back to a communist or worker audience the progress of "their" writers in the respectable literary world and mediates such mainstream literary controversies as that which arose over the banning of *Lady Chatterley's Lover*.<sup>72</sup> This double location, claiming full possession of both majority and minority positions, situating his own voice quite within the literary sphere even when at the height of his public career as a communist, is characteristic of Waten's career in writing — in a sense, its very motivation.

The main burden of his essay, thus credentialled, is an extended elaboration of the (socialist realist) national literary history, a strong version of the "two traditions" argument and perhaps the most complete such history offered by a communist writer in the period. It begins with what it sets out to demonstrate, the claim that "socialist realism in Australia springs naturally from Australian realism, the dominant literary trend in Australian literature, the result of the whole course of Australian historical development". From history to realism to socialist realism and *vice versa*. Waten first invokes a folk culture of bush ballads and yarns, a familiar enough trope, although its role here is *antagonistic*. Against this originary literature, a "realistic literature of the common people filled with a spirit of defiance", Waten opposes "the authors most admired by the upper classes, the landowners and the colonial governors' circles [who] modelled themselves on the worst melodramatic English novelists and had nothing but contempt for the Australian reality. *Here was born the second trend, the reactionary trend in Australian writing*"<sup>73</sup> The two traditions argument also generates the subsequent historical stages in Waten's narrative: *reformism*, as the school of the 1890s, the "harbinger of the modern socialist realist school", disintegrates after Federation: "the dream that the Labour Party would usher in the new socialist age dissolved in the face of reality"; and *modernism*, as the "fascist" tendencies of Brennan, Baylebridge and Norman Lindsay emerge in "their superman ideas, their chauvinism and anti-Semitism".

The opposite trend, the "revival of realism", comes only after the Russian revolution and the formation of the Australian Communist Party although its precursors are not communists — Furnley Maurice, Louis Esson, Vance Palmer, but then

Katharine Prichard. *Working Bullocks* again marks the beginning of "the new school in Australia, the school of socialist realism". Socialist realism and communism can thus be identified as the essence of the *modern* era, not just repeating the tradition but "extending the subject matter of Australian literature that, in the past, tended to deal with the life of the itinerant worker, small settler and drover, rather than the factory worker and city dweller". Finally, against this progressive modern development we have the latest manifestation of "the second trend", contemporary revisionism. This is presented through the cautionary tale of Eric Lambert who had "passed into the reactionary camp, one of the very few writers to succumb to the revisionist onslaught on the socialist realists" coming now from the mainstream institutions of Australian literature itself:

Just as the writers of the nineties were inspired by the labour movements of the time, so the modern socialist realists find their inspiration in the Communist Party, the only Party of socialism in Australia.

.... Because of the support for the progressive trend in Australian literature, the ruling classes and their press in recent times have begun to pay more attention to Australian literature. Critics in the daily press and lecturers in literature at the Australian universities, where until recently Australian literature was hardly mentioned, have begun to encourage more vigorously those writers who belong to the reactionary trend, extolling them, awarding them prizes, holding them up as models at the same time launching attacks on the Lawson tradition and the realists.<sup>74</sup>

Waten's essay thus marks out a history and a contemporary cultural politics for the communist writer: as heir to the true democratic and socialist national tradition; as the true heir to the realist tradition; as the embattled defender of the national culture; as the triumphant vanguard of an emergent revolutionary class; as the voice of history, "art and science";<sup>75</sup> as the ordinary voice of the ordinary people. Epic and epochal on one level, this utopian mandate was, on another, only common sense or "seeing clearly". Socialist realism, after all, was simply "realism combined with belief in, and support for, socialism".<sup>76</sup>

The impossible project of the communist writer might be understood as an attempt to reverse the history that Ross Chambers suggests for the nineteenth and early twentieth century European "art tale". Chambers describes the increasing "pressure within the readerly texts of the period of a sense of the writerly"; the increasing pressure, in other words, of the alienation and autonomy of the literary text which characterises modernity.<sup>77</sup> The socialist realist novel is precisely an attempt to leap backwards over this modernity, to reassert textual authority against its alienation and thereby to assert cultural authority against cultural and political alienation. The

paradoxes of socialist realism in practice — though not of *socialist* realism alone — are those of its belatedness.

But history finds its point in the present. Even as Judah Waten announces the triumph of socialist realism as the culmination of the national literary tradition, his present is inevitably and dramatically a "time of conflict". The confident assumption of a tradition, the "always-already there" of the national culture, had to serve as guarantor for the "always-arriving" future of Australian socialism and socialist realism. The totalising epistemological demands of socialist realism meant that every work in the tradition could only ever be a precursor. And what presented itself one moment as a strong, expanding mainstream, presented itself the next as an embattled minority position locked in mortal struggle against the forces of reformism, fascism, formalism, commercialism, revisionism and reaction, so many stages in the one cold war trajectory. But exactly: this was the very moment in which to write the great Australian communist novel.

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- <sup>1</sup> Judah Waten, *The Unbending* (Melbourne: Australasian Book Society, 1954); *Shares in Murder* (Melbourne: Australasian Book Society, 1957); *Time of Conflict* (Sydney: Australasian Book Society, 1961).
- <sup>2</sup> Works originally published by the ABS to 1961 include: Ralph de Boissiere, *Crown Jewel*; Frank Hardy, *Journey Into the Future* (see Chapter 7 below); *The Tracks We Travel*, ed. Stephen Murray-Smith; Eric Lambert, *The Five Bright Stars*; F. B. Vickers, *The Mirage*; John Morrison, *Black Cargo*; de Boissiere, *Rum and Coca-Cola*; Vickers, *Though Poppies Grow*; Katharine Susannah Prichard, *N'Goola and Other Stories*; Dorothy Hewett, *Bobbin Up*; David Forrest, *The Last Blue Sea*. Jack Beasley, *Red Letter Days: Notes from Inside an Era* (Sydney: Australasian Book Society, 1979), pp.161-62.
- <sup>3</sup> Anne Freadman, "Anyone for Tennis?" in *The Place of Genre in Learning: Current Debates*, ed. Ian Reid (Deakin University: Centre for Studies in Literary Education, 1987), pp.113-22.
- <sup>4</sup> See David Carter, "Documenting and Criticising Society", in *The Penguin New Literary History of Australia*, ed. Laurie Hergenhan (Ringwood, Vic.: Penguin, 1988), pp.370-80. The arguments there are based on the work for the present chapter. J. M. Harcourt, *Upsurge* (1934; Nedlands, WA: University of Western Australia Press, 1986); Jean Devanny, *Sugar Heaven* (1936; Melbourne: Redback Press, 1982); Katharine Susannah Prichard, *Working Bullocks* (1926; Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1972) and *Intimate Strangers* (1937; Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1976). Further references to the novels will appear in the text.
- <sup>5</sup> I have in mind again Ross Chambers' analysis of different modes of narrative self-situation: Ross Chambers, *Story and Situation: Narrative Seduction and the Power of Fiction* (Manchester: Manchester University Press; Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), pp.28-35. The word "seduction" in his title has its point, too, for my analysis of the erotic in these political novels.
- <sup>6</sup> Jean Devanny's description of *Sugar Heaven* as "epic" comes from her essay "The Worker's Contribution to Australian Literature" in *Australian Writers Speak: Literature and Life in Australia* (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1942), p.63. The quotation on the spirit of the war of the classes is from a review of the novel by L. Harry Gould, *Workers' Weekly* 19 June 1936, p.2.
- <sup>7</sup> Pat Buckridge, "Katharine Susannah Prichard and the Literary Dynamics of Political Commitment", in *Gender, Politics and Fiction: Twentieth Century Australian Women's Novels*, ed. Carole Ferrier (St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1985), pp.87-93.
- <sup>8</sup> The liaison Mark Smith/Marx myth belongs to Buckridge, "Katharine Susannah Prichard", p.89.
- <sup>9</sup> Buckridge, p.97.
- <sup>10</sup> Jack Lindsay, "The Novels of Katharine Susannah Prichard", in his *Decay and Renewal: Critical Essays on Twentieth Century Writing* (Sydney: Wild & Woolley, 1976), p.323.
- <sup>11</sup> Reactions to *Bobbin Up* are discussed in Chapter 6 below.
- <sup>12</sup> See Andrew Wells, "The Old Left Intelligentsia 1930-1960", in *Intellectual Movements and Australian Society*, eds Brian Head and James Walter (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1988), pp.222-27 and passim; also A. A. Phillips, "Cultural Nationalism in the 1940s and 1950s: A Personal Account" in the same volume, pp.129-44.
- <sup>13</sup> See Stephen Murray-Smith, *Indirections: A Literary Biography* (Townsville: James Cook University of North Queensland, 1981), pp.28-29.
- <sup>14</sup> Jack Beasley, *Socialism and the Novel* (Petersham, NSW: The Author, 1957), p.2. This monograph is reprinted in Beasley's *Journal of an Era: Notes From the Red Letter Days* (Earlwood, NSW: Wedgetail Press, 1988), pp.40-65. In this chapter I have quoted from the original 1957 edition.
- <sup>15</sup> Susan McKernan, *A Question of Commitment: Australian Literature in the Twenty Years After the War* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1989), p.25.

- <sup>16</sup> The great success of Dick Diamond's *Reedy River* performed by the New Theatre was of prime importance. See also J. D. Blake, "Folk Culture and the People's Movement", *Communist Review* 116 (August 1951), pp.872-75; Beasley, *Socialism and the Novel*, pp.1-2 ("a tendency today to exaggerate the role of the folk theme"); and many of the other communist essays cited in my argument below. Folk culture also becomes significant as it is opposed to American mass culture: see later in this chapter, and Graeme Smith, "Making Folk Music", *Meanjin* 44, 4 (December 1985), pp.479-82.
- <sup>17</sup> Beasley, *Socialism and the Novel*, p.7. See also Frank Hardy's speech to the Communist Party National Congress reprinted in *Tribune* 16 April 1958, p.7: "our creative position is that of Socialist Realism, the theory of art developed by the working class movement in an *enrichment of the old realism* in the period of the overthrow of capitalism and the building of socialism" (my emphasis).
- <sup>18</sup> Frank Hardy, "Some Ideological Problems of Communist Writers", *Communist Review* 174 (June 1956), p.184: "although the theories of the Proletcult (the proletariat would invent a new art of its own, breaking with the past, etc.) were defeated in the thirties, they left a harmful legacy". Reportage was an accusation made by communist readers during a controversy over the ABS-published novel *Tossed and Blown* by S. F. Bannister (1953): see *Tribune* 19 August 1953, p.8 and J. D. Blake, "Tribune Discussion Will Keep ABS on Right Track", *Tribune* 9 September 1953, p.8.
- <sup>19</sup> A. A. Zhdanov, "On the Errors of Soviet Literary Journals", *Communist Review* 66 (February 1947), pp.421-30. Repr. as "Report on the Journals *Zvezda* and *Leningrad*, 1947", in *Marxists on Literature: An Anthology*, ed. David Craig (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1975), pp.514-26.
- <sup>20</sup> McKernan, p.42
- <sup>21</sup> See my "Re-Viewing Communism: *Communist Review* (Sydney), 1934-1966", *Australian Literary Studies* 12, 1 (May 1985), pp.93-98; and Beasley, *Red Letter Days*, pp.174-84
- <sup>22</sup> Beasley, *Socialism and the Novel*, p.11. Interestingly, by 1959 Beasley is dissatisfied with the term "socialist realism" and coins "revolutionary realism": see his comments on his essay "For A Working Class Literature" (*Communist Review*, July 1959) in *Journal of an Era*, pp.66-75.
- <sup>23</sup> See, for example, the privileging of these two writers in Judah Waten's "A Great Literature Created by New Soviet Life", *Tribune* 6 November 1957, p.6.
- <sup>24</sup> Taken from Gorky, the phrase was repeated numerous times in Australian communist arguments. See Frank Hardy, "Some Ideological Problems", p.184; Ian Turner, "My Long March", *Overland* 59 (Spring 1974), p.39.
- <sup>25</sup> Judah Waten, "Socialist Realism: An Important Trend in Present Day Australian Literature", *Communist Review* 221 (May 1960), p.205. See also Judah Waten, "The Australian Tradition and Communism", *Tribune* 22 October 1958, p.7, an article prompted by discussions of A. A. Phillips's *The Australian Tradition* (see discussion below).
- <sup>26</sup> Waten's correspondence includes letters from Palmer, Davison, Phillips and Clem Christesen on a range of Waten mss. and other practical writing matters. Judah Waten papers, NLA MS 4536/2, correspondence 1951-57. Waten also becomes a full member of the Fellowship of Australian Writers in 1950, NLA MS 4536/2/53.
- <sup>27</sup> A Security report also (unreliably) lists as members: Alan Marshall, Vance and Nettie Palmer, Frank Davison, Katharine Prichard, Bernard O'Dowd, Bill Wannan, Clem Christesen and Ralph Gibson. Australian Archives AA: CRS A6122/XR1 [190], p.6 (1952?).
- <sup>28</sup> David Martin, *My Strange Friend* (Chippendale, NSW: Pan Macmillan, 1991), p.235. See also Murray-Smith, *Indirections*, p.30. Waten is not mentioned in the Security report on the Realist Writers. He is mentioned in the "news" columns of the *Realist Writer* (Melbourne) but does not write for the journal, nor is he published in the communist press in this period. My assessment of Waten's literary alliances is also based on interviews with John Morrison and Stephen Murray-Smith (1986).
- <sup>29</sup> Beasley, *Red Letter Days*, pp.104-5.

- <sup>30</sup> The best account is still Jack Beasley's, *Red Letter Days*, pp.131-68. See in particular his account of the early years, pp.137-40. McKernan's version, that the ABS "was set up in 1952 by a group of communists and their friends to publish socialist realist writing" is misleading on a number of counts (*A Question of Commitment*, p.28). An exemplary debate over the role of the ABS, over realism, nationalism, the nature of the Lawson tradition and political direction, is that occasioned by the publication of S. F. Bannister's *Tossed and Blown*: see *Tribune* 3 June-9 September 1953; David Martin, "How Should We Criticise?" *Realist Writer* 7 (September-October 1953), pp.3-4; E. M. M., "Whither Realist Writers?" in the same issue, p.11; and follow-up articles in Numbers 8 (December 1953-January 1954) and 9 (March-April 1954) — including in the latter John Morrison, "Comment", pp.11-12.
- <sup>31</sup> In addition to *The Australian Tradition*, these texts included Jack Lindsay, *Betrayed Spring*; Alan Marshall, *How's Andy Going*; Cyril Pearl, *Wild Men of Sydney*; Donald Stuart, *Yandy*. Listed in Beasley, *Red Letter Days*, pp.161-62. Beasley also reminds readers that the ABS was a limited liability company, not a co-operative, p.135.
- <sup>32</sup> In Raymond Williams' terms: "*alternative* ... the provision of alternative facilities for the production ... or publication of certain kinds of work, where it is believed that existing institutions exclude or tend to exclude these"; "*oppositional* ... [the above] raised to active opposition to the established institutions, or more generally to the conditions within which these exist", Williams, *Culture* (Glasgow: Fontana, 1981), p.70. The ABS functions precisely on the boundary line between these two categories.
- <sup>33</sup> The feature celebrating the first anniversary of the magazine section reveals the grounds of agreement and divergence among realist-communist writers. In letters of congratulation from Frank Hardy, John Manifold, J. D. Blake, Jock Graham, Eric Lambert, Laurie Aarons, Dave Smith, Lloyd Davies and David Martin we find the following array of terms: "the Australian tradition", "ideology", "active workers in the fields of science, art and literature", "a song of the Australian people", "working-class writing in Australia", "the Marxist standpoint on literature", "progressive writers", "a new body of worker-writers". The terms could be taken as equivalent yet they also reveal fault-lines that would later become irreparable splits. *Tribune* 8 July 1953, p.7. This magazine section would itself come under attack from "hard-liners". See Len Fox, *Broad Left, Narrow Left* (Sydney: The Author, 1982), p.151.
- <sup>34</sup> Katharine Prichard had not played this role but rather offered commentaries as an individual writer. *Communist Review* prints Hardy's pre-Congress report, "On the Cultural Front", 153 (September 1954), pp.272-75; his speech to the 17th National Congress of the Party, "Literature and Art", 163 (July 1955), pp.201-204; and his report to the 2nd National Conference of Communist Writers, April 1956, "Some Ideological Problems", cited above.
- <sup>35</sup> See for example, from the *Communist Review* of 1952: J. D. Blake, "Art and Culture Discussion", 131 (November), pp.347-52; Frank Hardy, "Make Literature a Mass Question For the Party and the Working Class", 132 (December), pp.374-79 and Jack Beasley, "Henry Lawson, Vanguard Fighter for Peace", in the same number, pp.381-84. In his article, Hardy gives a detailed account of the importance of the ABS for "worker readers", "worker critics" and "worker writers": "The Society, of course, is not a Communist organisation; its role is to take the books of our progressive writers to the people. It will publish not only books like 'Journey Into the Future,' not only social-realist books like 'Crown Jewel' and 'Voices in the Storm' but also humanist novels and stories in the democratic Australian tradition" (378).
- <sup>36</sup> Blake, "On the Work of Communist Writers", *Communist Review* 143 (November 1953), p.338.
- <sup>37</sup> See Hardy, "Some Ideological Problems", p.186 and *passim*.
- <sup>38</sup> Beasley, *Socialism and the Novel*, p.1. See Richard White, "'Combating Cultural Aggression': Australian Opposition to Americanisation", *Meanjin* 39, 3 (1980), pp.282-85; Mark Finnane, "Censorship and the Child: Explaining the Comics Campaign", *Australian Historical Studies* 23 (April 1989), pp.220-40. As suggested, Waten's own novel, *Shares in Murder*, needs to be understood as anti-crime fiction.

- <sup>39</sup> Beasley, *Socialism and the Novel*, p.2. See also Beasley, "The Great Hatred: Patrick White as Novelist", *Realist Writer* 9 (1962), pp.11-14; plus commentary on the "Patrick White debate" in Patrick Buckridge, "Intellectual Authority and Critical Traditions in Australian Literature 1945 to 1975", in *Intellectual Movements and Australian Society*, eds Head and Walter, pp.206-8 and David Carter, "Coming Home After the Party: *Overland's* First Decade", *Meanjin* 44, 4 (December 1985), pp.472-75.
- <sup>40</sup> Beasley, "For a Working Class Literature", *Communist Review* 211 (July 1959), p.279 (*Journal of an Era*, p.66). The other aspect of the negative response to Patrick White, which has not been widely remarked, is its coincidence with the "arrival" in Australia of abstract painting. See Herbert McClintock, "Empty Pictures, Empty Galleries", *Tribune* 24 January 1957, p.5. White is read in the context of abstract expressionism.
- <sup>41</sup> Ted Parfitt, "We Have Troubles Too", *Realist Writer* 7 (September-October 1953), p.5.
- <sup>42</sup> Judah Waten, *Trends in Literature in Australia* ([Melbourne?]: December 1966), pp.3-4. The 17-page typed document was probably published by the author perhaps under Party or Realist Writer auspices.
- <sup>43</sup> McKernan, *A Question of Commitment*, pp.54-64. First editorial: James McAuley, "Comment: By Way of Prologue", *Quadrant* 1, 1 (1956-57), pp.3-4. See also Susan McKernan, "The Question of Literary Independence: *Quadrant* and Australian Writing", in *Outside the Book: Contemporary Essays on Literary Periodicals*, ed. David Carter (Sydney: Local Consumption Publications, 1991), pp.165-76.
- <sup>44</sup> Carter, "Coming Home After the Party", pp.472-75. Revised as "Capturing the Liberal Sphere: *Overland's* First Decade", in *Outside the Book*, pp.177-92.
- <sup>45</sup> Carter, "Capturing the Liberal Sphere", pp.177-81; Murray-Smith, *Indirections*, pp.36-37.
- <sup>46</sup> Murray-Smith, *Indirections*, p.37; but see the attacks on the magazine in the communist press: Rex Chiplin, "*Overland*: Where's It Being Taken?" *Tribune* 13 May 1959, p.7 and responses 27 May, p.8; 3 June, p.6 (de Boissiere); 10 June, p.7 (Prichard and Hardy); also Judah Waten, "The Latest Issue of *Overland*", *Tribune* 14 October 1959, p.6; R[ex] M[ortimer], "Heading '*Overland*' — But in What Direction?" *Guardian* 28 June 1962, p.4.
- <sup>47</sup> Beasley, "For a Working Class Literature", p.281. See also Hardy's speech to the National Congress, *Tribune* 16 April 1958 and an unsigned article in *Tribune* on the theory of revisionism, 10 June 1959, p.6.
- <sup>48</sup> Beasley, *Socialism and the Novel*, ch.1; Waten, "The Australian Tradition and Communism"; Paul Mortier, "Socialist Realism and the Australian Tradition", *Communist Review* 194 (February 1958), pp.80-81; Jack Beasley, "Questions of Australian Literature", *Communist Review* 217 (January 1960), pp.31-35; Waten, "Socialist Realism: An Important Trend", pp.205-6.
- <sup>49</sup> Beasley, *Red Letter Days*, p.141. *Realist Writer* 1 (1961), inside back cover. Judah Waten, "Literary Comment", *Guardian* 26 July 1962, p.4.
- <sup>50</sup> Editorial, *Realist Writer* 1, 1 (July 1958), p.1 (my emphasis).
- <sup>51</sup> For example, Beasley's analysis of recent novels, *Socialism and the Novel*, pp.13-20; or his review of Ron Tullipan's *Follow the Sun* (Sydney: ABS, 1960) which he describes as "outstanding", contemporary, "militant" but limited to the trade union perspective: "Deeper and continuing analysis will lead him to a more all-sided and penetrating realism than he has achieved here. Deeper analysis of people will enable him to better understand the history-making potential of his waterside heroes and strengthen his portrayal of women", *Realist Writer* 1, 3 (1960), pp.17-18. See also his two commentaries on *Power Without Glory*, "Fourth Anniversary of Power Without Glory" (1954) and "Incorrect Criticism of Power Without Glory" (1958), both reprinted in his *Journal of an Era*, pp.29-39. The first defined the novel as critical realism; the second revises this estimation to show that the novel does after all have significant features of socialist realism.

- 52 The phrase was used in an item in the "Observer's Notebook" column in the *Observer* (7 January 1961, p.2) regarding an article by Waten in *Overland* (December 1960, p.48) on the recently-established Chair of Australian Literature at Sydney University, which Waten hopes will not be given to "a nominee of the Australian Congress for Cultural Freedom or DLP circles" (i.e. James McAuley).
- 53 "Eric Lambert Betrayed Himself", *Tribune* 21 November 1956, p.8.
- 54 Waten, "Bitter Freedom", *Tribune* 28 August 1957, p.6; reprinted in the English *Labour Monthly* (December 1957), pp.561-65.
- 55 Waten, "Howard Fast Steps Into a New Camp", *Guardian* 21 November 1957, p.6. This piece was reprinted in *Tribune* 4 December 1957, p. 7, a mark of the importance granted to the issue of (literary) revisionism.
- 56 Waten, "Eureka Inspires Fight for Socialism", *Guardian* 5 December 1957, p.3.
- 57 Waten, "When Literary Criticism is a Political Weapon", *Guardian* 23 January 1958, pp.4-5. Reprinted in *Tribune* 29 January 1958, p.6.
- 58 Waten, "New Book Aids Appreciation of Our Literature", *Guardian* 15 May 1958, p.4. Original emphasis.
- 59 In an article on the ABS, Waten comes up with an understated communist definition of the broad realist trend: "Unlike today's fashionable writers who preach pessimism and men's helplessness, the writers whose books have been published by the ABS look to the future as well as the past, *arousing in their readers a determination to end the evil conditions which give rise to unhappiness*", ("Book Society Plays its Part in the Battle of Ideas", *Guardian* 5 June 1958, p.4; *Tribune*, 4 June, p.6; my emphasis).
- 60 Waten, "The Australian Tradition and Communism", *Tribune* 22 October 1958, p.7. My emphasis.
- 61 Waten, "The Australian Tradition and Communism", p.7. Docker's "gloom thesis" thesis is argued in his *In a Critical Condition: Reading Australian Literature* (Ringwood, Vic.: Penguin, 1984), pp.110-40. The targets of Waten's attack are, respectively, the supporters of White, the "prose poets" (and perhaps Geoffrey Dutton and Max Harris); and the *Overlanders* who had recently split from the Party and developed their own readings of the 19th century heritage (particularly Turner and Murray-Smith).
- 62 Waten, "Alan Marshall's Story", *Overland* 5 (October 1955), p.33.
- 63 Waten, "*Working Bullocks*", *Overland* 10 (September 1957), p.39.
- 64 Paul Mortier, "Socialist Realism and the Australian Tradition", *Communist Review* 194 (February 1958), p.79.
- 65 Hardy, "Some Ideological Problems", p.183. See also Beasley, *Socialism and the Novel*, p. 17: "For the first time in Australian literature, [Prichard] created the hero of the new type, the revolutionary worker, in the person of Mark Smith".
- 66 Waten, "Three of Vance Palmer's", *Overland* 12 (Winter 1958), pp.39-40; "Palmer and Mann", *Overland* 16 (December 1959), p.38. Waten describes the trilogy as "the story of a militant but not politically-conscious trade union organiser who is gradually tamed and moulded into the typical Labor politician of the Theodore-Hanlon-Gair eras". It is also worth recalling that *Overland* was out of the Party, and Waten back in, by the time of these reviews.
- 67 Waten, "Palmer and Mann", p.39. The review also links Leonard Mann "to the same realist school ... who form the *link between the Lawson school and the modern social-realists*" (my emphasis). He has "tackled the biggest themes in Australian life and history": the first world war, Eureka, the depression. Waten's other piece in *Overland* in this period (No. 17, April 1960, pp. 39-40) is a report of the Adelaide Festival. Reporting on an art exhibition he writes: "For my taste too many of the Australian painters tend towards the abstract and do not reflect nature or the life around them".

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- <sup>68</sup> Beasley, *Socialism and the Novel*, p.12 "The typical circumstance is one that reveals a tendency of the time or of the people of the time.... [T]he typical characters with which we should be concerned are those representatives of the main social forces, of the working class and its allies, and the capitalists".
- <sup>69</sup> Buckridge, "Intellectual Authority and Critical Traditions", p.206.
- <sup>70</sup> The terms are taken from Paul Carter, "Lines of Communication: Meaning in the Migrant Environment", in *Striking Chords: Multicultural Literary Interpretations*, eds Sneja Gunew and Kateryna O. Longley (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1992), p.17.
- <sup>71</sup> Waten writes to Les Greenfield at the Sydney ABS, 24 May 1960, that he will send them the new novel in a week or so. The letter also mentions that the manuscript had been looked at by a number of readers including Jack [Beasley], and in its new form by Noel [Counihan], Alan Marshall and Frank Davison. He suggests further readers too, Bob [Laurie?], Joe [Waters] and Vin [Bourke]. (The identifications in square brackets are almost certain.) All except Marshall and Davison were Party members. ABS Records, Mitchell Library, ML MSS 2297/14.
- <sup>72</sup> In an article prompted by this controversy, Waten argues that *Lady Chatterley's Lover* is essentially reactionary and fascist, thus arguing against the attempt by "some critics in England and Australia [who] have read a progressive message into the novel, asserting that it strikes a blow against the ruling class". He claims that the capitalist press want the book published, for Lawrence's works are "very pleasing to the ruling class", and that the contemporary campaigns are part of an Anglo-American cold war strategy. Lawrence is accused for his "magazine" bathos, his mysticism, his anti-Semitism and, in an interesting argument, his "fascist conception of women". Against which Waten asserts the faith of the socialist realists "in art and science, in the possibility of happiness in the full equality of the sexes, [their] unconquerable optimism for the whole future of humanity": "D. H. Lawrence and 'Lady Chatterley's Lover,'" *Realist Writer* 6 (May 1961), pp.8-9.
- <sup>73</sup> Waten, "Socialist Realism", p.205 (my emphasis).
- <sup>74</sup> Waten, "Socialist Realism", pp.206-7.
- <sup>75</sup> Waten, "D. H. Lawrence", p.9.
- <sup>76</sup> Waten, "Socialist Realism", p.205.
- <sup>77</sup> Chambers, *Story and Situation*, pp.13-15.

## 6

**Text of Conflict:  
Judah Waten's *Time of Conflict***

*Now in Time of Conflict Mr Waten has come out openly as a literary spokesman for the Communist Party.*  
(Theo Moody, *Daily Telegraph*, 1961)

**Working (the) Models**

Judah Waten's *Time of Conflict* is structured in all its details of story, plot and discourse by the decision to write a "communist novel" and hence by the complex of institutional developments which made such a decision meaningful.<sup>1</sup> It is by no means the only Australian novel to include communist characters, which Ian Reid has noted as a recurrent feature in fiction from the 1930s to the 1950s.<sup>2</sup> Nor is it the only novel to feature *model* communists or a communist thesis. With the partial exception of *Sugar Heaven* and *Bobbin Up*, however, it is unprecedented in featuring a communist as its central character and the story of his communism as its central theme. Elsewhere the communists are relatively minor characters and the moment of conversion, as in *Intimate Strangers*, provides only the novel's final resolutions; or the communists are supplementary characters as in *Power Without Glory*, providing the argument and framework of interpretation that the story itself cannot supply.

Locally by the late 1950s there were positive and negative models for the communist or working-class novel. Yet even the positive models created the sense of a lack, a falling short of that historical, socialist and realist fullness that theory projected. *Power Without Glory* was the great communist novel of reformism or social democracy in the labour movement but not quite the great communist novel of communism. It was at best a precursor of "our national form of socialist realism". In order to "portray our times", Jack Beasley argued, the "new literature of the epoch of the struggle for people's power in Australia ... must tell of the new hero — the revolutionary Australian worker".<sup>3</sup>

The other significant recent exemplar was Prichard's *Winged Seeds* which had brought her goldfields trilogy to a conclusion in 1950. The novel was welcomed as a great achievement for Australian literature with its historical scope and "complex, *exquisitely disciplined* story line".<sup>4</sup> But was it socialist realism, was it communist fiction? Beasley's extended worrying at the problem shows the

considered application of socialist realist categories to local nationalist, historical fiction:

Sally Gough is at once the pinnacle and the limit of K.S.P.'s (sic) art. Most of all in this, the author's finest creation, can we find the thing that was not achieved.... For Sally Gough, for all her life-long process of intellectual change and development is not quite adequate as the central character of the trilogy's latter parts.

The onward movement of Australian history which has produced the most advanced representatives of the working class organised in the Communist Party, the author's own ideological rapport with communism and most important, the requirements of her own art, all called for the creation of the revolutionary worker as a genuinely heroic figure. There is a sense of loss, of something missing, particularly in *Winged Seeds*, because this is not achieved.

The revolutionary worker is the type Australian of today, just as the militant bush worker was the type of the nineties, because he represents the future and the creation of such a fully human character will mark the next great forward step in the Australian novel. The novel may become embellished or even enriched by the continual re-creation of familiar characters, but it can only advance by extending the frontiers of personality

.... *Winged Seeds*, of the decade 1936-1946 called above all for the creation of a vital revolutionary figure as the natural consequence of the trilogy's unfolding and the book loses zest because this was not achieved.<sup>5</sup>

Historical fidelity, political alignment, literary tradition — all have their place in the novel's achievement but none is sufficient against the scale of socialist realism that the *epoch* demanded. Waten had discovered the same insufficiency in Vance Palmer's trilogy and again in fellow-communist John Morrison's *Port of Call*. There was a strain of fatalism in the latter, reflected in a lack of character development: had Morrison "deliberately fashioned a seaman more characteristic of our time he would have heightened the significance of his novel".<sup>6</sup> Fatalism is an historical and political, not merely ethical, attribute.

The critical moment for the communist novel was defined by the presence of Patrick White as we have seen, but also by the kind of novels associated with Ruth Park: picturesque, *naturalistic* accounts of the poor and the working classes. Naturalism for Beasley was (merely) "the exact reproduction of people and circumstances from casual observation. It records surface impressions ... often losing sight of essentials".<sup>7</sup> It was, in other words, the very opposite of typicality, for the typical "is not imitation of what is chance, or unessential, it is the unity of what is essential and general with the individual in both people and events". Naturalism, Beasley feared, was an increasing tendency in the Australian novel. Nor was the issue merely technical, for naturalism made "use of the life of the working people, describing every wretched, tawdry and petty detail, ... but avoiding at all costs descriptions of the struggle of the workers *against* those conditions".

A more interesting problem of naturalism was presented by a contemporary communist novel, Dorothy Hewett's *Bobbin Up*. The example is interesting because of the large degree of success which it was granted despite its atypicality in structure

and language. Beasley records that the novel generated a great deal of discussion; and this was just as *Time of Conflict* was being written and revised.<sup>8</sup> He praises the novel's story of a strike: it is "typical, because essential characteristics of our class and their life are revealed". The communist heroine is "a typical proletarian" who combines "the general and essential features of our class with specific, concrete traits which make her a real person". And the qualities of the working class "are revealed most fully in the Communists who represent not only its present but more importantly, its future". But, and the "but" is a significant one, the novel has shortcomings which "could be described as concessions to naturalism". There are, Beasley agrees, valid objections to the novel's "reliance on surface description, a concentration on the unusual or sensational in people and events, a pre-occupation with anatomical description of women, an overstressing of physical relations". Similar judgements are given by Ralph de Boissiere and, poignantly, by Jean Devanny.<sup>9</sup> The political gaze of post-war socialist realism can find the novel's erotics and feminism only distracting. Sheer prudishness will not really explain this reading; or if it will the prudishness also needs to be explained as presenting itself to communist readers and writers as a solemn political and historical responsibility.

In the face of this ever-approximating history of lack, History we might say demands a new kind of hero, a new plot. The hero of *Time of Conflict* is Mick Anderson and the plot is his coming into communism. His name clearly signifies ordinariness or better *typicality*, as do his "secondary" characteristics: as rural (originally), working class (potentially), Irish-Australian (probably) and masculine (particularly). The effect of typicality is generated through the redundancy of these characteristics in relation to each other. Typicality is also an effect of the novel's plot. Its historical time span and key moments are epochal as the book's title suggests: from the First World War to the cold-war fifties via the Depression, Spain, appeasement, the non-aggression pact and the anti-fascist war. By 1961 this was a deeply familiar, resonant, even mythic sequence of events for communists and for many liberal intellectuals.<sup>10</sup> It was no less than the modern history of the nation, although its very recognisability enables Waten to leave the momentous history largely in the background or in the foreground as accurate historical detail. There is extended discussion in the correspondence between Waten and the Australasian Book Society (ABS) about such detail: did Hector St Clair sing that particular song; did the police have motorcycles at Rothbury; when did Harold Park commence night racing?<sup>11</sup>

On the large and the small scale *Time of Conflict* thus stakes its claim as historical and national fiction. At the same time its *political* themes also depend upon being recognised as typical, as stories often told, as deeply-embedded truths —

dependent upon a specific political doctrine but also upon a kind of proverbial wisdom. The themes are those which recur in all communist fiction: the inevitable betrayals of reformism and mere trade unionism; the essential difference that discipline and knowledge make; the transformation of the working class from despair to optimism; and the fatal links between careerism, opportunism and revisionism. In a way that recalls folk tales and other traditional genres, there is only a small number of such themes upon which the plot can be constructed but also only a small number which it needs. The theoretical terms are provided by the doctrine — "opportunism" for example — but the narration also asks for a different kind of recognition, ethical but not merely individual. Each individual story thus echoes or prefigures a larger story outside the novel, in history, in (political) experience. Nonetheless the novel will also depend for its *literary* authority upon the acknowledgment of its originality and autonomy as a work of art. Its political stories thus depend upon the recognition that these "often-told" tales are being told anew in a *novel* and in an *Australian* novel. Both factors create their own dynamic of narrative interest, and given the local history of the communist novel both allow for the literary sense of something being done for the first time.

In the realm of characterisation there is a further sense in which the story the novel tells has been told before (or is told *as if* already-told). This is not just because it recalls the familiar pattern of the *Bildungsroman*, important as this aspect of the novel is to its status as a serious literary work. I want to emphasise rather the novel's function as what we might call "people's history". The historical plot depends for its narrativisation on a series of more localised but thoroughly familiar stories. For example it recalls the First World War via Mick's father, a returned digger. His story is one already told countless times: promised his job back, he returns affected by the war, loses the job, and is never the same man again.<sup>12</sup> The story is at once generational (national and epochal) and susceptible to class analysis, for the link between the war and unemployment is capitalism.

The story of Mick's mother also depends upon its (illusion of) deep "folk" familiarity, so much so that she is caught, like the father, in Susan McKernan's broad generalisation: "In much socialist realist writing the Australian national character was represented by that romantic figure the easy-going, generous Irish-Australian and the poor were represented by the equally romantic working-class mother, keeping her children and house clean while her husband is out of work".<sup>13</sup> These are the characteristics we find in Annie Anderson, "blunt spoken and fearless ... straight-backed, high-shouldered and stout, ... prematurely old, completely grey" (9). The recognition factor means that her character can work as a narrative model, that is, signifying another kind of story to which the novel itself can be aligned: the local

tradition of the short story. Waten achieves thereby the maximum degree of representativeness for the minimum amount of representation.

Am I simply defining the novel's lack of originality or a failure of imagination? Perhaps, but what we find in *Time of Conflict* is something more like a *principle* of unoriginality. The sense of the story as pre-determined or inevitable, as impersonal, coming from history rather than the imagination, is clearly very much to the point as one kind of claim to realism ("truthful historical interpretation").<sup>14</sup> At the same time, but reading more against the grain of the novel's readerly discourse, there are certain parallels with folk tales or myths in the sense the narrative creates that this story is only one particular manifestation of a deeper collective story. Either case, in fact, can suggest the ways in which the text might be interested in minimising, as far as possible within the limits of the novelistic, traces of the merely individual in character and the merely accidental in events. Similarly, all traces of signature or "style" in the writing, all traces of the *merely authorial*, are ironed out as the narration aims for the impersonality and perhaps even the banality of history. The prose is plain, direct, "written with disarming simplicity" as an ABS Reader's Report put it.<sup>15</sup> More accurately, the writing is rigorously constrained by the conventions which signify simplicity, directness and plain-speaking. It is thus no surprise that communism in *Time of Conflict* emerges as experience or discipline rather than as the vision *bouleversante* of the earlier revolutionary novels. It is quite without what Jean Devanny in reflecting on Waten's novel termed "glamor".<sup>16</sup>

Although the comparison risks exaggeration, we might quote from Katerina Clark's account of the Soviet socialist realist novel:

In some ways the most definitive characteristic of Socialist Realism is not the mode of writing it envisages but its radical reconception of the role of the writer. After 1932 (at least) the Stalinist writer was no longer the creator of original texts; he became the teller of tales already prefigured in Party lore.... The Stalinist novelist must present a fictionalised account of reality and events, but these "historical tales" must be based on something analogous to the "divine plan of salvation" followed by the medieval chronicler, namely, on the Marxist-Leninist account of history.... As chronicler he merely *shows* how, in the particular model situation he has chosen, social and political contradictions work themselves out in successive resolutions of the spontaneity/consciousness dialectic.

A corollary of the Soviet novelist's status as mere teller of tales is his lack of autonomy over his own texts. It is the prerogative of his editors, critics, and patrons to see to it that the purity of the tale is preserved in the novelist's work.<sup>17</sup>

I will return a little later to the question of the ways in which the Soviet novel could or could not supply a model for local socialist realist fiction. For the moment I want to argue that there is at least a weak version of what Clark describes operating in the writing and publication of *Time of Conflict*. In addition to the textual effects I have described in which Waten too resembles a teller of tales already-prefigured, we can note that he discussed the novel and circulated drafts not only among his fellow

writers but also among his fellow communists and ABS functionaries, and as a matter of course not force.<sup>18</sup> This was precisely the sort of institutional difference that being a communist novelist might entail. Although Waten was interested in having the book taken by the "capitalist publishers", in his words, he prioritises publication by the ABS. He writes to Beasley, "I do want the movement to get as much as is possible out of the tome".<sup>19</sup> Even the cover design by Waten's friend and fellow-communist Noel Counihan becomes a matter of collective discussion and fine political interpretation.<sup>20</sup>

The privileged autonomy of the author was only a qualified virtue in relation to the author's responsibility to tell the story of the class or "movement". For the communist novelist operating inside institutions such as the ABS there was, in Foucault's terms, a somewhat different distribution of subject positions within the discourse of authorship (although it *was* still largely within this discourse).<sup>21</sup> Just as publication by the ABS meant the likely sacrifice of certain kinds of literary readers, this reduced authorship was a "sacrifice" the communist writer made in exchange for the right to tell *the* story of our epoch, "the dominant reality of our time".<sup>22</sup> For Waten this was a matter of commitment, of mediation between competing claims, and of a new disciplining of the indeterminacy of writing.

How is this disciplining effected and how does the writing make its claims to history, realism and communism? We can return to the question of genre by reading *Time of Conflict* against the categories of the *roman à thèse*. The didactic element of Waten's novel will inevitably be in tension with its realist and historical ambitions such that while the book proclaims communism it will, like *The Unbending*, disarmingly disclaim its own function as propaganda. Its duplicitousness, in Chambers' terms, will depend upon an extreme form of that mediation between implicit and explicit modes of narrative self-situation which characterises all readerly texts.<sup>23</sup> We will find the novel divided in its ambitions and methods, not only because of its contextual over-determinations, but because of its very determination to look undivided, to constrain meaning to a single end and on a single plane of representation. The *roman à thèse* is a useful category in so far as it conceptualises a set of relationships between didactic and realist modes. All fiction can be understood as a kind of argument, but the point is precisely *which* kind.

In *Authoritarian Fictions*, a study of the French *roman à thèse*, Susan Suleiman attempts to define the genre and its narrative grammars. Despite being somewhat innocently structuralist, the book's reductive schemata provide clear-cut models which can be used to explain the structuring and rhetoric of *Time of Conflict*. We could say it enables us to see things about the novel which are so obvious we

might otherwise miss them — and to see much that the novel itself wishes to conceal.

Suleiman also directs her enquiry to a broader question: "How can a story become the bearer of an unambiguous meaning?"<sup>24</sup> It is precisely the tension between fictional, realist and didactic elements that initiates her definition of the *roman à thèse* in terms of its techniques of disambiguation:

The realist novel proclaims above all the vocation of rendering the complexity and the density of everyday life; the *roman à thèse*, on the other hand, finds itself before the necessity of simplifying and schematising its representations for the sake of its demonstrative ends. Simplification and schematisation are more suited to allegorical or mythic genres than to realist genres. The *roman à thèse* is perhaps condemned to missing its aim, either on one side or on the other. (23)

For Suleiman the *roman à thèse* is founded on redundancy, indeed the multiplication of redundancies on every level: "the more one advances, the more the redundancies constrain meaning, reducing it and making it *one*" (55-56). It seeks to impose not only a single meaning but a "dualistic system of values" capable of producing "rules of action". Suleiman suggests three criteria for distinguishing the *roman à thèse* within the larger field of the realist novel: an unambiguous, dualistic system of values; a rule of action addressed to the reader; and a "doctrinal intertext" (56). The values and rules of action depend on a specific system of thought that exists outside the novel in explicitly doctrinal texts.

It is not difficult to apply these three criteria to *Time of Conflict*. Communism supplies the doctrinal intertext, an explicit framing device although as I will later explain less explicit than we might expect. Communism is introduced early on through Harry Timmins, "the local communist" in Wagga. The point of his introduction is the issue of discourse: who says what and who *reads* what. Harry interjects during a speech by a conservative politician and distributes leaflets in order to defend striking British seamen.<sup>25</sup> Mick has read Harry's books, "Bolshevik books" as his girlfriend Agnes anxiously discovers. The ethico-political position defined in Harry's demeanour — he is tall, good looking "in a sombre, unsmiling way", dressed neatly in a manner older than his years — is connected from the beginning to what he knows, what he has read. "Timmins never hesitated to express his views.... Mick admired his defiance but even more his eloquence" (15). The scene initiates a theme in the novel and a pattern of self-situation: communism gives purposeful speech contrasted to the workers' present passive silence and to self-interested "bragging". Harry turns up later as a "theoretician" (174) and Party tutor, taking classes on the limits of social democracy (of course, for this is the crucial theme of communist difference, 109).

This brief early episode shows the novel's dualistic system of values being set in train. Mick is as yet un(in)formed, although his natural sympathies are with Harry. Otherwise the scene is constructed around a dualism of values at once ethical and doctrinal: on one side Harry, militant workers, communism, selflessness, knowledge and revelation; on the other, conservative politics, the bourgeoisie, anti-communism, self-interest, ignorance and deception. Nor are the oppositions always explicit: Harry's kind of "respectability" is to be distinguished from that of the parliamentarian's conservative audience ("men wearing bowler hats..."); his interjections are to be distinguished from those of "two young men dressed in the latest style Oxford bags"; and the full significance of a comment by the Labor Party secretary is still to be revealed: "With his appearance and ability Harry Timmins could have gone a long way if he hadn't got himself mixed up with the communists" (15). Communism generates the oppositions and will supply the framework of interpretation in which their meaning will be completed, eventually in the form of a "rule of action": follow Harry, follow Mick. The implied reader, the receiver of the rule of action, is male.

Communism is introduced in a relay of meanings that move Mick from intuition and sympathy to knowledge and action. After the introduction of Harry and his books, this role is taken up by George Bright, a communist who helps Mick stow away to New Zealand. On the ship Mick is witness to a discussion between "older" radical positions such as anarchism and the IWW and their younger, more knowledgeable heir, communism (62-63). The older seamen support the former positions, and the mere age differentiation signifies an historical perspective in which the partial understandings of earlier radical politics are gathered into the evolution of communism. Indeed the *theoretical* dimension of the discussion is subsumed by the historical so that the appeal to the reader is more "history shows" than "logic proves". Mick listens, is "moved", but at this stage makes no interpretation of his own.

Similar scenes are positioned at key points throughout the novel, "teaching" scenes in which communism is situated in relation to other texts, other doctrines. After returning from New Zealand, Mick meets Lew Jenkins when he goes to his aid spontaneously at a Workers' Defence Army demonstration where he just happens to find himself. Lew takes much further the process of Mick's education from "spontaneity" to "consciousness", in the same process building-in the interpretive frame for the reader. Mick is introduced to explicitly-named communist texts — the *Manifesto*, Lenin's *State and Revolution*, the *Workers' Weekly*. Just as important, he is introduced at the same time to literary texts — Lawson, *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists*, Milton, Byron and Shelley, even a poem from G. K. Chesterton,

significantly entitled "For We Have Not Spoken Yet" (92-97). The intellectual or doctrinal appeal of communism figured by the theoretical texts is brought together with the emotional and experiential as figured by the literary texts (which can also figure the "non-doctrinaire"). In what is both a political and aesthetic model for the novel itself, Lew tells Mick that "Experience is the mother of all writing"; and he admits to a desire "to write a long poem into which he would pour all his heart and soul". In an important sense communism is like *learning to read and write* (indeed learning to *speak*). The next step in the relay occurs when Lew takes Mick to the Communist Party rooms and he sees Harry Timmins again in the course of his class on social democracy, "a serious fellow who might easily be taken for a teacher" (110). By the time Mick joins the Communist Party there can be no suddenness — no "originality" — in the decision only a sense of its historical inevitability.

We can also recognise *Time of Conflict* in Suleiman's analysis of a recurrent model for *romans à thèse*, the appropriation of the *Bildungsroman* structure or structure of apprenticeship. She describes the *Bildungsroman* syntagmatically in terms of "two parallel transformations undergone by the protagonist: first, a transformation from *ignorance* (of self) to *knowledge* (of self); second, a transformation from *passivity* to *action*" (65). In the *roman à thèse*, however, these two transformations are subordinated to a third which radically modifies their meaning:

The hero's self-knowledge is no longer an end in itself but a simple consequence: it is *because* he acquires knowledge of an objective, totalising "truth" that the hero discovers, at the same time, "his own essence". The adhesion to a doctrine guarantees the authenticity of the self, and the self is defined essentially in terms of adhesion to a doctrine....

Similarly, it is the adhesion to a doctrine that makes possible the hero's transition to action and the beginning of a "new life", ... a "life in accordance with the truth". Strictly speaking, the hero's apprenticeship ends when he acquires authentic knowledge; but the evocation, at least, of his future "life in accordance with the truth" is a necessary part of his story. (76)

The acquisition of knowledge, moreover, "is the prelude to action undertaken by the *group*" (77, my emphasis). The hero's "initiation" is conducted through a series of trials, specifically in the form of a trial of *interpretation*: "the candidate is placed before a situation — or a text — that he must understand and explain.... Rather than *leading* to the knowledge of truth ... the trial of interpretation ... simply *manifests* a knowledge [the hero] has already acquired" (78).

We are very close indeed to the structures of *Time of Conflict*. The narrative establishes its fictional contract with the reader in aligning itself with the *Bildungsroman*, which at least one critic — Lukács — has taken as the virtual definition of the novel.<sup>26</sup> Mick is introduced to the reader in the book's first sentence as a "youth" and the opening paragraph initiates the theme of a *false* maturity which

must be displaced by its true alternative in a dialectical pattern characteristic of the novel ("He had never known a normal boyhood. From the age of ten he had been doing a man's work"). The story of apprenticeship is also set in motion in the opening section:

[Mick had] plans for learning a trade and dreams of a life in Sydney in which Agnes played an important part. He was ambitious. He wanted to do something, be somebody. But it was all very misty in his mind. (3)

Mick is ignorant of his true vocation; indeed a false vocation is offered as his father wants to take him to Sydney as a boxer, a career he later pursues. The theme of ambition is also central. Mick's story, in Suleiman's terms a *positive exemplary apprenticeship*, is already being set up for contrast with Tony Grayson's negative exemplary apprenticeship: negative ambition or self-interest is opposed to positive ambition, that is, serving the interests of the workers, the Party, "the people as a whole of course" (230). The dominant motif in the characterisation of Tony is careerism which, in the communist glossary, belongs with the political category of opportunism or, in Lenin's terms, "adapting the Labor Movement to the interests of the bourgeoisie".<sup>27</sup> This is the course of Tony's negative apprenticeship through communism and unionism to Labor and anti-communism.

The *Bildungsroman* theme of ignorance of self is present in *Time of Conflict*, but only modestly because the "thesis" is more interested in ignorance of an objective truth. As Suleiman suggests the two stories are parallel. Ignorance of self motivates the narrative but less as a quest for Mick to "find" himself than for him to make something of himself, make something of who he already is. Thus his communism also comes to mean a return home. From the beginning he shows "determined self-possession" (22). In the structures of the *roman à thèse*, this self-possession must be subordinated or fused to possession of the truth. Only then will Mick "be somebody". The doctrine, communism, is thus equated with the *understanding* needed to turn his unformed sympathies into knowledge and his self-possession into a political category, class-consciousness.

The transformation from passivity to action which Suleiman remarks is overtly thematised in *Time of Conflict* with a peculiarly communist inflection. As she suggests, the possession of the doctrine is a prelude to group action, not just the group of communists figured in the novel but the working class itself, or "the people", whose actions are prefigured throughout. Passivity is one way of representing the condition of the working class before class-consciousness. This is the story of Mick's father reinforced by the novel's initial rural setting — for these workers are not (not yet) a working class. The story is repeated in some of the unemployed Mick later meets (148) and in Dai Jenkins, Lew's father, "an embittered

man" disillusioned by union leaders, the Labor Party, the "boneheads" (94-95). George Anderson's experience of bosses and government have left him cynical and self-pitying: "he believed in nothing, in nobody" (8); "'It's the system, Mick, that's licked me in the end.... You can't toss the system'" (20). The betrayal that lands them in prison is merely the last in a (redundant) series of confrontations between George and "the system" in which he can only lose and for which he can only feel *guilty*. For Mick it is the first in a series, the first of the trials he must undergo in the process of turning passivity or negative action into purposeful action in a struggle which he can only win and which is figured in part in terms of absolution from guilt.

Does *Time of Conflict* also foreground the trial of interpretation? We would expect so given Suleiman's argument and the theoretical burden of communist doctrine. But the trial of interpretation is present only in a weak form, as what we could perhaps call the trial of *recognition*. Mick is rarely shown thinking about Marxist propositions or responding emotionally, sensuously, to an idea. Despite the reading of which we are told — "he devoured books because of his passion to understand life and society" (182) — the characteristic mode of apprehension is a gradual coming into consciousness rather than devouring or being devoured: "Mick did not understand everything Lew said but quite naturally he felt sympathy for his ideas" (92); "The ideas of communism were settling deeply into Mick's mind" (128). Communism as the sheer recognition of a true description of experience belongs to the same code as Mick's ordinariness.

Earlier I suggested some of the larger historical shifts behind this kind of emphasis rather than the "erotics of conversion" in post-war communist fiction. The issue is also a narrative problem or the narrativisation of a political problem. Communism cannot be shown as the product of or figured as mere *experience* otherwise the difference that communist doctrine makes could scarcely be represented. Experience alone is just as likely to signify passivity, despair or the inability to think beyond Labor or unionism. Nor, from what I have called the long historical perspective, can its appeal be shown simply as *emotional* or spontaneous: politically this is equivalent to a form of anarchism,<sup>28</sup> the super-revolutionary views of Trotskyism, or the "older" radicalism expressed in *Time of Conflict* by Bert Leslie, for example, "who made a fetish of action" (163). Finally, the appeal of communism cannot be merely *intellectual* for it is not mere philosophising, not just ideas. Tony's fate, for instance, is prefigured in the revelation that he did "not get any strong emotional satisfaction out of [his move towards communism]; it was entirely an intellectual conclusion" (130). The accession to communism must involve all three capacities — experience, emotion, intellect — and then be something else again.

The language of vision is no longer available as a mode of resolution for these different capacities. There is no sudden moment of conversion for Mick, only the formalities of becoming a Party member. Instead, the higher resolution is figured in terms of *discipline* or *organisation*: "'We won't get too far without discipline,' [Mick] added.... [Bert] would never have guessed that Mick would come on so quickly politically" (182). Given which it is no wonder that we are a long way from the erotics of the earlier texts. It is in the realm of discipline (order, consciousness) that doctrine becomes embodied knowledge/recognition, and emotion and experience become purposeful as a "life in accordance with the truth". Experience, in short, becomes history. The heroism, natural necessity and theoretical completeness of communism are to be recognised as experience re-organised on a higher plane.

The terms I have been emphasising in describing the novel's representation of communism, whether as history, theory or politics, also suggest themselves as a description of the values of the narration: discipline, recognition, experience, consciousness, plain speaking. The narration assumes agreement between writer and reader as to what constitutes experience and the kinds of discipline that the serious tasks of writing demand. These tasks are at once modest and momentous: to make recognisable, to make clear, to state plainly. The discipline of the text — its suppression of writerliness — is also disciplinary, constraining the reader's desire for "excess". The style aims to be "matter of fact", to borrow one of Waten's own terms of praise (another is "stern realism").<sup>29</sup> What better style after all to establish the fact, the sheer matter-of-factness, of the revolutionary course of history? As Mick puts it, with vernacular conviction, "In the natural process of history communism'll replace capitalism" (230).

This sense of communist doctrine being "merely" an elaboration of experience and sympathy — being knowledge and maturity rather than sheer ideology — might not after all be too far from Suleiman's definition of the trial of interpretation, in particular her point that the trial manifests knowledge already acquired. Mick Anderson acts on communist principles more often than not even before he is a communist. His experiences do lead to the "new" knowledge communism provides, but equally we could say that the increasing level of consciousness that is revealed *as* communism is rather a progressive manifestation of knowledge already possessed. This is a tension in the novel's own argument, a tension that it needs rhetorically: communism as something altogether new, different in kind not just degree, and communism as the mere evolution of working-class experience. This tension is mapped out through the trials our hero must face.

First, the reformatory. Mick learns a good deal here about institutions and how to survive them, but more important is a trial of interpretation which emerges by way of contrast with a "false" trial, a mere trial of strength. He is beaten up unfairly by prefects and by an Instructor; but his boxing prowess also offers him the chance to become a prefect, to make somebody of himself, to make it in this system. He refuses this "on some principle ... acquired from his father" (45) thus passing one test. He also refuses the false trial (a return fight), seeing its "futility" (51), thus passing another test. This understanding is contrasted implicitly with the Instructor's sense of boxing as "a way to redemption ... honesty and manliness" (43). In another of the novel's sets of binaries, the notions of redemption, discipline, fighting and manliness all subsequently have their positive, substitutive communist meanings. There is also an implicit contrast between Mick and the other prisoners whose fighting is symptomatic of their fate: the more they fight the more they become victims of the system. Finally, it is hard to resist the link between the reformatory and *reformism*: the reformatory does not change anyone just as reformism does not change anything for the better. Aiming to ameliorate the system they only aid its perpetuation. If the analogy sounds far-fetched, it is clearly not an accident that the Superintendent is described as a reformer with some "rather daring ideas" (25). But it is precisely his system of self-government at the Home that is responsible for the worst injustices Mick suffers. His good intentions conceal moral cowardice.

Second, boxing. Mick's two periods as a boxer provide the same sort of trial of interpretation, bringing to full consciousness what he "knows" about the boxing game (this time knowledge inherited from his mother). Together they represent the major trial in the novel. Again, both end in a false trial of strength. The first is a fight Mick wins which gives him a shot at the title; but the sight of his defeated opponent leads him to quit and return to Sydney. His uneasy thoughts about boxing lead to thoughts about his mother, then Australia, then Agnes, "the symbol of that better life he had dreamt of ... the prospect of that new life, always obscure, that beckoned to him" (76). The second trial is a fight Mick could win routinely, against a past champ returning to the ring only to feed his wife and four kids. But he refuses to deliver the knock-out punch and this time quits for good. The interpretation is not spelt out, not theorised at all, but at just this moment the question of joining the Communist Party returns. Mick does not join immediately but does become involved in the unemployed movement. His next fights are the anti-eviction struggles.

Boxing is a happy choice for Waten in a novel that, as Suleiman says of her genre, "thrives on ideological polarisation, which becomes both a fundamental theme and an organising principle" (69). The boxing business, as Waten shows it, works like the reformatory as a relatively self-contained microsystem of capitalism.

The harder the workers work the better the bosses do, and the ultimate logic is that the workers fight among themselves, fight to kill each other (hence the counter logic of Mick's last fight which he manages to a draw). Boxing offers a "new life" to the boxers, the "battlers", offers indeed to make them "somebody" ("He was on stage; he was a somebody again", 102). But the mentality of the boxer, like the pre-communist worker, is fatalistic: "I used to think every fellow who went into the ring was a fatalist" (141).

The central sections of the novel are organised precisely around unfolding the "hidden" parallels between boxing and capitalism, and then the hidden oppositions between boxing and communism as the latter takes over from the former the meanings of "being somebody" and "fighting for a new life". Thus the two phases of Mick's boxing career, reflecting this structure. The contrasts are reinforced by the story of Terry McMahon. With communist George Bright, he is one of the seamen who helps Mick stow away. But working as the novel so often does through contrasting pairs, while Bright stays bright Terry turns up next as a boxing manager for Mick, eventually a manager just like all the rest. Lew observes, "It's inevitable he should go that way in this system," (108); or as Dai Jenkins puts it, "Terry's decided to emancipate himself before the revolution" (95). There is an irony here at Dai's own expense, one of the novel's many repetitions: Lew comments that his father thinks the greyhounds are going to "emancipate" him (97). False emancipation is opposed to true. Terry's story is also redundant in relation to Tony's, another telling of the story of personal ambition and its inevitable end in this system.

Boxing also works in the structure of initiation which underlies the *Bildungsroman*. Mick loses his identity the moment he signs on as a boxer: he gives a false name which becomes his ring name. He only recovers his true name in the Party, and only completely when he is arrested during the anti-eviction struggles. The process of initiation then is a kind of death and rebirth (perhaps, with his trip to New Zealand, even a descent into the underworld). It acts as an initiation into a collective and a process of transformation from passivity to action undertaken by the group, the Party or working class. It is in one sense a final ("true") loss of self, of individualism, contrasted with Tony's increasing individualism and opportunism. To mark the passage of his apprenticeship and maturing, the second term of imprisonment is paralleled to the first: "Then he had felt shame but now he did not feel any shame at all" (218). Further, Mick is contrasted to Tuttle, one of his old companions from the reformatory:

Mick went back to reading a tattered copy of *David Copperfield*, a present to the prison library from a City Mission. But after several pages he gave it up. The image of the embattled, savage Tuttle stood before his eyes. Inexorably he would be crushed; there was nothing else possible. Mick was suddenly glad he was a communist; vista beyond vista of hope stretched out before him. (223)

This contrast is the very theme of the novel and Mick's interpretation is a sign that he has passed his trials. (The actual criminal trials, by contrast, only underline the meaning of these "true" trials.) Mick's maturing is essentially his political maturing — so that communism is as natural as growing up — and when he is released from prison he finds the Party too has "matured"; that is, for the keyed-in reader, it has evolved from its early sectarianism to the united front policy: "The party had grown and become more mature" says Harry Timmins (227).

Mick's third trial is to do with sexual relations. After being separated from Agnes and beginning as a boxer Mick becomes involved with three women: an unnamed prostitute; Biddy, his landlady in Newcastle; and Queenie, the owner of a sly grog joint. These city women almost without names (Biddy, closest to a name, is the most sympathetic) are associated with sensuality, guilt, loneliness and dissoluteness, contrasted at each point with Agnes in a characteristic structure of the *Bildungsroman*.<sup>30</sup> In a romance pattern, desire is split into sensuality (self-directed, entrapping, degrading) and sentiment (other-directed, liberating, uplifting). Mick just "escapes" each time, interpreting or intuiting the dangers and false promises, and each time he meets communism again soon after. What is interesting is the relative absence of any moral critique, for the disapproval of Mick's actions is to be understood only in terms of his apprenticeship, his true vocation. Agnes too just escapes, in her case the *merely* sentimental plot to which she seems doomed by her upbringing: "Would Agnes always belong by instinct to the middle class, only longing for a peaceful, snug, domestic life?" (236). She remains nevertheless a sentimental rather than a sensuous object of desire, almost reversing the earlier fiction's valuation of desire against sentiment. She becomes "more beautiful than the women in romantic novels" (238). She too matures, but their sexual relationship, although briefly present, is subordinate to her becoming a worthy spiritual companion and in her own right a true interpreter. The novel is aware of its dangerous proximity to the genres of sentimental romance and attempts to police the boundaries between the sentimental and the (truly) popular. More than once different kinds of popular entertainment are contrasted and the less "respectable" forms preferred. In an interesting piece of intertextual framing Dame Clara Butt, "God Shall Wipe Away All Tears" and Rudolph Valentino are juxtaposed to their disadvantage with Tom Mix, "Tessy Stop Teasing Me" and the latest dance hits (13-14).

In another romantic twist, another of the novel's many doublings, the relationship between Mick and Agnes is also interrupted twice: after their first declaration of love when Mick is arrested for sheep-stealing; and after their second declaration of love when he is arrested for communist actions. Mick of course

cannot rediscover Agnes until he is a communist and he cannot live happily ever after with her until his second release from prison and return to Wagga — that is, until the complete restitution of his old identity which is now a new identity cleared of all guilt and ambiguity. Again *Time of Conflict* recalls Clark's description of the prototypical Stalinist novel: "The hero's love life is not valuable in itself; it serves only to aid him in fulfilling his tasks and in attaining 'consciousness'.... When the hero does 'get the girl,' he cannot get her as an erotic object; she must be his spiritual companion and a means of adding to the new generation of the 'family'".<sup>31</sup> And indeed family is the issue at the end of *Time of Conflict*. In an otherwise pointless exchange between Lew and Mick in its final pages, the two men's children are enumerated — and there is a serious joke about Mick's eldest boy becoming a revolutionary rather than a boxer.

### **Folk Tales, History and the Here and Now**

The arguments of Suleiman and Clark lead to a consideration of the allegorical or mythic genres which we find working within and against *Time of Conflict*'s realist conventions. As suggested, the *realism* of the novel depends upon its repetition of patterns from these non-realist genres. Suleiman draws on the actantial system of Greimas, itself based on Propp's analysis of the folk tale, in order to define the paradigmatic structure of the *roman à thèse*. In a positive exemplary apprenticeship, she argues, "subject, object, and receiver are syncretised in a single character, who is the hero".<sup>32</sup> The syncretisation of these first three actantial categories might seem to cast doubt on the usefulness of applying the system at all, suggesting criticisms of the kind Jonathan Culler has made of the Greimasian project.<sup>33</sup> Where it can be useful, as Suleiman points out, is precisely in its reductiveness, its ability to suggest the mutual redundancy and "inevitability" of certain narrative functions. If we assume that the system works best for the non-realist — mythic, allegorical, didactic — genres, then the degree to which it is operable for *Time of Conflict*, the degree to which in Culler's terms the distribution of actantial categories locates a thematic problem, will tell us something about the novel's own grammar.

Further, I think we can disaggregate Suleiman's syncretisation of subject-object-receiver. Although in one sense this syncretisation operates at the level of the *Bildungsroman*, the doctrinal intertext of the *roman à thèse* gives each category a double function. Thus the "object" is both the subject's true self and the true doctrine; it is therefore "occupied by two actors, one animate and one abstract" (80). This abstract dimension might recall the actantial schema for Marxism proposed by Greimas himself:

Subject ..... man

Object .....	<i>classless society</i>
Sender .....	<i>history</i>
Receiver .....	<i>mankind</i>
Opponent .....	<i>bourgeois class</i>
Helper .....	<i>working class</i> <sup>34</sup>

In Greimas's distribution subject and receiver are also linked but as slightly different theoretical categories and actors in history (*homme, humanité*).<sup>35</sup> We can keep the arbitrariness of Greimas's system at bay just long enough for it to make sense of the distribution of characters, and more, in Waten's novel.

At the simplest level Mick Anderson is *subject*. His individual ordinariness allows (indeed requires) a generalisation to the more abstract level of "mankind" or "class"; and in the ordinary language of the novel it does so, as it were, without the necessity for abstraction. The narrative's *object* can be defined in similar dual terms from the individual and ethical to the doctrinal or historical — from being "somebody", making something of life, to making a *new* life, a classless society. Gaining Agnes, as Suleiman's analysis would suggest, is only a secondary object subordinate to Mick's attainment of self-possession/class-consciousness. Thus her mere sentimentality is sufficient — an erotic object of desire would be excessive — and she must be absent for the whole course of Mick's "conversion". Mick is the *receiver* too, his growing knowledge directed at each point to the larger category of the collective, "mankind". Here, as elsewhere, the narrative proceeds from an initial parallelism between individual and doctrinal frames, through a series of substitutions, to the resolution of the two dimensions on a "higher" plane, as History. The narrative's ongoingness is generated by this process such that no personal resolution for Mick can be a final resolution for the narrative or its history. The novel ends on just such a moment: the resolution of one story, the exorcism of Tony, balanced against the mere beginning of another, the future of mankind.

The actantial categories of *sender*, *helper* and *opponent* sort out the specific details of the novel's characterisations:

The archetypal donor [sender] is a paternal figure. Possessing a knowledge similar, if not identical, to the one sought by the hero, the paternal figure functions as donor and/or helper: he communicates what he knows, helps the hero surmount his trials.... What is striking is that the father-donor, if he is present, is rarely the hero's biological father. He is, rather, a spiritual, elective father, whom the hero chooses as his own. (80-81)

While occupying the structural position of the sender or donor, the father in this schema is likely to act as an opponent or pseudo-sender. George Anderson is both a true and false sender. To refer to the Marxist actants Greimas suggests, it is in his role as "history"/"the working class" — as the embodiment of the workers' "pre-conscious" history — that he can operate as sender, bequeathing to Mick his

intuitive sympathies for the working people and against the system. Thus the principle which leads Mick to reject the offer of being a prefect. On the other hand his aspirations are bourgeois and "anti-historical", fatalist in a word, so he also bequeaths to Mick his false career as a boxer, sending the hero *into* the system (the reformatory, boxing). Mick's mother, by contrast, is an unambiguously positive sender and helper.<sup>36</sup> Agnes too: despite Mick's doubts she functions only as a figure of his "urge for heroic action" and a new life.

Mick's elective father is Harry Timmins, or rather the sequence Harry-George-Lew, those figures who combine the experience of the working class with the theoretical knowledge of its class aspirations and the discipline to effect them. Their characterisations mark them as such: although only three years Mick's senior, Harry is characterised by his older demeanour; George is older, over thirty, and the union delegate on the ship where his credentials are established in political discussion (62-63); Lew is possibly younger than Mick, but his possession of experience-knowledge is marked by his appearance — "short, narrow shouldered and slightly stooped ... a grey face, an earnest expression" (90). Literature and communist doctrine together, via citations in the narrative, also play the roles of sender and helper. As Suleiman suggests, the doctrine is paradoxically both object and helper for "in the *roman à thèse*, one always and only discovers what was already known" (84). The redundancies between the characterisations (and intertexts) help create that sense in the novel of stories often-told and truths that need only be recognised. The intrusive narrator has the further redundant role of *telling* the reader what need only be recognised.

The position of opponent is occupied by Terry, Tony, Agnes's father, and the "other" women. What they share is their implication in the bourgeois capitalist system. Mr Duffy is the simplest case, the petit-bourgeois manager of a grocery store and an office bearer in the Returned Soldiers' League and Masonic Lodge. Queenie, like Terry, is also a false helper, self-seeking and careerist, offering what can only turn Mick into a victim. Tony is the most complex case. What the actantial system demonstrates is that this is not interesting as a complexity of personality, for his personality is represented unambiguously even if its development from latent to manifest careerism takes some time. Indeed in actantial terms Tony is unambiguously a *true* helper in so far as he offers a doctrine to Mick that does not depend on his personality for its validity; and he is unambiguously a false helper in so far as his personality seems to offer a model for Mick to emulate. Hence the recurrent scrutiny in the novel of Tony's eloquence, his most attractive, powerful and dangerous quality, which is compared more than once to the plain speaking of Lew or the purposeful speech that Mick acquires. Tony becomes a true opponent when he

denounces the Soviet Union and joins the Labor Party. The apparent ambiguity of his genuine friendship and sympathy with Mick only serves to highlight the doctrinal point, the "truth" that was always present, that if you are not serving the interest of the working class you are serving the interests of capitalism.

The actantial structure enables us to see how one of the aims of *Time of Conflict* is indeed *simplicity* or at least that its complexity and scope must be managed without disturbing the fundamental simplicity of the structure described. Thus its complexity depends upon the multiplication of redundant, parallel and opposed, characters, episodes and discourses. The characters' places in the actantial system are determined almost exhaustively by their position on the axes worker-bourgeois or communist-capitalist. But the positions cannot be assigned only by political *argument*; they need to fall "naturally" and familiarly into place. The actantial system thus underlines the ways in which, in this particular novel and broadly in the *roman à thèse*, the raising of folk or mythic structures beneath a realist prosaic-ness is to the point both narratively and politically.<sup>37</sup> In the case of *Time of Conflict*, the point is to connect ordinariness to heroism, recognition to revelation; and to connect literariness to an "ordinary" story which is at the same time no less than a mythic history of the people. The novel must reach both above and below literature.

Suleiman describes a second structure common in the *roman à thèse*, the structure of *confrontation*, which she suggests is especially attractive to the communist novel. Both syntagmatic and actantial axes are different from those in the *Bildungsroman* in an account much closer to Greimas's version of Marxism. Rather than an exemplary apprenticeship we have an *antagonistic hero* who fights "for truth, justice, freedom, or his fatherland — in a word, for transcendental and absolute values" (103). In the structure of confrontation the hero espouses true values from the outset; his adherence to these values does not change in the course of the confrontation (there is no "becoming" as in the *Bildungsroman*); he represents a group that fights for these values; and his individual destiny merges with a collective destiny. He is the conscious representative of the group, not simply typical of "hidden" historical forces in the socialist realist sense. Here the narrative stake is not the "internal evolution of the protagonist, but the external evolution of the conflict" (112), one consequence of which is that these narratives must remain open-ended. Triumph in any particular confrontation only prefigures future struggles.

The structure of confrontation helps us "complete" the narrative of *Time of Conflict*. In one sense Mick's apprenticeship is concluded less than two-thirds of the way through the novel when he joins the Communist Party, although the *Bildungsroman* requires his second jail sentence and reunion with Agnes. In either

case, though, we see the structure of confrontation taking over from the structure of apprenticeship: in the anti-eviction fights, the second prison term, anti-fascism, union struggles against Tony, and so on to the end. The actantial slots can be redistributed in a way that clarifies Tony's role as anti-subject and anti-helper and the role of communism as the historical heir of working-class experience.

Confrontation dominates the last quarter of the novel, especially its fourth and final section. Perhaps this is why the novel goes beyond the more traditional three-part structure, and why the final section in some way feels supplementary. Mick's involvement in the Spanish war and the Second World War are recounted in only a few sentences, for the matter that remains to be completed in this final section is the confrontation with Tony. At the start of Part 4, after his experiences in Spain, Mick longs "for the first time ... to become a leading member of his movement" (239). Thus, for the first time, he fully occupies the slot of antagonistic hero in the confrontation with Tony who is already a leading communist union official. The novel's final section is structured around a series of confrontations between the two. As Suleiman suggests, the stakes are essentially performative rather than cognitive. Tony loses in that he must forego his leadership of history; he becomes less "free", he fears political obsolescence, and his last thought in the novel is to wonder whether communism was "historically inevitable after all" (280). Tony is consigned to the past, but the novel's conclusion is surprisingly low-key, at least at the level of story, ending as it does with Mick's comment to Lew, "Our best days are ahead of us. Not behind us, like Tony's". The structure of confrontation, we might say, keeps open the narrative of history *through* the closure that the structure of apprenticeship would otherwise entail.

Suleiman's discussion of the *roman à thèse* structures and their alignment with allegorical and mythic genres recalls again Clark's discussion of the Soviet novel. Clark highlights the Soviet novel's "rite of passage" structure, its parallels with traditional tales, and its recurrent dialectic around the poles of spontaneity and consciousness. We do not need to posit any direct influence of the Soviet novel on Australian communist writers, even less a strictly-applied policy-weighted socialist realism determining the forms of local communist fiction. Australian writers had their own agenda and a local cultural economy in which to intervene. In fact the parallels between Soviet and Australian fiction become all the more interesting if we free ourselves from such a proposition and see any similarities as produced relatively independently by a similar set of problematics, as communism is subjected to the constraints of novelistic discourse. Changes in Soviet literature were likely to be registered as accretions rather than fundamental shifts (that is, after the large-scale shift from pre- to post-socialist realist modes). Therefore we can turn to Clark's

analysis of the prototypical plot of the "high Stalinist" novel of the thirties and forties without being too disturbed about changes in Soviet literary politics post-war. Indeed her own argument suggests that this remained a fundamental plot structure against which variations were registered.

The prototypical plot is a rite of passage in which a "hero sets out consciously to achieve his goal, which involves *social integration* and *collective* rather than *individual* identity for himself". The hero is "assisted in his quest by an older and more 'conscious' figure who has made just such a successful quest before him"; he "is presented with some task in the public sphere ... against formidable obstacles"; and "as he meets each test, he gradually achieves the required degree of self-mastery and impersonality to be initiated" (167-68). The *Bildungsroman* pattern of a quest for true vocation is underscored by the older folk pattern of the initiation. The hero's conscious purpose and his "task in the public sphere" in turn recall Suleiman's structure of confrontation.

Mick does not set out consciously towards his goal, perhaps because in the Australian case, in this *pre-socialist* society, the (his)story of evolution from "spontaneity" to consciousness still needs to be told. Nevertheless *Time of Conflict* repeats many of the patterns Clark describes, more consistently than the merely casual parallels that might be produced by such traditional literary motifs as the quest or rite of passage. First, the three part initiation structure comprising the hero's separation from his habitual environment; his transition and instruction in the law; and the final rite of incorporation, which Clark suggests is not a major *event* but more of symbolic significance in that it changes the life of the hero forever — something just like Mick's joining the Party, at once routine and momentous. Initiation involves taking the hero away from the mother- or female-dominated world, as it does in *Time of Conflict*, and his trial is in part a test of *manliness*. As inscribed in the novel such a pattern is essentially sentimental and pastoral. That Waten repeats this pattern is significant, not least because of his strong writing of women in previous fiction. It is the sense of typicality and historical necessity in post-war communism and nationalism that makes the difference, determining, in contrast to the female-centredness of the pre-war communist novel, that the exemplary hero as the bearer of history be male. The unusual success of *Bobbin Up* is in partly proving otherwise.

The second parallel is in the pattern of death and rebirth in the rite of passage from individual person to impersonal collective. Underscoring the structure of apprenticeship in *Time of Conflict*, this folk pattern is summoned through Mick's name change, his voyage across the sea, and his descent into the underworld of petty criminals, alcoholics and temptresses. In modulating between the two structures the

narrative folds together its two arguments, the continuity of identity between "people" and communist and the discontinuity between communism and all that precedes it. Mick's growth in *personal* stature, his new "personal and intellectual authority" (275), is exactly his commitment to the collective, that is, to the *impersonal* inevitability of history. Third, in terms of characterisation, Clark's account of the conventional epithets used to describe the "elders" in the Soviet novel — "earnest", "tired, gray, wasted and stooped" — are exactly those we have already met in Waten's communists, Harry and Lew. Such epithets mark their accession to consciousness and act as figures for the novel's own readability, for *its* experience and earnestness. As in the Soviet novel too, the "villain" is represented in terms of psychological motivations, with a degree of attention given to the inner self which is not given to the positive hero. The hero must show wholeness; the villain on the other hand is divided between inner and outer as in the case of Tony's hidden ambition.

Clark's analysis of the Soviet novels in terms of a fundamental dialectic between spontaneity and consciousness is echoed in Mick Anderson's development from physical strength and powerful but unformed sympathies to the discipline and certitude of the communist. In the Soviet novel — resembling nothing so much as the medieval Corpus Christi plays — no incident is unique, "nor is its significance confined to the action of the novel" (175). For *Time of Conflict* too, "each occurrence either echoes or prefigures a greater event". These are the attributes defined above as redundancy, typicality and the doctrinal intertext which together enable us to read Harry's initial appearance as prefiguring Mick's story which in turn merely prefigures the transformation of the whole class and whole society/nation. At each step there is a synecdochal relationship between story and History. Perhaps in *Time of Conflict* we have only a weak version of what Clark describes because the categories of nationalism leak into the doctrinal intertext and blur its edges. The one myth cannot contain the whole of society in quite the Soviet way. On the other hand, one of the novel's arguments is to show precisely the redundancy of nationalism and communism in relation to each other.

We could continue to factor in post-war developments in the Soviet novel: Clark notes the appearance of less heroic heroes, more attention to the hero's cultural attributes, and a post-1956 theme of struggle against *careerists*.<sup>38</sup> However, as suggested, the point is not to trace detailed lines of influence but to remark on the similar structural effects, on novels written in different times and different places, of telling *the same kind of story*. The parallels, in other words, describe the effects of trying simultaneously to narrativise "History" and the "here and now"; making the individual *bildung* bear what is, at least in relation to the novel, a mythic structure,

the Marxist narrative of history; and doing so within what remains an aesthetic of realism, "realist" in a peculiarly overdetermined sense of the word referring all at once to a literary tradition, a set of political imperatives and a sense of "ordinary experience" itself overflowing with literary and political investments.

### **Tradition, Modernity, Revolution**

In a passage from *Time of Conflict* quoted earlier Mick Anderson is described reading *David Copperfield* as he contrasts his fate with that of the Dickensian-named Tuttle. The reference reminds us that communism is not the only intertextual device in the novel. The *Bildungsroman* itself is explicitly offered to the reader as an appropriate interpretive frame and is the principal stake in the novel's fictional contract with the reader. The appropriation of this deep nineteenth-century European tradition for a contemporary Australian communist novel is also exactly what the communist politics and aesthetics of the period demanded. *Time of Conflict* asks to be read for its *roman* and not just *à thèse*. More than any previous ABS publication except perhaps Waten's own *The Unbending*, it defined the mode by which the "marginal" ABS hoped to address the Australian literary mainstream, to earn its respect, to make it change. Waten's novel aspires to the status of a book distinctly for worker readers and for the movement, which as we have seen means a particular disciplining of its literary aspirations. But it is no less a political imperative for the novel to maximise its respectability as a work of art in order to maximise the respectability of its marginal politics. Soviet literature offered a precedent where "for the first time in history the gap between art and the people ... disappeared and at the same time the gap between the writer and the people disappeared too".<sup>39</sup> The *Bildungsroman* tradition becomes irresistible, both as the familiar vehicle for the story of an ordinary hero and as a mainstream of the great realist tradition.

There are some particular reasons for considering Judah Waten as a writer within the *Bildungsroman*. Dickens is a frequent reference point in *The Unbending* and *Time of Conflict* (the name of Agnes too might be derived from *David Copperfield*). Dickens was generally singled out by communist critics as representing the socially-critical wing of English realism. Waten could also read *Robinson Crusoe* as a version of the *Bildungsroman*.<sup>40</sup> Further, he aligned himself with the European, especially the French tradition. He once defined his ideal novel as one which would "describe the revolutionary mind in a tranquil country like Australia" and found his model in Flaubert: "I would like my novel with the revolutionary in the centre to be truly compassionate and human like Flaubert's *Sentimental Education*, one of the most successful political novels ever written".<sup>41</sup> Russian and Soviet literature could also have a special significance for Waten, as

himself "Russian" and communist, and it was the *continuities* between the nineteenth and twentieth-century literatures that most attracted his interest.<sup>42</sup> In a way that was not available to most of his communist contemporaries, Waten was able to locate himself as heir to multiple European realist traditions each of which held forth the *Bildungsroman* as a deep, natural structure.

What does *Time of Conflict* do with and within the *Bildungsroman* tradition? A standard literary analysis of the *Bildungsroman* describes the "typical plot":

A child of some sensibility grows up in the country or in a provincial town, where he finds constraints, social and intellectual, placed upon the free imagination. His family, especially his father, proves doggedly hostile to his creative instincts ... antagonistic to his ambitions, and quite impervious to the new ideas he has gained from unprescribed reading. He ... leaves the repressive atmosphere of home (and also the relative innocence), to make his way independently in the city.... There his real "education" begins, not only his preparation for a career but also — and often more importantly — his direct experience of urban life. The latter involves at least two love affairs or sexual encounters, one debasing, one exalting, and demands that in this respect and others the hero reappraise his values. By the time he has decided, after painful soul-searching, the sort of accommodation to the modern world he can honestly make, he has left his adolescence behind and entered upon maturity. His initiation complete, he may then visit his old home, to demonstrate by his presence the degree of his success or the wisdom of his choice.<sup>43</sup>

It is significant that *Time of Conflict* follows this classical structure rather than more recent, less "optimistic" variations; for the optimistic trajectory of the narrative is one of things Waten needs the tradition for. We can note his novel's close approximation to the classical structure while reading off its differences as a belated, Australian, communist example. The "child of sensibility" is present but in the specific form of the child of working-class sympathies. The "constrained imagination" is present in Mick's youthful urge for heroic action, the unhelpful father, and unprescribed reading. But significantly the major constraints are external to the (relatively innocent) family in the repressive system rather than the repressive home. Emancipation thus takes on a range of meanings beyond the "free imagination". Like the classical *Bildungsroman* hero Mick makes his way independently in the city where his "real education" begins, preparing him for his real career. Finally, he achieves his "accommodation to the modern world" and can return home. In *Time of Conflict*, though, this accommodation must be both the same and different: a return to the pre-modern world of rural community and an "accommodation" to the future world of communism, the "modern world" in quite another sense.

The implied reader of *Time of Conflict* is required to appreciate both the degree of Waten's reprise of the tradition and his appropriation of it for "another story". In fact the novel found its readers where it sought them among communists and unionists, but failed to do so, often spectacularly, in the literary press. The point

of interest as regards the former is not their political predisposition towards the novel, but rather the terms on which it is read and criticised and the places in which it was thought appropriate to review the book: *Communist Review*, *Tribune*, the Queensland and Melbourne *Guardians*, the *Building Worker*, the *Seaman's Journal* and *Common Cause* (the Miners' Federation journal).<sup>44</sup> In the reading formation thus described, the novel is read against the criteria of historical fidelity, its presentation of a working-class/revolutionary hero, its objectivity and optimism, its adequacy to communism, the *knowledge* it imparts, and its writing *for* the working class. Historical fidelity, in fact, is too weak a term to suggest the demands the book's communist and worker critics place on it. At stake is rather the book's ability to represent "our time", to show history as epochal, the epoch of communism as "the most significant organisation in contemporary history" (*Tribune*).

In short, the novel is read "correctly" against the categories of History *before* those of fiction, and it is sometimes found wanting. Some brief quotations can show this activity of a distinct (but not discrete) reading formation constituted interdiscursively between political and aesthetic categories, with its own hierarchy of values fully attuned to the task the novel sets itself and to its *newness*: "The wide range of the book shows the class struggle of the times in all its naked and often bloodied reality"; "Where the masses are the makers of history, there are thousands of heroes"; "a prototype of the militant worker who shapes the strength and conscience of our working-class movement, the hero-in-the-mass who will build the Socialist future"; "All workers should read this novel for a better knowledge of our social set-up and the great part the Australian working class has played"; "Katharine Susannah Prichard, Frank Hardy, Dorothy Hewitt (sic) and others have, of course, created Communist characters, but Judah Waten does much more than that. The Communist Party itself is the real hero of *Time of Conflict*"; "For the first time in Australian literature, [Waten] has successfully centred a novel around the theme which has defeated many talented overseas writers: the making of a Communist"; "The very ordinariness of his name points to the secret of his strength and dynamism. His is the heroism of the working people from whom he springs, given power and direction by the logic and humanism of Communism"; "Mick Anderson's development as a revolutionary hero after he joins the Party is restricted by the fact that the novel does not adequately portray the leap in political and ideological maturity that the Party itself took in this period"; "It has its weaknesses but it will play a big part in the task of developing working class understanding".<sup>45</sup>

The novel receives predictably dismayed reviews in the mainstream literary press although it is sometimes treated with the respect due to a work of art, even a flawed one.<sup>46</sup> Interestingly the book's most hostile reception comes from the new,

liberal "higher journalism" of the early sixties, in *Nation* and the *Australian Book Review*: "a dreary pre-adolescent world of priggishness, envy, and non-blubbing" to the former; "a laborious novel stiffened into complete paralysis by communist dogma" to the latter.<sup>47</sup> At stake is a modernising liberalism for a new intelligentsia that had as one of its enabling conditions the privileging of literature as a category of freedom against all the "ideologies" it could identify — communist, nationalist, conservative or commercial. In a sense the novel finds its target here too in offending a group that it prefigures in Tony's university and intellectual friends.<sup>48</sup>

By way of conclusion I want to read *Time of Conflict* against a more sophisticated cultural history of the *Bildungsroman*, Franco Moretti's *The Way of the World*. Moretti distinguishes between the classical and what we might call the continental *Bildungsroman*: Goethe or Austen against Stendhal, Balzac, Flaubert. He further distinguishes a distinct tradition of the English *Bildungsroman*, from *Tom Jones* through Dickens to *Daniel Deronda*. The classical mode emphasises narrative closure, managing individual formation such that identity and social integration are synthesised: youth must give way to maturity, "happiness" is posited as the highest value even at the cost of "freedom".<sup>49</sup> The later continental *Bildungsroman*, by contrast, stresses openness, change, an *opposition* between the individual and society, and a youth that can only be betrayed. As Moretti comments, "the two models express opposite attitudes towards modernity". The classical *Bildungsroman* "narrates how the French Revolution could have been avoided" (64).

*Time of Conflict* represents a belated return to the patterns of the classical *Bildungsroman*. Identity in the novel is gained only through social integration, here in the form of integration into the collective of the Party. If this seems too sectional a "society", the correct understanding of the novel, as we have seen, requires us to read the Party as the working class and the Australian people (hence Mick's return home). Such a return to an older pattern is possible, in part, because of the presence of nationalism and specifically the access this tradition still allows to a largely rural sense of community.

Moretti's discussion of the English *Bildungsroman* gives us a more elaborated argument against which to read *Time of Conflict*. His analysis echoes my earlier formulation of the ambivalent aspirations of Waten's novel. The genre's "unique interest for the history of culture" is its attempt "to combine 'democratic' and 'narrative' values: 'protagonism' and 'antiheroism'" (192). If we add "revolutionary values" to the equation we arrive once more at the paradoxes which, we might say, *Time of Conflict* is designed to *contain*. Moretti argues that in the English tradition as opposed to the continental, novelistic patterns are upheld by an "older sort of framework". Writing of *Jane Eyre*, *David Copperfield*, *Great Expectations* and *Tom*

*Jones* he asks: "Could it be that deep down, these novels are fairy tales?" (185). Again we find ourselves with an account of a novelistic genre that combines "literary" and "pre-literary" categories, but not in a fashion that could easily be called dialogic.

Moretti discovers in the English *Bildungsroman* "extreme paradigmatic oppositions", ultimately between good and evil: "fairy-tale like ... the world has meaning *only if* it is relentlessly divided into good and evil" (187). He singles out the role played by siblings or their substitutes in these polarisations, especially the sibling's demise, "an unusually definitive and taxonomic final syntagm, one that dissipates any residual ambiguity and irreversibly separates the hero and his alter ego" (186). Having set up Tony as Mick's "sibling", this is precisely the end that the last section of Waten's novel exists to produce, almost its sole point. There is indeed a sense in which *Time of Conflict* is not a political novel at all, not a novel about power or power structures, but a simple story of good and evil.

At the level of its story *Time of Conflict* works primarily in this moral realm, creating a desire for the triumph of the good and for the true doctrine that will show just how the world can be relentlessly divided into good and evil. But in contrast to the English *Bildungsroman*, it is also committed to a strong doctrinal "ethico-political universalism". Thus, between story and discourse, we see a process of double conversion: *from* the ethical and empirical, *to* political universalism, and *back again*, from History to the here and now. How, for example, are we to interpret Tony's fate? Is it a fault of personality or a political error? The point of course is that there is a reversible relation of cause and effect between the two. This doubleness is caught precisely in the notion of careerism, at once an ethical category to be understood on the level of personality (ambition), and an abstract class of action to be understood on the level of History (opportunism, reformism, revisionism). The difference between the two levels is precisely what the novel's rhetoric "conceals" with its disciplined banality and disciplinary narrator. Paradigmatically the two levels are simultaneous. Syntagmatically the novel must work to produce their simultaneity, which again is the point of Tony's final appearance. No wonder he doesn't look "happy", on one level, having just been consigned to the dustbin of History on the other!

The ethico-political theme of careerism might also be taken as a self-situating device in relation to Waten's own authorial investment in a communist career, a reflexive allegorisation of the place of this text and this author in the world. The novel, paradoxically given its political logic, speaks with an authorial voice which has a cultural authority exceeding that of its hero and his class — Waten's *authorisation* depends upon it. But the argument against bourgeois careerism that

Mick enacts allegorises, at the same time, the impersonality which the novel needs for its authority as history (and for its author as communist) thus warding off mere literariness. The text, in short, offers one sort of fictive resolution for the recurrent ambivalence in Waten's construction of a writing career, a career that is both a personal, authorial attribute and a political exemplum. Theo Moody, for one, grasped this aspect of the work in giving his review the acutely-punning title, "Red Career".<sup>50</sup> Mick Anderson is a hero "of our time" but he is also (therefore) virtually anonymous: over the course of the novel he comes to embody a public career which is both more and less than an individual achievement.

*Time of Conflict* is found largely within the *Bildungsroman* conventions Moretti describes, but inevitably never entirely within them. He remarks, for example, on the ordinariness of the English hero:

He is ... not expected to establish a moral universe that already exists, eternal and unchangeable, and even less to question that universe. His most typical function lies rather in making that world *recognisable* for any and all readers. The more the hero himself is an "anybody", better yet with a nondescript name such as "Tom Jones", the more easily will this process of identification take place. (189)

The moral universe that is here made recognisable as communism must be shown to have always already existed or at least as long as the working class has existed in history (and in the nation). But communism is also nothing if not the establishment of a new moral universe, transforming life not just in degree but in kind. It is difficult to say just which perspective predominates. Mick's ordinariness becomes not just a pre-condition for his transformation into a *hero* of our time, but paradoxically the one condition that must not be transformed. This is enacted in the inevitable scene of his return home as a communist (229-31). He is at first not recognised; then his *transformation* is recognised, in ethical terms ("You've grown into a man") and then politically ("It's a real school, the Party"). Only then, in Moretti's terms, can he "be finally recognised for what he has always been" (204). He is linked once again to the rural and the maternal: his hair is "prematurely grey, like his mother's"; she of course had "hardly changed at all". The question of guilt in relation to the father is also resolved, but the father must still die for he belongs to an earlier historical era and has bequeathed all he can. Again stressing the parallels with an earlier bourgeois literary tradition, we might say that Mick has earned the right to *inherit* ("one gets the inheritance, but actually one had it all along"<sup>51</sup>).

The series of parallelisms and binaries, redundancies and synecdoches, which characterises *Time of Conflict* can now be understood as its attempt to return revolutionary history to the realm of everyday life which is the novel's own. Here the *roman à thèse* and the narrative of History call on the *Bildungsroman* and sentimental romance. But as Moretti remarks, this novelistic realm is conventionally

anti-tragic, un-heroic and not least *anti-revolutionary*.<sup>52</sup> The novel's further task, then, is the inverse: to turn the realm of the ordinary and everyday "back" into an heroic one, but without losing any of its recognisability, its common sense. Here the *Bildungsroman*, in turn, calls on the *roman à thèse* and the allegorical or mythic genres.

But what attitude to modernity, and indeed to revolution, can the novel then sustain? *Time of Conflict* is, in one perspective, precisely about managing modernity. That of course is the "other" meaning of its title. As "post" modern in this sense the narrative must take us through the crises of modernity which, as a revolutionary historical novel and unlike some of its contemporaries, it can avoid only partly through its Australian-rural background. It must take us through the explosion of discourses and the separation of individual autonomy and social integration consequent upon the bourgeois revolution. These are forces latent in the city that Mick experiences and in the "journalists, painters, intellectuals and bohemians" (244) he meets.<sup>53</sup> James Joyce gets a special mention along with a barely-disguised John Anderson:

"One day [the Professor] showed me a book by a writer called Joyce. He said he was very good. But I didn't understand a word of it. Course I've had very little schooling.... "

"Wouldn't have made much difference if you'd had a lot", Tony said.

"Joyce is only for the select few, not the majority. He's a nihilist, and he's the voice of capitalist nihilism".

.... "Well, the Professor supports many progressive causes for the moment", Timmins said. "But in his own field he's a reactionary. He mightn't think so but he teaches the ordinary kind of capitalist university philosophy".

"But that wouldn't make him a reactionary as a whole, would it?" Stevenson asked.

"No", Timmins replied. "But you can't reject one basic part of Marxism without sooner or later falling a victim of bourgeois falsehood". (183-84)

In the face of capitalist nihilism, *Time of Conflict* wants to insist that meaning is (still) immanent and that identity and social integration can still be parts of the one trajectory. It wants to reconnect past and future — youth and maturity — so that the irruptions of modernity are contained within a trajectory of historical evolution where, as in the classical *Bildungsroman*, "events acquire meaning when they lead to *one* ending, and one only".<sup>54</sup>

Moretti finds parallels for the English and French traditions in the nature of their respective revolutions: the theme of social consensus marks the former, the theme of principles betrayed marks the latter. In *Time of Conflict*, written after a third (and "final") revolution, we see a return to the "pre-modern" structure of the English *Bildungsroman* in so far as the model of the normal individual achieving social integration can be sustained. But as inescapably post-modern in the sense suggested this structure can only be sustained by projecting the notion of social

consensus into the future and into one antagonistic section of society. This entails abandoning the valorisation of *compromise* that characterises the English tradition. The communist/working-class novel is in this sense less democratic than its middle-class model, and its mode might well be described as "uncompromising". Yet neither can the communist novel sustain the structure of an open-ended dialectic between individual and society characteristic of the French tradition, for its whole point is to announce the end of this dialectic once and for all. The Soviet revolution represents the narrative possibility of the end of modernity: the "end", in both senses, of what the previous two revolutions had set in train. The valorisation of stability produced by the first and the obsession with restlessness produced by the second are resolved into the steady inevitability of historical progress — which, despite its revolutionary dialectic, perhaps offers the least narrative interest of all. How indeed to arouse desire for the inevitable?

We might say that in *Time of Conflict* Waten wants to contain the *scope* of the French *Bildungsroman* within the structures of the classical or English mode. The novel thus offers itself as both a large-scale epochal story, the story of a generation, of the future of mankind; and as "just" the story of an ordinary bloke living in his time and place. In one dimension the novel's aspirations lead to the very limits of the novel form, to the point where it disappears into history or theory. But *Time of Conflict* might also be understood in terms of its local literary-political occasion as nothing less than a reassertion of *the novel*, calling forth all the authority of the novelistic tradition to invest the story of an individual life with full social meaning. The attempt to write the great "Australian communist novel" must be interpreted with the stress on each of the three words in the phrase. Paradoxically it is this very reassertion of the novelistic tradition, which must be a belated appropriation of the tradition against others, that turns the complexity of the novel into the simplicity of the *roman à thèse*. As with George Eliot, whose novels Moretti takes as marking the end of the English *Bildungsroman*, we might say that Waten "was tempted by the impossible, and tried to capture the essence of a new historical phase with the most significant symbolic form of the previous age".<sup>55</sup>

I have travelled a long way from *Time of Conflict* in order, I hope, to get closer to it; in order to show that in this most single-minded of novels nothing is singular after all. We have seen both the impossibility and the inevitability of its appropriation of *Bildungsroman* structures. It is a "simple" novel, even simplistic, but a complex cultural object. It is in many ways Waten's most ambitious novel but also the one for which he was virtually guaranteed the least literary credibility. We know enough of Waten's literary and political culture to know that its single-

mindedness is not the function of simple-mindedness, but an act of will, even, we might say, an historical necessity.

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- 1 Judah Waten, *Time of Conflict* (Sydney: Australasian Book Society, 1961). Further  
 2 references will appear in the text.
- 3 Ian Reid, *Fiction and the Great Depression: Australia and New Zealand 1930-1950*  
 4 (Melbourne: Edward Arnold, 1979), pp.8-9.
- 5 Jack Beasley debated whether it was critical realism or socialist realism. See "Fourth  
 Anniversary of *Power Without Glory*" (April 1954) and "Incorrect Criticism of *Power  
 Without Glory*" (April 1958), both from *Communist Review*, reprinted in his *Journal of an  
 Era: Notes from the Red Letter Days* (Earlwood, NSW: Wedgetail Press, 1988), pp.29-39.  
 Beasley's *Socialism and the Novel* (1957), reprinted in the same volume, also discusses the  
 novel. Quotations from the earliest essay, p.34.
- 6 Beasley, *The Rage for Life: The Work of Katharine Susannah Prichard* (Sydney: Current  
 Book Distributors, 1964), p.54 (my emphasis).
- 7 Beasley, *The Rage for Life*, pp.60-63. Although his judgements did not represent Party  
 policy and occasionally landed him in hot water, Beasley was the most considered of the  
 communist critics in the fifties and sixties. See his retrospective piece, "My Unilateral  
 Debate: Katharine Susannah Prichard, Rebel Heroes and Matters Pertaining", *Australian  
 Literary Studies* 11, 2 (October 1983), pp.246-55. Beasley was ABS managing editor during  
 the production of *Time of Conflict* and held extended correspondence with Waten about the  
 novel (see below). He is therefore a useful "benchmark" for suggesting the reading  
 formation to which Waten in part belonged.
- 8 Waten, review of *Port of Call* by John Morrison, *Meanjin* 10, 2 (Winter 1951), p.193.
- 9 Beasley, "Questions of Australian Literature", *Communist Review* 217 (January 1960), p.32;  
*Journal of an Era*, pp.78-79; and see comments in *Socialism and the Novel*, pp.40-41.
- 10 Beasley, "Questions of Australian Literature", p.33.
- 11 Ralph de Boissiere, "On Socialist Realism", *Communist Review* 219 (March 1960), pp.124-  
 25: *Bobbin Up* is described as "a novel about the working class written from the  
 revolutionary working class point of view. This is the most important thing about it". But the  
 book is seen to be spoiled by "a host of secondary contradictions.... The various stages of  
 lovemaking so persistently described strike the selfsame note again and again, when what is  
 needed is chords and discords to make harmonies" (p.125). Jean Devanny wrote to Les  
 Greenfield at the ABS, 2 November 1959, reporting on discussions she had conducted in  
 Townsville: "The consensus of opinion was commendatory in respect of the surging vitality  
 of the novel, the gripping picture it gives of aspects of Sydney life and the characterisation.  
 Opposite views were expressed on the treatment of communists. Some considered that the  
 book gave a true, un-idealistic picture of communists; others that it gave a true picture of  
 some communists in that particular environment.... The loose construction was recognised  
 by all as due to inexperience. The aspect of the book deplored by all but one or two was the  
 overstressing of the sex angle, and, as one put it, the insistence on 'bottoms and bellies and  
 bosoms.' This, it was considered, would tend to make it unpopular with that section of  
 readers whose attention a book of this nature should be designed to reach and influence.  
 This aspect, it was considered, had no political value in itself and detracted from the political  
 value of the novel. Five outsiders approached by me for their opinion ... said they 'liked it.'  
 In each case the sex angle was remembered, the politics scarcely mentioned.... To sum up, I  
 myself have to accept that to influence the wide mass of the people politically, that is, to the  
 left, sex crudities such as appear in *Bobbin Up* have no place". (ABS Records, Mitchell  
 Library, ML MSS 2297/3)
- 12 Many recent communist memoirs find their structure in just this history. See David Carter,  
 "'History Was on Our Side': Memoirs from the Australian Left", *Meanjin* 46, 1 (March  
 1987), pp.108-21.
- 13 ABS Records, ML MSS 2297/14: correspondence between Waten and Beasley between  
 June and August 1961. Waten comments on the difficulties of trying "to recreate the thirties  
 without falling into flat photographic ways" (14 August 1961).
- 14 Novels which tell variations of this story include Prichard's *Intimate Strangers* (1937),  
 Leonard Mann's *The Go-Getter* (1942), M. Barnard Eldershaw's *Tomorrow and Tomorrow*  
 (1947), Eric Lambert's *Twenty Thousand Thieves* (1952). See Ian Reid, *Fiction and the  
 Great Depression*, pp.77-84 for an account of links between war and Depression in a range  
 of Australian writers.

- 13 Susan McKernan, *A Question of Commitment: Australian Literature in the Twenty Years After the War* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1989), p.43.
- 14 Beasley, *Socialism and the Novel*, as reprinted in *Journal of an Era*, p.49.
- 15 ABS Records, ML MSS 2297/14, [April?] 1961.
- 16 Devanny to Beasley, ABS Records, ML MSS 2297/3, 22 October 1961: "In my opinion [*Time of Conflict*] ranks with *Yandy* and *The Hard Way* as a must for the ABS.... I believe my more sophisticated work appeals to a wider circle than Frank's or Judah's, to the 'allies', the farmers and urban middleclass. Though I must admit that workers too, in my experience, like their books to be infused with a certain glamor, using that word in its true, not bohemian sense". Devanny's *Cindie* appeared in 1949; the unpublished sequel was rejected by the ABS in 1958.
- 17 Katerina Clark, *The Soviet Novel: History as Ritual* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), p.159.
- 18 Waten to Les Greenfield, ABS Records, ML MSS 2297/14, 24 May 1960.
- 19 Waten to Beasley, ABS Records, ML MSS 2297/14, 28 April 1961.
- 20 See letters between Noel Counihan and Beasley, May-July 1961, ABS Records ML MSS 2297/14. The discussion centres on the central figure of the cover design. Beasley writes: "Judah's hero despite his bitter life experiences is a very warm and appealing fellow. I wonder if your figure just misses this characteristic. True enough, he's presenting an iron fist to the class enemy but at the same time he presents this front to every reader. It may be that the prizefighter in Mick tends to impinge on the revolutionary so giving the impression that militant workers and communists are all bashers.... It doesn't matter at all what the class enemy thinks about this but as you point out it does matter what our members and potential members think".
- 21 Michel Foucault, "What Is an Author?" trans. J. V. Harari, in *The Foucault Reader*, ed. Paul Rabinow (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1984), pp.101-20.
- 22 Waten, "Three of Vance Palmer's", *Overland* 12 (Winter 1958), p.40.
- 23 Ross Chambers, *Story and Situation: Narrative Seduction and the Power of Fiction* (Manchester: Manchester University Press; Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), pp.29-35.
- 24 Susan Rubin Suleiman, *Authoritarian Fictions: The Ideological Novel as a Literary Genre* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), p.27. Further references will appear in the text.
- 25 The reference is to the strike of June 1925: "Following a series of stoppages on the waterfront and the temporary deregistration of the seamen's union, the prime minister, S. M. Bruce, passed legislation ... aimed at the seamen's leaders, Tom Walsh and Jack Johnson, but efforts to deport them failed.... Bruce orchestrated a campaign linking the industrial crisis with the 'red' menace". *Australians: Events and Places*, eds Graeme Aplin, S. G. Foster, and Michael McKernan (Sydney: Fairfax, Syme & Weldon, 1987), p.137.
- 26 In his *Theory of the Novel*, trans. Anna Bostock (1920; Cambridge, Mass.: M. I. T. Press, 1971), pp.80-82 & 88-89.
- 27 Quoted in L. Harry Gould, *Glossary of Marxist Terms* (Sydney: Current Book Distributors, 1943), p.19, under the heading "Opportunism".
- 28 From Gould's *Glossary*: Anarchism: "A petty-bourgeois individualist ideology in the Working-class Movement denying any importance to organisation or discipline", p.3.
- 29 Waten, "Books That Influenced Me Deeply", *Educational Magazine* 36, 3 (1979) discussing *Robinson Crusoe*: "Defoe had two great attributes: plausibility and a matter-of-fact and evocative style ... an ideal narrator's prose", p.32. The phrase "stern realist" is applied to Henry Handel Richardson in Waten's piece on the ABS, "10th Anniversary of Book Society is Triumph for Aust. Literature", *Guardian* 22 March 1962, p.4.
- 30 Jerome H. Buckley, *Season of Youth: The Bildungsroman from Dickens to Golding* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1974), p.17.
- 31 Clark, pp.182-83.
- 32 Suleiman, p.80. A. J. Greimas, *Structural Semantics: An Attempt at a Method*, trans. Daniele McDowell, Ronald Schleifer, Alan Velie (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1983), pp.197-221.

- 33 Jonathan Culler, *Structuralist Poetics: Structuralism, Linguistics and the Study of Literature* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1975), pp.233-34.  
 34 Greimas, p.208.  
 35 A. J. Greimas, *Sémantique Structurale: Recherche de Méthode* (Paris: Larousse, 1966),  
 36 p.81.  
 She points out the moral to Mick: "You're like your father in some ways.... You're a sticker  
 and you're not frightened of carrying responsibility. But you're not the same Mick. You're a  
 different man. You think different. You've got the world on your mind not just your family"  
 (275).  
 37 It's hard to resist trying out the semiotic square. Perhaps:

<b>working "class"</b>	<b>"the system"/capitalism</b>
<b>"not capitalism"</b>	<b>non-working class</b>
= <i>communism</i> :	= <i>bourgeois values</i> :
optimism	despair
self-possession	fatalism
ideals/goals	cynicism
discipline	careerism
knowledge	doubt/ignorance
class-consciousness	self-interest

- This version has the advantage of producing communism as the "negation of the negation"  
 as in Jameson's rendering of the semiotic square, *The Prison-House of Language: A Critical  
 Account of Structuralism and Russian Formalism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press,  
 1972), p.166. Perhaps the primary point is the ease with which the novel lends itself to such  
 an operation.  
 38 If anything, Australian communists lined up on the "conservative" side of debates about  
 Soviet literature. See the debate in *Tribune* over Ehrenburg's *The Thaw*: Paul Mortier's, 25  
 May 1955; Mona Brand, 24 August; Miriam Hampson, 31 August; David Martin, 7  
 September; "Critical", 21 September; and a "summing up" from a Soviet journal, 18 January  
 1956 (all on the Magazine page, p.8). There was a similar debate over Dudintsev's novel *Not  
 By Bread Alone*, *Tribune* January-February 1958. See also Judah Waten's two pieces on  
 Soviet literature, "A Great Literature Created by New Soviet Life", *Tribune* 6 November  
 1957, p.6 and "Literature and the Writer in the Soviet Union", *Tribune* 28 January 1959, p.7.  
 39 Waten, "A Great Literature Created by New Soviet Life", p.6.  
 40 Waten, "Books That Influenced Me Deeply", pp.30-32.  
 41 Waten, "My Two Literary Careers", *Southerly* 31, 2 (1971), p.91.  
 42 See his two articles on Soviet literature cited above; "My Two Literary Careers"; and "A  
 Writer's Youth", *Outrider* 1, 1 (June 1984), pp.114-21.  
 43 Buckley, *Season of Youth*, pp.17-18. Waten's next novel but one is called *Season of Youth*,  
 no less; the *Bildungsroman* pattern is here used for the story of artistic vocation. See Chapter  
 9 below.  
 44 These reviews are collected in a scrapbook among Waten's papers at the National Library of  
 Australia: NLA MS 4536, Box 20.  
 45 In order: J. P., "Judah Waten's Important New ABS Book", *Guardian* (Queensland) 25  
 October 1961 (first three quotes); G. G., "Understanding Bloke," *Building Worker*  
 (November 1961); P[aul] M[ortier], "An Artist's View of the Communist Party", *Tribune* 25  
 October 1961, p.7 (5th & 8th quotes); Rex Mortimer, "'Time of Conflict' is Important New  
 Novel", *Guardian* (Melbourne) 2 November 1961 (two quotes); E. Thornton, "Time of  
 Conflict", *Communist Review* 240 (December 1961), p.472. Waten papers, Box 20.  
 46 For example, Alan Nicholls, "Tragedy of the Depression", *Age* 28 October 1961, p.18; John  
 McLaren, "Missed Opportunities", *Overland* 22 (December 1961), p.48. Leonie Kramer also  
 reviewed the novel, if with less respect, for ABC Radio's "Today's Books" program, 14  
 January 1962. Script in Waten's papers as above.

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- 47 Alan Davies, "Forced and Free", *Nation* 2 December 1961, p.23; [unsigned], *Australian Book Review* 1, 1 (November 1961), p.7. An exchange of letters (and insults) followed in *ABR*: Waten describes Max Harris as "the oily ratbag author of the *Vegetative Eye*" (1, 3 [January 1962], p.39), the review as "McCarthyite", and Geoffrey Dutton as "the Adelaide Club poet, the mansion-dwelling scourge of suburbanites" (1, 4 [February 1962], p.56). See Chapter 7 below for a discussion of this new liberalism in the context of attitudes towards the Soviet Union in the 1960s.
- 48 Waten was later to attempt a "university" novel, designed to attack the new "pseudo-radical" or reactionary tendencies in the universities: NLA MS 4536/4 (Frank Knopfelmacher, Vincent Buckley and Chris Wallace-Crabbe appear as thinly-disguised characters). Waten also writes a hostile review of Donald Horne's *The Lucky Country*, *Guardian* 10 December 1964, p.4 (a review later countered by Malcolm Salmon in the same paper, 21 January 1965, p.4, arguing that despite its right-wing bias the book contains many valuable, even radical, insights).
- 49 Franco Moretti, *The Way of the World: The Bildungsroman in European Culture* (London: Verso, 1987), p.8.
- 50 Theo Moody, "Red Career", *Daily Telegraph* 9 December 1961, p.16. Moody was a former friend of Waten's and his co-editor on the *Unemployed Special* in London (see Chapter 2).
- 51 Moretti, p.205, quoting Ross H. Dabney, *Love and Property in the Novels of Dickens*.
- 52 Moretti, pp.12 & 54.
- 53 There is more than one sense in which *Time of Conflict* is a repudiation of Waten's own bohemian and avant-garde past. In certain ways he resembles Tony more than Mick.
- 54 Moretti, p.7.
- 55 Moretti, p.227. He makes a number of points which suggest similarities between the belated projects of Eliot and Waten: both write novels in which the main characters are "*functionaries* of abstract beliefs" whose vocation does not involve renunciation, and in which "the synthesis of the highly motivated individual and of social structure can occur only if history moves forward: only through progress and as progress".

## A Closed Book: The Soviet Union and the Literary Witness

*In the great enterprise of working directly for the establishment of the system  
of public good, the artists, the men of imagination, will lead the way.  
They will proclaim the future of the human race.*  
(Henri Saint-Simon, *On Social Organisation*, 1825)

### The Future that Works

From the 1920s to the 1970s western writers published many hundreds of books on the Soviet Union. Among these, works by literary travellers constitute a distinct genre: the journey narrative of the literary witness. There are Australian examples of this genre in all its phases, from Katharine Susannah Prichard's *The Real Russia* (1934) to Judah Waten's *From Odessa to Odessa* (1969). To read this series generically is to trace, in narrative form and styles of authorship, the specific effects of shifts in cultural politics in Australia. We can observe the rise and fall of a genre. For the communist author, the relationship between communism and authorship was fundamentally altered over this period so that the discourse that was virtually inevitable in the 1930s becomes virtually unutterable in the 1960s. Nevertheless the genre continues as a template against which both writers and readers gauged variations, and it can be discovered as both model and anti-model in Waten's book.

The journey narrative of the literary witness: it makes a difference that these are narratives structured around *journeys*; that the narrator is *there* as a witness; and that the author is already an *author*, a recognised figure of literary or cultural authority. Although they will summon historical, economic and political discourses, more appropriate generic co-ordinates are those of the traveller's tale, autobiography/memoir and the literary utopia. Of these, the reference to the utopia is most easily misunderstood. We might expect accounts of the Soviet Union, especially those by communists, to be "utopian" in some general (largely dismissive) sense, or inversely to be "dystopian". But we need to define the category in stricter philosophical and generic terms, for utopian accounts of the USSR are by no means merely a function of political predispositions.

We can distinguish two modern forms of utopianism, programmatic and aesthetic.<sup>1</sup> The former proposes total social transformation on the basis of a single foundational principle which grounds a philosophical system or programme (Fourier's laws of passionate attraction, Bellamy's co-operation or service). To change society is to change its *whole* organisation, as if this were based, by contrast, on a single unsound principle (such as 'competition'). If the foundation is changed all else follows, from new architecture to new

human capacities. No sphere of life is too small or large for its scrutiny: domestic and public sites, administration, new forms of sociability. Perhaps the central figure of the utopian program is, as in Bellamy, the totally planned city.<sup>2</sup>

Aesthetic utopianism centres rather on the completely developed person. From Schiller to William Morris it finds expression in a dialectical model in which contemporary society is represented by the fragmentation of human attributes and social processes. Industrial civilisation has been achieved only through the divorce of reason and the senses, work and pleasure, production and true needs. The individual is alienated from his/her community. Such oppositions are overcome in an aesthetic "synthesis on a higher plane" in both realms. For the individual, resolution is projected as the harmonious reintegration of the whole person in the realm of culture; for the society, as communal or non-alienated modes of production. Indeed the two forms of resolution are, as it were, reversible. The completely developed person is both cause and effect of the re-organisation of labour as at once work and pleasure, art and necessity, science and culture. Thus the author and the art work are exemplary figures of the utopian resolution.

Both kinds of utopianism favour collective forms of social organisation; but both must offer more than economic or political programmes alone. Each utopian projection entails an ethical dimension as well, a final outcome in terms of the remaking of the individual. In fact, in effect, politics is largely dissolved in models of wholly self-governing communities, that is, dissolved into purely administrative technologies or into *culture*. Moreover this social transformation is typically achieved without politics too, achieved not through revolution but through education or reason. These are critical features to note, for one of the startling aspects of 'author journeys' to the Soviet Union is also, no less, the absence of politics and revolution.

These philosophical aspects of utopianism produce the narrative features of the genre. First, the journey structure, the journey to another place or time. The latter is most common in modern utopian fiction, underlining the possibility of real transformation: the utopia represents "our familiar country transformed by specific historical change".<sup>3</sup> We will see that the non-fictional journey to the USSR, while literally a journey to another place, functions as if it were a journey to another time. Second, the traveller-narrator who journeys from our familiar world, bears witness to the transformed world and returns transformed. This gives the genre its characteristic three parts: point of entry, journey around the new world, return to the now-estranged familiar world. While the first and third phases are typically weak — for in a sense they must be "seen through" for the utopia to have its effect in the reader's here and now — the middle phase by contrast is purpose-built to effect a kind of exhaustiveness, bearing witness that the new society has been transformed in every single aspect. To achieve this, utopian (and Soviet) journeys follow a panoramic or programmatic logic, moving from factory to farm, from nursery to ministry, and so on — from production to culture, from

ethics to economics.<sup>4</sup> Third, this structure produces a recurrent pattern of inversion in which the principles of the traveller's (and reader's) world are systematically turned upside down as the journey proceeds. The journey will also be marked by extended dialogues in which the narrator is pupil or witness while a "delineator" figure explains the essential simplicity of rational, communal solutions to complex social problems.<sup>5</sup>

These are the features delimiting the utopian genre: not any and every notion of a new world but specifically those programs for the complete remaking of social and individual life from administration and production to behaviours and bodies. The complete development or total transformation of social relations means the complete development of the individual and *vice versa*. This is the key utopian figure. Zhdanov's notion of writers as "engineers of the human soul"<sup>6</sup> is not just a Stalinist barbarism, but an extension of a utopian tradition, an ethical discourse that has its roots in progressive liberalism.

These are the features which also recur in literary travels to the Soviet Union. Bellamy's *Looking Backward* and Morris's *News from Nowhere* were part of the generic field in which the actual travellers to the USSR had to distinguish themselves.<sup>7</sup> For a start they had to insist upon their *non-fictionality*, but also, against the utopian fictional background, to exploit the power of being able to claim that *this* story, this time, was fact not fiction however incredible it might seem. Engels' *Socialism: Scientific and Utopian* had made this a political imperative at least for the communist. Prichard cites Engels' text as one of the key moments in the development of her own communism, and we can underscore the utopian elements in her account:

At last, I told myself, I had found a *logical explanation* of the poverty and injustices in the social system ... a *complete* tracing of social development ... a philosophy derived from *scientific investigation*.

Finding this exposition of Communism was like *discovering a new world*: a world with a social system created by the organised workers so that they could *use their hands and brains for the welfare of their country and people*.<sup>8</sup>

At the same time, in the very process of announcing itself as factual the literary witness narrative is likely to repeat the utopia's pattern of inversion wherein the capitalist here and now is made to look "unreal" from the perspective of the other place. Impossible ideals are suddenly made to appear simple and rational, while the banal is endlessly remarkable (A modern tractor factory! A communal kitchen!). It is difficult now to read "Foreign Writers Visit Coke Plant", one of Prichard's chapter headings, with the appropriate kind of aesthetic *frisson*.

Perhaps the neatest statement of the literary witness genre is Lincoln Steffens' memorable phrase, on his return from the Soviet Union, "I have seen the future and it works".<sup>9</sup> Steffens sums up the act of witnessing, the journey and return, the translation of another place into another time, and the utopian inversion of impossible and banal ("it works"). The generic field thus described is not politics or economics but everyday life. More

accurately, economics and politics are dissolved into everyday life, discovered everywhere, and so transformed into what is best called *culture*. The books are full of balance-sheets and statistics, but for the traveller-narrator these facts and figures are not merely recorded but *experienced* with a transforming power best called aesthetic. Hence the figure who can bear strongest witness to these transformations is a figure of cultural authority, the author, the "literary witness". The journey is completed only with the passage to publication in book form, for the book is the journey's pre-text as well as its text. "I was there", "I would not otherwise have believed": the literary witness *embodies* the transformation of politics into culture that the new society represents.

### **From Politics to Culture**

Probably the single most influential pro-Soviet work in Australia was by an Englishman, *The Socialist Sixth of the World* (1939) by the famous Red Dean of Canterbury, Hewlett Johnson.<sup>10</sup> Part of his argument — by way of inversion — was to show that it was *Soviet* society which truly embodied Christian ethics. Although not a literary figure Johnson's cultural status was similar, as a clergyman who was not just a clergyman because of his public interest in politics, economics and science (in which he was graduated); *and* because of his journey. The status of author is in this sense an ethical authority, located in the whole person rather than in profession or expertise, and mediating between the concrete realm of everyday life and the abstract realms of "social organisation". As a figure of cultural resolution, above the divisions of contemporary society, the author is invested with the authority to dissect that society and envision its future.

Hewlett begins with the classic liberal diagnosis of the ills of contemporary capitalist society, that which informed the dystopian projections of Aldous Huxley no less than the utopias of H. G. Wells. The *moral* dimension of capitalism is governed by "the competitive system of every man for himself ... men being used as means not ends". The *scientific* dimension is "the wholly irrational wastage of wealth, ... the poverty amidst plenty". The two levels are really one, for "frustration of science is the counterpart of denial of morals" (5). Soviet society by contrast is represented by a series of inversions of the principles which govern contemporary capitalism and by a series of syntheses which re-unite the practices and capacities which capitalism renders antithetical: "co-operation replaces competitive chaos ... the community rather than the self-seeking individual stands in the centre ... the elimination of the profit-seeking motive makes room for the higher motive of service ... the rational organisation of production and distribution of wealth welcomes science as an ally". The end of such transformation is what Johnson calls in the title of his final chapter "the Fully Developed Man". For "a new attitude towards human life is the natural counterpart of the new economic morality.... The removal of economic shortage, and the substitution of plan for

chaos, promise to open up new avenues of *freedom, liberty and creative personality*" (6, my emphasis). The Soviets "seek a wholly cultured people" (84).

The force of Johnson's book comes partly, of course, through his extra-ordinary non-communist authority. For Prichard, as a communist, the authority to speak must be managed differently. She travels not as the utopian naif but as a cultural figure with a known prior interest in the journey. Thus the literary structures of the quest — a journey motivated by a vision of the new world — and the pilgrimage — the journey of witness — can return. On the opening page of *The Real Russia*, Prichard signs herself as a *modern* author: "I want to write ... in splashes of colour, gouts of phrases as Walt Whitman would have, or Mayakovski: paint ... after the manner of the French symbolists, images seething and swarming over each other".<sup>11</sup> In fact her communism scarcely figures in the narrative and this is more than a matter of concealing didactic purpose. The point is rather the privileging of authorship: Prichard writes as an author rather than a communist, as an *individual* in the heightened sense that romantic notions of authorship entail. If on the one hand the narrator thus prefigures the utopian resolution of reason and senses, work and pleasure, on the other she is in some ways more like the earlier utopias' naive or "natural" observer than we might have expected.

*The Real Russia* is a wonderful example of the first, heroic phase of literary witness narratives. After three pages of "seething and swarming" images Prichard's focus shifts abruptly to the conventional travelogue opening ("The 'Jan Rudzutak' left London for Leningrad on a murky afternoon in July"). Why are these books so insistent on including the banal details of travel? Their function is generic, for the moment of departure signals the text's departure for the other place, the other generic site. The voyage connects the "future" with the familiar world while marking it off as other. The departure also implies a return, so strongly that Prichard leaves hers out. It is there only in the voice of the writer who writes.

The departure/voyage also acts as a generic blind for the text's didactic purpose. But a generic contract *is* established through this discourse of travel writing, one the text can exploit through expectations that it will cross borders to deliver a "real" encounter with the other, the authentic, the *real* Russia. Prichard distinguishes herself as a traveller from the mere tourist ("I did not want to be a tourist in Russia", 6). The difference between the traveller and the tourist is a difference within the semiotics of tourism, as Jonathan Culler has shown.<sup>12</sup> The traveller, we might say, is the tourist who writes, and writes to be published. The author is a seer, not just a sight-seer.

Once in Russia Prichard's journey/narrative is governed by what is both a traveller's and a utopian logic of the typical. As in the literary utopia, the traveller tours *throughout* the new society, witness successively to labour and creativity, education and play, public and domestic life. Chapter headings reveal this utopian agenda in the journey from production to culture, economics to ethics: Collective Farm Sketches, Iron Flows from the Furnace, Comrade Baby and his Mother Have Precedence, Sport in the Soviet Union, Every Day Life,

Literary Culture, A Soviet Factory Celebrates the Opening of a New Unit, Domestic Happiness the Rule Despite Easy Divorce. The resemblance of these titles to newspaper headlines is not accidental, for this *is* news and no longer news from nowhere. The actual existence of the Soviet Union made fictional "news from nowhere" obsolete and it would recur at first only in the dystopia.

The utopian themes of *The Real Russia* lie in its revelation of the application of science to everyday life; the convergence of "cultural development" and "industrial production"; the rational planning of new cities and collective farms; the principle of social *visibility*; and, as the point of all these, the "production" of a new kind of person:

The general attitude towards mothers and children is a reflection of Soviet administration in every department.... It is difficult to give any idea of the psychological changes brought about already by the new social and economic conditions.... Through the lives of individuals, one caught a reflection of the life of the community (146-48).

As in nineteenth-century utopian fictions, the new order of social relations is revealed in felicitous administration, new architecture, and new institutions with stately, technical titles: the school modelled on a Greek temple, the "prophylactorium", the Park of Culture and Rest, and the planned city of Stalinsk "with its army of *engineers*, architects, chemists, electricians, mechanics, teachers and *artists*" (65, my emphasis).

In the real Russia, things are not only more efficient but also more *beautiful*; the machine or the planned city is a work of art. The new social order is manifested in the new "stately" bodies of its citizens:

Thousands of boys and girls, young men and young women, marched through Moscow to the Red Square.... They swung along, headed by their standard bearers carrying the scarlet plush and gilt fringed banners won on previous occasions — swimmers in their brief suits, striding out with bare brown limbs...physical culture classes from all the factories, legions of full-bosomed bare-legged girls in white blouses and dark blue shorts. Singing and swinging their bare arms and legs in unison, they strode. A living demonstration of the vigour and beauty of working-class youth in the Soviet Union (159).

This is politics as culture. The utopian social programme finds its ultimate site of meaning in the aestheticised body. This aestheticisation of politics also recalls the avant-garde notion of "liberated creative energy" described in Chapter 1, a dynamic consequent upon the radical otherness of the new society.

### **Journey Into the Cold War**

In the two decades after the war, the utopian nexus between politics and culture in representations of the Soviet Union is undermined by several developments: the Soviets' familiarity as war-time allies (such that Uncle Joe could appear on the front cover of *Women's Weekly*<sup>13</sup>), the sheer amount of war damage sustained by the USSR, and, no least of course, cold war super-power politics. To defend the Soviet Union as peace-loving, anti-

imperialist or cultured was not necessarily to be launched on the utopian trajectory. The Soviet Union no longer functioned so readily as the "other", the future, of the writer's own society.

Yet while the USSR continued to be an object of a specific sort of literary/cultural interest the utopian paradigm would recur and its generic weight would have to be managed. Before turning to Frank Hardy's *Journey Into the Future* I want to mention an ephemeral war-time publication, *Soviet Culture*.<sup>14</sup> This booklet contains the text of talks delivered at a one-day conference in Sydney, organised in November 1941 by the NSW Aid Russia Committee, five months after the invasion of the USSR. The text is clearly different from a single-author journey narrative, although five of its twelve writers are indeed returned travellers. More telling is the notion of culture through which the project is conceived. The distribution of contributors is revealing: a disproportionate number of literary figures (Prichard, Miles Franklin, Frank Dalby Davison) alongside single speakers on music, ballet, architecture and the visual arts *and* speakers on medicine, science and education. The notion of culture, in other words, both privileges the "high arts" but goes further to embrace something like the whole of life; yet the predominance of the literary reveals the utopian nature of this conception of the whole of life. Hewlett Johnson is cited a number of times, so too William Morris.<sup>15</sup>

The individual chapters repeat the panoramic logic of the utopia, from administration to domestic space, from art to science. Utopian discourse is never far away: "The principal object and duty of a Government should be to change drastically the human nature with which it dealt" (7). The three literary papers come last, framing or grounding the specialised topics which precede them. The authors take on this role, speaking of *culture* on the basis of their *literary* authority. Davison criticises the conference for proceeding "as if aesthetic culture was the whole of culture" (87). But his own notion of culture — and politics — is nothing if not aesthetic:

In my view neither art nor science is the pinnacle of culture. Culture embraces all that differentiates us from the lower forms of conscious life: and at the very peak stands politics.... At its best politics embodies both art and science. It is a creative activity, working upon knowledge to produce a habitable future (87-88).

Politics ideally is culture, the synthesis on a higher plane of art and science. In Miles Franklin's terms, "a state of gracious living which comes from the nurture and appreciation of all that is finest in politics and science, as well as in the arts and handicrafts.... All cultures grow from experiments in living. Of modern cultures the most consciously and comprehensively planned is that of the USSR" (73-75).

The contributors to *Soviet Culture* are largely non-communists: culture rather than communism produces the utopian discourse. Important too is the sense (still) of the Soviet Union's modernity. But as the cold war hots up, politics and culture are disarticulated, in one

sense *especially* for communist writers.<sup>16</sup> Of course the utopian credentials of Hardy's *Journey Into the Future* are boldly announced in its title and embedded through intertextual cues to previous literary travellers. It is a remarkable late reworking of the generic features already indicated. Like *The Real Russia* its point is to redeem utopianism for the factual, everyday, historical world as the "real" potential future of the writer's and reader's society: "Communism — the Utopia of material, cultural and spiritual plenty, as an immediate possibility" (207). Utopian themes are ubiquitous: references to "joy in work" (169), "simple cultured people" (313), the "new man arising within the old" (202); "the new man emerging from the new society.... The Soviet people have thrown off the shoddy selfishness which the 'every man for himself' philosophy of capitalism breeds in people.... Their creative labour has been released" (263-64). Soviet society is rational, planned but (therefore) self-governing.<sup>17</sup>

Yet surprisingly, reading *Journey Into the Future* against the genre also exposes the limits of its utopianism. The utopian features are necessary to the text but not sufficient to its political or cultural logic. *Journey* was published in 1952 by the Australasian Book Society (ABS). The decision to publish it, orchestrated by the Communist Party via the Realist Writers' Group, led to the resignation of the Society's selection panel of non-communist literary figures, Leonard Mann, Alan Marshall and A. A. Phillips.<sup>18</sup> This episode reveals a good deal about the divergences between liberal and communist views but also their convergence around questions of nationalism and literature. But to analyse the shift in cultural politics that *Journey* manifests can also suggest why certain utopian features might unexpectedly pass from a "believer" like Hardy to a "sceptic" (or at least a different kind of believer) like Manning Clark.

The key utopian features are present in Hardy's work but in a relatively "weak", disaggregated form. Hardy is manifest in the text as "author" from the outset: the book begins with the story of the *Power Without Glory* trial and ends with an Author's Note promising future novels in the same vein. Yet the category of authorship for Hardy is always tied to communism or class in a way that was not the case for Prichard. He was for the moment Australia's most notorious communist. Hardy's narrator is present sometimes as the public communist, sometimes as an ordinary bloke and sometimes as a working (worker) writer. But these voices remain dispersed, falling short of the strong notion of authorship present in *The Real Russia*. Hardy wants to be able to argue, to intervene in the contemporary politics of Menzies' Australia — he refers back to local politics a number of times. The literary witness, then, is only one of the tactics he needs. Rather than the "present-ness" of the utopian narrator, the narration is explicitly located *after* the event in a way that the literary witness texts normally work to efface.<sup>19</sup> Similarly, the journey structure while still panoramic is more casual, even in a sense incidental to its more immediate political interest. Anecdotes can remain mere anecdotes, statistics mere statistics; impressive, of course, but not always with the utopian, transformative ethical dimension of earlier works.

Of course, no less than Prichard, Hardy wants to convert his readers. But a different politics is at stake. Things are bigger, better, brighter in the USSR — and even this is not always so for Hardy writes that the beer is better in Australia, St Kilda Road is prettier than Leningrad Avenue, the Australian worker is even in some respects better off than his Soviet counterpart. But the contrasts are not those of utopian inversion. Indeed one of Hardy's imperatives is to prove just how *like* Australia aspects of the Soviet Union are, almost as if he needs to establish its bourgeois credentials: its "more stable family life" (263), its "tasteful" architecture (171), the ability of its "shows" to do well on Broadway (100).<sup>20</sup> The arguments towards the inevitability of revolutionary change are largely confined to the book's final chapter, almost as a postscript.

The utopianism of earlier texts was tied to an internationalist perspective, a sense of the simultaneity of "world-historical forces" which motivates the utopian scale of absolute opposition and inversion. Now a nationalist argument underlies the comparison, both in local and international politics, and Hardy quotes from both Stalin's definition of the nation and the Australian Communist Party's new policy of "An Australian Path to Socialism".<sup>21</sup> The "simple cultured" new citizens of the Soviet Union can be folded back into the traditions of the "simple cultured" Australian folk. Indeed Hardy is sufficiently non-utopian to be a homesick traveller, to call his final chapter "There's No Place Like Home"!

The odd conclusion is that Hardy's overt political interest and didactic purpose lead *away* from utopianism to a form of moderation. In the context of international and local cold war politics — the anti-Communist Party referendum was defeated while Hardy was in the USSR — a new defensiveness is unavoidable. Utopian resolutions are postponed as Hardy must first establish that the Soviet Union is *not* totalitarian, not inhuman or drab, not warlike, and, ultimately, not a threat to the West, and so not its "other" in the fullest possible sense. The degree to which the utopian model is not available to Hardy as an argument for Soviet communism, the degree to which the nexus between politics and culture no longer holds, can be seen most clearly in the text's shrinking of the realm of culture into "entertainment".<sup>22</sup>

### **Meeting Manning Clark**

*Journey Into the Future* is the last Stalinist journey-narrative of the Soviet Union by an Australian, a reference less to its "dogmatism" than its cultural occasion. Between *Journey* and Manning Clark's *Meeting Soviet Man* there occurred a series of events — Stalin's death, Khrushchev's speech, Hungary, *Doctor Zhivago* — which again altered irreversibly the possibilities of thinking, writing and travelling about the Soviet Union. Clark announces this political moment as his book's own, but explicitly distances himself from any mere political interest. He wants to "take Soviet Man seriously".<sup>23</sup> Significantly, this allows the return of a "deep" aesthetic textualisation of the Soviet Union. The ethical ground of *Meeting Soviet Man*, suggested in its title, displaces politics and history into culture in a manner parallel to

earlier utopian narratives despite the dust-jacket's generic disclaimer that this "is not another 'Truth about the Soviet Union' book in the ordinary sense". The truth Clark seeks is precisely an aesthetic one.

It comes as a surprise to note that apart from a booklet on Abel Tasman, *Meeting Soviet Man* was Clark's first monograph. He had edited two collections of documents on Australian history but he was as well-known in the cultural field for his *Meanjin* articles "Letter to Tom Collins" (1943) and "Tradition in Australian Literature" (1949). Geoffrey Blainey has recalled the moment in the mid-fifties when "Clark the writer had arrived".<sup>24</sup> In fact his journey to the Soviet Union was as part of a Fellowship of Australian Writers delegation in 1958, together with Judah Waten and James Devaney. The point is that Clark's authority in the book is intensely literary; or cultural, perhaps, as the cultural was then constituted as a kind of middle disposition between literature and history. In *Meeting Soviet Man*, Clark explicitly distances himself from mere historians, as it were, for the sake of this cultural and aesthetic status. His journey is more than once linked to a pilgrimage (to meet "the men and women of Russian literature" to quote the dust-jacket again) and it proceeds under the sign of a *quest* for hidden truth, for "the very heart" of Soviet Man (21). This is not just a traveller's tale but a "journey across the ocean of life" (6) — the *writing* is such a journey. *Meeting Soviet Man* is offered modestly as "one man's impressions" but this is also to make the largest claims for the individual, the claims of great (romantic) art. Clark's book is in many ways more "literary" than the novelists' books, and it is a fascinating rehearsal of the themes and voices that would later characterise his *History of Australia* and his autobiographical *The Quest for Grace*.<sup>25</sup>

Clark seeks ethical and "metaphysical" realms which are represented as deeper than questions of government or politics. On one level this is clearly anti-utopian, for government will always be found wanting against the "secrets of the human heart" (21). But Clark's quest is also for a "living culture", and when he finds it the experience is truly aesthetic: "Of [the culture's] vitality at the moment, of its power to move, I had had that evidence which precludes doubt, that cathartic experience which great art and great art alone can send all over a man" (20). The hidden truths about the society will be discovered in this deeper ethical realm—the realm of art no less. The book's own ambivalence and originality is tied to a thoroughly conventional literary thematics.

*Meeting Soviet Man* uses Dostoevsky as a figure of the dystopian, tragic view of life against which utopia (figured by Lenin) is gauged: "the tragic pessimistic view of the world ... has been washed out of [the Soviet people's] minds" (81). People are forced to do "what *the Establishment* decided was good for them" (91, my emphasis) — a profoundly anti-utopian split between people and administration. Clark is sceptical of any planned, programmatic organisation of human happiness: "Soviet Man is dedicated ... to that very creed, that belief in reason, in progress, in perfection, which Dostoevsky had predicted would

end in murder and degradation" (79). The scale of Dostoevsky provides the book's "deepest" notes and resonates in its final movement.<sup>26</sup> But this is only one side of the equation. The fully developed society, culture or person must respond to "Lenin" as well, to the "Enlightenment", high-mindedness and "reverence for life" expressed in the key utopian resolutions: "when the distinctions between brain and manual labour disappear, when the freedom of one is the condition of the freedom of all" (5). The "whole point", Clark argues, is "that no-one whom Dostoevsky had caught by the throat and the heart could be indifferent to Lenin" (87).

In short, once the problem is posed in the aesthetic terms of ethical wholeness and division — or "a metaphysical difference ... stemming from two fundamentally opposed conceptions of the nature of man" (5) — the utopian and dystopian responses cannot help but produce each other. Indeed Clark takes *both* alternatives as opposites of his own commercialised, technologised, anti-cultural society, and in doing so repeats the utopian analysis of western society in terms of alienation, that is, capitalism's tendency "to split or separate off home life from work life, to deprive the worker of the sense of fulfilling his personality in his work" (88). Elsewhere Clark contrasts the gloom and despair of western culture with the optimism of Soviet culture.

*Meeting Soviet Man* proceeds as if it had little to do with utopian accounts of the Soviet Union and no political case to argue. But the comparison with Hardy suggests that utopianism might have been further removed if Clark's interest *had* been political. The bracketing-off of politics, reading it in ethical and cultural terms, is what keeps the utopian discourse alive, not least in the aesthetic figure of the narrator. The book expresses scepticism towards any form of programmatic utopianism, any governmental or administrative solution. But the very terms of this scepticism mean that a utopian sense of culture is always to hand. It is no surprise to find Clark repeating Prichard's terms in being struck "by the combination of high seriousness with gaiety in the Soviet people".<sup>27</sup>

*Meeting Soviet Man* might be understood in the context of what John Docker has called the "metaphysical ascendancy" in the Australian cultural field.<sup>28</sup> But Clark's cold war discourse is not that of *Quadrant*. It recalls instead a contemporaneous argument being developed in the pages of *Overland*, an argument from "individual pessimism" to "social optimism" articulated by two of Clark's former students, Ian Turner and Stephen Murray-Smith. In the magazine, the argument functions as part of a move away from communism to the "acknowledgment" of individual existential realities but to reconcile these nevertheless within a larger humanist framework — which is also the framework which contains serious art.<sup>29</sup> Judah Waten, by contrast, had rejoined the Communist Party not long before his visit to the Soviet Union. As a function of the genre itself as much as of Waten's politics, the journey suggested itself immediately as a book.<sup>30</sup> This never eventuated, perhaps because it clashed with *Time of Conflict*, perhaps because changing politics made the task more difficult.

Instead, on his return, his account of the USSR was published as three articles in the Party press, interrupted by a fourth on the *Doctor Zhivago* controversy.<sup>31</sup> At this volatile, momentous point in the history of communism Waten, as a respected author, was a token of the Party's cultural seriousness and *humanism*. He was thus part of an argument for the defining presence of those same qualities of seriousness, humanism and freedom in the Soviet Union itself.

Hence his focus on "People's Culture", "Literature and the Writer" and "Jews in the Soviet Union". Culture can still bear some of the meanings we have indicated, for it is asked to stand as evidence for the whole society: "culture and the people have merged into one"; "the remarkable achievements are the product of the entire social organisation of production and resources for human benefit" ("People's Culture"). But Waten is concerned to argue a different kind of history, redeeming the Soviet record on culture, from its own past in part, and realigning it to a history of progressive liberalisation and liberty. Having to deal with the society's own rejection of its recent past makes the utopian resolutions difficult to sustain, although ultimately they might be all that will sustain the argument's progressive history. As to *Doctor Zhivago*, its perceived betrayal of this utopian history left no room for moderation: "For a Soviet citizen ... to contribute to anti-communist and war propaganda is contemptible, far worse than the obscenities of the author of *Lolita*".<sup>32</sup> The excess of Waten's piece tends to confirm Abraham Rothberg's suggestion that *Doctor Zhivago* was targeted because it not merely exposed past crimes but argued that the whole revolution had been a disaster.<sup>33</sup> Waten is immediately concerned with the anti-Soviet uses made of the novel in the west.

Judah Waten also reviewed *Meeting Soviet Man* for the communist press. "The Professor's book," he concluded, "is a great disappointment" for it gives an overall impression of being anti-Soviet, largely because of its author's refusal to say "anything unequivocally".<sup>34</sup> Waten's response is sharpened by the difference he finds between the book and two earlier newspaper articles Clark wrote.<sup>35</sup> Of course his critique is political; but more interesting it is precisely the book's *aesthetic* discourse that Waten targets in targeting its ambivalence. He is correct to find a difference between the articles and the book. Not only are the former almost wholly positive about the USSR, but the doubting, questing, authorial figure at the "very heart" of *Meeting Soviet Man* is almost wholly absent from the articles.

### **The Journey of an Australian Writer**

In the mid to late sixties, the residual utopianism of *Meeting Soviet Man* was the last thing a communist novelist needed in order to write of the Soviet Union for a general or literary readership. Waten's *From Odessa to Odessa*, describing a later visit to the USSR, emerges precisely from the double and potentially paradoxical careers of communist and author.<sup>36</sup> By the time it appeared he had published five novels and was a regular reviewer for the *Age*.<sup>37</sup> Unlike Hardy's *Journey Into the Future* and his own earlier novels, *Odessa* was published by

a mainstream publisher rather than the ABS.<sup>38</sup> The book is addressed not to a Party or even a political readership but to a broadly literary audience, readers of "serious" books, books of "ideas" (we can take these terms seriously because they do in fact organise the cultural field). It is accordingly subtitled "The Journey of an Australian Writer" and Waten's photograph appears on the front cover. He writes with the authority of one wholly integrated into the literary field.

Developments in the USSR had, by the mid-sixties, produced a new articulation of interests in literature and in the Soviet Union. Khrushchev's de-Stalinisation involved the first "thaw" towards writers, as literature played a key role in marking off the new regime from the old: "the role of the writer became more subtle, ambiguous, and difficult, yet more important than ever to the ruling elite".<sup>39</sup> Critique through literature could thus accord with the State's purposes in defining the liberalisation of the post-Stalin period and exposing the wrongs of Stalinism, and this process required a less stringent regulation of styles, subjects and institutions. But it was always treading a fine line as it threatened to spill over into broader critiques of Party authority or revolutionary history. The decade would be marked by a series of liberalising moves followed by exemplary attacks on writers. The roll-call is now familiar: Pasternak, Brodsky, Yevtushenko, Solzhenitsyn, Daniel and Sinyavsky. In an unprecedented way, because of the relative absence of a public sphere for the discussion of political ideas, "liberal" Soviet writers were becoming a coherent opposition even when they acted consciously as "instruments of the Party in implementing the decisions of the Twentieth Congress".<sup>40</sup>

In 1961 a second "thaw" began marked by the publication of Ehrenburg's memoirs, Yevtushenko's "Babi Yar" and "Heirs of Stalin", and in November 1962 Solzhenitsyn's *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*. Early 1964, by contrast, saw the trial and sentencing of Josif Brodsky which drew a number of significant artists and intellectuals to his defence. After the fall of Khrushchev in October 1964 and following an initial period of liberalisation — throughout the period of Waten's journey<sup>41</sup> — the regime aligned itself with the conservative line in a way unprecedented since 1956. The 1965 arrest of Daniel and Sinyavsky became a world-wide cause and produced petitions and protests from western writers including communists. Over the next three years Solzhenitsyn would become the central figure of controversy. By the mid-sixties the notion of the dissident was established as "demands for intellectual freedom were ... escalated into demands for greater political freedom".<sup>42</sup> Jewish writers played central roles.<sup>43</sup>

This history produced a more intense interest in Soviet writers among literary intellectuals in the west, who petitioned, conferred, and journeyed. Few cultural discourses were as momentous as that involving the "writer's freedom" in the Soviet Union and beyond, partly as a result of the opposition between "freedom" and "totalitarianism" so fundamental to cold war intellectual politics, partly as a result of a new, more radical liberalism reacting

against the constraints of those same cold war politics. It was no coincidence that it was the *Artists and Writers* section which erupted into controversy at the 1959 Peace Congress in Melbourne, when an anti-communist and a recent ex-communist together introduced a Hungarian dissident writer to argue a resolution about writers' freedoms.<sup>44</sup> Literature and liberalism were brought together in arguments that were both old and new. Literature was identified with individual freedom, against politics; but it was also newly-politicised as a force for social change. Arguments against bureaucratic interference in literature went hand-in-hand with a revived sense of the writer's social responsibility. In Australia this produced a distinctive liberal approach which resisted cold war anti-communism and censorship as much as it resisted Stalinist repression. It took the idea of Soviet culture seriously, especially against the backdrop of western "mass-commercialism". Geoffrey Dutton was a key figure, arguing a "non-anti-communist" approach to the USSR; and following the trip by Clark and Waten, Soviet writers visited Australia and attended the Adelaide Festival throughout the 1960s.<sup>45</sup>

Literature, in these liberal humanist terms, provided a political critique while defining a separate cultural realm in which Soviet and western writers (and "peoples") could share their common humanity. This was a realm which Waten, as a "Russian", a Jew, a communist and a novelist, could inhabit and to which *Odessa* could speak, for it opened a new cultural space for him as a writer. Communism indeed could be a distinguishing *literary* attribute, a mark of authorial individuality. In 1966 Waten was interviewed on television, as a writer, but in a series on "Commitment".<sup>46</sup> The word has a period ring to it. In an anti-ideological atmosphere it made communism an unusual moral attribute, a quality of exceptional individuals — like authors.

It is not surprising, then, that politics is about the last thing we meet in *Odessa* nor that the genre we first meet is literary autobiography. Waten writes of Odessa, his birthplace, the erstwhile capital of Jewish literature and music, to which his journey will return him. The motif is already anti-utopian as promised by the book's title, a journey into the *past* not the future, and the opening chapter acts as a guarantee against mere politics by establishing the book's and the author's literary credentials: "You could call writing an Odessan aspiration" (8). Perhaps the promise is that this won't be another *Journey Into the Future*. Nevertheless a political interest in the journey is established, for the autobiography involves Tsarism, pogroms, revolution. Politics and literature are thus linked, but in the realm of experience not ideology.

The generic contract is then revised towards travel writing. Waten's journey to the Soviet Union takes a substantial forty pages, going beyond the framing role the journey has in earlier works to become significant in its own right. *Odessa* is a belated traveller's tale. The communist east is still a traveller's rather than a tourist's destination and, in Paul Fussell's terms, Waten is a "student" of what he seeks, a student of history.<sup>47</sup> Here the narrative is

organised as a journey into history (so once again there can be no sudden utopian inversions); also in part as a journey into literature as Waten interprets scenes through positive "humanist" literary models (Heine, von Kleist, Zbigniew Herbert, Brecht). As Waten travels east by rail across Europe, places passed through mark the anti-Semitic past of Germany and Poland and then the Nazi invasion of the USSR. (The imminent re-emergence of fascism in West Germany was one of the recurrent tropes in Soviet discourse in this period.) Against the Nazi past is contrasted the socialist present, so gradually the journey through the past does come to prefigure a journey into the future. But socialism itself has been embodied in the narrator's personal and ethnic experience, as a historical rather than political phenomenon.

In the Russian chapters, traces of the utopian panorama are restricted to the cultural sphere and to two issues: Jews and writers. This focus is inevitable because of Waten's position within contemporary literary discourses, and it can appear as the "logical" outcome of the authorial and historical narratives we have just read. The book's over-riding theme is now *post-Stalinism*. The narrator confronts the old and seeks out the new writers; the liberals — Ehrenburg, Polevoi, Granin, Yevtushenko, Voznesensky, *Yunost*, *Novy Mir* — occupy centre-stage and bear the burden of the future. He writes positively of once-discredited figures such as Tsvetayeva, Achmatova and Pasternak (though not *Doctor Zhivago*). He criticises or allows others to criticise Stalinist practices and even the present — "The present leaders, no more than Khrushchov (sic) seemed to understand that art would not flourish until there was a genuine variety of concepts and forms" (111); "I couldn't think of a living Soviet writer who was capable of anything a quarter as good as *War and Peace*" (82). As in his 1959 article, there appears to be a clear alignment with post-Stalinist liberalisation:

After the death of Stalin in 1953 some of the worst rigidities were jettisoned, but could it be said that the Stalinist concept of Socialist realism had been laid to rest? Otherwise how could you explain the sharp, discouraging criticism which faced novelists who came to grips with modern life and the praise bestowed on those who gave a rosy picture of life... In the West even left-wing writers were saying that for a genuine artist subordination to the Stalinist concept of Socialist realism could well be too high a price to pay for economic security. The powerful Writers' Union, they believed, should protect the non-conforming writer and support a much more flexible concept of Socialist realism. This would involve rejecting the Stalinist type of literary criticism that is hardly more than ideological polemic and jargon, a travesty of Marxism no better than Maoism in literature. (59-60)

The text, in short, is more than ready to announce for its western readers that there was "no shortage [of] heretical views" (52).

But the book's politics are not quite what this might suggest. *Odessa* aligns itself with the liberal Soviet writers as the emergent, progressive tendency, a position Waten also argued in a document he wrote on international literary trends in 1966.<sup>48</sup> This renders the Soviet Union an appropriate subject for serious cultural interest. But addressed to an Australian audience already predisposed towards humanist culture, the narrative enacts a recuperation rather than a revision by testifying to the ultimate "solvability" of all problems within Soviet

communism. Still, this is scarcely a utopian argument. Waten's narrator-traveller is self-effacing, not a site of ethical transformation. As one reviewer puts it Waten is a "passionless pilgrim",<sup>49</sup> and this is *because* of his political investment in the outcome. The contrast with Manning Clark could not be stronger.

The book's calm stems from its sense of historical progression: its criticism of Soviet practices enacts the system's break with its Stalinist past largely to secure a positive representation of the present and future. In a long historical perspective, the USSR is resuming its progressive (r)evolution. This enables Waten both to entertain the unsolved problems of the present and to underscore the credentials of the Soviet state in part by revealing its deep continuities with its Russian past:

Like all the major modern states, the United States, England and France, the Soviet Union was founded on a revolution, but unlike these three societies which took centuries to flower, the Soviet Union reached industrial, scientific and educational greatness in less than fifty years, probably the fastest rate of advance in history. But there were many unresolved problems still. As a writer I did not think that the Soviet Union had solved the problem of the relationship that should exist between a Socialist society and its creative artists. In the field of art and literature there seemed to be too many taboos and sacred cows not to be touched. And the unorthodox artist was still on the outer.

I could not say that I found such arts as painting or the novel in a very prosperous condition, although there had been a resurgence in poetry. But could such a vast country as the Soviet Union with an experience unique in dramatic grandeur, in intensity of suffering and despair, achievement and hope, remain long without new and great artistic expression? A literature, music and art so rich in tradition as the Russian and Soviet would surely produce more masterpieces, epics of post war years. Did not the first forty years of the Soviet Union see formidable cultural achievements? Names like Mayakovsky, Pasternak, Eisenstein, Podovkin, Sholokhov, Babel, Shostakovich and Prokofiev constituted a brilliant galaxy of high talent and achievement. Yet the last decade has seen only a few false starts. (197-98)

Even as it carefully places the Soviet Union within the ambit of literary humanism, *Odessa* has no place for challenges to the ultimate legitimacy of State or Party or their identification with the course of history and the history of the people. While the narrative is motivated by liberalisation it cannot entertain dissidence — there is a point to Leon Cantrell's remark that Waten's objection to the treatment of writers goes no further than that it is not "good policy".<sup>50</sup> The questions are not raised; in a sense they do not have to be because of the book's "merely" literary project. In what might earlier have seemed paradoxical, it is the mainstream "literary" reviews of *Odessa* which accept its generic invitations and are thus undisturbed by its politics: "Waten's return to his birthplace was as an Australian ... a writer and as a Jew, rather than as an apologist for the communist regime".<sup>51</sup> It is in this sense a disarming narrative: disarmingly plain and apparently plain-speaking, disarmingly personal, and disarmingly literary. Pro-Sovietism becomes newly possible within the literary sphere just as it was becoming increasingly impossible in the communist political sphere (post-Czechoslovakia for example).<sup>52</sup>

This positioning helps explain a significant elision in Waten's text. *Odessa* appeared in October 1969 but the trip it describes occurred five years earlier. This is never made explicit, although the period between encompassed the Daniel-Sinyavsky trial, the Solzhenitsyn controversy, the invasion of Czechoslovakia, and, more immediately, the publication of Frank Hardy's "Stalin's Heirs" articles in which Hardy exactly reversed the argument of *Journey Into the Future* by stating that "Soviet bureaucracy has more in common with the American power elite than with any Socialist or Communist movement".<sup>53</sup> It is difficult not to read *Odessa* as a reply to this scandalous communist anti-Sovietism, an attempt to realign literature, humanism and the communist state. Waten does so by locating his narrative in the earlier moment of liberalising optimism "before" dissidence. Solzhenitsyn is mentioned only as the author of *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*. The shift from liberalisation to dissidence is the key development between the time of journeying and the time of narration, the history it suppresses or cannot see.

Waten can conclude that he "had been in a new society" (197) but the phrase carries little utopian force. He can even remark on how plump the Russians are! If we had approached *Odessa* through our knowledge of Waten's politics alone we might well have expected a didactic, utopian journey into the future. Approaching it through the generic series and its shifting cultural politics we can understand why the utopian option is scarcely available, not because Waten's pro-Soviet communism is any weaker but because of changing positions, changing circumstances for what is utterable and unutterable, within the literary field. His status as a literary witness "guaranteed" something more than propaganda, and all the power of this authorial status is mobilised for a political argument that is autobiographical, literary, historical — anything but political. Waten has to distance himself from the utopian history of the literary witness genre, especially as a known communist, while drawing on the established claims of its literariness to authenticity and cultural interest. The notion of a totally transformed society is in one sense the last thing he needs in order to participate in the contemporary debates about literature, freedom and socialism. In another sense the idea must still be present but indeed as a "last thing" — the culmination of the progressive, humanist history, the literature and freedom, to which Waten bears witness.

From the 1930s to the 1970s the detours on the utopian journey into the future become longer, not least for the communist literary traveller. *Odessa* is a late example of the genre, on its furthest horizons. But notions of a *new* culture and cultured citizens the opposite of our own meant that utopian figures continued to haunt literary approaches to the Soviet Union throughout this period. They were the product of what might be called a particular disposition within the literary field. When first researching this topic I could envisage a conclusion in something like the following terms: "Books about the Soviet Union will continue to be written in ways that constitute a specific genre just as long as the Soviet Union can continue to function as the other of western society or culture". In the intervening period

we have had the rare experience of witnessing not just the collapse of a political system but the collapse of a genre as well.

- 1 This account of programmatic and aesthetic utopianism draws on contributions by David Carter, Ian Hunter and Jeffrey Minson to the Griffith University text *Culture and Utopia* (Nathan, Qld: 1990). See also Carter, "'Current History Looks Apocalyptic': Utopia and the Literary Intellectual", *Australian Literary Studies* 14, 2 (October 1989), pp.174-87; Hunter, *Culture and Government: The Emergence of Literary Education* (London: Macmillan, 1988), pp.70-107; Philip J. Kain, *Schiller, Hegel, Marx: State, Society, and the Aesthetic Ideal of Ancient Greece* (Kingston and Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1982); Minson, *Genealogies of Morals: Nietzsche, Foucault, Donzelot and the Eccentricity of Ethics* (London: Macmillan, 1985), pp.109-13 and passim.
- 2 Edward Bellamy, *Looking Backward 2000-1887* (1888; Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press, 1967). Other programmatic utopian writers include Robert Owen and Saint-Simon.
- 3 Raymond Williams, "Utopia and Science Fiction", in his *Problems in Materialism and Culture: Selected Essays* (London: Verso and New Left Books, 1980), p.205.
- 4 On the panorama and travel writing see Meaghan Morris, "Panorama: The Live, the Living and the Dead", in *Island in the Stream: Myths of Place in Australian Culture*, ed. Paul Foss (Leichhardt, NSW: Pluto Press, 1988), pp.35-46.
- 5 Gary Saul Morson, *The Boundaries of Genre: Dostoevsky's "Diary of a Writer" and the Traditions of Literary Utopia* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), p.75.
- 6 From Zhdanov's speech to the First All-Union Congress of Soviet Writers, 1934, reprinted in A. A. Zhdanov, *On Literature, Music and Philosophy* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1950), p.16.
- 7 Bellamy, *Looking Backward* and William Morris particularly in *News from Nowhere* (1891; London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1970). On Bellamy's influence in Australia see Robin Gollan, "The Australian Impact", in *Edward Bellamy Abroad*, by S. Bowman et al. (New York: Twayne, 1962), pp.119-36.
- 8 Friedrich Engels, *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific* (1880; first English translation 1892) reprinted in *Marx and Engels: Basic Writings on Politics and Philosophy*, ed. Lewis S. Feuer (London: Fontana, 1969), pp.109-52. Katharine Susannah Prichard, *Why I Am a Communist* (Sydney: Current Book Distributors, n.d. [1957?]), p.8 (my emphases). There are precedents for the figure of *cultural* authority making such a statement of *political* position: for example, Morris's "How I Became a Socialist" (*Justice* 16 June 1894, quoted in E. P. Thompson, *William Morris: Romantic to Revolutionary* [London: Merlin Press, 1977], pp.175-76).
- 9 Frank Hardy uses the phrase as an epigraph to his *Journey Into the Future* (Melbourne: Australasian Book Society, 1952). Further references will appear in the text.
- 10 The Very Reverend Hewlett Johnson, Dean of Canterbury, *The Socialist Sixth of the World* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1939), a Left Book Club selection. It was reprinted in an abridged version in Australia by the Australian Friends of the Soviet Union (FOSU), Sydney, n.d. (1941?). Alistair Davidson comments that after the USSR became an ally in 1941 the FOSU, then called the Australian-Soviet Friendship Society, regained support it had lost after the signing of the non-aggression pact (*The Communist Party of Australia: A Short History* [Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1969], p.85). Perhaps the Australian publication matches this date although it is still issued under the name of the FOSU. The edition includes Johnson's preface which dates itself as written "on the fifth day of the Nazi attack on the Soviet Union". My quotations from this abridged Australian edition cited above. Further references will appear in the text. For signs of the book's influence see John Sendy, *Comrade's Come Rally! Recollections of an Australian Communist* (Melbourne: Thomas Nelson, 1978), pp.7-8 (and note 16 below). In 1942 over 200,000 copies of *The Socialist Sixth* had been sold in Australia (Sendy, *Melbourne's Radical Bookshops: History, People, Appreciation* [Melbourne: International Bookshop, 1983], pp.112-13).
- 11 Katharine Susannah Prichard, *The Real Russia* (Sydney: Modern Publishers, 1934), p.1. Further references will appear in the text. Prichard visited the USSR in 1933.
- 12 Jonathan Culler, *Framing the Sign: Criticism and Its Institutions*, pp.157-58 and Ch.9 ("The Semiotics of Tourism") passim.
- 13 *Australian Women's Weekly* 12 May 1945.
- 14 *Soviet Culture* (Sydney: NSW Aid Russia Committee, 1942). Further references will appear in the text. The contributors and contents are, in order of publication (which seems to follow the order of the conference talks): "Medicine", Dr J. Grahame Drew; "Medical Plans and Progress", Professor J. V. Duhig; "Science", Professor I. Clunies Ross; "Education", Elsie Blackshield; "Education", John Dease; "Music", Dr Cyril Monk; "Ballet", Raia Kuznetsova; "Art", Bernard Smith; "Architecture", Henry

Pynor; "Literature and Drama", Miles Franklin; "Literature and Drama", Katharine Susannah Prichard; "Literature", Frank Dalby Davison. The booklet also prints a message from "British scientists, artists, actors, poets, writers" plus the resolutions passed at the initial conference.

15 For example, on pp.22, 36 & 41. Bernard Smith quotes William Morris, p.57.

16 This is exemplified in another returned traveller's tale: John Rodgers, *Report on the Soviet Union* (Melbourne: Australia Soviet House, 1949). The Melbourne City Council refused use of the Town Hall for the delivery of the speech of the *Report*. A civil liberties campaign was organised around the issue, and the speech was eventually delivered at the Unitarian Church, Melbourne, 23 February 1949. See Don Watson, *Brian Fitzpatrick: A Radical Life* (Sydney: Hale & Iremonger, 1978), p.227; Malcolm Saunders and Ralph Summy, *The Australian Peace Movement: A Short History* (Canberra: Peace Research Centre, 1986), p.32. 1949 was a crucial year with the national coal strike, the federal ALP's loss of office and the formation of the Australian Peace Council. See Meredith Burgmann, "Dress Rehearsal for the Cold War", pp.71-79 and "Hot and Cold: Dr Evatt and the Russians, 1945-1949", pp.105-8; and Frank Cain and Frank Farrell, "Menzies' War on the Communist Party, 1949-1951", pp.109-34, in *Australia's First Cold War 1945-1953: Volume 1: Society, Communism and Culture*, eds Ann Curthoys and John Merritt (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1984). Rodgers of course is not a *literary* witness, but he does mention that among the sponsors of his talk are "four of Australia's best-known authors". No names are given but likely candidates would include the Palmers, Prichard, Leonard Mann, Alan Marshall or Frank Dalby Davison.

17 "The first fundamental difference between capitalism and socialism exemplified in Soviet Russia is that, while in capitalist countries the means of production, distribution, information and exchange ... are owned and controlled by groups of rich individuals, under socialism as in the USSR, these are owned and controlled collectively by the working people. From this fundamental difference others arise — and they are many". *Journey*, p.129.

18 See Jack Beasley, *Red Letter Days: Notes from Inside an Era* (Sydney: Australasian Book Society, 1979), pp.62-64, 137-38.

19 This is no less true of those passages where Hardy shifts to the present tense. The shift is a way of underlining that this is how it happened *then*. Perhaps surprisingly given the genre, *Journey* is the first example of something that becomes recurrent in Hardy texts, the splitting of his narratives into text and meta-text (and, however briefly here, the retelling of the *Power Without Glory* story). See John Frow, *Marxism and Literary History* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986), pp.197-205.

20 For example: "Change the rules and the language and I was at the football in Melbourne," (110); talk at the trots in Moscow (!) "was reminiscent of conversation on trial nights on Thursdays at the Melbourne showgrounds" (123); and one worker met was "like a really friendly Australian working man" (231). It is no accident that this kind of comparison tends to occur in "populist" situations. The category of "the people" is a key one in Hardy's text and, as elsewhere, it functions differently from the "mass" or the "proletariat".

21 Hardy quotes Stalin's definition of a nation — "a historically evolved, stable community of people, based upon the common possession of four principal attributes, namely: a common language, a common territory, a common economic life and a common psychological make-up manifesting itself in common specific features of national culture" — and adds: "Of all the definitions of a nation given through the years, that is, to me, the only satisfactory one" (261). The CPA in 1951 announced its policy in terms of "Australia's Path to Socialism": see Alistair Davidson, *The Communist Party of Australia: A Short History* (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1969), pp.117-18. Hardy quotes extensively from this policy, *Journey*, pp.328-32.

22 *Journey*, Chapter 4, "Entertainment Galore" and Chapter 5, "At the Football and the Races".

23 Manning Clark, *Meeting Soviet Man* (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1960), p.1. Further references will appear in the text.

24 Geoffrey Blainey, "The Manning Clark School of History", *Scripta* 6, 2 (1990), p.64. Clark: "Letter to Tom Collins: Mateship", *Meanjin* 2, 3 (1943), pp.40-41; "Tradition in Australian Literature", *Meanjin* 8, 1 (1949), pp.16-22.

25 On Clark's aesthetic status see David Carter, "Manning Clark's Hat: Public and National Intellectuals", in *Celebrating the Nation: A Critical Study of Australia's Bicentenary*, eds Tony Bennett et al. (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1992), pp.87-103. Manning Clark, *The Quest for Grace* (Ringwood, Vic.: Penguin, 1990). The dust-jacket blurb helps the reader to acknowledge the authority of the historian taken up into the larger category of the author: "Manning Clark is a historian who went to Russia with an Australian writers' delegation.... For him, meeting Soviet people was like a reunion with oldest friends — the men and women of Russian literature, whom he had known intimately for years". The

circumtextual framing is completed by Clark's photograph on the book's back cover, in which he looks every inch the poet-philosopher-prophet.

26 The book concludes: "... for months after the return one felt a nostalgia not so much for Soviet Man but rather for the tragic grandeur of Russia — and for Russians".

27 Clark, quoted in "Writers Back from USSR Talk of Cultural 'Vigor', Quality", *Tribune*, 22 December 1958, p.4.

28 John Docker, *In a Critical Condition: Reading Australian Literature* (Ringwood, Vic.: Penguin, 1984), pp.83-109.

29 See my "Capturing the Liberal Sphere: *Overland's* First Decade", in *Outside the Book: Contemporary Essays on Literary Periodicals*, ed. David Carter (Sydney: Local Consumption Publications, 1991), pp.186-87.

30 Waten kept a notebook on the journey and intended to write a book from these notes. He writes to his wife, "It's an extraordinary impression, more remarkable than I ever imagined. I'll get a good book out of it". Judah Waten papers, NLA MS 4536 Box 25, letter to Hyrell Waten, 12 November 1958.

31 Judah Waten, "How People's Culture Flourishes in USSR", *Tribune* 14 January 1959, p.7; "Literature and the Writer in the Soviet Union", *Tribune* 28 January 1959, p.7; "The Jews in the Soviet Union", *Tribune* 11 March 1959, p.6. The articles were printed in slightly different versions in the *Guardian*, 1959: "My Impressions of the USSR", 29 January, p.5; "Literature and the Writer in the Soviet Union", 5 February, p.5; "National Equality in the Soviet Union" 19 February, p.5.

32 Waten, "They Were Right to Reject *Dr Zhivago*", *Tribune* 2 March 1959, p.7. After having been rejected by *Novy Mir* the novel was published in 1957 in Italy and then in English in 1958. The award of the Nobel Prize to Pasternak was in October 1958; criticisms of him began then and Pasternak made the required self-criticism in *Pravda* in November. The Australian FAW delegation left Australia at the end of October and stayed until mid-December. See *Meeting Soviet Man*, "A Conversation About Pasternak", Chapter 4.

33 Abraham Rothberg, *The Heirs of Stalin: Dissidence and the Soviet Regime 1953-1970* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1972), p.32. The debate was also critical for the post-communist *Overland* which published two pieces on the novel, one negative, by Katharine Prichard, one positive, by Maurice Shadbolt: "Two Views on *Dr Zhivago*", *Overland* 14 (March 1959), pp.30-32. This prompted *Tribune's* controversial attack on the magazine's revisionism: Rex Chiplin, "*Overland: Where's It Being Taken*", *Tribune* 13 May 1959, p.7. See my "Capturing the Liberal Sphere", pp.184-85.

34 Waten, "The Professor's Book is a Great Disappointment", *Tribune* 9 March 1960, p.6. Clark writes to Waten firmly defending his book and its sympathy for the Soviet people: "I knew that you, and McAuley, Buckley etc would not like this. I did not reply publicly to their abuse nor will reply publicly to abuse this time". Letter to Waten, 5 February 1960, Waten papers NLA MS 4536/2/325.

35 Clark, "Soviet Culture An Active Reality: Seeking the Literature of Many Lands", *Age* 3 January 1959, p.13; "Soviet Culture: The Creative Driving Force Behind Russian Ideals", *Age* 10 January 1959, p.17.

36 Judah Waten, *From Odessa to Odessa: The Journey of an Australian Writer* (Melbourne: F. W. Cheshire, 1969), p.108. Further references will appear in the text.

37 Waten begins reviewing regularly in early 1967. He also writes for the *Australian Book Review* and the *Sydney Morning Herald* a number of times from 1965 to 1969. In 1966 he published a series of articles in the *Age* on literary figures encountered overseas: "Ehrenburg, Miller and Yevtushenko", 5 February, p.21; "Stephen Spender, the Snobs and Arnold Wesker", 12 February, p.22; "Some Australians and Iris Murdoch", 19 February, p.22.

38 Waten's previous two books, *Distant Land* and *Season of Youth*, had been published by Cheshire. The former was also an ABS selection.

39 Rothberg, p.12. The account which follows draws largely on his work. Some of the key texts around which debate centred in the 1950s were an essay by Ilya Ehrenburg, "On the Role of the Writer"(1953); Ehrenburg's novel, *The Thaw* (1954; sequel, 1956); Dudintsev's novel, *Not By Bread Alone* (1956); and most famously, of course, Pasternak's *Doctor Zhivago* (1957, in Italy; 1958 in English). See references to Australian debates above, Chapter 6.

40 Rothberg, pp.15-20 (quotation p.20).

41 Rothberg, pp.140-45. With his wife and daughter, Waten left Australia around Christmas 1964. They were in Bombay in January 1965, Berlin by February, the USSR in March and April (Odessa). In May Waten attended an International Writers' conference in Weimar (along with John Morrison, Dorothy Hewett, Bert Vickers, Alan Marshall, Geoffrey Dutton, Max Harris, Bill Wannan, Clem Christesen,

Frank Hardy and John Manifold): "No-One Can Blanket This News!" *Realist* 20 (Spring 1965), pp.18-20. He was in the UK until November, returning home via Berlin and Moscow in early February 1966. Rothberg, p.197. See Chs 12-18 passim.

For contemporary CPA thinking on the question of anti-Semitism in the USSR see *Soviet Jewry: A Reply to I. Leibler* (Sydney: Current Book Distributors, 1965). This issue would consume a good deal of Waten's time and energy over the course of the 1960s and make him a controversial figure in the Jewish community.

Anti-communist Catholic radical, Vincent Buckley, and recent ex-communist and radical nationalist, Stephen Murray-Smith, introduced exiled Hungarian dissident writer Tibor Meray to the conference and supported a resolution about the lack of freedom of writers "in a number of countries". This phrase was blocked in the final resolution, largely because of communist organisation against it. See "What Happened in Melbourne", *Outlook* 3, 6 (December 1959), pp.3-4; and Ralph Summy and Malcolm Saunders, "The 1959 Melbourne Peace Congress: Culmination of Anti-Communism in the 1950s", in *Better Dead than Red: Australia's First Cold War: 1945-1959: Volume 2* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1986), pp.89-91. Buckley gives a key role to Waten: "next morning [we] were subjected in our absence to vilification from a Communist writer, Judah Watern (sic)" ("What Really Happened at the Peace Conference", *Observer* 26 December 1959, quoted in Summy and Saunders, p.89). And see Waten, "The Association for Cultural Freedom Brings an Emissary", *Tribune* 10 September 1958, p.7.

See correspondence in the Judah Waten papers, NLA MS 4536/2 from throughout this period (1959-1969) between Waten, Dutton, Max Harris, and Soviet writers, especially Oksana Krugerskaya. Soviet writers visited Australia in 1960, '63, '65, '66 & '68 and attended the Adelaide Festival Writers' Week a number of times.

Interview with Tony Morphet, "Spectrum: Judah Waten on Commitment", ABC Television, 18 December 1966.

Paul Fussell, *Abroad: British Literary Travel Between the Wars* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), p.39. See Culler's critique, *Framing the Sign*, pp.155-56.

*Report of Literary Trends* (1966). No place or publisher given. A 10-page typed document. Waten writes: "the Stalinist concept of Socialist realism simplified reality and imposed on it an authorisation of accomplished truth ... it made man's place in history static" (p.7). Dorothy Hewett wrote to Waten, 2 February 1966: "I felt I had to write a short note to congratulate you on your long roneoed report after returning home. I thought it was excellent and reflected so much of what I'd felt and seen myself even in the short time I was in the GDR and Moscow. I'm sure it will do a great deal to give people, particularly left-wing writers, a balanced view of the kind of perspectives that lie ahead, if only we have the skill and the guts to get hold of them". NLA MS 4536/2/872.

Maurice Dunleavy, "Passionless Pilgrim", *Canberra Times* 15 November 1969, p.14.

Leon Cantrell, "From Odessa to Odessa", *Australian Left Review* December 1969, p. 75.

Brian Kiernan, "Revisiting Russia with the Eyes and Ears of an Adult", *Australian* 25 October 1969, p.23. See also: Clive Turnbull, "From Melbourne to Odessa and Back", *Age* 11 October 1969, p.13; Geoffrey Dutton, "From Odessa to Box Hill", *Australian Book Review* (November 1969), p.20. For reviews more interested in the book's politics see Cantrell (cited above) and Robert Jones, "Not Worth the Trip", *Bulletin* 22 November 1969, p.67.

Gordon Adler in *Tribune* does not directly criticise the book but largely ignores it and is much more critical than Waten of the current Soviet regime. "Waten: Story of an Odyssey to Odessa", 26 November 1969, pp.6-7.

Hardy, "History Invited Us", *Bulletin* 18 January 1969, p.31. Hardy's articles, originally from the London *Sunday Times*, were printed between 11 January and 1 February in the *Bulletin*. Waten's correspondence includes a sheaf of documents on the Daniel-Sinyavsky case, apparently sent to him by Dorothy Hewett as part of an appeal for writers' signatures protesting their imprisonment. This is after Waten had reprimanded Hewett in a letter (31 March 1967), on receiving news from East Germany of an extremely critical letter she had written to one of her hosts about the treatment of writers, on her return from that country (NLA MS4536/2/1021-5, 1029, 1039-48). Waten's *Report of Literary Trends* argues that the Stalinist-Socialist Realist past is behind the Soviet Union, and that the changes introduced at the 20th Party Congress will not be reversed "despite the Sinyavsky and Danil (sic) case". See also "Writers Gaoled in the Soviet Union: A Symposium of Australian Writers' Opinions", *Realist* 29 (Winter 1968), pp.44-52; contributors include Prichard, Ralph de Boissiere, Aileen Palmer, Len Fox, Kylie Tennant and Roland Robinson.

## 8

## A Jewish Australian Writer

*I do not regard myself as a Jewish writer but as very much an Australian writer who happens to be of Jewish extraction.*  
(Judah Waten, "My Two Literary Careers", 1971)

### Beyond the Migrant Writer

During the last decade or so in Australia a significant body of critical and theoretical work on migrant writing has appeared. I have referred to some aspects of this work in relation to Judah Waten's *Alien Son* and the location of the migrant writer in the immediate post-war period. Here I want to turn first to recent critical work on migrant or non-Anglo-Celtic writing and then to read a number of Waten's "migrant" fictions against the perspectives it supplies. In addition I want to discuss Waten's critical writing on questions of migration and migrant literature.

After *Alien Son* and *The Unbending* Waten departed from the migrant story, if we can use that phrase for the moment, in *Shares in Murder* and *Time of Conflict*. He returned to it in 1964 with the publication of *Distant Land* and in 1971 with *So Far No Further*. The former also marked Waten's return to mainstream publication and was his most critically acclaimed work after *Alien Son*. Waten also published short stories and memoirs, many concerning migrants and migration, collected in 1978 in *Love and Rebellion*.<sup>1</sup> The alternation in Waten's career between works which focus on non-Anglo-Celtic migrants and works which locate their heroes as Anglo or Celtic "ordinary Australians" itself has bearing on the question of how we theorise the field of migrant writing. What status do we give to experience and autobiography? What distinctions need to be made between writing *of* migrants and writing *as* a migrant? What status indeed do we give to *migration*?

Judah Waten's writing does not *prima facie* fit well with many of the current notions of migrant/non-Anglo-Celtic writing. In a theory field that is post-structuralist and post-modernist in one sense or another, Waten's realism presents a surface resistant to the play of critical desire. For a criticism that valorises excess, his self-denying prose is not likely to be fashionable or theoretically viable. Manfred Jurgensen, for example, has argued that "there is no multicultural imagination at work in any of his writings".<sup>2</sup> If it is the case that "multicultural aesthetics", in Jurgensen's term, has little to say about Waten, we need to ask not only how this absence reveals absences in Waten's writing but also how Waten's writings reveal absences in the theory.

The notion of "migrant writing" has been cast into doubt in recent theoretical work, by Sneja Gunew for example for whom it can never appear except alongside the notion of the non-Anglo-Celtic: "the term 'migrant writing' is commonly used without any awareness of the differences it contains within itself, not simply those that exist amongst the various non-Anglophone groups but also the differences which have nothing to do with migration but everything to do with the fact that the writer is non-Anglo-Celtic".<sup>3</sup> To emphasise migration can delimit the space from which "migrants" may speak to that of the trajectory towards assimilation; non-Anglo-Celtic, by contrast, can foreground the question of positionality within language and culture. More recently Gunew has employed the term "ethnic minority writing", in part to indicate "that such writing needs to be seen always in relation to something designated ... as ethnic *majority* writing".<sup>4</sup> This minority literature cannot be theorised simply against the socio-history of migration but rather in terms of *reading for cultural difference*.<sup>5</sup> Reading for difference in this sense is to read against the grain of universalist assumptions which support the culture of normative, though never singly dominant, groups: male, middle-class, white, Anglo/Anglo-Celtic. It should no longer be possible to read as if there were one literature unmarked by cultural specificity surrounded as it were by minority literatures which are so marked, as working-class, female, Aboriginal or, for our purposes, "migrant". Minimally, such an argument calls upon the reader to acknowledge that Anglo-Australian literature is indeed an ethnic literature. It thus also alters our sense of what constitutes the national literature, which must be something *other than* an ethnic literature.

This theoretical shift aims to make "readable" texts which might otherwise be understood simply in terms of lack in relation to the dominant: lack of order, style, nation-ness or, indeed, universality. It is to return them fully to the realm of textuality, important as migrant writing often deploys "marginal" genres such as autobiography or memoir which themselves be taken to lack literariness. We can thus begin to read their stories as always in part the story of the text's own minority relationship to a majority tradition. This is the kind of reading of *Alien Son* which I hope to have provided above. It is a reading which discovers this writing as a strategy of resistance to the homogenisation of the minority or marginalised groups as singly migrant, ethnic, Other.<sup>6</sup>

Sneja Gunew has been the most prominent theorist of migrant and non-Anglo-Celtic writing in Australia. Her arguments enter this writing into the critique of the subject which characterises the projects of both post-structuralism and post-modernism. Drawing on Lacan and later Kristeva, she discusses the migrant as a specific form of the decentred or fragmented subject, fragmented to the power of

two as the migrant is forced to renegotiate his or her entry into the symbolic. The definition of "migrant" becomes less a matter of birthplace or passport than of positioning within discourse, "not so much a question of *being* a migrant but of writing from a migrant position"<sup>7</sup>:

By "migrant" I mean those who construct their subject-positions in terms of those who have had to renegotiate an entry into the symbolic. "Migrants" are those whose initial socialisation has taken place in a language and culture other than the hegemonic one, so that when they enter a new culture they are repositioned as children renegotiating language and the entry into the symbolic.<sup>8</sup>

Her emphasis on the repositioning of the migrant as child recalls my own earlier reading of *Alien Son* through its doubleness as both within and beyond the position of migrant.

Gunew's work enables us to expand the differences between what we might call pre-structuralist and post-structuralist readings of migrant writing. The former is grounded in the categories of individual experience, the authentic voice and, therefore, an expressive notion of language. It privileges the first-person mode as the site of authenticity and so reads migrant writing in a limited and reflectionist sense as autobiographical or sociological (in which case third-person omniscient conventions might be appropriate). Against these constraints Gunew returns to the migrant story as text or discourse: "'I' guarantees nothing, just as the fact of being born into a language other than English does not guarantee that one speaks from a position different from that taken by writers placed within the host language".<sup>9</sup> Migrant writing has often been read as analogous to oral history, itself misunderstood as the authentic testimony of "speaking subjects" but not "writing subjects".<sup>10</sup> This in turn, Gunew argues, privileges two master plots for the migrant experience, the migrant success story or the migrant as problem.<sup>11</sup> I will show later how Waten's stories intervene in these master plots.

In the pre-structuralist scenario migrant writing is perceived as an unproblematic addition to or assimilation into the majority culture. As such its primary function is to affirm the host culture's own depth and breadth even if at sub-literary levels. In the post-structuralist scenario, by contrast, migrant writing is (potentially) a site of the transgressive, of resistance to or subversion of a dominant culture. As both inside and outside the majority language, inside and outside its hierarchy of discourses, it is likely to transgress the limits by which that culture defines itself. In particular, Gunew argues, "migrant writing registers a reading and interrogation of the nexus between culture and nationalism".<sup>12</sup> Writing from a marginalised position in relation to a dominant Anglo-Australian culture, the dislocation of the "migrant" represents a position between two positions which itself dislocates the majority culture's normative assumptions regarding the oneness of

nationality, identity, common sense, place and home, language and experience: "Some (not all) of this writing breaks down any obvious reading of a unified subject (according to gender, class, culture) because these texts register clearly their dissonance with traditional meaning processes. Some, not all, because some migrant writing also plays the game of mimicry ... creating familiar facsimiles of the subjects we all know".<sup>13</sup> The transgressive is that which exposes the exclusions, contingencies and contradictions of hegemonic discourses. It exposes as it is exposed to the limits of discursive limits. Thus the valorisation of excess and extravagance, hybridity and alienation, in recent criticism of migrant writing.<sup>14</sup>

The transgressive power of the marginalised is now a familiar trope in critical and theoretical writing. As a mode of criticism it will find itself drawn to *non-realist* forms, to writing — and speaking — which foregrounds its writerliness, thereby rendering and thematising as problematic subjectivity, the migrant experience, ethnic identity, and their representations. Classic realist narratives, by contrast, will be seen to collude in the very systems of representation and subjectivity which marginalise minority voices. They will simply deliver up the migrant story for majority consumption; like Waten's novels, according to Jurgensen, they will offer "little resistance to their integration into mainstream Australian literature".<sup>15</sup>

In this moment the critique approaches more dangerous ground where theories of discourse and subject-formation carry a disguised aesthetic imperative which it is difficult to anchor specifically to migrant or ethnic minority writing. Gunew's work lies within this theory field and so carries forth its aesthetic imperative towards the non-realist work. But her readings foreground positionality:

The question is always: for whom? If one asks how these texts differ from other kinds of non-realist or experimental writing in Australia, an answer is: only in so far as they foreground historical, cultural and socio-political questions concerning pronouns and positionality: who, from where, when and to whom? The reminder, to those who have eyes to see, is that the enunciating positions are partial and outside (or overlapping with manifestations of other cultural codes).<sup>16</sup>

Elsewhere specific histories and politics seem to be forgotten altogether. It is not difficult to see why Jurgensen finds Judah Waten unreadable as the expression of a "multicultural imagination":

A multicultural imagination is a transformational imagination, involving a transference of imaginative speech, in content and form, in semantics and grammar, in vocabulary and semiotics. It is recognisably "open", volatile, incomplete, in a state of becoming.... A multicultural work of literature is not carried by the safety of an established "mainstream" literary culture. Instead, it is perceived by that culture as a threat to the canon, and so defined as a failure or as marginal....

The unique contribution of the multicultural artist is more than a combination or rearrangement of native and second-language literature. A new quality of imagination asserts itself, realising visions which could not have been

expressed in any other form.... A truly multicultural aesthetics articulates new imaginative relations; it explores original concepts, ideas, images and experiences. Multicultural writing is the art of conveying a new consciousness; it is a different kind of imaginative thought.... The written work must possess a quality of originality capable of creating its own imaginative space in Australian literature; it does not aim for integration into a literary culture but strives to extend its range and concept.<sup>17</sup>

In this formulation "multicultural aesthetics" becomes just another name for aesthetics; for what post-romantic aesthetics has always claimed as the transformative capacities of Art. While these capacities may no longer be expressed in terms of resolution, the dialectics of transcendence are never far away in such conventional, over-excited claims for originality, "new consciousness", "becoming". No doubt certain kinds of migrant writing are operable in this way for certain readers and writers, but Jurgensen's claims are more ambitious. The problem is that "multicultural" is thereby in danger of appearing sheerly redundant in relation to literature or the imagination. Almost inevitably Jurgensen concludes that "*all* literary art ... is multicultural whenever it extends beyond the boundaries of a national culture. In this sense, the classical works of world literature have conveyed to their diverse readership a multicultural imagination".<sup>18</sup> Cultural difference disappears in the undifferentiated world of Art and its transcendent citizens.

My scepticism towards this kind of argument for "minority" writing has also been voiced in relation to certain feminist aesthetics based either on Kristeva's notion of the semiotic or on *l'écriture féminine*. As Rita Felski argues, "the theory of a subversive textual politics reveals an overemphasis on the transgressive function of the experimental text in modern society". The equation of the aesthetic conventions a text employs and its politics is "ultimately formalist in its failure to theorise the contingent functions of textual forms in relation to socially differentiated publics at particular historical moments". Such a critique has two consequences: it takes us beyond the formal properties of texts to their "frameworks of reception"; and it enables realism (for example) to return as a possible cultural politics depending, as Gunew might say, on the questions of who, from where, when and to whom. In Felski's words:

the necessity and importance of a feminist avant-garde must be balanced against an equal need on the part of oppositional movements for texts which address the particularity of their social experience more explicitly and unambiguously, a need that has often resulted in a preference for realist forms which emphasise the denotative rather than aesthetic dimension of the text.<sup>19</sup>

The same argument has its point in the context of migrant/non-Anglo-Celtic writing. If the "I" guarantees nothing, nor does the "avant-garde". Realist *representation* of the migrant/non-Anglo experience has its political occasions and effectivities; the

politics of address will not be exhausted by the politics of style. Further, as readers, we cannot surrender these realist texts either to the pre-textual or to the merely literary. To be aligned with a "conservative" aesthetic tradition through the intertextuality of conventional markers should not simply be equated with the conservative cultural politics of assimilation which seek to efface cultural difference.

The notion of a multicultural imagination might not tell us about anything more than the critic's aesthetic training. As Gunew herself has remarked, in certain mobilisations of linguistic or psychoanalytically-based theories of discourse there remains the danger of a universalised grammar of transgression blind to specific historical and indeed discursive contexts.<sup>20</sup> More acutely, what announces itself as a theory of discourse operates in effect as a generalised aesthetic, an aesthetic that can also affect political statements in the field: "[Fifth World (migrant) people] have in common a range of cultural experience that allows them to see all cultural and political systems as temporary structures that are infinitely changeable and open to question. [They] have a great advantage over those who are monocultural — they are suspicious of *all* systems".<sup>21</sup> Against such figures of transcendence we need figures of limitation, concepts of cultural difference alert to the "very limited space from which to speak" which migrants are assigned within the majority culture.<sup>22</sup>

I have argued through this critique because it shows the tendency in recent theories of migrant writing towards privileging anti-realism, linking realism and assimilationism, and claiming migrant writing as a form of minority literature hence a form of post-modernism.<sup>23</sup> In other words, it shows those tendencies which are unlikely to find Judah Waten's fiction an object of theoretical interest or value. My argument is not to defend realism, especially not on its own terms, nor to pose "history" against "aesthetics" as real to unreal. The point is rather to identify distinct discursive and hence operational realms. Although I remain sceptical of the merely-conventional aesthetic claims of a critique such as Jurgensen's, the arguments towards post-modernism can indeed define the limits of Waten's discourse and its implication in the politics of assimilation.

More positively, the theories of ethnic minority writing can provide a set of concepts and perspectives through which to read Waten's migrant fiction in quite specific ways *as* migrant fiction without reducing it to the quasi-autobiographical or sociological categories of "the migrant experience". The literariness of Waten's fiction, its literary realism, however unfashionable, can become an object of interest as strategic within migrant writing which we can address without assuming in advance that it is politically retrograde. It can be read for cultural difference. We can ask, for example, how Waten writes from a migrant position and "examine the

conditions under which it becomes possible to clear a space in which to speak migrant".<sup>24</sup>

Before turning to Waten's writing directly there is another, specific case argued against it which I want to address. In an investigation of literary evidence about the migrant experience, Bosworth and Wilton place Waten with David Martin as writers "with claims to the title of 'high literature', [who] have dealt directly with migration". Their conclusion is that the novels of both "remain portraits painted by an outsider ... who has turned himself into an English language writer". Thus they are "limited" despite their "considerable realism".<sup>25</sup> I could take each of these remarks as a useful starting-point for my own analysis: there is indeed a sense in which Waten has turned himself into an English language writer and we certainly want the notion of limits. But their merely negative force for Bosworth and Wilton emerges in an inaccurate, even offensive discussion of Waten's assimilationism:

Some of Waten's writing is mildly critical of Australia's unpreparedness for non-Anglo-Saxon migrants.... But Waten is also a comfortable writer, a serene revolutionary who is not sad that Australia is such a "tranquil country", who even loves his mother ... and who devotes much of his writing to assimilation. In *Distant Land*, for example, Waten traces the conversion of the Kuperschmidts, a family of pious Polish Jews, into the materially successful Coopers. He makes much of generational differences, but the children of migrants always emerge as "Australians" and "do well" (indeed, there is much apparent endorsement of the cliché: "Every Jewish boy becomes a brain surgeon".) Assimilation is at least effective for the second generation although, invariably for the parents, the actual migrants, there is more agony or pathos and no assimilation.

Waten, in part, is writing about his own experiences. He fits very much into the mould of his second generation migrant characters.<sup>26</sup>

To find one's voice within the bounds of Australian culture and the English language is seen as a virtual act of betrayal. Waten is indeed an "assimilationist" writer or at least a writer who cannot write outside the rhetoric of assimilation. But his engagement with assimilationism is certainly more complex than Bosworth and Wilton allow. For a start, in the history of the Jewish diaspora assimilation has quite another range of connotations which must be articulated with the term's contemporary, Australian meanings.

This critique of Waten's assimilationism is argued naively. The same cannot be said of the analysis in Hodge and Mishra's *Dark Side of the Dream* which nevertheless reaches a similar conclusion.<sup>27</sup> I will delay my discussion of this more sophisticated case until the end of the chapter, and by way of conclusion.

### **Ethnicity and Assimilation**

In order to address the issues raised above I want first to look at Waten's non-fiction writings spanning the period 1948 to 1983. This period extends from the moment of high assimilationism to high multiculturalism.<sup>28</sup> In the late 1940s, while working for

the Jewish Council to Combat Fascism and Anti-Semitism, Waten published several articles on Yiddish/Jewish literature in Australia.<sup>29</sup> There was a political dimension to the consideration of these issues soon after the Second World War and during a new wave of Jewish migration from central and eastern Europe. Historically the question of Yiddish was at the centre of Jewish debates about assimilation, for Yiddish was one of the clearest marks of Jewish difference in whatever culture/majority language Jews lived. It was argued that the war had proved that assimilation was no guarantee of safety for the Jewish people, an issue debated in Waten's novels.<sup>30</sup> Yiddish also had class connotations (poor, immigrant, working-class) and it had divided the Australian Jewish community into Anglo and immigrant "factions".<sup>31</sup>

Waten's discussion of Yiddish literature is as much an intervention in these concerns as it is literary history. In focusing on Pinchas Goldhar and Herz Bergner, Waten mounts an argument for Yiddish literature but also for the notion of a literature inevitably in transition — a transition towards *Australian* literature. His language is organicist in its understanding of the relationship between literature and cultural context. While contemporary, immigrant Yiddish literature represents a continuation of the cultures of Russia and Poland, "a living literature must not remain static: it must *adapt itself* to the new environment if it is to survive". But a clear line is drawn before assimilation at least in the "Jewish" sense of the term, the public disavowal of Yiddish/Jewish culture for the sake of social or political acceptance. Some form of linguistic and cultural "assimilation", or adaptation rather, is seen as inevitable, even desirable if the culture is to retain its organic links to place; but "vulgar assimilation" in Waten's own phrase is truly reactionary, "capitulating to the so called superior culture of the ruling classes of [the] adopted country". All Waten's post-war writings are marked by this sense of historical inevitability, a discourse which is modernising, secularising and *anti-nostalgic*.

If not altogether an original argument, this might nevertheless be the *first* such argument in Australia in which an ethnic minority literature stakes a claim on Australian literature (for this is its claim). The point is not its pure originality but its sense of political occasion. Waten makes a number of nice distinctions that few other cultural commentators of the period could have made. While in Australia Yiddish "has as yet been the only vehicle through which the Jew has expressed the deepest feelings and aspirations of his people", it cannot be assumed that Jewish literature in Australia will always find expression in Yiddish: "As English becomes the language of Jewish people of the second and third generations, it is probable that there will arise an *Australian Jewish literature in English*". This cannot be reduced

to a simple assimilationist trajectory, certainly not one that effaces cultural difference.

The immigrant Yiddish speakers with whom Waten identifies were marginal not only in relation to Anglo-Celtic (Protestant or Catholic) Australians but to the Anglo-Australian Jews as well. His own constituency in these articles is overtly a Jewish one, but it is interesting that he positions himself within this Jewish readership/community as something like an English-language interpreter of Yiddish culture, an "outside insider".<sup>32</sup> Rather than identifying with either the majority Australian or Jewish cultures, he positions himself with the minority Yiddishers on one side and with a democratic Australian literature on the other. It is a position of mediation that we will frequently meet (and have already met) in Waten's writings, mediating here between Australian and Jewish, English and Yiddish. He is arguing towards a Jewish readership in the attempt to *create* a community of readers for these Australian Yiddish writers — to create Australian-Yiddish mentalities — which scarcely existed even among Australian Jews. He does so partly by reporting back to Jewish readers the progress of "their" literature in the field of Australian literature.

Waten's willingness to adopt such a position comes from a cultural politics that does in some respects resemble assimilation. He wants "a Jewish literature, which *in a sense* is also part of Australian literature" (my emphasis: the hesitation is interesting). He celebrates the acceptance into Australian literature of translations of Goldhar and Bergner. Goldhar's stories "breathe the Australian environment, the Australian Jewish community and its relations with the non-Jewish world". By contrast, "Yiddish writing which does not concern itself with life in this country, but is merely produced here by accident and is thematically and in spirit simply a repetition of Yiddish literature in older countries" is not considered as *Australian* literature. For Waten and for his Yiddish and Australian literary peers the proper relation between Australian and Yiddish/Jewish cultures was, as we have seen, one of alliance not incongruity. Here Australian literature, in the "fullest" sense of the term, was understood as part of an evolving democratic project and as anti-colonial. Perceived as such, it could scarcely be constituted as a *centre* or an oppressive dominant. An alliance with a popular, suppressed literature such as Yiddish could seem the most natural thing in the world.

There is a species of assimilation or at least anti-separatism in Waten's argument. It is based on a broadly humanist and organicist notion of the relationship between a literature and a people which leads to the conclusion that "for a Jewish literature to grow in this country it must have close links with the literature of the country". But read with a slightly different emphasis, Waten's project is no less

grounded on a sense of cultural difference and the hybridity of the migrant — Yiddish within Jewish within Australian. These are communities and speaking positions each of which Waten himself partially inhabits, each of which is itself divided. At its blandest perhaps the argument suggests a simple translation from one to the other. But in Gunew's terms, Waten's discourse is better thought of as "clearing a space" for the migrant or non-Anglo-Celtic voice within Australian literature, a voice that can talk to Australian literature, talk *as* Australian literature, without losing the marks of its cultural difference.

In his argument against *Jewish* assimilation Waten foregrounds ethnic difference but does so in a rhetoric of universalising humanism that seems to render ethnicity a secondary rather than primary category. Anti-Semitism is seen as part of the larger problem of racism confronting "all the democratic forces of the world". Its end "would not be found in the assimilation of the Jewish people, but in their independent existence in equality with all other peoples of the world".<sup>33</sup> As in an earlier phase of feminism the emphasis falls on equality rather than difference, but it does not fall on essence. It is perhaps impossible to decide philosophically whether such a global multiculturalism inscribes or simply dissolves cultural difference. This might instead be a local, "occasional" political question.

In mid-1958 Waten was advised by the editors of *Span*, an Australian-Asian anthology, that his story "Mother" would not be included despite having been accepted. The reason: "it was really unsuitable for this anthology as a story about an alien *not* being assimilated and running into difficulties here — completely wrong as a picture of Australia to distribute to our Asian friends". Waten replied:

Your point that "Mother" is actually unsuitable as it is about an alien not being assimilated doesn't seem very valid. Many aliens are not assimilated and nobody knows that better than people in Asia who have read about the White Australia policy ... and the discrimination against many foreign migrants and coloured people. Or do you really think the book will be a success in Asia if it merely provides a sugary Good Neighbour Council picture of the lives of foreigners in Australia?<sup>34</sup>

Of an American Jewish novel he wrote, it "suggests that the sense of Jewish difference still remains in the US but is now acceptable, easily accommodated to the non-Jewish middle-class point of view on foreigners. The Jews provide fun for all".<sup>35</sup>

The politics of assimilation had yet to become a major issue when Waten addressed the question of Jewish literature and identity in the 1940s. By the mid-sixties, it could scarcely be avoided. As the best-known Australian-migrant-Jewish writer, Waten was invited to review works of migrant biography and fiction and a number of academic studies of Jewish settlement. He also wrote essays on international Yiddish culture and non-English-speaking writers in Australia. These

works coincide with the writing of *Distant Land, So Far No Further*, and many of the stories in *Love and Rebellion*. Their contexts are the local cultural politics of assimilation; the emerging popularity of American Jewish literature; the "success" of the Australian Jewish community as represented in the academic studies; and, last but not least, contemporary debate about anti-Semitism in the Soviet Union.<sup>36</sup>

In the book reviews Waten's interest is in the link between ethnicity and assimilation: the process whereby Jews "disappeared as Jewish ethnic entities" and the socio-economic trajectory from the "traditional pattern of Jewish migrant occupations" to post-war middle-class professionalisation.<sup>37</sup> "In the English speaking countries", Waten suggests, Jews "have become more integrated into the general community than was ever thought possible". This migrant success story has both positive and ironic dimensions. First, a positive insistence on the contributions Jews have made in cultural and professional fields; this is a familiar trope of Jewish settlement history, but here it is less a communal pat on the back than an argument against the anti-Semitism which accuses Jews of separatism. Second, an ironic account of contemporary Judaism among the successful second and third generations. They "are not immersed in Jewish culture, although they may be ardent supporters of Israel" Waten comments without comment.

He is also ironic towards another side of the migrant success story: "Australia is truly the golden land; every Australian is 'kindly' ... Australia is without a bureaucracy.... If only it was quite like this!"<sup>38</sup> It is no surprise to find him insisting that there has indeed been a "subdued anti-Semitism" in Australian society. Waten's concern is always to balance the "genuine loss" involved in the near-disappearance of Yiddish literature and theatre in the English-speaking immigrant communities against the larger, anti-nostalgic perspective of historical inevitability.<sup>39</sup> Yiddish is "a tough travelling language, refusing to die despite wanderings and genocide and the adoption of English".<sup>40</sup> But there is a danger in nostalgia: the *shtetls*, he remarks, have become "the object of exaggerated reverence in some American-Jewish literature".<sup>41</sup>

Waten's essays on Yiddish culture addressed an international audience and must (like this last remark) be understood as interventions in the contemporary debate over Soviet anti-Semitism:

Often when anti-Soviet propagandists assert that today Yiddish culture is in a serious plight in the Soviet Union and that soon the Soviet Jews will be without a literature and language, they appear to try to leave the impression that conversely in the West, the Yiddish language and literature are flourishing. Actually the reverse is true. Yiddish is at a very low ebb in the USA and is virtually extinct in Britain, but in the Soviet Union there is still considerable creative activity in the Yiddish language.<sup>42</sup>

The arguments are detailed but their point might be summed up, reductively, in the following way: assimilation is good in so far as it means Jews becoming part of the general democratic, social (or socialist) movements in their country of habitation, in so far as it can be perceived as part of a progressive, modernising history. Against this history, separatism is mere anachronism. Assimilation is bad when it means a sheer loss of culture for the sake of wealth and status in the non-Jewish community:

[T]he whole question of integration or assimilation which as a rule was accepted and encouraged by the European socialist movement, was increasingly discussed in the Yiddish press that arose in Odessa and Warsaw. Even then Russian culture was beginning to exercise a profound influence on Jewish intellectuals and workers, largely because of the *universal* character of the ideas that animated it, the ideas of writers like Tolstoy, Plekhanov and Lenin. At the turn of the 20th century significant numbers of Jews were turning to the Russian language and Jews began to enter Russian culture and literature. However, Yiddish remained the language of the Jewish masses....

[In Britain] the Yiddish labour and general press declined as Jewish Labour gradually became part of the general labour movement.... Except as a private family language, generally imperfectly spoken, Yiddish has disappeared from the Anglo-Jewish world.... Jewish life in England has gradually found expression in an expanding Anglo-Jewish literature precisely because English has become the only language of the English Jews....

Yiddish literature and culture have catastrophically declined in the USA in the face of the integration of the American-born Jews and powerful Americanisation campaigns.<sup>43</sup>

The rise and fall of Yiddish culture is tied not to ethnicity but to the social conditions of its existence: "Yiddish literature was the specific product of Jewish life in Czarist Russia and tended to whither away under socialism with its *full facilities for integration*, or even when Jews were transplanted to the countries of capitalist democracy where they enjoy educational and civil equality".<sup>44</sup> Whenever, wherever, Yiddish ceases to be the vernacular language, Yiddish literature will decline.<sup>45</sup> It has survived best in the Soviet Union, Waten argues, because there it has "adapted itself to the new life and does not draw on a Ghetto sensibility which is still the case with Yiddish writers elsewhere"; "Yiddish writers can express one area of the *Soviet-Jewish* spirit and at the same time address the vast Soviet world".<sup>46</sup> The strongest contrast is with Zionism which "virtually [denies] Jews national citizenship in the countries of their birth".<sup>47</sup>

Waten's arguments are "pro-integration". While this has nothing manifestly to do with assimilation into a local capitalist or ethnic status quo, it nevertheless represents an argument *on the model* of assimilation into a national project in which ethnic difference becomes secondary. Zionism, ironically, might well be drawn to the selfsame model. It is only possible for Waten, of course, when the national project is aligned with the trajectory of a larger progressive history (such as supports Waten's view of the Soviet Union). But it is not difficult to see the complicity of such arguments with those of an exclusivist (ethnic) nationalism. Waten's own

immigrant Jewish experience, refracted through modernist, communist and nationalist discourses, rendered him both sensitive and sceptical towards the claims of ethnicity. Ethnic difference is asserted against the absolutist "myths of cultural superiority" which sustain the majority culture; but a universalising rhetoric in turn is asserted against the absolutist claims of ethnic difference in the form of separatism or *imperialism*.

In a later review, "after" multiculturalism, Waten remarks how certain commentators have endowed migrants with "an excessive exotic nobility". And he interrogates the concept "ethnic", noting its curious Australian use, its awkward history, its dicey politics:

*Ethnic* is misleading as it is used only to describe migrants from non-English speaking countries, from Europe or Asia, although it can as well be applied to Australians of Anglo-Saxon or Celtic origin and their customs and characteristics. Once it was a put-down word, as having to do with peoples not Christian or Jewish, heathen in fact. Something of that odium still hovers around *Ethnic*: it implies inferiority, at the best it is patronising.

Yet in Australian history, *Ethnic* represents an advance in Australian thinking.... Only a few decades ago newcomers from European countries were variously described by such offensive terms as wogs, reffos, ikey mos and, of course, dagos. Few novels or short stories ... presented these migrants objectively, as other than stereotyped characters, often unpleasant stereotypes.<sup>48</sup>

Earlier he had disputed the very claim that Jews "constitute some kind of *monolithic ethnic group*, with a belief in a common destiny".<sup>49</sup> It was important for an anti-Zionist, communist Jew to resist such a claim in order to claim his own right to speak Jewishness, a right that was in fact denied to him more than once.<sup>50</sup> Waten insists on the differences within the category "Jew":

I do not believe Catholics or Protestants are ethnic groups nor are the Jews. Jews are many things, national, religious, secular and cultural.... The Jews in the Communist Party of Israel are Jews ... and not even the most pious rabbi in Israel would doubt it.<sup>51</sup>

It might just be possible to read this as an early moment of resistance to the monolithic essentialising conducted under the sign of ethnicity, even if this was visible to Waten in only one direction. National, religious, secular and cultural identifications cut across each other and across any single ethnic identity; singly or together they cannot provide ethnicity with an essence. The argument thus also undermines assimilationism, a *form of* ethnism rather than its opposite.

There is no fundamental change in Waten's discourse in its final phase, but we can note the shifting construction of his position from, as it were, Jewish to migrant to non "Anglo-Saxon-Protestant".<sup>52</sup> As early as 1970 Waten recognises in his interest in Jewish immigrant culture the larger question of "foreign migrant writers" and non-English-speaking writers: Greek, Turkish and Italian-language

writers, Carboni, Wenz, Stefan von Kotze, Velia Ercole and contemporaries join Goldhar and Bergner as exemplars.<sup>53</sup> The task is no longer to bring forth the few migrant writers to the majority culture but rather to take a position among the many non-Anglo-Celtic writers past and present, already inside Australian literature. Waten defines the links between "all writers of non-English backgrounds" in the very same phrases he often used to define his own writing: "Loneliness, homesickness, language and cultural barriers, misunderstandings between the newcomers and the locals, divided families or the sharp conflicts between parents and their children brought up in Australia and representing different worlds and social and cultural mores".<sup>54</sup>

Waten's 1970 essay is again possibly the first essay of its kind, on non-English language writers, to appear in the mainstream cultural press. It strains at the very limits of a nationalist discourse within which, however, it is finally constrained:

It is my belief that all these foreign language writers have contributed to Australian literature, although they are far from the Australian or wider English tradition. They should not be ignored if Australian literature is to further develop its individual quality. These writers describe, among other things, elements of character which are bound to become part of the Australian character when the foreign components in present day Australian society have been absorbed.

Certainly there is no renewal of foreign language literatures in Australia. They stop with the first generation migrants....

The foreign language literatures in Australia remain enclosed in their communities, but English writing is the main thread linking the lives of the widely different peoples living here. English has proved to be able to express the different national identities which now make up the Australian people. The increasing presence of the foreign migrant in Australian literature is evidence that it has grown up and that Australia is no longer a country of people of exclusively British origin.<sup>55</sup>

Multiculturalism *avant la lettre* or "foreignness" delivered to the dominant culture merely as evidence of its own maturity? The Australian tradition and identity still represent the outer boundaries; there is still an organicist conception of the relationship between literature and people which defines the nation. Yet within these boundaries, within the nation, we find multiple traditions, multiple characters, indeed multiple national identities. Then again, perhaps all these are launched on the one historical trajectory. "The 'ethnic' writers will come of age and take their work a stage further when they begin from where they are, when they start to look with real perception and love at the landscape around them".<sup>56</sup> The goal is to become an "Australian writer"; the "language in Australia for the expression of national identity is English"; but non-Anglo-Saxon writers can make this English "their own".<sup>57</sup> One way or another it seems to be the fate or duty of the margins to enter the mainstream.

Post-structuralist interest in migrant writing is self-evidently interested: it has an investment in discovering writing which "contributes to the formation of resistances to the absolutist claims made on behalf of any culture ... [with] a healthy

scepticism towards any bid for universal truths".<sup>58</sup> As far as absolutist ethnic (and in *this* sense national) definitions of culture are concerned, Waten largely shares this sceptical project. Of course he deploys a pre-structuralist language or, to use a different comparison, he writes from a modernist rather than a post-modernist position. Waten is the earliest commentator on Australian literature to make non-Anglo-Celtic writing in Australia visible as a topic *for* Australian literature. Much of his writing thus prefigures more recent arguments about ethnic difference, hybridity and marginality. While migrant writing is not seen as a radical disruption to Australian culture, it is located as a site from which the differences within that culture are revealed.

But sooner or later we find ourselves up against nothing less than a "bid for universal truths". Ultimately Waten's pre-structuralism and modernism make all the difference. It is difficult to push his arguments beyond the level of cultural *diversity* to that of cultural *difference*.<sup>59</sup> Beyond mere diversity, for Waten, lies the universalist notion of a progressive history, anti-nostalgic but also wholly positive in both the philosophical and ethical senses of the term. History, in other words, has a goal. "Australian literature" is not perceived as a site of oppression just because (but also just in so far as) it is perceived as aligned with this positive history. The migrant subject too has a goal. Waten's migrant subjects, his own migrant subjectivities, may be double, divided, even stranded between two selves, but they are still subjects in transition, subjects on the way to somewhere. *Authenticity* is still an end (if not, interestingly, an origin).

A teleological history in this sense will almost certainly be "assimilationist", absorbing or dissolving all differences as it progresses towards its goal. Therefore, despite his insistence on the migrant voice, Waten's position is available for recuperation by the dominant culture for it continues to identify (with) the nation as a site of positive meaning. Migrants, non-Anglos, are different but perhaps the differences are "inessential". Waten's arguments on ethnicity and assimilation thereby reproduce an orthodox liberal humanism, not least in their communism, implying a consensual, equalitarian, national/human evolution. This liberal humanism is scarcely a unified field however. In one direction it could indeed (re)produce the politics of assimilation. In another it undoes the cultural centrism at the heart of assimilation. Waten's sense of the mainstream tradition is, at the very least, an increasingly inclusive one. Thus while minority writers are urged into the mainstream there is little suggestion that they (nevertheless) remain its perpetual supplements. Migration and foreignness become, rather, a constitutive element of contemporary Australian literature and its *history*.

It is not possible to write of Waten's views on migrant writing as if his discourse were merely innocent. He had a gate-keeping role, a considerable authority (present in the modesty of his critical demeanour) as an Australian-migrant writer. He has his own stake in Australian literature and in defining its ground as here rather than there: the "here" is clearly not Anglo-Saxon-Protestant, yet it clearly is "Australian". His prescriptions for migrant writing are those which allow his own fiction to figure unambiguously as part of Australian literature. Waten's critical interventions were clearly enabling for his (and for others') fiction, even as their commitment to positive notions of "Australia" and "literature" could render them part of an oppressive discourse for later ethnic minority writers.

Waten writes from a position at home in the majority culture and this can produce the argument that ethnic writers must "begin from where they are". At the same time he can show that this place is never ethnically pure or stable. Waten's career shows that "migrant" writing was on one level an *option* for him — and therefore political — even if on another level it was also a compulsion. He identifies himself — sometimes from outside — with the migrant, ethnic or non-Anglo writers. He clears a space to speak migrant or Jewish. But he refuses to speak only migrant or Jewish. If the terms of Waten's criticism make migrant writing available for recuperation by the majority culture, it is a recuperation that can only operate against any notion of monolithic ethnicity.

### **Facing the Different and Indifferent Australian World<sup>60</sup>**

In their introduction to *Striking Chords*, Gunew and Longley outline three categories of "non-Anglo-Celtic Australian writing":

The first ... deals with those texts which juxtapose the old and new cultures. Such writing, often nostalgic and elegiac, is usually perceived to be the only form that so-called migrant writing may take. And indeed, this is the only group which can properly be termed *migrant* writing.

The second group often corresponds with the second generation after immigration and may be described as taking up the position of translation and mediation.... At home in both languages and cultures, these writers translate one reality into the other and mediate between the two....

The third group is made up of those who forge new languages and new representations.... They foreground the transgressive possibilities of incorporating elements from other languages and other systems of representation into the more conventional forms, not least in their blurring of the traditional boundaries between speech and writing.<sup>61</sup>

Waten's fiction can be located unevenly across the first and second categories. *Distant Land* juxtaposes old and new cultures, but without nostalgia. It is elegiac, almost inevitably one might say for a story of a Jewish family across the course of the twentieth century. But the elegiac is almost always accompanied by *anxiety* and thus rendered symptomatic of a present lived contradiction whose resolution lies in

the future rather than the past.<sup>62</sup> The narrative of an "irrevocable" history is at once deeply elegiac, for whole ways of life are lost, and unavoidably optimistic, for new ways of life are created.

Although born outside Australia Waten can also be positioned with the second generation immigrants as he positioned himself. He insisted that he was not a Jewish writer, but "an Australian writer who happens to be Jewish".<sup>63</sup> His own description of the position from which he wrote employs the metaphor of inside and outside (as well as the figure of migrant as child):

The idea of writing in Yiddish or any other language than English did not and could not occur to me. I was brought up in Australia and despite my foreign cultural background I was firmly embedded in Australian life and English was the only possible means of communication with foreigners as well as Australians. Writers like myself are not like that other group of writers, those who came to Australia after they passed the age of say 20, compelled to have a second childhood ... a second becoming aware of the world. For writers like myself a second childhood was unnecessary and we were able to write about our foreign communities as Australian writers ... knowing those communities from the inside".<sup>64</sup>

Not only can we say that Waten is "at home" in both cultures, much of his work, both fictional and non-fictional, represents an *argument for* this possibility. His writing and his career can be understood exactly in terms of translation and mediation.

If the third category is the least applicable let me take that as a signal to begin my analysis of Waten's later "migrant" fiction with the very question of language which it poses. It is important in the context of migrant writing to focus on the *literariness* of Waten's realism, for the alternative is to understand it merely as lack, as the pre-literary speech of the migrant. But to narrow the question: how can we read Waten's utterly conventional realism *as* migrant writing, as strategic within the politics of cultural difference?

First, it is important not to underestimate the text's self-inscribed and self-inscribing function of "doing something for the first time". Perhaps the very notion that there are *stories as yet untold* is exclusively realist. It brings an additional weight to the burden of truth-telling and history already inscribed in realism. Naively or acutely, this is how Waten constructed his own migrant-writing career. The first-person semi-autobiographical stories of *Alien Son* become the third-person "chronicles" of the subsequent novels, "a chronicle of non-Anglo-Saxon migrant life in Australia".<sup>65</sup> The (realist) imperative towards representativeness carries its own consequences for representation. But if Waten shares this perspective on migrant writing with "majority" criticism, there is nevertheless a different politics at stake in the act of chronicling.

Second, their claims on realism situate Waten's migrant writings already inside a deep novelistic tradition and a local Australian tradition. To make these claims is to argue that migrant histories are national history. Rather than approaching a "strange" or exotic sub-culture in order to report back to the centre, Waten's texts speak on the assumption that here, within the culture, there is a story to be told — which can be told like any other story. There *is* a primary sense in which the story is related for the majority culture. The implied audience is "Australian". But rather than an "anxiety to please the more powerful on whom life depends",<sup>66</sup> Waten's writings are calculated to resist ghettoisation as simply migrant or even Jewish writing; they resist that "very limited space" assigned to the migrant voice.

Waten's realism, finally, participates in that universalising humanist discourse described earlier in relation to his criticism. Let me take as read the overwhelming deconstruction of both realist and humanist meta-narratives. Still we need to articulate their specific meanings for the occasion of Waten's writing, that is, as part of an anti-racist, anti-"ethnist" cultural politics. Here realism functions as the sign of a "universal" language (beneath languages) in which "all things worth saying may be said".<sup>67</sup> In a particular sense it is therefore the language of *translation* in which cultural difference can be uttered in terms of essential human or historical truths (beneath cultural difference). As with every theory of language, this is also a theory of subjectivity. In realism the subject may be divided between languages but not *in* language: there remains an essential self for which it is always theoretically possible to find the right words.

Linguistically Waten's fiction is not marked by difference. On the contrary, its realism is a powerful signifier of *belonging*, first to the realm of serious writing, second to the realm of serious Australian writing:

One can confidently assert that in the future there will be much more writing about the non-English communities in Australia.... Of course I only mean serious writers and serious writing. There is already plenty of caricature writing, mostly produced from the outside of the non-English communities.<sup>68</sup>

One aspect of this aesthetic is that Waten renders the foreign speech of his characters in what one critic calls "flat standard English".<sup>69</sup> It is easy to forget that they are not speaking English or to be uncertain what language is being spoken. But here as elsewhere Waten is less nostalgic about authenticity than his critics. He introduces Yiddish words, syntax and phrasing, but rather than mimicry it is a matter of slightly inflecting English, strategically placing non-English words or proverbs, shifting the register slightly away from the idiomatic. This is a difficult point to establish economically, but let me quote two passages:

None of them could make conversation with Joshua after they had shaken hands with him and wished him long life after the custom. He sat in a corner with his head bowed, sighing loudly, seemingly oblivious of the others who spoke in hushed voices among themselves. If sighs could remain hanging in the air, thought Mr Mandel, Joshua Cooper's sighs would remain hanging in his son's house until the end of all generations. (*Distant Land*, 153)

Falkstein repeated to himself something from his father and grandfather: "Who is rich? The man who is content with his fate.' I am content with my fate, the fate of a rich man," he thought, a bleak smile breaking out from the ends of his mouth.

When he came home he quoted from the Book of Zohar:

"Men fall only in order to rise."

Then he added:

"I rose and so did you, Sofie. We have risen to riches. Now I am content. I shouldn't care if I died next week. I don't imagine I have very long to live."

She coughed sceptically.

"You behave like a man who expects to be here in twenty years time," she said. "You're reaching out for more all the time. To take it with you? You know, Joseph, I think it gives you pleasure to be alive."

He shrugged his shoulders. The hearts of men and the bottom of the ocean are difficult to fathom, he said to himself, recalling an old Jewish proverb. (*So Far No Further*, 68)

In both quotations "non-Englishness" is suggested through minor shifts in syntax and diction, through an unidiomatic formality or proverbiality. The second passage is also deeply ironical in its traditional references (the language of the dialogue is Yiddish or Polish). There *is* a "standard English" omniscient narrator against which foreignness can be gauged, yet the narrating voice shifts easily inside that otherness and between indirect discourse and dialogue. Its task is indeed to give the majority culture access to a foreign culture, but it avoids the "excessive exotic" by playing subtly across the borders of familiarity and unfamiliarity. There is a point to the (Australian) reader's recognition of these foreigners as both the same and different.

In an analysis of Yiddish as a sub-cultural vernacular, an "affront to the dominant tongue", Maria Damon lights on the "hyperverbalism" of Yiddish-influenced English-speaking performers whose rhetoric "consistently undermine[s] a teleological narrative that would privilege a 'moral of the story'.... The point of the story is to keep telling the story".<sup>70</sup> Nothing could be further from Waten's writing than hyperverbalism and anti-teleology. But the very contrast re-figures the novels' rhetoric as a form of disciplining, a rigorous ordering and bringing into complementarity of volatile cultural differences so that the moral of the story can indeed be brought to a conclusion (even in the later novel which only goes "so far"). Waten's cultural politics are not about defensive survival on the margins but rather expanding his own inwardness to the majority culture, clearing a more generous space for the non-Anglo story *within* the Australian story. Perhaps this does demand controlled subtlety and commitment to the mundane (which is at times merely banal). Still, against the dislocating language that Damon analyses, Waten's own

prose starts to look a little less stable, less self-evident, than it wants to. Cultural difference, we might say, leaks out from under the story's moral.

*Distant Land* is the story of a family from pre-First World War Poland/Czarist Russia, their migration to Australia (1925) and their post-war "success". *So Far No Further* focuses on the children of post-war immigrants from two families, one Jewish, one Italian; it ends with a romantic attachment between the Italian son and the Jewish daughter. Waten is interested in the "migrant success story". But *pace* Bosworth and Wilton, while there is virtually always "successful" assimilation, worldly success is accompanied often grotesquely by contradiction, pathos and anxiety. At the same time, to resist assimilation altogether is likely to produce one or other form of anachronism (hopelessly upholding the old ways, aggressive separatism, or even, for Waten, theocratic Zionism). The novels work by posing one form of assimilation against another.

In *Distant Land* Shoshanah Kuperschmidt successfully becomes Susan Cooper as she works to ensure the economic, social and professional success of her family. In the process she readily abandons religious practices and what her husband Joshua would call "ideals". Her voice becomes "strident and harsh and her eyes ... hard and rapacious" (66). At the markets she offends her fellow Jews by price-cutting and working on the Sabbath:

Mr Leibel Schwartz lost his temper and said bitterly: "Your parents would die of shame if they knew you desecrated the Sabbath by working on it, let alone taking the bread out of the mouths of your fellow-Jews."

"What did you all come here for?" she asked. "To make a success. To make money. You can't in this country unless you turn your back on the old ways. Haven't you all done that?... So it is here; so I must be. I don't feel I have to apologise to anyone about it."

And that was that and her competitors knew it....

"Better to stay poor than to become a lunatic chasing the pound," Israel Cohen said.

"With a pound you can buy things, without it nothing," said Joseph Gold. "I'm afraid we'll all have to become lunatics." (65)

She sacrifices the "old ways" that impede her success, even as she clings to "traditional, even superstitious beliefs" (73). This contradiction marks the course of (vulgar) assimilation. Judaism for Shoshanah becomes superstition and social climbing, with not much in between except cooking. The contradiction she lives, by suppressing, is suggested by her death from cancer.

Yet, as the quotation shows, the novel does not allow any single position of moral superiority towards her. This is magnified throughout by the way the text distributes reader sympathy. She has her own pragmatic integrity ("Shoshanah has no shame; she is frank: 'God loves the poor and helps the rich'"<sup>71</sup>). The idea of "being realistic", moreover, is a self-reflexive figure in the text. Interestingly, she

continues to be *Shoshanah* for the reader and to command Joshua's love, a desirability it is difficult for the reader to resist.

Australia as the promised land is also treated ironically. The novels are happy to show — as a matter of fact — that economic and social success is available to Jews in Australia in ways that it was not in the old (pre-revolutionary) countries. But this is scarcely due to anything "Australian" in Australia, only to a relative absence of institutionalised anti-Semitism. There are limits here too: a "successfully assimilated" Jew is denied membership of an exclusive golf club in the story "Three Generations".<sup>72</sup> As Carl Harrison-Ford comments of *So Far No Further*, although the second generation is moving out of the "closed, racial world of their parents" they do not move into an "open, Australian life ... an egalitarian, free alternative".<sup>73</sup>

In *Distant Land* assimilation turns Jewishness into something that Joshua, for one, scarcely recognises. For him the promise of a land where Jews can be Jews without fear or discrimination means turning himself into a "half-clown, half-trader" (37), half-thief, half-comedian (61). The novels return memorably to this scene of self-consciousness, absurdity, grotesqueness, to an *assigned* identity and double dislocation, between one thing and another neither of which is originary.<sup>74</sup> Joshua's new "career" means changing his name, turning himself into a German goy rather than a Polish Jew, and shaving off his beard, the very mark of his Jewishness. Instead of the intellectual he had aspired to be, he becomes an unqualified travelling optician ironically known as the Professor. The question the novel poses is whether these excruciating violations of identity do, necessarily, violate anything "essential".

Both sides of the question are emphasised; indeed the dislocations of identity can be fatal. Split subjectivities are distributed over different character sites: Saul Greenberg, for example, the onetime unionist who despite himself becomes a factory owner; or Berel Singer, whose "concept of Jewishness was a kind of secular Judaism which he held with the same fervour as a religious Jew" (42). Berel claims that Australia has given him everything he wanted short of a fortune: "A living, no Jew-hatred, and the kind of freedom I dreamt of in old Russia when I was a young man and belonged to a Socialist group" (32). But in the same breath he declares that the "Australian world plays havoc with Jewish life.... If you get too deeply into it you are lost and you become like the Australian Jews, suspended between two worlds" (33). Joshua remarks on Berel's "desperate battle to preserve Jewishness in surroundings completely goyishe, far more so than the country they had left behind" (33). For all his optimism, Berel is the figure suspended between two worlds. His own children refuse to speak Yiddish and they find Jewish food inappropriate to the climate, though still better than cold mutton! As Berel talks, Joshua observes his face slip from candour and earnestness to "a sly, smirking smoothness" and yet

sadness (36). The novel invites us to read these as character attributes, certainly, but there is always more than personality at stake.

Berel dies soon after the Second World War of "some wasting disease" (120) and his death signals the irrevocable passing of the old Jewish world:

"This is the first time I have been in the synagogue for a long time.... And now I come to mourn the death of Europe's Jews. Joshua, the Jewish world we knew is dead. It can never be recalled...."

Truly he was mourning for the end of his own life as well as for the dead of Europe....

Joshua glanced curiously at the man who for so long had been an unbeliever.

"Now for the rest of my days I shall treasure everything that belongs to us," Berel continued. "These houses of worship as well as our culture." (120)

At the service for the Jewish dead which follows, Joshua experiences a moment of bitterness towards the Name of God: "What good was this Kaddish they were intoning with such fervour?" (122). The web of beliefs sustaining the culture, at once religious, communal and intellectual, has been irrevocably dispersed. But, for better and worse, the separate strands are available for the invention of new identities.<sup>75</sup>

As critics have remarked, the pattern of generational change and conflict structures all of Waten's migrant writings. The children become "Australian" no matter how traditional their migrant parents (*willy nilly* is a recurrent term, significant of Waten's particular historicism). There are positive and negative versions of this process of integration and, less remarked, a recurrent pattern of relationships: of a number of children (usually three) it is the youngest and least "ethnic" who becomes the authentic bearer into the future of the ideals of the old culture. The youngest child also reconciles mother and father, following the latter's ideals but with the former's (good) looks. The point is to establish the continuities beneath the discontinuities of migration: "Jewishness" itself guarantees nothing especially as it is reshaped through the Australian social or political system. Again the pattern is a self-reflexive figure, here of the novel's capacity to carry forth the positive values of the old culture into a transformation of the new.

Berel has three sons: Joseph and Nathan, partners in a clothing factory, and Morris, a medical student. Berel feels certain of the two eldest, for "they were traditional Jewish business men even without Yiddish" (42). His youngest, by contrast, "had fewer dealings with Jews..., [yet] was nevertheless more sympathetic to his father's strivings.... In his heart of hearts Berel despised business men, only respecting men of learning" (41-42). The pattern is repeated in Joshua's family: Ezekial, the eldest, becomes a barrister, a business man, a devout Jew and Zionist. His Jewishness, in the argument of the text, is both too much and not enough. In its

historical argument he is one figure of modern Judaism, aggressively ethnist under the sign of religion:

Ezekial had grown heavy and pompous with his success. Since he had become his father-in-law's partner his conversation was almost entirely about business, take-overs and expansion. On Saturdays he went to synagogue with Mr Mandel and returned home full of communal affairs and severely critical of those members of the board of the synagogue who failed to attend the service.... Ezekial had become very devout since his mother's death.... Let him be a religious Jew if he wants to be; it gives him solace and uplift as well, Joshua said to himself. He was not Joshua's idea of a religious Jew nevertheless. To his mind his father's uncle, Reb Moishe Eliazar, was the criterion of a religious Jew and not his son, who was like a convert, more holy than the holy, yet whose religion seemed very synthetic indeed. (155)

The contrast is with the youngest child Benjamin, also a lawyer but of left-wing sympathies. Joshua describes him as "an Australian, a goy more than a Jew, only interested in Australian affairs, without any Jewish feeling" (156). Yet it is to Benjamin that the future belongs, including Joshua's Jewish future.

These conflicts are played out in the novel's climax when Benjamin announces his intention to marry out, to marry a "shiksa". The event draws its argument to a close, assigning its characters to their final positions. Joshua's immediate reaction is shock, but as he sorts through his responses he can find nothing to say against the marriage that is not based on superstition or emotions "having their origins not in reason but in obscure feelings stemming from the dark past and the history of his people" (165). The passage towards this conclusion is difficult, for Joshua has a deeply-ingrained "suspicion of gentiles"; Benjamin's children "would be lost to the Jewish people" (165). In addition, the narrative underscores the mundane Australianness, the *foreignness*, of Thelma, Benjamin's partner. Her speech, her attitude, her very glances are non-Jewish, the food she cooks is gentile food with "an alien smell" (164). What wins her to Joshua are her views on anti-Semitism and racism. She has "ideals" (164). Even so, when he reflects on what Shoshanah would have thought of the marriage he is disquieted by a feeling of disloyalty towards her. For Shoshanah marrying out had been "a genuine fear as though of death itself" (132).

For Ruth, Joshua's daughter, inter-marriage "means the end of Jewishness" (163) even though she has few of her mother's traditional or religious beliefs. Earlier Joshua remarks that inter-marriage was "the only tenet of Judaism, or what they believe is Judaism, which the community clings to. Everything else has gone by the board" (132). Ezekial of course cuts Benjamin completely and argues with his father. He attempts to persuade Joshua to live in Melbourne amongst Jews. For Ezekial, Joshua's decision to stay in the country amounts to "choosing to live a Christian life in preference to a Jewish one" (177).

He also suggests living in Israel but Joshua hesitates before the Jewish life Israel offers, perhaps the Jewish life of which he had always dreamed:

He really did not know what he wanted; none of his old ideals satisfied him any longer. They had become shadowy, intangible like his own past which seemed lost in mists. Perhaps the truth was that unbeknown to himself he had formed deep ties with the new land, he had become part of it, and it was from it that new ideals would arise. (157)

*This* is the novel's unambiguous assimilationist argument (the "perhaps" is merely conventional). Joshua's "new" life, his ideals, are to be found here and now, for better or worse, willy nilly; not in the past in secular Yiddish culture or traditional beliefs; not in their contemporary politico-religious forms; and not elsewhere, in the promised land of Israel. This amounts to an argument against Jewish separatism and "vulgar assimilation" in which the two are rendered virtually equivalent. By the end of the novel Ezekial strikes Benjamin as "much closer to an extreme Christian conservative than to a Jew like myself or even [Joshua]" (185). Joshua demurs, foreseeing the possibility of anti-Semitism once again compelling Jews to come together. But Benjamin's is closest to the final word: "'It's different now.... Now we are divided on the same lines as all other people.'" (185)

The tendency of the argument is consistent with Waten's critical writing. Jewishness is not an essence but an "evolution"; it is religious, cultural, social and political and so closely determined by time and place. We could emphasise Waten's insistence on "a multiplicity of ways of being Jewish, on the right to self-definition and the right to refuse definition".<sup>76</sup> On the other hand we could emphasise the texts' programmatically-opposed progressive and reactionary ways of Jewish assimilation. If there is a multiplicity of ways of being Jewish they are not all equal. In *Distant Land* as elsewhere a singular, unambiguous argument is complicated only by the number of instances across which it is dispersed.

Ethnicity, we might say, is necessary but never sufficient. To argue which, the novels must figure an authentic form of integration (which will figure their own integrative form). Ideals which can be expressed as a form of Jewishness can be translated without loss into other cultural and political forms, and without compromising Jewishness:

[H]e thought of his life, from the earliest days when he had excelled in the Talmud and when he played the violin and later when he became a good linguist, serving a useful purpose during the war against the Nazis. Now he never played the violin and he had almost forgotten his languages, except the English he spoke. Even his Yiddish and German were now imperfect. He had not achieved what he had wanted; he had not realised his ambitions. But he had not lost his ideals, he told himself. Once he thought only of Jewish causes. Now he believed that his people and the rest of mankind could not be separated into different worlds. It did not make him less a Jew. It made him more a Jew. For him a Jew was one who respected all mankind, loved justice and believed in intellect. He would give

expression to his ideals in this town which he now believed he was destined to stay in. (187)

Joshua successfully "re-invents" his Jewish identity. What was loneliness for him becomes "perfect rest" (188), a significant phrase in a novel of Jewish migration.

In many ways, as we have seen, Waten is resisting Jewish essentialism before Anglo-Australian assimilationism. Hence his concern to argue against the primacy of "ethnic" difference. There is only an indirect concern with the politics of group survival, perhaps the principal trope of Jewish fiction and history. The texts work to identify the kinship between ethnism and assimilationism and to name the ethnicity of the Anglo-Saxon-Protestant or Celtic-Catholic host cultures. In *So Far No Further* Paul Avanzo's relation to his Italian/Catholic identity is juxtaposed to the Irish-Catholic Australian (itself dominant-dominated). Certainly the textual politics are not directed primarily at "resisting integration". But perhaps we can rewrite Jurgensen's terms to claim that the texts are designed, rather, to resist *exclusion* (the actual effect of assimilation), that is, to *demand* integration. The question then is: on whose terms?

The narrating position in Waten's fiction, I have argued, can never be located (wholly) outside the minority cultures. One effect of this is to suggest that the "migrant" culture does not depend upon the gaze from outside for its self-definition. Waten's anti-essentialism, but also his realist universalism, is present in his assumption that he can "do" Italian or Greek just as well as Jewish migrants. "The Knife" suggests what is enabling and disabling in this assumption. Waten takes on the stereotype of Italian With Knife and rewrites it from the migrant's perspective; but in the terms in which realism poses the issue he might only land on a further stereotype. In this sense the story may not get beyond "sympathy",<sup>77</sup> although the series of transpositions whereby it signifies *migration*, rather than Italian-ness, is more complex. The knife is not the Italian migrant's weapon but his link with his homeland. It becomes a weapon through the generic typing of Plinio by his Australian antagonists. A story about identity, "The Knife" is also a story about masculinity, for the father and grandfather's knife has been passed on to Plinio by his mother. But the knife — as home, law, phallus — can never reassert the masculine identity disrupted by migration. Its rise as a weapon is its fall from meaning. Used by his father for wood-carving, "his mark of self-sufficiency", its use as a weapon by Plinio marks his ultimate loss of self-sufficiency. Waten dramatises the process whereby all "foreign migrants" are "forced to experience themselves generically" as foreign.<sup>78</sup> In "A Child of War and Revolutions" the narrator remarks ironically on being taken for a German, a "Squarehead as well as Ikey Mo": "All foreigners were Germans" (*Love and Rebellion*, 13).

Serge Liberman has suggested that the history of Jewish migration is paradigmatic of ethnic minority migration in its inevitable foregrounding of the questions of identity: adaptation or alienation, assimilation or separatism, tradition or modernity, identification with the home left behind, with the here and now or with the future elsewhere. As in Waten's fiction, generational conflict and the issue of inter-marriage are the critical points.<sup>79</sup> For Liberman the emphasis falls on the balance between survival and "success" (the conventional trope). For Waten, by contrast, the emphasis falls on what we might call the problem of *modernity*. From the beginning of *Distant Land*, the Jewish community is shown to be in transition and, in a sense, hybrid. This is the novel's very starting-point. Joshua is a prodigy in Hebrew and Talmudic studies but he is also attending a Russian school: "Without knowing it Mr Kuperschmidt, although devout and conservative, had been affected by the break-down of the old ghetto world, and had set his mind on giving his son a secular education, an education that would bring a university degree and a profession" (5). Joshua learns Russian, Ukrainian and Polish as well as Yiddish and Hebrew. He reads the Russian writers, Chekhov, Gorki, Lermontov, Tolstoy, and contemporary Yiddish writers such as Aleichem: "Always he oscillated from one world to another — from the small Jewish world to the mysterious, fascinating greater outside world and then back to the Jewish again" (6).<sup>80</sup>

An enigma in Joshua's mind — the meaning of the Christian or gentile world in relation to the Jewish — is thematised in the novel across the opposition between the progressive and regressive forces of history. To Joshua, the Christian world means anti-Semitism and inhumanity yet it also provides learning: "there were teachers and pupils who were dedicated to the highest ideals, to the love of all peoples and the betterment of humanity" (8). Judaism provides him with his ideals but also with a mistrust of gentiles which, if justified locally, is ultimately irrational:

During his last years at school he had read many Russian writers, from Chernyshevsky to Gorki and he had steeped himself in the modern Yiddish and Hebrew writers. They had shaken his belief in the traditional religious attitudes of the Jewish ghetto world which had been further undermined by the war and the Russian Revolution. Even Yiddish culture seemed to be the culture of the ghetto, yet he could not embrace the culture of the non-Jewish world, much as it drew him to it.

In the Beth Hamedrash he had first talked about all these matters and he had cast doubts on the Holy Books. Then he had attended Zionist meetings where the future of the Holy Land was discussed and he found himself siding with those Zionist Socialists who believed their socialist aims could only be realised in the Holy Land. In general he was affected by Socialist ideas, yet because he felt a kind of hostility to the gentile world, a hostility that was at odds with his sympathy for the culture and the ideals that emerged from that world, he could not think of Socialism as something to be achieved in the land where he lived. For all his shedding of Jewish religious beliefs he still retained a traditional Jewish view of the non-Jew and could not come to terms with him. (12-13)

Although segregated, Christian workers, like the Jews, live in the poorest parts of the township (15). The question of class is entered into the problem of modernity alongside the question of Eretz Israel. Joshua rejects becoming a rabbi; as he is unable to go to university in Poland or Germany he decides to go to Palestine. The Holy Land offers itself as a reconciliation of his contradictory attitudes towards the non-Jewish world, for Palestine in this time and place is dangerously aligned with modernity. Joshua's father "believed it was a heresy or at least a piece of gross impertinence to want to anticipate the Messiah" (16); Reb Chaim Avremal is blunter: "They start with the Holy Land and finish up Bolsheviks" (18).

Shoshanah too, in her own way, is a sign of modernity and change, a product of the disruptive war years, unconcerned by the prospect of "migrating to a country where [she] would be surrounded by gentiles" (31). Joshua's idealistic dream of Eretz Israel, where as a linguist he could be a "human bridge between peoples ... Arab, European Christian and Jewish" (22), where he could "help to construct a new Jewish life" (26), is deflected by Shoshanah's "driving ambition" (27) for their economic success.

The significance of Palestine/Israel changes in the course of the novel (or rather its historical meaning emerges more clearly). From the perspective of post-war Australia it can no longer be a place of reconciliation, for in Israel too, it is implied, the Jews are divided "along the same lines as all other people". Ezekial disapproves of the secular politicians in Israel: "He really believed in a theocracy for Israel, a religious state led by rigidly orthodox rabbis. He admired the Catholic Church which combined religion and politics" (183). Benjamin, by contrast, resists Joshua's suggestion that he develop an interest in Jewish affairs, in Israel: "Australia's my country," he replies (125). The course of a modernising, emancipatory, progressive history is *beyond* or *through* ethnicity, certainly beyond religion. It is mundane, ordinary history, available to all, anchored in the here and now. Waten will always seek to clinch his most ambitious arguments in the most ordinary terms.

Modernity is approached differently in *So Far No Further*. In bringing together the children of Jewish and Italian families, Waten is making the same sort of argument beyond ethnicity even as he registers the force of ethnicity for all his characters. Further, this post-1968 novel is involved in a heavy-handed (that is, excessively disciplinary) argument with the politics of the New Left. The task of the novel is not only to consign the old ethnic superstitions to the past by reconciling Deborah's Polish Jewishness and Paul's Italian Catholicism, her radicalism and his conservatism (which is idealistic, genuine). It is also to win back the history of human progress and modernity from the new "presentist" politics to what I have

called the long historical perspective. Despite this, or rather because of it, the novel's resolution remains incomplete. Deborah has the last word as she resists Paul's proposal of marriage: "[W]e will have to live in our separate houses" (224). Waten's strong teleology produces a narrative emphasis on ongoingness rather than closure.

To conclude I want to consider the "post-structuralist" critique of *Distant Land* mounted by Hodge and Mishra.<sup>81</sup> They read the novel alongside John O'Grady/Nino Culotta's *They're a Weird Mob* as assimilationist. They are correct to argue that writing by "real" migrants (their quote-marks) can be no less assimilationist than that by Anglo-Celtic Australians; multiculturalism was not always historically available. What I find theoretically interesting is that they fail to distinguish Waten's text in any way from O'Grady's. Behind this failure is the ultimately formalist critique of realism defined earlier. It produces some remarkable over-readings. Waten's memoir "A Writer's Youth", they say, "is silent about his migrant experience". Unfortunately the passage they quote comes from the end of the memoir where Waten comments, with an irony they seem to miss, that his failed novel *Hunger* included "everything" except his migrant background. The memoir begins: "The first writer in my life was Sholem Aleichem, the great Yiddish comic writer".

The novel's realism is the first thing Hodge and Mishra note. They align it with other canonical emigrant family sagas including *The Fortunes of Richard Mahony*. Waten would not have minded this location at all, for his work is indeed designed to address the literary tradition, to be considered in its space. For Hodge and Mishra, though, this can only be a shortcoming or worse a "suppression" of the migrant voice. Thus they read *Distant Land* as an "unacknowledged narrative of assimilation". But on one level at least, nothing could be more acknowledged in this novel which begins with debates *within* a Jewish community between Yiddish, Hebrew and Russian options and ends with Zionism, anti-Zionism and "Australian-Jewishness" juxtaposed. What Hodge and Mishra mean, of course, on a different level, is that Waten's voice is indistinguishable from majority voices. This has its point, as I have shown, but their criticism finally depends upon a sheer aestheticisation of "voice".<sup>82</sup> If they imply an answer to the question of who Waten is writing for, they fail to ask who he is writing against.

Waten's fiction gives nothing to the overt politics of assimilation (it would not have been handed out to arriving immigrants<sup>83</sup>). At the level of discourse, and in contrast to *They're a Weird Mob*, there is no position from which a distinctive Australian way of life is offered as a singular good thing (affectionately "weird", that is, unique, authentic, native). O'Grady's plot, as Hodge and Mishra show, can only be a kind of "first contact" narrative in which the boundaries of inside and outside

remain firmly delineated. Waten's migrant story, by contrast, begins before migration and the borderlines to be negotiated are largely those of the Jewish community in transition. "Australia" has only a weak presence in the text, not as a goal so much as a kind of historical accident. There *is* a positive goal in the reconciliation of Jewish and Australian identities figured at the end of *Distant Land*, but Australia is only a contingent, and so transformable, site for this process.

I have also argued that Waten's migrant writings can be read as strategies of resistance to the "othering" of the majority culture: the fiction offers no position from which the "foreigner" can be taken generically as exotic or as pure Other. The strategy is to show that the foreigner/migrant both is and is not the same, and the fictions locate the power to make these differences on the migrants' own ground rather than on the grounds of the majority culture. If in their bid for cultural respectability Waten's texts are more assimilationist than he knows, it might also be the case that they are more wrought by cultural difference than their strong teleology admits. Again the critics can be more anxious about the authentic than Waten himself. Hodge and Mishra in effect render Waten's migrant writing illegitimate, "inauthentic" against "genuine multicultural writing" or "authentic voices" (their words). They exercise their own suppression of anything less than the "traumatised response of multicultural writing proper". But by reading cultural difference as firstly a formal difference, they fail to read for cultural difference after all. They are left in the awkward position of defending post-modernism in the name of authenticity.

In Waten's fiction diverse ethnic histories are argued into the course of Australian history as constitutive rather than as supplementary. This is despite and because of his strong commitment to a national tradition and to the universal categories of mankind and history (and Soviet communism) which render ethnicity secondary. His is an argument against ethnic essentialism and against assimilation. It is, we might say, an assertion of universal values against the assumption of universality made by any single culture, Jewish or Anglo-Saxon-Protestant as the case may be. There are no chosen people in Waten's novels except perhaps the People (but that's another story).

This is the most optimistic case *for* Waten as a migrant/non-Anglo-Celtic writer. He writes from a "migrant" position, he clears a space within the majority culture for the migrant/non-Anglo voice. His disarming assumption is that there is an "other" story to tell which can be told like any other story. Here we might want to resist the merely impossible concept of a multicultural aesthetics by insisting on the novels' "success" in specific frameworks of reception and a specific local politics. For their contemporary reviewers, to stay within a limited sphere, the novels posed

questions about Australian literature which modestly reworked their sense of the culture's boundaries.<sup>84</sup>

At the same time the positions articulated in the post-structuralist, post-modernist — and post-assimilationist — criticism do enable us to define the limits of Waten's texts. The points can best be made negatively in terms of what the texts *cannot resist*. Waten's realism, in implying the translatability of all cultural difference, cannot proscribe readings which will merely efface those differences. It cannot constrain readings of the texts as mere chronicles or migrant spectacle in so far as the third-person omniscient narrator participates in an authoritative empiricism.

In short, there is a limit to how far the texts can constrain their co-option to a position within the host culture. They can be read so as to deliver migrants to that culture, now with the guarantee of being "good neighbours" (or good migrants and bad migrants). Further, despite their socialist inflection, the humanist universals through which the fiction mounts its critique of ethicism are the values claimed for literature itself in the majority culture. The texts cannot resist their being read as *merely universal*. But the point of my argument is that these will be assimilationist or "aesthetic" readings, not readings for cultural difference.

- 1 Judah Waten, *Distant Land* (Melbourne: Cheshire, 1964); *So Far No Further* (Mount Eliza, Vic.: Wren, 1971); *Love and Rebellion* (1978; Richmond, Vic.: Hodja Educational, 1983). *Distant Land* was also an Australasian Book Society selection, and a *Herald-Sun* Readers Book Club choice! It won the 1964 Moomba Festival Best Australian Novel award. Further references will appear in the text.
- 2 Manfred Jurgensen, "Multicultural Aesthetics: A Preliminary Definition", in *Striking Chords: Multicultural Literary Interpretations*, eds Sneja Gunew and Kateryna O. Longley (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1992), p.33.
- 3 Gunew, "PMT (Post Modernist Tensions: Reading for (Multi)Cultural Difference", in *Striking Chords*", p.43. For further discussion of the meanings and politics of the different terms see Gunew, "Home and Away: Nostalgia in Australian (Migrant) Writing", in *Island in the Stream: Myths of Place in Australian Culture*, ed. Paul Foss (Leichhardt, NSW: Pluto Press, 1988), p.35. Gunew also discusses the dangers and the usefulness of "Anglo-Celtic" which, she argues, does not commit us to the notion that "Anglo" and "Celtic" are homogenous.
- 4 Gunew, *Framing Marginality: Multicultural Literary Studies* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1994), pp.23-24.
- 5 Gunew and Longley, Introduction to *Striking Chords*, pp.xvi-xvii.
- 6 Gunew, "Migrant Women Writers: Who's on Whose Margins?" in *Gender, Politics and Fiction: Twentieth Century Australian Women's Novels*, ed. Carole Ferrier (St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1985), p.165.
- 7 Gunew, "Migrant Women Writers", p.168.
- 8 Gunew, "Framing Marginality: Distinguishing the Textual Politics of the Marginal Voice", *Southern Review* 18, 2 (July 1985), p.144.
- 9 Gunew, "Migrant Women Writers", pp.165 & 167.
- 10 Gunew, "Authenticity and the Writing Cure", in *Grafts: Feminist Cultural Criticism*, ed. Susan Sheridan (London: Verso, 1989), p.117.
- 11 Gunew, "Constructing Australian Subjects: Critics, Writers, Multicultural Writers", in *Diversity Itself*, ed. Peter Quartermaine (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1986), p.55; also "Framing Marginality", p.148.
- 12 Gunew, "Framing Marginality", p.144.
- 13 Gunew, "Authenticity and the Writing Cure", pp.118-19. The specific focus here is women's writing.
- 14 For example, the following essays in *Striking Chords*: Efi Hatzimanolis, "Speak as You Eat: Reading Migrant Writing, Naturally", pp.168-77 and Ivor Indyk, "The Migrant and the Comedy of Excess in Recent Australian Writing", pp.178-86.
- 15 Jurgensen, "Multicultural Aesthetics", p.33.
- 16 Gunew, "Authenticity and the Writing Cure", p.120.
- 17 Jurgensen, "Multicultural Aesthetics", pp.30 & 32.
- 18 Jurgensen, "Multicultural Aesthetics", p.30.
- 19 Rita Felski, *Beyond Feminist Aesthetics: Feminist Literature and Social Change* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1989), pp.4-7 & 160-162.
- 20 Gunew, "Authenticity and the Writing Cure", p.119. See also Toril Moi, *Sexual/Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory* (London and New York: Methuen, 1985), pp.170-72.
- 21 Longley, "Fifth World", in *Striking Chords*, p.23.
- 22 Gunew, "Framing Marginality", p.146; and see Nikos Papastergiadis, "The Journeys Within: Migration and Identity in Greek-Australian Literature", in *Striking Chords*, pp.149-61, for an account of Antigone Kefala's work as transgressive but less than transcendent.
- 23 Gunew, "PMT", p.37.
- 24 Gunew, "Migrant Women Writers", p.168; "Framing Marginality", p.144.
- 25 Richard Bosworth and Janis Wilton, "Novels, Poems and the Study of Europeans in Australia", *Teaching History* 15, 2 (July 1981), pp.45 & 50.
- 26 Bosworth and Wilton, "Novels, Poems", p.48.

- 27 Bob Hodge and Vijay Mishra, *Dark Side of the Dream: Australian Literature and the Postcolonial Mind* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1990), pp.188-93.
- 28 The policies of multiculturalism were established in the early-mid 1970s but it was some time before literary publications expressing this new sense of ethnic/migrant groups began to appear. For example: Manfred Jurgensen's *Ethnic Australia* (Brisbane: Phoenix Publications) appeared in 1981; Sneja Gunew's *Displacements: Migrant Storytellers* (Deakin University Press) in 1982; R. F. Holt's *The Strength of Tradition: Stories of the Immigrant Presence in Australia* (University of Queensland Press) in 1983.
- 29 Waten, "Yiddish Literature in Australia", *Unity* (July-August 1948), pp.4-5; "Contemporary Jewish Literature in Australia", *Australian Jewish Historical Society Journal and Proceedings* 3, 2 (1949), pp.92-102. Subsequent quotations from these two articles, emphases mine. See also "Pinchas Goldhar", *Voice* (February 1947), p.13.
- 30 *Distant Land*, pp.79-87; "Three Generations", *Love and Rebellion*, pp.113-14.
- 31 See for example, Hilary L. Rubinstein, *The Jews in Victoria 1835-1985* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1986), chs 10 & 11, esp. pp.152-63.
- 32 Maria Damon, "Talking Yiddish at the Boundaries", *Cultural Studies* 5, 1 (January 1991), p.17, where she defines her own relation to her American Jewishness as a "reinvention and recognition of ethnicity".
- 33 Waten, "Yiddish Literature", p.4 (paraphrasing Goldhar).
- 34 Tom Inglis Moore (for the Canberra Fellowship of Australian Writers), letter to Waten, 26 August 1958; Waten to Inglis Moore, 7 September 1958, NLA MS 4536/2/258-59. *Span: An Adventure in Asian and Australian Writing*, ed. Lionel Wigmore for the Canberra Fellowship of Australian Writers (Melbourne: F. W. Cheshire, 1958).
- 35 Waten, "Cliches and Cardboard", rev. of *Potatoes Are Cheaper*, by Max Shulman, and *Settle Down* Simon Katz, by Bernard Kops, *Sydney Morning Herald* 22 December 1973, p.15.
- 36 Waten's extensive newspaper and periodical cuttings collection reveals his interest in the Jewish writers in the USA: Bellow, Roth, Potok, Singer etc. There is also a large collection of cuttings on Jews/Yiddish in the Soviet Union. As well as communist papers, there is a good deal from *Time*, *Newsweek*, the *Bulletin*, the *Times Literary Supplement*. Judah Waten Papers, NLA MS 4536, Boxes 30-36.
- 37 Quotations in this paragraph are from Waten's book reviews: "The Kosher Caper", rev. of *Jewish Settlers in Australia*, by Charles Price, *Australian Book Review* 4, 2 & 3 (December 1964-January 1965), p.27; "Melbourne Jewry", rev. of *The Fortunes of Samuel Wynn*, by Allan Wynn, *Australian Book Review* 7 (September 1968), p.202; "The Jewish Contribution to Australian Society", rev. of *Jews in Australian Society*, ed. Peter Medding, *Age* 18 August 1973, p.12.
- 38 Waten, "Melbourne Jewry", p.202.
- 39 "Portrait of the Jewish Home", rev. of *The Walled Garden*, by Chiam Berman, *Sydney Morning Herald* 21 February 1976, p.16.
- 40 "Yiddish Heroes and Themes", rev. of *Portraits of Yiddish Writers*, by Yitzhak Kahn, *Age* 28 July 1979, p.26.
- 41 Waten, "Portrait of the Jewish Home".
- 42 Waten, "Yiddish Culture in West and East", *Labour Monthly* (August 1966), p.374; repr. in the journal of the Communist Party of the USA, *Political Affairs* (October 1966), pp.51-61. See also "Will Yiddish Culture Survive?" *Labour Monthly* (September 1966), pp.440-46; "Yiddish Culture in the West", *Australian Left Review* 3 (October-November 1966), pp.52-57; and "Setting the Record Straight", *Political Affairs* (March 1967), pp.58-61.
- 43 Waten, "Yiddish Culture in West and East", pp.376-78. In "Will Yiddish Culture Survive?" Waten adds that the "State of Israel offers no hope to Yiddish" (p.445).
- 44 Waten, "Setting the Record Straight", *Political Affairs*, p.59 (my emphasis).
- 45 Waten, "Will Yiddish Culture Survive?" p.445. Elsewhere he adds: "I myself would grieve at the passing of Yiddish literature in the Soviet Union, just as I do at its passing on other countries. I have always been a protagonist of Yiddish writing from which my own work as a novelist draws inspiration", ("Setting the Record Straight", p.61).
- 46 Waten, "Will Yiddish Culture Survive?" p.446 (my emphasis).
- 47 Waten, "Setting the Record Straight", p.60.

- 48 Waten, rev. of *Ethnic Australia*, ed. Manfred Jurgensen, *New Literature Review* 12 (1983),  
p.46.
- 49 Waten, "The Jewish Contribution". My emphasis.
- 50 For example, in 1967-68 invitations to address Jewish organisations were withdrawn: from  
the Young Men's Hebrew Association of Australia for Waten to be Guest of Honour and  
guest speaker, on "The Jewish Writers in the World Today"; from the Labour Zionist  
Organisation of Australia; and a third, from the Aleph Zadik Aleph Youth Group, on *Alien  
Son*. The reason given for the latter, in reply to a vigorous letter from Waten, is Waten's  
"publicly stated views on current Jewish world problems [and] due consideration of the  
views of the leaders of our Jewish community". Waten papers, NLA MS 4536 Box 30.
- 51 Waten, "The Jewish Contribution".
- 52 See Waten, "Writers from Two Cultures", *Aspect* 5, 1-2 (1980), p.55; and "Multilingual  
Neighbours On Our Literary Scene", rev. of *The First Multicultural Anthology*, ed. Andrew  
Dezsery and *Neighbours*, by Andrew Dezsery, *Age* 11 October 1980, p.30.
- 53 Waten, "In Other Tongues", *Nation* 27 June 1970, pp.22-23; "Discovering Migrant  
Literature", *Island* 16 (1983), pp.26-29.
- 54 Waten, "Writers From Two Cultures", p.50. He uses the same formulation for his own  
writing in "My Two Literary Careers", *Southerly* 31, 2 (1971), pp.87-88.
- 55 Waten, "In Other Tongues", p.23.
- 56 Waten, rev. of *Ethnic Australia*, pp.47 & 48.
- 57 Quotations from Waten, "Jews in a New Land", rev. of *On Firmer Shores*, by  
Serge Liberman, *Age* 3 October 1981, p.28; rev. of *Ethnic Australia*, p.48;  
"New Voices, New Attitudes", rev. of *Displacements: Migrant Storytellers*,  
ed. Sneja Gunew, *Age* 21 August 1982, p.14.
- 58 Gunew, "The Migrant Experience", in *The Macmillan Anthology of Australian Literature*,  
eds Ken Goodwin and Alan Lawson (Sydney: Macmillan, 1990), p.169.
- 59 The distinction is made by Homi Bhabha, "The Commitment to Theory", *New Formations* 5  
(Summer 1988), pp.18-19: "Cultural diversity is the recognition of pre-given cultural  
'contents' and customs, held in a time-frame of relativism; it gives rise to anodyne liberal  
notions of multiculturalism, cultural exchange, or the culture of humanity". Cultural  
difference, by contrast, might be characterised by its recognition that the cultural contents  
are not "pre-given" and that beyond plurality lies hybridity. Of course Waten's commitment  
to historical progress complicates his relation to any fixed time-frame of relativism.
- 60 Waten, "Writers From Two Cultures", p.54.
- 61 Gunew and Longley, Introduction to *Striking Chords*, p.xxi.
- 62 For example, the scene of the memorial service for the war dead, when Joshua experiences  
something very much like the absurdity of existence, *Distant Land*, pp.120-22.
- 63 Waten, "My Two Literary Careers", p.
- 64 Waten, "Writers From Two Cultures", pp.50.
- 65 Waten, "Writers From Two Cultures", p.51.
- 66 Damon, "Talking Yiddish", p.24.
- 67 The phrase is A. D. Hope's from his poem "William Butler Yeats", *Collected Poems*  
(Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1972), p.72.
- 68 Waten, "Writers From Two Cultures", p.55.
- 69 John McLaren, "New Novels", rev. of *So Far No Further, Overland* 52 (Winter 1972), p.53.  
In a foreword to the novel Waten adds an interesting explanation of his language: "some  
characters speak only Italian, others Yiddish or Polish. Therefore I have set down all speech  
in ordinary conversational English. No single form of foreigners' English exists; there are as  
many variations as there are different kinds of newcomers. I have regarded the use of  
foreigners' English as well as dialects as unnecessary to the story and indeed distracting".
- 70 Damon, "Talking Yiddish", pp.24-25 (and *passim*).
- 71 M. J. Haddock, "The Prose Fiction of Jewish Writers of Australia 1945-1969", *Australian  
Jewish Historical Society Journal of Proceedings* 7, 7 (1974), p.508.
- 72 "Three Generations", *Love and Rebellion*, p.115.

- 73 Carl Harrison-Ford, "In a New Country", rev. of *So Far No Further*, by Judah Waten, *Nation* 5 February 1972, p.22.
- 74 In a personal letter, Waten describes Joshua in terms of "the theme of the lost personality, the inability to acquire a new one in the new world... [He] is quite prosperous but he has really been stripped of his beliefs and hopes". Letter to a Mr Baldwin, 25 January 1971, Waten papers, NLA MS 4536/2/1643. Interestingly the conclusion here seems more pessimistic than that of the novel itself.
- 75 Cf. Damon, "Talking Yiddish", p.27, where she talks autobiographically about reading Jewish work "not for clues to a primary sort of Jewishness but for permission to invent new ways of being Jewish".
- 76 Damon, "Talking Yiddish", p.26.
- 77 See Peter Corris's review of *Love and Rebellion*, "An Alien Son Grows Up", *Australian*, 20-21 May 1978, p.9: the stories "present Italians and Greeks as stereotypes with only the externals of their culture and behaviour observed... Their dominant emotion is sympathy". In a positive review of the stories, this becomes "compassion" — Rod Nicholls, "A Migrant-Eye View of Australian Life", *Age* 6 May 1978, p.26.
- 78 Abdul R. JanMohamed and David Lloyd, "Introduction: Minority Discourse — What is to be Done?" *Cultural Critique* 7 (Spring 1987), p.10.
- 79 Serge Liberman, "Australian Jewish Writing: An Assessment and a Programme", *Menorah* 1, 1 (1987), p.88.
- 80 Damon reminds us that Yiddish itself is a hybrid language, and Yiddish literature a modernist literature, "Talking Yiddish", p.19: "Written Yiddish itself, long post-dating its spoken life, dizzyingly defamiliarises a primarily Germanic sound by representing it through Hebrew lettering.. [N]ot only have Jews been bilingual in relation to the dominant culture, but the internal usages of Yiddish and Hebrew within the marginalised group itself contributes to a consciousness of juxtaposition that happens specifically in language". Also: "the folksy minimalism of Aleichem's modernism has been misconstrued as pious and sentimental nostalgia".
- 81 Hodge and Mishra, pp.192-93. Nino Culotta [John O'Grady], *They're a Weird Mob* (1957; Sydney: Ure Smith, 1974).
- 82 Hodge and Mishra, p.193: the criticism proceeds by retelling the story of the characters' assimilation.
- 83 According to Hodge and Mishra this did occur with *They're a Weird Mob*, p.190.
- 84 On *Distant Land*, for example, Jeana Bradley, "Recent Australian Fiction", *Westerly* 2 (August 1965), p.53; R. M. Wilding, "Jewish Migrant", *Bulletin* 24 October 1964, pp.54-55. On *So Far No Further*, A. R. Chisholm, "Clash of Ideals", *Age* 4 December 1971, p.13; Brian Kiernan, "Change and Conflict in a Generation Gap", *Australian* 1 January 1972, p.15. The London *Jewish Quarterly* finds Waten "the authentic voice of Australian-Jewish life": "From Far and Near", *Jewish Quarterly* 13, 3 (Autumn 1965): collected in Waten's papers, NLA MS 4536, Box 20.

## 9

**Reading for Autobiography:  
From *Alien Son* to *Scenes of Revolutionary Life***

*I always remembered my mother standing in St Kilda, on the pier at St Kilda, I was very young, and I have a recollection of that awful sadness and nostalgia, and that began a novel.... Remorse is, I think, a tremendous catalyst.*  
(Judah Waten, Interview with Suzanne Lunney, 1975)

**Autobiographical Readings**

Judah Waten never wrote an autobiography, a single extended prose narrative "focusing on his individual life, in particular on the development of his personality".<sup>1</sup> But throughout his literary career he was telling stories that invite autobiographical readings. This might be true for many fiction writers, as literary biographers have repeatedly shown. Indeed it is a conventional mark of "serious" fiction, a mark of authorial expressivity, met in present literary economies by the "serious" reader who might well be discovered in the search for resonances of the author's life in his or her writings, expectations that will not be aroused elsewhere. But there is more at issue in Waten's case than the orthodoxies of authorial criticism, for the autobiographical dimension in his writings is of another order, a more unusual pattern of repetition and dispersal. Waten's texts across fiction, memoirs, interviews and essays can be seen to participate in an autobiographical project that extends across his whole writing career — but which, in more than one sense, could never be complete.

Waten spent most of the second half of his life writing about the first half, initially in his fiction and then increasingly, in later life, in memoir pieces. The significance for an autobiographical reading lies not in tracing real-life sources but in the *limited* span of years which attract autobiographical interest (childhood to young adulthood) and its *repetitions*. At the same time, by linking short fiction, memoirs and excerpts from novels it would be possible to reconstruct a discontinuous "autobiography" for Waten's first twenty or so years. In addition Waten's papers contain manuscript evidence that he intended to continue his memoirs at least through to the 1970s.<sup>2</sup> We will need to keep both perspectives in mind: the career-long autobiographical project, which sought to incorporate the whole career into the autobiography, and the massive bias towards childhood and youth in the stories that are told (and re-told). We will also need to divide the latter

instance, for childhood and the passage from youth to maturity (a very literary trope of course) produce different kinds of narrative.

Nevertheless an autobiographical reading can begin with the claim that Waten returned, throughout his writing career, to the telling and re-telling of "one" story, the story of his childhood. Waten's career as a writer involves a series of returns to the scene of childhood, the scene of the family drama. It would be no more accurate to suggest of Waten than of Patrick White, Martin Boyd or Henry Handel Richardson, three other writers compelled to revisit the family drama, that he had only one story to tell. But it could certainly be argued that one story was more resonant, more cathected, more capable or demanding of reiteration, more fraught with anxiety and desire — and so more productive of stories — than any other. The one story contains many stories. There are versions of Waten's childhood in *Alien Son*, *The Unbending*, *From Odessa to Odessa*, *Distant Land* and *Love and Rebellion*, as well as in articles, reviews and interviews.<sup>3</sup>

The question is *how* to read autobiographically. My object will not be an originary self taken as primary and prior in relation to the writing in which it finds expression, but rather the processes of self-inscription. Thus my interest is in reading for *autobiography*, not reading biographically. By the same token, this notion of self-inscription has little to do with, say, John and Dorothy Colmer's understanding that deconstruction reveals the self to be an "imaginative construct"<sup>4</sup> (more properly a *romantic* "revelation"). What kind of a construct, we might ask in return, is the imagination?

To read for autobiography will be to read across both fictional and non-fictional texts for inscriptions, stagings or emplotments of the self — not just self-portraits — which may be concentrated and dispersed in character, anecdote, plot or narrative sequence, perspective and voice. This process involves a redeployment of genre, not by transcending generic boundaries as Paul Jay, for example, almost claims to be doing in reading fictional texts autobiographically, but by recognising shifts in the nature of the reading contract which accompany shifts in our orientation to a particular text or group of texts.<sup>5</sup> Philippe Lejeune's notion of the autobiographical contract has been subject to weighty criticism from deconstructive and feminist theorists, but if his "all or nothing" conditions for autobiography are understood as properly relational, his definitions — not of "autobiography" but of when and how it is possible to read autobiographically — are still useful for my purposes.<sup>6</sup> Waten is exemplary in this regard. To read his fiction and non-fiction autobiographically is to find oneself negotiating each of the limit conditions which Lejeune suggests for the presence of autobiography: centrally the assumed identity between author, narrator and protagonist. We become hypercritical of the genre

boundaries — the genre *relations* rather — between fiction, autobiographical fiction and autobiography as we shift between named and un-named, first and third-person narrators, or between fictions which resemble memoirs and memoirs which resemble short stories.

Nancy K. Miller has suggested a process of "double reading" across both fiction and autobiography for certain female autobiographical writers, and I want to draw further on feminist interpretations of autobiography below. Miller distinguishes her proposal for a double reading from earlier forms of "biographical 'hermeneutics'" which tend to read all women's fiction as autobiography. She describes it instead as "an intratextual practice of interpretation which ... would privilege neither the autobiography nor the fiction but take the two writings together in their status as text". Working across the two generic frames it is possible to identify recurrent patterns in the structuring of subject positions or what Miller calls a "matrix of fabulation" in the textual structuring of "problems of origin and identity" across different genres.<sup>7</sup> In similar fashion I hope to have rescued *Alien Son*, and by extension other Waten texts, from a form of biographical hermeneutics which might read all *migrant* fiction as autobiographical. Having done so I want now to return to these texts, to read across their generic boundaries, and to read them within and against autobiographical models for their textual structuring of problems of identity.

In the mildly deconstructive work of Paul Jay, for example, or spectacularly in *Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes* the theory of autobiography has exceeded both its mimetic and metaphysical definitions of the shaped or shaping self.<sup>8</sup> One of the emphases in recent feminist theories of autobiography has been to insist, further, that the autobiographical tradition as constructed in critical history is a masculine tradition, even in its more sceptical and deconstructive forms. The point is not just that women have been left out — an omission that could readily be made good — but rather that the paradigms of selfhood and narrative design which function as normative in the western tradition are androcentric and thus work actively to exclude the different forms of self, life and writing which, it has been argued, are characteristic for women's texts. The tradition has also been gender blind in taking these norms as universal, against which women's texts might only figure in terms of lack. Feminist critiques have focused on two related assumptions: first, "the assumption held by both author and reader that the life being written/read is an exemplary one", the assumption of the "masculine representative self"<sup>9</sup>; second, "the assumption that autobiography is grounded in individualism and in individualism of a certain kind" in which "the concepts of singularity, autonomy, teleological design, unity, appropriation and achieved rhetorical ends are privileged".<sup>10</sup>

Diverse readings of women's autobiographies have analysed the ways in which, culturally and discursively, these texts do not participate in the dominant autobiographical forms, either through exclusion or *self*-exclusion:

No mirror of *her* era, the female autobiographer takes as a given that selfhood is mediated; her invisibility results from her lack of a tradition, her marginality in male-dominated culture, her fragmentation — social and political as well as psychic. At both extremes of *subjectivity* and *publicity*, the female autobiographer has lacked the sense of radical individuality.<sup>11</sup>

Joy Hooton takes up the issue of individuality, drawing on the psychoanalytic work of Nancy Chodorow and others concerning male and female development. The primary characteristic she identifies in distinguishing female autobiographies is their relative interest in *relatedness*.<sup>12</sup> Male autobiographies tend, even if ironically, to emphasise singularity and autonomy (or their failure). Female autobiographies, by contrast, emphasise the self as relational, defined in terms of attachment, community, interaction (or their failure). A number of secondary characteristics discussed in Hooton's argument can be understood through this primary difference: a strong teleological design in male autobiographies contrasting with narrative structures which are relatively open-ended, episodic or discontinuous in female texts; a different sense of the past, as a stepping stone in the individual journey for the male ("a series of temporary lodgings, discarded as soon as the furnishings are worn out", 96), against a sensuous evocation of the past "for its own sake" for the female; a different narrating self, shifting readily and fluidly between positions in the female autobiography while self-consciously "obsessed with the gulf between the narrating and the narrational self" (99) in the male. The mainstream of theory does generate readings of female autobiographies but, as Hooton puts it, "the main impression is of lighting up odd corners of the text while huge areas remain in shadow" (86).

Such binary schemes will always risk collapsing under the weight of exceptions they produce and they risk essentialism, merely inverting the hierarchies of the masculinist tradition while still within its oppositions. Hooton avoids this only by accumulating close readings of many individual instances. For my purposes, her contrasting pairs can be taken as a hypothetical grid, a system of differences, across which a multiplicity of male and female life writings can be located between its two, "male" and "female" poles. The differences between male and female autobiographical writings need to be shown as relative, unstable over time and cultures and in terms of an individual's relation to language and cultural institutions. Although she does not state the point directly, Hooton's own examples suggest that female *literary* autobiographies, those by recognised authors, are often closer to male forms in their sense of purposive design, while certain male literary

autobiographies are willing to risk a great deal in the sensuous evocation of the past and so resemble (relatively) certain forms of female life writing. What this tells us is not that the gendered/gendering differences are insignificant but that they are indeed a matter of positionality in relation to literary/cultural institutions.

I want to read Waten autobiographically in part through feminist readings of (women's) autobiography, not just because this is the source of the most interesting recent work in the field, but because of their foregrounding of this question of positionality. I am interested, first, in the hypothesis that cultural difference functions similarly to gender difference in certain circumstances, producing a comparable sense of identity and empowerment (or their lack). Second, I am interested in the hypothesis that Waten's migrant/Jewish family history produces a different pattern of socialisation from that of the majority of his male literary counterparts — or at least that it makes a different complex of cultural positions available to him and so a different textualisation.

At one point in her argument Hooton paraphrases Domna Stanton to the effect that "the absence of women's autobiography from critical writing sorts oddly with the frequent claim or criticism that women's writing is more autobiographical than men's" (81). The point could also be made for migrant/minority writing in its relation to majority forms. Waten is a complicated instance. The autobiographical has been a constant dimension in readings of his texts since the earliest appearance of the *Alien Son* stories, and it has almost always been connected to his/their status as "migrant" or "foreign". This connection comes to be reinforced through circumtextual details such as the author's proper name and biography on the cover, the artwork, or publisher's notes. By way of contrast, to read one of Waten's "non-migrant" works such as *Time of Conflict* requires a certain amount of refocussing, repositioning ourselves in relation to the autobiographical, perhaps even a slight sense of disorientation, which testifies to the real power of the reading frames beyond the text itself. Waten writes both of his literary and political "education", producing different versions of the *Bildungsroman* over the course of his career; but the autobiographical will always tend to mean migrant, Jewish, foreign, before it means anything else, a process in which writer and reader are complicit.

Waten's autobiographical texts, in other words, are autobiographical in a different way from those of many of his contemporaries. His writings reveal virtually nothing of what Richard Coe describes as the Australian myth in the genre of the "Childhood", the myth of the "writer or poet growing up in a cultural desert so inconceivably barren that ... he must either conquer it or (simpler solution) escape from it".<sup>13</sup> It is in this relation that I find feminist theorising of autobiography instructive in suggesting ways in which Waten's "ethnic" minority/migrant status

might act to reproduce a speaking position and specific textual strategies parallel to those of female autobiography — or at least *outside* dominant male/Australian forms. To speak biographically for the moment, Waten's Jewish upbringing in Australia can be understood in cultural terms as involving a kind of feminisation. I do not mean that he was made "effeminate" in the common sense but rather that the forms of masculine identity made available to him were not (simply) those which were predominant in the surrounding society. Jewish traditions of education and acculturation together with Jewish rites of masculine domestic and communal integration created a line of difference both between the family and the world outside, and within the family as the young Judah's "assimilation" also meant a kind of betrayal. The Jewish male (and in many ways the *migrant* male) is a "feminised" figure from the perspective of a culturally-sanctioned Anglo-Australian notion of masculine independence precisely because of family, communal, cultural or religious ties. In other words, Waten's writings might be discovered in an interestingly tangential relationship to both masculine and Anglo-Australian modes of self-representation.

Given Waten's early assimilation into English, we should not expect the positioning of a self altogether outside dominant cultural forms (of ethnic, literary and masculine identity); but at the same time, given the peculiar double minoritisation of Yiddish-Jewish immigrants, we should not be surprised to find traces of a process of individuation and socialisation, including socialisation into masculinity, significantly different from the main/male stream. It might not be possible to decide whether the migrant or Jewish dimension of these processes is the most important in any particular instance, nor whether there are other categories of marginalisation (or domination) coming into play, but in this context as elsewhere reading for difference will be productive. More than one critic has already made the connection between female and Jewish as marginal sites.<sup>14</sup> Susan Friedman indicates the underlying model:

the emphasis on individualism [in the autobiographical canon] does not take into account the importance of a culturally imposed group identity for women and minorities. Second, the emphasis on separateness ignores the differences in socialization in the construction of male and female gender identity. from both an ideological and psychological perspective, in other words, individualistic paradigms of the self ignore the role of collective and relational identities in the individuation process of women and minorities.<sup>15</sup>

While remaining sceptical about such ready translations across different sites of difference, this model can still be used to sustain a hypothesis against which Waten's work can be read: that Waten's different socialisation and different relation to culture

will produce forms of self-representation different from the majority male, Anglo-Australian forms and norms.

To begin reading Waten's texts autobiographically is to note a number of curious and, I think, significant features across the oeuvre. First, Waten writes of Jewish/immigrant childhoods; but he writes no Jewish protagonist *of his own generation* beyond the years of childhood or early youth.<sup>16</sup> In fiction at least, Jewish for Waten means childhood. By contrast, his three novels which might be termed *Bildungsroman* — *Time of Conflict*, *Season of Youth* and *Scenes of Revolutionary Life* — are centred on non-Jewish "Anglo-Australian" males spanning the course of years from early youth to maturity. Second, there are at least two distinct autobiographical narratives or scenes of autobiography in Waten's writings. The scene of childhood is likely to produce *fiction*, while the story of (pre-)maturation and literary or political education is more likely to produce a form of *memoir*. Despite their obvious continuity in Waten's own life the two narratives are not often aligned textually. Different speaking positions, different trajectories, and a different relation to self and to the past are inscribed. Situated on the dividing line are questions of Jewish and family identity.

### **Stories of Childhood**

We should not be embarrassed at sharing the general critical consensus among amateur as well as professional readers that Waten's most memorable writing is to be found in the stories of *Alien Son* and the "Jewish/immigrant" parts of *The Unbending*, *Distant Land* and *Love and Rebellion*. It is more difficult to share the language in which this consensus is normally expressed, in orthodox expressive realist terms which privilege an empiricist sense of experience at the cost of a capacity to read other generic and rhetorical dimensions. But sheer experience will not explain anything, for as suggested above the large bulk of Waten's writing is based in one sense or another on his "experience".

Part of an explanation might be found in psychoanalytic terms, in the models of language and subjectivity psychoanalysis has produced. In Waten's stories of childhood, at least, the writing — for this is my focus here — is structured around a matrix of relationships between Father, Mother and son to which it returns (and, we might say, which returns to it) repeatedly.<sup>17</sup> The family triangle is the "scene" in which they are staged. For the purposes of the present chapter I want to argue this return as significant in terms of self-representation, and to argue further that it is the unresolved and unresolvable conflicts of the family drama rather than the sheer intimate experience of a Jewish migrant childhood nostalgically-conceived that makes the Jewish stories indeed memorable (and intimate and anti-nostalgic).

It is impossible to make such a point without invoking Freudian or post-Freudian notions of the oedipal complex. Granting its explanatory power, not its universality, the question is where we *locate* the oedipal scenario, where we locate its textual location. Again, my object is not the personality or the unconscious of Judah Waten. The point is rather that in the process of writing, the process of narrativisation, the triangulation of relationships which describes the oedipal scene comes reiteratively to provide the "right" scripts to enable Waten to speak of a migrant/Jewish childhood. For whatever complex of psychological, linguistic, textual and institutional reasons this is where adequate meaning and representation are found. The oedipal script is in this sense a conventional one that inheres in fictions no less than in families. The further, biographical implication, that it is the unresolved complex of relationships in the family drama, especially Waten's relationship with his mother, which actually motivates (in part/some of) his writing is difficult to resist. (Just as it is difficult to resist Barthes' suggestion that the "writer is someone who plays with his mother's body".<sup>18</sup>) But for the moment the point is that *symbolically* there is a recurrent set of associations between mother, language, Jewish identity and writing in Waten's stories of childhood.

Let me return to the stories of childhood at the beginning of Waten's literary career — as Waten himself so often did. The title *Alien Son* itself refers us not just to a history of migration but also to a position within a family. Here the place of the story "Mother" in relation to the rest of the volume is revealing. The primary relationship between Mother and son (child and adult son) is singled out in this one story which also does not fit into the book's loose chronological sequence. "Mother" is significantly longer than any except the first story, "To a Country Town"; it is placed as the final story; it is the only story which fixes on a single character; and it is the only one to extend back into the past before the moment of migration. Waten himself commented that it summed up the book: "'Mother' can start the book, it can finish the book, it could be used separately, it could be taken right out of the book almost, because it sums up the book".<sup>19</sup>

Reading autobiographically, there is indeed a sense in which the relationship between Mother and son "sums up" the book:

When I was a small boy I was often morbidly conscious of Mother's intent, searching eyes fixed on me. She would gaze for minutes on end without speaking one word. I was always disconcerted and would guiltily look down at the ground, anxiously turning over in my mind my day's activities.<sup>20</sup>

*Alien Son* can be understood as an extended working out of this relationship of guilt and anxiety under the gaze of (the) Mother. The "alienees" of the son is significant almost exclusively in relation to her, and especially in the issue of language ("We

hardly speak a common language any more", 159). Here we might invoke the Lacanian schema of the child's entry into the symbolic order, the order of language and the "law of the father", in which subjectivity is formed through the very processes of signification. More particularly Sneja Gunew has represented the experience of migration, particularly when it involves negotiating another language, as "analogous to re-entering the Lacanian symbolic".<sup>21</sup> As we have seen Waten's early accession to English might suggest only a modest instance of this re-negotiation and splitting; and yet the "other" language, Yiddish, was always there and concentrated, as it were, in the figure of the Mother. It is in terms of this relationship to the Mother/language that the child-adult narrator must plot questions of identity in the short stories.

*Alien Son* initiates a pattern of "strong mothers" and "weak fathers" recurrent in Waten's fictions. The Mother is not, however, the strong "maternal" figure, the care-giver and bearer of family or community values, the sentimental figure common in Australian writing (not least Australian male autobiography). She is instead most often associated with irony. If she is associated with the home it is only because of her (ironic) refusal of the new world and the new language. Moreover, *she* is the figure of the law who issues both prohibitions and injunctions within the family, including the injunctions towards education and culture outside the family and the community. When the father acts in this way it is as her agent. The symbolic roles of mother and father, in other words, are not neatly occupied by the characters of Mother and Father. While the Father (in *Alien Son* and beyond) is associated with the world of commerce and sociability, he is also represented as "irresponsible" and childlike in many ways, a figure of play, of freedom and sensuous pleasure. We might say he represents the semiotic rather than the symbolic order.<sup>22</sup> As a law-giver he is singularly unreliable and arbitrary, especially in comparison to the mother's formidable "certainty in herself" (168). In this sense the role of the symbolic father is occupied by the Mother's prohibitions and injunctions. Yet she is also a paradoxical figure, precisely around the questions of migration (which she initiates and then refuses), language and identity: "It was a puzzle to me why Mother, who was constantly displeased when I spoke the new language in preference to the language she spoke, should be anxious that I shine at school (60)".

Despite these points, however, Waten's writing could still seem most resistant to any sort of psychoanalytic reading for they are about as far from psychodrama as we can imagine. There is little focus in *Alien Son* or later works on the "inner life", and no thematisation of a "writing cure", the notion that the process of composition is a recuperative or therapeutic one. Waten was not sympathetic to the Portnoyan project of "putting the id back in Yid".<sup>23</sup> Their mode turns instead on

the realist categories of observation, dialogue, action and chronicle. Even the process of remembering is largely implicit and the texts are seldom overtly self-reflexive.<sup>24</sup> There is calm, even detached, recollection rather than any crisis of identity. On one level it is difficult to imagine a writer who tries harder to keep the semiotic from disturbing the hierarchies of the symbolic order. This resistance might, of course, have its own analytic interest. But when read through the frameworks of the present argument, the ordering of the writing in Waten's autobiographical fictions of childhood is revealed as less disciplinary, less linear, less monovocal than its realist demeanour might suggest. That the stories of childhood almost always return as *fiction* is an effect of their reiterative (rather than sequential) function, their returns to the family triangle. The Jewish/immigrant writings are marked by patterns of repetition, but also fragmentation or deferral.

In the short stories these effects can be located, not in linguistic or narrative disturbance, but in the plotting of perspective and relationship, through the loyalties, sympathies and betrayals within the nuclear family and in terms of its symbolic relationships. We might recall those terrible, recurrent passages of conflict in *The Unbending*: "behind all the words lay the profound but carefully suppressed difference between husband and wife ... knowingly or unknowingly they were both fighting for the boy's soul".<sup>25</sup> From the opening of the first story in *Alien Son* — virtually the first story Waten thought worth publishing under his own name — the patterns of triangulation are set in motion:

Father said we should have to leave the city. It was soon after we came to the new land that he had been told of a town where he was sure to make money if he opened a drapery shop....

But Mother said that he was a cripple when it came to the real job....

"Talk, talk", she said.

No, Mother wouldn't go into the wilderness; she wouldn't leave the coast. Ever since we had come to this country she had lived with her bags packed. This was no country for us. She saw nothing but sorrow ahead....

.... For as long as I remembered she had always looked as if she expected nothing but sorrow and hardship from life. I somehow imagined that Hagar, the mother of Ishmael, must have looked just like my mother. (1-2)

Typically, the child-narrator's presence is no more than implicit until a page or so into the story. Yet he is present everywhere in his relations to Father and Mother, in the subtle miming of their voices and in that mix of strangeness and intimacy that marks all the relationships. The capitalisation of their titles has an interesting effect in raising the symbolic dimensions of their figures. The self or the drama of the inner life is rarely the centre of interest in any of the ways that we might anticipate in autobiography, or autobiographical fiction for that matter, but as both narrating and narrated this self is also ubiquitous, occupying *all* the positions in the family

triangle. The autobiographical self is present we might say, paraphrasing Foucault, in the "singularity of his absence".<sup>26</sup>

Autobiographies are often grouped according to their purported focus on the inner or the outer life, but this conventional opposition seems to collapse in upon itself in the triangulated relationships of *Alien Son*. Further, despite my conjuring of the oedipal complex, the issue in Waten's writing of childhood is only occasionally that of masculine individuation, for this can never be separated from the questions of "relatedness" — to Mother, language, Jewishness — within the story of migration. The self is less at issue than the relationships thus described, relationships for which in one sense the writing bears responsibility. Not that the narrating/narrated self ever discovers pure collective identity — quite the reverse — rather that any speaking-position, any voice, is discovered *in relation*. This is the point of my interest in the parallels between Waten's autobiographical writing and the categories through which women's autobiography has been theorised. In what ways might the (arguably) autobiographical texts of this Russian-Jewish migrant in an Anglo-Celtic society reproduce some of the textual forms of women's autobiography? Does the theorisation of marginality clarify the ways in which Waten's autobiographical texts "fall short" of the strong teleological structures of other male and other literary autobiographies.

The first story in *Alien Son*, the opening of which I have quoted above, begins with the child between the two parents, between their shifting identities: as Mother and Father, as "generic" Jewish and as generational, historical figures (Father's chest which contained "all the written history of the pair", 2-3). There is a *burden* of knowledge carried by the child-narrator which is dispersed throughout the writing, even displaced onto the horses ("I think the horses must have been laughing at him on that journey", 4). The "I" is used explicitly only a few times in the opening pages, until there is a marked shift of focus: "Early next morning I ran out into the street", (6). But the significant point in this first moment of individuation, this assertion of autonomy, is that it leads the child more deeply and self-consciously into his Jewishness, into a Jewish community and the m/other language. The boys' games lead them to Hirsh: "The boys mimicked him in a childish gibberish as he mumbled to his horse *in the only language I knew*" (7, my emphasis). Language, identity and community are drawn together; individuation produces a kind of guilt. When Hirsh looks closely at the child, the narrator comments "It was as though he had caught me out" (8).

The child later deflects his disobedience towards his mother by introducing Hirsh to the family home, and the old man's appearance especially for the mother means the possibility of "a community" (8). Briefly, comically, poignantly, the

community is established — even if Hirsh is the father of a thief, even if it includes a non-Jewish Russian and Scottish Mrs McDougall from next door. But the explicit "I" scarcely re-appears. The self is dispersed throughout the pervasive irony of the narration and in the unresolved conflict between Mother and Father with which the story ends.

Although there is a relatively "centred" reliable narrator in the stories, the relationship to the narrated self is fluid rather than ironic. The self is defined within the shifting network of family and community relations rather than autonomously; better, relatedness and autonomy are not binarily opposed. The self is often diffuse, the focaliser rather than the focus of attention (and we can note the other-directed titles of companion stories: "Sisters", "Uncle Isaac", "Father's Horses", "Neighbours"). This move into character is partly a product of the fictional form, but we might also see the *fictionalisation* as itself a product of a certain mode of self-apprehension and representation. Whatever self-consciousness, guilt or alienation these relationships entail, their presence is rendered not as a threat to autonomy or a "form of the Other, against which the self must strive to define itself"<sup>27</sup> but as the given environment, the space in which the self finds itself.

The point might be better expressed through contrasting the representation of self-in-relation here to what we find in the childhood scenes of better-credentialed male autobiographical texts: Donald Horne's *The Education of Young Donald*, Hal Porter's *The Watcher on the Cast-Iron Balcony*, Bernard Smith's *The Boy Adeodatus* and, to add a work of fiction, George Johnston's *My Brother Jack*.<sup>28</sup> For all the detailed, sensuous evocation of childhood and family relations in these texts there is a curious sense that the child-self who would become author finds himself in *this* family, at this time and place, only because of a sort of historical accident. However much they retrace influences or origins, the predominant sense is of their child protagonists as other beings. Although these effects are relative, they can be understood, I think, in terms of Hooton's arguments about the strong teleology in male autobiographical writings, the stages passed through and left behind however ironical the grasp of present autonomy. Out of historical accident runs destiny.

Such characteristics are largely absent from Waten's writings about childhood. In *these* texts at least he does not have the luxury of an ironical or nostalgic relationship to his own childhood. The child's alienation from the parents — from the law of the father — is seen more as generic and generational than a matter solely of individuation ("neither of us knew that there could be no reconciliation with the ways of our fathers", 132). Otherwise *Alien Son* and the later stories of childhood carry little suggestion of individual destiny or the related search for origins. "Origins" are omnipresent — not anything to be recuperated or refused

— and the journeys that recur do not cohere around the image of a life-journey. There is a *relational* sense of the self, a self plotted in terms of relationships rather than teleology: thus the relative absence of the self, both child and adult, as a strongly motivated or motivating presence. The drama of self-revelation or self-making has virtually no place.

The stories represent a series of returns to the scene of the family triangle, reworking the child's relationship to Mother and Father and their relationship to each other as he observes and is observed. The relational structure of the stories is also the structure of the volume, in Waten's terms "a novel without architecture, a novel without a plot";<sup>29</sup> stories told as if for their sheer tellability; discontinuous, episodic, reiterative rather than linear. There is also a sense in which the stories are historical rather than individual (although the distinction is thoroughly misleading). What I mean is that the intimate, small-scale family dramas they recount are saturated with a sense of historical movement which is also communal, generational. The very modesty of the narration is an effect of this dominant sense of the self in history; so too the sense that the characters are actors within some larger story, a larger history that they cannot often comprehend or control. Waten's later memoir pieces return to this scenario. Indeed Hooton's description of female autobiography as "halfway between 'autobiography,' traditionally defined as a narrative in which attention is focused on the self, and 'memoir,' a narrative in which attention is focused on others" (102) is not at all inappropriate for Waten's stories of childhood.

At the same time, of course, the comparisons between Waten's texts and women's autobiographies have their limits. Relatedness is met at each point by "alienation". And the final three stories in *Alien Son*, before "Mother", can be read as stories of "male proving"<sup>30</sup> in which the "I" is more isolated and thrust into the world. Interestingly, in a sense these are also the least "Jewish" of the stories: "Black Girl", an initiation into racial and sexual exploitation which ends with a guilty return home ("I ran, my heart heavy with guilty secrets", 143); "Near the Wharves", a less than heroic initiation into political exploitation ("All my mother's dread of police asserted itself in me and I felt as if I had committed a crime", 153); and "Making a Living", an initiation into economics ("I couldn't face my mother just then.... For the first time in my life I had stepped out into the world and I had touched with my own hands the hard kernel of life, getting a living", 167). Each story involves a step in a slightly different direction beyond the family, but each step towards autonomy also means a guilty return home, to a home defined by Mother's presence.

Perhaps in this relation to the mother, Waten's writings are, after all, largely inside the tradition of Australian male autobiography, at least as proposed by Don Anderson:

[The male heroes] are sensitive (if at times aggressively insensitive), literate, and isolated youths (yes, male!). All feel guilt with respect to their mothers, aggression to their fathers, and ignore their siblings. All lose some form of faith. All choose some form of flight, from family or country.<sup>31</sup>

But this description is more useful for throwing Waten's writings into relief. *Alien Son* is not a portrait of the artist as a young man (Joyce is indeed Anderson's point of reference). The child's sensitivity is not to those aspects of the natural or social world that intimate the aesthetic, but to Mother and Father and social interaction. There is, perhaps surprisingly, no "closed world of faith" from which to flee only a tenuous and porous community which is shown to be in transition from the book's opening sentence. (I find it difficult to know even what text Richard Coe is reading when he writes that for Waten "it was the escape from the narrowness of his Russian-Jewish family milieu which appealed to him [about school life] most of all".<sup>32</sup>) In *Alien Son* there is only the vaguest prefiguring of flight from family and country, although significantly this becomes the pivotal moment for the autobiographical memoirs I will discuss below.

Comparison with Joyce and *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* is instructive nevertheless. Paul Jay uses Wordsworth and Joyce as exemplary figures in the evolution of "literary self-representation": from Wordsworth's desire to represent the past "as it was" — a process disturbed by the implicit but repressed "realisation that the textual 'I' is always partly a fictive Other" — to Joyce's "wilful" fictionalising of his subject "as, *a priori*, a masked Other".<sup>33</sup> *Alien Son* is modern in this sense, in that, like *Portrait of the Artist*, self-representation depends upon fictionality; the "irony inherent in self-representation is never treated as a 'problem'...: it becomes, rather, a central element informing its method".<sup>34</sup> Joyce's method of course is part of an autobiographical-aesthetic project of "self-making", not a return to the past but an act of breaking from it to forge a new self as artist. For Waten, by contrast, there is little sense of the self "uprooting ... traditional foundations" or of a past that has to be overcome.<sup>35</sup> Although *Alien Son* might also be considered a "beginning text" in Said's terms, a narrative written to forge the beginning of a career,<sup>36</sup> the theme and strategies of self-making are absent in Waten's texts. It might seem, then, that the search for origins or recovery of an original identity is the primary motivation in Waten's retelling of family (and Jewish) lore. The past, as self or context, is not a problem to be conquered or a recaptured so much as a series of *stories to be re-told*. In the short stories the movement is, as it were, to gather in the "untold" stories about the (family/community) past and so to multiply them, not to escape or fix them, or to write them out in self-defence as Anderson's case studies suggest.

The relation of child to parents is also different, although Waten, like Porter and Horne, downplays the role of siblings (in his case to focus more intensely on the mother-son relationship not on the self). The child-narrator's guilt before his Mother is not simply the result of the child's inevitable inability to repay the maternal debt, or the rejection of (over)mothering bonds in the differentiation of and into masculinity which underscores the autobiographical trajectory in Horne, Johnston or Porter. It has much more to do with the impossible guilt of the child who has been the primary reason for migration but whose individual life can never compensate for the loss of identity and meaning in the Mother's life. Hence, again, "Mother".

The significance of the symbolic roles of Mother and Father in the stories lies in the complex of meanings attached to Mother, home, Jewishness and the Yiddish language, and so to the very act of writing. Yiddish is the "mother tongue": the mother refuses to speak English while the father is eager to learn the new language outside the home: "Mother never lost this hostile and ironical attitude to the new land. She would have nothing of the country; she would not even attempt to learn the language" (179). This can be seen as the son's project too and yet the mother, as suggested earlier, is the dominant ethical presence, the figure who will push the child into the world inevitably at the cost of her own intimacy with him. The child's second entry into language, into English, changes the meaning of Yiddish (and so of Jewishness). Its power must be suppressed but also, thereby, intensified in his relationship to the Mother: "when she heard me chattering in the new language, or Father breaking his tongue over strange words she became alarmed as if both of us had made our peace with enemies and were about to desert our faith" (14). *Writing* in English, in these Jewish/migrant stories at least, might then be understood as a complex address to the Mother, a repetition and renegotiation rather than a simple remembering.

The Mother does not believe in birthdays, and we could almost say she does not believe in childhood. The Father, by contrast, "did not hesitate to make friends with children as soon as they were able to talk to him and laugh at his stories" (169). But he is if anything a threat to individuation, with his fluid and absorptive personality and language. I find it interesting that twice in interviews Waten mentions the character of the weak father in *The Unbending* as "one of the best things [he had] done" in fiction.<sup>37</sup> Here the father is allowed his full potency and seductive weakness while finally being mastered by the over-arching power of the narrative figured in the mother's ironical speech and broken English.

This reiterated matrix of relationships, the matrix of symbolic relationships, is for Waten the primary locus of self-representation or, more precisely, self-representation as a Jewish/migrant child.<sup>38</sup> Self-representation cannot be understood

apart from a collective identity, not least *because of* the child-narrator's ambiguous relationship to that collectivity. It is thus never just a question of individual ego formation. Migration means that the processes of language acquisition and the formation of a cultural identity which accompany individuation cannot easily be separated from a sense of guilt, anxiety or *remorse* — the word that recurs surprisingly often when Waten discusses the sources of his writing (as in the epigraph to this chapter).<sup>39</sup> Its excessive and unresolvable meanings produce the necessary "supplementary" story of *Alien Son*: the extended, intimate, but also resistant elaboration of the meaning of the mother's life in "Mother". Even within the story there is a sense of iterability, a multiplication of stories, which belies its calmly descriptive pose. The *final* image as the mother turns away, "her shoes equally down at heel on each side", is still an image of remorse.

This anxiety and remorse can be understood in the act of writing (and writing in English as suggested). To write, for Waten, to be a writer, is in one sense to repay the debt of maternity and migration but it is also the ultimate sign of his distance and difference; it is to fulfil the mother's destiny but also to announce his own "self-authoring". To write about one's childhood, any childhood perhaps but with a doubled force for the migrant and "foreign" childhood, is to find oneself a stranger there, an alien son. But for Waten this is inseparable from an almost uncanny sense of intimacy. Thus the recurrent sense is of a past that returns not a past that has been left behind.<sup>40</sup>

It might be objected that the interpretations of Waten's fictions I have offered describe significant *fictional* effects but nothing more. The implied opposition between fiction and autobiography in such an observation is a misleading one however. The effects are indeed wholly fictional. To say this is not to dispel their autobiographical significance but rather to locate it, to make it visible. The protocols of reading for autobiography will have their own inflection, towards self-inscription as I have shown and, in Lejeune's terms, towards identification between protagonist, narrator and author. This identification can be understood as deferred in the case of "autobiographical fictions" just as it is in *Alien Son* by the distance between narrator and protagonist, for example, or the fact that child and parents are un-named, both of which allow a certain ambivalence around the autobiography/fiction boundary. As I have argued, the stories both invite and resist autobiographical readings. My autobiographical reading, then, is an over-reading; there is no more, but also no less, guarantee of its viability than for "fictional" readings, no more guarantee we might say than its ability to make the texts readable, to multiply their readability.

### **A Career in Writing and a Conclusion**

Waten's career as a writer can be located at two extremes: on the one hand intimate stories of the family drama and on the other large-scale attempts to write the history of the era. The latter as we have seen in Chapter 6 can produce an ambitious novel such as *Time of Conflict*, and there is a related impulse at work in *The Unbending* which is divided precisely between the two extremes just defined. In addition, there is the epochal migration saga of *Distant Land*, taken a further step in *So Far No Further*; the story of a writer "of our era" in *Season of Youth; From Odessa to Odessa* which projects the Soviet Union as the *place* of our era; and Waten's popular history of the 1930s, *The Depression Years: 1929-1939* (perhaps the decade of our era).<sup>41</sup> Finally there is *Scenes of Revolutionary Life* which can be taken as the history of the revolutionary mind in Australia which Waten had foreshadowed a decade before the novel was eventually published.<sup>42</sup>

The two extremes might not be as polarised as first appears. In a number of these texts we find Waten exploring in fiction the notion he expressed in an interview in mid-career, that "in the 20th century ... the Jewish migrant has been the symbol of the oppressed, and of the migratory person".<sup>43</sup> The shift of perspective or magnification can operate in either direction: outwards to the larger narrative structures such as in *Distant Land* or inwards to the short stories such that the family in all its relationships seems saturated in history. Nevertheless the Jewish and family history is generally left behind or displaced when the narratives move to the larger scale. *Time of Conflict*, *Season of Youth* and *Scenes of Revolutionary Life* can each be related to the *Bildungsroman* structure and, for similar reasons, each has an Anglo-Australian protagonist. The hero in each case is *representative*, conceived as bearing an exemplary burden or scope that could not be borne by any "minority" figure: to paraphrase Brodzki and Schenck he is the masculine representative hero, the mirror of his era.

What happens to families in these narratives? *Time of Conflict*, as I have argued, gives the family a conventional role in the *Bildungsroman* structure and in a class and historical narrative. In its sentimental climax the novel resolves its two trajectories, the necessary move beyond family and the return home and reconciliation. In *Season of Youth* — with its classic *Bildungsroman* title — the situation is a little more complicated, less easily resolved, although generic resemblances to the earlier novel can be traced.<sup>44</sup> The "strong" mother is again a sentimental figure, but here her virtues are shabby genteel. The "weak" father, another disappointed returned Anzac, is a brutal, self-pitying, self-deluding man. The novel's plot is initiated by his accusation that the second son, Dan, is a bastard conceived during his absence at the war. This is a fallen (and urban) world compared to *Time of Conflict*.

The question of illegitimacy echoes throughout *Season of Youth*. There are three sons: the narrator, the eldest, who leads a dissolute life but whose aspirations to be a writer begin to take shape over the course of the novel; "Dapper Dan the Bastard" who becomes relatively wealthy and successful on the shady —illegitimate — side of the law but who also seems to be the most sentimental towards his mother; and Peter, the youngest, whose aspirations are petit-bourgeois and whose gifts are for social climbing. Part One of the novel ends, as we might expect generically, with the narrator's violent departure from the family home, in this case because his father, with some reason and with strict thematic logic, accuses him of being a "wife stealer". Dan and Peter vie for favouritism and, at least in the family circle, act like model sons. But the end of the novel, after the mother's death, finds the narrator moving back in with his father as the other two sons clear out. We can scarcely speak of reconciliation, for nothing much has changed in the relation between father and son (the last words from the narrator are "He [the father] would be what he was for the rest of his life", 200). There is no return here to a simpler rural/maternal scene, but symbolically the legitimate son has been identified. The novel's epigraph from Byron announces the theme: "A Strange doom is thy father's son's".

The *Bildungsroman* (or *Künstlerroman*) plot of *Season of Youth* concerns the formation of the writer. The novel's first sentence makes this clear — "Even as a young boy I wanted to be a writer" — and, in terms of the fiction, the novel we have must stand as testimony to the success not only of this fictional project but of authorial legitimacy as well. Thus there is a second test of legitimation worked out in the narrative, that of identifying the legitimate writer. In predictable ways true literature is grasped as a matter of "experience" and truth to life which connects it to the story of maturation (and masculinity, for the arty set tend to be "dandies"). The span of the novel is precisely that of the *Bildungsroman*, from the end of childhood to the beginning of maturity and in particular to the first signs of maturity as a writer. There are helpers and opponents along the way: Kate in the first category who instructs the narrator in the moral significance of literature ("It inspired mankind to struggle against evil ... [if] full-blooded and full-bodied", 88) or Wilson who introduces him to Tolstoy; Alistair Briggs in the second category ("a great poem or novel or short story provided a pure aesthetic experience", 131). Alistair is talented, handsome, educated and already a published poet who does not like being reminded of his occupation as a journalist (in many ways he repeats the figure of Tony Grayson from the earlier novel).<sup>45</sup> His aestheticism is connected with self-regarding characteristics and it is no surprise when he is linked to Dapper Dan the Bastard — who punches him on the nose:

He was a terrible mess this handsome Alistair, and I felt sorry for him for the first time. He was the victim of someone like himself, another king-hit merchant but more efficient. They were two bastards who enjoyed hurting others. (164)

The narrator turns from the arty set at this point (the end of Part Three) and starts to write and *read* seriously. If "experience" is privileged it is so only in a dialectic relationship with "literature" itself. The novel is punctuated with accounts of the narrator's reading. There is also emphasis on the need for "craft" (170). The prefigured synthesis is, as the narrator comments on his own aspirations, "as much a moral matter as literary" (169). Through a range of embedded self-situating episodes, the moral is distinguished from moralism, the aesthetic from mere aestheticism.

The significant point for the present study is that writing is linked into the family drama through the double story of legitimation, which is reinforced by the use of a first-person narrator. One of the narrator's first intimations of a desire to write comes from his mother's frustrated desire to communicate her plight to the newspaper *Truth* (both the debased and the true meanings of the word are pertinent): "In my head I used to make up imaginary letters for her; she would have been shocked if I'd told her about them. They were mostly about father.... Out of this imaginary letter writing came a desire to write a book, about the same subject, *mother's sorrows*" (15, my emphasis). At the end of the novel, in ways that parallel Waten's own account of his "second" literary career, the narrator has "given up writing anecdotal stories" and is instead "drawing from personal experiences ... from the life of my family and myself" (198). This follows shortly after the death of his mother for which he turns up drunk and dishevelled. There is an autobiographical parallel of another kind here. Waten's mother's death and his own "irresponsible" behaviour is one of the few scenes that is written up into (fragmentary) narrative form in the unpublished memoirs. Indeed in one manuscript, beside an account of the mother's death, Waten has written in the margin: "The more I think of myself, my personality even repels me — why I have never written my memoirs. I would never write my memoirs".<sup>46</sup> Of course, this comment comes in the midst of the activity of writing "memoirs" — Waten's own "strange doom".

To draw these points together, I want to suggest that the realist orthodoxy concerning the moral burden of literature contained for Waten the further meaning that "serious" writing involves not only taking responsibility for oneself but also symbolically for oneself as *son* (the symbolic burden might well not work in this way for daughters). In *Season of Youth* the father-son relationship is roughly resolved as a kind of manageable hostility; the mother-son relationship, on the other hand, remains unresolved, a matter of remorse, but also connected to the on-going

project of a writing career. If this is a sentimental motif in the novel, its repetition across Waten's texts suggests a more complex compulsion.

In both *Time of Conflict* and *Season of Youth* the representation of the family is conventionally governed by plot function and the *Bildungsroman* structure, notwithstanding the "excessive" characteristics attached to the family relationships in the latter novel (excessive, that is, in relation to the narrative of a writing career). Both heroes are strongly masculine figures and the story depends upon the trope of masculine individuation. Episodes in each novel can be linked through biographical research to events in Waten's own life, but otherwise both resist autobiographical readings most obviously in their choice of narrators and their overtly conventional generic fictional structures. We might even suspect some over-protestation in the author's note which guards the entrance to *Season of Youth*: "This novel is not autobiographical nor are the characters portraits of living people. The 'I' is a necessary device for the telling of these pages".

By contrast *Scenes of Revolutionary Life* resembles the form of the memoir, or at least a thick slice of memoir between two very thin slices of fiction (the first eight pages and the final nine, in the form of an Epilogue, are in the novel's present, the mid-1970s; the pages in between cover the years 1927-1933).<sup>47</sup> This is despite Waten's choice of another Anglo-Australian narrator and protagonist, Tom Graves. The book ends with Tom about to commence the memoirs that, in third-person form, make up the large centre of the novel.

What distinguishes *Scenes of Revolutionary Life* from the earlier two novels is its relative plotlessness. It is perhaps as much picaresque as *Bildungsroman* although Tom Graves is an unlikely picaro — too earnest, too modest, and prone (also) to remorse. Apart from its opening and closing frame the structure of the novel is episodic, and although he sees a great deal of life in the Communist Party and unemployed movements in Australia and England, including (like Waten) the inside of Wormwood Scrubs, it is not clear that Tom's character changes a great deal through his experience. The story of apprenticeship can be implied but it is scarcely built-in to the narrative design. Similarly, Tom's indulgent and protective parents fade out of the picture when he leaves Australia, and although their indulgence creates an oppressive burden of guilt for him this does not provide the materials for any final resolution. Even his true vocation turns out to be rather low-key: revolutionary and literary ambitions resolve themselves into steady employment as the editor of trade union journals. But the novel wants to insist that this is a successful life, regardless of lingering regrets or aspirations left unfulfilled. A successful revolutionary life might after all involve just this kind of quiet, patient,

even tedious work — like the slow working out of world historical forces or perhaps, on a different scale, like the writing life.

There is undoubtedly a sense in which we can read the narrative as a version of Waten's own memoirs and not only because of detailed biographical parallels or the repetition of motifs such as the protagonist's filial guilt. Indeed there is a sense in which we cannot but read it in this way despite its status as fiction. At this stage of Waten's literary career, with that career firmly established as public knowledge and public property, it is virtually inevitable that such a narrative by him — a retrospective account of a communist and literary life — be read autobiographically. As the reviews indicate, even its deflections into fiction will be read autobiographically.<sup>48</sup> Moreover the context of the public writing career will also define the occasion of the text's *writing*: the career in the public domain is a crucial "pre-text", a necessary pre-condition for such a narrative to be significant as a kind of literary capital. The text is entered into the discourse of the career both by the author and his readers, doubly so for Waten as I have emphasised. Because of the conjunction of his migrant, Jewish and communist identifications, because of the way Waten himself located these identifications inside discourses about Australian identity, he was a writer and public figure peculiarly taken as embodying the significance of his own published works. The slide between work and man in Tony Morphett's introduction to his ABC television interview is characteristic: "Waten's subject matter is in the area traced by three lines: he's an emigrant, he's a Communist, he's a Jew".<sup>49</sup>

Waten's own public activities in writing and speaking were complicit in this identification of self and work despite his own repeated insistence on the fictionality of his fiction: it is part of the context against which this fictionality — in other words the claim to literary significance — is defined in the work. In interviews no less than in his fiction and memoirs we find certain stories or, better, certain scenes of stories returned to repeatedly, by interviewers and editors as much as by Waten himself. It is as if these stories have an inexhaustible iterability for Waten and his audiences. He was an almost irresistibly "interviewable" subject in ways that are in excess of his strictly literary reputation (and he has attracted more biographical than critical commentary) because of the manner in which the story of his life seemed to be a continuation of the stories he told as a fiction-writer and, of course, *vice versa*.

We have noted the "disproportionate" degree to which Waten's texts concentrate on the period of childhood. At least it is in this period that events, memories and opinions are likely to turn themselves into *stories* whether inside fiction, memoirs or interviews. To mention one brief example, in Waten's Author's

Statement in *Australian Literary Studies* one moment expands into a story-telling (and autobiographical, Jewish, childhood) occasion in its own right:

At different stages in my life different books and stories have been important to me but all these books have remained with me right up to this time.

When I was very young I heard many stories read aloud in Yiddish but the story which moved me most was a story by the great Yiddish comic writer Sholem Aleichem, called "The Pair", about a rooster and a hen. They were tied up and sold at a market. The pair passed from a "savage in a fur cap" to a "fat woman in a Turkish shawl", who fattens the pair for the Passover. There was nothing in the world to which God's creatures couldn't become accustomed. The pair had grown so used to their troubles that they now thought things were as they should be, just like the proverbial worm that made its home in the horseradish and thought it sweet. But when the passover approached the pair began to understand the cold, bare truth and to comprehend everything they were seeing and hearing. One thing only they could not fathom. Why had the Turkish shawl boasted that God would reward her for fattening such a pair for Passover? Was that what their God wanted?

This tragi-comic parable undoubtedly affected my stories which were only to appear many decades afterwards.<sup>50</sup>

When we move beyond stories of childhood, the recurrent scenes are those of a precocious public life defined by political and literary aspirations. Here we cross the shadow-line between childhood and youth, between the "family" narrative and the narrative of the career, which marks the beginning of a separate autobiographical trajectory.

*Scenes of Revolutionary Life* is full of tantalising detail for the historian or biographer, but I want instead to address the question of why these post-childhood stories tend towards the form of the memoir (even in the novel) and why they take the particular memoir form they do. Mortality might be one explanation, producing that familiar mode of retrospection towards the end of a public career, the literary memoir in which the scattered incidents of a literary life are corralled together and embodied in the writer who writes. We might expect the relationship between past and present selves to be less fraught or perhaps less playful in the memoir as opposed to the autobiography (although this might also be a gendered distinction); we might expect the narrating voice to be relatively secure in its retrospection, gathering itself up into its narrating present. But of course the sense of an ending or a career winding down will not provide a sufficient explanation for specific generic choices.

It will not, for example, indicate why Jewishness virtually disappears as an issue or scene in Waten's post-childhood autobiographical narratives or why these narratives cluster around a decade or so in Waten's life from the late 1920s — why once more there is a disproportionate focus on a limited period for autobiographical scrutiny given the persistence of Waten's memoir (and "memoir fiction") writing over more than a decade. The large middle of *Scenes of Revolutionary Life* opens with the early years of Tom Graves — aged 17 — as a publicly active communist

and aspiring writer. Beginning in 1927 it follows his political and "literary" activities in Melbourne and Sydney, his departure for Europe, his involvement with the Communist Party and left-wing journalism, and then his imprisonment because of activities in the radical unemployed movement in London. His romantic relationship with Maggie Carlton is described within the same time span. The section ends with Tom's departure from London to return to Australia in the early 1930s having gained some political experience but more self-doubt and disappointment in literary and sexual affairs.

What is curious is the lack of interest the novel shows in the continuities between this youthful life (roughly to age 23) and the older figure who has just resigned from active public life. The reader has to accept on faith the process of development and achievement as the narrative simply leaps over everything in between. There are plenty of memories but little interest in the story of maturation, hence, in part, the relative desultoriness of the novel's construction. The theme of the validation of a communist life is surprisingly low key in its structuring presence.

Waten's papers reveal that the story of the mature active life was planned as the second part of a three-part novel in which Tom was to have become a novelist as well as an editor and which took the story through the cold war period to 1968 (Part 3 was to cover the 1970s).<sup>51</sup> We can imagine that the story simply got too large; on the other hand, this inclusive narrative, this history of our era, seems more than once to have been deflected or deferred. The story of a mature writing career never gets written as a single, continuous narrative or a novel despite sketches and drafts for it being prepared over a decade or so. Further, around the time that *Scenes of Revolutionary Life* was being written (and this appears to have been a long process going back to the mid-1970s<sup>52</sup>), and then after its publication, Waten's energies were directed or deflected into shorter, episodic memoir pieces: "My Literary Education" (1981), "With Uncle Jacob and Aunt Malka in Paris" (1983), "Why I Came Home — Naked — Fifty Years Ago" (1984) and "Memories of Radical Melbourne" (1985). There was also the revision of stories and memoirs for *Love and Rebellion* (1978). The memoir pieces return to much the same period as the novel: early communism and the writing of *Hunger* (1929), the trip to Europe (1931), the departure from England and the return home (1933). Manuscripts among Waten's papers indicate that this sequence was also planned to continue through to the present;<sup>53</sup> but here again Waten's interest was *first* drawn to the stories of the period between childhood and the mature career, and he *returned* to these scenes before turning to anything later. The only published autobiographical work "about" Waten's mature life is *From Odessa to Odessa* with its contemporary intervention in a political debate.

My earlier arguments suggested that Waten's stories of childhood produce memorable fiction in part because of the symbolic family drama they inscribe, at once Jewish, migrant and oedipal. Their fictional form expresses a pattern of internal resonances and repetitions, a circular or imbricated rather than linear construction. There is a clear contrast with the strongly linear and teleological forms of *Time of Conflict* and *Season of Youth* where the family drama is subordinate to each text's self-contained argument. In the later memoir pieces we are on different ground again, somewhere between the two (but closer as it turns out to the short stories). In the memoir form the logic is once more linear but it is also episodic, fragmented and for Waten at least only weakly teleological. The form of the memoir is metonymic rather than metaphoric and reading always involves the presence of a contiguous external frame of reference that is a more or less public history.

Elsewhere I have described the distinctive relation of self to history in the blossoming sub-genre of the (ex-)communist memoir.<sup>54</sup> Rather than the story of a prominent public life which shows the autonomous individual witnessing and acting in great historical scenes these memoirs are motivated to tell an obscure history that will otherwise not get told, the story of ordinary men and women caught up in the great historical movements of their era. Perhaps most distinctive is their subjects' sense of having lived *on the side* of history. This is expressed in a shared historical trajectory arcing from the Depression to the cold war which remains remarkably intact even as individuals join and leave it at different moments. The texts are memoirs rather than autobiographies, to make use of the conventional distinction, because of their characteristic mix of anecdotal modesty about the self combined with an epochal historical scope: there is a *necessity* about the memoir form not merely a falling short of autobiography. Joy Damousi has subsequently made the point that this is characteristically a female perspective; by contrast the exemplary, public, historically-representative self predominates in male texts.<sup>55</sup> Dorothy Hewett's *Wild Card* stands to one side of this group of texts in another sense, in so far as it foregrounds the "autobiographised" self and thus discovers a different historical trajectory.<sup>56</sup>

We might expect Waten's memoirs to be exemplary of the communist memoir. But here as elsewhere our expectations are only partly fulfilled, although here too Waten's writing in certain ways resembles female rather than male forms. The course of history which structures the narratives mentioned above is implied or foreshadowed in Waten's texts, in his stories of unemployed battles, political imprisonment and censorship or the struggle to be a communist writer. But the strong teleology of these communist memoirs, which remains even as personal goals are untangled from Party goals, is largely absent from Waten's memoir pieces.

Indeed the goal suggested by Waten's own sketched-out plans for his sequence of memoirs —the validation of a communist life, the life of a communist man of letters, "the revolutionary mind in a tranquil country like Australia"<sup>57</sup> — even this has only a weak, implicit or deferred presence in the published memoir pieces.

It is important to recall that Waten's actual biography as a communist is an unusual one extending both before and after the more familiar trajectory in that it precedes the Depression and survives the cold war. The "long historical perspective" which I have analysed in earlier chapters is one that Waten could find exemplified in his own life. He defines his accession to revolutionary ideas as an almost inevitable product of childhood and youth ("A Child of Wars and Revolutions" as he puts it), which can be contrasted to the revolutionary *moment*, the sudden accession of historical and political consciousness, which tends to mark other communist memoirs. In general terms, nevertheless, the reason Waten turns to memoirs, why we might say even his fiction turns to memoirs, is also the sense of the self not so much in command of history as in the stream of history, a history conceived as the movement of mass social or "world-historical" forces. But within this vast historical shell Waten's memoirs are remarkably domestic, attenuated or "incidental". If we are to read the life as exemplary it will only be via detours and disruptions and by relating its fragments to a larger story or history beyond its own borders.

In a recent essay on Maxine Hong Kingston's memoirs of a migrant identity, *The Woman Warrior*, Lee Quinby defines the memoir positively as a kind of strategic refusal of autobiography, in particular of its sovereign subjectivity.<sup>58</sup> She paraphrases Kingston's own "sly" definition of the memoir as a form which can neither be dismissed as fiction nor quarrelled with as fact, an ambivalent space which is opened up in a situation where the relations between history, culture and identity are rewritten. The memoir's discontinuous, composite construction through series of stories and anecdotes resists the pull to unity and teleology of the autobiographical:

Whereas autobiography promotes an "I" that shares with confessional discourse an assumed interiority and an ethical mandate to examine that interiority, memoirs promote an "I" that is explicitly constituted in the reports of the utterances and proceedings of others. The "I" or subjectivity produced in memoirs is externalized and, in the Bakhtinian sense, overtly dialogical. Unlike the subjectivity of autobiography, which is presumed to be unitary and continuous over time, memoirs (particularly in their collective form) construct a subjectivity that is multiple and discontinuous.<sup>59</sup>

Quinby is clearly not thinking of the memoirs of retired generals or sportsmen when she discusses Kingston's rather special use of the form. Kingston's text is also more explicitly working the forms of a revised selfhood than anything we find in Waten's writing. Nevertheless Quinby's discussion does suggest some of the characteristics

of Waten's memoir pieces, their discontinuity and externality, and some of the reasons why this is the form that recurs for Waten in writing of his "self in history".

"My Literary Education", for example, has a purposive thread as indicated by its title but just as striking is its apparently digressive and substitutive movement through a sequence of inconsequential self-contained episodes, only marginally connected to the protagonist's literary development, and related as embedded stories.<sup>60</sup> There is only a weak sense of Waten as the "proprietor or creator of his history", only a weak sense too of the "mystery of beginnings" even here in the story of a literary education.<sup>61</sup> Instead the discontinuously connected stories suggest a self *in the midst* of history in a way that refuses to make the self the centre of attention or meaning. The text's conclusion, not surprisingly, is inconclusive: the novel the youthful narrator writes yokes together just about everything of this youthful life so far but in a way that leaves just about everything still to be understood. If it marks the end of youth (the final sentence reads "I was then 18"), it does not yet mark the beginnings of a literary career.

The next piece, "With Uncle Jacob and Auntie Malka in Paris", is itself in a sense wholly a digression: it begins "On my way to London in 1931 I broke my journey in Toulon to catch a train to Paris to see my aunts, my father's sisters, Malka and Hannah who lived there" (all the memoirs date themselves internally as this does). The literary and political ambitions of our narrator are as it were put on hold for this journey "back" into family history and into a *Jewish* world. His Aunt calls Judah by his Russian-Jewish diminutive, Yudka, and her eyes start to glaze over when he talks of his "miniscule literary achievements" (126). The story is largely given over to the eccentricities of Jacob and Malka despite the future tragic history of Nazism also shading the narrative. Although self-contained, the text reads (as it must) like a fragment of something larger — both a larger text and a larger history outside the text. It has a characteristically "weak", though poignant, resolution: "You must come again Yudka ... Travel as much as you can. See new things. The time might be short for all of us" (139).

Similar characteristics mark Waten's other late memoir pieces. The pressures of history and memory (and so of maturation) in this narrative structure are relaxed and expansive; *hence*, in part, the episodic memoir form. To paraphrase Waten's own description of *Alien Son*, perhaps we could call these memoirs an "autobiography without architecture". Waten's texts are at one level stories of masculine maturation as their concentration in the period between childhood and maturity suggests. In an interview he described this period, from the late 1920s to the mid-1930s, as one of his "favourite periods": "that's when I was emerging as a man, *as it were*, growing into manhood, *for want of a better term*, and when I had a

great number of experiences".<sup>62</sup> What is surprising, though, is how "under-thematised", how diffuse, this *Bildungsroman* structure is in the published memoir narratives (and I find fascinating how in the quotation above Waten almost seems to be speaking someone else's language when he uses the metaphors of masculine maturation). The teleology of the career is seldom more than implicit within the individual text, and perhaps even then only through the inscription of the figure or voice of the publicly-known mature writer in the present (for of course that is part of their meaning). The structure of apprenticeship is even less evident here than in *Scenes of Revolutionary Life*.

Indeed it can be argued that rather than the authoritative voice of literary realism it is the modest, low-key voice of the episodic memoir which Waten needed to make his own history tellable — and so, too, the history of his era. These anecdotal and incidental memoir narratives resemble his first stories in their displaced focus on the developing self and their digressive, unemphatic form. The short fictions, as I have suggested, manifest a structure of return and reworking while the memoirs are more linear and more public, demanding to be read through the "external" knowledge of Waten's literary and political reputation. In the memoirs *sequence* is all; each conclusion is about moving on to the next stage and the next story. And whereas the fictions are relational, in the memoirs the narrator is largely isolated. The two different structures thus suggest different relations to the self and the past (indeed to different, discontinuous pasts). But like the short stories, the effectiveness of the memoirs is often a matter of the speaking voice, telling stories as if for their own sake, for their sheer tellability, and thereby reproducing certain effects of orality.

Finally, we can link fictions and memoirs through the manner in which in both a weak sense of the narrator/author as the "proprietor or creator of his history" goes together characteristically with a pervasive sense of the self in history. The narrator's historical exemplariness, like the strong narrative of history itself, is relatively diffuse or casual. Neither the self-motivating individual nor the collective experience holds centre stage, as again there is a difference, a deflection, however slight, from the strong, self-authoring masculine autobiography which, perhaps in more than one sense, Waten was unable to write. In these scattered memoirs a modesty and irony with regard to the self comes together with a sense that what the self has experienced is historically significant; but this larger history, the history of our era, is dispersed rather than insistent. Their strong emphasis on sequence, and so on a larger narrative structure, comes together with a kind of incidental inconsequence. This peculiar blend of characteristics might be thought of as a way of defining the success of these memoir texts in representing their stories as

"experience" in two senses at once: as veridical (this is just what happened) and as pedagogical (in the process of maturation). The memoirs depend upon this latter dimension being over-determined but always understated. The autobiographical project is rejoined by this discovery of a non-fictional form which returns to something like the distinctive qualities, the memorable "simplicity", of Waten's earlier fiction.

In order to draw these readings to a conclusion I might once again make explicit my reading for autobiography. There is a set of conventional explanations which might help to explain the iterability of these stories of youth and pre-maturity for Waten. This is the period of individuation when the self is relatively unformed and so overflowing with meanings, not all of which can ever be recuperated or synthesised. These are stories which escape the stable purposive design of the career as often as they foreshadow it. Richard Coe's romantic terminology also has a point to make, although as I have argued Waten shows an interesting lack of interest, in all his writings, in "the essence of his inner self":

It was Baudelaire who defined genius as "childhood recoverable at will"; and it is above all the poet who sees the essence of his inner self in the remembered experiences of an earlier state of being: himself as a child, as an adolescent, as a *very* young man.... Poets, as such, rarely write memorable autobiographies of their mature years. Everything essential that has to be said about themselves has already been said: in their poetry.<sup>63</sup>

We might also recall John Colmer's point that the second and third volumes of autobiographical trilogies are rarely successful.<sup>64</sup> In Waten's case the dividing line between pre-mature and mature (authorial) self is perhaps peculiarly clear because of the relatively late publication of *Alien Son* (when Waten was 41). His memoirs relate both a precocious youth and a prolonged immaturity, at least as far as a career in writing is concerned.

Waten's literary career had its beginnings in a return to the scene of childhood. At the end of his career he turns again to its "beginning" in childhood and youth, a conventional way of marking the passage of a literary life. Perhaps what is less conventional is the relative decentring of the literary in favour of the "life" in the published memoir pieces. Much of Waten's writing subsequent to *Alien Son*, as we have seen, returns to the period between the writing of these stories and the childhood about which they are written. To express the point in this way is to emphasise the sense of a period "in between" marked at either end by that complicated relationship between self, family and community described in the earlier part of this chapter.

The return to writing which eventually produces *Alien Son* is thus a return to a complex domain of meanings, maternal and Jewish above all, and then female, "migrant" and Yiddish, the language of the home and one contextual "language" for the writing. To *write* could represent both the final break with the Mother and a reconciliation and recompense; the final act of self-assertion and the fulfilment of *her* destiny. Both meanings are contained within the story "Mother". The masculine assertiveness of the avant-garde or proletarian revolution might be located at the other extreme of this gendered scale (despite Kristeva).<sup>65</sup> Perhaps this is why Waten recalls his mother's presence still haunting his would-be revolutionary avant-garde novel *Hunger*, in the form of the prohibitions of her favourite text, Tolstoy's *Kreutzer Sonata*:

Everything went into it... Not everything, of course. There was nothing about my migrant background nor was there anything about sex. Perhaps *The Kreutzer Sonata* had got into me.<sup>66</sup>

It is not the simplicity of Waten's return to what he "knew best" but the complexities, the unfinished business, that produce his memorable stories.

What gives particular force to the period in between the childhood and the writing about the childhood is that for Waten this is the period in which he moves furthest from "home" in his relationship to Jewishness, to Mother and family, and even to writing after his return from England. The "non-Jewish" narrators in the later memoirs are not the historically exemplary figures of the middle novels, but rather a way of marking the distance from childhood, the move of the self from the family into history (they are unemphatically "Jewish" after all because of the memoir form's incorporation of the author's proper name within its framings). But of course this kind of break can never be complete, perhaps for any (male) individual but doubly so for the Jewish migrant whose personal history bears so much more than a merely personal significance. This could easily become a sentimental argument, but it is a perspective that even Waten's communism would have reinforced "anti-sentimentally". His understanding of his place, at once exemplary and marginal, in an epochal history draws Waten back into his own childhood and family such that his communism and his writing come to be understood in terms of family history even as, again, they mark an irreparable break from it.

The late memoir pieces, then, return to the unfinished story of this break in order to give it continuity, to stretch it out in linear terms (rather than to concentrate it as a psychological complex) and so to place things in their order in the whole life story. The memoir form itself implies continuity, connecting chains of episodes together across diverse scenes, their end guaranteed as it were by the actual subsequent career. But for Waten the memoir form never quite succeeds in aligning

childhood, youth/early adulthood and the mature career in a single narrative extending all the way back into childhood and all the way forward into the formed and directed public life.

Waten's texts are never spectacularly marked by psychic — or linguistic — disturbance nor are they much interested in "subjectivity". Nonetheless to read across the wide field of his writings in different genres is to be struck by the repetitions, "digressions" and absences which I have been discussing throughout this chapter and which I have argued can be read autobiographically, read as inscriptions of the self. The two scales of Waten's writing, the intimate and the epochal, come together at the end of his writing career as they did at the very beginning. Although in the memoirs there is a different ordering of priorities and strategies than in the fiction, we characteristically find fictions which resemble memoirs and memoirs which keep turning into collections of stories.

Waten is just the writer who could publish an essay on his suburb alongside a book on the Soviet Union without feeling a sense of disproportion between the two — indeed he could make the former historical and the latter domestic.<sup>67</sup> However I want to end my discussion of autobiography in Waten's texts with the emphasis on the Jewish and migrant dimensions of this self-inscription. Because of his Jewish and migrant past — although of course the point is that it is never simply past — Waten could apprehend his own life as "historical" in an intimate, everyday, domestic and often peculiarly decentred sense which is by turns overtly compelling and elusively pervasive. In addition, the nature of Waten's gradualist communism could underscore this grasp of self and history which finds its language in his unemphatic realist discourse.

Despite Waten's own often rigid aesthetic preferences, the boundaries between the personal and the historical or between "subjectivity" and "publicity" are characteristically fluid in both the short fiction and the memoir pieces, and in that sense of stories that insist on being turned into stories. There are similar effects in passages in the Jewish/migrant novels, especially *The Unbending*, and in interviews. Perhaps it is not surprising after all to find that remorse and revolution can co-exist for Waten as impulses to writing. The pleasure of these texts often comes through a dual autobiographical reading whereby we trace Waten turning his life into writing by turning writing into his life, or more accurately into a career.

- 1 Philippe Lejeune, "The Autobiographical Contract," in *French Literary Theory Today: A Reader*, ed. Tzvetan Todorov (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), p.193. The  
 2 quoted phrase, as I have used it, cannot of course have the force of a definition.
- 3 The bulk of this material is to be found in the Judah Waten papers, National Library of  
 Australia, NLA MS 4536, Box 32. Further material in Boxes 9, 10, 30.
- 4 Specific references will be given throughout this chapter, but in addition to *Alien Son* and  
 the novels and interviews cited see in particular: *From Odessa to Odessa: The Journey of an  
 Australian Writer* (Melbourne: F. W. Cheshire, 1969), ch. 1; "Born in Odessa," "A Child of  
 Wars and Revolutions" and "Read Politics, Son" from *Love and Rebellion* (1978; Richmond,  
 Vic.: Hodja Educational Resources Co-operative, 1983); "My Literary Education," *Bulletin*  
 21 April 1981, pp.24-28; "With Uncle Jacob and Auntie Malka in Paris," *Southerly* 43, 2  
 (1983), pp.123-39; "Why I Came Home — Naked — Fifty Years Ago," *Bulletin* 24 April  
 1984, pp. 70-73; "Memories of Radical Melbourne," *Australian* 28-29 September 1985, p.8.  
 Further references will appear in the text. Also of interest is Waten's book for children,  
*Bottle-O!* (Melbourne: Cassell Australia, 1972), which returns to the scene of childhood of  
*Alien Son*.
- 5 John and Dorothy Colmer, eds, *The Penguin Book of Australian Autobiography* (Ringwood,  
 Vic.: Penguin, 1987), p.5.
- 6 Paul Jay, *Being in the Text: Self-Representation from Wordsworth to Roland Barthes* (Ithaca  
 and London: Cornell University Press, 1984), pp.18-21. Despite insisting that  
 autobiographical writings defy categorisation as a genre, which would seem to be the wrong  
 way to pose the question in the first place, Jay offers an exemplary generic study of modes  
 of literary self-representation.
- 7 See for example Paul De Man, "Autobiography as De-facement," *Modern Language Notes*  
 94, 5 (December 1979), pp.919-23; Nancy K. Miller, "Writing Fictions: Women's  
 Autobiography in France," in *Life/Lines: Theorising Women's Autobiography*, eds Bella  
 Brodzki and Celeste Schenck (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1988), pp.45-  
 61.
- 8 Miller, "Writing Fictions," p.59.
- 9 Roland Barthes, *Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill  
 and Wang, 1977).
- 10 Bella Brodzki and Celeste Schenck, Introduction, *Life/Lines* pp.2-3.
- 11 Joy Hooton, *Stories of Herself When Young: Autobiographies of Childhood by Australian  
 Women* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1990), pp.83-84.
- 12 Brodzki and Schenck, Introduction, p.1. My emphasis in final sentence.
- 13 Hooton, p.91. Further references will appear in the text.
- 14 Richard N. Coe, "Portrait of the Artist as a Young Australian: Childhood, Literature and  
 Myth," *Southerly* 41, 2 (1981), pp.131. Coe's article is itself in need of a thoroughly  
 sceptical reading. See for example A. F. Davies, "How to Write a Childhood," *Meanjin* 46  
 (March 1987), pp.54-57.
- 15 See Shari Benstock, "Authorizing the Autobiographical" and Susan Stanford  
 Friedman, "Women's Autobiographical Selves: Theory and Practice", in *The Private  
 Self: Theory and Practice of Women's Autobiographical Writings*, ed. Shari  
 Benstock (London: Routledge, 1988), pp.16 & 38-40.
- 16 Friedman, pp.34-35.
- 17 The partial exception is "With Uncle Jacob and Auntie Malka in Paris," written as an  
 autobiographical piece, which features a narrator-protagonist aged around 20. However  
 Jewishness for the narrator, as suggested in my analysis below in this chapter, is  
 significantly related to the narrator's childhood especially when his Aunt calls him by his  
 Russian-Jewish diminutive. "My Two Literary Careers," *Southerly* 31, 2 (1971), pp.83-92, is  
 one of the few Waten texts to align the earlier and later periods, though it does so only  
 through the figure of a second beginning.
- The capitalisation of Mother and Father is Waten's own in *Alien Son* (1952;  
 Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1990).

- 18 Roland Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text*, trans. Richard Miller (New York: Hill and Wang, 1975), p.37.
- 19 Judah Waten interview with Suzanne Lunney, National Library of Australia, 27 & 30 May 1975, typescript pp.28-29.
- 20 Judah Waten, *Alien Son*, p.168. Further references will appear in the text.
- 21 Sneja Gunew, *Framing Marginality: Multicultural Literary Studies* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1994), p.72 (ch.4 passim).
- 22 Terms from Julia Kristeva which Gunew has also introduced to her analysis of ethnic minority writing. The semiotic describes "pre-linguistic experience which is tied to our memories of the maternal body ... characterised by the physical aspects of language — sound, shape, rhythm — and [contrasting] with the notion of language as a means of ordering the self and experience rationally", *Framing Marginality*, p.104. Part of the interest in introducing these notions, as I go on to argue, is the apparent resistance of Waten's strictly realist texts to their critical "desires".
- 23 This phrase occurs in a review of Roth's *Portnoy's Complaint* collected among the numerous cuttings of reviews from Australian and overseas publications that Waten assembled over many years. NLA MS 4536, Box 33.
- 24 I am here "reading off" *Alien Son* against concepts suggested by Paul Jay's discussion, *Being in the Text*, pp.22-24.
- 25 Judah Waten, *The Unbending* (Melbourne: Australasian Book Society, 1954), p.116.
- 26 Michel Foucault, "What is an Author?" as cited by Candace Lang, "Autobiography in the Aftermath of Romanticism," *Diacritics* 12 (Winter 1982) where she writes: "the mode of self-manifestation of the subject can no longer be determined as 'self-expression,' but ... is better defined as the specificity of his (sic) interference in the linguistic codes he manipulates, so that if the subject is 'revealed' in his work, it is negatively, as it were, in the interstices of the text, by 'the singularity of his absence'" (p.12).
- 27 Hooton, p.94.
- 28 Donald Horne, *The Education of Young Donald* (1967; Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1975); Hal Porter, *The Watcher on the Cast-Iron Balcony* (London: Faber and Faber, 1963); Bernard Smith, *The Boy Adeodatus: The Portrait of a Lucky Young Bastard* (Ringwood, Vic.: Penguin, 1984); George Johnston, *My Brother Jack* (1964; London: Fontana, 1967).
- 29 Judah Waten, interview with Hazel De Berg, NLA De Berg MS 888, p.985.
- 30 Hooton, p.95.
- 31 Don Anderson, "Portraits of the Artist as a Young Man," *Meanjin* 42, 3 (1983), p.340.
- 32 Richard Coe, "Portrait of the Artist as a Young Australian: Childhood, Literature and Myth," *Southerly* 41, 2 (1981), p.142. No texts are cited. The point is probably true of Waten himself but it is not a scene in his writing.
- 33 Jay, p.116.
- 34 Jay, p.116.
- 35 Jay, p.117. Waten has spoken of Joyce as an early influence: "My Two Literary Careers," pp.83 & 88; interview with Barrett Reid, State Library of Victoria, 27 February 1967 ("I had been swept up by Joyce and I was all Joyce").
- 36 Edward W. Said, *Beginnings: Intention and Method* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1975), p.34, discussed by Jay, pp.123-24.
- 37 Suzanne Lunney interview, p.41; interview with Geoff Herbert broadcast on Radio 3CR Melbourne, 1985. In the latter Waten describes the character of the father as "like myself, emotionally a little bit feeble."
- 38 The interviews cited above all contain extended discussions of both mother and father. Suzanne Lunney's NLA interview, for example, includes Waten's reflection that he was more on his mother's than his father's side in their quarrels and that she "invested a lot of emotional capital" in him (p.20). Later he comments that *The Unbending* had its origin in a recollection of his mother, in the anecdote used as an epigraph for this chapter.

- 39 Suzanne Lunney interview, p.32; interview with Richard Brown, Face to Face, ABC Television (n.d.), typescript p.2. In describing the writing process in the latter, Waten's first example is "if you're writing about a mother, your own mother obtrudes."
- 40 In the De Berg interview Waten remarks: "The experiences I had as a child, a boy, stayed with me for a very long time, have stayed with me all my life, of course, and I think one's experiences before 14 are perhaps the most vivid of a writer's life. Anyhow the fact is that writers go back to those years again and again and again, in fact the basis of any of their stories ... those early years have remained vivid years to me, and those years form the basis or gave me the inspiration for this book."
- 41 Judah Waten, *The Depression Years: 1929-1939* (Melbourne: F. W. Cheshire, 1971).
- 42 Waten, "My Two Literary Careers," p.91.
- 43 Judah Waten interview with Tony Morphett, 18 December 1966, *Spectrum* ABC Television, typescript p.6.
- 44 Judah Waten, *Season of Youth* (Melbourne: F. W. Cheshire, 1966). Further references will appear in the text.
- 45 It is likely that Briggs is based partly on Alwyn Lee. See Chapter 2 above.
- 46 Waten papers, NLA MS 4536, Box 32.
- 47 Judah Waten, *Scenes of Revolutionary Life* (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1982).
- 48 See for example John Douglas Pringle, "Who's That Down the Well?" *Sydney Morning Herald*, 16 October 1982, p.35. The review begins by noting Waten's life-long communism and ends by stating that the character's voice is "the voice of Judah Waten."
- 49 Interview with Tony Morphett, *Spectrum*, ABC Television, typescript p.1.
- 50 Judah Waten, [Author's Statement], *Australian Literary Studies* 10, 2 (October 1981), p.236. Something similar occurs in "My Two Literary Careers" which expands when talking of mother, family and migration (pp.87-90).
- 51 Waten papers, NLA MS 4536, Box 12. Notes on typescript of *Scenes of Revolutionary Life*. Part 1 is entitled "They Thought the World Needed Changing" (1927-39); Part 2, "At Home" (1945-68); Part 3, "Return" (1969-77).
- 52 Waten papers, NLA MS 4536, Box 12. The material referred to above was deposited in the National Library in 1979.
- 53 Waten papers, NLA MS 4536, Box 32, Folder 47.
- 54 David Carter, "'History Was On Our Side': Memoirs from the Australian Left," *Meanjin* 46, 1 (March 1987), pp.108-121.
- 55 Joy Damousi, *Women Come Rally: Socialism, Communism and Gender in Australia 1890-1955* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1994). Damousi does misread my estimation of women's communist memoirs; my focus on their inclusion of domestic or personal issues was intended to define what made them interesting not to describe their shortcomings.
- 56 Dorothy Hewett, *Wild Card: An Autobiography 1923-1958* (Melbourne: McPhee Gribble/Penguin, 1990).
- 57 Waten, "My Two Literary Careers," p.91.
- 58 Lee Quinby, "The Subject of Memoirs: *The Woman Warrior's* Technology of Ideographic Selfhood," in *De/Colonizing the Subject: The Politics of Gender in Women's Autobiography*, eds Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1992), pp.297-320.
- 59 Quinby, p.299.
- 60 I will be following the text of "My Literary Education" as first printed in the *Bulletin*. The piece was later twice revised: "A Writer's Youth: A Memoir," *Outrider* 1, 1 (June 1984), pp.114-21; "A Writer's Youth," in *Joseph's Coat: An Anthology of Multicultural Writing*, ed. Peter Skrzynecki (Sydney: Hale & Iremonger, 1985), pp.198-206.
- 61 Phrases here quoted and paraphrased from Hooton, pp.93-94.
- 62 Interview with Suzanne Lunney, p.18.
- 63 Coe, p.127.

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- 64 John Colmer, *Australian Autobiography: The Personal Quest* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1989), pp.17-18.
- 65 For a critical reading of Kristeva on the avant-garde and transgression see Elizabeth Grosz, *Sexual Subversions: Three French Feminists* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1989), pp.55-60.
- 66 Waten, "My Literary Education," p.28.
- 67 Waten, "Home of the White Horse," *Age Weekender* 3 August 1979, pp.10-11. In addition to *From Odessa to Odessa*, Waten prepared for publication a collection of his writings about the communist countries, called "Looking at the Soviet Union" (typescript in Waten papers, NLA MS 4536, Box 32).

## Bibliography

This bibliography is divided into two sections. The first comprises texts written (or translated) by Judah Waten arranged chronologically; archival material relating directly to him; interviews with him; and reviews of his published books. This is a selective bibliography listing only those writings cited in the thesis. The second section is a General Bibliography which lists all other primary and secondary sources used in the preparation of this work.

### 1. JUDAH WATEN

#### 1.1 Archives

Judah Waten Papers, National Library of Australia NLA MS 4536.

Australian Archives (ACT): Australian Security Intelligence Organisation; CRS A6119, Personal files, alpha-numeric series, 1949- . 101: Waten, Judah Leon Part 1, 1928-1953; 264: Part 2, 1955-1958; 357: 1957-1957; 446: 1958-1959.

Australian Archives (ACT): Prime Minister's Department; CRS A463, Correspondence files, annual single number series, 1956- ; 1969/2107. Judah Waten-Commonwealth Literary Fund, 1954-1971.

#### 1.2 Interviews

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"Spectrum: Judah Waten on Commitment". Interview with Tony Morphet. *Spectrum*, ABC Television. 18 December 1966.

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"Face to Face: Judah Waten". Interview with Richard Brown, ABC Television, n.d.

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*From Odessa to Odessa : The Journey of an Australian Writer*. Melbourne: F.W. Cheshire, 1969.

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*Classic Australian Short Stories*. Edited with Stephen Murray-Smith. Mount Eliza, Vic.: Wren, 1974.  
*Love and Rebellion*. 1978. Richmond, Vic.: Hodja Educational Resources Co-operative, 1983.  
*Scenes of Revolutionary Life*. Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1982.

#### 1.4 Uncollected Writings

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1930

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"STRIFE!" [Editorial/Manifesto]. *Strife* 1, 1 (October 1930), p.1.

1931

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1945

"Inspector Ryan". In *Southern Stories: Poems and Paintings*, ed. Brian Fitzpatrick (Melbourne: Dolphin Publications, n.d. [1945?]), pp.88-102 [pseud. Matt Turner].

"Reflections on Literature and Painting". In *Southern Stories*, ed, Fitzpatrick, pp.52-58.

1947

"Pinchas Goldhar". *Voice* (February 1947), p.13.

1948

"Yiddish Literature in Australia". *Unity* 1, 1 (July-August 1948), pp.4-5.

1949

"Contemporary Jewish Literature in Australia". *Australian Jewish Historical Society Journal* 3 (1949), pp.92-97.

1951

Rev. of *Port of Call* by John Morrison. *Meanjin* 10, 2 (Winter 1951), pp.189-93.

1955

"Alan Marshall's Story". Rev. of *I Can Jump Puddles* by Alan Marshall. *Overland* 5 (October 1955), p.33.

1957

"Bitter Freedom". *Tribune* 28 August 1957, p.6. Repr. *Labour Monthly* (December 1957), pp.561-65.

"Working Bullocks". Rev. of *Coonardoo* and *Working Bullocks* by Katharine Susannah Prichard. *Overland* 10 (September 1957), p.39.

"A Great Literature Created by New Soviet Life". *Tribune* 6 November 1957, p.6.

"Howard Fast Steps Into a New Camp". *Guardian* 21 November 1957, p.6; *Tribune* 4 December 1957, p.7.

"Eureka Inspires Fight for Socialism". *Guardian* 5 December 1957, p.3.

1958

- "When 'Literary Criticism' is a Political Weapon". *Guardian* 23 January 1958, pp.4-5.
- "New Book Aids Appreciation of Our Literature". Rev. of *The Australian Tradition* by A.A. Phillips. *Guardian* 15 May 1958, p.4.
- "Three of Vance Palmer's". Rev. of *Seedtime, The Passage* and *The Swayne Family* by Vance Palmer. *Overland* 12 (June 1958), pp.39-40.
- "Book Society Plays its Part in the Battle of Ideas". *Guardian* 5 June 1958, p.3; *Tribune* 4 June, p.6.
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