

# **The Utopian in a Faithless Age**

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## Abstract

The Austrian philosopher, Karl Popper, a fugitive of Nazism in the 1930s, once declared that Utopianism "...with the best intentions of making heaven on earth...only succeeds in making it a hell..." (108), and certainly Utopia's history is littered with failures fuelled largely from within.

Yet the host of academic sources, as well as fictional, journalistic and popular history works on the ideal state that I have encountered in my research have been an indication to me of the perennial appeal of the subject, and the place it continues to hold in human imagination in defiance of our 'faithless age.'

I have set out to write a novel loosely based on one of New Australia's 'impractical dreamers,' Harry Taylor, attempting to set the dilemma of a liberal late-nineteenth century Socialist on his return to Australia within the context of his failed utopian dream and against the backdrop of a small Australian town fast betraying the co-operative nature which first encouraged him to settle there.

I have found in many ways my exegesis and novel to cross paths with and echo each other. The history of 'Mylong' in which my main character, Harry Gardener, is portrayed belongs in part to myself as well, and I have taken the liberty of including parts of my personal experience in the exegesis where it seemed to relate to the ethos of the town which I, in a sense, inherited.

Otherwise, while the vision of 'Landfall' may be mine, in tracing some of the story of Utopianism and linking it with white Australian history and the New Australia colony in Paraguay, I have tried to access as many late nineteenth and early twentieth century sources as possible to capture as naturally as possible the mood of a particular utopian adventure and time.





## Statement of Originality

This work contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any other university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where reference has been made in text. In addition, I certify that no part of this work will, in the future, be used in a submission in my name, for any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution without the prior approval of the University of Adelaide and where applicable, any partner institution responsible for the joint-award of this degree.

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Reg Taylor \_\_\_\_\_

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## The Utopian in a Faithless Age

Before our family moved to Renmark in South Australia just after the 1956 Flood we had been living on higher ground, and I only really took much notice of it when someone was drowned. Of course I was young but I still think it was a reflection of the flood's mostly insidious nature. Though the volume of water was tremendous, it was spread over such an area that its progress must have involved a lot of dividing and conquering, with the river snaking round unprotected flanks and introducing itself in unexpected places, interspersed with the odd really big moment when it found a weakness in a levee and barged through bringing men scurrying like white ants to try to fill in the gap.

In the end the water did go again, leaving yabby crammed backwaters and mosquito seething ponds, and acres of mud that eventually turned mosaic. The centre of the town had been successfully defended, though the cellar of the pub was flooded, and after the main roads had been fixed the council set in place a monument to defy any future flood event by erecting along one flank of the town a levee so big that some locals liked to think it would be visible from space and keep the town on the map for ever.

While they were doing this, streets full of houses on the fringe of town were still empty; abandoned by owners whose date of return, if ever, was uncertain, and they were more or less wide open. And so on Friday-nights after dark my brother and I explored them by torch light, getting in through broken or non-existent locks on doors and windows. The tantalising wrecks of human habitations almost invite invasion, so the actions of people who've historically ransacked them aren't all that reprehensible. There is something so *Mary Celeste*-like about their desolation that helps us feel that whatever was someone else's once might as well be ours. I still like to think we weren't entirely disrespectful. Darkness not only lent enchantment but a kind of reverence to our intrusions, partly inspired by fear but also from

being an audience to our own adventures. Once we were terrified out of our wits by the sound of an opening screen-door and the shuffling steps of some revenant as we huddled behind a couch with the adrenalin singing in our ears. Generally though we uncovered without doing too much damage mostly unremarkable secrets, quotidian artefacts lent a poignancy by their owners' hurried exit; already sepiaed photos given another lick of age by mischance, the mildewy paintings of some probably defunct local talent who'd never have to grieve over them now, a record player with a 78 still on the turntable which cackled out when the handle was wound some tune that had been inherently melancholy, but whose agitatedness now sounded more disconnected in that setting than us.

We never did get a chance to explore the family home of the Taylor's, though it was next door to ours. As befitting the most substantial residence in town, it had already been cleaned up and reoccupied when we arrived. If we *had* got in there early enough I know now that we would have discovered one room with hundreds of books in it; most of them sour with damp. Harry Taylor's descendants had left their run too late, and the books which rated low on the scale of furnishings had been left to soak and squirm and proclaim their ruin as the water fell. But even the ones higher up that stayed dry would have held little interest for us after our initial curiosity was satisfied.

Most of Harry Taylor's literary tastes, so I've learned, were restricted to icons of the late nineteenth century like Ruskin, Spencer, Carlyle, Shaw and Morris (naturally), while his eclecticism would have been elsewhere reflected in rows of leather and cloth bound items reminiscent of stocks in the back room of the town library that we weren't allowed to borrow and wouldn't have gone within a mile of anyway. Apart from his other interests Harry Taylor was a bibliophile whose voracious appetite for knowledge, languages, causes, dead ends—and utopian themes—had led him to amass thousands of books. Later I found out that in his own lifetime he had distributed a lot of his library to worthy causes in the town, but most of

them were swallowed up by the Flood as well. It was Renmark's version of Florence's *diluvio* in the 60s when between three and four million books suffered from immersion. An army of volunteers and experts and philanthropists saved most of them: in Renmark's case I imagine the damaged ones would have made a one way trip to the dump.

With their loss it was as if everything of their owner went as well. Because, on top of that non-discovery, the most curious legacy of the time I spent in the town is that I never heard anything about him. Neither Harry Taylor's name—or New Australia's—were ever raised at school or anywhere else in town that I know of and I had to wait until both were revived in Gavin Souter's *A Peculiar People* and Don Gobbet and Malcolm Saunders' *Harry Taylor of the Murray Pioneer*. Gobbet and Saunders, encouraged by the discovery of personal papers of their subject, might have wanted to help dispel his anonymity. As they pointed out, thirty years after the death of a man who had not only been among the principals of New Australia but a tireless advocate of the area he adopted, his name was honoured there by a fairly humble street, an unremarkable grandstand at the local oval, and a rose garden on the town's foreshore that has—even more latterly—been remodelled in someone else's honour.

I have not been drawn to writing a novel featuring a fictional version of him from a sense of obligation. But in an age when utopianism, politically and philosophically (if not emotionally) seems to have lost most of its relevance, I am fascinated by Harry Taylor's connections with New Australia and the Riverland of South Australia.

The ease with which his name passed into desuetude could be a measure of a number of things: apathy, which might head the list in front of any suggestion of censure following the watering down of some of his Socialist principles; lingering conservative opposition to his original evangelism—there has always been something in the Australian ethos which tolerates ratbags but abhors radicals—or it could just, and may very well, be simply that the

sun-scuffed, second rate intellectual torpor which had hung over at least that part of Australia for so long, meant that the past just didn't rate. It may have been the town's particular, sloppy and self-satisfied expression of post modernism. It could be that Taylor was just waiting to be revived.

While my novel is not meant to be hagiography, or anywhere near biographically faithful, I am devoting space in my exegesis to the person on whom the main character of my novel is based, if only to acknowledge the source of some of the personal qualities in his apparent doppelganger, Harry Gardener. My motives are entirely selfish; my means I hope imaginative. The first part of the novel employs provocative historical details and characters which cannot be ignored, but beyond and after that I have sabotaged history. I never quite got over the confession in Alan Marshall's introduction to *I Can Jump Puddles*, that he had tampered with literal truths of his past in his enchanting semi-memoir (as it must be called, I suppose). I really didn't want to know. I do not intend to give away any hints in my fictional narrative of the disparities between the past and its imitations. But having said that, any ghost of Harry Taylor who objects to being misrepresented or even represented at all, might wish to assuage his feelings with the thought that there was a kind of inevitability to it.

I cannot claim to be among those utopian nomads, even modern ones, who live with the conviction that their next port of call will supply all their needs. While a peripatetic childhood may have had the effect of making me feel never really settled, Renmark is in many ways as central to my personal history as Harry Gardener's, since I remember so much of it from the relatively short period I spent there, even if few of my memories are fond ones.

Over a divide of not so many years I realise that Harry Taylor and I shared the experience of living in the same town, and whatever else we did not have in common – his religious faith, his moral and social values—some of my experiences there must have been

his; whatever I write about his fictional self's life will therefore have something to do with mine.

I have disguised Renmark's name under the non-de-plume, Mylong. Its proper one would be easy enough to find out; Australia is not populous enough to play such hide-and-seek games in, and there's something about us that demands to know, so places here can be confirmed as real and live and commonplace. But, as I have explained in my introduction, I have done it for the same reason I have changed most of the names of historical figures in the story, as a way of giving towns and their characters and even the narrator some breathing space.

The story behind the establishment of New Australia is well enough known to be recapitulated fairly briefly. After the defeat of the maritime, shearers' and other unions in the strikes of 1890-91, and while the bulk of the union movement retired to lick its wounds or seek political representation as a salve for them, a tiny minority responded by turning their backs on the old Australia and trying to build Utopia in the new. It may not have been just a reaction to defeat on the wool shed floor: Neville Meaney, after listing what he considers the three most significant of the 'invasion scare' novels to appear in Australia after the Franco-Prussian War: (*White or Yellow? A Story of the Race War of A.D. 1908*, by William Lane, *The Yellow Wave: A Romance of the Asiatic Invasion of Australia* by Kenneth Mackay, and *The Australian Crisis* by C.H. Kirmess), says that none of the novels displayed much faith in Britain's willingness to help Australia out in its hour of need, nor in the Australian parliamentary system to organize resistance on the country's behalf. Salvation depended instead on the emergence from the old ruling class of "a strong new leader...to rally the people and save the day" (230). Similar no-nonsense sentiments were subsequently aired by the fictional 'Kangaroo' in Lawrence's novel of the same name, and by the flesh-and-blood Eric Campbell of the 1930s 'New Guard', yet the reaction of the press and the public to



Australia's emigration to Paraguay under the 'strong leadership' of William Lane was almost entirely unsympathetic.

**“...And the Paraguayan skies and nights are cold**

**You can forsake your country and lose your soul...” (Redgum)**

As late as 1980 an Australian folk-singing group—who may have confused both Patagonia's name and climate with Paraguay's—were voicing their disapproval of the 19<sup>th</sup> century exodus. At the actual time of sailing the *Adelaide Advertiser* was content to describe it more-in-sorrow-than-anger as “...a curious and interesting phenomenon in our social history and one deeply to be regretted” (4), but other publications were less charitable. *The Bulletin* wasted no words in calling the expedition “...an ignominious bolt...” (Gobbet and Saunders 60), to what they elsewhere described as “...a miasmatic land of half-breeds, goitre, and assorted pestilences” (Souter 46). In fact, the country to which the colonists travelled turned out to be neither as physically threatening as some feared nor as paradisaical as others hoped. Michael Wilding has suggested that provocateurs had been planted in the colonists' midst, but the truly disruptive agents surely came from among the rank-and-file colonists themselves. In a very real sense they took the late nineteenth century world and their own temporal version of humanity, their Australianness, with them, and the colony foundered on those terms.

Looked at like that their story is not really romantic, nor even pathetic or tragic. The educated ones at least may have been naïve but they were not ignorant. Philosophically they might have been enjoined in what Gavin Souter called “...a flight of idealism—a gorgeous but fragile butterfly which could not abide the noise and smoke of a sixpenny restaurant...” (16), but they were also part of a larger group including white and blue collar workers who

were soon indiscriminately united, as Souter says “...in rumours, slanders, quarrels and fisticuffs,” [which ensured that]“...before New Australia was officially two months old it was ready to fall apart” (85).

Somehow Taylor escaped being tainted. To be fair he left New Australia’s breakaway colony, Cosme, only three years after his first arrival in Paraguay, and spent some of the time in between back in Australia canvassing funds, which might suggest he didn’t have time to be disillusioned, but he had in any case, according to Mary Gilmore, “...a more forgiving nature than anyone she had ever known” (39). He made no enemies. His were an ever willing, if not particularly skilled, pair of hands in the Colony.

**“Each for All. All for Each.”** (New Australia Co-operative Settlement  
Association Certificate of Membership)

At times the past can feel close enough to touch, at other times inconceivably remote. Behind the—admittedly slightly self-satisfied looking—picture of Harry Taylor on the cover of his biography, there is a shot of him standing near a group of men and women in front of some thatched dwellings in Cosme. What do they look like? Quaint? And self-conscious of it? Well, only to us, naturally, but it shows how hard it is to try and squeeze life out of old photographs, to see people living and breathing in a now-ness that’s become a then-ness from which we are so far removed. In the case of Cosme, stories like the one about a snake falling from the ceiling onto Mary Gilmore’s shoulders while she was nursing her baby, only help make that part of the past look almost gothic.

Sometimes I feel as if history could be more easily appreciated if, rather than being distracted by its detritus, we were able to transport its human subjects here. In my experience historic buildings and artefacts resonate mostly with the restoration that has left them in

improbably good nick. If we could somehow reintroduce their human owners to us, however, I wonder whether it might free them from the status we've imposed on them. The women would be overwhelmingly relieved to be here, I believe, to sigh over housekeeping aids and freedoms they'd never imagined being able to enjoy. The men wouldn't know themselves once they'd learnt to drive. They would all soon pick up the new vernacular. I like to think that parties from both sides of the temporal divide would soon realise there was nothing so unusual about one another.

As it is, most of the figures from those old photos seem unapproachable; overdressed and stuck there—which in a way they are—waiting at best to break into the sort of jerky movement newsreel versions of World War One soldiers used until they toppled over as if they had suddenly become overwhelmingly tired.

Worse, some of the old photographs from the New Australia adventure claim to show identities that aren't even visible. Maybe they were among the slides that William Lane's brother John hawked round Queensland when he returned to Australia on a recruiting drive, which would account for their condition. A print from the University of Sydney Library's Cosme collection, for example, purporting to show two figures in an orange orchard in the settlement, surrenders nothing but a grey and bubbling at the fringes, arborish setting for the wispiest hints of humanity. The imprint of their figures seems as elusive as the proof of Jesus's swaddling in the Shroud of Turin. Where are they? We might ask. They are the sort of images that ESP enthusiasts strain to assure us have some once-removed-from flesh-and-blood significance. They might as well be ghosts.

But then there are photographs of people like Ettie Lane.

I was drawn overall to the subject of my novel, I should confess, not simply by synchronicity, but by the pictures of her in Gavin Souter's *A Peculiar People*, and in

the collection referred to above. One shows her, or if not her, then her sister Alice—they were very alike—playing cricket at Cosme, fielding at long stop in a long skirt. And there is another of her in the kitchen next to her mother. Others of her and her younger sister in *A Peculiar People* show them sitting as regulation bookends to a group of kindergarten children; unsmiling because they're looking into the sun most probably, while in another couple of group shots they have the look of pubescent girls suggesting that the exercise is an intolerable intrusion into their lives...And then there is one of her and her family in a pose which breaks every rule of the Victorian portrait code. Hattie's father, seated in the middle and holding one of the younger children, looks suitably patrician, but everyone else in the picture is, really, acting up. Even Jenny Lane, Ettie's mother, seems to be in the middle of fielding some cheek from one of her children or delivering a mild reproof to them. It's clear they wouldn't sit still: the faces of one or two are blurred, including that of the infant Jennie adopted after his mother died. Ettie is squeezing his face against hers. He looks sulky, as if she's just threatened him with adoption. She looks lovely. Her long brushed back hair is falling down and around her squarish face as she grins at the camera. It could have been taken yesterday.

It is finds like these that have given me the confidence to attempt an historical novel without feeling it need be stamped with proofs of period authenticity every step of the way.

My story is not always chronologically faithful, either. The discrepancy between their ages meant it would have been impossible for Taylor and Ettie Lane to have had the relationship I describe between Gardener and Hattie (as I have called her), but I could not let her go.

Her mother, Jenny Lane, who so scandalized Mary Gilmore, was one of those women who in any age weren't content to wait round for social change, I believe; they anticipated it,

even if their actions left them stranded among their expectations. In my novel her daughter, inheriting the pagan spirit of her mother, utterly seduces the circumspect, diffident and several years older Harry Gardener, until their illicit affair is found out and Gardener is forced to leave.

Harry Taylor's departure from Cosme was also premature, if not clouded with scandal, with family illness as its nebulous pretext. His eventual reappearance and immersion in the Riverland area of South Australia might be seen as anti-climactic. In the big picture one could say he was lost as well as found there; his commercial achievements as proprietor of a country newspaper could never compete with the youthful, spirited and idealistic act that incorporated him in the New Australia-Cosme myth. Of course his fate, if it could be called that, was not unique. Neither he nor his companions could have been aware that a most unlikely life was to be breathed back into the ashes of their failed settlement by historians and romantics. Gilmore tended to idealise her time there; though records suggest that for a good part of it she was unhappy and didn't do a lot to make the lives of other colonists particularly enjoyable, while some of those interviewed by Souter were unflatteringly candid in their recollections of the colony. Were they to be resurrected now they might be bewildered by the interest shown in them, feel fraudulent even; yet history, as I implied earlier, has a habit of delineating unwitting subjects and making them creatures of myth.

It is within that frame of reference that attention has been turned on New Australia in recent years. Like Anne Whitehead's, Gavin Souter's interest may have been aroused or quickened by the tit-bit seized on by the seagull editors of both the *Australasian Post* and the *Brisbane Telegraph*, in the 1960s. The article's writers invested the settlement with the most exotic overtones—it was portrayed as a vestigial enclave, a tiny slice of Australia, preserved, as all good remnant societies are, in a time-warp, with settlers speaking a decades out of date dialect, wearing turn of the century clothes, and stoically pursuing a lifestyle that had been

overwhelmed by change in their mother country fifty years before. In fact, a 1975 television programme, *Their Ghosts may be Heard* (ABC Four Corners) showed that while its few surviving original settlers still bore some evidence of their Antipodean heritage, nothing around them did.

Publicity has drawn a steady stream of visitors to Paraguay more recently. It has become a junior partner among touchstones of Australian myth like Eureka and Gallipoli. Unhappily, as a still more recent television story on New Australia illustrated, (ABC Foreign Correspondent) the traffic between Australia and its South American partner has been nearly all one way. Many of the Paraguayan colonists' descendants, who might otherwise have been indifferent to their history, would love to be able to migrate to the country of their forbears. It would be no fault of theirs if they were to feel some sense of betrayal by Australia's indifference to their appeals. Some of the original colonists or their children fought on the Allied side in the First World War.

As sad in their own way are stories like those of ninety two year old Lillian Wood, who had come to Paraguay when she was twenty-two to be "...beached on a foreign shore by William Lane's dream." She told her daughter that she "...thought it was a lark; she never dreamed she wouldn't be going back..." (Whitehead 507).

In one sense the aging survivors of New Australia were living contradictions of the myth surrounding it. On another, however fundamental level, interviews with them helped illuminate the paradox behind the fantasy of the intersection of two historic voyages of the Pacific Ocean. In Douglas Stewart's *Terra Australis*, the editors of *The Penguin Book of Australian Verse* point out that de Quiros "...turned back from the New Hebrides, never venturing on to a possible discovery of Australia, [while] William Lane, the radical idealist aiming to establish a 'New Australia' in Paraguay, was eventually forced by failure to return on his tracks" (Howarth, Slessor, Thompson 176). In Stewart's poem the two phantom sailors

reveal themselves to be still driven to find sanctuary in longitudinally opposed havens, which the information gleaned from one another does not seem to discourage.

‘And westward still it lies, [de Quiros claims] God knows how far,  
Like a great golden cloud, unknown, untouched,  
Where men shall walk at last like spirits of fire  
No more by oppression chained, by sin besmirched.’

Despite Lane simultaneously assuring him:

‘Westward lies a desert where the crow  
Feeds upon poor men’s eyes and picks their eyes;  
Eastward we flee from all that wrath and woe  
And Paraguay shall yet be Paradise...’ (Stewart 29-36).

Simplistically and definitely non-epically, there is on one level a reminder in the poem that a persistent ingredient of at least some Utopian dreams is the desire to be somewhere else (in practice often *with* someone else: the possibility of finding a companion in utopian settlements has been one of their attractions for single people). Implicitly the poem also reminds us, however, of the futility as well as the possible nobility of such intentions. The ultimate expression of such unease might be found in an essay of John Updike’s where he refers to an ancient king of Ireland who found in the midst of battle that “...unsteadiness, restlessness, and unquiet filled him, likewise disgust with every place in which he used to be and desire for every place which he had not reached” (100). He was insane, of course.

More happily the poem of Randolph Stow's—*Landfall*—with which I have introduced my novel, while evoking quite different feelings than those that early settlers must have felt, captures, I think, the sense of homecoming which all travellers seek, however elusive it may prove to be. More prosaically it also echoes some of Louis Marin's Utopian definition:

From the time of Thomas More's book, Utopias have tended to begin with travel, a departure and a journey, most of the time by sea, most of the time interrupted by a storm, a catastrophe which is the sublime way to open a neutral space, one which is absolutely different: a meteoric event, a cosmic accident, which eliminates all beacons and markers in order to make the seashore of a land appear at dawn, to welcome the human castaway (Marin 14).

It is a concept which may now have changed. In *Varieties of Literary Utopias*, Northrop Frye says "...because technology is progressive...the conception of an isolated utopia like that of More or Plato or Bacon [has evaporated and] getting to the future has tended increasingly to be a journey in time rather than of space, a vision of the future and not of a society located in some isolated spot in the globe" (11).

Foucault may have grieved over the passing of another traditional Utopian metaphor:

...the boat has not only been for our civilization from the 16<sup>th</sup> century to the present the great instrument of economic development...but has been simultaneously the greatest reserve of the imagination. The ship is the heterotopia par excellence. In civilizations without boats dreams dry up, espionage takes the place of adventure, and the police take the place of pirates....(Web n.pag.).



But he proposed a compensatory alternative of spaces and enclaves—which he called heterotopias—within the reigning dystopia of a system, since “...Utopias are sites with no real place—they present society itself in perfected form, or else society turned upside down” (n.pag.Web). Postmodernism has also been seen by Fredric Jameson as a powerful force in revitalizing the utopian impulse in the form of spatial utopias, where “...the transformation of social relations and political institutions is projected onto the vision of place and landscape, including the human body. Spatialization, then, whatever it may take away in the capacity to think Time and History, also opens a door” (Jameson120). To, in many cases, the I-Pod and the television set, I would suggest. Given humans’ tenacity, however, I imagine their hunger for change and movement will eventually see them settled on the moon, even if they need to be sustained for generations by reminders of a blue and benign ‘home’ hanging tantalizingly above them.

**“In Public Life he always tried  
To take a judgment Broad and Wide.”**

(Belloc 19-20)

When William Lane’s brother, John, returned to Australia in 1901 he undertook an odyssey more memorable for its stoicism than for the numbers of new members he managed to sign up. In their pursuit he covered enormous drought-stricken distances on his bicycle, but his bike’s inbuilt water tank often aroused more interest than the substance of his crusade. The mood of the country had changed. In the early 1900s The Trade Unions were recovering and Labour Governments had been elected, even if, as they struggled “...to meet the temptations, both gross and insidious, of power...Utopia was beginning to display its most obstinate characteristic—its habit of retreating with the horizon” (Phillips 65).

In this climate I suspected that the radical Taylor might easily have become one of the Conservatives whose complacency Hilaire Belloc so loved disturbing; or worse, since he was a loyal lieutenant of William Lane, and like his general left South America to take the reins of a newspaper, that he would come to resemble his leader, who in later life became the most loyal and bigoted champion of all things British and the most hostile opponent of social change through the pages of the *New Zealand Herald*. I thought, since Taylor's living descendants in the town were (however innocently) very much members of Renmark's establishment when I lived there, that Taylor himself, once he'd outgrown the first flush of youthful idealism, would have lapsed into the crusty kind of conservative he was always going to become.

In fact I discovered he was a far more appealing and sympathetic human being than his mentor, tempering political zeal with tolerance and humanity. There was also something quixotic about him. While possessed of seemingly limitless energy he suffered from periodic bouts of 'brain fag' when he was overtired.

His first introduction to the River came when he was recovering from one such episode at a small village, Murtho (called Verco in the story) near Renmark: from which, after a spell at Mildura just over the border in Victoria—where he failed as a fruit grower and established himself as a journalist—he bought the struggling local newspaper at Renmark.

At the time of Harry Taylor's arrival in 'Mylong', the cooperative commercial basis designed by *its* founders had recently collapsed, and while the town was apparently recovering thanks to government inspired schemes which would have been very much to Taylor's taste, it could hardly have been thriving.

Still, in the very early 1900s, "The town had a simplicity that Taylor found endearing," according to Gobbet and Saunders, "...there were fewer than a thousand people in and around it...calves and lambs wandered along the street, kangaroos hung around on the town's

outskirts ... 'A spirit of frank camaraderie and good fellowship pervades the town and is at once very noticeable and very pleasing' [Taylor said]" (16).

My own memories of the town are still too vivid for me to reconcile with those impressions, denying, as they seem to do, all that must have been squalid and primitive when he arrived. But we are—were—very different people, from very different backgrounds.

His was solid, Methodist and upper class (if such a strata still existed in Australia) and privileged in more than one sense, since his education was supplemented by a strong Christian sense of obligation to his less well-off fellow men. He gave freely of his newspaper's profits to local charities in Renmark and patronised to their material benefit musical, dramatic and sporting societies.

Taylor's presence in the Riverland was also active and inclusive and central to the town, while my family's was restricted to the social fringes.

I do not want to labour the point, but when I was young my brother, sister and myself must have enrolled in a dozen different schools along the River. We were young and adaptable but it left us without a lasting sense of loyalty to any of the towns that supported them. The reasons our family kept moving had nothing to do with education and everything to do with the pinch of necessity. I learnt that there is nothing quite so mean as small-town gentility, the stress of going without and covering up. I envied then, no, I envy now, those families who luxuriated in full-on squalor, in yards full of clapped-out cars and broken toys and cats curled like scarves around litters of kittens on bankrupt arm chairs. The kids in those families came to school smelling like stale cheese and dressed in whatever they'd thrown on or not even taken off from the night before. They had scabby knees and scratched themselves, and were ready to take up arms at a moment's notice against anyone who slighted them or their families. At that age I used to think their mothers' swollen states were proofs of fertility, instead of one of the badges of no-hopers: they never looked much different whether they

were pregnant or not. Their fathers often seemed frailer by comparison, caught up in unequal marital contests and worn down by them and the adventitious proofs of paternity. They were pot-valiants, compelled in the cold light of day to live much warier existences, forever on the lookout for the local sergeant, whose clap on the shoulder for what they hoped was some long cold crime in a far distant galaxy might identify them as being very much part of this one. They were the sort of men who could be seen being sulkily herded onto buses to serve prison terms in the city for stealing petrol or poultry or for molesting children other than their own.

Very often the journalism of Taylor's time, in so far as it encroached on unsavoury behaviour at all, distanced itself from it in language that implied delinquents could only benefit from the writer's patronage. Then, as now, the river could have been the living breathing metaphor that lifted Taylor above the mundane, too, with its great expanse of life and movement. Whatever other legacies the area left me with I am grateful for it being the epicentre of liberties that city children could never enjoy. Then, in reading references to his passion, his erudition, his courtesy, I am reminded of qualities that did not seem to belong to anyone in the community I knew. Perhaps he really was able to enjoy the company of like and higher minded members of the educated classes in those days. Certainly Taylor was very impressed by the 'new chums,' who settled there, "...rattling good fellows' who maintained Old World courtesies and amenities" (Gobbet and Saunders 16). Perhaps, with Taylor's—or his era's—passing, a moral and cultural vacuum replaced the spirit of him and his kind.

In the time I lived there social divisions were marked; the poor tended to be poorer and more obvious than their city counterparts, while the well-off had an exaggerated sense of their own status and an intolerance of any non-landholding, non-professionally or non-commercially successful intruder who tried to ingratiate himself among them.

The snobbery could not have been entirely new: as far back as 1897 it was reported that there was proposal among a group of residents to form a 'Settlers Club,' for 'gentlemen'

independently of the Hotel. And in recalling Taylor's encomiums of the town's citizens I wonder what struggles some of them must have undergone to maintain their courtesies, and from what meannesses—as in the welter of contemporary references to public drunkenness—must they have had to avert their gazes to maintain their faith.

**'And in the flowers that wreath the sparkling bowl,  
fell adders hiss and poisonous serpents roll.'**

(Prior 141-2)

When Renmark was first established by the Chaffey Brothers it was intended to be 'dry', in fact. They even induced the South Australian government to introduce a clause in the Licensed Victuallers Act which made the town virtually a Prohibition Settlement. But in the early years, when no licences existed, there was said to be a pub under every tree when steamers visited the town and a plethora of sly-grog shops to further distribute the vessels' largesse.

When a licence was eventually granted for a hotel to be established on a form of the Gothenburg system, meaning that all profits from the establishment were returned to the town, sections of the populace, including nearly all of the church groups as well as the Labour Party, still fought against it.

Objections ranged from the niggardly of 'Nil Desperandum,' who complained in the *Murray Pioneer* of the Hotel Committee's plan to put a wooden floor to the veranda outside the pub, "...as it will afford a platform for the puissance of step dancing among larrikins..." (Gurr 27), to the moral: a letter from 'Temperance,' adjured young men to, "Arise to the dignity of Manhood, and spurn loathsome sottishness and sin..." (Gurr 10), and in the same year (1896) a Congregational minister preached his case from the pulpit against the legalised

sale of liquor, while also denouncing whist, chess, draughts and any other vitiating pursuit he could put a name to.

While part of the attraction for me of the particular Australian setting for my novel has been the potential of files like the above from the *Murray Pioneer* and the works of local historians, the story of not just the town where I lived, but New Australia's and nearly all Utopias, can't escape more serious references to the demon drink. Without it being a deliberate focus of my attention I have discovered, for example, that in my notes for this exegesis the word 'alcohol'—and this does not include any of its euphemisms—occurs almost 250 times.

Most Utopias, Spartan or otherwise, have frowned on alcohol, and perhaps wisely, since it so often dilutes commitment. As an ingredient of compromise by which most people live, it is worth asking whether any society with aspirations to ideality can afford to have it on the premises. On the other hand, temperance itself was often an ingredient of a greater puritan programme. Alcohol, specifically the native *cana*, was supposed to have been behind the original ructions in New Australia, though probably its consumption was the product of frustrations that had been brewing on their own account for some time, and for which the edict prohibiting social interaction with Guaraní women must take some responsibility.

Sex and temperance have historically been twinned irritants of communal living, and celibacy, except perhaps in the case of the Shakers (who may have found some sexual release in their 'ecstatic' dances, I suspect) impractical. By contrast the expectation of sexual liberation was undoubtedly one of the utopian attractions of communes in the 1960s and 70s, even if some may also have been drawn to them in the hope that their sexuality might be sacrificed to a higher cause, rather in the way troubled members of priesthoods and other religious orders have supposedly attempted to do. In any case, 'free love' usually turned out

to be a threat to one of the relics of bourgeois society—monogamy—to which communities turned, or clung to, in their decline.

In Britain in the mid nineteenth century, one of the impulses behind the cocoa and chocolate Quaker philanthropists—Richard and George Cadbury, the Frys, the Rowntrees, et al—was the desire to provide a palatable and healthful alternative to gin. In Australia most readers would be aware that the colony’s very early history was dominated by alcohol, specifically spirits, and as late as 1867, in one of the first of Australia’s public protestations of sophistication, a picnic given in honour of the visit to Melbourne by Prince Alfred, Queen Victoria’s son, was ruined, according to the *Argus* newspaper, by parched crowds stampeding in a ““bacchanalian picture of unbelievable horror...over the food, champagne and wine that had been provided...”” (Fitzgerald and Jordan 5).

Such stories are the stuff of legends; appropriately perhaps, since the authors of *Under the Influence – a history of alcohol in Australia* – suggest that “The claim that our level of alcohol consumption is a unique feature of our national identity is a myth” (Fitzgerald and Jordan 7-8). Of more pertinence perhaps is that alcohol’s place in Australian society has always had a strong whiff of the illicit. You could debate whether Australia embraced Puritanism or had it thrust upon it, but I think the Temperance movement had the perennial advantage of being able to play on drinkers’ implicit sense of guilt. When the authors of *Under the Influence* quote (not quite accurately) one of Barry Humphries’ alter-egos, Sir Les Patterson, from ‘*Never trust a man who doesn’t drink*’: “Though he may not throw up in your kitchen sink/ I’d rather be half-plastered/ Than a blue-nosed wowser bastard...”” (Fitzgerald and Jordan 87), they are acknowledging someone who gave Australian audiences the chance to both vicariously enjoy, and elevate themselves above, the excesses of the Cultural-attaché to the Court of St James.

Sir Les Patterson's progenitor, Barry Humphries, is a recovering alcoholic, and one among many Australian writers granted entrée to alcoholism's questionable fraternity. Fitzgerald and Jordan refer to an Australian satirical journal, *Humbug*, which in 1859 featured Marcus Clarke's essay on 'The Curse of the Country', and Henry Kendall's poem 'The Demon of Drink': "According to Michael Wilding, Clarke and Kendall both wrote from experience..." (6). More recently Nigel Krauth devoted a large part of a paper to the responses of contemporary Australian writers to questions affecting alcohol and the practise of their craft.

Elsewhere it has been observed almost with pride that in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century "...of America's seven Nobel laureates, five were lushes—to whom we can add an equally drunk-and-disorderly line of Brits: Dylan Thomas, Malcolm Lowry, Brendan Behan, Patrick Hamilton, Phillip["I work all day, and get half-drunk at night"] Larkin (208) and Kingsley Amis, all doing the conga to in most cases an early grave" (Shone n.pag.).

Whatever the reason or reasons for those who over imbibe—and one of the most thought provoking is offered by historian Gilman Ostrander: "Alcoholism ...afflicts people who from early childhood develop a strong sense of being psychologically alone and on their own in the world..." (186-7)—it seems that for many writers, who tend in any case to be unreliable joiners of anything, Utopia lies at some point in a bottle's falling tide.

Naturally, writers have never been alone in that. If alcoholism is a disease which affects the isolated, the depressed and the poor, early Australian white settlement must have been ripe for candidates.

The Temperance movement of the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries could be seen as an instrument of the Protestant Church and its emotionally chilly charter, but at a time when almost all women were dependent on men, it did provide women with one of the first opportunities to unite on their own behalf.



Predictably, women had no real say in whether their husbands took them off to Paraguay, but one of the more palatable of its features for many of them was apparently its promise of temperance—even if, despite all the freedoms promised on *its* charter’s behalf, they were otherwise denied a voice in, or a vote on, New Australia’s affairs, and had to be satisfied with the sort of male protection and moral shelter which Anny Blaine and her daughter Hattie in my novel were both certain they could do without.

One of the allied but sadder alternatives to New Australia were the almost coeval settlements set up in South Australia by the government on socialist principles in the 1890s to get rid of some of the unemployed. Some of those returning from Paraguay did so in time to dip their toes in the river in such settlements, with similar unhappy results.

Stripped of romance, the story of that baker’s dozen of projects shows how common were their reasons for failure—in prosaic form the Riverland settlements were often on badly chosen land, or at least land whose potential for production was over rated; out of reach, often, of irrigation schemes, run by dictator-like administrators, and consisting of an unhappy mix of married and unmarried men (variously described as ‘battlers’ and ‘no-hopers’) who loathed the system of tenure, or non-tenure, they were labouring under.

At a Royal Commission held into their failures in 1899, most poignant and significant of the evidence given at the Commission by one of the survivors—all of whom had been left with a loathing of communal living—was this: “I would like to have a block. I would like to be able to say, this is my home and be able to have a right to it and that my neighbour, if he does not like me, has not the power to turn me out. I want a home of my own” (Mack 114). It was also significant that the head of the enquiry, Mr Samuel McIntosh, “...gave no praise to the men of Murtho, but did praise the ladies, whom, he said, were in favour of staying on so that they would eventually have a home of their own and they were happy that the rules kept their men away from ‘the drink...’” (Mack 151).

I have put on record elsewhere the shadow cast over my childhood and many others in the Riverland by alcohol. Both my father and his brother were victims of it, and while they were products of an unhappy home I wonder what impetus the area lent to their addictions. Those ad-hoc settlements given the imprimatur of a State government in the 1890s had strong and most pragmatic links with the efforts made by later governments after the First and Second World Wars to settle returned soldiers on land in apparent reward for their sacrifices. In what was perhaps the last attempt to establish a class of yeomanry in Australia, however, the experiences of many ex-servicemen and their families who were offered up puny acreages of scrub in Victoria after the First World War, however, make pathetic reading.

Authorities and returned soldiers were at cross purposes from the start. While the visions of both contained utopian elements of fresh air, waving grain crops and regeneration, politicians' aims had a strong ingredient of pragmatism—they wanted to get disenchanting ex-soldiers out of the way—and paternalism: *The Age* itself determined, presumably at a safe enough distance from, or elevation above, “the enfeeblement of the streets” (Lake 21) that one of the great needs of the day was to turn the human tide “...to the breeding grounds of health and wealth...[the country] ...and to the raising of a sturdy producing race” (Lake 21). Since the state of yeomanry had all but disappeared in England by that time there may have been a Dickensian note of nostalgia in their evocations of a past that never properly existed anyway. In any case the character traits sought after in applicants: “...honesty, sobriety and the willingness to work hard—as well as sturdiness and a large family...” (14), proved so often to be not only elusive or evanescent qualities in beneficiaries of the scheme, but inadequate even in their perfect form. So many small settlers, after they'd been battling for years, walked off their land with nothing.

As if, but only as if, benefiting from earlier administrative exercises, soldier settlers after WW11 near Renmark were ensconced in newly built homes among freshly planted

acres, leaving them little to do in their immediate future other than anticipate harvesting the fruits of their toil. Unfortunately, and typically, most of the recipients of the government benevolence had not only no experience of any kind of farming, but often little taste for toil, and nor did many of them appreciate in the first sunny years of their investiture as men of property, that they would all too soon be bound to repay at the going interest rate the money the government had lent them. It was hardly surprising that alcohol's use was indiscriminate and self-destructive when I lived there, and suicide common when whatever bravery or bluster its victims could muster faltered in the face of debt. Country life has many apparent advantages and not just in the eyes of sentimental outsiders, but its isolation also allows the depressed to stew over problems which can eventually seem to have but one morbid solution.

In real life Harry Taylor's wife was a Temperance advocate; in my novel *Gardener's* wife becomes almost messiah-like in her opposition to the grape, until she herself is brought undone by it. Alcohol hovers over the story in which the town hotel is very much central; elsewhere, one of my characters, Ingrid, who has fallen from a state of grace that almost no one knew she had ever enjoyed, is redeemed when she becomes sober, even if it is less a result of the salutary example of Temperance's advocates than as a way of avoiding membership of their coterie.

In the conclusion to Fitzgerald and Jordan's remarks on Australia's alcohol consumption, they suggest in fact that "...myths construct images not of who we are but who we want to be. Exaggerating our collective alcohol consumption, then, may be an oblique symptom of some disappointment with our everyday selves" (5).

And perhaps we have been a disappointment. But perhaps the country has to take some responsibility, too. Whether or not English colonisation of Australia represented an apogee of European military "...jostling and jockeying..." (Blainey 28), or was a primal expression of nomadism, it is a truism that the first hundred years of white settlement here were marked by

searches for more sympathetic surroundings than the ones most arrivals found themselves in. Rupert Murdoch has said “Australians have the scepticism and modest expectations of people who went inland and found the dead heart; Americans have the optimism of a people who went inland and found the Mississippi and the prairies” (Atwood, n. pag.). And certainly, the results of most of the inland pilgrimages were disappointing. Maps are stippled with the stigmata of explorers’ contused hopes: ‘Mt Hopeless,’ ‘Mt Misery,’ ‘Mt Despair’—and even—suggesting that the view from it led to its discoverer abandoning any pretence of cartographical professionalism —‘Mt Buggery’.

Perhaps it *would* have been better if Australia had remained a repository for fantasy. Certainly up until the 16<sup>th</sup> century about the only bit of speculative information missing from maps hinting at its whereabouts was “Here there be dragons...” (in itself a romantically apocryphal addendum, apparently), and Australia’s unsubstantiated existence gave the imagination of writers like de Foigny and Swift a free hand to describe it, while exciting the commercial fantasies of others.

Still other writers supplied information they believed their readers wanted, meaning that duty or necessity blurred the outline for them between fiction and fact. The Archbishop of Sydney, Patrick Moran, in his *Discovery of Australia by de Quiros in 1606*, went to strenuous lengths to suggest that de Quiros’s true—and cunningly disguised—landing point in the Pacific was not in fact Vanuatu, as history has commonly conceded, but somewhere near Gladstone in Queensland, and he applauded James McAuley’s epic on the subject, even though the poet actually went no further than depicting de Quiros as a martyr for the Catholic cause.

On the surface it seems hard to say whose imagination was more utopian, de Quiros’s or the Archbishop’s; fundamentally they were both tweaking with the truth. Moran was never

shy of making the best of facts available to him to serve a higher cause, and he may have been seduced by the near reverent flavour of de Quiros's prose:

On the 17<sup>th</sup> of May we climbed up a high mountain very silently, and from the top we discovered a beautiful plain. On descending to it we found much nutmeg and almonds of a different kind, for the rind smells like an apple, and another fruit with smell and taste like a nectarine. Of all these fruits the woods were full, and there is scarcely a tree in all this land that is not of some use, so that here one might live in luxury (Moran 9).

The Archbishop might have been unable or unwilling to recognise a good salesman when he saw one: de Quiros had a vested interest in bringing his sovereign, Phillip 111 of Spain, good news, but his description does not seem to accord with any part of Australia white settlers confronted.

Otherwise, explorations in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> Centuries (and for a time Australia's peripheries seem to have teemed with Dutch sailors), effectively killed Australia off as a utopian or commercial proposition for a hundred years. Their landfalls may have added to some spice to history in legends of lost Dutch colonies and blonde headed indigenous tribes, but you could otherwise argue whether, imaginatively, the continent has ever recovered from the blows of Carstensz: "...we have not seen one fruit bearing tree, nor anything that man can make use of..." (Flannery 18), and Dampier: "the miserablest people on earth..." (312). Australia was never to be utopian.

**"But a bold peasantry, their country's pride,  
when once destroyed, can never be supplied."**

(Goldsmith 55-56)

Jack Lindsay, in his recapitulation of early white Australian history, suggests that there was a certain irony in the ultimate plan, if it existed, of settling convicts on small farms:

A large proportion of the convicts were peasants who had committed minor felonies in a desperate effort to stay alive during the final burst of the enclosure acts...the birth of the pastoral interest created an entirely new situation and produced a squirearchy even more ruthless than that which had transported the peasants; and there were not even any towns to flee to (9-10).

Efforts to make land available to small property holders saw the squatters retaliate: “They bought up the eyes of an area, used dummies, fetched paupers from asylums as fake-buyers, pretended to share out land among their families, and had the ready support of the banks in wiping out new farmers” (Lindsay 13-14). For a while hopes were high and (anonymous) ballads jubilant:

“We will plant our gardens and sow our own field  
and eat from the fruits which industry will yield,  
and be independent, as long we have strived,  
though those that have ruled us the right long denied.” (Lindsay 13-14)

But in the end the first attempt to build a class of yeomanry failed; all that happened was that big squatters emerged as bigger free-holders. At the conclusion of his précis Lindsay presents an argument:

that in Australia, through the extremely simplified modes of struggle, there appeared first in the world the mature forms of parliamentary democracy, with representations of the working-class —though strictly speaking there was hardly a firm-based proletariat at all. It will be obvious too that this strange state of things brought about a certain ceaseless tension, a chafing of revolutionary forces without a basis for action, which needed the release of caustic and sceptical attitudes, the sole ones that could make the tension tolerable (13-14).

If that were true it might explain why most revolutionary actions in Australia have been less than full-blooded, and why we have generally relied on off-shore conflicts to take part in wars. That sounds flippant, but the Eureka Rebellion was fundamentally a fizzer and the shearers' strike at Barcaldine in Queensland in 1891 was snuffed out by mostly sabre rattling forces. I don't mean to deprecate a cause that Lawson enthusiastically endorsed: "They needn't say the fault is ours if blood should stain the wattle" (41-42) — thirteen of the strikers received harsh punishments for their supposed sedition, and Lawson upped-stakes for Sydney when he was threatened with the same fate—but we seem to have a long history of never quite biting the radical bullet. The Eureka champion, Peter Lalor, survived to become a spokesman for capital, the turpitude inflicted on the Labour Government by one of its own, Sir John Kerr, in 1975, aroused no revolutionary reaction among those who saw Whitlam's dismissal as an act of democratic abrogation, and Kerr's action was either endorsed or ignored by the electorate at large in the election that followed.

Overall it is probably not something to mourn: the legacy of the strikes of the 1890s would otherwise have been more bitter; we may be fortunate that about the most robust offering up of violence in Australia's 60s was contained in posters like the one Peter Cock

saw in an ‘anarchist collective’. While advising that, “‘When necessary...be assured we shall use every means at our disposal [in the] ruthless and relentless destruction of the bureaucratic and cultural machinery of repression...’” its authors held out hope of a more merciful alternative: “‘Dynamite and guerrilla warfare of the mind is as effective in its own domain as dynamite and guerrilla warfare in the streets’” (Cock 45).

Otherwise, in other places, liberators and oppressors have usually both emerged from internecine battles with bloody hands and long memories. South America’s own history of internal conflict has been so persistent and so beggaring of belief that it was perhaps inevitable that outsiders in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century and later should have represented it in comic book terms. The Australians who came to Paraguay in the innocent state of unpreparedness that second-hand familiarity breeds, however, “...came to a country where older rules applied, backed by grim forces beyond their imagining; where the old class structures and feudal traditions Lane had sought to escape were fully entrenched” (Whitehead 563).

After the General Strike of 1921 in Paraguay, for example, over 200 workers were shot and buried in a mass grave on one estancia alone, after trials that lasted “...as long as it takes to smoke a cigarette” (Galeano 53). After which the English and Scottish landowners in Paraguay organised a function in honour of the military leader of the reprisals, Lieutenant Varela, at which they sang “For he’s a jolly good fellow”. No Australian political leader ever won approval so cheaply.

**“Not in Utopia, subterranean fields,  
Or some secreted island, Heaven knows where!  
But in the very world, which is the world  
Of all of us”—**

(Wordsworth 353).



Anne Whitehead refers to a descendant of one of the original settlers saying at a reception in Sydney in 1980, ““Our grandparents left Australia looking for paradise on earth. I had always wondered what they hoped to find. And now I know. They were looking for this”” (67).

That was poignant and paradoxical enough; as sad perhaps is the thought that the Australian settlers in South America might have found and occupied a part of South America which was truly blessed.

Arthur Tozer—called Croser in my novel—was one of the members of the original surveying party who went to South America to size up the prospects of Argentina. They ran out of puff when the pampas gave way to desert, but Tozer was still tantalised by legends of fields of strawberries and apple orchards run wild and buried treasures from the Jesuit settlements in the distant mountains, and with the incorrigible hunger of the adventurer-cum-fortune hunter, regretted that the prospecting party turned back before they got to them. He was suspicious that “...further on there would have been something really worth seeing” (Whitehead 106). And there was: they just missed discovering and having the opportunity of settling in a blessed landscape filled with alpine lakes, wildflower speckled meadows, and forests of cedar and beech and fuchsias...

The land they never saw was settled by German and Swiss settlers in the early 1900s, became a centre for Nazi Party sympathisers in South America during the Third Reich and a hideout for Nazi war criminals afterwards, and its major city, San Carlos de Bariloche, is now an alpine resort for the conspicuously indulged; a place, so contemporary legend suggests, where seasonal and long term visitors with skins like melting chocolate can bask behind dark glasses while any trace of inherited guilt sinks like a spoon into the *gelatis* before them.

I have used Bariloche as the putative Utopia that Hattie Lane is alone among her Australian counterparts in inheriting, while leaving open at the end of the narrative the question of whether her original impressions have remained unchallenged.

There was something more *Lord of the Flies*-like about the Australians' camp. On their island men flashed knives around from the word go in a way that would have been unheard of back in Australia. You could say they were not so much adapting themselves to local colour as defending themselves against it: Paraguay could be dangerous. But you have to wonder, if the settlement had been as totally isolated as Lane wanted and still enjoyed the same privations, just how bad things would have eventually become. By the time Lane looked to God for salvation the damage had been well and truly done: "It is reaping of my own sowing that the Settlement we have tried to build has been uncemented by the sense of God, without which there can be no firm trust among men..." (Whitehead 209-10), he confessed, in a plaint which *The Bulletin*, that had adopted a take-no-prisoners approach towards him from the start, described as "...[an] awful vein of snuffle, self-glorification and pious frenzy" (Whitehead 63).

Lane's appeal to potential converts back in Australia had been entirely secular. "Come out from this hateful life," [he called] "come together in all unselfishness to trust each other, and to be free!" (Whitehead 63).

And they might have done. Yet if the withheld card that led to their Gallipoli-like choice of landfall could have been re-dealt, what would they have made of it anyway? Would they have been absorbed into the landscape around them there as well, or, under Bariloche's natural beneficence, and as the prerogative of the prosperous, made their new home into an image of the Australia they'd left, a commemoration of corrugated iron and fly-wire enclosed verandas; a relic of an Australia born in homesick minds, which generations of smart operators could exploit in the name of tourism? Would they? Well, probably not. In

Paraguay, once the radical fires burnt low, they started celebrating the achievements of British imperialism and the Coronation of Edward VII, even while they were turning up at socials in sombreros and spurs with pistols and knives on their belts. Different threads were leading to much the same amorphous end, I would say. And it didn't take that long.

Australians overseas have traditionally been identifiable not just by the crows' feet round their eyes, but by a certain look of bemusement, and have otherwise often been betrayed by their callow behaviour, or its less attractive travelling companion, brashness. Despite its wit John Forbes' poem '*Europe: a guide for Ken Searle*', with its closing lines, "I hung around / with other Australians and hit the piss" (92), echoes the would-be worldly but actually uncomfortable response of so many Australians exposed to other cultures.

In Paul Theroux's *The Great Railway Bazaar* he recalls with displeasure having to share a railway compartment with three young Australians: "It was a situation I grew to recognise over the next three months. At my lowest point, when things were at their most desperate and uncomfortable, I always found myself in the company of Australians, who were like a reminder that I'd touched bottom" (69).

It is a reasonable criticism of Theroux and many other travel writers that they tend to insist on having the last and often unfair word. Australia was still remote from Europe and I wonder if those Australians who did not seek refuge in Earls Court type communities in England in the 1960s and 70s, but ranged further afield for their cultural experiences, might not have needed a robustness erring on the side of insensitivity to cope with the physical challenges of travel.

Theirs was not, however, a search for Utopia, but more for havens which, if only on a subconscious level, they recognised as transient.

When Randolph Stow flirted with the notion of contemporary Australians fleeing from the imposition of a cottage garden culture on Australia's natural world:

“On Kerguelen, New Amsterdam and such friendly islands,  
Pitching our tents, and on each planting one karri;  
Under the name of Yggdrasil\* we worshipped them...” (31)

(\* In Norse mythology an immense holy ash tree)

he was being ironic as well as romantic—Kerguelen and New Amsterdam are both tiny, windswept French outposts in the Southern Atlantic. Paraguay is still the only place where Australians—fleeing perceived persecution of another kind—have attempted to extend their presence in the world.

One can only speculate whether the Paraguayan authorities, who welcomed Australian settlers on such generous terms, envisaged a future in which the new arrivals would be absorbed completely within larger society, or were prepared to accommodate them indefinitely on their own terms. Keen as Paraguay was to top up its population after protracted wars with its neighbouring states, its leaders might not have looked that far ahead, but in any case their disenchantment must have been total.

In the final lines of Stow’s poem, ‘*The Utopia of Lord Mayor Howard*’, quoted above, he says “The remembrance of our trees so sighs in our sleep / that the immigrants have been more than we can handle” (31). Yet the numbers that the Australians’ leader envisaged at his most messianic as forming a revolutionary ‘Independently British’ Second Front in South America, never looked like being realised. From day one nearly all the colony’s transactions in humanity were recorded on the left hand side of the ledger.

**“...an island like ours... / is less an island / than some sort of shadow  
the sea casts / something the sun / can’t quite bring itself / to bury.”**

(Lowe 16-24)

The argument that the ‘sky god’ of Europe has never been integrated with the immanent deity of the Australian landscape, leading to a spiritual void among the alienated and guilt-ridden whites clinging to the nation’s better watered strips of coast, has almost become a philosophical given in some quarters of Australia.

My own feelings are ambivalent, but it might be salutary to recall that, among other things, Australia’s indigenous people generally preferred to live in its more congenial parts too, and the disenchanting impressions made by the earliest white visitors to this country have not in the long run precluded white occupation of Australia’s interior anyway, by settlers who would protest vigorously if reminded of their alienated state.

In Patrick O’Farrell’s otherwise fascinating encapsulation of “The Cultural Ambivalence of Australian Religion”, he makes the comment, “Saturday is devoted to the substitute religions which dominate our culture—shopping (materialism), sport (the TAB, football), and boozing (laying in the grog for Saturday night)” (8).

Apart from inviting at least one obvious response—who waits till Saturday for ‘laying in the grog’?—I suspect that most Australians’ lives are not played out in a haze of sun, surf and alcohol, but in negotiation with the same verities as anywhere else, (except that the weather here *is* usually better). Indeed, it may be because those opportunities for pleasure which exist naturally here are not really all that frequently enjoyed, that they have assumed the status of myth, and are at least partly responsible for the particular form of homesickness that haunts Australians when they are away from home.

**“I found everything wet in the cabin, in which there had been a great deal of water—the skylight of the cabin was open and raised—the compass in the binnacle was destroyed...”** (Deveau Web).

In my introduction I likened the finds that met my brother's and my intrusions into houses left empty by the 1956 flood to the discovery of the *Mary Celeste*. Even allowing for the fictions that have grown up around that vessel—the laden tables, the vial of oil still balanced on a sewing machine—the comparison was extravagant; but certainly the buildings in Renmark *had* been deserted in a hurry, and though we never found a table set for dinner we came across sideboards drooping under the weight of mud crazed plates that were almost certainly never going to find their way onto any dinner table again. So there was pathos there.

Ironically, the flooded out homes could be seen as sharing cold, hard truths with the failures of settlements north of South Australia's Goyder's Line. In reality the 'Mylong' of my novel is on the wrong side of Goyder's Line, that surveyor's admonitory underscoring of the viable boundary of cultivation in South Australia, which foreshadowed the disastrous failures of farmers who ignored it. Were it not for the River Murray, Renmark could have been an example of white settlement pushing the envelope too far as well, and yet at times the town's sustenance was still threatened when the river's flow, pre-lock days, was reduced to a near trickle. I can remember an old lady telling me when I was young how she had driven a horse and cart across it. The flooded out homes that I explored in 1957 shared some link then with the deserted homes of South Australia's north, since they are both proofs of one or other of the elemental forces to which settlement was suspect. Perhaps the ruins of all human settlement echo utopian aspirations and their dissolution.

The landscape of my upbringing, beside the River Murray, came closest to that of Kate Jennings:

I grew up in the Bush. Not the Outback but in the semi-arid stuff on the edge of red-dirt country...I'm no stranger to mulga and mallee, fly-blown sheep and

Bathurst burr, the latter from the end of a hoe, with long days spent as a teenager chipping the bloody things out at the root (Jennings 88).

That is the sort of country I recall. On the edge of desert; the sort of land for which ‘The Fringes’ of *Waknuk* in John Wyndham’s *The Chrysalids*, provide a more morbid, palpably post-apocalyptic comparison.

In Renmark for a time our father had a mail run that took him from home on a route that mostly skirted the river, but which occasionally strayed from country that enjoyed the providential artifice of irrigation into real and unsuccoured scrub.

The mail round stopped at all the sheep stations along the way. On the main road leading to most of them they had canvas mail bags hanging next to forty-four gallon drums sitting on perches with the ends knocked off them to make room for ice and bread, but sometimes we went off-road. One of the stations had a house on the end of a track in the middle of the scrub. If not actually adrift in the red sand surrounding it, it looked hardly permanent. They were the sort of places managers or small-station owners lived in and it isn’t hard to imagine the fate of most of them. When properties were subsumed and managers made redundant the houses would be left to droop and gape until weather, weeds and scavengers pulled them apart.

Some small children ran from our van when we arrived and peeped round corners at us, like their aboriginals peers did in the real Outback. The place had an attempt at a garden, an ubiquitous pepper tree along with two or three yuccas and handfuls of geraniums stuck in truck tyres among upended beer bottles bordering otherwise empty beds. It was windy and when the woman asked us in for a cup of tea she had to wipe the dust from the cups. She seemed fond of our father though and maybe she was glad of a chance to talk to someone. First of all she said her husband was away, but then she explained it by confessing that not

long before, after all her attempts to control his drinking and sniff out his ‘plants’, she’d followed him in the middle of the night when he’d sneaked out of bed and discovered that he’d replaced some of the inverted empty bottles bordering garden beds with full ones so that he could top himself up in the middle of the night. He was in hospital drying out completely just then. She looked worn; not beaten, just beyond optimism; the twitch at the corner of her mouth in appreciation of the irony of the scene she was describing might have had some sort of appeal once, but not now. When I hear people being sentimental about the fifties I think of women like her in places like that.

Morgan, at the end of the run, was a small town so dismal it had a grim romance to it, if only in hindsight, representing as it did a shaky outpost between the world I knew and something more unforgiving and claustrophobic teasing at its edges. It was sun-stunned and stony, littered with ruined warehouses from its paddle-steamer trading past, and surrounded by bare paddocks and wretched scrub. Shrinking distances have changed its nature now, I know, it has become a weekend retreat for city shack owners; it is in its past incarnation that I visualise bus tours from some other world visiting it, if only so its passengers could ask, ‘Do people really *live* here?’ from the safety of their air-conditioned cabins; even if the subjects of their fascination, faltering from one scrap of shade in the street to the next, would have probably protested, if they’d had the energy, against any suggestion that they were inhabiting a surreal state.

I confess that I am obsessed with the unarticulated misery of such places, by their insistence on the futility of action. Sometimes, driving through country like it, I stop and get out and listen. To nothing, or something worse than nothing; the most faint-hearted of breezes in juiceless whisks of mallee leaves, or the cry of a tiny solitary bird toppling, almost, from twig to twig. Landscapes like it suggest that softer ones are a kind of lie, waiting to be unmasked. Perhaps all Utopias represent such cultural antitheses and are suspect because of



it: for their survival they need to be bourgeois as San Bariloche and as exclusive; places of subsidised ideals, imitations of the real.

I share Stow's gratitude for the martyrs of Australian bush history: the Barcroft Boakes, Leichardts and Lawson's swaggies, who died, he suggests, tasting "...terrain their heirs need not draw near" (Stow 52); even though I am acquainted with someone born on a station in the north of South Australia who has the strongest ties to it and the surrounding country still. It is pure coincidence that the same grazing property, *Murnpeowie*, on which my friend was born, was mentioned in the work of English scientist, Francis Ratcliffe, who visited it during one of the expeditions he made into the Australian bush on behalf of the CSIRO in the 1930s. Stranded there in a dust storm he says,

Until [then] I had been able to preserve an objective attitude to the country through which I travelled, despite the fact that almost everything about it necessitated an adjustment of my limited city-bred notions of what was right and natural. But the vastness, the loneliness, and the desolation of *Murnpeowie* broke through my mental defences; and once they had cracked, it was impossible to weld them together again (Ratcliffe 250).

To be fair, better land practices have reduced the incidence of temporal events like the one Ratcliffe describes, but in any case such reflections on Australia's inland are no longer encouraged—there are intimations of reproof in Tom Lynch's essay, *Literature in the Arid Zone*, when he says, "Nothing in the novel (*Wake in Fright*) ever suggests that Cook does not share the perspective of his character..." (77). Lynch also describes a passage from Patrick White's *Voss*: "...the party entered the approaches to hell with no sound but that of horses passing through a desert, and saltbush grating in the wind..."(331) as "...psychologically

evocative but hardly likely to overcome the prevailing antipathy to desert places” (82). And he takes Eva Sallis to task for perpetuating in her novel *Hiam* “...the image of the desert as a void, a largely lifeless and undifferentiated place...One might expect a writer with Sallis’s background to have a more nuanced and sympathetic view of the desert” (Lynch 85).

But why on earth should she feel so obliged? I want to ask.

There is no record in Harry Taylor’s biography of his attitude towards the inland though I suspect, given his nature, that he would have approached any excursion into it with his habitual sangfroid. In my novel, on the other hand, his second self’s intrusions into country beyond the Riverland are brief and apprehensive. Taylor, before his premature death, retained, according to all sources, a positive and embracing interest in the world around him; Gardener, as the decline in his health and optimism accelerates, withdraws from it, eventually reconciling himself, in his last utopian gesture, to making a haven of his home.

**‘Hand woven be my weft, hand-made  
My pottery for pottage,  
And hoe and mattock, aye, and spade  
Hang up about my cottage.’**

(Betjeman 9-12)

It is easy to see how liberal socialists, including Australians, were attracted to *The News from Nowhere* (Morris: 1890). It is a strange and earnest little book set in a sunlit England where people approach work with the same appetite they have for the wholesome food laid on all round them. In a world where everything, even the English climate apparently, has been won over by reasonableness, homes are bowered by grape vines and peach trees, and the novel is only saved from being quite unreal by the occasionally prickly nature of its inhabitants (some

of the old men are contentiously reminiscent of Carrol's "Father William"), and by the elusive, somehow poignant figure of Ellen. Throughout the part of the book she's in she shows she doesn't mind a bit of intellectual sword crossing with the narrator, but at the close of his privileged adventure she salutes him with a sadness that is at odds with most of her didactic tone. There is something in her farewell that would have pleased both Pre-and-Post-Raphaelite readers, I expect, even if her shake of the head at the end also suggests that she might have seen through her guest all along.

John Betjeman, in describing a visit to the house of Morris's dreams, Kelmscott, which featured on the original frontispiece of *News from Nowhere*: "It haunts one. I know of no other house with so strong an atmosphere..." (169), appears to have been seduced by it and its associations with Morris and the Rossettis, even if 'The Garden City' from which I have quoted at the beginning of this section show that he still considered utopians fair game.

Kelmscott's is the kind of British world that I see Harry Gardener on his return or flight from Paraguay attempting to enter, as so many Australians did in those days, and still do, drawn by ancestral ties to an ethos they imagine to be more benign than their own. Certainly, the New Australian settlers still clung to the image of themselves as 'Independent Britons', even if very few of them were ever to get close enough to the 'Old Country' to have their assumptions put to the test. On the one and only visit I paid to the United Kingdom I discovered that there was almost nothing with which I could identify, yet I must still have been carrying some inherited expectations to feel so let down.

Whatever other material shortcomings our home suffered when I was a child, we were surrounded by books. The majority of the authors were still English, however, and probably led us to remaking our world—even that evoked by home grown products such as 'Snugglepot and Cuddlepie'—on exotic terms. That is common to children everywhere, I know: most of Huck Finn's and Tom Sawyer's games, for example, were based on exotic

models, but even at high school, such Australian literature as we were exposed to was restricted to 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> Century writers who seemed duty bound to commemorate the dour and routinely defeated.

That is an unfair criticism of the individual writers, but a fair impression of their cumulative effect. Henry Lawson's unflinching description of the lonely woman in *The Drover's Wife*, dressing herself and her children up on Sunday afternoons so that they might go for a walk along the bush-track pushing an old perambulator in front of her, "...though there is nothing to see and not a soul to meet." (6), sums up the horror I feel in retrospect for the sort of bushland I was surrounded by when I was young with its "...everlasting, maddening sameness of stunted trees" (6).

It was a relief for me to be introduced in my teens to the lyrical iconoclasm of Patrick White and Hal Porter. Phillips suggests that the consistently grim note of Lawson's and Barbara Baynton's short stories reflect:

...a sense of spiritual darkness emanating from the land itself, a feeling of primeval cruelty fed by the sunlight which glares instead of glowing, by the grey of the bush which some obstinate Europeanism within us insists should be green... (81).

Yet Porter unapologetically enjoyed and shared his experience of an Australia remade within his purview by generations of white settlement. Overriding his misanthropy, prejudices and, spite, often, were his descriptions of landscape:

[In Gippsland] I see fecundity everywhere—the seedboxes of poppies shaking out their pepper, the winter defrocked trees blotted with nests, the summer trees

bearing billions of leaves, the vast mushroom-rings, the grapelike bunches of blackberries overhanging the paths and ditches along the river... (63).

Then, in the 1970s and 80s, when he was enjoying a revival in popularity, I discovered the novels of Martin Boyd. It wasn't just the unapologetic elegance of his style, rescued whenever it threatened to trespass into sentimentality by wit, which so appealed. It was the discovery from his semi-autobiographical novels that not everyone in nineteenth century Australia was engaged in a pyrrhic battle with the elements. Boyd might have exaggerated just how leisurely his family's life was: he was a writer after all, and preferred, for example, not to dwell on the slightly disreputable source of his family's wealth. Yet however selective his memory, the accounts of his family's freedom and taste for civilized pursuits in the late nineteenth century in Australia are not unrealistic and nor would they have been unique. Civilized, liberal and unburdened by Australian accents, their frequent trips 'Home' (at least until their finances took a hit in the 1890s) included leisurely European diversions from which their children could only benefit, even if their cultural restlessness foreshadowed the condition from which Martin Boyd suffered for most of his life.

Brian McFarlane suggests that "There has always been something grudging about the Australian response to Boyd. Perhaps he would have been more critically and commercially popular if he had not confined himself to writing about the upper-middle classes" (McFarlane 35). Yet for me, learning from *A Difficult Young Man* that Boyd's protagonists were able to escape the worst of the summer by migrating south to the hills outside of Hobart for a month or two, where they went on cherry and strawberry picking picnics, was both heartening and revelatory. What could have been more natural? I wondered. Or more inviting of jealousy, perhaps, from those sharing the limbo in which most of us dwell; a world in which, ironically, we have neither the means to be truly free, nor (if this is not too

patronising) the kind of culture which allowed indigenous Australians to enjoy liberty with almost no means at all.

**“We thought to find the Happy Land,  
A blissful land all fair and free,  
On that far-off delightful strand  
Where blooms the golden-fruited tree.  
But late we found, alack! alack!  
The Golden Age comes no more back.”**

(Taylor. n. pag.)

Sometimes utopian protagonists, secular or otherwise, seem to have been not only romantic but fool-hardy, and most definitely poor students of history; like those insects who keep falling into the same traps, or birds who keep butting their heads against the same invisible glass—without inviting as much sympathy.

It is doubtful if the majority of the people in Australia’s South American adventure looked too deeply into historical precedents to their expedition, or if they did were deterred by past results. Mary Gilmore believed that “One of the dim dreams of William Lane [was that] by a peaceful penetration of the land it would become British and a British colony would lead the world in collectivism” (Gilmore 8766). The motivations of other, often simpler people in the expedition seem to have been less ambitious. Admittedly, the inspiration for many of them was still political, and given added impetus by the fact that the opportunity to develop a community had been granted them by a foreign government on the most generous terms, while their own only ever handed out pocket-handkerchief sized and

mostly useless pieces of land. Yet in practice the freedom they were embracing amounted to not much more than exchanging one form of poverty for another, while among the privileges men were bound to embrace was a commitment to celibacy while they were waiting for marriageable females back in Australia or Britain to be seduced by the appeal of their Communist state.

How unsustainable it all seems now. Even disregarding the small number of opportunists who would have been there simply to see what they could get; on top of the naivety, the integrity and the romanticism of the better intentioned, the driving force for most must have been the thought of bettering themselves. And even those aspirations were sabotaged by poor organisation, squabbles and intrigues. Looked at most critically, Cosme's utopianism seems very makeshift (and very Australian in a way) and disrespectful to the nobler or more desperate purpose behind other ventures.

The vision behind Harry Taylor's Renmark (or Harry Gardener's 'Mylong) was never utopian, but even the socialist cooperative nature of its foundation was soon compromised, and in the time when I lived there its horticultural interests were overseen by near cartels. It might be significant that the local constituency has (as far as I know) been represented exclusively by Country or National Party candidates for the last forty years, while for nearly all that time the same and increasingly wistful face of their Labour opponent has appeared on telephone poles at election times appealing for the same handful of votes. It is surely not the future that Harry Taylor, or the Harry Gardener of 'Landfall' envisaged for the Riverland, but, as I became ever more aware during the composition of both novel and exegesis, apathy and self interest can be as effective as hostile opposition in wearing down ideals.

**“Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world,  
and the soul of soulless conditions. It is the opium of the people.”**

**Marx (n.pag)**

When a contemporary Australian social commentator unapologetically stated some years ago: “I’ve spent a life-time attacking religious beliefs and have not wavered from a view of the universe that many would regard as bleak: namely, that it is a meaningless place devoid of deity...” (Adams Web), he may not have been conscious of the debt he owed the past. In a sense the hard work had all been done for him. Few of us in the Western secular world are now subject to the political, theological and social tensions which once collectively tormented it.

In past ages when penalties for sedition and blasphemy were so unambiguously sharp-edged, dissenters persisted in ways which beggar belief now. It was almost as if the death penalty served a dual purpose; first as a way of treating undesirable elements as a genetic weakness that need be culled, while at the same time giving authorities and the public the chance to indulge their most morbid instincts without feeling they were compromising their finer feelings. Sometimes reformers and dissenters like Kropotkin, Cabet and Paine seemed to have spent much of their time anticipating, or just failing to anticipate, the doom-laden knock on the door, which makes their courage in this (faithless) age bewildering.

Some of the sects challenging the religious and political status quo in the 17<sup>th</sup> centuries were inspired by the execution of Charles 1, when for a brief time all things seemed possible, but otherwise the host of dissenting groups—the Diggers, Ranters, Muggletonians and others—accompanying and succeeding the monarch’s absence always seemed to run the risk of sailing too close to prevailing social winds.

Australia was not immune from attempts to find alternatives to conventional secular Christian religion in the 19th century, either, often in the wake of Darwin’s theories, when those rejecting an anthropomorphic conception of Deity looked for evidence of a governed and still benevolent universe.



Free thought societies (some of them with Utopian aims) drew thousands to public debates here even if, as Chrys Stevenson says, "...the status quo fought back and[...]many were harassed, fined, jailed and had their careers ruined following charges of blasphemy or atheism" (17).

It has been argued by people like Patrick O'Farrell and Russel Ward that religion never really got off on the right foot in Australia—which might hint at an element of vindictiveness in its later shows of strength—both Protestant and Catholic leaderships took a vigilant and jealous interest in temporal affairs in the 19th and 20th centuries in ways which seem starkly at odds with the ideals of liberality, tolerance and philanthropic obligation that people like Harry Taylor were imbued with from the pulpit and hearth. But then I wonder if philosophical enlightenment may not have actually strengthened the numinous faith of him and his kind and ensured they would never be sectarian bullies.

**"Howard then went to Mullumbimby and proclaimed the day of doom."**

(Cock 126)

Australia's first utopian experiment was initiated by Johann Krumnow in 1839 near Hamilton in Victoria and endured for a remarkable 44 years, but otherwise the small handful of communities established independently of government sponsorship in the mid-19th Century soon failed, and for all the pluck that no doubt attended their birth, the very names of some of the late 19th Century agrarian-socialist settlements, '*Bon Accord*', '*Resolute*' and '*Nil Desperandum*', resonate with incipient gloom.

The expectations of later communes which Peter Cock studied were initially entirely sanguine. Unfortunately, when members of the counter-culture settled on abandoned farmland in the 1960s and 70s it often resulted in the land being twice cursed. Some

communal settlers were fortunate or canny enough to recognise the attractions of country like that near Byron Bay, with its year-long temperate climate, proximity to the sea, plentiful water, and the availability of cheap, small tracts of fertile land. Some of them, like the uncle of Harry Gardener in my novel, flourished on the failures of their fellow settlers. Unfortunately, most communities were made up of what Cock charitably calls "...high energy people and low energy people..."(124), which meant that too few, a disproportionate number of whom were women, were left to do the work.

While badly in need of genuine leadership, many of the settlers' preference for its charismatic substitutes also led to them putting their trust in eco-prophets, whose doomsday predictions anticipated the apocalyptic millennialists' of this century. At their least doctrinaire, the communities Cock visited so often reeked of this:

The *Erica Commune* was built on the site of a former timber town. Its residents inhabited four of the five remaining broken-down timber dwellings. These, together with an old sawmill and piles of junk left by the town's previous residents, comprised their physical surroundings...Most of the land was cleared, but covered with rubbish, and blackberries had taken over. The river that ran through their property, although well stocked, was rarely fished. They had seven goats, several of which were sick. They were awaiting some horses. The ravaging of their small garden by rabbits had dulled their enthusiasm for growing...(Cock 132).

You can almost hear the clock ticking down...It could be argued that the thing utopian communities most long for, change, is what undoes them. People change their minds. They miss things. In his study Cock found that women in the communities got sick of talking about

vegetables and children. Atmospheres became claustrophobic. Families withdrew into themselves and TVs took back the lounge.

Sometimes it seems hard to decide who should be more derided: radicals who ditch their politics with age, or those left clinging crankily to them. So much of the 60s and 70s popular culture seems discredited now, and even one of its more admirable legacies, the anti-Vietnam War movement, has been subsequently tarnished by the careers of many who once claimed leadership of it.

In my own case time has so far undermined my memories of the '60s and '70s, that I needed to see an old episode of the Simpsons recently, in which Chief Wiggum relishes the chance of handing out "some good old hippy ass whopping" (Television) to even recall some of its mantras. It reminded me that there *was* a kind of innocence to the period, even if its bucking against conservatism was underpinned by a prosperity which a generation imagined to be perennial, when it was really an historical precedent.

It is harder, at this distance, and in this period of political agnosticism, to understand the forces that drew people to experiments like *New Australia*. Even now, with the '60s and '70s far behind us, very few people in Western society know the pinch of real poverty, and, since so few of us are engaged in hard physical toil, it is almost impossible to appreciate the gut-busting and never guaranteed labour people had to perform once, or the pittance they were paid for it. We cannot share their experiences, to most of us the prospect of some universal brotherhood would be an anathema, a stifling imposition on our lives. Real grass-roots utopianism must be born among the desperate, surely, even if historically its leaders have very often come from outside their ranks and very often (as with *New Harmony's* Robert Owen and *Oneida's* Humphrey Noyes) misused or abused the trust placed in them.

It is no surprise that the unemployed and in many ways uneducated were drawn to messiah-like advocates such as New Australia's Billy Lane, even if all parties were to be

ultimately disappointed with one another. Lane, it should be said, did not actually try to use religion to exert his authority until everything in Cosme was falling apart anyway, and even then showed no signs of pre-empting the wrath visited by some 20<sup>th</sup> century despots and cult-figures on their once apostolic followers: his departure from Cosme on a wet day was muted, apparently, and almost unwitnessed. Otherwise, the most enduring communes do seem to have been those with a strong (if temperate) sectarian base, even if one suspects that the isolation of groups like the Amish may be under increasing threat from the electronic teasings of the outside world.

If our ever less private planet has little space left for Utopias, the New Age's Fred Robinson may have had this deficiency in mind when he chose land with an adjacent airstrip for his Universal Brotherhood community in Western Australia in the early 1970s. His faith in the imminent utilization of the facility by extra-terrestrial "Elder Brothers" echoed a popular wave of sentiment in the 1970s and 80s, when Hollywood became infatuated with the notion that divine-like forces with mankind's salvation at heart were on virtual standby in the cosmos. Otherwise, literary theory might have tried to compensate for the shortage of physical space at least, with conceptions like Foucault's heterotopias, but modern philosophy itself often seems to me to call for a strong streak of self-absorption in its audience.

When I was a teenager I borrowed a copy of Norman Lindsay's *Creative Effort* from the local library and then had to devote some time to fulfilling a task that had defeated the printer, of cutting and separating the books' pages before I could read it. I didn't resent it; the fact that in 1966 I was presumably the first person to borrow the book in the more than forty years it had spent sitting on the shelves, only reaffirmed a sense of my critical acumen and emphasized my distance from the 'mob' which Lindsay spent so much time anathematizing. The book affected me profoundly at the time, though re-reading it now I can't think why; except that adolescents—vain, desperate for some evidence of distinction in themselves and

with only the most abstract inkling of their own mortality—are probably the natural audience of such Nietzsche-inspired philosophy, since the notion of qualifying to be enlisted among the ranks of super- or over-men appeals to those with a fundamental lack of confidence.

Otherwise, existentialism seems to have left little room for Utopias. Though protagonists like Kierkegaard clung to the idea of a supreme being, which might or might not take an interest in humans' welfare and reward them in another world, he made the possibility sound rather wishful.

The decline of theology's appeal in the last century may have led to more people trusting exclusively in the temporal, especially given Science's confidence in its ability (and many of its own visions are, almost despite themselves, utopian) to reinforce and extend mankind's tenure on earth.

In his essay, 'The Two Cultures', C.P. Snow contends that "...if the scientists have the future in their bones, then the traditional culture responds by wishing the future did not exist" (126); and certainly dystopian novelists of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century like Orwell and Huxley often seemed to suggest that we have little to look forward to anyway unless we change our ways. Yet scientific observers such as Eric Horvitz have anticipated a near future in which mankind's lives will be significantly enhanced by automated reasoning systems, while in lectures and science fiction novels the computer scientist, Vernor Vinge, has cheerfully forecast that moment, which he christened Singularity, when humans will create machines so much smarter than humans that their creators will be overwhelmed. Ray Kurzweil seemed to find his version of a utopian future quite as congenial with his claim that by 2029 machines will be possessed of an intelligence, self-awareness and emotional richness that will blur the line between man and machine—an intoxicating notion that Daniel Lyons in an article in Newsweek somewhat diluted when he quoted biologist Z.P. Myers as saying, "Kurzweil's singularity theories are closer to a deluded religious movement than they are to science. It's

New Age spiritualism, that's all it is. Even geeks want to find God somewhere and Kurzweil provides it for them" (Lyons Web).

Perhaps geeks *will* inherit the earth. Curiously, though, the weaknesses of some of the scientific arguments of people like Kurzweil may lie in the fact that their authors *are* imaginative, and having strayed from the paths of scientific discipline, left themselves vulnerable to flights of fancy. On the other hand the general optimism of them and other bona fide liberal philosophers may really be aimed at audiences less gloomily disposed than the one most contemporary writers have in mind.

**"History is littered with the debris of extinct Colonies and Communes. The early Christians were fortunate enough to be saved from taking any such disastrous course since they enjoyed the inestimable advantage of believing that the millennium was near, which precluded them seeking to establish a beneficent regime in this world. In the time at their disposal it was just not worthwhile."**

(Muggeridge 43).

Malcolm Muggeridge was a writer of brilliant paragraphs, of things savagely and often cruelly observed. The condition of disdain afflicting him from middle age was eventually terminal, but he was not always thus: he grew up in a Socialist household whose library included Rousseau's *Confessions*, Whitman's *Leaves of Grass*, "...which represented the wilder flights of freedom—ostensibly, along with justice, our ultimate objective..." (60), the Everyman edition of *Das Kapital*, which he doubts his father ever read—Muggeridge didn't—a collected edition of Carlyle in five brown volumes; Ruskin's *Unto this Last*, and William Morris's *News from Nowhere* and *Earthly Paradise*, "...which with their nostalgia for medieval guilds, knights in armour, and Pre-Raphaelite ladies with long white necks,

aspects of socialism which figured little in our Croydon Labour Party...” (61), proved popular at Sunday night readings.

The atmosphere of both the home and library of Muggeridge bore comparison with Harry Taylor’s. Unlike Taylor, though, Muggeridge had personal memories from his boyhood of a utopian settlement, a Tolstoyan colony in the Cotswolds, established by Socialists from Croydon: “The land was cheap in those days and they acquired some fifty acres of rough land in the Cotswolds and then, to demonstrate their abhorrence of the institution of property, ceremonially burnt the title deeds” (42).

Such earnestness mirrors—to me—that shown in the faces of another expatriate Tolstoyan community in Bournemouth around 1900, in a photograph from Ian Todd and Michael Wheeler’s *Utopia* (107), gathered before a mix of glass houses and cold frames. Everyone in the tableau seems to have been caught in the act of doing something horticultural, with the exception of one man who is reading something presumably improving while a seated woman is engaged in that activity which Dickens so approved of in his fictional females, piecework. Everyone else, down to a small pinafored child, appears to be digging, shovelling, or tending the needs of some growing thing, while a man in the background with a scythe over his shoulder is clearly just about to go off and mow something or has just come back from doing it. They all look vulnerable to the sort of farmer neighbour the Cotswold colonists had, who took the ceremonial burning of the colonists’ title deeds as an invitation to encroach on their territory, and land, in a way, the first blow among their soon-to-be divided in any case kind.

In Muggeridge’s unsympathetic reference to Utopias above he sounds rather weary; recalling his appearance on television in later life; his prose, like his lips looked then, seems over ripe. Whatever his shortcomings, though, he would be forever redeemed by his exposure

of Stalinism, in which he was initially almost alone, and for his attacks on the gullibility and complicity of Western intellectuals like Wells, Shaw, and Beatrice and Sydney Webb.

Historically, artists have not always distinguished themselves in their exercise of political judgment, and nor can they claim to have any sort of mortgage on finer feelings, though they have often appeared to want to. There is an implied criticism of their kind in Solzhenitsyn's *The First Circle*, where Nerzhin, a political prisoner under Stalin discovers that "...in conditions where only courage, strength of character and loyalty to friends made a man and could decide the fate of a comrade ...delicate, sensitive, highly educated persons often proved to be craven cowards, very good at finding excuses for their own despicable behaviour and turning into wheedling, two faced traitors" (468). Nor have they always been morally courageous enough to defy implicit or explicit pressures on them. This is not meant to denigrate survivors of Russian purges like Gorki, for example, whose nimbleness we can understand even if we cannot really appreciate its desperation. Tergiversation still carried no guarantees. In what Malcolm Muggeridge called "a delectable example of Fearful Symmetry" (239), for example, ex-prince Mirsky described Pushkin on the centenary of his death in 1937 as a court lackey, without appreciating that since Pushkin had recently been reinstated as a national hero, he, Mirsky, would be liquidated for denigrating him.

Less punitive but quite as enduring a force in quelling dissent in this country has been censorship. Between 1920 and 1970 the Commonwealth Customs Department kept a reference library of around 15,000 books, magazines and comics, banned for their seditious or corrupting nature, and even more pervasive and more subtle perhaps have been those influences, generally, but not exclusively non secular, which had a say in producing the monochrome, unadventurous and self-satisfied world excoriated in Barry Humphries' suburbia. This was and is a scenario that beggars comparison with the often brawling, chaotic and sometimes vitriolic but never dull world of colonial Australia, whose subsequent



transformation may seem incredible. It is not an exclusively Australian syndrome; the United Kingdom has an enduring tradition of presenting an unexceptionable face to the world, while the comments of expatriate Australian writer, Kevin Roberts, who has lived for many years in Canada, suggest that there, too, “Understanding the times in which we live, and seeing through the fog of politics and the miasma of false moral posturing requires a first class humbug detector” (31). While as yet showing few signs of wanting to adopt the hypocrisy of Americans (that, at least, our sardonic streak will not allow) there seems to be an understanding in liberal, pluralist society that some subjects are best left unaided. Implicit censorship has a way of making even mavericks mind their manners.

Historically, the best shield for writers has often been satire, even if Thomas More, in a transformation common to many aging practitioners of literature, proved to be singularly deficient in humour in his later years while fulfilling the office of Lord Chancellor. John Updike, when reviewing James Thurber’s posthumously published, *Credos and Curios*, noted that Thurber had retreated from the creator of the apocalyptic millennialist, ‘The Get Ready Man,’ to become “...by the end of the fifties, one more indignant senior citizen penning complaints about the universal decline of virtue” (130). Satirists have a poor record of deposing despots, and perhaps the realisation that their efforts will never see the world enjoy the health they have in mind for it embitters them, and they decide that almost any change is only likely to make society a worse place than the one of which they’ve already despaired.

In my own case, and at my age, I would prefer to coax rather than bully readers down the path of righteousness: mockery of the status quo benefits everyone, I believe, especially when readers, like those Czars of Eastern Europe in the 1950s, can’t be absolutely sure if they are the target. This may well sound cowardly, teasing is a kind of flattery after all, but I believe it gives this one step removed from first person narrator (if that’s how he can be

described) the freedom to say things for which the writer need not necessarily be held to account, and with which he may not even agree.

**‘Ah! If we only could  
Blot out the bitter thought  
Make life the thing we would  
And shape it as we ought.’**

Mary Gilmore (81)

In my novel I have not been especially kind to Carrie Whitcombe’s inspirator, Mary Gilmore: from most accounts her presence in New Australia was rarely graceful, and twee poetic legacies like ‘Us Two’ (79) and ‘Marri’t’ (61) which the first rapture of marriage inspired in her make embarrassing reading. Sometimes writers’ work leads quite independent lives from their authors, however, and sometimes, as in the case of Gilmore, when she dispensed with artifice: “Somehow we missed each other, / we two poor bankrupt souls, sowing / a harvest that we recked not of...” (7-9), is indivisible from them. Gilmore was one of at least two notable examples in New Australia of jilted or disappointed lovers seeking comfort elsewhere and paying for it: when ‘Red Clara’ Jones, the nurse on the expedition, was let down badly by the Cosme Lothario, Dave Sanderson, she pre-empted the fictional Hattie’s threat made to Harry when their union was dissolved, and married the first man she saw. Her union, like Hattie’s, was disastrous. More happily, ‘Red Clara’ and Sanderson’s relationship was revived after the First World War following the death of Clara’s husband. In asking myself whether I should have the two principal protagonists of ‘Landfall’—Harry and Hattie—reconciled, however, I came to a conclusion with which both parties would have concurred, I think: it was too late. They had become different people. It may have been too late for Hattie to go

back to South America, as well; certainly any attempt of the older Gardener to pursue her would have been doomed.

After Gardener's first liberating affair with Hattie ends with their enforced separation, he is never to have another relationship on such equal terms. Thereafter, following the death of his wife and their son, his dedication to work and local welfare increasingly become a means of distancing himself from uncomfortable truths, until he is lost and saved by illness and a relationship with a young woman who seems at first incapable of any affection at all. It is not the resolution that I foresaw to Gardener's story, but it seemed to have a kind of symmetry in the end.

**“To die would be an awfully big Adventure”**

(Barrie 177)

Northrop Fry suggests that there are three or four kinds of utopian states—one, sentimental and fleeting, based on childhood memory—the Arcadian or paradisaal, which puts emphasis on the integration of man with his physical environment; the City, which expresses human ascendancy over nature, and the “...Land of Cockaigne, the fairyland, where all desires can be gratified” (Fry 126).

In her biography of J.M. Barrie, Lisa Chaney mentions a play, *The Never Never Land*, by the playwright Wilson Barret which was produced in 1902: “It would be entirely appropriate if this had inspired Barrie's name, when the Australian one derives from a people who gave the repository of their understanding of themselves the name of the Dream Time” (Chaney 226). Barrie's Utopia might belong to his childhood; I am not sure exactly where the Dream Time would sit among Fry's definitions (paradisaal perhaps), or whether Australia's original settlers would be flattered by Chaney's allusion to it; it may be an incidental

curiosity that the Guaraní of Paraguay, whose original champion was Cosme's Leon Cadogan, are currently waging their own campaign for traditional land title with the support of Cadogan's son, Rogerio, but they had a kind of 'Neverland' too; known, not surprisingly considering their history, as 'yvy marane'y', ("the place with no fear").

Certainly, a strong link between unsophisticated or ancient societies has been the myth of a paradise where its members are freed from oppression and want, and perhaps this is why Australia's mostly white and adequately fed population, inheritors of Jack Lindsay's "...caustic and sceptical attitudes ..." (13-14), has not often found room for the fantastic and fabulous in its literature and feels uneasy in their company. I was brought up among books like *Coral Island* without ever appreciating that the action surrounding it and the myth-like Pacific figures of Gaugin and Robert Louis Stevenson emanated from Australia's back yard in a sense. The off-shore romance captured in adult tales from Olaf Ruhen's *South Pacific Adventure*, has never been appropriated by the mainland either, I believe. As close as it has got has been in the past and more recent gothic horrors of Tasmania which, along with Norfolk Island, Pitcairn and the Abrolhos Islands, could be seen as outposts of Australia proper. Otherwise, the legacy of piracy, mutiny, shipwrecks; even the paradisaical flavour of white planter-cum-missionary settlements on coconut fringed atolls, has never really become part of the Australian ethos; like tropical depressions their impact has almost always been absorbed and diffused on impact with the coast. (New Zealand, it should be noted, being considered neither on nor off-shore by Australians, doesn't appear to count.)

In discussing his own attraction to castaway stories as a child in his memoir, *Montebello*, Robert Drewe refers to a condition of the psyche, first identified by Gideon (of hotel bedside-Bible fame) as Islomania, and subsequently celebrated by Lawrence Durrell, as

a rare but by no means unknown affliction of spirit [among people] who find

islands somehow irresistible. The mere knowledge that they are on an island, a little world surrounded by sea fills them with an indescribable intoxication (15).

We may be living on an island too large in that case; or, in the end, not large enough. Not large or generous enough to include a San Carlos de Bariloche within its confines; too vast to allow the genesis of the sort of story recounted by Mark Twain of two men picked up by a vessel in the Pacific floating in a tiny canoe. Near death and hundreds of miles from land, they reputedly spoke a language no-one understood and claimed allegiance to no country they could name. Twain called them “Men Without a Country...wandering children of Nowhere...” (99), who subsequently, as if they had successfully shed a skin, threw in their adopted home of Fiji without ever betraying their origins.

In my novel Harry Gardener’s world is circumscribed by the River Murray. His shoreline is not a stepping off point to any sea, however, except to what he sees as oceanic Outback wastes. The original nomadism of Australian indigenous people in search of fresh hunting territories may have been ritualistic and liberating, but when Gardener’s journalistic excursion into that country discovers a vestigial group of fugitive aborigines it suggests to him that they are occupying an even more fragile outpost than his own. And he is living on an island that makes promises it never keeps.

One of the qualities that first drew me to Harry Taylor and with which I have attempted to infuse my main character, was his energy. It is a characteristic which fascinates me in others, only offset by the fact that it tends to be distributed indiscriminately in society and, as a study by Clive Boddy suggests, is an ingredient of the cynical and manipulative charm exercised by such seemingly diverse personalities as business tycoons, psychopaths and—probably—politicians.

The closing lines of 'Landfall' with which I have prefaced my novel: "And if they should ever tempt me to speak again / I shall smile and refrain" (11-12), are reminders that its writer was a romantic, and confessing to that most impractical of utopian ambitions, self-sufficiency. It is a faith that most of us surrender as we grow older. But I am interested in those less ambitious sections of the population who protect themselves against self-knowledge and loneliness by replacing infancy's egoism with a closed in world in which they can still pretend their own company is company enough, or, as in the case of Gardener, by the expenditure of energies which allows them to function almost independently of events until, or unless, fate overwhelms them.

J.M. Barrie was fascinated by an escapism that he could unflinchingly dissect but not change, and while his methods of both analysing and retreating from his inner conflicts are not mirrored in Gardener, he does come to share one of Barrie's persistent fantasies.

Flight is a common enough exercise of the unconscious. Among writers it may be an expression of their hunger for acknowledgment which in most cases is never to be satisfied. It gave Dylan Thomas the chance to prove to his school fellows that at last he had a *real* secret:

And when they do not believe me, I flap my arms and slowly leave the ground,  
only a few inches at first, then gaining air until I fly, like Dracula in a schoolboy  
cap, level with the windows of the school, peering in until the mistress at the  
piano screams and the metronome falls with a clout to the ground, stops, and  
there is no more time... (6).

In the end the dream of flight is Gardener's escape, though it is not until he is near death that he becomes aware of the final destination that inspires it.

*L'isola che non c'è* (Never Never Land)

From radio soap opera's last days in the 1950s Barry Humphries cuttingly recalls seeing the still extant conduits of heroes and heroines of serials he had listened to as a child, propped up at the bar of the Assembly Hotel in Sydney, from whence they would "...from time to time, fall off their stools and totter to the adjacent Macquarie studios..." (168) where, in what they supposed to be 'international' accents they would impersonate everyone from sexy ingenues and loveable mothers to "...benevolent family solicitors and likeable cads" (168). He then suggests that "Today, Australian actors have gone to the opposite extreme. Convinced that they don't even sound faintly Australian when speaking naturally, they assume a grotesque parodic accent unknown outside the Australian film industry" (168-9). I wonder if one of the reasons for the success of many Australian actors in today's international film industry is that the need to adopt a (normally) American accent has not only liberated them from the constriction to which Humphries refers, but from the obligation to confront their native selves.

It would be glib to suggest that the throwaway nature of our society, in which everything from marriage partners to homes are considered disposable, is reflected in our approach to language: Australians are hardly unique in the lack of respect we show for the spoken or written word, and I am suspicious of anyone, including myself, who attempts to substitute another culture for their own; it is almost always an admission of inadequacy. Yet, while my own nowhere near unique but somewhat unusual experiences in another country, Italy, have always left me pleased to return to Australia, it has been with a residual sense of dissatisfaction; aware not only of the quality of life here, but of its limits. The exuberance

with which the substitutes for style are celebrated in this country is paralleled, I believe, by our uneasiness in the presence of the real thing.

While I cannot claim an exhaustive acquaintance with Italian literature I would like to think I have been influenced by the musical and emotionally transparent qualities of its prose. Otherwise, I have tried to write something which, while not a fable, is at least an excursion into make-believe, into the kind of narrative of writers I most enjoy. The practice of Adrian Mole's amanuensis, Sue Townshend, of sandwiching diary entries in between household chores, may well have contributed to the unpredictability of *The Diary of Adrian Mole*, and an alternating input from the Grossmith brothers in *Diary of a Nobody* kept each writer on his toes: I wonder if one of the ultimate favours fictional writers can pay their readers is to keep them wondering what will happen next.

Paraguay's long history of Utopian settlement (balanced, paradoxically, by the Guaraní's pre-contact form of utopianism which periodically saw them taking disastrous steps to find a paradise of their own), is almost inextricable from its record as a haven for the unwanted. Following the inspiration of *Nueva Germania*, perhaps, which paved the way for Nazi refugees after the Second World War, undesirables and dictators fallen from grace were still being smuggled into the country in the 1970s, prompting Pico Iyer to comment that Paraguay was like Madame Tussaud's waxworks, "...except all the figures are living" (163).

Australia cannot match Paraguay's legacy of utopian ruins and our history as a dumping ground has been a lot briefer. The sense of isolation or abandonment felt by some Australians, then, may be exaggerated. In Robert Drewe's *The Shark Net* he playfully dismisses the anguish of coastal Perth's citizens who, from his youth, "...brave bare toes gripping their verandas...were forever squinting into the summer sun and wind, the winter



rain and gales...” (35). Gazing at nothing, so it seemed to Drewe, until his youthful self at last divined that they were searching for Africa.

That unease might seem peculiarly West Australian, though Nicholas Birns suggests that Gerald Murnane’s fascination in *A History of Books* with Tristan da Cunha, a small island off the West African coast, reflects a greater obsession in our hemisphere with ‘...the entire idea of extraordinary islands, small or large, in the Southern Ocean...’ (8). Since Murnane, as has been documented, has generally preferred not to stray far from his home in country Victoria, perhaps it shows that it is not only from sandy sea-side places but from dusty inland ones that Australians yearn to reach out to the world.

Jean Francois Vernay, in an essay on “Projections and Utopianism in Australian Fiction,” suggests that four Australian Utopian novels—Rodney Hall’s *The Last Love Story*, Christopher Koch’s *Out of Ireland*, Peter Carey’s *The Unusual Life of Tristram Smith* and Gerald Murnane’s *The Plains*—had their roots in the writers’ births before or during WW11, leaving them with a sense of estrangement from Mother England and a pressing need to create some imaginative compensatory utopian space for their loss. While that might indicate a degree of parental carelessness in the timing of the off-springs’ conception, I am more interested in Vernay’s suggestion that *The Plains* is the closest Australian narrative to Thomas More’s *Utopia*. And yet, however elegant Murnane’s presentation of its world is, I do not think *The Plains* could sustain Harry Gardener’s Utopia, or mine.

I have not otherwise been convinced of the success of exercises in the fabulous and picaresque by contemporary Australian writers, although I am sure the reputations of people like Peter Carey can withstand my criticism which really amounts to a confession that I have never wanted to read any of his novels twice. It may not all be his fault: Australians appear compelled to demystify almost everything except their current infatuation with Celebrity, ‘reality’ television and the social media, which have collectively persuaded them that their

participation in life can be at once voyeuristic and active. We are not alone in that: in a short story of the Italian writer, Stefano Benni, 'Papa is on TV', no one, including the condemned man or his proud family and friends who have gathered to watch his execution on television, seems capable of separating reality from display.

**“Our home is not here, it is in Heaven; our time is not now, it is eternity....”**

(Stow 135)

At the beginning of my exegesis I said that one of the things which drew me to my subject was the comic potential of contemporary records from Harry Taylor's time. Along with all their negative qualities I believe the island-like communities of the Australian bush can evoke a peculiar drollness among their human habitants which calls for little or no imaginative reconstruction.

I have not attempted to appropriate the disingenuous advice of the author of the *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*: “Persons attempting to find a motive in this narrative will be prosecuted; persons attempting to find a moral in it will be banished; persons attempting to find a plot in it will be shot...” (Twain, Preface); but I have still tried to write something that is neither didactic nor too self-conscious. In the end I believe writers' preoccupations, like their characters, should be allowed to speak for themselves.

In a faithless age, the persistence of imagination can seem as strange and wonderful, or futile, as stamp collecting or a devotion to good works. Yet it persists, sustained by the unreliable but ultimately resilient optimism of the human spirit. Donald Goodwin argues that “...both writing and drinking bear certain similarities to trance states...” (193), and certainly, the trance like and privileged moments of composition, when they are freed from the temporal and the cynicism of their or any other time, are what all writers ought to recognise

and guard jealously, I believe. It is almost certainly as close as they will ever come to being citizens of a Utopian state.

**“Lord Mayor Howard... said that the trees on the corner had grown so tall that they had lost their attraction. Neat rose gardens would be much more attractive.” (Stow 31)**

From the 1960s and 70s I have memories which make me cringe now of joining the ranks of those whose reaction to ‘cottage garden’ culture led to them calling, among other things, for the extirpation of just about every plant in Australia without indigenous claims. My first introduction to the European landscape helped restore some balance to my attitudes, I think. I sometimes wonder if my recollections of childhood overall would be fonder if I had been born into a part of Australia more like the composite country of Hal Porter’s Gippsland; but then I realise that most of the disfavour I now feel for the Riverland has been inspired subsequent to my actual experiences there and in a way independently of them. Europe reawakened childhood memories of acres of peach and apricot and orange trees in blossom in the first and few kind days of spring—and somehow devalued them. It wasn’t all the country’s fault.

In any case, I cannot deny my enduring fascination with the Riverland where my story is set; I owe it a debt for that, and whatever else our upbringings did not have in common I share Porter’s undisguised anguish for things past and lost. No one has written as well as him of the landscape of childhood:

From waking to sleeping, from January to December, it is impossible for me not to be aware of fecundity: the grass thicker than wool and gorged with globules of dew or matted with frost; the late twilight air flowing in currents of moths and

Christmas beetles and cockchafers as we play on The Common under a sky closely gravelled with planets and stars; the footpaths and paddocks glaring yellow with cape-weed through which we paddle until boots or bare feet are mustard-coloured with pollen; the birds gibbering and squealing and squeaking a million-fold in every elm in every street at sunrise and sunset, and, late at night, when one is in bed, and the candle blown out, the crowing of roosters from every direction, from near, from nearly near, from over the hills and far far away, cry answering cry repeatedly in sounds so threadlike, so distant, so weary, as to be almost the cry of silence itself (63).

How beautiful his faithlessness was.

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In book by two or more authors, the second or third authors' names can be given in normal form.

MLA rules.

Article from scholarly journal

Author's name. "Title of the Article." Publication information.

Piper, Andrew. "Rethinking the Print Object: Goethe and the Book of Everything."

*PMLA* 121.1 (2006): 124-38. Print.

121.1 is Publication information: The volume number. Full stop. The issue number.

PMLA is the name of the scholarly journal. Omit Introductory A, An or The.

Newspapers do not require volume and issue numbers. Put the city name of the paper after the name of paper in square brackets. [ ] Name of paper in italics. Write date, month and year. Abbreviate the names of all months except May, June and July.

The name of the article in magazine referring to New Australia must be in "quotation marks"

Place colon between title and subtitle in works cited. Italicise them.

If two quotes by the same author appear in the one paragraph you may do this:

(Taylor 138,141).

You should put for Web references, name of Web Site, e.g. *Google Books*, (if it has been published in another source) italicized, Medium of Publication consulted: Web, and then date of access (day, month and year). If no page no. put n.pag. after date of publication. If it is strictly on-line just write Web.

Other works – after Works Cited – come under headings, Works Consulted, Selected Bibliography, or Selected List of Works Consulted.

Centre the title Works Consulted an inch from top of page.

n.d. (no date)

If more than one title by an author is in the list of Works Cited, abbreviate title of the one you are quoting; e.g., (Taylor, *This* 7)

Long quotes are indented an inch – 10 spaces from left margin.

In works cited the second title of author is listed - - -.

The period or full stop of a quote comes after the reference; e.g., ..won” (35).

: is generally used before a long quote, but not always.

If the quotation is formally introduced a colon is usual. Otherwise use a comma or nothing at all if the quote is an integral part of the sentence.

You must replace existing punctuation points; e.g. period, with one appropriate to the sentence structure, but not ? or !

If an ellipse occurs at the end of the sentence add extra three periods.

Write the first edition date immediately after the title. Title. 1993.

With a poem you must quote line nos.

If the sentence is followed by a parenthesis use only three dots and the last after the final parenthesis. i.e. ...(Taylor 3).

I would like to take this opportunity to thank my chief supervisor, Dr Phillip Edmonds, for his unfailing encouragement during my candidacy.

- - -. *Redheap*, 1930. Sydney: Ure Smith, 1966.110. Print.

**“With many a weary step, and many a groan  
Up the high hill he heaves a huge round stone.”**

(Pope 735 )

: (‘He looked like some extraordinary old performing seal, scarcely aware of what was going on around him, or of who anyone was...’) (236).

Confronted with philosophical or literary dissertations I have sometimes felt like one of those family pets who resign themselves to television being an impenetrable mystery after their first inspection of it is unsatisfied. While I plodded my way through the ratiocinations of Camus’s *The Myth of Sisyphus*, for example, the trials of its narrator invidiously reminded me of a hung-over character in Kingsley Amis’s *The Old Devils* who, having first hauled himself into a sitting position in bed, and recalling Pope’s lines, plunges his foot to the floor, “...with a conviction that everything he had was lost and everyone he knew was gone” (106-7).

Likewise, when I read the Structuralist, Roland Barthes’ solemn declaration that, “writers cannot use writing to ‘express’ themselves, but only to draw upon that immense dictionary of language and culture which is ‘always already written’...”(Seldon 105), I was inescapably reminded of his sentiments’ endorsement by the adolescent narrator of Flann O’Brien’s *At Swim Two Birds*:

“Most authors spend their time saying what has been said before – usually said much better.... The entire corpus of existing literature [therefore] should be regarded as a limbo from which discerning authors could draw their characters as required, creating only when they failed to find a suitable existing puppet...”  
(O’Brien 25)

**“Out there their place is, where the charts are gapped,  
unreachable, unmapped, and mainly in the mind.”**

(Stow 52)

The 17th Century history of the Ranters is at least superficially sunnier. There was something engagingly larrikin-like about the behaviour of this heretical, pantheistic, guilt-free group, who, in a period when nakedness was a social taboo – and how much has changed since? – were said to parade in the nude and engage in the most wanton and outrageous behaviour. There is the extraordinary – and endearing – story of a prominent Ranter, Abiezer Coppe (whose *Fiery Flying Roll* delivered a swinging blade to hypocrisy and inequality) who was said to have taken to the pulpit stark naked in church and devoted a full hour to cursing and blaspheming (as a relief from his habitual “roaring, drinking, whoring and open full mouth swearing”). (Ariel 56) It seems typical of him and his brethren that they were generally canny enough to quench the judicial torch when it was turned on them by recanting, or, as in the case of Coppe, making out to be mad. What is really extraordinary about them, and disturbing from this distance, is that the innocent enough demands they were voicing – however extravagantly – have in many cases still to be conceded to the society in which we live. They were a rare example of a utopian group who just wanted to have a good time.

Much earlier, a convict ship which left London in August 1797, transporting 75 British women and 44 men to the penal colony of New South Wales in 1797, short circuited the process by which Lane’s party arrived in South America. It was commandeered off the coast of Brazil by its New South Wales Corps guards who hoisted a flag in the name of the French Republic and sailed to Uruguay where they were eventually allowed ashore to fend for themselves. As Whitehead records:

To the convicts, a vagrant existence and a crash course in Spanish must have looked infinitely preferable to the life of felons in Australia. They adapted as best they could, the women becoming domestic servants or prostitutes, the men rediscovering old skills as pickpockets and footpads. Later many of them became respectable and all of them vanished without trace into the life of Montevideo. (Whitehead 61)

New Harmony’s demise might not have been all Owen’s fault, of course; Cole’s elegantly succinct summary of the dying days of a companion settlement at Orbiston in

Scotland: “Dogs barked; the weather was wet; and no one wanted to work...” (174) points to more fundamental and enduring reasons for the failures of community settlements.

Oneida, an exception to generally non-secular utopian settlements in North America of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, was most famous for its efforts to break down monogamous marriage, which its imposing leader, John Humphrey Noyes saw as a religious as well as a social tyranny. So far so good, it seems fair to say, but while Noyes could also plausibly argue that “variety is the nature of things, as beautiful in love as in eating and drinking...” (Martin 14), this ardent Perfectionist seemed to have enjoyed more than his fair share of sexual partners, and fathered a disproportionate number of the colony’s children on those occasions when the masculine dictum of *coitus reservatus* was waived on his behalf.

Ernest Hemingway’s later work often suggested that he had forgotten his (often incorrectly quoted) dictum that, “The most essential gift for a good writer is a built-in, shockproof, shit detector...” (Neil Postman went further or narrower in suggesting that, “...at any given time, the chief source of bullshit with which you have to contend is yourself...”) but to me Hemingway’s shorter fiction at least embodies the humility and transparency of writers I admire.

1884. Print.

Singing for supper. Autobiography of a Super Tramp. Lawrence’s Kangaroo – what will I do with my rubbish? Do what ye like with it. Story of Benni. A Perfectionist who craftily adapted John Wesley’s belief that Perfectionism was both an epiphanous and progressive



work of grace: Noyes boldly declared that since he had surrendered his will to God everything he did was perfect since his choices “came from a perfect heart”.

Sandeen, Ernest R. *John Humphrey Noyes as the New Adam*, New York, CUP, 1971 p. 82.

However convenient, repetitive and circular their arguments may seem, what makes them appear more than quaint and self serving, is the apparent faith their proponents exhibited in them. In a faithless age that now seems extraordinary

“I’ve always understood the religious impulse, the great overwhelming fear of death, of annihilation which is a part of most of it, and a desperate need to find a meaning in a universe which really doesn’t have one.” Phillip Adams. 29th March 2009. Compass television programme, ABC. Web.

New Harmony’s demise might not have been all Owen’s fault; Cole’s elegant summary of the dying days of a companion settlement at Orbiston in Scotland: “Dogs barked; the weather was wet; and no one wanted to work...” (174) hints at more fundamental and enduring reasons for the failures of community settlements.

With the exception of that anathema to the book selling trade, Abby Hoffman, who ran aground in the 80s among students who had more interest in conventional education than radical politics, Peter Coyote is one of the few leading American counter culture figures from that time to have remained faithful to the Cause. And even he was tripped up at least once with his recordings of *The Education of Little Tree*, when the supposed memoirs of an American Indian – which always did sound a bit too good to be true – proved to be the cynical confabulations of White supremacist Asa Earl (aka ‘Forrest’) Carter. It is doubtful if Coyote would have enjoyed the irony of the deception he helped disseminate.

Carter A.E., *The Education of Little Tree*, N.Y.: Delarcorte Press, 1976. Print.

The outside world has not been immune to this utopianism. Like moths to a flame, various nations have been drawn towards Paraguay. In the latter 19th century, Napoleon III established New Bordeaux for Basque migrants. Following this was Nueva Germania, established by Nietzsche's brother-in-law, whose proto-fascist sympathies paved the way for Nazi refugees in the 20th century. There were colonies for the Italians (Nueva Italia), Swedes (Colonia Esta), Moravians (Hutterite colony), Russian (Mennonites in the Chaco) and even Japanese (the Beehive). And, of course, there was William Lane's colony of Australian socialists established in 1893.

Most dreams ended in disappointment. As a result, Paraguay has been left with a legacy of utopian ruins, of which the Para-Australians are a particularly interesting contemporary manifestation.

Spencer insisted that he aimed to bring about reconciliation between faith and sciences. His antagonism towards social reforms in later years, however, betrayed his arguments and beliefs to be fundamentally circular and self-justifying, and balancing on pins' heads of rationality from which he was dislodged by age. The condition of political cynicism at which so many people eventually arrive, without them suffering anything like an intellectual crisis on the way, suggests to me that the adherents to called opposing political poles may have a lot more in common than they – and we – think; making those with an appetite for power all that more untrustworthy. They want it on any terms.

It is an oversimplification, I know, but most people's view of the universe really is restricted by such small portions of it as they can encompass, and it is a perversity of human nature that in the most paradisaical of situations the transcendental only occasionally ousts the mundane.

Jerry Rubin, archpriest of the radical Left in the 60s, lived on to become one of its creed's ultimate apostates; there was an air of vindication in one report of his passing: "His death at the age of 56 was the result of the mildest of rebellions: he had been jaywalking on Wiltshire Boulevard in Los Angeles when a car struck him. Presumably the bourgeoisie mourned the passing of one of their members." (Berger. n.pag) The writer then noted how subsequent to their own radical youths, Sonny Bono was elected a Republican member of Congress and Jane Fonda married a media magnate, while Rubin himself had niftily decided that the creation of wealth was the real American revolution.

would not overly disturb the lives of those administering it. It was as if they were already living in a divinely decreed future. Terrorism may be part of the human disposition, prompted by awareness of injustices, or by the frustration imposed by American participation in the Vietnam War, say, or by nostalgia for a supposedly glorious past: (Todd and Wheeler suggest that while the Peasants' Revolt of 1381 was directed against serfdom and heavy taxation.... "it was also sustained by the belief that England before the Norman Conquest had been a country of freedom and equality ...")<sup>1</sup> But Max Abrahms found that "...terrorism's proponents and participants are often marked by feelings of loneliness, rejection, or exclusion from valued relationships, groups or societies..."<sup>2</sup> In the end even terrorists want to be loved.

Mockery of the status quo is normally a safer way of challenging society; even if mockery contains an acknowledgment of defeat, since it offers no real alternatives; and can still be dangerous, as the Kent State University killings in 1970 showed: film footage of that tragedy shows soldiers ambling to and fro in a rather self-conscious fashion in front of an audience who might have been struck by their likeness to the Grand Old Duke of York's appointed men, before the goaded soldiers finally turned their rifles on them. Still, there is a long tradition of derision as an element of protest in repressive or – like ours – conservative and litigious societies. Even in the Eastern bloc countries of the 1950s and 60s, opponents of the State were apportioned as much of a tenuous licence to satirise authority as their targets were shrewd enough to concede. Irony is a two way weapon, however. The really shrewd and vain in the West have learned that one of the best ways of disarming satirists is by embracing them. From Spike Milligan to Billy Connolly, there have been few satirical comedians in British society, for example, who have been able to resist the invitation to cosy up to the British Establishment and, once compromised, to modify their assaults on it. Even Lenin and Stalin, however much they might have privately despised them, were not blind to the

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<sup>1</sup> Todd, Ian and Wheeler, Michael. *UTOPIA*. New York: Harmony Books, 1978, p.10.

<sup>2</sup> Max Abrahms *What Terrorists Really Want: Terrorist Motives and Counterterrorism Strategy*, *International Security*, Volume 32, Number 4, Spring 2008, p 84.

advantages of seducing Western liberals with their acquaintance, especially once they discovered with what facility it could be done.

At the moment in Australia, satire usually manages to be both crass and careful. Relying on safe targets, its tone is never really subversive in the way of cartoons like 'The Simpsons' 'Family Guy' and 'South Park', which, despite having been given birth to in the land of the bland, defy the sanctions of good taste. This is not simply a reflection on public sensitivity at large; literature itself is being choked – and it is not too strong a word – by the centrifugal force of political correctness. It is not an exclusively Australian syndrome; the United Kingdom has a strong and enduring tradition of hypocrisy by which it has striven to present an unexceptionable face to the world, while the comments of expatriate Australian writer, Kevin Roberts, who has lived for many years in Canada, suggest that there, too, "Understanding the times in which we live, and seeing through the fog of politics and the miasma of false moral posturing requires a first class humbug detector."<sup>3</sup>

It is a shame that writers must tread so carefully now. I am reminded of the almost reluctant reference by Robert Drewe near the close of *'The Savage Crows'* when his chief protagonist, Crisp, asks an old mutton birder on one of the Bass Strait Islands, what is the main business of the head man, 'Plum', in their little indigenous colony.

"'Guilt, of course. Fuckin' guilt.'" is the response. "There's money in it boy..."<sup>4</sup>

It is not a point which Drewe pursues. Elsewhere, there are so many other no-go areas in popular and serious culture which blunt or deny imagination. It is an unhealthy, but not new prohibition.

Later, censorship took on a more subtle role in quelling dissent. The Commonwealth Customs Department kept a reference library of around 15,000 books, magazines and comics banned in Australia between the 1920s and the 1970s. The situation reached a comical nadir in the 1950s and 60s when it seemed as if Commonwealth Censors felt obliged to consign to obloquy specimens from a flood of often innocuous seeming works to assuage public apprehension that they were about to be overwhelmed by items of a seditious or corrupting nature.

This is not an examination of censorship per se, however. More pervasive and more subtle were often those influences, generally, but not exclusively, non-secular, which had a say in producing the monochrome, unadventurous and self-satisfied world excoriated in Barry Humphries' suburban Australia. This was and is a scenario that beggars comparison with the often brawling, chaotic and sometimes vitriolic but never dull world of colonial Australia, whose subsequent transformation may seem incredible. And yet it changed and has been changed again, even if its

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<sup>3</sup> E.A.K. Roberts From *'Writing Time'* An Exegesis presented as part of his requirements of the Doctor of Philosophy, Griffith University, 2003, p.31

<sup>4</sup> Robert Drewe, *The Savage Crows*, Fontana Books, Sydney, 1978, first published 1976, p.262

proponents would claim otherwise, with society now seemingly enthralled by a legislatively backed conservatism preaching one of the most intolerant of liberal doctrines; pluralism. Its savage proponents ought to be aware that the sort of legal action which saw the right wing journalist, Andrew Bolt, claim to have been silenced from criticising the conduct and substance of indigenous affairs, was not really necessary, however. Since the historically fairly brief flame that political dissension shed on the country in the 19th Century, Australians have mostly trodden with care. While as yet showing few signs of wanting to adopt the hypocrisy and humbug of the English or Americans (that, at least, our sardonic streak will not allow) there is an implicit consciousness in liberal society that some subjects are not only off-limits for public debate, but should not even be privately aired. Implicit censorship has a way of making iconoclasts feel guilty, of self-censoring their thoughts. Most mainstream journalists are now reduced to the status of urgers, or complaisant onlookers, rather than actual reporters and interpreters of news. The medium is indeed their message, and they are the occasionally bemused but dutiful purveyors of it.

Historically, artists cannot claim to have had any sort of mortgage on finer human feelings, though they have often appeared to want to. In Solzhenitzyn's, *'The First Circle'*, Nerzhin, a political prisoner under Stalin discovers that "...in conditions where only courage, strength of character and loyalty to friends made a man and could decide the fate of a comrade...delicate, sensitive, highly educated persons often proved to be craven cowards, very good at finding excuses for their own despicable behaviour and turning into wheedling, two faced traitors."<sup>5</sup>

Nor have they always been morally courageous enough to defy implicit or explicit pressures on them. This is not meant to denigrate survivors of Russian purges like Gorki, whose nimbleness we can understand even if we cannot really appreciate its desperation. Tergiversation still carried no guarantees. In what Malcolm Muggeridge called "a delectable example of Fearful Symmetry",<sup>6</sup> for example, ex-prince Mirsky described Pushkin on the centenary of his death in 1937 as a court lackey, without appreciating that Pushkin had recently been reinstated as a national hero, meaning that he, Mirsky, would be liquidated for denigrating him. But artists have often shown themselves to be no better judges of causes than the so-called man in the street. In his essay, *The Two Cultures*, Snow conceded to a scientific acquaintance his assertion that among the most famous of 20<sup>th</sup> Century writers were those like Yeats, Pound and Wyndham Lewis who were not only politically silly, but politically wicked. His answer to his colleague's suggestion that their influence and attitudes brought Auschwitz nearer, was that there was indeed a connection, "which literary persons were culpably

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<sup>5</sup> Solzhenitzyn, Aleksandr. *The First Circle*, London: Fontana Books, William Collins Sons & Co. Ltd., 1970, (first published 1968), p.468,,

<sup>6</sup> Muggeridge, Malcolm. *The Green Stick from Chronicles of Wasted Time*. London: Collins, 1972. P.239

slow to see, between some kinds of early twentieth century art and the most imbecilic expressions of anti-social feeling.”<sup>7</sup>

The malady they shared has been in some ways endemic to the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, with the demigod status of pop culture heroes in particular encouraging its icons to pontificate on almost any matter close to their hearts. It reminds me of one of the most recent of international pop festivals, arranged as a protest by Bod Geldof against the G-8 economic summit at Gleneagles in July 2005. Its ultimate overshadowing by the terrorist bombings in London’s tube on the 7<sup>th</sup> of the month, for which the concerts were no competition, was of course tragic. But I had a sneaking change of heart for one of the members of the pop group *Oasis*, Noel Gallagher, who excused his band’s absence from the event by saying, “Correct me if I’m wrong, but are they hoping that one of these guys is on a quick 15 minute break at Gleneagles and sees Annie Lennox singing ‘Sweet Dreams’ and thinks, ‘Fuck me, she might have a point there, you know?’... and some Japanese business man going, “Aw...we should really fucking drop that debt...” It’s not going to happen, is it?”<sup>8</sup>

Nazi propaganda’s attempt to show off P.G. Wodehouse’s anti-British Fascist tendencies during the Second World War, only revealed him to be harmlessly apolitical, guilty at worst of living along with his literary creations in a world set somewhere around 1920. And that is perhaps one of writers’, anyway, saving graces. Their crankiness, or lack of social skills, makes them unreliable joiners of anything, let alone Utopias. This is not a failing restricted to converts to the Right, though they seem to be far more numerous in literature. If 20<sup>th</sup> Century English literature was littered with fundamental conservatives, as well as the incipient kind like Kingsley Amis – who did not so much jump ship as have his berth upgraded – it also contained examples like Spender, Isherwood and Auden who seem to have responded to a call from the Left which had first to penetrate their fairly well insulated domestic surrounds. It is a perhaps incidental curiosity that time which “pardoned Kipling and his views,”<sup>9</sup> not only tends to be forgiving of artists’ personal peccadillos but helps out once they are well and truly dead in seeing their oeuvre safely agisted within the stable of Artistic Tradition.

Earlier in the last century, the phrase, “useful idiots”, variously attributed to Lenin and Stalin, was supposedly used to describe several prominent British writers including H. G. Wells and Doris Lessing, along with George Bernard Shaw, the American journalist Walter Duranty, and singer Paul Robeson in the 1930s.

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<sup>7</sup> Snow, C.P. Cambridge lectures reprinted in *New Statesman* 6<sup>th</sup> October, 1956, *The Two Cultures* (quoted here from *The Writer in the Modern World*, edited by Heseltine and Tick, Melbourne: F.W. Cheshire, 1962 p.124

<sup>8</sup> Gallagher, Noel. Quoted in *The Observer* London, June 19<sup>th</sup>, 2005.

<sup>9</sup> Auden, W.H. *In Memory of W.B. Yeats*, quoted from *The Faber Book of 20<sup>th</sup> Century Verse*, Ed. John Heath-Stubbs & David Wright, London: Faber, 1989. P. 39. Print

To this list could be added names like Malcolm Muggeridge and Arthur Koestler, and the Austrian philosopher Karl Popper, in their pre-enlightened days. Popper, a member of the Communist Party in his youth, was subsequently appalled by the failure of democratic parties to stem the tide of fascism in Austria in the 20s and 30s and the effective welcome extended to it by Marxists who believed that it was a necessary dialectical step towards the implosion of capitalism. Himself a fugitive from Nazism, he wrote that Utopianism “with the best intentions of making heaven on earth...only succeeds in making it a hell – that hell which man alone prepares for his fellow-men.”<sup>10</sup>

This canny gentleman’s intolerance of intellectual casuistry would have made him as many enemies as friends, no doubt, but how heartily people like Muggeridge, Orwell and Koestler would have nodded in agreement with him.

Muggeridge and Koestler have both described their initial seduction by Communism, and the subsequent renunciation of their vows in anti-totalitarian novels written after they experienced the reality of life in Russia in the 1930s<sup>11</sup>. Muggeridge’s expectations of Stalinist Russia were entirely positive before he left England. In his review of Muggeridge’s biography<sup>12</sup> Christopher Hitchens said, “A.J.P.Taylor told him as he was embarking, ‘If the Russians do not come up to your expectations, don’t take it out on them. Muggeridge’s reply was worth quoting: ‘No, no. It will be Utopia. I must see the ideal even if I am unworthy of it.’”<sup>13</sup>

It didn’t take him long to recant. “His reports from the Ukraine in the year of the famine stand...as irrefutable evidence of a new barbarism. The ancillary lesson he drew, about the gullibility and credulity of Western intellectuals, was to last Muggeridge the rest of his life.”<sup>14</sup>

Muggeridge was a writer of brilliant paragraphs, of things often savagely and sometimes cruelly observed. The condition of disdain which he assumed in middle age was eventually terminal, reducing him to expressions of disgust, as if the journalistic imperative which he admits haunted him for most of his life was the only thing still obliging him to flesh out often uninspired work.

He was not always thus: he grew up in a Socialist household whose library included Rousseau’s *Confessions*, Whitman’s *Leaves of Grass*, “which represented the wilder flights of freedom – ostensibly, along with justice, our ultimate objective”,<sup>15</sup> the Everyman edition of *Das Kapital*, which he doubts his father ever read – Muggeridge didn’t – a collected edition of Carlyle in five brown volumes; Ruskin’s *Unto this Last*, and William Morris’s *News from Nowhere* and *Earthly*

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<sup>11</sup> Muggeridge, Malcolm. *Winter in Moscow*, London: Eyre and Spottiswood, 1934. Koestler, Arthur. *Darkness at Noon*, London: Macmillan, 1940. Print.

<sup>12</sup> Wolfe, Gregory. *Malcolm Muggeridge: a biography*. Michigan: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1995

<sup>13</sup> Hitchens, Christopher, *A Hundred Years of Muggery*, The Weekly Standard. May 5, 2003.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Muggeridge, Malcolm. *The Green Stick from Chronicles of Wasted Time*. London: Collins, 1972. P.60



*Paradise*, which with their nostalgia for medieval guilds, knights in armour, and Pre-Raphaelite ladies with long white necks, “aspects of socialism which figured little in our Croydon Labour Party”<sup>16</sup> proved popular at Sunday night readings.

He had personal memories of ‘the Colony’, a Tolstoyan settlement in the Cotswolds, established by Socialists from Croydon when he was a boy. “The land was cheap in those days and they acquired some fifty acres of rough land in the Cotswolds and then, to demonstrate their abhorrence of the institution of property, ceremonially burnt the title deeds.”<sup>17</sup>

Such earnestness mirrors – to me – that shown in the faces of another expatriate Tolstoyan community in Bournemouth around 1900, in a photograph from Ian Todd and Michael Wheeler’s *Utopia*<sup>18</sup> gathered before a mix of glass houses and cold frames. Everyone in the tableau seems to have been caught in the act of doing something horticultural, with the exception of one man who is reading something presumably improving while a seated woman is engaged in that activity which Dickens so approved of in his fictional females, piecework. Everyone else, down to a small pinafores child, appears to be digging, shovelling, or tending to some plant’s needs, while the man in the background with a scythe over his shoulder is clearly just about to go off and mow something, or has just come back from doing so. They all look vulnerable to the sort of farmer neighbour the Cotswold colonists had, who took the ceremonial burning of the colonists’ title deeds as an invitation to encroach on their territory, and land, in a way, the first blow among their soon-to-be divided in any case kind.

Muggeridge was not especially generous in the matter of their legacy:

“History is littered with the debris of extinct Colonies and Communes. The early Christians were fortunate enough to be saved from taking any such disastrous course since they enjoyed the inestimable advantage of believing that the millennium was near, which precluded them seeking to establish a beneficent regime in this world. In the time at their disposal it was just not worthwhile. Perhaps the best hope of reviving the Christian religion would be to convince the Pope, the Archbishop of Canterbury and other dignitaries that the world will shortly be coming to an end. A difficult undertaking, I fear, notwithstanding much evidence pointing that way.”<sup>19</sup>

Here he sounds rather weary; recalling his appearance on television in later life, his prose, like his lips, seems over ripe. In old age Muggeridge became evangelically pessimistic – the perennial

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<sup>16</sup> Muggeridge, Malcolm. *The Green Stick* from *Chronicles of Wasted Time*. London: Collins, 1972. P. 61

<sup>17</sup> Muggeridge, Malcolm. *The Green Stick* from *Chronicles of Wasted Time*. London: Collins, 1972. P.42

<sup>18</sup> Todd, Ian and Wheeler, Michael. *Utopia*. New York: Harmony Books, 1978, p.107. Print.

<sup>19</sup> Muggeridge, Malcolm. *The Green Stick* from *Chronicles of Wasted Time*. London: Collins, 1972. P.43

*uccello di malaugurio* – managing, in an interview with Solzhenitzyn, for example, to reduce the never innately jocose novelist to a state of profound gloom.

Yet were Muggeridge to be alive today his eyes would no doubt have lit up at the following piece of triumphant invective aimed against globalization. The cause of Toronto protestors in 2000 might well have been worthy; unfortunately their language could have been lifted straight from the 60s: “Whether we were reclaiming the road from cars, reclaiming buildings for squatters, reclaiming surplus food for the homeless, reclaiming campuses as a place for protest and theatre, reclaiming our voice from the deep dark depths of corporate media, or reclaiming our visual environment from billboards, we were always reclaiming. Taking back what should have been ours all along...not the corporations.”<sup>20</sup>

Whatever Muggeridge’s shortcomings, he would be forever redeemed by his exposure of Stalinism, anyway, in which he was initially almost alone. In one of his savage attacks on the

I would hate to be guilty of joining the ranks of those (and this would be just one of countless examples) like James Thurber who, according to John Updike when reviewing his posthumously published, *Credos and Curios*, had retreated from the creator of the apocalyptic millennialist, *The Get Ready Man*, to become “by the end of the fifties, one more indignant senior citizen penning complaints about the universal decline of virtue.”<sup>21</sup> (Of course, if every generation were in fact such a poor imitation of its preceding one then mankind would be extinct by now.)

But perhaps the reason so many satirists do become trenchantly conservative as they age is that they reach the conclusion that any change to the world is only like to make it even worse than the one of which they have despaired. In my own case, and at my age, I am more interested in coaxing rather than trying to bully readers down the path of righteousness: mockery of the status quo benefits everyone, including readers I believe, especially when, like those totalitarian Czars of Eastern Europe in the 1950s, they can’t be absolutely sure if they are the target. This may well sound cowardly, teasing is a kind of flattery after all, but I believe it gives a one step removed from first person narrator (if that’s how he can be described) the freedom to say things for which the writer need not necessarily be held to account, with which he may not even agree, and from which even he may benefit.

Mr Bandparts, a Samuel Johnson-esque mouthpiece for Lindsay’s brand of Nietzscheism in *Redheap* manages to be comically sympathetic while at the same time sabotaging that side of Lindsay which periodically threatened to take charge of his prose. Mr Bandparts, an intellectual

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<sup>20</sup> Klein, Naomi. *No Logo: Taking Aim at the Brand Bullies*, London: Flamingo, 2002, p.358

<sup>21</sup> Updike, John. Reviewing *Credos and Curios* in *Assorted Prose*. Harmondsworth, England: Penguin, 1965. Check P.130.

colossus at risk of permanent entombment within his mother's honeysuckle bowered home (due to a weakness for beer which periodically sabotages his academic forays into the greater world) chafes under the influence of small town life.

"A damned hole, Piper," he says, while seeing his student off the property, "A cheese, with mites in it."<sup>22</sup> A deist, giving space to the existence of gods who overlook if not superintend their universe, he includes them in his views on the Utopian:

"I don't believe in flattering the gods... But they are clever devils, for all that. They have designed a system that always goes wrong in order to stir up a Utopian frenzy to put it right. By what it *is*, the idea is engendered of what it is *not*, by what it is *not* arrives the conception of what it *should be*. Thus is the infantile impetus of thought generated in the human biped."<sup>23</sup>

I find irreverence, however cynical, almost always reassuring. For example, I have often been put off by what I perceive as the glumness of Russian literature and the world it depicts. It even intrudes into the stories of Chekhov: despite the fact that his tales are often set upon the more leisured rungs of society there are still reminders – as in an otherwise romantic interlude between the lovers, Ryabovskiy and Olga, in a country cottage, to cockroaches 'crawling about busily in the thick files of paper under the benches'<sup>24</sup> - of a grimmer and grimmer world underpinning theirs. So often the flavour and the tenor of Russian literature is claustrophobic, with the metaphorical windows of escape for its near hysteric protagonists blocked off as expeditiously as the physical views of the frozen Siberian waste on the building site were in Solzhenitsyn's *A Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovitch*.<sup>25</sup> A study of Russian history and its succession of bloody tyrannies would be enough to make most readers ask (ill-informedly, no doubt), 'What is wrong with these people?'

In *Adrian Mole and the Weapons of Destruction*,<sup>26</sup> when the bookish Adrian finds the delectable Daisy (maverick member of the awful Flower family), shivering next to a miserable log fire in her home, he says, "Do you know that there is not a single healthy fire in the whole of Dostoevsky's oeuvre?" To which she responds, "I've never read Dostoevsky, and with good luck and a fair wind I shall never have to."

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<sup>22</sup> Lindsay, Norman. *Redheap*, Sydney: Ure Smith, 1966, first published 1930, p.85

<sup>23</sup> Lindsay, Norman. *Redheap*, Sydney: Ure Smith, 1966, first published 1930, p 110

<sup>24</sup> Chekhov, Anton, *Lady with Lapdog and Other Stories*, Harmondsworth, England: Penguin 1964, p117

<sup>25</sup> Solzhenitsyn, A. *A Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovitch*. London: Macmillan, 1962.

<sup>26</sup> Townshend, Sue. *Adrian Mole and the Weapons of Destruction*, London: Michael Joseph, London, 2004. Pp 172-73

When Adrian then says “I felt strangely liberated...” so did I. I do not think humour should ever be expected to be reasonable, or fair or kind: in the end it is inclusive, asserting that life is meaningful by protesting against the dishonesties that stands in its way.

When I was a teenager I borrowed a copy of Norman Lindsay’s *Creative Effort*<sup>27</sup> from the local library and then had to devote some time to fulfilling a task that had defeated the printer, of cutting and separating the books’ pages, before I could read it. I didn’t resent it; the fact that in 1966 I was presumably the first person to borrow the book in the more than forty years it had spent sitting on the shelves, only reaffirmed a sense of my critical acumen and emphasized my distance from the ‘mob’ which Lindsay spent so much time anathematizing. The book affected me profoundly at the time, though re-reading it now I can’t think why; except that adolescents – vain, desperate for some evidence of distinction in themselves, and with only the most abstract inkling of their own mortality – are probably the natural audience of such Nietzsche-inspired philosophy; since the notion of qualifying to be enlisted among the ranks of super- or over-men appeals to those with a fundamental lack of confidence.

My lack of interest in philosophic argument now is a failing of someone who has always had difficulty with abstract thought, as well as a measure of disillusionment. Very often I feel like one of those family pets who resign themselves to television being an impenetrable mystery after their first inspection of it is unsatisfied. Having plodded my way through the ratiocinations of Camus’s *The Myth of Sisyphus*,<sup>28</sup> and specifically his rationale for non-suicide, I was inescapably and irreverently reminded of the hung-over character in Kingsley Amis’s *The Old Devils*<sup>29</sup>, who, having first dragged himself into a sitting position in bed,

“...paused again, [and] said, ‘With many a weary sigh, and many a groan, up a high hill he heaves a huge round stone,’ before plunging a foot to the floor “...With a conviction undimmed by having survived countless previous run-offs...that everything he had was lost and everyone he knew was gone...”

An irreverent example of existential despair, perhaps. Likewise, when I read a summary of the structuralist, Roland Barthes’ declaration that “writers only have the power to mix already existing writings, to reassemble or to re-deploy them; writers cannot use writing to ‘express’ themselves, but only to draw upon that immense dictionary of language and culture which is ‘always already

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<sup>27</sup> Norman Lindsay, *Creative Effort, an Essay in Affirmation*, Published by Art in Australia, Sydney, 1920

<sup>28</sup> Camus, A., 1955. *The Myth of Sisyphus*, London: Hamish Hamilton, first published 1942

<sup>29</sup> Kingsley Amis, *The Old Devils*, Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, Middlesex, 1987.pp 106-7

written'...." <sup>30</sup> I think of how far it falls short of the declaration of Flann O'Brien's absurd adolescent narrator in *At Swim Two Birds*:

"...The entire corpus of existing literature should be regarded as a limbo from which discerning authors could draw their characters as required, creating only when they failed to find a suitable existing puppet....Most authors spend their time saying what has been said before – usually said much better. A wealth of references to existing works would acquaint the reader instantaneously with the nature of each character, would obviate tiresome explanations and would effectively preclude mountebanks, upstarts, thimblerriggers and persons of inferior education from an understanding of contemporary literature."<sup>31</sup>

Sometimes I wonder (unqualifiedly, I know) if the oceans of ink philosophers and literary theorists spend on defining positions would be better left to writers who may find them intuitively without even claiming them as their own. As it is enough creative minds are devoted to those circular seeming arguments which threaten to reduce or extend cogitation to the point of monomania. Spencer insisted that he aimed to bring about reconciliation between faith and sciences. His antagonism towards social reforms and support systems in later years however, betrayed his arguments and beliefs to be fundamentally circular and self-justifying, and balancing on pins' heads of rationality from which he was dislodged by age. The condition of political cynicism at which so many people eventually arrive, without them suffering anything like an intellectual crisis on the way, suggests to me that the adherents to called opposing political poles may have a lot more in common than they think; making those with an appetite for power all that more untrustworthy. They want it on any terms.

Existentialism seems to have left little room for Utopia. Though protagonists like Kierkegaard clung to the idea of a supreme being, which might or might not take an interest in their welfare and reward them in another world he made the possibility sound rather wishful. If, however, disillusionment in the current age has led to people reverting to a primitive faith in the temporal, confidence in Science as a benefactor of mankind has not only endured (and many of its own visions

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<sup>30</sup> Selden, Raman and Widdowson, Peter. *A Reader's Guide to Contemporary Literary Theory, Third Edition*. Hertfordshire: Harvester, Wheatsheaf, 1993. P. 105

<sup>31</sup> O'Brien, Flann. *At Swim Two Birds*, Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books 1967, p.25. Print.

are, almost despite themselves, utopian) but in some – maybe many – ways it could be argued that it has outgrown art.

From the same essay I quoted earlier, novelist/scientist C.P Snow described his experiences of straddling what he calls polar groups of *intellectuals* (who have arbitrarily claimed ownership of that description, he claims) and scientists.

He says, “Non-scientists have a rooted impression that the scientists are shallowly optimistic, unaware of man’s condition. On the other hand, the scientists believe that the literary intellectuals are totally lacking in foresight, peculiarly unconcerned with their brother men, in a deep sense anti-intellectual, anxious to restrict both art and thought to the existential moment.”<sup>32</sup> ...If the scientists have the future in their bones,” he contends, “then the traditional culture responds by wishing the future did not exist.”<sup>33</sup>

Dystopian novels, of course, particularly those of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, often seem to have been keen to suggest that we don’t have much to look forward to anyway. Over five hundred ‘island stories’ were printed between 1788 and 1910, including *The Swiss Family Robinson* (1818) and Ballantine’s *Coral Island* (1818); but *Lord of the Flies* did its best to take the shine off all of them when it came out in 1954.

Andrew Milner says “dystopian future fictions recount... what would have happened if their empirical and implied readerships had not been moved to prevent it.”<sup>34</sup> Orwell showed himself to be aware of this in comments he made about *1984*, (“The scene of the book is laid in Britain...to emphasize that the English-speaking races are not innately better than anyone else and that totalitarianism, if not fought against, could triumph anywhere”)<sup>35</sup> but Fredric Jameson lamented his “conviction about human nature itself...and added “...if its (dystopian fiction’s) serious purpose is in its warning, then the more grimly inexorable the fictive world becomes, so the less effective it will be as a call to resistance.”<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Snow, C.P. Cambridge lectures reprinted in *New Statesman* 6<sup>th</sup> October, 1956, *The Two Cultures* (quoted here from *The Writer in the Modern World*, edited by Heseltine and Tick, Melbourne: F.W. Cheshire, 1962. P.122

<sup>33</sup> Snow, C.P. Cambridge lectures reprinted in *New Statesman* 6<sup>th</sup> October, 1956, *The Two Cultures* (quoted here from *The Writer in the Modern World*, edited by Heseltine and Tick, Melbourne: F.W. Cheshire, 1962. P.126

<sup>34</sup> Milner, Andrew. *Framing Catastrophe*, from *Imagining the Future. Utopia and Dystopia*. Edited by Andrew Milner, Mathew Ryan and Robert Savage. Arena Journal New Series, No, 25/26, 2006. Melbourne: Arena Printing and Publishing Pty Ltd p.354.

<sup>35</sup> Orwell, George. *The Collected Essays, Journalism and Letters of George Orwell Volume 4 (“In Front of Your Nose”)*, 1945–1950 Harmondsworth: Penguin p. 546. First published in *Life* magazine, 1949

<sup>36</sup> Jameson, F. *Archaeologies of the Future: the Desire Called Utopia and Other Science Fictions*, London: Verso, 2005. p.198

More optimistically, Dr Eric Horvitz suggested in what was no doubt intended to be a heartening article in *New Scientist* that,

“In 50 years’ time lives will significantly enhanced by automated reasoning systems that people will perceive as ‘intelligent’. Although many of them will be deployed behind the scenes, others will be in the foreground, serving in an elegant, often collaborative manner ...”<sup>37</sup>

In lectures and science fiction novels, the computer scientist, Vernor Vinge, went further in popularizing the notion of a moment when humans will create machines so much smarter than humans that their creators will be overwhelmed. He called this happy event Singularity, and more or less reiterated the point in a later paper when he said, “Within thirty years, we will have the technological means to create superhuman intelligence. Shortly after, the human era will be ended.”<sup>38</sup>

Another scientific prodigy, Ray Kurzweil, who finds his own version of a utopian future just as congenial, claimed that by 2029 machines will possessed of an intelligence, self-awareness and emotional richness that will blur the line between man and machines. To me there is something naïve in his belief of the possibility of a mutual respect developing between sentient life forms, and Daniel Lyons in an article in *Newsweek*, quotes biologist Z.P. Myers as saying, “Kurzweil’s singularity theories are closer to a deluded religious movement than they are to science. It’s New Age spiritualism, that’s all it is. Even geeks want to find God somewhere and Kurzweil provides it for them.”<sup>39</sup>

So perhaps geeks *will* inherit the earth. Curiously, the weaknesses of some of the arguments and predictions of people like Kurzweil – he has got some things spectacularly wrong, most notably that the U.S. economic boom would continue unabated from 1998 to 2019 – probably lie in the fact that they *are* imaginative and, having strayed from the normal paths of scientific discipline, left themselves vulnerable to flights of fancy, but I wonder if their marginalisation is due in part to the fact that they dealing with concepts that have already left non-scientific minds behind.

On the other hand the general optimism of them and bona fide liberal philosophers may really only provide answers for those living in the here and now anyway; for audiences that are, if not superficial, then less gloomily disposed than the one most writers provide.

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<sup>37</sup> Horvitz, Eric. *Eric Horvitz Forecasts the Future*. *New Scientist*, 18<sup>th</sup> November, 2006. Net source

<sup>38</sup> Vinge, Vernor., *The Coming Technological Singularity: How to Survive in the Post Human Era*, delivered at the Vision-21 symposium sponsored by the NASA Lewis Research Centre, March 30-31, 1993. Net source.

<sup>39</sup> Lyons, Daniel. *I, Robot*. *Newsweek*. 24-7-09. Net source.

Otherwise utopian thought – except perhaps for its Green, as in environmentally protective, disciples – seems almost irrelevant today. The situation could change. Two years ago when I began researching this subject, those institutions of the capitalist creed, world stock markets, were shaken badly. They may still be under threat in what former French Prime Minister, Alain Juppe, described as an “...existential crisis for Europe that raises the spectre of a return to violent conflict on our continent.”<sup>40</sup> This was and is a challenge on the most prosaic and inclusive level – far outweighing environmentalist’s detections of our system’s shortcomings, even though they would probably claim that a dereliction of society’s duty of care was at least partly to blame for the world’s stock market shudders. (It would amount to contemporary secular heresy, to suggest that at least some of the passion being invested into the threat of global warming at the moment is millennially or apocalyptically based. Yet the symptoms of the doom laden discourse surrounding it are familiar; when proselytisers like Tim Flannery start referring to the earth in anthropomorphic terms – “I think that, within this century, the concept of *Gaia* will become physically manifest”<sup>41</sup> – I begin to feel very uneasy.)

### **An Awfully Big Adventure**

Northrop Fry suggests that there are three or four kinds of utopian states – one, sentimental and fleeting – based on childhood memory; the Arcadian or paradisaal, which puts emphasis on the integration of man with his physical environment; the City, which expresses human ascendancy over nature, and the ‘Land of Cockaigne, the fairyland, where all desires can be gratified.’<sup>42</sup>

I am particularly interested in the paradisaal and the “sentimental and fleeting”.

In her biography of J.M. Barrie<sup>43</sup> Lisa Chaney mentions a play, *The Never Never Land*, by the playwright Wilson Barret which was produced in 1902. “It would be entirely appropriate if this had inspired Barrie’s name, when the Australian one derives from a people who gave the repository of their understanding of themselves the name of the Dream Time.”<sup>44</sup> It brings to mind all those instances of fantastic Utopias: “*L’isola che non c’è*” (the island that doesn’t exist, in the Italian translation of Never-Never land) or, in South America alone, “the place with no fear” of the Guarani, the myths of Viking shipwrecks in landlocked Paraguay, the Ybtyrutzu Range on the road to Villarica,

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<sup>40</sup> Groves, Jason. London Mail Online 1-12-2011.

<sup>41</sup> Blair, Tim. The Telegraph, Sydney, January 3, 2011, Net.

<sup>42</sup> Northrop Fry *Varieties of Literary Utopias* from *The Stubborn Structure: Essays on Criticism and Society*, Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1980, first published 1970, p.126

<sup>43</sup> Chaney, Lisa. *Hide and Seek with Angels, A Life of J.M. Barrie*, New York: St Martin’s Press, 2005, p. 226

<sup>44</sup> Ibid



said to hide buried treasure and mysterious clans of white men with tails...The list of usually benevolent super-visitors and their legacies is endless.

However Chaney suggests that there is a particular if still timeless reference in Barrie's Utopia to a changing world:

'By 1904 Britain had become an industrial society whose underlying doctrine – in practices and beliefs – was that empirical science was the only valid way of thinking. Other modes of “knowing” and being were by now frowned upon. They were either, like myth, often seen at best as primitive, at worst false; or, like play, merely trivial and to be outgrown and discarded as soon as possible...’<sup>45</sup>

Barrie, she says:

“...is driven to create the glorious immortal Boy...the personification of abandonment, of play and of childhood. To achieve this he lives in the Never Land, an alternative to the real world, where growing up never happens and where the glorious imagination is ever alive...”<sup>46</sup>

I do not mean to denigrate the store of children's fiction in Australia but I have often wondered whether it has found room for the fantastic or fabulous. I was brought up among books like *Coral Island*<sup>47</sup>, without ever appreciating that the action surrounding it and the myth-like figures of Gaugin and Robert Louis Stevenson, emanated from Australia's back yard, in a sense. The off-shore romance captured in adult tales from Olaf Ruhen's *South Pacific Adventure*<sup>48</sup>, has never been appropriated by the mainland either, I believe. As close as it has got has been in the past and more recent gothic horrors of Tasmania which, along with Norfolk Island, Pitcairn and the Abrolhos Islands, could be seen as outposts of Australia proper. Otherwise, the legacy of piracy, mutiny, shipwrecks, even the paradisaical flavour of white planter-cum-missionary settlements on coconut fringed atolls, has never really become part of the Australian ethos; like tropical depressions their impact has almost always been absorbed and diffused on impact with the coast. (New Zealand, it should be noted, being considered neither on nor off-shore, doesn't appear to count.) Perhaps we are living on an island too large; or, in the end, an island not large enough.

Flight is a specific ingredient of many people's dreams, including my own. Not, I hope, in the self-defeating sense of J.M. Barrie, who was fascinated by his escapism that he could unflinchingly

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<sup>45</sup> Chaney, p.239

<sup>46</sup> Chaney, pp 237-8

<sup>47</sup> Ballantyne, R.M. *Coral Island*, London: T. Nelson & Sons, 1858

<sup>48</sup> Ruhen, Olaf. *South Pacific Adventure*, Melbourne: Sun Books, 1966

dissect but not change, but in a self-affirming way whose reality sometimes retreats and sometimes seems close to being confirmed.

I have tried to write something which is in some ways a fable, the sort of narrative at which the writers I most enjoy excel. I do not believe I would include any or many Australian writers in the company of the Narayans, the Joyce Careys, Evelyn Waugh or Flann O'Briens, whom I suspect were often as surprised as their readers by the turn their fiction took. I wonder whether one of the reasons behind the success of a *Diary of a Nobody*<sup>49</sup> was because an alternating input from the Grossmith brothers kept each other on their toes. I believe that one of the ultimate favours fictional writers can pay readers is to keep them looking forward – even if it is apprehensively – to what happens next.

Donald W. Goodwin concedes in *Alcohol and the Writer* that "its (alcohol's) toxic effect on the brain can restore the sense of wonder that children experience,"<sup>50</sup> but that is in chapter otherwise devoted to *Notes on an Epidemic*. I would include my main character in *Landfall*, Harry Gardener, a wordsmith at worst, among those creative spirits whose motors kept humming along without the need of stimulants to sustain them. But if, like Barrie, he did not suffer from what Goodwin described as the epidemic disease of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, I would award possession to both of alcoholism's often inseparable corollary, loneliness. While Barrie's method of both analysing and retreating from his inner conflicts are not mirrored in Gardener, I am interested in general in the way isolated people protect themselves against self-knowledge and despair by constructing a world in which for most of the time they can pretend they are self-sufficient. To me it seems futile, if, in its own way, brave. Yet people practise the self-deception denying it, while going to almost any lengths sometimes to hold onto relationships – usually marriages – in which none of their needs are met, except the denial of their greatest fear: that of being alone. I see Gardener living on a frontier, constructing defences not only against a physical outside world but an emotional one from which he has been cut off and stranded, first by his enforced separation from his lover Hattie in Paraguay, and then by the death of his son and his wife. I see him dedicating himself to work, to local welfare, to his garden, while his attitudes harden, he becomes less tolerant, more neurotic under the burden of his frustrations, until, or unless he is saved by a new emotional involvement, or the restoration of an old one; by confronting the desert at Nygar's doorstep, or by taking ultimate flight from it. Flight is what Barrie clung to. It may be the ultimate utopian solution for Harry Gardener too.

In a faithless age the persistence of invention and creation can seem as strange and wonderful, or futile, as stamp collecting or a devotion to good works or making money. I agree with at least one of Donald Goodwin's assertions when he argues that, "both writing and drinking bear

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<sup>49</sup> Grossmith, G. and Grossmith W. *Diary of a Nobody*. London: J. W. Arrowsmith, Ltd. 1892

<sup>50</sup> Goodwin, Donald, W. *Alcohol and the Writer*. Michigan: Andrews & McNeel, 1988. P.187

certain similarities to trance states.”<sup>51</sup> Certainly the trance like states of composition are what writers live for, I believe, guard jealously and, if they have any sense, recognise as privileged. In that sense and in those moments writers can be freed from the temporal, and the cynicism of their or any other age be kept from their door.

While my novel accompanying this exegesis is not meant to be true to history, I share with Australia’s Barry Humphries and Hal Porter their anguish for things past, and this has been part of my attraction for the period in which my novel is set. Porter could at times be quite unpleasant (and most definitely politically incorrect) but no one has written as beautifully as he of that ideal blend of European and natural landscape, Gippsland, which he recalls from his childhood:

“From waking to sleeping, from January to December, it is impossible for me not to be aware of fecundity: the grass thicker than wool and gorged with globules of dew or matted with frost; the late twilight air flowing in currents of moths and Christmas beetles and cockchafers as we play on The Common under a sky closely gravelled with planets and stars; the footpaths and paddocks glaring yellow with cape-weed through which we paddle until boots or bare feet are mustard-coloured with pollen; the birds gibbering and squealing and squeaking a million-fold in every elm in every street at sunrise and sunset, and, late at night, when one is in bed, and the candle blown out, the crowing of roosters from every direction, from near, from nearly near, from over the hills and far far away, cry answering cry repeatedly in sounds so threadlike, so distant, so weary, as to be almost the cry of silence itself.”<sup>52</sup>

How beautiful his faithlessness was.

The Doctor is ‘never marketed outright as a messianic figure, but it’s all there: the “the lonely god”, more of an idea than a man, who resurrects himself in a crucifix position; who has, literally, defeated the devil, resisted temptation and forgiven his greatest enemy...’

Moreover, this God ‘needs us just as much as we need him. We make him better, keep his power in check and continue to astound him with our capacity for curiosity and kindness. It’s a

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid, p.193

<sup>52</sup> Porter, Hal. *Watcher from a Cast Iron Balcony*. London: Faber & Faber, 1962, p.63

symbiotic relationship – one that we can see, understand and relate to more than a faceless, questionable deity.’

He also points out that popular culture, from *Aslan* to *Robocop*, has always dabbled in religious allegory. I suppose the wizards and magicians of Enid Blyton have a quasi-mystic status, too; while the *Terminator* films are not only almost Biblically moral but feature a self-sacrificing, Salvationist figure.

p.180 Jean Baudrillard’s *Simulations*, 1983 Baudrillard suggested that humankind should surrender to the triumphal world of objects, reflecting the view of a generation of films from *Blade Runner* to the *Terminator* series and *Universal Soldier*, in which human subjects and subjectivity are involved in a (mostly) losing war with invasive postmodern technologies.

(The growth of interest in the paranormal in the 70s – was that a reflection of the time, a complacent if not overfed society searching for some meaning – following on from the failure of militant, subversion of the 60s, accompanying the counter culture but not necessarily mirroring it – Close Encounters of the *Third Kind*, *ET*, *Starman* et al), were aimed at much wider – as in middle class – audiences but had a strongly spiritual basis, even if it all looks rather wistful now...While sci-fi films of the 50s often portrayed intergalactic travellers as sinister – as in communist, apparently – invaders, using the outward habiliments of human form to disguise their true selves and motives; for a brief period we invested these peripatetic spacemen with near divine status. (Did that mirror the easing of East-West tensions? implying a tacit confession that there had been and still were naughty boys on both sides who might not be beyond reformation by the intervention of a salutary paternal hand?) Was the fading of interest in that field just due to fashion, or to the fact that many of the paranormal practitioners were shown to be frauds? And that thirty years later we are still waiting to hear from out there...Are we more cynical now? Is it because, the security of those times having been largely lost, people’s interests have turned to more bread and butter issues? Maybe not, since they have been replaced in popular culture with the massive investments in Tolkien’s subterranean world, the Harry Potter movies and other big budget films. I suppose you could say people have now set their sights on internalised – literally in Tolkien’s case – fantasy. The Terminator films of Schwarzenegger’s have of course been apocalyptic, set in fields in which those from the future have been able to move freely if perilously through time. Is that because the concept of time travel is one area of the paranormal that has not been debunked by science; that we are still teasingly fed hints from legitimate practitioners that that door to speculation has not been entirely shut.

Writing in *The Guardian*, the journalist, Stephen Kelly, light heartedly suggested that *Doctor Who*, while no messiah, is, in the absence of an interventionist God, a figure who brings salvation wherever he goes, transforming the lives of whoever he meets through kindness and sacrifice, and an example of a hero of popular culture becoming a modern figure of worship. (Sunday 24 December, 2011.)

Mention Koestler’s book on paranormal.

In his memoir, written for radio, *Reminiscences of Childhood*, Dylan Thomas recalls the lane outside his first dame-school:

‘(It) was a place to tell your secrets; if you did not have any, you invented them; I had few. Occasionally, now, I dream that I am turning, after school, into the lane of confidences where I say to the children of my class: “At last I have a secret.”

“What is it? What is it?”

“I can fly!” And when they do not believe me, I flap my arms like a large, stout bird and slowly leave the ground, only a few inches at first, then gaining air until I fly, like Dracula in a schoolboy cap, level with the school, peering in until the mistress at the piano screams, and the metronome falls with a clout to the ground, stops, and there is no more Time....’

*A Reader's Guide to Contemporary Literary Theory, Third Edition.* Raman Selden and Peter Widdowson. Hertfordshire: Harvester, Wheatsheaf, 1993.

Baudrillard suggested that humankind should surrender to the triumphal world of objects, reflecting the view of a generation of films from *Blade Runner* to the *Terminator* series and *Universal Soldier*, in which human subjects and subjectivity are involved in a (mostly) losing war with invasive postmodern technologies.

Canon: a general rule or standard, as of judgment, morals, etc

p. 180 cont. 'His most provocative recent proposal has been that the Gulf War was not a real but a television war, a media event or spectacle.

p.181 'This view was attacked for its irresponsible sophistry by Christopher Norris, one of Baudrillard's most serious critics.'

Of course that's how the American administration wanted the Gulf War and the later invasion of Iraq to be – events tethered to, and liberated by, their media presentation: essentially bloodless epiphanies of Shock and Awesomeness – on which, unfortunately, reality intruded. Baudrillard made the classic mistake of theorists in pursuing an elegant and witty idea to an ultimately absurd conclusion; performing, by the constrictions imposed on his subject, a betrayal of one of postmodernism's tenets. Ultimately, all dogmas seem to echo the insistence of small stubborn children in trying to hammer rectangular objects into round holes as proof of their spatial awareness.

p.22 'For the rest, the Utopia of abundance and absolute leisure is an ancient one: the famous *pays de Cockayne* indeed reflects a peasant ideology in the combination of hunger and back-breaking toil it fantasizes away. In our time, in societies of high productivity, it also encourage fantasises of enclave life, as in the 1960s American counterculture, in which a bare minimum is necessary to survive and lead different kind of Utopian life within standard American capitalist affluence. These Utopias are, to be sure, explicitly or implicitly collective in their nature: the mediaeval ones obviously taking the village and the older collectivities for granted, while contemporary versions presuppose a kind of secret underground network within the official state, so many clandestine communities of a hidden Utopian nature flourishing beyond the latter's reach and invisible to the latter's organs of surveillance...'

How would we deal with Occupation while we're on the subject? Has France recovered from it?

The question could hardly be put to Australia's indigenous people, since most of them are not in a position to make a comparison between life before and after white occupation, even if many of the descendants of the originally vanquished still appear to be living in a state of bewilderment, 200 years later. Unfortunately most of their (mostly) urban spokespeople, when they talk of things lost, are dealing in the same sort of sentimental currency as Westerners who hunger for Paradises mislaid.

"Some of them are part of the political-correctness-gone-mad crowd, for whom even the most grievous insult is just a laugh..." Tory Shepherd, *The Advertiser*, Friday, August 16, 2013.

Pp 67,68. " 'Would you like to come and see my garden?' It was a wonderful garden. It bloomed with custard apples, hibiscus, wild tulips, and bananas, and the incredibly sweet scent of Persian lilac hung in the air. There was a big native drum on the veranda, its skin of waterbuck hide worn bare with beating, and all around us tumultuous mountains spread away. But it was not enough to beguile loneliness, to keep the cafard\* at bay."

\*depression

“As he handed back my passport, the customs man said, ‘I see you were born in Australia. That must be a wonderful country.’

“‘Parts of it,’ I said, ‘are quite like Africa in many ways.’

“He looked at me in dismay.

“This is a recurring theme all through this part of the continent: this besetting loneliness in the midst of plenty.”

p. 69. “In many ways the Belgians in the Congo have made rather a better effort in meeting this problem than the British. Where Africa has pressed too heavily upon them they have resolutely shut it out, or rather they have taken hold of it and forced it to their own designs...living in fact as closely as they can to the life they left behind them in Belgium.”

Alan Moorehead. *No Room in the Ark*. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1963, first published 1959.

The last few lines of Stowe’s poem *Landfall*, have a hint of youthful bravado in their claim to the writer’s independence, but true Utopias would include the ideal of the sufficiency of self. Whereas many actual utopias betray the need for human company in people, even if that company eventually proves stifling. (Who may have had Dickens among them: his description in one of those moments when he was not burdened with sentimentality or tiredness – perhaps because it was framed by a coach window, and recalled the physically invigorating journeys he so enjoyed – best captures, at least to me, what must have been the close proximity of wealth and poverty in 19<sup>th</sup> Century London):

“They rattled on through the noisy, bustling, crowded streets of London, now displaying long double rows of brightly-burning lamps, dotted here and there with the chemists’ glaring lights, and illuminated besides with the brilliant flood that burst from the shops, where sparkling jewellery, silks and velvets of the richest colours, the most inviting delicacies succeeded each other...Streams of people apparently without end poured on and on, jostling each other in the crowd and hurrying forward, scarcely seeming to notice the riches that surrounded them on every side...”<sup>53</sup>

Dickens was no revolutionary, however, as Orwell insisted, except in so far as he was in revolt against authority. His attacks on society were moral, “always pointing to a change of spirit rather than a change of structure”.<sup>54</sup> However much he admired the working classes, he really didn’t wish to admit them to too close an acquaintance.

Today people have less say in that matter. The wealthy – and one can hardly use the term ‘well-bred’ anymore – are dependent on ostentation, and nothing more, to qualify for entry to the Members Enclosure. There even appears to be a connection between those ultimate garnishers of riches, industry captains, and political leaders – since they share the qualities of ambition and self-

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<sup>53</sup> Dickens, Charles. *Nicholas Nickleby*, London: Pan Books, 1968, first published 1839, p. 383.

<sup>54</sup> Orwell, George. *Charles Dickens*, from *Collected Essays*, London: Secker and Warburg, 1961, p.47

centredness and a fundamental indifference to the needs of others. Less well known are studies like the one conducted by Clive Boddy, who found that successful businessmen also have a lot in common with psychopaths, in that they “tend to be manipulative, arrogant, impatient, impulsive and charming and have no conscience.”<sup>55</sup> Sometimes, those qualities sound almost enviable; the very low price tyrants place on others’ lives could be taken as evidence of the high value they set on their own; certainly charisma has historically often been enough to satisfy the need in people to lump their uncertainties in some messianic figure’s lap in an expression of trust which tyrants and con merchants have unfailingly tapped into. Almost everyone – sociopaths excepted, and not surprisingly, since they sometimes attribute a Christ like status to themselves – seems to want to be part of something.

Otherwise – and this is prejudiced, I know – the success or impact of charismatic leaders among utopian seekers in Australia, seems to have been muted. Peter Cock, recalls a meeting with one individual, Howard, “... (who) had been attempting to establish alternative communities for several years, firstly as a leading light behind an attempt to establish a Fred Robinson community in Victoria...” (Fred Robinson was a leader of the Universal Brotherhood in the 60s and 70s, who believed in the divine trinity of God, organic vegetables, and the imminent arrival of our ‘elder brothers’ from outer space.) “Howard then went to Mullumbimby and proclaimed the day of doom. When it did not come at the allotted time he and a few of his followers left, disillusioned...”<sup>56</sup> (Not unnaturally, one would suggest.)

. I am interested in the way isolated people protect themselves against self-knowledge and despair by constructing a world in which for most of the time they can pretend they are self sufficient. I see Gardener constructing defences against not only against a physical outside world but an emotional one from which he has been cut off and stranded.

One of the enduring legacies of kill-joy influence of the church in Australia may lie in its buildings being reserved for the uneasy and infrequent attendance of congregations, largely on occasions of births, marriages and funerals (‘hatches, matches and dispatches’) while more recently and much more disturbingly, the accusations of sexual predation made against mostly Catholic agents of the church, have wounded, and will probably continue to wound it

Stow, despite the often unflattering mirror he holds up to white Australia in *Tourmaline* and *To the Islands* was no formulaic apologist for colonial settlement. ‘Ruins of the City of Hay’ (p. 35) is a beautiful poem which has at its heart, both a recognition of the ephemerality of the human imprint on the Australian landscape, and a poignant commemoration of it.

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<sup>55</sup> Boddy, Clive, R, *The Implications of Corporate Psychopaths for Business And Society: An Initial Examination and A Call To Arms* [CHBoddy@tinyonline.co.uk](mailto:CHBoddy@tinyonline.co.uk) Middlesex University Business School. Net.

<sup>56</sup> Cock, Peter *Alternative Australia - Communities of the Future?* Melbourne: Quartet Books 1979, p.126 Print.

'The wind has scattered my city to the sheep.  
Capeweed and lovely lupins choke the street  
Where the wind wanders in great gaunt chimneys of hay  
And straws cry out like keyholes.

Our yellow Petra of the fields: alas!  
I walk the ruins of forum and capitol  
through quiet squares by the temples of tranquillity  
wisps of the metropolis brush my hair,  
I become invisible in tears.

This was no ratbags' Eden: these were true haystacks  
Golden, but functional....'

Quoting the possibly apocryphal but definitely Isolationist Chinese philosopher, he says:

Though the neighbour states (said Lao Tse) live in sight of the city  
And their cocks wake and their watchdogs warn the inhabitants  
The men of the city of hay will never go there  
All the days of their lives.

But the wind of the world descended on lovely Petra  
and the spires of the towers and the statues and belfries fell.

The bones of my brothers broke in the breaking columns.  
The bones of my sisters, clasping their broken children,  
Cracked on the hearthstones, under the rooftrees of hay.  
I alone mourn in the temples, by broken altars  
Bowered in black nightshade and mauve salvation jane.  
And the cocks of the neighbour nations scratch in the straw.  
And the dogs rejoice in the bones of my brethren.

He mourns the passing of settlement and cultivation and finds poignancy in, 'the capeweed and lovely lupins,' even the 'black nightshade and mauve salvation jane' of a doomed settlement, the detritus of a state overwhelmed by the landscape it briefly delineated.

P. 52 The Singing Bones "Out where the dead men lie." Barcroft Boak  
My country's heart is ash in the market-place,  
is aftermath of martyrdom. Out there  
its sand-enshrined lay saints lie piece by piece,  
Leichardt by Gibson, stealing the wind's voice,  
and Lawson's tramps, by choice made mummia and air.

No pilgrims leave, no holy-days are kept



for these who died of landscape. Who can find,  
even, the camp-sites where the saints last slept?  
Out there their place is, where the charts are gapped,  
unreachable, unmapped, and mainly in the mind.

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noted that "...many people need a highly structured environment to survive and change."<sup>57</sup>

Even if

Patrick O'Farrell, in his essay *The Cultural Ambivalence of Australian Religion*, suggests that, "In contrast with Europe and America, the perceived image of religion has been very negative: wowserish, divisive, reactionary..."<sup>58</sup>

Part of the church's image problem here, he believes, has had to do with the kind and quality of clergyman that were exported to Australia, in much the same way that not only convicts, but the failures in good families were exiled.

"Australia attracted many of Britain's clerical failures, the fools, the second rate, the well-meaning incompetents"<sup>59</sup> (of the kind that innocently bedevilled the Rudd family in 'On Our

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<sup>57</sup> Cock, Peter. *Alternative Australia - Communities of the Future?* Melbourne: Quartet Books, 1979, p.130. Print.

<sup>58</sup> Patrick O'Farrell, *The Cultural Ambivalence of Australian Religion*, from *Australian Cultural History*, eds Samuel Louis Goldberg, Francis Barrymore Smith, CUP Archive, 1988. P.8

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid*, p.8

*Selection*<sup>60</sup>). He also refers to “the crucial element of climate... the religion imported into Australia was derived from the damp and gloomy British Isles. This was expressed in similarly derivative architecture...[while] particularly in the Australian Outback clerical black and other formalities of religious garb seemed formal and impractical to the point of being ridiculous.”<sup>61</sup>

As a kind of trade-off, O’Farrell and Russel Ward both suggest that in religion’s absence its substitutes – mateship, unionism and egalitarianism – made the Australian working class particularly amenable to socially progressive and largely secular movements such as Chartism, unionism, feminism, women’s suffrage, nationalism, socialism and communism in the nineteenth century. While at the other end of the social scale, despite Australia’s isolation, migrants and visitors kept the educated classes up to date with European Enlightenment.

The fact that the popularity of the movement was often healthiest when headed by charismatic religious visitors, suggests that times of uncritical immersion in the movement may have depended in part on its evangelical health, I know, but this is at odds with the results of referenda in the 1920s and 30s, when one in three, presumably clear headed voters, supported the prohibition of alcohol in their States. Otherwise, many women would have been attracted to the movement by the chance that it gave them to be represented (until groups like the WCTU appeared on the scene it was unknown for women to address crowds, for example) as well as having a crack at men. Perhaps the social advances being made outside the movement – despite the historical resistance of the status quo – made some Temperance members eventually feel that they might have overinvested in its cause.

**“We thought to find the Happy Land,  
A blissful land all fair and free,  
On that far-off delightful strand  
Where blooms the golden-fruited tree.  
But late we found, alack! alack!  
The Golden Age comes no more back.”<sup>62</sup>**

Where life is finite but apparently predictable, calamity often appeals, especially, but not necessarily only, to some religious or social groups. Behind their apparently philosophical attitudes lurks their expectation that for them at least the event might still be vicariously enjoyed. Curiously, the pleasurable anticipation with which contemporary charismatic Christian sects await Rapture and

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<sup>60</sup>

<sup>61</sup> Patrick O’Farrell, *The Cultural Ambivalence of Australian Religion*, from *Australian Cultural History*, eds Samuel Louis Goldberg, Francis Barrymore Smith, CUP Archive, 1988. Pp. 8-9

<sup>62</sup> Harry Taylor. ‘To a Disappointed Communist.’

their ascension to the next world, for example, does not seem to discourage them from storing up treasure in this one.

Interviewed by George Plimpton *Paris Review* Issue 18 (Spring 1958); later published in *Writers at Work, Second Series* (1963)

- **You can write any time people will leave you alone and not interrupt you.** Or rather you can if you will be ruthless enough about it. **But the best writing is certainly when you are in love.**
- **I might say that what amateurs call a style is usually only the unavoidable awkwardnesses in first trying to make something that has not heretofore been made.**
- **From things that have happened and from things as they exist and from all things that you know and all those you cannot know, you make something through your invention that is not a representation but a whole new thing truer than anything true and alive, and you make it alive, and if you make it well enough, you give it immortality.** That is why you write and for no other reason that you know of. But what about all the reasons that no one knows?
- **The most essential gift for a good writer is a built-in, shock-proof, shit detector. This is the writer's radar and all great writers have had it.**

; to me his behaviour summed up everything that was self-infatuated and intellectually bogus in the 60s counter-culture.

but there is something about the windy insatiability of Mr Ginsberg and one of his heroes – Whitman – that always made me feel as if I was taking on all 22 chapters of *Hiawatha* when I approached their work.

He is stranded on an island that makes promises it never keeps.

He is stranded on an island that makes promises it never keeps.

moved by this “strange and romantic episode.”<sup>63</sup>

passengers - among whom may have been a definitely non-revolutionary Dickens, who, when exhilarated by travel at least, was able to unflinchingly capture the inequities of a 19<sup>th</sup> Century London where “... the most inviting delicacies, and most sumptuous examples of glittering ornaments [were] guarded by one thin sheet of brittle glass.” (Dickens 1839:383)

P. 126 ‘Howard...had been attempting to establish alternative communities for several years, firstly as a leading light behind an attempt to establish a Fred Robinson community in Victoria...Howard then went to Mullumbimby and proclaimed the day of doom. When it did not come at the allotted time he and a few of his followers left, disillusioned with prophecy.’ (The guru, Fred Robinson, proclaimed that on 16<sup>th</sup> July, 1978, only the New Age people would be saved.)

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<sup>63</sup> Mark Twain, *In Australia and New Zealand*, Ringwood, Vic., Penguin Books, 1973 (first published 1897) p.99 in Australia had to do with the kind of clergyman that were exported to Australia,

Among other utopian-like settlements – some enduring as the Mennonites’, and some as nefariously short lived as *New Germany*, established in 1886 by Nietzsche’s sister and her husband – was that of Port Madryn in Argentine Patagonia , where a hundred and fifty three Welsh colonists landed off the brig *Mimosa* in 1865.

“They were poor people in search of a New Wales, refugees from cramped coal-mining valleys, from a failed independence movement, and from Parliament’s ban on Welsh in schools. Their leaders had combed the earth for a stretch of open country, uncontaminated by Englishmen ...they did not want to get rich.” (Chatwin 23)

From Bruce Chatwin’s narrative it seemed as if their ultimate wish at least was satisfied. Otherwise, the most common feature of that and other racially tangled communities – of Boers, Scots, Italians and Germans he visited – seems to be a depressing mix of poverty, homesickness, and apprehension. *In Patagonia* is a bleak book full of sad people clinging to a past represented by faded photos and wistful flower beds, among descendants whose only utopian dreams are of escapes to North America and who do not even speak their parents’ language. It made me never want to go there.

Curiously, long after the waves of colonial invaders and the enslavement they imported with them ceased, Paraguay was among those South American states which remained a dumping ground for Europeans: as late as the 1970s undesirables and dictators fallen from grace were smuggled in, prompting Pico Iyer to comment that Paraguay was like Madame Tussaud’s waxworks, “except all the figures are living”. (163)

There were so many other dissenters who sailed close, or too close, to the wind under the flag of Utopian dissent. Satire often proved the best cover for writers like Swift and Thomas More, even if More himself proved to be singularly deficient in humour in later years while he was fulfilling the office of Lord Chancellor.

Cock’s summary of the course most communes ultimately took is bleak: “Many groups began with high ideals, radical aspirations and expectations, a strong sense of community feeling and individual responsibility towards others in the group. However, as a result of their ‘heavy’ encounters, their naïve idealism, and failed relationships, members left to go elsewhere.” (63) Generally, around Christmas time, it seemed

wife swapping and foul language: (“At one Ranter meeting of which we have a (hostile) report, the mixed company met at a tavern, sang blasphemous songs to the well-known tunes of metrical psalms and partook of a communal feast. One of them tore off a piece of beef, saying 'This is the

flesh of Christ, take and eat.' Another threw a cup of ale into the chimney corner, saying 'There is the blood of Christ.'" (Vaneigem

The Guarani were Voltaire's inspiration for the 'noble savage'

The Guarani were Voltaire's inspiration for the 'noble savage'. The Jesuit missions in the 17th century were seen as models of socialist utopias where the Guarani proved adept in Western arts, such as religious ornamentation and music. Their artistic productions, known as the Hispanic Guarani Baroque, are arguably the first entry of the New World into Western art history. The missions dissolved with the expulsion of the Jesuits in 1767 and the Brazilian slave-traders descended on the abandoned missions. But the idealism gene continues to be part of Paraguay's mestizo DNA

The Guarani had their own pre-contact form of utopianism. They believed in *yvy marane'y* (land without evil), a place somewhere to the west where their ancestors can be found. Once a generation, a charismatic leader would rise up to lead tribes off to find this mythical place, usually with disastrous results.

The outside world has not been immune to this utopianism. Like moths to a flame, various nations have been drawn towards Paraguay. In the latter 19th century, Napoleon III established New Bordeaux for Basque migrants. Following this was Nueva Germania, established by Nietzsche's brother-in-law, whose proto-fascist sympathies paved the way for Nazi refugees in the 20th century. There were colonies for the Italians (Nueva Italia), Swedes (Colonia Esta), Moravians (Hutterite colony), Russian (Mennonites in the Chaco) and even Japanese (the Beehive). And, of course, there was William Lane's colony of Australian socialists established in 1893.

Most dreams ended in disappointment. As a result, Paraguay has been left with a legacy of utopian ruins, of which the Para-Australians are a particularly interesting contemporary manifestation.

Murray, Kevin. 'Why Paraguay? Australia in the Latin Mirror.' Art Monthly May 2009 Net n.pag. 29-6-14.

We visited the artist colony in Aregua, which featured a number of smaller gallery-shops including contemporary Guarani watercolourist Owa. You could find a beautiful quaint stone cottage there for \$5,000. It made me think that the Australian colonists weren't misguided about setting up a utopia in Paraguay, they just picked the wrong time and place.

The Guarani were not recognised as human beings until 1957.

Their current day spokesperson and benefactor is Rogerio Cadogan, son of one of the original Australian Paraguayans who spent a large part of his life studying their culture and supporting their cause.

'Battle of Acosta Nu' Murnane. From Landscape with Landscape. 823A M9771a.

'The Image of Tristan da Cunha, a small island off the West African coast, found in [Roy] Campbell's work and mulled over by Murnane registers...the entire idea of extraordinary islands, small or large, in the Southern Ocean.' 'Reading Gerald Murnane's 'A History of Books' Nicholas Birns. Academia. edu. p.8. 'Both men [however disparate their personalities] are men of the Southern Hemisphere,' Birns suggests, 'with powerful and strange echoes of the Northern in them

Dalkey Archive Press. High Holborn, London. Net source.Context no. 23, n.pag.

'Murnane postulates a remote counter Australia away from the known society of the coasts, a place that is a kind of diorama of his own imagination.' *The Plains* 1982.

Reading Gerald Murnane's 'A History of Books', Nicholas Birns.

In the *Shark Net* Robert Drewe describes The People of the Dunes, those inhabitants of that natural feature of the coastline which he says a large proportion of Perth's population occupied: 'Their brave toes gripping their verandas, the Sand People were forever squinting into the summer sun and wind, the winter rain and gales. (35-36) I'd follow their gaze out to sea and wonder what they were looking at. There was nothing out there.

(37) After a while I worked out why the Sand People were always staring over the cliffs and out to sea. They were trying to see Africa.

Drewe, Robert. *The Shark Net*. Penguin Books, Maroondah Highway: Penguin Books Australia Ltd, 2000. pp 35-37. Print.

because if I were to speak strictly of "utopia," discussion would be limited to Gerald Murnane's *The Plains* (1982), which is the closest Australian narrative to Thomas More's *Utopia* (1516).

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Vernay, Jean Francois, O.R.A.C.L.E Reunion, On line. N.pag, no date

Projection and Utopianism in Contemporary Australian Fiction: Towards an Explanation of the Paranoid Mind.

Vernay suggests that utopian fantasies of perfection, control and domination, contain the seeds of paranoia that lie at the heart of dystopian fiction.

'Drawn by the desire for perfection, utopian writers are bound to strive for controlling every little detail in the conception of these channelled and regulated societies which, once they have been tried out, might reveal themselves as sheer hells.'

'In keeping with the utopian genre, the ideal society that Gerald Murnane proposes in *The Plains* has not been discovered but created.'

This is an oversimplification, but in Rodney Hall's *The Last Love Story* the lives of the citizens in the seemingly utopian City South, are threatened by the forces of corruption from which a harsh regime in the dystopian City North has felt obliged to defend itself.

In Christopher Koch's *Out of Ireland*, the ethos of Van Dieman's Land, which has felt it imperative to preserve its image as a Paradisal World by denying the history of its convict system and the eclipse of its Aboriginal civilization, contains a lurking hostility which will eventually change the state into what Fry calls '...a world state assumed to be ideal [...] in terms of slavery, tyranny or anarchy...' (28) *Varieties of Literary Utopia*.

Kropotkin lived a precarious existence between his imprisonment in 1874 in Russia and eventual settlement in London in 1886. Etienne Cabet fled to England in 1834 after his



depiction of a Utopia in the *Voyage and Adventures of Lord William Carisdall* (1840) saw him charged with treason. Tolstoy, had he lived to see the Russian Revolution, might just have been tolerated by its totalitarian regime which rewarded so many of his followers with execution, but only perhaps after he had been reduced to the acceptably semi-comatose state in which Malcolm Muggeridge found Gorki in Moscow in the 1930s: ('He looked like some extraordinary old performing seal, scarcely aware of what was going on around him, or of who anyone was....') (236)

Earlier efforts of millennialists in the Middle Ages to seek joy and justice outside the established church, almost always led to their execution. There was something unequivocally heroic about Thommaso Campanella's *City of the Sun*, written in 1602 while he was serving what was meant to be a life term, and smuggled out—in itself an egregiously hazardous addition to the views that saw him incarcerated in the first place—while he was still in jail. On a more but not, as it turned out, purely secular level, when a group of Protestant English agrarian communists, the Diggers, attempting to farm some of the common land that was being eaten up by enclosures were driven off their plots in 1650, a physical clearing of the decks seemed sufficient to dispose of the hazard they represented, but as late as 1792 the publication of Thomas Paine's *The Age of Reason*, whose heresies now sound almost playful, saw him having to flee from England.

Few people in Western, secular society are now susceptible to the once indivisible political, social and theological tensions which (tormented society)saw the innocuous creed of Wesleyan Perfectionism, for example, exploited by John Humphrey Noyes, the founder of *Oneida*, who craftily adapted John Wesley's belief that Perfectionism was both an epiphanous *and* progressive work of grace, by declaring that since he had surrendered his will to God everything he did "came from a perfect heart"(Sandeem, 82); or Jeronimus Cornelisz, the psychopathic "Captain-General" of the castaways on the Houtman Abrolhos, who relied

on Anabaptism to declare himself "...incapable of sin, since his every action (including murder and rape) was inspired directly by God" (Titlestad 151).

### **Abstract**

The research for my novel, 'Landfall', has been in some ways intuitive. I do not know if that is normal, but in attempting to trace the story of Utopianism, and linking it with New Australia in Paraguay, with Australian history in general, and in particular with the cooperative basis on which my fictional town 'Mylong' was established, I unsurprisingly discovered hundreds of academic sources on the subject, and the same plethora of fictional, journalistic and popular history works. In the end, for good or bad, I have relied on my own judgment in deciding the fitness or relevance of works to my purpose.

In many ways my exegesis and thesis cross paths and echo each other. The history of the town in which my main character is portrayed belongs in part to myself as well; much of the exegesis is personal, in touching on my own history I trust it relates to the ethos of the town which I inherited, in a sense, from Harry Taylor, and from his alter ego, the fictional Harry Gardener.

The overall tone of my dissertation may suggest that I share, or shared, Gardener's sense of loss and dislocation, which the novel may reinforce. I do not think it serves any purpose apologising for it or trying to transfer the blame to others. Almost all of those who survive failed Utopias, even those of childhood, must carry a share of the responsibility for their disenchantment. In the end the vision of 'Landfall' is my own.

In my research I have tried to ask myself where the Australians' community in Paraguay sits within the tradition of utopian adventures, while at the same time trying to pin down an

elusive definition of that ideal state. Todd and Wheeler, for example, in response to their own question, "...what do utopias have in common?" suggest "Very little...except, perhaps, for an almost universal dislike of lawyers..." (7), and then go on to discouragingly propose that, since its founders are often faced with the contradictory demands of individuals' freedom weighed against their ideal organization "...utopia, curiously, is rarely a very pleasant place to live" (7).

Certainly, the Spartan model, with its rigorous controls over almost everything including sexual reproduction, and its condemnation of indulgence, seems uninviting now, despite, or because of, the fact that "...from Plato and More to Rousseau and Wells, it could justifiably be claimed that the story of utopia begins with the state of Sparta..." (Todd and Wheeler 21).

Other Utopian theorists have been those seeking a return to a Golden, mythical, back-to-nature-Age; those benevolently inclined, like Paine, Fourier and Spinoza, who hoped the sweet voice of reason would see society altered into some form agreeable to all; the equally benevolent but philanthropically entitled Owens, and cocoa-king Quakers of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> Centuries, who felt a sense of duty to supply both funds and leadership for change, and those—and here any of the totalitarian inclined philosophers could fill the description—who saw and see not only the necessity for, but the inevitability of, violence to achieve their aims.

It is hard to say who can take pride of place among the excesses of Hitler, Lenin, Stalin, Mao, Pol-Pot, or even those later-comers but no mean competitors in the field from former Yugoslavia; all examples, at least in their more durable form, of utopian experiments overseen by ultimate authoritarians who were wont to distil, dilute or distort the apocryphal Lao Tse's philosophy. His belief that 'the people' should live in a rudimentary state, eschewing the trappings of progress, the arts and the cultured life, was echoed by many

philosophers succeeding him; generally harmlessly, until the more deranged of modern messiahs found it appropriate for the dignity of labour to be asserted by millions of deaths.

I do not know how much of the blame can also be laid at the feet of Marx and Engels but I have always found something chilling in the off-handed way they appeared to dismiss milder propositions for social change with their insistence on the dialectic imperative of revolution.

I number them among, if exceptional examples of, those polemically charged idealists and anarchists, whom I imagine straining the capacities of the British Museum's Reading Room at one time as they stewed over their remedies for social injustice, before shedding their muddy boots and revolutionary zeal at home before a thrifty fire. Perhaps Marx, Engels and their ilk were among the homeward bound pedestrians whose nightly jousts with horse drawn carriages of the bourgeois infused them with a particular taste for revenge on the vehicles' cosseted passengers.

while Eugenics, last taken up as a workable philosophy by Hitler, seemed to demonstrate that it was possible to believe in the ultimate perfection of humanity based on scientific conceptions.

Some reformers' interests, stripped of their pretensions, like Coleridge's and Southey's plans to set up a Pantisocracy, seem to have had most in common with the turn-on-tune-in-and drop-out mantra of the 1960s. Others, like Fourier, whose radical philosophies contained enough fundamental punch to outweigh some of their more feather-like ingredients, seem to have invested utopian fantasies with qualities missing from their own lives.

Sexual desire was one of the things many utopian models, especially the Spartan ones, hoped to constrain, or at least show by example could be channelled from licence into the milder pleasures of monogamy. Yet Charles Fourier's views on sex in his model were liberal to the point of generosity. He had a scheme for succouring the unloved and jilted; he

defended homosexuality and was a supporter of women's rights. Some of his social and moral views, held to be radical in his day, have become main stream in current society. He may also have been a lonely man, one of those reformers who longed to bring a joy to their audiences which they themselves would only ever be able to vicariously enjoy.

In reading of Fourier's presumably celibate existence, of the demands placed on him to work as a door-to-door salesman before he retired to his room at night to construct works that were largely disregarded in his time, I am reminded of Mr Plant in Joyce Carey's *The Horse's Mouth*, the bachelor boot-maker, whose only pleasure in life came from attending meetings with other harmless anarchists, where they could espouse their vision of an imminent world of peace, love and joy. Carey's narrator, Gulley Jimson, describes the great air of satisfaction his friend and benefactor took at the end of one such evening, as he poured all the leftover drinks into one jug for his guest to enjoy, before removing his boots and lighting his pipe and brooding on Proudhon and Comte and Spinoza—prompting Jimson to cynically recall: “I once bit a man who didn't like Spinoza...I remember he was trying to grind out my guts with his knees...” (Carey 101).

Mr Plant's existence might have been echoed in Australia by at least one of the spruikers among the free-thought advocates: ‘Chummy’ Fleming’, himself a boot-maker, who agitated militantly on behalf of anarchy in the late 19th Century, before contenting himself with more gently pleading its cause in later years. Chummy seemed to have managed to make bad friends across a broad spectrum of politics; at different times he was thrown off platforms (and remounted them) dumped in the Yarra, donged over the head with an Irish band leader's trombone, and jailed. Debate in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20th Century in this country could be robust.

In 1879, after Marcus Clarke published an article in which he dismissed Christianity as moribund, he engaged Bishop James Moorhouse in a public debate: Clarke won the

argument, but he was ostracised by the Establishment forthwith and died in poverty not long after.

In fact, despite the presence of a chaplain, there wasn't even a divine blessing given when the First Fleet landed. Indeed, Stevenson quotes the First Fleet chaplain, the Reverend Johnson, as complaining bitterly that he was "...left to stand under the shade of a tree, and made to feel that neither God nor I was wanted at the foundation of the new nation" (Stevenson 11). The first church had to wait until 1793 to be erected and the Church's first representative was never overwhelmed with Governor Phillip's support.

For those and other, no doubt grimmer and more cynical, reasons, Russel Ward described the Outback as a place where "Men were born, and lived, without entering a church, or hearing a sermon or prayer" (93).

I find it hard to be as charitable to their successors, whose agelessly ambulant vehicles may still be seen abroad, even if they look less like living relics than ghosts of Kombi-vans past.

Predictably, women had no real say in whether their husbands took them off to Paraguay, but one of the more palatable of its features for many of them was apparently its promise of temperance.

. During the subsequent Victorian era many were seeking to fill the gaps left in society by Darwin's theories. Herbert Spencer's views—and all ten volumes of his *A System of Synthetic Philosophy* graced Harry Taylor's bookshelves at one time—had at their heart a notion of a governed and somehow benevolent Universe, allowing those who might reject an anthropomorphic conception of Deity to retain that conception at a subconscious level.

which might hint at an element of vindictiveness in its later shows of strength.

Some of Cock's accounts are unintentionally comical. In one communal household he visited, after listening to a householder—Sue's—complaints of the drudgery she was stuck

with, he learned that "...she was living with Brian, whose passions were Japanese poetry and illustrating on rice paper" (132).

*Oneida*, an exception to generally non secular utopian settlements in North America of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, is perhaps best known for its efforts to break down monogamous marriage, which its imposing leader, John Humphrey Noyes saw as a religious as well as a social tyranny. So far so good, it seems fair to say, but while Noyes could also plausibly argue that "...variety is the nature of things, as beautiful in love as in eating and drinking..." (Martin 14), this ardent Perfectionist seemed to have enjoyed more than his fair share of sexual partners, and fathered a disproportionate number of the colony's children on those occasions when the masculine dictum of *coitus reservatus* was waived on his behalf.

Part of the reason being, O'Farrell suggests, that it "attracted many of Britain's clerical failures, the fools, the second rate, the well-meaning incompetents..." (8), (of the kind that innocently bedevilled the Rudd family in *On Our Selection*), in much the same way as not only convicts, but the failures in good families were exiled.

In religion's absence its substitutes – mateship, unionism and egalitarianism – may have made the Australian working class amenable to socially progressive and largely secular movements, but if "...mateship as a grassroots moral philosophy sprang from a godless people in a godless environment..." (Stevenson 13) it makes the Church's subsequent influence on Australian life seem anomalous.

The first alternative communities of Australia's city fringes: *Montsalvat* in Eltham, Victoria, in the 1930s, and *Dunmoochin* (a title that hardly inspires confidence) in the 1950s in nearby Cottlesbridge, were more artist refuges and weekend retreats than serious settlements.

Earlier, in the 1920s the Lindsays, a young Kenneth Slessor and Hugh McCrea envisaged a rebirth of the Golden Age on Sydney's North Shore. Yet, while he remained a

champion of Australia's claims to be the site of a *New Atlantis*, in Norman Lindsay's subsequent retreat to Springwood he showed less and less signs of wanting to share his 'Olympus' on a permanent basis with anyone.

while ostensibly antipathetic to the Establishment's code, seemed to have often taken traditional domestic Hierarchies with them.

It sounds like pure *Bludgermindee*, the spiritual haven of one of Barry Humphries' early creations, Neil Singleton, whose laudatory list of its activities: "Abolition of money. Viability of faith healing and acupuncture...Access to tools and venereal disease..." (Humphries 155) almost fails to qualify as parody.

Unfortunately, one of the problems of those who attempt to swim against political tides is that their voices, if only because of popular opposition to them, tend to become strident as their owners are driven into increasingly defensive positions. Left-wing firebrands, on the other hand, of the sort that the labour movement fed on in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries in Australia, have historically very often bought out with imperial honours and sinecures, or left to decline into the sad state of poor 'Chummy' Fleming, who, so his biographer recalls,

...took a stand, wet or fine, every Sunday on the banks of the Yarra until his death in 1950, before summoning his few cronies with a cow-bell. Draped on the branches of the tree above were two faded red flags with 'Anarchy' and 'Freedom' worked on white. The little man with his trousers rolled at the cuffs would preach in a quavering voice at the inequities of religion and government. With his milky eyes fixed beyond his listeners he would tell of the coming reign of earthly happiness and brotherly love... (James17-18).



: “A new wave of pioneers are spreading up the north-east coast of Australia, some settling where only aboriginals and hermits have previously dared, others following the hardship trail of Australia’s first settlers...” (Byrne n.pag.).

**Perhaps the best hope of reviving the Christian religion would be to convince the Pope, the Archbishop of Canterbury and other dignitaries that the world will shortly be coming to an end. A difficult undertaking, I fear, notwithstanding much evidence pointing that way**

, or an expression of discontent from someone “...who praises some ideal foreign country and talks endlessly of settling there but only to excuse himself from being an active citizen of his own...” (Murnane 91).

Sometimes I think the status which intellectuals enjoy ascribing to their fellow, but, by implication, lesser men and women, makes such commentators sound as if they have allowed themselves to drift to the periphery of contemporary life, or be shunted there.

Byrne, M. Sydney: *National Times*, July 1973. n. pag. Print.

—the blame for the archaic restrictions on everything from licensing laws to censorship which prevailed in this country until the 1970s may have been the responsibility of our ethos, our secular wowserism, and a product of the emotional parsimony bestowed on Australians by Anglo–Saxon forbears, but it was also reinforced by the cold dead hand of the Church.

one of the last gasp ‘happenings’ of the counter-culture, a weekend of spiritual healing and alternative therapies was conducted on the river flats near Renmark in 1979. But while at least one of the event’s rituals included full body massages conducted in the muddy shallows of a backwater, there were probably not much more than a handful of voyeuristic locals among the crowds drawn to the demonstrations. Otherwise, the few efforts made to establish alternative communities in that period— generally, and suspiciously, planted deep in mallee

scrub—died of inanition. I suspect the whole era hardly ruffled the surface of the Riverland's ethos

“...serving in an elegant, often collaborative manner to help people do their jobs, to learn, to teach, to reflect and remember, to plan and decide and to create...” (Horvitz n.pag)

Selflessly well intentioned as the efforts of Robert Owen may have been, for example, he was one of one of those leaders who couldn't help but dictate the terms of radical change. He always knew best. Owen, as Margaret Cole suggests, was not only a philanthropic and benevolent employer, but a shrewd businessman and judge of men, but “...from the moment he set foot on the banks of the Wabash [in *New Harmony* in North America] he ceased to be a practical reformer and became a prophet...”(150-51).

*Oneida*, an exception to generally non secular utopian settlements in North America of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, is perhaps best known for its efforts to break down monogamous marriage, which its imposing leader, John Humphrey Noyes saw as a religious as well as a social tyranny. So far so good, it seems fair to say, but while Noyes could also plausibly argue that “...variety is the nature of things, as beautiful in love as in eating and drinking...” (Martin 14), this ardent Perfectionist seemed to have enjoyed more than his fair share of sexual partners, and fathered a disproportionate number of the colony's children on those occasions when the masculine dictum of *coitus reservatus* was waived on his behalf.

“Neil Singleton.” *A Nice Night's Entertainment*, Sydney: Currency Press, 1981.155. Print