
UNIT 1 SHORT FICTION / STORY

Structure

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

1.0 OBJECTIVES

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

1.1 INTRODUCTION

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

1.2 SHORT FICTION / STORY -HISTORY AND SCOPE

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

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

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

1.2.1 19th Century American, English and Australian Short Fiction

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

1.3 ORIGIN And DEVELOPMENT Of AUSTRALIAN SHORT FICTION / STORY

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

1.3.1 Short Fiction in the 1830s -1860s

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

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

1.3.2 Short Fiction in the 1860s-1880s

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

1.3.3 Short Fiction in the 1880s-1890s

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

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

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

1.4 THE BULLETIN YEARS

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

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

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

1.5 AUSTRALIAN SHORT FICTION IN THE 20th CENTURY

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

1.6 EMERGENCE of MIGRANT and ABORIGINAL SHORT FICTION

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

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

1.7 LET US SUM UP

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

Writers of that Age

Their Works

Elizabeth Jolley

Five Acre Virgin (1976)
The Travelling Entertainer (1979)
Woman in a Lampshade (1980)

David Malouf

Antipodes (1985)

Olga Masters

The Home Girls (1982)
A Long Time (1985)
Bearded Ladies (1984)
Scission (1985)

Kate Greenville

Tim Winston

Minimum of Two (1987)

Barry Hill

A Rim of Blue (1978)
Headlocks (1983)
 (His themes are politics and family relations or as Keryn Goldsworthy puts it 'the politics of family relations').

Joan London

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

Short Fiction/Story

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

1.8 QUESTIONS

- (1) Who would you credit you credit for the establishment of short fiction as a genre?
- (2) What were some of the types of short fiction produced in Australia? Which of these types appeal to you? Give reasons to support your answers.
- (3) What were the prominent themes that captured the imagination of writers of short fiction in Australia? Discuss.

1.9 SUGGESTED READING

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

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

Structure

- 2.0 Objectives
- 2.1 Introduction
- 2.2 Marcus Clarke
 - 2.2.1 From Foreign Office to Foreign Shore
 - 2.2.2 Man of Many Talents
- 2.3 *His Natural Life*
- 2.4 Themes in Clarke
 - 2.4.1 Marcus Clarke in the 20th Century
- 2.5 *The Seizure of the Cyprus*- Text
 - 2.5.1 Analysing *The Seizure of the Cyprus*
 - 2.5.2 Action in *The Seizure of the Cyprus*
 - 2.5.3 Characterisation
 - 2.5.4 Narrative Technique
 - 2.5.5 Contextualising *The Seizure of the Cyprus*
 - 2.5.6 Highlights
- 2.6 Let Us Sum Up
- 2.7 Questions
- 2.8 Suggested Reading

2.0 OBJECTIVES

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

2.1 INTRODUCTION

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

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

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

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

2.2 MARCUS CLARKE

2.2.1 From Foreign Offices to Foreign Shores

Marcus Andrew Hislop Clarke was born at 11 Leonard Place in the London borough of Kensington on 24 April 1846. He was an only child and his mother died of tuberculosis when he was still an infant. He studied at the Cholmeley Grammar School at Highgate and befriended two young boys there who were to remain his friends for life. These two young boys were the poet Gerard Manley Hopkins and his brother Cyril. Clarke was however closer to Cyril. When Clarke was sixteen his father fell ill and had to be put into an asylum for the mentally disturbed. With the institutionalisation of his father, Clarke watched his dreams of going to France, and learning French crushed under the existing circumstances. This was because his father's financial affairs were in complete disarray and Clarke realised that the brilliant career he had planned for himself was never to be fulfilled. He did not see any future prospects and decided to go to Australia where his family still had connections. He sailed from Plymouth on 16 March 1863 while his father was still ill in hospital. His father lingered on and was to die eventually on December 1 that same year. Clarke arrived in Melbourne in June that year and on 19 November 1863 his first humorous piece "The Puff Conclusive", appeared in the *Melbourne Punch*.

2.2.2 Man of Many Talents

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

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

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

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

2.3 HIS NATURAL LIFE

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

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

Marcus Clarke

2.4 THEMES IN CLARKE

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

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

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

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

2.4.1 Marcus Clarke in the 20th Century

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

2.5 The Seizure of Cyprus - TEXT

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

This remand cost three of them their lives.

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

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

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

2.6 ANALYSING THE SEIZURE OF THE CYPRUS

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

2.6.1 Action in *The Seizure of the Cyprus*

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

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

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

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

The chief characters who plan the seizure are Fergusson, Walker, Pennell, M'kan, Jones and another unnamed prisoner. The opportunity presents itself when Lieutenant Carew and the ship's surgeon, decide to go fishing. The convicts lead by Fergusson seize the ship and formally announce their course of action. The seventeen mutineers take over the ship while the Lieutenant, the surgeon other prisoners and soldiers are left marooned on the island with provisions to last them a while. One astonishing feat that these desperate men perform is that of uniting the Lieutenant and his wife without harming her personal dignity. The plans of the mutineers include escaping

Introduction to Short Fiction

and making their way to China or India or South Sea Islands or the Friendly Islands. The action splits into two as the story of the mutineers and that of those marooned on the Bay unfolds. Those marooned have no means of communicating with Hobart Town neither do they have any possible means of escape by land as the thought of hostile natives keeps them from trying too hard to escape and they are basically land-locked. Their only means of escape is a raft that could carry them away from the bay at least. Popjoy an ex-convict who has cast his lot with the Lieutenant and his party instead of with the mutineers manages to construct a rough and crude raft that however keeps them afloat till they are rescued by the passing "Oxelia." Lieutenant Carew is tried and acquitted, Popjoy for his role in securing their freedom is pardoned and finds his way back to England. In England Popjoy has no idea how to fend for himself knows no other way of life than the chain and the cat-o-nine-tails. He finally takes to begging and is arrested once again. It is there in court that he recounts the story of the mutiny.

In the mean time life on board the *Cyprus* is full. The men have organised themselves into the established hierarchy and Walker is the Captain while Fergusson is Lieutenant and Jones mate. They are on their way to the South Seas when they go off course and land in Japan. Here against the Captain's wishes three ex-convicts do not return to the ship and stay on with the natives. This dissension causes Walker to lose face and a man named Swallow who was transported for rioting in England assumes Captain-ship. He has an interesting story behind him, he had escaped once and was being sent back to "Hell's Gate" when he is rescued in time by the mutiny. Swallow guides the ship to China, on route they seize a ship called "Edward" and with the sextant bearing the name of "Waldron" they pretend to be shipwrecked sailors and playing on the sympathy of the English Merchants in Canton find their way back to England. So far these two stories were running parallel to each other. In England the original people on board the *Cyprus* meet and it is at this stage that we realise that the events have completed a full circle.

England:

Popjoy as mentioned earlier is in England and has been remanded for begging in the streets. He has already made the tale of the mutiny popular in England. Meanwhile the escapees have made their way back to England. As circumstances would have it they are remanded and face trial. They are tried as pirates, escaped convicts and as felons and hung. Most of them are sent back to "Hell's Gates." Swallow himself manages to escape death penalty and is sent back to "Hell's Gate" the place he fought so desperately against. He tries to escape twice but fails. He finally dies at Port Arthur still in chains. He never managed to escape or die escaping and was a broken man an instance of a 'brave man crushed into brutality by a system of punishment'. Five years later, Popjoy who has settled down and married is travelling on a ship from Quebec. He is shipwrecked and while attempting to escape on a small boat he is washed overboard. He had been trying to procure a pension for himself and was awaiting papers from Lieutenant Carew but he dies without receiving any thing at all.

That in short is the action of this short story. It serves both the functions of the term 'action'. It is the main story line of the tale and the series of events that constitute the plot of the story.

Clarke does not leave any loose ends. Every thing is tied up neatly within this short tale and at the end of the story we are filled by a sense of the futility of human efforts against a system.

Characterisation consists of three main categories: a type, for instance a conceited man or a blunt man; a social type, an antiquarian or an old college butler; or a place or scene, like a tavern, or a cockpit. In this particular story the characters are essentially flat characters except for Fergusson initially, then Swallow later on and Popjoy. Flat characters very simply put are those characters that do not develop at all and remain the same from the beginning of the narrative to the end. Fergusson and Swallow though displaying some of the characteristics of the round character types are not fully developed. Popjoy's character too faces the same dilemma but he is interesting in his own way. He begins as a little boy convicted at the age of eleven years for stealing a hare. He grows into a criminal in the eyes of the Law and is one of the convicts being transported. But he develops further tries to save the marooned party, succeeds and is pardoned but not knowing what to do with himself gets convicted once again. But using his cunning and strong survival skills he manages to be acquitted once again. Begins leading a settled life, even applies for a pension but dies eventually. This story falls within the realm of the novel of action rather than that of character and displays all the characteristics of that genre even though it is a short story.

Conflict also plays a dominant role in this short story. There is tension between the characters as they are unsure about the success of the mutiny; there is tension once again when dissension takes place and when Swallow takes over as Captain. There is tension between the mutineers at large and the society; between the character of Swallow and the system and between the marooned party and the environment. The plot of a novel or a short story is the plan or the design; schemes; pattern of events in a play, work of fiction and the organisation of incidents and character in such a way as to induce curiosity and suspense in the spectator or reader or otherwise. In the continuum of time and space plot, we ask ourselves several questions: why did this happen? Why is this happening? What will happen next? Will something happen at all? Is anything going to happen?

Aristotle the great Greek Philosopher considered plot to be of prime importance. He believed that plot was the imitation of action as well as the arrangement of the incidents. He considered a plot to be whole only if it had a beginning, middle and an end. There are two types of plot mainly- simple and complex particularly in drama and that too in tragedy. The simple plot involves structural unity and continuity whereas the complex plot is one where there is a reversal of fortune (*peripeteia*) and a situation where ignorance gives way to knowledge (*anagnorisis*). Aristotle emphasised plot as compared to character. Keeping this in mind how would you view this particular short story? By the 1927s when E M Forster's "Aspects of the Novel" was published a plot had come to mean a narrative of events, the emphasis of which fell on causality, in which the time sequence was however preserved.

The plot in this short story can be drawn on a linear scale that splits into two and these two run almost parallel to each other for a short while. These two nearly parallel stories ultimately meet at a point that is England and from then on, again split into two. The plot construction is almost visual like a river. It flows quietly then when it meets some obstruction it bifurcates into two. These two branches run along each other till at some other juncture they unite and eventually branch out again. The manner in which Marcus Clarke writes is simplistic. He does not employ bombastic words or terms. His style is clear and lucid. He wrote of the romantic adventure and of convict life. His writing has a genuine quality that is difficult to find elsewhere. His writing is often set against a background of brutality, venality and sometimes savagery. He makes use of metaphors drawn from language, (remember what we said

earlier about his themes and how the environment provided him with a theme because of its metaphoric possibilities). The imagery is very vivid. He uses words so effectively that he is able to evoke visual images of the harsh environment, the perils of being cast on a little bay with rapidly depleting stocks, the dilemmas of the convicts before they commit to the act of seizing the ship. Let us highlight some issues in the next section.

2.6.3 Narrative Technique

Every storyteller has a tale to tell. The manner in which s/he tells us the story is the narrative style/narrative technique. There are several narrative styles to choose from but what needs to be considered is whether the narrator/ writer is able to spark an interest in the readers and to capture their imagination or not. While some writers would prefer to use the first person narrative others would prefer to let a character do the telling, (like Marcus Clarke in this story). He begins the story with an account of the first person narrative wherein he uses the authorial voice, "I" and the story is told but through the course of the story the authorial voice disappears and the story/ narration acquires an identity of its own. There is also a continuous to and fro movement between the telling of the seizure of the "Cyprus" and the events that have coloured the history of the place — "Hell's Gate". Clarke's use of phrases like "the surf beating with violence on the rocky shore" and "the westerly winds blowing with fury into the harbour" evokes images of violence and preminent doom. The hostile environment seems to be working in tandem with the even more violent nature of man as the prisoners are transported to the island and ill -treated there. Nature seems to be conspiring against the ill-fated prisoners and making their escape futile. His use of language is such that it not only generates an interest in the mind of the reader but also communicates very effectively the atmosphere, the ambience he was trying to create. Humour is present in Clarke but is often tinged with just the right amount of sadness/ pathos and satire. It also contributes to the feeling of impending doom. What we have been saying about his peculiar brand of humour tinged with pathos is evident from these lines:

"Three wretches drew lots as to who should get a sight of Hobart town. One was to murder the other, and the third was to volunteer his evidence. The lottery was drawn, the doomed man laughed ere his companion beat out his brains, the two survivors congratulated each other on their holiday on the scaffold of Hobart town."

Do you find any such passages in the text that bring out so clearly yet painfully the plight of the prisoners while at the same making us laugh at the absurdity of it all? Having said this let us now try and contextualise *The Seizure of the Cyprus*.

2.6.4 Contextualising *The Seizure of the Cyprus*

A good short story like a good novel usually has something to offer its readers. Normally a writer being placed in a certain time and place would write about what s/he feels strongly, would wish to express his/ her concerns and views on a particular matter and that would be done through the medium of writing. Clarke as we have discerned for ourselves was a prolific writer with a mission that of documenting the history of Australia through his writings. Keeping this in mind it may be concluded that even if the story itself was a creation of his mind, he was actually consciously/ unconsciously preserving for posterity the happenings of the early days of the settlement in his writings. He was providing a sense of history to Australia that was largely a transported culture still attached very strongly to the apron strings of the mother country. The transportation of convicts may have stopped by the time Clarke

began writing but it was a part of Australia's history being a penal colony as it was. It was something that could not be simply pushed aside and done away with. Though the early settlers were mostly convicts who had been transported for life to Australia and the conditions they survived under were pitiable as is evident from the story, they were still a part of what was to later become the Australian Federation and were in fact working side by side with the founding fathers of the nation that their presence no matter how degrading or otherwise and their contribution or lack of it cannot be neglected or ignored. Marcus Clarke was not only pointing out the ills of the society at that time but was also capturing the images of brutality and inhuman behaviour that characterised this practise towards the end of the eighteenth century in Australia. Clarke also kept in mind the harsh, and often, hostile nature of this strange land that they had come to inhabit under duress. For those largely descended from European stock, the antipodes was a complete inversion of nature with its strange flora and fauna and equally peculiar climate. This particular story is taken from a collection called **Old Tales of a Young Country** and is one of the stories on convictism. Mention is also made of this story in *The Last of Macquaire Harbour*:

"Five years after seizure of the "Cyprus" it was resolved that Macquaire Harbour should be abandoned."

In a way *The Seizure of the Cyprus* echoes what Clarke talks about in *His Natural Life*. Similar aspects of convictism are depicted in both these works. It tells not only of the sentences of the prisoners' but also of the brutality, degradation and the despair within that system. It tells of the freedom from Victorian constraints and the misuse of that freedom by some. Even the depiction of the natural world as essentially hostile to the plight of man is not only visible but also a constant reminder of the futility of human effort and the mortality of mankind.

2.6.5 Highlights

It would be a good idea to read the story thoroughly after reading the introduction. It would be worthwhile to keep in mind the following facts :

- (1) the transportation of the convicts from the homeland to Australia.
- (2) the plight of the convicts
- (3) the trivial reasons that lead to their conviction
- (4) the life awaiting them
- (5) the desperation that makes them do the things they do
- (6) the futility of their lot

Other stories in "Old Tales of a Young Land" that tell of the Convict Past:

The Last of Macquaire Harbour
 Port Arthur Nos 1,2 and 3
 Correspondence Resulting from "Port Arthur No 1"

Other Stories:

Cannabis Indica
 Pretty Dick
 An Up- country Township
 Poor Jo

Human Repetends
 Holiday Peak
 La Beguin

2.7 LET US SUM UP

This unit is about the life and times of Marcus Clarke and his short story *The Seizure of the Cyprus*. His main novel, his other works, and his role in the creation, or rendering of the Great Australian Myth, the position he occupies, the influences that worked on him and the literature he produced have been dealt with. It also provides us with the unique opportunity to read one of his works which were hitherto unavailable and relatively unknown. After a detailed and careful reading of the story it would be a good idea to sit and reflect on the many issues that have been raised. It would be worthwhile to reflect on the introduction to Clarke, his life, and his works.

This unit has been designed to provide a guideline for a beginner of Australian literature to think along several lines. Many issues related not only to the subject matter but also the development of the short fiction have been raised but I would suggest thinking aloud keeping in mind the development and trends followed by the short fiction in the Northern Hemisphere. Do the short stories from these two hemispheres have anything in common? How does the narrative unfold? What can be concluded from your reading of Marcus Clarke and any other short fiction writer of that period in the Northern Hemisphere? Are there any parallels or echoes? We could and we should spare some thought to these questions and think along those lines. In the contemporary world a lot is being said about, read about post-colonial Literature- do any of the stories you have read in this block or otherwise subscribe / conform to the set formulas? It might be useful to read Edward Said and Aijaz Ahmed along with writers of fiction.

2.8 QUESTIONS

- (1) How would you create a distinction between the fiction of Marcus Clarke and Henry Lawson?
- (2) Lawson belonged to the age of "Nationalistic Australia", where does Clarke fit in?
- (3) What are the unique features of Clarke's style of writing?
- (4) Have you read any other modern day story of convict life, escape? (Consider reading Pappilon).

2.9 SUGGESTED READING

- (1) Adams, F., "Two Australian Writers (Clarke and Gordon)," *Fortnightly Review* CCCIX (1 September 1892). Reprinted in "The Australians" (Unwin, London, 1893)
- (2) Marcus Clarke's *His Natural Life*
- (3) Greene's "History of Australian Literature" (Volume I)
- (4) Marcus Clarke's *Old Tales of a Young Land*
- (5) Michael Wilding's "Introduction" to "Marcus Clarke- *For the Term of His Natural Life*, short stories, critical essays and journalism" (ed) Michael Wilding, (University of Queensland Press: Queensland 1976)

UNIT 3 **BARBARA BAYNTON : *THE CHOSEN VESSEL***

Structure

- 3.0 Objectives
- 3.1 Introduction
- 3.2 *The Chosen Vessel* – Text
- 3.3 Overall Structure Of *The Chosen Vessel*
- 3.4 Interpretations
 - 3.4.1 A Feminist Reading of *The Chosen Vessel*
 - 3.4.2 Reflections on the *Bush* in *The Chosen Vessel*
 - 3.4.3 Motherhood and Baynton
- 3.5 Barbara Baynton's Ideological Position: Contextualising *The Chosen Vessel*
- 3.6 Let Us Sum Up
- 3.7 Questions
- 3.8 Suggested Readings

3.0 OBJECTIVES

The primary objective of this unit is to look at one of the first and finest writers of the Australian *Bush*, Barbara Baynton. I do not wish to go into the fascinating details of Baynton's own life but I will mention those episodes that seem to find an echo in her short stories. I will also critically examine her story, *The Chosen Vessel* as an indictment of the hardships of *Bush* life and as a paradigmatic statement of the dichotomous relationship between the sexes.

3.1 INTRODUCTION

Baynton wrote most of her short stories in the 1890s and her writings show an aching sense of discordance and disjuncture between the characters that people her stories and their habitat. Baynton's own life, specially her date of birth and her parentage is shrouded in mystery. The details supplied by her have been subsequently proved wrong (Her birth date given by her as 4th June 1862 was later shown to have actually been 4th June 1857). Baynton married thrice in her life and adopted the surname of her second husband, Dr Thomas Baynton, whom she married in 1890. It was during the period of this marriage that she wrote most of her short stories. Her first story was published in the Christmas edition of the *Bulletin* in 1896. After initial title changes (*The Tramp, What the Curlews Cried*) it was decided that the story be called *The Chosen Vessel*. Her early short stories were included under the collective title of *Bush Studies*. Some of her best stories of the 1902 edition published by Duckworth And Company, London, were *Squeaker's Mate*, *Scrammy* and, *Billy Skywonkie*, *Bush Church* and *The Chosen Vessel*. Her novel *Human Toll* was published in 1907 and *Cobbers* in 1917. Barbara Baynton died in Melbourne on 28th May 1929.

Most of her work shows an overriding concern about people in the *Bush*, their alienation from it and the shockingly harsh effects of the cruel landscape upon the people inhabiting it. Here she is almost at par with her contemporary, Henry Lawson, in depicting the evil, brutal nature of the *Bush*. She does not celebrate it as a singularly 'Australian' entity as most other writers did. The ideas of the Australian nation and a virile masculinity connected with the *Bush* are subverted very skilfully by Baynton's stories.

3.2 THE CHOSEN VESSEL - TEXT

She laid the stick and her baby on the grass while she untied the rope that tethered the calf. The length of the rope separated them. The cow was near the calf, and both were lying down. Feed along the creek was plentiful, and every day she found a fresh place to tether it, since tether it she must, for if she did not, it would stray with the cow out on the plain. She had plenty of time to go after it, but then there was her baby; and if the cow turned on her out on the plain, and she with her baby, – she had been a town girl and was afraid of the cow, but she did not want the cow to know it. She used to run at first when it bellowed its protest against the penning up of its calf. This satisfied the cow, also the calf, but the woman's husband was angry, and called her – the noun was cur. It was he who forced her to run and meet the advancing cow, brandishing a stick, and uttering threatening words till the enemy turned and ran. "That's the way!" the man said, laughing at her white face. In many things he was worse than the cow and she wondered if the same rule would apply to the man, but she was not one to provoke skirmishes even with the cow.

It was early for the calf to go to "bed" – nearly an hour earlier than usual; but she had felt so restless all day. Partly because it was Monday, and the end of the week that would bring her and the baby the companionship of his father, was so far off. He was a shrearer, and had gone of his shed before daylight that morning. Fifteen miles as the crow flies separated them.

There was a track in front of the house, for it had once been a wine shanty, and a few travellers passed along at intervals. She was not afraid of horsemen; but swagmen, going to or worse coming from, the dismal, drunken little township, a day's journey beyond, terrified her. One had called at the house to-day, and asked for tucker.

That was why she had penned up the calf so early. She feared more from the look of his eyes, and the gleam of his teeth, as he watched her newly awakened baby beat its impatient fists upon her covered breasts, than from the knife that was sheathed in the belt at his waist.

She had given him bread and meat. Her husband she told him was sick. She always said that when she was alone and a swagman came; and she had gone in from the kitchen to the bedroom, and asked questions and replied to them in the best man's voice she could assume. Then he had asked to go into the kitchen to boil his billy, but instead she gave him tea, and he drank it on the wood heap. He had walked round and round the house, and there were cracks in some places, and after the last time he had asked for tobacco. She had none to give him, and he had grinned, because there was a broken clay pipe near the wood heap where he stood, and if there were a man inside, there ought to have been tobacco. Then he asked for money, but women in the bush never have money.

At last he had gone, and she, watching through the cracks, saw him when about a quarter of a mile away, turn and look back at the house. He had stood so for some moments with a pretence of fixing his swag, and then, apparently satisfied, moved to the left towards the creek. The creek made a bow round the house, and when he came to the bend she lost sight of him. Hours after, watching intently for signs of smoke, she saw the man's dog chasing some sheep that had gone to the creek for water, and saw it slink back suddenly, as if it had been called by some one.

More than once she thought of taking her baby and going to her husband. But in the past, when she had dared to speak of the dangers to which her loneliness exposed her,

he had taunted and sneered at her. "Needn't falter yourself," he had told her, "nobody 'ud want her run away with yew."

Long before nightfall she placed food on the kitchen table, and beside it laid the big brooch that had been her mother's. It was the only thing of value that she had. And she left the kitchen door wide open.

The doors inside she securely fastened. Beside the bolt in the back one she drove in the steel and scissors; against it she piled the table and the stools. Underneath the lock of the front door she forced the handle of the spade, and the blade between the cracks in the flooring boards. Then the prop-stick, cut into lengths, held the top, as the spade held the middle. The windows were little more than portholes; she had nothing to fear through them.

She ate a few mouthfuls of food and drank a cup of milk. But she lighted no fire, and when night came, no candle, but crept with her baby to bed.

What woke her? The wonder was that she had slept – she had not meant to. But she was young, very young. Perhaps the shrinking of the galvanized roof – hardly though, since that was so usual. Yet something had set her heart beating wildly; but she lay quite still, only she put her arm over her baby. Then she had both round it, and she prayed, "Little baby, little baby, don't wake!"

The moon's rays shone on the front of the house, and she saw one of the open cracks, quite close to where she lay, darken with a shadow. Then a protesting growl reached her; and she could fancy she heard the man turn hastily. She plainly heard the thud of something striking the dog's ribs, and the long flying strides of the animal as it howled and ran. Still watching, she saw the shadow darken every crack along the wall. She knew by the sounds that the man was trying every standpoint that might help him to see in; but how much he saw she could not tell. She thought of many things she might do to deceive him into the idea that she was not alone. But the sound of her voice would wake baby, and she dreaded that as though it were the only danger that threatened her. So she prayed, "Little baby, don't wake, don't cry!"

Stealthily the man crept about. She knew he had his boots off, because of the vibration that his feet caused as he walked along the verandah to gauge the width of the little window in her room, and the resistance of the front door.

Then he went to the other end, and the uncertainty of what he was doing became unendurable. She had felt safer, far safer, while he was close, and she could watch and listen. She felt she must watch, but the great fear of wakening her baby again assailed her. She suddenly recalled that one of the slabs on that side of her house had shrunk in length as well as in width, and had once fallen out. It was held in position only by a wedge of wood underneath. What if he should discover that? The uncertainty increased her terror. She prayed as she gently raised herself with her little one in her arms, held tightly to her breast.

She thought of the knife, and shielded its body with her hands and arms. Even the little feet she covered with its white gown, and the baby never murmured – it liked to be held so. Noiselessly she crossed to the other side, and stood where she could see and hear, but not be seen. He was trying every slab, and was very near to that with the wedge under it. Then she saw him find it; and heard the sound of the knife as bit by bit he began to cut away the wooden support.

She waited motionless, with her baby pressed tightly to her, though she knew that in another few minutes this man with the cruel eyes, lascivious mouth, and gleaming knife, would enter. One side of the slab tilted; he had only to cut away the remaining little end, when the slab, unless he held it, would fall outside.

She heard his jerked breathing as it kept time with the cuts of the knife, and the brush of his clothes as he rubbed the wall in his movements, for she was so still and quite, that she did not even tremble. She knew when he ceased, and wondered why, being so well concealed; for he could not see her, and would not fear if he did, yet she heard him move cautiously away. Perhaps he expected the slab to fall – his motive puzzled her, and she moved even closer, and bent her body the better to listen. Ah! What sound was that? "Listen! Listen!" she bade her heart – her heart that had kept so still, but now bounded with tumultuous throbs that dulled her ears. Nearer and nearer came the sounds, till the welcome thud of a horse's hoof rang out clearly.

"O God! O God! O God!" she panted, for they were very close before she could make sure. She rushed to the door, and with her baby in her arms tore frantically at its bolts and bars.

Out she darted at last, and running madly along, saw the horseman beyond her in the distance. She called to him in Christ's Name, in her babe's name, still flying like the wind with the speed that deadly peril gives. But the distance grew greater and greater between them, and when she reached the creek her prayers turned to wild shrieks, for there crouched the man she feared, with outstretched arms that caught her as she fell. She knew he was offering terms if she ceased to struggle and cry for help, though louder and louder did she cry for it, but it was only when the man's hand gripped her throat, that the cry of "Murder" came from her lips. And when she ceased, the startled curlews took up the awful sound, and flew wailing "Murder! Murder!" over the horseman's head.

"By God!" said the boundary rider, "it's been a dingo right enough! Eight killed up here, and there's more down in the creek – a ewe and a lamb, I'll bet; and the lamb's alive!" He shut out the sky with his hand, and watched the crows that were circling round and round, nearing the earth one moment, and the next shooting skywards. By that he knew the lamb must be alive; even a dingo will spare a lamb sometimes.

Yes, the lamb was alive, and after the manner of lambs of its kind did not know its mother when the light came. It had sucked the still warm breasts, and laid its little head on her bosom, and slept till the morn. Then, when it looked at the swollen disfigured face, it wept and would have crept away, but for the hand that still clutched its little gown. Sleep was nodding its golden head and swaying its small body, and the crows were close, so close, to the mother's wide-open eyes, when the boundary rider galloped down.

"Jesus Christ!" he said, covering his eyes. He told afterwards how the little child held out its arms to him, and how he was forced to cut its gown that the dead hand held.

It was election time, and as usual the priest had selected a candidate. His choice was so obviously in the interests of the squatter, that Peter Hennessey's reason, for once in his life, had over-ridden superstition, and he had dared promise his vote to another. Yet he was uneasy, and every time he woke in the night (and it was often), he heard the murmur of his mother's voice. It came through the partition, he knew she was praying in her bed; but when the sounds came under the door, she was on her knees before the little Altar in the corner that enshrined the statue of the Blessed Virgin and Child.

"Mary, Mother of Christ! Save my son! Save him!" prayed she in the dairy as she strained and set the evening's milking. "Sweet Mary! For the love of Christ, save him!" The grief in her old face made the morning meal so bitter, that to avoid her he came late to his dinner. It made him so cowardly, that he could not say good-bye to her, and when night fell on the eve of the election day, he rode off secretly.

He had thirty miles to ride to the township to record his vote. He cantered briskly along the great stretch of plain that had nothing but stunted cotton bush to play shadow to the full moon, which glorified a sky of earliest spring. The bruised incense of the flowering clover rose up to him, and the glory of the night appealed vaguely to his imagination, but he was preoccupied with his present act of revolt.

Vividly he saw his mother's agony when she would find him gone. Even at that moment, he felt sure, she was praying.

"Mary! Mother of Christ!" He repeated the invocation, half unconsciously, when suddenly to him, out of the stillness, came Christ's Name – called loudly in despairing accents.

"For Christ's sake! Christ's sake! Christ's sake!" called the voice. Good Catholic that he had been, he crossed himself before he dared to look back. Gliding across a ghostly patch of pipe-clay, he saw a white-robed figure with a babe clasped to her bosom.

All the superstitious awe of his race and religion swayed his brain. The moonlight on the gleaming clay was a "heavenly light" to him, and he knew the white figure not for flesh and blood, but for the Virgin and Child of his mother's prayers. Then, good Catholic that once more he was, he put spurs to his horse's sides and galloped madly away.

His mother's prayers were answered, for Hennessey was the first to record his vote – for the priest's candidate. Then he sought the priest at home, but found that he was out rallying the voters. Still, under the influence of his blessed vision, Hennessey would not go near the public-houses, but wandered about the outskirts of the town for hours, keeping apart from the towns-people, and fasting as penance. He was subdued and mildly ecstatic, feeling as a repentant chastened child, who awaits only the kiss of peace.

And at last, as he stood in the graveyard crossing himself with reverent awe, he heard in the gathering twilight the roar of many voices crying the name of the visitor at the election. It was well with the priest.

Again Hennessey sought him. He was at home, the housekeeper said, and led him into the dimly lighted study. His seat was immediately opposite a large picture, and as the housekeeper turned up the lamp, once more the face of the Madonna and Child looked down on him, but this time silently, peacefully. The half-parted lips of the Virgin were smiling with compassionate tenderness; her eyes seemed to beam with the forgiveness of an earthly mother for her erring but beloved child.

He fell on his knees in adoration. Transfixed, the wondering priest stood, for mingled with the adoration, "My Lord and my God!" was the exaltation, "And hast Thou chosen me?"

"What is it, Peter?" said the priest.

"Father," he answered reverently; and with loosened tongue he poured forth the story of his vision.

"Great God!" shouted the priest, "and you did not stop to save her! Do you not know? Have you not heard?"

Many miles further down the creek a man kept throwing an old cap into a water-hole. The dog would bring it out and lay it on the opposite side to where the man stood, but would not allow the man to catch him, though it was only to wash the blood of the sheep from his mouth and throat, for the sight of blood made the man tremble. But the dog also was guilty.

3.3 OVERALL STRUCTURE OF *THE CHOSEN VESSEL*

The story of *The Chosen Vessel* is superficially, simple enough. It tells of a woman, alone in her *Bush* home with her baby. A visit by a *swagman* during the day unsettles her and she is afraid that he may return. When he does, she is terror-stricken. Just at the moment when he is about to enter her house with his "cruel eyes, lascivious mouth and gleaming knife", she hears horse hooves. She runs to the man on the horse for help but, Peter Hennessey, the rider, with his own particular problems, thinks that she is an apparition and rides away. The next day her corpse is found by a boundary rider, still holding on to her baby.

A summary of this sort cannot bring out the powerful undercurrents of the intense little story. What marks it as a gem in its genre is the telling itself. The story is repeatedly told in the past. There is a fascinating backward-forward movement of the tenses. We meet the unnamed woman in the evening when she is penning up her calf for the night. The first visit of the *swagman* in the morning is told in the past tense. Again, the identity of the horse - man to whom she runs for help, is not explained till later. Peter Hennessey gives his own account of a woman in white with a baby clasped to her bosom, running towards him. The actual rape and murder takes place in a black out of language. This telling of the story in flashbacks gives it an edge of suspense without lessening its dramatic immediacy.

The story itself can be divided into five unequal configurations. The first, when the woman goes about her work, thinking about the morning's encounter with the *swagman*. The second, when the *swagman* comes back at night, the woman's subsequent fear ending with her flight, rape and murder. The short third part is about how her body is discovered by a boundary rider. The fourth part is the succinct account of Peter Hennessey's life and politics culminating in his ecstatic vision of what he thought was the *Madonna* and *her child*, ending with his knowledge of her real identity. The miniscule fifth forms the conclusion of the story and tells about the murderer. It is an intriguing and haunting end because Baynton talks about how "the sight of blood made the man tremble". The story ends on a note of brittle equipoise.

3.4 INTERPRETATIONS

3.4.1 A Feminist Reading of *The Chosen Vessel*

The most noteworthy feature of *The Chosen Vessel* is the depiction of the time-honoured division of woman as an object of sexual desire and as a mother/goddess. However, the way Baynton does it is replete with hidden ironies and nuances. The anonymous young wife and mother, alone with the male baby are defenseless and vulnerable. Her urban/town background is mentioned in passing which makes her even more alienated from

the *Bush*. Her loneliness is overwhelming and her defenses fragile. She has to resort to such flimsy pretences as impersonating a male voice to make the *swagman* think that there is a man in her house. She leaves food and her mother's brooch to bribe any intruder. She does not have any money to give the *swagman* showing how women in the bush were economically dependent on their husbands. Her husband himself never takes her fears of being left behind alone seriously. He taunts her by saying that, "nobody'd want ter run away with yew." Of course, he is proved wrong.

The story takes up the bisection of woman as object of lust and woman as nurturer at the very beginning. The first sentence that the woman thinks about the morning visit of the *swagman* goes like this

"She feared more from the look of eyes, and the gleam of his teeth, as he watched her newly awakened baby beat its impatient fists upon her covered breasts, than from the knife that was sheathed in the belt at his waist."

The same breasts that nurture the baby also awaken the glint of lust in the

swagman's eyes. This motif is carried on throughout the story with several ironic undertones. The apparently harmonious relationship between mother and child, cow and calf, ewe and lamb, is invalidated by the agony of Peter Hennessey's mother praying for the salvation of her son's soul. The effect of the story is intensified by Hennessey's grotesque mistake of confusing a victim of rape with the virgin mother.

The story is also enlivened by several indirect barbs against the Church. The priest with political interests, "rallying the voters", the repetition of the words "good Catholic" for Hennessey when he rides away from the woman, entirely undermining the meaning of the words; show Baynton's concern about the meaninglessness of institutionalised religion.

3.4.2 Reflections on the *Bush* in *The Chosen Vessel*

The Bush had earlier been glorified by most male writers as the embodiment or as an identifying marker of the Australian nation and as a space within which male camaraderie, strength and machismo flourished. Baynton totally changes this bias. Peter Hennessey may have the time to notice the rugged beauty of the Bush

"He cantered briskly along the great stretch of plain that had nothing but stunted cotton bush to play shadow to the full moon, which glorified a sky of earliest spring. The bruised incense of the flowering clover rose up to him, and the glory of the night appealed vaguely to his imagination."

For the woman, however, the *Bush* is an "enemy", just as the cow is an enemy, to be met head on with a stick. In fact, the gender divisions of the story are quite stereotypical. The men are all out in the open, traversing vast spaces. The husband, a shearer, had gone away to his shed, leaving his wife to look after the homestead and the baby. The priest is politically active, an important and busy man involved with his community. The *swagman* is almost a vagabond with his dog and his knife. And Hennessey rides to town to cast his vote. It is 1896 and there is, of course, no question of his mother going out to vote. She too is left behind to pray for her son's soul. The two women can be seen as appendages to the men; they do not really exist in their own right. The woman in the Bush does not even have the right to fear for her own safety, and as the story tells us, her self-esteem was frequently sullied by her husband's jibes and insults.

3.4.3 Motherhood and Baynton

Baynton has usually been seen by various critics as a writer who valorised the maternal instinct. In the collected works of Barbara Baynton, entitled by her name, the editors, Sally Krimmer and Alan Lawson write about this facet in their introduction to the text.

"In contrast to the pervading vision of moral chaos and cruelty Baynton's images of motherhood emerge as a hope for humanity ... Amongst all the destructive, environmental forces ... motherhood is the one creative element."

This can be seen in the relationship between the murdered mother and the child. She does not let go of her child even after death. But the correlation is not without its own tensions as can be seen in the flawed bond between Hennessey and his mother. The bitterness and guilt in the relationship is almost galling for Hennessey and leads to not one, but two episodes of disorientation and confusion. The first is the obvious one when he thinks that the woman about to be raped and killed is a supernatural vision of the Virgin and her child. The second is when he actually sees a picture of the Madonna and Child in the Priest's house. The religious halo of the picture is eroded until he sees an ordinary woman with "half-parted lips" and eyes "beam(ing) with the forgiveness of an earthly mother for her erring but beloved child." The passion of her motherhood brings her down to ordinariness. And it is Hennessey's own blemished understanding of motherhood that makes her so ultimately proving her to be as counterfeit as his 'vision' of the night before.

3.5 BARBARA BAYNTON'S IDEOLOGICAL POSITION: CONTEXTUALISING *THE CHOSEN VESSEL*

In order to understand *The Chosen Vessel* we have to place it within the context of Baynton's entire oeuvre, see it as being framed by her own social/ideological concerns. To look at *The Chosen Vessel* as an isolated text is a risk that we cannot take because it would give us a false understanding of Baynton as a writer. I will try to connect *The Chosen Vessel* with her most overriding concerns that abound in all her writings.

Namely her insistence on sexual difference between men and women and the special status accorded to pregnancy, childbirth and the maternal instinct in women. In fact the first point of sexual difference incorporates the second too to a certain extent because according to Baynton the maternal in women is what leads them to be superior to men; peace loving, caring, cultured as opposed to the crudeness, bestiality and the callousness of the men who are closely connected to the same adjectival qualities of the Bush.

A false reading of Baynton's ideological stance as a writer is what I wish to avoid and the isolated reading of *The Chosen Vessel* would lead us to exactly that: an incomplete comprehension of the tensions and contradictions in Baynton's writings. It is very easy to label Baynton as a feminist writer based on analysis of *The Chosen Vessel* but my contention is that her insistence on sexual difference based on the biological superiority of women leads her to a trap of her own making.

Firstly, I wish to clarify what exactly I mean by sexual difference. I use the term in the way the "the gynocritics" (a word coined by Elaine Showalter) of feminism use it — as an écriture féminine, the inscription of the female body and female difference in language and text. Hélène Cixous, one of the leading advocates of écriture féminine has said that there have been very few writers who have inscribed their femininity into their writing. However as Elaine Showalter puts it:

"The concept of écriture féminine provides a way of talking about womens' writing which reasserts the value of the feminine and identifies the theoretical

project of feminist criticism as the analysis of difference", (Elaine Showalter, *Writing and Sexual Difference*, p. 16, 1982).

Barbara Baynton

If we follow this line of argument we can go further and say with Adrienne Rich that –

"female biology ... has far more radical implications than we have yet come to appreciate. Patriarchal thought has limited female biology to its own narrow specifications. The feminist vision has recoiled from female biology for these reasons; it will, I believe, come to view our physicality as a resource rather than a destiny", (Adrienne Rich, *On Lies, Secrets and Silence*, p. 35, 1979).

I wish to first see Barbara Baynton as a writer who consciously and deliberately inscribed her feminine, biological self into her writings. Her repeated metaphors of pregnancy and motherhood is her way of citing the difference between men and women. In *A Dreamer* she talks about a young pregnant woman who is travelling home to see her mother. It is full of references to the special bond between mother and child. As the unnamed woman walks she listens to the birds.

"From the branch of a tree overhead she heard a watchful mother-bird's warning call, and the twitter of the disturbed nestlings. The tender care of this bird-mother awoke memories of her childhood. What mattered the lonely darkness when it led to mother?"

And later the authorial voice says "She quickened her pace, but did not run, motherhood is instinct in woman."

I have already talked at length about the intense maternal instinct of the woman in *The Chosen Vessel*. Baynton, in fact, wrote about the death of her son with Dr Thomas Baynton in her poem *Goodbye Australia!* and *Baby* both written in 1899 and the former published in the *Bulletin*. I will quote *Goodbye Australia!* in full

Good-bye to it all!
God still holds the land, haply;
Still holds me - its toy.

First, our one child died;
And the heart-broken mother
The summer sun slew,

Last flood drowned the stock;
The fires took home, fencing ...
Her garden is gone.

So, I will leave it.
The blue waters roll the ship
In the dull, sad bay

Forget you, loved hearts!...
This dead wattle holds your dear
Memory ever.

Good-bye to the grave
On the hill; for the far isles
Are calling. Good-bye!

This poem, entitled *Good-bye, Australia!* is a lament, not only for the dead son but also for the dead, cruel land which has forgotten how to nurture. The summer sun, the floods and the fires all compound the death of the son and increase the agony several times. Nature itself seems to be ruthless and uncaring and she has to move to greener climes. In another poem, *To My Country*, she apostrophises Australia as a mother who breeds slaves. The concluding lines are :

"O, nurse of serfdom, how shalt thou be shriven
Of threadbare knees and dust-enshrouded brow,
Mother of slaves who dare not speak their thoughts."

The idea of the maternal is carried on to the idea of the nation; but here the mother is to be pitied for breeding such sad progeny, "a painful tale of desperate men." Baynton's notions about sexual difference seem very subtly to talk about Australia, and more specifically, the Bush as male, dead and non-nurturing. As the University of Queensland Press introduction to her collected works puts it succinctly.

"In most of the stories woman is shown as maternal, loving and peaceful while man is portrayed as brutally sexual. Man's natural home is the cruel landscape while woman is instinctively associated with civilization and the town."

Baynton's complex identification with writing about the maternal is not without its own set of problems specially when she connects all that is anti-woman with the Australian Bush. When she does this, she in fact plays into the hands of patriarchal ideology. In a way it can be seen as an agreement with "the structure of patriarchy that have divided labour into mens' production and womens' reproduction ... (and) the familiar dualism of mind and body, a key component of Western patriarchal ideology. Creation is the act of the mind that brings something new into existence. Procreation is the act of the body that reproduces the species," (Susan Stanford Friedman, *Speaking of Gender*, p. 75, 1989).

In *The Chosen Vessel* we can see the crosscurrents of all these ideas: The public sphere of men, the private sphere of women; the physicality of the women (the breasts of the nursing mother which arouses the glint of lust in the *swagman's* eyes, even the physical ordinariness of the *Virgin Mary* as seen by Peter Hennessey) and the valorisation of the bond between mother and child. The patriarchal order had always wished to relegate women to the processes of her body. As Nietzsche says, "Everything concerning woman is a puzzle, and everything concerning woman has one solution: it is named pregnancy," (Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spake Zarathustra* (1883), quoted by Susan Stanford Friedman, p. 78). Susan Stanford Friedman says that such ideas project "the concept of woman as a being without thought, without speech, in the creation of culture. Before the discovery of the ovum, woman's womb was represented as the mere material vessel into which man dropped his divine seed. But even after women's active role in conception became understood, cultural representations of woman based on the mind-body split continued to separate the creation of man's mind from the procreation of woman's body," (ibid, p. 78) According to patriarchal definition, de Beauvoir writes, woman "has ovaries, a uterus; these peculiarities imprison her in subjectivity, circumscribe her within the limits of her own nature. It is often said that she thinks with the glands," (Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* (1949) ibid, p. 78).

Baynton's characters do the same. They think with their glands except may be in the one powerful exception, *Squeaker's Mate*. The same themes recur in her novel *Human Toll*. The heroine Ursula Ewart is given Baynton's mother's maiden name and also the name of one of her grandchildren. Ursula wishes to write but she feels that she has to first move away from the Bush in order to be able to express herself creatively. Ursula is

herself an orphaned child who is taken care of by a reformed convict called Boshy. Her only friend is Andrew and she grows to love him but later, a girl called Mina tricks him into marrying her and also has a child by him. Mina however ill-treats the baby and attempts to kill it. Ursula runs away with the child into the *Bush* but gets lost and the baby also dies. Ursula cannot forget the child as it was when alive and loves it all the more now that it is dead. Ironically, it had been Ursula's possessive love for the baby that had made Mina want to kill her own child.

The strange twists of fate that occur because of Ursula's fevered love for the little child seem almost to happen in the realm of madness. The rescue of the child and the flight into the *Bush* is also a flight into hysteria and delirium. When alone, tired and thirsty with the stiffening child, she cannot even make herself steal one egg from an emu's nest. She imagines that "the robbed bird was standing disconsolately over ... its nest" and she restores the egg. The meaning of her life is bound to Andrew's baby and its death makes her lose her hold on reality until Andrew and an Aborigine save her. Interestingly the drama of her hysteria, in a stream-of-consciousness mode, happens in the space of the *Bush* where "nature was frankly brutal". Baynton's carries the idea of maternity further by delineating it as an instinct that may transcend even natural laws. The maternal instinct may rise as in Ursula's case "like the spring sap in a young tree" even for a child that is not her own.

But motherhood in Baynton is not without its own problematics. In *A Dreamer* the promise of reunion with the mother is brought to nought. I have already mentioned the guilt and tension in the relationship between Peter Hennessey and his mother.

In her most anthologised story, *Squeaker's Mate* we meet a woman who is entirely different. Her strength is destroyed after an accident and the rest of the story happens with her lying alone in a room while Squeaker brings home another mate who is pregnant. Her former "man's strength" had alienated her from other womenfolk because she had "no leisure for yarning" and her barrenness makes her all the more alien. She is the only woman with a name in Baynton's collection of short stories and ironically, her name is *Mary*, the symbol of pure motherhood.

Various questions remain unanswered. Is the woman so strong, silent, and indeed, almost traditionally masculine because she is not like other women ("her uncompromising independence", her barrenness; her physical strength)? The questions become more plentiful when we see that the manuscript of the story tells the birth of the new mate's child and the death of the woman in hospital. What would this new birth have meant? Of course, the published version ends with the old mate still in power with a broken back, an unfeeling brute of a husband and childless. Is she so strange and superior because of the very fact of her childlessness? Interestingly, her husband repeatedly compares her to a snake that has now to crawl on her belly in order to live. (He found the "Go and bite yourself like a snake", would instantly silence her). The same epithet is used for Mina, Andrew's wife who tries to kill her own child. As The UQP introduction says, "Mina is continually described in terms of a serpent, her 'venomous eyes' blaze with 'green malignity'; she hisses, is 'snake-head'; and her hands are 'scaly!'" She is therefore the "symbolic embodiment" of "evil". So is the *Squeaker's Mate* evil because she cannot bear a child and behave like a woman? Is her broken back a punishment for having tried to transgress gender roles?

Baynton herself had very fixed ideas about women's traditional roles. She valorised the space of the home and household duties for women. In an article entitled "Indignity of Domestic Service" she gives reasons why domestic servants are no longer happy with their work and prefer to go and work in factories. She writes that now they no longer have to be servile and self-effacing in front of the mistress of the house.

"No hated caps, or other "I serve" - insignia, and above all, that paramount privilege, men as masters."

"I may sound disloyal to my sex, yet, it is a common truth; show me a woman in power, and I will show you a despot. Indeed, in my anti-suffrage canvass in London, my surest and most successful weapon for anti-votes was to just ask shopgirls. "Would you rather have a woman over you than a man?" Towards the end she states - "The domestic life is in the - to women - political wilderness just the one oasis which they understand... It is selfish thoughtlessness that has made girls leave this most womanly pursuit for the demoralizing factory life, with its pernicious, far-reaching after-effects."

Baynton goes back to the traditional roles allowed to women by a patriarchal society. Her anti-suffragism and the glorifying of "domestic life" as a "womanly pursuit" can only mean that her accordance of special status to the maternal is not an inscription of the feminine body in the masculine world of literature, but rather a kind of "regressive biologism" (a term used by Susan Stanford Friedman for Anais Nin). It is not a feminist interruption in male literary discourse, as the "gynocritics" would wish it, but a regression into the same old dichotomy of the male mind and the female flesh. Seen in this light, we can say that Baynton is in concordance with the kind of "patriarchal thought that has limited female biology to its own narrow specifications." She too "thinks with her glands" and makes her characters do the same. For her feminine difference and maternity are not radical departures but sentimentalized depictions within the traditional patriarchal framework.

3.6 LET US SUM UP

Baynton's *The Chosen Vessel* is a terse, yet exquisitely forceful story about the ruptured interpretations of 'woman', she is a victim of lust as well as of worship. The Biblical allusion of the title makes the story that bit more ironic and expands its field of reference. What has woman been chosen for after all? Hennessey asks a similar question towards the end of the story, "And hast thou chosen me?" But his hope too turns out to be chimaera. We also see that the *Bush* has been depicted as malevolent, malignant and vicious.

In the last section I have tried to place Baynton's story within her entire oeuvre from the point of view of sexual difference and the inscription of the maternal into her texts. But I was led to conclude that Baynton's claim for the superiority of the reproductive female body is ultimately regressive and falls within the traditional patriarchal division of male production and female reproduction.

3.7 QUESTIONS

- (1) Can you read Barbara Baynton's story, *The Chosen Vessel* as an indictment of *Bush* life?
- (2) Explain the dichotomy of whore/goddess (mother) with reference to *The Chosen Vessel*.
- (3) Write a note on how the short story has been structured. Does it have a 'twist' in the end?
- (4) Make a note of the stereotypical gender differences that have been depicted through the characters in the story.
- (5) What is *écriture féminine*? Do you think Barbara Baynton's valorisation of the maternal is a feminist interruption in male-centred literary discourse?

3.8 SUGGESTED READINGS

- (1) Sally Krimmer & Alan Lawson (eds.) : Barbara Baynton : Bush Studios, other stories, Human Toll, Verse, Essay and Letters (Univ. of Queensland Press : 1980).
- (2) Laurie Hergenhan's: "Shafts into Our Fundamental Animalism": Barbara Baynton's Use of Maturalism in **Bush Studies**. (Australian Literary Studies, Vol.17, no:3, May 1996).
- (3) Jack Lindsay's "Barbara Baynton: A Master of Naturalism." from **Decay and Renewal** (published by Wild & Woolley, Sydney, 1976). and
- (4) A.A. Phillips', "Barbara Baynton and the Dissidence of the Nineties" from **The Australian Tradition** (Angus & Robertson Sydney, 1966)

UNIT 4 HENRY LAWSON : *The Drover's Wife* : *The Union Buries Its Dead*

Structure

- 4.0 Objectives
- 4.1 Introduction
- 4.2 Henry Lawson – A Brief History
- 4.3 *The Drover's Wife* – Text
 - 4.3.1 The Socio-Cultural Context
 - 4.3.2 Theme and Characters
 - 4.3.3 Use of Language
 - 4.3.4 Landscape Portrayal
- 4.4 *The Union Buries Its Dead* – Text
 - 4.4.1 The Socio- Cultural Context
 - 4.4.2 Theme and Characters
 - 4.4.3 Use of Language
- 4.5 Let Us Sum Up
- 4.6 Questions
- 4.7 Glossary
- 4.8 Suggested Reading

4.0 OBJECTIVES

This unit introduces you to Henry Lawson and his short stories. We shall begin with a biographical approach by noting how Henry Lawson's life has influenced his art. We will then examine the critical approaches to Henry Lawson and his short stories *The Drover's Wife* and *The Union Buries Its Dead*. This will naturally lead us to a discussion on the themes in his short stories and the literary styles or devices used by him.

4.1 INTRODUCTION

Henry Lawson (1867–1922) is the best known of the contributors of the journal *The Bulletin*. His poems and stories were also published in *The Worker* and other radical papers. Writing provided only a meagre source of income and in 1899 in an article titled *Pursuing Literature in Australia* for *The Bulletin* he wrote:

“My advice to any young Australian writer whose talents have been recognized, would be to go steerage, stow away, swim and seek London, Yankeeland or Timbuctoo – rather than stay in Australia till his genius turn to gall, or beer. Or, failing this – and still in the interests of human nature and literature – to study anatomy, especially as applies to the cranium, and then shoot himself...”

What does he mean? Clearly he believes that the literary capitals of the world are in Europe and America. For any writer to remain in Australia would mean obscurity. Moreover, the writer's talents would go to seed in this country. In short, it would be suicidal for any established writer to remain in Australia. Does he seriously mean this or is he writing in a higher vein? Or does this statement emanate from his own experiences as a writer?

He wrote both poetry and prose but it is his prose that is far more telling and carefully worked out. He regarded prose as his forte, not poetry as he recounted to a reporter in 1917 though in the early years his reputation rested on his poetry. At one time it was even held widely that he was the national poet of Australia but he lacked imaginative penetration as a verse writer. The best of his work was accomplished in the first fifteen years of his writing career. His story collections are *Short Stories in Prose and Verse* (published by his mother in 1894), *While the Billy Boils* (1896), *On the Track* (1900), *Over the Sliprails* (1900), *The Country I Come From* (a retrospective selection published in Edinburgh in 1901), and *Children of the Bush* (London, 1902). It is his short stories that we will analyse in this unit.

4.2 HENRY LAWSON – A BRIEF HISTORY

Henry Lawson led a poverty-stricken life and worked as a coach painter before becoming a writer and an outback *swagman*. He spent the last twenty years as an alcoholic beggar who was “in the end more an object of pathos than veneration”. Though, when he died he was honoured by a civic reception attended amongst others by the then Prime Minister Mr William M Hughes, himself (Adrian Mitchell, 1995:1).

Lawson's father, Peter (Niels) Larsen, was a Norwegian who came to Australia in the early 50s but had little luck as a gold-digger at *Ballarat*. His mother, Louisa, was the granddaughter of early settlers. She was also a short story writer and proprietor-cum-editor of a radical women's magazine *Dawn* (1888-1905). She was a profound influence not only on his upbringing but also on his literary life. His father, who worked on *roving* commissions for the gold diggers in the outback, was mostly away from the family. Later, in 1883 the parents separated. Despite hard times Louisa was determined to provide her children with a good education as she herself had been denied one by her father. She took the initiative to avail of the provisions of the New South Wales Public Schools Act of 1866-67 for the opening of ‘provisional schools’, where twenty-five children could attend school regularly, and got a school started at Eurunderee. Henry was enrolled in this school on October 2, 1876. Thus, though difficult, his education was fruitful. As he describes:

“And we learnt the world in scraps from some ancient dingy maps
Long discarded by the public schools in town;
And as nearly as every book dated back to Captain Cook
Our geography was somewhat upside-down...”

(S.Murray-Smith, 1975:7)

Nevertheless, such education as he had was entirely due to Louisa's ambition for him, already conscious, as she must have been, that he was a talented lad. Yet as Bertha Lawson, his wife tells us Henry's mother “could never have given him the sympathetic understanding or affection he most needed”. Bertha's impression is that this helped increase his sense of loneliness and diffidence as a boy. His hearing had been impaired from the age of nine though that does not seem to have hindered his sensitivity. His inner ear could catch the “pace and phrasing of colloquial speech” as well as “the rhythms and cadences” in his prose writings while his observation came from a “good eye for detail” (Adrian Mitchell, 1995:3). All these attributes helped him in his writing career.

The *Bulletin* encouraged material that dwelt with Australian life. It emphasised realism, especially of bush experience, and a casual, colloquial tone. It also encouraged dark, melodramatic but often compelling stories of the convict system. What many of the *Bulletin* writers had in common was the dominating site of the

bush and some of the values and myths associated with it and with "true Australianness, including male *mate ship* and *egalitarianism*"; values endorsed by all writers especially Lawson and Barbara Baynton (Laurie Hergenhahn, 1986:xiv). You must note the special Australian sense in which *bush* is used to refer to the vast interiors, the outback. It displaced words such as *forest* and *wood*. With it developed a new vocabulary of the *Bush* – *bushranger*, *swag*, *stockman* – to replace the names of an intimate countryside in England. For instance, convicts escaping in the bush came to be called *bushrangers*. The appeal of the *bush* gradually came to be the great myth of Australian history. In a way, it satisfied the Australian quest for identity.

You will recall that early Australian writers were in one way or another trying to approximate to the literary models of the mother country, England. However, Australia was quite different and it was within this context that the search for an Australian identity became a challenge for Australian writers. From these biographical details we can form an idea of the forces that shaped and determined the way he viewed the world in general and his surroundings in particular in his literary works. The emergence of the *Bulletin* – its proprietors, editors, readers and writers, helped him, as it did many others, in displaying their literary skills. And, though the flowering of the short story in the 1890s coincides with the peaking of the European short story in *Chekhov*, the two are apparently not connected (Laurie Hergenhahn, 1986:xiii).

Lawson was greatly preoccupied with Australia's past. The outback, in particular (of which he gained first hand knowledge and experience through the six month tramp from Bourke to Hungerford on Queensland border, funded in 1892 at the age of 25 by the *Bulletin*) and Australian society, in general, influenced most of his literary works. As a nationalist he wanted to give his country a past to be proud of. Phillips (1971:90) in his review asserts:

Lawson's love for Australia came from deeper levels than the ventriloquial folk voice, but it hardly colours at all his picture of the Australian scene. Reading Lawson's work consecutively, one becomes more and more convinced that he was not merely objectively delineating the New South Wales plains; he was projecting on to them the landscape of his soul.

There is a similar quality in Lawson's recordings of Australian society. He celebrates Australia as a land of splendid opportunity only when he is speaking through the folk-voice humour or yarns. The tone is very different when he speaks for himself. In the stories, as we shall observe later, his chosen human subjects are the people on the roads, rejects from an unjust society, the slum's victims, the *Selectors* struggling against a hostile environment, their wives facing slow spiritual destruction through hardship and loneliness.

It has been argued that Lawson wrote his best work during a period of drought and economic depression. The year 1892, when he undertook the outback trip from Bourke to Hungerford, was a year of severe drought. However, in looking at his works, one becomes progressively convinced that it is insufficient to accept the claim that there are subjective compulsions controlling his emphases (Phillips 1971, Mathews 1971, Mitchell 1995).

A number of qualities combine to make Lawson an outstanding writer although over the years he has not been valued for the same reasons. The themes that appeal today are not the comic ones of resilient battling but those concerning "loneliness, failure.... and a compulsive insistence on the gossamer precariousness of happiness"

(Hergenhahn 1986). It is through the clinical description of the bush in his short stories and sketches that Barnes (Barnes 1986) in his critical appraisal comments, "Henry Lawson is the voice of the bush and the bush is the heart of Australia." Similarly, H. M. Green in Roderick (1966:8) in his admiration of Lawson stated "to read him in a foreign country is to breathe the air of home."

The qualities of Lawson's style that critics have classified and admired are "economy and simplicity, his deft use of implication to evoke what is left unsaid, his feeling for the fragmentary random quality of life, his sympathy for the outsider and an air of truthfulness which is not simply a matter of sparse but telling documentation, but of feeling of sensitivity and voice" (Barnes 1986, Roderick 1966 and Kiernan 1987). In his commentary Barnes also observes that many have sought to imitate Lawson's simplicity but no other Australian writer has managed so well to create that effect of natural unaffected speech, which is Lawson's hallmark. The absence of pretension and of self-conscious literariness enabled Lawson to write in a genuinely simple style. Roderick while describing Lawson's influential role in Australia's literary scene points out that "Lawson's power lies in his ability to capture tersely a mood or a wisp of sentiment" in his stories. Can you think of any Indian writers whose style resembles Lawson's?

To sum up briefly then, Lawson's strength lay in giving expression to the voice of the bush and his ability to represent things, mood, scene etc. with brevity and terseness as they really are (realism). An examination of two of his stories will help us in understanding him and his writing better. Having looked at Lawson's life and the factors that influenced his writing, it would be apt for us to turn to his short stories now. In the next section we shall examine closely the short story *The Drover's Wife* to see what we can learn of life in Australia at that time, particularly of life in the bush. We will also find here a sketch of what a woman's life was like in the bush. We shall also note the stylistic devices that Lawson employs. Now read the story carefully, making notes in the margins as you go along.

What do we mean by the drover's wife? Who is a drover? A typically Australian usage, drover means a person who moves along minding cattle/ sheep across vast distances, in search for greener pastures and water for the flock. He is akin to a shepherd/ cowherd. The title tells us that we will read about a woman who is married to a drover. And yet when we read the story, we find that the drover is an absent presence. He is never there and the wife is hardly a wife at all – she is a mother, the farmer, the protector of the farm and the family.

4.3 THE DROVER'S WIFE - TEXT

Henry Lawson's story "The Drover's Wife" was originally published as a book in the collection entitled **While the Billy Boils**. It is a wonderful story that portrays the hardship of life in the Bush of Australia from a woman's perspective – quite unusual for Australian writing of the period. This is probably Lawson's best-known work, very popular in anthologies of Australian short stories.

The two-roomed house is built of round timber, slabs, and stringy-bark, and floored with split slabs. A big bark kitchen standing at one end is larger than the house itself, veranda included.

Bush all around – bush with no horizon, for the country is flat. No ranges in the distance. The bush consists of stunted, rotten native apple-trees. No undergrowth. Nothing to relieve the eye save the darker green of a few she-oaks which are sighing

above the narrow, almost waterless creek. Nineteen miles to the nearest sign of civilisation – a shanty on the main road.

The drover, an ex-squatter, is away with sheep. His wife and children are left here alone. Four ragged, dried-up-looking children are playing about the house. Suddenly one of them yells: "Snake! Mother, here's a snake!"

The gaunt, sun-browned bushwoman dashes from the kitchen, snatches her baby from the ground, holds it on her left hip, and reaches for a stick.

"Where is it?"

"Here! Gone in the wood-heap," yells the eldest boy – a sharp-faced urchin of eleven.

"Stop there, mother! I'll have him. Stand back! I'll have the beggar!"

"Tommy, come here, or you'll be bit. Come here at once when I tell you, you little wretch!"

The youngster comes reluctantly, carrying a stick bigger than himself. Then he yells, triumphantly:

"There it goes – under the house!" and darts away with club uplifted. At the same time the big, black, yellow-eyed dog-of-all-breeds, who has shown the wildest interest in the proceedings, breaks his chain and rushes after that snake. He is a moment late, however, and his nose reaches the crack in the slabs just as the end of its tail disappears. Almost at the same moment the boy's club comes down and skins the aforesaid nose. Alligator takes small notice of this, and proceeds to undermine the building; but he is subdued after a struggle and chained up. They cannot afford to lose him.

The drover's wife makes the children stand together near the dog-house while she watches for the snake. She gets two small dishes of milk and sets them down near the wall to tempt it to come out; but an hour goes by and it does not show itself.

It is near sunset, and a thunderstorm is coming. The children must be brought inside. She will not take them into the house, for she knows the snake is there, and may at any moment come up through a crack in the rough slab floor; so she carries several armfuls of firewood into the kitchen, and then takes the children there. The kitchen has no floor – or, rather, an earthen one – called a "ground floor" in this part of the bush. There is a large, roughly-made table in the centre of the place. She brings the children in, and makes them get on this table. They are two boys and two girls – mere babies. She gives them some supper, and then, before it gets dark, she goes into the house, and snatches up some pillows and bedclothes – expecting to see or lay or hand on the snake any minute. She makes a bed on the kitchen table for the children, and sits down beside it to watch all night.

She has an eye on the corner, and a green sapling club laid in readiness on the dresser by her side; also her sewing basket and a copy of the *Young Ladies' Journal*. She has brought the dog into the room. Tommy turns in, under protest, but says he'll lie awake all night and smash that blinded snake.

His mother asks him how many times she has told not to swear.

He has his club with him under the bedclothes, and Jacky protests:

"Mummy! Tommy's skinnin' me alive wif his club. Make him take it out." Tommy:

"Shet up you little —! D'yer want to be bit with the snake?"

Jacky shuts up.

"If yer bit," says Tommy, after a pause, "you'll swell up, an' smell, an' turn red an' green an' blue all over till yer bust. Won't he mother?"

"Now then, don't frighten the child. Go to sleep," she says.

The two younger children go to sleep, and now and then Jacky complains of being "skeezed." More room is made for him. Presently Tommy says: "Mother! Listen to them (adjective) little 'possums. I'd like to screw their blanky necks."

And Jacky protests drowsily.

"But they don't hurt us, the little blanks!"

Mother: "There, I told you you'd teach Jacky to swear." But the remark makes her smile. Jacky goes to sleep.

Presently Tommy asks: "Mother! Do you think they'll ever extricate the (adjective) kangaroo?"

"Lord! How am I to know, child? Go to sleep."

"Will you wake me if the snake comes out?"

"Yes. Go to sleep."

Near midnight. The children are all asleep and she sits there still, sewing and reading by turns. From time to time she glances round the floor and wall-plate, and, whenever she hears a noise, she reaches for the stick. The thunderstorm comes on, and the wind, rushing through the cracks in the slab wall, threatens to blow out her candle. She places it on a sheltered part of the dresser and fixes up a newspaper to protect it. At every flash of lightning, the cracks between the slabs gleam like polished silver. The thunder rolls, and the rain comes down in torrents.

Alligator lies at full length on the floor, with his eyes turned towards the partition. She knows by this that the snake is there. There are large cracks in that wall opening under the floor of the dwelling-house.

She is not a coward, but recent events have shaken her nerves. A little son of her brother-in-law was lately bitten by a snake, and died. Besides, she has not heard from her husband for six months, and is anxious about him.

He was a drover, and started squatting here when they were married.

The drought of 18—ruined him. He had to sacrifice the remnant of his flock and go droving again. He intends to move his family into the nearest town when he comes back, and, in the meantime, his brother, who keeps a shanty on the main road, comes over about once a month with provisions. The wife has still a couple of cows, one horse, and a few sheep. The brother-in-law kills one of the latter occasionally, gives her what she needs of it, and takes the rest in return for other provisions.

She is used to being left alone. She once lived like this for eighteen months. As a girl she built the usual castles in the air; but all her girlish hopes and aspirations have long been dead. She finds all the excitement and recreation she needs in the *Young Ladies' Journal*, and Heaven help her! Takes a pleasure in the fashion plates.

Her husband is an Australian, and so is she. He is careless, but a good enough husband. If he had the means he would take her to the city and keep her there like a princess. They are used to being apart, or at least she is. "No use fretting," she says. He may forget sometimes that he is married; but if he has a good cheque when he comes back he will give most of it to her. When he had money he took her to the city several times—hired a railway sleeping compartment, and put up at the best hotels. He also bought her a buggy, but they had to sacrifice that along with the rest.

The last two children were born in the bush—one while her husband was bringing a drunken doctor, by force, to attend to her. She was alone on this occasion, and very weak. She had been ill with fever. She prayed to God to send her assistance. God sent

Black Mary – the “whitest” gin in all the land. Or, at least, God sent “King Jimmy” first, and he sent Black Mary. He put his black face round the door post, took in the situation at a glance, and said cheerfully: “All right, Missis – I bring my old woman, she down alonga creek.”

One of the children died while she was here alone. She rode nineteen miles for assistance, carrying the dead child.

It must be near one or two o’clock. The fire is burning low. Alligator lies with his head resting on his paws, and watches the wall. He is not a very beautiful dog, and the light shows numerous old wounds where the hair will not grow. He is afraid of nothing on the face of the earth or under it. He will tackle a bullock as readily as he will tackle a flea. He hates all other dogs – except kangaroo-dogs – and has a marked dislike to friends or relations of the family. They seldom call, however. He sometimes makes friends with strangers. He hates snakes and has killed many, but he will be bitten some day and die; most snake-dogs end that way. Now and then the bushwoman lays down her work and watches, and listens, and thinks. She thinks of things in her own life, for there is little else to think about.

The rain will make the grass grow, and this reminds her how she fought a bush fire once while her husband was away. The grass was long, and very dry, and the fire threatened to burn her out. She put on an old pair of her husband’s trousers and beat out the flames with a green bough, till great drops of sooty perspiration stood out on her forehead and ran in streaks down her blackened arms. The sight of his mother in trousers greatly amused Tommy, who worked like a little hero by her side, but the terrified baby howled lustily for his “mummy.” The fire would have mastered her but for four excited bushmen who arrived in the nick of time. It was a mixed-up affair all round; when she went to take up the baby he screamed and struggled convulsively, thinking it was a “black man,” and Alligator, trusting more to the child’s sense than his own instinct, charged furiously, and (being old and slightly deaf) did not in his excitement at first recognise his mistress’s voice, but continued to hang on to the moleskins until choked off by Tommy with a saddle-strap. The dog’s sorrow for his blunder, and his anxiety to let it be known that it was all a mistake, was as evident as his ragged tail and a twelve-inch grin could make it. It was a glorious time for the boys; a day to look back to, and talk about, and laugh over for many years. She thinks how she fought a flood during her husband’s absence. She stood for hours in the drenching downpour, and dug an overflow gutter to save the dam across the creek. But she could not save it. There are things that a bushwoman cannot do. Next morning the dam was broken, and her heart was nearly broken too, for she thought how her husband would feel when he came home and saw the result of years of labour swept away. She cried then.

She also fought the *pleuro-pneumonia* – dosed and bled the few remaining cattle, and wept again when her two best cows died.

Again, she fought a mad bullock that besieged the house for a day. She made bullets and fired at him through cracks in the slabs with an old shot-gun. He was dead in the morning. She skinned him and got seventeen-and-sixpence for the hide.

She also fights the crows and eagles that have designs on her chickens. Her plan of campaign is very original. The children cry “Crows, mother!” and she rushes out and aims a broomstick at the birds as though it were a gun, and says “Bung!” The crows leave in a hurry; they are cunning, but a woman’s cunning is greater.

Occasionally a bushman in the horrors, or a villainous-looking sundowner, comes and nearly scares the life out of her. She generally tells the suspicious-looking

stranger that her husband and two sons are at work below the dam, or over at the yard, for he always cunningly inquires for the boss.

Only last week a gallows-faced swagman – having satisfied himself that there were no men on the place – threw his swag down on the veranda, and demanded tucker. She gave him something to eat; then he expressed the intention of staying for the night. It was sundown then. She got a batten from the sofa, loosened the dog, and confronted the stranger, holding the batten in one hand and the dog's collar with the other. "Now you go!" she said. He looked at her and at the dog, said "All right, mum," in a cringing tone and left. She was a determined-looking woman, and Alligator's yellow eyes glared unpleasantly – besides, the dog's chawing-up apparatus greatly resembled that of the reptile he was named after.

She has few pleasures to think of as she sits here alone by the fire, on guard against a snake. All days are much the same for her; but on Sunday afternoon she dresses herself, tidies the children, smartens up baby, and goes for a lonely walk along the bush-track, pushing an old perambulator in front of her. She does this every Sunday. She takes as much care to make herself and the children look smart as she would if she were going to do the block in the city. There is nothing to see, however, and not a soul to meet. You might walk for twenty miles along this track without being able to fix a point in your mind, unless you are a bushman. This is because of the everlasting, maddening sameness of the stunted trees – that monotony which makes a man long to break away and travel as far as trains can go, and sail as far as ship can sail – and farther.

But this bushwoman is used to the loneliness of it. As a girl-wife she hated it, but now she would feel strange away from it.

She is glad when her husband returns, but she does not gush or make a fuss about it. She gets him something good to eat, and tidies up the children.

She seems contented with her lot. She loves her children, but has no time to show it. She seems harsh to them. Her surroundings are not favourable to the development of the "womanly" or sentimental side of nature.

It must be nearing morning now; but the clock is in the dwelling-house. Her candle is nearly done; she forgot that she was out of candles. Some more wood must be got to keep the fire up, and so she shuts the dog inside and hurries around to the woodheap. The rain has cleared off. She seizes a stick, pulls it out, and – crash! The whole pile collapses. Yesterday she bargained with a stray blackfellow to bring her some wood, and while he was at work she went in search of a missing cow. She was absent an hour or so, and the native black made good use of his time. On her return she was so astonished to see a good heap of wood by the chimney, and she gave him an extra fig of tobacco, and praised him for not being lazy. He thanked her, and left with head erect and chest well out. He was the last of his tribe and a King; but he had built that wood-heap hollow.

She is hurt now, and tears spring to her eyes as she sits down again by the table. She takes up a handkerchief to wipe the tears away, but pokes her eyes with her bare fingers instead. The handkerchief is full of holes, and she finds that she has put her thumb through one, and her forefinger through another.

This makes her laugh, to the surprise of the dog. She has a keen, very keen, sense of the ridiculous; and some time or other she will amuse bushmen with the story.

She has been amused before like that. One day she sat down "to have a good cry," as she said – and the old cat rubbed against her dress and "cried too." Then she had to laugh.

It must be near daylight now. The room is very close and hot because of the fire. Alligator still watches the wall from time to time. Suddenly he becomes greatly interested; he draws himself a few inches nearer the partition, and a thrill runs through his body. The hair on the back of neck begins to bristle, and the battle-light is in his yellow eyes. She knows what this means, and lays her hand on the stick. The lower end of one of the partition slabs has a large crack on both sides. An evil pair of small, bright bead-like eyes glisten at one of these holes. The snake – a black one – comes slowly out, about a foot, and moves its head up and down. The dog lies still, and the woman sits as one fascinated. The snake comes out a foot further. She lifts her stick, and the reptile, as though suddenly aware of danger, sticks his head in through the crack on the other side of the slab, and hurries to get his tail round after him. Alligator springs, and his jaws come together with a snap. He misses, for his nose is large, and the snake's body close down on the angle formed by the slabs and the floor. He snaps again as the tail comes round. He has the snake now, and tugs it out eighteen inches. Thud, thud comes the woman's club on the ground. Alligator pulls again. Thud, thud. Alligator gives another pull and he has the snake out – a black brute, five feet long. The head rises to dart about, but the dog has the enemy close to the neck. He is a big, heavy dog, but quick as a terrier. He shakes the snake as though he felt the original curse in common with mankind. The eldest boy wakes up, seizes his stick, and tries to get out of bed, but his mother forces him back with a grip of iron. Thud, thud – the snake's back is broken in several places. Thud, thud – its head is crushed, and Alligator's nose skinned again.

She lifts the mangled reptile on the point of her stick, carries it to the fire, and throws it in; then piles on the wood and watches the snake burn. The boy and the dog watch too. She lays her hand on the dog's head, and all the fierce, angry light dies out of his yellow eyes. The younger children are quieted, and presently go to sleep. The dirty-legged boy stands for a moment in his shirt, watching the fire. Presently he looks up at her, sees the tears in her eyes, and, throwing his arms around her neck exclaims:

"Mother, I won't never go drovin' blarst me if I do!"

And she hugs him to her worn-out breast and kisses him; and they sit thus together while the sickly daylight breaks over the bush.

4.3.1 The Socio-Cultural Context

Lawson points out in the story that the drover's wife and her husband are Australians. The story first appeared in the *Bulletin* and was written when Lawson was only twenty five years old (1892), it is important to remember that the *Bulletin* was occupied at the time with the issue of nationalism. It was just a decade before the creation of the *Federation* that is it is set in the last decades of the nineteenth century. Lawson was himself a nationalist and hence this attachment of the characters to their country. Lawson portrays life lived in the bush as it was. As Roderick (1966) points out, "His pictures of life convey to us a great sense of the background of the whole people's life; their struggles and cares, their humour and outlook...."

4.3.2 Theme And Characters

We have here the story of a woman who as we can see from the title of the story is not anyone in her own right. She is identified as the wife of a drover who is away "droving" while she is left alone in the bush to fend for herself and her children. The

story revolves around her life, the problems she faces in the bush while her husband, an *ex-squatter* whose property has failed, is away and how she deals with the present danger of the snake. Hers is a life of hardship. She has had to deal with villainous-looking *sundowners*, death, and childbirth all by herself. Also grassfires, mad bullocks and threatening dams have to be encountered. Yet life has little to offer and life in the bush is monotonous with very little to do except maybe take a walk. There are no opportunities to socialise, as there are no people that she can meet here, her hopes and dreams have been lost in the Bush and her husband who is mostly away may even forget that he is married.

Lawson's objective here is not merely to document the place and the incident with the snake, nor is it merely to demonstrate the bravery of Australian pioneer settlers and the nature of the hardship they endured in the outback. Notice the way in which Lawson introduces his characters in a brief and detailed manner:

The drover, an ex-squatter is away with sheep. His wife and children are left here alone.... Four ragged, dried-up looking children are playing about the house. Suddenly one of them yells: snake! Mother, here's a snake.... The gaunt sun-browned bushwoman dashes from the kitchen, snatches her lofty baby from the ground, holds it on her left hip, and reaches for a stick.

This description introduces the reader to the characters in the story. We also get the impression from the description of their dressing and physical appearance that they are a poor family struggling against the odds to survive. This is the author's style of building up his stories. In spite of the hardships we see the drover's wife as strong, loving, brave and resilient. In fact she appears to be the quintessential mother. We get a powerful description of her in the story:

She has few pleasures to think of as she sits here alone by the fire on guard against a snake.... All days are much the same to her. This bushwoman is used to the loneliness of it. As a girl-wife she hated it, but now she would feel strange away from it.... She seems contented with her lot. She loves her children but has no time to show it.

The episode of the snake defines life, the strain of waiting. Yet there is something more than stoicism or fatalism here – the full weight of responsibility falls on the woman while the reader is being told that the bush is indeed “no place for a woman”; he is at the same time also depicting the heroic deeds of the woman in the outback. From the story we get a sense, a feel of the boredom and monotony of the environment:

There is nothing to see, however, and not a soul to meet. You might walk for twenty miles along this track without being able to fix a point in your mind, unless you are a bushman. This is because of the everlasting, maddening sameness of the stunted trees – that monotony which makes a man long to break away and travel as far as trains can go, and sail as far as ships can sail – and further.

If a man cannot endure such a place, then surely it is not a place for woman to persevere here. Yet Lawson describes in the story how the drover's wife is able to fend for herself and her children despite these hardships. Notice how the writer subtly brings up this point rather indirectly without having to lecture to the reader. She is also portrayed as the fiercely protective mother of her children: She “snatches her baby from the ground, holds it on her left hip and reaches for a stick” to kill the

snake. The safety of her children is indeed dear to her. Also, we notice that loyalty looms large in the bush: notice the son Tommy's emphatic declaration:

Mother, I wont never go drovin': blast me if I do!

Tommy reckons that his mother should be protected; she should not be left alone. This precocious loyalty, argues Mitchell (1955:10) "is the basis of defence against defeat".

The image of the drover's wife subverts the stereotype of the woman as a helpless, clinging creature who, needs to be protected by the powerful male. And even though in the story, she is referred to as the drover's wife, she is a powerful character in her own right.

Flashbacks are used as a device to reveal the pattern of the woman's life, its rigours, hardships and fears as well as, and more importantly, to invent the central incident with their own accumulating sense of spiritual and emotional exhaustion. The relief shown by the mother by hugging her son, Tommy, when the snake is finally killed exemplifies this:

And she hugs him to her worn-out breast and kisses him, and they sit thus together while the sickly daylight breaks over the bush.

The flashbacks are significant also (Mathews, 1971:ii) in exposing the pitiable nature of the victory of killing one snake because it is not the first and most certainly not the last in a succession of crises, each of which further expends the dogged human spirit. It is not pioneering steadfastness that Lawson is portraying but slow human disintegration. It is the compassion of the story, its awareness of the human plight and not archetypal possibility, which suggest that Lawson's bush portrayals may be capable of fruitful development.

4.3.3 Use Of Language

In *The Drover's Wife* and indeed in Lawson's other stories we find uniqueness of sentences that are full of nouns but scarce on adjectives and excluding verbs. Such sentences are effective in emphasising the disjointed and discontinuous country:

Bush all round – bush with no horizon, for the country is flat. No ranges in the distance.... No undergrowth. Nothing to relieve the eye.

The verbs that do occur are in the present tense, as in "the country *is* flat". It lacks connection with the past but then it is the human resilience that is significant, the heroism of the ordinary life – the woman having dealt with all sorts of situations – the situations we have already mentioned, such as saving the dam in a downpour, facing mad bullocks, deceitful sundowners, for example, the one who made a hollow woodheap for her despite all the trust that she put in him. It is a graphic description that provides us a sketch of a woman in the bush and has a visual quality about it that makes it powerful. You feel the whole action as if enacted before you. And aspects of bush life are presented also through the confiding tone of the author. This form of narration, of telling the story, of 'yarning', is Lawson's preferred form. Though it is not a carefully constructed form, such as we find say in Mark Twain's stories, it is an equally artful form that is also quite appealing and effective. Note also the use of words that are typically Australian. Beginning with 'drover' as opposed to shepherd.

The other words that you may have encountered for the first time could be 'bush', 'tucker', 'swag', etc.

Henry Lawson

4.3.4 Landscape Portrayal

The Australian landscape was something that the early settlers had to reckon with, as it was different from the one they had grown up in and so the uniqueness of this landscape, its beauty remained to be captured. It was seen primarily as monotonous and in this story it matches with the monotony of the life of the drover's wife:

The everlasting, maddening sameness of the stunted trees – that monotony which makes a man long to break away and travel as far as time can go, and sail as far as trains can go, and sail as far as ships can sail – and further.

But this bushwoman is used to the loneliness of it. As a girl-wife she hated it, but now she would feel strange away from it.

The woman is adjusted and resigned to life in the bush. There is a connection she establishes with it. She has become a *bushwoman* – that seems to mark her identity because otherwise she is merely the drover's wife. The landscape may seem as cursed but Lawson qualifies it by saying that this is how it would seem 'unless you are a bushman'. Who could better adjust to it than those who lived in the bush? And remember Lawson refers to them as Australians, which is significant in marking their new identity. It becomes a matter of pride. Having read *The Drover's Wife* and analysed it, let us now take up the next Lawson story: *The Union Buries Its Dead* in the next section of our discussion.

4.4 THE UNION BURIES ITS DEAD – TEXT

While out boating one Sunday afternoon on a billabong across the river, we saw a young man on horseback driving some horses along the bank. He said it was a fine day, and asked if the water was deep there. The joker of our party said it was deep enough to drown him, and he laughed and rode further up. We didn't take much notice of him. Next day a funeral gathered at a corner pub and asked each other in to have a drink while waiting for the hearse. They passed away some of the time dancing jigs to a piano in the bar parlour. They passed away the rest of the time skylarking and fighting.

The defunct was a young union labourer, about twenty-five, who had been drowned the previous day while trying to swim some horses across a billabong of the Darling.

He was almost a stranger in town, and the fact of his having been a union man accounted for the funeral. The police found some union papers in his swag, and called at the General Labourers Union office for information about him. That's how we knew. The secretary had very little information to give. The departed was a "Roman", and the majority of the town were otherwise – but unionism; is stronger than creed. Liquor, however, is stronger than unionism; and, when the hearse presently arrived, more than two thirds of the funeral were unable to follow.

The procession numbered fifteen; fourteen souls following the broken shell of a soul. Perhaps not one of the fourteen possessed a soul any more than the corpse did – but that doesn't matter.

Four or five of the funeral, who were boarders at the pub, borrowed a trap which the landlord used to carry passengers to and from the railway-station. They were strangers to us who were on foot, and we to them. We were all strangers to the corpse.

A horseman, who looked like a drover just returned from a big trip, dropped into our dusty wake and followed us a few hundred yards, dragging his pack-horse behind him, but a friend made wild and demonstrative signals from an hotel veranda – hooking at the air in front with his right hand and jobbing his left thumb over his shoulder in the direction of the bar – so the drover hauled off and didn't catch up to us any more. He was a stranger to the entire show.

We walked in twos. There were three tows. It was very hot and dusty; the heat rushed in fierce dazzling rays across every iron roof and light-coloured wall that was turned to the sun. One or two pubs closed respectfully until we got past. They closed their bar doors and the patrons went in and out through some side or back entrance for a few minutes. Bushman seldom grumble at an inconvenience of this sort, when it is caused by a funeral. They have too much respect for the dead.

On the way to the cemetery we passed three shearers sitting on the shady side of a fence. One was drunk – very drunk. The other two covered their right ears with their hats, out of respect for the departed – whoever he might have been – and of the them kicked the drunk and muttered something to him.

He straightened himself up, stared, and reached helplessly for his hat, which he shoved half off and then on again. Then he made a great effort to pull himself together – and succeeded. He stood up, braced his back against the fence, knocked off his hat, and remorsefully placed his foot on it – to keep it off his head till the funeral passed.

A tall, sentimental drover, who walked by my side, cynically quoted Byronic verses suitable to the occasion – to death – and asked with pathetic humour whether we thought the dead man's ticket would be recognized "over yonder". It was a G.L.U. ticket, and the general opinion was that it would be recognized.

Presently my friend said:

"You remember when we were in the boat yesterday, we saw a man driving some horses along the bank?"

"Yes."

He nodded at the hearse and said:

"Well, that's him."

I thought a while.

"I didn't take any particular notice of him," I said. "He said something, didn't he?"

"Yes; said it was a fine day. You'd have taken more notice if you'd known that he was doomed to die in the hour, and that those were the last words he would say to any man in this world."

"To be sure," said a full voice from the rear. "If ye'd known that, ye'd have prolonged the conversation."

We plodded on across the railway-line and along the hot, dusty road which ran to the cemetery, some of us talking about the accident, and lying about the narrow escapes we had had ourselves.

Presently someone said:

"There's the Devil."

I looked up and saw a priest standing in the shade of the tree by the cemetery gate.

The hearse was drawn up and the tail-boards were opened. The funeral extinguished its right ear with its hat as four men lifted the coffin out and laid it over the grave. The priest—a pale, quiet young fellow—stood under the shade of a sapling which grew at the head of the grave. He took off his hat, dropped it carelessly on the ground, and proceeded to business. I noticed that one or two heathens winced slightly when the holy water was sprinkled on the coffin. The drops quickly evaporated, and the little round black spots they left were soon dusted over; but the spots showed, by contrast, the cheapness and shabbiness of the cloth with which the coffin was covered. It seemed black before; now it looked a dusky grey.

Just here man's ignorance and vanity made a farce of the funeral. A big, bull-necked publican, with heavy, blotchy features, and a supremely ignorant expression, picked up the priest's straw hat and held it about two inches over the head of his reverence during the whole of the service. The Father, be it remembered, was standing in the shade. A few shoved their hats on and off uneasily, struggling between their disgust for the living and their respect for the dead. The hat had a conical crown and a brim sloping down all round like a sunshade, and the publican held it with his great red claw spread over the crown. To do the priest justice, perhaps he didn't notice the incident. A stage priest or parson in the same position might have said, "Put the hat down, my friend; is not the memory of our departed brother worth more than my complexion?" A wattle-bark layman might have expressed himself in stronger language, none the less to the point. But my priest seemed unconscious of what was going on. Besides, the publican was a great and important pillar of the Church. He couldn't, as an ignorant and conceited ass, lose such a good opportunity of asserting his faithfulness and importance to his Church.

The grave looked very narrow under the coffin, and I drew a breath of relief when the box slid easily down. I saw a coffin get stuck once, at Rookwood, and it had to be yanked out with difficulty, and laid on the sods at the feet of the heart-broken relations, who howled dismally while the grave-diggers widened the hole. But they don't cut contracts so fine in the West. Our grave-digger was not altogether bowelless, and, out of respect for that human quality threw it down to deaden the fall of the clay lumps on the coffin. He also tried to steer the first few shovelfuls gently down against the end of the grave with the back of the shovel turned outwards, but the hard dry Darling River clods rebounded and knocked all the same. It didn't matter much—nothing does. The fall of lumps of clay on a stranger's coffin doesn't sound any different from the fall of the same things on an ordinary wooden box—at least I didn't notice anything awesome or unusual in the sound; but, perhaps, one of us—the most sensitive—might have been impressed by being reminded of a burial long ago, when the thump of every sod jolted his heart.

I have left out the wattle—because it wasn't there. I have also neglected to mention the heart-broken old mate, with his grizzled head bowed and great drops streaming down his rugged cheeks. He was absent—he was probably "outback". For similar reasons I have omitted reference to the suspicious moisture in the eyes of a bearded bush ruffian named Bill. Bill failed to turn up, and the only moisture was that which

was induced by the heat. I have left out the "sad Australian sunset", because the sun was not going down at the time. The burial took place exactly at midday.

The dead bushman's name was Jim, apparently; but they found no portraits, nor locks of hair, nor any love-letters, nor anything of that kind in his swag – not even a reference to his mother; only some papers relating to union matters. Most of us didn't know the name till we saw it on the coffin; we knew him as "that poor chap that got drowned yesterday".

"So his name's James Tyson," said my drover acquaintance, looking at the plate.

"Why! Didn't you know that before?" I asked.

"NO; but I knew he was a union man."

It turned out, afterwards, that J. T. wasn't his real name – only "the name he went by".

Anyhow he was buried by it, and most of the "Great Australian Dailies" have mentioned in their brevity columns that a young man named James John Tyson was drowned in a billabong of the Darling last Sunday.

We did hear, later, what his real name was; but if we ever chance to read it in the "Missing Friends Column" we shall not be able to give any information to heart-broken Mother or Sister or Wife, nor to any one who could let him hear something to his advantage – for we have already forgotten the name.

As in *The Drover's Wife* we will look at the art of storytelling that Lawson adopts – of concentrating on an incident. We note the significance or lack of it in the observance of ritual. This ritual is being performed in the face of absolute desolation that is physical as well as spiritual. An individual may face emptiness but culture assigns a pattern on the lives of people. Lawson inverts the emotional impact of the incident that is central to the story, that of the Union burying its dead.

The story first appeared in the *Sydney Truth* as *A Bushman's Funeral: A Sketch from life*. It was an outcome of his trip to Bourke in the North-West. The far West, according to Kiernan (1987:10) had been romanticised by many previous writers, but Lawson was appalled by the life he found there.

4.4.1 The Social Cultural Context

This story is based on an incident that is recounted by Jim Grahame in *Rambles with Henry Lawson*:

Just before we left Bourke a man carrying an Australian Workers union ticket was drowned in the river and the local agent of that union took the responsibility of the burial. Lawson and I went to the little funeral, it was a hot day and all at the graveside were bare headed, but an over officious publican opened an umbrella and held it above the officiating priest's head, irritation and maybe contempt flashed across the reverend's face. Lawson nudged me.

Lawson has used this incident to provide an insight into the way he looked at life. The story draws attention to Unionism and celebrates the spirit of mateship.

The story begins with the image of boating on a Sunday afternoon on a billabong of the Darling. We are amidst a very different setting that draws attention to the bush and the pertinent question here is whether the water is deep or not. How are we to

look at the death of a person who drowns there? Nobody had bothered to know the drover while he was alive and drove horses along the river bank. But when he drowned and was found to be a young Union labourer, everybody was concerned and came to the funeral to pay their last respects. This foregrounds the importance attached to Unionism as it presumably helps in the protection of their rights; this is what mateship is all about. The important thing about him is that he is a Unionist and unionism as a kind of systematised mateship is stronger than creed. As Lawson puts it:

The fact of his having been a Union man accounted for the funeral.... The departed was a 'Roman' and the majority of the town were otherwise – but Unionism is stronger than creed.

The members of the funeral get together at one of the pubs and soon everyone is preoccupied in his own way, unconcerned with the tragedy, dancing jigs or even fighting. Nothing seems to matter much despite the solemnity of the occasion; in any case two-thirds of the mourners (the unionists) are too drunk to follow the funeral. The pubs close their bar doors out of respect as the procession goes past the place and temporarily it is the side door that the patrons use. It is noon time and three drunk shearers sitting on the shady side of a fence manage to get their hats off, not really out of respect but because propriety demands it. While the service is on the publican holds the priest's hat. The way the story is narrated does not reflect the seriousness that the title suggests. How is this to be interpreted and what is it that it reflects is examined in the next section. Lawson has in the title "ironically appropriated the representations from any number of pictures and illustrations of the aftermath of the American Civil War". Typically, these were large-scale representations, very sobering in their effect, of the Union troops mourning their fallen comrade. It is immediately apparent how Lawson has inverted the emotional impact, and reversed the contemporary meaning of the title.

4.4.2 Theme And Characters

The chronicler of the event describes the funeral thus:

Just here man's ignorance and vanity made a farce of the funeral. It is not the loneliness of the human condition and the deadliness of human indifference that is so overtly being described here. As Phillips points out (see Murray-Smith 1975:36-37) Lawson was unashamedly sentimental but was determined not to lapse into sentimentality; thus the skilful use of openings and endings:

While out boating one Sunday afternoon....
Anyhow he was buried by it and the most of....
We did hear later on....

The same capacity for the apt and planned alternation of mood is also shown in the story. The story is highly charged with emotion. The funeral of the unknown young man, identified by a Union ticket in his pocket, is attended by fellow Unionists in the township from a sense of solidarity and respect. Time and again we are pulled up sharply from the verge of becoming sad:

I didn't take particular notice of him, I said. He said something, didn't he? Yes, said it was a fine day. You'd have taken more notice if you'd known that he was doomed to die in the hour.

The solemn thoughts raised by this exchange are abruptly ended by the remark one of the mourners makes as he sees the priest: "There is the Devil." The narrator of the story continues: "I noticed that one or two heathens winced slightly when the holy water was sprinkled on the coffin. Having now established an iconoclastic and irreverent mood Lawson switches back again:

The fall of lumps of clay on a stranger's coffin doesn't sound any different from the fall of the same things on an ordinary wooden box... but perhaps one of us – the most sensitive might have been impressed by being reminded of a burial of long ago, when the thump of every sod jotted his heart.

Immediately following this we are told:

I have left out the wattle – because it wasn't there. I have also neglected to mention the heart-broken old mate, with his grizzled head bowed and great pearly drops steaming down his rugged cheeks. He was absent – he was probably "out Back". I have left out the "sad Australian sunset" because the sun was not going down at the time....

We are then made to recall the seriousness of comments on the name of the dead bushman and the story ends:

... we shall not be able to give any information to heart-broken Mother or Sister or Wife, nor to anyone who could let him hear something to his advantage – for we have already forgotten the name.

Yet all this is not so much the alternation of mood as the setting of one – complex, human and true – by the use of plain language, juxtaposition and interplay of detail. This is a highly skilled method of craftsmanship.

In the funeral we get a glimpse of the mourners from the narrator as people coarsened and spiritually debilitated by life in the outback, as people who can only accommodate the suddenness, the impartiality, the ever-presence of death by seeking to stave off or to soften the unadorned truth (Matthews 1971:xi). Our attention is constantly and cynically drawn to a whole range of complex facades and disguises used by the mourners to wall off the truth – fake sentimentality on the part of the mourners. Notice for instance that the pubs shut their front doors but leave their side doors open; there is even a desperate suggestion that the Drover's fate could have been fended off if only they had been warned:

...if ye'd known that, ye'd have prolonged the conversation...

But all these Matthews argues, further serves only to advance the fact of death and the true plight of the mourners more insistently, while transforming an apparent preoccupation with the burial of the dead into a study of the terrified living. The mumbled groping burial service affirms death as the story's great reality. The narrator has a perception of how the occasion should be observed which perhaps just points to the fact that propriety is difficult to observe in the bush. Yet it is imperative to observe certain proprieties.

Unlike the emotion of alarm and fear posed by the dangerous snake in *The Drover's Wife*, in this story we get the emotion of sadness, of helplessness in the face of death and man's

inability to do anything about it. As with other stories, there is no real resolution, no ending, only a feeling that one episode – a vital and somehow revelatory one – has been momentarily caught, its implications apprehended with tantalizing incompleteness. And though these characters remain enclosed and shadowy, a visionary element in the writing, a flicker of revelation in image and phrase brings us into contact with the great issues and aspirations of a man under stress, man on trial, man alienated.

4.4.3 Use Of Language

The writing in the story is pithy and to the point. It is written in such a way that the story is upon you as a reader at once and bears you along swiftly. The position of the narrator deserves attention. Mitchell (1990: 30) observes that "in Lawson, his narrator merges himself with the collective; there is no separating the attitudes and values of what is recounted from those apparently endorsed by the narrative itself. The narrator is not critical of the comic riot with which the funeral begins, and he is unperturbed that so many of the mourners are soon incapable of walking to the cemetery." He speaks in the first person plural, "we", because he identifies himself with the mourners; he is part and parcel of the drovers. This brings out the sensitivity of those who can feel – the grave digger even tries 'to gentle the clatter of the lumps of clay, out of respect for that human quality described as "feelin's"'. From the story we get the ironic feeling that nothing really matters, nothing surprises. Out in the broiling and dazed plains, in the heat and the dust, life such as it is goes on. Nothing of great significance happens. That man, apart from the constant pressure and demands of living, is also living under the shadow of an uncontrollable phenomenon: Death, and he can do nothing about it. But then the narratorial "we" becomes "I" and there is a thinking and noticing what the individual can do on his own account. And through the "I" we get to the next phase of the story in which the narrator registers details that indicate true feeling beneath the layer of indifference. Thus a true to life narrative is presented to the reader.

4.5 LET US SUM UP

We have looked at two of Lawson's stories in this unit. Lawson is successful in portraying life at the time, in foregrounding the prevalent societal concerns. In writing of the exploited selector, drover or the broken-down bushwoman, he was writing of all humanity in fear and suffering. His vision apparently so confined in a geographical or sociological sense was further afield. He displays a keen awareness, observation, and sensitivity and thus is a sympathetic chronicler of bush life. As a pioneer in the short story genre, he was able to give direction and colour to the Australian short story. He wrote his stories in a brief, terse manner and in a common man's language. What is unique is his ability to describe the human condition in a realistic manner. For example in *The Drover's Wife*, as Roderick puts it, we feel pity for the sorrow-laden community, while in *The Union Buries Its Dead* we see resentment against death, the manner of its coming and the helplessness of man. The latter story depicts the human being as sad and destined to suffer.

Lawson's influence is still as pervasive as ever. His stories have retained their power and finesse. His themes are still as relevant as a century ago. People still identify with him. Roderick (1966:63) with reference to *The Union Buries Its Dead* and its relevance to the present, comments that "perhaps it is because the story brings us up

suddenly against the fact of death, death robbed of sentimentality, intractable death, bleak, rigid, cold, unsparing; that it has this timeless power to attract even as it repels, a power gained from the marriage of fear and fascination that makes the fact of death an eternal mystery. In his stories Lawson mirrors the restlessness of humanity" and the situation is the same even today.

Finally, in *The Drover's Wife* and indeed in some of his other stories and poems, we note Lawson's Republican views: "...her husband is an Australian, and so is she..." These views are now in vogue. People regard themselves more as Australians with a unique culture now more than ever. Lawson's ideas, themes and socio-political views were thus ahead of his times and people are now beginning to appreciate the power and relevance of his genius even more. His contribution to the Australian literary landscape has, therefore, truly been phenomenal. It is perhaps because Lawson's stories are so local that they assume universal significance. For not only do they portray the specific conditions of bush life and what it means to be an Australian they also illuminate aspects of what it means to be human in a world often not arranged according to our convenience. It is this wider significance that contributes to the lasting appeal of the stories.

4.6 QUESTIONS

- (1) Describe the life of women in the Australian outback as depicted in the short story *The Drover's Wife*?
- (2) With examples from *The Drover's Wife* describe the literary style and language used by the author in the story.
- (3) Discuss the themes covered in *The Drover's Wife*?
- (4) Discuss the theme of helplessness in *The Union Buries Its Dead*.
- (5) In what ways are the drovers portrayed as hypocrites in *The Union Buries Its Dead*? Show with examples from the text.
- (6) Discuss the literary style used in the story *The Union Buries Its Dead*.

4.7 GLOSSARY

Ballarat	A place in Victoria well known for its gold fields. In 1864 the administrators of the gold fields antagonised the miners, a group of them thereby rose in rebellion against the administration. This was known as the Eureka rebellion. The event though not an actual revolution was a symbol of political radicalism (and the result of provocation by the authorities).
Billabong	A portion of a river that has become dry; billa means creek and bong means dead
Bulletin	The Sydney Bulletin was established in 1880. In 1896, A g Stephens introduced the Red Page literary columns.

Bush	is used in a special Australian sense to mean the vast interiors, the outback. It displaced words like <i>woods</i> and <i>forests</i> . With it developed a vast range of vocabulary of the Bush like – bushranger, billabong, swag, stockman – to replace the names of an intimate country side in England. For instance, convicts escaping in the bush came to be called bushrangers. The appeal of the bush gradually spread until a time came when the bush with all its nuances and new vocabulary came to be the great myth of Australian history. In a way, it satisfied the Australian quest for identity.
Ex- Squatter	refers to a one time big landlord or land owner
Federation	refers to the coming together of the Australian colonies to form the Commonwealth of Australia on January 1, 1901
Pioneering	derived from the word pioneer refers to those who were the first to settle in Australia, and therefore, faced lot of hardships. Their endeavour to sustain in the land so different from their native place is seen as a positive attitude
Selectors	refer to the Australian farming community
Stockman	the term came into use in the 1830s and originated from the word stock used collectively for farm animals. From 1850 it became synonymous with cattle and a stockman is thus a cattleman
Sundowners	are typical wandering nomads who lie down to sleep wherever the sun goes down
Swag	was part of the bush vocabulary. Henry Lawson describes it as a tent "fly" or strip of calico (a cover for the swag and a shelter in bad weather...), a couple of blankets spare clothing and small personal effects often comprised the swag

4.7 SUGGESTED READINGS

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***Introduction to Short
Fiction***

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UNIT 5 ARTHUR HOEY DAVIS : *CRANKY JACK*

Structure

- 5.0 Objectives
- 5.1 Introduction
- 5.2 *Cranky Jack* – The Text
- 5.3 Overall Structure of *Cranky Jack*
- 5.4 Interpretations
 - 5.4.1 What is Psychoanalysis?
 - 5.4.2 Psychoanalysing *Cranky Jack*
- 5.5 Contextualising *Cranky Jack*
 - 5.5.1 The Pioneer Legend
 - 5.5.2 Labour and Alienation
 - 5.5.3 Parricide
- 5.6 Let Us Sum Up
- 5.7 Questions
- 5.8 Glossary
- 5.9 Suggested Readings

5.0 OBJECTIVES

The main objective of this unit is to look at the story, *Cranky Jack* by Arthur Hoey Davis, better known as Steele Rudd. I will give a brief sketch of his life and take a quick look at his style and the kind of stories he wrote. I will also read *Cranky Jack* as an attempt to dismantle paternal authority.

5.1 INTRODUCTION

Arthur Hoey Davis was born in 1868. His pen name was derived from the eighteenth century editor and essayist of *The Tatler* and *The Spectator* Richard Steele. He aroused the attention of the founding father of the *Bulletin*, J.T. Archibald who already had Lawson and A.B. Paterson writing for him regularly. His first story in the *Bulletin* was called *Starting the Selection* and appeared on 6th April 1895. His *On Our Selection* tales were published routinely after that and they told the story of the Rudd family, Dad, Mother, Dan, Dave, Joe, Kate, Sarah, Norah, the younger siblings, friends and neighbours. The short sketches were basically a humorous look at the hardships of Bush life. These short stories however, exhibit neither pessimism nor sentimentality, just a never-say-die spirit of struggle that keeps everybody going. In a pithy, sardonic style, interspersed with frequent exclamations, Davis tells the story of his own family, which moved to a shingle hut in an out of the way place in Queensland's Darling Downs in 1870. In his 1895 story, he talks about this exodus to the Creek.

"It's twenty years now since we settled on the Creek. Twenty years! I remember well the day we came from Stanthorpe, on Jerome's dray - eight of us, and all the things - beds, tubs, a bucket, the two cedar chairs with the pine bottoms and backs that Dad put in them, some pint-pots and old Crib. It was a scorching hot day, too, talk about thirst! At every creek we came to we drank till it stopped running."

As mentioned earlier, in the tradition of Steele and Addison, Arthur Hoey Davis' / Steele Rudd' short stories were published in periodicals. These short stories were later put together in a book form for the first time in 1899 and were also called *On Our Selection*. The book can be called a collection of various comic incidents with only a

very loose kind of co-ordination between the chapters. The stories tell of the initial misfortunes and privations, trials and tribulations of the Rudd family until the desperate fight for survival gets over and there is hope of eking out some kind of bargain from the inhospitable, harsh and alien land.

Arthur Hoey Davis / Steele Rudd (as he is more popularly remembered) wrote twenty-four books in all and his early books almost made the Rudd family a kind of grand myth of the Australian pioneer family. But as the fortunes of the Rudds soared, Davis himself faced financial bankruptcy. He lived on a pension of £ per week until his death in 1935. His last Rudd family book was published in 1926. Having talked about his life and the kind of stories he wrote briefly, let us now try and take a quick look at his style. Davis' style had steadily declined, making his stories more of the banana-peel variety. He desperately tried to keep entertaining an audience that no longer wanted to read him and was content with the fun, frolic and laughter of the earlier stories. Davis' stories can be seen as entertaining, farcical, and hilarious - and this idea was reinforced by the illustrations that accompanied his early stories that emphasised the idea of a kind of rollicking slapstick comedy.

Cranky Jack that forms Chapter VII of *On Our Selection* is somehow different from the other stories in that the apparent meaninglessness of Jack's actions and words awaken a sense of the absurdly gruesome. The violence and morbidity of the story needs a thorough explication of the nuances of humour and the problematics attached to paternal power.

5.2 CRANKY JACK - TEXT

It was early in the day. Traveller after traveller was trudging by Shingle Hut. One who carried no swag halted at the rails and came in. He asked Dad for a job. "I dunno," Dad answered—"What wages would you want?" The man said he would n't want any. Dad engaged him at once.

And *such* a man! Tall, bony, heavy-jawed, shaven with a reaping-hook, apparently. He had a thick crop of black hair—shaggy, unkempt, and full of grease, grass, and fragments of dry gum-leaves. On his head were two old felt hats—one sewn inside the other. On his back a shirt made from a piece of blue blanket, with white cotton stitches striding up and down it like lines of fencing. His trousers were gloom itself, they were a problem, and bore reliable evidence of his industry. No ordinary person would consider himself out of work while in them. And the new-comer was no ordinary person. He seemed to have all the woe of the world upon him; he was as sad and weird-looking as a widow out in the wet.

In the yard was a large heap of firewood—remarkable truth!—which Dad told him to chop up. He began. And how he worked! The axe rang again—particularly when it left the handle—and pieces of wood scattered everywhere. Dad watched him chopping for a while, then went with Dave to pull corn.

For hours the man chopped away without once looking at the sun. Mother came out. Joy! She had never seen so much wood cut before. She was delighted. She made a cup of tea and took it to the man, and apologised for having no sugar to put in it. He paid no attention to her; he worked harder. Mother waited, holding the tea in her hand. A lump of wood nearly as big as a shingle flew up and shaved her left ear. She put the tea on the ground and went in search of eggs for dinner. (We were out of meat—the kangaroo-dog was lame. He had got "ripped" the last time we killed.) The tea remained on the ground. Chips fell into it. The dog saw it. He limped towards it eagerly, and dipped the point of his nose in it. It burnt him. An aged rooster strutted along and looked sideways at it. *He* distrusted it and went away. It attracted the pig—

a sow with nine young ones. She waddled up, and poked the cup over with her nose; then she sat down on it, while the family joyously gathered round the saucer. Still the man chopped on.

Mother returned—without any eggs. She rescued the crockery from the pigs and turned curiously to the man. She said, "Why, you've let them take the tea!" No answer. She wondered.

Suddenly, and for the fiftieth time, the axe flew off. The man held the handle and stared at the woodheap. Mother watched him. He removed his hats, and looked inside them. He remained looking inside them.

Mother watched him more closely. His lips moved. He said, "*Listen to them! They're coming! I knew they'd follow!*"

"Who?" asked Mother, trembling slightly.

"*They're in the wood!*" he went on. "Ha, ha! I've got them. They'll never get out; *never get out!*"

Mother fled, screaming. She ran inside and called the children. Sal assisted her. They trooped in like wallabies—all but Joe. He was away earning money. He was getting a shilling a week from Maloney, for chasing cockatoos from the corn.

They closed and barricaded the doors, and Sal took down the gun, which Mother made her hide beneath the bed. They sat listening, anxiously and intently. The wind began to rise. A lump of soot fell from the chimney into the fireplace—where there was no fire. Mother shuddered. Some more fell. Mother jumped to her feet. So did Sal. They looked at each other in dismay. The children began to cry. The chain for hanging the kettle on started swinging to and fro. Mother's knees gave way. The chain continued swinging. A pair of bare legs came down into the fireplace—they were curled round the chain. Mother collapsed. Sal screamed, and ran to the door, but couldn't open it. The legs left the chain and dangled in the air. Sal called "Murder!" Her cry was answered. It was Joe, who had been over at Maloney's making his fortune. He came to the rescue. He dropped out of the chimney and shook himself. Sal stared at him. He was calm and covered from head to foot with soot and dirt. He looked round and said, "Thought yuz could keep me out, did'n'y?" Sal could only look at him. "I saw yuz all run in," he was saying, when Sal thought of Mother, and sprang to her. Sal shook her, and slapped her, and threw water on her till she sat up and stared about. Then Joe stared.

Dad came in for dinner—which, of course, wasn't ready. Mother began to cry, and asked him what he meant by keeping a madman on the place, and told him she *knew* he wanted to have them all murdered. Dad didn't understand. Sal explained. Then he went out and told the man to "Clear!" The man simply said, "No."

"Go on, now!" Dad said, pointing to the rails. The man smiled at the wood-heap as he worked. Dad waited. "Ain't y' going?" he repeated.

"Leave me alone when I'm chopping wood for the missus," the man answered; then smiled and muttered to himself. Dad left him alone and went inside wondering.

Next day Mother and Dad were talking at the barn. Mother, bare-headed, was holding some eggs in her apron. Dad was leaning on a hoe.

"I *am* afraid of him," Mother said; "it's not right you should keep him about the place. No one's safe with such a man. Some day he'll take it in his head to kill us all, and then—"

"Tut, tut, woman; poor old Jack! He's harmless as a baby."

"All right," (sullenly); "you'll see!"

Dad laughed and went away with the hoe on his shoulder to cut burr.

Middle of summer. Dad and Dave in the paddock mowing lucerne. Jack sinking post-holes for a milking-yard close to the house. Joe at intervals stealing behind him to prick him with straws through a rent in the rear of his patched moleskins. Little Bill—in readiness to run—standing off, enjoying the sport.

Inside the house sat Mother and Sal, sewing and talking of Maloney's new baby.

"Dear me," said Mother; "it's the tiniest mite of a thing I ever saw; why, bless me, anyone of y' at its age would have made three of—"

"Mind, Mother!" Sal shrieked, jumping up on the sofa. Mother screamed and mounted the table. Both gasped for breath, and leaning cautiously over peeped down at a big black snake which had glided in at the front door. Then, pale and scared-looking, they stared across at each other.

The snake crawled over to the safe and drank up some milk which had been spilt on the floor. Mother saw its full length and groaned. The snake wriggled to the leg of the table.

"Look out!" cried Sal, gathering up her skirts and dancing about on the sofa.

Mother squealed hysterically.

Joe appeared. He laughed.

"You wretch!" Mother yelled. "Run—*run*, and fetch your father!"

Joe went and brought Jack.

"Oh-h, my God!" —Mother moaned, as Jack stood at the door, staring strangely at her. "Kill it!—why don't he *kill* it?"

Jack didn't move, but talked to himself. Mother shuddered.

The reptile crawled to the bedroom door. Then for the first time the man's eyes rested upon it. It glided into the bedroom, and Mother and Sal ran off for Dad.

Jack fixed his eyes on the snake and continued muttering to himself. Several times it made an attempt to mount the dressing-table. Finally it succeeded. Suddenly Jack's demeanour changed. He threw off his ragged hat and talked wildly. A fearful expression filled his ugly features. His voice altered.

"You're the Devil!" he said; "*the Devil!* THE DEVIL! The missus brought you—ah-h-h!"

The snake's head passed behind the looking-glass. Jack drew nearer, clenching his fists and gesticulating. As he did he came full before the looking-glass and saw, perhaps for the first time in his life, his own image. An unearthly howl came from him. "*Me father!*" he shouted, and bolted from the house.

Dad came in with the long-handled shovel, swung it about the room, and smashed pieces off the cradle, and tore the bed-curtains down, and made a great noise altogether. Finally, he killed the snake and put it on the fire; and Joe and the cat watched it wriggle on the hot coals.

Meanwhile, Jack, bare-headed, rushed across the yard. He ran over little Bill, and tumbled through the wire-fence on to the broad of his back. He roared like a wild beast, clutched at space, spat, and kicked his heels in the air.

"Let me up!—*Ah-h-h!*—let go me throat!" he hissed.

The dog ran over and barked at him. He found his feet again, and, making off, ran through the wheat, glancing back over his shoulder as he tore along. He crossed into the grass paddock, and running to a big tree dodged round and round it. Then from tree to tree he went, and that evening at sundown, when Joe was bringing the cows home, Jack was still flying from "his father".

After supper.

"I wonder now what the old fool saw in that snake to send him off his head like that?" Dad said, gazing wonderingly into the fire. "He sees plenty of them, goodness knows."

"That wasn't it. It wasn't the snake at all," Mother said; "there was madness in the man's eyes all the while. I saw it the moment he came to the door." She appealed to Sal.

"Nonsense!" said Dad; "*nonsense!*" and he tried to laugh.

"Oh, of course it's *nonsense*," Mother went on; "everything I say is nonsense. It won't be nonsense when you come home some day and find us all on the floor with our throats cut."

"Pshaw!" Dad answered; "what's the use of talking like that?" Then to Dave: "Go out and see if he's in the barn!"

Dave fidgeted. He didn't like the idea. Joe giggled.

"Surely you're not *frightened*?" Dad shouted.

Dave coloured up.

"No—don't think so," he said; and, after a pause, "You go and see."

It was Dad's turn to feel uneasy. He pretended to straighten the fire, and coughed several times. "Perhaps it's just as well," he said, "to let him be to-night."

Of course, Dad wasn't afraid; he *said* he wasn't, but he drove the pegs in the doors and windows before going to bed that night.

Next morning, Dad said to Dave and Joe, "Come 'long, and we'll see where he's got to."

5.3 OVERALL STRUCTURE OF CRANKY JACK

The story starts with the entry of Jack himself. When he says that he does not want any wages for his work, Dad engages him at once. There follows a paragraph of description that seems slightly exaggerated and distanced from reality. He was

"Tall, bony, heavy-jawed, shaven with a reaping-hook, apparently. He had a thick crop of black hair-shaggy, unkempt, and full of grease, grass, and fragments of dry gum-leaves. On his head were two old felt hats - one sewn inside the other. On his back a shirt made from a piece of blue blanket, with white cotton stitches striding up and down it like lines of fencing. His trousers were gloom itself ... He seemed to have all the woe of the world upon him; he was as sad and weird-looking as a widow out in the wet."

In fact, Dorothy Green in her essay, "No Laughing Matter", calls him a genuine bush-hatter — a man who is not merely eccentric, but also extremely alienated from material truth. He was a type of character made familiar by Lawson. Early on in the story, Mother realises that Jack is not all right in the head and creates a scene when Dad returns. Jack, however, refuses to leave. The family gradually gets used to him until one fine day, a snake enters the house. When Jack comes in with Joe to chase it away, he thinks that the snake is the Devil brought in by Mother. The snake hides behind the mirror in the bed-room and when Jack sees his reflection in it, maybe for the first time in his life, he screams, "Me father!" and runs away.

The next day, Dad and the boys find Jack riding a tree and shouting to imaginary entities. As he rises up from the trunk, Dad and the boys take fright and run away from the scene. Later, Jack agrees to be taken quietly into the barn and be shut in. Ultimately, the climatic moment of the story arrives when one day, Jack walks stealthily into the house, looks at himself in the mirror and takes an axe to it. The event is described in the following manner —

"He paused just a moment to grip the axe with both hands. Then with a howl and a bound he entered the room and shattered the looking-glass into fragments. He bent down and looked closely at the pieces.

'He's dead now,' he said calmly, and walked out. Then he went to work at the post-holes again, just as though nothing had happened."

The story gives us interesting insights about the back breaking work in a pioneering family and also gives us an inkling about what the *Bush* can do to someone who was "sad and weird-looking," someone who has not learnt to grin and bear all trouble.

5.4 INTERPRETATIONS

Cranky Jack was written long before Freud became a fashionable by-word in literature. Before we begin with an analysis of the story let us take a quick look at the theories of Freud and Lacan who promoted psychoanalysis and on whose theories we have based our interpretation of the text.

5.4.1 What is Psychoanalysis?

Psychoanalysis is a type of therapy that is aimed at curing people suffering from various mental illnesses or 'investigating the interaction of the conscious and the unconscious elements in the mind' (Oxford English Dictionary). This type of therapy is based on the knowledge of and an understanding about how three things work. Namely: the mind, a person's instincts and sexuality. *Psychoanalysis*'s chief concern is and has always been the articulation of sexuality in language. The origins of the theory may be credited to Sigmund Freud (1856- 1939), who laid emphasis on the "literary unconscious" of the author (and its corollary, 'character') on the reader and on the text, (Raman and Selden, *A Readers Guide to Contemporary Literary Theory*, p. 136). Freud's work rests broadly on the notion of the *unconscious*, which is that part of our mind that is beyond our *consciousness* and as yet has a very strong influence on our actions, words and deeds. Freud was a firm believer of the idea of *repression* as well. *Repression* is the "forgetting" or "ignoring" impulse in our minds, that chooses to hide away/ suppress/ repress our unexpressed desires, impulses, passions, emotions and aspirations far away from our conscious minds to that of the unconscious. Another notion in addition to the unconscious and repression is that of *sublimation*. When a person tries to hide away all his/ her desires, passions, emotions, and does not succeed or think that s/he has succeeded where as the mind having a will of its own not only does not suppress those instincts/ passions etc but also elevates them in status to some thing grand and 'noble', an act of *sublimation* occurs.

He also stressed the analogy of the relationship between the author and the text and the dreamer and his/ her dream / fantasy. According to Freud, when a male child is an infant, his libidinal drives are not directed towards any definite sexual object, he is too young to have formed any idea of gender or identity- it is only the 'pleasure principle' at work here. Freud made certain observations about the human mind that not only scandalised 19th century Europe, but also revolutionised the way people looked at and studied the human mind. His first observation was that the human mind was not merely a passive receptacle for information. He believed the human mind to be a vital, dynamic force that could if it chose to, function independently of the individual will. But he also believed in the sexual nature of the dynamic energy of the mind that he termed *libido*. Based on this first premise, he inferred that: the human mind could be divided into three (not water tight) components / chambers:

- the conscious: where all the impressions, images, information is gathered during a persons 'awake' state of being
- the unconscious: where the information, impressions, images gathered during the day are laid aside for future reference and use
- the subconscious: which lies somewhere between the conscious and the unconscious chambers.

To this third chamber 'the subconscious', he attributed the most significance, importance and power. He believed it to function only when the conscious was at rest, as in when a person is asleep. Once 'the awake' / 'wakeful', mind is asleep/ at rest, the images, impressions, information gathered during the day are released. That is what Freud calls a *dream*. What he was also trying to do, was also establish his other theory about the interpretation of dreams, implying that dreams are the release of suppressed/ repressed emotions that have been pushed aside during the day but are however, constantly at play somewhere in the persons mind. These dreams are often those impulses, instincts, emotions and desires that we suppress during our conscious state as a result of societal / other pressures and prohibitions. In a way our dreams are the symbolic manifestations / representations of our repressed fantasies. Freud also talked about the *Oedipus Complex*. *Oedipus Rex* is a play written by the famous Greek Tragedian *Sophocles*. This play is about the story of King Laius and Queen Jocasta of Thebes, and the birth of their son, in ancient Greece. When the baby was born, the court soothsayers predicted that the boy would grow up and kill his father and marry his mother, thereby begetting children from her. Meaning the baby would be guilty of not just *parricide* but also *incest*. As a result of this prediction the King and Queen decide to 'do away' with their son, as such foul acts were frowned upon very strongly by the ancient Greeks. The King and Queen therefore give their son away to a shepherd with instructions to leave him out in the open to be eaten by wolves. But the old Thebian shepherd ties the baby's feet together and pierces his soft ankles with thorns to prevent him from wandering away, but at the last minute feeling sorry for the little baby, hands him over to an old Corinthian shepherd and tells him to take the baby far away and to never let the baby come back to Thebes. Corinth was a kingdom some distance away from Thebes, so the old Corinthian shepherd having taken the baby away gives him to his King and Queen to bring him up as their own, as the couple lack children. The baby is named Oedipus, or the lame one. Oedipus grows up to be a fine young man, with no clue about his real identity or the future foretold by the soothsayers. On the day he is to take over his father's throne, someone in the crowd taunts him by saying that he is not even the real son of his parents. Greatly disturbed by this taunt, he demands the truth from his foster parents and is told that he has been brought up as their own. At the same time, he is also made aware of the predictions of his future actions and in order to prevent such consequences. He leaves Corinth and goes as far away as possible from Corinth. In a state of confusion, sorrow and anger at his fate, he meets an old man at a crossing of four roads and the arrogance of youth, goads him on to slaying the old man. Eventually Oedipus reaches Thebes that has been beset by plague and pestilence of the worst kind. At the entrance to Thebes is a *Sphinx* with a riddle that no one has managed to solve. The sphinx has brought the plague on Thebes. Oedipus ever ready to accept a challenge solves the riddle and Thebes is rid of the sphinx and the pestilence. News of King Laius' death is brought to the Queen. She is then offered in marriage to the person who can get rid of the sphinx and Oedipus marries the Queen and even begets children from her. Years later the truth is revealed to Oedipus by the old Corinthian shepherd who brings news of his foster parents death due to old age. Oedipus is shocked by this revelation, but his sorrow and confusion are compounded by the fact that he was supposed to commit parricide and incest, his worst fear comes true when the same shepherd reveals Oedipus's real identity, all the bits fall into place and Queen Jocasta, shocked by the knowledge that incest has been committed unknowingly, hangs herself and Oedipus overcome by grief and sorrow at

all that has transpired, and feeling cheated by destiny blinds himself with the pin on Jocasta's brooch. He then leaves the House of Thebes to wander blind and alone in his misery.

The *Oedipus Complex* that Freud talks about is based on this story. Deriving from the myth of *Oedipus*, Freud concludes that a male child will always try to replace his father for the affection of his mother and that the *reality principle* is something different as the mother's affections lie with the father figure, who threatens the male child with dire punishment like *castration*. It is only when the male child manages to suppress this desire for the mother that he can identify with and accept not only the presence of the father in the mother's life and within the family structure but also identify with the *masculine role*. This desire however, according to Freud does not really go away and lies suppressed in the boy's unconscious. *Libido* as described by Freud is the 'energy associated with sexual desire' whose main focus lies in yet another three fold structure: the *Oral*, the *Anal* and the *Phallic*. This *libido* is a part of a greater drive called *Eros/ the life force* that is often in contrast with *Thanatos/ death wish*. *Transference* is another term associated with Freud, it occurs when a patient under treatment transfers and redirects his/ her feelings of desire, antagonism etc towards the physician/ analyst. *Projection* is a mechanism whereby the negative aspects of the person concerned are conveniently attributed to another person. *Screen memory* too works as a defense mechanism whereby a person blots out a more significant (painful) memory with a less significant one. *Freudian slip* that occurs every now and then when repressed material finds an outlet through the slip of the tongue or the slip of the pen is another such defense mechanism that our unconscious invents. Freud also had many negative views on women. He believed women's sexuality to be based on "feelings of *narcissism*, *masochism* and *passivity* and the ideal that they suffer from an innate form of *inferiority complex* known as *penis envy*".

Carl Jung a disciple of Freud applied this same theory to a group of people. He believed that just as a person/ an individual remembers events, images, impressions that lie buried within his psyche, so to would a community who share that same memory, though they may not have individual consciousness of it. At the moment we shall limit our discussion to Freud and Lacan as their interpretations bear most significance to our analysis of *Cranky Jack*.

Jacques Lacan (1901-1981) yet another disciple of the *School of Psychoanalysis* was of the firm belief that human beings enter into a world of pre-existing system of signifiers that take on meaning only in a language system. This entry into language enables them to find a subject position within a relational system be it male/ female, father/ mother/ daughter. These he believed to be totally governed by the unconscious. Instead of Freud's *Id- Ego- Super Ego* tripartite structure, Lacan brought in the concept of the 'imaginary' and the 'symbolic'. Lacan believed that till the child is three s/he has no idea of who s/he is. It is only when the child looks at him/her self in the mirror that s/he begins to identify with the image in the mirror, and makes the distinction between the subject and the object. But the mirror need not be a real/ physical mirror. The minute a child begins to identify with the image as a subject and a self-image is formed however fragmented, a 'fictional ideal' or 'ego' is created. Once the dichotomy between the two- 'being' and the 'other' is established and the father figure is involved, the child is hurled into the 'symbolic' world of differences (male/ female, father/ son, present/ absent etc). In Lacanian psychoanalysis instead of the *conscious*, *unconscious* are the *imaginary* and the *symbolic*. We did mention Freud and his theory of the *interpretation of dreams*, expanding on that Freud stated that the unconscious always hides meaning in the symbolic manifestations that need decoding. His *dream images* undergo

condensation, where several images combine and *displacement*, where significance shifts from one image to a contiguous one. (Raman and Selden, p 140).

Arthur Hoey Davis

Lacan on the other hand believed that the 'garbled and enigmatic dream work follows the law of the signifiers'. For both Freud and Lacan, the primal *Other* is the father within the Oedipal triangle, who, forbids incest, threatens the child's desire for his mother and thereby becomes an agent of Law. Lacan however is more concerned with the *imaginary* father than the real father. Lacan believed the *unconscious* to be the very core or the kernel of our being and this *unconscious* he said was structured like language. In order to prove this belief he gives the example of how *displacement* takes place in the *dream work* of Freud. He believed it to function like *metonymy* where one thing is represented by means of a part standing for a whole, and considered *condensation* to be analogous to *metaphor*, where several things are compressed into one symbol. His thoughts and beliefs also lead him to speculate on the way thoughts actually emerge into the *consciousness*. In order to explain this phenomenon he too goes back to the infantile stage of a child. He says that before a child reaches the stage where he can actually distinguish between the self and the other, he lives in a realm of the *imaginary*. In this realm of the *imaginary* a child forms an idealised identification with his mother. After this begins the mirror stage (during which the child sees its own reflection in the mirror) the child begins to see and conceive of him self as a whole being distinct from the others. At this stage, the child is normally between the age of 6-18 months and it is also during this stage that the child acquires some linguistic ability whereby he enters into the language system, which is once again "concerned with lack and separation", as language names "what is not present and substitutes a linguistic sign for it." The child begins to socialise during this time, in keeping with his share of *dos* (*prohibitions*) and *don'ts* (*restraints*) that he inherits from the society that he is born into (the *dos* and *don'ts* are normally associated with the figure of the father, the figure of authority). It is in this new order wherein a child conceives of himself as opposed to the other, (has entered the linguistic mode and is made aware of societal prohibitions and restraints), that he enters the realm of the *symbolic*. This is the basis of Lacanian psychoanalysis.

5.4.2 Psychoanalysing Cranky Jack

The father-son relationship based on bitterness, guilt, mutual loathing is treated with frivolously awesome depth and absurd directness. When Jack sees his mirror-image for the first time and sees his father in his own physical present, he is frightened out of his wits and runs away. But his sole aim after that becomes the need to annihilate his father, who he thinks has come back from the dead to haunt and terrify him. Maybe as he had terrified him in the distant past when Jack was a young boy, much like Dave or Joe. The intricate symbolism of the central event of the story deals with several layers of meaning. Not only does it deal with the subconscious desire to destroy paternal authority, but in the mirror-image of Jack, we see that Jack has himself grown to become the physical replica of the dead father - suggesting that the process of mobility from father to son is an on-going, never-ending process and maybe a process that deteriorates into madness with the misuse of paternal power or the misappropriation of filial respect.

Interestingly, the figure of paternal domination in the Rudd family, Dad, is not without his own blemishes. He is also a slave driver with his own sons as and when the need arises and that is almost always.

"Middle of summer. Dad and Dave in the paddock moving lucerne. Jack sinking post-holes for a milking-yard close to the house."

In the scene where Dad, Joe and Dave run away from Jack, Dad has thoughts only of his own safety. When Joe catches hold of his father's shirt as he runs, Dad turns around and tells his off-spring to let go. Davis writes it thus –

"Let go!" Dad gasped. "Damn y', let me go!" - trying to shake him off. But Joe had great faith in his parent and clung to him closely."

The figure of the all-powerful patriarch, the pioneering father, who depended on his male progeny to continue the hard work and lend a hand in the fields, becomes a symbol of tyranny. The killing of the father by the "cranky" son takes away some of the responsibility of the act while simultaneously allowing for the resentment to show through the thin guise of filial acceptance of paternal control. The humour of this story is of the particularly macabre kind. Jack's movement away from language and meaning is of a very frightening sort - the type that does not allow him societal entry. The first words that he speaks tell of a persecution of some nameless variety.

"Listen to them! They're coming! I knew they'd follow! ... They're in the wood!...Ha, ha! I've got them. They'll never get out; never get out."

The fear as well as the bravado has a certain child-like quality of miserable insecurity and emotional deprivation. Jack himself is never totally aware of his physical needs. He agrees to work without pay and at the end of the story, has been at the Rudds' place for fifteen years.

"He slaves from daylight till dark; keeps no Sunday; knows no companions, lives chiefly on meat and machine oil; domiciles in the barn; and has never asked for a rise in his wages".

Jack never really realises the extent of his oppression. He 'kills' the patriarchal figure of authority formed by his own reflection but he does not realise that he has given up all his rights to his surrogate father, Dad.

The Rudds, at this stage, are, of course, very poor. Mother apologises to Jack for having no sugar to put in his tea and when she goes out to look for eggs, returns without any. But in the cruel, malignant *Bush*, only the truly indifferent can survive. And Jack in his grand madness is also truly indifferent. He is also "the best horse Dad ever had."

5.5 CONTEXTUALISING CRANKY JACK

5.5.1 The Pioneer Legend

Steele Rudd's best *On The Selection* tales were written in the last five years of the 19th century and the first few years of the 20th century. It was a time when Australian literature was still struggling to find a voice and a language for itself. It was not an easy struggle and was fraught with the problems of either exoticising or sentimentalising its differences from 'real' English Literature. This is what Frederick Sinnett (1830-1866) had to say about the first few attempts of Australian writers.

"In the first place we may remark that most Australian stories are too Australian, and, instead of human life, we have only local 'manners and customs' portrayed in them. The dramatis personae are not people with characters and passions, but lay figures, so constructed and placed in such attitudes, as to display the costumes of the place and period." (*The Fiction Fields of Australia*)

Steele Rudd's tales about a pioneering family trying its best to make ends meet was another way of talking about Australia; its harsh landscape and the excruciating hard work that survival demanded. The fact that Rudd was actually talking about his own family and his own childhood maybe lessens the predilection seen in certain other writers to write merely about "local manners and customs". Brian Hoad (in the *Bulletin*, Dec. 27, 1994 to Jan. 3, 1995, p.105) talks about *The Steele Rudd Tales* under the heading "National Myth" and goes on to say that

"The basic theme was the struggle for existence, a matter of simple survival through hard times. The basic technique was to laugh at the intolerable: at rotten food, foul water, ragged clothes and improvised shoes (if any); at drought (particularly in the 1880s), searing heat, flies, sandy blight, skin sores and foot-rot; at clearing and burning-off and harrowing and sowing, when you can't even afford a hoe, let alone a draught horse and plough."

This of course has all the ingredients that could go into the making of a national myth. It celebrates the virtues of courage, enterprise, hard work and perseverance and is a nationalist legend of its kind. It tells of the taming of a cruel, intractable landscape for man's use. And Steele Rudd's stories tell it better because "to Australian life and letters he brought the rich gift of honest laughter", as his epitaph puts it. The harshness is tamed not only by labour but also with laughter. But it would not do to take the laughter at face value because as Dorothy Green says in "No Laughing Matter" (the *Bulletin* Literary Supplement, Sep. 30, 1980, p.35) that the attempts at laughter have "something pathetic about them. They represent the pitiful effort made by the poor throughout history to put a good face on simply because it is otherwise intolerable. But the public just loved the myth of Dad, Mother & the brood of thirteen children on the Settlement. Maybe because they could not face the truth that mere hard work and perseverance were just not enough. J.B. Hirst in "The Pioneer Legend" says that

"The pioneer story can also be described as legendary because of what it leaves out: there is usually no mention of the social, legal or economic determinants of land settlement. The pioneers are depicted in a world limited by the boundaries of their properties, subduing the land, and bathing the elements. Their enemies are drought, flood, fire, sometimes Aborigines." (*Intruders in the Bush*, ed., John Carroll, p.15, OUP: Melbourne, 1982)

These tales went into the myth-formation of the Australian nation. And the pioneer legend went a long way in creating the image of the diligent bush-battler with the never-say-die attitude. What it did was to create heroes out of ordinary men like Dad. As J.B. Hirst puts it, the legend "accords heroic status to the ordinary man — frequently the pioneers were squatters, but small settlers were also honoured with the title. The pioneer legend transforms the low-status selector of the nineteenth century into a nation-builder. The legend also proclaims that success is open to all since all may possess the requisite qualities of diligence, courage, and perseverance. Secondly, the legend provides a simple unofficial, popular history of the nation." (*Intruders in the Bush*, p.29)

Therefore the pioneer legend becomes a kind of false marker of the democratic ethos of the Australian nation. 'False' because it takes into account only the white settlers and sees the Aborigines, as intruders or dark forces that were to be controlled. Lawson's poem, "How the Land Was Won" (1899) talks about this element:

"With God, or a dog, to watch, they slept
By the campfires' ghastly glow,
Where the scrubs were dark as the blacks that crept
With 'nulla' and spear held low;" (*Intruders in the Bush*, p. 20)

There are other people too on par with the Aborigines in their social position. "The low-status selector," more often than not, had people even lower on the social rung working for him. Cranky Jack falls within this category. He has no rights to speak of; it is a different matter altogether that he does not ask for them. The democratic note that the pioneer legend elaborates actually reveals the false glorification of a superior white male settler who has had the opportunity to make good.

5.5.2 Labour and Alienation

Cranky Jack's labour is seen in the domain of work that does not have any meaning to the man who labours. The more he works, the less meaning his work has. He is relegated to the position of a mere machine or a workhorse. His alienation is closely connected to his labour, his involvement as well as his human estrangement from it. As Marx had said in his essay *Alienated Labour*:

"The worker becomes poorer, the richer his production, the more it increases in power and scope. The worker becomes a commodity that is all the cheaper the more commodities he creates. The depreciation of the human world progresses in direct proportion to the increase in value of the world of things." (Early Texts, tr. & ed., David McSellan, p. 135, Barnes & Noble, 1971)

So the alienation of Cranky Jack here is actually his objectification, where the natural objects of his life lie completely independent and alien to him. It is actually the 'thingification' of Cranky Jack that we see here, where he becomes a mere commodity; i.e. he is reduced to a mere animal or a thing. According to the laws of political economy, Marx finds that the alienation of the worker increases in direct proportion to the increase in production. He says –

"The more the worker produces, the less he has to consume, the more value he creates, the more valueless and worthless he becomes." (*Alienated Labour*, p. 134)

Therefore, since Cranky Jack produces more work than is actually expected of him, he loses all human importance in the Rudd household. His misery, his sense of self, his 'beingness' all come to nought, his only identity is the value that he creates. The process of dehumanisation is further explained,

"Firstly, that labour is exterior to the worker, that is, it does not belong to his essence. Therefore he does not confirm himself in his work, he denies himself, feels miserable instead of happy,... (and) mortifies his body and ruins his mind." (*Alienated Labour*, p. 140)

Alienation then, as in the case of Cranky Jack, is the loss of self, the loss of spontaneity, and the separation of work from life. Ultimately, it also leads to the separation of man from man. Dad cannot even begin to think in terms of a human relationship with Cranky Jack. For Dad, he is just a machine who will labour without wages, he only wishes to use Cranky Jack's physical self and is not concerned about his spiritual well being. He is also sure that Cranky Jack is as "harmless as a baby." Marx had said,

"On the one hand, there is the production of human activity as *labour*, that is, as an activity which is alien to itself, to man and to nature, and thus alien to consciousness and to the realization of human life; the abstract existence of man as a mere *working man*, who, therefore plunges every day from his fulfilled nothingness into absolute nothingness, into social, and thus real non-existence." (*Alienated Labour*, p. 139)

Cranky Jack's position in the Rudd family is concluded in the following lines,

"He slaves from daylight till dank; keeps no Sunday; knows no companion; lives chiefly on meat and machine-oil; domiciles in the barn; and has never asked for a rise in his wages."

It is indeed slavery of the worst kind; a worker who does not realise that he is human and deserves better. Cranky Jack's internalisation of the fact of his alienation makes him accept his "meat and machine-oil", like an animal or a machine. It is just a linear progression towards nothingness and non-existence. The fake democracy of the pioneer legend and the myth of the nation of brave pioneering men become meaningless when confronted with such truths of tyranny. The pioneer landowner of immovable property with the 'slave' worker on his settlement is no different from the modern capitalist and the exploited worker in the factory. The alienation of Cranky Jack from his labour and the degradation of his human self becomes complete when he "mortifies his body and ruins his mind." His work only succeeds in making him "sad and weird" and he does not care about the torture that he inflicts upon his body and destroys his mind in the process. The saddest part is that he also "knows no companion".

5.5.3 Parricide

The state of Cranky Jack's mind takes us into the even more fascinating domains of guilt and murder. It takes us into the central core of the story - the killing of Cranky Jack's father, his own reflection in the mirror. Quite early on in the story, we realise that Cranky Jack suffers from some kind of persecution anxiety. He suffers from delusions that tell him that some unnamed persecutors have followed him and are in the woods. It is a strange mix of fear and aggression because he concludes that he has got them and that "The will never get out. *Never get out.*" Cranky Jack's alienation in the Rudd family is immediately established because his language holds no meaning apart from madness for Mother. The frightening visions of nameless persecutors are something that is beyond Mother's understanding of reality. She immediately decides on Cranky Jack's insanity and rebukes Dad for bringing a mad man into the house. The meaninglessness or rather the apparent meaninglessness of Cranky Jack's language sets him apart from normal, everyday people who have maybe reined in their madness.

The crux of the story talks about one of the key themes in twentieth century literature, the Oedipal nature of man: love for the mother and wish for the death of the father. Freud had first put forward his findings regarding infantile sexuality in 1905, just six years after the first actual publication of *On the Selection tales* in 1899. The story of Cranky Jack is interesting in the way it foreshadows the findings of Freud, where the son wishes to kill the authoritative father and gain the sole attention of the loving mother. The death, or rather the murder of the father is what the entire Cranky Jack story is all about. Freud had gone on to say that the first fear of the male child is that his father may take away the object of his affections (his mother) from him. His fear takes place, primarily because, he realises that his father possess greater phallic power, a bigger penis. The phallus plays an important role in this drama because this is what the little girl envies her brothers (penis-envy) and what the son fears that the father will cut off (castration complex). This latter seems to very real in certain societies where initiation rites of pubescent males take place.

"It seems as if initiation ritual in such societies provides a very definite trauma corresponding to the genital stage which begins at puberty and for which genital mutilations are therefore especially appropriate. The fuss that is usually made in such rituals about removing the boys from the protection of their mothers; the threats made against them in the name of their fathers; the beatings, punishments and humiliations which they collectively have to endure at their

fathers' collective hands; the emphasis on the new responsibilities for sexual conduct which the newly initiated now carry, all these things add up to being a traumatic culmination of the Oedipus complex in which sons prove the strength of their identification with their fathers and the extent of their repression of the negative, hating, parricidal aspects of their own ambivalence." (Christopher Baddock, the "Oedipus Complex", *Essential Freud*, pp. 91-91, Basil Blackwell Ltd, UK, 1988)

The "negative, hating, parricidal aspect" of Cranky Jack is revealed in all its guilt-ridden, destructive force. Interestingly, the first incident of the sighting of his father, in Jack's own mirror image, happens when a snake enters the house and Jack, for no apparent reason says that Mother had brought in the snake:

"You're the Devil!" he said; *'the Devil! THE DEVIL!* The missus brought you, ah-h-h!"

This strange connection can be interpreted in various ways. As a general indictment against all womenfolk for having succumbed to the seductions of the serpent; or more specifically, in keeping with the tone of parricide in the story, the snake can symbolise the male penis, the symbol of paternal authority which Mother allows into the house. Anyway, the fact of the matter is that Cranky Jack cannot rest until he kills his father, his own mirror image. The reasons behind this need to kill are not stated but we can guess at persecutory aggressiveness from Jack's father directed towards the child Jack. This may also be the reason behind his persecution anxiety and also his fear as well as the need to kill his father. John Carroll in the chapter, entitled "The Psychology of Guilt" states that

"When the infant, later the child, restrains his aggression out of a fear of physical retaliation he will suffer from persecution anxiety. ... His superego develops sadistic qualifcs, growing out of identification with the persecuting parent. The result is that aggressive impulses are checked by the superego and sent back in a sadistic form against the self. This is the superego that Freud personalised as a figure of archaic severity threatening the most ferocious punishments. It is the product of what Freud termed "identification with the aggressor." (John Carroll, "The Psychology of Guilt", p. 34, Routledge & Kegan, London, 1985)

Cranky Jack's fear of his father is very evident because after he sees what he thinks is an apparition he seems to run away from a fearsome physical presence. He rushes across the yard, tumbles through a wire fence, and shouts,

"Let me up! -Ah-h-h! -let go me throat."

As he runs, he continuously glances back over his shoulder and when he comes to a big tree, he dodges round and round it. With the "fear of physical retaliation", however is also the "identification with the aggressor" and Cranky Jack ultimately 'kills' his father - as well as himself in his reflection. The irony is the mirroring ad infinitum of the father in the son - a sad tale of the continuity of paternal authority.

In attempting to contextualise Arthur Hoey Davis' *Cranky Jack*, I have tried to first pin it historically to the pioneer legend that gave rise to the popular myth of the Australian nation having been built by strong, masculine pioneering fathers. But the hardship and the labour required for such endeavours may result in the kind of alienation that we witness in Cranky Jack's derangement. The killing of the father may talk about a specific instance of castration anxiety and the desire for parricide but may, symbolically,

also tell of the fear and anxiety involved with the masculine, paternal pioneering effort; and the guilty need of the son to destroy the edifice of white settlement.

Arthur Hoey Davis

5.6 LET US SUM UP

A.H. Davis' *Cranky Jack* is a layered story of a son's destruction of his father, rejuvenated in his own reflection in a mirror. It also tells of exploitation and uses laughter as a means of normalising various macabre situations. In A.H. Davis' sketches of the Rudd family's labour and toil we can always see humour functioning as a defense mechanism. The optimism of the stories was the reason behind their wide popularity. The hardships and the backbreaking work on the selection were real enough but the humour helped disguise the cruelty of it all.

I have all also looked at *Cranky Jack* vis-a-vis the national myth of pioneering fathers, the problem of alienation from labour and the psychological implications of parricide.

5.7 QUESTIONS

- (1) Read *Cranky Jack* as an attempt at dismantling patriarchal authority. What is the significance of the mirroring of Jack's Self as his father?
- (2) Analyse the uses of humour in the story.
- (3) Analyse the myth of the pioneer legend. Does the story realistically depict a pioneering family in the Bush? Point out instances from the text.
- (4) Read *Cranky Jack* as the dehumanisation that arises out of the alienation of labour.

5.8 GLOSSARY

The Tatler and The Spectator

Those familiar with the literary history of the eighteenth century would know that Sir Richard Steele (1672- 1729) carved a niche for himself as miscellaneous essayists. He started **The Tatler** in 1709 and **The Spectator** in 1711 and several other periodicals as well. Steele worked in close alliance with Joseph Addison (1672- 1719). They worked very well as a team, while Steele brought wide experience of life to his work Addison polished it with a wonderful flourish of elegance.

5.9 SUGGESTED READINGS

- (1) "No Laughing Matter" - Dorothy Green, 'The Bulletin Literary Supplement', Sept. 30, 1980.
- (2) "Steele Rudd and Henry Lawson" - A.D. Hope, 'Meanjin', March 1956.
- (3) "Celebrating Bush Battlers: Steele Rudd" - Brian Hoad, 'The Bulletin', Dec. 27,

UNIT 6 CHRISTINA STEAD : *THE OLD SCHOOL*

Structure

- 6.0 Objectives
- 6.1 Introduction
- 6.2 Christina Stead: Life and Works
- 6.3 Stead and Style
- 6.4 Themes in Stead
- 6.5 *THE OLD SCHOOL*- Text
 - 6.5.1 Analysing *The Old School*
 - 6.5.2 The Title of *The Old School*
 - 6.5.3 Plot
 - 6.5.4 Characterisation
 - 6.5.5 Language and Style
 - 6.5.6 Theme of *The Old School*
 - 6.5.7 Cultural Context
 - 6.5.8 Highlights
- 6.6 Let Us Sum Up
- 6.7 Questions
- 6.8 Suggested Reading

6.0 OBJECTIVES

This unit will deal specifically with Christina Stead and her contributions to the short story as a genre. After going through this unit it will be easier for you to understand the development and to note each writers' contribution to the short story. Christina Stead, her life, her works, her style, and an analysis of one of her hitherto unpublished short stories will give you a fair idea of how to understand a work of fiction, how to trace the development of the genre among other things.

6.1 INTRODUCTION

In this section we shall take a quick look at how the shift in themes and style had already begun by the time Christina Stead entered the literary stage. The Australian short story had moved away from the Lawson tradition to a completely new mode of writing. By the time Christina Stead began her works, the realistic novel, and the novel of character were no longer current. The realistic novel as we know concentrated on the here and the now, it dealt with every day life, events, with the social environment of the day and with movements (political, social, economic etc.). It was down to earth and much closer to everyday life than it had had ever been before. The writers of the realistic novel paid greater attention to exact documentation and in getting facts right. This is however not to undermine their importance but to indicate the shift from one mode of writing to another. Christina Stead began writing stories, even novels that were more philosophical and even psychological in outlook. At this stage we shall get a glimpse of our writer for the first time. As she was to say herself, hers was a novel of psychology rather than spirituality. For Stead her characters were more important than any thing else. Her fiction ranges from fantasy to the most thorough of realistic documentation, as she moves through the layers of social class and from one continent to another expressing

a deep concern for the various social and political movements of her time and for those who were struggling to make something of their lives much as she had herself done in the past. She was conscious of the various strata and hierarchies in society and her literary work spans continents making the readers aware of various concerns prevalent then. Stead was Australian born and brought up, who worked by day and studied by night in order to procure a job and a passage to England. Once in England she traveled to many other countries, even went to Europe and America. Her physical movement resulted in her writings that span roughly four continents. Combined with her concerns was a poetic use of language, a keen satirical insight and an unparalleled imagination that gave her an edge over others and offered an entry into her characters. Her specialty lies in her ability to write and describe people and scenes as they unfolded before her eyes. She was able to translate both incidents and characters as they were and did not indulge in rumination. She wrote as she herself points out because she could. Robert Geering states that she never reused her books. Instead what she did was transfer the many sketches she had made into books and turned books into short stories. There have been many complaints about the evasiveness and disorder prevalent in her works but Stead's novels are drawn directly from life, and her characters too have the same source. Hence they tend to spill over the boundaries of conventional literary models and just as life cannot be contained, bracketed, similarly her work tends in this manner towards disorderliness and evasiveness. The short story form, however, forced her to compress her material and retain only its most important elements.

As one of her critics puts it, "the strength of Stead's work lies in her detailed observations, which she uses to illuminate the nature of her diverse subjects. These observations are made from an idiosyncratic perspective, moulded out of countless thousand impressions gathered and forgotten over the years. They form a constant body of material from which all her work is drawn." Yet however refracted they are, however unique, they are still part of 'the million drops of water that are the looking glass of all our lives.' She was interested in discovering the vast potential locked within the boundaries of closed societies -boarding houses, hotels and families- and the various fountains of passion that may be lying dormant merely waiting for the right moment to bubble and rise from within. Her fiction is a literature of interiors, filled with eccentrics, grotesque and all-time losers.

6.2 CHRISTINA STEAD: LIFE AND WORKS

Christina Ellen Stead was born on 17 July 1902 the year Australian women gained the right to vote in federal elections. She was a third generation Australian. When barely two and a half years old, her mother died leaving her with a father who was a curious mixture of an atheist and a puritan. Christina Stead may have acquired a literary bent of mind from her maternal uncle William who was a poet. Her father had a menagerie in the backyard of his house where he kept venomous snakes. He also had a keen interest in various types of fish. From an early age Christina Stead was an avid reader (with a special fondness for the tales of Hans Andersen, the Grimm Brothers, and the Arabian Nights) and was a good storyteller herself. At the tender age of thirteen years she learnt French and became an admirer of Guy de Maupassant. At Sydney High School she edited and contributed prose and verse to the school magazine, "*The Chronicle*". By the time she began her two-year course at Sydney Teachers College, where she edited the College magazine, she was widely read in the classics and in the works of Poe, Balzac, Boccaccio and Rabelais. These biographical details are important as no writer can exist in a vacuum, moreover they contribute to the writer's development, her style and her work. Christina Stead left her literary and personal papers to the National Library of Australia. From her various notes, R G Geering, her literary trustee has extracted a number of her articles

**Introduction to Short
Fiction**

and published them in the first issue of the *Southerly* (1984) that has thirteen of her hitherto unpublished short stories, dealing with various experiences ranging from her early childhood in Bexley and family life at Watson's Bay, to her voyages and journeys to several countries. Let us take a close look at her oeuvre. Her novels include:

Seven Poor Men of Sydney (1934), *House Of All Nations* (1938), *The Man Who Loved Children* (1940), *For Love Alone* (1944), *Letty Fox and Her Luck* (1946), *A Little Tea, A Little Chat* (1948), *The People With the Dogs* (1952), *Colours of Asia* (1955), *Miss Herbert (The Suburban Wife)*, (19), *The Palace With Several Sides* (1986), and *I'm Dying Laughing* (1986).

We have discussed a few relevant details on her life, we have mentioned her works we shall now take a look at some of her important earlier works. Let us begin with her earliest novel the *Seven poor Men of Sydney* (1934) also the only novel set in Australia. This novel is about the lives of ordinary people and deals with the working class of Sydney during the Depression of the 1920s. Though it is a poetic novel, several publishers rejected it, before Peter Davis, a young London publisher, finally published it on the condition that she should write a more conventional novel that could be published before the *Seven Poor Men of Sydney*. This novel was to become *The Salzburg Tales*, a tale cycle with several narrators in different narrative genres. In her novel *For Love Alone* (1944), a young woman takes advantage of the 'chances of distant seas' that Sydney as a port offers. She rejects her home and family, and after imposing voluntary solitude, eventually makes her way to London. The novel however is more about an inner voyage, the process of discovery of the self through a gradual and growing understanding of love. Critics have considered *For Love Alone* to be an "honest and insistent evocation of female sexual longings" for the fact was that "such desire was generally acknowledged only tacitly if at all." It is largely autobiographical and deals with her early life in Australia. The novel is about a young girl Teresa Hawkins, who like Christina Stead endured personal hardships, worked by day and attended business classes at night in order to procure a passage to England and a job there. She eventually arrived in London in 1928. The first half of the novel is set in Australia and is fixed in an actual environment-both social and natural, while the second half is set in a strangely surreal London. The novel's terms change with the transfer of locale. Teresa Hawkins' need for love translates into a need to escape, through love, into a larger world. It is a long and uneven novel sometimes rather limited in its emotional range. Yet it is powerful too. Its attraction lies in Teresa's search of her inner being, her own consciousness. *For Love Alone* (1944) and her *The Man Who Loved Children* (1940) are the most autobiographical of her works. *The House of All Nations* (1938) is largely influenced by Stead's own experiences in international banking and is a portrait of financiers who manipulated and exploited the economy. In the *Man Who Loved Children* (1940), she probes the dangers that lie inherent within restricted family circles. Every day domestic squabbles and tensions that often conceal deep-seated antagonisms and damaging emotional pressures are clearly depicted in this novel. She manages to paint an extremely convincing picture of a family created and drawn partly from her own childhood. She also endows a sense of life, and defeat in the novel and in her characters. Her novel is at once both universal and unique.

Christina Stead had a strong tendency towards melodrama and this is to be found in largely in *For Love Alone*. She does not really have scenes of cozy intimacy between husbands and wives, but it contains several brother-sister relationships that often verge on incest. For instance, the various brother-sister relationships: between Michael and Catherine (*Seven Poor Men of Sydney*), Tom and Nellie Cotter (*Cotter's England*) and Philip and Nell (*The People with the Dogs*). Hazel Rowley her

biographer is of the opinion that "this loving brother and sister" clearly served as the unconscious model of a happy sibling couple. Christina Stead was also conscious about her physical unattractiveness in comparison with her cousin Gwen and her father. In all her stories about her childhood, she is aware of personal appearance. This awareness was, reinforced by her father who was obsessed with physical appearance himself. He expounded the theory that appearances reflected character and his own 'handsomeness' and fairness was the outward signs of his own goodness and innocence. For David Stead, plainness was a kind of deformity. Within ten years of her marriage to David Stead Ada had six children of her own. Ada was not easy to get along with and Christina Stead resented her. Rowley is inclined to believe that at an unconscious level Stead may have believed that her natural mother had left her because she was bad, at another level, she could have been angry about being deserted, rejected, unloved and unlovable. Where circumstances change thus, the unloved makes sure they are really unlovable and Christina Stead was to become as a writer, an observer, to be a professional outsider. While she considered herself an Australian writer living abroad, Australians rejected her on grounds of not having lived in Australia and the Americans criticized her for being Australian.

6.3 STEAD AND STYLE

Her fiction is about disrupted and oppressed lives and economic hardships, and the strain of meager living. Her situations are mostly domestic and mundane, not really remarkable. But from within these seemingly mundane situations she constructs elaborate studies of character, and charts the intricacies of the human relationships. The most distinctive feature of her fiction is her style. She was adept at combining the quirks / idiosyncrasies of her characters with the inner workings of their minds. She was good at portraying the emotions they (were barely aware of) are experienced and the good and the bad elements in such a detailed manner to conjure a unique yet probable character. Her characters appear to be those boisterous on neurosis, they are those who cry, beg, coerce, rather than persuade and are extremely loquacious. Their loquaciousness however being an indication of their own confusion, the sense of anger, rage, fear, the whole range of emotions they are undergoing. This being too detailed at times proves tiring for the readers but it was her very own unique style of writing. Her writing though often uncoordinated (in the usual expectations of novel writing) is more of a response to a stimulus, generated by the chain of events in her novels. Her vocabulary has a very wide range- being brought up in such a culture (refer to her biographical details) with a naturalist and a botanist for a father and having read voraciously through her growing years -she ranges from the "further limits of scientific precision to the romantic extravagance of fantasy"; (Robert Geering). Though she is so precise, so exact, and definite in her writing style, and her characterisation, she does not try to create an exactness of her characters. Instead what she does is try and identify her subjects by a process of continuous approximation. On the one hand she is exact (particularly where details are concerned) and on the other, defines exactness by assuming approximation.

She is quite often very inclusive in her fiction particularly in her earlier works like *The Seven Poor Men of Sydney*. In this novel the description of the setting is elaborate, but interesting and also helps contain some of the apparent formlessness (her novel is considered formless as opposed to the conventional novel which she avoids at every cost and chance) of the novel. She reconstructs the period, reflecting the conflicting idealism of the time, and the contending social philosophies. The patriotic fervour of the Great War that was being countered by the then emerging socialism not only fired the imagination of many but was also reflected in her novel. It was a period of labour unrest, economic uncertainty and of cultural and spiritual

doubt. The setting provides for the different emerging ideas, attitudes, social temper, and the local colour she adds to her work acts like a subsidiary to the ideas and proves supportive as well.

Her most famous novel "The Man Who Loved Children", (1940), probes the dangers that lie inherent in the restricted family circle. Every day domestic squabbles and tensions conceal deep-seated antagonisms and damaging emotional pressures. In this novel she manages to paint an extremely convincing picture of a particular family. This family that she has created is drawn partly from her own childhood, but amplified and fully endowed with a sense of life, and defeat that is peculiar to the story. The novel is at once both universal and unique. Christina Stead also has a tendency towards persistent melodrama and this is to be found largely in "For Love Alone." "The House of All Nations" (1938) is a portrait of the financiers who manipulated and exploited the economy.

She ranges widely from within a limited world (domestic world) and though this proves to be her trump card it also proves to be her main weakness of her work particularly in her next novel *The Man Who Loved Children*. In most of her novels Stead's characters take a stand. Once they have done so they do not / fail to hear or notice anything that stands in their way of thinking. This creates an impression of her characters (especially the main ones) as egotistical and often unappealing and therefore unattractive. Their ideology seems to form their mental life, but this mental life is also largely determined by their inherent/ innate inclinations. It often appears that there is an imperfect balance between the inner realities of her characters' mind and lives and the outer manifest realities. This is in fact a result of the misalliance of the novel of character with the novel of ideas. At this stage we are assuming that we are all aware of the different types of novels. For instance the novel of character, the novel of ideas, the picaresque novel, the regional novel etc., In case any of us would like to refresh our memories we could always read any work that explains 'Literary Types and Terms'. Christina Stead's recreation of the social circumstances of the 1930s and 40s is impressive, and her expression of 'a particular kind of life' is thorough.

The success of Christina Stead's fiction, particularly her capacity to translate herself deeply into her characters' suggests that 'rage', envy or whatever, are edged aside by the novelist's loving absorption in individual personalities (Shapcott). She seems to be imaginatively losing her self in the process of recreation. Her response to that personality and the desire to give it expression drove her in her literary creativity. She is very clear about this in the following words: "...expression, which is an entity, a need, a frightful desire, stronger than any other physical desire..." (Web, Friendship, p 93-93). For Stead to love was to be able write. She believed both to be creative activities where one nourished the other, (Ann Blake, p13). She wrote in a spirit of revenge, using fiction to make a self-gratifying version of her experience: The fictionalization of her past gave her a real power: the power to recast reality. (Hazel Rowley, p79)

6.4 THEMES IN STEAD

Let us now analyse the important themes in Stead's fiction. Her very first publication *The Salzburg Tales* forced her to confront the possibility that one of her models would recognise herself and take offence. She also published her autobiographical family novel *The Man Who Loved Children*. It is believed that she changed the locale to protect her family, but as Hazel Rowley has unearthed, she changed the locale to the United States of America, because of the request put forward by her publishers. (Rowley, p260) Christina Stead's supreme loyalty lay with her work.

Amongst her letters none of her personal correspondence with those she made models survives. Presumably she destroyed it all, (Ann Blake, pp 16). Stead's gaze discovers within her central figures a greedy, even ugly, energy: "Every human being is a sort of monster, if you get to know them." (*I'm Dying Laughing*, pp345). As mentioned earlier her characters are loquacious and long after their verbal outpourings are over and done with, the readers is still struck by the scale of their passions. Her characters are authentic and individual because of her well-documented ability to catch the idiosyncrasies of her model's habits of speech. Stead could have provoked her models to pose for her, write to her, talk or play out scenes for her which may have led to them feeling offended and betrayed by her. But what emerged from the models, were her own figures of literary significance that had been made over in her imagination and brought into being through the repeated drafts of her work. For Stead the ideal scope of the novel was a work, which reached beyond the study of human psychology, however insightful or affecting. Critics have various opinions regarding using real models for fictional work. R G Geering is of the opinion that "... ultimately nothing of this really matters. People are used as models for characters and the important thing, the real achievement, is the literary work, the imaginative creation that emerges."

Her subsequent fiction confirms the accomplishments of her major works. After a break of nearly fifteen years, her new works continued to concentrate on 'the drama of the person', expressing the inner convictions and delusions of her characters and recreating the semi-transparent envelope of their lives. But the world of her imagination had become quite separate from the immediate pressures, real events of every day life and this becomes apparent in her later works *Cotters' England* (1966), *The Little Hotel* (1973), *Miss Herbert (The Suburban Wife)* (1976). For instance in *Cotters' England*, Nellie Cook's earlier political enthusiasm no longer has any substantial focus. Similarly in *The Little Hotel*, the stories of the various guests depict a decayed mode of life and *Miss Herbert (The Suburban Wife)*, shows the shallowness of a woman, who is quite blind to the social changes taking place about her. Stead resisted the conventional novel whenever she could. For a detailed understanding of what a conventional novel form is, it would be helpful to read Forster's *Aspects of the Novel*. She did away with plot in the conventional sense and instead diffused action through her various characters. By doing so what she achieved was a variety of perspectives rather than a single, unifying (read artificial structure). Her story element springs from her character's hopes, fears, disappointments, their motivations however demanding or conflicting, their disappointments and their sheer determination to succeed. You might recall what we said earlier about those ordinary people struggling to make something of their lives. She appears to be rejecting fictional strategies constantly and her work present the entire range and texture of experience, which does not have a shape or a form imposed upon it. She rarely has a plot, to compensate for her style she has tried to develop a more appropriate, a more inclusive form in coming to terms with life.

While Stead was sensitive to the seriousness of fiction: "A novel is philosophic. A person who writes a novel is being philosophical about society, but he needn't have a social line," she did not have a direct / manifest social message to deliver. Caught between the paradox of constructing sense of the un-constructed, Furphy turned towards the comic perceptions of relationship between fiction and reality, it had the opposite effect on Christina Stead. Her characters have a tendency of taking a negative or defensive stance very often. They seem to be resisting any restrictions, definitions imposed by society, they also appear to be fighting free of constricting personal relationships, they are defiant of any form of order, control / determinism. The only movement that becomes apparent in their restless quest is for freedom and knowledge. This could be the result of the writer's unconscious biography making its

presence felt through the inner minds of her characters, somewhat like the subconscious seeping into the very thought processes that plagued the author so often finding its way into her literary creations. If you ever manage to lay your hands on Hazel Rowley's biography of Christina Stead do not miss the opportunity of reading it. Christina Stead's life was in fact very akin to Teresa Hawkins in *For Love Alone* or that of Louis Pollitt's in *The Man Who Loved Children*. The ending images of her novels (particularly the last scene of *The Man Who Loved Children*) are often contradictory to the imaginative impetus of her work. Louie Pollit crosses the bridge to escape into the world, at the end of *The Man Who Loved Children*. Yet, the misery and emotional upheaval she incurs earlier on in the story, lingers on in our minds, long after the image of her achieving what she set out to attain vanishes from sight.

Though she gives all the details of the circumstantial world, the subject of Christina Stead's fiction lies in her detailed presentation of her characters' inner perception and presentation of the inner minds of her characters. Her character portrayal and analysis are excessive, in fact they appear larger than life and her ambition to account for character in terms of individual choices and social intention surpasses her capacity to control the imaginative design her creativity is giving way to. Hers is a fiction that expresses loss, exhaustion and defeat. It is genuinely unsentimental. No doubt we will all remember that the 'sentimental novel' was very popular in eighteenth century England and that it concentrated on the distresses of the virtuous and attempted to show that a sense of honour and moral behaviour was rightly rewarded. It also depicted effusive emotion as an evidence of the kindness and goodness of the character concerned. *Pamela or Virtue Rewarded* (Richardson) is a good example of such a novel. Keeping this in mind it will be easy for us to determine the grounds on which it is said that Stead's fiction was genuinely unsentimental. Christina Stead did not have any such elements in her novels. Her fiction in fact documents the action thoroughly, much like the "naturalist novel" that had become the current literary trend at the turn of the century. Before we assume that we are all familiar with this term let us discuss very briefly what the "naturalist novel" was all about. In Literature "naturalism or naturalist" developed out of realism. The naturalist interpreted life concentrating on depicting the social environment of the times and dwelt on its deficiencies and on the shortcomings of human beings. *Emile Zola* was an excellent exponent of this form of writing and he influenced the works of *Maupassant* for instance. Other forms of literary creativity emerged which sought to mirror life with the utmost fidelity. We may have deviated slightly at this juncture but it is better that we know what we are talking about, to know what we are referring to then to proceed further in ignorance. Coming back to Stead's fiction, she maintains neutrality of point of view and expresses the inner life of her characters and registers the varying intensities of their experience. She was completely fascinated with the individuality of her characters and also with social theory. But she does not always manage to reconcile the two comfortably. Her writing gives the impression that she is constantly seeking the extra ordinary within the ordinary. What she discovers however, in her quest is "nervous strain, furtive desires and contradictory impulses. Even though she adopted the naturalist mode of writing, she is deeply interested in depicting the quality of experience than in exposing the failures of the world. She is favourably inclined towards the psychological rather than the spiritual aspect of writing.

Christina Stead's characters' vocal performances reveal the monsters underneath. She believed that a writer must work from life and develop skill in language and observation in order to produce something useful for the world, and to avoid the conventionally literary. Stead transforms real people into fictional accounts and makes them her own creations, (Ann Blake, p12). She described herself as a psychological novelist and her subjects as 'the drama of the person', and was always

a fervent advocate of drawing from life. She believed that people (characters) could not be invented for they would then be mere puppets, (Lidoff, p 217). For her a piece of work to have value had to be thoroughly grounded in reality. She therefore took her characters from life, their stories and her novels often following the course of events of their lives. According to Robert Geering: The short story for her was more than a literary form, it was an ever changing proof of man's universal needs for self-expression. "The story dies if written to a rigid plan or pinned down. It is a million drops of water that are the looking glasses of all our lives," (Kenyon Review XXX, 4 (1968), p 449).

Christina Stead's first publication *The Salzburg Tales* (1934) is a work that expresses a young Australian writer's fascination with European heritage. These stories are written with a detachment that frequently runs to satire. This collection was inspired by a visit to the festival city in 1931. It included a few stories, the only ones she can remember in detail, from an earlier Manuscript (now lost) that she tried, unsuccessfully, to get published in Australia while she was still at the Sydney Teachers College. In these stories Christina Stead works within the geographical and literary context of Europe and her collection of stories in this book are written with a sophistication and finesse that is not found in her earlier novel *The Seven Poor Men of Sydney*. It will be obvious upon reading her works that most of Stead's characters are motivated by money, greed, envy and opportunism. The English working classes were bigots and its members lead dishonest lives, cheating landlords obsessed with getting something out of nothing. Stead seems fascinated by her characters- their behaviour, the result of circumstances of birth and upbringing. Many of her characters or character-types appear again in her works: there's Miss Chillard from *The Little Hotel*, the storyteller from *The Salzburg Tales*, *Seven Poor Men of Sydney*, *The Beauties and the Furies* and *Cotters' England*; and there's the cynical Benjamin Cullen, the real life Eric of *A Writer's Friends*.

Stead is a natural storyteller. As in *The Salzburg Tales* her enthusiasm for the form is palpable. Whether she's writing a fairy story, documenting her own voyage to London as the companion of a well to-do alcoholic, exploring the likelihood of doppelgangers or spinning a little horror story about the man who lost his face, Stead is obviously enjoying herself- and the reader cannot help but follow suit.

6.5 THE OLD SCHOOL -TEXT

The brick school in its yellow playground lay south west from and below Lydham Hill. One morning the wind-break on the knoll half sank to the horizon like a constellation wheeling; the house lay close to the breast of clay, shawled in pines. It turned out that there were trees in the school ground too -- a Moreton Bay fig, a pepper tree with outstretched arms and in the lower part, near the headmaster's house, some flower beds for the infants.

The rumour about the school among the very small children who had never been there, was that children were beaten there and prisoned, 'caned and kept in, even the babies'. Mistrial and injustice were common at home, but there never was any particular conclusion, while in this new yellow earth, there were strange administrators, and things had a beginning and an end, the end at four o'clock, the conclusion liberty, sometimes delayed 'kept in half an hour.'

Cause and effect were much clearer than at home, effect often unlooked for, doomful and needing analysis. Cause and effect mostly concerned the boys. A boy who jumps over the fence in the evening and shouts while playing stolen football, who pick a pansy from the infants' garden, who takes a pear from the Jollys' fruit stall, will soon

be seen at the headmaster's table waiting for six cuts. There are even trusties, worthy little boys who do not seem to earn much respect, who are willing to take him there. And it is known pretty soon that the boy who stays away a whole week, a truant (that is a terrible word) in the hot silent gully, hidden by trees, paddling in the shallow creek, will go to the reformatory. The shadow of the reformatory was steep and dark. The informants – there are always a number of small sages about – know all about it. It had barred windows, food was bad, beatings the usual thing and you only came out of there to go to prison. In any case, in there they wrote blucher boots. Blucher boots were stiff work-boots with heavy soles, cheap and long wearing. It was accepted that children who came to school in blucher boots would leave school early and do rough work. They might even work on the road alongside their fathers, who, too, wore blucher boots. The very word was socially significant: 'he's wearing blucher boots!' The nice girls looked down and away in shame, the dirty girls grinned. Nevertheless there was Tom Biggar, a fleshy chestnut and rose boy often good at drawing. Mr. Roberts put upon the varnished table a blucher boot to draw and beside it some potatoes. There were protests from the girls and the nice boys. They also did not want to draw potatoes. Tom's were very good though. Mr. Roberts said he might be an artist. Tom laughed, 'I'm going to work on the road with father, when I can.' He did not mind the prospect at all: he would earn money like his father.

All the outside information, these certitudes, were spread by the informants, natural moralists, two or three to a class and as far as I knew, all little girls. There were girls and boys in each class, but in their own society, that is in the playground, they did not mix. There was one moral little boy, though: he was called after one of the greatest English poets and had a good memory. Once the whole school was assembled in the long room to hear of a most serious crime. 'Who did it? It is a mistake to think you must be loyal to your classmates, when such a thing has been done.' The headmaster marched up and down and called 'Speak out'. Many moral questions were debated by the girls in large circular evasions but this was an obsolete law never debated. (The informants knew that someone had scandalously coupled the names of male and female teachers in stolen chalk on the boys' outhouse.)

In all the school assembled, only one child had the moral courage to tattle, Dryden Smith himself, an undersized clerkly boy of ten; 'It was Snowy Thorne.'

This delation froze the school in lessons and caused the playgrounds to move with wagging heads and hands, as a fern-slope under wind; whatever the verdict, Dryden was left alone, contaminated: such a lesson in public morality lasts through life. Even the informants dared not become informers.

At the end of the year, Dryden won a prize From Log Cabin to White House given by Mr Roberts, a man who protected children, and Dryden recited before the parents and the minister 'Horatius at the Bridge', standing up trembling but brave. I can still see his pale serious round face as it rose, twice, once for the denunciation, once for the poem. And I saw him once more, at Christmas, at the old Anthony Hordern's with his little face just above the counter, where they sold men's ties. We saw each other but made no sign. He was at work. I was at school. I too had won a prize, 'Feats on the Fjord', which struck me as second best and I recited "There was a sound of revelry by night". I could see, as I proceeded, that the parents were stupefied with boredom and good manners.

The informants, our moralists, had clean dressed, pink, blue or sprigged, patent leather shoes and white socks, and curls natural or rag. They did clean school work too, even when we got to pen and ink. Goodness alone knows how, with their pink

cheeks and shiny curls and neatly dressed brisk little mothers, they got all this news about jails, reformatories, judges and sentences, lashings, canings, bread and water.

When wrongs took place in school or grounds, the informants instantly knotted together, a town moot: they discussed, debated and delivered an opinion. What the teachers said was brought forward but only as hearsay. I never had an opinion to give; in one way I did not understand and then I was always puzzled. I thought then that cruelty and injustice were natural and inevitable during all of a poor creature's life.

Now Snowy Thorne, the accredited bad boy of the school, a ten-year-old orphan with straw hair, tearstained face, a good Norfolk suit given him by his aunts and blucher boots – if the little girls picked him out for gossip and innuendo it was because the teachers had picked him out first. The headmaster, a grey haired small-headed socialist, a mild moderate mediocre fellow, thought he had been slighted in being sent out to this distant suburban school, a revenge for his opinions. He hated Snowy Thorne. Some iniquity discovered, Mr Fairway would call together the three upper classes (fifth was top class then), pack them into the long room which was built in a court house style, and make Snowy Thorne walk up and down, up and down, all the length of the room, by the three blackboards, up and down from the desk where he got his canings to the door to the yard through which he could escape (but Mr Roberts stood there), in his neat but yellowing Norfolk suit and his dull black boots. What annoyed Mr Fairway was that Snowy Thorne would not admit all of his crimes, until after being baited and exhibited and worn down he cried and was caned; and even then no one was sure. But who else threw ink into the new fish pond that Mr Fairway had just put in at his own expense to cheer up the boys' playground? Who else wrote certain symbols on the wall, for example, a rooster and a strange eye with long lashes? Whose pale poll was seen at evening star time alone in the playground and whistling to itself? Where had the toffee apples gone from the IXL shop? It could only have been the butter ladies' boy (his aunts sold butter). I do not know what became of Snowy Thorne. Poor Mr Fairway! The school was given more classrooms, a better grade; and a new assistant head, smart, conceited and lively and, worst of all, with a B.A. degree, came to push the aging man about.

When we first came to school, we sang a pretty song about the old bell,

I was hung in my place when the village was young,
And the houses were scattered and few,
In the old dingy belfry for ages I've swung.
But my song is the same as when new.

Though I knew it was about another place, it also seemed to me to be about Bexley, where the houses were scattered and few; But by the time Mr. Bobsley B.A. came, closer settlement had begun, many old paddocks were closed to us.

The first teacher I knew was a confident pretty neat woman, married, with two young children at home. She told us about them almost every day: luckily for her in these children she had met her ideals. She had large blue eyes and crinkled hair; and her children were fair, too. The school children called her 'very strict', not a slur. This was another moral issue often debated – who was the better teacher, the strict or the slack?

'If I hear a single sound you won't go home to lunch, you'll stay in all day and I'll make rabbit pie out of you and eat you,' she said. This threat caused some of the infants to sob out of hunger in prospect; other sobbed out of fear. We were very

young. Each shiny morning she looked up and down the ranks as they marched in and standing at her desk would cry, 'Millie fall out, Jack Dodger, Will Hill, Polly – fall out' and by the time the class stood at its desks there would be on the floor a ragged line of the guilty, surveyed by the others with interest and guilt. It was not always possible to understand why they were guilty. It was easy to note some, torn jacket, hair 'like a birch broom in a fit', and Maidie Dickon of course, for truancy, though she hid in no sunny gully. We sang the first song, 'Good morning to you, glorious sun', sat down and the moment came, the review of the sinners, more, exciting to the teacher than to them. Some after a homily would be sent back to their seats, two or three were left to tramp up and down. Then a general explanation of the law. If parents could not afford boots they must send a note explaining; but if children had boots and came without, then – and so forth. Children had the duty of asking their parents for boots and shoes; if the soles were worn out, they themselves must take them to the boot-mender's. I myself stood there once in broken boots, but was saved. As I stood there with flushed cheeks and resentful, the class sang its second song, with the chorus, 'Shoo, shoo, go out black cat'. At this moment the headmaster appeared winking (he was younger and happier then). He pretended to be a black cat and ran out: the delinquents were sent back to their seats. When the class set to work, Maidie Dickon would be called to the desk and her case gone into. She had been away eight days, say, and only returned in response to the teacher's note. She must now go home and bring a note of excuse from her mother. The dark haired little girl went out silent, passive. As she clumped to the door, one of the informants, the censors (who felt themselves enabled to speak in class) remarked that Maidie was wearing boys' boots, blucher boots. So she was. Presently another who had been sent to the head with a message, returned to say that Maidie was sitting in a corner of the shed, doing nothing. So she was, she could even be seen from our doorway, quite still, head drooping. A willing messenger was sent to tell her to go home. The next day she did not come; but at mid-morning on the following day someone saw a motionless bundle there, with her two bare legs in the boots, crouched in the infants' shed: she had no note.

For a few days after, she sat in her desk in front, clumsily doing lessons with a book and pencil from the school cupboard were given out sparingly: you had to bring your own. The censors were indignant (though well provided with books and pencil cases). There was a considerable outcry, 'It isn't fair' they exclaimed. Usually a new book was given as a sort of prize, for very good work. Maidie would begin a new exercise book and then stay away for so long that the book would belong to someone else by the time she returned. She came without any property at all, no pencil box, sponge box, slate pencil, pencil, school bag, handkerchief, forlornly destitute.

The censors (the informants) were astonishing newsgatherers. How could they know? – but they did – that Mr Dickon was a roadworker who had been on strike (for them a criminal thing), that Mrs Dickon was a washerwoman, never home in the daytime. When she got a query from the teacher, Mrs Dickon always answered at once, on odd pieces of paper bills or newspaper, which were exhibited and read out to the class by the clean gold haired teacher. These notes would say 'Maidie had to help me,' and once she said 'I have a new baby and Maidie had to stay at home to help.' Maidie knew a brief popularity then: the informants loved new babies.

Monday mornings were bank mornings. Children with prudent parents brought each a shilling or a six-pence and went to the headmaster who wrote down in each bank book the sum brought. He complained about it – how did we know that? – and we could not understand his complaint at such a privilege: a moaner, evidently. I also banked one shilling a week and one Monday the shilling was missing. Neighbours and busybodies (informants should I say) helped me look for it, said it was stolen.

Knowing how confused I was, how I always lost things at home, I thought I had lost it myself. We turned out the little lunch case, poked at its seams and everyone studied the floorboards. 'Who stole it?' very soon became 'Maidie Dickon stole a shilling.' 'How do you know?' 'She must have, she's poor.' Even the teacher was shaken. Maidie Dickon remained as before, silent, forlorn. I felt guilty. I felt sure it was I. Justice without evidence took its course. The following Monday when I opened my case a shilling piece lay on top. 'Maidie Dickon must have put it back' they cried. As for me, I believed that I had over-looked it, that it had fallen out of a seam, a pocket. That notion of Maidie Dickon climbing up all those stairs (I was at the back in a banked classroom), opening cases, taking out, putting in and all with such cunning and stealth, she who never moved, never always late, did not fit. Even now, she never spoke, never volunteered word or action. There she is though, the little girl in white, with her bowed heavy shoulders and black eyes, in my mind; and with her, the horror of money.

She was sitting there one morning hunched more than usual because of the dress. Someone was reading the lesson, 'A man in a land where lions are found was once out late in the day far from home' (a phrase I have never forgotten), but the little girls' interest was glued to a topic right at home and they interrupted the fascinating lion story (I remember that the man hid in a hole under the cliff and the lion leaped right over him into the gulf), to remark to the teacher that Maidie was wearing a new dress made out of a sheet. 'No, it's a flour bag, her mother hasn't got any sheets.' This was a serious argument without malice. 'Mrs Taylor, she shouldn't come to school in a dress made out of a sheet' – craning, inspecting, deciding. They had been simmering with this news, waiting for the moment to let it out. Before school, she had pulled away from their inquisitive puzzled fingers and eyes, little sparrows pecking at the odd-feathered one, her large opaque black eyes on them and then away – with what feeling? Even in the lines that morning, they, the good, had been disorderly, fluttering. And now, when the bright haired woman settled them all, they told her she had been obeyed. Maidie had only stayed away the last time because she had no dress to wear. Now she had a dress, 'It's made out of a sheet.' 'Flour bags?' 'NO, it's a sheet.' The teacher, curious, went right up to Maidie's desk and studied the dress.

It was soft old thick cotton, made in fashion, with a deep yoke, long sleeves into wristbands, several inch wide pleats into a waistband, tucks and a wide hem to let down. It was white and remained white, though certain marks (which had made them say flour bags) had faded with washing.

Maidie never had any lunch. During the lunch recess she sat by herself at the far end of the wooden seats which ran round under the high brick walls. The rest of the girls in groups in the noonday shade of the buildings occasionally glanced her way, during a lull in their busy colloquies, condemning her for her misery, some, perhaps, curious about her life. If a newcomer, a wandering casual, not yet incorporated socially or perhaps even kindhearted, approached her, the playground leaders at once dispatched a messenger, 'You mustn't talk to her: she hasn't any lunch,' and some other parts of the indictment might be added, if the wanderer hesitated.

Some hungry children ate their lunches in snatches under the desks during school hours and had none left when noonday came. Some of these grasshoppers cast eyes on their friends' lunches and even begged; but they got little if anything. They too had the sin of lunchlessness, though it was understood they were more weak than sinning. Was it one of those who in the morning poached another's lunch? In the middle of the morning Dorothy (a sweet little girl who was not an informant) found her lunch gone. 'The thief – the thief' a word they liked to shrill and who could it be?

Yes, Maidie it might be – but for some reason the informants had grown a little careful since the episode of the shilling. They must have had doubts, too. But what a din!

She listened at her desk, motionless: she sat in the shed or playground. At last, the lunchless one, Maidie wept, but no one pitied her. They sang the midday song, 'Home to dinner, home to dinner, hear the bell, hear the bell, bacon and potatoes...' etc. Dorothy lived too far away to go home and the teacher gave her money for the IXL shop.

It is a hard cruel know that has gathered in the shade at the top of the yard, looking over their shoulders fiercely at the girl in the white dress, a bundle of submission in the sun sometimes shaking her black basin-crop which she scratches ('she has nits') and glancing mildly round her: perhaps she is shortsighted. 'Thieves oughtn't to be allowed in school,' and they bring into their talk the reformatory, these pink and blue girls, whispering secrets boasting and harsh; and yet all are afraid. The reformatory for Maidie, there with coarse dishes, coarse clothes, sleeping on sacking or planks, there children are flogged, though it serves them right, there is the cat o' nine tails, there they are put into cells alone, there are iron bars on the windows and if they escape the police catch them. The little girls in pink and blue know the names of the jails – Long Bay, Parramatta, Bathurst. Where do the charming little balls of fluff, their mothers' happiness, gather this awful lore? Mrs. Taylor, the teacher, comes round the corner of the infants' building where Maidie sits in the midday sun, close to the side gate leading into the headmaster's dark snug cottage. Mrs. Taylor speaks,

'Are you hungry, Maidie?'

'Yes.'

'Have you nay lunch?'

'No.'

'Don't you ever bring any lunch?'

'No.'

'Come and have lunch with me.'

She takes her by the hand. They go round the corner towards the infants' building where the teacher has her packet lunch, done up in a white damask serviette, on her desk.

The teacher does not acquire merit by this action. How set back the informants are now! 'She oughtn't to do it!' Yes, morality has got a black eye. The teacher has fallen from grace. 'She shouldn't give her lunch when she never brings any.' What Mrs. Taylor does will henceforth be debated with less than latitude: she has sided with the luckless, rebuffed the righteous. I was there. I was never able to make up my mind about things; and so it is still there, clear to me, the ever burning questions of good and bad which (to be fair to the informants) so greatly occupied their minds. I always thought it strange that adults do not notice how profoundly little children are engrossed and stirred by moral debate. They are all the time sharpening their awareness of the lines and frontiers.

6.5.1 Analysing *The Old School*

We shall analyse the short story *The Old School* from several angles. We shall begin with a few comments on the title of the story, followed by a discussion on the plot. We shall then analyse the narrative structure of the story and also take a look at Stead's characterisation. We will end our discussion with the theme of *The Old School*. Our analysis will also include the contextualisation of *The Old School*.

6.5.2 The Title of *The Old School*

Let us reflect a little on the title of the story- *The Old School*. Sometimes the title itself tells us a lot about what the story contains. For instance *The Old School* could be the tale of any old school, a school that is old, the old school where the narrator studied, the old school as in people belonging to a certain tradition, a certain generation and thinking and behaving in a certain manner. A title that says so many things and conjures so many images in our minds would obviously strike a chord somewhere. Going a little further the title also brings to mind our own school, the schools we attended as children. The title invites us to refresh our own memories of the past. It also helps us draw analogies between other works written in England for instance. In fact the title has a very Dickensian resonance about it. It brings to mind images of schools and teachers like Mr Grindstone (in Dicken's *Hard Times*), of *Nicholas Nickleby*, *Great Expectations*, *Mill On The Floss* (George Eliot), and *Jude The Obscure* (Thomas Hardy). As was the tradition most Victorian novelists talked about education and the type that was appropriate for the age. England we may recall had just about managed to over throw the shackles of **Romanticism** and was now concentrating on **Utilitarianism**. We do know what Romanticism and the Romantic movement comprised, Utilitarianism was a concept promoted largely by Jeremy Bentham who believed that only that which had a practical purpose to serve and that, that was grounded in facts should be advocated while romantic frills and fancies were to be frowned upon. For instance in *Hard Times* Mr Grindstone asks a student to describe a horse. The student describes the horse as a quadruped, and herbivorous etc but has actually no clue as to what a horse looks like. Most of the Victorians were trying to come to terms with and negotiating the most practical method of imparting sound, useful education. All this was often reflected in their creative works like novels. Some were even trying to show the futility of the useless method and syllabi being advocated by the schools of those days. For instance *The Mill On the Floss*, is a comment on the uselessness of the type of education that is being imparted to Tom. This education is useless because it will not really prepare Tom for the life that he will have to lead in the future and also because it fills his head with ideas and notions that are above his station in life. Not only were most of the writers trying to negotiate the viability of this method of education they were also exposing the pitfalls of the system and that may also have been the case with Christina Stead. She offers us a comment on the schooling system of Australia in the early decades of the twentieth century. The title by itself seems to suggest four things:

- (a) the old school where the narrator/ author studied
- (b) life/ the oldest school in the world
- (c) the old school as in the old school of thought and
- (d) a comment on the schooling system of the times.

We shall not go into too many details here. If we read the story keeping these four points in mind, we will be in a position to discern for ourselves the various shades of meaning inherent in the text. Let us now take a look at the plot of *The Old School*.

6.5.3 Plot

What do we understand by the term 'plot'? Aristotle the ancient Greek philosopher was the first to recognise plot as the most important ingredient of a tragedy (the other five ingredients being, character, diction, thought, spectacle and melody). Though Aristotle talked about tragedy, these six constituents of a tragedy provide the basis of all narratives – be they novels, plays or tragedies. We shall take a look at plot or what Aristotle called the very "life and soul" of the story. A good plot is the outcome of a

writer's strategies and tactics to produce a story that is not a mere narration but has a life of its own and not only creates an interest but also sustains that interest till the end. Having said this let us now turn to a discussion on the plot of *The Old School*. *The Old School* as mentioned earlier is one of the last written of her stories but it was the first in experience. It takes the reader back to the town of Bexley where Christina Stead grew up. Stead lets the reader know where the school is located, what it appears like at first sight, and what impressions one gets of it on first looking at it. The 'insider-outsider' relationship is evident throughout the short story. The school becomes a strange world that the narrator imagines to be a treeless and flowerless place. The narrator is amazed to discover that the school actually has trees and flower-beds and shows signs of being a habitable place.

The narrator knows only what s/he has heard the school to be. S/he believes it to be a place where there is a beginning (when school starts) and an end (at four in the evening) and where justice is meted out more swiftly than in a law court. It could even come in the form of a detention, crime is followed equally quickly by retribution and if the crime is not discovered then there are spies and informers or 'trustees' who will do the needful. The narrator believes the school to be a 'prison' where children are, 'beaten, caned, locked-in' all this is played off by a sense of the freedom that lies outside the gates of the school. Of the freedom in playing truant, but all this does not go unnoticed by the school or its administrators. The differences between 'home' and 'school' are quickly noted and accepted by all. Anybody breaking rules is punished with six canes at the Head Master's table. It is a world where justice is not delayed but where mistrials may take place. Note the language used to convey the sense of impending mistrials, right at the beginning of the story. Another amazing feature in the plot is the fact that these young, innocent children who are well dressed and neat, do neat work in class seem to know so much about the world outside the school. They seem to be aware of the fact that naughty children will be punished and will eventually end up in the 'reformatory' which was a school with barred windows, beatings, bad food and from where he would graduate to the prison. These children are also aware of crime, jails, lashings, canings, of the names of prisons and the conditions therein. It is a world where injustice prevails and people take out their frustrations on some one weaker than them, (Headmaster picking on Snowy Thorne, the girls picking on Maidie Dickon).

Another thought provoking element is the 'blucher boots' that strike the readers with the thought that it symbolises poverty. It stood for the working class. Anyone wearing these boots "would leave school early and do rough work", it meant that the wearer of the boot was from a poor family and that his father wore those boots to work on the road and so would the children. The words "blucher boots" receive added social significance, the working class for instance. It stands for those children who will never finish their studies but will join the work force as early as possible. The insider-outsider relationship becomes forcibly stronger as the girls (insiders) pass on information or 'message of certitude' to the outside world. But even within this seemingly homogenous world class distinctions are maintained and the not so well dressed, not so neat student is needlessly the butt of cruel jokes and malicious taunts. It is a microcosm of the adult world, but even within that little microcosm things change, developmental activities increase rapidly while the open spaces are being encroached upon and many of the paddocks are now closed. Within this microcosm children behave like miniature adults and are 'profoundly engrossed and stirred by moral debate.' Their teacher falls from grace for sharing her lunch with the poor child Maidie Dickon.

Let us now turn our attention to the mode of characterisation Stead employs in *The Old School*.

6.5.4 Characterisation

As students of Literature by now we do know about the two basic types of characters—round and flat. Flat characters very simply put are not well developed and are recognisable stereotypes like the “rogue”, the “braggart” or the “clown”. Round characters on the other hand are well-defined and well-drawn characters who have a breadth and a life of their own and who live through the narration. Stead too makes use of stereotypes like the poor child – Maidie Dickon and Snowy Thorne the social misfit. Why would a writer use stereotypes? Dickens uses the same type of characters, why should he have done that? These writers probably used the flat stereotypical characters in order that they may be recognizable immediately and that they would remain in the minds of the readers long after the narration itself is over. Stead’s characters once again have a Dickensian resonance. She seems to be using her characters to serve a basic purpose that being to get her message across – essentially exposing the system of education prevalent then. Stead manages to record faithfully minute details along with personal traits and chains of thought, and is able to express the mixed and sometimes complex nature of her characters. Her characterizations appear authentic and individual as she manages to catch the idiosyncrasies of her individual speakers. Her portrayal of the character of Maidie Dickon is powerful. Maidie stands as a symbol of the underprivileged lot of our society. Along with Maidie is the other social misfit—Snowy Thorne have been constructed powerfully. The “blucher boots” almost becomes a character by itself as it symbolises the working class, the socially insignificant. Maidie is a helpless little girl, helpless because of her social class she has to bear the taunts of her classmates, and the curiosity they express at the lifestyle of the poor. Let us take a look at the there of the story.

6.5.5 Language And Style

She uses powerfully language to express her beliefs on social theory. Stead has tried to put across the social circumstances of the day. The children have been attuned in such a way as to consider poor to be bad. The poor have no voice. There are distinctions maintained between the rich and the poor are such that anything associated with the poor becomes a morally wrong choice. She expresses quite clearly the fact that social discrimination did exist and children were taught to think likewise from a very tender age. This has led to the loss of innocence in her characters and they behave like miniature adults. Her choice of words particularly while describing the children is very interesting. She uses words like ‘trusties’, ‘natural moralists’, ‘informants’, ‘informers’, ‘a town moot’, ‘censors’, ‘messengers’, ‘busybodies’, ‘playground leaders’, ‘hard, cruel knot’ and ‘indignants’ which tell a different story, a story that takes one away from the world of the children, away from innocence. The language she utilizes is such that it is reminiscent of the world of adults, a world where people are aware of the ills of society and yet continue to perpetrate them.

6.5.6 Theme of *The Old School*

In this particular story her re-creation of the social and educational system of the early decade of the present century is remarkable. She has the ability of translating herself deeply into her characters and with great absorption she shapes the story. She fictionalized her past in an attempt to recast reality and thereby tried to attain power over her own fate. Her strength lies in her detailed observation of her character’s inner perspectives. You will find this particularly in the portrayal of the narrator who is amazed time and again by the incidents that occur in the school. *The Old School*

documents the various incidents that has affected the narrator profoundly but maintains a neutral point of view. Stead seems fascinated with the individuality of her characters. This is followed closely by her interest in social theory. The juxtaposition between the school as a prison and the real prison (in this case the reformatory school from where on the children will graduate to the real prison) are drawn out very well. The images juxtaposed between the school as a prison where children are kept in for the day and the real prison (in the shape of reformatory schools and later on the main prison) is well drawn in the story and seems to be constantly playing one against the other. *The Old School* tells of a social issue – the discrimination of the underprivileged and the mental and emotional stance of the young students. She believed that a writer should work from life. This story is true of her claim. It tells of her growing up days at Bexley.

6.5.7 Cultural Context

In terms of composition, the stories range from 1920-30, to the last decade of her life in Australia. Her last written stories *The Old School* and *A Little Demon* are actually her earliest experiences. After her return to Australia in 1974, she had only one more book to her credit, *Miss Herbert* (1976). Thereafter she concentrated on memories of her own childhood in Australia and to the histories of her parents' families. The University of New South Wales had decided on March 2, 1983 to award an honorary degree of Doctor of Letters to Christina Stead. She had accepted the proposal but her death on March 31, 1983 prevented her formal admission to the degree. Christina Stead's *Ocean of Story – The Uncollected Stories*, span five years but she does not propose any theories on life or even art within this wide time range. She does not have a moral message, or a theory to put across to her readers. She merely wrote because she could. She takes great delight in her characters but stand apart and observes them, as would an outsider. Her strength lies in her detailed observations. This collection is an "essential reading for Stead fans and a good introduction to those who haven't yet enjoyed her," (Elaine Lindsay, S M H 14/12/85). *The Old School* is a tale about the oldest school in the world, the school of humans that teach one early in life the ways of the world. It is in these play fields and classrooms that children learn all the lessons of life. It is about 'lines and frontiers' of boundaries being crossed, of children constantly sharpening their notions and awareness of the lines and the frontiers and the results of that.

6.5.8 Highlights

Note the manner in which the story is written. Does the writer have a social theory to project? From my understanding of the story it is obvious that Christina Stead had a social message to spread. This message was to do with the educational system and the social circumstances that existed at that time. Social hierarchies, class distinction, have been a part of our lives for so long that we never realise where it all began. This simple yet powerful tale tells of where the seeds of such thought could have possible been sown. What about the ending of the story is it the expected ending or is it unusual in some way?

6.6 LET US SUM UP

Christina Stead was one of those writers who never really received fame during her life span. She however has been rated as one of the best writers Australia has produced. She is often compared to Patrick White and Frank Moorhouse. We have traced the beginning of the short story and its development in Australia. What must be noted is the difference in this genre from one continent to another and also from the pre-Lawson and Lawson stories to the type of stories Christina Stead wrote. This

period in Australian Literature may be called the modern period if not, the contemporary period. It deals with literary style after Lawson, throws light on the development of the Australian Short Story after Henry Lawson and talks at length about Christina Stead's fiction. From talking about her novels and her style we moved on to an analysis of the short story from "Ocean of Story" ... *The Old School*.

6.7 QUESTIONS

- (1) What do you know about the short story form in general?
- (2) How does the Australian short story develop?
- (3) What differences do you find in the stories written before Stead's time?
- (4) Have you read any other Australian short stories? How do they compare with Christina Stead's writing style?

6.8 SUGGESTED READINGS

Most Australian writers are hard to find in our libraries. But for a taste of Australian Literature it would be worth it to read Henry Lawson's short stories, Marcus Clarke's collection of short stories and the following books by Christina Stead:

- (1) For Love Alone
- (2) The Man Who Loved Children
- (3) The Salzburg Tales
- (4) Ocean of Story

For the more adventurous reader her biography by Hazel Rowley makes delightful reading and is also very informative

- (5) Geering, R G Christina Stead (Twayne, 1969; rev A & R 1979)
- (6) Geering R G Christine Stead (OUP, 1969) Australian Writers and their Work
- (7) Geering R G Ocean of Story -(Penguin Books, 1985) The Uncollected stories of Christina Stead
- (8) Rowley H Christina Stead: (Minerva Australia, 1993) A Biography Southerly - A Review of Australian Literature, Number One, 1984

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- (9) Elizabeth Riddell
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Christina Stead's Bibliography:

- The Salzburg Tales (1934)

***Introduction to Short
Fiction***

- Seven Poor Men of Sydney (1934)
- The House of All Nations (1938)
- The Man Who Loved Children (1940)
- For Love Alone (1944)
- Cotter's England (1966)
- The Little Hotel (1973)
- Miss Herbert (The Suburban Wife) (1976)
- I'm Dying Laughing
- The Beauties and the Furies
- *An Ocean of Story* (1988) pub. Posthumously