Randolph Hughes versus Percy Stephensen: an Australian Cultural Battle of the 1930s

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In late 1936 a dispute erupted following a review by Randolph Hughes in the English journal *The Nineteenth Century and After* of two books recently published in Australia: Carl Kaeppel's *Off the Beaten Track in the Classics* and P. R. Stephensen's *The Foundations of Culture in Australia*. Hughes was particularly harsh on both Stephensen and his book, describing it as a 'fumy elucubration ... clumsily conceived and barbarously written; it is the product of a mind that is muddled and ill-furnished'. He also made some ill-informed and unfortunate statements regarding anti-English sentiment in Australia, in particular that soldiers returning injured from the front during the war had been spat on in Queensland, and that the Archbishop of Brisbane had been denied access to Britain during the war because of his anti-patriotic activities. Hughes had confused Archbishop Duhig of Brisbane with his fiery counterpart, Daniel Mannix of Melbourne.[1]

There was an immediate response. The Acting Agent General for Queensland in London denounced 'certain passages which were grossly libellous and offensive, and had not the slightest foundation in fact' and referred the matter back to his government for instructions.[2] The Queensland government subsequently sent a letter of protest, described by Hughes as 'almost a state paper', to the editor of the journal.[3] Archbishop Duhig, according to Hughes, threatened to sue Constable, the publisher of *The Nineteenth Century and After*, and Hughes for £25,000, a move described by him as 'a peculiarly and characteristically Roman Catholic action to try to

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make money to that tune out of what everybody will have recognized as a writer's genuine slip'.[4] Stephensen wrote a reply to Hughes' article in which he claimed that 'in guttersnipe ferocity, and in hysterical viciousness, it went far beyond the limits of what has come to be understood, in civilized countries, as being fair criticism', and dispatched it to the editor of *The Nineteenth Century*. Although *The Nineteenth Century* declined to publish Stephensen's piece it did issue an apology both to him and to Archbishop Duhig.[5] Through all of this Hughes remained unrepentant, claiming, in a letter to his friend Carl Kaeppel, that, regarding his statement about the returning soldiers, 'there were—and are—plenty of excremental qualities in Queensland, and nothing is more likely than that the thing should happen'. Stephensen's reply he brushed off as 'too canaille and educationally crude for publication in such a review'.[6]

The affair stimulated an amount of discussion about the nature of Australian culture in the Australian press, and eventually reached the pages of the *New York Times Book Review*, where Hartley Grattan commented on both the 'bad tempered, narrow minded and ill-informed' nature of Hughes' article and the 'barracking' quality of Stephensen's piece.[7] There is a decidedly unpleasant element to this dispute, enhanced perhaps by the unpleasant characteristics of the two combatants. Both men had a tendency to extreme positions, and to express those positions in an extreme and verbally violent fashion. Both men were rabid anti-Semites and pursued courses of action that aligned them with extreme right-wing political groups. Hughes blamed a Jewish colleague for his departure from his position at King's College at the University of London. As well as writing pro-Hitler pieces for the periodical press he also volunteered to go to Germany to conduct (favourable) research on the Nazi regime. Offered a research post at the University of Berlin, he was unable to take it up because of ill-health. Stephensen was equally anti-Semitic, and he eventually become involved in the fascistic Australia First movement, leading to his internment during World War II.[8]

It would almost appear that both Hughes and Stephensen were cut from the same cloth. There were other similarities in their backgrounds. Both men had studied at Oxford after completing their initial degrees at Australian universities. Both had chosen to stay in England after their time at Oxford, Hughes as an academic,

Stephensen as a publisher and writer; it was only the collapse of his English ventures and the prospect of establishing a new press with Norman Lindsay that enticed Stephensen back to Australia in 1932. By the middle of the 1930s Hughes was living the insecure life of a free-lance writer, having left his academic position, and Stephensen was desperately trying to survive financially as an independent publisher. His great achievement during those years was to secure the publication of Xavier Herbert's *Capricornia*. Indeed Stephensen and Hughes had already crossed paths when Stephensen agreed to publish Hughes' book *C. J. Brennan: An Essay in Values* which appeared under the P. R. Stephensen & Co. Limited imprint in 1934. When the first, and only, issue of Stephensen's new magazine, the *Australian Mercury*, appeared in July 1935, Hughes wrote to Stephensen to congratulate him 'on this strenuous venture, and to wish [him] all the success that such an enterprise deserves'.[9] He even took out a subscription to the magazine, though he was later to complain that, having paid his money, he had never received his copy of the magazine, which is not surprising given that most of Stephensen's schemes tended to go broke fairly quickly. It was in this magazine that the first instalment of *The Foundations of Culture in Australia* appeared.

Prior to the event Stephensen and Hughes would appear, at least on the surface, to be unlikely combatants. That appearance, however, was deceptive and masked fundamental philosophical differences that placed these two men in opposing camps. At the beginning of his article in *The Nineteenth Century and After*, entitled 'Culture in Australia', Hughes claimed that the books written by Kaeppel and Stephensen were 'symptomatic of a collision of values in Australia'.[10] It is not hard to see in the values, lifestyle and behaviour of Hughes and Stephensen an embodiment of this collision of values. Randolph Hughes was passionately pro-English and pro-European and described himself as a high Tory, opposed to democracy and believing 'fermement à la tradition, interprétée d'une façon raisonable'. It was this combination of toryism and belief in the value of European civilisation that led Hughes not only to describe Hitler as a 'good European' but also to support the *Action Française* and to express sympathy for the doctrines of Charles Maurras.[11] Indeed in his fierce anti-Christian paganism and his anti-Semitism

there is much that links Hughes to Maurras. Moreover Hughes attempted to live out his toryism, wearing a monocle and gloves and insisting on the proper manners of a gentleman—despite a tendency to involve himself in acrimonious disputes with colleagues and friends.

Peter Coleman has suggested intellectual similarities between Maurras and Stephensen, but admits that Stephensen, himself, placed more emphasis on the influence of Sorel.[12] Although, like Hughes, he was an anti-Christian pagan, Stephensen did not share Hughes' love of Europe, and things European, but instead invested his passion in advocating the cause of Australian culture. Stephensen was simultaneously anti-Semitic and pro-aboriginal. In behaviour Stephensen was more of a wild colonial boy than a gentleman, although he was not afraid to trade on his Oxford background. It can be argued that the contrast between Hughes and Stephensen can be traced back to their reactions to the Oxford experience. Australians at Oxford during the inter-war period tended to react in one of two ways; they were either inducted into English culture and became its supporters as in the case of Sir Keith Hancock, or they reacted against English culture and raised the flag of Australian nationalism in opposition to it, as in the case of Manning Clark.[13] Hughes was aware of the importance of the Oxford experience; Mr Stephensen, he declared, 'in his mental strength and cultural acquirements, is a typical Rhodes scholar'.[14]

There was much more to this 'collision of values', however, than just England versus Australia or Europe versus Australia. It had more to do with the nature of culture; is culture universal or is it the creation of particular places or nations? For Hughes, Europe and England were not just representatives of a particular superior form of culture. They embodied the universal tradition of culture and that universality was not tied to any particular place. In this regard Hughes was a peculiar form of fascist as his ultimate allegiance was not to any single homeland but to Europe considered as a spiritual entity containing the noblest creations of the human spirit. Stephensen did not deny the universality of culture, nor was his definition of culture as those ideas of permanence expressed in art, literature, religion and philosophy that 'transcend modernism and ephemerality', particularly radical. What did distinguish Stephensen's view of culture

was his insistence that culture was 'the essence of nationality'; culture is created in a particular place and forever bears the mark of its original site of creation, because that site is imbued with a particular 'spirit of place'.[15]

This conflict between culture as universal and culture as national and particular has had a long history, and has a particular pertinence for a place such as Australia that was created as an outpost of empire and has been forced to come to terms with the end of that empire. Despite their political extremism and extraordinary bad manners, Hughes and Stephensen were developing arguments that transcend the circumstances of the 1930s, and I should like to examine those arguments in a more detailed fashion. In this regard it is worth noting Hughes' claim that his original objective in writing 'Culture in Australia' was not to attack Stephensen but to bring to public notice the achievement of his friend Kaeppel.[16] In the early part of the article Hughes bemoaned the fact that there had been work of genuine distinction created in Australia, including that of his teacher and idol Christopher Brennan, that was not well known in Europe. Equally at the end of the essay he attacked the remarks of Professor G. H. Cowling that Australia could not produce great literature because it lacked ancient castles, churches and ruins, the very remarks that had originally goaded Stephensen into writing *The Foundations of Culture in Australia*, as 'æsthetic nonsense'.[17] Hughes was not seeking to defend a sentimental prejudice in favour of England, a 'little England' with its own 'spirit of place', but to defend England as the principal bulwark of civilised values in the modern world. His position is perhaps best summed up in the view that he attributed to Brennan:

> For he saw that the English tradition is on the whole the most developed embodiment or expression of a very large part of the fundamental forces that go to make what is most precious in civilization, and that in its organized resources it is the most potent conservator of those forces. He saw moreover that this tradition derives largely from, and also complements and reinforces the great Latin tradition in Europe, upon which all that is most valuable in Europe reposes, and by which are ultimately safeguarded even those elements of culture which are not Latin in their derivation.[18]

One is reminded by this passage of the claim made by T. S. Eliot

that England is a 'Latin' country,[19] which explains perhaps Hughes' attraction to Maurras but not his enthusiasm for Hitler. Although Hughes defended the 'Latin tradition' it was not a Latin tradition in which Christianity had any place. His friend A. R. Chisholm defended Catholic Christianity to Hughes as anti-Romantic and as the basis of authority for civilisation, while condemning Protestantism as a false doctrine that had undermined authority and led to both bolshevism and democracy—a line of argument derived from Maurras and Lassere, although Maurras also linked Protestantism and Judaism.[20] Hughes responded by arguing that 'the basis of what is best in European civilization is pre-Christian, and existed already, in a highly developed state ... in the Graeco-Roman world'. Elsewhere he claimed to his friend Carl Kaeppel that Christianity was 'the greatest evil against which what is best in civilization has to contend'. Hughes was resolutely pagan, which perhaps explains his opposition to Christianity and Judaism, his praise for Hitler as a man who was 'getting rid of Christian values', and his friendship with the communist Jack Lindsay. His 'Latin tradition' was composed of a series of pagans, Lucretius, Bruno, Goethe, Shelley, Swinburne, Nietzsche, whom he termed the 'intellectual and spiritual elite in history' distinguished by their 'redoubtable and uncompromising' antagonism to the 'values of Jewry and Christianity'.[21]

For Hughes what was of most value was to be found in this tradition and Australia, in this regard, was little better than a wasteland. Hughes admitted in a letter to Gilbert Murray that he 'hated Australia' and he began 'Culture in Australia' with the statement that 'Literary productions emanating from Australia do not usually arouse intelligent attention in civilised quarters of the globe, and this is not to be wondered at'.[22] His friend Chisholm shared not only Hughes' anti-Semitism, toryism and enthusiasm for Maurras but also his low opinion of Australian culture. As well as hoping 'devoutly for the appearance of a Caesar' Chisholm wrote in his foreword to Hughes' study of Brennan that 'in literature, however, and particularly in poetry, our tradition is hopelessly wrong, and never gets beyond the cult of the stockrider, the wattle and the bell-bird'.[23]

Nevertheless amongst the rubbish that is Australian literature and culture there were a few members of the intellectual and spiritual

élite whose work was worthy of consideration, work produced 'in pathetic isolation, almost in defiance of the environment'. Hughes mentioned A. G. Stephens, Chisholm, Professor W. J. Woodhouse and Kaeppel in the area of criticism. Of course both Chisholm and Kaeppel were, like Hughes himself, former students of Brennan. In poetry he listed Victor Daley, Shaw Nielson, Hugh McCrae, and of course, the giant towering over them all, Christopher Brennan.[24] Their work was valuable because it was good literature not because it was Australian, and Hughes claimed that the finest work of these four poets was not at all Australian in its essential qualities. For Hughes the 'greatest literature ... is supranational ... working in terms of a beauty that is absolute'. 'Beauty', he continued, 'is not primarily and principally a vehicle for the conveyance of anything except itself alone; and, in particular, it is not the function of poetry neatly and pleasantly and proudly to express the sentiments and idiosyncrasies of any nation'.[25]

Christopher Brennan's importance and significance did not lie in his Australianness, 'if Australia can be said,' claimed Hughes, 'save in a superficial and unimportant sense, to have produced him at all intellectually', but in his contribution to the absolute realm of beauty. Hughes' picture of Brennan in his *C. J. Brennan: An Essay in Values* placed a great deal of emphasis on Brennan as a member of that European spiritual and intellectual élite that defined itself by its quest for the absolute and beauty. At a mundane level Hughes attempted to demonstrate that Brennan, like himself, was not only 'a believer, even to the point of mysticism, in the English tradition', but also a Tory, 'even a high Tory'. At a more spiritual level Hughes placed Brennan within the fellowship of those who 'stood for the great old traditional and ... eternal values in literature ... These values may be very roughly summed up as imagination, beauty, power, and form'. The writers who meant most to Brennan, claimed Hughes, were Aeschylus, Swinburne and Mallarmé, and he compared the younger Brennan to the young Nietzsche in terms of his abilities as a classicist.[26]

Brennan's importance lay in his contribution to the 'Kingdom of the Spirit', in his capacity to create a beauty that dwells in the realm of the absolute and the eternal. For Hughes, as for Mallarmé, the underlying æsthetic of this form of art

is nothing less than a religion; as spiritual and mystical as any other, and yet making no hard and impossible demands upon the reason ... it is nobler than any other, for it makes no appeal to the lesser, basely selfish side of man's nature, which is desperately concerned to prolong its individuality, however little worth preservation it may be; its sole appeal is to the highest part of man, the part that seeks towards what else is highest in this world, and thence to what is highest in the transcendental world. And it reinstates man in his Eden.... It offers him sure salvation, and salvation of the only acceptable sort.[27]

In Brennan, Hughes could discern that true religion of the spirit, the religion of the European spiritual elite that owed everything to the special Latin tradition derived from Graeco-Roman paganism and carried down through the ages by poets and other gifted illuminati. For Brennan, Hughes claimed, the works produced by such men were holy, for in them 'was revealed that Ultimate Spirit for which and by which he lived', a spirit 'which for those of his persuasion ... is the Holy Ghost indeed'.[28]

Hughes was defending a very particular version of the Universal European/English Latin tradition, a spiritualised paganism that owed its debts to Romanticism and Gnosticism rather than to Classicism. In this regard Chisholm held much more closely to the orthodox position on the nature of the Latin inheritance, recognising the importance of Catholic Christianity as a bulwark of order for modern civilisation and arguing, to Hughes, that the highest achievement of Symbolism and Mallarmé was nihilism. Hughes saw that his role as a high Tory lay in the preservation and maintenance of this tradition so that it could continue to grow and evolve. The tradition was in a general sense European, and Hughes certainly believed that England and France were its special homes, but it was not a national but a universal tradition. It could be pursued anywhere in the world— even in the wasteland of Australia. He argued that Brennan could have written his poetry anywhere, 'England, France, or Germany, or in Utopia'.[29]

Hence, for Hughes, to attempt to create a national literature, 'a literature that, in and out of season, should be distinctively and specifically Australian' was a 'somewhat silly task', and it was this view that he brought to bear as he wrote 'Culture in Australia'. He praised his friend Kaeppel's book because it was in the 'traditional

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line of European culture at its best'. It was a book that provided no 'distinctive sign' of its author's origin or background, a book that 'proceeds from European civilisation, and ... is written in a spirit of service to that civilisation'. It represented the true spirit of culture in Australia. Hughes used Stephensen's book as a contrast to Kaeppel, as an example of the false spirit of culture in Australia. His major criticisms were twofold, firstly that the book was fanatically pro-Australian 'to the extent of being anti-English and anti-European', and secondly that it fell 'into the not uncommon error of supposing that a "national" literature can be deliberately created'.[30]

Hughes complained that Stephensen displayed a 'distempered hostility' to European traditions, and to those of England in particular, viewing the history of Australia as a continuous victimisation of Australia by England. Stephensen's central thesis, he argued, is that Australia has no longer any need of England in either cultural or practical terms, and that if Australia continues to be dependent on England, such dependence will only harm her. Indeed, Hughes conceded that Stephensen was right in arguing that a new people was being created in Australia, and that they were no longer 'in harmony with England'. Nevertheless he remained opposed to the idea that this process involved the imposition of some sort of national 'lore' on the population by Australian men of letters and scholars so that it became 'the chief instrument of education in the schools and universities'. Great art, claimed Hughes, is not great by virtue of its national origin; the national element is only an 'incidental or even accidental element' in such works. In this regard Hughes was close to John Anderson's criticism of Stephensen. Anderson claimed that 'if good Australian writers come to the fore, it will be because of their contributions to literature as such and not because they are Australians'.[31]

Hughes would have agreed with Anderson that great art has a universal element and that it is spurious to promote art simply because it is the product of a particular nation. Nationalism is no substitute for quality—despite recent attempts to resurrect the idea of a national canon that will sit at the core of the education of all Australians. It would not be untrue to say that the idea of such a canon can be traced back to Percy Stephensen and his 'lore', and it is to his conception of culture that we must now turn.

Hughes claimed that Stephensen's 'lore' was 'an object of his religious regard'. It would not be inappropriate to say that just as Hughes infused his universal spiritual tradition with the qualities of a religion, so Percy Stephensen did the same with his vision of Australian nationalism. In this regard it is worthwhile recalling Machiavelli's preference for the religion of the Romans over Christianity because it encouraged the Romans to 'exalt and defend the fatherland'.[32] Just as Hancock's *Australia*, first published in 1930, can be read as a Machiavellian treatise designed to summon Australia out of its slumber and develop its *virtù* so that it will be able to compete against other nations, so Stephensen's *Foundations of Australian Culture* can be viewed as a plea for a form of civil religion that will encourage Australians to 'exalt and defend the fatherland'.

Stephensen's conception of culture provides evidence for this interpretation. Every nation and national culture, Stephensen claimed, was composed of two 'permanent elements': race and place. A national culture is the 'expression, in thought-form or art-form, of the spirit of a Race and of a Place'. Moreover, Stephensen continued, it is the 'spirit of a Place which ultimately gives any human culture its distinctiveness'.[33] Australians may be racially the same as the British, after all these were the years of Australia claiming to be 98% British, (Stephensen himself was of mixed Danish and Swiss ancestry) but they were culturally different because the 'place' they lived in was different. Stephensen never explained exactly what this 'spirit of place' was, or how a country as physically diverse as Australia could be moulded by a single 'spirit of place'; it remained a somewhat shadowy and mystical notion that he had gleaned from D. H. Lawrence. Unlike Hughes, who for all his Fascist leanings did not limit culture to a particular race or physical location—even Australia could be a home to culture—Stephensen made his ideal of culture both racially and geographically specific. But, intellectually, Stephensen's conception of culture was fairly conservative, harking back ultimately to Coleridge; a culture is the expression of a nation's ideas of permanence as contained in its art, literature, religion and philosophy. He specifically excluded politics and economics from culture, nor did he even consider what today would be understood as 'popular culture'.

Stephensen's purpose was to defend the local and particular nature of culture; as perhaps one would expect of a man engaged in building up the local publishing industry. 'Cultures', he claimed, 'must remain local in creation and universal in appreciation.' He did not deny that there was such a thing as a 'world culture', he merely claimed that it had to be understood as the sum of its parts. The Australian contribution to this world culture was 'the definition of ourselves: in literature, art, and all the civilised achievements'. It was the Australian 'spirit of place' as interpreted through Australian eyes. Writers who had the misfortune not to possess Australian eyes could have no place in this vision of culture, and those who left Australia for more congenial climes were little better than traitors.[34]

In other words Stephensen's conception of culture possessed a powerful normative and prescriptive dimension, and ultimately it would be he who decided how the Australian 'spirit of place' was to be defined. To begin with he decided that Australian literature and culture was one of 'national expansion', in contrast to English literature and culture which was in a state of decline and decadence. As Australia's 'national mind' was in a state of progressive movement this meant making war on most of what passed for culture in Australia as it was 'stultified, smug, and puerile'. A national autonomous culture was needed to break the mould of this existing state so that Australians could 'develop an adequate sense of [their] own destiny and national character'. This meant, as Hughes correctly saw, the imposition of Australian 'lore', as well as Australian 'sentiment', culture and tradition, onto the youth of the country. But it was to be a selective 'lore', one in line with Stephensen's vision of a culture of 'national expansion'. This meant, in effect, attacking many of the accepted elements of Australian culture. 'The first thing to debunk', he asserted, 'is the Lag Tradition, and then the Dave Tradition and then the Bloke tradition.' Stephensen was critical of Archibald's *Bulletin*, claiming that it had 'had a dubious effect on Australian literature, and on culture in Australia'. What Stephensen attacked was Australian popular culture in the name of a still trying to be born high culture. This high culture placed at the service of national development would assume the role of a civil religion in the Machiavellian sense as it would provide Australians with a positive

vision of themselves, thereby encouraging them further in their task of nation-building.[35]

At the heart of Stephensen's aesthetic lay a simple and somewhat crude realism: Australians had to write about Australia because that was what they directly experienced in their everyday lives. Ideas brought from elsewhere were nothing but 'the empty formulae of culture' that could not and did not relate to the reality of the sensual world in which people lived. Hence to teach European culture was to turn the youth of Australia towards 'a fantasy of Europe', and to create in students a split personality in which they experienced 'a mental hankering for Europe plastered upon the physical necessity of living in Australia'. There had to be a connection between idea and world; otherwise the consequence would be 'cultural unreality'.[36] This crude realism has, unfortunately, long survived Stephensen and continues to influence the way in which culture is understood in Australia. If taken seriously it would reduce culture to the here-and-now and wipe out most of the past two and a half thousand years of art, literature and culture as unreal and therefore irrelevant. It stands at the opposite pole to Hughes' vision of a continuous Latin spiritual tradition reaching from the Graeco-Roman world to the present time.

Stephensen's advocacy of cultural autonomy and isolation led naturally onto a demand for economic self-sufficiency and isolation. But there was also a sense in which Stephensen saw Australia as a 'new Europe'. With the prospect of war in Europe, and the decadence of English culture, the possibility existed that civilisation in Europe could be totally destroyed. In that event a new home for white European civilisation would need to be found. America could not take on this task because she was not homogenous in race and culture, she was a 'vast crucible of miscegenation'. Australia was the only 'whiteman's continent', and Stephensen opined that Australia may yet be called upon to act as the 'principal guardians of white civilisation, of white culture, of white traditions upon this earth'. And it was not just European civilisation that Australians would be called on to preserve; it was also 'European physique'.[37] Australia needed to be different and autonomous not only for her own sake but also for Europe's. An independent and autonomous Australian culture would somehow preserve European culture, even as it actively sought to deny the influence of that culture on Australia because,

Stephensen claimed, it had no reality in Australia. It was all very odd.

In his response to Hughes' criticisms in 'Culture in Australia', submitted to *The Nineteenth Century and After* but never published, Stephensen adopted a much more hostile approach to European culture. He accused Hughes of possessing 'a purely narrow "European" view of culture' and argued that 'in the numerous non-European parts of the world, there is arising a grave doubt concerning Europe's ability to conquer, subjugate, exploit, and culturally dominate the rest of the world in perpetuity'. To Africans, Americans and Australians, he asserted, 'European culture is exotic in its nature'. There was no world culture only 'megalomaniacal' attempts to impose local concepts of culture on the rest of the world. This meant asserting again the idea that Australian culture was necessarily different from European culture, and that if Hughes was a 'convinced European' this meant forfeiting any right to express an 'Australian' viewpoint on Australian affairs. He also dismissed Hughes as a 'Mendelian Remissive ... afraid to face a new destiny in a continent that is strange', and therefore fleeing from the challenges that face Australians and which they must meet boldly as a progressive people.[38] In other words he denounced Hughes as un-Australian, a tactic that Stephensen's heirs in the Australian republican movement continue to use in the 1990s.

Indeed, one can find in Stephensen many of the ideas and imagery that have provided the staple of Australian nationalism since the 1930s. At its core is the theme that nation building cannot proceed properly until a national culture is constructed. This culture guarantees Australian intellectual independence, thereby providing the foundation on which independent action in other areas can be pursued. In a way it reverses the Marxist argument by making culture the 'base' on which the 'superstructure' of the economy and society is to be built. After all it is culture that is the permanent element of any nation; economics and politics are constantly changing. It is this assumption regarding the primacy of culture that has provided the intellectual basis for many of the attempts in recent years to transform Australia from the 'clever country', to 'getting into Asia', to 'The Republic'. And an independent 'Australian' culture most certainly implies that there are those who are 'un-Australian'.

Australian culture, on this view, provides the foundation stone on which an independent Australian nation can be built by performing the function of a civil religion. The continuing influence of European culture has weakened the capacity for Australians to build a strong and powerful country. Therefore European culture must be replaced by a native Australian culture that will provide the stimulus for Australians to become a great people. At its very core this conception of culture is Machiavellian because its ultimate goal is a strong and powerful Australia populated by a people infused with *virtù*. Culture matters not because of what it is but because of what it can help a people to achieve.

At one level the dispute between Randolph Hughes and Percy Stephensen was a clash between two men who were rather unpleasant and who espoused political values that were, and remain, repugnant. It would be wrong, however, simply to dismiss all the ideas of these two men as simply the ravings of a pair of boring old fascists. The ideas of Stephensen, in particular, continue to exert an influence on intellectual life in Australia. Behind the huffing and the puffing there was a debate of fundamental importance going on regarding the nature and proper role of culture, a debate of crucial importance for a country such as Australia that began its modern existence as a settler society and outpost of empire.

For Stephensen culture was all about nation building. Its proper function was as a 'progressive' force leading to the creation of an independent, autonomous Australia. Australia had to have its own culture, expressing its spirit of place if it was to achieve that goal. Hughes saw culture as possessing a value in itself, universal in nature and beckoning to those who were in search of beauty and the absolute. It had no national home, even though Hughes liked to identify England and France as the particular homes of culture in Europe. Although Hughes had his own particular version of culture as a pagan, Latin spiritual tradition, the validity of his argument does not depend on accepting his particular version of how that tradition of culture is constituted.

In the 1990s it is the Stephensen view of culture that is in the ascendant in Australia. Culture is a tool to be used by governments to transform and re-make the Australian people so that they can become independent and autonomous. The Australian people will

become a creative nation as they seek to build the clever country in preparation for the coming of the republic. At such a time it is worthwhile reminding ourselves that there other conceptions of culture than that offered up by Mr Keating and his admirers. Or, to put it in more contemporary language, the idea of culture is constantly being contested. The Hughes/Stephensen conflict indicates one form that that contest has taken.

Notes

1   Randolph Hughes, 'Culture in Australia', *The Nineteenth Century and After*, vol.120, no. 717, November 1936, pp.614, 627.
2   *Rockhampton Morning Bulletin*, 1 January 1937, in Randolph Hughes Papers, Mitchell Library, Ms. 671, vol.98, Press Cuttings, p.77.
3   Randolph Hughes to Carl Kaeppel, 13 January 1937, Randolph Hughes Papers, vol.9, p.219.
4   Randolph Hughes to Carl Kaeppel, 15 February 1937, Randolph Hughes Papers, vol.9, p.233.
5   P. R. Stephensen, 'Culture in Australia: A Reply to Randolph Hughes', Randolph Hughes Papers, vol.90, p.191, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 27 February 1937, 27 March 1937, in Randolph Hughes Papers, vol.98, pp.92, 100.
6   Hughes to Carl Kaeppel, 13 January 1937, 15 February 1937, Randolph Hughes Papers, vol.9, pp.219, 233.
7   C. Hartley Grattan, 'The Literary Scene in Australia', *New York Times Book Review*, 15 August 1937, in Randolph Hughes Papers, vol.98, p.112.
8   On Hughes see my forthcoming *Australian Dictionary of Biography* entry due to be published in 1996; on Stephensen see Craig Munro, *Wild Man of Letters: The Story of P. R. Stephensen*, Melbourne, 1984.
9   Hughes to *Australian Mercury*, 17 August 1935, Randolph Hughes Papers, vol.20, p.75.
10 Hughes, 'Culture in Australia', p.607.
11 Hughes to Paul Mesplé, 5 Avril 1935, Randolph Hughes Papers, vol.14, p.337; Hughes to Gilbert Murray, 1 September 1937, Randolph Hughes Papers, vol.3, p.3.
12 Peter Coleman, 'The Party's Over', *Salisbury Review*, vol.11, no. 1, September 1992, p.42.
13 Compare for example, W. K. Hancock, *Country and Calling*, London, 1954, and C. M. H. Clark, *The Quest for Grace*, Ringwood, 1990.
14 Hughes, 'Culture in Australia', p.622.
15 P. R. Stephensen, *The Foundations of Culture in Australia*, Sydney, 1936, pp.15, 25, 17.
16 Hughes to Carl Kaeppel, 13 January 1937, Randolph Hughes Papers, vol.9, p.219.

17 Hughes, 'Culture in Australia', pp.606–7, 629.

18 Randolph Hughes, *C. J. Brennan: An Essay in Values*, Sydney, 1934, p.29.

19 Quoted in Ernst Robert Curtius, *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages*, trans. Willard R. Trask, London, 1979, p.35.

20 Chisholm to Hughes, 12 November 1933, Randolph Hughes Papers, vol.4, pp.104–105; on Maurras' views on Protestantism and Judaism see Michael Sutton, *Nationalism, Positivism and Catholicism: The Politics of Charles Maurras and French Catholics 1890–1914*, Cambridge, 1982, chapter 2.

21 Hughes to Chisholm (rough copy) 1934, Randolph Hughes Papers, vol.4, p.183; Hughes to Kaeppel, 17 November 1937, Randolph Hughes papers, vol.9, pp.301, 293; Hughes to Gilbert Murray, 1 September 1937, Randolph Hughes Papers, vol.3, p.3.

22 Hughes to Gilbert Murray, 1 September 1937, Randolph Hughes Papers, vol.3, p.2; Hughes, 'Culture in Australia', p.605.

23 Chisholm to Hughes, 12 November 1933, Randolph Hughes Papers, vol.4, p.106, A. R. Chisholm, 'Foreword', Hughes, *C. J. Brennan*, p.12.

24 Hughes, 'Culture in Australia', p.606, *C. J. Brennan*, pp.75–79.

25 Hughes, *C. J. Brennan*, p.74.

26 Hughes, *C. J. Brennan*, pp.28, 29, 34, 44, 55.

27 Hughes, *C. J. Brennan*, p.102.

28 Hughes, *C. J. Brennan*, p.44.

29 Hughes, *C. J. Brennan*, p.73.

30 Hughes, *C. J. Brennan*, p.73; Hughes, Culture in Australia', pp.608, 614, 620.

31 Hughes, 'Culture in Australia', pp.626–627, 620; John Anderson, 'Australian Culture', in Janet Anderson, Graham Cullum & Kimon Lycos, eds, *Art and Reality: John Anderson on Literature and Æsthetics*, Sydney, c. 1982, p.254.

32 Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Discourses*, ed. Bernard Crick, trans. Leslie Walker, Harmondsworth, 1970, p.278.

33 Stephensen, *The Foundations of Culture in Australia*, pp.14, 15.

34 Stephensen, *The Foundations of Culture in Australia*, pp.17, 28, 125.

35 Stephensen, *The Foundations of Culture in Australia*, pp.55, 84, 91, 102, 97, 66.

36 Stephensen, *The Foundations of Culture in Australia*, pp.102–3.

37 Stephensen, *The Foundations of Culture in Australia*, pp.88–89.

38 Stephensen, 'Culture in Australia: A Reply to Randolph Hughes', pp.189, 213, 211.