

The Quality of 'Life': Dorothy Hewett's literary criticism

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I've discovered that literary critics are very, very suspicious of people who change genres. They think there is something suspect about it. Otherwise you are a Jack-of-all-trades or a Jill-of-all-trades and master or mistress of nothing. Whereas I've never found any difficulty in this really. It just seems natural to me. It's all writing, you know. (Moore 40)

Here, in one of her last interviews, Dorothy Hewett returns to one of the central facts of her writing life—the prolific diversity of her work over many decades. Hewett was a writer of great facility; a 'natural' who wrote easily and freely, and it is perhaps this facility, as well as her need to earn a living in the Australian literary marketplace, that fostered her fearless movement within and between genres and modes throughout her career. The subsequent critical suspicion to which she refers is related to the categorical impropriety of such mobility from the improperly public, improperly political and improperly productive woman. Lack of mastery is surely the corollary of such wide-ranging productivity, she concludes, as are the suspicions about authority and authenticity that must follow from such 'amateur' literary shiftiness. What Hewett's comment omits, however, is that she herself was a literary critic and literary criticism was one of her many chosen genres, and it was a form of writing in which she made several reflexive distinctions and evaluations about the writing of others. Her central critical concerns reflected her own capabilities: the 'natural', the unconstrained and the 'felt' were tremendously significant for both writer and reader. For Hewett, writing was 'natural'—it was part of nature and part of life—and there was tremendous value in the category of 'life'. 'Life' was a locus of argument and evaluation for all Hewett's literary criticism, and it structured her work as she evolved from romantic individualist to socialist realist critic and practitioner and back again.

Dorothy Hewett is known predominantly as an Australian poet and dramatist, but she also produced a body of nonfiction prose that spanned fifty years, including literary and political essays and reviews, autobiographical meditations and early left-wing journalism. Much of this prose exhibits the facility and energy evident in *Wild Card* (1991), her autobiography and most popular nonfiction work. Hewett's nonfiction prose is actually far from 'wild'. This prose usually demonstrates a collected rhetorical understanding of the specifics of genre, audience and purpose, and although the Hewett range *is* impressive there are steady threads of interest that focus this range. Several key elements were important for powerful writing—'life', the 'natural', the 'felt' and an organic sense of place—and these elements are consistently elaborated and re-elaborated. This is emphatically the case in Hewett's Cold War literary criticism. This essay reads Dorothy Hewett's literary criticism between 1945 and 1969 (essays, reviews, tributes) as a significant subset of her nonfiction work and also across the larger field of postwar Australian literary criticism, a field constituted by overlapping and discontinuous debates about value, authority, textuality, national identity, the public sphere, professional writing and academic work. Her literary criticism to 1969 demonstrates

important shifts in her own development as a writer, political activist and public commentator, as well as larger cultural and political shifts in the Cold War period (Bird, Dixon and Lee xv-xvii).

Literary criticism is reflexively marked by a sustained engagement with the text under review as well as wider debates about the possible rhetorical goals of criticism. These are, in turn, subtended by concerns about the nature and purpose of literary representation as such. Dorothy Hewett's literary criticism places her squarely in the category of Romantic expressive critic, committed to highly personal, subjective and thoroughly engaged reading. As a reader, affective identification was Hewett's greatest desire and pleasure, and when a writer achieved this locus of recognition she gave her greatest praise. Feeling was the first step in a process of making a judgement: affect led to identification and led the critic to embark on predominantly sympathetic engagement through description. In interviews after 1968, Hewett enthusiastically identified herself as essentially a Romantic in various guises (anarchist, especially), nominating energy, revolutionary fervour, imagination, vocational drive, the desire for and interest in life in all its texture as characteristic of her true affiliations. Using recognisably Romantic terms, Hewett saw that the writer-critic's position was typically and precariously doubled:

You have to have this double role. That's the paradox, that's what life is all about. On the one hand you have to create for yourself some sort of separation, some sort of role as critic. On the other hand you have to be right in the middle of it, there's no way out. You have to be the eternal naïf, the god's fool, if you like, the clown, the one who plays many roles, the one who remains open to experience. It's a very vulnerable position. (Modjeska 89)

In this interview in 1988, Hewett suggests that for a writer life is all about paradox and necessary duality: paradox is 'what life is all about'. 'Life' and its multiple roles are to be fully engaged, whatever separation you might seek in order to carve out a critical view. For Hewett, the nature and function of literature was to evoke this 'life', this richness of experience. If writing evoked the feeling of 'life', then readerly identification was assured and the work was valuable. To evoke the feeling of 'life' was the first task of the writer and the reader's task was to affectively and sympathetically recognise and appreciate the texture and density of this materiality. The *topos* of 'life' is the major source of argument in Hewett's literary criticism between 1945 and 1969, and this puts her in direct genealogical alignment with F. R. Leavis's 'vital capacity for experience, a kind of reverent open-ness before life' (Leavis 9).

The notion of 'life' and the capacity of literature to evoke it is the centerpiece of a number of claims about literature in the modern period. It is a *topos* that structures Henry James' idea of 'the felt life' as well as D.H. Lawrence's insistence on the significance of an impersonal spontaneous-creative Life force that obliterated ego and personality. F. R. Leavis went on to read both writers as exemplars of an authentic humanist literature precisely because of a strong set of assumptions that the purpose of literary representation was to convey the texture of life. This presents a problem; as Michael Bell has so lucidly pointed out about Leavis' work, 'life' in literature was an almost sublime category, a circular proposition with no possibility for intervention: 'great literature was a literature reverently open to Life and what

Life was could be demonstrated by great literature'. The value of literature was precisely that 'life can be disclosed in a depth inaccessible to observation, reflection and theory' (Bell 82). 'Life' was therefore a vague and shifting category, a sort of sustained narrative energy or portrait of authentic human struggle that could only be identified on a case-by-case basis, although Blake, Lawrence, Dickens and George Eliot could be counted on quite often. This meant that critics could only rely on a certain gifted intuition in identifying a powerful and valuable case of 'life' when they saw it. Hewett, who was completely uninterested in the impersonality and disinterestedness that marks the criticism of F.R. Leavis and T.S. Eliot, was certainly for life and vitality as the significant criterion for judging literature. In terms of an interest in the representation of life as struggle, energy, sexuality, affirmation, creation and embodiment, Hewett's greatest influence is undoubtedly D. H. Lawrence.¹

The special merit of lived experience as a category of literary evaluation was also related to theories of mimesis and realism throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In *Studies in European Realism*, *The Historical Novel* and *The Meaning of Contemporary Realism*, Georg Lukács saw life as embodied in literature, and literature in turn as a form of history. Other socialist realist theories of the 1930s foregrounded the revolutionary importance of realism in conveying the relationship between base and superstructure, based loosely on Engels' famous definition of realism in a letter to Margaret Harkness (1888): 'realism, to my mind, implies, besides truth of detail, the truthful reproduction of typical characters under typical circumstances'. Truth was related to 'life' and 'the real' (Baxandall 90-1). For Hewett, 'truth' was present when the writer created the sense of 'life'. She struggled with the injunctions to programmatic affirmation, optimism, collectivism and education articulated by Maxim Gorky and Andrei Zhdanov, but she obviously felt that direct mimetic reflection was both possible and proper. Typicality is something that Hewett tried to include in her criteria of value before 1968, but it always went against the romantic individualist grain.²

In Hewett's literary criticism to 1969, several strands of various commitments and interests are united in the *topos* of life. It is the quality of life—read as the real, the identifiable, the material, the palpable, the sensual, related to Australian landscape, sexual energy and the masses—that allowed Hewett to negotiate the divergent attractions of romanticism and realism in her movement between romantic expressive artist and socialist-realist critic. 'Life' was a concept and a locus for criticism that brokered a deal between youthful Romantic individualism, undergraduate exposure to Arnold, Leavis and Lawrence, and the experienced socialist realist. Starting with early undergraduate literary criticism, which initially imitated the stylised and remote voice of Arnoldian and later Leavisite criticism in vogue at the time, Hewett mobilised her great fluency to write about authors whose work she loved. There was a shift in the terms of this work, between 1945 and 1946, when her leftwing journalism in the mid-1940s had an immediate impact on the quality of her voice and her critical terms of reference. After sustained political work and her engagement with socialist realism in the 1950s, her critical work of the 1960s demonstrates some aspects of the complexity of this decade in the Australian literary field (Bird, Dixon and Lee xvii). In the 1960s, Hewett was characteristically positioned again on the inside and the outside. She worked from within the academy as an undergraduate and then tutor in the English Department at the University of Western Australia, but also outside it as a published writer, publically engaged activist and Party member.

Hewett's early writing for *The Black Swan* unveils a nucleus of ideas and judgements that consistently preoccupied her. *The Black Swan* was the magazine of the Guild of Undergraduates of the University of Western Australia, and Hewett was involved with its production in 1945-1946. Her essays on Edith Sitwell and Katherine Susannah Prichard are particularly notable. The very choice of these two writers so early on demonstrates her competing interests in romantic individualism and modernism on one hand and socialist realism on the other. In 'The Work of Edith Sitwell' in 1945, Hewett positions Sitwell as an *enfant terrible* whose work displays preoccupations with childhood experience and landscapes, the modern and experimental, the intuitive and non-realistic, gothic settings and fairytale characters. Her account of Sitwell introduces the importance of poetry to Hewett, but also the terms 'human experience' and 'feeling': 'It is largely this sensual vocabulary and the singing quality of her rhythm that strikes to the roots of human experience, and makes much of her otherwise obscure poetry understandable in the realm of human feeling' (Hewett, 'Sitwell' 34). Long quotations from both text and author are a trademark of Hewett's descriptive literary criticism, and the Sitwell piece is no exception. She does make some judgements about Sitwell's work that lie outside a passionately sympathetic reading of the poems; for example, Hewett values the elevating effects of the war on Sitwell's moral vision and the texture of her language: 'The horror of war drew her away from the purely personal and the sensuous that formed the glittering roundabout world of her early years' (30). Here, there is an echo of the contemporary reading of middle Yeats, who she was reading (along with Pound, Eliot and Dylan Thomas) in the University Library rather than attending lectures. Hewett's Sitwell essay marks the origin of a number of elements that came to the fore again in all Hewett's work after leaving the Communist Party in 1968: the figures of the *enfant terrible*, the daringly theatrical and experimental woman, the lost idyllic garden of childhood and the interest in sensuousness of sound and image. The interest in modernism in this essay was to disappear completely under the influence of socialist realism, and later in the 1940s she produced obediently negative accounts of the bourgeois individualism and stylistic degeneracy of Ern Malley and Patrick White, both of whom she later revisits in post-communist apology and approbation in the 1970s and 1980s (Hewett, 'White' 18; Hewett, 'Ern' 85).

A year later, growing leftwing involvement produced a 'group' essay on WA writers from *The Black Swan* editors, with a particular essay by Hewett on Katherine Susannah Prichard's *The Roaring Nineties*. Hewett's deep admiration for Prichard lasted until their disagreement about Soviet censorship in the mid-1960s. Hewett's terms of critical reference include her approbation for the 'living' evocation of Australian landscape, and we also see the beginnings of her application of Soviet theories of socialist realism. This represents a clear step away from the terms of the Sitwell essay. For example, Hewett notes that Prichard 'lays particular stress on the fact that creative realism must bring out the hope and struggle of the people towards progress' (Hewett, 'Spotlight' 6). Hewett also claims that Prichard 'has learnt a way to make history come alive', that 'she has used the mass of people to carry her story' and that there is a 'sense of teeming vivid history' (5). The crowd, the masses are 'a great vital force of energy growing up and spreading their will over the Australian land' (5). Socialist realism certainly emphasised the importance of the putting realism at the service of representations of revolutionary history and class struggle, but there is also something strongly Lawrentian about Hewett's engagement here. The 'vital force' is reiterated as a 'hot rush of energy characteristic of her novels' (5). Australia is 'bare, hot, crude' and a 'huge

living force molding men, women and beasts' (5). The invocations of Sitwell's eccentric and aristocratic childhood could not be more different, although the emphasis on senses and sensuous apprehension nevertheless connects the work on Sitwell and Prichard. Hewett's rhetoric of 'life' has the capacity to cover the work of both women—language in Sitwell and the workers in Prichard are characterised as alive, energetic, hot and vitally present.

Hewett was not invested in neoclassical codes of decorum or rules of argumentation; she insisted that she wrote as she felt, and she felt that writing (a kind of being) was about life and that good writing made one feel life. Hewett's literary criticism draws on her great capacities for description and narration and she remained uninterested in the presentation of a crisp thesis, argued strongly and supported by detailed evidence. Her work as a journalist did not require her to manifest any greater interest in structure, and indeed encouraged her penchant for long quotation and recount, but it had a significant impact on her 'voice', which became more immediate and more direct. Between 1946 and 1948, Hewett worked as a journalist for the *Workers' Star*, a Perth-based communist weekly newspaper (1941-1951). She wrote under her own by-line on occasion, and otherwise contributed to a weekly column titled 'A Woman Says', which changed to 'Not Only for Women' in 1948. Hewett applied the tenets of socialist realism to a range of subjects, including Alan Marshall in a column in October 1946: '*These Are My People* is written by a man who has a warm friendliness for humanity, and a great faith in the capacity for the grit and goodness of the ordinary man...the people who make up the little country towns and the backblock farms of Australia' (Hewett, 'People' 4). She tacks on the notion that 'these are all people, citizens of the world' but that 'the Australian countryside is like a warm living presence' (4), which recalls her emphasis on qualities of heat, presence and force. 'Life' as seen in landscape, heat and presence is still crucial to her terms of evaluation. In addition, the work on Marshall provides a strong example of the crossover in Hewett's work between a cultural nationalist focus on landscape as source of specifically national identity and an international socialist realist focus on 'the worker' as the audience for inspiring revolutionary realism. This crossover is held together by the heated rhetoric of 'life', which covers both the 'grit and goodness' of the 'ordinary man' and the 'warm living presence' of the Australian landscape.

It was with a return to Perth in 1959, after ten years living a committed political life in Sydney, that Hewett returned to literary criticism. The writing and publication of her working-class novel, *Bobbin Up*, in 1958 (produced against the background of work with Frank Hardy and the Realist Writers Group in Sydney, and her disillusionment with the Party after the invasion of Hungary in 1956), broke her ten-year absence from writing. After its positive reception by Party and readers, Hewett was never silent in the same way again. She again enrolled as an undergraduate at the University of Western Australia, and began to publish reviews and essays that indicated a clear continuity of ideas and interests from 1946, but a new, more personal and powerful voice. In addition to the *topos* of 'life', and in some ways related to it (both having lived more 'life' and having more authority on the Left and as a successful novelist), Hewett's voice is the most significant aspect of her rhetorical orientation. A powerful and palpable sense of unique self is conveyed in Hewett's use of 'I', and it is personal experience (*my* life) that often forms the ground for judgements in the criticism after 1959. There is a long association between non-metrical writing and storytelling (first-person, immediate, descriptive) and in colloquial usage, 'prosy' denotes someone who converses familiarly, chats, gossips, talks or lectures. Hewett's critical voice hails the reader

with its personal immediacy and presence and her work is often quite 'speakerly'. In rhetorical terms, Hewett was increasingly invested in the deployment of ethos. When writing in Western Australia for *Overland* and *Westerly* in the 1960s, she could (as a 'practitioner') comfortably address an audience that she could assume possessed shared values and shared assumptions. This shared community of readers made the structuring *topos* of 'life' enduringly effective and affective in Hewett's criticism.

Hewett published in *Westerly*, *The Critic*, *Overland* and *Australian Left Review* in the 1960s. She wrote about and/or reviewed Western Australian publishing, Randolph Stow, Peter Cowan, Kylie Tennant, Henry Lawson and Katherine Susannah Prichard. For 'How Beautiful Upon the Mountains', an essay on Kylie Tennant for *Westerly* in 1960, Hewett is billed as 'novelist, poet and undergraduate'. The directly personal quality of her voice and her autobiographical positioning is striking and a definitive sign of things to come:

Whenever I think of her (Kylie Tennant) I can still smell the scent of woodbugs and bleached jarrah, where I lay on my stomach on the bungalow verandah, gazing entranced at a photo of Kylie Tennant in pants and Eton crop. ... I too would become a realist writer in pants and an Eton crop, with an emphasis on social problems. (Hewett, 'Mountains' 4)

For the readers of *Wild Card* this is a familiar call to sensuous childhood memory *and* the importance of costume, and cross-dressed costume at that. Here is the combination of realism and romance again: the writer about 'social problems' is also a theatrical and Romantic youngster. Hewett, the newly published author, dramatizes the importance of this earlier identification with the older woman writer for her own work: 'I too would become a realist writer'. She goes on to suggest that what is valuable about Tennant's early work concerns Australia: 'it gave me a new sensitivity, a new awareness of my own country and my own people' (4). Hewett strongly identifies with Tennant's 'romantic realism', which is grounded in 'her deep sympathy, her identification with the land' (4), and these terms are familiar from the Prichard essay in 1946. In a retrospectively ironic move, Hewett argues that Tennant's turn to the grotesque and surreal makes for a kind of degenerate 'contemptuous naturalism' that 'throttles her novels'. She asks 'is she up another dead-end with a bug about style *à la* Patrick White?' (7). The socialist realist condemnation of what Soviets saw as the degenerate and bourgeois modernist focus on style and negation drives Hewett to value *The Battlers* over Tennant's later novels, where 'the country never comes through with that thrill of identification...we never get a kind of real feeling' (6). The affective capacity to identify with the writing, the associated strength of its realism and the related significance of 'the land' are all still strong sources of critical approbation. They are still organised around the *topos* of 'life' that structured Hewett's literary criticism, and seem only to have been mildly tempered by her radical decade, socialist realist experiments and eventual publications in Sydney between 1949 and 1959.

In 1963 Hewett wrote a passionate 'tribute' to Katherine Susannah Prichard's autobiography *Girl in a White Muslin Dress* for *Westerly*. This was a book which she saw as 'intensely feminine, romantic and adventurous', surely amazing criteria for an essay in *Westerly* in 1963. Otherwise there are familiar sources of approbation: Prichard had 'transmitted the measure of her own heart, the rhythm of her own mind so that Kattie the child and Katherine

the girl, become living presences' (Hewett, 'Muslin' 63). The 'tribute', as an autobiographical and partisan mode of review, alerts the reader to the potential affective crossover between critic and her object of appreciation, and here there is a clear sense of what Hewett strove for and valued in her own work: 'It is the curious invocation to landscape and intuitive emotional response that marks the great writer. Her wonderful gift for landscape, her feel for 'place'.... She dares to write tenderly, romantically, from the heart' (64). These are romantic terms indeed—greatness involves the evocation of landscape, especially in terms of feeling. Hewett goes on to claim that the work is warm and rich and a 'great affirmation of life' and here Lawrence and Leavis are surely back in critical range and resonance. The fact that this review is termed a 'tribute' to Prichard's autobiography is perhaps the reason for its strongly gendered terms—the affective investment of both genres requires the recognition of gender, as a sensitive and sympathetic reading by a female critic and fellow communist, and it foregrounds terms such as 'romance', 'tender', 'feminine', 'heart' and 'intuition'. The rhetoric of 'life' is present here in the usual terms of heat and positivity, but it is explicitly yoked to gendered experience and the particular capacity for the woman writer to capture the affective importance of 'land'.

In a review of Randolph Stow's *Merry Go Round By the Sea* for *The Critic* in 1965 Hewett wrote: 'I went through the pages crying out 'it was like that, exactly' and 'a series of electric shocks of recognition does colour critical judgment...only a writer who had fully apprehended the world could make it move, smell, run, and ache in the memory as this does' (Hewett, 'Stow' 86). The notion of critical judgement as something other than sophisticated recognition and identification is quite difficult to find in Hewett's literary criticism before 1969. The readerly 'shocks of recognition' don't 'colour' Hewett's 'critical judgement' so much as constitute it. Hewett claims that in *Merry Go Round*, Stow comes 'home to the real country of his spirit, the Stow country around Geraldton' and that in this work he 'closes the gap between symbol and reality' and gives 'the Australian world mythic quality' (87). This comment on 'gap-closing' indicates an ongoing subtextual dialogue with the demands of socialist realism in the 1960s in terms of Soviet suspicions about symbolism. Nevertheless, the terms of this essay, written in a politically busy and difficult year for Hewett, reach out for categories and descriptions that become extremely important in her drama and poetry after 1969: the 'real country of spirit', the importance of the mythic quality and the role and function of the symbolic. Nevertheless, the *topos* of life is alive and well (so to speak) in this review in the notion that the job of the writer is to 'fully apprehend the world'. The vitality of Stow's recollection of West Australian youth is the source of Hewett's strongest praise.

For Hewett, the tenets of socialist realism were wearing thin by the mid-1960s. Two unpublished political essays indicate this: 'Eat Salt and Bread and Speak the Truth' (17.3.1965) and a piece about the Social Realist Writers Group called 'The Times they are A-changin'. Ian Syson published these in *Hecate* in 1995. They attest, as does her correspondence from this era, to the increasing political unease Hewett experienced throughout the 1960s as she sought to resolve the contradiction between individual imagination and emotion and the demands of political analysis. The freedom of the writer's imagination, and the other literary-political issues of style and censorship, closely concerned her throughout the mid- to late-1960s. Hewett and Prichard had strongly disagreed about the show trial of two Soviet writers, Andrei Sinyavsky and Yuli Daniel, who were prosecuted in the Moscow Supreme Court in 1965-1966 for the publication (under pseudonyms and

smuggled to the West) of what was deemed to be 'anti-Soviet' material. Prichard staunchly defended the Soviet decisions regarding the authors (5-7 years forced labour) and Hewett bitterly opposed them.³ Hewett's essay on the occasion of Prichard's death ('An Excess of Love: The Irreconcilable in Katherine Susannah Prichard') caused a furore in the pages of *Overland* and a range of emphatic written responses to the essay, both positive and negative, dominated the following volume. This moment of dialogue marks an important moment in Australian literary and political writing and illuminates the difficulties, divisions and affiliations in the broad Left and the Communist Party at this time.

It is this extraordinary essay that Hewett published on Katherine Susannah Prichard at the end of 1969 that proclaimed the terms of her break with the Communist Party of Australia, following the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968. In an unusually argumentative mode in 'An Excess of Love', Hewett claims that in Prichard's lifetime the Australian Communist Party had 'become a fragmented and irrelevant force'. She adds that 'her [Prichard's] beliefs were not so much nationalist and political as a kind of vitalist utopian substitute for religion' (Hewett, 'Excess' 27). She concludes about Prichard that 'it was one of her tragedies that she could not, would not, change' and that 'in the clash between the artist's pagan and poetic sensibility and the moralizing Marxist religieuse it is the latter who finally wins the battle' (29). Hewett's disdain for utopian vitalism here is an extraordinary disavowal of the terms of her own literary criticism over the preceding twenty-five years. Here, the notion of the artist's pagan and poetic sensibility connects Hewett to a Lawrentian notion of vitalism, which she may well have first approached through Prichard's fiction. 'Utopian vitalism' was something of which she was guilty. In the balance of the 1969 essay, Hewett mourns the closing of Prichard's 'natural metaphysical gifts' into an 'iron maiden' of political dogma, and this is surely self-referential. She sees that Prichard's blind ongoing commitment to communism resulted in 'characterless documentation' and 'bondage to the pragmatic and the positive' that were like 'walls without windows' in her later work. In a move entirely reminiscent of Lawrence, she claims that 'the sensuousness, the sexual energy drained out of her writing, leaving only the husk of schematic politics to sustain her and her work'. In other words, dogmatism had robbed her work of 'life' and without this 'life' there was only the shell of realism in the service of socialist moralizing. Just as she cited the gendered terms of the 'body', the 'heart' and the 'romantic' in her 1963 tribute to Prichard, this essay criticizes the loss of the gendered terms of sexual energy and the sensuous. Hewett's view that these aspects of Prichard's work have been lost to dogma and political rigidity forms the strongest expression of disapprobation yet to appear in Hewett's criticism.

Hewett's final assessment of Prichard rested on a quotation of Yeats's poem, 'Easter 1916': 'too great a sacrifice can make a stone of the heart'. It is this quotation of one of the most significant modernist poets that declared, as nothing else might have, Hewett's freedom from the CPA and from the fate she so unflinchingly recounted for Prichard. The citation of Yeats also brings us back to Hewett's essay on Sitwell in 1945. Although Hewett went on to work, teach and write about art in the context of the social, she was never again backward in claiming what is implicit in all her literary criticism (and that which the *topos* of 'life' broadly indicates also): that art is made by powerful individuals who owed allegiance to their own imaginative impulses first and foremost. Hewett went on to write essays and reviews for *New Poetry*, *Theatre Australia*, *Westerly*, *Overland* and *Scripts*, and she wrote about poetry, Patrick White, life-writing, Peter Cowan and Randolph Stow. In these essays after 1969, the

rhetorical centrepiece had become the individual and the imaginative, but the importance of landscape, the sensuous body, of feeling and identification are also present. 'Life' had been marginalized as the 'sublime object of ideology' as had the associated importance of realism, but it was still encompassed within the locus of the 'felt', the vital and the energetic and these terms were of enduring and paramount significance in all her work. Hewett told Drusilla Modjeska in a 1988 interview, when referring to her relocation to Sydney in 1973: 'it was the most astonishing liberation of the spirit and physical energy I have ever experienced. It came almost too late, I felt, because I was fifty and it had taken all that time, but it was amazing that it happened at all' (Modjeska 97). Although themes of experimentation, alienation, fragmentation and disintegration enter her critical register during her time in Sydney in the 1970s, the importance of energy never abates in Hewett's criticism. In her reviews and essays of the 1980s and 1990s, she values the 'lively and fresh in Miles Franklin' (Hewett, 'Brilliant' 86); Peter Cowan's 'flickering impressionistic energy' (Hewett, 'Empty' 2); 'the quick of Life' in Christina Stead (Hewett, 'Literary Spectrum' 83) and 'the felicity and energy of language' in the Ern Malley poems (Hewett, 'Ern' 85). Hewett's work to 1969, and even later, begs a comparison with the work of another great left-wing critic and theorist, Raymond Williams. Williams's early career, particularly, demonstrates a strikingly similar desire to marry a Leavisite reading of literature as a form distinguished by the capacity to realize life as fully as possible (but associated with the repression of politics) with a committed class politics. The strangeness of this Left-Leavisism draws again on the combination in Hewett's work that made it so particular—the strain of organicist romanticism that co-existed with a sustained and committed Marxism.

Hewett's literary criticism between 1945 and 1969 illuminates her self-positioning in the Australian literary marketplace after World War Two and the complex, uneven and iconoclastic nature of her literary and political views and practice. It speaks to us, directly and indirectly, about the general nature of Australian literary criticism in this period, and more particularly about the shifts in discursive and critical engagements on the Left. It also tells us a great deal about Hewett's creative work in all its breadth, sometimes as confirmation and sometimes as contradiction. The subsequent twenty-five years of her literary criticism (1970-1994) reveal a significant amount about the terms of critical engagement and creative practice in Australian poetry and Australian theatre in the 1970s, especially in Sydney. Hewett's mature assessment of Patrick White, Peter Cowan and Randolph Stow is well worth reading in its own right. As a writer and as a critic, Hewett continued to be provoked and enlivened by her Romantic double position both inside the mess of life and also slightly outside it, working as a practitioner, critic and commentator in the field of Australian literature.

NOTES

¹ Hewett read Lawrence as an undergraduate, but she also must have engaged with Lawrence through his impact on the work of Katherine Susannah Prichard, who was a crucial role model for Hewett until the mid 1960s. Vitalism in the context of the sexualised body and the

working class was certainly Lawrence's terrain, and it drew vitalist tendencies away from the towering figure of Nietzsche and into the terrain of politics of class and region. Lawrence became a privileged figure of critical attention for F.R. Leavis, whom Hewett would certainly have read as an undergraduate in the early 1940s and then again in returning to the University of Western Australia in the early 1960s.

² In the Australian context, Norman and Jack Lindsay were central to the promulgation of theories of vitalism, evident in their publications *Creative Effort* (1924) and the subsequent publications of the periodical, *Vision*. There are a number of connections to be made with this work along the axis of the gendered body, gendered essentialism and critical authority. This is a significant piece of work and, although mentioned here, is materially outside the scope of this paper.

³ The correspondence between Hewett and Prichard in 1965-66 demonstrates the insistence and passion of Hewett's argument about the impropriety of the trial of the authors in the context of the freedom of the writer, and the concomitant and absolute refusal by Prichard to join any protest against the hard-line Soviet treatment of them. Prichard thought any organised protest in the form of a petition disloyal and damaging to the Party and in this she was joined by a number of other pro-Stalinist Party members at the time.

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