

# SPACE EXPLORATION: CATHERINE MARTIN, AUSTRALIA, THE WORLD, THE UNIVERSE AND WHATEVER

*Kevin Gilding*

## Introduction

In this paper I argue that Catherine Martin's texts, and *An Australian Girl*<sup>1</sup> in particular, are about creating space for Australia within a European philosophical tradition and, within and paralleling this perspective, making spaces for women (and, more ambivalently, the Aborigines); secondly, that to achieve her main aim, she adapts in *The Explorers* and, most notably, in *An Australian Girl* the model of the secondary epic (the *Aeneid*, the *Lusiads*) to explore, on the one hand, European origins and, on the other, national goals; and thirdly, that in developing her theme she uses opposing or contrasting images of Australian scenery to create a rhetoric of personal and national exploration.

These effects are more apparent in the first edition of the novel, published in 1890, where Martin found an authentic voice of woman as author and epic hero. They are, however, significantly muted in the better known shortened 1891 edition in which other hands played a part. Variations between the 1890 and 1891 versions, as indicated in the publisher's letters, are detailed in the footnote below.<sup>2</sup> This revision, it is argued, diminished the heroic and nationalist quality of the book which in the 1890 edition focused much more explicitly on the 'big questions' and on the status of the female hero whose search for meaning is fiercely gender driven. Russel Ward, commenting on Manning Clark, lists the historian's questions which are also Martin's: 'Are we children of God or self-conscious pieces of complexly evolved matter? What, if anything, is the purpose of life? Are the traditional answers given to these questions in Christian European society valid?' (14-15). And what, asks Martin, is the role of Australia in all this uncertainty and quandary? Centrally, isn't it much more difficult to answer these questions if one is a woman who is not supposed even to ask them?

In the first instance, it is the development of an understanding of and resistance to women's precarious artistic, social and intellectual status which is the theme of Martin's work from the early poems to the 1890 version of *An Australian Girl*. Within this context, I intend in the next section to contrast Martin's notion of the epic hero in *The Explorers* and in her novel where she sought to intellectualize the world of feeling from a feminine viewpoint.

## From Male to Female Epic

### *The Explorers and Other Poems: A Fragile Faith*

*The Explorers and Other Poems* comprises three sections: the title poem in three parts (130), Miscellaneous Poems (72) and Translations (64). The first and longest section of the book is ostensibly about the Burke and Wills expedition, a topic Martin had first tried her hand at in a short poem entitled 'In Memoriam', published in *The Border Watch* on 13 December 1871. In the earlier poem what Michael Ackland has distinguished as the theme of

*The Explorers* is already present, that is the 'reinterpretation of standard male myths' in which 'the emphasis is placed on freely chosen personal sacrifice, Christian values and co-operative enterprise' (108). But in the longer work the motives are more mixed and the theme extended to include British origins, national progress and the struggle for belief as a basis for this. To encompass these wider aims Martin adopted and then adapted the mode of the secondary epic which, under the influence of Virgil's work, generally took as its focus the issues of national destiny and the dangers of spiritual and social faithlessness.

The particular work on which she based the poem was Luis de Camoens' *Lusiads*, whose ostensible subject is the discovery of India by Vasco da Gama, but whose true subject is the soul of Portugal: the central question posed is, 'Is the nation worthy of its role as the bearer of Christianity?'. There is no evidence as to which of the half-dozen or so translations she was familiar with (including one in 1853 by Sir Thomas [Major] Mitchell), but her general debt is clear from the theme and, more particularly, from her parallel (and rather clumsy) introduction of tales to while away the time and in the figure of the old man who in Camoens questions the explorers' craving for power and fame and in Martin their incompetence and self-will. Also relevant is Martin's use of what Paul Carter rightly says distinguished the *Lusiads* from other epic poems—its descriptive power and 'juxtaposition of pleasingly contrasted episodes' (123). Indeed the juxtaposition of contrasted episodes is basic to the poem's structure. It is just possible that Martin took the hint from Mitchell's preface, which highlights these aspects (Carter 122-23).

How, then, did Martin adapt the epic form? A structural variation is that it is the second, not the first, part of *The Explorers* which begins in *media re* with the remnants of the expedition returning to their deserted base camp. The parallel first and fourth parts exemplify Martin's skill in adapting the epic form to her own purposes and in creating, after the manner of Camoens, interlocking and contrasted episodes of, on the one hand, a bustling, somewhat 'pushy' town, and on the other, an idyllic pastoral scene of co-operative endeavour. Within this overarching picture of national growth the old bushman's reflection in the first part: 'Within the bush life passes like a dream/In strange oblivion of the wondrous strides/The world at large is making' (2), is seen later as at once ironic and prophetic of Wills's vision in the fourth part. Likewise, the third and fourth parts deal with the struggle for faith at a personal and national level, contrasting the attitudes of Burke and Wills and their social consequences. Near his death Burke talks of men's judgement, his vain search for fame, and his consequent loss of faith in providence:

Man at the height of earthly bliss  
Seems still but the mere puppet of blind chance: ...  
Without a hope, a joy, or a belief,  
Beyond a rigid form, which in its shroud  
Will never heed the voices, low or loud,  
That rise in the hoarse accents of despair  
Beside it. (102)

Despair encompasses Burke and the waves sweep 'each ancient landscape from the way'. His experience is echoed in Part Four in the mob's destruction of the 'ancient landmarks of an ancient land' (120) and their 'hoarse cry/Of unbelief and anarchy' (125). If the third part was Burke's, the fourth is Wills's who finds in a dream ('No dream/Was this') the true symbol of human need. In the haunting memory of 'A dying haggard man' lost in the Australian bush (123-4), he realises his individual—'I feel and know, I do not die in vain' (129)—and social purpose, opening

up a realm, where the faint sigh  
And plaints of hunger never need ascend  
To vex the sapphire skies, that brightly bend  
Above great woods. (127)

From him the 'deeper meaning' of immortal life 'was not hid' (129): what was for Burke 'a rigid form' (102), is for Wills a tale 'To shadow forth the glorious after-life' (130).

The management and adaptation of the epic form is impressive. The construction of faith and purpose in adversity is, however, fragile. Martin's problem is that the theme is constrained in a generic and stylistic straitjacket which makes it difficult for her to find a woman's voice as author. The poem sits uneasily between male heroic myth and a resolution which has little to do with fame and heroic deeds. The perspectives are contrasted but unexamined because the gender issue has not been resolved. It is this issue which is basic to the second section, entitled 'Miscellaneous Poems'.

In the last poem of this second section, 'A Stately Ship Went Sailing' (203-04), Martin uses her recurring image of a perilous voyage: 'Across the cruel main,/That heedeth not man's wailing,/Nor moans of mortal pain'. Looking out 'at eve and morn' is a maiden forlornly seeking the return of the ship which 'comes not back again'. Women's lot is constrained and resolution is only achieved by an act of faith. But nothing much is resolved for a 'heart much vexed with doubt', a 'mind much perplexed with enquiry' ('A Reminiscence' 164), whose only comfort in the wilderness is non-conformity with illusive pleasures and empty praise. As Ackland justly comments, 'the overall impression left by "Miscellaneous Poems" is one of loss, exile and personal malaise' from which there seems no ready escape.

But over the next five or so years Martin developed and expressed her own 'independence and delight in ideas' in her short stories—'Breaking the Law'<sup>3</sup> a year later in 1879 is about a woman's escape from domestic oppression—and in her reviews—what Ackland calls 'arguably her most personal essay', her article in 1885 on the life of George Eliot deals with escape from the kind of piety and oppressive social proprieties thought appropriate for a woman. Ready to speak with a voice of her own, she returned to her wider aims, but this time prompted, not by Camoens, but by Virgil who asked questions alien to the *Lusiads*; not 'Are we worthy?', but 'Why did we come? What did we bring? What will we do?'. And because it was an independent woman who was seeking, the questions were all the more pungent, the answers all the more radical.

### **An Australian Girl, 1890: A Virgilian Epic**

*An Australian Girl* a Virgilian epic? The *Aeneid*, the story of Aeneas, the *Lusiads*, the story of the sons of Lusus, that is, of the Portuguese, and *An Australian Girl*, are all stories about a person or a group intimately connected with and representing 'imagined communities', written at a time when the nation needed to be reminded of its significance through the invention of an appropriate myth (the notion is adopted from Anderson).<sup>4</sup> As for *An Australian Girl*, its setting, as can be inferred from the dating of Stella's letters to her brother,<sup>5</sup> is the centenary year of 1888 (the action extends from mid December 1887 to early November 1889), when much was said about the future but not much about the nation's inner life. In contradistinction, the object of Martin's epic was like Virgil's, that is, as J.S. Ryan points out, 'to probe the national character, to link past and present, to trace...origins and the emergence of national ideals' (Ryan 61).

As in other epics, the story presents a version of an earlier inherited national past which is, if slavishly followed, corrupting. And concomitant with this past is the epic machinery of supernatural forces which aid or divert the hero—protestant piety, Roman Catholicism, British institutions, material prosperity, the Enlightenment; Dante, too, 'the great master', says Stella, who 'speaks more nobly of love than any other of the sons of light' (262) yet who prepares Hades and Purgatory for lovers, Hegel who divined a purpose without a purposer (represented by Anselm) and Kant whose *Critique of Pure Reason* was the one book 'for which Stella gave up all other researches' 'not so much with the hope of finding spiritual guidance but for some standing ground' (1.6, 112). His book provides the map for Stella's journey.

**'Things that can never be fixed and at rest, but [are] always becoming'**

How does Martin enlarge her theme to give to the Australian colonies in 1887—1889 an

epic significance? The answer is by suggesting, like Virgil, first that the action of the novel takes place over extended space: 'The way is so far and the sea so treacherous' (248) moans Stella and the refrain echoes throughout the novel; second, that its time-span is immeasurable, stretching from the abyss of time to a mythical and visionary apotheosis 'in which the limitations of time and space had become even as figures of speech' (3.15, 268). In the original 20 April 1890 letter to her brother Cuthbert, Stella, after rehearsing some Aboriginal myths, muses on the possibility of returning to a pristine state, not in the interests of romantic primitivism but in order to be made acutely aware of the development of the moral sense:

Is there not something in the conception that makes one wonder whether it would not be worth while to be even an Australian black, so as to look at the world with eyes purged from the sophistry of the schools—in fact to be the ape who put his tail in the copper kettle declaring that the true science of cooking demanded that one should be subjectively conscious of the process. (1.16, 213)

A parallel passage in *The Old RoofTree* describes the growth of the moral sense by hard-won, deeply painful experience through the 'wide grey lampless depths of time' (101-02):

Here a little victory, and there a big defeat...What tragedies by the way—what violence and shedding of blood....What death-in-life contests before this fluid, shifting element of experience and opinion hardened into law for the punishment of sin... (64)

This Kantian morality is not learned 'by laws handed down out of heaven' but won from personal experience, 'bought at a most extravagant price, by the tears and sufferings and lives of countless generations' (65), by the 'savage at midnight when he seems to hear the footfalls of an avenging ghost' (43).

It is not, of course, the mere extension of space and length of time by which Martin gives significance to her theme. Space and time are in fact one continuous and simultaneous process—'Things that can never be fixed and at rest, but [are] always becoming'<sup>6</sup>—Martin writes in *The Old RoofTree*, together with a paradoxical comment on what Ishbel perceives as the English sense of history:

But it is one of the most disappointing surprises of the old country, to find how curiously such expectations [that is, that Cathedral City should be 'a focus of light and leading'] are often falsified....They seem to have no historical perspective, no conception of worldly affairs as things that can never be fixed and at rest but always becoming. (101-2)

Witness the appearance of the clergy houses in Cathedral City:

What a look they have—as of keeping the Law and the Prophets at their appointed moorings, those excessively proper little houses, with their smooth-shaven lawns, their tiled footpaths, their flower-beds that seem to peep into an almanac before they dare to open a bud—the eaves and porches and oriel windows, kept so speckless that no bird would ever dare to build its nest near them (27).

The means Martin uses to give to *An Australian Girl* a vaster theme is one used by Virgil in the *Aeneid* (which she quotes in the original—her copy still exists—in 1.17): immeasurable space and time filled with moments of decision after which everything, for better or worse, would always be different. What I want now to stress is Martin's adaptation, as in *The Explorers*, of the epic structure to say things which are peculiar to her own concerns and, in particular, how this idea of 'becoming' generally informs Martin's response to Australian space.

### Space as Metaphor

The first point then: we have seen how in *The Explorers* Martin uses interlocking episodes to create a complex pattern of events and ideas. Within this pattern, the contrasting depictions in Part First and Part Fourth are a rhetorical exposition of what Paul Carter calls, in his discussion of Sir Thomas Mitchell, 'the spaciality of events' (Carter 116). Space as a

metaphor for, on the one hand, European origins and, on the other, personal and national discovery is a recurring theme in Martin's texts ranging from *The Explorers* to *The Incredible Journey*.

But, unlike Mitchell's *Three Expeditions* whose heroic theme, epic resonances and references to Authorities, place it within the Western imperial tradition ('it is a country worthy of being English for thousands of years'), Martin's aim was first to clear space of outward and corrupt practices in order to use it as a metaphor for exploring the developing inner life of the individual and the land. The latter (approximating to but not the same as Mitchell's 'fair blank sheet') waits for meaning (it has none directly from its Aboriginal past), but on its own terms and not in ways which simply reinscribe Western culture's unresolved oppositions—reason/faith, science/religion, male/female, rich/poor. (In parenthesis, I should remark that all four dichotomies generate problems in the text—but that is another story—and none more than a fifth, the black/white opposition.)

Perhaps the most startling example of space used as a metaphor for personal and national discovery occurs in the Lullaboolagana section of *An Australian Girl*. The 40 acre Home Field of the Station, owned by one of Stella's brothers, had been cultivated some years before by a relative of the Courtlands, who had, like Shenstone, 'planted groves and avenues and alleys, diversified his woods, pointed his walks, and entangled his shrubberies. The result was a charming semi-English milieu of the kind that the British race are so skilful in creating in the far regions of the earth' (174). There is even a suitable ruin redolent with past history in one of the bridges spanning the Ooloolloo:

an enormous gum-tree, which from time immemorial had lain across the creek as it fell.... There were marks all along the upper side of this tree made by the stone axe of the aborigine, who had climbed it in quest of opossums, or to place his bark-enclosed dead among the boughs, or perhaps to scan the surrounding country for the little column of pale blue smoke that might proclaim the presence of a tribal foe not far off. (176)<sup>7</sup>

In this setting, Stella discusses Virgil's *Eclagues*, a copy of which she has found at the Homestead 'full of notes in her deceased kinsman's handwriting',<sup>8</sup> with a cynical but suitably romantic (and paroxysmic) Langdale. Was it possible that the Home Field with its beeches, hazel bushes, osiers and cypresses 'was full of hints from those stately pastoral poems' (210)? Langdale, adopting the role of a commentator/editor, considers whether the first eclogue might not be prophetic of Lullaboolagana. The passage is a good example of Martin's highly allusive style: to make sense of Langdale's comments one needs to catch the reference to the Messianic fourth Eclogue which Augustine and the medieval Church took as prefiguring the birth of Christ:

Then you have flocks of pigeons [says Langdale], and elms and turtle-doves without number. In view of this, you must perceive that the lines concerning the hoarse note of the wood pigeon, the turtle-dove's complaint, and the towering elm serve—first, either as a prophecy regarding Lull, or second, that the place has been moulded upon these lines. I incline to the latter view. (212; emphasis added)

Later, when Anselm, now her lover, must return to Europe for a time, Stella, already before his departure, imagines his return as absence, as potential psychic alienation:

'Oh, my love—my love, you have come back, all the way across the salt-dividing sea!' and with that she burst into low sobs: 'Oh, the way is so far—so far; and sometimes there are dreadful storms!' she moaned. The adder that lies ever at the heart of passion had awakened, and stung her. (241)

Or as Ishbel says in *The Old Roof Tree*, 'the love of man and woman [but] a hooded snake of self-assertion' (260). Then, the 'cultured beauty of the Home Field, with its wealth of leafing trees and budding roses and spring flowers, disquieted her' while the 'gaunt writhing trees' of the Wicked Wood 'seemed to draw her to them as by a spell' (248). Finally, the Mallee depicts the restlessness, perhaps inquietude, of things that 'can never be fixed but are always becoming'.

Place and landscape were important and Martin was stimulated by colonial painters who saw pastoral and wilderness areas as opposing features of the landscape and, more generally, seized upon the land's potential for myth.<sup>9</sup> When she thinks of the Mallee and, more particularly, the Wicked Wood as types of 'the most weird aspect of our scenery' (247), she is almost certainly thinking of Marcus Clarke's 'weird melancholy'.<sup>10</sup> More generally, she herself uses contrasting images of Australian scenery to create a rhetoric of personal and national exploration.

#### 'Sapere audi': Have the Courage of Your Own Understanding; or a Grand Unfolding into the Absolute?

How, then, does Kant relate to all this? Kant's stress on having the courage to use one's own understanding without the guidance of another, on knowledge not consisting in the impressions of the sense but in reasoning about them, that is, in the formulation of structures, and, lastly, on the supremacy of the individual conscience, sends Stella back to base to 'ascertain [her] necessary and unassailable ignorance' (1.6, 119) and to question the 'sophistry of the schools'—'whether it would be worth while to be even an Australian black so as to look at the world with eyes purged from the sophistry of the schools' (1.16, 213).

In opposition to Kantian philosophy is Anselm's Hegelian theorising on the moral significance of Christian faith and Darwinian evolution in 2.8 in which he argues that the latter will lead inevitably to a more altruistic society:

But don't you see that if we conceive of man as a *mauvais sujet* of so unreclaimable an order that even Omnipotence has vainly striven to reform him...how little hope there is for man's final regeneration! But when the truth dawns on us that man has slowly, painfully, worked his way upwards to love, to knowledge, to worship, we may hope that he is capable of still greater improvement...there are forces slowly moulding a more comprehensive and reasonable—a more inevitable form of social ethics. (2.8, 111)

In this process, we should only think of the 'Unknown Cause' as 'having endowed the earth with the potency of life, passing through successive forms of development to man, and man himself with the possibility of gradually rising nearer to the source of light' (2.8, 117). Hegel's notion of minds rising out of the ultimate purpose of the universe itself is anathema to Stella who, in a strategic move which is both resistant and placatory, attributes her inability to find comfort in the conclusions of modern science to the stupidity inherent in being a woman 'as St. Therese somewhere says' (2.8 107)! This gendered distinction, involving as it does a struggle to appropriate female ground within male territory, is basic to the working of the novel.

#### Epic Structure

Martin shows considerable technical ingenuity in adapting the epic structure to her purposes. For her the probing of national ideals was somewhat different from Virgil's task. The latter was dictated by the new regime of Augustus, namely, that Virgil's contemporary Romans were to put behind them the national trauma of civil strife in order to start over again. David Quint comments that in the *Aeneid* 'The past must be both buried and forgotten, and then reinvented in the "memory" of the present' (62). Thus the first six books of the *Aeneid* are about a recurring desire for the past, typified in the mimic, miniature copy of Troy established by Helenus and Andromache at Buthrotum (Book 3), and, the last six about undoing and transforming it for the present.

But Martin's task is considerably differentiated from Virgil's in that she had no dazzling successes to weigh, no evident strengths to test and no recognized importance to proclaim. As a result, the psychic complexity of Martin's epic is of a different kind and requires a different, though in fact similarly structured, solution. The temptation is not to 'repeat the past' but rather to reject it for a world 'purged from the sophistry of the schools' (1.16, 213). This, with many complexities, is, indeed, the overall thrust at the levels of gender and national

destiny of the first part of *An Australian Girl*. It ends at Chapter 2.15/36 with Stella and Anselm's ride on the Peeloo Plain. There, in the ghostly light,

It was like an unborn kind of dawn, struggling to kindle day in a strange world, in which the limitations of time and space have become even as figures of speech.

These great unpeopled spaces call up thoughts of the early dawn of civilization.

(2.15, 268-69)

Desire has abandoned the world of sense and intelligence the 'wrestle with words and meanings'.

In the second part of the novel, at an equally crucial passage in Chapter 3.16/54, Stella, among London crowds and seemingly 'placed *en rapport* with currents of intellectual power' (3.16, 295), is 'subtly influenced...by the vast unpeopled spaces which...lay no ghostly charges on human beings to postpone their lives for the sake of those who have been and those who are to come' (450). For her, 'Fancy, imagination, and memory, all were buoyant as young birds that had newly learned to cleave the air' (449). The sentence evokes that 'strange world' of desire apart from sense; at the same time, though, it calls to mind Stella's reference to Kant in the excised chapter 6 of the first volume:

the dove...feeling the resistance of the air she cleaves, might think that in airless space her flight would be swifter. Even so did Plato descrt the world of sense because of the narrow limits it sets to the understanding, and venture upon the wings of ideas into the empty space of pure intellect. (1.6, 121)

The guiding spirit of Kant points to the impossibility of achieving that imagined space. Just as Stella's temptation is not to 'repeat the past' as much as to reject it, so her solution is, as we shall see in the next section, not to 'undo the past' as much as to rediscover value in the given present.

#### From 'The Heart of the Matter' to 'A Matter of the Heart': The 1891 Revision

I want now to note how the excisions in the 1891 version have to an extent diminished the epic quality of the novel and thus distorted the significance of individual episodes at the levels of gender and national destiny.

A significant example is Chapter 53 (originally 3.13) of the 1891 edition—the brevity of the 1891 text is indicative of a lengthy omission from the 3 volume novel. In the later version, Stella's sudden discovery of Anselm's intention to accompany his sister to the East is succeeded immediately by bitter tears, then her own long delayed acceptance. Adulterous desire is the ostensible motivation. In 1890, the two events are widely separated:

1890	1891
Chapter 3.13: Stella's discovery; visit to German women	Chapter 53: Stella's discovery; invitation accepted
Chapter 3.14: Socialist meeting	Excised
Chapter 3.15: Socialist ideas debated; invitation accepted	Excised

What is the effect of this separation?

In the lengthy passage excised from Chapter 53, Stella is repelled by the smouldering, revengeful vindictiveness among a group of socialist women. Her resulting dilemma has both social and personal dimensions: 'That feeling of wild, hopeless rebellion' (which in different ways both she and the women experience) prompts either violence or, sometimes, in 'finely-wrought minds' 'an anarchy of scepticism—of hopeless despair' (3.13, 257). This potential for violence is pointed to in the two sequent excised chapters, 3.14 (Signor Gerstenberg's speech to his fellow Social Democrats) and 3.15 (a debate between the Signor and Langdale on Socialism). In his speech the Marxist Gerstenberg argues that 'There is such a thing as historical development, individual and national, and that both forms are surely, and not

slowly, moulding circumstances that must make for the emancipation and the union of the labourers of Europe an inexorable factor in all coming history' (3.15, 274). The password is, to use Martin's own curious translation, 'Proletarians of all countries, combine yourselves'. In other words, individualism, nationalism and 'monarchical institutions' will be replaced by a new world-wide confederation—in Hegelian terms, the realisation of cosmic purpose. In Chapter 3.16, Anselm, a pure Hegelian (rather than Marxist) who believes that purpose depends on how the contradictions that are *always* arising in human existence are resolved, counters with the view that to interfere with the 'inexorable nature of things' by heaving up a part (the proletariat) as if it were the whole would do irreparable harm: Gerstenberg and his like will lose control of the process and be destroyed by violent forces. Anselm trusts rather to reform through individual effort, relying on 'the nature of things' to see matters through to a successful ending. At the end of 3.16 Stella belatedly accepts the invitation to the East.

The 1890 context of Stella's acceptance provides a more complex pattern of motivations. One is certainly that the Signorina, 'quite faggot' by her political activities, is also going east, prompted by Mrs Farningham's belief that there is growing affection between her and Langdale:

I shall persuade her to come to the East. The dreaming calm of the East, the remnants of buried empires, the immense resignation of the people, the absence of politics, and all the questions that we find so burning and important in the whole world. I cannot imagine a better *mise-en-scene* for such a pair to slip into love-making. (3.15, 289)

But 'The East', so depicted, suggests another motive—an escape from the 'anarchy of scepticism—of hopeless despair' to which Stella has been subject and which social conditions have generated among the German women. 'The East' reverberates through the book, suggesting quiescence, even death, certainly disengagement from practicalities, menacingly associated with the hymenospereum at Lullaboolagana, 'tall and slender, arrayed in pale saffron, like an Eastern bride' (32/234) and with the clinging 'Eastern fragrance' (2.17/38) of Anselm's fatal letter.<sup>11</sup> This world is, indeed, associated with the 'unborn kind of dawn' on the Peeloo Plain 'struggling to kindle day in a strange world' where time and space are merely figures of speech.

With violence rejected, Stella's choice seems to be between despair or escape from a 'future that had been woven for her by treachery and deceit' (448), between being entrapped or cutting adrift from 'small mean complications', from 'the obtusion of indifferent, inept personalities' (3.16, 295). Her choice of the latter initially brought a kind of joy and vitality not 'limited to a small patch of the world' (462), but 'part of the full life which pulsed through the world, in distant lands under alien skies' (3.16, 295). The finely ironic generalities of 1890 suggest a commitment to ideals but a disengagement from practicalities: 'because of the deeper experience, the sadder outlook on life which sorrow gives, all the years to come will be more strenuously dedicated to the service of life' (3.16, 299).

Stella eventually escapes from her dilemma when she realises that the meaning of life is hers individually to create and control—that, in contradistinction to her more expansive mood, the only sense life will have is what she makes for it on her *own* patch: then and only then will it have any larger meaning. Mistrustful of the socialist women's 'universal schemes of social betterment', and doubting whether there is 'any one system of social change that could minister so widely, so universally to the evils from which men suffer' (3.53, 155), Stella settles, within the larger purpose so necessary for her emotional well-being, for a meaning 'local,... blinkered but not blind, neither impotent nor omnipotent'.<sup>12</sup> In the penultimate chapter of the novel, Stella comforts the distraught Anselm with the words that, although their lives are to be widely separated,

Yet the day can never come in which we shall be indifferent to each other. And in the same way we may know, with a conviction beyond dispute, that behind all the confusion and mystery of life there runs a great sane purpose with which we may join our wills and lives. In the end the most we can hope to do must be limited to a small patch of the world, and as far as our personal influence can reach. To spoil that

for the sake of any happiness—You know the rough and ready classifications of the world. (3.17, 319-20/462).

At the end, when Ted with the fine munificence of a married man declares that the whole 80,000 acres of his pastoral property Strathhaye is hers, Stella settles for 250 acres of her very own (an investment paid from her own funds) on which to settle poor but self-respecting Europeans. She even expects to make a profit!

Stella's potential tragedy stems from the fact that consciousness has outpaced the possibilities of action, that perception must pace within a prison house. Even her love for Anselm is not without fear of her eventual subjugation, that the love of man for woman might be but 'a hooded snake of self-assertion'. When she is subsequently tricked into marriage with Ted, the dominant myth in the second half of *An Australian Girl* becomes that of Hades and Purgatory, 'old stories that still go walking in [Stella's] dreams' which threaten psychic imprisonment. Dante, 'the great master' who 'speaks more nobly of love than any other of the sons of light' (262) also punishes lovers. Release comes with disengagement from Anselm, committal to Ted whose 'allegiance was so unshaken—he exacted so little'—and independent management of a scheme of privatized social welfare. Which is about right for the ending of an epic—Odysseus returning to domesticity, Aeneas realizing that, opposed by the gods, founding the city would not be his task and Camoens aware that the old heroic virtues about which he wrote were already waning.

University of Adelaide

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#### Notes

- References placed parenthetically in text are indicated thus: 3.16, 299 ie. vol. 3, ch. 16, p. 299. All other references are to the 1891 edition. *An Australian Girl*, New Edition (London: Bentley, 1891), abridged. Rpt. London: Pandora, 1988.
- Although some condensation had occurred before the publication of the 1890 version (letter from Bentley to Martin in Adelaide, 31 January 1890), the major abridgment took place immediately prior to the one volume 1891 edition. In a letter to the author of 9 January 1891 the publisher, in the interests of story line and local colour, suggested the excision of three chapters of metaphysics and virtually two about German socialism together with some smaller variations. Since Martin was hard to

contact (she was travelling in Europe) and was, in any case, averse to cutting, Bentley employed 'a literary critic of many years standing' and proceeded with the revisions along the lines suggested (letter to Martin in Antwerp, 14 April, 1891). [Source: *The Archives of Richard Bentley and Son 1829-1898*, British Publishers Archives on Microfilm, part 2 (Cambridge: Chadwyck-Healey, 1976-1977).] As a result, well over one hundred pages were cut, including the five complete chapters—vol. 1 chs. 5 & 6 on Catholicism and Kant respectively, vol. 2 ch. 8 on evolution ('metaphysical observations') and vol. 3 chs. 14 & 15 (German socialism). Other significant excisions occurred in vol. 1 chs. 8-22 (in 1891 chs. 6-16)—Stella's letters to her brother—and in vol. 3 ch. 13 (in 1891 ch. 53)—Stella's visit to some German socialist women.

- 3 The Author of 'The Explorers and Other Poems', 'Breaking the Law', *Observer Miscellany* 1878: 849-63.
- 4 The use of classical terms to epitomise colonial triumphs is not uncommon. For example, Kendall, writing on another public occasion, invokes the *Aeneid* in 'The Sydney International Exhibition' (1879) II. 178-203, where Troy is rejected for Rome as an appropriate symbol of Sydney, 'the City that our fathers framed' (Read 198).
- 5 Stella's letter of Easter Sunday from Blumenthal (Barossa Valley) is placed between a letter from Fairacre (North Adelaide) dated 14 March and two others, one (later excised) dated Easter Monday which refers to 'the shortening days of April' and a second from Fairacre dated 10 April written at least a week after her return. The only year consistent with this arrangement is 1888 when Easter Sunday fell on 1 April.
- 6 The same phrase occurs in Martin's *The Silent Sea* (1892: U of New South Wales, P, 1995), and the notion in 'An Idle Apprentice', *The Leader*, 18 December 1915.
- 7 Perhaps the ruin and the Virgilian prophecy (see above) are whimsical references to a passage in Frederick Sinnett's *The Fiction Fields of Australia*: 'Unless we go into the Aboriginal market for 'associations', there is not a single local one, of a century old, to be obtained in Australia:....It must be granted, then, that we are quite debarred from all the interest to be extracted from any kind of archeological accessories' (22-23). Sinnett, himself rather dismissive of 'archeological accessories', contends that 'the kind of novel we want to see written' is 'a picture of universal human life and passion, but represented as modified by Australian externals' (33). Martin took the former (if not the latter) aim to heart.
- 8 Martin's copy still exists among her books, heavily annotated and published at a time consistent with the Wainman's ownership.
- 9 For colonial artists' use of opposing images in the landscape, see Tim Bonyhady, *Images in Opposition: Australian Landscape Painting* (xii; 59).
- 10 An example of Martin's highly allusive style, like her unscrubbed references to Arnold's 'To Marguerite' (241) and Browning's 'The Last Ride Together' (393).
- 11 The *Aeneid* also juxtaposes West and East in a series of oppositions: control/loss of control; order/chaos; purposeful reason/quiescent drift. See discussion in Quint 21-31 of Virgil's depiction in the *Aeneid* Bk. 8.675-728 of the battle of Actium.
- 12 The felicitous phraseology is Graham Nerlich's in his unpublished Sir William Mitchell Centenary Oration at the University of Adelaide, 1995; Nerlich is contrasting meaning which is 'local and doubtless temporary' with theories like Hegel's which give cosmic meaning to human existence.