E. O. Schlunke, Angus & Robertson and the Making of Regional *Umwelt*

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> **region. 1** an area of land or division of the earth's surface, having definable boundaries or characteristics (a mountainous region; the region between London and the coast). **2** an administrative district esp. in Scotland. **3** a part of the body round or near some organ etc (the lumbar region). **4** a sphere or realm (the region of metaphysics). **5** a separate part of the world or universe.
> *Concise Oxford Dictionary.* 1964. 8th ed 1990[1]

> A regionalist, Schlunke has captured in his fiction the essence of the Riverina and central-western NSW—its sunbleached expanses of wheat paddocks and sheep runs, red-brown-soil, dusty townships and drily taciturn inhabitants, especially those of old German extraction. Sardonically humorous and slyly debunking in the "Steele Rudd" manner, Schlunke is also, in his later works, a social satirist. *Oxford Companion to Australian Literature* 610–11.

The Oxford Dictionary's definition of region (1964) is deceptively straightforward. While the term can be defined by such a geographical narrative, the *Oxford Companion* suggests a "regionalist" also "captures" a further "essence" characteristic of both human and other-than-human in a location. Together, these passages raise questions about the culture of regions in Australia; how independent or self-defining they have been; how co-existent with other regions and how regional literature might have been shaped through negotiations with the centre.

This essay first outlines some obstacles to regionalism, then offers an outline of the earlier history of the eastern Riverina of NSW, lifetime home of Eric Otto Schlunke (1906–1960) and the subject of his publications, before discussing regional specificity in one of his stories.[2] While the culture of Australian regions may be welcomed, there are obstacles in making it accessible to the centre. For example, the more distinctive the culture, expression or even geography of a region has been, the less easily can it be understood in already-used mainstream terms. Presenting it in pre-existing forms dilutes its specificity. In practical terms the centre, through its commercial and cultural dominance, may determine in what light a region is represented. These factors are shown through Schlunke's archival meta-texts, in the publicity, book covers and blurbs and surviving correspondence with his publishers. The negotiations of Angus & Robertson with the Commonwealth Literary Fund (CLF) also show that the publishers, in turn, were subject to federal government policy aimed at changing Anglo-Australian attitudes. While there is no suggestion that this change in public policy was anything but good, it is further evidence that perceptions of regional "essence" in the mid-twentieth century were not entirely the work of the region itself.

Makings of "The Riverina"

The Riverina refers to a region bounded or crossed by rivers; the Murrumbidgee and Kalari/Lachlan, the Murray and the Darling. The colonisers' name is thought to have been bestowed by John Dunmore Lang in the 1830s (Learmonth 452–53). It is part of the large country of the Wiradjuri people whose management of it created and sustained healthy "park-

like" grassy woodlands. From the 1820s the eastern Riverina country was invaded and subjected to the colonists' hooved animals, especially vast numbers of sheep (Gammage; Gilmore). The Wiradjuri people resisted the invaders' disruption of their management and occupation of the land, suffering intermittent and murderous aggression as a result. They suffered illness and premature deaths from hitherto-unknown diseases, losing control of much of their land to "squatters" who were permitted to set up huge properties for sheep and cattle.

In the later nineteenth century, overstocking and excessive clearing by the pastoralists made their "holdings" less profitable as did changing land laws (Muir.) The owners of the vast stations subdivided and sold the land, which brought greater populations of colonisers who now also farmed, ploughing then sowing the ground with wheat, oats and hay grasses, further clearing in their need to maximise wool- and food-production. Mary Gilmore (1865–1962), though less often treated as a regional writer, is most prominent among Schlunke's literary antecedents. Growing up immersed in the Wagga district, Gilmore returned often in essays, poems and letters to situating both the First Nations traditional owners and impoverished colonists in their parallel worlds, referencing ecological destruction as well as violence, dislocation and injustice, as she does in *More Recollections* for example.

The invaders steadily spread to the west of the Riverina, establishing the towns of Narrandera and Griffith and occupying the western plains to Hay, Nyngan and Condobolin. To recite such names is to call up other authors of the region; the best-known, Joseph Furphy (1843–1912), largely wrote of the western Riverina, using the names of real towns to orient the readers of his magnum opus *Such Is Life*.

The east includes the cities of Temora, Wagga and Albury where the second and more intense invasion included the community of German-speaking Lutherans who had left South Australia and "settled" across the eastern Riverina. These colonists constituted a distinct society dotted across the region, remaining distinct over the next generations. Schlunke was born into this community and farming life at Reefton, near Temora, a generation after Gilmore's firsthand knowledge of the Riverina and its mutually-exclusive colonial and regional specificity. Where her earlier work tended to focus on an implicitly-justified colonist, the later perspective treats "the blight of our being" (*Collected Verse* 10) intensely in such poems as "The Hunter of the Black" and "A Song of Swans" (8–10), raging at individual murderous colonists and their collective decimation of the natural world and its Aboriginal society.

Imagining Regional Specificity from the Centre

In 2007, Lyndon Terracini could write: "We are a diverse nation living in very diverse places and we make art, often in spite of where we live, that expresses the culture of our place" in his essay "Making Art Outside Metropolitan Australia" (1). In his role as producer, Terracini—at different times opera singer, founder of the Northern Rivers Performing Arts, Artistic Director of the Queensland Music Festival and Artistic Director of Opera Australia—valorised arts within communities as manifestations of their region. He saw local creations as able to identify characteristics and transform them into public performance. Made by and received within regions, they perpetuate both identity and community relations. He goes on:

> [E]very town and city . . . has not only its own history, but also its own individual culture. The opportunity to create work which reflects a local culture, the culture of particular places, has been a privilege and a most fascinating experience. (1)

He leaves the relationship with "metropolitan Australia" undiscussed. Aotearoa New Zealand theorist Stephen Turner, by contrast, argues the opposite view, for the difficulty of representing

"the reality of a lived experience of place" (219), precisely because of that history. For him, culturally and economically, the region can only be created in terms understood—because originating with—the metropolitan source, the ultimate imperial centre:

> [T]he pressures of colonialism itself, conceived as the operation of a metropolitan gaze, cannot be subject to representation. Such a society cannot by definition know itself in terms of its own making and must collude in the concealment of local truths. (221–22)

Turner goes to a further and practical reason—applicable to any of the arts—for the absence of that regional specificity celebrated by Terracini: "[I]deas and images of colonised space consolidate an internal history of place . . . at once produced and hidden by the economics of attempting to sell one's story to others" (220). Here he equates the metropolitan gaze with the requirements of metropolitan market forces in producing culture. Turner goes on to argue that it is market forces, originating in the imperial centre, that determine the discourse concerning a region. With this point, the possibility of representing the singularity of a region is placed under question: if the market has no appetite for the unique elements of a region, the region will be homogenised and difference unwritten or erased.

Turner's view of an ex-colony as a problematic space of irreconcilable knowledges echoes Mary Gilmore's assessment of nineteenth and early twentieth century Riverina Indigenous and colonial populations. For Turner, regional difference and the art created from it thus tend to be sacrificed in favour of pre-existing "ideas and images of colonised space [that] consolidate an internal history of place" (220). As a consequence, consumers of mainstream culture, whether readers of literature or viewers of performed and visual arts, are presented with a homogenised history and preconceived regional society. Turner's theme is the power of the commercial metropolitan centre but he is not alone in arguing that the arts cannot easily fulfil the function of identifying the region by its distinctive history. Other generalising tropes become attached to a geographical region instead. Rebekah Clarkson notes that short stories "concerned with region and place often play their own role in "local myth-making," a view supported by Victoria Kuttainen's analysis of their "supposed challenges to dominant cultural orthodoxies" in *Unsettling Stories: Settler Postcolonialism and the Short Story Composite* (98). After all, readers—largely metropolitan or at least reading *elsewhere*—construct this place in imagination from contemporary preconceptions, ideology and terminology. Turning now to literature, I reverse both Turner's and Terracini's perspective on cultural orthodoxies and the metropolitan gaze in favour of representations of the region from within.

E. O. Schlunke and the *Umwelt* of the Region

Schlunke's dedication to both regional writing and farming were creative, economic and emotional. With the exception of his scholarship years at Hurlstone, a selective agricultural boarding school in Sydney, his life was the place where he was born at Reefton and its surrounding district.[3] He became responsible as a young man for both his extended family and the productivity and welfare of the large farm. Those who live, depend and work on a farm integrate life, location and work, as Bella Bathurst outlines:

> [F]arming isn't the same as other jobs. It is the only profession in which everything is everything: history, identity, livelihood, direction, purpose, culture, money, sustenance, site of work and place of rest, unfinished business and last resort. (Bathurst 36)

Schlunke wrote about and from this farming state, emphasising his dedication to the representation of place and period. In 1954, he stressed this amalgamation in first pitching his writing to the Angus & Robertson Publishing Department.

> Most of these stories were written for the Sydney Bulletin during and after the war, and reflect conditions in the N.S.W. Riverina during that period. . . . All the stories are thoroughly authentic, the result of half a lifetime observation and experience, and were written to provide a wider interest and an escape from the ever present cares and responsibilities of running a sheep and wheat property. (ML MSS3296)

Writing of it both takes his region to others and assists his own wellbeing but there is a co-existence of subject, immediate place, and its representation that was not often found in regional writing of the mid-century. Federico Italiano terms this fusion "geopoetics":

> that particularly geographical consciousness, that territorial knowledge which is individualization of the nexus Man-Earth, as it emerges from literary texts, and that transcends every limiting frame of perception . . . it is the vibrating sensations of a subject who observes and lives his *Umwelt*, his own and real environment, rather than repeating the ornamental description of a static and codified nature as known from Greek and Latin poetry. (iv, 21)

Where Schlunke stresses his own "observation and experience" of the region, Italiano presents an existential state of individually gained "territorial knowledge" at a nexus (which I assume he intends to include "Woman" and "Man") with earth. Italiano argues that earth "lives" in a literary text in more than the naming of distinctive geographical features, making it possible to approach the "regionalism" of a short story as partly an emanation of the region itself. The *Umwelt* from which Schlunke wrote is an intimate state, the phenomenological coexistence of subject and world. Inseparable from existence itself, it "transcends every limiting frame of perception" which may be cultural orthodoxies or the unknowable colonial space outlined in Turner's discourse of imperialism. Italiano implies that earth also "lives" in a literary text in more than naming distinctive geographical features, making it possible to approach the "regionalism" of a short story as partly an emanation of the region itself. Making place, experience and existence inseparable, it abandons literary "ornaments" that overlay and "codify" a static nature with conventions. For Italiano these are known "from Greek and Latin poetry," but for the genre of regional short fiction in Australia in the late nineteenth to mid-twentieth century, the common ornaments were established by Steele Rudd and perpetuated by *The Bulletin* where most of Schlunke's early stories first appeared. While his tone is often ironic, his characters comic in their dealings with the world, Schlunke avoids such literary convention in his fiction: other-than-humans are participants as in Italiano's "subject who observes and lives his *Umwelt*, his own and real environment" (para 18). There are many horses, there are no heroic horses, horsemen or horsewomen, there are many recently arrived European colonists but no Australian pioneers, and as we shall see he explicitly resisted any comparison with Steele Rudd's comically hapless farming family and archaic Queensland farming practices.

Schlunke's technique for combining this state of being that includes both regional specificity and accessibility for the outside reader is seen in his short story "The Red-Shoulders." From the very title—the local name of a species of parrot—he uses ecological detail to distinguish the specific *Umwelt* of the characters while making it intelligible for the extra-regional reader. The central character is a teenaged boy, an obsessive bird- and nature-

lover, who knows the farm, his home terrain, intimately. The bird species and regional biota are presented in terms which, though general, are more specific than was Schlunke's habit in his farming stories:

> [The boy moved] on to the high, jutting ridge where the lichened rocks lay patient. He had everything taped, from micro-organisms to large, roaming animals; everything in the three-hundred-acre paddock, developing in nature's complicated interlocked pattern; his eager face took it all in . . .
> By the time he reached the overhanging edge of the valley the birds about him no longer noticed his approach; crouching quiet and almost indistinguishable among the leaves, they were giving all their attention to the greater menace below. (101)

> [There was a] parrot of tremendous energy and vitality; as quick to pluck, plunder and discard a blossom, as a finch in its twinkle-of-an-eye seizing, husking and swallowing of a millet-seed. Among the dark-grey foliage of the iron-bark tree he had momentary glimpses of a bright-green, red and yellow plumage; a bird about the size of a grey thrush or noisy miner (103).

It is a moment of dynamic containment, health and undisturbance—of both boy and birds—including the rare parrot—before the birds fall silent, alert to a "menace" which proves to be a poacher intent on trapping rare "Red-Shoulders" to sell as cage birds in Sydney. The man is tough and aggressive, unkind to the boy who assists him, yet an impoverished "battler" and the narrative ends with bird-loving boy and man momentarily reconciled by mutual love of the parrots.[4] That love ought to be universal, the text implies, and names Cayley's *What Bird Is That*, the popular pan-Australian ornithology published and republished by Angus & Robertson, as if hinting at the importance of knowing Australian bird species by their regional and scientific names, their distribution and their habits. Schlunke was not alone in his deliberate use of local names. The practice of applying Australian terms to largely unrelated objects was widespread in the 1940s and 50s, as George Main shows in his account of commercial farming in the eastern Riverina. Main suggests that the practice was for conservation purposes, but it also nationalised the nomenclature, distinguishing it from traditional names inherited from Britain, the metropolitan centre:

> After World War II, as agricultural systems intensified, wheat breeders in New South Wales named new wheat varieties after other birds threatened by broadacre farmland development: Rosella, Plover, Thornbill, Currawong, Pardalote, Babbler and Diamond-bird. In a similar fashion, oat varieties in southern Australia are named after native animals . . . Echidna, Bandicoot, Wallaroo, Quoll, Glider, Possum, and Bettong. (222–23)

Schlunke's other stories quickly dissolve the expectation that "regional" authenticity will be sustained by reference to unique biota and distinctive geography alone. The traits and habits of his characters instead establish a social authenticity after the narrative is clearly "placed': those in a rural context begin with a character pacing a farmhouse verandah or with emus between rows of wheat or opening a paddock gate on horseback. These settings are then fixed in Georgian labours of life and farming—ploughing, haymaking, land care, lambing—recognisable to a general reader. The tales set in towns and hamlets—which he almost always disguises under a pseudonym by contrast with Furphy's practice—are equally recognisable though by contrast with the "farm" stories they have strikingly little other-than-human life,

their interactions are entirely human and situated in the distinctive built environment of roads, shops and houses. Schlunke again asserted authenticity as established on his own observations and experience when he pitched a novel set in town to Davis: "There would be a lot of subsidiary characters, all the important men of the town, campaigners and so on . . . the political side would be very familiar to me because I have been more or less involved in local politics all my adult life" (6/12/54 ML).

Schlunke's Correspondence with Publishers

Individually published, many of Schlunke's regional stories had a paradoxical success in an international network. Throughout the 1950s the editors of the biennial anthology *Coast to Coast* included his stories first published in journals like *The Bulletin*. Some were further selected by publications and radio stations in Denmark, Italy, England, Yugoslavia and Russia, a transnational reach reflecting a major change in the post-war world. When Angus & Robertson accepted the selection that was to become *The Man in the Silo*, factors from far beyond the region were introduced. Books, like bags of wheat, have a context as well as content; commercially they are "nodes in publishing's network" (Grundy) and Schlunke's correspondence with Angus & Robertson shows a process of modifying an author's work to fit other priorities. The writer's perception of his scrupulously represented forms of regionalism was somewhat reconstructed by the publishers before the printing of his first collection (1954).[5] He wrote to Beatrice Davis:

> 29/11/1954
> About the jacket I haven't any definite ideas except that I'd object to a Steele Rudd character pushing a single-furrow plough. . . . A more or less abstract design, suggesting an interest in the more earthy aspect of human character ought to be suitable.
>
> [Pencil addition in another hand "Miss Hall Please return to Miss Morewith"] (ML 03824/21).

Davis interpreted his wishes in a formal note to Production:

> 27/1/55
> Memorandum to Mr Ingram:
> Schlunke: THE MAN ...
> Jacket design for the above
>
> Mr Schlunke's only comment about this is he did not want a derelict outback countryside shown, but rather a prosperous farming area. However he doesn't want anything too detailed or representative.

Is "a prosperous farming area" the same as "the more earthy aspect of human character" the author wished to foreground? Davis's attention is no doubt partly focused on retaining readers of traditional rural fiction while the author appears to envisage a modernist design that explicitly distances his work from the Steele Rudd tradition. The readership may not already be versed in the eastern Riverina but were to meet a version of regional Australian society that had moved from its dualistic squatters and battlers. It also appears to have joined a period of greater national humanity and empathy, signalled by the passing of Federal law to give Indigenous adults the right to register and vote in national elections, followed by the

referendum of 1967 which undid state governments' monopoly over policy concerning First Nations people. Long-term advocacy led by First Nations campaigners underlay the success of the referendum, yet there was also regional revision of stereotyping racism. The Wagga *Daily Advertiser*, for example, published a full-page and impressively detailed account of "the Waradgery," summed up as "a highly skilled, highly moral and well organised people" (5) by the writer, who was "Mr A. J. Grassby."[6]

Post-war Australia was ceasing to define itself as a British-oriented monoculture. The economy was in urgent need of an increased labour force. Unable to address the situation with English-speaking migrants alone, the Federal Government inaugurated policies designed to attract immigrants. The national population almost doubled with arrivals from Italy, Germany, Greece and eastern Europe, including refugees and people displaced in the long humanitarian crisis of the 1930s and '40s in Europe (Ward 275–77). Their acceptance and absorption into existing communities then became a government priority that was to be expressed in several forms, not least of which was encouraging literature as a means to widen sympathies while also lessening prejudice against pre-existing non-British communities such as Schlunke's own.[7]

This acceptance of newcomers appears to have occupied at least parts of the literary industry, as the background to one of Schlunke's "town" stories, "Assimilation," suggests. The story is about the experiences of a first-generation Syrian—not a recent immigrant—who is successful as a wool-dealer but is avoided by fellow-members of the regional city's clubs, by contrast with his son, who is embraced by both sexes because he is a champion sportsman. First accepted by *Meanjin*, its editor Geoffrey Serle wrote to Schlunke apologising for delaying its publication; fellow short-story-writer Judah Waten also wrote an even more topical story on the same theme (10 June 1957, 38 ML03824). The Commonwealth Literary Fund (CLF) was a second form of influence on the content of literature in this period. *Meanjin*'s decision may have been based on financial considerations as much as humanitarian principles: Angus & Robertson's acceptance of a first collection of Schlunke's short stories depended on receiving support from the Commonwealth Literary Fund (CLF).

Though existing since 1908, by the 1940s the CLF consisted of a parliamentary committee of representatives from all three political parties chaired by a nominee of the Prime Minister and assisted by an Advisory Board of writers and academics. Its scope had been recently expanded to include funding and underwriting projects associated with Australian literature (*Oxford Companion* 171–72). Jacqueline Kent, describing its funding of periodicals such as *Meanjin* in Davis's time at Angus & Robertson, notes the effects of

> the political ideologies of the time. Labor Prime Minister Chifley considered literary magazines to be elitist; not serving the mass of the people. Robert Menzies, leader of the opposition, was also dead against government money being spent on "elitist" [sic] individual enterprises (75).

Ongoing support of publishing by the CLF depended on nice political judgement in the Cold War Period's highly charged political atmosphere. In 1952, for example, W. C. Wentworth, notorious anti-Communist parliamentarian, attacked the Fund's Board, "for its leftist political affiliations" (Moran 5). The interest of publishers in the funding body was less ideological; Angus & Robertson succeeded in securing CLF underwriting for *The Man in the Silo* as it did for all three of Schlunke's collections. When Davis finally sent a draft of the blurb to Schlunke, he found himself defined as a farmer foremost, a writer not of a region but of a regionally unspecified but "authentic," modern, German-Australian farming community. The status accorded him was as an already-published writer, not of biosystems specific to the Riverina, but of diverse nationalities folded into the vision of a new rural Australia:

> E. O. Schlunke is a successful farmer, descendant of successful farmers and one of four or five most popular short-story writers in Australia today. . . . [H]e represents the present-day class of firmly established landholder, and his stories mark the distinction between the new, mechanised farmer and Steele Rudd's old cockie . . . the reader will meet here . . . characters . . . descended, like the author, from one of those groups of hardy German settlers who were among the first people to demonstrate that agriculture as well as sheep and cattle growing could be practised in the country. These Australians have a different and, for our literature, a fresh traditional attitude to the problems inherent in pastoral life. There are Italian prisoners of war who considerably enlivened the rural scene during the years of their Australian employment and whose blithe charm eventually endeared them to most of their exasperated employers. (ML 03824/93)

Several details stand out, including the social respectability of the "long-established landholder" with German heritage—a crop- and pasture-growing farmer—Australians nonetheless with both "fresh" and "traditional" attitudes assisted by the "blithe charm" of Italian prisoners-of-war. Not surprisingly, Schlunke thanked Davis: "I like it so much I propose to cull it for my epitaph; I could neither ask for more nor live up to it if you gave it" (24 June 1954. 03824/59).

Quite apart from their regional or literary status, Schlunke's stories served an ideological function in redefining the Riverina within a national vision of mutual acceptance, normalising its non-Anglo populations in names and sentences, plots and settings. Not only normalising: Davis seems to have selected stories for each collection to maintain the image of the quaint benevolence of the newcomers. She rejects a story in which (by contrast with the sweet "Muttie's Miracle" with its clever, chicken-hatching mother who brings the community together) a severe and unloving German woman repeatedly beats her small granddaughter. Davis reacts similarly in response to the outline of a confronting novel Schlunke proposed to call "The Intruder." Set in his Riverina in the late 1930s, it compares Lutheran authoritarianism with that of the Nazis. He pitched:

> [T]he scene [is] a farming community of German descent, bound to the soil by habit, technically quite efficient . . . but mentally inhibited by an early indoctrination into a religion which hasn't changed . . . since Luther invented it. The "pastor" and his "elders" exercise an unquestioned control which seems to be benevolent since no one ever thinks to question it.
>
> Into this set-up comes a modern young German, an engineer from a ship from which he has deserted . . . because he anticipates that Hitler will plunge Germany into destruction. (ML MSS 3296/51)

The young engineer arrives in the Riverina, is warmly embraced because of the old people's nostalgia for their German heritage and admiration for his work ethic; a farmer's daughter falls in love and marries him.

> War breaks out: the community fairly smothers the young man in their attempts to protect him, but his reaction is one of resentment. While Hitler is overrunning Europe he is overwhelmed by a terrible sense of losing his chance of sharing in the excitement.
>
> . . .

> At first his wife is the one to feel his resentment, she withdraws more towards her family and the faith of her community while he becomes hostile to them . . . The pastor and elders descend on him and are confounded to find that the terrors of hell-fire they wield over the rest of the community are quite ineffective on him. . . .
>
> While his wife's family wilt with fear of what is likely to happen, he jeers at them and makes his preparations for a desperate defence against the police . . . An attempt is made to seize him and hand him over, but he scares them off by showing that he will shoot any who lays a hand on him. As soon as the police appear he fires on them. He is killed in the fight. (ML MSS 3296/52)

Davis rejects it, firstly because of the affects it generates for herself which she attributes to its religious and ethnic content, and secondly because of her market: the reading public, she states, will not be attracted to its characters:

> I have been thinking over the outline plot of your proposed novel, "The Intruder," . . . and I must say I cannot feel very enthusiastic about it.
>
> At the same time I suspect this may be a purely personal reaction, because the narrowness of Lutherans I find oppressive, and I cannot bear vainglorious Germans; and I could not therefore feel that the fate of your central figure was a matter of great moment.
>
> Being practised in the humorous-ironic, and knowing your people and their background thoroughly, you could, I feel sure, handle the theme admirably. But it would not, in my opinion, be a very appealing theme unless you created a remarkable heroine genuinely in love with the intruder, to whom all this represented real tragedy. (19 March 1957 ML MSS 3296/51 and ML MSS 4585)[8]

Whether her response is personal or commercial necessity, the theme of a novel must be "appealing" in certain ways for publication. The pressure to continue to represent community and region in endearing terms appears to have become an increasingly frustrating constriction for the writer himself. In addition to his farm diaries and correspondence, Schlunke's archives include numerous manuscripts of stories, novels and plays, a number of them with settings other than the contemporary Riverina and its Anglo-German communities, that were rejected or unfinished. So closely identified as a regional writer,[9] efforts to find a publisher in Britain failed by contrast with other Australian authors such as Ruth Park.[10] His long correspondence about acceptances and rejections suggests not that he wished to continue in the same successful mode but that he wanted to break out of his accustomed style and regionalist categorisation because it limited his writing, income and reputation.

Schlunke's own life nonetheless remained inseparable from the immediate region, his "*Umwelt*, his own and real environment." He continued to correspond with Davis about writing and the natural world which were interdependent and inseparable for him.

> Reefton 1957
> We are having a scorching drought, with disastrous possibilities. I had been able to keep it in the background of my mind while I was busy with my novel, but now it has come out and hit me hard. There seems no possibility of rain, so the only thing I think of is to write another absorbing novel.

Conclusion

The literary imaginary of the Riverina region has been created not by texts alone but also by the inevitable engagement of writers within an economic and social system. Metropolitan entities in commercial and aesthetic webs of publishers, publishers' readers, reviewers and government agents all participate in changing orientations that are not only geographic but also commercial, national and political. Together they may have somewhat obscured the reality of a region but even Turner partially rebutted his view of the arts' inability to represent historical, colonial reality:

> The place that is lived-in and not just looked-at can never be absolutely erased from an image. . . . There is . . . a significant local truth about the conditions of the cultural topography, or peopled landscape, in a colonial setting. (226)

I have used the example of the eastern Riverina region and the life and writing of Schlunke to explore the interplay of centre and region in "regionalist" literature. Schlunke sought to present knowledge of his region in accessible forms of social and ecological narratives. His correspondence with Angus & Robertson, on the other hand, shows how contingent it may be on the priorities of the centre found in the input of the publisher and other entities. While not amounting to censorship, Beatrice Davis's judgement, estimation of success and her own literary preferences influenced which of his stories were accepted. The publisher's desire for funding from the CLF brought indirect pressure on Schlunke from the political centre, to convey the Riverina in the light of ethnic diversity and social cohesion, to cater to the tastes of a metropolitan readership.

NOTES

[1] I have chosen to cite this edition of the *OED* as it both reflects Turner's point and would be the version most likely consulted by writers and publishers discussed in this essay.

[2] I have discussed other relevant aspects of Schlunke's career and publications elsewhere, for example: Barbara Holloway, "Just Growing up in a Paddock: E. O. Schlunke and Modes of Relationship in Regional Literature." *JASAL*, vol. 23 no. 2, 2023; "Mixed Blessings: Narratives of Inheritance in Farming and Writing." *Australian Humanities Review*, no. 21, 2023.

[3] This was not literally true, as his correspondence and diaries show visits to his fiancée's township of Albury, absences for training during the Second World War and later, numerous visits to Sydney for holidays and to meet with editors and fellow writers, particularly Douglas Stewart, Norman Lindsay and Ronald McCuaig.

[4] Better-known as Swift Parrots, a "threatened" species 50 years ago, now classified as "endangered." First published by Angus & Robertson in 1931, *What Bird Is That* became a household staple, a copy of which had only recently been acquired by Schlunke when he wrote "The Red-Shoulders" (Personal communication with David Schlunke 30 September 2023).

[5] Three early novels had been serialised in the *Sydney Morning Herald* and *The Bulletin* while the Australian Broadcasting Company (ABC) regularly broadcast his nonfictional analyses of "life on the land" and concerns for the environment of the Riverina (*Oxford Companion to Australian Literature*)..

[6] Grassby's family was, like Schlunke's, not mainstream British.

[7] The community was strongly differentiated in the later nineteenth and early twentieth century; this was at first self-imposed by its strict and authoritarian Lutheran leadership. During World War 1 and the early 1920s, however, isolation was increased by local hostility toward those of German extraction, and by legislation incarcerating some members of the community and making schooling in German illegal.

[8] The work remains unpublished.

[9] Most contemporary reviewers termed Schlunke a regional writer whereas Bruce Bennett classified him, with Herz Bergner, David Martin and Mena Abdullah, under the subheading "Migration Tales" in his chapter "Politics, Location and Story-telling 1950–1970." Bennett's next category, "Regionalism and Beyond" includes only the Western Australian writer Peter Cowan—with whom Schlunke had often been compared—and Hal Porter.

[10] Park's novels quickly reached an overseas readership. The British publisher Michael Joseph put out *The Harp in the South* in 1948 and *The Witch's Thorn* a year after Angus & Robertson's publication. Doubleday NY published *Serpent's Delight*, Ballantine and Dell Paperbacks accepted the later *Swords and Crowns and Rings*. See Roger Osborne "A Versatile Career: Ruth Park's Novels in the American Marketplace." *Ruth Park*, special issue of *Australian Literary Studies*, vol. 39, no. 2, 2024.

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