

# Literary Journals and Literary Aesthetics in Early Post-Federation Australia

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The first decade after Federation saw the establishment of a significant number of new Australian literary journals and magazines. *Steele Rudd's Magazine* began in 1904, lasting for three years and then resurrecting itself several times over until the end of the 1920s. C.J. Dennis's South Australian journal the *Gadfly* also lasted for three years, from February 1906 to February 1909. Journals like these were in one sense off-shoots of the *Bulletin*, creating alternative literary spaces not only for *Bulletin* contributors themselves, but also for a newer generation of aspiring writers (and editors) who had come to regard the *Bulletin* as limited in its range. Even A.G. Stephens—editor of the *Bulletin's* 'Red Page'—had set up a different journal, the *Bookfellow*, to provide what AustLit calls a 'sophisticated alternative.' (Stuart Lee in the *ADB* calls it a 'small, dilettantish magazine.') It ran for a few months in 1899 and then, when Stephens actually left the *Bulletin*, it started again in 1907 and lasted into the 1920s. Norman Lindsay went on to celebrate a number of *Bulletin* personalities in his book, *Bohemians of the Bulletin* (1965); but he, too, sought out alternative publishing venues: setting up the short-lived *Rambler* in early 1899, for example. The most significant literary journal of the decade was J.F. Archibald and Frank Fox's Sydney-based *Lone Hand*, which began publication in May 1907 and claimed high levels of circulation: around 50,000 for the first few issues.

Writing about the *Bulletin* poet Hugh McCrae, Lindsay remarked: 'The *Lone Hand* came at the right time for both Hugh and myself. It gave us a chance to have our works produced in a decent format, and that has a great deal to do with inspiring works' (Lindsay 125). The view that alternative literary spaces were needed even for *Bulletin* contributors themselves had been around since at least the end of the 1890s, with the demise of influential journals like *Cosmos* (May 1899) and *Southern Cross* (November 1900). The *Australian Magazine* lasted only a few months, from March to September 1899. One of its editors was Arthur Jose; in *The Romantic Nineties* (1933), Jose recalls 'a motley collection of artists and authors'—like George Lambert, Roderic Quinn and Christopher Brennan—who were instrumental in getting this journal underway: 'In those days the *Bulletin* was the only vehicle for their wares, and it did not welcome what they believed to be the best of their stuff' (Jose 4). The short, intense life of the *Australian Magazine* is in sharp contrast with the sheer longevity of the *Bulletin*, one of many casualties of a boom-and-bust literary economy. 'It died in September,' Jose writes, 'amid the hilarious laughter of its parents' (5).

So at the moment of Federation—and following in its wake—just when the nation brings its colonies together, there is a splintering of literary activity across a number of journals that fragments, or perhaps continues to fragment, any received sense of what constitutes a national literature. The literary magazine in this instance claims a relative autonomy for itself, distanced from larger, nationally representative projects, an obvious example of which is the *Bulletin's* slogan 'Australia for the Australians'—which became 'Australia for the White Man' under James

Edmond's post-Federation editorship in 1903. Smaller literary magazines can also distance themselves from mainstream literary discourses, a point that is often made about the early modernist magazines circulating in Britain and the United States around the same time: as Eric White notes, 'the predominate feature of the little magazines in the rise of literary modernism was their ability to catalyse and sustain the production of avant-garde artworks and specialised discourse networks' (White 1). In Melbourne in the first decade after Federation, a further suite of new little magazines appeared that seemed to encapsulate exactly these formations: creating alternative aesthetic spaces for *Bulletin* contributors and a number of other writers, many of whom, like the journals themselves, have long since faded into obscurity. The distributor and publisher Thomas C. Lothian had premises in Elizabeth Street and Little Collins Street. Lothian was already networked into local literary and academic circles, and was a member of the Australian Literature Society, founded in 1899. But as a publisher, he came to encourage a raft of emergent, socially and aesthetically progressive writers who helped to reconfigure the received literary canon. In 1906 he published his first original Australian book, the radical Irish socialist (and *Bulletin* contributor) Bernard O'Dowd's *The Silent Land and Other Verses*, following this with O'Dowd's *Dominions of the Boundary* (1907), John le Gay Brereton's *Sea and Sky* (1908), and Emily Robb's *Jetsam* (1908), amongst other collections of new Australian poetry. During this time, Lothian also published three important literary journals, each of which took local literary writing in new directions: the *Native Companion* (January–December 1907), *Trident* (May 1907–April 1909) and *Heart of the Rose* (December 1907–October 1908).

We want to look at these three journals alongside some other little magazines that also sprang up in Melbourne during this decade. The *Microbe* was a small, hand-printed journal published from November 1901 to August 1902 by Alfred Dickson and Frank Wilmot, lasting for just eight issues. Wilmot was part of a literary circle that included Hal Stone, another author/publisher/editor who went on to form the 'Waysiders,' a literary group who collaborated on a number of stylised amateur journals including *Ye Kangaroo* (1902–1905), *Ye Wayside Goose* (1905–1906) and, in 1912, a single issue of the *Red Ant*. Sydney Partridge, who was married to Stone, was involved with these journals and published one of her own, the *Daisy* (February 1907), which also lasted for just one issue. Stone's publishing house, the Wayside Press, in fact printed a number of issues of Lothian's *Native Companion*. His little magazines—he called them 'journalettes'—developed a 'quaint,' faux archaic aesthetic that rejected nationally representative vernaculars, consistent with its 'amateur' status. In fact, they cultivated their amateurism as a way of marking out a distinctive position in the post-Federation literary field—which they might invest in, defend or argue about, depending on the case. The second issue of the *Microbe* remarks, 'The Sydney "Bulletin", grown fearful at the advent of another rival in the field, characterized our first issue as "obviously" amateur. Well, so is the "Bulletin!"' These journalettes don't just provide alternative literary spaces to the *Bulletin*; they are explicitly *anti-Bulletin*, especially in relation to literary tastes. The *Microbe* dismisses a contribution precisely along these lines: 'Too vulgar—try the *Bulletin*.' Stone's *Ye Wayside Goose* in fact printed a long diatribe against the *Bulletin* that ends with this reaffirmation of its amateur status: 'Finally, Frank Wilmot writes for the *Goose* cheerfully without money and without price, while Mister [A.G.] Stephens [editor of the *Bulletin*'s Red Page] grows facetious at the union rate of £1 per col.'

Lothian's Melbourne journals were less overtly antagonistic to the *Bulletin*—not least because they shared some of the same contributors—but they were just as clear about the distinctive

aesthetic space they wanted to inhabit. The first issue of the *Native Companion* opens with an essay by its editor, Bertram Stephens, titled ‘Genius and Australia’:

Alongside of the Bush school is an independent group whose work shows hardly any local influences at all. The writings of [Victor] Daley, [Roderic] Quinn, [George] Essex Evans, [J.B.] O’Hara, [Christopher] Brennan, [John le Gay] Brereton, [Sydney] Jephcott, [James] Hebblethwaite and others form just as important and quite as large a part of recent Australian verse as the purely Bush literature. They have not been led away by common obvious themes, nor have they strained after ‘local colour. (6)

In fact, this minor canon of late colonial male poets—although it’s important to the *Native Companion’s* aesthetic reaction against ‘local colour’—was already circulating through the *Bulletin* anyway: this is where many of these writers published their earliest works. But when E.J. Brady took over as editor with volume two, in August 1907 a very different canon began to emerge, and the magazine itself was significantly transformed.

Carol Mills makes this point in her 1999 introduction to the journal when she notes, ‘Volume one of the *Native Companion* looked like a late nineteenth century literary periodical. Volume two, from August 1907, was a child of the twentieth’ (1): when it shifts from D.H. Souter’s linear cover design (Fig 1)—with its isolated figures: the man reading alone by candlelight, the solitary bird in the forest—to Ruby Lindsay’s more fluid, feminine, silhouetted flock (Fig 2) and Blamire Young’s flowing scene (Fig 6) which shows its native companions nourished by a feminine figure from classical myth. Mills regards Brady as ‘clamorously nationalistic’ but she also situates the journal in the framework of its bohemian social networks (with contributors meeting at Fasoli’s restaurant in King Street), and characterises its alternative literary position in typically mainstream terms: ‘At times,’ she writes, ‘volume two was self-conscious of its separation from the popular herd, and could be precious’ (4).

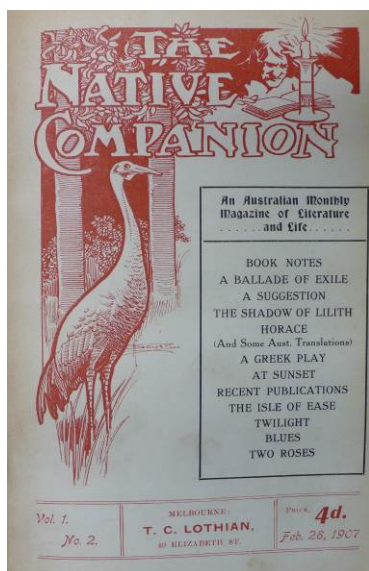


Figure 1.



Figure 2.

Brady encouraged the publication of short lyric poetry—from Brennan, Brereton and Roderic Quinn—that contrasted with the more robust, masculine poetry of the nationalist tradition. And he also drew together a group of newer women writers, whose work gave the *Native Companion* a feminine aesthetic more attuned to emergent forms of literary modernism, consistent with those later cover designs by Lindsay and Young. The *vignette* becomes an important form here: stories by Mabel Forrest, Sumner Locke, Beatrix Tracy, B. Cecil Doyle and also Sydney Partrige provide brief glimpses into a character's consciousness, rendering intensely-felt emotions and embedding themselves in the particularity of their setting (which may or may not be Australian). It is now generally well known that Katherine Mansfield published her earliest works in the *Native Companion*, three stories under her own name and one signed as 'Julian Mark': four very short stories in total, including 'Vignettes,' set in London, and 'Silhouettes,' set in New Zealand, in which a young woman gazes out of her window, 'seized by a passionate desire for everything that is hidden and forbidden.' Mansfield's stories help to open up the connections between colonial identity and literary modernism in the *Native Companion*. Indeed, this journal, we want to argue, enabled a local modernist aesthetic to develop a couple of decades before the usual points of origin ascribed to Australian modernism by literary commentators (see, for example, David Carter's essay on the Adelaide-based little magazine, *Desiderata*, which began in 1929: see Carter 85–98).

Mark Williams has read Mansfield's *Native Companion* stories as *precursors* to literary modernism, as if they speak to literary debates a decade earlier: 'the vignettes' he writes, 'were decidedly fin de siècle in style and tone; for Mansfield at this time meant Oscar Wilde and the Decadents, not the cultural nationalism and anti-imperial sentiment of the 1890s in Australia' (257–58). But Mary Ann Gillies has given Mansfield's *Native Companion* stories a more emergent role, affiliated to trends in European modernism. (Two years later Mansfield would publish much longer, discursive stories in Alfred Orage's influential literary magazine, *The New Age*.) Gillies also sees these early *Native Companion* stories as stretching modernism's reach back into the antipodes: 'The vignette or slice-of-life story format,' she writes,

is one of the most important means used by Mansfield to represent the female perspective . . . In the process of depicting these intense moments, Mansfield not only creates new spaces to represent women's experience, but she also makes use of her New Zealand life, translating it in ways that extend modernism beyond its Anglo-European boundaries. (255)

We want to suggest that the vignettes published in the *Native Companion*—not just by Mansfield, but also by Mabel Forrest, Beatrix Tracey, Sydney Partrige and others—sit somewhere *in between* the influences of fin-de-siècle decadence and newly emergent European modernisms. They evoke a nascent aesthetic modernism that turns away from the bush, allowing us to contrast the vignette as primarily a feminine, metropolitan form with the masculine provinciality of the *sketch* so ubiquitous to a range of Australian literary magazines at this time, like the *Lone Hand* and, of course, the *Bulletin*. Having said that, we must also note that writers such as Mabel Forrest, Sydney Partrige and even Mansfield herself also *contributed* to those other magazines (Mansfield published a short poem in the *Lone Hand* in October 1909). It is not as if the *Native Companion* was alone in its commitment to a nascent modernist aesthetic, in other words; and writers were versatile, adapting their literary forms to suit the temperaments of different journals. The situation in Australia in fact resembles Elisa Grilli and Evangelhia Stead's account of French

little magazines during this period” *La Plume* (1899–1906), for example. There was, they note, ‘much migration across magazines’; ‘relationships established within and between magazines became a marked feature of periodical culture and the general artistic field in the 1890s and 1900s’ (Grilli and Stead 84–85).

Thomas Lothian’s investment in specialized literary journals was certainly risky, and none of them lasted for more than two years. *Trident* (Fig 3) at first seemed to be secure, anchored to the English, French and German departments at the University of Melbourne, under Walter Murdoch’s editorship—and with an interest in humanities education, in pedagogy, and so on. But in the May 1908 issue, Murdoch recognised the danger of tying a journal to high-minded literary (and pedagogical) ideals, and sought to open *Trident* up to a broader range of literary interests. ‘To begin with,’ he wrote, ‘it will be noticed that we are no longer trilingual, or even bilingual. *That* experiment we have definitely put behind us . . . we have decided that *The Trident* is not to be, any longer, a magazine for specialists.’ Murdoch wanted to take *Trident* ‘in the direction of a general Australian Review,’ but in fact, the focus on French, German and English literature remained and was reaffirmed when another lecturer in English at Melbourne, Archibald Strong, took over as editor. The desire to engage more widely with local public affairs was hampered by its close connection to university life, and its European focus prevented it from developing a distinctive Australian identity—even though its contributors included Vance Palmer, Hugh McCrae, John le Gay Brereton and Bernard O’Dowd, who writes an essay on ‘Art and Sanity’ (discussing Max Nordau and Bernard Shaw) and contributes a poem, ‘Australia Mavourneen,’ that plays out a genealogy of European mythical traditions and then turns towards a romantically-conceived Anglo-Irish Australian future. (The refrain is ‘Australia mavourneen, my heather, my rose!’) The editorial in the final issue of April 1909 is a pragmatic, almost cheerful response to the journal’s inevitable collapse:

After the month *the Trident* will cease to appear. It is sorry for its subscribers, against whom its only complaint is that they are so few in number. It is sorrier still for the great majority who might have been expected to buy and read it but have never done so. To the one class it extends its thanks, to the other its compassionate forgiveness. It bears practically no malice, and dies well pleased on the whole with everybody, including itself.

The third Lothian little magazine, the *Heart of the Rose* (Fig 4) is also short-lived, just four issues, each published as a limited edition of 500 copies. But it embraces specialisation by producing a kind of radical aesthetic autonomy that depends on the formation of a new—or intensively *re*-newed—national literary canon. For Stuart Sayers, the *Heart of the Rose* was ‘a remarkable publication, lavishly produced, but too precious to survive’ (32): that word *precious* (which Carol Mills had used above to describe the *Native Companion*) suggests something at once rarefied and narcissistic, ill-suited to the pragmatics of literary production. *Heart of the Rose* was edited by William Mitchell—Sayers calls him ‘a minor poet and aesthete’ (32)—and was intensely influenced by French symbolist poetry and by the role of the poet-prophet, with one issue introduced by an extract from William Blake’s *Milton*.

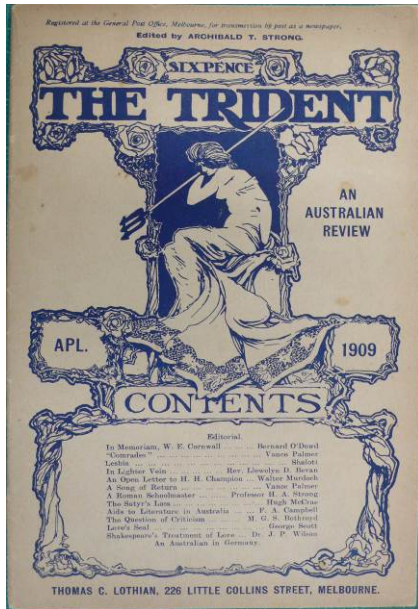


Figure 3.

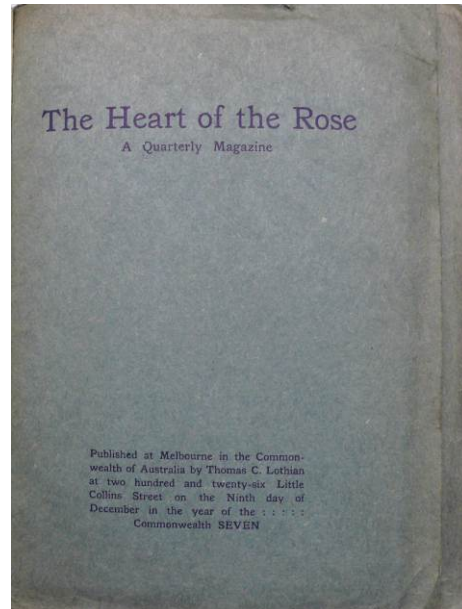


Figure 4.

The first issue concluded with Nettie Palmer's translation into prose of Paul Verlaine's 'Ars Poetica' (1882); the fourth issue translated a poem by Rimbaud, and Archibald Strong contributed essays on Swinburne and Baudelaire—downplaying the decadence of the latter and talking up his Symbolist aspects. Helen Hewson has recently described John Shaw Neilson's 'encounter' with Nettie Palmer's translation of Verlaine in this journal; she also notes that French symbolist poetry circulated through other Australian journals, including the *Bulletin* and Stephens' *Bookfellow*. But the *Heart of the Rose* internalises these influences—stripping them of their playfulness and mockery—and then uses all this as a way of fabricating a revived national literature that is able to speak to an international literary scene. Bernard O'Dowd's long prose piece in the first issue, 'Morgana Mine and Other Realities,' is a manifesto for the journal's poetic vision of Australia, drawing directly on Verlaine's image of the poet as a spirit of the air. It describes a meeting between the author and an unnamed woman in the centre of Australia, perched on top of Chamber's Pillar and looking out across the sky. O'Dowd offers a delirious, panoramic vision of a country that is literally possessed by its poets, whose spirits seem to flow through the places they inhabit. As it does so, it creates a unique literary canon that the journal then absorbs into itself, allowing the *Heart of the Rose* to produce a kind of indexical relationship to the landscape, and to a national literature:

[H]ere surely is the Olympus of the Australian dispensation, where the gods we make by our virtues and our powers shall abide and cherish us for ever. [Frank] Myers and his friends prefer Riverina; [Sydney] Jephcott and his need the ripple and roar of Kosciuskan waters; [Frank] Williamson (one of the petals of our own Rose, we hope, and one who will be found very near the heart itself), clings with his blue-eyed friend to the opalescence over Matlock [River]; Roderic [Quinn] and Victor [Daley] and Chris [Brennan] . . . float faithfully, as an efflorescence of its subtler glory, over the blue and gold and sunshine of Sydney; [Adam Lindsay] Gordon, almost as a volcano cloud, hovers over Gambier; Kendall wafts to grave [James]

Hebblethwaite at Georgetown his preference of Araluen [the name of Kendall's daughter, who died in infancy, the subject of his 1879 poem; but also a place-name and a river in NSW], even over the Tiers [Tyers River and Lake Tyers are in southern Victoria] and the Derwent and Wellington [rivers in Tasmania and Victoria]; while Jessie Mackay, queen of the Southern Alps . . . signals us all that her Evarra dare not be ignored.

Jessie Mackay was a New Zealand poet who was published by Thomas Lothian; this last reference is to Kipling's poem 'Evarra and his Gods,' about a character who makes idolatrous images. Poetry is given this role broadly speaking in the *Heart of the Rose*, tied to creation myths and to the poet as a god-like or transcendental figure. The nationalism of the journal is thus both exact (poets are local, tied to particular places) and amorphous, already shaped by French symbolist imagery and then made to radiate outwards as a kind of free-floating global and trans-historical effect. Part of this effect involves imagining Australia as a kind of arcadia that was already lodged deep inside the European imagination, something that Ian Mclean argues in *White Aborigines: Identity Politics in Australian Art* (1998) was the outcome of a denial of actual colonial conditions:

Australian subjectivity is founded on age-old Western figures of otherness—the most significant being the notions of the Antipodes and an austral utopia. This gives Australians a perverse claim to being European. Indeed, a common strategy of Australians who fear their perverse origins is to read the metaphors of an Antipodes and a southern utopia back into classical texts. (8–9)

The playwright Louis Esson was a contributor to the *Heart of the Rose*; he had recently returned from Europe, spending some time in Paris and meeting W.B. Yeats in Dublin. Later on—in 1921—Esson wrote, 'I have always looked on Mr. Yeats as the High Priest of Literature' (Fitzpatrick 31). In a long piece for the *Heart of the Rose* called 'Terra Australis: Fragments of a Conversation,' Esson introduces three characters—the stranger, the mystic and the host—in a setting that recalls the stock location of those familiar bush nationalist sketches: 'the hut, lazy creek.' The stranger is a newcomer who thinks that Australia has no local culture, no history. But the host insists that Australia is a kind of attitude, a vernacular condition that all great writers around the world instinctively share, including Verlaine ('Michael Angelo, Wordsworth, Blake, and Paul Verlaine, Whistler and Norman Lindsay—they are all very patriotic Australians'). The mystic agrees, unleashing Australia into exactly the sort of global, trans-historical literary archive that Ian McLean has described:

Australia is not . . . restricted by geographical boundaries. She is everywhere, in America, India, Italy, ancient Persia, in modern Ireland, too; Greek philosophers dreamed of her, meditating in the Academe, in painted stoa, in the garden of Epicurus—and Indian teachers under the bo tree—and prophets who 'dimly taught in old Crotona.' William Morris, who was a seer, found Terra Australis in Chaucer's England. Spanish captains like [Vasco Nunez de] Balboa and Ponce de Leon and De Quiros sought her overseas; and the world to-day still strives to pluck out the heart of her mystery. Terra Australis beckons at the sliprails of the Imagination, promising but to the rebels a fresh perception of beauty, an unblazed track to truth.

The influence of French symbolism on Australian poetry usually finds its origins in Christopher Brennan, who wrote for the *Heart of the Rose* and a range of other journals including the *Australian Magazine*, the *Bookfellow*, and the *Bulletin*. Brennan gave a series of lectures in Sydney on French symbolism in July 1904; and of course, he had corresponded with Stéphane Mallarmé, whose work he venerated. Recent books by David Brooks (2011), John Hawke (2009) and Katherine Barnes (2006) have all identified symbolism's influence in Australia with Brennan, emphasising in particular the link to Mallarmé. For Paul Kane, this makes Brennan unique, but it also makes him a liability for the local poetry scene: 'in the global economy of influence' he writes, 'Brennan is a free trade advocate, willing to finance an imbalance of payments—where one imports more than one exports. Brennan has no desire to protect fledgling industries at home (young poets) from the multitudinal dumping of foreign giants of mass production (European romantics and symbolists)' (78). Putting aside Kane's conflation of symbolism, romanticism and mass production, this remark effectively isolates Brennan from a local poetic economy that he actively participated in: as one contributor among many others to the *Heart of the Rose*, for example (which drew on Verlaine, Rimbaud and Baudelaire—but not Mallarmé). The *Heart of the Rose* was another 'free trade advocate,' but it also wanted to use the influence of French symbolist poetry as the means of reshaping—and redefining—an Australian literary canon, at least at the level of rhetoric. It was an Australian little magazine that allowed itself to imagine that it was powerful enough to radiate its own influences back out to Europe.

The *Heart of the Rose*'s investment in Australian literature as a globalised, trans-historical object of reverence and desire also meant downplaying decadent literary influences, as we noted with Archibald Strong's essay on Baudelaire. The move towards Federation brought with it a rejection of the despondency and melancholy of the bush nationalist tradition and encouraged a sense that Australian literature—in order to have universal appeal—should be positive, active, outward-looking. This journal gives us an early manifestation of a newer, vitalist tradition in Australian literature. But this meant that even though its contributors were influenced by (for example) French symbolist poets like Paul Verlaine, they were obliged to distance themselves from a Europe now seen to be derivative, and in decline. Louis Esson's mystic says: 'The old worlds . . . lose touch of reality. Their pulse grows feeble: they repeat only the thoughts of their ancestors, living at second-hand. Australia feels the life-giving Sun in her blood.' The investment in vitalism after Federation has been well chronicled, reaching its apotheosis in Tom Inglis Moore's *Social Patterns in Australian Literature* (1971). Inglis Moore had talked about the 'earth-vigour' of Australian writing in strongly masculinist terms, even recuperating Henry Lawson into this tradition by pushing aside Lawson's melancholic reputation to speak instead about his 'characteristic vigour' and so on. For Inglis Moore, 'There has been no period of decadence. Australia may still be an empty land, but so far it has not become a "Waste Land." The national vigour runs too strongly for worlds that go out with a whimper' (293). But the *Heart of the Rose* has a residual investment in decadent tropes like the occulted bush, and in religious mysticism and orientalism. Some of its contributions populate the bush with Euro-mythological creatures like R.B. Arden's 'The Undine of the Creek,' which presents a doomed erotic encounter between a white water nymph lifted from European legend and an Aboriginal man, merging western mythology with an appropriated concept of 'alcheringa.' Occulted dying race narratives like this sit alongside the vitalist repopulation of the bush as a kind of hybridised space—the home of what Inglis Moore called the 'Austral Pan,' for example, a place inhabited by satyrs, sprites, and anthropomorphised animals. These are narratives that are simultaneously fin-de-siècle and post-



Federation, harking back to (for example) the work of the early modernist Australian artist Sydney Long, whose 1898 painting *Pan* (Fig 5) was, as Denise Mimmocchi writes, ‘aligned with the spirit of Stéphane Mallarmé’s faun; the Symbolist poetic embodiment of bucolic liberty and erotic frisson that saw Pan and his pagan flock recur as fin-de-siècle emblems’ (111). Long’s earlier painting *The Spirit of the Plains* (1897) may also have influenced the later cover designs by Ruby Lindsay (Fig 2) and Blamire Young (Fig 6)—ten years later—of the *Native Companion*: which shows us how fin-de-siècle tropes continued to circulate through the post-Federation cultural scene.



Figure 5.



Figure 6.

If we move now to the other Melbourne-based journals—Alfred Dickson and Frank Wilmot’s *Microbe* (Figs 7 and 8) and the various ‘journalettes’ edited by Hal Stone—the first thing worth noticing is that they have no investment in the idea of a national literature: they never invoke its pre-Federation traditions and they don’t imagine, or prophesy, its post-Federation future. Unlike the *Native Companion* or *Heart of the Rose*, they also never attempt to turn their contributors into a literary canon. John le Gay Brereton wrote some poems and contributed a story to the *Microbe*, but the journal did not capitalise on Brereton’s literary reputation or invest in his lyrical bush pantheism. In fact, it rejected a later contribution from him on sheerly practical grounds: ‘Excellence of sketch is undoubted, so too is it’s [*sic*] length for it would monopolise all our space.’ These are locally-produced journals—the *Microbe* was published from a house in Laura Street, East Brunswick—but they are not interested in developing any distinctive connections to place. They are aspirational, elitist and universalising; at the same time, they casually reflect on their own minor, peripheral status, accepting their inevitable failure with a kind of resigned good humour. Philip Mead has noted that Frank Wilmot ‘was associated particularly with the Melbourne nationalist school of writers—Bernard O’Dowd, Louis Esson, Frederick Sinclair, and Vance and Nettie Palmer’ (5)—writers who had all contributed to the Lothian journals, the *Native Companion*, *Trident* and *Heart of the Rose*. There is, however, no sign of this nationalist

school in Wilmot's journal, the *Microbe*. Mead also quotes Wilmot reflecting on his aspirations as a journal editor:

If there has been a lodestar in my life, it has been the idea of controlling, editing and publishing a first-class literary periodical, a journal that paid its contributors liberally, that selected its material severely and made no compromise either with contributors or the public. (4)

But the *Microbe* didn't seem to share this ambition.

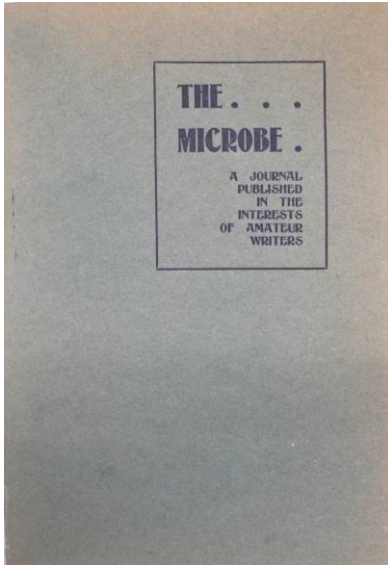


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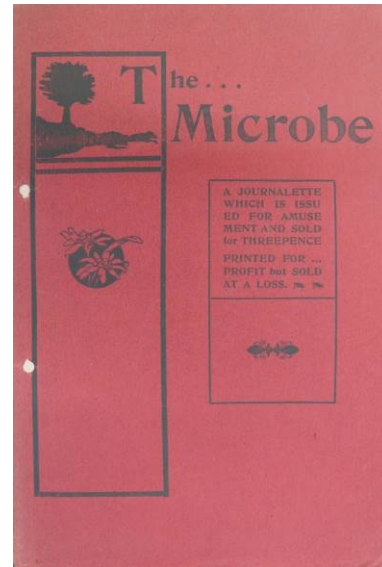


Figure 8.

In an early editorial, the name of this journal was cast as a more or less arbitrary decision: 'There is no reason given herein for the journal having the above title. It is merely a fancy, and as fancies seem to be all the rage just now we dare say you will fall in with our idea.' In a subsequent edition Wilmot added, 'There is no danger of any contributor being paid.' The *Microbe* certainly positioned itself against the *Bulletin* as an alternative literary venue, but as we have noted this is articulated almost exclusively in terms of taste. The only sustained critique in the *Microbe* is of A.G. Stephens' book of poetry, *Oblation* (1902), provocatively illustrated by Norman Lindsay, which the *Microbe* regards as too sensual, and 'vulgar'—an example of what it called 'erotomania.' This is also the only time the *Microbe* invokes Australian literature as a category. Stephens is cast as a 'devoted priest to a goddess of Australian literature, a goddess for whom he has toiled wonderfully and well; and yet as an evidence of his adoration, he blots her face like this'; and the review continues, 'we resent this blotch on the face of a delicate literature whose constitution can't withstand it.' This is the opposite of the 'earth-vigour' and vitalism found in *Heart of the Rose*, and it is also a rejection of European-influenced decadence. But there is no over-arching aesthetic here, outside of a commitment to higher literary values—something the *Microbe* sardonically rehearses in its final notice: 'To our generous correspondents, the public and the world: This organ of culture and advanced ideas herewith takes up its hat and passes out into the deep, dark night. If our aesthetic audience will allow the term, we go absolutely and

irretrievably BUNG. We wanted assistance and it came not, we went out on the highroad and called for literature and the housewives ran out with penny novelettes.'

Frank Wilmot contributed poetry to Hal Stone's 'journalettes,' *Ye Kangaroo* (Figs 9 and 11) and *Ye Wayside Goose* (Fig 10) and was one of the 'tribe' of Waysiders, a loose confederation of authors, printers, type-setters and artists mostly based in Melbourne; *Ye Wayside Goose* describes (and mythologises) them as 'a Tribe of Literary and Art Enthusiasts, who are banded together for the purpose of Worshipping Nature, Loving the Beautiful, & Breathing God's Pure Air.' But they didn't really pursue the idea of a pagan bush teeming with otherworldly spirits, and they weren't really advocates of 'earth-vigour' either. The October 1905 number of *Ye Kangaroo* lists Frank Wilmot as a 'maker of pictures'; Wilmot also produced the cover design for the July 1905 issue ('drawn on zinc'), one of many covers that doesn't actually feature a kangaroo.

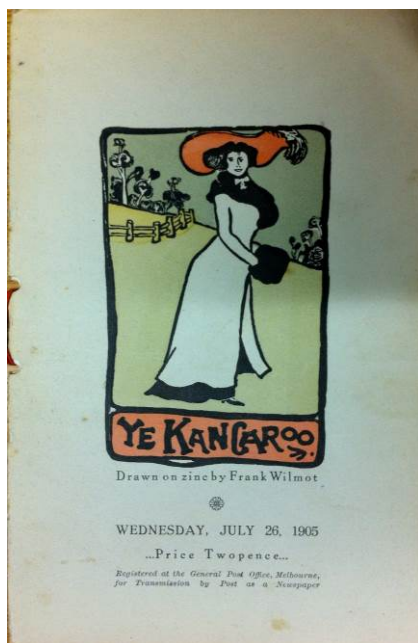


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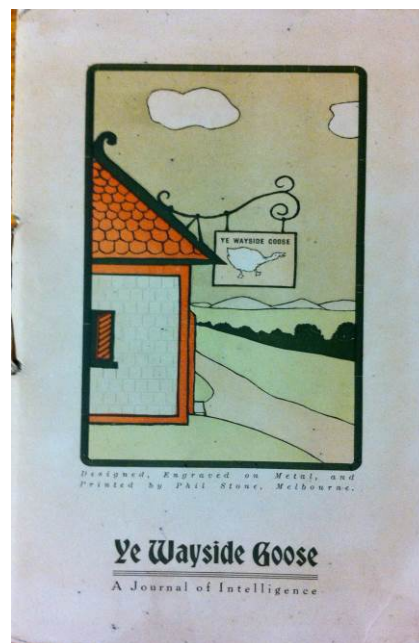


Figure 10.

Philip Mead notes that Wilmot was a supporter of 'informal "guilds" of handcraft workers (like backyard, handset printers) against the deadening middle-class of "wowsers, bourgeois" Sabbatarian Melbourne' (Mead 8). These journalettes in fact embraced handcrafted aesthetics, influenced by the arts and craft movement which had arrived in Australia at the beginning of the century. Production values outstripped content here, with specialised typographies and hand-made, coloured prints, each page carefully framed so that the layout itself becomes conspicuous. Produced mostly in home studios in Fitzroy, Carlton and Brunswick (a few issues were printed elsewhere, in Launceston or in Sydney), both journals invested in a particular kind of counter-cultural amateur disposition, partly reflected in their emphasis on decoration and ornamentation. The May 1905 issue of *Ye Wayside Goose* includes a transcription of an address to the Waysiders by John W. Tucker, president of the Australasian Typographical Union, which lends support to their project: 'One of the objects for which you are banded together,' he tells them, 'is "to love the beautiful".' The Waysiders are invigorated by this advice, which removes their amateur

aesthetics from the professional domain and sanctifies it. ‘He urges us to continue on purely amateur lines,’ the article says, ‘and to keep ourselves free from the corrupting effects of the filthy lucre.’

We have already noted the way these journalettes had staked out their opposition to the *Bulletin* as an example of the mainstreaming, and the increasing professionalisation, of Australian writing. Wilmot had fallen out with A.G. Stephens, and the *Microbe* was particularly critical of the *Bulletin*’s claim on the national literature. In response to a negative review of *Ye Wayside Goose* in the *Bulletin*, Hal Stone also weighed in to the dispute. In his article, titled ‘A Blood-Red Pagan of the Syd. *Bulle.*’ (a play on the title of Stephens’ famous *Red Page*), Stone wrote:

Mister Stephens, of the Syd. Bulletin, smote the Goose hip and thigh, wiped the blood from his pagan pen, then laid down beside a mulberry tree and slept . . . if the contents were Awful, well, then, the *Bulle.*’s must also be—which they are at times, especially when it runs amok on iguana-swallowing yarns. Surely we Australians have some sense.

But as with the *Microbe*, this is one of only a few moments when this journalette addresses the nation at large. Mostly, its focus—and the same is true of *Ye Kangaroo*—is on the minor, the ephemeral, the idiosyncratic. They never attempt to assemble a nationally representative canon; and yet—if we think of Frank Wilmot here, or Sydney Partrige—some of the contributors could well be seen as participating in the kind of nascent Australian literary modernism that we’ve been describing. One of the few regular contributors to *Ye Kangaroo* and *Ye Wayside Goose*, who is completely forgotten today, is B. Cecil Doyle. The journalettes valorise her partly because she was also involved in amateur journal production. The April 1905 issue of *Ye Kangaroo* notes that

*Bralgah*, issued by Miss B. Doyle, on the border of Queensland, ‘midst the dust, flies and drought, is a journal so nice and full of dream pictures that I feel it a real literary loss to the A.A.P.A. [Australian Amateur Press Association] to see it issued as a manuscript journal instead of printed.

It looks as if *Bralgah* (an Aboriginal name for the ‘native companion’) really has been lost; so have other amateur little magazines mentioned elsewhere in *Ye Kangaroo*, like the *Sundowner* or the *Little Vagabond*. So this journalette makes space for even more minor, precarious publications than itself. Doyle’s contributions to *Ye Kangaroo* included a whimsical series of dream visions, where a narrator finds herself in a dark forest or gazing out to sea, and experiences some kind of inner reflection that re-establishes her connection to nature and the cosmos. Doyle’s collection of poems, *Myall Leaves*, was published in 1910 by Sydney Partrige, who by this time had set up her own press. These are writers who support each other’s work at local levels; Partrige published a collection of her own stories, *Life’s Wallaby*, in 1908. But Partrige also published across a wide range of journals, including the *Bulletin* and some of the newer journals from this decade, like the *Lone Hand* and *Steele Rudd’s Magazine*, which had serialised her novel *Rocky Section: An Australian Romance*, and then published it in novel form in 1907. Doyle’s literary career was similar in kind, publishing in these amateur journalettes but also in the *Bulletin* and the *Lone Hand*, as well as the weekly *Australasian*, to which she contributed a series of short stories under the general title, ‘Vignettes.’ This is where nascent modernist imperatives have the potential to cross over into mainstream publishing frameworks in Australia: as we have

noted, these realms are not always mutually exclusive. *The Heart of the Rose* emphatically embraced an Australian literary canon with a renewed sense of purpose, consciously (or, rhetorically) setting itself apart from the broader literary scene. *Ye Kangaroo* and *Ye Wayside Goose* also carve out a kind of sequestered literary space, but only by virtue of their adamantly minor, amateur disposition.

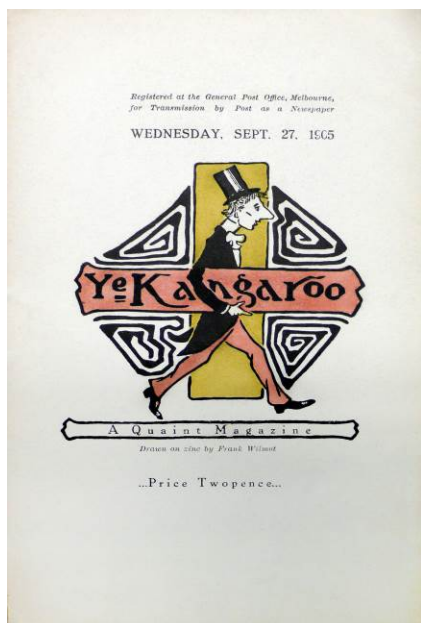


Figure 11.

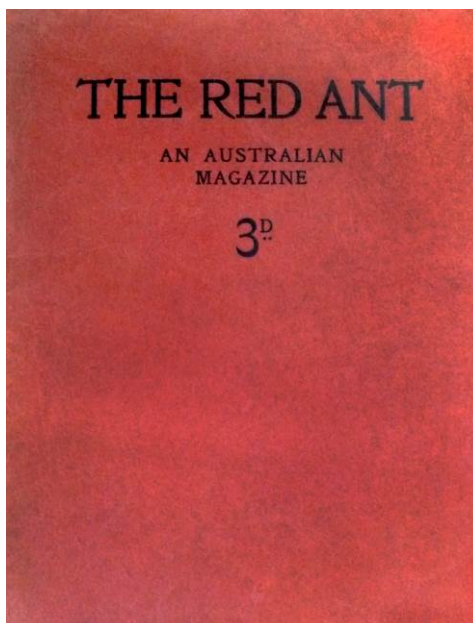


Figure 12.

Hal Stone went on to publish several other journals in the next two decades, the most significant of which was the *Red Ant*, which appeared early in the next decade, in 1912, published out of Sydney and lasting for just one issue. The subtitle is *An Australian Magazine*: this is a bid for national appeal (compare *Ye Kangaroo's* subtitle: *A Quaint Magazine*), with much less emphasis now on hand-printed decorative flourishes and amateur dispositions. The contributors included Sydney Partridge, Mary Gilmore and B. Cecil Doyle—whose story, ‘A Drought Vignette,’ continues the vignette form by evoking a fleeting moment of consciousness in the mind of a dying animal. Another contributor was Leonora Polkinghorne, who had written for the *Waysiders’* journalettes under the name ‘Cecil Warren’ and had collaborated with Sydney Partridge on a settler romance serialised in the *Leader* and the *Western Mail* in 1907. One of her contributions is a poem, ‘The Incomprehensible,’ which parodies the investment that earlier Australian journals, like *Heart of the Rose*, had made in European occult mythologies and literary traditions:

You may master your Browning, with outside assistance;  
 Of Plato drink deep; conquer Goethe’s resistance;  
 But in reading of ME you gain nought by persistence.  
 High Priest of the Occult!  
     Mere man and woman  
 Are far ‘neath my notice  
     Too grossly human!

Banshees and fairies and spirits of wood,  
 Gnomes, elves and Titans of vale, hill or flood,  
 Sprites, naiads, pixies best suit my high mood;  
 I would NOT stoop to REAL things, e'en if I COULD!

Polkinghorne's poem, for now at least, marks an end-point to the decade's infatuation with Euro-pagan mysticism: it is as if the *Red Ant* wants to normalise the Australian literary economy all over again, bringing it back to earth (i.e. back to Australia). But of course, the kind of elitist literary dispositions the *Red Ant* now begins to disavow in fact turn out to have a much greater longevity than any of the Australian little magazines we have talked about in this article.

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