Sydney or the Bush: Some Literary Images

It has frequently been observed, as something paradoxical, that although Australia from the 1890s was one of the most highly urbanised countries, its literature appeared to be preoccupied with the countryside. This 'paradox' was noted by contemporaries as well as by later commentators. In his introduction to *Australian Writers* (1896) Desmond Byrne asked whether local novelists 'who find so little material in Sydney or Melbourne' had seen what Henry James and W. D. Howells had done with their cities, and Byrne quotes the *Australasian Critic* in 1890 for the view that English readers of Australian fiction must form the impression that 'big cities are unknown in Australia'. In his *Victorian Cities* (1963) Asa Briggs makes a similar observation that 'at a time when the "muckrakers" were exposing the evils of the American cities ... Australian interests were diverted from the city altogether', and gives as his chief example the work of Henry Lawson.[1]

Yet the reality for Lawson and his generation was more complex. Although in the legendary nineties there was much writing about the bush, some of it romantic and escapist, many writers were also recognising the challenge of the city. For Lawson and others of that generation there was a choice, or a tension, between the societies of 'Sydney or the Bush'. This protean phrase sums up the opposing models available to those who asked where civilisation was going in this country, what sort of people Australians were becoming. One model, the bush, was receding, the other, Sydney, was advancing disturbingly. Just as urban civilisation was to dominate rural, so the focus of urban civilisation itself was shifting to Sydney—which was assuming the role previously played by

1 Asa Briggs, *Victorian Cities* (Odhams, London, 1963), p.301.

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'Marvellous Melbourne', and becoming the largest, most progressive, and culturally dominant of the colonial capitals, the image and reality of the metropolis.

Here, as elsewhere, the modern city was a new environment and experience. As Asa Briggs also observes, the rapid urbanisation of American and Australian populations at the turn of the century raised the same questions as it had in England in the 1840s, where the phenomenon first occurred: 'What shall we do with our great cities? What will our great cities do with us? (p.75). Rural nostalgia was only one expression of this concern in the writing of the 1890s. Another was the attempt to find imaginative means of engaging with the seemingly unengageable mass existence of the city—the faces in the street by day; at night the larrikins and their doxies, made more bizarre and threatening by gaslight; the unemployed dossing out on the Domain, or down by the docks.

It is a truism of Australian literary history that writers, like the painters having to develop a new palette to depict the landscape, had to discover the forms and the diction, the conventions, to render the different environment and experience of this country. In the closing decades of last century, the modern city also demanded the adaptation of traditional conventions and the creation of new forms and images. In this period, the responses to and literary images of Sydney which predominate in the writing of this century began to emerge. How much these were based on observation of the actual city, and how much influenced by responses to the 'City' already established elsewhere—in Dickensian, modernist, or social realist conventions, for example—varies considerably from writer to writer. Yet, whether presented as a social issue, or as the local manifestation of a universal cultural tension between country and city, past and present, 'Sydney or the Bush' is a recurring if changing theme in the work of major writers in this century.

Here this theme is traced over almost a century, from the emergence of the modern city in Australia, and its reflection in literature, to the present. The sheer volume of imaginative writing set in Sydney precludes any attempt at inclusiveness, and only the most familiar works which can be associated with the city will be referred to. Considering them in terms of attitudes they reveal towards Sydney might seem quite incidental to their author's artistic concerns; yet what emerges suggests that the images of the city these writers have formed are by

no means unrelated to their imaginative perceptions of life.

The varied writings of Henry Lawson contain a range of responses to the cultural dilemma of 'Sydney or the Bush': recoil from the city as the focus of modern civilisation, escape from it into an idealised pre-industrial past, or a coming to terms with it by relocating that past within the city itself. Lawson had come to Sydney from the Mudgee area as a youth in 1883. He had risen before dawn to work as a carriage hand, seen the unemployed searching the 'Wanted' columns outside the *Herald* office at four in the morning, seen the slums and the poor, and began to write about the faces in the city's streets, the slum-dwellers, larrikins, and prostitutes, as well as about the representatives of another culture 'up country'. His earliest memories went back to the last of the goldrushes, which he associated with Eureka and the movement to unlock the land; yet, as the elder son of a selector, he knew that those days when the world was wide were over, and that any radical impulses would have to come from the anonymous faces crowded into the city's streets. His coming to the metropolis after his childhood on a selection, and encountering the depression of the early 1890s was a personal experience of the major socio-economic developments and cultural divisions of the period. As the imaginative historian of Australia's transformation from a predominantly rural to a predominantly urban-industrial nation, Lawson saw the choice between an alienating, dehumanising city, in which physical and moral growth was stunted, and the countryside which bred madness, violence, and despair out of loneliness, but which could, ambiguously, also allow a dignity and warmth in human relations lacking in the city:

> Nearly every man the traveller meets in the bush is about as dirty and ragged as himself, and just about as hard up; but in the city nearly every man the poor unemployed meets is a dude, or at least, well dressed, and the unemployed *feels* dirty and mean and degraded by contrast—and despised.
>
> ('Dossing Out' and 'Camping', *Bulletin* 1893)[2]

2 Henry Lawson, *Complete Works*, I, p.303. Subsequent volume and page references, included in the text in parentheses, refer to this edition.

Among Lawson's earliest stories is the Arvie Aspinall sequence in which he seeks to bring his experiences as a carriage hand together with his sympathy for the newly discovered class of young urban manual workers. By common consent the result is sentimental, but the stories suggest the problems of adapting a literary model to observed socialreality. There seems little likelihood Lawson was aware of such contemporaries writing in English about the modern city as Gissing, Dreiser, or the Crane of *Maggie*, but one model he had from the earlier English experience of urbanisation was Dickens. A Dickensian element is apparent in Lawson's stories about city life from this early sequence, through his mature work, as in 'Mr Smellingscheck', to the late 'Elder Man's Lane' series. The urban setting in each case is not so much an observed Sydney as a literary extension of Dickens's London, a city-scape that could equally well be located in any centre of exploitative capitalism. The influence of established literary modes on his early attempts to respond to urban life can be suggested by another example, said to have been written in Surry Hills but, with its delineation of 'marks of weakness, marks of woe', essentially another version of Blake's 'London':

> They lie, the men who tell us in a loud decisive tone
> That want is here a stranger, and that misery's unknown;
> For where the nearest suburb and the city proper meet
> My window-sill is level with the faces in the street—
> Drifting past, drifting past,
> To the beat of weary feet—
> While I sorrow for the owners of those faces in the street.
>
> And cause I have to sorrow, in a land so young and fair,
> To see upon those faces stamped the marks of Want and Care;
> I look in vain for traces of the fresh and fair and sweet
> In sallow, sunken faces that are drifting through the street—
> Drifting on, drifting on,
> To the scrape of restless feet;
> I can sorrow for the owners of the faces in the street....
> ('Faces in the Street', *Bulletin*, 1888; I, p.48)

When, before the turn of the century, Lawson locates his image of the city—the focus of economic forces asserted against the humanity

and individuality of his characters—in a specific Sydney its centre is Paddy's Market. In 'If I Could Paint', published in the *Bulletin* in 1899, he depicts the Markets as the centre of working class life:

> Paddy's Market, Saturday night—a world of types, humour, pathos, and tragedy there. The usual haggard-featured, temper-and-voice-spoilt mother, going from one entrance to another of the markets: a boarding-house keeper, with two or three grown-up, white-shirted, stand-up-and-turn-down collared (mother does all their linen herself) straw-hatted cigarette-smoking sons (boarding at home and paying twelve or fifteen shilling a week) aping men-about-town in King Street to-night. She has the ordinary load of Sunday-dinner stuff on one arm, and a great, peevish brat on the other, two or three trailing behind, or hanging on to her skirts. She turns sharply, at last, goaded to it, and says: "Be quiet, blast yer! (that I should say such a thing) where am I to get hokey-pokey money from?" I'd like to paint her and the children—and the "nan-nan" sons—hurrying past in the background. I'd call it "Nit! There's Mother". Where was she to get hokey-pokey money from? ... And in the face of Mother Grundy and to the advancement of Australia, the slums—there are miles of 'em now—and the poor of Sydney; the interiors of brothels (where little girls keep the door when "Aunty" is at the pub, or too drunk), and Chinese dens (for European and Australian types as well as Chinese—the variety of types and feminine beauty would surprise you a bit, I reckon). The Patrol of the Prostitutes at night in Elizabeth, Bathurst, College, and Hunter Streets; splendid types, some of them, and there is plenty of street light to allow of effect. Our civilisation has advanced so that these are no longer shy of light and crowds. (I, p.577)

In his unfinished autobiography, Lawson remembers Paddy's Market as about the only place he would go to on Saturday nights in his teens, and recalls again this figure of the harassed mother, an urban version of The Drover's Wife or Mrs Spicer of 'Water Them Geraniums'.

The market on Saturday night is also the focus for the critical depiction of Sydney as the centre of capitalist civilisation in William Lane's ironically entitled *The Working Man's Paradise* which, set

during the shearing strike of 1889 and 1891, appeared in 1892, the same year as Lawson's first urban stories. Lane's observer is a bushman on his first visit to Sydney, who is appalled by the misery he sees in the crowd of faces in this Temple of Mammon, spending their weekly earnings to survive another working week, and by the prostitutes, larrikins, and drunkards in the streets surrounding the Markets:

> All around were like this. All! All! All! Everyone in this swarming multitude of working Sydney. On the faces of all was misery written. Buyers and sellers alike were hateful of life ...
>
> The women, the poor women, they were the most wretched of all; the poor housewives in their pathetic shabbiness, their faces drawn with child-bearing, their features shrunken with the struggling toil that never ceases nor stays ...
>
> It seemed to Ned that here was collected, as in the centre of a great vortex, all the painted and tired and ill-fed and wretched faces that he had been seeing all day. The accumulation of misery pressed on him till it sickened him at the heart.

Like Lawson, who appears in Lane's novel as 'Arty, the people's poet', Lane also seizes on a single figure to establish sympathetic contact with the crowd, a blind girl who is singing for alms:

> It was a hymn she sang, an old-fashioned hymn that has in its music the glad rhythm of the revival, the melodious echoing of the Methodist day. He recollected hearing it long years before, when he went to the occasional services held in the old bush schoolhouse by some itinerant preacher. He recalled at once the gathering of the saints at the river; mechanically he softly hummed the tune.[3]

Out of context, these echoes from 'the old bush school' might sound a nostalgic harking back to an earlier, more innocent way of life that might still be discoverable outside the city. In fact, the novel explicitly

3 William Lane, *The Workingman's Paradise* (1892; facsimile edn with an introduction by Michael Wilding (Sydney University Press, Sydney, 1980) pp.36–38. See Wilding's introduction for a detailed account of Lane's involvements and influence.

rejects such sentimentality at its literary (and for Lane, personal historical) roots in English provincial life, and sees Sydney as the centre of the exploitative capitalism that is dominating the whole continent. The alternative to this City of Dreadful Night lies in the future, in the revolution that such misery must occasion.

The City of Dreadful Night is less an image of Sydney than it is the writers' perception of a disturbance in society which stirs in them deep, ambivalent, feelings. This way of seeing the city presupposes an observer who is sympathetically concerned with humanity but who simultaneously feels cut off from the crowd. The people are seen as dehumanised by misery and vice; they are as figures glimpsed in a nightmare, the unnaturalness of their servitude accentuated by artificial lighting. The observer can only translate them back into human terms, identify himself with them empathetically, by singling out a single figure—Lawson's mother or Lane's blind girl—and by engaging imaginatively with this individual; the mass are lost, unengageable. For all the realism in the writing of these examples, they are as much an expression of attitudes against the city, and the civilisation it incorporates, as many a modernist poem, and for the good reason that Lawson and Lane are responding to the same social developments and personal anxieties as writers who were beginning to adopt quite different stylistic modes.

By 1894, only a couple of years after Lane's representation of Paddy's Market as a centre of exploitation and vice, Christopher Brennan (born and reared in that same Haymarket area) began writing the verses which would grow into the elaborate sequence of *Poems [1913]*—in which any representation of urban life seems far removed from Lane's or Lawson's.

> The yellow gas is fired from street to street
> past rows of heartless homes and hearths unlit,
> dead churches, and the unending pavement beat
> by crowds—say rather haggard shades that flit
>
> round nightly haunts of their delusive dream,
> where'er our paradisal instinct starves:—
> till on the utmost post, its sinuous gleam
> crawls in the oily water of the wharves;

where Homer's sea loses his keen breath, hemm'd
what place rebellious piles were driven down—
the priestlike waters to this task condemn's
to wash the roots of the inhuman town!—

The explicitly sought epic associations and the flitting Dantesque shades make apparent that this is not a particular late Victorian city but the City in history, and western literature—the fallen state of man, the obverse of the eternal Edenic state of innocence. The next poem, which speaks of 'London or Tarshish, Rome and Paris' reinforces this. Whatever the city, or whenever its period of cultural ascendancy, the emphasis is on its unnaturalness, its desolation (the familiar, paradoxical sense of isolation within a multitude), and on its nightmarish dehumanisation. This second poem, 'Ah, who will give us back our long-lost innocence', speaks of the cities as belching 'their sodden dreams of empire, lust and blood'.

As accommodation within the city, within civilisation and time, is impossible, the seeker after eternity becomes an outcast, the Wanderer:

When window-lamps had dwindled, then I rose
and left the town behind me; and on my way
passing a certain door I stopt, remembering
how once I stood on its threshold, and my life
was offer'd to me, a road how different
from that of the years since gone!

His road is Dante's *cammin di nostra vita*, a metaphor for life; and while the poem is sufficiently specific and personal in tone to suggest the poet's own experience, it is enhanced by its traditional, and general metaphoric implications. The 'town' of the poem is an image of that social conformity which the romantic spirit revolts against everywhere, in every age.

There is a deliberate specifying of setting in the Epilogue titled '1908' —'The droning tram swings westward'. As the poem after which is written 'EXPLICIT 15 December 1913', it is a summation of the themes of the *Poems*, but its 'I' is more personal and localised. The experience described is a tram ride from the city to the university in mid-winter dusk, a journey between two spires, one the university tower, the other identified by A. R. Chisholm in his introduction to

the *Verse* (1960) as old St Benedict's, which used to front George Street.[4] The journey allegorises Brennan's early life in terms of remembered landmarks: his passing from the 'long-lost innocence' associated with the church to his later search for Eden associated with the tower of 'hermetic thought'. The stated intention of this epilogue is to establish some identification or sympathetic relationship with the people in the streets, to recognise that all men are in search of spiritual solace:

> their fellow-pilgrim, I must greet
> these listless captives of the street

Yet 'listless captives' hardly assists in establishing the proclaimed identification, nor does seeing them as 'pavement thralls' and observing the 'dark crowd's dreary loitering' assert sympathy. The 'lampions' orange blaze', the 'electrics' ghastly blue' and 'the gin-shop's ochrous flare' (*gin-shop's*?) are, for all their anachronistic and literary flavour, at one with the attitudes soon to be expressed by T. S. Eliot's 'Violet Hour': the saddened recognition of the artificial injection of excitement into drab lives after dusk. Brennan's lights image the 'bright banality' between these lost, deluded souls and the night in which they 'flit'.

More interesting, though, than the consistency of Brennan's attitudes with the modernist image of the city as a nightmare vision of hell is their consistency also with those of Lawson and Lane. Despite the obvious differences in levels of literary sophistication—Brennan was well aware of the French symbolists who influenced modernism in English, and his poetry is transitional between a full-blown romanticism and a disillusioned modernism—Lawson and Lane in their more realistic modes were responding similarly to the city. More fundamental than aesthetic or stylistic predilections were shared assumptions about the unnaturalness of life within it.

A different response emerges in Lawson's work after the turn of the century, and his personal and artistic decline. Although his later writings are inferior, they are interesting in terms of his response to the form of civilisation that has emerged as dominant in the new century. He idealises the country communities of the past, which he had previously presented

4 A. R. Chisolm and J. J. Quinn, eds, *The Verse of Christopher Brennan* (Angus and Robertson, Sydney, 1960), p.4.

with an unillusioned realism, and, in a similar way, comes to terms with the city by relocating the pastoral past within it. His Sydney is no longer centred on Paddy's Market and representatives of the working class; it becomes more fragmented, local and personal. He writes of his experiences in courts, prisons, and hospitals, of the areas in which he lives and their local eccentrics and non-conformists, including himself. Still referring often to Dickens, he adopts a very Dickensian recourse in the 'Elder Man's Lane' series, and writes of pockets of humanity within the otherwise unengageable city. There are urchins with hearts of gold, and Benno the bottle-o who, like Wemmick in *Great Expectations*, devotedly cares for his aged P. One especially Dickensian story, 'I'll Bide', is about a Miss Havisham type household tucked away in the suburbs. It is kept by a woman awaiting the return of her lover who went, many years before, to the goldfields. One day he returns, only to find the house has been demolished for a development. This theme of the passing of time and the loss of a more romantic past to the mechanised present sums up Lawson's preoccupation in his late writing. The young poet who had lamented the passing of Cobb and Co. coaches and crowded diggings, finally comes full circle to celebrate the picturesque Sydney of his youth, with its horse-drawn traffic and tall-masted ships at the Quay that had then seemed to him the City of Dreadful Night.

Recoil from the city, the desire to retreat from it, or into a community that is in but not of it, persist as basic responses in later writers. These are more responses to an image of civilisation than they are to Sydney in itself, yet, by definition, imaginative writers will engage us more by their larger responses than by the accuracy of their topographical, architectural, or other descriptive observations. A different response, which could be seen as latent in Lawson's acceptance of and identification with the viewpoint of his 'low' characters, is a version of pastoral in which the urban poor and working class are seen not as alienated—and certainly not as alienated from the author and his implied audience—but as true folk with their own manners, morals, customs, rituals, and folkways, as traditional peasantry relocated in inner suburban villages. The obvious danger with this mood is that the writer, in avoiding a distanced and patronising sympathy for the masses, will lapse into sentimentality and assume that his folk are more 'real' and 'natural' than

the middle classes who have lost contact with the roots of life, have grown too effete to share the rude pleasures of the poor.

As twentieth century writers were attracted more frequently to urban subjects, the grey dehumanised crowds of the city were differentiated, socially and geographically, and associated with recognisable sub-urban cultures. The larrikins, who provided one set of images for disturbed and uncomprehending reactions to urban change in the late nineteenth century, became increasingly a subject for examination. Ambrose Pratt's *The Great Push Experiment* (1902) capitalised on fears that the larrikins constituted an organised threat to civilised society by sensationally depicting a 'push' as a crime syndicate. A more understanding interest in the 'pushes' is found in the foreword to Edward Dyson's *Factory 'Ands* (1906), a collection of stories mainly from the *Bulletin*, which in its first years had crusaded against larrikin behaviour and found itself involved in a libel suit. Dyson anticipated some of the success C. J. Dennis's Sentimental Bloke was to enjoy, and *Factory 'Ands* was followed by two further collections. Although in his foreword Dyson reveals a sympathetic understanding that the larrikins were more often urchins and street Arabs than psychopaths bred by industrialisation, the stories themselves imply an amused detachment from the ungrammatical prattling of his characters and the workers are seen as traditional, low comic figures.

In *Jonah* (1911), Louis Stone came to an imaginative and unpatronising understanding of the urban working class life and the larrikins. The novel opens with a description of Saturday night in Waterloo, pay night and shopping night. As in Lawson's and Lane's descriptions of Paddy's Market on Saturday night, the weekly shopping provides a means of engaging with the faces in the street. In *Jonah* the custom is described as if it is almost a pagan ceremony, with overtones of the sacrifice and the hunt; and this pattern in the people's lives also provides a pattern in the novel about them, for Stone returns periodically to such scenes in establishing the rhythms of their lives. Stone is a deft realist who works through character and situation, rather than documentation, to reveal the manners and morals of the inhabitants of Waterloo and the surrounding inner industrial suburbs. With a skilful impression of following the hazards of fortune, he shows us the contrasting lives of two larrikins, Jonah and Chook, as they graduate from the 'push' to marry and make their way in the world. The contrast

in their fortunes—Jonah's rise to prosperity but personal disappointment, and Chook's contentment with his humble lot—has its share of melodramatic excess (with Jonah) and sentimentality (with Chook). But even if somewhat schematic, the contrast brings out the predatory nature of the economy in which they live—to succeed Jonah must destroy others, and himself, in the process. For this urban peasantry, life is a struggle to survive not against nature (there is nothing about the seasons or the added adversity of winter which one would expect in a European or American urban novel) but against economic circumstance. Without didacticism, Stone presents the proletariat's own view of these circumstances: they are shown as unconscious of capitalist oppression; they see themselves simply as the poor, who have always been so and always will be. Their class enemies are not 'the rich', who are remote and shadowy, but the shopkeepers, whose ranks Jonah eventually joins.

The basic rhythm of the novel is that of the generations: the larrikins and their doxies rebel against conformity and monotony; courtship, marriage, parenthood (not necessarily in that order) follow; and then a slow sinking into the pattern of their parents' lives before them. This timeless pattern reasserts itself in each generation, as in novels of rural life, and the true pastoral note is hit by Mrs Yabsley when she regrets the passing of the good old days:

> Suddenly she felt old and lonely, and wrapping a shawl round her shoulders, went out to her seat on the verandah. It was near eleven, and the street was humming with life. The sober and thrifty were trudging home with their loads of provisions; gossips were gathered at intervals; sudden jests were bandied, conversations were shouted across the width of the street, for it was Saturday night, and innumerable pints of beer had put Cardigan Street in a good humour. The doors were opened, and the eye travelled straight into the front rooms lit with a kerosene lamp or a candle. Under the verandah at the corner the Push was gathered, the successors of Chook and Jonah, young and vicious, for the larrikin never grows old.[5]

5 Louis Stone, *Jonah*, (1911; Angus and Robertson, Sydney, 1965), p.149. Subsequent page references, included in the text in parentheses, refer to this edition.

Although in her old age Mrs Yabsley sentimentalises the past in comparison with the present (which bears a strikingly cyclical similarity to it), Stone is unsentimental in his attitudes to the city. In *Jonah*, there is no idealised rural alternative to long for, at most a ferry trip to the north shore, and his characters do not constitute a pocket of humanity in retreat from urban anomie, but live at its centre, and accept it as their engageable community and environment. Paddy's Market is not an image of exploitation and degradation but a colourful festivity to mark the end of the working week; the eye of the observer is not that of an alienated author but of young Chook. The Markets contain 'the drift and refuse of a great city'; this time though it is not the shoppers who are being referred to but the treasure troves of second hand goods. The shoppers move 'like water in motion', but instead of Lane's 'vortex' of human misery they are enjoying themselves good-naturedly (p.69).

Stone uses the Sydney setting more imaginatively than simply observing the ways of life in the slums around the footwear factories, and contrasting these with the more gracious life harmonised with nature on the other side of the Harbour. When Jonah breaks out of the constraints of the inner suburbs and, on the north shore, declares his love for Clara, Stone uses the city to express Jonah's emotions:

> They had talked for half an hour, intent on figures which Jonah dotted on the back of an envelope, when they were surprised by a sudden change in the light ... The sudden heat had thrown a haze over the sky, and the city with its spires and towers was transformed. The buildings floated in a liquid veil with the unreality of things seen in a dream. The rays of the sun, filtered through bars of crystal cloud, fell not crimson nor amber nor gold, but with the mystic radiance of liquid pearls, touching the familiar scene with Eastern magic....
>
> And as they watched. surprised out of themselves by this magic play of light, the sun's rim dipped below the skyline, a level lake of blood, and the fantastic city melted like a dream. The pearly haze was withdrawn like a net of gossamer, and the magic city had vanished at a touch. The familiar towers and spires of Sydney reappeared ... (pp.180–81)

Such bejewelled prose as this, and shortly after when Jonah and Clara

see the city after dusk as 'a symphony in light', gathers in many of the stock properties of *fin de siècle* and the Celtic twilight found also in the early verse of Kenneth Slessor. But in context these conventionally exotic metaphors are appropriate to allow the cityscape to express Jonah's transported emotions; they are also ironically checked by Jonah's doodling calculations on an envelope and discoursing all the while on his business plans.

The possibilities for the novel of urban life that Stone discovered have constantly been rediscovered. *Jonah* stands at the head of two related traditions: the 'larrikin' novel about the young rebel against the stultifying lack of opportunity in his own background (and the equally stultifying respectability of the dominant middle classes encircling the inner suburbs) and the urban pastoral which, like *Jonah* itself, can contain a larrikin novel within its episodic structure. Both strains have attracted many writers associated politically with the 'Left' who have been seen collectively as realists or social realists. While many of these have been content to simply name Sydney streets and suburbs and provide flat descriptions of working class life, others have aspired to capture poetically the essence of representative experience. Kylie Tennant's *Foveaux* (1939) which opens in 1912, in a period contemporaneous with *Jonah*'s, warmly embraces the folkways of the inner suburb which provides the novel's subject and title. The realism of her style is constantly heightened by a delighted celebration of the oddities and eccentricities, architectural and human, of this community; even the garbage collection is transformed into ritual and a theatrical display (Chapter IV). Other novels that continue the urban pastoral tradition are Ruth Park's *The Harp in the South* (1948) and Dorothy Hewett's *Bobbin Up* (1959) In the first, Paddy's Market on Saturday night is evoked, as in *Jonah,* to contrast its colour and excitement with the dull routine of the working week. In the second, there is a description of Tempe tip as a Vale of Tempe with its own historical and Arcadian associations (Chapter XIX). Despite a tendency to divide writers into 'mere' realists and the 'more imaginative', such a distinction is difficult to maintain. Although Chester Cobb's *Days of Disillusion,* (1926) with its Virginia Woolfish stream of consciousness technique is ostensibly a departure from realism, its details are neatly observed and untouched by metaphoric suggestiveness. The same could be said of some later writers who stylistically proclaim themselves to be experimental and

imaginative beyond the range of realism, but have only a different manner, and often that at secondhand.[6]

Images of the City of Dreadful Night register the extreme of rejection in the emergence of literary attitudes towards Sydney. In Lane's novel and Lawson's early work, this imagery expresses the cultural dilemma of Sydney or the bush. At the other extreme, of acceptance, the imagery of urban pastoral resolves the dilemma by relocating the natural and the communal within the city; a version of this can be found in Lawson's later work. Although not in such pronounced polarity, these opposed patterns of imagery and response continue in the literature of this century, perhaps more because of established literary attitudes and conventions than because of a sense that the dilemma persists within society. Brennan's attitudes towards the City can be compared with Lawson's, but Brennan's are more heavily determined by literary influences (and different influences from those affecting Lawson) than by the actual city of Sydney. Similarly, later writers who ostensibly express attitudes towards Sydney can be seen as responding at least as much to images of the City established elsewhere. To illustrate this, and to trace later developments, some works by modern writers will be glanced at now. Although the author of the first book wrote only one novel set in Sydney, the opportunity of examining the impressions of a major European writer concerned with the social changes associated with urbanisation is irresistible.

D. H. Lawrence's *Kangaroo* (1923) was written after a two month stay in Australia, in 1922, the year of Lawson's death. Early in the novel occurs an often quoted passage about a first encounter with the bush, in Western Australia. But this experience of the bush as intimidatingly ancient and lonely is presented through the memory of Somers, the Lawrence figure in the novel, when he goes into the back garden of the

6 Two plays which provide examples of an imaginative use of realistic Sydney settings are Dorothy Hewett's *This Old Man Comes Rolling Home,* 1976 (first produced 1967) and Peter Kenna's *A Hard God,* 1974 (first produced 1973). *This Old Man* is set naturalistically in Redfern but employs rhythms and poetic effects, some of which are reminiscent of Patrick White's *The Season at Sarsaparilla. A Hard God,* naturalistically set in the western suburbs, uses its characters' Irish Australian lilt to convincingly infuse lyricism into the colloquial, especially in Aggie's monologue recalling her first coming to Sydney from the country.

bungalow he has rented in suburban Sydney. From the roof of the summer house, he looks out over the 'vast town' which is

> lying mysteriously within the Australian underdark, that peculiar lost, weary aloofness of Australia. ... And it didn't seem to be real, it seemed to be sprinkled on the surface of a darkness into which is never penetrated.[7]

The relationship between landscape and cityscape, Sydney and the bush, is problematical for Somers-Lawrence as it was for earlier Australian writers. His conditioned European expectation of an organic, and idealised, relationship between civilisation and nature is disappointed. Sydney may be admitted to be 'the London of the Southern hemisphere', 'a real metropolis ... One of the great cities of the world', but it is London 'made in five minutes, a substitute for the real thing', and although it is one of the great cities, it is 'without a core', like Australia itself: 'The friendliest country in the world: in some ways the gentlest. But without a core. There was no heart in it all, it seemed hollow' (p.336). The lack of 'fit' between this civilisation—part derivative, part indigenous, in a democratic way that Somers-Lawrence finds disturbing—and the landscape which contains it is imaged on the city's fringes. Somers and his wife trace this civilisation to its limits where it meets the bush at a state reserve ('a bit of Aboriginal Australia') and the sea in a litter of 'promiscuous' bungalows, tin cans, and old paper:

> The *vacancy* of this freedom is almost terrifying. In the openness and freedom of this raw chaos, this litter of bungalows and tin cans scattered for miles and miles, this Englishness all crumbled out into formlessness and chaos. Even the heart of Sydney itself—an imitation of London and New York, without any core or pith or pith of meaning. Business going on at full speed: but only because it was the other end of English and American business. (pp.32–33)

Sydney provided Lawrence with his image of civilisation in Australia,

7 D. H. Lawrence, *Kangaroo* (1923; Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1950), p.18. Subsequent page references, included in the text in parentheses, refer to this edition.

as it had William Lane or as much later it was to provide Xavier Herbert in his *Poor Fellow My Country* (1975). The vision of Herbert's Jeremy Delacey as he leaves the city by train from Central is not dissimilar to Lane's. Delacey is led by his sense of the myopic insularity and material self-satisfaction of this society to flirt with a right wing nationalist group, as Lawrence's Somers had done. Yet Somers remains sufficiently uncommitted to feel the seductiveness of lotus-eating Sydney:

> Richard bought himself a big, knobbly, green, soft-crusted apple, at a Chinese shop, and a pretty mother-of pearl spoon to eat it with. The queer Chinese, with their gabbing gobbling way of speaking —were they parasites too? A strange, strange world. He took himself off to the gardens to eat his custard apple—a pudding inside a knobbly green skin—and to relax into the magic ease of the afternoon. The warm sun, the big, blue harbour with its hidden bays, the palm trees, the ferry steamers sliding flatly, the perky birds, the inevitable shabby-looking, loafing sort of men strolling across the green slopes, past the red poinsettia bush, under the big flame-tree, under the blue, blue sky—Australian Sydney with a magic like sleep, like sweet, soft sleep—a vast, endless, sun-hot, afternoon sleep with the world a mirage. He could taste it all in the soft, sweet, creamy custard apple. A wonderful sweet place to drift in. But surely a place that will some day wake terribly from that sleep.
>
> Yet why should it? Why should it not drift marvellously for ever, with its sun and its marsupials? (p.338)

Among the novels which are most evocative of Sydney are Christina Stead's *Seven Poor Men of Sydney* (1934) and *For Love Alone* (1944). Stylistically, they range from a realistic location within the city to an expressionistic, often lyrical rendering of their youthful characters' dreams, delusions, and disillusions, which are projected onto the Sydney of the 1920s. Both open in a fishing village, identifiable as Watsons Bay, which is a community on the outskirts of the city and on the edge of oceanic and ambiguous possibilities. In *Seven Poor Men,* the centre of Sydney is seen not as dehumanised and inorganic, as the antithesis of life, but as varied and vital. It is filled with parks, birds, the scent of flowers, and a range of human activities:

> The city ran on outside. Typewriters tapped, loiterers and unemployed men lounged in the little park, a hydraulic lift wheezed up and down in the cart-dock. The City Council took up and put down tar paving which would not set on account of the heat. A man opposite developing blue prints turned on his heliotrope light, the whistle blew for the cranes . working on the Harbour Bridge, ferries whistled, a liner coming down the harbour to berth at midday bellowed, cars rattled past, the messenger boys went out for the lunches, the swallows chased each other off the red roof of the new yellow and blue building opposite which had the blue escutcheon of the Chilean Republic's consul on its walls ...[8]

This collage of impressionistic detail presents a more diverse and objective Sydney than is perceived by the characters, who project their own dreams and frustrations upon it. Haunted by the surrounding sea's ambiguous promise of escape, they react against the economic restrictiveness and social conformity of the city. Yet, although the novel is permeated with images of poverty, both economic and spiritual, they do not coalesce into a single, and simplistic, image of Sydney as a centre of capitalist exploitation. Joseph Bagenault contrasts with his cousins Michael and Catherine by not feeling alienated nor deracinated: 'This is my city, here I was born and bred, I cannot be lost here, nothing can happen to me' he thinks during one of the novel's 'night scenes'. As he nears the area of the Markets:

> the city had become warm, hospitable, a city of hearths and yellow-silk lighted interiors; spoons clapped on soup-plates, spoons clanked in cups, sugar-basins revolved ... The street-lights were switched on and glowed warmly in a slight thick dusk, as if to prove conclusively that the day had knocked off work and gone home. Near an old garden, he noticed how the trees had taken on an inhuman air with something wild in them, as lions have, sitting unreconciled in the back of their cages licking their paws, in the

8 Christina Stead, *Seven Poor Men of Sydney* (1934; Angus and Robertson, Sydney, 1965), p.109. Subsequent page references, included in the text in parentheses, refer to this edition.

> zoo. He heard again the tapping behind him of the nocturnal prostitute just beginning her beat: fresh, odorous, with shining curls and a big bow on her neck and frilled elbows, pretty, dainty. (p.122)

In this description of a walk at dusk through the Markets area can be found all the stock elements of the modernist nocturne, including garish purples, mauves, and reds. But these are the colours of the chocolate boxes in a lolly-shop window; even the prostitute, the conventional figure of urban degradation, is 'pretty, dainty'. What is remarkable is the lack of intensity usually found in such set scenes; here there is an implicit acceptance that this is only one aspect of the human life that goes on in this setting. The City of Dreadful Night exists within a larger city; behind the windows fronting the possibly menacing streets are the clapping spoons and clanking cups of a populated city, not just a nightmare haunted by flitting shades:

> The people were all wilted at the end of a long hot day, but they hurried because they were hungry and they were anxious to get their shoes off. Sometimes they went in pairs, and the man carried the girl's shabby paper case; sometimes they did not go straight home but had something first. The ill-lighted greasy chain restaurant opposite was full of people eating ninepenn'orth of tea, pies, and toast. (p.162)

It has been objected that such passages as these are the most prosaic realism, sorting ill with the lyrical responses to the city by the romantic characters; but such realism recognises a fuller and more human variety in society than the characters are able to individually.

Formally, *Seven Poor Men of Sydney* cannot resolve its conflicting tendencies towards a Marxist concern with social injustice and a vitalist celebration of the exuberant energy of life; between a pessimistic sense of the ineffectuality of the individual, and a patient and hopeful acceptance of social life; stylistically, between lyric effusiveness, whether expressive of optimism or despair, and a descriptive and implicitly accepting realism. The result is that Sydney is captured not as an allegorised image of capitalist exploitation, nor as a realistically observed background, but as a complex and richly varied cultural

ambience. The description of Mendelssohn's room in Woolloomooloo expresses this unconventional openness of response nicely; so much is admitted—the surrounding view, the other tenants, the way of life in this ghetto—that it becomes a celebration of community *and* diversity. The markedly more mature *For Love Alone* employs comparable settings to render the feelings of its heroine, Teresa Hawkins. Here, though, they are dramatically controlled to express her responses, so that, although the City of Dreadful Night reappears in the slum scenes, and Sydney is also seen contrarily as merging into the natural world that surrounds it, these are clearly recognised as projections of Teresa's feelings. Despite Teresa's Nietzschean rejection of the 'herd' life of Sydney's inhabitants, Christina Stead's detachment from this could be said to be a mood of acceptance, of recognition of the city as an image of life in all its complexity and contrariety.

Kenneth Slessor is the poet who is immediately thought of as 'a man of Sydney', the title of Douglas Stewart's book on him. Slessor accepted the city as a major source of his images for his meditations on Time, Memory, History, the vitalist surge of life and the ever present premonition of death. Yet it is in his prose, such as his *Portrait of Sydney* (1950) or *Life at the Cross* (1965), that he is more directly concerned with the city and expresses his affection through detailed evocation of its scenes. In his collected *Poems* (1957) there are surprisingly few pieces specifically related to Sydney, though more frequently it provides the implied setting. The early 'City Nightfall' in its strained figures and conceited irony is redolent of Arthur Adams and the *fin de siècle:*

> Smoke upon smoke: over the stone lips
> Of chimneys bleeding, a darker fume descends.
> Night, the old nun, in voiceless pity bends
> To kiss corruption, so fabulous her pity.

'Late Trams' affects a different form of detachment, one reminiscent of Eliot's 'Preludes':

> That street washed with violet
> Writes like a tablet
> Of living here; that pavement
> Is the metal embodiment

Of living here; these terraces
Filled with dumb presences
Lobbed over mattresses,
Lusts and repentances
Ardours and solaces,
Passions and hatreds
And love in brass bedsteads ...

More characteristic though is 'William Street' which in four stanzas reverses such modernist attitudes by celebrating the sensuous and whimsical appeal of the city at night:

The red globes of light, the liquor-green,
The pulsing arrows and the running fire
Spilt on the stones, go deeper than the stream;
You find this ugly, I find it lovely.

The emphasis here, as with 'Ghosts' trousers, like the dangle of hung men/ In pawnshop windows, bumping knee by knee' is on the imagination's transformation of mundane reality rather than on the reality so transformed. A favoured situation in Slessor's poems is to have the imaginative observer behind a window pane, detached from the reality which stirs his memories and meditations. So Captain Dobbin

Now sails the street in a brick villa, "Laburnam Villa",
In whose blank windows the harbour hangs
Like a fog against the glass,
Golden and smoky, or stoned with a white glitter,
And boats go by, suspended in the pane,
Blue Funnel, Red Funnel, Messageries Maritimes,
Lugged down the port like sea-beasts taken alive
That scrape their bellies on sharp sands
Of which particulars Captain Dobbin keeps
A ledger sticky with ink,
Entries of time and weather, state of the moon,
Nature of cargo and captain's name,
For some mysterious and awful purpose,
Never divulged.

He is the chronicler of the sea beyond his room, that 'cemetery of sweet essences' from which he imposes Memory and History on 'the blind tide/That crawls it knows not where, nor for what gain'. A similar assertion of the imagination against the boundlessness and flux of the sea is found in Slessor's finest poem, 'Five Bells', an elegiac reminiscence of his friend Joe Lynch who was drowned from a ferry. The atmosphere of the Harbour—its lights, sounds, the reflections of the city in its waters at night—pervades the whole poem. Sydney provides a rich image of life, even though the poet is detached from its immediacies and brought to question its ultimate significance.

The major writer who has engaged most often with Sydney and its suburbs is Patrick White. The map his novels, short stories, and plays leave in the reader's mind follows the broad contours of class differences and life styles in the suburbs and leaves the central city as a Babylon populated chiefly by patent leather ladies of the night, pissing sailors, and orphic drunks. Images of Sydney as the modernists' neon-lit nightmare abound in his work, yet so also do versions of pastoral, both on the suburban fringes and close to the city's centre; and over the course of his work can be discerned a shift from a mannered recoil from the City towards a form of acceptance. The opening of his second novel, *The Living and the Dead* (1941) is a modernist set piece presenting London's Victoria Station at night, and a character who wishes to make some contact with 'the faces in the street'. Sydney first appears in his next novel, *The Aunt's Story* (1948), and the description of the city at night (Chapter V) is painted in the full modernist spectrum of violet, crimson, and purple. A similarly conventional attitude affects *The Tree of Man* (1955). When Stan Parker goes to Sydney in search of his son Ray he finds himself in an 'ant-world', *fourmillante cité*:

> So Stan Parker went on his way over the asphalt. Once he thought he saw Ray looking at him from a window, but was mistaken apparently. A young woman who was pinning some material to her bust pulled down the blind. In one street two cars rammed each other, crushing the occupants. He went on, sad to think that the impulse to run to their assistance had been taken from him; it would have been different on a dirt road. Now he no longer looked at people, but for the names of streets nailed to corners. He went on, over a rime of rotting vegetables, and

old newspapers, and contraceptive aids.[9]

Only in the most incidental way could this be identified with Sydney. It is a generalised image of the modernist City: dehumanised ('it would have been different on a dirt road'), depersonalised ('he no longer looked at people, but for the names of streets'), sterile and unnatural (the contraceptive aids), it is the obverse of the sense of community and an organic relation with nature that the Parkers have in the countryside, which by the end of the novel has become a suburb. Such cliched depictions reach an hysterical pitch in the frequently quoted description of Himmelfarb's journey into the modern Babylon of Sydney in *Riders in the Chariot*, a catalogue of perjorations both inherited and characteristically the author's own: the neon's greens and purples colour 'the pools of vomit and the sailors' piss', the breasts of blue-haired grannies roundly assert themselves 'like chamberpots in concrete', and the city meets the sea in 'a scum of French-letters'.[10]

The play, *The Season at Sarsaparilla* (first produced 1961) has a quite different tone. A satiric comedy of Sarsaparillan life subtitled 'A Suburban Charade', it is almost affectionate in its presentation of the ritualised routines of the middle class. 'Life', vitalistic and instinctual, is within or behind these routines, not outside them. The recurrent off-stage sounds of a pack of dogs pursuing a bitch in season images the underlying reality of the cycle of nature that the events force most of the characters to recognise. The births, copulations, and deaths that occur are not presented as aberrations revealing how man in modern mass urban-industrial society has lost contact with the roots of his nature, or the well springs of life, or whatever. They are life, as the callowly 'artistic' Roy with his escapist dreams recognises at the end, and, as young Pippy learns, they will recur 'Over and over and over. For ever and ever and ever'. What might seem disconcerting about this apparent acceptance of the norm is that it implies through Judy and Roy a rejection of ambition and critical detachment. Other characters are also shown as coming to an undeluded appraisal of their self-images. Is therefore no course other than acceptance of the majority life-style to be entertained? Yet this is

9 Patrick White, *The Tree of Man* (1955; Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1961), p.273.

10 Patrick White, *Riders in the Chariot* (1961; Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1964), pp.391–92.

failing to recognise what is at the centre of this version of urban pastoral—the Boyles, the characters who have all the life. Ern the sanitary man and Nola his ripe, childless wife are in middle-class suburbia but not of it; they are presented as freed from middle-class affluence and inhibitions, closer to the natural and instinctual, to 'real' life, or Life. This relocation of the folk and traditional pastoral values within the city setting is found elsewhere in White's work around this time: in, for example Whalleys in the short story 'Down at the Dump', or Mrs Godbold, the only survivor of the *illuminati* in *Riders in the Chariot.* A qualified suburban-pastoral note also pervades the next novel, *The Solid Mandala* (1966). Like *Riders* it is set on the frontier of suburbia as it encroaches on an older, rural way of life: but, as in *The Season at Sarsaparilla* the mockery of suburbia is more mellow. There is the impression that life on Sydney's fringes is no worse than elsewhere, indeed that it is preferable to the world of war and revolution on the other side of Mrs Poulter's television screen.

In *The Vivisector* (1970), the artist Hurtle Duffield wanders around a city which is presented with a descriptive realism remarkable after *Riders in the Chariot.* His whereabouts are located by simple references to the Quay, the Domain, or Central Railway. Spewing drunks and leather-mouthed prostitutes are still encountered, but they do not coalesce into an image of rejection; in fact, Duffield, during an early bohemian phase, takes up with a lusty young whore. In later years he retreats from his wealthy patrons and admirers behind the pretentious facade of his house in Flint Street, and into the urban-pastoral world of Chubb's Lane:

> The back staircase to his house opened on Chubb's Lane. Here the clothes-lines and corrugated iron took over; ladies called to one another over collapsing paling fences; carts were parked and serviced, and dragged out on shrieking wheels. In the evening young girls hung around in clusters, sucking oranges, sharing fashion mags, and criticising one another's hair as though they had been the artists. There was a mingled smell of poor washing, sump oil, rotting vegetables, goatish male bodies, soggy female armpits, in Chubb's Lane.[11]

In *The Eye of the Storm* (1973), the Sydney setting is even more

11 Patrick White, *The Vivisector* (1970; Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1973), p.264.

detailed: the family house that was originally at 'the unfashionable address' of Centennial Park, flats in Kensington, Watsons Bay, and the Parramatta Road. There are still pissing sailors, to express Dorothy's disdain; still condoms on the beach at Watsons Bay to image Basil's disgust; and there is Mrs Hunter's perception of life of the city that mingles pastoral and satire:

> The life of Sydney was streaming past and around, you could sense as well as hear, pouring out of factories and offices: by this hour men in bars ... had begun inflating their self-importance with beer; ambulances were hurtling towards disasters in crumpled steel and glass confetti; in semi-private houses, mothers would have started sponging little boys, their still empty purses, while nubile girls looked in glasses to pop their spots cream their skins dreaming of long-hoped-for but unlikely lads.[12]

But these familiar images are now used with detachment by the author to express what in context are recognisably the characters' responses to situations. The City is distinctively Sydney, not simply a hazy, conventional emblem of modern man's fallen state.

One aspect of Sydney life that remained peripheral in most imaginative writing until recently is the bohemianism that has long been a feature of Australia's oldest, largest, and least easily characterised city. In works of autobiography, biography, and reminiscence, the tracks of generations of bohemians can be mapped around the *Bulletin* office, the Quay and of bohemians can be mapped around the *Bulletin* office, the Quay and the University. In the 1890s, Victor Daley, Julian Ashton, Arthur Streeton, Norman Lindsay, and others were drawn to Sydney as the metropolis of Australasia.[13] Lindsay's *Bohemians of the Bulletin* (1965) opens with an account of the Quay area in these years. In his autobiography, *Naught to*

12 Patrick White, *The Eye of the Storm* (1973; Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1975), pp.100–01.

13 Since this essay was written, Graeme Davison has published a very detailed description of Sydney's 'urban frontier' and its literary bohemia in the 1890s: 'Sydney and the Bush: An Urban Context for the Australian Legend', *Historical Studies* (1978), 191–209.

members of the Dawn and Dusk Club, the Lindsays, Daley, the Quinns, Ashton, and Favenc. Norman Lindsay's son Jack, in *The Roaring Twenties* (1960), remembers a later generation —and Christopher Brennan's daughter. In *Seven Poor Men of Sydney* there are 'Lindsays galore' in the Roman Cafe (and possibly Brennan also), but the scene is glimpsed from outside, as such scenes most usually are in fiction until recently, despite the strong and continuing tradition of an intelligentsia (and lumpen-intelligentsia) identifying themselves as a 'push' at variance with society at large. This 'push' sees itself as a libertarian enclave within a conformist, even repressive society; a community of individuals sharing the same unillusioned values, folkways (especially in relation to drink, sex, and drugs), and mythic past replete with heroes. It is a community that accepts the city and has its own watering-holes and corroboree grounds within its familiar territory—while at the same time having the satisfaction of breaking others' taboos.

An 'inner urban tribe' Frank Moorhouse calls them in his early story 'Apples and Pears' and describes their nomadic life-style:

> Drinking from beer bottles in grimy kitchens. Dancing to worn rock and roll records. Talking about authoritarianism and Zen and about Burroughs and Ginsberg Sending up your friends, sending up yourself. Talking just beyond what you know. Always being tempted out that little way further beyond your knowledge.Wading out in the beer. Always more books to read. Someone else to know about. Always another party. Always someone's affair finishing. Another affair starting. Another person gone to North Ryde Psychiatric Centre. Another lesbian. Another pill. Another idea about going interstate. Another way of making an easy quid. Another idea about going to the country and living like a primitive.[14]

14 Frank Moorhouse, *Futility and Other Animals* (Gareth Powell Associates, Sydney, 1969), pp.19–20. For discussion of a distinctive Sydney tradition in intellectual life see C. M. H. Clark, 'Faith', in Peter Coleman, ed., *Australian Civilisation* (Cheshire, Melbourne, 1962), pp.85–87; Geoffrey Serle, *From Deserts the Prophets Come* (Heinemann, Melbourne, 1973), pp.233–36; John Docker, *Australian Cultural Elites* (Angus and Robertson, Sydney, 1974), pp.131–65. [See also Peter Kirkpatrick, *The Sea Coast of Bohemia: Literary Life in Sydney's Roaring Twenties* (University of Queensland Press, St Lucia, 1992).]

Moorhouse's linking of discrete stories through recurrent characters in this first collection, and *The Americans, Baby* (1972), captures the transient 'feel' of relationships in this community of young people at variance with what they perceive as society's norms. As well, and this comes out more markedly in his subsequent collections, especially *The Electrical Experience* (1974), the 'bush', the countryside seen as the repository of uncomplicated traditional values, is still an alternative to Sydney for many of his characters.

The early short stories of Michael Wilding and his novels *Living Together* (1974) and *Scenic Drive* (1976) also accept Sydney as a fully adequate ambience for contemporary social comedy. In *Aspects of the Dying Process* (1972), his story 'The Sybarites' is a lush evocation, through the consciousness of a new arrival, of Sydney's pagan and erotic promises. Other stories in this collection bring out well the drifting quality of relationships within the city's bohemia, as its life is experienced by the narrators. 'Somewhere New', which dryly observes a cultural climber's hectic efforts to locate himself at the centre of avant garde cosmopolitanism (which is always relocating itself somewhere else), heightens a difference in attitude between writers of this and earlier generations. Christina Stead captures the earlier ethos, in the way her characters are persuaded that the cultural capital, the true metropolis, lies elsewhere, most probably London; and they are haunted by an awareness that Sydney is merely provincial. For Moorhouse's and Wilding's characters, the world has come to Sydney. Through the media they are affected by the same political causes, ideological issues, fashions and fads as prevail internationally. Through contact with visitors from abroad they realise that provincialism is a universal affliction within the international culture; even Americans, such as Moorhouse's Becker, suffer from it. But provincialism is also seen as having its positive connotation—as being the way of life of those who belong to the distinct location of Sydney, the ground for an authentic variety of that contemporary culture.

Beyond this, though, are the true provinces. There is still the choice between 'Sydney and the Bush', as the poet Les Murray reminds us by seeing the city from the countryman's point of view:

> Uncle Clarrie reckoned when he knew Sydney first, it
> was a lazy dangerous town five stories high

with razors up lanes, trams crushing stained corn,
hawkers spitting,
straw hats on the ferry, shopgirls indignant about
everything—
It was never a village. But now it'd hold even more
people who never in their lives have to know the score.
(From 'Explaining to the Fencers')[15]

Although over what is now almost a century, literary attitudes towards Sydney have broadened and diversified, the historical opposition of city and country continues to re-emerge, as in this poem. More often though it has manifested itself, not as a preoccupation with a locally rooted cultural division, but as a more general concern with the course that modern civilisation has taken, a concern shared by literature written elsewhere over the same period. Even so, the continuance of traditional responses to and images of Sydney have confirmed its metropolitan status within Australian writing. In our literature, Sydney represents the City, in a variety of images which have both reflected and affected attitudes towards urban life.

15 First published in the *Sydney Morning Herald*, 10 June 1978.